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# "ETHNIC IDENTITY IN WEST AFRICA:THE SPECIAL CASE OF AFRO-BRAZILIANS IN XIXTH AND XXTH CENTURY BENIN, NIGERIA,TOGO AND GHANA"

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Ethnic identity,often perceived as a given,or an absolute can also be seen to be societally imposed and conditioned by specific circumstances.Born into an ethnic group,the reality of that designation need not necessarily be static or fixed.Emigration and displacement can serve to alter or transform an identity, as the new culture accepts or negates the ethnicity,obviously dependent upon the economic,social and political exigencies and requirements of the society being entered.The shifting often ambivalent or contradictory sense of ethnic identity can be seen to characterize the case of a group of 19th century emigrants who made the decision to leave Brazil and in the case of some, return to the African continent of their birth, while in the case of others, a return to the continent of their ancestors.(1)

The transformational nature of ethnic and cultural identity for many of the emigrants had been significant factors in their inability to adapt to either a slave existence in Brazil, or conditions imposed upon freedpersons living within a slave society,such as that of Bahia, Brazil from the 1830s through the 1860s.(2) This identity would not center solely on ethnicity or African ethnic group identity--while this would be a very important factor--but also upon religion,which would be used in certain instances for group cohesion and,in other circumstances for exclusion and separation of individuals and groups. The most recent information concerning the 1835 Revolt of the Males,provided by our distinguished commentator, Professor Joao Jose Reis, critically analyzes the factor of Islamic religion and its role in what was also a potentially social, economic and ultimately, political revolution in 19th century Brazil.(3) For slaves and freedpersons entering the rebellion, ethnicity,cultural and religious group identity were significant in determining which groups were to be trusted with information concerning the conspiracy plans.Ethnic considerations as to who was Nago, or Hausa, and who was a Bantu speaker,became important determinants of individual and collective loyalty.

The concept of a religious jihad,in itself is,of course, exclusionary as it congregates Muslims to if necessary fight against non-Muslims, infidels who have refused to accept the one true Islamic faith.In Bahia, within the context of the 1833 Revolt, the question of religious identity, and those Afro-Brazilians refusing to surrender their religious identity upon demands that they convert to Islam all served to reinforce separate collective identities among the Afro-Brazilian population. The response of the dominant planter and elite class to the rebellion however, would be a more generalized attack not only upon Afro-Brazilian Muslims, but more generally upon urban slaves and freedpersons who were suspected of complicity in the conspiracy. What had been exclusionary behavior among the rebellion leaders towards those

slaves and freedpersons who had refused to join the revolt, was in essence undercut by the dominant society who saw much larger and ethnically and religiously diverse groups,all,to be potential threats to the security of Bahia.(4)

The legal restrictions and daily constraints that were imposed upon all freedpersons living in Bahia after the rebellion, began to make life intolerable for many former slaves. The abrogation of their right to assemble in groups, beyond the number of two or three persons, the fact that it was no longer legal for them to be on the streets of Salvador after sunset, discrimination against them in hiring practices, brought a perverse kind of solidarity to a group that heretofore had been divided by religion and ethnicity. If all were perceived to be potential threats to the established order and slave society, then a more collective reaction on the part of freedpersons became possible.

If it were true that urban slaves in Salvador enjoyed greater privileges and freedom than their rural counterparts, and enjoyed more direct contact with freedpersons, the lives of both groups would be negatively affected in the aftermath of the Male Rebellion. The tolerance of the society dissipated in relationship to both groups.(5) It was within the general context of this increasing societal intolerance that the decision to leave Brazil and return to Africa began to gain acceptance among numbers of freedpersons.Adept at saving funds and collectively pooling resources through historic institutions such as the religious brotherhoods and fraternities of slaves and freedpersons(irmandades de misericordia).These individuals turned their attention from using their collective savings societies to secure a proper burial in Bahia, to amassing sufficient resources to purchase passage on one of the regular ships travelling between the port of Bahia and the western coast of Africa.(6)

While it was true that Nago former slaves, and Muslim freedpersons predominated in the ranks of the Afro-Brazilian returnees during the 1840s and 1850s,(7) there were other groups,such as Hausa, Mina(Ewe) and Fon who applied for passports to undertake the journey back to Africa.However, once having made the decision to leave Brazil, the returnees did receive a certain collective identity from Brazilian society, that classified them as disgruntled Nago freedpersons, of questionable loyalty.For those Afro-Brazilians who shared their vision, that Brazil would never represent a true homeland for the former slaves, that which the returnees were proposing was seen to be inspirational.

It is of interest to note that returnees to Africa continued to leave Brazil,even after the formal abolition of slavery in 1888. The fact that there were dozens of Afro-Brazilian emigrants on the

vessel, Alianca, in 1899,(8) demonstrates the important example and inspiration of the early emigrants of the 1850s.Discontent with Brazilian society understandably increased after slavery's formal dissolution, as no adequate economic or social provisions were made for the now national freedperson population.Forgotten by the political elite and unable to compete with the far more desired European immigrants,Afro-Brazilians again contemplated Africa as a solution to their intractable problems of economic, social and political marginalization. In the case of the 1899 emigrants, tragedy accompanied the decision, as an outbreak of yellow fever aboard the Alianca ended with the death of several passengers, and British authorities in Lagos, Nigeria refusing to allow the ship to land, citing the health risk posed because of the disease. Finally,after a protracted waiting period,the now destitute passengers were allowed to come ashore at a small port in the Bight of Benin,months after they had set sail from Bahia.(9)

The act of voyaging and leaving one land,also created an identity for the voyager that could subsume an original ethnic identification. Many of the original Afro-Brazilian emigrants to Africa were in reality autocthonous Africans, captured by slavers and sent to Brazil for purchase. Having survived and made their way successfully through the grim physical realities of slavery in Brazil-- supported (or not) the Male Rebellion-- these Africans had obtained their freedom and come to the decision that their lives would be qualitatively better by returning to Africa. Upon their return, most often not to the exact geographical location of their birth in the interior, but rather to a coastal enclave, these Africans-by-birth were seen by many of the coastal African residents to have been 'foreigners', in part because they were of different African ethnic groups, but in cases in which they returned to Mina or Nago areas, they were classified as foreigners because they were coming from Brazil.(10)

Speaking the same African languages as groups living in Lagos,Nigeria, Porto-Novo, Benin(former Dahomey) or Porto Seguro,Togo the former Brazilian slaves were considered outsiders by most of the local population, as the experience of departure, slavery,acculturation to Brazilian mores--which in Bahia were of course very African--had transformed them into people of another ethnicity and race.For coastal Africans regarding the european-style clothing worn by the emigrants, their use of the Portuguese language and adaptation to a culture in which they might have spent twenty or more of the most formative and productive years of their lives, these middle aged newcomers were not Africans;they were designated Bresiliens in Togo and Benin,Amaros in Nigeria,and Tabon people in Ghana.(11)

This refusal by the coastal societies to grant ethnic legitimacy to the African returnees,would mirror problems encountered by former African-American slaves in Liberia,and former North American slaves who had supported the British in the Revolutionary War,Black Nova Scotians, and Black English poor, all of whom would be settled by Britain in Freetown, Sierra Leone. All of these Black emigrant groups would enter into severe conflicts with local African societies, who correctly believed their land rights were being violated by these arriving foreigners with black faces, who had no legitimate rights to occupy territory that was by history and the right of tradition, owned collectively by the indigenous coastal societies.(12)

The authenticity question raised by the indigenous coastal societies,whether to accept the returnees as genuine members of other indigenous ethnic groups, or as the Dahomean King Guezo would refer to them: Europeans with brown faces,(13) would constitute a continuing problem for the former Brazilian slaves. For Muslim slaves,born on the African continent, the question of identity and acceptance, could be especially poignant. Consider the situation of several returnees who had been born near the northern Yoruba city of Ilorin,and because of the jihads in neighboring Hausaland had converted to Islam at an early age. Sold into slavery as a result of the warfare in the north and intra-Yoruba conflicts, the Muslim slave was forced to confront the Middle Passage experience, adaptation to Brazilian slave society in a period of economic expansion of the sugar industry, and through perseverance, good fortune and an understanding of the mechanisms of the slave system, the slave is able to obtain freedom and manumission. Alienation from the society, as well as adherence to Islam could have made the individual atleast a supporter of the Male Rebellion, or perhaps a participant. The repression following the rebellion would become a major factor in the decision to leave Brazil and return to Africa. The act of returning, however, would not necessarily guarantee acceptance by the home community in the home region of Ilorin,, where immediate family or political circumstances might have been radically transformed. The twenty or thirty years in Brazil, for those who remained on the continent,had created a stranger, one who would have to find new group ties and altered sense of ethnic identity, with others who had shared the experience of loss and attempted return.(14)

The reconstruction of an African identity that was forced upon the returnees, or more correctly, an Afro-Brazilian identity,in large part was born from their rejection by traditional African groups within the various coastal enclaves along the Bight of Benin. They were seen to be first Amaros in Lagos, not Yoruba, as the Brazilian experience, whatever it had been, became a primary identity vis-a-vis the local experience of daily life on the

coast.The men's satorial choices of white suits, panama straw hats, large moustaches,walking canes and thick cigars, clearly separated them from the local society. While women returnees usually would wear 'proper' Victorian attire, there would be Brazilian fashion accents,particularly the use of white lace, that remembered Bahia, and could also served to make the Amaro women, or Bresiliennes, somewhat distinctive from other western-oriented African women,who were a part of the growing West African elite of the mid-19th century.(15)

One consequence of the returnees ambiguity of cultural identity would be the mosque constructed by the Bresiliens, in the town of Porto-Novo, Benin. Financed by predominantly Nago merchants, who had amassed considerable fortunes in their trading ventures along the coast, the spacious and costly mosque was promoted and publicized as a testament to the piety and commercial acumen of the Afro-Brazilians. However the building is rather startling, as the architectural style resembles far more the Catholic Cathedral of Salvador, than it does the traditional African mosque of Djenne, Mali.(16) For the Muslim Bresilienne community, some of whom had either participated or been supporters of the Male rebellion,to consciously build a mosque that resembled a Catholic cathedral demonstrates uncertainty or confusion in the group's cultural identity. Contemporary descriptions of the Porto-Novo returnee Muslim community portray a devoutly religious group, dedicated to the tenets of Islam, and the propagation of the faith.However, despite this evidence, corroborated in oral history tradition,(17) the Bresiliens chose to build an Islamic shrine that resembles a church.

Another example of conflicting ethnic identification for the returnees would be their divergent positions during the era of European colonial takeover in West Africa. In Benin, which underwent French military occupation during the 1890s, there were Brazilian returnees who served as scouts, spies and interpreters both for the French forces, and in the army of the Dahomean King Behanzin. It appeared that ethnic loyalty or solidarity often gave way to personal self-interest and aspirations for rapid economic gain, or professional advancement.(18) Adept at speaking several languages, the returnees were seen to be especially useful as scouts, although several members of the Dahomean royal family would question the sincerity of the Bresiliens' loyalty to Abomey, in the face of foreign attack and threatened occupation. The fact that large extended returnee families would have relatives fighting on both sides of the conflict--certainly not unknown in the annals of world warfare--also raised suspicion concerning the ultimate allegiance of the returned Africans and true Afro-Brazilians, i.e., those who had been born in Brazil, but chose during the course of the 19th century to come to Africa, to remake their fortunes and professional lives.

For those returnees who chose the winning side in the colonial wars, the rewards from the colonial victors could mean low-level positions in the colonial bureaucracy, educational opportunities in European-run missionary primary and secondary schools, and subordinate staff jobs in the large French, English and German trading companies and commercial houses that would so monopolize coastal trade during the colonial period.(19) The bitter historical irony for those returnees and other Africans who gave their support to European intervention and colonization, was that they would lose both political and economic advantages and their perceived social position under colonialism. The Bresilien merchants, many of whom had profited during the period 1850-1870, would be reduced to clerks, or very junior trading partners when they came up against the colonially favored foreign trading companies; merchants from Porto-Novo or Ouidah were simply unable to compete with a Freres Cyprien Fabre, or a John W. Holt Co. The returnees, of course had far less access to capital, and minimal institutional infrastructure, which would have allowed some competition between Africans and Europeans.

Education reinforced group cohesion, as it provided Bresiliens with intellectual tools to obtain professional advancement as teachers, attorneys, physicians and civil servants, in disproportionately larger numbers than their presence in the total population. The returnees had early access to educational opportunities, as they had interacted with European missionaries along the coasts of Togo and Benin, in the early 1860s.(20) For the Catholic returnees the fact that they predated the arrival of the missionaries, indeed had constructed, in 1847, a chapel in

the village of Agoue,Benin in anticipation of the eventual arrival of prelates. The returnees not only represented the faithful during the early years of the missionaries,they were significant sources of financial support for the church, paying from their own savings for the construction of chapels and the upkeep of parishes. This group appropriation of the early Catholic mission effort, including that in British Lagos, emboldened the Amaros and Bresilliens to demand that instruction in the mission schools be conducted in the Portuguese language.Partly as cultural validation, but more importantly in the 1860s and 1870s,it was perceived by the returnee merchants that Portuguese would be of greater utility in their businesses and for their children,than a mastery of French, German or English.(21)

The advent of colonialism would again modify,if not transform the basis of group cohesion and identity for the returnees and their descendants. If increased intermarriage and liaisons with indigenous residents of the coast were drawing Bresilliens and Africans closer,racially,their espousal of the virtues of european-style education and cultural values was separating them more from traditional African culture and ways of being. The question of marriage and the returnees was for many Africans along the coast, a subject of some contention. Oral history sources, church documentation and in the early 20th century newspapers owned by the Bresilliens attested to very high rates of intra-group marriage, within the returnee community. Official or first spouses were to be found from within the community; more irregular liaisons, that were not sanctified or even officially revealed to the Church most often were with local African women.(22)

A contradictory sense of self and ethnic identity would characterize many of the Bresiliens who worked for the French colonial civil service. Representing France throughout the continent, many ceased to think of themselves as Africans, preferring to take their annual home leave in Paris.(23) Their original perceptions of themselves as different from, and better than other African groups, were now reinforced as they worked as middle-level clerks in colonial bureaucracies in Brazzaville, Dakar and Niamey. They operated telegraph machines and worked as primary school teachers in Ouagadougou and Libreville, many believing that they were part of a grand colonial civilizing mission to bring order and centralized Napoleonic bureaucracy to needy Africans. They had always considered themselves to be members of the African elite, but their position in the colonial civil service, in their self-perception, and as seen by many within the Bresilien community had finally transformed them into Europeans.

The self-deception of some Bresiliens as to their real status within colonial African society could not provide them immunity from European discriminatory attitudes or behavior, when manifested.Low level civil servants could be summarily dismissed from their positions with limited justification provided, if an administrator wished it. A western educated African who was seen to be excessively haughty towards his European superiors, or who mistakenly assumed his superiors to be colleagues, was swiftly brought back to reality.As the creoles of Sierra Leone learned sadly, Africans seen to be too well educated were seen as dangerous threats by the colonial system.(24)

Bresiliens in Benin and Togo, who entered professions other than the colonial bureaucracy, would also encounter problems, as they started pushing the limits of European tolerance. Journalism was a profession dominated by the returnees and their descendants during the 20th century. All of the major African newspapers in Benin and Togo were owned and edited by Bresiliens. The general tone and political position of the African press were respectful towards the French administration, but critical of what was seen as the under utilization of African professionals and intellectuals. There would be editorials lamenting the degree of official attention accorded traditional rulers and customs,(25)and by implication, the lack of recognition or validation of the experiences of those Africans who saw themselves as an elite, and the chief beneficiaries of European education and culture.

For the journalists who were less veiled in their criticism of the colonial administration, the reaction of the government could prove brutal and direct. La Voix du Dahomey, owned by a Jean da Matha Santana, was severely critical of the administration of Governor Charles Fourn, during the mid-1920s. Fourn was routinely seen to be anti-elite, needlessly restrictive in his relations towards all Africans, and not sympathetic to what the newspaper

called the necessary process of the African's natural development towards a more enlightened culture.(26) Finally, charges of maladministration on the part of the Governor, and hints of serious official misconduct would prove to be the undoing of the Bresilien Beninese 'muckraker', or early investigative reporter/editor. A very brief news report of his sudden death would appear, almost hidden, in a 1926 edition of La Voix du Dahomey. No further reference to the cause of death was to be found in newspapers printed during the following six month period. Oral history research, painstakenly conducted with members of the journalist's family and former associates in 1972, revealed that da Matha Santana had been assassinated, by order of the French administrator,who had seen himself being continually defamed in the editiorial series authored by the Bresilien. (27) Fourn resorted to direct action to permanently silence his critic at the newspaper.

There would be other Bresilien journalists who would also challenge what they saw to be injustices within the colonial system, however no others were required to pay the high price of da Matha Santana. As a function of their contact on the continent and in Europe with other members of the intellectual elite of the francophone colonial world, the Bresiliens would come to embrace the cause of decolonization. They would present their analyses and arguments in articles, pamphlets and monographs written in impeccable French;it was all part of the larger contradiction of the colonial elite anywhere, whose anti-colonial diatribes would only be taken seriously, if they were expressed and presented in the most lucid prose of the colonial idiom.

Culturally, the Bresilien elite during the period after the Second World War would be caught between their affinities for Europe and their new and ringing group-identity as Africans demanding self-government and independence. This was being demanded from a colonial system that had awarded them measured benefits and a guaranteed evolue,or evolved status, vis-a-vis the majority of African subjects or indigenes. For those members of the group who had not especially prospered under colonialism, who had not been able to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by higher education, there would still remain a cultural option and identity that permitted them to feel superior to the majority of Africans. As they would remind anyone who cared to listen, they were descendants of former Brazilian slaves. They would carefully guard,almost jealously protect their Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian cultural forms, such as bumba meu boi and congada. However, by the 1960s and 1970s, these festivals assumed the character of ritual and ceremony, as most of the original Portuguese song lyrics and canticles had been subsumed by Yoruba, Fon and Mina language phrases.(28) While the drumming and dance steps would survive intact,the historical significance and meaning of the festivals being enacted were mostly lost on those performing. However, for the generally poor, elderly and female participants of these

ceremonies, the experience continued to represent their historical difference and self-perception and validation as members of an elite group. Although their professional accomplishments and earnings hardly distinguished them from their African neighbors, relatives and friends, the Portuguese surname, a racially mixed or metis background,(that could have been the result of varied historical circumstances) and an idealized,truly mythical attachment to a "Brazilian homeland", now defined the returnee experience for these Afro-Brazilian descendants.

Ethnic identification and selective historical memory(and loss of memory) worked together to transform what had been for most,a very brutal slave experience in Bahia, into something not only positive, but worthy of celebration. Having ancestors who had been Brazilian slaves therefore made one better than other Africans. It is important to note that these superiority notions were not shared by the entire Bresilien community in Togo and Benin, the Tabon in Ghana or the Nigerian Amaros;however the present author did find group members in all of those countries who clutched their family's history, almost in self-defense against present day political, social and economic disappointments. This curious historical legacy provided them with an emotional or psychic buffer,which would manifest itself in organizations such as the Brazilian Descendants Friendly Society in Lagos, or an almost bankrupt association to promote the annual Bresilien carnival,in Porto-Novo,Benin.(29)

Again, it should be stressed that the descendants of the returnees who were successful within the late-colonial or early post-independence African societies generally did not interest themselves in these cultural manifestations. They did not lament,as did some of the ceremony participants, that the loss of the ability to speak the Portuguese language was a cultural tragedy for the group. Rather, the successful Bresiliens were more comfortable with an identification as members of the national elite; they expressed gratitude that their parents,had availed themselves of the opportunities of a western education, or had insisted that their children study, which had gave them access to better professional opportunities. If Brazil existed at all in their consciousness, it was most likely as an admiration for Pele as a Black superstar, and a vague desire to spend a vacation in the land of their 'ancestors'.

This more typical elite response was given to the present author in 1972, by a Bresilien high official in the Beninese Foreign Relations Ministry, who, as a descendant of a Brazilian returnee, had been intensely lobbied,by members of the delegation of Brazilian Chancellor for Foreign Affairs, Gibson Barbosa, en tournee at that time in Africa, to drum up local interest in a Brazilian economic and foreign policy initiative for the African continent.(30) The Beninese official stated he was somewhat angered at the Brazilian African Initiative, as it sought to portray strong

fraternal ties between Brazil and Africa,in part,as a function of the historical experience of the ex-slave returnees.The African diplomat remembered the former slaves had left Brazil because their lives had become intolerable in Bahia, given the societal repression against all freedpersons and former slaves during the 1840s and 1850s. Now that historical experience was being transformed into international cultural affinity, in large part because of political and economic expediency. What upset him also was that this transformed historical tale was being accepted genially and generously by his own government, and other neighboring governments that were part of the Brazilian chancellor's West African itinerary. There also had been no challenge, or even questioning of another more important tenet of the Brazilian African policy initiative,that of Brazil as a racial democracy. As African awareness concerning Brazil was generally nonexistent, or confined to Pele, the theory of a racial democracy, would continue to gain African adherents.

The firm hold Bresiliens exercised on important educational and professional organizations in Benin and Togo during the period 1950-1965, would become one of the casualties of the military coups d'etat that would dominate the political history of the 1970s and 1980s. In both cases, military strongmen from the northern regions would try to redress historic neglect of their areas, by replacing western-educated elite southerners, with more authentically African officials from northern ethnic groups. In this wholesale government reorganization and shuffle, the Bresiliens were easy target. When then Togolese army colonel(later,Chief-of-State) Gnassingbe Eyadema began his campaign to destabilize Togo's first president, Sylvanus Olympio in the mid-1960s, Eyadema supporters loudly and publicly criticized the president for not being a real African because of his Portuguese surname. As the destabilization campaign became more acrid, opposition newspapers demanded that Olympio go back to Brazil, the real country of his origins.(31) Upon his assassination,reportedly at the direct hands of Eyadema, Togolese Bresiliens had reason to be wary of their future within the country. Many went into exile in neighboring Benin, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire.

The popular resentment against the Bresiliens and what was seen to be their overbearing and haughty elite manner, of course had been nurtured over time. Seeing them, and other southerners dismissed from their important positions in government gave some satisfaction to northerners, who had been forced to suffer in silence in northern secondary schools, while Bresilien teachers complained about the absence of real culture and civilization in the rural areas. Southerners,(which would include disproportionately large numbers of Bresiliens) who might have misused their positions as civil servants were now to be humbled. Having excellent educational skills and resources, many

Bresiliens would obtain employment in international organizations, departing on an odyssey of self-imposed exile, that for many would last for decades.

For many Bresiliens who spent extended periods of the decade of the 1980s away from Benin and Togo,the flurry of popular interest and participation in the national democracy movements have presented them with new opportunities for public service and participation in national life. The case of Benin is very instructive. Engaged in all aspects of the struggle waged to topple the military dictatorship of General Mathieu Kerekou, Bresiliens were and remain active participants in that country's return to democracy and ongoing attempt to strengthen the institutional foundations for civil society.

They would not define themselves primarily as descendants of Brazilian returnees, but rather as African nationals and Beninese patriots, who once again believe in a democratic future for their country. However, as a student of their history in Africa, the present author was not surprised to find Bresiliens participating in the highest ranks of the 1990 National Conference for Democracy which effectively ended the rule of the military, and in the transitional government that prepared the country for presidential elections in 1991.(32) The elected head or president of the national conference was the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cotonou,Msgr. de Souza. The person responsible for overseeing and writing major portions of the new national constitution was the nationally respected female jurist Grace d'Almeida; she was ably assisted by the president of the national women's lawyer association,Mme. da Silva. There is one Bresilien in the cabinet of the newly elected President Nicephore Soglo; the cabinet position is that of unofficial vice-president, in reality a minister to the ministers.

Perhaps most intriguing is the public discussion concerning the First Lady, Mde.Soglo. While the President is not Bresilien, his wife is, coming from the old traditional Bresilien neighborhood in the coastal enclave of Ouidah. On a continent where official first ladies, while perhaps being influential in the background, are seldom public figures in their own right. Mme. Soglo has broken that mold, as she is an international lawyer, and has upon occasion publicly,if humorously, scolded her husband for not doing more to assist women's advancement in Benin.(33) For mildly bemused Benin intellectuals, Mme. Soglo has brought national politics squarely into the 20th century, behaving as a western-style first lady, with even some credible feminist credentials.

The author, hoping to provoke a response, asked the Bresiliens if there was any historical significance to their occupying such important positions within the national movement to return the country to democracy.While they saw no direct or indirect relationship of their current participation to their Brazilian background, there was for some of the interviewees, a slightly affirmative, or positive response to the observation that the Bresiliens, even unconsciously, were again assuming major roles within national society.(34)

While it is accurate to portray the Bresiliens of Togo and Benin as active participants and contributors to the national intelligencia, their impact within society has been out of proportion to their small numbers, relative to the national population, from their first arrival on the coast in the 1840s. Perhaps a total of only 5,000 returnees succeeded in reaching the continent throughout the 19th century.(35) The group learned to support and protect its own members, as it was never openly welcomed and supported by local residents, or completely accepted by Europeans. Responding to a situation in which an individual, or a group without a patron could become easy prey for another with support, the Bresiliens transformed themselves into a group culture, that of the returnees. As would other local and foreign individuals and groups, the returnees would find available social,economic and political niches or interstices, into which their experiences, talents, flexible world view and limited financial resources would allow them to function.

Bresiliens were characteristically and perhaps pathologically, the group in between worlds and different cultures. To the extent that it was possible to exploit successfully that middle-group status, in commerce, or diplomacy and politics, they did so. Particularly during the mid-decades of the 19th century, safety was to be found in numbers and within a group, which the Bresiliens would judiciously form. Intra- group marriage strengthened the unit's cohesion, and also could represent potentially good commercial and political contacts.(36) In what some non-Bresilien African observers have classified as caste like behavior, marriages among the first rank or tier of Bresilien families-- the de Souza, d'Almeida,Paraiso and da Silva clans,primarily based in Ouidah and Porto-Novo-- had the expected results of binding families and clans, to ensure continued economic, social and even political dominance within the group.

The extended family characteristic of 19th century Bresilien life has changed greatly in the present, but not totally disappeared. If,in the 1920s,it was considered socially improper for a Bresilien intellectual, or merchant to marry an 'African', today, the seeming proponderance of Bresiliens in two-career professional marriages is striking.(37) While no social stigma is now attached to marrying outside of the group, it is expected or

anticipated that the Bresilien will marry an appropriate professional. Importantly,these group expectations are directed at women,as well as men. Of course they are not limited to a single group, and can been seen to function as social parameters in upwardly mobile and elite groups in all societies. However, with the Bresiliens there is a resonance, a hearkening back to the early 20th century photographs of linen suits and starched lace dresses, the spats and panama hats that characterized a formal bourgeois Sunday afternoon in Ouidah, or in Bahia. The physical images and symbols can be seen in the museum photographs of Pierre Verger, in Bahia and in Benin.(38)

Expectations of professional excellence and personal achievement, are still prized and continue to characterize contemporary Bresilien society. That expected achievement has become a part of the group's contemporary ethnic identity, and collective responsibility. It is expected, if not verbalized, that a Bresilien would be elected president of the national conference for democratic transition, one who happened to be a member of the Catholic hierarchy. It is considered within the group both normal and appropriate that one of its members would be given the responsibility of largely redrafting the constitution and the entire penal code. An earlier generation of Bresiliens produced a legal scholar who became a judge at the World Court in the Hague, setting precedents for legal excellence,in the mid-1960s.(39)

The collective history of the group, from the time of their arrival in Brazil as slaves, is a remarkable and impressive history. Their shifting and flexible ethnic group identity and cultural norms and values have directly contributed to that history. Not consistent, often contradictory, self-serving and not always likeable,or themselves, even tolerant of difference they perceived to be inferior, the Bresiliens survived the often deadly coastal politics and warfare of the 19th century, and maneuvered their collective way through the colonial systems imposed upon them,by the French, Germans and British. Perhaps more consistency in their ethnic identification would not have served the group as well, in the diverse challenges they had to confront. Perhaps their inconsistency in culture and ethnic identity was more a human reaction to their changing situation, than an unfortunate lapse in ethnic group solidarity, a solidarity that had rarely been shown to them as a group, either in Brazil, or upon their return to Africa.

ENDNOTES

1.See J.Michael Turner, "Les Bresiliens-The Impact of Former Brazilian Slaves Upon Dahomey (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), Boston University,1975, and Turner, "Cultura Afro-Brasileira na Africa Ocidental",Cadernos Candido Mendes,Estudos AfroAsiaticos,no.1,jan.-abr. de 1978.
2.Turner, "Bresiliens",pp.8,11.
3.See Joao Jose Reis,Rebeliao escrava no Brasil:a historia do levante dos males(Brasiliense,1986) and Reis"Sobre revoltas escravas"in Joao Jose Reis,Escravidao & Invencao da Liberdade,Estudos Sobre o Negro no Brasil(Brasiliense, 1988)
4.Reis,"revoltas",p.123, theoretical discussion of importance of Islam as a religious and political force in 1835 Salvador, also Jose Carlos Ferreira,"As insurreicoes dos Africanos na Bahia",Revista do Instituto Geografico e Historico da Bahia, Anno X,Vol.X,No.29,(1903),p.113.
5.Reis,Op.cit.
6.A.J.R. Russell-Wood,Fidalgos and Philanthropists,The Santa Casa da Misericordia of Bahia 1550-1755(Berkeley,1968),p.142.
7.Reis,"revoltas",pp.125-126, with a perceptive critique of incomplete Yoruba ethnic identity analysis of Maria Manuela Carneiro da Cunha,Negros,Estrangeiros(Brasiliense, 1985).
8.Pierre Verger,Flux et Reflux De La Traite Des Negres entre Le Golfe De Benin et Bahia De Todos os Santos du XVIIe au XIXe Siecle(Paris,1968),p.631, Turner,"Bresiliens",pp.80-82.
9.Ibid.,p.82.
10.C.W.Newbury,The Western Slave Coast and Its Rulers(Oxford,1961)pp.56,81, and see Richard Burton,A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomey, Vol.I(London, 1954),pp.47,68-9.
11.See Turner,"Africans,Afro-Brazilians and Europeans:19th Century Politics On The Benin Gulf",Africa(Universidade de Sao Paulo,Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos) 4, 1981, Turner,"Cultura",pp.23-4, and E.Frances White,Sierra Leone's Settler Women Traders:Women on the Afro-European Frontier(Ann Arbor,1987).
12.Arthur T.Porter,Creoledom(London,1963), also David Ralston,"The Return of Brazilian Freedmen to West Africa in the 18th and 19th Centuries,"Canadian Journal of African Studies,Vol.3, No.3,Fall,1970 and I.K.Sundiata, "The Fernandinos:Labor and Community in Santa Isabel de Fernando Poo"(unpublished Ph.D. Thesis),Northwestern University, 1972.
13.Turner,"Bresiliens",p.153.
14.Ibid.,p.153.
15.See Turner,"Ritorno All' Africa",Afriche,Quaderni di Introduzione Alle Realta Africane(Societa Missioni Africane,Genova)Periodico Trimestrale-I Trim.'89,pp.20-3.

16.Turner,"Bresiliens",p.124.
17.Ibid.p.123, oral history interview with Paraiso family in Porto-Novo, February,1972.
18.Boniface I.Obichere,West African States and European Expansion,The Dahomey-Niger Hinterland 1885-1898(New Haven,1971),p.99.
19.Ibid.,Chapter V.
20.Turner,"Bresiliens",pp.348-9.
21.Ibid.,pp.202-203.Also Turner,"Cultura",p.21.
22.See Turner,"Politics",pp.10-11.
23.Turner,"Bresiliens",p.359, interview with Damien d'Almeida, Come,Benin, March, 1972.
24.Sundiata,"Fernandinos",Chapter Two.
25.Turner,"Bresiliens",p.371.
26.Ibid.,p.378.
27.Ibid.,pp.378-9.
28.Turner,"Ritorno"p.25.
29.Turner,"Bresiliens",p.352.
30.Anani Dzidzienyo and J.Michael Turner,"African-Brazilian Relations:A Reconsideration" in Wayne A. Selcher ed.,Brazil in the International System:The Rise of a Middle Power (Boulder,1981),pp.202-3.
31.Ibid.,p.214.
32.Turner interview with Attorney Grace d'Almeida, 2 February 1992 Cotonou,Benin.
33.Turner interview with three administrators of the National Conference for Democracy, 28 January 1992, Cotonou,Benin. Names witheld at author's discretion.
34.Turner interview with Msgr.Etienne de Souza,Archbishop of Cotonou,1 February 1992.
35.Verger,"Flux", notes for Chapter XVI,pp.633-34.
36.Newbury,"Coast",pp.56,81,Turner,"Politics",p.10.
37.Turner Interview with Attorney Grace d'Almeida and family, 2 February 1992.
38.Verger poster-photograph collections in the Museu Afro-Brasileiro,Salvador,Bahia and Musee du Fort Portugais, Ouidah,Benin,also Verger Retratos da Bahia(Corrupio, 1983).
39.Beninese international lawyer Luis Pinto served on the World Court during the 1960s and 1970s.