

**REPORT: LECTURE TOUR TO BRAZIL
1-23 DECEMBER 2000
ORGANIZED BY SEPHIS (SOUTH - SOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMME FOR
RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT)
AND UCAM (UNIVERSIDADE
CANDIDO MENDES), CENTRO DOS ESTUDOS AFRO-ASIATICOS**

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of Dakar (Senegal)

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INTRODUCTION

This lecture tour was meticulously prepared by Professor Livio Sansone, Scientific Vice President of the *Centro dos Estudos Afro-Asiaticos* ([University of Rio de Janeiro](#)) and by the Coordinator of SEPHIS, Ulbe Bosna, with the assistance of Ingrid Goedhart. They worked on this traveling lecture series for nearly a year. It was an enormous success, thanks to the diversity and quality of the teachers and researchers I met and the interest my lectures raised for a public that was highly attuned to everything concerning the culture and history of Africa.

It was just by chance that shortly after my return from Brazil, the *Centre d'Etudes Africains* of Rabat invited me to Morocco. There I discovered the same interest in African history and civilization, and particularly the same desire to renew contact that had been sustained across the Atlantic for Brazil and the Sahara for Morocco for centuries. Today, North-South relations have replaced these ancient connections with Africa south of the Sahara.

Similarities in the two experiences have prompted me to compose a unique report that has allowed me to share my unforgettable souvenirs of Brazil and Morocco with all my friends at the dawn of this new Millennium. It has taken me so long to write because too many memories were still jostled together in my head after having covered thousands of kilometers from the southern tip to the northern tip of Brazil and then on to Morocco. I met countless people in both countries, who all left an indelible impression upon me. I needed a bit of time to sort out all these memories in my mind. I can now share them with you all, while portraying their full human and intellectual dimensions.

Prelude to My Trip to Brazil

My trip to Brazil was carefully prepared by SEPHIS and Livio Sansone, although due to time constraints, I was unable to receive him in Dakar when he traveled to Africa on a lecture tour. He was my shadow during my entire stay, taking care that every detail of my movements were covered, and ensuring that I did not get lost between the São Paulo Airport and Campinas. The seminar on methodology held in Dakar for university students hailing from the three continents familiarized me with SEPHIS' mission of developing South-South exchanges. I had already participated in a few of the seminar's sessions with colleagues from our History Department. There I met one of the Brazilian students who, along with his [friend Elisa from Japan](#) and a Senegalese student named Alain, would be my guardian angels for my entire stay in Rio. It was they who met me at the airport and who accompanied me when I departed at the end of my tour of Brazil. Thanks to the availability of all my colleagues who welcomed me with open arms, I was able to discover Brazil from inside out.

Prior to that, I stopped off in Paris, Amsterdam and Leiden to meet the SEPHIS team and the researchers at the African Studies Center. In just a little time, I was able to meet many researchers and exchange points of view on my research projects. We also made plans to pursue the possibility of receiving funding from SEPHIS [and/or alternatively](#), for an extended stay as an associate researcher at the African Studies Center.

My projects [involved writing/ editing?? the second](#) volume of my work on 20th century Senegambia and compiling a General History of West Africa in three volumes in a collaborative effort with several other historians. In addition to the SEPHIS team consisting of Ulbe and Ingrid, I met the following researchers at the African Studies Institute, in the absence of its Director, Gerti Hesseling: Wim Van Binsberg, Merijane de Bruijn, Han Van Dijk and Peter Gesehirre. I was able to appreciate the dynamic teams of researchers and the richly endowed library which together have earned the African Studies Center its stellar reputation. The Center has enormous potential for [associate researchers who want to undertake long-term work and/or participate in a series of think tanks on Africa in every discipline](#).

On this occasion, I received several works by the following authors:

- Richard Fardon, Wim Van Binsbergen, Rijk Van Dijk editors, *Modernity on a Shoestring*
- *Dimensions of Globalization, Consumption and Development in Africa and Beyond*. Kidos - Leiden -London. 1982, 422 pp.
- Mirjam de Bruiju and Han Van Dijk: *Arid Ways: Cultural Understandings of Insecurity in Fulbe Society*, Central Mali/Thele Publishers, Amsterdam, 1995, 547 pp.
- Gerti Hesseling: *Politiques foncières à l'ombre du droit, l'application du droit foncier urbain à Ziguinchor, Senegal*, African Studies Center, Leiden. 1992, 213 pp. (Land Policies in the Shadows of Law: The Application of [Urban Land Laws in Ziguinchor, Senegal](#))
- Wim M.J-Van Binsbergen - *Religious Change in Zambia Exploratory Studies*, Kegan Paul. International London and Boston 1986, 423 pp.
- *Tears of Rains. Ethnicity and History in Central Western Zambia*, Kegan Paul International London and New York, 1992, 495 pp.

My voyage was preceded by the publication in Portuguese of a booklet containing three articles I had written, entitled: *Senegambia – Arguments for a Regional History*. The articles addressed the following topics:

1. Reflections on Historical Discourse in Oral Traditions in Senegambia;
2. Writing History in Post-Independence Africa: The Case of the Dakar School;
3. History and Perception of Frontiers in Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Issues of Regional Integration.

This publication in Portuguese and distributed before my lectures, greatly facilitated dialogue and discussions with students and teachers. It was especially helpful for those who had the difficult task of translating from French into Portuguese during my speeches before keenly interested audiences. It was always a special pleasure to meet so many people at all the universities across this vast country, from the southern to the northeastern parts of Brazil.

Rio de Janeiro - 2 December 2000

Rio was both my arrival point and my point of departure for my Brazilian tour. I was warmly received by Claudio, Alain and Elisa at the airport and then retired to my hotel. The next day, the three of them arrived to take me on a tour of Rio's magnificent sites. We boarded the ferry so that we could view the city from the mouth of the bay. That Monday, my mentor Livio took me out to dinner at a restaurant set on one of the hills of Rio. On Tuesday, he checked me out of the hotel and lodged me in a magnificent three- or four-level house perched atop a hill; it was reached by climbing a stairway with a thousand steps. A Chilean artist had claimed the site and was inspired to decorate the steps, much to the delight of tourists, who flock there to photograph one another or to buy his works. He has decorated the step sides with huge, salvaged bathtubs transformed into immense flowerpots. I

discovered much more about the daily lives of Brazilians by staying among them than I ever would have had I remained confined to a tourist hotel.

On Tuesday, we got down to serious business, beginning with my lecture at the University of Rio. I was impressed by the horde of students who awaited me and their enthusiastic response to my lecture on the theme of historic discourse in oral traditions. Alain the Senegalese student served as my interpreter. In fact, this theme raised a great deal of interest in Rio and everywhere I went, due to its specificity in the writing of African history. My audience was very curious about the griot caste and their role in the conveyance of oral traditions. The hall's electrically charged atmosphere linked me with an invisible cord to this young audience, one that was highly attuned to anything concerning Africa, which it was rediscovering through my presentation. This feeling of complicity in that bond with Africa would resurface again and again throughout my voyage. Thanks to Valéria Calmon's ability to mobilize so well, this lecture was a resounding success. She organized it all, imbuing the meeting with a special style, an early indication of how wonderful my trip would be.

The next day, the Afro-Asian Studies Center received me to conduct a more intellectual discussion about the Dakar School of History and particularly the respective roles played by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Cheikh Anta Diop and Abdoulaye Ly in awakening African nationalism. We also focused on those leading historians' relations with the black diaspora in the affirmation of African civilization values. Students who had attended my first lecture and professors from the Afro-Asian Studies Center were also in the audience.

Our debates spilled over to a cocktail in the hall, which featured a magnificent exhibition by Silva Maranhão, a Brazilian plastic artist. His gigantic frescos lent a magical feeling to this immense hall back dropped by the setting sun. After visiting the exhibit, I offered the painter my booklet as an expression of my admiration for his works. To my great surprise, he returned half an hour later with a marvelous tableau which he offered me with great emotion, encircled by his charming family and friends. The painting represents the masters' vision of a slave on a coffee plantation; the slave's body is disproportionate to his tiny head to show that for his masters, all of his working strength is concentrated in his arms rather than his intelligence. On the back of the tableau, he had dedicated the following to me: "*Ao Amigo Boubacar Barry com carinho Expecrel Para Historiador da liberdade. Rio 6/12/2000.*" (*To our friend Boubacar Barry, with For the Freedom Historian. Rio, 12/6/2000*)

I was so moved by this generous gesture from such a creative artist that I was at a loss for words. Here was a man who could simultaneously depict his vision of beauty and his rejection of suffering by Africans once bound by slavery in Brazil who are even now assailed by civil war in Africa, as he had witnessed when visiting Angola. It would be my greatest pleasure to receive Silva in Dakar one day. There he would be able to meet many talented Senegalese artists such as Souleymane Keita, whose paintings have adorned my house for years. I am certain that Silva and Soulèye will one day build the bridge between Brazilian art and African art and express renewed joy in hope for a New World. This meeting was a high point in my voyage, which I am not about to forget. "Obrigado, Silva."

On that same day, I had lunch with Livio and Professor José Murillo de Carvalho, who under the aegis of the SEPHIS Program, had traveled to Nigeria to give a series of lectures on the theme "The Struggle for Democracy in Brazil: Possible Lessons For Nigeria." The University of Port Harcourt also supported the tour. The three of us shared our experiences with this program, which opens new avenues for South-South cooperation and most importantly, allows people to experience what life is really like on other continents.

During a free afternoon, I visited a major exhibit entitled: "*Negro de Corpo e Alma + 500*" (Black in Body and Soul + 500) at the *Casa França – Brasil*. Ana Lúcia Magalhães Pinto, the foundation's president, introduced this magnificent exhibit, which retraces the great 500-year odyssey traversed by African slaves and their descendents down through Brazilian history.

Negro de Corpo e Alma, modulo da Mostra do Redescobrimento ora apresentado na Cas
França-Brasil, consttui o desafio de relatar a saga de uma cultura na complexidade de sua

construção e demonstrar a importância do negro em nossa história, sua força e presença como formadoras da alma múltipla do nosso povo.

Nesse sentido, a construção que aqui se mostra é a de um ethos, o modo de ser brasileiro que, como muito a propósito enfatiza o curador da mostra, Emanuel Araújo, é definido pelos grandes símbolos da cultura afro-brasileira – samba, Carnaval, futebol – dos quais nos orgulhamos sem, no entanto, reconhecer aos seus representantes os direitos civis, políticos e sociais.

*Uma cultura, qualquer que seja, é a afirmação radical de sua diferença, e, como construção ininterrupta, que experimenta avanços e retrações, inclui no seu caminhar a análise, a revisão e o relato das conquistas e fracassos que a constituem. Em **Negro de Corpo e Alma** temos uma belíssima síntese da trajetória de uma identidade étnica cuja contribuição para o universo cultural brasileiro é definitiva. Sem ela, nosso país seria outro.*

The City of Rio sponsored guided visits for schools, thereby permitting young Afro-Brazilians from poor neighborhoods to view this exhibit, which recognizes the roles played by blacks in shaping Brazil's plural identity. There are signs of a slow awakening to this diversity, which challenges the ideology of racial democracy. As opposed to 1988 when the conference on the abolition of slavery in Brazil was held, today one can feel a more visible presence of Afro-Brazilian movements, which speak out in the press and on the radio to claim their place in the sun. The purpose of the Afro-Asian Studies Center at Candido Mendes University, created in 1973, is to promote research on Africa, race relations and the specific problems of Afro-Brazilians. The Center explores more extensively the reasons behind inequalities in education and in employment in the civil service and the police force, where Afro-Brazilians have an especially large representation.

São Paulo – 7 December

On 7 December, I flew from Rio to São Paulo, where my friend Professor [Kabengele Munanga](#) awaited me. I first met the professor in 1988 during the centennial celebration of the abolishment of slavery in Brazil and was pleased to meet him again with his Brazilian wife last summer in Lisbon, at a conference on 20th-century Africa. I was warmly received by Professor Kabengele, this born-and-bred Zairean who by fate had become a Brazilian, and is one of the few Africans to teach at the University of São Paulo. That evening, I dined with the Kabengele couple and their Brazilian friends of Japanese origin, in an Italian restaurant. This was yet another confirmation of the cosmopolitan spirit that I would observe throughout my voyage to Brazil. It is ingrained in every aspect of living for this people of mixed heritages, *par excellence*.

On the morning of 8 December, Professor Kabengele accompanied me on a visit to CEBRAP, [the Centro Brasileiro de Análise e planejamento \(Brazilian Center of Analysis and -----\)](#) which, like CODESRIA in Africa, has been a refuge for the many intellectuals excluded from universities during the country's dictatorships. The center was developed on a cross-disciplinary basis embracing all fields as a means of accompanying the transition to democracy in Brazil. There I met Omar Ribeiro Thomaz and had a very interesting discussion about his experiences in Guinea Bissau and Mozambique and the Center's activities.

In the afternoon, we had lunch at the university restaurant, nestled in a little forest. It was the Amazon in miniature, recreated on a spectacular site in the heart of the campus. Mrs. Ana Mayer Singulle, who would serve as interpreter for my lecture, shared lunch with us. She is conducting a comparative study of Afro-Brazilian prisoners and African-Americans in U.S. prisons. I gave her contacts for Ahmed, one of my former students at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Ahmed is a former Black Panther who spent 22 years in prison for a crime he never committed. [I met him/ back up with him?? He and I met again, after he had left prison and was studying for a Ph.D.](#) He had converted to Islam while incarcerated and has been able to pursue his studies with the help of the black community, which also stood by him during that long ordeal. He was a good friend to me during that winter session,

and introduced me to Michigan and Detroit's black community. In fact, it was my humble honor to receive him at my home two years later, and to guide his steps in his impassioned search for his roots on the shores of the Senegal and Niger Rivers and in the Fouta Djallon, where he visited my relatives in Timbo and Mamou. He was keenly set on looking for similarities in the relationships of slaves living on the shores of the Mississippi, Senegal and Niger Rivers and the way their mentalities evolved. In addition, he researched the role played by Stokely Carmichael compared to the African revolutionary leaders, Sékou Touré and Kwamé Nkrumah in Africa. The issue of the relation between African Americans or Afro-Brazilians in prison is a major stake that today determines the destiny of this community, which is more visible in these correctional facilities, on football fields and in basketball courts than in institutions of learning.

That afternoon, accompanied by Professor Kabengele, I presented my lecture to a very small audience, but one that was highly informed about African issues. I covered all three themes in my booklet, which prompted lengthy discussions about oral traditions and nationalism. We especially lingered over the current issues of conflicts and democratization in Africa.

On that occasion, Professor Kagenbele's experience served as a reference point for my reflection and discussions about African diasporas and the fate of African intellectuals in post-independent Africa. We focused primarily on the problems encountered in anchoring the notion of citizenship, which is being warped by single-party military and civil dictatorships. We reviewed the list of all the Zairean or African intellectuals victimized by political oppression in their countries. Some have chosen internal or external exile by moving to neighboring countries before leaving the continent permanently. Professor Kabengele's experience with integration revealed another facet of the extraordinary destiny of certain diasporas, for he had come to Brazil with some of his Zaï re-born children, who were raised by his new Brazilian wife as though she were their real mother. The children are now Brazilian citizens and have all done well in college. One of his sons has become a renowned musician and I was offered a CD that he had just released to the public.

In contrast to the slaves who were dragged into Brazil, however, this family's African roots run deep, and they or their children can always return to Zaire one day to reunite with their closest cousins. I hope that Professor Kabengele and his family will be able to return there regularly and keep the umbilical cord tied to their motherland, like second-or third-generation Japanese-Brazilian children who return to Japan regularly. This is true for Eliza, Claudio's friend, for example. She is as much at ease with her Japanese identity (she speaks the language fluently) as she is with her Brazilian identity. She and Livio are preparing a thesis on Japanese-Brazilians who return to Japan, and we had a long conversation about the destiny of the diasporas in their cultural and affective relationships with their parents' homelands.

At the lecture, I met Fily, a young Senegalese and former student of the University of Dakar who moved to Sao Paulo several years ago. That evening, he invited me to participate in a *congadas* spectacle, which is often erroneously described as a Brazilian folkloric performance. In fact, each gesture reveals the profoundly religious nature of the ceremony, with each expression dedicated to family and community cohesiveness.

The noise of their drumbeats, their songs and their dances invades doorways and open windows, takes over houses, streets and churches, transforming the wearisome and sometimes violent everyday landscape of whole towns and winning eyes and hearts and making a fitting tribute to people's ability to overcome life's problems stretching all the way from the days of the slave quarter to the poor shanties surrounding our towns today.

Unlike the first *candomblé* I attended in 1988 in Sao Paulo, where all the dancers were white except for the Queen of Black Angola, at this Congados they were black and most of the spectators in the hall were white. Upon my arrival, I was welcomed like a king and watched the entire performance standing up, in tribute to their consideration for allowing me to preside over the ceremony. Although I could not fathom its every meaning, I was

deeply moved by this ceremony, as *“these rhythms were beating with the beats of those who are together but where each one has its own cadence. The Congadas is essentially a manifestation of a spirituality arising from African religions such as the candomblé and Umbanda. The manner of preserving their identity and cultural values was through the assimilation and incorporation of elements of Roman Catholicism into a confluence of symbolic and religious reinvention in which orixas and saints could share space side by side within the black man’s terreiros or holy ground.”*

When the ceremony ended, Laycer Tomaz, who had just published a magnificent work in Portuguese and English entitled *Da Senzala A Capela - From Senzala to Chapel*, offered me a copy inscribed with the following dedication: *“Para Boubacar Barry Leve o meu carinho e a inquietude de neu o char, dianre de tarita beleza messe munda. São Paulo / 8-12-2000.”*

Once again, I was overjoyed by this unexpected evening that revealed another side of Brazil with its rainbow of colors, where fortunately, the people’s joy of living helps them overcome daily anxieties through dance.

This center was designed to serve as a meeting point for people of every background and social condition who come to commune over the soup served at the end of the ceremony. The black community owes its individual and collective survival to this set of rites, which through all the vicissitudes of history, has been the glue that has held families together. In fact, this was one of the characteristics of slavery in Brazil. The Senegalese student Alain blended in perfectly with this center where intellectuals, artists and musicians meet periodically to exchange ideas and commune. It would be interesting to study the myriad itineraries of this new African diaspora growing today in Brazil, albeit on a small scale compared to the more visible influence of African migrants in other places, such as the Mourides of Senegal who flock to the North American cities of New York or Chicago.

Curitiba, 9 December 2000

On 9 December, I left São Paulo for Curitiba, where I was met at the airport by Marcia Graf and her husband Alneto, a former civil engineer. They first welcomed my spouse and I in 1988, when they showered us with hospitality. [Maria is an old acquaintance whom I first met at the International Symposium on Slavery organized in Nantes by Serge Daget in 1985 and again in Dakar at the Symposium organized by UNESCO on the Black Code, on Gorée Island.](#) She retired from the Federal University of Curitiba to teach at the Private University of Tuiuti do Parana. The university’s administrative and academic staff, under the personal guidance of its Chancellor, Sydnei Lima Santos, reserved the most unexpected welcome of my trip to Brazil thanks to their extraordinarily simple and warm hospitality. Bit by bit and day-by-day, the next part of the schedule for my princely visit would be revealed. Marcia had prepared it with the utmost discretion, with the collusion of the entire University. Everyone had made special arrangements just for me.

That afternoon, Marcia and Alneto picked me up to tour Curitiba and its surroundings. I visited the open-air Municipal Theater, which was set in an old quarry surrounded by forest at the edge of the basin linked to terra ferma by a bridge with a manmade river flowing beneath it. The only thing I needed was a concert to transport me to the fantasy world that this lovely contrasted landscape was forging in my mind. From there, we visited the Ecology University nestled in forest and mountain on this magical site where the beauty and purity of nature bring peace to one’s spirit. I discovered another facet of this city, which I was unable to appreciate during my first, all-too-brief stay in 1988.

That same evening, I was invited to dine at the home of Mrs. Rosane Santos, whom I will call the Portuguese Queen, for she embodied that particular style, beauty and generosity. During my entire stay in Curitiba, she attended to the least detail of my movements, ensuring that wherever I went, two or three teachers took turns to accompany me. Professors and administrative staff attended this grand banquet with their families. I must admit that I felt a little lost among all these beautiful people speaking Portuguese

simultaneously, unable to understand a single word. Nonetheless, I was truly appreciative of everyone's effort to include me for a little bit in his or her conversation and relieve me of my sense of isolation caused by the language barrier. It was a marvelous evening, giving me a foretaste of what I would experience for the next few days.

Sure enough, on Sunday morning, Mrs. Rosane Santos, who loves to remind people of her Portuguese roots, arrived to take me out, accompanied by two other professors from the Tuiuti do Parana University. We went to two radio stations to speak during their live broadcasts. The first station's vocation was to broadcast to Portuguese-speaking countries, particularly to Guinea Bissau, Angola and Mozambique. The commentator has a passion for African music, whose rhythms played in the background while he read poetry by African nationalist poets with love and devotion. The second station was a community radio that covered all the issues of the day. My passage was an occasion to talk about the Tuiuti University and the topics of my lecture for the following Monday. At both stations, Mrs. Rosane dos Santos proved to be such a talented announcer that professionals in the trade would have been jealous. Between the two stations, I enjoyed discovering a large part of the city of Curitiba and its immediate surroundings.

At morning's end, we returned to the downtown area, visiting the church and the Sunday market, which was a burst of colors, just like a typical African market. Indeed, the craftwork closely resembled articles found in an African market. People engaged in the same endless haggling, and there was a festive air about the place. On the square, I listened delightedly to Henri Pollack as he played brilliantly *on his violin and occasionally sipped from a glass of coconut juice, while I sipped from a glass of coconut juice, reminding me of* a typical Dakar street scene. After visiting the market, a royal lunch awaited me in a restaurant specializing in Brazilian cuisine. A dozen or so teachers and administrative staff also joined us. Once again, I was treated to a feast in a cordial atmosphere, where even more secrets of Curitiba's Brazilian cuisine were revealed to me. It was my honor to meet the head chef, a lady, who gave me a brochure of the restaurant's history. Additionally, a musician was called to play a Brazilian tune especially for me to accompany this meal, which is normally offered only on major holidays.

That same evening, I was a guest of Marcia and Alneto Graf's family, where they celebrated both Marcia's and her son-in-law's birthdays. All the Graf family was there, with Marcia's mother, her son-in-law's parents and the Swiss fiancé of their second daughter, who is studying in Paris, and had come with her brother to visit Brazil. Coddled in the entire family's warm hospitality, I shared this event with them over a sumptuous meal. I was also introduced to a friend of the Graf family, a 90-year old poet in top form. We chatted late into the night at this home, where the world in microcosm had gathered just to share the good feeling of being together.

Early Monday afternoon, Marcia accompanied me to the Federal University, where I delivered my lecture. Unfortunately, this coincided with exam time, so my audience was very small but highly captivating given the depth of our discussions on Africa and the destiny of Afro-Brazilians. It is a paradox to observe that Africa occupies an insignificant place in university curricula as a discipline, despite the existence of numerous experts on the history of African slavery in Brazil, where the system was maintained until 1888.

We addressed the problem of racial democracy and the national ideology that extols the absence of racism in Brazil. I pointed out that blacks were invisible in the universities, airports and commercial centers. To my great surprise, my listeners who were *apparently* all white, replied in one voice that they were black. The tannest of them informed me that his great grandfather had been a slave. I was at a loss for words and then I remembered the first time I attended a *candomblé* in São Paulo. While all the worshipers were white, they also claimed their double identity as "white blacks." Throughout my stay, I was confronted with this paradox, where one's *dark, light or white skin color has a different meaning* depending on the place, given the ambiguity of the notion of race in Brazil.

Late in the afternoon, I went with Marcia to Tuiuti University, where everyone had come to hear my lecture. To my great surprise and pleasure, Chancellor Sydnei Lima Santos was there in person with his entire staff, including the school's dean, professors and

students, who filled the great conference hall. I was at first surprised at the size of this private university set on a modern campus, which has grown in three years to 18,000 students. The Chancellor, who founded this university, is an energetic man of 75 years, a retired colonel of the Brazilian Army, and also a mathematics professor. He and his family built this empire with an iron hand tempered with great generosity in heart and spirit. A man with a lively expression who exudes intelligence and keen discernment from afar, the Chancellor gained my admiration before I ever met him, just from what I saw of his campus. I immediately began to dream of transplanting it somewhere in Africa - perhaps on Senegal's "Little Coast" or on the High Plateaus of the Fouta Djallon in Guinea.

Indeed, it is with that wish that I opened my lecture on frontiers in Africa. My presentation was admirably interpreted by the/a history professor, who had an admirable command of the concepts covered and of the French language.

Quite naturally, we ventured far beyond the theme of frontiers during our discussions, covering the current issues of governance and conflicts in Africa and the obstacles to a necessarily united continent. I drew careful comparisons with Brazil to highlight the specificities of Africa, which suffered the consequences of four centuries of slave trade and a century of colonization. This has impeded any attempts to loosen the stranglehold of the Berlin Conference arrangements. The Consul of Senegal to Curitiba spoke at length about the ways in which Brazil and Africa complement one another, for they share the same ecological zones and the same culture. Africa could benefit from the many technologies developed in Brazil in the agricultural and industrial sectors and exchanges between the two parties could be intensified in every area. A proponent of Pan Africanism, he also supported Senghor who, with the advent of Senegal's independence, wanted to establish permanent relations with Brazil, particularly in the cultural sphere. As I listened to him, I recalled my first voyage to Curitiba where, at the home of the Honorary Consul, I met distinguished persons with whom I held a rather odd conversation. We communicated in sign language, since I could not speak Portuguese. Standing before a map of the globe, they drew a red line of demarcation between the North and the South starting in the Mediterranean Sea, and continued down to the Panama Canal. I immediately understood their message, and in turn traced a bridge across the Atlantic between Rio and Dakar. The meeting ended before I could pursue my conversation with these mysterious men, who vanished like they had appeared, as though in a dream. The paradox is that they all were white/ appeared white, and I still keep a confused memory of that meeting. This enigma still remains fresh in my mind 12 years later, and is added to the one created by my "white" interlocutors that morning who had looked straight into my eyes and sworn they were black.

Beyond the color of one's skin, however, the consul explained Brazil and Africa's natural calling to develop their bonds. For my entire trip, I clung to this idea – my wild dream of a bridge between Africa and Brazil - as I traveled progressively from South to North, to Bahia and especially to Recife, where the desire to leap into the water and swim to the other side flashed through my mind more than once. Dakar seemed so close and yet so far away!!

The Honorary Consul of Senegal's presentation was followed by that of the Chancellor. They seemed to have a special rapport, for the Chancellor was once the Consul's professor. The Chancellor joined the podium to express his attachment to Africa. He was especially enthusiastic about my proposal to transplant his university somewhere in Africa. He dwelled at length on the need to develop education in order to free men from the yoke of poverty. Sydnei Lima Santos emanated the confidence of one who knew he had fulfilled his duty well, even though he was still ready to do more to change the world. He personally presented me with the University emblem, representing an open book bearing the epitaph *Promoção Humana*. We would say at home that "man is his own best medicine" to express that boundless confidence in the human spirit, which only education can reinforce.

This Bahia-born septuagenarian was sensitive to the evils suffered by Africa and was ready to contribute to our joint project to construct a private university in Africa. Chancellor Sydnei Lima Santos' example fortified my resolve to pursue this project, which I have nurtured with friends for years, in light of the structural crisis that has afflicted African

universities for the past two decades. The Chancellor had remained on course and persevered to build this university, starting with a private school installed a few years ago in his family courtyard. Long years spent in the army as a superior officer brought greater rigor to that gargantuan effort by this veteran blessed with the vision of a mathematician. We set a date so that together, we could realize our dreams for Africa and the consolidation of its age-old relations with Brazil.

When the conference ended, I was honored to receive a long line of people waiting for me to dedicate my booklet for them. Here as elsewhere in Brazil, I must say that I had never signed a book for so many people who showed such enthusiasm for that gesture. I was grateful to sign every time, glad for their interest in my modest works and especially in Africa. The conference ended with a cocktail extravaganza offered in my honor by the Chancellor, who remained by my side until the affair ended late that evening. When I left with Marcia, my heart was full of joy for this marvelous evening. I felt that I had sparked an interest for African history and rekindled the flame of a true fascination for the Continent, whose presence is so vivid in Brazil. And yet, it was so difficult for me to leave all these people whom I had met several times since my arrival, just when I was beginning to match each face with a name.

Regretfully, my stay in Curitiba had drawn to an end and it was late at night when I finally bade farewell to Marcia and Aleneto Graf, who accompanied me to my hotel. I would leave early the next morning, taking the airplane again to the São Paulo Airport and then on to Campinas for the next stage of my trip.

Campinas, 12 December 2000

At the São Paulo airport, I could not find the driver that the University of Campinas had sent for me. I therefore took the bus, assisted by two young women students from Rio who were going to the same place. But the way seemed excessively long to me, and at one point, I wondered if I was headed in the right direction, especially since I couldn't communicate in any language with the two students. Once at the bus terminal, the young women nevertheless very kindly insisted on accompanying me up to the University house. On the way, we chatted at length about soccer with the taxi driver, one José Ribeiro. He was very talkative; apparently, Brazil has never gotten over its defeat by Cameroon at the Sydney Olympic Games. Despite the defeat, however, I became a nice guy for these Brazilians once I began to talk about that famous Cameroon-Brazil game, and they gave free rein to their passion for soccer.

I was immediately enchanted by the comfort of the University House, whose architectural design is a real jewel. It is equipped with a pool, sauna and restaurant, all overlooking an artificial lake and encircled by green hills. It was one of the most beautiful campuses I saw during this trip to Brazil.

Robert Slenes met me soon after, apologizing for the confusion at the airport. I reassured him that I was a seasoned traveler and had found the campus thanks to the two students and his daughter, whom I contacted by phone from the bus terminal. Robert Slenes is an American who, after studying Brazil's history, settled down in Campinas, just like the Zairean Kabengele. He took me on a tour of the campus, which had already won me over with its beauty, and then we dined at the University Hotel restaurant. I was naturally fascinated by the experience of this American married to a Brazilian who had chosen to live in this country while keeping in contact with the United States, which he visits regularly. He revealed to me yet another facet of these contemporary diasporas in this "globalized" world.

The next morning and prior to my lecture, I visited the Institute of Philosophy and the Humanities, particularly the Postgraduate Program for History, which is a model of success in research training for students seeking masters' degrees and doctorates. My passage coincided with admissions selection for students aspiring to enter the postgraduate program, which offers scholarships in addition to training and more extensive education. The government has set up a financial system that also controls student's performance levels, which I found fascinating. I was indeed pleasantly surprised by the quality of the various

masters' theses for history, the best of which were published in a prestigious volume. Some of the theses, given their volume and content, could be compared to a 3rd cycle or Ph.D. dissertation. I seemed to me that even too much was required of these students, who seemed fascinated by historical studies, especially regarding slavery and its implications in Brazil's evolution. Robert Slenes offered me a number of publications from this series of carefully edited masters' theses. They are:

- Elcienne Azevedo – *Orfeu de Caraprinha. A trajetoria de Luiz Gama na impeiral cidade de São Paulo*. Editoria da Unicamp 1999, 280 pages.
- Sueann Canfield. *Eur defesa da honra, Moralidade, Modernidade E Nação No Rio de Janeiro 1918-1940*. Editera da Unicamp 2000, 393 pages.
- Fernando Antonio Mencarelli, Cena Aberta. *A absolvição de um bilontra e o teatro de revista de Arthur Azevedo*. Editoria Unicamp, 1999, 323 pages.
- Jaime Rodrigues, *O infame comercio, propeostas e experiências no final do trafico de Africanos para o Brasil 1800-1850*, 2000, 238 pages.
- Wlamyra R. de Albuquerque. *Algazarra nas mas. Comemorações da Independência na Bahia 1889-1923*. Editora da Unicamp, 1999, 137 pages.
- Joseli Maria Nunes Mendonça. *Entre a mão e os anéis. A lei dos sexagenários E. os caminhos da abolição no Brasil*. Editora da Unicamp, 1999, 417 pages.

This partial list of publications is indicative of the quality and diversity of the works published by this programme, which draws students from universities all over Brazil. They aspire to benefit from this exceptional training institute and its dynamic team of historians. I would meet the latter at my lecture and later share productive conversation with them over dinner.

In the afternoon, I delivered my lecture in English with Robert serving as interpreter. The Dakar School was the topic. I was received by a highly interested audience and we addressed both the issues of cultural identities and the dependence theories advocated by Senghor, Cheikh Anta Diop or Abdoulaye Ly to found nationalism. They were especially appreciative of the analogies drawn between this nationalism and that of blacks in the Diaspora. They listened tentatively to the diverse preoccupations of the Dakar School historians, whom they discovered for the first time. Indeed, despite the importance of Brazilian studies on slavery and the contribution of black people to Brazilian civilization, Africa remains the great unknown, the great missing factor in academic and university curricula. A group of black Afro-Brazilians who were extremely interested in Africa, including Cristina E. Alex Wisseu Bach, had traveled from São Paulo specifically to attend my lecture. Cristina, who is interested in the *Laçados*, the Afro-Portuguese who have established a Diaspora in Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau over the centuries, offered me a videocassette entitled "*Atlantico Negro. Na Rota dos orixàs*," a film by Renato Barbieri.

Filmado no Maranhão, Bahia e Benim. O ducumatário faz uma viagem no espaço e no tempo em busca das origins africanas da cultura brasileira. Partindo das mais antigas tradições religiosas afro-brasileiras: o candomblê e o Tambor de Mina. Atlantico Negro. Na Rota dos orixàs transporta o espectador para a terra de origen dos orixàs e voduns Benin, onde estão as raizes da cultura jeje nagô.

She also gave me a CD on Brazilian music to initiate me to samba rhythms. Professor Kabengele's son was also in the hall; he is studying at Campinas while living in São Paulo with his parents. [I am so pleased that my friend Elisée Soumoni of Benin will be the first visitor on this lecture tour to Brazil. A native of Benin, he will know better than I how to join the visible and invisible links between Africa and Brazil.](#)

In the evening, I was my honor to attend an extravagant dinner with Professors Robert Slenes, Silvia Lara and Maria Clémentine Pereira, who are from the History Department and had attended my lecture. Over succulent platters of grilled meat of every kind, this was an opportunity to continue our discussion about possibilities for exchanges

between Dakar and Campinas and above all to promote the teaching of African history in Brazil. Beyond that, however, it's a matter of promoting the teaching of Brazilian history in Africa. Indeed, aside from a few general notions, we are ignorant about Brazil's rich history and especially about Afro-Brazilians' highly diversified experiences over the past five centuries. This issue was debated in Bahia as well as in Recife. In Campinas, we made plans for setting up a joint program among several Brazilian universities that would invite African specialists for long periods to teach and initiate a research program on Africa.

We spent a pleasant evening and on the way back, I dropped by Robert's home just to say good evening to his daughter, who had insisted on meeting this stranger from Africa in person with whom she had only spoken on the phone. Robert offered me his book, *Na Senzala Uma flor esperanças E recordações na formação. Da família escrava. Brasil Sudeste, Século XIX – 4ª impressão (Editora Nova Fronteira. 1999, 299 pp.)* In this work, Robert looks into family history among slaves and thus addresses the social history of that community, which managed to maintain cohesiveness until the 19th century as a result of late industrialization. This contrasts with the splitting up of families in the United States, where early urbanization propelled blacks towards northern cities. I believe this can explain why African culture has survived in every facet of social life in Brazil more than in the United States, where city life broke family ties. Robert has the advantage of having pursued African studies in American universities, where he gained a solid knowledge of African societies. That perspective afforded him a better understanding of African roots among Afro-Brazilians in their familial and religious organization.

I was very touched by Robert's dedication: "To Prof. Boubacar Barry - A book which presents a small piece of Africa in Brazil - With best wishes and hopes for a speedy return to Unicamp. 12.12.2000."

At the end of my stay in Campinas, I began to think seriously about learning Portuguese so that I could return as quickly as possible to Brazil, which had become a fascination for me. I must say that it was with some regret that I left Campinas and its university. I could already imagine many opportunities for the university to collaborate with Dakar that would have to be developed as soon as I returned.

I departed from southern Brazil and headed northeast to Bahia and Recife, where I got closer and closer to Africa. These two cities are so vibrant in every aspect of social and cultural living, where everything is so intensified that you would think you were in Lagos or Cotonou.

Bahia, 12 December 2000

In Bahia (the old name for Salvador), I was received by the most French but also the most African of Brazilians, Ubiratan Castro, who earned his doctorate in Paris working under Katia de Queiros Mattos, the renowned specialist in Bahia history. Ubiratan knows Bahia like the back of his hand, and it was thanks to him that I learned Bahia's history in just a few days. Night and day, he strolled with me through the city streets, explaining each quarter's history down through time and successive occupations by the Portuguese, the British or the French, with each power leaving its mark on the houses and streets. Beyond this official history, he also revealed to me the suffering and combats led by the black slaves who actually experienced the grandeur, trials and tribulations of Bahia.

Mr. Castro is the Director of the Center for Afro-Asian Studies of Bahia, located in the heart of Pelourinho, the oldest quarter. I arrived early afternoon and delivered my first lecture at the Center for Afro Asian Studies shortly after, at 6:30 p.m. There, a very cosmopolitan mix of people awaited me, including distinguished figures from civil society, artists and black activists (represented by an African American reporter passing through Bahia). My lecture bore on oral traditions but quickly turned to debate about the current crises in Africa and the means of turning them around. A highly politicized audience raised the issue of black liberation in the Diaspora and on the continent. A large number of Afro Brazilians also attended, and their presence was felt in this jam-packed amphitheater. For the first time, I

really felt at home in this center, which juts out over a giant plaza steeped in history. At night, it was lit with a thousand and one lamps, lending a fairylike air to Bahia as Christmas festivities approached. It reminded me of a novel written by my fellow countryman, Thierno Monembo after a prolonged stay in Bahia: he named it *Pelourinho* by analogy to his Peulh origins – Poullo. The fascinating novels I had read by Jorge Amado about the turbulent life of Bahia's slums were especially vivid in my mind.

The conference ended with a cocktail that was highly appreciated by the participants; this gave them another opportunity to meet and for a short time, share the cares and hopes of this city of Bahia. That same evening, Castro, his wife and his daughter, who is a law student, invited me to a typical Bahia restaurant so that I could discover the delights of that [region's cuisine](#). Castro is also a fine gourmet and guided me on a tour like none other of the secrets of Bahia-Brazilian cooking and Bahian history. The restaurant was established in an old house with most of its decoration still intact, a living testimony to the splendid residences of Bahia's high society.

The next day, on 15 December, Castro picked me up at the Hotel Bahi do Sol, which is located right downtown. The place is perfect for pleasant strolls along sidewalks scattered with stands displaying every variety of tropical fruits. Given my Sahelian roots, it was hard to resist the temptation to stop each time and fill up a basket. At 10 a.m., I returned to an overflowing amphitheater at the Faculty of Letters to deliver my lecture on Dakar's School of History. I was deeply moved by the young students' thirst for knowledge, as they were naturally attracted by Africa. They were just as interested in the continent's past as in current issues concerning political crises and the prospects for unity on the continent. I was thrilled to observe that people who had attended the conference the evening before had returned to hear this lecture as well. The hall reminded me of the ambiance at African universities, what with its dilapidated equipment in a rather rustic setting. Among the faithful listeners was a renowned artist of Bahia, Jaime Sooré, who heads a nongovernmental organization that promotes schooling for blacks in Bahia. He was keenly attuned to everything concerning Africa. He posed questions about African's participation in the slave trade, which was the cause for this large black community's presence in Brazil. In fact, Bahia is the second largest black city in the world.

The audience demonstrated a real fascination for Africa, and when one student asked me about opportunities for exchange with the University of Dakar, I promptly invited her to come with me to Senegal. She leaped with joy and the hall resounded with applause, for she had dared to express everyone else's wish: to travel the African continent and discover its charms one day. She was standing in the long line to receive one of my signed books and planted a big kiss on my forehead with such spontaneity that I was ready to load them all onto a boat for Dakar while awaiting the construction of my bridge over the Atlantic. I was struck by the easy familiarity that prevailed between students and professors and I mused that the specter of sexual harassment seen in the USA could not be applied to Brazil in the same way.

At this lecture, I also had the pleasure of meeting Professor João Reis, who wrote a thesis on the revolt led by Muslim slaves in Bahia. As fate would have it, he collaborated on that work with Professor Lansiné Kaba, my friend and fellow Guinean, who at the time was a professor at the University of Minneapolis. Over the course of a memorable evening, we reminisced about our relationship with Kaba. By chance, he and Professor Reis had just seen each other at a conference on the African Diaspora, organized by Michael Gomes in New York.

Castro and I left the conference to have lunch at Dadäs where I discovered Bahia's famous cuisine. In fact, Jorge Amado once sang praises of the restaurant's owner. "*No universo da cozinha baina, Dadà significa um ponto alto do beru comer,*" he declared. Jorge Amado was right, for I savored an exquisite cuisine, the sum of all the recipes to be found in African cuisine enhanced by Dadäs talents. Dadà has left her mark and established a stellar reputation for her three restaurants installed on Rua Frei Vicente, on Rua Teixeira Mendes and on Alto in Ponbas. Using palm oil and okra as a base, one can savor all the dishes prepared with rice, gari, and manioc that are found along the West African coast, particularly

in Benin and Nigeria. I felt right at home, and Dadà herself was our very gracious hostess. Two distinguished figures were also her guests: Alette Soares and Rina Angulo, woman leaders who founded the famous publishing house, Editora Corrupia. In 1968 they toured Asia and are also very familiar with Benin and Senegal.

I invited Dadà to open a restaurant on Almadies beach in Dakar, where she could contemplate the sun as it set over Bahia every day. It would really be marvelous to give my fellow Senegalese a chance to taste her Bahia cuisine. She responded enthusiastically to my suggestion, offering me a card bearing her picture – *Tempéra da Dadà* – upon which she had written these kind words: “*Boubacar unu grande beijo com todo tempero da nossa Bahia.*” Just as we were leaving the restaurant, a large group of customers was entering. The place never empties in this extremely poor section of Bahia: in many ways it reminds one of certain parts of Treicheville in Abidjan with its famous “maquis” (cozy little cafes) that attract the jet set.

That lunch at Dadàs is forever stamped in my mind, thanks to the cordial ambiance she cultivates as she receives her clients. Her warm hospitality calls to mind the ladies who run the “*maquis*” of Abidjan or Douala. Their delectable cooking spiked with peppery tropical aromas can be smelled from far away. That evening, I visited another of Dadàs restaurants, this one located in Pelourinho, in the midst of the tourist district. The restaurant was much more sophisticated and most of the clientele were tourists. After dinner, I meandered through the streets of Pelourinho, which were all lit up for the holidays. I finally ended up in a sort of bar where an Afro-Brazilian band was playing a steady beat with such devotion that I remained there enthralled, listening to them for hours. The clients – Afro-Brazilian for the majority – must have been regular customers. They sipped their drinks and occasionally got up to dance, listening with special attention to this music concocted just for them. They reacted as connoisseurs to the steady gut-wrenching beat of the drums. The musicians played for their own pleasure, and there was a special rapport with the audience that I couldn’t always fathom. Still, I was spellbound by the music. It had such an African flair that at times I wanted to chat with these Afro-Brazilian people, who might help me to understand their past and present history fortified by five centuries of presence in Brazil.

It was quite late when I finally pulled myself away from the club, but I was sure that its regulars would continue listening to that music until the wee hours of the morning. I could tell from the simplicity of the music instruments and the modestly priced drinks that this was a meeting place for the very poor Afro-Brazilians of Bahia. I departed with many questions churning in my head, knowing that I could elucidate them only by staying longer in Bahia in order to penetrate the secrets behind those faces; sometimes they seemed so familiar, resembling people I know in Africa. In Rio, for example, I actually met a student who bore all the traits of a Tutsi. She asked me to send her information about that people whose name she learned for the first time.

The next day Castro took me out for a guided tour to discover every historical and social feature of Bahia. It is truly a privilege to have Castro as one’s guide, for each street, each house, indeed the whole district is draped in its own particular history, one that has filtered down through centuries of colonization, slavery, revolutions and military dictatorships.

Brazil today is a synthesis of all that sedimentation of countless contradictory facts and events in an immense country the size of a continent. Brazil is a country of contrasts in terms of its geographic and social makeup, where the super rich live side-by-side with the extremely poor. It can be compared to the contrast between Brussels and New Delhi; one gets a clear picture of the ocean separating living standards between two sections of Bahia - one rich and the other poor - who face each other every day without it bothering anyone. Just near a church, the descendants of Muslim Yorubas still hawk amulets to exorcise evil and bring good luck to passing tourists. We visited the slum communities of Bahia Afro-Brazilians, where dwellings sprout like mushrooms, in a disarray that only *favela* artists have been able to paint so skillfully, thereby lending a bit of harmony to this architecture of the poor. It is hard not to think of Jorge Amado’s novel, with his impassioned descriptions of the rage of Bahia’s poor people in defending their property rights. This in turn reminds us of [the beautiful tale of the Martinique.....author,.....?](#)

The poor's daily struggle for acceptance by a city that rejects them was not foreign to me as an African, for the same phenomenon can be found in Dakar, Abidjan or Douala. In those huge metropolises those who are left to fend for themselves in slums are a hundred times more populous than the privileged minority living in the showcases of modern cities open to the world. I was astonished at the hordes of street children claiming the sidewalks to beg and, unfortunately, to prostitute themselves as well. I could then clearly understand Alain's motivation for conducting a comparative study of street children in Dakar and those in Bahia, under the supervision of Livio Sansone. Alain, who knows Bahia well, offered me some very striking photographs of the people who sleep and die in the streets of Bahia. His pictures are the perfect venues for illustrating his field study of the human condition in the streets of Bahia.

I put Alain in touch with my colleagues in the History Department, Benga, Faye and Thioub, who are working on the evolution of municipalities, youths, people on the edge of society and prisons in Senegal. They are eager to receive Alain, who must return to Senegal to finish compiling documentation for his comparative study of Bahia and Dakar. That study is a prelude to that mythical bridge which will soon become a reality, at least from the intellectual standpoint. Indeed, Bahia's social realities, with its ambiance of poverty, but also its cultural abundance, reminds us in many ways of the contrasts in African towns. They have become holding stations for this rural migration, before their city dwellers, still wet behind the ears, launch into adventure headed for New York, Paris or Rome in search of dream employment. Such is the fate of African cities when they are not destroyed by the civil wars putrefying most states.

Our discovery of Bahia lasted the whole morning and included a visit to the magnificent port restaurants at the old transformed Customs Warehouse. There, waitresses are dressed like the signares of Saint-Louis, Senegal, back in its days of colonial splendor. In the poor sections, the narrow streets were alive with a rainbow crowd reflecting the interbreeding between Indians, blacks and whites birthed through the pain and vicissitudes of a history of endless conquest. I continued to insist that [Ubiratan](#) publish his works so that he could share his intimate knowledge of Bahia from its full historic and social perspectives with others. In certain respects, [this scholar](#) reminds one of those famous griots who are recipients of the word, the memories of the dead as well as the living, and who even know how to speak to stones and breathe life into them. I believe that Castro should travel to Africa to rediscover his roots and take a new look at Bahia, which will give him a new perspective of its profound historical and social dimensions. He needs to reconnect with the umbilical cord that ties him so intensely to Africa.

I owe so much to Castro for his availability and generosity in sharing all of his knowledge of Bahia with me. Thanks to him, I was able to see the city through different eyes compared to my first stay in 1988. At the time, I was the guest of Professor Katia de Queiros Mattos, lodged in a splendid house belonging to the daughter of the Governor of Bahia, where I was able to pierce the veil of aristocratic life in all its splendor. Incontestably, this greatest country's paradox lies therein, for the most abject poverty rubs shoulders with opulent wealth, and the steadily widening gap is only bridged during Carnival. During that festive week, it spills everyone into the streets, regardless of color or class, in frenzied dancing to the rhythm of the SAMBA, exorcising all demons.

We ended our stroll on the giant Pelourinho square, where I paused awhile to buy precious stones for my wife in atonement for having gone on this tour of Brazil without her this time. We were received by a Frenchwoman who had left Paris to live in Bahia with her Burkinabé friend, whom unfortunately I did not get a chance to meet. In Bahia, like other towns of Brazil, an African diaspora is slowly taking root. Most of these people come from Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. They include students, merchants and mainly immigrants fleeing the civil wars and conflicts that have bloodied Africa. Brazil is gradually opening to Africa, even though the movement is still timid and lacks any foresight of the great potential that can be found in organizing and developing relations between the two continents. South Africa seems to have gotten the message. In fact, my voyage coincided with a visit by Thabo Mbeki, the president of South Africa, who was seeking

membership in Mercosul for his country. Moreover, there is now a direct flight between Rio and the Cape, thereby assuring contact between the two continents in the southern hemisphere.

I lingered a bit in selecting my stones, heeding the wise advice of the French lady. Castro also surprised me with a marvelous gift as a souvenir of that memorable day which ended late that afternoon at another restaurant on the beachfront with his little family. To tell the truth, it is hard to refuse tasting the wonderful delicacies of Bahia cuisine, especially when Castro is your guide. I simply let myself be carried away by the magic of my friend's word, until he dropped me off at my hotel. I thanked him wholeheartedly for helping me to discover Bahia. It made me want to return for an even longer stay.

That evening, I had just bought a ticket to see a flamenco performance, when João Reis invited me to attend a singular, unprecedented performance by Riachão, the famous singer of Bahia. He was celebrating his 75th birthday by returning to the stage with all the musicians of his generation. It was the biggest surprise of the evening and I didn't regret one bit renouncing my flamenco dancing to discover the talents of Riachão the chansonnier. He knows how to revive Bahia's entire social history for an audience in unmatched harmony with him. The quality of this septuagenarian's voice and his music reminded me of the image I have kept of the Tuiuti Chancellor, Sydnei Lima Santos. Despite his age Riachão was as solid as a rock and held the audience in breathless anticipation throughout the evening, never taking a break. It's really a shame that I do not understand Portuguese, but I was able to follow the audience's reactions by their outbursts. Everyone was in perfect symbiosis with this monument of Bahia as he recounted the region's turbulent history and joy of living that has survived its ups and downs. Dressed all in white and sporting his legendary cap, Riachão was at home and at ease with this audience, in the same way that Youssou Ndour feels at home at the Thioossane Club. Youssou's fans never leave the dance floor from the beginning to the end of an evening while he plays nonstop from midnight 'til dawn. When I finally left, I bought Riachão's CD entitled "*Organização Humanenochuni - a mulher em primeiro lugar*," just so that I could carry a souvenir of that marvelous evening with me, which I owed to João Reis' kind invitation. Indeed, having a homegrown guide can alter one's vision of Bahia for a tourist, who might risk overlooking the most important things. I was my good fortune to close out the evening with João Reis and his wife, who joined us at an open-air ball taking place right in downtown Pelourinho.

A Latin band was playing music that was so familiar to me because of its incendiary beat, and people were dancing wildly to the salsa. I felt right at home: the whole scene reminded of the "bals-poussière" in Kinshasa neighborhoods in the good old days of Rochereau and OK Jazz, when one could still lead a good life in Zaï re. That open-air party was the place to meet all Bahia, regardless of race or color. Open to everyone, this ball is a place of communion with the musical beat in celebration of racial democracy. That feeling becomes even stronger during carnival time, when Brazil forgets its miseries and its contradictions for a week. That evening, I listened to the music again and watched the people dance, and I must admit that I was not at all uncomfortable in this exuberant atmosphere that makes you cast away your daily woes just for a little while. I had a crazy desire to dance, but resisted because I did not want to lose a moment of this grandiose and fascinating event, where the mingling of races and cultures lights you up and carries you to seventh heaven with the rhythm of sounds and movements in perfect harmony. It was quite late when we decided to leave the ball and the Pelourinho quarter, where bands played different music on every corner and windows were thrown wide open at house parties. All the music in the world had converged upon this little space loaded with history, which I would love to discover one day. It would certainly give me a better appreciation of the novels written by Jorge Amado, who immortalized life in Bahia with his love and passion for the "little people." But we had already reached my hotel and I thanked João Reis for that splendid cultural evening. Regrettably, we had not had enough time to discuss his works on the revolts led by Muslim slaves in Bahia. Like Casto, however, Reis lacked an African experience allowing him to better comprehend the impact of Africa's cultural and religious heritage as a way of explaining the everyday behavior of slaves in Brazil. As much as

Brazilians have learned to assimilate or reject their Portuguese heritage, they have yet to fully assume their African heritage, not always fathoming every dimension of that influence and its most subtle ramifications. I left Bahia the next morning for Recife, the last city on my tour and as usual, it was hard to accept that I had to leave so soon. I had begun to weave relationships and appreciate the goodness and generosity of all my colleagues, who had rivaled one another in their kindness to ensure that my stay was pleasant and purposeful.

Recife, 17 December 2000

Recife, located in the northeastern corner of Brazil and commonly called Pernambuco, was the last leg of my voyage. For the first time, I was pleased to discover the charm of an oceanside town, with its two giant rivers that have earned this splendid site at water's edge the name "Brazilian Venice." I did not know anyone before I was welcomed at the airport by Professors Marcos Carvalho, a historian and Maria Brandão, an anthropologist, who handled every detail of my stay in Recife.

I had just a little time to rest before Marcos Carvalho picked me up at my hotel to take a tour of that old city, the first to be occupied by the Portuguese. Its old buildings and ancient church remind one somewhat of Gorée, only on a larger scale. Marcos, who earned his Ph.D. in the United States, is as just as familiar with African history and like Castro for Bahia, knows Recife's history like the back of his hand. He is a native of Recife who preferred to return to Brazil and reside in his hometown, which he deeply loves, despite increasingly difficult living conditions for teachers. Teachers evoked this crisis in Brazilian universities wherever I went. They are discontent with the president's university policy, although he is actually a product of the privileged circle and defended leftist ideas before he came into power. This reminded me of the university system crisis in Nigeria after its prosperous oil boom years, which triggered a brain drain. The flight of intellectuals from Brazil to North American universities has been exacerbated by capital flowing out of the country at the hands of politicians and businessmen. This has become a major concern for nationalists, who are somewhat nostalgic for the national policies of military dictatorships that built the backbone of Brazilian industry. One can sense the bitterness of the shrinking middle class. It is which is powerless before the steadily deepening abyss between the rich and the poor and the consequences of globalization, which is at the root of this fierce liberalization process.

Recife is a picturesque old town with its narrow streets and caravansaries transformed into boutiques selling extraordinarily beautiful handcrafted products made of exquisite finely woven cotton. Everyone was out in this marvelous public square bustling with activity – restaurants with business booming, people engaged in sports such as the famous capoeira and groups preparing for Carnaval to rhythmic drumming. I couldn't resist tracing a few steps of the *sabar* as a salute to all the preparations underway for this year's Carnaval. Unfortunately, I would not have the pleasure of witnessing. But all of Brazil was already feverishly anticipating this yearly event, when a whole nation comes together in joyous communion, refuting daily worries in a collective therapeutic session. It brings to mind the *ndeup* exorcizing dances practiced by the Lebou populations on the Cape Vert Peninsula in Senegal.

I learned a great deal about Recife, particularly this northeastern city's colonial history. It was the first to be developed by the Portuguese before they moved south. During my promenade with Marcus, we had a long talk, and he spoke of his family with engaging honesty. We continued chatting late into the night at a local restaurant specializing in grilled meat, which is so delicious in Brazil. Fortunately, the specter of the mad cow disease has not yet reared its head here!

I have observed how frankly historians can discuss their private lives and link the past to the present in their conversations. After a few hours, I felt I had known Marcus forever. He had to travel the next day, but we managed to share advice about opportunities for developing African studies in Brazil. Like the others, he was aware that knowledge about

Africa could do much to facilitate comprehension of Brazilian history and particularly the role played by Afro-Brazilians in the flourishing of this culture of racial intermixing. It is particularly prevalent in Recife, where Indians, blacks and whites are so intimately interwoven in every aspect of daily living. Like Reis, he studied African history in the United States and was familiar with works on Africa, particularly the controversy spearheaded by Philippe Curtin over the number of slaves carried across the Atlantic. However, he was unaware of work conducted by Africans in Africa and especially by historians of the Dakar, Ibadan or Dar-Es-Salam Schools, who have tried to understand the development and the impact of the slave trade on African societies. Their clarification will in many respects enrich slave history in Brazil, which remains the primary concern of Brazilian historians and anthropologists. Indubitably, a history of the multiple and varied slave rebellions will make it easier to understand the phenomenon of slave revolts in the New World, particularly in Brazil, where so many *quilombo* communities were established. It has become a prime necessity for scholars to place a double focus on both Africa and the New World if we are to understand the slave trade phenomenon as a whole – economically, politically and socially - and especially to decipher the complexities of today's black diasporas.

The next morning, Maria do Carmo Brandão, whose dynamism is matched only by her kindness, arrived to take me to her university, where I delivered my first lecture on oral traditions. Students and professors of history, anthropology and philosophy filled the hall. They listened attentively to my exposé on the social and cultural aspects of oral traditions in Africa as conveyed by the griot caste.

A Gabonese student whose name, Rodrigue Philelion Amidou, recalled Senegalese origins, served as interpreter. The presence of historians specializing in the European Middle Ages who also spoke French fluently made it easier to grasp the analogy between troubadours and the griot phenomenon in the preservation and transmission of oral traditions. Christine Dabat, who is of French origin, teaches Medieval History. However, the anthropologists, who were the most numerous in the hall, oriented debate so that it focused primarily on the relationship between history and myths. Mrs. Danielle Perin Rocha Pilxa, who is also of French origin, offered me a published list of the seminar series organized by the Anthropology Department on the theme *Imaginário E Memória dans le cadre des XI ciclo De Estudos Sobre o imaginário*. Her dedication was written in French: "To Professor Boubacar Barry, as a sign of welcome to the northeastern lands of Brazil and the first steps towards future exchanges, 12/2000." One of the seminars, "Négritude, Memória E Emaginário," indicates Afro-Brazilians' place in challenging the process by which Brazilian identity is constructed. The identity theme seems to have become central to research in this university, which just goes to show the major impact that knowledge about the rest of Africa can have on enlightening everyone's mind.

After the lecture, discussions continued over a very cozy lunch shared at the university restaurant. This time, more Afro-Brazilian students and professors came and through their conversations, I could feel a black movement that was claiming recognition of its identity. That leitmotiv that reappeared several times in discussions, as though the myth of racial democracy had suddenly crumbled.

Early that afternoon, before my second lecture covering the Dakar School of History, I was privileged to view a video documentary produced by Claudia Pontes M. Melo on the life of a black *quilombo*. That community is still living in perfect independence on their bit of land under materially harsh conditions, isolated from the rest of the world. The documentary, entitled "*Serrete do Gado Brabi de Ililé*," truly unsettled me as I was allowed a glimpse of this community's lifestyle. It seems lost in an aimless sanctuary lacking any specific connection with modern Brazil or with Africa, locked in the most absolute isolation. At least that was my impression, which may have been distorted by my incomprehension of Portuguese. I must admit that I need more information to understand the historical reasons behind this community's isolation besides its instincts for survival. I am aware that Brazil is known for its vigorous slave revolts, which resulted in the establishment of many *quilombos* seeking to escape the oppression of slavery.

Still, it is hard to understand why, a century after the abolition of slavery in Brazil, this community should continue to live in utter isolation and material destitution, devoid of education. I did not have enough time to pursue this matter further because of the language barrier. Several young Afro-Brazilian researchers also [attended the meeting/ also viewed the film, including](#) Alexandro Silva de Jésus, who is researching the slave revolts. He has published a work entitled *Divino Mestre: Protostantismo popular e insurreicoes negras em Recife 1846*. “En 1846, ume protestante negro, natural de Recife, Pernambuco, alfabetiza va negres e foi acusada de fondar uma seita sismática e de insurgir as negros contra a escravidos.”

Just when I was becoming familiar with some of the young people’s research topics, an impressive throng of students and professors swarmed into the hall, just as they had that morning. They were eager to hear my second lecture on the Dakar School of History, the last in that series to close out my Brazilian tour.

To my great surprise, Claude Rivière, who produced a work on social changes in Guinea, was in the audience. He had been invited by the Department of Anthropology. This substantiates the close ties between the French School and the Brazilian School regarding the perception of Africans’ history in Africa as well as in Brazil, from Roger Bastide to Katia. I was happy to meet up with Claude Rivière again, whom I hadn’t seen in a long time. Throughout my trip, I could feel the very real influence of French culture in every field, especially in architecture. One needs only to consider Rio’s principal buildings, which are miniature copies of those in Paris. My lecture was received with the same level of enthusiasm as in the morning, while discussions focused more on current identity crises and the problems linked to national construction faced by postcolonial states.

It is obvious that for Brazilians who lack a long view of Africa’s history, it is difficult to understand both the internal and the external factors of the current crises and challenges to be faced by this continent that will enable it to reintegrate its geographic space and get its social and political dynamic back in sync. In so doing, Africa will be able to concentrate on creating the proper conditions for integrated development. Beyond this limitation in understanding, not only was there a current of sympathy but also a willingness to acquire a better understanding by seeking to discover Africa. This was the wish expressed many times by Professor Maria Do Carmo Brandão, who is Coordinator for the Postgraduate Program in Anthropology. She intends to assure that teaching about Africa is developed at her university. She delivered a certificate to me on behalf of the Departments of Anthropology, History and Philosophy to express their satisfaction for the lectures I had delivered at their faculties.

That evening, I was invited to a dinner at the residence of the Anthropology Department Chair, who had studied in Paris. Claude Rivière and a few professors from the Department were also there. This gave me a chance to mingle with my colleagues again and to taste delicious home cooked Brazilian food. I was more relaxed, for I had just ended this often infernally paced lecture series. Indeed, I wondered how I had managed to keep up the rhythm, taking a plane every two or three days and sometimes delivering two speeches in the same day for eager audiences that always clamored for more. I still don’t know where I found all the energy, if only because of my profound conviction that I had to get a message across and build a bridge between Africa and Brazil, transcending the vicissitudes of history. I was relieved to have fulfilled my mission, and I believe that Maria understood that I was at the end of my rope, for she made arrangements allowing me to rest for the remainder of my stay and visit the charming city of Recife.

The following day, I was invited by Walter Silva, a philosophy professor and former Secretary General of the Socialist Party in Recife. He has a perfect command of French, having lived in Paris. He introduced me to a restaurant specializing in grilled meats – it is the meeting place for the city’s politicians and business people. I will not dwell too much on the delights of that meal, where each waiter strives to give you the best morsel of one part or another of Brazilian or Argentine beef. There is something for everyone’s palate, especially for all the big eaters, since you can consume as much as you like, but must know when to

resist temptation at one point. We took our time eating while talking politics and assessing the place of blacks in Brazil and African-Brazilian relations.

Professor Walter Silva is first and foremost an active partisan of the intellectual left having Afro-Brazilian roots that transcends the problems of race and color. This philosopher is a humanist above all, imbued with Pan Africanist ideals cultivated during his long stay in Paris, where he stayed in touch with Africa. He is aware of the importance of African heritage as a foundation of Brazilian identity. He was among those who organized Nelson Mandela's trip to Recife, where the latter was crowned Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Recife to mark the importance of relations between Africa and Brazil. Professor Silva entrusted me with his proposal for an international seminar involving Brazil and Africa, "*Reconstruindo diálogos ante as desafios do terceiro milênio.*" It was drafted in 1997 but is still timely, due to the pertinence of its vision of South-South relations that Africa and Brazil can promote in a multidimensional world. I have reproduced the following excerpt to show its connection with the seminar that Livio Sansone has proposed to organize in collaboration with Soumon Eliséé and myself:

Relações

Como antigas e pré-históricas se configuram as relações do Brasil com a África. Segundo os geólogos Wegener, Diet e Holden, antes da era mesozoica teria existido uma Pangea (união dos continentes), unindo geograficamente, inclusive, o Brasil e a África. Não se pense, porém, que essas relações sempre foram estáveis. Como expõe José Honorio Rodrigues, no seu « África e Brasil, um outro horizonte », elas oscilaram ao longo de uma história do Brasil, vulnerável as pressões externas, sejam de Portugal no período colonial, inglesa na fase monárquica-imperial (Dom João VI, Pedro I e Pedro II) ou soviético-americana durante a Guerra Fria. Ou ainda das opções da política exterior brasileira, em voltar-se prioritariamente para a América Latina, Europa, América do Norte ou o desbravamento da fronteira asiática. Acrescente-se que as relações Brasil/África são percebidas e processadas por óticas diferentes, ensejando a formulação de discursos conseqüentemente diversificados, exemplificados pelos enfoques culturalista, mercantil-economicista, geo-estratégico-militar, igualdade racial e científico, como veremos adiante.

No fundo, ao valorizar ou não suas relações com a África, o Brasil exprime a maneira como vê a si próprio, ou seja, sua autoconsciência como nação. Essa ambigüidade traduz ainda um dos dilemas da formação da identidade brasileira, o qual consiste no reconhecimento ou recusa, pelo Brasil, da sua condição de país africanizado. Ante tal impasse, as elites se dividem, defendendo uns que o Brasil deve se identificar com o mundo ocidental branco e sustentando outros, como Gilberto Amado, que o Brasil é uma República mestiça e que o êxito do seu futuro e destino depende do reconhecimento desse fato.

Aliás, esse grave problema da construção de uma identidade nacional, afeta países em geral, pois sem identidade não é possível a formulação de um projeto de sociedade e, por extensão, a adoção de políticas públicas, inclusive a externa. Como se não bastassem essas dificuldades, as relações Brasil/África hoje, ante a crise que nos cerca, devem ser reavaliadas a partir de uma contextualização nos quadros de uma pós-modernidade irreversível e imprevisível, na medida em que desreferencializa, dessubstancializa e desconstrói parâmetros racionais, históricos e sociais, justificando-se, assim, a recorrência à reflexão conjunta e diálogo, como alternativas para reinventar o futuro. Reinvenção realista com dados concretos do presente e talvez dolorosa por destruir velhas convicções e crenças ideológicas, porém necessária como exigência das circunstâncias atuais. Igualmente corajosa ao delinear e enfrentar desafios implícitos numa contemporaneidade em transição.

This seminar, whose objective will be to rekindle dialogue between Africa and Brazil, will cover the following themes:

- a. Cultural Discourse;
- b. Trade/ Economics;
- c. **Military Geostrategy (Geostrategies??);**
- d. Racial Equality;

e. Science Education.

This magnificent project is commensurate with the interest kindled by ANC's victory over Apartheid, reaching beyond Africa to create more equitable multinational corporations free of racism. This makes it easier to understand the mutual attraction between South Africa and Brazil, which justifies Brazil's great pride in receiving Nelson Mandela in Recife in 1998 and especially Thabo Mbeki's request to join Mercosul and establish South-South cooperation with SADEC.

I was seduced by Silva's project, which echoes Livio Sansone's proposal, to organize an African-Brazilian seminar in Dakar. On the other hand, I am convinced that these laudable projects can only take shape if Africa gains more credibility at the political, economic and cultural levels and reclaims its responsibility in this initiative to consolidate its relations with Brazil across the southern Atlantic. The Black Atlantic theme is not just a myth but a reality buried deep in this ocean that millions of blacks crossed or perished upon during the notorious Middle Passage.

Professor Silva and I parted ways all too soon, leaving many of our questions for one another unanswered. Nonetheless, I felt that I had been living a dream with this philosopher who harbored great ambitions for Africa and Brazil. Although I was enthralled by our conversation and the pleasant atmosphere of our lunch, thoughts continued to spin about in my mind. I had not yet found the rest I craved after being held spellbound for so many days by numerous interlocutors who always had something to contribute on the intellectual and human level. I in turn felt obliged to respond to their questions, curiosity and fascination for our African continent.

This fascination is even more impressive considering that most teachers like Silva have never set foot in Africa except for a layover at the Dakar airport, where long-haul planes must stop before continuing on to Europe (which now has a direct link to South America). This was a major paradox for me, for I was obliged to fly up to Paris and then back down for about twelve hours to reach to Brazil. And yet, Rio is just five hours away from Dakar by direct route.

I was reluctant to leave Silva, for I wanted to know more about the political activities of this philosopher, who had just withdrawn from his office as Secretary General of his party. I have always marveled at philosophers' ability, more than experts in other field, to persuade us to assume our capacity for conception and defiance. This enables us to better comprehend the demands of our human condition at every moment. In that respect, Professor Silva mirrors the intelligence and finesse of a Senegalese philosopher, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, who actually traveled to Pakistan to prepare the biography of a great Muslim thinker.

It was therefore easier to understand Silva's fascination for Nelson Mandela, who simultaneously incarnates the passion of the fight against Apartheid and the magnitude of pardon for a multiracial society in South Africa. Brazil could learn a few lessons from that gesture, in fact. Silva and I continued our discussion all the way back to my hotel.

That afternoon, I was finally able to calm the many thoughts jostling in my mind, when I ventured out with two of Maria's students, Amaro Braga and Danielle, to do some quick shopping at the "Casa da Cultura." we haggled as though we were at the Sandaga Market in Dakar. The House of Culture is an old prison that has been converted into an exclusive shopping center selling only artisanal objects of extraordinary quality. All kinds of lovely embroidered sheets, blankets, tablecloths and jewels were on display – every article revealed a melding of Portuguese, Indian and black talents. The building has an imposing architecture with thick walls that remind one of the stringent security measures once required for the prison when it housed society's misfits.

For now, however, the cells had been transformed into shops all along a corridor with a mezzanine above it, laid out the same as the cells on the ground floor. The whole place was truly impressive and even held a certain beauty if one could only briefly forget the hell experienced by its former prisoners. Some spent their whole lives there, deprived of freedom for crimes they had not always committed.

The Casa Cultura is an example of the successful conversion of a penitentiary into a commercial center worth visiting to buy souvenirs of Recife. Unfortunately, I could not stay for long in this magnificent building, whose lobby was occupied by a band of young musicians. Their lovely music wafted throughout the shopping center, enjoining visitors to bring peace into their hearts for the upcoming Christmas festivities. Amaro and Danielle surpassed themselves in speaking French to me during our outing, which allowed me to discover the finery of Recife craftwork. The products on display reflected the artistic creativity of this people living at the crossroads of northeastern Brazil.

Upon my return from the Casa da Cultura, I met Maria do Carmo Brandão, who was waiting for me with a friend who also teaches anthropology in Rio. That evening we crisscrossed the city and, abetted by traffic jams, had time to speak at length about Recife and the history of that city, which is truly washed by the waters of two great rivers and the Atlantic. We first visited a huge exhibit in the Foundation's private museum, where an elaborate reception was being held for its inauguration. Everyone who was anyone in Recife was there, and this was apparent in the luxury cars that pulled up to the entrance to drop off all the beautiful people. It is they who have assured the continuum of power, wealth and knowledge through the centuries. That continuum was depicted perfectly by the exhibit, which reviewed every aspect of the economic, political and cultural life of Pernambuco Province.

Most amazing was the exceptional place allotted to slave life in this exhibit. Their painful odyssey in Brazil was intimately linked to the development of exploitative technologies for processing sugar cane, tobacco and cotton, which made the province's fortune. Some scenes depicting whipping or torture were hard to bear, given the realism exposing the least detail of their hellish conditions. Fortunately, the museum also contained rooms reserved for art and creativity that softened the shock for guests who visited the slavery period rooms. It was hard even for someone as well-informed as myself about the sufferings of slavery in Africa and the New World, where millions of Africans were transported by force. Paradoxically, unlike Europeans who were forced to immigrate or did so willingly, Africans in the New World still do not feel entirely at home after five hundred years of presence. Even worse, they cannot always return at will to Africa, a continent that is incapable of receiving them or offering them dignity and better living conditions.

As I traveled through Brazil, I kept a manuscript by my side that was written by my friend Wendy Wilson. It is a sort of autobiography sharing her experience as an African-American living in Africa with her family. For now, it now bears the title "*Negroes: Notes from A Native Anthropologist for West Africans and Other Strangers.*" Her reflections draw from her dual personal experience in the USA and in Africa, traveling through history to reconstruct the social, cultural and political dimensions of this community of African Americans, which is known [just as poorly by other \(white\) Americans as it is by Africans](#). Married to a Senegalese and perfectly fluent in Pulaar and Wolof, Wendy Wilson, just like Philippe Wamba or Manthia Diawara by virtue of their intimate knowledge of Africans on both shores of the Atlantic, is steadily rebuilding the mythical bridge that has been missing to restore the African persona in all its diversity and wealth.

There seems to be a real and ongoing [_____](#) to look frankly at the [African American](#) phenomenon, and to pull out the lessons there for whomever might need them. Many people are curious about us, many people sense there is something to learn about how we came to be or where we seem to be going that doesn't [_____](#) out in purely academic discourse about slavery or the welfare system, or the Negro intellectual, for that matter. It doesn't course out in the fishbowl discourse on Afrocentricity, where we examine our collective cultural [navel](#) while the world looks through the glass. In fact, few people seem to understand much about us [inducting??](#) many of our Americans compatriots. There are many things that it seems we also do not want to study too closely about ourselves. Like other people, we have our intellectual opportunists, our folkloric spokespeople, our detractors and our dreamers. What I've noticed, though, is that we have become terribly astute at hiding ourselves. Despite countless seminars, conferences, texts and [speeches](#), many people feel uncomfortable with African Americans and with Negroes. One must ask at some point, what do we have to do with that?

Shooting from the hip, Wendy, adopts an anthropologist's perspective, but also that of a "subject" in order to analyze these Afro-American communities and make them better known to others who, *a priori*, are incapable of imagining the extent of their diversity. I strolled through the museum thinking of Wendy's manuscript. It is such a treasure trove of discoveries about African Americans, whom I thought I knew so well. I mailed her a postcard from Bahia to let her know that I had finally finished reading her work with such pleasure. Still, it would do Wendy a world of good to experience life in Brazil. She would then acquire a better grasp of the fate of all diaspora Africans in their relationships with others and with Africa.

I am certain that such a trip to Brazil would help her discover another dimension of the failings of an integration that is due not only to racial color prejudices but also to the inhumane legacy of slave conditions. That legacy relegated the large majority of Africans Brazilians to the lower rungs of the social ladder. Indeed, they are invisible in colleges, in the airports and in most activities related to power, assets and knowledge. That is also the paradox of racial democracy touted by Brazil but which in fact is disfigured by gaping cracks between the poor and the wealthy.

All these ideas bounced about in my head while we continued our tour of that splendid museum amidst a crowd representing the elite of the town dressed in all their finery. On the second floor, a special room was reserved for the elaborate costumes of carnival dance troupes and mock-ups of *candomblé* scenes, where one can feel the strong presence of African culture. This marvelous room with its colorful costumes was stark contrast to the atrocious scenes depicting slaves' everyday life on the ground floor. Images of the painting that Silva Maranhão had given to me in Rio came to mind, measuring the full burden of slavery on this people's destiny. While they are still searching for their roots, each time they have been able to invent new reference points to ensure their survival. That survival in itself is an accomplishment.

My visit to this museum was all too brief; I shall have to return there one day when there are fewer people, and take all my time to contemplate, scrutinize and learn about the past of this Pernambuco Province, which was fully covered by those who had designed this magnificent exhibition.

It was with regret that I left the museum to dine in a sumptuous restaurant downtown, in the company of Maria and her friend. We continued talking late into the evening over another delectable meal of that delicious Brazilian cuisine that never ceased surprising me. Again we discussed opportunities for cooperation between Dakar and Recife, especially the absolute necessity for everyone to visit Africa and Brazil as part of an exchange program for students and professors.

It was quite late when I finally agreed to separate myself from my lovely hostesses at my hotel, where I rested for the night before departing the next day for Rio. Maria insisted on sending me the two students who had gone with me to the Casa da Cultura so they could accompany me to the airport. I finally left Recife late in the afternoon with regrets for, paradoxically, I was also becoming attached to this town that felt a bit like home, perhaps because it was so close to Dakar as the crow flies. Actually, however, the more I travel, the more I begin to feel at ease wherever I go, like a world-class citizen. Everywhere I go, I find the roots of my nomadic Peulhs, whose ancestors traversed the entire Sahel and the savannah from east to west on the African continent in search of grazing land. I am always ready to pack my bags and discover new horizons. [I still remember my great trek from Zaria to Yaoundé, passing through Garoua in Northern Cameroon](#) in search of my Peulh ancestors who had remained in the east.

Rio, 20 December 2000

In Rio, Livio Sansone, Claudio, Eliza and one of Livio's Italian friends were waiting for me at the airport to take me to dinner in Copacabana, just as he had promised as a beautiful close to my voyage. I could not leave Rio without seeing the bay that attracts tourists from around the world. It was a weekday, and yet the place never emptied. In fact, it was hard finding a parking spot and then seats in an open-air restaurant so that we would not miss the least detail of the street scene. I recounted every detail of my marvelous tour to my friends and reassured Livio a thousand and one times that he had organized my trip with such mastery that nothing had occurred to trouble this dream tour. Not even a luxury tour could have offered as much. I had had the privilege of meeting many colleagues who made my stay so pleasant due to their unparalleled availability and the knowledge of their country or town that they so generously shared with me.

I barely had two days to discover Rio as a tourist and enjoy Livio's hospitality. He and his wife Angela and son Pedro welcomed me again into their splendid home perched atop a hill. I shared their hospitality with his Italian friend, who had come from Bahia with his wife and two children to spend the Christmas holidays with the family.

It was interesting to observe Livio and his friend, both born Italians living in perfect harmony, who had chosen to live in Brazil and marry Afro-Brazilians from Bahia. Racial mixing in Brazil is a continuous process tied to ongoing migrations, for the country is still new despite the disparities between rich and poor.

I met many Frenchmen on the tramway who had just settled in Brazil. Their only handicap was that they could not speak the language, an indispensable skill in this country, where the large majority speaks only Portuguese. I must admit that I was sorry I could not speak the language, which would have opened all the right doors to this land of a thousand wonders.

I took full advantage of Livio's friend's presence to visit Rio with his little family, taking the tramway to visit the high points of this picturesque town or the ferry to reach the other shore and play the tourist. Alain, the Senegalese student, was particularly helpful as I did my last bit of shopping, looking for gifts for all those who impatiently awaited me after this trip to Brazil. But the time passed too quickly for all that I wanted to do as I discovered the lovely city of Rio, where mountain, forest and water lend this bit of rock such special charm. I was obliged to leave Rio just when the entire city was joyfully preparing to celebrate Christmas. It was especially hard to decline all the invitations from friends who constantly entreated me to stay and celebrate with them. Oh well – I had already promised my daughter that I would join her in Washington to spend the end-of-year holidays with her. So, after a frenzied shopping spree with Alain through the streets of Rio, I returned to Livio's to pack my bags and prepare to take the plane for New York that evening.

Livio and I discussed how we could hold a seminar in Dakar on relations between Brazil and Africa and I asked him to contact Walter Silva in Recife, who had already prepared a similar project. But I was troubled by the idea of having to leave Rio and to leave Livio and his charming family, who had welcomed me with open hearts combined with all the warmth of Rome and Bahia. Claudio and Eliza arrived to take me to the airport. I was really loaded down, what with all of the books I had been given at each stage of my journey, not to mention the gifts I had purchased. My suitcase had to be carried up the stairway leading to the street, and so it was Livio, who, in a burst of generosity, carried the heavy luggage on his shoulders. He gently teased me as he declared, "It's hard to have an important friend because you end up carrying his bags." That was the last image I've kept of Livio, who put my suitcase in the car with a smile. I do not know how I'll manage one day to repay his gesture of friendship, and all his generosity expended to make sure my trip went well.

I was now in the hands of Claudio and Eliza. They had twice welcomed me upon my arrival in Rio and insisted on accompanying me for my departure with the same degree of attention that they had showered upon me throughout my entire stay. Claudio had been enchanted by his stay in Dakar during the SEPHIS seminar. He shared every detail of his first discovery of Africa with Eliza in the hope that one day they will return together to visit Senegal. Before leaving for the airport, they offered me a CD of Brazilian music and wrote this kind message as a sign of their friendship:

Dear Boubacar,

It was a pleasure to spend some sunny days with you here, in Rio de Janeiro. We hope you had enjoyed it too. Wait us with bouye juice in Dakar, OK!! Best wishes for you and your family. Love.

Rio 22.12.2000.

Everything must come to an end. After checking in, I reluctantly left Claudio and Eliza, then slipped into the long line of passengers to take my plane for Washington. My trip to Brazil had ended as though I had daydreamed it all. But I was thoroughly convinced that I had had a marvelous journey.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this journey, I was unsure of how I would prepare this report, which I first considered to be a simple administrative matter, needing only to write a few pages to describe the series of lectures that I gave in various places. I hadn't taken any notes during the whole trip, except for a few addresses I requested at the end of a lecture or meal from the colleagues I met in every town between flights. But my equally enriching experience in Morocco taken so soon after my return from Brazil, gradually inspired me to conceive this report in its current format. It allows me to share my impressions of the Brazil trip with all who have not yet had the pleasure of making such a fantastic journey. In fact, it was only gradually, during the course of my trip, that I was able to measure the importance of this voyage organized by SEPHIS and the Center of Afro-Asian Studies. I shall never find the words to express my profound appreciation for this tour, which helped me learn a little about Brazil. I had attended seminars around the world and had even traveled to Brazil in 1988. But this particular tour put me in direct contact with hundreds of people. While it is true that I was able to contribute something to them, they in turn gave me an idea of local customs and perspectives on all the social issues, which could never be found in a book. I have experienced Brazil's past while still in the present through my contact with distinguished experts, historians, anthropologists, philosophers and artists. In addition to their scholarly knowledge, they opened their hearts for me and shared their anguish but also their hopes and visions of relations between Africa and Brazil.

Three months after my journey, I still hadn't written anyone to express my gratitude to him or her, for I just couldn't find the proper words. Once I began to compose this report, however, I worked incessantly until I reached the end of this replay of my memories, like a film that unrolls on paper, but I fear without always being able to match my words to the realities of the dream I shared with each of you. I believe this is the only way to thank you all, by sharing my impressions of the trip and also – why not? - my vision of Brazil through the distorting prism of my ignorance and questions.

It is my deepest hope that the mythic bridge between Brazil and Africa which we constructed together throughout my long voyage, will one day become reality and link both sides of the Atlantic. I am also very pleased to inform you that Livio, Elisée Soumini and I have prepared a proposal for a symposium that we hope to organize in February-March 2001 on the theme: "The Transatlantic Construction of Concepts of Race, Black Culture, Negritude and Anti-racism: Arguments for A New Dialogue Among Researchers in Africa, Brazil and Cuba."