

Book Review

Araujo, Ana Lucia. *African Heritage and Memories of Slavery in Brazil and the South Atlantic World.* Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2015. Print.

A much needed transatlantic study on Africa and Brazil has finally come alive. Beyond the core contribution of Melville Herskovits to the legacy of Africa in the New World, Araujo assembles in this formidable volume, established Atlantic scholars who collectively focus on African heritage in Brazil and by extension, on the connections between memories of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to focused studies on slavery, racialization, slave rebellion, African cultural survivals, and African heritage tourism amongst others, the most compelling is the theorization of “wounded pasts” (1-15) by the editor by drawing cogent parallels between multivalent memories and African heritage. The ten chapters offer a compendium of well researched work that is united by their recuperation of African lost agency. Instead of an idealized “return” to African memory, the book is remarkably contesting in its grounded ethnographic and archival research methodology which is geared toward exposition and critique. Araujo argues that the South Atlantic world is understudied but also contends that the role of Africa and Afro-Brazilians has been officially marginalized. In order to redress such significant erasure of memory from public visibility, *African Heritage* serves as a cogent effort to correct this imbalance in Brazilian identitarian representation in visual and verbal media.

From theorizing African heritage from its “wounded past” to a celebratory and “valued identity marker” in urban and rural Brazilian society, the volume moves into specific case studies. Chapter 1 by Mariza de Carvalho Soares deploys the African collection in Brazilian National Museum in Rio de Janeiro as a critique of colonialism and decolonization. Chapter 2 by Maria Helena Machado discusses Agassiz’s photographic collection as a contention of racial degeneration. Chapter 3 by Matthew Rarey argues that public flogging and tortured black bodies triggered the 1835 Malê Rebellion and the subsequent abolition. Chapter 4 by Mathias Assunção interrogates Capoeira (in contrast to

Candomblé) as an exemplification of wounded African (Angolan) heritage in Brazil. Chapter 5 by Martha Abreu Hebe Mattos considers *jongo/caxambu* as symbolic elements of ancestral worship and the activation of African cultural heritage. Chapter 6 by André Cicalo examines the Valongo wharf in Rio de Janeiro as an invaluable disembarkation point of enslaved Africans and its implication for memorialization of slavery in the public space. Chapter 7 by Márcia Schenck and Mariana Candido questions public memory of slavery in Angola and the implications for the absence of this vital memory in the public sphere. Chapter 8 by Patrícia de Santana Pinho addresses the intricate connections between African American Roots tourism and racial harmony in Brazil. Chapter 9 by Kimberly Cleveland examines Afro-Brazilian presence as the contestation of marginalized Africa in Brazilian historical formation. Chapter 10 by Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos proposes a new vision of examining transatlantic past of slavery and African legacy as well as the consideration of reparations in view of human rights violations.

While all the chapters merit further elaboration, a few are more alluring in their concerns with critical race theories, cultural retentions, and African heritage. Maria Helena Machado's Chapter 2, "Race and Visual Representation" and André Cicalo's Chapter 6, "From Public Amnesia to Public Memory," invite the reader to critique the racist theories of the nineteenth century as illustrated by the "pure-race and mixed-race photographic series" (45) of the Agassiz's collection as well as the deliberate shame in the face of the memory of slavery especially in the case study of Gamboa in Rio de Janeiro. Both studies highlight how photographic collections and archival excavations can be instrumental in the better understanding of the myths and realities of racialization. In addition, they augment theoretical studies by providing authentic materials with which to appreciate and further analyze racist ideology especially the contradiction of the Brazilian government in pursuing recuperative projects concerning memory of slavery in Africa such as the UNESCO's slavery past project while at the same time proving to be less supportive of slavery past in public spheres in Brazil. Despite their focus on nineteenth and twentieth/twenty-first centuries respectively, both studies converge on the commonality of race relations and the need to question covert and direct efforts to suppress Afro-Brazilian history, culture and legacy. In the context of recent persecutions and destructions of Candomblé temples all over Brazil by fanatical evangelicals, it is striking that

Gamboa in Rio de Janeiro used to be a thriving locale for samba music, Candomblé rites and capoeira performances.

A worthy comparison can also be drawn between Matthias Assunção's "Angola in Brazil" in Chapter 4 and Patrícia de Santana Pinho's "Bahia Is a Closer Africa" in Chapter 8, in the sense that while one explores *Angoleiro* identity in Bahia in relation to capoeira, the other focuses on African American Roots tourism through which Africa is rediscovered in Bahia. Assunção suggests that "looking at the parallel emergence of Angolan identity in Candomblé and capoeira can provide new insights" (110) when it comes to religious and cultural survivals. In addition to the controversies of purity/impurity when it comes to Nagô/Bantu (Angola) and Bahia/Rio dynamics as well as 'capoeira Angola' versus 'capoeira regional,' this intertextual discussion of new manifestations of African cultural practices complicates how African Americans would perceive Africa as analyzed by Pinho. Arguing that African American tourists go to Brazil with preconceived notions of Brazil as propagated by American scholars and the perception of Brazil as a racial democracy projected by the Brazilian tourist industry, Pinho suggests that Bahia's Africanness is a convenient representation equally conditioned by a "transnational dialogue" (278) that concludes that Bahia is a closer Africa only because it is "comfortable" for African Americans as a justification for minimizing the impact of slavery in Brazilian racial formation.

In sum, *African Heritage* is a welcome addition to the bibliography on Afro-Brazilian and South Atlantic studies. It will surely provoke further studies.

Niyi Afolabi

University of Texas at Austin