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Transnational Africas, Struggle and
the Rising of Modernity

When in 1793 Archibald Dalzel published his history of Dahomey, he did so at the height of the Abolitionist arguments then convulsing the British body politic. Did the slave trade barbarize Africans, so that they needed to be 'saved' from it; or did it 'save' them from a barbarous reality? With perhaps some subtle shifts of emphasis or tone, such have been the discourses acted out in Western nations regarding Africa ever since. Thus, in the classic analysis of the philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe, an external framework of knowledge about 'Africa' and 'Africanness' has been constructed that is foreign to the continent and its lived experience.¹

Indeed, lurking in Dalzel's pro-slavery account was a description revealing that the realities were far more complex than most of these debates on Abolition ever would allow:

Antonio Vaz Coelho was . . . born in Brazil, where he had been taught to read, write, and keep accounts. He had inherited some property from his parents; and being of an enterprising disposition, he had made several voyages to Ardrah [Allada], where he at last settled, and became a very respectable trader . . . He had an uncommon share of vanity, and was excessively fond of military enterprises . . . he generally armed his dependants with blunderbusses, which he purchased from the Europeans.²

Vaz embodied some of the complex realities of the late eighteenth century. He had enough money to set up business, and had decided on West Africa (the Costa da Mina, as it was known in Brazil) whence his ancestors had come. In the nineteenth century, a steady

stream of fellow Brazilians of African heritage would follow. Many, like Vaz, became agents for the continuing trade in enslaved persons. How could ex-slaves participate in this? It has to be remembered that, in a society such as colonial Brazil, or the stratified world of many West African kingdoms by the nineteenth century, there was little alternative: those who did not own slaves were potentially slaveable.³

This chapter tries to gain a sense of the importance of the identities embodied by someone like Vaz. It looks at the transnational dimensions of African ruling classes, religious frameworks, ethnic identities, and also of the seeds of resistance that this created to what were increasingly authoritarian states. It shows how the impetus for the political revolutions that overturned West African aristocracies came not only from internal unrest at rising inequalities, but also from the transnational awareness of the late eighteenth century. Societies of West and West-Central Africa had close diplomatic and commercial ties with North Africa and the Arab world, with the Americas and Europe. By the eighteenth century, global factors influenced movements of struggle, identities and the cultural framework.

The transnational focus of this chapter is vital to this book as a whole. It nails once and for all the canard that African societies were somehow divorced from wider patterns of modernity. But it also invites us to look anew at patterns of influence in shaping that modernity. Here, language shapes discourse, as well as perceptions of power: if modernity and humanism are 'Western', they become the child of Europe. Yet more than three out of every four migrants to the New World before 1800 was African. These men and women were captured and enslaved not only for their labour but also for their skills. African cattle herders were valued from the Argentine pampas to the Venezuelan Llanos and the deserts of northern Mexico. The fire-growing skills of West Africans from Sierra Leone and the Guinea-Bissau region were valued in the Carolinas and northern Brazil. The cultivation of foods that became staples of the American South – such as peanuts – was the preserve of African slaves until the nineteenth century. And, as we have already seen, African institutions like the *quilombo* were vital in allowing new integrated societies

to emerge in the New World.* As so often there is a disconnect between the patterns of influence that shaped history, and the way in which historical discourse about the past is shaped.⁴

In the eighteenth century, influence came to reflect not only the ways in which new societies were formed, but also how they were challenged. Warfare techniques learnt in Kongo led to major rebellions, such as the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina in 1739. These challenges were painfully slow to have lasting effects, because of the institutional enormity of the tyranny of New World slavery. However, when the insurrectionary movements gathered pace in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they were decisively influenced by events in Africa. Kongo techniques again influenced military strategies of the Haitian revolutionaries in the 1790s – with enduring success.† Military experiences of the wars in northern Nigeria in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries then drove risings in Brazil and Cuba, stoking the tensions which saw the abolition of slavery in both countries in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵

Yet these influences did not just travel from Africa and Europe to the Americas. They also returned to Africa, alongside figures such as Vaz. This direction of influence grew, especially in the nineteenth century, when whole communities of maroons arrived in Freetown with the new Sierra Leone colony. To consider how the transnational forces of slavery and resistance generated one another and collided, we can turn to St John's Maroon Church, Freetown. Visiting in May 2017, I was shown around by a church elder. Outside, I could not help noticing that he was wearing a red baseball cap, and when I remarked on this he laughed. Red remained a symbol of military power, the colour of the maroon flag and of the rafters in the church.

The colour red retains this meaning also in The Gambia – where in 1998, the red cap was reinstated for soldiers – and among the Jola of Casamance, where it remains the badge of rulership for village heads. The red hat's voyage from Senegambia to the Americas, and the voyage of that colour back again, speaks loudly of the way in

* See above, Chapter 5, and Coda to Part One.

† For more detail on the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), see below, pp. 390–94.



Maroon flag outside St John's Church, Freetown.

which political rulers despatched people to the Americas – only for the same idioms of power and warfare to return to challenge them in the nineteenth century, and to help overthrow what had become tyrannical warrior aristocracies.⁶

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURES AND AFRICAN RULING CLASSES

In an upmarket restaurant in Dakar's *plateau* (downtown), the menu will include food better known elsewhere for being found in Paris: profiteroles, *pain perdu*, even well-known French wines in this overwhelmingly Islamic country. In Luanda, until the recent arrival of Chinese-funded skyscrapers and shopping centres by the bay, it was Portuguese-style cuisine that was upmarket, with grilled fish and *vinho branco*, just as you might find in Lisbon's *baixa*. This adoption of foreign luxuries as a sign of status has a long history; in his seminal book *Black Skin, White Masks*, the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon described in detail the ways in which members of African and Caribbean elites sought to perform this class- or status-signalling once in Europe. But this process reflects a far older history of African elites and their responses to transnational forces.⁷

As we have seen, these transnational influences entering and leaving Africa are as old as the globalization of the world (and Africa) from the fifteenth century and before. What changed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the way in which political elites in Africa took advantage of these growing influences to harness personal and family wealth, developing patterns that did not disappear with postcolonialism. In the eighteenth century, by manifesting their difference through importing outside clothing, education and religious practice, the African ruling classes created a growing distance between themselves and their subjects.⁸

Ruling classes have always distinguished themselves through symbols of power. Sceptres and crowns are neither unique nor unusual symbols of rulership. In Ndongo, Angola, regal power lay in the horse's tail and the iron arm-ring. In Benin, the aristocracy adorned themselves with coral; while on the Gold Coast, umbrellas shaded the ruling class (and still do), and the throne of power was symbolized by the royal stool. These trappings of royal majesty all preceded the rise of European trade.

What changed with the rise of transnational influences was the dependence of African ruling classes on access to foreign luxury goods. It was not that old symbols of power were discarded, but that they were supplemented with a kind of double symbolic meaning, directed both at African subjects and at European traders. In Kongo, for instance, the crown of office known as the *mpu* – in which loops of raffia fibre were intertwined into a tall spiral growing out of textiles – remained important into the eighteenth century. Kongo ambassadors and kings usually wore both local cloth and coral beads, but they merged these with the insignia of Christian nobility to demonstrate their access to this external power. Meanwhile, Kongo religious and initiation ceremonies such as the *sangamento* often merged Kongo and European forms, with Kongo dresses and weapons mixing with European hats and golden crosses.⁹

The old, therefore, was not discarded but rather melded with foreign symbolisms to represent the new bases of power. From the perspective of the kingly families, this symbolic transformation cut to the heart of their authority to rule over subjects. Moreover, as the West African trading classes grew, and ruling families lost control over the Atlantic trade in the eighteenth century, more people were able to gain access to



Mpu hat, late 1800s–early 1900s (palm-leaf fibre (raffia), leopard claws).

these symbols of power. This, too, may be an important explanation for the collapse of the aristocracies, and the ongoing civil conflicts that affected so many societies. As in Europe, the spread of consumption challenged the ritualized performances of consumption and status as aristocratic power; and with this came challenges to the aristocratic classes themselves that could not be held back.¹⁰

It is useful to see that these symbols of distinctiveness were cultivated from the very beginning. They appeared at once in the ways in which the ruling classes of West and West-Central Africa engaged with European trading nations. This trend was apparent even in the very first audience granted to the Portuguese in 1491 by the manikongo, Nzika Nkuwu: 'The [manikongo] was in a courtyard of one of his Palaces, accompanied by innumerable people, and sitting on a

platform richly decorated in their style. He was naked from the waist upwards, with a cap woven of palm cloth raised very high on his head, and a silver-embossed horse's tail on his shoulder, and from the waist down dressed with some damask cloths, which the King of Portugal had sent to him.¹¹

Thus, as soon as the Portuguese arrived, the manikongo had dressed himself in luxury imported cloths, which were matched by his own symbols of power in the horse's tail and palm-woven *mpu*. The process of social differentiation through access to the imported luxuries had begun. Very rapidly, ambassadors from places as distant from each other as Benin, Jolof and Kongo appeared in Europe. With so many rulers from West and West-Central Africa seeking political representation, and making political claims on European trading partners, this kind of interchange could only grow. And with it grew the gifts of luxury goods to the ruling classes from whom the African ambassadors were sent.¹²

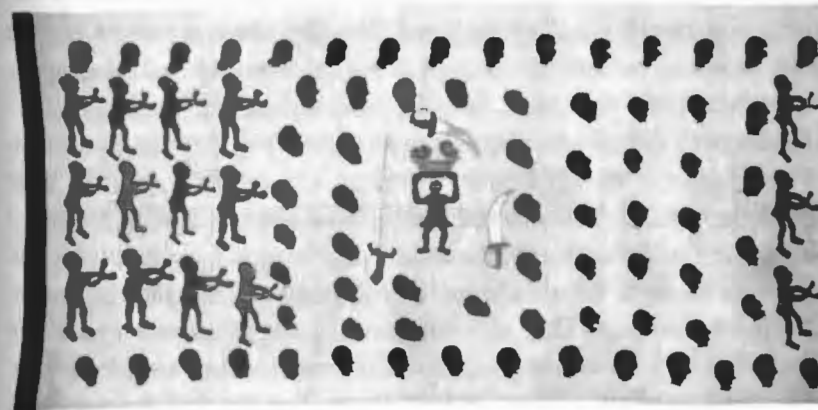
A good illustration of the way this happened in practice comes with the embassies sent by Dahomey to Brazil and Portugal in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1750, Dahomey had sent an embassy to Salvador in Brazil. Such embassies were quite frequent from this region through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: in 1783, the King of Badagry in what is now south-western Nigeria was seized by his subjects and sent to Salvador with twenty slaves to attend him, with a letter explaining the situation to the governor there and hoping for increased trade, while Allada also sent an embassy to Salvador in 1809.¹³

In the 1780s and 1790s, then, the recurrence of these embassies became more intense. As the Age of Revolution swept the Atlantic world, Dahomey embarked on a series of diplomatic forays, sending several embassies. In that of 1795-6, the main costs for the prince and his ambassador were in the purchase of fine cloths, capes, hats, jackets, coats and shoes; these perhaps seemed necessary to the royal status that they enjoyed once they were in Portugal, but certainly also helped to create a strong differentiation in clothing with Fon subjects in Dahomey.¹⁴

Dahomey sent at least five embassies to Brazil and Portugal – in 1750, 1795, 1805, 1811 and 1818 – as did its neighbour Onim (which

became Lagos, and was subject to Oyo), sending three up to 1823. The ambassadors were lodged in colonial official buildings, and the entire cost of their visit was defrayed by the Portuguese state (the voluminous documentation on the costs of these visits survives). This could be quite a large sum, since Dahomeyan ambassadors generally travelled first to Salvador in Brazil, for discussions with the Portuguese governor who administered the Portuguese fort at Ouidah, and thence to the royal Court at Lisbon.¹⁵

As the political pressures of the Age of Revolution and the Abolition campaign mounted, so, too, did the transnational dimensions of these Dahomeyan embassies. By 1811, when Dadá Adandozan despatched an embassy to Salvador, the British had abolished their slave trade and political pressure was mounting on the Portuguese to do the same. As the commercial consequences of this seemed disastrous for Dahomey, the need for diplomacy was strong. By the time that the embassy arrived, the Portuguese royal Court was also in Brazil, having fled to Rio de Janeiro from Napoleon's troops in 1807-8; and, in a long letter of October 1810, Adandozan lamented that he could not assist the Portuguese royal family in their trouble with the French.¹⁶



War standard sent by Adandozan, King of Dahomey, to João, King of Portugal, when exiled in Rio de Janeiro, in 1810, representing Dahomey's defeat of the army of Porto Novo in 1805. Tragically, this standard was destroyed in the 2018 fire at Rio de Janeiro's Museu Nacional.

One of the conventions of this sort of embassy was the reciprocal exchange of gifts. Ambassadors from Dahomey brought through cloth and ivory, and enslaved persons, and returned with gifts such as pieces of fine silk. As in the earliest periods, such diplomatic exchange accentuated material differences in clothing and access to luxury goods between African rulers, the new trading classes discussed in the last chapter, and their subjects.¹⁷

Good examples of this differentiation by the late eighteenth century come from the diary of Antera Duke of Calabar. The diary suggests that he owned either a clock or a watch, as he frequently notes in it precise times (such as '6am'). Duke also writes how he and his fellow trader Esien Duke 'dressed as white men', that is, in European clothes, to go down to a ship that had recently arrived near Calabar at Parrot Island, 20 miles downstream from the port and named after the huge flocks of parrots seen daily near by. The idea of dressing in European clothes for a European audience does not in itself suggest that the display of luxury clothes was a sign of status. However, often public events in Calabar required the display of both Ékpè and European clothing styles. As Duke noted in one entry of 11 November 1786, 'about 4 o'clock we went to the town palaver house and we dressed again in town style in long cloth and Ékpè cloth [tied dyed with blue and white triangles] and hat and jacket and every fine thing.' For wealthy traders such as Duke, therefore, it was important to show access to luxuries such as imported hats and jackets at major social events of the Ékpè society.¹⁸

This sort of symbolic pluralism, incorporating African and European styles, was widely found among traders in many areas of West and West-Central Africa by the eighteenth century. Bosman described along the Gold Coast, in around 1700, how the rich traders and members of royal families were very keen to display their access to European clothing: 'They are very fond of our Hats, never thinking they pay too much for them . . . Their common Habit is made of three or four Ells of either Velvet, Silk, Cloath, *Perpetuana*, or some sort of Stuff; and several have this sort of Habit or Paan, as they call it, made of fifty sorts of Stuff.'¹⁹ But the desire to display power through access to these luxury clothes was itself related to the royal classes and their interest in acquiring foreign goods. This element to the

performance of royal power remained very potent throughout the eighteenth century. The Englishman Robert Norris described how, in the 1780s, the Dadá of Dahomey's bedroom consisted of a bedstead and mattress made in Europe, with check curtains, and how the floor was covered by a carpet that Norris himself had sold to him a few months before. In the 1770s, one of the most important *manis* of Cacongo had an apartment furnished in a European style, with beds, commodes, and dressers covered with silver ornaments, and chairs with which to receive European visitors, while the *mani* himself sat on the floor.²⁰

The importance of such displays of power was very well described when Paul Erdmann Isert visited the ruler of Great Popo, in 1788: 'His outfit consisted of a very costly Black *pantjes* reaching from his hips all the way to the ground. Over this he wore a loose silken dressing gown, and on his head, a coachman's cap, on top of which was a European hat worked all over with large silver flowers . . . in his hand he also carried a Spanish manilla cane with a silver knob.'²¹

Of course, African monarchs were not alone in their use of 'exotica' as a means to demonstrate their political power. Just as symbols of royal power were universal, so many monarchs across the world sought to show their power (and modernity) by displaying their access to previously undreamt-of beings or objects. Following Vasco da Gama's return from India to Portugal in 1499, for instance, King Manoel I had five elephants brought back, too, which went before him whenever he rode through Lisbon, preceded by a rhinoceros. All rulers found the new forces bringing peoples together astonishing, and a display of the novelties that came from these exchanges was important. What was emerging by the early eighteenth century was, in fact, a shared culture of elite consumption and power, spanning Africa, the Americas and Europe.²²

One of the best examples of how this shared language developed is the visit of the ambassadors of Dahomey to Portugal in late 1795 and early 1796. As soon as the Dahomey royal party reached Europe, they began to enjoy the delights of Lisbon. In January and early February of 1796, they made twenty-four visits to the Opera House on the Rua dos Condes, and nineteen to the Theatre of São Carlos. Meanwhile, among the bills sent to the Portuguese crown for

payment in February was one from the restaurant run by Isidro Barreiro in the Mouraria district. On 17 December, the Dahomeyan royal party had tucked into soup, roast chicken, veal, puddings, three bottles of port and three of table wine, and similar outlays followed. By adopting luxury foreign clothes, food and entertainments, therefore, the royal lineages made a clear distinction between themselves and those they ruled, as well as a connection to the royal families of their transnational trading partners.²³

African ruling families had multiple strategies to help to build this sort of mutual understanding. Beyond the adoption of European styles of clothing and furnishings, they also knew it was important to be able to switch languages easily. By the very late seventeenth century, it was becoming widespread for African kings to send their senior children for schooling in Europe. The ruler of Bissau sent his son to Portugal as an envoy and for instruction in 1694, noting that he had had no instruction or knowledge of the Portuguese language as yet. By the eighteenth century, the sons of some trading families from Calabar were sent to Britain to be educated, as was also the case among some of the princes of Fante ruling families in Anomabu on the Gold Coast. A prominent African trading family at St Louis on the Senegal River in the 1780s was run by three sons, according to the traveller Saugnier: one, Thévenot, had spent a lot of money in Paris in his youth and taken the title of 'the African prince'; another, known as 'Saint-Jean', was the son of a former English governor of Senegal, and had been in London; and a third, Lejugê, had travelled as far as India and in all of Europe.²⁴

One of the key skills that African traders and rulers hoped their children would learn through this education was proficiency in the European languages needed to trade successfully. Like elites in all societies, they hoped that by expanding their skillset they would enable their children to reap greater profits in business and political negotiations with the outside world. In a pattern that strikes us as enormously familiar in the twenty-first century, they recognized that it was by understanding and living with Europeans in their societies that they would develop the cultural flexibility and knowledge necessary to 'do business' in Atlantic Africa. By the 1780s, Lathe – the

most successful trader at Great Popo* – had one son studying in England and another in Portugal, where, as one observer put it, 'they are learning to write and calculate.' And, while around 1700 the ruler of Hueda understood some Portuguese, by the 1780s, the yovogan could speak English, French and Portuguese; the Court of Dahomey, in 1797, had people who could read Portuguese well enough to discuss the tenets of the Catholic faith, while the new regent of the kingdom mentioned that his own uncle had died in Portugal.²⁵

These strategies were, therefore, fairly widespread in many different societies of West and West-Central Africa. It was far from unknown for African diplomats or princes and merchants to study in Europe and the Americas. European city-dwellers were thus fairly well accustomed to the presence of members of African ruling families among them from at least the eighteenth century. So this makes it all the harder to fathom the incredulity with which evidence of this broad transnational awareness was sometimes greeted by outsiders. When an English emissary, Bowdich, reached the Ashanti Court at Kumasi, in 1817, he found that one member of the nobility could astonish us by offering to lend us some books to read; he showed us two French volumes on geography, a Dutch bible, a volume of the *Spectator*, and a *Dissuasion from Popery, 1620*'. Yet really this should not have been astonishing in itself: what was astonishing was Bowdich's ignorance of the strategies of African elites, as they had grown over the preceding centuries, in tandem with those of their European trading partners.²⁶

The growing differentiation of African ruling classes from their population was in some ways one of the more significant political changes on the continent during the slave-trade era. It anticipated many subsequent political upheavals. When, in the 1970s, the historian and Black Power activist Walter Rodney wrote that this era saw the alliance of African and European elites at the expense of the African poor, he recognized that these transformations also paved the way for the continuing inequalities in postcolonial African societies. The construction of economic exploitation thus had a long, painful,

* In what is now the Republic of Benin.

history. A complex interplay of elite agencies was involved, in which no one came out of it with much credit.²⁷

From an African perspective, it was in the elite incorporation of transnational influences that the new idioms of power were most visible – today's *pains perdus* and imported wines are the elaborate cloths and furniture of yesteryear. But, although this appeared to buttress the authority of African monarchs, it also unleashed forces that could not be controlled. More people might gain access to the symbols of power, and challenge ruling families. Finally, it was in the emergence of new forms of syncretic religious belief, and strategies of flight and conflict, that a powerful vehicle would develop to threaten the aristocracies.²⁸

TRANSNATIONAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND THE RESISTANCE TO POWER

Towards the end of the dry season of 2011, I spent some weeks in a small town some way north of Bissau. Electricity did not work in the streets, but the town was bright at night because of the waxing moon which rose every evening. One evening, a friend suggested I follow him through some back alleys off the main road, as there was a visiting marabout, or Islamic seer. The marabout was renting a room in a compound behind the one where I was staying, it turned out. After dark, we went into his room, which was empty except for his bed and an impressive collection of exegeses on the Qur'ān. My friend was excited, for this seer had trained widely: born in Guinea-Bissau, he had studied with *shaykhs* in Mauritania, in Mali and as far away as Egypt.

This transnational religious element from the Sahel brings with it today its own political connections. Mosques in small villages carry their characteristic signs, which announce that they have been built with funds generated elsewhere in the Umma. Meanwhile, instrumental connections with the Islamic world rise and fall with regularity. Today, it is the people-smuggling route through Libya, but it was not so long ago that Muammar Qaddafi himself used to try to act as a

bridge, attempting to build his own secular empire. For many years, one of the most famous landmarks in Bissau was the crumbling whitewash of the Libya Hotel, said to be owned by Qaddafi himself, who would drive down on occasion with caseloads of dollars that he used to give to his clients, in Guinea-Bissau and elsewhere.

For the Sahel and its hinterland, this interconnection of transnational religious and political power is very old. Plural symbolic dimensions to royal power are as old as the trade that linked Mali, Kano and Borno with Morocco, Tripoli and Cairo. In the early times, while Mansa Musa's pilgrimage is the most famous reminder of this, these exchanges had affected all the major Sahelian kingdoms; already by the early fourteenth century, while Mansa Musa was passing through Cairo, there was a madrassa for the people of Borno in the Cairo district of Fustāt, where Borno travellers lodged when they visited the city. Sahelian kings rapidly adopted Islam, as did many of their rulers; and yet their control over the ideas that followed the religion to Africa was weak.²⁹

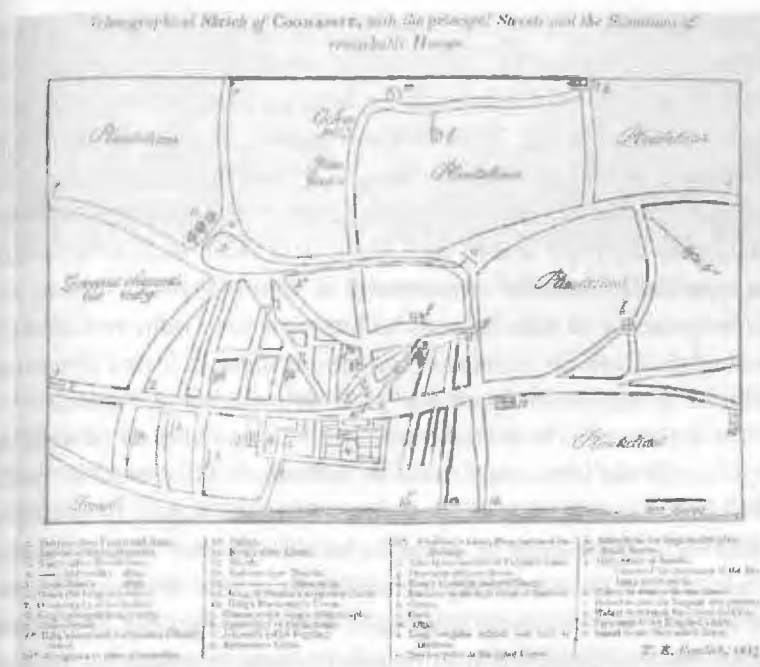
These transnational influences on Sahelian cities grew ever stronger through the period from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Katsina overtook Kano as the commercial hub of Hausaland from the 1730s, but Kano's administrative base remained very powerful, with separate military and civil administrations and influential throne slaves. The regional economy worked through locally produced cloth currencies and imported cowries. Gradually, social structures emerged in the Sahel that ensured integration with transnational connections. By the 1790s, any foreign merchant settling in Timbuktu married a local woman. In the early nineteenth century, Al-Hajj Abd Salam Shabinī described how merchants came to Kano from India, and that Indian manufactured goods were found in local markets, in continuity of long-standing practices of globalization.³⁰

Yet the adoption of Islam by the kings of Borno and Hausa created religious tensions. Religion was fundamentally political – just as it always is. As change swept across schools of Islam in the eighteenth century, there were some who claimed that the 'Muslim kings' of the Sahel were not sufficiently pious and strict in their faith – just as had been said of Sonni 'Alī of Songhay as early as in the 1490s. And it was true that practices were mixed. The installation of a new Sarki of

Katsina was one that involved many aspects of the pre-Islamic rituals of kingship. Meanwhile, it would be the alleged 'hybrid Islam' of the mais of Borno, and of the King of Gobir in Hausaland, that would be used as a justification for the attack on them by the soldiers of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early nineteenth century.³¹

The incorporation of distant religious ideas and external trappings of power had a longer history in the Sahel than it did in the Atlantic kingdoms of West Africa. Yet, as we shall now see, the consequences were not entirely dissimilar. As in the Atlantic kingdoms, the transnational influences brought with them the danger that monarchs would lose control over the levers of political power. In the same way that kings of Atlantic states could not control the flow of trade, so the ideas that crossed the Sahara could not be controlled, and nor could the ways in which they were dispersed through the community. Itinerant *shaykhs*, forerunners of the one I met over two centuries later in Guinea-Bissau, could 'stir the pot' with new discussions. It became harder and harder for political rulers in the Sahel to control this, and so transnational religious forces would come to challenge their power.

While these transnational influences in the Sahel seem far away from the Atlantic kingdoms, the economic pressures on Africa from both north and west meant that there were areas that saw a crossover. By the late seventeenth century in Allada, the word for Christ in a catechism created by Spanish missionaries was 'Lisá', clearly linked to the name given to Jesus in Islam, 'Issa'. Meanwhile, a century later in Kumasi, the capital of the Asante Empire, there were North African as well as Atlantic influences (just as there were in Dahomey) which culminated in the late eighteenth century, when Osei Kwame, the asantehene, was said to have secretly adopted Islam. Bowdich's description of the palace at Kumasi ('Coomassie') can stand as a telling indication of the integration of different architectural and ideological frameworks that characterized many savannah states such as Asante, caught between the Atlantic and Sahelian systems in the early nineteenth century: '[The palace] is an immense building of a variety of oblong courts and regular squares, the former with arcades along the one side, some of round arches symmetrical, turned, having a skeleton of bamboo; the entablatures exuberantly adorned with bold fan and trellis work of Egyptian character.'³²



Map of Kumasi (spelt 'Coomassie' by Bowdich).

And so it should be no surprise that in areas touched by the Atlantic, ruling elites incorporated external religious idioms and ideas, just as they had done in the Sahel with Islam. Further west, in the coastal regions of Guinea-Bissau, by the end of the seventeenth century, Bacampolo, the ruler of Bissau, had adopted aspects of Catholic ritual that were having an effect locally. One report declared that there were 400 Christians in the trading centre of Bissau by 1694, and that 'when a Christian dies, if the illness struck them in the house of a non-believer, the said [gentile] goes to call the Vicar to administer the last rites, and when the said Christian is buried their [gentile] relatives accompany the funeral procession to the doors of the Church.'³³

There had always been a strong religious element to the trading and cultural relationships linking the peoples of Greater Senegambia with the Portuguese. Much of the wax exported from the region accompanied enslaved persons to the South American port of Cartagena: once there, it was often traded to be made into the candles that

adorned the churches of the New World, from Cartagena to Lima and Santiago in Chile. This relationship between long-distance trade and religious belief did not dissipate over the eighteenth century. At times of political need, West African monarchs often flirted with Catholicism, as had their predecessors in the sixteenth century. This rarely led to much, as the frustrated letters of Brazilian missionaries to Dahomey in 1797 attest, and kings and their successors would often row back on early expressions of interest. Nevertheless, the frequent presence of missionaries had its own slow influence, and the impact of the Catholic missions on religious ideas in Sierra Leone can be gauged by the Temne word for 'Hell' in 1796 being 'Satanas'.³⁴

What emerges is the transformation of local ideas about religion and power. These were not somehow 'authentic'. They drew on transnational connections, and shaped that wider world, too. In this light, the very idea of authenticity reveals a worldview that requires Africa and Africans to have been separated from the rest of the world, isolated from world-historical processes. For the adoption of external ideas on the one hand was a mirror to the way in which, as we have seen, Africans also shaped the development of new ideas in the Americas on the other. It was a process of reciprocal influence.

The hybrid nature of some religious ideas both in the Sahel and in the Atlantic in the eighteenth century offers an intriguing mirror to the experience of Africans in the New World. As early as the late sixteenth century, a movement emerged in north-eastern Brazil known as *santidade* that was seen as a real threat to colonial power in Salvador. Adepts of *santidade* installed their own 'pope' and melded Tupinambá religious practices with the beliefs of African maroons into a new religious movement. Africans and mixed-race African-Native American *mamelucos* flocked to the community until it was crushed. Relevant African religious symbols may have included the palm tree, while the religious leaders were Tupinambá. Syncretism with Christianity emerged in the reappropriation of the myth of Noah, and of the place of baptism.³⁵

This blend of religious transformation and struggle against colonial power became a strong feature of the experience of enslaved communities in the New World, especially as this grew in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Jamaica, in the 1730s, the leader



Eighteenth-century panorama of Salvador da Bahia.

of the maroon communities was known as 'Nanny' of the Maroons, who was also a leader of the Obeah cults of Jamaica, which were derived from religious shrines in Great Popo and Dahomey. When the religion of Candomblé emerged in late-eighteenth-century Bahia, it interwove Yorùbá religiosity and Catholic form; here, the use of African plants and healing techniques allowed the creation of religious cults that rejected the prevailing colonial culture. In the nineteenth century, direct resistance to slavery was mobilized through Islam in Bahia in the 1835 Malé Uprising.³⁶

The early emergence of religious practice as a channel to contest power in the Americas was significant. The passage of Africans back and forth between the two continents was not restricted to enslaved persons, and African travellers brought this way of looking at religion as a way of speaking back to power. As early as the seventeenth century, free Africans in the New World returned to Angola and set up as commercial agents and traders. By the later eighteenth century, free Africans from north-eastern Brazil were returning to Dahomey and Great Popo. Many of them seem to have settled in the region of Lagos, before 1800. Since religious transformation was a key aspect of the experience of Africans in the New World, this meant that these persons brought back with them a new understanding of religion and its potential to challenge power.³⁷

Enslaved persons also travelled between Brazil and Africa. Some were exiled to Angola from Bahia for misdemeanours and overtly challenging Portuguese colonial power in Brazil. Meanwhile, slave-trading ships sent from Brazil were usually manned by a large number of African sailors, many themselves enslaved. Many of the sailors

used on small ships to transport sugar and provisions within the state of Bahia itself were African: 426 enslaved sailors have been recorded as working these ships in just four towns in Bahia between 1776 and 1800. This pattern was also true of the trans-Atlantic trade. Ship captains used African crew from Yorùbá- and Gbe-speaking areas* in the trade to West Africa, as they could act as interpreters when they landed at African ports in present-day Togo, Benin and Nigeria. Many of these crew appear to have also been employed for their knowledge of African medicine, listed as *sangradores* (bleeders) in the ship's roster; and, since medicine was inserted in a metaphysical and religious worldview, these crew members also brought with them insights into the new religious framework emerging in the New World.³⁸

By the later eighteenth century, there were thus two channels for the incorporation of transnational religious power in West and West-Central Africa. Ruling elites sought to offer a hybrid face to their religious practice, incorporating Islam in many parts of the Sahel, and Christianity in some Atlantic kingdoms (especially in Kongo and parts of Greater Senegambia), but at the same time holding fast to existing religious shrines and practice. However, by the eighteenth century, the same transnational forces that brought these faiths also brought with them new models of religious struggle against power. From the Muslim world, this took the form of the Salafiya revival movement of the late eighteenth century, and from the Atlantic the use of religion as a challenge to colonial power in the Americas. As new forms of ethnic identity began to emerge, people in different parts of Atlantic Africa were able to harness them and these models of religious struggle to challenge the aristocracy's monopoly of power.

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURES AND THE 'INVENTION' OF ETHNICITY

Whenever the issue of political conflict in Africa emerges in the news, it is often ascribed to 'ethnic' discord. The implication, stated or not,

* Known in Salvador as 'Jeje'.

is that such ethnic conflict is age-old. The model that is thereby conveyed is the familiar one, of static peoples and histories. It reminds us how old historical discourses still feed into preconceptions, and shape contemporary debates; and why many African thinkers insist on the historicity of the problems of 'development' in the twenty-first century.³⁹

When it comes to the question of age-old 'ethnic' discord, there is one overriding problem with this analysis. This is that most modern ethnic categories did not emerge in Africa until the nineteenth century. Ethnicity is resoundingly modern; and, as a category of use in Africa, it emerged in response to the transnational pressures, and the need to mobilize identities in the struggle to overturn the authoritarian power of the slave-trade era. Nevertheless, veritable mini armies of political scientists, think tanks and their institutional political backers discuss the significance of the topic, and how outside intervention can resolve the ethnic discord that this discussion is itself helping to create through its classifications. And, indeed, however problematic the concept may be, like all strategic actions conceived by empires, the invention of ethnicity has created 'facts on the ground'.

This sort of intellectual sleight of hand goes right back to the early centuries of Atlantic trade, and the strategies developed then by European outsiders. While ethnicities themselves are new, the attempt by outsiders to categorize Africans through ethnic labels is very old. In the seventeenth century, for example, the Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval composed an early ethnographic study of the different African peoples of the port of Cartagena. From Cartagena, ships sailed to the Cape Verde Islands and Guinea-Bissau, and to Angola and the ports of Allada for captives. The mix of peoples arriving in the port made Cartagena one of the most cosmopolitan cities on earth. Some Africans were enslaved in the mines of what is now Colombia, while others were transported across the Panamá Isthmus, to be shipped on to the Viceroyalty of Peru. Captives were auctioned by the Cartagena town crier by the gates of the main square, and all colonists had a stake in the trade in one way or another: Sandoval himself acted for the Jesuits in the trade for enslaved persons to the Cape Verde Islands during the period in which he wrote this work.⁴⁰

Sandoval's 1627 book sought to describe all the 'nations' of Africans in the New World, but, in so doing, he revealed some of the problems with this project. Of the peoples of Greater Senegambia, the Bainunk 'Bootes' who lived at the mouth of the Casamance River shared a language with the people known as 'Floups', but could not understand those who were just 'Bainunk'. Meanwhile, the Balanta people included 'many different castes of this nation, some of whom do not understand each other'. To make things more complicated though, many Balanta spoke other languages, such as Brame or Mandinka, while many Brames could speak Bainunk, Floup, Balanta and Mandinka.⁴¹

If Sandoval's picture of different categories sounds somewhat confused and contradictory, that is because it is. The emerging 'ethnicities' that were being drawn up in the New World were categories that, again, simplified hugely complex affiliations of kinship, belief and language such as existed in different parts of West and West-Central Africa. Often, some peoples of the same 'ethnicity' could not understand one another, something that remains the case today among the Serèer of Senegal, and the Jola of Gambia, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. Further south, in the region of Benguela in Angola, the 'Ndombe' category first noted by the Portuguese in the late seventeenth century incorporated different peoples with different rulers. A better-known example would be among the Yorùbá of south-western Nigeria. There are large numbers of 'Yoruboid' variants, on a spectrum of mutual intelligibility, of which Yorùbá is by far the most widely spoken (standardized following the translation of the Bible into Yorùbá in 1884).⁴²

Ethnic designators had locally ascribed meanings, and are best seen as an extension of political identity. These political identities were far from being reducible to any one component, but incorporated many different aspects of identities in West and West-Central Africa: kinship, lineage and religious beliefs, and affiliation to a particular area of land. Indeed, for this reason, 'ethnicities' might appear to have some sort of continuity, as they were used continuously to refer to these constellations of different factors. It became strategically valuable for people to use these terms themselves in Africa, to create distinctions between themselves and other potentially hostile

groups, thereby allowing them to stake claims to land and other resources.⁴³

That ethnic categories were retrospective is also suggested by the archaeological record, which shows common origins, whereas today nations are divided into different 'ethnicities'. By and by, the construction of these categories had an effect in Africa as to how identities were conceived. The migration of Africans back and forth across the Atlantic, and the importance of these categories in defining affiliations and boundaries, meant that African peoples used their own frameworks and priorities to define what they were to mean. This led to the construction of new forms of ethnic identity, which were mobilized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to very important effect.⁴⁴

Why was ethnicity important in the first place? There was a mutual interest in the concept of 'ethnicity', as some early examples from the diaspora can show. It mattered greatly to the fight for freedom for Africans, and to the securing of economic status for colonists in the New World. For Africans, too, knowledge of these new labels was important. Seeking freedom through legal channels of redress in the New World meant that understanding these ethnic markers was vital. This emerges in the evidence of a ship arriving in Hispaniola in 1575 under Captain Cristóbal Cayado with captives from Greater Senegambia. Among the passengers on the ship were a number of free Africans who identified themselves to the colonial authorities on arrival in port. These individuals ascribed their own 'ethnic' origins to themselves and successfully asserted their free status. One was 'a black called Manuel who said he was a Creole and free', another 'a Black called Hernando from Çape lands who was bearded and said that he was free', another 'Amador Lopez who said he was raised in the island of Santiago [Cape Verde] and was free'. Ethnicity was, therefore, a category that helped navigate the new territory, and thus formed another new strand in the ideas of belonging that Africans developed in their new communities in America.⁴⁵

Beyond any mere usefulness of ethnicity, however, was the reality of the emotional pull of the discovery of a shared background with people so far from home. Africans in the New World often sought out people from the same shared cultural region. They married one

another and stood sponsor to one another at baptism, in sixteenth-century Colombia and Cuba as in eighteenth-century northern Brazil. The children of people of the same 'ethnicity' born from these marriages would be called Serèrè, Nalú or Mandinka 'Creoles', showing that they had been born out of this new love discovered in the Americas. Who can fail to be moved by the story of the Bijogó Francisco, a barber, who described how, in 1632, another Bijogó called Gaspar had been sold in Lima's market? Francisco had gone a few days later to the house of the buyer and had found Gaspar there, 'and had spoken to the said Gaspar Bioho as someone from his land and who understood his language, and Gaspar Bioho was delighted by this as was he'. Francisco agreed to become Gaspar's godfather when he was baptized into the Catholic faith, and so the strength of the community, and of the 'Creole Bioho' identity, grew.⁴⁶

What, then, was the source of this growing imperative to ethnicize African identities from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries? The evidence shows a variety of pressures: the economic realities of the 'value' of human labour in the New World, the attempt to 'order reality' by missionaries and traders, and the growing military conflicts in West and West-Central Africa that made it a strategic advantage to claim one identity over another, and to create clear differences from other ethnicities, who might then become legitimate targets for capture as enslaved persons. In other words, what emerges is a vital tension between African imperatives and strands of identity (kin, religion, language, land) and transnational forces linked to economic profit and a categorical worldview.

Maybe the best example of how this interaction worked is in the emergence of the Yorùbá ethnicity in southern Nigeria. As many historians have pointed out, 'Yorùbá' ethnicity did not exist until the nineteenth century, when it emerged probably initially among communities of liberated Africans in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and also among communities of free and enslaved Yorùbá speakers in Salvador. In Salvador, only 3 per cent of enslaved Africans arriving in the nineteenth century came from outside of Yorùbá regions, and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, sources describe the emergence of a general language spoken by these people. With the passage of many of these liberated Africans from Brazil and Sierra Leone back to



West Africa, 1839. Mitchell map, drawn from an 1839 atlas. 'Yarriba' peoples at centre-right, below Eyeo [Oyo].

southern Nigeria, the construction of a shared identity emerged, and, as this 1839 map shows, it was already becoming a 'hard' identity by the middle of the nineteenth century. This was then more or less standardized into modern Yorùbá following the translation of the Bible into the language in the 1880s.⁴⁷

However, as in many other parts of West Africa, this did not imply in practice a shared ethnic or linguistic identity; indeed, in regions such as Ekiti in southern Nigeria, to this day, neighbouring villages speak mutually incomprehensible forms of the 'Yorùbá' language. It was well known that there were many different branches to the Yorùbás, and that they did not all share one common ethnic origin.⁴⁸

The transnational process was at work in the construction of a Yorùbá ethnicity. Not only did the liberated Africans from Sierra Leone play a part, but so, too, did transformations of Yorùbá identities in the New World. In Cuba, many different lineages of Yorùbá speakers – Oyo, Egba, Ijebu and Ijesha – were all subsumed into one ethnic designator, that of 'Lucumí'. In time, other peoples from the same region, such as Arada and Igbo, were also called 'Lucumí', and this identity became the cornerstone of the new Afro-Catholic religion of Santería. Similar changes and streamlining of complex identities took place in Brazil, where those who worshipped Yorùbá

orixás collectively worshipped in Candomblé shrines. The nineteenth century saw some free Africans in Brazil returning to settle in what are now Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria, bringing with them this new sense of collective identity and helping, as we have seen, in the construction of the new ethnicity.⁴⁹

Writing of the Jahanké people of Senegambia, the religious historian Lamin Sanneh notes that 'they are not an ethnic group as such and possess no language of their own.' The evidence is that this holds true for very many different peoples across West and West-Central Africa. Ethnic categories emerged, as we have seen here, as much in the Americas as in Africa itself. They were, in the end, of use both for Africans and for imperialists. For imperialists, they helped to categorize a reality that escaped them; and, in Africa, the construction of hard ethnic boundaries helped to define who was and was not a friend or an enemy, a potential threat or a potential ally in times of warfare, insecurity and political destabilization. Finally, the struggles of the eighteenth century would become a contest for power, and the new categories would help to mobilize identities and communities in the fight against an unequal economic and political system.⁵⁰

MAROON COMMUNITIES AND THE GATHERING FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

Influential historians of the American Revolution in the late eighteenth century have shown how the American value of freedom was deeply marked by the presence of slavery. Yet already, for two centuries and more, this connection had been deeply imprinted on the consciousness of enslaved Africans in the New World.⁵¹

One poignant speech shows how African warfare in the New World was shaped by the struggle for freedom from the start. In Venezuela, in 1552, Miguel, the leader of one group of maroons, was said to have declared: 'That the reason that had moved them to withdraw from the Spanish, was well known to have been in order to gain their freedom, which only in such a difficult and unjust manner was open to them; since God had created them free just like all other peoples in the world, and yet the Spanish kept them

subjected and tyrannically held them in perpetual and wretched servitude.'⁵²

Struggle against enslavement offers perhaps the best way of grasping the significance of this early African globalization, and the impact of liberation struggles in the Americas on Africa in the late eighteenth century. Conflicts led by Africans against their warrior aristocracies were not somehow isolated from the revolutionary fervour of the rest of the world. As we have seen in this chapter, many connections had grown up between Africa and the rest of the Western hemisphere. When the Age of Revolution struck the United States and then Haiti in the 1780s and 1790s, the pattern of reciprocal influences continued with transnational impacts in Africa.

Maroon communities had been growing in Africa through the eighteenth century, too, partly in response to the slave trade. People appear to have escaped from the plantation island prison of São Tomé to the island of Fernando Pó (Equatorial Guinea) throughout this century. And on the continent, communities of escaped captives were growing. They formed in present-day Benin as people escaped the armies of Dahomey. And when Adam Afzelius visited Sierra Leone in 1795, for instance, he found that enslaved persons had escaped their captors. Some had come from a failed slave rebellion against the Fuuta Jaalo Almamate, which had begun in 1785; others had set off over the jungle-covered hills that rise sheer behind Freetown. Here they had formed maroon communities in inaccessible regions, much as their counterparts had done in the New World. The parallels with the Americas are striking. Afzelius described how a group of captives awaiting sale into the Atlantic trade had escaped to land held by the Susus, and then made military attacks on their neighbours – much as maroon communities had long done in Brazil, Jamaica and many parts of the Caribbean. The Susus had tried to put the maroons down, but with no success, so they had had to call on Mandinga allies 'for assistance, which being granted, there are now assembled nearly 4,000 men to exterminate the villains'.⁵³

Afzelius himself visited the maroon community, to see conditions there. The name of the settlement was Yanghia Cori, and by the time of Afzelius's visit it had a population of five or six hundred. At first, the community had been joined by some free people, and there had

been fields of cotton and rice. However, as the Susu and Mandinka united against the maroons, these lands and the water used to irrigate them were taken. The main military strategy was to starve out the maroons. The besiegers surrounded the mud walls of the town and camped there in temporary huts; they had cut down all the trees and bushes surrounding the settlement to make it impossible to escape out of sight. The community did not survive much longer.⁵⁴

The patterns of influence from the Americas were soon striking. It would not be so very long before a new and powerful channel of that freedom returned to Sierra Leone. In 1808, free maroons who had come from Jamaica to Sierra Leone founded the maroon church, St John's, in central Freetown, a little way uphill from the asylum where liberated African slaves would be housed when they first were freed from 'illegal' slave ships later in the nineteenth century. They built the rafters of the church with planks taken from the slave ships, and, as we saw at the start of this chapter, outside the church would in time stand the maroon-coloured flag that was their emblem, embossed with a ship. Beyond Senegambia, other societies in West and West-Central Africa also saw red as the privilege of royal power, as was the case in Dahomey and Kongo. Symbolic power coalesced and then returned from the Americas to influence ideas and struggle in both the New World and the Old.⁵⁵

It is notable that the struggle of this maroon community near Freetown occurred in the very same years as the Haitian Revolution unfolded in the French colony of St Domingue. Here, enslaved persons had risen up in 1791 against the planter class in France's richest New World colony, ultimately overthrowing it in 1804 in an event that would prove as significant for the nineteenth century as the abolition of the slave trade. Indeed, in the Sierra Leone case, the escape of these maroons was itself connected to French policies, as Afzelius noted. The disruption of the trade in captives caused by the Haitian Revolution was widely discussed in African Atlantic ports, and thus the move by these maroons in Sierra Leone to join escapees from Fuuta Jaalo connected revolutions in the Americas with struggles in Africa. Awareness of the diaspora in the Americas was, by the end of the eighteenth century, becoming a relevant factor in movements to overthrow the dominant slave-holding aristocracies in some parts of West Africa.⁵⁶



Rafters of St John's Maroon Church, Freetown.

Such techniques of flight were not unusual. In Senegambia, among the Serèèr peoples of the Saluum Delta north of the Gambia River, villages were in a condition of permanent armed defence against slave-raiding parties. Some villagers, the Safèn, lived in areas that could be better defended from slave raiders because of the terrain of forests and hills. They welcomed refugees from other communities, and fiercely defended an autonomy free of the hierarchy of both monarchy and slavery. Serèèr 'ethnicity' thus in time came to incorporate many different peoples, as a group characterized not necessarily by linguistic use or physical heredity, but by its struggle against both unbridled Jolof state power and also Islam. In the nineteenth century, the Serèèr retained their hostility to Islam, while speaking different languages, many of which are mutually unintelligible.⁵⁷

While the Serèèr example does not illustrate transnational connections for African maroons, there were other regions that did so, especially Angola. As noted earlier, the *quilombo* of Palmares in Brazil was perhaps the most important maroon movement in the

Americas until the Haitian Revolution. The very term *quilombo* derived from the Imbangala military platoons of Angola, and came to be used to describe the maroon settlements in Brazil in the early eighteenth century. By the 1740s, the many communities of escaped slaves in Angola also began to be called *quilombos* by outsiders, and, by the nineteenth century, members of these maroon communities called themselves *quilombos*, showing the incorporation of a term from the Americas into a description of a situation in Africa. As in Sierra Leone, defeating these communities of maroons required outside African military assistance in Angola.⁵⁸

By 1795, and with the rise of the community described by Afzelius in Sierra Leone, the roots of connection and influence become blurred. The rise of enslavement in Africa had clearly led to the development of multiple maroon communities who adopted strategies of geographical isolation and militarized defence in self-protection. Beyond the communities of Serèrè and Angola runaways, settlements in Igbominaland in southern Nigeria were always sited on hilltops, as an echo of these maroon settlements. When these strategies failed, some among their communities might be captured and transported to the New World, where they would bring this strategic awareness of defensive isolation into new maroon communities. News of the success of some of these communities then returned to Africa, along with figures like Antonio Vaz, who, as we saw in the introduction to this chapter, increasingly established themselves during the eighteenth century. Meantime, the strategies of African maroon communities were intensified as the forces of the Atlantic world became more constraining. Transnational cultures of political struggle were emerging that connected communities in a large part of West and West-Central Africa to the cruel empires of the New World.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION: THE SOUNDS OF STRUGGLE

At a meeting of musicians and historians from West Africa in London in June 2015, the Bissau-Guinean *gumbe* musician Manecas Costa performed one of his signature tracks, 'Ermons di Terra' ('Brothers

of the Land'), before discussing the music itself. *Gumbe*, Manecas Costa said, had been a vital form of resistance during the independence war fought against the Portuguese dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. Other *gumbe* musicians describe how it was a key way of communicating information across the *mato* (bush), which the Portuguese could not understand, and also a way of asserting a national identity in the Kriolu language that was used, and that the Portuguese often could not understand. Yet *gumbe* music itself is not indigenous to Guinea-Bissau, for when, in the early nineteenth century, some maroons and freed slaves from Jamaica went with the British anti-slave trade squadron to the settlement at Freetown, in Sierra Leone, they brought their 'gumbay' drums with them. The *gumbay* was performed loudly and heedlessly in the street, to the annoyance of the British colonists; and *gumbay* drums remain popular in Sierra Leone to this day, and can be found in the maroon church of St John, while *gumbay* music plays raucously from loudspeakers on the beaches near Freetown.⁶⁰

So *gumbay* was a music developed to communicate among maroon communities in Jamaica during the eighteenth century, which was then used in the same way in Guinea-Bissau during the successful 1960s War of Independence. Music followed routes and movement, and allowed people to share new identities that could challenge power. As Paul Gilroy showed in his foundational book *The Black Atlantic*, music was an intellectual production that embodied many of the pathways – human and other – crisscrossing the ocean.⁶¹

Like the thirst for freedom, this connection was also something that had developed very early, and had developed globally. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries going to establish their missions in Paraguay sought special licence to take with them 'eight Black slaves, musicians from Angola', who would be brought for their skill at singing and playing the flute and cornet, so as to accompany Mass. African musical style itself provided the soundtrack to many historical experiences in the New World from a very early time.⁶²

It is not surprising that musical styles emerged along the routes of the trade in captives. This, too, was a transnational trade bridging worlds. Ironically, just as patterns of maroon settlement were linked

to flows across the Atlantic, the same was the case with the institution from which they were escaping, that of slavery. Servants crisscrossed the Atlantic, bringing with them the imprint of the institution of slavery in both directions. Some went from the Americas back to West Africa. 'Castle slaves' were well known at Elmina on the Gold Coast and came to influence local forms of dependence and slavery at the Elmina settlement. Meanwhile, by the later seventeenth century, there were many domestic slaves in Cacheu, in Guinea-Bissau, and some enslaved persons were known to have travelled between there and Cartagena. In this way, some ideas of dependence and enslavement also became transnational, like the practices of escape from them by maroons – and the music that accompanied them.⁶³

Thus, the musical interchange bridging African communities and those of Europe and the New World was established alongside the transnational institution of slavery. Iberia was a perfect theatre for this sort of cultural transformation, being already a product of exchanges between Catholic, Jewish and Muslim cultures going back several centuries. African musical influence was then embodied in a variety of dances and popular cultures that spread quickly in Iberia and the Americas. In Portugal, stories and dances from Guinea-Bissau became embodied in dances such as the *guineu*, as well as in folk tales that spread across the Alentejo region and were still recounted in the twentieth century.⁶⁴

Yet how could music really accompany the consolidation and expansion of such an institution as slavery? Microhistories from Senegambia and West-Central Africa offer the best way of reflecting on this unexpected aspect of African history. In Senegambia, the rise of the slave trade linking French 'factories' at St Louis and Gorée with Louisiana in the eighteenth century saw the removal of many people to the American South – indeed, 'Senegal' remains a common surname in Louisiana to this day. These Senegambian captives brought with them the structure of the xalam or ngoni tradition, these being lutes of four or five strings, similar to the Jola akonting.* The musical structure employed in Senegambia of the fodet had a remarkable similarity to the '12-Bar Blues'. In this way, the American Blues

* See above, Chapter 2.

emerged from the fusion of different instruments and styles from Senegambia in a New World setting.⁶⁵

Also remarkable was the reciprocal influence that this would in time have in Africa, far beyond the *gumbay* drum. Following the independence of Haiti in 1804, there was an increasing interconnection of formerly French New Orleans with Santo Domingo and Cuba. The trade in enslaved persons continued to Cuba until 1866, and, as many of the crew on these ships were freed Cubano-Africans (just as Afro-Brazilians had manned the ships to West Africa in the eighteenth century), they brought with them strains of these new musical styles on the return voyages to Africa. When, in the 1940s and 1950s, modern Senegalese music began to emerge, it was heavily influenced by Cuban music played on the radio, just as Congolese *rumba* in the 1950s. Here was the echo of an earlier struggle again, this time to a different yet familiar soundtrack, formal European colonialism in Africa.⁶⁶

As the flow of music shows, experiences of the diaspora in the New World would influence cultural expression in many different parts of West and West-Central Africa. The reciprocal transnational influence did not rest only with music but was also, as we have seen, central to the maroon communities and the strategies needed for survival in a society with slave-holding, and to the way in which religious practice could be used to develop an ideology of militarized resistance. As these changes took hold in America, ongoing struggles against overreaches of power linked up the Age of Revolution in the Americas with movements in Africa.

And yet this relationship of transnational influence from and to Africa cannot be left, finally, at the moment of a rising against power. The context for that rising, the depths of the need that it answered, has its own sound. The whip, brute signal of the animalization of the slave-owning class (which they projected on to slaves), was the other core soundtrack to the Atlantic. It was embedded in fantasy and coercion, and sublimated in psychotic racial and sexual neuroses, as Frantz Fanon so excoriatingly analysed. It was as brutally enduring an instrument as the akonting or the banjo, flogging the dead horse of colonial consumption and desire for so many centuries; and it was resurrected from the Americas in twentieth-century colonial Africa,

like this music itself, in the hands of Belgian rubber tappers, Portuguese *cipaios* (military police), French *corvées* and British conscripts, panicked by Mau Mau, in the era of European imperialism in twentieth-century Africa.⁶⁷

How to take account of these parallel sounds, of music and brutality? Many Africans formed their own vehicles of struggle, and individual cases explore this best. There is the experience of Manuel Bran, hauled before the Inquisition in Cartagena in 1650. Born in the Cape Verde Islands, he had been taken as a captive with his mother to the Azores as an infant, where eventually he had grown up and married a Spanish woman, Leonor de Sosa, who was a servant to the same owner as he was. He had then been taken off by his owner to Brazil, for four months, and thence to Cartagena, where they sold him to his current owner, Rodrigo de Lobo. Stripped multiple times of his family by the institution of slavery, it was not surprising that Manuel Bran was accused of spitting on crosses and denying the existence of God, when in the midst of being whipped by his owner in Cape Verde, whipping crucifixes was a common accusation before the Inquisition, and, where cruelty and abuses of power were so universal, so was the disbelief in the master's God.⁶⁸

The whip, like the banjo and the drum, was a transnational instrument. It was the instrument of the Atlantic slave-owning class, as base as the rhythms and melodies of the African experience were moving. Yet music, too, memorializes the place of the whip. The infamous nursery rhyme 'Eenie Meenie Maine Mo' is given its fullest and ugliest context in one study of the Creole language Papiamentu from the Dutch West Indian island of Curaçao. Here, it is suggested that, 'Reconstructed to its original Creole form, this song would read (in an English orthography): "Eene meene maine mo / K'e cha ting ke bai deto / I fi! / Ole es latigo", which, when properly translated, reveals its slave origins: 'Children / Boys / Girls calm down / For you have to go to bed / It is finished! / Here's the whip.'⁶⁹

Warrior Aristocracies and Pushback from Below

In the nineteenth century, the famous French historian and political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville argued that the American Revolution grew out of a conflict between aristocratic and democratic forms of government. Democratic forces had convulsed against the power of European aristocracies. The rise, and rise, of commerce overthrew the landed aristocracies. It was this crisis in elite power that was a key element in the 'Age of Revolution'. In America, Tocqueville wrote, 'the aristocratic element, always feeble since its birth is, if not destroyed, at least weakened further.'¹

Tocqueville's vision has been hugely influential in the writing of Western history. Generations of historians have debated his ideas since, emending but never really surpassing his analysis of democracy and aristocracy. Some examples may be useful. In his analysis of the First World War, Arno Mayer suggested that, in fact, the aristocratic classes had managed to retain much of their power and influence in Europe in the nineteenth century in the face of the bourgeois revolutions of the late eighteenth century, and that the First World War was in part the conclusion of this struggle. Another influential American historian, R. R. Palmer, took Tocqueville's view further in suggesting that both aristocratic and democratic forces were gaining in strength throughout the period after 1760, and that the Age of Revolution was the logical consequence of this.²

These discussions of aristocratic and democratic forces in this vital period of world history have never included Africa. Yet this chapter shows that such convulsions were also an important part of the political revolutions in West Africa in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Moreover, the parallels do not end there. As