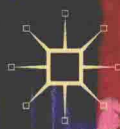# AFRICAN ROOTS, BRAZILIAN RITES

CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN BRAZIL

CHERYL STERLING

African Roots, Brazilian Rites

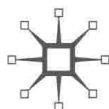## Cultural and National Identity in Brazil

Cheryl Sterling

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Introduction: What Roots?
Which Routes?

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax,
to grasp the morphology of this language,
but it means above all to assume a culture,
to support the weight of civilization.

Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*

What is spoken or silenced depends on who is speaking,
who is doing the documenting, from whose perspective,
by whose criteria, and what is being recorded.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild[1]

Issues of identity are considered part of the hallmark of modern con-
sciousness. If we view modernity as the point from which to give voice
to rupture and displacement, queries such as who am I? and where
do I belong? arise out of the modern subject. This is why Paul Gilroy
(1993) relocates the discourse of modernity to the triangular route of
the slave trade, renaming it the black Atlantic. For who else but the
enslaved Other (and their descendants) embodies this crisis of non-
belonging to the extent that it transcends existential angst to develop
into new myth-making realities. This work's engagement with Afro-
Brazilians' articulations of Africanness and blackness incorporates
their quest for rootedness in Africa but also places them in the unified
oeuvre of diaspora space that Gilroy reconceptualizes to include the
history of enslavement, racism, and the engagement of black peoples
with practices of nation building, citizenry, and modernization in the
Western discourse of modernity.

In any interrogation of identity, the tension lies within the very
articulation of the term. Identity is often viewed as the dichotomy
between notions of being and becoming. Being relates to the fixed,

unitary, originary source, while becoming is the variable, polysemic narrative that changes with each encounter. Embedded within this tension are the following questions: If the nature of identity is fluid and malleable, how does it motivate social interconnection? And at what point does it generate the stable, autonomous individual self that connects with the larger social grouping? These questions present the paradox within identity construction as individuals and groups assert an identity to inscribe their social/political positions and places in the world, which run contrary to the formulations by other groups about who they are and the significance of their cultural forms. What is seemingly a natural heuristic system, in which mutual exchange leads to greater knowledge, becomes quite nefarious within an asymmetrical power dynamic.

Theoretical models that straddle the postcolonial and postmodern divide privilege the malleability, fluidity, and negotiation attendant to identity construction (Burke and Stets 2009; Alcoff et al. 2006; Friedman 1998; Hall and du Gay 1996; Bhabha 1994). Identity, for García Canclini, is a narrated construct; however, its authorial source is predicated on the foundational, consecrational events in a nation, perpetuated through educational systems, reified in museums, and rhetorically promulgated in civic rituals and political discourse (*Consumers* 89). What interests Canclini and has a direct bearing on this work are the different "symbolic matrices" that narrate heterogeneity and the differing, nuanced codes that exist simultaneously in the national construct and the individual subject (ibid. 94–95). Rather than consigning the construction of identity to state-sanctioned representations, Stuart Hall (1996) further problematizes its source coding, questioning who needs identity to polemically theorize it as a temporary construct manifesting itself from discursive practices and the body of representations taken from the position as Other rather than subject. Said (1979) addresses this paradox within identity formation in both its formulation through hegemonic apparatuses (political, economic, educational, and their institutional counterparts) and the interrogation of such dominant discourses in acts of self-representation that become political. Insofar as Said (1993) raises the spectrum of culture as a site of resistance and self-representation, James C. Scott (1990) addresses the distinctiveness within subordinate groups that lends itself to such formations. Identity arises from what group members choose to emphasize in their cultural repertoires: by selecting stories, songs, dances, texts, and rituals based on their use value, they create new artifacts and

cultural practices to meet their needs. The agency of such cultural selection derives from what is accepted, what survives, and what is transmitted (Scott 157).

Identity in this work is conceived as a complex layering of Brazilian hegemonic discourses that defines the Afro-Brazilian subject and the ways Afro-Brazilians define themselves based on their cultural referents. Culture, too, has its dichotomies and contentions in this work between its conceptualization as a way of life, the lived reality of Afro-Brazilians (Williams 2009), and as a hegemonic, dominating, and saturating purview (Said 1993), due to the racialized zones of contestations under which Afro-Brazilians live. This text contemplates and interrogates the ways in which Afro-Brazilians deliberately choose a cultural identity based on their sense of ancestral location—their rootedness in Africa—and generate a stable, normative racial and social categorization through conceptualizations of their blackness to engage with dominant political and social paradigms. Discourses of Africanness and blackness are analyzed through the combined lens of Candomblé, specifically the Yoruba-influenced sector of the religion, and the metaphor of *Quilombo* agency (the independent communities formed by runaway slaves). Candomblé and Quilombo paradigms are interpreted as autogenous, intrinsic models that arise out of Afro-Brazilian subjectivity and signification, to which is added a third, external vector, formulated through the rubric of Black Power ideals.

This text discusses the formulation and epistemology of Candomblé rites and rituals and, analogically, extends its performance modalities from the private space of the *terreiros* [the religious enclaves] to the public space through the *festas populares* and the *Blocos Afros*, the Afro-based carnival groups, in Salvador da Bahia. It examines the discursive and performative articulations of an African/black subjectivity in drama, poetry, and hip hop, extending the research to encompass São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Cultural performances are read as "auto-hegemonic" articulations of identity that interpellate state discourses in movements away "from a reactive position pitted in perpetual conflict with authority, to an active position that derives authority, power, autonomy, and agency from itself" (Okediji 5). Such auto-hegemony allows for a framework that embraces subject articulation and dialogic accord in the creation of identity, and the two epigraphs to this chapter focalize the understanding that only a speaking subject can be definitional in regard to positioning, placement, trajectory, capability, and capacity in the world order.

"Why Keep Asking Me About My Identity?"[2]

Race and culture as social categories generate a formidable alliance and conundrum in which to discuss Afro-Brazilian subjectivity due to the tensions, affective ideologies, negations, negotiations, and embracements found in the particular compounding and rejection of each signification, whereby culture is racialized and racial identification becomes culture. Historically, race relations have always been sites of tension in Brazil. Socially and politically charged discourses and policies, based on the ideal of a "*democracia racial*," promote an ethnic plurality in which the idealized being, albeit racially mixed, chooses his or her racial identity. This myth of a racial democracy horizontalized racial hierarchies in its purported celebration of the three vectors of identity found in the mix of European, indigenous, and African bloodlines. The blending of peoples became epigrammatic in the characterization of Brazilian cultural multiplicity, and within those celebratory treatises African-derived cultural forms, delineated to their essences, became symbolic markers of the racial and cultural melding of the nation. Systemic closure between phenotype and institutionally and socially defined identities allows Brazilians to create an unprecedented array of color codification. Phenotype determines representational identity, and Brazilians choose how they want to identity and be identified in a chain of raced-based, color-coded significations, but the choices are never between racial identities or color codings that are equal; rather, a clear privilege is given to an individual with a white/European aesthetic over an African/black one, or simply put, the whiter one looks guarantees greater access to social and economic ascension (Telles 2004; Htun 2004; Reichmann 1999; Twine 1998).

Such overt privileging of whiteness dates back to the concourse of transatlantic slavery that began these African diasporic societies but, more specifically for the purposes of this work, also to the codification of the policy of "*embranquecimento*" or "*branqueamento*" [social whitening] (1889–1911) that prevailed after slavery (Twine 1998; Burdick 1992; Winant 1992; Fontaine 1985; Skidmore 1974). Afro-Brazilians are the targeted group in this process of embranquecimento because whitening is equated to social mobility. Governmental policy banned all immigration of African and Asian peoples and, in turn, actively sponsored the immigration of whites in order to lighten the population. In tandem with its immigrationist agenda, the policy of embranquecimento promoted miscegenation in order to genetically attack and alter the black being. For the members of

the black population, as subcitizens,[3] it was explicitly forecasted that only their lighter-skinned descendants could achieve social mobility (Bailey 2009; Guimarães and Huntley 2000; Degler 1986). The legacy of institutionalized embranquecimento is reflected in popular Manichean beliefs that undergird the social fabric of Brazilian society: by blacks, that through this gradual whitening caused by miscegenation all social and economic impediments will disappear and, by whites, that with a whitened (and less backward) population, Brazil will take its place as a model of modernity in the world.

Brazil today is one of the ten largest economies in the world, with one of the most inequitable distributions of wealth. The Human Development Index marks it as a nation with markedly substandard conditions for the poor and the working class, and severely lacking in social policy or infrastructure to ameliorate this vast disjunction (Nobles 6; Baeto 778–80).[4] What becomes the dangerous camouflage in the national imaginary is that these economic and social cleavages are considered class-based issues, rather than racial ones, and that, due to the myth of democracia racial, even to suggest that the society is racially demarcated is evidence of one's own racism (Sheriff 2001; Nobles 2000). However, Afro-Brazilians are 33.7 percent of the 53 million poor Brazilians, which equates to 63 percent of the overall poor population, who are disproportionately affected by these "subhuman conditions" (Baeto 778). In tandem, they are the most likely targets for state-sanctioned violence, receive the lowest wages, and are allocated the most menial employment (Moehn 2007; Vargas 2006; Baeto 2004; Arias 2004). The combined racialized pathologies and nonfunctioning institutional structures continue to code Afro-Brazilians as outside the system of social and economic ascension.

These race-based discourses of embranquecimento and democracia racial are read in this text as the point from which to theorize and construct a discursive and representational alterity to the negation of the Afro-Brazilian subject. Néstor García Canclini argues in *Hybrid Cultures* (2005) that Latin American national identities incorporated the popular—the cultures of the social underclass—to legitimate their rulership of the people, yet simultaneously, in policy enactment, tried to eradicate their cultural forms in the nation's vision of the linear progress to modernity. However, in regard to Brazil, African cultural forms were co-opted rather than eradicated as key markers of *Brasilidade*, Brazilian identity. This narrative emphasizes a selective criteria of Africanness through topical invocations of cultural melding that allow *feijoada*[5] to become the national dish, samba the

national dance, and deracinated versions of the African-based religion of Candomblé and the martial art *capoiera* to be folklorized as popular performance genres.

How Does Hybridity Function in Brazil?

While hybridity purports to function outside of race, each of its theoretical vectors functions within the complex codings of the discourses of embranquecimento and democracia racial, as well as the processes of incorporation into the particular type of capitalist modernization that the nation underscored, to become discourses of social exclusion. To speak of hybridity in (post)modern cultures is to speculate on processes that are at once interruptive and transgressive, and yet commonplace and pervasive (Werbner 1997). Questions that such relations engender and that are immediately applicable to the Afro-Brazilian subject are the following: Whose culture determines the hybrid? What are the terms of hybridity when relations are not equal in access or resources and one is considered of lesser stature in the society or a member of a co-opted culture? Hybridity, as a lived reality, in the everyday movement of ordinary people within national spaces, within regions, cities, and neighborhoods, subject to influences from local and international forces, both culturally and politically, is a naturalized phenomenon that enables transmutations and entrenchment of values, behaviors, and ideas. Hybridity also connotes the social interrelations generated between different ethnic groups, genders, classes, technologies, and systems of power. It may apply to a total syncretic process in which all differences are nullified; an inter-mix in which the differences are apparent, but a new altered form is created; or even a continuous remixing of a previous syncretism.

What these discourses have conveniently forgotten or elided is the original formulation of hybridity as racial mixing and the biological determinism of cross-pollination. Hybridity's connotative significance expands to a combination of racial, cultural, and linguistic mixing, and the text *Eloge de la Créolité* is the apical proclamation of mixedness. *Creolité* promulgates a radicalizing counternarrative to *Francophonité* and creates a sense of Caribbeanness for those of the literati and the learned. The interrelation of Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean becomes a celebratory cultural, linguistic, and literary source, and a new way to be in the world. Hybridity here becomes a self-congratulatory construct in its assumption of equal relations, equal access, and equitable displacement, purporting the counterhegemony of such discourses in allowing for the voicing of difference.

The problem readily apparent in such postrace discourses is that, in the attempt to liberate us from the category of race, they do not eradicate institutional racisms, individual constructs of race, or the effects of race-based social policies that flourish all over Latin America and the world (Andrews 2010; Gudmundson and Wolfe 2010; Ben, III., and Restall 2009; Marable and Agard-Jones 2008; Clarke and Thomas 2006; Torres and Whitten Jr. 1998). For instance, in Paul Gilroy's (2000) ill-timed treatise against race, he declares, "skin is no longer privileged as the threshold of either identity or particularity" (47), postulating an obvious limit to his theorizing in the Brazilian context. His analysis cannot possibly extend to the complex figuration that marks Afro-Brazilian subjectivity, in which race translates into a complex pigmentocracy that hierarchializes based on skin shade, and the body that symbolizes *mesticismo*[6] is the tropic ideal. When the equivalent term to *creole* in Portuguese, *crioulo*, translates to "nigger," how can hybridity or creoleness be a transformative discourse? When hybridity becomes the normative, how does it amplify the role of Afro-Brazilians in the society, especially if they conform to neither its idealized standards of beauty nor the idealized values it upholds?

My attempt here in laying out some aspects of hybridity theory is to point to the limited modality in which it functions as an evocative paradigm for Afro-Brazilians' identity. Approaching Brazilian hybridity outside the paradigm of race, however, leads us into a non sequitur, but neither can we approach it just through the parameter of race-based identification. Given these issues, the Afro-Brazilian subject is a *hybrid* construct, both culturally and racially, but the manifold ways in which Afro-Brazilians reconstruct and choose to advance their Africanness and blackness is at the heart of this interrogation. What form of hybridity is then useful in order to study the dichotomies in representation between the hegemonic discourses of negation embedded within Brazilian society and the deterministic paradigms of Afro-Brazilians? In answer, an evocative modality from which to explore Afro-Brazilian identity arises from Canclini, who extends hybrid theorizing beyond areas of racial mixtures, religious syncretism, and traditional movements (*Hybrid* 2).

Hybridity also emerges when multiple and heterogenous traditions exist at the same time and share the same spaces, allowing for the simultaneity of modernity and practices deemed archaic. Allowing for in-depth perceptions about the functioning of power dynamics inside asymmetrical systems, such "reconversions" denote the adaptation of knowledge and the reshaping of ideals to reinsert into old frameworks and generate new modalities. The top-down phenomenon of power

relations is replaced by significations of the multifaceted dimensions of social action and the negotiations underlying the political processes within heterogeneous dynamics (*Hybrid* 3). Canclini's model advances an understanding of individual and group positioning in the midst of heterogeneity and the manner in which alternate figurations of hybridity lend themselves to identity formation. Even though he detaches from identitarian postulations, Canclini, in acknowledging the provisionality and transitoriness of hybridity, points to its limits and highlights an ever-present conundrum in Afro-Brazilian relations: Why do individuals and groups opt out of such open frameworks of multiplicity? The self-determining processes involved within Afro-Brazilian attempts at closure of identity become the target of investigation in this work.

The Profound Call of Africanness and Blackness

The desire for a root source is at the center in the Afro-Brazilian quest for Africannness. What must be understood is how Africa is defined and reconstituted in this particular diasporic lens. And how do conceptualizations of Africa become the formulaic base for the Africanness or the Afro in their identity formation? Similarly, how does the discourse of blackness develop in its relational sphere and manifest in the ideation of the Afro-Brazilian subject? In formulating Afro-Brazilian subjectivity, it must be understood that identities considered black in other spatialities are not necessarily black in Brazil. "To be black in Brazil," writes Marshall C. Eakin, "means to have no white ancestors"(115) and connotes social and economic exclusion rather than a racial identification (M. Guimarães 44). To identify as black may be a process of auto-selection, often prevented by the color stigmatization in the society. Hence, many Afro-Brazilians will call themselves anything but black, which translates into local parlance as "*Negro*" or "*Preto*"; additional categories such as *Moreno* [light brown] or *Pardo* [brown] become the official forms of identification endorsed by the census (Baeto 2004; Telles 2004; Piza and Rosemberg 1999). Even though the theorists addressed in this introduction condemn identitarian constructs as essentializing notions, none have addressed why and how these terms and subjectivities persist in real-world discourse. The proliferation of texts on blackness tells another story, one of peoples questing for a claimable center of self-determination (Fleetwood 2011; Andrews 2010; Gudmundson and Wolfe 2010; Yancy 2008; Elam Jr. and Jackson 2005; Sansone 2003; Moore 1997). Blackness in this work is a purposeful injunction of a chosen

identity as *"Negra," "Preta," "Parda," Afro-Brasiliera,* or even *"Afro-descendente,"*[7] in relation to a discourse of empowerment and social transformation. Key questions that such positionalities engender are the following: Why do individuals and communities refuse and resist hybridizing identities? What do they gain from positioning themselves within narratives of fixity and rootedness? And how are these forms of belonging generated from the actuality of transatlantic crossings, transculturation, and transnational groupings?

To further understand the dialogic doubleness in the tension between the appropriation of root discourse and heterogeneous frameworks of articulation, through which Afro-Brazilians restructure their interethnic, mixed race, and cross-class valence, I turn to Edouard Glissant's theory of roots and rhizomes. Glissant similarly decries the attachment to roots and advocates for a multiple-rooted system in his ideation of the rhizome. Attachment to root cultures is an attachment to legitimating ideologies that dominate other cultures. Rootedness evolves from narratives of mythic origination, is structured through lines of descent or "filiation," and is ratified by claims to land and territory, preserved through the conquest of other territories, authoritatively encoded in colonial enterprises (Glissant 144–45). Vehemently eschewing atavistic ideologies that seek to destroy or control others, Glissant alternatively theorizes the rhizome within the contradictory experiences of cultural contact, reproduced in a network of *Relations,* of fertile contacts and synergies, without a predetermined beginning or predictable end. It is rather part of a cycle of expansion and creation of the new, evident in the poly-rooted character of Caribbean subjectivity. With its beginnings in the traumatic memory of slavery and its assertion of creolization,[8] the tentacle-like proliferation of a rhizomatic identity allows differences to have a place; systems of shared belonging may then construct relational identities in concert, out of shared communication, without imposition or warrants from above.

This exploration of root ideologies, their permutations, and their *routes* is much more Glissantian in its character, but not because of an intent to negate the concept of root. Rather I begin to write against Glissant's concept of the root source as an ideological construct to perpetuate domination. However, I see within his theory of the rhizome the relational root, the spreading of different aspects of Afro-Brazilian subjectivity and identity. Facets of that rhizomatic root, I argue, are found in Candomblé rituals, carnival, drama, poetry, and hip hop culture as explored in this work. Glissant's relational root refutes the notion of identity as imposed from a hegemonic system outside of the

subject position. In such a formation, identity is constructed as part of an amalgam with relativized, multiple centers that coexist with each other à la Canclini (2005).

This work shifts the issues regarding Afro-Brazilian identity from the focus on the impossibility of an imagined past to the more agentative foci Ella Shohat advocates, by understanding the mobilization of the articulation of the past, the deliberate deployment of sets of representations, and the political vision they access and represent for Afro-Brazilians ("Notes" 110). Many of the primary and scholarly texts used in this work are originally in Portuguese, and the translations are mine. I have attempted to be as faithful as possible to their intent, to allow Afro-Brazilians' voices to articulate their own paradigms and relations to their society.

The first chapter is an overall historical analysis, focusing on the link to the Yoruba peoples from Benin and Nigeria, from which Afro-Brazilians undergo a symbolic reterritoritalization of a sense of Africanness in the transposition of Candomblé discourse and ritual. This is not to deny the intercultural flow of Africans in Brazil or the "transnational formation" that results (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* ix) but to argue that the Yoruba model is deliberately remembered and enshrined to signify Africa. The chapter focuses on three vectors in which one may trace this imbrication of roots and relational ideations. The discourse of rootedness in Candomblé is examined within the construction of first a Nagô-centric (Yoruba-based) identity, specifically out of the conditions of forced and voluntary transatlantic travel; second, the legitimation of the *pureza nagô* [pure Yoruba] by religious adherents and the scholars they co-opt; and, third, the articulation of Africanness through the "reconversion" of ritual and symbology out of the Yoruba-based matrix (Canclini 2005).

Chapter 2 examines three public rituals in Salvador, the *festa de Santa Barbara*, the *festa de Iemanjá*, and the *Lavagem do Bonfim*, considered rhizomatic implantations from the discursive and performative fields of Candomblé. Linking the ritual forms within the *terreiros* to the public ceremonies in the city of Salvador, the festas are read as forms of cultural politics. Their celebratory aspects are analyzed in light of the project of political and social transformation that they illustrate through their performative strategies. Examining performance encompasses subject formation, the internalization of subjectivity, and its representation in the public sphere. As public reflexivity, performance inverts and reverses established social order, articulates social issues, and strengthens group identity. Shifting the negotiation of discourse to the performer, the body is the visual text

in which identity is simultaneously formed and performed. This chapter then engages with public performances of an "African" identity as contrastive ideations of power that are sources of communal identification and transformative praxis.

In 1975, the year after *Ilê Aiyê* was founded, their carnival presentation marked the beginning of a new cultural era. Openly challenging the established hierarchy, their first popular hit, "*Que Bloco É Esse?*," marks the transition to a black aesthetic as a source of creativity. Chapter 3 thus interrogates the polemical discursive and performative iterations of Africanness and blackness by the blocos afros. The body of representation of an African identity found in the bloco, Ilê Aiyê is juxtaposed against the more hybridic formulation of the bloco, *Olodum*. Such comparison allows for an exploration of the causative factors, strategies of engagement, and field of affect/effect in the refusal of a hybridic identity (Ilê Aiyê) and the sanctioning of one (Olodum). As the two major blocos afros, the representational sphere of these two carnival groups are read as delineative texts of what Brazilians consider a transgressive political ideation in the way they denounce oppression in all forms and seek to revise the historical archive on the black world. However, the tension such work generates is in understanding the actual points of transformation within the society. While carnival allows for a spectacular representation of Africanness and blackness, does the representational corpus generated by the blocos afros indeed connote transformative praxis?

Chapter 4 examines the works of the writing collective Quilombhhoje as a literary movement that challenges the aesthetical code of blackness inherited from Enlightenment discourse and undergirds the formulation of the policy of embranquecimento. Comparing Quilombhhoje's project of articulation to the United States–based Black Arts Movement (BAM), it analyzes a similar convergence of political thought and action. Each movement's aesthetic quest, it deems, poses radical challenges to conventional literary models and are consciously shaped by an interrogation of the symbols, ideals, and social forces reflected in the poetry analyzed. The works of Quilombhoje are read as a collective continuation of the ideals of the BAM poets, but with crucial differences in the insertion of specific Afro-Brazilian spheres of representations that speak to their desired telos to restore a "lost" history and generate a "pluricentric" ideology (Quilombhoje 1985).

Chapter 5 compares the two major Afro-Brazilian theater groups, *Teatro Experimental do Negro* (TEN) with the *Bando de Teatro Olodum*. It situates each group historically, but within a similar quest

for an aesthetic form derived from Candomblé as a template for dramaturgy. Analysis focuses on a seminal play by each group, *Sortilégio* by TEN and *Cabaré de Raça* by the Bando, to elicit their imbrication of aesthetics and politics in their desiderata to generate impact beyond the field of performance on conceptualizations of the self, community, and society. Focusing primarily on the Bando's creation of aesthetic signifiers that speak to the real, lived experiences of Afro-Brazilians, it situates the Bando's use of mimesis within a canonical framework in order to highlight its difference in its development of a singularly unique Afro-Brazilian theater form.

Chapter 6 situates the hip-hop movement in the network of philosophies and aesthetics of blackness, power, and resistance, and examines the songs and performance textures of the artists through their videography as testimonies for the dispossessed and disenfranchised. Hip-hop is both a cultural movement and a political one, and this chapter situates it as an alternate social movement in Brazil that generates a site of contestation and a specific political positioning as *marginal*, within an Afro-Brazilian identitarian framework. I argue that the hip-hop movement arising from within the ingenious, experimental cultural reformulations of blackness, beginning in the *bailes* black, the soul and funk dance movement from the 1970s, allows for the transposition of hidden forms of protest to engage symbolically with the dominant social and political sphere (Scott 1990). It frames the hip-hop movement as proactive rather than reactive, in that its oppositionality is not its only paradigm; it not only renders resistance to subordination but is also engaged in the project of actively shaping subjectivity and agency.

This text concludes by bringing together the interpretations of Afro-Brazilian negotiation in their quest for inclusion in the Brazilian narrative ideal. Its wide-ranging themes and reworking of subjects, such as their dialogues of rootedness and alternate spheres of relation, the dynamics and reconfiguration of centers of power, and the agency and self-reflexivity of performance and representation, shed critical light on the ways in which cultural and political identity is dually inscribed hegemonic discourses and the self-reflexivity of the subject.

Conclusion

To reflect the unique trajectory of Brazil, this work elides the boundaries between race and culture by analyzing their representations in written and performance-based texts. By linking Yoruba ritual and