

with Professor E.J. Alagoa and myself, they are exploring the life history and oeuvre of Green. As far as the women's studio portraits are concerned, Schneider has also made new discoveries. His current work in progress focuses on Francis W. Joaque (c. 1845–1900), a Sierra Leonean photographer, who might have taken some of the images in Libreville. Even though *Otofieber* appeared only two years ago, subsequent findings already cast additional light on the history of photography along the coasts and on the images in Passavant's collection.

In conclusion, the essays in this book at first seem somewhat episodic, a bit like patchwork. Yet, similar to a patchwork blanket or piece of clothing, the parts slowly begin to form a whole, and by the end the reader has gained a sense of time and place and the photographic history of a region. In addition, the essays demonstrate how photographs can be integrated into research designs in many different ways, and they also point to the challenges that lie ahead. It is a pity that such a fine and stimulating book, which accompanied an exhibition at the Museum der Kulturen Basel, appeared only in German. I hope that these studies with their interesting approach and rich tapestry of materials will be translated to English.

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## book review

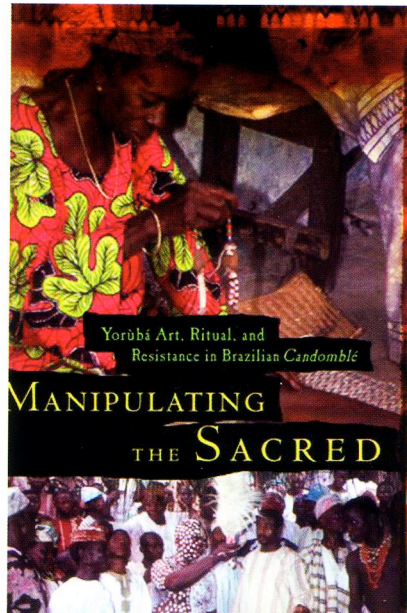
### • Manipulating The Sacred Yorùbá Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé by Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara

Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005.  
208 pp., 44 b/w and 36 color illustrations,  
glossaries, bibliography, index.  
\$29.95 softcover.

reviewed by Kimberly Cleveland

In *Manipulating the Sacred: Yorùbá Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé*, Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara imparts a wealth of information about Candomblé Nagô, the religion that has linked Yoruba-based practice in Bahia, Brazil, with Yoruba religion in West Africa since the eighteenth century. The author argues that Candomblé Nagô provides its predominantly Afro-Brazilian participants not only spiritual guidance, but attainable opportunities for mobility that are otherwise unavailable from their subaltern position in Brazilian society. Candomblé Nagô initiates face economic and other types of hardships within and outside the boundaries that physically indicate the sacred sphere. The privileging of African priorities, customs, and concepts that takes place in Candomblé Nagô, however, makes their religious experience distinct. At the same time that Candomblé Nagô is dynamic and changing, as evidenced by the gods, customs, and rituals that diverge from the West-African Yoruba models upon which they are based, it remains closed to the inverted values of the hegemonic Brazilian population and, the author argues, is therefore resistant.

Omari-Tunkara bases her discussion on knowledge gained over the course of more than twenty years as an active participant in Yoruba religions on three continents and on a set of diverse analytical tools. Through her own special status as an "outsider/within" initiate, a term borrowed from Patricia Hill Collins (1991:40), Omari-Tunkara occupies a liminal position and gives a rare view from inside the world of Candomblé Nagô. She draws heavily on the concepts and arguments laid out in her 1984 monograph *From the Inside to the Outside: The Art and Ritual of Bahian Candomblé*, now out of print and difficult to obtain, and her other scholarship on



gender, agency, and art in Bahian Candomblé Nagô. In the two decades since that important 1984 publication, Omari-Tunkara has continued to gain information about Yoruba religious practices in Brazil and West Africa, which she presents in *Manipulating the Sacred*.

The first three chapters of the book cover the key terms, concepts, and practices of Candomblé Nagô. Although there are several types of Candomblé houses or communities, Candomblé Nagô, whose structure is specifically based on Yoruba models, is Omari-Tunkara's main focus. Recalling her work from 1984, the author explains how the *ilês axés* (sacred spiritual spaces) are conceived of and function as "microcosms" for Africa in the minds of the initiates. As identified by Omari-Tunkara, the two tenets of Candomblé Nagô are 1) the preservation of "pure" African ideas and 2) the meticulous maintenance of the esoteric religious ritual processes of the Yoruba-speaking peoples of West Africa (p. 21). Despite their incorporation of both "traditional" and postmodern social and religious practices, Yoruba societies in Africa and the Diaspora remain fundamentally linked, nevertheless, through their cosmological, divination, and belief systems.

The *ilê axé* is characterized by a complex hierarchy that dictates the clothing, colors, social behavior, and sacred art forms required of the initiates, and also signifies each individual's rank, prestige, and privileges associated with the serving of the *orixás* (gods). In direct contrast to the secular sphere, Afro-Brazilian women occupy the majority of the high positions within this Candomblé Nagô hierarchy. Central to Yoruba religion in West Africa and Bahia is the concept of *axé* (loosely defined as a worldwide energy), a powerful



force to which mortals and gods are subject. Sacred arts are used in the outward expression of *axé* and are an essential component in the veneration of the gods in both Brazil and West Africa. Omari-Tunkara argues that as meaning, history, and energy are continually invested in and expressed through these arts, the initiates and *orixás* are actively manipulating the sacred.

The fourth through sixth chapters of the book are case studies of Yemojá/Yemanjá, *egún* or ancestor worship, and the twin saints Cosme/Cosmas and Damião/Damian, respectively. Through a compare-and-contrast approach, the author demonstrates how Bahian concepts and practices correlate with those in historical and contemporary West-African Yoruba religion, while also examining and emphasizing the variations characteristic of Bahian Candomblé Nagô. Chapter 4 on Yemojá/Yemanjá, the mother of all the *orixás* and the subject of both secular and sacred Brazilian celebrations, is the strongest demonstration of the degree to which Brazilian associations with and representations of a particular *orixá* can differ from their West African Yoruba counterparts. Chapter 5, which compares ancestor worship in West Africa with that on the Brazilian island of Itaparica, is the most focused on gender. Clear contrasts are drawn between forms of ancestor worship performed by and for males, versus the various funerary and artistic practices associated with female immortalization. I would need to see more evidence to be convinced of Omari-Tunkara's assertion in Chapter 6 that Brazilian Roman Catholic celebration and iconography of the saints Cosmas and Damian have undergone a "Yorubánization" as she calls it (p. 112).

The general interest in Bahia as a center of Yoruba retention in the Diaspora continues to grow. Bahia remains the most common geographical locus of examination as the historical site with the greatest Yoruba cultural and religious influence and the place where African influences are still most strongly evidenced in Brazil, and *Manipulating the Sacred* follows this pattern. While there are intersections in the discussion of religion contained in Omari-Tunkara's writing and that of, for example, anthropologist J. Lorand Matory (2005:38–72), and in the discussion of Yoruba

arts in Brazil in the scholarship produced by Robert Farris Thompson (1993:146–61) and Henry Drewal (Drewal 1999:143–7) in the last decade or so, *Manipulating the Sacred* is the most focused, single-authored examination of sacred art in Bahian Candomblé Nagô from an art historical perspective to date.

With its numerous images, both black-and-white and color, glossary of key terms and glossary of the *orixás*, in addition to the wealth of information presented in the chapters, Omari-Tunkara's book is a valuable heuristic tool. *Manipulating the Sacred* is a thorough discussion of the structure of the Candomblé Nagô communities in Bahia, covering religious language, concepts, practices, hierarchy of initiates, and duties. The in-depth examination of sacred art is mainly limited to clothing, which the author identifies as the most important two-dimensional art form in Candomblé Nagô (p. xxv). Each article of clothing can be understood as a signifier of status within the religious hierarchy. Additionally, Omari-Tunkara discusses each piece's significance in different West African and Brazilian social and historical contexts, revealing the trans-Atlantic dialogue taking place within the required costume.

Through *Manipulating the Sacred*, the reader gains a better understanding of the role that choice has played in Candomblé Nagô over the centuries. This includes initiates' association of Catholic saints with the Yoruba deities first instituted as a defensive mechanism during slavery, and the more recent rejection of "syncretism" led by religious leader Mãe Stella since the 1980s. Contrary to the tendency to homogenize Candomblé Nagô, the consistent naming of the individual religious associations in Omari-Tunkara's discussion demonstrates that very often differences exist not only between Yoruba practice in Brazil and West Africa, but between the numerous Candomblés of Bahia. While the words "agency" and "resistance" have become ubiquitous in postcolonial scholarship, the author's use of these terms seems appropriate in relation to the sacrifices Candomblé Nagô participants make in choosing to follow the tenets of their religion in a hegemonic society.

I recommend this book for the vast amount of information it contains about the social, economic, and religious aspects of Candomblé

Nagô. Omari-Tunkara has clearly given much consideration to the terminology she uses in her discussion. In an unexplained departure from her earlier scholarship, however, I found her use of the terms "Portuguese Brazilian" and "African Brazilian" to distinguish between Brazil's minority population of greater European descent and influence, and the majority population of greater African descent, somewhat awkward. It would have only been icing on the cake if a greater number of recent images could have accompanied the very current information the author provides in this publication.

Those familiar with the study and documentation of Candomblé in Brazil and Yoruba religion in West Africa will recognize the name Pierre Verger. A French ethnographic photographer who settled in Brazil, Verger became known as "the messenger" for his role in relaying knowledge between Yoruba religious leaders in West Africa and some of Bahia's most important figures in Candomblé. *Manipulating the Sacred* will cause the reader to ponder whether, with her scholarly and personal religious pursuits that have spanned twenty-plus years and covered three continents, Omari-Tunkara is becoming the next Yoruba "messenger."

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