

Pierre Fatumbi Verger:

*Negotiating Connections Between
Brazil and the Bight of Benin*

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Este artigo estuda os aspectos particulares que caracterizaram as relações de Pierre Verger (1902–1996) com seus informantes da comunidade Agudá do Daomé (atual República do Benin). Através do estudo de suas notas de pesquisa e da correspondência mantida com estes informantes, o artigo mostra como tais relações foram cruciais para seu trabalho e em que medida exerceram um impacto no desenvolvimento dos contatos entre as duas regiões, historicamente interligadas pelo tráfico atlântico de escravos. O artigo mostra que apesar da influência de sua posição econômica e social e dos questionamentos suscitados por suas intervenções, Verger mostrava um zelo incansável por seus informantes que por sua vez acabou também se tornando um informante crucial para os descendentes de africanos na Bahia e para os descendentes de brasileiros no Benim.

French-born ethnographer, photographer, historian and *babalawo* Pierre Fatumbi Verger (1902–1996) spent most of his adult life between Brazil and the Bight of Benin (modern Togo, Republic of Benin, and Nigeria), studying the relations and shared cultures of these two regions that developed as a result of their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. Verger is best known, however, for his photography, especially in Brazil and several French-speaking countries. Over the last twenty years, extensive use of his photographs in art books, documentaries, exhibitions, and on the Internet has reinforced the actual and imagined connections between Brazil and Benin.¹

Despite this recent popularity, few scholars have critically examined his scholarship, which has not been translated into English and hence often goes unread in English-speaking academic circles.² Although his work is cited in the literature on the Luso-Brazilian Atlantic slave trade, most references are intended to indicate or comment on specific primary sources examined by him. Utilizing Pierre Verger's correspondence and research notes belonging to the collection of the Fundação Pierre Verger (FPV) in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, this paper examines a specific and still unexplored aspect of Verger's work: his relationships with his Aguda informants from Dahomey (later Republic of Benin), the name usually ascribed to the descendants of former Brazilian slave returnees as well as Portuguese and Brazilian slave merchants who settled in the Bight of Benin between the end of the eighteenth century until the early twentieth century.³

The FPV houses Verger's research notes accumulated during his more than fifty years of fieldwork and archival research on the Atlantic slave trade, especially the Luso-Brazilian component of it. A regular, almost obsessive presence in the Bahian archives, Verger also made use of archives in other parts of Brazil, as well as in Europe and Africa, copiously transcribing scores of documents on the Atlantic slave trade, some of which were published in two important works, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le golfe du Bénin et Bahia de todos os santos du XVIIe au XIXe siècles* and *Os libertos: sete caminhos na liberdade de escravos da Bahia*.⁴ The transcriptions of additional documents, as yet unpublished but found in the FPV archives, allow us to understand how Verger developed his research and the various choices he made as he carried out his work. Today these transcriptions are even more valuable, because many of the original documents are in advanced states of decay,

According to Verger, the FPV was created to highlight the common heritage of Bahia and the Bight of Benin. Its aims are offering to Bahia information about Benin and Nigeria, and informing these two countries about their cultural influences in Bahia.⁵ Verger's research archives also contain letters, notes, pictures, postcards, Christmas cards, death notices, and invitations received and exchanged with religious and government authorities, including presidents, ministers of state, and ambassadors from Brazil, Benin, and Nigeria. Of particular interest for this article is his rich correspondence with the several members of the Aguda community of former Dahomey.

The first part of the paper focuses on Verger's career as photographer and ethnographer. It also contextualizes the development of Verger's connections with Bahia and Dahomey. The second part examines Verger's correspondence with Dahomean (and then Beninese) individuals of the Aguda community. Studying these letters, most of which written in French and

never examined before, the paper explores the relations developed between Verger and his Aguda informants. Because of Verger's privileged position as an elite white male and despite the political implications resulting from his intervention in Bahia-Dahomey reciprocal exchanges, most of his Dahomean and Brazilian informants considered him not only an individual who brought them cultural and political prestige, but also a cherished mediator, a scholar who was always available to provide them with information about their ancestors.

Pierre Verger: Between Bahia and the Bight of Benin

In order to understand Pierre Verger's relationships with his informants, it is important to briefly examine his unusual career as photographer, traveler, ethnographer, and historian. Most biographic information about Verger was provided by him and is found in different publications, mainly in Portuguese. In 2002, the centennial of his birth, two biographies were published in Brazil. *Pierre Verger: Um homem livre* by Jean-Pierre Le Boulter provides the reader with a great number of details about his early and adult life, but is essentially based on sources available in France and does not develop a deep or critical analysis of his work and career.⁶ Also in 2002, Cida Nóbrega and Regina Echeverria published another biography basically consisting of testimonies, documents, and Verger's pictures, which also did not engage in a critical assessment of his scholarship and was essentially based on sources available in Portuguese.⁷ More recently, Jérôme Souty published *Pierre Fatumbi Verger: du regard détaché à la connaissance initiatique*, the only book-length scholarly study deeply examining Verger's work as photographer and ethnographer.⁸

Pierre Édouard Léopold Verger was born in 1902 to a bourgeois Parisian family. In 1932, he began to experiment with photography and started traveling around the world, showing a particular interest in exotic destinations, including French colonies in the Caribbean, Polynesia, and West Africa. Such an interest was certainly not a new phenomenon: since the sixteenth century European artists and travelers in quest of the self, or with colonial and civilizing ambitions—including André Thevet (1516–1590), Jean de Léry (1536–1613), Charles-Marie de La Condamine (1701–1774), Jean-Baptiste Debret (1768–1848), and François-Auguste Biard (1799–1882)—engaged themselves in these initiatory and exploratory journeys. Since the end of the nineteenth century, several other French artists and travelers, such as Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954) had already taken this same pathway.

In the 1930s Verger started offering his photographic services in exchange for transportation and some financial support, which enabled him continue

traveling. Between 1935 and 1936, his acquaintances helped him to establish contacts with French colonial administrators and visit French Sudan, Burkina-Faso, Togo, and Dahomey. Upon return to France, several pictures taken during this first African journey illustrated the pages of French publications such as *Voilà* and *Revue du Médecin*. In 1939 some of his pictures from Togo illustrated a French publication of colonial propaganda, entitled *Le Togo*.⁹ Indeed, the visual content of this initial production of portraits of Sub-Saharan types was in harmony with French colonial perspective in the region that was to describe these colonial and exotic populations for European audiences.

Arriving in São Paulo in 1940, Verger met the French anthropologist Roger Bastide (1898–1974) who, along with other French scholars who went to Brazil in the 1930s to teach at the Universidade de São Paulo.¹⁰ Just before meeting Verger, Bastide had spent just three weeks in Bahia. Verger himself later recalled that Bastide was the first to call his attention to the African influences in Bahia and to encourage him to go to Salvador.¹¹

In 1946 Verger obtained a contract with the Brazilian magazine *O Cruzeiro* and settled in the city of Salvador. He arrived bringing several letters of introduction from Bastide, which helped him gain access to Bahian official and intellectual circles.¹² By that time several US scholars—including Ruth Landes (1908–1991), Donald Pierson (1900–1995), E. Franklyn Frazier (1894–1962), and Melville Herskovits (1895–1963)—were already interested in African cultures, religions, and traditions in Bahia.¹³ In Salvador, Verger joined a group of prominent intellectuals, mainly white, which included the writer Jorge Amado (1912–2001) and the Argentinean-born artist Hector Julio Bernabó (1911–1997), alias Carybé.

Between 1946 and 1948, Verger photographed several Candomblé temples showing various aspects of Candomblé religion, including initiations and animal sacrifice—scenes of limited access to outsiders.¹⁴ This work resulted in a grant from the Dakar's Institut Français de l'Afrique Noire (IFAN) in 1948, to conduct research on West African religions and their connections to Afro-Brazilian religions.¹⁵ It is possible to suppose that Candomblé groups with which Verger was in contact in Bahia expected him to establish contact with Orisha and Vodun communities in the Bight of Benin, because before his departure for West Africa, Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo (1890–1967) known as Mãe Senhora—the Candomblé priestess and leader of the Bahian Candomblé temple Ilê Opó Afonjá, who was later recognized by Verger as his spiritual mother—gave him a red and white beaded necklace, the colors of the orixá [deity] Xangô. With this gesture, she symbolically opened Verger's path into Orisha religion. As Verger himself put it, after his arrival in the Bight of Benin, the necklace became a "passport," immediately identifying him as a devotee of Xangô.¹⁶ Hence, it is not surprising that some

months after his arrival Verger was initiated into the cult of Shango in the Dahomean towns of Ifahin and Sakete.¹⁷ These events, which became legendary in the oral tradition of Bahian Candomblé, symbolically marked the beginning of an idealized and self-designated role as “messenger” between Africans and their descendants on either side of the Atlantic.¹⁸

During his stay in Dahomey between 1949 and 1950, Verger investigated the origin of the deities brought from the Bight of Benin to Brazil, in particular the relations between the voduns of the Casa das Minas temple in Maranhão and those of the royal family of Abomey.¹⁹ Upon his return from West Africa in April 1950, Verger brought to Brazil not only research notes and objects used in Vodun and Orisha ceremonies, but also hundreds of photographs showing Fon and Yoruba religious practices. The emphasis on this dialogue between Brazil and the Bight of Benin is also visible in a series of photographs by Verger, which illustrated a series of five articles titled “Acontece que são baianos” signed by Gilberto Freyre and published in the magazine *O Cruzeiro* in 1951. The various pictures, showing Catholic festivals and the architecture developed by the Aguda community in Benin and Nigeria are accompanied by Freyre’s text, which was largely based on Verger’s research notes.²⁰

Also in the 1950s, during a visit to the city of Oshogbo, capital of the Yoruba territory of Ilesa, in modern Nigeria, Verger delivered a letter in Yoruba from a Bahian Candomblé priest, Eduardo Mangabeira, to the Ataoya [king].²¹ Known as Eduardo Ijexá, this priest belonged to a group of provenance or “nation” known in Bahia as “Ijexá,” a term derived from Yoruba to designate people from the Kingdom of Ilesa.²² This series of exchanges, carefully planned in advance by Verger, are eternalized in a picture taken by Verger of Eduardo Ijexá, posing in front of several framed portraits of the Ilesa royal family and a map of Ilesa.²³ In return, the king gave Verger several copper bracelets and “genuine pebbles of river of the river Oshun” as gifts for Bahian Candomblé priests.²⁴

In 1952 Verger paid a visit to the Alafin [king] of Oyo, giving him a black and white photograph of Mãe Senhora, probably taken by him.²⁵ Verger told him she was a fifth generation descendant of one “Iyanaso,” a title conferred to the priestess who is in charge of the cult of Shango in the royal palace of Oyo.²⁶ In response, the Alafin asked Verger to take a picture of the woman who carried the title “Iyanaso” at the time.²⁷ Then the Alafin gave Verger several ritual objects associated with the cult of Shango as gifts to Mãe Senhora, in addition to a letter addressed to her in which he referred to her several times as “Iyanaso of the Shango worshippers in Brazil,” a title she proudly assumed from then onward.²⁸ Some months later, in 1953, during a stay in Ketu, Verger was initiated as an Ifa diviner (*babalawo*) and received the name “Fatumbi” (“he who is reborn in Ifa”).²⁹

Verger's role in promoting the connections between Bahia and the region of the Bight of Benin was not limited to transmitting messages and exchanging letters and gifts. During a stay in Gorée Island from December 1953 to June 1955, he developed relations with important Dahomean authorities associated with IFAN. Among them were several distinguished members of the Aguda community, descendants of Luso-Brazilians slave returnees and slave merchants, who since the beginning of the French rule had been very close to the colonial administration, playing the role of intermediaries or collaborators. With their support, Verger obtained his third grant from IFAN, which allowed him to travel to Dahomey and Nigeria in July 1955. Back in Bahia, over the next two years, he conducted research on the slave trade between the Bight of Benin and Bahia, especially at the Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia and the Biblioteca Pública do Estado da Bahia. In 1958 a six-month grant awarded by the High Commissary of French West Africa allowed Verger to travel again to Dahomey and Nigeria.

Verger's idea of himself as a "messenger" was not always well received by other anthropologists. Melville Herskovits, who kept a correspondence with him in the late 1940s and early 1950s, criticized this aspect of Verger's work, arguing that by reestablishing the lost connections between both sides of the Atlantic he had destroyed the "natural laboratory" of Bahia.³⁰ Decades later, in the 1980s, Juana Elbein dos Santos also criticized Verger—in response to his negative review of her book *Os Nagôs e a Morte*—not because of his role of "messenger" but because according to her he perpetuated a colonial point of view, by limiting himself to describing and photographing the populations he studied.³¹

Verger's descriptive approach, criticized by some scholars, not only conveyed his particular point of view but also his work as messenger.³² From this perspective, he not only showed visible similar elements between Bahia and the Bight of Benin, but he also helped to make to construct and make these elements clearly visible in the pictures he took on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, various of his sets of photographs showing Candomblé ceremonies in Brazil and Vodun ceremonies in Dahomey, as well as pictures representing Afro-Brazilian traditions, were actually staged. In *Flux and Reflux*, for instance, there are two strikingly similar pictures titled "Vendeuse d'acarajé à Bahia, Brésil" (Acarajé Woman Street Vendor, Bahia, Brazil) and "Vendeuse d'akara à Ouidah, Dahomey" (Akara Woman Street Vendor, Ouidah, Dahomey), which were published in *Flux et Reflux* and its Portuguese translation. The first picture portrays a woman street vendor preparing fritters named *acarajá* in Ouidah, whereas the second picture depicts another woman in Salvador (Bahia), preparing *acarajé*, a fritter made from black-eyed peas (figure 3 and figure 4). In showing the two women seated in an almost identical position, Verger made a clear choice in order to emphasize



Figure 3 *Akara* woman street vendor, Ouidah, Dahomey, present-day Republic of Benin. Photograph by Pierre Verger, n/d. Used by permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

how Yoruba culinary traditions survived the Middle Passage. He employed a similar strategy in other pictures, including those of the enthronement of Alaketu [King] Adwori, taken in Ketu, and that of Mãe Senhora taken in Salvador.³³ Other pictures comparing ways of dress, domestic architecture, and religious ceremonies in Bahia and in the Bight Benin also take a similar approach.³⁴ Verger's photographs helped to eternalize the way black Bahians imagined their "relatives" in the Bight of Benin and vice-versa. Today, these groups tend to perceive these images as evidence of the survival of their reciprocal cultural and religious traits on both sides of the Atlantic. From this perspective, Verger's vast photographic work and his actions promoting contacts among the peoples of the Bight of Benin and Bahia also contributed to preserving, and in some cases transforming, the self-image of these individuals and groups.



Figure 4 *Acarajé* woman street vendor, Rio Vermelho, Salvador (Bahia, Brazil). Photograph by Pierre Verger 1947. Used by permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

Verger often insisted that his activities were not based on any scientific method and that he did not use questions in collecting information.³⁵ However, since his early fieldwork on both sides of the Atlantic, he never positioned himself as a neutral observer, but rather was one of the few scholars to develop participant observation. As Jérôme Souty explained “the photography is a means to facilitate human contact. The pictures are shown, exchanged, shared, and they allow connections to be developed.”³⁶ Such a practice was not necessarily new and was employed by European travelers and artists with various native populations around the globe, during the nineteenth century, before the invention of photography and before anthropology emerged as an academic discipline.³⁷ However, Verger was a pioneer

in using these images to reestablish or create connections between both sides of the Atlantic. For Verger the camera was not only a means of seducing his informants but also to mediate his relations with his informants, by establishing a distance between him, in his role of observer, and the models he photographed. By exchanging pictures and research notes, he subverted the hierarchical relation between ethnographer-informant, establishing instead what George E. Marcus has defined as a collaborative relation.³⁸

Following the trail blazed by Fernand Braudel in his study of a Mediterranean as a system, Verger also greatly contributed to the study of the Portuguese and Brazilian slave trade and helped to build the history of the South Atlantic. After a meeting in Paris in 1959, Braudel encouraged Verger to write a doctoral dissertation for further publication, a condition which would allow him to get financial support from the 6th section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (modern-day *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*).³⁹

In 1962, at the age of sixty, Verger became a research associate of the French National Council of Scientific Research (CNRS, *Conseil National de Recherche Scientifique*). In 1966 he defended at the *Université de Paris* his third cycle doctoral dissertation supervised by Paul Mercier (1922–1976). The 1440-page manuscript, based on his research carried out in archives all over the Atlantic, was at the basis of his major history book *Flux et reflux*. In 1967, Verger was nominated a senior researcher and in 1972 he became research director of CNRS. However, at the age of seventy-two he was never able to take real advantage of these academic positions. In a letter to Denis Dohou, Director of the Ouidah Museum of History of September 12, 1973, he gave his title as Pierre Verger, ex-research director of the CNRS, ex-member of the *École Française d’Afrique*, ex-research associate of the IRAD (*Institut de Recherches Appliquées du Dahomey*), ex-research associate of the African Institute of the University of Ibadan and a little bit *babalawo*, under the name of Fatumbi.⁴⁰

“I Hope You Will Come Back to Dahomey Soon”

When I conducted fieldwork in Benin in 2005, various informants, scholars, and other contacts from Ouidah, Porto-Novo, Abomey, and Cotonou proudly told me they had collaborated with Verger. Their statements led me to think that they were trying to assert the reliability of the information they were providing me with by claiming past experience as informants or collaborators. Later in Bahia, however, in examining more than forty years of Verger’s correspondence and research papers, I identified numerous Luso-Brazilian names of Aguda families by then very familiar to me from my time in Benin. In the letters, it was evident that these informants perceived

their contact with Verger as a relationship of collaboration. Although they often made requests for financial assistance, jobs, books, and research advice, as well as for information about their ancestors who came or returned from Brazil to the Bight of Benin, the correspondence reveals a certain sense of intimacy with Verger and gives the sense of longstanding relationships of mutual respect. What does the correspondence between Verger and his Aguda informants reveal about their relations? What particular elements did characterize the relationships developed by Verger on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean?

Before examining Verger's relations with Aguda informants, it is important to explain why this particular group was crucial for his work. The Aguda, who represent 5–10 percent of Benin's current population, are the descendants of former slave returnees, descendants of Brazilian and Portuguese slave merchants, as well as the descendants of slaves kept by these two groups, who were later assimilated by them. These descendants, today found in Benin, Nigeria, Togo, and even in Ghana, still carry the Portuguese last names of their old Brazilian masters, and maintain customs inherited from the period their ancestors lived in Brazil.⁴¹ Most Aguda are said to be Catholic, but as among the former slave returnees there were also Muslims as well as Vodun and Orisha followers, today several of them still practice these religions.⁴² Moreover, they had various ethnic backgrounds and several native languages, especially Yoruba or one Gbe-language.

Despite these distinctions, returnees shared a common past, marked by their enslavement and experiences in Brazil. Unlike the local population who remained on African soil, they had been baptized, carried Portuguese names such as Silva, Reis, Assunção, Almeida, Santos, Cruz, Paraíso, Oliveira, and Souza, dressed in European fashion, and had so-called white manners. Until the early twentieth century, the Aguda often chose to marry within their community, in order to preserve its cohesion. The members of the community who were former slaves brought from Brazil a particular cuisine, including dishes such as *feijoada* (beans and several kinds of pork, similar to the French *cassoulet*), *cozido* (boiled meat and vegetables), and *acará* (fritters made with black-eyed peas). The Aguda community also marked its presence in the public space through the development of a domestic architecture inspired by Luso-Brazilian colonial style.⁴³

Once settled in the Bight of Benin, the Aguda attempted to continue following the model of the Luso-Brazilian slave society, not only because they preserved Luso-Brazilian customs and culture, but also because several returnees became slave merchants, therefore playing a crucial role in the illegal slave trade between Brazil and the Bight of Benin. As Manuela Carneiro da Cunha pointed out, by 1850 several returnees were actively involved in the slave trade at Ouidah, Agoué, and Porto-Novo.⁴⁴ In addition, because

the returnees also associated themselves with the families of Luso-Brazilian slave merchants, Dahomey's and Benin's population perceived the Aguda as an elite group. Being an Aguda meant belonging to a modern bourgeoisie because of their different manners and because most of them were literate and more educated than the local population. As for many inhabitants of the Bight of Benin, their Westernization was seen as assimilation and denial of their African origins, this apparent "superiority" was not always well accepted.

In 1892, the kingdoms of Dahomey and Porto-Novo were conquered and became part of the French colony of Dahomey. With the end of the Atlantic slave trade the prosperity in the Aguda community. The Aguda, perceived the European presence as advantageous and were able to forge a new place in the colonial society.⁴⁵ While many of their descendants continued to perform the same trades as their ancestors in Brazil (carpenters, tailors, barbers, masons, etc.), others obtained administrative positions as clerks, interpreters, and traders, thus consolidating their privileged place in the colonial society. The pages of the *Journal officiel de la colonie du Dahomey* not only identify the names of several members of the Aguda community who held administrative positions during the colonial period but also thus reveal the extent to which they endorsed the colonial regime.⁴⁶ Although after the independence of Dahomey in 1960, the Aguda lost their hegemonic influence, still today they are perceived as an elite group in the Bight of Benin.

Verger's contact with the Aguda dates back to his first trip to Dahomey in 1936, before he had started his research on the Atlantic slave trade. Verger's first contacts with these informants were probably facilitated by their privileged social position and close connections with the French colonial administration. Aguda families were (and still are) proud of their Brazilian ancestry and as an elite group they preserved the material heritage inherited from their ancestors. As the most prominent members of these families were literate, and prosperous enough to travel to Europe and other overseas destinations, it is not surprising that they were able to maintain and strengthen their ties to Verger via mail correspondence.

During his first trip to Dahomey Verger met several members of the de Souza family, descendants of the Brazilian slave merchant Francisco Félix de Souza (1754–1849). By 1800 de Souza had settled in Little Popo (today Aneho) as a slave merchant and by 1805 several records identify him as the clerk of the Portuguese fortress São João Batista da Ajuda in Ouidah. Oral tradition shows that after a conflict with King Adandozan (r. 1797–1818) over the slave trade, de Souza was imprisoned.⁴⁷ With the help of Prince Gakpe (Adandozan's half brother), de Souza escaped from jail and settled in Little Popo, from where he supported Gakpe in an 1818 coup d'état overthrowing Adandozan. Gakpe took power under the name of Gezo (r. 1818–1858),

making de Souza his main commercial agent, and bestowing upon him the honorific title of “Chacha,” associated with his nickname. De Souza became a prominent figure in the history of Dahomey, not only because he was one of the wealthiest slave merchants of the region but also because of his fruitful partnership with Gezo. In 1835, numerous former slaves returned to the Bight of Benin following a slave uprising in Bahia known as the Malê Rebellion, and de Souza, strongly supported the returnees who settled in Ouidah, especially in the Brazil Quarter. A central figure of the history of the region, de Souza is still today perceived as the founder of the Aguda community.

Like other wealthy families of Luso-Brazilian background, the de Souzas still possess material heritage left to them by their ancestor. In 1936 Verger took numerous photographs of their buildings, photographs, painted portraits, furniture, and various other kinds of artifacts, thus becoming the first scholar to document the family history.⁴⁸ One of these pictures (figure 2), taken in Ouidah in 1936, shows Roberto Norberto Francisco de Souza (1879–1956), a member of the family and the sixth Chacha, posing in the family cemetery with two oil on canvas portraits: a small portrait representing Francisco Félix de Souza, the first Chacha, and a larger portrait depicting Francisco Félix de Souza (1858–1880) alias “Chicou,” the third Chacha. Later, when Verger was researching his doctoral dissertation, eventually published as *Flux et Reflux*, the de Souzas provided him with information about their family genealogy and historical involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, and the pictures of these portraits were published in the book. However, in the years that followed the deaths of the older members of the family, Verger’s work came to be an important source of family history for the de Souzas themselves.

In the 1950s, Verger came into contact with Ambroise Dossou-Yovo, head of the Dossou-Yovo family from Ouidah, which had longstanding ties to the de Souza family. Ambroise became an important source of information for Verger because his ancestor, Antônio Dossou-Yovo (1762–1887), had worked for the English fort in Ouidah during the period of the Atlantic slave trade, and according to oral tradition, he helped Francisco Félix de Souza to escape from prison, later becoming his employee (figure 1).

When King Gezo took power in 1818, he allegedly sent Antônio Dossou-Yovo, along with another emissary, to Bahia with the mission of finding and redeeming Agontimé, the king’s mother who had been sold into slavery by King Adandozan.⁴⁹ Verger was the first scholar to sustain that Agontimé was responsible for bringing the voduns of Abomey to Brazil, via a temple in the Northeastern state of Maranhão known as the Casa das Minas.⁵⁰ Ambroise Dossou-Yovo became a close friend of Verger, also providing him with important information to his work in tracing the voduns from Dahomey brought to Maranhão. In one of his letters, Ambroise Dossou-Yovo illus-



Figure 2 Roberto Norberto Francisco de Souza (1879–1956), a member of the de Souza family and the sixth Chacha in the family cemetery. The oils with a portrait of Francisco Félix de Souza, the first Chacha, and Francisco Félix de Souza (1858–1880) alias “Chicou,” the third Chacha. Photograph by Pierre Verger, ca. 1936, Ouidah, present-day Republic of Benin. Used by permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

trated the reciprocal nature of his relationship with Verger, stating: “Your [other] friends from here and I, we need pictures and you need the voduns. Do not deprive us.”⁵¹ In another letter, Dossou-Yovo suggested that despite being a Frenchman Verger respected his black informants, saying: “you left [us] so many souvenirs, thanks to your goodwill regarding men of the black race.” At the end of his letter, he not only requested that Verger give him news and information but also showed interest in the latter’s research, ask in wondering “in what direction are your studies now. Ethnological. Ask questions as you need.”⁵²



Figure 1 A member of Antônio Dossou-Yovo family and his children in front of his home in Ouidah, modern Republic of Benin. Although it is possible to presume that the man portrayed in this picture is Ambroise Dosso-Yovo, it was not possible to clearly determine his identity. Photograph by Pierre Verger, ca. 1952, Ouidah Benin. Used by permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

In 1959, prior to the publication of *Flux et Reflux*, Verger sent a letter to a member of the de Souza family named Roger de Souza, identified as a teacher and resident of Ouidah. In this letter, Verger informed him of documents he had located in Bahian archives about Francisco Félix de Souza. Verger referred to several documents from 1805 signed by “Francisco Feliz de Souza, Escrivão da Fortaleza de São João Baptista de Ajuda,”—the first documentation establishing that de Souza had been a clerk in the Portuguese fort in Ouidah.⁵³ Verger went on to cite a document written in Portuguese dated April 1821 authorizing de Souza to travel to Bahia:

Sua Magestade, El Rey Nosso Senhor, Attendendo a Supplica que fez subir a sua Real Presença, Francisco Feliz de Souza, que por muitos annos tem servido com prestimo e zeal na Forteleza de S. João Baptista de Ajuda na Costa da Mina, Foi Servido permitir lhe a licença para se recolher a essa Cidade da Bahia, trazendo consigo aquella parte de seus escravos que se julgarem proprios de seu pessoal serviço.

Palacio do Rio de Janeiro, em 9 de Abril de 1821

firmado, Joaquim Joze Monteiro Torres

à/Sres. da Junta Provisória do Governo da Provincia da Bahia.⁵⁴

This document transcribed by Verger confirms that de Souza received permission from the Portuguese Crown to travel to Brazil. However, he never did so, very probably because Gezo refused to allow him to leave the kingdom.⁵⁵ Verger ended the letter by saying that he would let Roger know if he found additional information about de Souzas.

Verger also exchanged letters with other de Souzas, including João Eugène de Souza (Ouidah), Joseph de Souza (Ouidah), and Germain de Souza (Porto-Novo). In a letter of January 12, 1972, Germain de Souza, a high school Philosophy teacher at Lycée Béhanzin, asked Verger to provide him with Francisco Félix de Souza's parents' names, along with a copy of his birth certificate.⁵⁶ Verger answered this letter on February 1, 1972, explaining that this was quite difficult because "it would be necessary to consult the baptism records of various parishes of the city and the surrounding areas during the months that followed the date of his birth."⁵⁷ In a letter of January 28, 1973, Verger thanked Germain de Souza for sending him his state doctoral dissertation proposal about Francisco Félix de Souza and gave him some research advice, including the suggestion that he not refer to de Souza as the viceroy of Ouidah, because this position was filled by a local individual, known as the *yovogan* or "chief of the whites." Verger added that he could provide some printed sources about de Souza, but also called Germain's attention to the importance of collecting oral traditions from the elderly women in the family.⁵⁸

In 1991 Verger also provided advice to Simone de Souza (born Francine), a local historian married to a member of the de Souza family who compiled a large amount of data about the family in a book published in 1992.⁵⁹ In her letters, Simone de Souza asked Verger about the meaning of some words borrowed from Portuguese like "varangue" (*varanda*), or balcony, and about the various Catholic festivals brought from Brazil by the Aguda. Despite the value of the genealogical research developed by Simone de Souza—the information about Francisco Félix de Souza presented in her book is not always accurate and very often based on an idealized image of the de Souzas' ancestor—her letters reveal that she constructed de Souza's biography essentially based on Verger's work.⁶⁰ In addition, despite having collected

numerous birth and death records in the parishes of Agoué, Ouidah, and Grand-Popo, their mail correspondence shows that she largely relied on baptism records from the Portuguese fort that Verger had located and compiled, sending them to Father Villaça, the Catholic priest of Ouidah's cathedral, another important Aguda informant and close friend with whom he exchanged frequent letters.⁶¹

Verger also kept close connections with several other Aguda families who descended from former enslaved men and women who returned to the Bight of Benin after 1835. The ancestor of the Almeida family, for instance, was an enslaved man whose African name was Gbego Sokpa, Zoki Azata or Zoki Kata from Hoko in the Mahi country (north of Abomey) who was sent into slavery in Bahia in the early nineteenth century, where he was baptized Joaquim (?–1857). His owner was a Brazilian slave merchant named Manoel Joaquim de Almeida (1791–1854), and after earning his freedom, Joaquim took on his former master's surname, later returning to the Bight of Benin and settling in the coastal city of Agoué. He became a very prosperous slave merchant and continued traveling back and forth between Brazil, the Bight of Benin, and West Central African slave ports. His will, opened in July 1857 in Salvador (Bahia), shows he was a prosperous man who owned houses and dozens of enslaved men and women. Verger took a photograph of d'Almeida's tomb in Agoué, which was published in the French edition of *Flux et Reflux* and translated editions of the book.

Verger exchanged information with the Almeidas about their ancestor's life. In a letter of August 10, 1984, César Camille d'Almeida informed Verger that his daughter Célestine was traveling to Bahia, where she was going to conduct research for a third cycle doctoral dissertation. He explained that his daughter wanted to take advantage of the occasion to visit the small one-story house which had belonged to her great-grandfather Joaquim d'Almeida. This letter mentions the exact words employed in d'Almeida's will to describe the small house "located at Rua dos Ossos in the Freguezia de Santo Antônio Além [do] Carmo, which borders on one side with the house of Dona Ursula de tal Ferraz and the other side with the yard of a house belonging to Maria da Conceição."⁶² It is likely that Verger had given the family a copy of the will whose complete transcription appears in his book *Os libertos*.⁶³ Verger was in Paris when Celeste d'Almeida visited Bahia and so he did not meet her, but in his response to a letter he received from her, he mentioned having known several members of her family and also having consulted her ancestor's will.⁶⁴ He also answered César d'Almeida's letter by indicating that he would be glad to visit him during his next trip to Benin.⁶⁵

Verger also developed close relations with the descendants of a slave returnee called Bambero Paraíso, whose life story has been the object of

debate among scholars of the slave trade between Brazil and the Bight of Benin. Through the relationships that Verger developed with other members of the Paraíso family, including François Paraíso and Louis-Émile Paraíso, Verger was able to reconcile the various oral traditions with the written records, thus clarifying the life trajectory of their ancestor. According to some members of the family and to the oral traditions collected by Paul Marty in 1920, Bambero was a prince of the Kingdom of Oyo, who after being sold into slavery was sent Bahia.⁶⁶ To other members of the family, like the prominent and prosperous businessman Urbain-Karim Elísio da Silva from Porto-Novo, once in Bahia, Bambero was “the brain” of the Males uprising, the most important slave rebellion, which took place in Brazil in 1835.⁶⁷ However, this version was not consensual among the members of the family, and, very probably, Bambero returned to the Bight of Benin at least fifteen years after the rebellion. In a letter dated October 13, 1971, the great grandson of Bambero Paraíso, a public prosecutor in the Dahomey Appeal Court who lived in Cotonou (whose first name is not provided), told Verger one version of the oral tradition on Bambero’s origins:

Do you know that my great-grandfather left [for Africa] from Bahia? He was led by a slave trader following a state conflict that deposed his father of whom he was the only son, and because the conspirators could not spill royal blood, le mayor of the Palace ordered to put him in a bag (he was still a child) and to drown him in the river. Fortunately, a slave merchant who was passing there sent the people away and took the boy, who he brought with him to Brazil. My great grandfather was called Bami bi ero (“give me prosperity”) because his father (very old), who was animist and converted to Catholicism, baptized José alias Pequino and learned the profession of dentist-barber.⁶⁸

This version, like others in the oral tradition, emphasizes Bambero’s noble origins. However, while recognizing that his ancestor was captured because of political conflicts, this account portrays enslavement as a mechanism for salvation from death, with the slave merchant becoming a hero of sorts. In addition, Paraíso states that the name “Bambero” derives from a Yoruba praise-name (“Bami bi ero”). Probably not knowing Portuguese, he did not establish a relation between the nickname and the profession of “barber” (*barbeiro*) he exerted in Brazil while enslaved. In this same letter, Paraíso also explains that the date his great grandfather returned to the Bight of Benin was uncertain because he also became a “merchant of *bois d’ébène* [i.e. slaves] and other spices and frequently traveled between Ouidah, Bahia and London.”⁶⁹

Through his research Verger corroborated information collected by Paul Marty in 1920, and did not question Paraíso’s Oyo origins. In addition, he

confirmed that Bambero was sent to Bahia. There he was converted to Islam and received the name Abubakar, and became a barber-dentist, a popular profession among African enslaved men from the Bight of Benin who were sent to Brazil.⁷⁰ Actually in cities like Rio de Janeiro, the *métier* of barber was associated with the professions of surgeon, bleeder, and dentist, because these professionals performed healing activities such as bloodletting, by employing medicinal leeches and suction cups.⁷¹ In fact, by 1850 Bambero may have been bought by the Bahian slave merchant Domingos José Martins (alias “Dominguinhos da Costa”) and brought to the region Porto-Novo. When Martins died in 1864, the king of Porto-Novo, Dé Sodji, inherited Bambero and his son.⁷² According to an account found in the archives of the Society of African Missions in Rome and transcribed by Verger, Bambero continued to exert his profession of barber as late as 1874: “He has called a Creole of Porto Novo, named Ricardo, who applied some medicinal leeches near his ears. I mentioned him bloodletting; I thought of, he told me, I would send someone to look for Paraíso, a barber from Brazil. One hour later . . . Paraíso arrived and bled him with great skill.”⁷³

Like other former slave returnees, José Bambero Paraíso or José Abubakar Paraíso (his Muslim name) became an important figure of the Aguda community, especially among the Muslims of Porto-Novo, a position that his descendants were able to maintain while keeping their ties with Catholicism. In his book *Os libertos*, Verger tells the story of Louis-Émile Paraíso, a descendant of Bambero and director of the Beninese Society of Electricity and Water. During an official trip to Brazil, Louis-Émile paid a visit to Bahian Candomblé temple Ilê Opó Afonjá where he participated in a ceremony honoring the *orixá* Xangô. According to Verger, Louis-Émile was so impressed by the ceremony that in his return to Benin, he traveled to the old capital of Oyo, where he met the Alafin. There, after reciting some family praise-names, the Alafin explained to him who his ancestor was and that his African name was Agboluade. Although it is hard to confirm Bambero’s precise origins, when Verger encouraged the Paraísos of Benin to develop connections with Bahia—just as he did by promoting exchanges between the leaders of the Candomblé temple Ilê Opó Afonjá and Ketu’s royal family—he engaged himself in a process of healing, mixing his roles of historian and ethnographer with the role of *babalawo*, which he also became during his long South Atlantic journey.

In the 1960s, the end of the colonial rule in West Africa led the Brazilian government to support a dialogue with the newly-formed African nations, in order “to produce demonstrations of Brazil’s racial democracy.”⁷⁴ In this context, Verger encouraged the members of the Aguda community with whom he was in contact to travel to Brazil, one of whom was his informant Romana da Conceição. Descended from enslaved Africans, Romana

was born in Recife and in 1899, as a young girl, she traveled to Lagos (Nigeria) with her family. After an invitation from the Brazilian government, she went to Brazil for a three-month official visit.⁷⁵

During the 1960s, when the newly created CEAO (Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais) of the Universidade Federal da Bahia promoted the ties among Brazil, Nigeria, and Benin, Verger was a crucial actor who helped to materialize these exchanges. Brazilian scholars who traveled or lived in Benin and Nigeria included Vivaldo da Costa Lima (1925–2010) and Júlio Santana Braga. In addition, diplomatic officials traveled to the new independent Nigeria. Among them, the Brazilian writer Antônio Olinto (1919–2009), who was nominated cultural attaché in Lagos in 1962, where he lived with his wife Zora Seljan for several years.⁷⁶ Through his experience in West Africa he not only encouraged the reciprocal exchanges between Brazil and Nigeria, but also wrote a monograph and a trilogy of novels focusing on the Aguda presence in the Bight of Benin.⁷⁷ Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Verger brought several Brazilian Candomblé priests to Benin and Nigeria. Among them were Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos (alias Mestre Didi), Mãe Senhora's son; Balbino Daniel de Paula (alias Pai Balbino); and Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos (Mãe Stella de Oxossi). Verger's support also encouraged Beninese Vodun priests to visit Bahia. In 1988 Daagbo Agbessin Hounon Houna (1916–2004), the Supreme Chief of the Vodun in Ouidah traveled to Bahia, where he visited several Candomblé temples.⁷⁸ During the preparations for the Vodun festival *Ouidah 92* (held in February 1993) in Benin, Daagbo Hounon Houna sent an official letter to Verger asking him to choose the Brazilian Candomblé priests who should be invited to attend the festival.⁷⁹ Over the years, other artists, entrepreneurs, and scholars who were part of Verger's circle of friends, including Carybé (1911–1997), Tasso Gadzanis, Sérgio Ferretti, and Gilberto Gil paid visits to Benin and Nigeria.

Despite the numerous political and economic changes that affected Brazil and Benin between the end of the 1930s and the early 1990s, Verger was able to take advantage of his relations with different government authorities and other prominent personalities. His letters rarely contain any comments on the important political events that took place during this long period on both sides of the Atlantic. Such approach allowed him to continue his research between Brazil and the Bight of Benin even though during almost fifty years of fieldwork, he witnessed World War II, the end of French colonial rule in Benin and Nigeria (1960), and two long military dictatorships, one in Brazil (1964–1985) and another in Benin (1972–1991), followed by the redemocratization of the two countries. Although Verger had a privileged position to conduct fieldwork in Dahomey during the French rule, he continued to travel to the new Popular Republic of Benin⁸⁰ under the Marxist-Leninist military dictatorship led by Mathieu Kérékou, despite the new re-

gime's prohibition of public Vodun ceremonies.⁸¹ From the end of the 1980s until his death he continued to be a strong supporter of the exchanges between Brazil and Benin, in particular between Ouidah and Salvador. Verger also played an important role in the organization of the Vodun festival "Ouidah 92," held in Benin in 1993 to mark the new religious freedom established in the country by Nicéphore Soglo's new democratic government.⁸²

Conclusion

Since his first visit to Dahomey in the 1930s until the end of his life, Verger kept continuous and close relations with his informants in the Bight of Benin. In the numerous letters that Verger received from the members of the Aguda community, the senders expressed a desire to visit Brazil, always asking when he would return to Dahomey (Benin), or if they would be able to meet elsewhere in Brazil or France, confirming how much they estimated him. The study of his correspondence with his Aguda informants does not corroborate his legendary image as a solitary scholar who merely observed instead of asking questions. Unlike the methods of participant-observation and use of photography, written correspondence established a different dynamics, in which Verger not only asked and answered questions but also provided his informants with information regarding names, dates, and documents they were looking for.

Verger's correspondence with the members of the Aguda community also give us clues about the role played by his informants in the development of his research interests. Among the Aguda community, Verger's position as an elite white male contributed to the development of collaborative relations, because most of them occupied important official positions in the French colonial administration. Although French colonial rule in West Africa provided Verger with a favorable context for conducting his fieldwork, he continued promoting the exchanges between Bahia and the Bight of Benin after the independences of Benin and Nigeria. In fact, in the 1960s, he became an essential actor who joined the new interests of Brazilian government by becoming a strong supporter in developing relations with the young African nations.

Verger's correspondence shows that the long-lasting relations he developed with his informants were based on a genuine interest in reconstituting the broken connections between the two sides of the South Atlantic, even though these relations were also constructed, imagined, and idealized, and sometimes based on an essentialist vision of Africa. At the same time, by overemphasizing the ties between the Bight of Benin and Bahia, Verger dismissed the connections between Bahia and other South Atlantic regions, including Benguela and Luanda.⁸³ His almost obsessive interest in

collecting information on the migrations between West Africa and Brazil strongly contributed to opening new avenues for further research about the economic, cultural, religious, and social exchanges in the region.

Despite his social and economic position and the questions raised by his interventions in the so-called natural laboratory for the ethnographic study of the peoples of Dahomey and Bahia, Verger showed a tireless zeal for maintaining contact with his informants. Ironically, as a consequence of these particular relations, after settling in Bahia, he inverted his position of mere mediator—or as some critics alleged, “white French colonizer” in search of information for his studies and models for his pictures—to become a crucial informant for the descendants of Africans in the Bahia and for the descendants of Brazilians in Benin.

Notes

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2. Among the recent scholarly studies on Verger’s work are Angela Lühning, “Pierre Fatumbi Verger e sua obra,” *Afro-Ásia* 21–22 (1998–1999): 315–364. Among the few studies examining Verger’s written production, see Andrew Apter, “Notes on Orisha Cults in the Ekiti Yoruba Highlands: A Tribute to Pierre Verger,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 35, no. 138/139 (1995): 369–401; Peter F. Cohen, “Pierre Fatumbi Verger as Social Scientist,” *Cahiers du Brésil Contemporain* no. 38/39 (1999): 127–151; and Jérôme Souty, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger: du regard détaché à la connaissance initiatique* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2007).

3. There is a large bibliography on the Aguda community of Benin. The most recent and complete work written in Portuguese is Milton Guran, *Agudás: os “Brasileiros” do Benim* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1999). See also the numerous works by Robin Law, including Robin Law, “The Evolution of the Brazilian Community in Ouidah,” *Slavery & Abolition* 22, no. 1 (2001): 3–21, and Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slavin ‘Port’ 1727–1892* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004). See also Ana Lucia Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery: Victims and Perpetrators in the South Atlantic* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2010), chapters 3, 6, and 7.

4. Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le golfe du Bénin et Bahia de todos os santos du XVIIe au XIXe siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1968). English and Portuguese translations of this book were also published: Pierre Verger, *Trade Relations Between the Bight of Benin and Bahia from the 17th to 19th Centuries* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1976), and Pierre Verger, *Fluxo e refluxo do tráfico de escravos entre o Golfo de Bénin e a Bahia de Todos os Santos dos séculos XVII a XIX* (São Paulo, Corrupio, 1987); Pierre Verger, *Os libertos: sete caminhos na liberdade de escravos da Bahia* (Salvador: Corrupio, 1992).

5. This foundation, created by Verger in 1988, contains his personal archives, including papers, books, 62,000 film negatives, films, and videos, as well as his notes taken during fieldwork and research in the archives, manuscripts, and correspondence. See the headings “A Fundação” and “Histórico e Estatuto,” on FPV, <http://www.pierreverger.org>.

6. Jean-Pierre Le Bouler is a sociologist and curator of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France who had previously published the correspondence between Verger and the anthropologist Alfred Métraux (1902–1963).

7. Cida da Nóbrega and Regina Echeverria, *Verger: Retrato em preto e branco* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 2002).

8. Souty, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger*.

9. Jean-Pierre Le Bouler, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger: um homem livre* (Salvador : Fundação Pierre Verger, 2002), 89.

10. Among others this group included Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), and Pierre Monbeig (1908–1987).

11. See Le Bouler, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger*, 154–155. On Bastide and Verger, see also Stefania Capone, “Roger Bastide or the Darkness of Alterity,” in *Out of Study and into the Field: Ethnographic Theory and Practice in French Anthropology*, ed. Robert Parkin and Anne de Sales (New York: Berghan Books, 2010), 171–196.

12. Fernanda Arêas Peixoto, “Bastide e Verger entre “áfricas” e “brasis”: rotas entrelaçadas, imagens superpostas,” *Revista IEB*, no. 50 (2010): 48, and Pierre Verger, “As múltiplas atividades de Roger Bastide na África (1958),” in *Verger-Bastide: dimensões de uma amizade*, ed. Angela Lühning (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2002), 39.

13. For a recent study on the presence of North American scholars in Bahia, see Anadelia A. Romo, *Brazil’s Living Museum: Race, Reform, and Tradition in Bahia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), chapter 4, and Lorelle D. Semley, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yoruba Town* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 138.

14. However, Verger only permitted some of these pictures to be published years later, in the 1980s. See Lisa Earl Castillo and Luis Nicolau Parés, “The Elusive Boundaries of the Secret: Images of Afro-Brazilian Religion in the Photography of Pierre Verger,” in *O Brasil de Pierre Verger*, ed. Alex Baradel (Salvador: Fundação Pierre Verger, 2006).

15. After 1966 the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire replaced the Institut Français d’Afrique Noire but the acronym remained the same.

16. See Pierre Verger, *50 anos de fotografia* (Salvador: Corrupio, 1982), 255 quoted in Le Bouler, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger*, 197.

17. The thunder deity known as Xangô in Brazil and Shango among the Yoruba, is referred to as Heviosso by the Fon. On Verger’s initiation, see Cohen, “Pierre Fatumbi Verger as Social Scientist,” 130. About Verger’s particular relation with Mãe Senhora, see Semley, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass*, 139.

18. See Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and Tradition in Candomblé* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), chapter 7. His role of messenger is central in the exhibition *Pierre Verger: le messenger. Photographie 1932–1962* organized by the Revue Noire in 1992 at the Musée d’arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie in Paris, see the catalog Jean-Loup Pivin, Pascal Martin Saint-Léon, and Charles-Henri Favrod, ed. *Pierre Verger: le messenger. Photographies 1932–1962* (Paris: Revue noire, 1993). The idea of Verger as a messenger is also present in the documentary *Pierre Verger: Mensageiro entre Dois Mundos (Pierre Verger: Messenger Between Two Worlds)* by Lula Buarque de Hollanda (Rio de Janeiro: Conspiração Filmes, 2000).

19. See Pierre Verger, “Le culte des vodoun d’Abomey aurait-il été apporté à Saint Louis de Maranhão par la mère du roi Ghèzo?” *Études Dahoméennes* 8 (1952): 19–24, and Pierre Verger, “Uma rainha africana mãe de santo em São Luís,” *Revista da USP* (1990): 151–158.

20. See Gilberto Freyre and Pierre Verger, “Acontece que são baianos,” *Revista O Cruzeiro* XXIII, nos 43, 44, 45, 46, and 47 (1951). About this series of articles see Angela Lühning, *Pierre Verger: repórter fotográfico* (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2004), 21, and Paulina Alberto, “Para africano ver: African-Bahian Exchanges in the Revention of Brazil’s Racial Democracy, 1961–63,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 45, no. 1 (2008): 99.

21. Exactly when this meeting occurred is unclear. See Pierre Verger, *Orisha: les Dieux Yoruba en Afrique et au Nouveau Monde* (Paris: A.M. Métaillé, 1982), 30 qtd in Le Bouler, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger*, 198–199.

22. The term “nation” (mina, jeje, nagô, etc.) is often employed as a synonym with ethnic group. I prefer the term “region of provenance,” borrowed from Mariza de Carvalho Soares, which is a broader category of identification that includes ethnic groups as well. See Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *Devotos da cor. Identidade étnica, religiosidade e escravidão no Rio de Janeiro, século XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2000), chap. 3 and Mariza de Carvalho Soares, “From Gbe to Yoruba: Ethnic Change and the Mina Nation in Rio de Janeiro,” in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, edited by Matt D. Childs and Toyin Falola (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004) n1, 243.

23. See FPV, <http://www.pierreverger.org>, menus Amérique and Brésil, section Bahia (Salvador), picture no. 27165. I am grateful to Lisa E. Castillo for calling my attention to this picture.

24. Paulina Alberto reproduces a letter of 1950 sent by Verger to Herskovits describing these objects, see Paulina Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 225.

25. See Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 226.

26. See J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 170.

27. Verger, *50 anos de fotografia*, 258, quoted in Le Bouler, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger*, 199.

28. See Semley, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass*, 146, and Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 226.

29. See Cohen, "Pierre Fatumbi Verger as Social Scientist," 130. On Verger's initiation see also Milton Guran, "Notas de pesquisa sobre a iniciação e o trabalho fotográfico de Pierre Fatumbi Verger no Benin," *Cadernos de Antropologia e Imagem* 7, no. 2 (1998): 105–114.

30. Angela Lühning, "Pierre Fatumbi Verger e sua obra," *Afro-Ásia* 21–22 (1998–1999): 124.

31. Juana Elbein dos Santos, "Pierre Verger e os resíduos coloniais: o outro fragmentado," *Religião e Sociedade*, no. 8 (1982): 11–14. For Verger's critical review of *Os Nagôs e a Morte* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1975), see "Etnografia religiosa iorubá e proibidade científica," *Religião e Sociedade*, no. 8 (1982): 141–243. On this episode, see also Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil*, 201.

32. For João José Reis, Verger's descriptive method was close to the positivist approach, "Verger historiador," *Folha de São Paulo*, São Paulo, February 18, 1996, 6.

33. Souty describes this approach as a comparative method through the use of images. See Souty, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger*, 134.

34. See Semley, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass*, 152.

35. See the interview with Pierre Verger in the documentary *Pierre Verger: Mensageiro entre Dois Mundos*, and Cohen, "Pierre Fatumbi Verger as Social Scientist," 138–139.

36. Author's translation. Souty, *Pierre Fatumbi Verger*, 73.

37. Among the artists who used painting and drawings, as well as photography, to establish relations with the local populations is another Frenchman François-Auguste Biard (1799–1882) who went to Brazil in 1858. See Ana Lucia Araujo, *Romantisme tropical: L'Aventure d'un peintre français au Brésil* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008), chapter 7.

38. George E. Marcus, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork," *Representations*, no. 59 (1997): 91–93.

39. In 1975, the 6th section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études was transformed into the present-day École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.

40. Except otherwise indicated all translations are mine. FPV, Verger's Research Documents, Caixa "Dahomey," Letter from Pierre Verger to Denis Dohou, typed, September 12, 1973, 2.

41. Milton Guran, *Agudás: Os “Brasileiros” do Benim* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira 1999), 88.

42. Júlio Santana Braga, “Notas sobre o ‘Quartier Brésil’ no Daomé,” *Afro-Ásia* (1968), 189; Guran, *Agudás*, 15; and Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, *Negros, estrangeiros: os escravos libertos e sua volta à África* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985), 189.

43. See Alain Sinou, “La Valorisation du patrimoine architectural et urbain: l’exemple de la ville de Ouidah au Bénin,” *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines* 29, no. 1 (1993), 36.

44. See Cunha, *Negros, Estrangeiros*, 109.

45. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *L’Afrique occidentale au temps des Français : colonisateurs et colonisés (c.1860–1969)* (Paris : La Découverte, 1992), 373.

46. Araújo, *Public Memory of Slavery*, 113.

47. Oral tradition retaken by historians, including Robin Law, sustain that de Souza went to Abomey to claim an unpaid debt Adandozan owed to him, see Law, *Ouidah: The Social History*, 166. However, in a letter to the Portuguese Prince Regent Dom João VI dated October 9, 1810, Adandozan explains that de Souza was preventing slave ships from buying his captives. See Ana Lucia Araujo, “Dahomey, Portugal, and Bahia: King Adandozan and the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *Slavery and Abolition* 3, no. 1 (2012): 1–19.

48. See photos nos. 7300, 7333, 7334, 7335, 7340, 7348 on the FPV website, <http://www.pierreverger.org>, in the menu “Photo Library” and under the rubric “Ouidah,” in the sections “Dahomey” and “Afrique.”

49. Verger took a picture of Dossou-Yovo’s tomb, which shows his date of birth and death. See FPV, Photo Library, photo no. 7108. I am grateful to Angela Lühning, Alex Baradel, and Roberta Rodrigues for giving me access to this picture. On the story of Agontimé, see Ana Lucia Araujo, “History, Memory and Imagination: Na Agontimé, a Dahomean Queen in Brazil,” in *Beyond Tradition: African Women and their Cultural Spaces*, ed. Toyin Falola and Sati U. Fwatschak (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011), 45–68.

50. See Verger, “Le culte des vodoun d’Abomey aurait-il été apporté à Saint Louis de Maranhão par la mère du roi Ghèzo?”

51. In French : “Moi même et vos amis d’ici avons besoin de photo, vous des Vodouns. Ne nous privez pas.” FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Ambroise Dossou-Yovo to Pierre Verger, handwritten, December 1, 1952.

52. In French : “laissé tant de souvenirs, grace à votre bonne disposition pour les hommes de race noire [. . .] Dites nous en quel sens sont actuellement lancées vos études. Ethnologiques. Posez des questions au besoin.” FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Ambroise Dossou-Yovo to Pierre Verger, typed, June 8, 1955.

53. FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Pierre Verger to Roger de Souza, typed, March 5, 1959, 1.

54. FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Pierre Verger to Roger de Souza, typed, March 5, 1959, 1. This same passage of this document is quoted in Verger, *Fluxo e Refluxo*, 492.

55. See Law, *Ouidah: The Social History*, 166. Some authors considered the possibility that de Souza had legal problems preventing him to return to Brazil, but at least in 1821 this was no longer true.

56. FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Germain de Souza to Pierre Verger, handwritten, January 12, 1972, 1.

57. Author’s translation of: “il faudrait pouvoir consulter les livres de baptêmes des diverses et nombreuses paroisses de la ville et celles de villes environnantes pendant les quelques mois qui ont suivi la date de sa naissance.” FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Pierre Verger to Germain de Souza, typed, February 1, 1972, 1.

58. FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Pierre Verger to Germain de Souza, typed, January 28, 1973, 1.

59. See Simone de Souza, *La Famille de Souza, Benin-Togo* (Cotonou: Éditions du Bénin, 1992).

60. See FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Simone de Souza to Pierre Verger, handwritten, April 28, 1991, 1 and FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Simone de Souza to Pierre Verger, handwritten, June 18, 1991, 1.

61. In 1988 Verger sent Father Villaça the transcription of the baptism records of the Portuguese fortress of Ouidah. Father Villaça acknowledged receipt of these documents in a postcard sent to Verger, dated October 12, 1988.

62. See Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, Inventários, “Testamento de Joaquim de Almeida,” Salvador, December 17, 1844, 3/228/1697/13, fol. 2 and FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from César Camille d’Almeida to Pierre Verger, typed, Agoué, August 10, 1984.

63. Verger, *Os libertos*.

64. FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Pierre Verger to Madame d’Almeida, typed, August 18, 1984, 1.

65. FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” Letter from Pierre Verger to César Camille d’Almeida, typed, September 27, 1984, 1.

66. Paul Marty, *Études sur l’Islam au Dahomey* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1926), 51–52, 89–90.

67. Urbain-Karim da Silva is related to the Paraísos on his maternal side (his mother’s last name was Paraíso). See Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery*, 363. On the claims that Bambero was the “brain” of the Malês rebellion see also João José Reis and Milton Guran, “Urbain-Karim Elisio da Silva, um agudá descendente de negro male,” *Afro-Ásia* 28 (2002): 77–96.

68. In French: “Savez-vous que mon arrière grand-père est parti de Bahia? Il y avait été conduit par un négrier à la suite d’un conflit d’État qui a détrôné son père dont il était le fils unique, comme les conspirateurs ne pouvaient pas répandre le sang royal, le maire du Palais, l’avait fait enfermer dans un sac (il était encore enfant) pour aller le noyer au fleuve. Par Bonheur, un marchand d’esclaves qui passait par là a mis gens en fuite et a recueilli le gosse qu’il a emmené avec lui au Brésil. Mon arrière grand-père qui s’appelait Bami bi ero (“donne-moi la prospérité”) car son père (assez âgé) et qui était animiste a été converti au Catholicisme, baptize José dit Pequino et apprit la profession de dentiste-barbier.” FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” “Letter from (first name illegible) Paraíso to Pierre Verger,” handwritten, October 13, 1971, 1–2.

69. FPV, Caixa Dahomey, “Letter from (first name illegible) Paraíso to Pierre Verger,” handwritten, October 13, 1971, 3.

70. See Jean-Baptiste Debret, *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1834–1839), vol. 2, plate 12, and Mariza de Carvalho Soares, “Art and the History of African Slave Foliage in Brazil,” in *Crossing Memories: Slavery and African Diaspora*, ed. Ana Lucia Araujo, Mariana P. Candido, and Paul E. Lovejoy (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press), 226–227.

71. Betânia Gonçalves Figueiredo, “Barbeiros e cirurgiões: atuação dos práticos ao longo do século XIX,” *História, Ciências, Saúde — Manguinhos* VI, no. 2 (1999): 277–291.

72. See Verger, *Os libertos*, 34–35.

73. In French: “Il avait appelé un créole de Porto Novo, nommé Ricardo qui lui plaçait quelques sangsues près des oreilles. Je lui ai parlé de saignée; J’y ai pensé, me di-t-il je vais envoyer chercher Paraíso, barbeiro du Brésil. Une heure après . . . Paraíso arrivait et le saignait avec assez d’adresse.” FPV, Caixa “Dahomey,” “Extrême onction en Porto Novo,” March 6, 1874, (SMA/Rome 3.A. 30), handwritten note taken by Verger.

74. See Alberto, “Para africano ver,” 87.

75. A picture of Romana da Conceição appears in the various editions of *Flux et reflux*. For a critical analysis of how the Brazilian government organized and promoted this visit, see Alberto, “Para africano ver,” 78–117.

76. On Olinto’s interest in West Africa, see Jerry Dávila, *Hotel Trópico: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization, 1950–1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 58–61.

77. Antônio Olinto, *Brasileiros na África* (Rio de Janeiro, Edições GRD, 1964). The first novel of the trilogy, *A Casa d’Água* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Bloch, 1969), was translated into several languages. It was followed by *O Rei de Keto* (Rio de Janeiro: Nórdica, 1980) and *O Trono de Vidro* (Rio de Janeiro: Nórdica, 1987).

78. See Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery*, 148.

79. Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery*, 148.

80. In 1975, three years after seizing power, Kérékou changed the name of Dahomey to Popular Republic of Benin. In 1990, with the end of the Marxist-Leninist regime and the establishment of a transitional government, the name of the country became Republic of Benin.

81. Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery*, 130–131.

82. On Verger’s role in the organization of “Ouidah 92,” see Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery*, chapter three.

83. See in this issue Mariana P. Candido, “South Atlantic Exchanges: The Role of Brazilian-Born Agents in Benguela, 1650–1850,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, and Mariana P. Candido, “Commercial and Personal Ties Across the Atlantic: The Benguela-Bahia Connections, 1700–1850,” in *Paths of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Interactions, Identity, and Images*, ed. Ana Lucia Araujo (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011), 239–272.