

Afro-Brazilian Cultural Heritage in Nigeria: Mapping Contemporary Practices of Commemoration and Initiatives Toward Future Preservation

Abstract

This paper explores the contemporary practices and initiatives established by the community of Nigerians of Afro-Brazilian origin with particular attention to how their cultural heritage intersects with the notion of cultural memory, different practices of commemoration and hybrid identity. Based on fieldwork research in southern part of Nigeria, Lagos in particular, I argue that there are three areas of action proposed by the representatives of Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria. They are as follows: 1. The necessity for mapping architectural manifestations of local and collective memory; 2. The initiation and execution of memorial practices as contemporary cultural activities; 3. The strengthening of institutional, commercial and international interactions. This analysis contributes to a nuanced understanding of cultural practices or spaces within multicultural societies in Nigeria.

Keywords: Afro-Brazilian, cultural heritage, commemoration, Nigeria, identity.



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Introduction

Contemporary Nigeria, like many societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, faces numerous challenges related to the preservation of unique heritage and cultural memory, alongside the need to reconstruct identity and historical awareness. The proliferation of globalisation, alongside social and political changes, necessitates a reconstruction of identity and historical consciousness, which constitutes a significant theme for researchers focusing on cultural heritage. This article delineates the objectives, theoretical framework and outcomes of field research concerning Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage, the role of cultural memory in constructing the identity of Nigerian communities within the contexts of local, regional, and national values.¹ The overarching

¹ This paper is the result of the author's research conducted under the project titled "Pamięć kulturowa a dziedzictwo afro-brazylijskie w Nigerii – w poszukiwaniu tożsamości" [Cultural memory and the Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria – in search of identity]. This research was

aim of the research is to analyse memory practices and traces of heritage, including elements of urban space in Nigeria, facilitating new perspectives on contemporary negotiations of group identity.

In the early 19th century, migrants of Brazilian and African descent started arriving in Lagos and Badagry, including not only Afro-Brazilians but also Afro-Cubans and Sierra Leonians known as Saros (Otero, 2010). Among these, the Afro-Brazilians and the Saros were the most prominent groups. The Afro-Brazilians in West Africa were descendants of African slaves, mainly of Yoruba descent, who had been taken to Brazil and returned to West Africa between the 1820s and 1890s, mainly after the abolition of the slave trade in Brazil (Araujo, 2010; Castillo, Mann, 2024; Olinto, 1964; Ojo-Ade, 2009). In Nigeria, both Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Cubans were collectively referred to as ‘Brazilians’ or Aguda (a Yoruba term for Catholics), likely due to their predominant Catholic faith (Amos, 2017; Castillo 2016). The Afro-Brazilian community settled in their own quarter on Lagos Island, significantly influencing architecture and developing a unique creole culture during the 19th century (Lindsay, 1994). Their architectural style, that made substantial and even revolutionary contributions to Lagos’s urban landscape, was characterised by a blend of Brazilian, Portuguese and British colonial elements and traditional Yoruba spatial layouts (George, 2013; George, 2021; Harrison, Igwe, 2015). Afro-Brazilians were celebrated for their design and construction skills, craft and innovation (Ojo-Ade, 2009).

Methodology and Research Implementation

The focus of this scientific endeavour, which aligns with the field of cultural and heritage studies, encompasses both material and spiritual testimonies: specifically, the traces of the material heritage of Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria, as well as manifestations of cultural memory mechanisms among their representatives. The study group comprises Nigerians with Brazilian surnames, who identify as descendants of Africans in Brazil (from West Africa).² The return migration took place in the 19th and 20th centuries, settling along the West African coast, with the largest single wave between 1835–1837 and when Brazil’s participation in the Atlantic slave trade ended in 1850s. (Castillo, 2016;

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² The author would like to thank the interviewees for their valuable ideas and contributions to this research on the community, inhabitants and members of Popo-Aguda, including Martins families, Gomez and Fernandez, and a joint visit to the Brazilian Quarter in Lagos carried out thanks to representatives of the Afro-Brazilian Association.

Cunha 2012; Castillo and Mann, 2024). The overarching goal is to investigate the role of cultural memory and Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria within the context of identity construction. This scientific inquiry aims to enhance understanding of contemporary processes and experiences in the Diaspora and provide a critical interpretation, thereby addressing the following questions: 1) What are the most important contemporary practices of commemoration and initiatives toward future preservation of Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria?; 2) How and for what reasons does the studied community utilise memory in cultural productions, interactions, oral and material transmissions?; 3) What institutional, social and cultural mechanisms enable the transformation of memory and the recovery of the group's forgotten heritage, and where do they lead?

The outcomes of this research include filling critical knowledge gaps regarding the participation of Afro-Brazilians in shaping the cultural reality of the region, encompassing various aspects and contexts: historical (colonialism, memory, migration, Diaspora life, mutual influence), cultural-religious (the richness of ethnic and religious diversity, cultural hybridity), and social (communication, elements of conflict). During a two-month field work research, traces of heritage were examined, focusing on the practices of residents and elements of urban space. A field study was predominantly conducted in southwestern Nigeria, specifically in Lagos, Ibadan, and Badagry, key locations where Afro-Brazilian communities are most active, have the largest architectural setting and play a significant role in shaping the contemporary landscape of the Lagos agglomeration. Additionally, there are formal structures with an official representative of Afro-Brazilians known as 'onipopo'. The selection of these sites was justified by the richness and preservation of cultural heritage, alongside the presence of relevant associations. Moreover, the research area in Nigeria was precisely defined and limited to a few spaces, with the study group, comprising the largest representation of Afro-Brazilians, being historically and familially linked to the Popo-Aguda district. Nigeria is an appropriate location for initiating this research due to its unique material heritage.

A comprehensive analysis was conducted on the symbolism and narratives surrounding indigenous architecture integrated into the Afro-Brazilian legacy (both secular and sacred structures) in the historical Popo-Aguda district located in Lagos Island, as well as the practices surrounding holidays, the celebration of festivals and carnivals, and the activities and roles of formalised associations, such as the Brazilian Descendants Association Lagos (founded

in 1963)³ and the Yoruba-Brazilian Descendants Renascimento Association.⁴ The research expedition employed qualitative methods, including narrative analysis, observation of memorial practices, and visual or photographic documentation of the old Brazilian Quarter. Thanks to this, some specific cultural practices that signify Afro-Brazilian identity and meanings were investigated. Queries were conducted in library and museum archives, including The Nigerian National Museum in Lagos, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Bayero University in Kano, Lagos State University Centre for Afro-Brazilian Studies (LASUCAS), the Lagos State University Library, and the Onikan House Library. Specific cultural practices that delineate Afro-Brazilian identity were examined, particularly among members of two above-mentioned Afro-Brazilian organisations. Conversations with representatives from the Martins, Salvador, and Gomez families, as well as individuals involved in the management of the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre on Lagos Island, facilitated the gathering of data regarding their experiences, traditions, and perceptions of identity.⁵

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Cultural Heritage and Identity

Preliminary research in this area indicates that the topic of cultural heritage is not frequently addressed in current scholarly literature, with existing works either general in nature or situated solely within political and literary contexts (Keitumetse, 2016). Heritage is understood here, following Gregory Ashworth's perspective, as a process in which objects, places, events, and actions derived from the past – treated as carriers of historicity that meet social,

³ The 1960s was the period during which scholars from Brazil showed an interest in the history and culture of Aguda society. However, this phenomenon occurred against the backdrop of a more extensive history of organisations advocating for Brazilian cultural heritage.

⁴ The oldest lay organisation within the Brazilian community and the Catholic Church in Nigeria was the Catholic Friendly Society inaugurated in 1903, followed by the Brazilian Descendants' Union (1919). Its founders were the second generation of Brazilian returnees, who, unlike their predecessors who only spoke Portuguese, were proficient in English. They were: P.F. Gomes, S.J. Sawyer, J.F. Branco, J.T. Munis, H.M. Reis, J.P. Marquis, V. F. Munis, J.J. Martin, A.F. Gomes, D.P. Siffre, E.E. Gomes, E.I. de Souza, J.B. da Silva, F.E. da Silva. The Society was actively supported by Fr. Pedro Martins (Later Monsignor Pedro Martins), whose current family, dedicated to the memory of Brazilian origins, this author met in Lagos in 2020 and 2024.

⁵ Discussions on the researched topic were also conducted during the scientific conference, the 8th Annual Lagos Studies Association Conference titled "African Identities: Peoples, Cultures and Institutions in Motion," organised at the University of Lagos by the Lagos Studies Association, of which this author is a member.

political, or economic needs or demands – are transformed into experiences of the contemporary (Ashworth, 2015, p. 31–40). The process of engaging with the past occurs through diverse forms of remembrance, storytelling, and commemoration, which include artifacts, traditions, sources, and monuments. It entails transforming the past into experiences that are lived in the here and now, as well as creating representations of the past within the present context. Meanwhile, the role of education is to safeguard this heritage, which is understood as the preservation, conservation, and transmission of cultural legacies to future generations. Essentially, heritage acts as a social construct that allows for the preservation of sites, objects, and memories, which in turn shape our understanding of the past and identity. The selection of tangible or intangible heritage resources is based on subjective criteria, and historical components are adapted and utilised in the present according to the requirements of those engaging with them. As defined by UNESCO in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage from 2003:

The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003).

Heritage can signify a cultural and political process of remembering and forgetting, as it can not only be accepted, commemorated, and passed on to future generations, but also rejected and forgotten. If heritage no longer provides benefits, it is rejected and removed from public spaces and social awareness.

1.2. The Memory and the Practices of Commemoration

In the context of African research, various theories of cultural heritage and memory are of special value, including works of Elisabeth Mudimbe Boyi (*Remembering Africa*, 2002), Kodzo Gavua (*The Politics of Heritage in Africa: economies, histories, infrastructures*, 2015), or Sabine Marschall (*Landscape of Memory. Commemorative monuments, memorials and public statuary in post-apartheid South-Africa*, 2010). The works collectively explore the intricate

interplay between memory, heritage, and identity within the African context, while also engaging with broader themes of cultural representation and the legacies of colonial encounters. A common thread among these authors is their emphasis on the significance of memory, not merely as a recollection of the past but as a dynamic process that shapes identities and cultural narratives in contemporary Africa. Mudimbe-Boyi's collection of essays highlights the multifaceted nature of Africa's memory through various textual expressions and personal experiences. By focusing on the dialogues that emerge from the meeting of Africa and the West, the author underscores how memories of the continent are inscribed and re-inscribed across different cultural artifacts and narratives. This approach resonates with Gavua's examination of heritage, which moves beyond traditional museum studies to consider a wider array of knowledge production. By analysing the marketing of violent pasts in Ghana and South Africa, Gavua situates heritage as a contested site where memory and identity are continually negotiated, reflecting both local and global dynamics. Marschall's exploration of "memory objects" further enriches this discourse by exploring the role of material culture in the lives of intra-African migrants. Her findings challenge prevailing assumptions about the sentimental value of objects, highlighting instead the socio-cultural contexts that inform emotional attachments. This focus on the significance of everyday items as vessels of memory aligns with Mudimbe-Boyi's notion of memory as a site of dialogue and Gavua's understanding of heritage as a form of knowledge production. Together, these works underscore the importance of memory in shaping cultural identity and heritage, illustrating how personal, collective, and historical narratives intersect to inform contemporary experiences. By bridging various domains such as literature, heritage studies, and material culture, the authors contribute to a nuanced understanding of how memory operates as a vital force in the ongoing construction of African identities.

What is more, memory includes past recollections that are expressed in contemporary locations. Identities can be shaped through personal, familial, and communal practices, traditions, or stories that define our sense of self. This also encompasses how people use memory to establish a sense of home. Mirjam de Bruijn, in her essay about a confrontation surrounding the political transformation of the Sahel, provided a thoughtful comment on the past in the present: "Forgotten and unforgotten pasts inform the present (Trouillot 2015) and help us imagine the future [...] The importance of the past operates at two levels. First, stories and images from the pre-colonial era provide people with the collective memory they use to exert power in the present. Second, remembering the past plays a role in establishing a person's identity, and it does not need to be a conscious process (de Bruijn and Both 2018; Stoler 2016)." (de Bruijn, 2022, p. 171).

Commemoration, as a cultural practice, serves to render past events or individuals present for the purpose of veneration by specific social groups, thereby affirming their own identity. This practice can manifest in tangible forms as well as through various ceremonial actions, such as anniversary celebrations and speeches. Cultural modes of commemoration are interwoven across diverse media and cultural realms, which include the establishment of holidays within the calendar, public gatherings, and the construction of enduring memorials, such as commemorative plaques, epitaphs, monuments, and lists honouring the deceased. The essence of commemoration lies in the incorporation of specific elements from the past – events, individuals, locations that no longer exist, or even objects – into collective memory, effectively transferring these elements into the broader public domain. Commemoration is typically situated within a social ritual, utilising specific media that serve as tangible manifestations of the past within the present. A critical analytical dimension in the inquiry of these commemorative practices is the concept of participation, which is articulated through the co-presence of individuals and the performative realisation of rigorously defined patterns.

To introduce the latest research perspective on cultural memory, it is worth citing Milton Guran's example. The research conducted by Guran, titled "The Bricolage of Memory," explores the intricate connections between memory, commemoration, and identity in Benin. The study delves into how Aguda individuals and community construct their identities through the selective remembrance and representation of past events (Guran 2002). Being Aguda in present-day Benin involves sharing a collective memory tied to a series of accomplishments and a distinct "Brazilian" identity.⁶ In the context of the Afro-Brazilian community in Nigeria, diverse cultural practices of commemoration serve to either establish or reinforce communal bonds by coordinating activities within the public sphere. These practices create a framework for rituals, which may include the observance of a calendar that marks significant holidays (such as festivals or carnival), or the erection of monuments that designate sacred spaces of remembrance.

2. Identity and Belonging: Afro-Brazilian Cultural Practices

Many Afro-Brazilians face challenges regarding their sense of belonging due to the erasure and marginalisation of African heritage from world history. While in many cases an experience or history is linked with a sense of pride, in others it is forgotten or neglected. In an effort to address the cognitive gap in the cultural narrative of Nigeria's past, various conceptualisations of memory and

⁶ On Aguda communities in Benin see more: Turner 1975; Verger 1976; Soumonni 2004.

cultural heritage related to the African field of study need to be incorporated. Apart from the theoretical background presented before, the author draws on the theories of different African scholars, such as Amadiume, Mudimbe-Boyi, Gavua, Gildea, Barber, Marschall. Nigerian scholar Harry Garuba focused on the processes of knowledge creation and narrative construction that shape socio-cultural memory while transcending European premises.

The author posits that in certain West African countries – Togo, Benin, and particularly in southern Nigeria – the intensification of practices related to a shared Afro-Brazilian heritage manifests in two domains: spatiality and subjectivity, as evidenced by the group's significant emphasis on visual identification (through architectural objects, memorial sites, or symbolism). Research in this area is necessary for several reasons: to highlight historical connections, to protect culture, and to strengthen mutual understanding. Understanding the group's perspective aids in uncovering the historical context of the slave trade and its impact on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as documenting and preserving cultural practices, enabling future generations to comprehend and celebrate their heritage. It fosters mutual understanding between Brazil and the multicultural countries of West Africa and promotes awareness of shared histories and cultural exchanges, facilitating dialogue.

Investigations into Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria reveal the complexity of identity processes and the significance of cultural memory in a historical context. The contemporary cultural practices identified during the research respond to challenges related to migration, the experience of slavery, and the current needs of the group regarding identification and the preservation of a sense of community. Data analysis indicates that cultural memory plays a pivotal role in shaping the social and cultural identity of Afro-Brazilians, not only enabling the reconstruction of forgotten narratives, familial histories, and traditions but also strengthening social bonds and fostering integration within local communities. As a result of the conducted research, key themes concerning Afro-Brazilian cultural memory were identified. The most significant findings include: 1. The necessity for mapping architectural manifestations of local and collective memory; 2. The initiation and execution of memorial practices as contemporary cultural activities; 3. The strengthening of institutional, commercial or international interactions. The author offers the insights on the matter below.

2.1. The necessity for mapping architectural manifestations of local and collective memory for preservation

Community representatives, with whom the author had conversations during city walks in a former Brazilian Quarter, highlighted the importance of historical events from the 19th and early 20th centuries that shaped their dual identity, reinforced by the experiences of their ancestors, as well as actions that help maintain connections to the past. Research participants underscored the significance of memorial sites, family genealogies, and simple symbols associated with Afro-Brazilian architectural heritage that contribute to the strengthening of their identity, for instance, street names (Martin Street, Tinubu Square, Broad Street, or Kakawa Street), old residencies under prolonged renovation, or lost symbols of Lagos, such as Ilojo Bar (Zeijl 2021; Teriba, 2017). As the author interrogated memories in the context of the increasingly diverse multicultural communities found in urban areas, the observations underscore the significance of architecture not merely as physical structures but as vessels of historical narratives and cultural identity. The reflections on the state of the Afro-Brazilian quarter in Lagos provide a poignant commentary on the interplay between cultural heritage and urban development. They encapsulate the essential role that certain edifices, for instance an old Water House, play in preserving the memories and experiences of past communities (Amos, 2017). The Water House is one of the few extant residential structures that exemplifies Brazilian architectural style in Nigeria (formerly known also as Latin-American style). Situated on Kakawa Street in downtown Lagos, the building was constructed in the 19th century during the period of the Lagos colony. It is “of considerable architectural merit in addition to its great sentimental and historic interest. The facades are well proportioned and detailed and the gardens are of great charm and contain the well, which gave the house its name” (MacRow, 1959, p. 96). It was owned by Candido Da Rocha and is currently inhabited by a senior Da Rocha family member. By contrasting the decaying facades of historic buildings with the new constructions that replace them, the landscape highlights the loss of cultural continuity and the erasure of collective memory that often accompanies urban renewal initiatives.

Moreover, the above-mentioned Ilojo Bar – known also as Casa do Fernandez, regarded by Graciano Martins, President of the Brazilian Descendants Association in Lagos, as the centre of the community’s past social scene, which stood on Tinubu Square, serves now as a critical case study in the discourse of practices and sites of commemoration. Recognised as a national monument, its illegal demolition in 2016 represents not only the physical loss of a beloved community hub but also a symbolic severing of the ties to the cultural landscape that once defined the area (Zeijl, 2021; Folorunso, 2020, p. 3). Martins,

focusing on his own memories and experiences, pointed out that any act of erasure raises important questions about the values that guide urban development and the prioritisation of commercial interests over cultural preservation for further generations that may finally lose bonds. The bulldozing of such a significant site, albeit neglected and underfunded for many years – as explained by Nkechi Olatubosun-Adedeji, current Curator of the National Museum in Lagos, reflects a broader trend observed in many urban centres around the world, where the imperatives of modernisation frequently overshadow the need to honour and protect historical landmarks. Her insights resonate within the larger framework of urban studies, museum studies and heritage conservation, drawing attention to the need for a more nuanced approach to urban planning – one that recognises the intrinsic value of cultural heritage. The tension between development and preservation of similar architectural examples, such as the Mohammed Shitta Bey Mosque, designed by Brazilian architect João Baptista da Costa, or Holy Cross Cathedral,⁷ necessitates a dialogue that includes the voices of those who are directly affected by such changes, particularly the local communities whose histories and identities are at stake (Omanka, 2004; Teriba 2017). The Cathedral, with its simple cruciform shape resembling a hand in plan, has origins dating back to 1864, a period following the abolition of the slave trade. As argued by Ejiga, Igwe and Kashim, Holy Cross Cathedral initially served as a place of worship exclusively for the Brazilian returnees, but today – rebuilt in 1930s in Neo-Gothic style – it stands as a multicultural, multi-ethnic church, with the practice of Catholicism uniting all its members (Ejiga, Igwe, Kashim, 2015).

What is important, the Aguda community values the history, significance and origins of the site and treats it as a symbol of the Brazilian heritage. In this context, initiatives undertaken by local Afro-Brazilian communities, social entrepreneurs and private property owners become crucial, as they advocate for the recognition and preservation of spaces that embody the rich tapestry of cultural narratives. Fundamentally, recently a lot of iconic Afro-Brazilian structures dating as far back as the 19th century have simply vanished from the urban landscape. This reminds us that the built environment is not just a backdrop for contemporary life, but a living archive of the past, deserving of protection and respect. As the city of Lagos continues to evolve rapidly, the challenge lies in finding a balance that respects historical significance while accommodating the needs of a modern populace (Olatunji, 2009).

⁷ In 1864, the Aguda community, led by Senghor Izidore Ezechiél de Souza, negotiated with the British Government to acquire land for the construction of the church and a large wooden cross was placed on the site as a symbol of their claim. Fourteen years later, the foundation stone of the Holy Cross Cathedral was laid. Brazilian craftsmen and master builders, led by Lazarus Borges da Silva, were contracted to construct the church (Ejiga, Igwe and Kashim, 2015).

However, locations, artefacts and events possess multiple meanings and are used for diverse purposes by different groups, each conveying unique messages. Distinct members of the Afro-Brazilian descendants' community may interpret the same object or practice in various ways, leading to conflict, indifference or neglect of cultural origin. This situation is referred to by John E. Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth as "dissonant heritage," indicating that a single place, event, or object can elicit both positive and negative emotions from individuals (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996).

2.2. The initiation and execution of memorial practices as contemporary cultural activities

Preliminary analyses of the collected data and observations revealed that the group engages in diverse forms of expression, such as art, music, festivals, family and spiritual ceremonies, which reflect the values they uphold, and reference places associated with so-called 'troublesome' heritage. Additionally, different practices can manifest as ritual activities in their own right, such as public gatherings, festivals or anniversaries honouring the deceased. Practical aspects of cultural heritage preservation at the local level, located in the Brazilian Quarters in Campos, Olowogbowo, Bamgbose, Popo Aguda, or Sandgrouse areas on Lagos Island, have been used as resources for constructing and legitimising representations of the past, manifest through: the organisation of cultural events (e.g. regular meetings in a local community club) and festivals (the Festival of our Senhor do Bonfim, the Carnival celebrated annually, the Afro-Brazilian Heritage Festival in December), as well as efforts towards the renovation of monuments contrary to land use plans, and the co-creation of local museums. In December 2023, during Afro-Brazilian Heritage Festival in Lagos, numerous families draped in Ankara fabrics participated in a procession within the historic residential Brazilian Quarters to celebrate their heritage and honour their ancestors.⁸ The festival, held under one of the slogans "May the spirit of our forefathers guide us. Viva Brasileiros!" was accompanied by dances, music performances and food. It was organised by the Brazilian Descendants Association Lagos. Interestingly, even though the promotion of cultural cuisine is particularly relevant to African diasporic communities, a similar trend is popular among group members during bigger celebrations and family events. Particular Bahian

⁸ Families included: Balthazar dos Reis, Hilario Campos, Cardoso, Marinho, Jorge Ferreira, Rodriguez, Cypriano Miguel da Silva, Antonio da Costa, Abosoiz-Joaquim, Hermenegildo Gaspar da Silva, Lazaro Borges da Silva, Aruna, Jose Martins, Pedro Pacheco, Dominga da Souza, Laguda, Sheteolu Gomez, Salvador, Bamgbose Martins and others (The Façade Nigeria, 2023).

dishes (from Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, such as *frejon*) strengthen bonds and promote emotional health, while the shared experiences of preparing and enjoying meals together contribute to building community and reinforcing social connections. The food itself – if we apply the beforementioned category proposed by Sabine Marchall – can be treated a “memory object” that link the members to particular past (Marschall, 2010).

Hence, the goal of such institutions is to provide a platform to reconnect with symbolic or returnees’ homelands and each other, creating hybrid identities and using nostalgia through cultural practices. These cultural products serve as carriers of memory, facilitating the transmission of history and values from generation to generation. In dynamic spaces, (re)formulations of personal and local collective memory reflect the underlying social-cultural dynamics within communities and neighbourhoods.

2.3. The strengthening of institutional, commercial and international interactions

The third identified key theme concerning Afro-Brazilian cultural memory is the role of strengthening of institutional, commercial and international interactions. The increase in collaboration between Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria, including the Martins and Gomez families, and their relatives or similar associations in Brazil (e.g. through international visits to Brazil), contributes to the reinforcement of a sense of connection and the creation of new hybrid cultural forms. Mechanisms of institutionalised social life, such as the activities of a formalised association, play a crucial role in the process of reclaiming forgotten heritage. Notably, actions undertaken to preserve or promote a shared history and traditions have an interventionist character.

As explained by representatives of the Brazilian Descendants Association Lagos, the members, currently comprising 170 individuals, support initiatives aimed at protecting deteriorating tangible and intangible heritage, signalling their presence in public spaces, and potentially playing remarkable roles in shaping the knowledge of younger generations regarding the history of Lagos, Nigeria, human rights, and identity-forming attitudes. The members highlight the mission role of their association, that states: “We aim to revive and unlock the historical, cultural and touristic value of the Portuguese/Brazilian Quarters to reposition its cultural relevance and enable us to showcase its past glory as being one of the rare cultural hubs in Lagos State with a unique relationship with Brazil.” (BDA Lagos, 2024). The goal is to promote mutual understanding, cooperation and a fraternal relationship among members in Nigeria and the Diaspora. Moreover, the association has been actively involved

in various educational initiatives, including the promotion of the Portuguese language. The first Portuguese language class in Lagos, in conjunction with the Federative Republic of Brazil, was launched in 2022. The classes aimed to promote the Portuguese language and provide youth with an opportunity to learn the language.

Furthermore, in the era of globalisation and in response to potential cultural homogenisation, the Afro-Brazilian community exemplifies that grassroots strategies are aimed to protect and preserve the unique cultural values of communities that may be threatened. Given that a significant portion of the community possesses distinct self-awareness and self-identification, interventionist actions, particularly glorification of the past, have the potential to garner substantial public attention, despite the government's inadequate concern. Local memorial sites can, in turn, become spaces for reconnections with ancestral homelands, for civic mobilisation and sensitisation of subsequent generations to past, present, and future experiences. They are sites for evolution of remembering, reconstructing, memory-making, or forgetting.

The interviewees strengthened the role of establishment of dedicated museums in Lagos and across Nigeria to celebrate and document the extensive contributions of Afro-Brazilians and their descendants to Nigerian society since their arrival in West Africa in the early 19th century. Their aim is to provide effective and efficient measures in preserving cultural heritage and monuments. As African museums confront their colonial legacies and the challenge of redefining cultural identities in a post-colonial context, the unique narrative of Afro-Brazilians or other returnees remains largely overlooked and underrepresented. Few examples of institutions that stand as a tribute to the returnees and the history of the slave trade include the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre working under Loving Lagos in Lagos (a Lagos-based company aimed at providing activities on the history and cultural heritage of Lagos), the National Museum in Lagos (albeit devoid of a permanent exhibition on the Brazilian component), and the Brazilian Baracoon in Badagry (also known as Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum, built in the 1840s). Their current activities clearly indicate that Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage is a crucial component of Nigeria's national identity, highlighting how these communities have influenced various aspects of urban life in Lagos, including architecture, performative arts and social customs.

The Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre stands as a tribute to the returnees from Brazil who shaped the cultural and architectural identity of Lagos. These returnees, often referred to as the *Aguda*, brought with them a fusion of traditions, cuisine, and artistry that continues to influence Lagos' vibrant culture. The centre captures this rich history and serves

as a living archive of their contributions, showcasing everything from traditional artifacts to modern artistic expressions [...] Step into the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre and let your senses come alive. Each corner of this dynamic space offers something unique: Exquisite Architecture: Marvel at the Afro-Brazilian design elements that reflect a harmonious blend of African and European influences; Interactive Exhibits: Dive into history with multimedia displays and artifacts that chronicle the journey of Afro-Brazilian communities; Art and Performances: Enjoy exhibitions by contemporary artists and live cultural performances that celebrate the enduring ties between Lagos and Brazil; Culinary Delights: Savor traditional Afro-Brazilian dishes at the centre's café, where every bite tells a story of cultural fusion (Loving Lagos, 2024).

Even though the centre is commercialised, its message strongly suggests that visits not only contribute to preserving and promoting Lagos's rich heritage for future generations but also serve as opportunities to uncover stories of migration, Diaspora, resilience, and cultural exchange that shaped Lagos's identity. By tracing the historical migration patterns and cultural exchanges that occurred between Brazil and Nigeria, such institutions demonstrate how the development of exhibitions on Afro-Brazilian heritage can serve as catalysts for social change and a more inclusive understanding of Nigerian heritage. Furthermore, they engage with contemporary museum or cultural sites' practices that advocate for collaboration and community engagement, drawing on successful examples from other African nations. By confronting colonial frameworks and embracing the hybridity of identities, Nigerian museums can evolve into vital spaces for dialogue and reflection, ultimately contributing to a richer, more nuanced understanding of belonging in post-colonial Nigeria.

Other crucial initiatives, particularly of an academic and educational nature, are: The LASU Centre for Afro-Brazilian Studies (LASUCAS) and the Nigerian-Brazilian Public History Project. The LASUCAS was developed in 2019 at the Lagos State University, after a cooperation agreement was signed between the Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, Brazil and the University. It is "conceived as an academic, sociocultural and economic institution for Brazilian heritage in Lagos in particular and in Nigeria and the Diaspora in general. It is a confluence of sociocultural and economic research activities in the area of Afro-Brazilian studies and an umbrella body for all Afro-Brazilian research and studies in Lagos or in Nigeria" (LASUCAS, 2024). The LASUCAS Director, Professor Tayo Ajayi, shared his thoughts in our conversation in July 2024, on the matter that discussions on cultural heritage and connections between Brazil and Nigeria have been ongoing for many years and persist

today. The centre provides an opportunity for students to learn Portuguese and examine these trans-Atlantic exchanges, focusing on Brazil and Sub-Saharan Africa, along with the movement of people, artifacts, and concepts across the Atlantic, both in the past and present. The focus is on bridging Brazil and Africa, with a special attention to the Afro-Brazilian community in Brazil. Its objective is also to promote commercial relationships between the Afro-Brazilian descendants' entrepreneurs in Lagos and their counterparts in Brazil with partnership with the Brazilian Descendants Association, the Brazilian Government and research institutions in both countries.

The second organisation, the Nigerian-Brazilian Public History Project, represents a scholarly initiative aimed at recovering the significant contributions of Afro-Brazilians and their descendants to Nigerian society, tracing their impact from their arrival in West African communities in the early 19th century through the early 20th century. As described by the founders, "the project will curate, archive and disseminate various aspects of social, cultural, religious, economic and political life of Nigerians of Afro-Brazilian descent to the transformation of Nigerian society in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial contexts [...] to underscore the enormous role of Afro-Brazilians in West African public and private life, serve as important teaching tools from elementary to tertiary levels, provide resources for research and scholarship, and for useable knowledge for all learners" (The Nigerian-Brazilian Public History Project, 2024). The project, coordinated by a prominent scholar in Francophone and Anglophone postcolonial studies, Ekua Agha, based at Birkbeck University of London, aims at contributing valuably into the development of knowledge production on Afro-Brazilian heritage. The goals resonate with the meaning of heritage provided by Laurajane Smith, that is as primarily a social practice, a process of engagement, an act of communication, and the creation of meanings, rather than a material object (Smith, 2007). The researcher, sharing her own experience of having Afro-Brazilian ancestors, demonstrated that the value of heritage is not linked to physical objects or locations, but rather to the ways in which these objects and places are utilised to impart values that form the foundation of various identities. Similarly, the Project's Team member, Aduke Gomez, added a noteworthy perspective on the Gomez family contributions in the urban life of Lagos.

Conclusions

The research on Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria constitutes a significant step towards understanding the complex relationships between cultural memory and identity, primarily serving as a foundation for a long-term programme aimed at comprehending the role of Afro-Brazilian heritage in identity

construction within the context of West Africa. The findings emphasise the necessity for further analysis of the “plural and contested senses of place” – as proposed by Amin (Amin, 2002, p. 959), processes of remembering, occurring within the studied community, the dynamic interactions among multiethnic communities, and their impact on contemporary cultural life. The distinctive nature of different commemorative practices lies in their reliance on repetition, which explicitly engages with the past; through this symbolic reiteration, they achieve an end that transcends mere functionality. However, not everything originating from the past qualifies as heritage; its significance is defined by the community that engages with it. Understanding these phenomena is crucial for the preservation of cultural heritage, community building and solidarity, nostalgia, and the promotion of mutual understanding between West African countries and Brazil, and the awareness of social issues and challenges, such as cultural identity, migration, Diaspora, urban studies, and their impact on local communities. In conclusion, this research illuminates the intricate dynamics of Afro-Brazilian heritage and cultural memory within the context of Nigeria, revealing how these elements play a crucial role in the ongoing negotiation of identity and belonging among descendants of Afro-Brazilians. Through an in-depth exploration of historical narratives, architectural legacies, and contemporary cultural practices, we have established how the Afro-Brazilian community in Nigeria actively engages in memory-making processes that both preserve and redefine their cultural identity. The findings underscore the significance of memorial practices, spatial representations, and institutional efforts in developing a collective identity that honours ancestral legacies while simultaneously responding to contemporary challenges posed by globalisation and urbanisation. The analysis demonstrates that cultural heritage is not merely a remnant of the past but a vibrant, living aspect of the present that shapes social interactions and community cohesion. Initiatives undertaken by local associations are pivotal in enhancing awareness of Afro-Brazilian contributions to Nigerian society, advocating for the preservation of cultural sites, and facilitating international dialogue with Brazil.

Moreover, this study highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of cultural heritage that embraces the complexities of identity formation in post-colonial contexts. As communities navigate the challenges of cultural or historical erasure, their ability to reclaim and celebrate their heritage becomes essential for building a sense of belonging and continuity across generations. Ultimately, the ongoing efforts to map architectural manifestations, initiate memorial practices, and enhance institutional collaborations underscore a broader movement toward cultural revitalisation and recognition of the Afro-Brazilian narrative within the tapestry of Nigeria’s national identity. This

research not only contributes to the academic discourse surrounding cultural heritage and identity but also serves as a clarion call for further exploration and engagement with the rich histories that continue to shape contemporary Nigerian society. As we move forward, it is imperative to recognise the value of diversity in cultural expressions and the role they play in mutual understanding and respect among communities in an increasingly interconnected world.

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