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Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa

**CONVERSIONS**

Paul Christopher Johnson

**DIASPORA**

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## CHAPTER I

# What Is Diasporic Religion?

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We can also say of every religion that it reproduces in more or less symbolic forms the history of migrations and fusions of race and tribes, of great events, wars, establishments, discoveries, and reforms.

Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*

We are not a diaspora, we are just trapped.

Emeline Michel, Haitian singer

This chapter lays out the parameters for the central theoretical issues of the book, moving from the widest to the narrowest distinctions. I examine, in turn, diaspora, diasporic religion, African Diaspora, and African diasporic religions, the latter specifically in New York City. The attempt to establish a solid theoretical footing for the starring phrase among these, *diasporic religion*, may appear a fool's errand, since both *diaspora* and *religion* are highly conflicted terms. How can we cheerfully head for the mountains with only these two frayed ropes in our packs? I wager that the two ropes can be sufficiently rewoven, and woven together, to hold the needed weight.

## That Shared Something: Defining Diaspora Analytically

The notion of diaspora has been progressively widened over the last century to include not only the dispersions of the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian populations but also diasporas as disparate as those of

Calvinists (Weber 2002: 7), the Portuguese (Klimt and Lubkemann 2002), the Mormons (Smith and White 2004), and the New Orleans victims of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Gross 2006). The term has even been applied to the dispersion of individuals from a position of social valuation to one where little is accorded them, as in “the sexual diaspora of older women” (Merkin 2006: 18)—the experience of being sexually “in exile.”<sup>1</sup> Suddenly, it appears, everyone is in diaspora. Well, why not? We all came from somewhere else and are at least dimly enough aware of it to be able to call up sentiments about our origins. Ethnic revivals are at least in part a reactive move, a standard means of vying for a fair share of the socioeconomic pie (Barth 1969; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Rumbaut and Portes 2001: 5; Baumann 2000; Berking 2003), and diaspora has become their reliable vehicle. The practical, colloquial use of the word suggests affiliations by virtue of biological descent, which allegedly transmit blood continuity across space: The Jewish diaspora, from this perspective, is the set of people whose families were from, but then were exiled or otherwise departed from, Israel during dispersions under Babylonia, Rome, or other conquerors. The Irish diaspora is built of the descendants of the families that left Ireland during the potato famines of the nineteenth century, and so on.

This concept inspires groups and galvanizes political mobilizations, but for analytical and comparative purposes it falls short on at least two counts. First, in this view, there exist natural groupings of humans who, through emigration, inevitably become diasporas. But there are no such natural groups and, it follows, no natural diasporas, either. The second obvious problem with the everyday uses of *diaspora* is that the category is overly broad. It is true that if we go back far enough, all human beings have their origins in East Africa (Palmer 1998); but the assertion that we are all members of an East African diaspora is not useful.<sup>2</sup> Although we all have ancestors from that region, that memory is not part of our conscious experience; nor is it constitutive, so far as we know, of our bodily habitus; nor is each of us seen by others as a member of that category. Folk invocations of diaspora fail to specify its cultural particularity: it depends not merely on having a family tree that sprouted in another place but also on having a double consciousness in relation to place. For members of a diaspora, that awareness is central, even actively conjured in their lived experience. They feel a gap between here and there, where they are “really from.” They may even value that gap, seeing it not as a deficiency but as a resource or mark of distinction, and actively cultivate a sense of it (Malkki 1997: 62).

The prevalence of these confusing folk usages, not to mention the mixed approaches of analytical meanings—as social form, as type of consciousness, as mode of cultural production (Vertovec 2000: 142)—suggests that we need to spend some time giving boundaries to the notions of diaspora and diasporic religion.

#### DEFINITION BY ETYMOLOGY

The ascent of *diaspora* as an analytical term has taken several routes. One of these is the route of roots, the tracing of its etymology as a way to delimit its semantic range (e.g., Tölölyan 1996; R. Cohen 1997; Baumann 2000; Sheffer 2003).

*Diaspora* comes from the Greek verb *speirein* (to sow, or scatter, as in seed) and the preposition *dia* (over); thus, “to scatter over.” The same Indo-European root, *sp-*, appears in words like “spore,” “spread,” and “sperm.” *Diaspora* was first used by Greeks to describe the colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean world, and it probably connoted a sacrificial loss of the homeland for the cause of Greek expansion; hence irretrievable separation though not necessarily forced migration or enslavement (Tölölyan 1996; Baumann 2000).

The word took on a different valence when applied to the Jewish experience, as a translation of the Hebrew term *galut* in the Greek version of Hebrew scripture, connoting severance and exile (Deuteronomy 28: 25, 58–68) and the Jewish dispersions (732 B.C.E., after conquest by Assyria; 586 B.C.E., after conquest by Babylonia; 70 C.E., after conquest by Rome).<sup>3</sup> Yet, at least in the later context of rabbinic teaching, the notion also carried the promise of ultimate return (Cohen 1997; Baumann 2000). In Jewish thought *diaspora* carries within it a soteriology, the promise of the future salvation of the people through a return to the place of origin. As Thomas Tweed (1997: 42) notes, other groups’ religious diasporic practice may proffer analogous promises of geopiety projected into the future: “Next year in Jerusalem! Next year in Havana! Next year in Saigon, Palestine, and Llasa!” (cf. Wright 1947; Tuan 1976; Smith and White 2004). This common feature suggests how different diasporas draw on different imaginative and sentimental sensibilities: diasporas of hope, of terror, of despair, of desire (Appadurai 1996: 6).

#### DEFINITION BY LIST

A second route to definition has been the attempt to specify the empirical contents of a diaspora, so as to enable us to differentiate “diaspora

societies” from other societies (Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1996; R. Cohen 1997; Van Hear 1998; Baumann 2000; K. Butler 2001). Scholars have reached a relative consensus on the traits constituting diasporas. Most obvious in these lists is the dispersion of a present group or of past ancestors from an original center to two or more new sites. Next is some retained collective memory about the homeland.

A third criterion is the maintenance of relations with the departed homeland, at least as an imagined community, which defines in significant ways the contemporary experience of the hostland. These relations may include economic as well as social and cultural remittances (Levitt 2001) in both directions, or it may entail ritual performances that call the homeland to mind in order to improve or transform the experience of the hostland.

Fourth, the best of these list-based definitions also call attention to institutional infrastructures that make and sustain diasporic sentiments in what I refer to as “stagings,” or performatives (Axel 2004). This issue is important for the present study because, when a group of new arrivals in New York City claims identification with the religious African Diaspora, that group must enter the diaspora through institutional networks, material repertoires, and spaces already present in the city (David Brown 1999).<sup>4</sup> Emigrants rely on artifactual representations that recall the homeland to mind (Appadurai 1996; Tweed 1997: 97; P. Werbner 2000; Miller 2005).

A fifth defining feature often invoked is that a diaspora group remains at least partly separate, distinct, or alienated from the mainstream society in the host country. “Whoever passes from one [territory] to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds,” wrote Arnold Van Gennep at the beginning of the twentieth century (1960 [1901]: 18). By this criterion, full assimilation in the new place or the total severing of ties to the homeland renders a group no longer diasporic (Saint-Blancat, quoted in Baumann 2000: 326).

A sixth typical characteristic is the nostalgic idealization of the homeland and ancestral time, which may or may not be linked with the desire for actual permanent return (Appadurai 1996: 37–38; Tweed 1997: 94). Relatively few African Americans will actually return to live in Africa, though the ritual experience of momentary “return” both in space and in time is widely performed in African Diaspora religions of the Americas.

These rough criteria offer a fairly standard set of markers to use in analytical definitions of diaspora. These in turn should allow us to distinguish diasporic religious forms from nondiasporic ones.

## DEFINING BY RELATION: WHO IS NOT IN A DIASPORA?

Diasporas differ from ethnic communities in themselves, Tölölyan writes, “by the extent to which the latter’s commitment to maintain connections with its homeland and its kin communities in other states is absent, weak, at best intermittent, and manifested by individuals rather than the community as a whole” (1996: 16). Tölölyan’s point about “extent” or degree of diasporization is important, but it may prove useful to confront an apparently simpler problem, at least as a thought experiment: Who is not in diaspora? To put this differently, if groups can undergo “de-diasporization” (Van Hear 1998: 48), what exactly does this process entail? One of Nicholas Van Hear’s examples seems clear enough: when people return permanently to wherever they consider home, they cease to be in diaspora. Recent such groups include ethnic Germans and Greeks returning to homelands from the former USSR after 1989 and Palestinians who returned to the West Bank from Kuwait between 1990 and 1992 (Van Hear 1998: 6, 48, 195, 200). A second example is those always in transit, for example as nomads (Cohen 1997): the lack of any established homeland location precludes any sense of territorial dislocation. The Bedouins and the Romani (“Gypsies”) represent this type.

Third, a community that is entirely uprooted to a new homeland is no longer dispersed; it remains “intact,” merely in a new place, and the key spatial feature of diaspora, the engagement of hostland and homeland communities across a gap, is forfeit. Next, at least as a logical possibility, we can imagine a group that remains dislocated from a homeland community but which so fully assimilates in the hostland that it is no longer cognizant of the homeland and abandons the sort of “co-responsibility” that is constitutive of active diasporas (Saint-Blancat in Baumann 2000; P. Werbner 2000: 17). Eric Hobsbawm, for example, describes his childhood family life among the assimilated Jews in interwar Vienna. In his memory, Jews were simply part of the cosmopolitan cultural fabric of the city. Despite prevalent anti-Semitism, any specific meaning accorded to Jewishness was slight, as were his sentiments of loyalty: “I have no emotional obligation to the practices of an ancestral religion and even less to . . . the nation-state which asks for my solidarity on racial grounds” (Hobsbawm 2002: 10–12, 24).

Finally, a group lacking the resources, time, energy, and political clout to guard and fan the sparks of memory can cease to live in diaspora, as the exhausted-sounding epigraph from Emeline Michel suggests: “We are not a diaspora, we are just trapped.” Diasporic affiliations

and representations come into being under certain historical conditions and may be transformed or disappear under others (Clifford 1994: 315). Hence, writes Eddie Glaude of African Americans, “Most people don’t live diasporic lives” (2000: 103).

In the most restrictive and precise definition, diasporic social formation is determined by consciousness and discourse about spatial dislocation, as in Martin Baumann’s admirably concise definition: “The relational facts of a *perpetual recollecting identification with a fictitious or far away existent geographic territory and its cultural-religious traditions* are taken as diaspora constitutive” (2000: 327, italics in original).

To this review of definitions by etymology, list, and relation, I would like to add five further considerations to sharpen the meaning of *diaspora*, and by extension *diasporic religion*, to a more incisive point.

*A diaspora is a specific kind of culture.* Diasporas are cultural rather than biological forms.<sup>5</sup> For a diasporic culture to be maintained or transmitted, information like memories, tastes, and habits must be communicated from one individual mind to another. Each leap of “contagion”—to borrow an epidemiological metaphor (Sperber 1996)—entails a new reception, the adaptation of incoming information to a new psychosocial and material context. Change occurs as that memory is reconfigured within a semantic field of relevant schema or scripts by which an individual lives (Kertzer 1988; Shore 1996; Sperber 1996; Sewell 1999; Zerubavel 1999; Boyer 2001; Whitehouse 2000, 2004).

Individual minds must receive and reproduce the words, habits, and tendencies which, when assembled densely and consistently enough with those of a group of people located in another place, come to be called a “diaspora” in comparisons with other clusters of habits, memories, aesthetic preferences, or languages. Diasporic culture names a relative match among these clusters carried by individual minds, a sufficient though never complete similarity (Boyer 2001: 35–36). The reproduction of such a similarity requires communications between individuals. But diaspora culture is distinctive in that the transmissive gaps to be bridged are enormously widened.

*Diasporas are cultures that cross wide transmissive gaps and are also about such gaps.* Diasporic cultural transmissions entail not the reception and incorporation of words or ideas passed contiguously, through direct contact or immediate networks, but rather the exchange of signals and symbols through electronic media, the post, videotapes, or secondhand gossip networks. Cultural transmission is conducted not only through human copresence in known places, as in the homeland, but

also across empty space dividing homeland from hostland. The wider the spaces those transmissions must cross, and the greater the number of rival signals in the cultural field of reception, the more variation may occur—even if, as is often the case in diasporic religions, strident discourses insist on fidelity to tradition and absolute continuity between the homeland and the diasporic group (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 39).

Corollary to the spatial gap is the oft-perceived temporal gap, or “lag” (Brent Edwards 2003), where the homeland is made by those in diaspora to carry the symbolic weight of the “original” and the “inherent”; just as, for those remaining in the homeland, the diaspora often must bear the load of “modernity” (Gilroy 1993: 191, 197). Even messages exchanged in the here and now may be incorporated by individual persons according to schema derived from their memories of a place located in the past—depending on how long ago the emigration occurred—rather than the present. When a Garifuna person in New York receives a videotape of a ritual from a Honduran village and watches it in her high-rise apartment, she may view the videotaped actions as occurring not only in a different place but also in a different time, the time of her childhood (cf. Richman 2005: 25, 196, 213). The homeland is conceived both as a geographic backwater compared with the city, and as a hallowed place: hallowed because it mediates the past in some way that resists transience, even though the homeland village may be fully engaged with processes of modernity. Diasporic Garifuna often caricature the imaginary homeland and its dwellers, both to fortify their own superiority and to endow the homeland with the sacralizing power of ancestral authenticity.

*A diaspora is a series of interventions, not a permanent state of being.* The Irish Americans of Chicago may be sentimentally joined to the imagined homeland for a given occasion, like a Saint Patrick’s Day parade or a Notre Dame football game, but the union requires substantial effort. For, after all, the Irish of Dublin and the Irish Americans of Chicago are not the same; or, rather, they are similar in certain respects and quite different in others. No doubt most members of both groups live through most days without giving the matter much thought, their minds preoccupied by other collectivities in relation to whom they reference themselves (Hefner 1993: 25) and that determine who they are: Catholic or Protestant; from Northern Ireland or Eire; conservative, liberal, or socialist; spouse or bachelor; punk rocker or traditional fiddler; and so on. Not only to be of Irish extraction but also to *feel* that identity and its spatial pull (Tölölyan 1996: 15)—which is of

the essence in the restricted use of *diaspora* advocated here—is therefore a contingent and usually temporary state, as it is only one among a set of possible affiliations. Such emotions are evoked by some situations and not by others, which is why such diasporic conjunctions tend to require elaborate stagings.

These stagings include discursive acts, repeated performatives (Axel 2004: 38). But the manifestation of “the Irish diaspora” is also contingent on a long list of infrastructural supports: a special day on the calendar, the city’s assent to closing streets for parades, the manufacture and sale of green hats and buttons, the green dye poured into the Chicago River, the massive surplus of beer. It entails a conjunction of commercial and civic interests that can be achieved only infrequently—or not at all, for diaspora groups that lack sufficient numbers, capital, and political clout. Without repeated commemorations, diasporas may disappear from the minds of potential members. When the homeland cannot be called to mind, or fails to evoke sentiments of affinity, a diaspora ceases to exist (though, to be sure, it may exist in another, archaeological sense, as a trail of bones or arrowheads [Mintz and Price 1992: 47]). There is no essence of diaspora external to the acts themselves (Gilroy 1993: 110).

Such commemorative labor is enjoined not only in large performances that are consciously and ideologically diasporic but also in small, habitual acts—a “quotidian diaspora” (P. Werbner 200)—often without any special awareness of it. Listening to merengue is more likely to evoke diaspora sentiments for Dominicans than listening to Brazilian bossa nova, and a Dominican in his car often sets his playlist accordingly. A Jamaican diasporan knows full well the colors her hat should bear to signal that identity to observers and to herself, though, again, it is not typically a matter given conscious deliberation. Diasporas are sentimental communities but also habit communities, and such emotions are quickened by forceful appeals to the senses in certain kinds of acts and events: religious rituals, musical performances, home-style meals. The homeland must be staged again and again. Even quotidian diasporas require work.

Why does anybody do this work? Diasporas are desirable because they are consequential actions. They are articulations across gaps that, like the articulations of hip or knee joints, allow for forward motility (Edwards 2003: 15). By naming a horizon of expectation, they provide solidarity, purpose, identity, and futurity. Against this horizon, diasporans not only perform rituals but also raise funds and mobilize campaigns. The Garifuna diaspora in New York, for example, generated the

revenue that brought electricity to many Honduran Garifuna villages in the early 1980s. Moreover, their invocation helps to define borders within a competitive cultural market (Appadurai 1996; Zukin 1996; Berking 2003), which can lead to resources from city and state governments for social services or institution-building.

*Diaspora culture is the elevating of one reference group over other possible ones.* Because being diasporic *does* something, diasporas are interested interventions; they act as props or shims (Edwards 2003: 14) that temporarily level differences by demoting rival reference-group affiliations and elevating just one. The most common is the identification of ethnicity, especially among many Caribbeans in the United States for whom the racial reduction to “black” is viewed as a socioeconomic liability. As the sociologist Mary Waters showed, for example, Caribbean anglophone blacks in the United States often stress their West Indian-ness and may consciously maintain their distinctive accents so as not to be too easily conflated with African Americans, who are perceived as holding low social status (Waters 1999: 57, 103, 151, 332). Haitians in New York sometimes bank on the prestige of French to accomplish the same sort of distancing (McAlister 1998). A Haitian in New York may under certain circumstances feel, be identified as, or introduce herself as “African American,” “African,” “Caribbean,” or “French”; but all of these identifications are likely to be suspended during a Vodou ceremony in Brooklyn in favor of an authentic “Haitian-ness,” because that is the diasporic identifier befitting the occasion. Yet that same person might the next day attend a neighborhood watch group or a protest against police brutality, at which she identifies as black. Or she may visit a Cuban *botánica*, a store selling popular ritual tools like icons and candles, and, while chatting with a Cuban *santera*, enjoy the conviviality of a common African diasporic religious heritage.

Although diasporic affiliations emphasize one identification over others, the nomenclature of diaspora also connotes distance and the limits of complete identification. For example, to become a member of the African Diaspora both forges a link with Africa and guards a certain distance from it, allowing for its selective invocation. During the 1980s, African Americans were activists against South Africa’s apartheid system in part by virtue of their African diasporic loyalties. The imagined community was broad enough to enable them to find common cause with South African victims of apartheid. Yet similar mobilizations have not occurred in relation to other African traumas, notably in Sudan and

Rwanda, because famines and massacres are not as easily related to familiar North American schema in the way that South Africa's racial segregation could be compared to the black experience in the United States. Diasporic sentiments, and interventions, may be limited by what is imaginable and salient within the cultural repertoire and material context of the hostland.

*Diaspora culture is usually urban culture.* In recent diasporas, the receiving social context of a hostland in which a diasporic group must be incorporated is not only pluralistic, it is usually also urban, because cities are where jobs, extended kin networks, and ethnic enclaves to receive newcomers are most likely to be found.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, such urban contexts may appear quite homogeneous the world over, equally run by "money, the frightful leveler" that "hollows out the core of things" (Simmel 1950: 414; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 54). The urban context transforms orientations in time and space, ideas of work and value, and even the experience of self-identity (see, for example, Simmel 1978; Soja 1989; Harvey 1990; Giddens 1990; Zukin 1996). Displacement can generate a sense of incoherence, anomie, and vulnerability, but that very incoherence opens possibilities and needs for new solidarities in the city (Weber 2002: 47; Sennett 1994: 371).

On the other hand, diasporic cultures are rerooted in and through what Robert Orsi (1999) calls "urban subjectivities," in which the marking of differences becomes valued as the shared expressive culture of the city. This kind of subjectivity is shaped in the context of frequent meetings with unexpected others, a cityscape of new and unfamiliar materials out of which meaning must be made, and a sort of self-awareness or mirroring quality of city people intensified by the observation of difference, as well as the possibilities for selective identity, which are more readily available in large cities than elsewhere (Orsi 1999: 44, 54–57). In the radical pluralism of the city, received signals may be regarded as precarious, contingent, and voluntarist rather than as cultural certainties or requirements. The city has a "contagion factor" that makes ethnic minorities privy to the styles and choices of others; thus diaspora societies may rub against each other to spark new, cross-diasporic fires (Zukin 1996; Sheffer 2003: 25).<sup>7</sup>

To be sure, the classifying processes to which most diasporic groups are subjected are far less flexible and far less graced by the privilege of self-selection. Instead, they are read into hostland scripts to play parts not of their own choosing, depending on their proximal hosts—the hostland groups in reference to which they are perceived by the mainstream

majority (Mittelberg and Waters 1992). As Aihwa Ong (1999: 12–16) so well describes, the fluidity of terms like *globalization*, *diaspora*, and *transnationalism* have too often connoted notions of freewheeling mobility and cultural exchange without attending to the economic and political structures that radically delimit and constrain the lives of the vast majority. New subjectivities come wrapped in new forms of subjectification (Ong 1999; Asad 1993; Mahmood 2005). For example, the Garifuna in the United States tend to be read in relation to African Americans and, less commonly, in relation to Latinos, since many Garifuna are Spanish-speaking.

Yet even Garifuna immigrants to the United States, whose potential repertoire of identifications is far more circumscribed than that of most European immigrants, might on occasion forward Hispanic, Black, Caribbean, Honduran, Garifuna, or village-based identifications. In this pattern of code-switching that sometimes seeks to substitute ethnic or geographic identifications for racial ones, the Garifuna are similar to other Caribbean emigrant groups (McAlister 1998).<sup>8</sup> However, as chapter 6 shows, Garifuna shamans and devotees of traditional religion in the United States depart from this standard Caribbean model of using ethnicity to refute the racial reduction to blackness. Instead, traditional Garifuna religion becomes a vehicle of black identifications, through its links to the African Diaspora and an emerging African diasporic horizon.

The conditions of Garifuna subjection, then—being forced to emigrate to the United States to support families in Honduras, Guatemala, or Belize, and the marginal status immigrants occupy once arriving there—are also the conditions of a new subjectivity (J. Butler 1997), which includes the possibility of a greater engagement with other groups of the African Diaspora and with the diasporic subject position itself. The fact that diaspora identifications are usually maintained in urban contexts, where multiple identification options are juxtaposed, accelerates the problem of authenticity and origins as these are determined reactively. And this question of authenticity, among other things, draws diaspora into direct contiguity with religion.

## Diasporic Religion

If diaspora is contested, religion is even more so.<sup>9</sup> To critically evaluate their relation, so as to justify the phrase *diasporic religion*, I begin by attempting to sketch a rough profile of diasporic religion.

Religious bases for identity are enhanced through exile (Herberg 1960; R. B. Williams 1988). Religious and national identifications may be fused in idealized representations of the departed land (Tweed 1997: 95; Orsi 1999: 56): to be Garifuna in the New York diaspora, for example, is a sentiment especially acquired in the practice of Garifuna *religion*. As migrants are forced to assimilate in the economic or productive sectors of life, they maintain a sense of continuity with the past primarily in cultural domains, such as religion, music, or style (Mintz and Price 1992; Gilroy 1993: 40, 57; Clifford 1994: 313).<sup>10</sup> Where Garifuna canoe building or cassava cultivation are impossible for migrants, religious performance becomes more important as a source of ethnic affiliation and for maintaining memories of home. Third, diasporic religion stresses “horizontal” over “vertical,” social dimensions, as a shared exile status and a sense of equality take primacy over homeland hierarchies, opening spaces for the reworking of gender, class, ethnicity and religious authority (Tweed 1997: 97; Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares 2001: 270). Membership in the religion becomes more important than status within it, inverting the valence that obtains in the homeland, where religious membership may not be a conscious issue. A fourth characteristic of this profile is that diasporic religion does not merely reproduce homeland religion but transforms it in response to constraints and opportunities posed by the host society (Warner 1998; Levitt 2001; McAlister 2002). Fifth, changes in diaspora religious communities transform the homeland through processes of social and financial remittances and actual physical returns (Foner 1978; Clifford 1994; Levitt 2001; Johnson 2002b). Through such transformations, both “locative” and “utopian” religious styles, religious acts and words based in geopiety and those detaching identity from territorial origins, take hold and exist simultaneously as distinct modes of religious action (Jonathan Smith 1978, 1987; Whitehouse 2000, 2004), so that diasporic religious identifications may begin to conflict with homeland religious practice (Hall 1996b; P. Werbner 2000). Sixth, diasporic religion, as a subculture stimulated by rival groups itself, is in part reactive, responding to comparison, boundary work, and defensive definition with and against religious neighbors who were in most cases absent or less numerous in homelands. A key part of such boundary work entails the discursive invocation and attempts at stabilization of what constitutes a group’s authentic “tradition,” leading to creative innovations and sometimes inventions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Handler 1988; Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1994; Palmié 1995; Zane 1999; Demerath 2001; Weber 2002: 47; Clarke 2004).

Finally, like diasporas in general, diasporic religion is not simply bestowed by imputed geographic, ethnic, or racial continuities, though such continuities may provide its tools. Diasporic religious identifications are created and maintained through the work of memory, transit, communication, consumption, political contest and, not least, of ritual.

While this profile is useful, and serves as a baseline for the case of the Garifuna, the relation between diaspora and religion can be developed further. Diasporas do not merely express or carry religions: in a certain sense, they make them.

*If religions are sometimes the cause of diasporas, diasporas sometimes make religions.* The classic case of diasporic religion, Judaism, proffers important leads for comparison. The etymological and discursive history of the term *diaspora* is strongly marked by Judaism. Indeed, when the phrase *African Diaspora* was first put in print by George Shepperson in the 1960s, he called it a metaphor drawn from the Jewish case (1968: 152). In one sense, of course, the Jewish diaspora can be said to have been “caused by” religion, by the resistance of Jews to the imperial religions of their conquerors. But it has also been argued that the diaspora caused Judaism.

For the ancient Greeks who gave us the word *diaspora*, the prospect of exile from one’s land was a thoroughly religious problem: it was impossible to give up your land without also surrendering your religion, and vice versa (Tuan 1977: 154). But as Martin Baumann (2000) points out, *diaspora* was an ambivalent term for Jews. It described the move out of Palestine between the fifth and first centuries B.C.E., but it did not always imply forcible removal or exile, and it carried within it a soteriology of the anticipated return to the homeland. The Jewish dispersion therefore was not merely a loss but also a great source of vitality. “Babylon” was a cipher not only of exile and the loss of sovereignty, but also of a revitalized Judaism (R. Cohen 1997: 4–5). Out of the diaspora emerged an incipient scriptural canon, synagogues under the leadership of charismatic prophets, the exegetical style based in contact and communication with rival traditions, and the very notion, value, and ritualization of return. In other words, Cohen suggests, Babylon was the crucible that, in a sense, made Judaism into a fully articulated religion.

Jonathan Z. Smith articulated the matter somewhat differently (1987: 94–95). The destruction of the Temple brought forth of necessity a more portable, transmissible style of Judaism, one based not on temple ritual but rather on religious law and its interpretation, the Mishnah. Similarly, in Christianity, as the faith expanded, the ritual requirement

of visiting the Jerusalem shrines of saints was replaced after the fourth century by the calendar of saints' days, changing a system of religious practice based in ritualizations of specific places into one that was utopian and mobile. In the context of the Americas, as Sabine MacCormack has shown, the Spanish destruction of Andean material religious representations forced Andeans to rethink and articulate theological concepts in newly systematic ways (1991: 408–11). And Harvey Whitehouse (2000, 2004) has theorized through Indonesian cases how a religion may shift from a primarily ritual, “imagistic” mode of transmission to a primarily “doctrinal” mode correlated with its capacity for spatial and social extension. It is this line of thought leads to the comparative proposition that diasporization makes religions.

How so? First, diasporas force the hand of practitioners using religious discourses and actions. Where once they were unmarked parts of the social environment and its quotidian routine, religious words and acts now become the objects of conscious selection. They must be planned for, allotted space, deliberated, and settled on. Which ideas and rituals must at all costs be recollected, retained and revived, and which can be left aside? By what criteria? Who decides? For groups in exile or emigration, religion is reified by being dislodged from its embedded, unspoken status to becoming a discrete object of contemplation and contest (P. Brown 1981; Jonathan Smith 1987; R. Cohen 1997; Levitt 2001). As John Thornton (1998: 235) noted with respect to the recreation of African religions in the Americas, “The merging of religions requires something more than simply mixing forms and ideas from one religion with those of another. It requires a reevaluation of the basic concepts and sources of knowledge of both religions in order to find common ground.” This critical reevaluation can intensify religious sentiments, discourses and practices, as in the infamous Herberg hypothesis (1960: 27–28).

According to Herberg, although immigrants to the United States were expected to assimilate in most respects, they were also expected to retain their old religion; hence religion became the expression of ethnic specificity and heritage. Arguably this remains the case for immigrants to the United States who find religion to be conducive to collective action, and the thesis has been convincingly updated (Warner 1993). Yet it does not inevitably or universally hold true. Religious acceleration depends on the status of religion in the receiving country. It is not at all clear, for example, that Jamaicans emigrating to London become more religious by virtue of that transit in the same way that Koreans have

done in the United States, as “religion” is not a privileged and protected category for social organization in Great Britain as it is in the United States. That is why, rather than simply echo Herberg, I say that religion is created as a discrete category of conscious reflection and action and that its “hand is forced.” As it becomes a problem for reflection, religion may be either forfeited or embraced more fervently than before. What it will surely not do is remain the same.

Second, diasporas make religions in the sense that they demand public recognition and summon new versions responding to that demand. The most obviously public (and mobile) medium of transmission is that of texts. Though once-indigenous religions becoming diasporic do not inevitably become text-based religions, they must at least become to a certain degree “public.” Their relative security in the hostland—their legitimacy as a recognized and protected “religion” whatsoever—depends on a persuasive presentation (Vertovec 2000: 149). Going public entails the articulation of cultural products so that they are perceived as both legible and relevant, or at least tolerable, to a broader audience. When indigenous religions become diasporic, they must become at least modestly more cosmopolitan in their appeal—available and recognizable to audiences that did not produce them, and which may be distant in time and space from the site of their origins. Newly arrived religions may remain “under the radar” in a host society for a certain period, but their long-term endurance requires the acquisition of stable institutional niches; this in turn demands the rationalization of their style in previously unknown ways. This was the case, for example, with the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería. Once a secret religion of immigrant communities in Miami and New York, in the last decade it has acquired greater long-term security by surviving legal scrutiny of its practice of animal sacrifice, by marshaling a thoroughgoing defensive theology, and by reinventing itself as a church (do Campo 1995; Palmié 1996; Johnson 2005).

Third, diasporas make religions in the sense that they generate a spatial trail, an itinerary of sites which, by signifying golden ages of organic integrity and autonomy, present multiple horizons of memory for adherents. To be sure, emigrants spatially and ideologically replant rituals in new sites. Haitian devotees of Vodou found a new social niche in New York at the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Brooklyn (McAlister 1998). Cubans, including practitioners of Santería, reoriented themselves to the shrine of Our Lady of Charity in Miami (Tweed 1997). Cuban American *paleros* and *santeros* (devotees of the Afro-Cuban

religions of Palo Monte and Santería) rewrote city maps in accord with their own analogical logic of religious correspondences (David Brown 1999, 2003). When attached to new sites, religious objects and practices signify within a new system of relations, shifting the meanings they communicate (Sahlins 1976, 1985; Ortner 1984; Sewell 1999; Vásquez and Marquardt 2003).

But even as some features of diasporic religion are transferred to new sites, remembered spaces become sacralized as pivots of imagined communities (Laclau 1990; B. Anderson 1991; Appadurai 1996). And here religious and commercial links are strongly imbricated. Continuity with the homeland is brokered by merchants of material goods who sell the “authentic” to those in exile. In this commerce of memory making, the pure and original are rendered valuable commodities, so that diasporas and “purist” claims about origins are intimately associated (Matory 2005: 116). The anthropologist Karen Richman has even argued, with respect to Vodou, that the Haitian diaspora made religion in the sense that a whole new class of ritual specialists arose in the homeland to mediate absent migrants’ suddenly problematic relation to the spirits left behind (2005: 119, 128).

Did the diaspora make Garifuna religion? By being exiled from the place of their ethnogenesis, St. Vincent in the eastern Antilles, the Black Caribs regained it as an idealized symbolic homeland. Two centuries later, when many Garifuna left Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala for New York City, the lands of their Central American home villages became idealized as perfect repositories of authentic, rooted identity. They became sacred as places set apart in memory; places to which Garifuna return with expectations of regaining traditional knowledge and experience; places religiously idealized, and materially bought and consumed, to save them from being defined by quotidian life in the United States. In the words of Tomoko Masuzawa (mediating the spirit of Walter Benjamin): “Once the reproductions proliferate and scatter about in the world, these countless simulacra do not leave the original alone in peace but . . . ‘reactivate’ the original” (1993: 18).

Moreover, the processes of migration, the reification (and sometimes intensification) of religion, the recoding of religion into transmissible forms, and its replanting in new sites of attachment can yield more surprising results than merely the idealization of the place left behind. New diasporic horizons may arise as historical memory is reworked (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1989: 1). In such cases religion is not just a sacralizing process, surrounding previously banal ideas and personages

with auras of infinite and unchanging authority, but rather a set of transformations in which ethnicity and even “race” are smelted down and remade. In the migration to New York, the Garifuna found Africa. They “became African,” or reacquired a conscious Africanness, by virtue of joining the religious African Diaspora, through a series of complex processes of remembering and rerouting.

*Diasporic religion is re-membered religion.* Diasporic religions are assembled memories of the self in space that can be transmitted sufficiently well to attract a following, become a collective memory, and be sustained over time. Enduring over time is a problem for any religion, because between a symbol’s production and its reception and reimplementation yawns not only the chasm of space but also that of culture. A symbol that had meaning in the homeland must be attached to new sites of meaning in the receiving land. How then can continuities of meaning be carried over from person to person, and from application to application, so that a religion maintains its distinguishing character?

Here I give close attention to a classic text on collective memory by Maurice Halbwachs (1992). Memory, in Halbwachs’s assessment, is not primarily a matter of individual psychology but rather a social pattern into which the individual is born. It is a collective phenomenon in part because it is mediated by language: its precondition is words, each of which is embedded in its own history and conventions (173). It is also a collective phenomenon because the individual is socialized into a specific group comprising many individual members’ recollections but relatively independent of any one of them (39). It is only to the degree that individual thought is placed in a social framework, and participates in its memory, that the act of recollection becomes possible (38; cf. Cassirer 1955).<sup>11</sup> Collective memory also exceeds and stands independent from individual memories because it is spatially defined in landmarks and territory (Halbwachs 1992: 183, 201, 204, 220, 222). This definition too composes a kind of dialectical process. Even as memory carries its own landmarks everywhere, it must be constantly reattached to the current space the group occupies, to objects that revivify remembrances (Halbwachs 1992: 95; cf. Massey 1993: 146; Durkheim 1995: 232–33). It is the materiality of religions, Halbwachs argues, their embeddedness in rites and “material operations,” that provides their most stable component, as ritual action allows for multiple interpretations and is less subject than doctrine to splintering (116; cf. Turner 1967; Kertzer 1988). To the degree that it becomes impossible to renew religious memories through physical contact with their place of generation,

therefore—say, under conditions of exile or relentless transit—memory suffers the dual processes of becoming “impoverished” and “congealed” (Halbwachs 1992: 106).

The two are directly related, as it is the risk of a religion’s being forgotten that leads to the “congealing” of dogma and the transformation of sites and objects into second-order symbols that (metaphorically) represent the remembered territory rather than (metonymically) act as indices of it through contiguity (Halbwachs 1992: 117). Objects and sites that constituted the ritual apparatus of a religion’s initial creation are transformed into “a teaching, a notion, or a symbol,” each of which “takes on a meaning” (102). In the refrain “Next year in Jerusalem!” for example, the specificity of the ritual site and its “texture” (Lefebvre 1991: 42, 57, 235) are rendered smooth and seamless, and endowed with a previously absent coherence. This transformation can have spatial and social effects. Religions are transformed by immigration when their idiosyncratic textures are “smoothed” for adaptation to already legitimated religious sites. This process allows for the enlargement and transmission of a religion as a collective memory (Halbwachs 1992: 201), as previously “local” religion is joined to larger regional or transnational solidarities. But it also changes the religion into something new.

Several points from Halbwachs’s work remain salient. The emigrant carriers of Caribbean religions arriving in U.S. cities must on the one hand discover, select, and stabilize agreed-upon new places of devotion, and on the other accomplish this task in relation to a cityscape already thoroughly parsed and designated by other religious and secular forces. The places selected must offer a “hook”: they must seem familiar and relatively consonant with the objectives and practices of newly arriving African Diaspora devotees. For example, a mosque, a McDonald’s restaurant, and a used-car dealership are unlikely (though not unthinkable) sites of religious implantation.

McAlister’s (1998) study of the use of the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at 115th Street in East Harlem is illustrative on this score: Haitians’ use of the site for pilgrimages in honor of the Vodou deity Ezili Danto depends, in part, on the Italian American community’s assent and welcome. According to McAlister, the influx of Haitians is viewed positively by the site’s older users because the Haitians have buoyed and revitalized what was once a dying ritual, precariously maintained by a waning Italian American constituency. Similarly, when the Garifuna began to establish a presence in the New York African Diaspora, they did so in part by calling on the resources of places like

the African Diaspora and Caribbean Culture Center on West 58th Street. Though the center was established by an Afro–Puerto Rican santera, Marta Moreno Vega, and serves primarily as a Santería resource center, the Garifuna were welcomed as an expansion of the center’s broad purpose. It offered both propitious and familiar hooks—the Spanish language, a broad-based clientele of people of color, and a religion based in material exchange leading to spirit possession—and space for newcomers who corroborated that broad religious profile. Yet, if this process generates new religious alliances by expanding the “African diasporic religions” identification, from the perspective of those operating the center, for the Garifuna the new threat posed by the possible absorption of Garifuna religion within a larger diasporic set provokes a reactive quest for determining specific, unique, and “authentic” Garifuna religious collective memories (Halbwachs 1992: 93, 98).

Spatial dislocation presents a religious crisis, but such crises call forth creative responses and religious innovations through the freedom from place (Tuan 1977: 152), and not only in religion. Migration provides previously unknown liberties for women, for example, offering means of independent wage earning and distance from family obligations (see, for example, Waters 1999: 92, 315). Migration also enables the formation of new and wider imagined religious communities and allows the Garifuna to rethink their practices as part and parcel of the African Diaspora. Their very subjection within a new hegemonic order generates new possibilities of memory making.<sup>12</sup>

## The African Diaspora

To recapitulate: diasporas are social identifications based on shared memory bridges linking a lived space and a left-behind place. The remembered land must be sustained through periodic physical returns, imagined and ritualized returns, or both. If to be “in diaspora” is to reside in two or more spaces, at least imaginatively, it is also to occupy a memory space between them. At least two gaps are implied in diaspora religious “identity”: between words or acts in a hostland and those in a homeland (a gap in space), and within those groups from one moment in time to the next, between a recollected past and a projected future (a gap in time and memory). Being “in diaspora” is best understood not as the final closure of those gaps, but rather as the active engagement with, and evocation of, such gaps as a source of meaning.

It follows that diasporic religions are never simply given, either in racial ciphers like blackness or ethnic ones like Garifuna-ness or Africanness. In cases of complete assimilation, or lack of access to the resources required to build and maintain the links, African Diaspora religions may be forgotten. And some individuals may simply choose never to join the African Diaspora, whether through religion or any other means.

The distinguishing analytical feature of the modern African Diaspora, associated with the Atlantic slave trade, is its emergence in relation to race (Palmer 1998: 64 n. 2). Membership in the African Diaspora is not usually a selective identity, because its racial correlation with blackness is imposed rather than chosen. Though it can be more or less embraced as an individual expression, that choice occurs in a larger context of imposed identity. In the United States, for example, pigmentocracy continues in force, as the Garifuna are read by outsiders in relation to African Americans and treated to the same rigidly racialist, and often also racist, classifications.<sup>13</sup> The racial bias against Caribbean migrants of color remains, albeit sometimes masked as an issue of class, in the segmentation of neighborhoods and job markets, the availability of loans, and access to good schools. It is not entirely by choice, for example, that the Garifuna, like so many other Caribbean immigrants, take up residence in Bronx or Brooklyn neighborhoods considered perilous by many whites, and that most typically work as live-in attendants for the sick or aged, to the detriment of their own households (cf. Zane 1999: 165).

Despite the force of this reception context, blackness and Africanness are not self-evidently linked: “becoming black” and “becoming African” are distinct, relatively autonomous processes. There is at best an elective affinity between black culture and African diasporic religious culture, just as there is only a loose overlapping between “race” and “ethnicity” (Hall 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). In fact, the two identifications are often at odds in the temporalities they signify. Black identity often stands for futurity, variously as a cipher of global cosmopolitan modernity or, conversely, inner-city postmodern decay. African diasporic religious identifications, by contrast, are often anchored to the past through ciphers of ancient origins and roots. “Black” and “African diasporic” identifications each have their mythologies, key symbolic tropes, and ritualizations that cannot be easily equated. My first analytical objective, therefore, is to complicate each and unlink them, to show how one could argue that the Garifuna, a “black” people, have only recently joined the African Diaspora through religion.

THE INCIPIENT AFRICAN DIASPORA:  
THE IDEA OF A SHARED AFRICANNESS

The idea of an African Diaspora has been present for much longer than the phrase itself. It may be as old as plantation slavery, beginning with the fictive kin networks generated by the dislocation from Africa. For example, the historian Katia Mattoso writes of the existential indeterminacy confronted by slaves arrived in Brazil: “But try to imagine what it must have been like for a Muslim to find himself in a group of slaves practicing an animistic religion, or for a Bantu to join a community where Yoruban influence dominated, or, even more complicated, for a creole slave to confront black religions whose meaning he no longer understood. All these individuals must have been forced to find some compromise, to grope toward a *modus vivendi* in which unresolved contradictions must have produced constant tensions” (Mattoso 1989: 127).

Finding common ground required both conversion and convergence of subjectivities, and religion often provided an emergent, interethnic *lingua franca*, though which religion would play that role was far from a given. According to João Reis, describing nineteenth-century Bahia, Brazil, “Islam . . . was a heavyweight contender in a cultural free-for-all that also included the Yoruba orisha cult, Aja-Fon Vodum, the Angolan ancestor spirit cult, among other African religious manifestations. Add to this a creole Catholicism, and you will have an idea of the religious plurality in the African and Afro-Bahian communities of the time” (1993: 97).

Beyond this plurality, however, and allowing for the strategizing of shared projects like slave rebellions, lay some sense of an emergent Afro-Atlantic culture consisting of a loose association of aesthetic, religious, political, familial, and linguistic overlaps (Thornton 1998: 211). James Sweet, for this reason, even argued that “becoming ‘African’ was essentially an American phenomenon” (2003: 115–17), as diasporans created their homeland through a process of hybridization between ethnic groups formerly distinct in their self-understandings (cf. Palmer 1998; Matory 2005: 3, 10, 36).

The discursive notion of something like a diaspora, even if the term itself was not yet invoked, has been in play at least since the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> In the earlier stages of this incubation, at least, a putative relation to an actual, territorial Africa was often part of the consensus, whether in actual transport links and plans of return, as proposed by Marcus Garvey, or in discourses on continuities with the soil of Africa. When the Martinican Aimé Césaire first used the term *négritude* in 1939, for example, in his *Notebook of a Return to My Native*

*Land (Cahier d'un retour au pays natal)*, it framed blackness in close relation to African territorial identity: "My blackness is not a tower or a cathedral, it plunges into the red flesh of the soil."<sup>15</sup>

#### THE NONTERRITORIAL AFRICAN DIASPORA

The African Diaspora did not exist by that name before the 1950s (Appiah 1992; Gilroy 1993) and was only definitively established in 1966 with a seminal article by George Shepperson in *African Forum*, titled "The African Abroad or the African Diaspora."<sup>16</sup> It was solidified as a discursive entity a decade later through the publication of a string of volumes that included the expression in their titles, edited by Joseph Harris (1971), Jacob Drachler (1975), Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg (1976), and Graham W. Irwin (1977) (Alpers 2001: 7). This modest academic explosion pushed the term into academic currency and common usage.

The discursive arrival of *African Diaspora* was precisely contemporaneous with the post-1960 migrations from the Caribbean, which at once granted the new project a broader front and exposed its fissures. The Caribbean groups who arrived en masse in the United States and Europe had disparate ethnic, racial, and religious self-understandings, and the sudden copresence and confrontation between Portuguese-, Spanish-, French-, and English-speaking groups, all presenting claims on or resistance to the new nomenclature, strained the newly minted diaspora's links to even an imagined Africa. The putative organic bonds of territoriality were replaced by late-modern signifying chains, and, at least among intellectuals, the African Diaspora was redefined as a derivative of shared suffering under slavery and subsequent racist regimes: the sublime slave (Gilroy 1993) on the repeating island (Bénitez-Rojo 1996). Here was a means of salvaging a common political project of resistance and partially shared structures of feeling. The new identification would be one not essentialized in race, ethnicity, or territory, but rather focused on history and the shared experiences of subjugation and racial terror (Mintz and Price 1992; Appiah 1992; Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1994; West 2001; but cf. Lovejoy 1997, Law and Lovejoy 1997, Thornton 1998, and Sweet 2003 for a somewhat different perspective). Africanness was rethought as a genealogy of claims and practices rather than a biological determination or territory (Matory 2005: 15).

Membership in the African Diaspora, it followed, was not an identification deriving from "hard" racial or ethnic essences. Rather, it was

acquired through cultural processes—what Weber called “conscious monopolistic closure” around certain features—that entail a kind of “conversion” of consciousness (Sansone 2003: 10).<sup>17</sup> The disjuncture remains between the rigid racialist, and racist, classifications migrants were and are subjected to—but which had also provided the planks for the initial platform of the African Diaspora—and the newer idea of the African Diaspora as an imagined community variably adopted by agents in their own representational practices. So, for example, Césaire’s *négritude* is still a point of reference, but it is now eclipsed by *migrITUDE* as the buzzword of the new Franco-African literati, rendering the territorial consciousness of Africa increasingly abstract.

#### SEPARATING ETHNICITY FROM “RACE”

The uncoupling of ethnic from racial identifications has taken especially curious forms in the area of religion, as many Cuban and Brazilian practitioners of the religions of the African Diaspora are not black at all, either in their self-understandings or the perceptions of others (Pierucci and Prandi 2000). To take an extreme example, someone who identifies racially as “white” may under certain conditions of “soft racialization” (Sansone 2003: 53) mark herself as ethnically African when it is advantageous to do so. Such voluntary double consciousness may present double value (Gilroy 1993: 91), the ability to see and work with multiple audiences. White Cubans or Brazilians may become “African” by initiation into religions such as Santería, Candomblé, or Umbanda—though their willingness to do so depends on the ability to shift ethnic codes in other contexts.<sup>18</sup> Thus pan-African or African diasporic identifications must in at least some cases be distinguished from black modern identifications, the latter presenting a kind of “lateral diaspora” (Clifford 1994: 306) based on mutually recognized phenotype, style, music, musicality, and other tastes and habits. Multicentered and utopian, they have no reference to an idealized homeland or any aspiration of return.<sup>19</sup>

Given the fractures between African diasporic and black identifications, African diasporic religious culture may or may not be part of a person’s repertoire. Some Caribbean emigrants become black through migration and in consequence of the globalized dissemination, and domination, of U.S.-produced “black culture” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1998; England 1999). Others join the African Diaspora through associations with African diasporic religious affiliations. Some understand themselves as black but do not locate their ancestral homelands in or in

relation to Africa (Gonzalez 1988; Torres and Whitten 1998: 21). Conversely, others locate the homeland there so naturally that they do not view such descent as worthy of the marked emphasis that diaspora consciousness often elicits (Appiah 1992: 6–7).<sup>20</sup> If joining the African Diaspora entails a conversion of subjectivity, the practical implications for collective identifications and representations remain thoroughly underdetermined (Gilroy 1991, 1993; Gordon and Anderson 1999; West 2001: 141; Sansone 2003). The distinctiveness of the African Diaspora perhaps lies in the confusion between the way its members read themselves in and through elective subjectivities related variously to blackness and Africanness, and the way they may be read by others as simply black within the suffocating monopolistic closure of U.S.-style pigmentocracy.

Still, even the race system faced by Caribbean migrants in the United States is not utterly determinate. The fact that ethnic and racial identifications are not the same, and that the conversions that bring them into being or transform them are not the same either, is apparent in the ways the Garifuna read themselves into racial strictures. Sarah England's survey of a sample of Garifuna declarations of their "race" on the U.S. census provides an example: 41 percent declared themselves "Afro-American/Black," 38 percent as "Hispanic," 16 percent as "other/Garifuna," and 5 percent as "other/Afro-Hispanic" (England 1999: 26). Whereas the first identifier indicates a race-based identification, the other three suggest one based at least partly in ethnicity or culture—in language, history, and geography.

The selection from among these identifications depends, presumably, on choices made about what to leave behind and on perceptions about already existing networks to which Garifuna social actors can attach themselves. Many such African diasporic networks available to arriving migrants, including the Garifuna, are religious ones. In the next sections I evaluate how the host city—New York City, in this case—is indigenized by incoming Caribbean migrants through African Diaspora religions.

## African Diasporic Religions in New York: Making a World in the City

I define *African diasporic religions* as those sets of religious discourses and practices that invoke Africa as a horizon of memory, authenticity, and sacred authority—whether Africa is physically known, imagined, or

ritually created—and which consider the distance from that idealized place as a problem that is remedied by rendering the place as present in ritual. Therefore African diasporic religions can be, and are, performed by those not of African descent. This view contrasts with the main sort of rival definition of African diasporic religion—that is, any religion performed by persons of African descent. African diasporic religions constitute a cultural category rather than a racially defined one. Still, the majority of its practitioners are, in fact, of African descent; in consequence, African diasporic religions in the United States are forged and maintained under strictures of racism similar to those endured by people of color. What is that constrained space like, and how do African diasporic religions occupy and reshape it?

Afro-Caribbeans in New York, including the Garifuna, tend to live in South Bronx or East-Central Brooklyn, an area Robert Orsi described as a “post-apocalyptic moonscape, part bombed-out Dresden, part Fort Apache” (Orsi 1999: 7). This landscape reflects the economic structure of the city: Manhattan is the showplace serviced by the Bronx and Brooklyn, replicating on a local scale Immanuel Wallerstein’s description of a world economic structure consisting of a racially defined “core” and “periphery” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 79; cf. McAlister 2002: 187). The workers come in under cover of darkness to sweep the downtown clean for each new day of Manhattan’s dealing and dining. Then they return home across the rivers. The subway ride north offers a racial index of the shifting space: north of the 125th Street station, after the train passes under the Harlem River, the commuters are mostly black and brown, and English is far from the dominant language heard.

Yet the rationally planned cityscape is far from empty of religious life; nor does it necessarily produce, to take Max Weber’s phrase, a “shell as hard as steel.”<sup>21</sup> The pedestrian in the city engages in constant idiosyncratic enunciations of space. Her movements are in part directed by proper names, monuments, and lights, yet she makes the street her own by appropriating that space, selectively drawing to consciousness her own memories and associations that mark and sacralize certain spaces, passing over and forgetting others (Certeau 1984: 104). Michel de Certeau’s (1984: 93–95) figuration of the World Trade Center as the city’s panoptic eye and sacred center (now absented) serves as a prescient reminder of how rationally planned cities are bent by subversive appropriations and “symbolic hijackings” of space (Bourdieu 2000: 185), whether pedestrian or airborne. In the interstices of these enunciations occurs a “contagious intimacy” of immigrants and natives, constantly

placing the boundaries of culture at risk (Robert Park, quoted in Orsi 1999: 30). The character of urban religion, at least of those religions not strategically built into the cityscape—consider Saint Paul’s Church alongside the site of the World Trade Center, or the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, powerfully paired with Columbia University—is one of disjuncture between territory and practice, or “ecological dissonance” (K. Brown 1999: 86). That disjuncture is a religious crisis that calls forth creativity and innovation.

Religious memory and transmission first require representation within the limits and available repertoire of spaces and materials in the new territory. For “second diaspora” religions, already reconfigured from Africa to the Caribbean, and now again from the Caribbean to U.S. cities, the mapping of religions onto new territory occurs by three processes, which I simplify here for heuristic purposes. The first is one of metaphoric, metonymic, and synecdochic *hooking*: through the use of specific religious symbols and sites, immigrants attach homeland practices to the new landscape as they perceive similarities to other objects and sites already present in the new terrain. But these objects and sites in the hostland already carry their own semantic load. When homeland religious practices are carried in relation to this new material context, the set of references and therefore also the experience of ritual practice are shifted (Turner 1967: 45–47; Sahlin 1981: 46; Parkin 1991: 219; Sewell 1999: 58–60). The second process is *telescoping* (Bastide 1978a: 247–48), the condensation of objects and practices into ever-smaller spaces.<sup>22</sup> The third process is that of additivity (Mintz and Price 1976: 10, 45, 51), as African Diaspora religions begin to read themselves in relation to each other.

### HOOKING

David Brown asked a Cuban priestess of Santería in New York how she continued her work without the territorial resources she had at home. She gave an example: “You have to find a mountain [to revere Obatala, the Santería sky god]. Where will I find a mountain in New York City? You have to find a similarity, Riverside Drive, you stand at the base of it [the rocks] and to you that’s a mountain” (1999: 169). She hooked Obatala onto Riverside Drive in New York with a chain of associations. Yet the apparently simple substitution of urban rocks for mountain does not just allow the ritual action to occur; it opens possibilities for new significations. Riverside Drive might itself be linked to Obatala; the signification

*mountain* might be transferred to anything one stands at the base of; an advertisement for Busch beer admonishing viewers to “head for the mountains” might take on a different connotation from the one its producers intended; or a stone from the site might be placed on an altar to represent the mountain, and replace even the need to return to Riverside Drive.

The yearly Haitian pilgrimage to Sodo, with its shrine to Notre Dame du Mont Carmel—transcultured with the Vodou spirit (*Iwa*) Ezili Danto—is now performed by a visit to the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (McAlister 1998: 124; K. Brown 1999: 90). To preserve them, the rites were reinscribed on new maps. The same process occurs when *santeros* make the Statue of Liberty a site of the Afro-Cuban *ocha* (Yoruba: *orisha*) Olokun, god of the sea, or visit the East and Hudson Rivers as the domain of Ochun, goddess of fresh waters and femininity (David Brown 1999: 169).<sup>23</sup>

In another example, when Rastafarians rename North America as “the heart of Babylon,” and thereby cast Jamaica and Africa as authentic centers (Hepner 1998: 209), or refer to Miami as “Kingston 21” and Brooklyn as “Little Jamaica,” such valuations involve hooking. The spatial mapping of Jamaica onto U.S. cities entails the erection of dance halls, reggae clubs, smoking yards or “weed gates,” select storefront vendors of Rasta apparel, ritual paraphernalia, and *ital* (“natural” and approved) foods (Hepner 1998: 206).

## TELESCOPING

Telescoping is a common tactic in Santería and Vodou, which rely on distinctions between humanized and “wild” spaces. The everyday Vodou ritual practice of pouring libations of rum (*kleren*) on the earth for the ancestors of Ginen (Africa) may now be accomplished by in a high-rise apartment by pouring the libations into a pail of dirt. The pail becomes “the earth,” which extends metonymically to represent “family roots” (K. Brown 1999: 85, 99). To reproduce the traditional Vodou agricultural rite of “cooking the yams,” which lasts three days and is conducted on the family rural plot, the yam harvest is represented by a little pile of symbolic yams and the land by a few leafy branches, with Brooklyn’s Prospect Park standing in for the *Gran Bwa* (Big Wood) against which cultivated land signifies (K. Brown 87, 91).

For *santeros*, the houses of the Yoruba-Cuban *ochas* are transposed and condensed to *canastilleros*, the shelved cupboard shrines of urban

apartments (Murphy 1988; David Brown 1989, 1999: 161–62). Basements are the equivalent of the courtyards used as Cuban ritual sites, just as a park serves as “the forest” (*el monte*) and the backyard, for those lucky enough to have one, as “the bush” (David Brown 1989, 1999: 164–67; Murphy 1988: 57).

Telescoping and hooking do not simply mirror homeland religious practice in miniature by preserving memory. The process entails transformation and sometimes ritual reductions. As Roger Bastide’s monumental *African Religions of Brazil* shows in great detail, the move from one social world to another entails loss, as collective representations lacking a place or function in the “modern world” fall away (1978a: 242). Religion is a set of memories that must be routinized and transmitted. Without the land, and landmarks, to which memory can be affixed, constitutive parts disappear, because they are forgotten. Much like Halbwachs, Bastide was mistaken, however, in viewing religious dislocation and reterritorialization as a zero-sum game in which preservation and forfeit were the only alternatives (Bastide 1978a: 253). The African diasporic religions are massively prolific.

#### ADDITIVITY

The reproduction of “traditional” religious structures in New York entails infusion and transformation. When the Vodou rite of cooking the yams is telescoped to symbolic yams, the chthonic dimension of performance is reduced, and the problem of social relations—exacerbated in the cityscape by the division of families, both biological and ritual—is accorded greater weight (K. Brown 1999: 89; 1991: 47). In New York, with the detachment of Vodou ritual sites from the actual earth where ancestors are buried, spirit possession by specific family ancestors is infrequent, while possession by the lwa Gede, the generalized spirit of the dead, grows (K. Brown 1991: 368). The “hot” Vodou Petwo deities, meanwhile, known for their fast work, attract greater numbers of devotees in New York than in Haiti, as they better reflect the needs of emigrants (McAlister 1992: 21).<sup>24</sup>

National and racial significations are also brought to the fore. As Haitians in New York make “pilgrimages” to the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, this particular Virgin Mary and her associated lwa, Ezili Danto, become icons of national identity as well as of religious devotion, all the more so because the site, and festal day, must be shared and spatially contested with Italian pilgrims (Orsi 1985, 1992; McAlister 1998: 134).

Religions may also begin to be read against and combined with each other. Spiritual Baptists (or Converted) who have emigrated from St. Vincent are influenced by Trinidadian religious style in Brooklyn and may even adopt the Yoruba orishas in their practice (Zane 1999: 167–69, 175). In the Spanish Harlem barrio, Santería takes on a Puerto Rican style as Santerismo, combined with Espiritismo to reduce the wide range of ochas to “Seven African Powers” (Murphy 1988: 48; Brandon 1993: 107–8).<sup>25</sup> In this condensed form, the power of Africa is available for purchase in an aerosol spray can (“20% Gratis!”) from any local botánica. For many New York practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions, the distinct homeland religious lineages of the ochas of Santería, the spirits of dead ancestors (*muertos*) of Palo Monte—an Afro-Cuban tradition with Kongo roots—and the spirit phalanxes of Espiritismo—a possession-based tradition originating in France and North America in the nineteenth century—are combined in ritual practice, remaking the religious grammar through code switching. The same ritual act or object can be discursively framed for different contexts and objectives (David Brown 1999, 2003; Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2003). The ochas may be especially invoked in relation to questions of “roots,” tradition, and Africanness, compared with the Palo *ngangas* or *muertos*, often marshaled in support of missions involving money or lust (Palmié 2002). The ancestral spirits are discursively invoked for family concerns, while the discourse of Espiritismo may be viewed as effective in contexts calling for “scientific” debates or ecumenical religious comparisons on topics of evolution, spiritual cleansing, or reincarnation.

Stylistic crossovers in ritual practice are now also common. At one Garifuna ceremony I attended in the Bronx, a woman in possession trance behaved in a manner neither I nor any Garifuna present had ever witnessed. She picked up burning candles to pour hot wax on her chest and shoulders, perhaps to prove her trance or give evidence of the power of the possessing spirit. Because such demonstrations are nonexistent in Garifuna homeland possession trances but do occur in Vodou, she may have learned the new expression at a Haitian rite.

But such code switching between once-distinct religions especially occurs in relation to second-order verbalizations. Among the various groups who view and identify themselves collectively as African Diaspora religious practitioners, and therefore as members of a single supraethnic religious style, it is now common to hear comparisons of the various subreligions and their deities, and crediting them with distinct values. Santería is known for its attention to lineage and its divination specialists

(*babalawos*); Vodou for its pageantry and the dramatic “heat” of its possession dances; Palo for its speed and ruthless efficiency; Garifuna religion for its rustic authenticity—the latter based on its vernacular and ceremonial use of an indigenous rather than European language, and the rough-hewn style of its drums and drumming.

What are the processes by which an emigrant group expands this religious superform in the city, joining the African Diaspora and thereby bringing into focus a new historical horizon of self-understanding? What are the consequences for practice in the homeland when it does so? With the conceptual apparatus of this chapter in hand, I examine these questions with respect to the Garifuna. The story begins with the historical formation of the Garifuna as a society with its own religious repertoire, beginning with its ethnogenesis on the isle of St. Vincent (Yurumein), the place that defined the first Garifuna diasporic horizon.