

## From the *Calendas* to the *Calenda*: On the Afro-Iberian Substratum in Black Performance Culture in the Americas

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*This article presents a new theory on the origin of the calenda (also known as calinda, colinda, corlinda, and caringa) by analyzing the term from an Iberian perspective. It claims that the term should not be understood as a type of dance or song, but as a festive period in the Iberian calendar. It explains the calenda with reference to an Afro-Iberian substratum in Black performance culture in the Americas and highlights the role of brotherhoods.*

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### Keywords

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IN HIS ACCOUNT ABOUT LOUISIANA FROM 1718 TO 1734, Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz mentioned how 300–400 Blacks used to gather on Sundays “under pretense of *calinda* (or of dancing).”<sup>1</sup> His words count as the first reference to Black performance culture in New Orleans. Like other Europeans who reported on slave dancing after him, Le Page du Pratz had no firsthand experience of what he saw and wrote down his impressions of a performance that was profoundly strange to him. He considered these “tumultuous gatherings” dangerous because they allegedly provided an opportunity to sell stolen objects and to “plot rebellions” (1758:352). Much has been speculated about the meaning and origin of the mysterious term *calinda*, also known as *calindae*, *caleinda*, *colinda*, *caringa*, *corlinda*, or, more commonly, *calenda*, the form I will use in this article. The main reason for the uncertainties among contemporary scholars is the apparent contradictions in primary sources. Some eyewitnesses described the *calenda* as a lascivious handkerchief dance, while others claimed it to be a mock war performance with sticks or a satirical song. Some located the origin of the performance in the Bight of Benin, while others claimed that it originated from the Kongo region<sup>2</sup> or that it was originally a European dance that had come to be adopted by Black slaves in the Americas. While the *calenda* has traditionally been understood as a typically Caribbean phenomenon—Marcos Sueiro called it “the universal Caribbean

dance” (1994:1)—this article presents an analysis of the performance from a broader Iberian perspective, including continental Latin America. It questions the widespread assumption that the term originally referred to a specific type of dance or song and claims that the apparent contradictions in descriptions of *calendas* in primary sources become clearer if the term is understood as a reference to a festive period in the Iberian calendar. It explains the *calenda* with reference to an Afro-Iberian substratum in Black performance culture in the Americas and highlights the importance of mutual-aid and burial societies modeled upon Afro-Iberian brotherhoods.

### *New Paradigm*

One of the most intriguing observations regarding the delicate topic of African heritage in the Americas comes from a missionary worker of the Moravian Church in the Dutch colony of Suriname, who noted in 1745 that the slaves in the capital Paramaribo “do not all belong to one nation but to several,” which forced them to use “Negro-English in order to communicate among themselves.” Yet whenever there was a funeral, “each nation conducts it in its own native language” (Staehelein 1913–1919:91). As will be shown in this article, concern over a decent funeral was a crucial element in the development of Black social structures in the diaspora. While the quote highlights the importance of interaction and adaptability, it also shows that the heterogeneity of the slave population and the necessary adaptation to the new social reality of the diaspora did not obliterate the desire to preserve certain customs from the African homeland. This desire may be the prime reason for the vast scholarly interest in Black performance culture, as expressed in the famous words of Eileen Southern: “The once prevalent ‘myth of the Negro past’—that enslavement caused them to lose their every vestige of the African heritage—is nowhere more firmly refuted than in the areas of music and dance” ([1971] 1997:57).

While I subscribe to Southern’s words, I do wish to point out that her reflections on African musical heritage in the diaspora ignored the impact of early European—primarily Portuguese—influence along the African west coast. It would, indeed, be wrong to assume that all enslaved Africans became exposed to European music only after arrival in the Americas. For instance, Rui de Pina wrote in his late fifteenth-century account that the Portuguese King John II (1481–1495) had not only sent crucifixes, chalices, and banners to the King of Kongo, but also church bells and pipe organs (de Pina [1492] 1992:105). Simão da Silva’s long list of Portuguese gifts sent to the King of Kongo in 1512 referred not only to mirrors from Venice, lace from Bruges, and textiles from India, but also to Portuguese frame drums, bells, and trumpets. The committee that was to deliver these gifts included an organ player and a bagpipe player (Brásio 1952–1971, Vol. I:247–53). An anonymous sixteenth-century account showed that the Portuguese King Manuel I (1495–1521) had also sent instructors to Africa to teach local people “how to sing plainchant to organ music” (Brásio 1969:82). That these European instruments were not just played and listened to by a small elite in the royal court is shown by Diogo de Santíssimo Santo, who observed in his late sixteenth-century diary that he had seen various choirs in Kongo performing Christian hymns and that one choir included a man who could “sing to the organ”

(Brásio 1952–1971, Vol. III:296). The transition of Luso-Kongolese musical culture to the Americas in the context of the slave trade is confirmed by Alonso de Sandoval, who in his early seventeenth-century writings on the slave population in Cartagena mentioned that “among [the Kongolese slaves] are many black men who are great Christians. Much of the clergy is this color, and they pride themselves on knowing how to play the organ” ([1627] 2008:41). All this indicates that the mixture of African and European musical elements is a process that initiated in Africa long before the first enslaved Africans arrived in North America. I therefore wish to distance myself from a tendency of selective nostalgia in the search for “African survivals” that traces Black musical culture back to an untouched, virgin African motherland.

Rather, I would like to suggest a new paradigm in the analysis of Black performance culture in the Americas by acknowledging the existence of an Afro-Iberian substratum. When studying the history of Black music and dance, it is important to note that virtually all members of the sixteenth-century charter generations in the Americas had previously lived on the Iberian Peninsula or in heavily Iberianized African societies such as the Cape Verde Islands and São Tomé (Green 2012:189, 194, 208). Since Portugal had been granted the commercial monopoly over Africa by Pope Nicholas V in 1455, all slaves destined to the Americas initially had to pass through Portugal. Portugal firmly maintained this monopoly until the mid-sixteenth century (Thornton 1998:155). John Chasteen believes that during their stay in Portugal, these Africans must have been influenced by Portuguese music and performance culture, and he claims that “the formative nature of these early developments must explain the powerful imprint of certain particularly Portuguese traits, such as processional dance, in diasporic dance culture” (2004:194).

We should add that from the late sixteenth until the mid-seventeenth century, Luanda was the dominant source of America-bound slaves, which Linda Heywood and John Thornton labeled “the Angolan wave” in the history of the transatlantic slave trade (2007:ix). Considering the profound Portuguese Catholic influence in the kingdom of Kongo and in Angola, there can be no doubt that a large percentage of these slaves shared familiarity with the Afro-Iberian customs previously introduced by the charter generations (Newitt 2010:13). As Joseph Miller argued, these West-Central African slaves lived in intimate contact “with predecessors who had arrived in small numbers from backgrounds in slavery in late medieval Iberia,” and “particularly those coming through Kongo channels, must have had a useful familiarity with Portuguese Christianity and used it to find places for themselves without relying on the more ‘African’ aspects of their origins” (2002:61). There is no reason, however, to assume that seventeenth-century Kongolese considered Catholic elements “un-African.” Enslaved Africans from Kongo and other regions with a strong Portuguese influence perceived these elements as a natural part of the culture they had grown up with. Like Islam, Catholicism has a centuries-old African history. As Marina de Mello e Souza rightly argued in relation to Kongolese slaves in Brazil, “Catholicism represented a link to their native Africa” (2005:83). Considering that a high percentage of slaves who arrived in the Americas until the mid-seventeenth century must have been familiar with Iberian customs, the existence of an Afro-Iberian substratum in Black culture in the Americas should not be surprising.

The importance of this substratum does not apply to present-day Latin America only. We should not forget that, with the exception of the northern periphery, virtually all territories ruled by the British, Dutch, French, and Danish in the Americas had an Iberian history. For instance, French rule in the western part of Hispaniola, in what became known as Saint-Domingue and later as Haiti, properly started in the mid-seventeenth century only after having been ruled by Spain for a century and a half. The island of Trinidad remained under Spanish control until 1797. Even Louisiana had a Spanish and Afro-Iberian history before the arrival of the French. When exploring the mouth of the Mississippi River in the Spring of 1700, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville was informed by indigenous informants about “a Spanish settlement” in the region composed of “whites, mulattoes and blacks.” Nearby, another village existed that the indigenous people called Connessi, meaning “village of the blacks.” There, in what was probably a maroon settlement, “only Negroes with their families” lived, and they were “rather numerous” (Le Moyne d’Iberville 1981:154). We should also be aware that many of the slaves brought to North America in the first half of the seventeenth century had familiarity with Iberian customs. For instance, virtually the entire charter generation in New Amsterdam (Dutch Manhattan) had Iberian Catholic baptismal names (Dewulf 2017:39–40). Despite the decline of Spanish power in the Americas from the mid-seventeenth century onward, the vicinity of the Spanish-controlled mainland and large islands such as Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico accounted for a strong and continuous Iberian influence in the entire Caribbean space. A case in point is the Dutch Antillean islands of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire, where Catholic priests from the nearby mainland would regularly come to baptize slave children. As a result, the islands developed into religiously segregated societies with an entirely Catholic slave population and a Dutch Protestant and Jewish slaveholding elite (Rupert 2012:85–90). The fact that slaves did not live in an Iberian colony is thus no reason to assume that they had no exposure to Iberian customs.

This acknowledgment of an Afro-Iberian substratum in Black performance culture in the Americas will help us to better understand the origin and meaning of the mysterious term *calenda*.

### Primary Sources

One of the earliest primary sources on the *calenda* is Jean-Baptiste Labat’s description of a dance in his work *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l’Amérique* (New Journey to the American Islands). Labat, a French Dominican friar, claimed that the *calenda* he witnessed in northern Martinique in 1698 was a dance “which comes from the Guinea coast and, from all appearances, from the kingdom of Ardra [in the Bight of Benin]” and added that “the Spanish have learned it from the blacks and dance it all over the Americas in the same manner as the blacks.” According to Labat, the rhythm of the dance was provided by two drums, of which the larger was called “big drum” and the smaller, “the *baboula*.” The dancers “are drawn up in two lines, one before the other, men on one side and women on the other.” One participant “sings a song,” the refrain of which is “repeated by all the spectators by a great clapping of hands.” The dancers “hold their arms like those who dance while playing the castanets”; they

“jump, they spin, they approach within two or three feet of each other, draw back in cadence until the sound of the drum tells them to draw together again, whereby the men strike their thighs against those of the women,” and one has the impression “that their bellies are hitting, while in reality it is the thighs that support the blows.” They then “retire in a pirouette, to start over the same movement with lascivious gestures whenever the drum gives them the signal, as it does several times in succession.” Occasionally, “they interlock arms and make two or three runs, always striking their thighs and kissing.” Despite the fact that the dance is “opposed to decency,” the Spanish Creoles in the Americas “made it into their favorite divertissement” and “even perform it during devotions.” In fact, they “dance it in their churches and in their processions,” and even “nuns dance it on Christmas Eve,” albeit “not in the company of men” (Labat 1742:463–7, 518).

During a French expedition to the Falkland Islands in 1763–1764, the French Benedictine Antoine-Joseph Pernety claimed to have witnessed a *calenda* in Montevideo. This dance, he argued, “was much spoken about by travelers,” whereupon he repeated almost verbatim Labat’s description of the dance, which raises doubts about the authenticity of Pernety’s claim (Pernety 1769:299–302).

Research by the historian Adrien Dessalles later revealed that the *calenda* Labat had observed must have been organized clandestinely. In his *Histoire générale des Antilles* (1847; General History of the Antilles), Dessalles presented a document from the colonial archives of Martinique revealing that in August 1678, a plantation owner called Grény had been charged by the colonial authorities for having permitted “a large gathering of Negroes at the wedding of one of his slaves” and that the “*kalenda*, in which blacks from all the neighborhoods had participated, had lasted from morning till night.” When Lieutenant Baudry arrived with the intention to disperse the crowd, he “had been received with insults” and “had been forced by the crowd to leave the premises.” Thereupon, the Council had prohibited all planters to “allow gatherings of slaves, dances and *kalendas* on their premises.” Dessalles characterized the *kalenda* as “a gathering of Negroes where they danced in their own style to the sound of a drum and an instrument they called *banza* [a type of guitar]. . . . It is a very lascivious and very tiring dance” (1847:296–7).

About half a century after Labat, a second extensive description of the *calenda* was provided by Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry in his *Description topographique* (1797–1798) about Saint-Domingue, the later Haiti. The French Creole lawyer from Martinique highlighted how “the dancers, always as couples, advance to the center of the circle, and start to dance.” According to Moreau de Saint-Méry, the *calenda* was a dance “with few variations,” based on “a single step in which the dancer successively advances and retrieves each foot, while tapping heel and toe, in a very similar manner as in the *Anglaise*.” The dancer “turns around his partner and she also turns and changes her position while waving the two ends of a handkerchief that she holds in her hand.” The dancer “puts his arms up and down, while holding his elbows close to the body and dances with his fists almost closed.” Two drums, the shorter of which was called the *bamboula*, were used in the dance. They produced a monotonous tune, to which the sound of peddle gourds and that of the *banza*, a “coarse guitar with four cords,” was added. The females then “form a circle” and “clap

their hands and answer in choral form to the chants of one or two singers.” Despite similarities in the accompanying music to the dancers’ performance, the differences in the choreography make one wonder whether he and Labat actually witnessed the same dance. To add to the confusion, Moreau de Saint-Méry also noted that “another dance of African origin in Saint-Domingue is the *chica*, called *calenda* in the Windward Islands, *Congo* in Cayenne [and] fandango in Spain” ([1798] 1875:52–3). So, according to Moreau de Saint-Méry, in the Windward Islands the term *calenda* was used for yet another type of dance of African origin that was known as the “Congo” dance in Cayenne. Here again, we find a surprising reference to Iberian performance culture, as if the *chica*, the Congo dance, the Windward interpretation of the *calenda*, and the Spanish fandango were one and the same dance. From Moreau de Saint-Méry’s *Loix et constitutions des colonies françoises de l’Amérique sous le vent* (Laws and Constitutions of the French Colonies in the Leeward Islands), we also learn that when a new militia was created in Saint-Domingue in 1765, one of its tasks was to “dissipate assemblies and *calendas* of the blacks” (1785:829).

Another source from the eighteenth century is a short reference by Thomas Jeffreys in his *Natural and Civil History of the French Dominions in North and South America*, where he spoke about slave culture in the French Caribbean and argued that dancing is “their favorite diversion, particularly the *calendae*, a sport brought from the coast of Guinea and attended with gestures which are not consistent with modesty, whence it is forbidden by the public laws of the islands.” The musical instruments used at these performances were “a sort of drum, being a piece of hollow wood covered with sheepskin, and a kind of guitar, made of a calabass [*sic*]” (1760:192). In the early nineteenth century, the French physician Michel Étienne Descourtilz defined a *calenda* he had witnessed in Haiti as “an extravagant and lascivious black dance that takes place at funerals” (1809:274).

After Le Page du Pratz first mentioned the *calenda* in the early eighteenth century, the term reappeared in a source from Louisiana dating back to 1831. This time, the author was Pierre Forest, who reported that “every Sunday the negroes of the city and of the surroundings” used to gather “in a large number of distinct groups” on a “huge green field on the bank of a lake.” There, at what must have been Lake Pontchartrain, each group “has its own flag floating atop a very tall mast, used as a rallying point . . . [for the] dance.” They danced “with extraordinary speed and agility. Actually their dance is rather a pantomime than a dance.” They made music by “beating and rolling their sticks on their drums; a sharp sound is produced, repeated two or three times by the surrounding echoes.” Forest reproduced one of the Black dancers’ “favorite songs,” which in its third stanza referred to the *calenda*: “Dempé mo perdi Lizette, Mo pas souchié *calinda*, Mo pas bram bramba boula” (Joyaux 1956:468–9). Samuel Kinser later translated this stanza as follows: “Since I have lost Lizette, My footsteps care not for the *calinda*, Nor for the ‘bram’ of the *bamboula*” (1990:38).

Surprisingly, Kinser does not seem to have been aware that this song had been recorded earlier in Saint-Domingue by Moreau de Saint-Méry, according to whom “Lisette” had been composed in the 1730s by a certain Duvivier de la Mahautière. Comparing Forest’s version to the Haitian original—“Dépi moin pédi Lisette, Moin pas souchiè calenda, Moin quitté bram-bram sonnette, Moin pas batt *bamboula*”—it

becomes clear that one of the verses got lost and that a different translation than that of Kinser seems more accurate: “Since I have lost Lisette, I don’t care any longer for the *calenda*; I no longer use the belt with jingle bells and I no longer beat the *bamboula*” (Moreau de Saint-Méry [1798] 1875:52–3, 77). The use of a belt with jingle bells—the “bram-bram sonnette”—was a common feature in Black dance performances in Louisiana. For instance, in his description of the “great Congo dance” in honor of “the king of the wake” that he saw in New Orleans in 1823, Timothy Flint mentioned how “the bells that they have hung about them tinkle” ([1826] 1968:103), and in his description of the dances on Congo Square that he witnessed in the mid-1830s, James Creecy noted that the dancers were “most fancifully dressed, with fringes, ribbons, little bells, and shells and bells, jingling and flirting about the performers’ legs and arms” (1860:19–23).

The song “Lisette” was likely brought to New Orleans by slaves who had accompanied refugees from Saint-Domingue in the aftermath of the 1791 revolution (Dessens 2007:159–62). Variants of this song also appeared elsewhere. Around 1740, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made reference to it as a “chanson nègre” and transcribed the third stanza as “Dipi mo pèrdi Lizette, Mo pa batte Bamboula, Bouche a moi tourné muette Mo pa dansé Calinda” [Since I have lost Lisette, I no longer beat the bamboula, My mouth has become mute I don’t dance the *calinda* any longer]. The song was also included in the anonymous pamphlet “Idylles et Chansons, ou Essais de Poésie Créole, par un Habitant d’Hayti” (Idylls and Songs, or Essays on Creole Poetry, by an Inhabitant of Haiti) that was printed in 1811 in Philadelphia (Epstein 1977:94).

The *calenda* was also mentioned by Hélène d’Aquin Allain. Following the Haitian revolution of 1791, Allain’s family had moved to Jamaica, and in 1833, when she was 3 years old, to New Orleans. In her memoirs *Souvenirs d’Amérique et de France par une Créole* (Memories of America and France by a Creole Woman), she claimed to recall that the “blacks then still used to dance on Congo Square,” but that “she had never seen them.” However, she did remember certain phrases relating to these dances, such as “Dansé *calinda*, boudoum, boudoum” and “Qué *bamboula* ya pé fé!” (d’Aquin Allain 1883:172–3).

William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison’s collection *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867) also included a *calinda*, which the editors defined as “a sort of contra dance, which has now passed entirely out of use.” The accompanying satirical song in Louisianan Creole told the story of a certain Monsieur Préval and a ball he had organized, where every stanza ended with the words “Dansé *calinda*, bou-doum, bou-dou” (Allen, Ware, and Garrison [1867] 1951:111–3). Henry Krehbiel later included a slightly different version of this song in his collection *Afro-American Folksongs* ([1914] 1962:116–53), as did Mina Monroe in *Bayou Ballads* (1921:40–55). A variant of the song, whereby the story of Monsieur Préval was replaced by that of a certain Monsieur Baziro, appeared in Irène Thérèse Whitfield’s *Louisiana French Folk Songs* (1939:135–7). In *Six Creole Folk-Songs*, Maud Cuney-Hare identified another satirical song, “Dialogue d’Amour,” as “a *calinda*, a dance that was linked to songs of derision” (1921:21). It told the story of a plantation owner who tried to win the favors of a girl but ended up being rejected by her because “all his cane is burned.” Yet another Cajun song, first recorded in 1956, included the

word *colinda* in its refrain: “Allons au bal, Colinda, tu vas matin dans le brouillard. Ta robe était déchirée” [Let’s go to the ball, Colinda. You go in the morning fog. Your dress was torn]. A later variant of this song—“Allons danser, Colinda” (Let’s Go Dancing, Colinda), made famous by Rod Bernard in 1962—indicated a shift in meaning of the term: no longer a dance or song, but a girl’s name (Bernard and Girouard 1992:37–52).

While Congo Square had lost its function as a gathering place for New Orleans’ Black population by the late 1840s, Louis Moreau Gotschalk’s musical composition “Bamboula” (1848) re-ignited interest in what had become a forgotten corner of the city. The fact that the cultural heritage of America’s Black community could be a source of inspiration for success in Paris—then still the Mecca of culture—was a sensation, and it triggered what Ted Widmer called a wave of “Congomania” (2003:72). Together with his fellow journalists Henry Castellanos and Lafcadio Hearn, George Washington Cable played a crucial role in this late nineteenth-century revival of interest in Congo Square. Cable’s famous article “The Dance in Place Congo” relied on what informants had told him and mixed that information with data he copied from Moreau de Saint-Méry’s account about the slaves in Saint-Domingue. According to Cable, the “true *calinda* . . . was a dance of multitude, a sort of vehement cotillion,” the latter being a popular contra dance style. He also claimed that this was “the favorite dance all the way from [Louisiana] to Trinidad” and used to be accompanied by a song that “was always a grossly personal satirical ballad” (1886:517–32).

In his vignettes of life in New Orleans from the 1890s, Henry Castellanos claimed to recall that Kongolese slaves in New Orleans usually spoke the local French Creole, yet would occasionally also make use of “their own Congo calabash” (1895:296). They would do so, he added, when they revered their “kings,” who were honored “in the Congo dances.” Two of them “were blacksmiths, and were called by all the African womanhood *candios*, which means kings” (297). He called the dance a *bamboula* and argued that its “contortions and gyrations” were similar to the “Voudou dance” (158). He explained that during the dance, “they would sing . . . Creole songs,” which included the verses “Dansé Calinda, bou doum, bou doum” and “Eh! eh! Bomba, hen, hen! Canga bafio te, Canga moun de le, Canga do ki la Canga li” (94).

Castellanos’ vignettes were undoubtedly influenced by earlier reports, such as d’Aquin Allain’s *Souvenirs d’Amérique*. His references about vodou were also reminiscent of Marie B. Williams’ article “A Night with the Voudous” (1875), based on an alleged eyewitness account of a vodou ceremony on St. John’s Eve by a “Professor D. from New Orleans,” probably the scholar and diplomat Alexander Dimitry. Professor D. admitted that his account was based on recollections from 50 years earlier, yet he claimed to remember similar words to those of Castellanos: “Houm! Dance Calinda, Voudou! Magnian, Aie! Aie!” (Williams 1875:403–4). The same phrase as the one used by Castellanos appeared verbatim in Charles Dudley Warner’s article “A Voudou Dance” (1887) about a visit to a vodou priest, probably Jim Alexander, also known as “Indian Jim” because of his alleged African Amerindian descent. Warner spoke about a shuffle to which people sang the words “Dansé *Calinda*, boudou, bou-doum,” and he also claimed to have heard the words “Eh! Eh! Bomba, hen! Hen! Canga bafio lé, Canga moun de lé, Canga do ki la, Canga li” (Warner 1887:454–5), which

he probably copied (verbatim) from Moreau de Saint-Méry. Also, the term *candio*, which Castellanos translated as “king,” was first used by Moreau de Saint-Méry, in the above-mentioned song “Lisette” ([1798] 1875:57, 77).

The fact that these late nineteenth-century journalists evidently copied from earlier works raises questions about their authenticity. A more credible source of information is the memoirs of former Cuban runaway Esteban Montejo, published in 1966, which represent one of the few primary sources on the *calenda* from a Black perspective. Montejo, who used the term *caringa*, spoke in his interview with anthropologist Miguel Barnet of a dance where bystanders would sing the satirical song “Toma y toma y toma *caringa* pa’ la vieja palo y jeringa. Toma y toma y toma *caringa* pa’ lo viejo palo y cachimba” [Take and take and take *caringa* for the old woman stick and syringe. Take and take and take *caringa* for the old man stick and pipe]. Montejo characterized the *caringa* as a “white man’s dance” that became popular among the island’s Black population. It was danced by groups in parks and on the streets “with couples holding handkerchiefs,” to which music was played with “accordions, scrapers and kettledrums.” He added that Black *guajiros* (farmworkers) in Cuba preferred the *caringa* to African dances (quoted in Barnet [1966] 1987:64). Despite Montejo’s denial that the *caringa* was an originally African dance, Barnet defined it in the accompanying glossary as a “dance of African origin” (196). References to this dance, named either *calenda* or *caringa* and danced with a handkerchief or sombrero, can be found all over Cuba (Guerra 1989:129–35). One example from the province of Ciego de Ávila has the following stanzas, both ending with the chorus “toma y toma, *caringa*”: “No me busques por los montes que no soy ningún bejuco, búscame por las *caringas* que eso es lo que a mí gusta. Cuando la *caringa* vino, vino en una yegua baya y la gente le decía: *caringa* tú no te vayas” (Santos Gracia and Armas Rigal 2002:74–5) [Don’t look for me in the mountains because I’m no creeping weed, look for me at the *caringas* because that’s what I love. When the *caringa* came, it came on a bay mare and people said: *caringa*, don’t go away]. The term *karinga* also appeared in Teodoro Díaz Fabelo’s dictionary of “Congo words used in Cuba,” where he translated it as “a musical instrument from Rwanda” and added that in Cuba, there used to be a song “Dale y dale, *karinga*!” (Give Him and Give Him, *Karinga*), a likely variant of Montejo’s song (Díaz Fabelo 1998:89).

Montejo’s description of the *caringa* corresponds to Cable’s claim that the *calinda* dance was traditionally accompanied by a satirical ballad and also recalls Moreau de Saint-Méry’s characterization of the *calenda* as a handkerchief dance. A parallel to Moreau de Saint-Méry’s description can also be found in the work of Katherine Dunham who, during her research on the island of Trinidad in 1932, argued that, except for the musical accompaniment, the *kalenda* she had witnessed in Congo Village was highly similar to the dance described by this eighteenth-century French scholar ([1947] 1983:xxi). In the glossary to her book, she also claimed that the *kalenda* is a synonym for the *bamba*, a “social or marginal socio-religious dance of Haiti, known in other islands and southern states of America” (72).

We find further references to the *calenda* on the island of Trinidad. An article in the *Port of Spain Gazette* from March 26, 1881, mentioned that “the gentlemen often figured in the *bamboula*, the *giouba* and the *calinda*” in the costume “of the

*Nègre de jardin* . . . that is to say . . . of the field labourer.” The same newspaper also mentioned on February 26, 1898, that the “last *shack-shack* has been shaken, the last *calenda* sung, the last *quatro* stunned, the last clarinet squeaked, and quiet reigns once more.” In his study about the 1858 carnival, Lewis Inniss used the term *corlindas* in reference to dances that took place during the festivities (1932:12–3). Today the term is primarily used on the island in reference to stick fighting. One of the earliest references to the *calenda* in the context of stick fighting appeared in 1881 in the context of the Canboulay (*Cannes Brulées*, French for “burned sugarcane”) Riots that followed an attempt by authorities to ban this violent practice. According to Lord Hamilton, who was sent out from London to lead the investigation into the riots, Blacks used to parade in Trinidad on the first of August to celebrate abolition “in organized bands in the streets and singing the *Kalinda* songs.” These bands were “each headed by a mock King, a Queen, several Princesses and a galaxy of royal imitators.” There were “strong body-guards of armed *batonniers* each carrying a lighted flambeau and a lethal looking hardwood five foot battling stick,” and “the Champion of each band walked ahead singing boastful *Kalinda* songs about himself and the victories and conquests of his followers.” The bands were organized “on parochial lines and very often clashed with rival bands which refused to recognise their supremacy.” When performing, they formed a circle, in the midst of which would sit “the drummers, beating out drum language to direct the fighters,” and the supporting chorus “chanted the refrain to the *Kalinda* songs led by the *chantuelles*.” The music gave the warriors “courage and the singers saw that the crude rules of the game were observed. No fighter, so long as he had fallen to the ground, was to be struck by his opponent” (Elder 1964:130). According to Earl Leaf, the *calenda* stick fighting has certain moves that corresponded to those of sword fighting, which made him suspect that there may have been a time when the dance was executed with swords rather than with sticks (1948:190). The *kalenda*, sometimes also referred to as *kalinda*, has meanwhile become a general term for the dances, songs, and other performances that accompany the stick fighting ritual during the Trinidad carnival (Hill 1972:23–31; Liverpool 1998:24–37).

The same term appeared in a document relating to stick fighting in Haiti. While doing fieldwork in the 1930s, Harold Courlander assisted near the town of Jérémie in an “activity of the Congo nation,” which he referred to as a “Mousondi battle dance,” the name of which may refer to Nsundi, a duchy in the Kongo kingdom (Warner-Lewis 2003:202–7). Yet, according to Courlander, “some older people called this dance *kalinda*.” It consisted of six dancers who carried sticks, which they were “holding . . . like sabers.” They were led by a man, who gave orders with his whistle and who wore on his legs “anklets made of seed pods and beer-bottle caps which rattled rhythmically as he moved.” When the leader gave a signal, the men “leaped into the air and came together in mock combat. First, one would strike and the other would parry, then the second would strike and the first would parry, always in time to the beating Congo drums.” At another signal “all six dancers leaped into the air vertically, twisting into a full turn each time, landing in position to strike and parry” (Courlander 1960:131–3). Courlander also related the *calinda* dance to a secret society called *Société Vinbindingue* that was allegedly dedicated to “zombiism” (1939:71–2)

and noted that “the word *Calinda* appears sometimes in songs of the Vodoun cult in Haiti” (1960:166–7).

A reference to stick fighting in Martinique can be found in the work of Lafcadio Hearn, who, in *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890), argued that “the old African dances, the *caleinda* and the *bele* are danced on Sundays to the sound of the drum on almost every plantation in the island” and specified that “the *caleinda*” is “danced by men only, all stripped to the waist, and twirling heavy sticks in a mock fight.” Sometimes, however, “when the blood becomes overheated by *tafia* [rum],” the mock fight may become a real one, and then “even cutlasses are brought into play” ([1890] 1903:143–6).

In her study *Bayou Ballads* (1921), Monroe argued that such stick fights also used to take place in Louisiana, where “the *Calinda* was a war-dance in which men alone took part, stripped to the waist and brandishing sticks in a mock fight,” and “the last remaining dancer well deserved to have the water in his bottle replaced by good *tafia* (whiskey) to celebrate his victory” (55). Considering the parallels to Hearn, it may well be that Monroe copied this passage and transferred it from Martinique to Louisiana. However, it should be said that credible references to stick fighting among slaves in Louisiana do exist. For instance, in the memoirs of the former slave William Wells Brown, published in 1880 as *My Southern Home*, we read that when the dancers on Congo Square became fatigued, they would “stroll off to the groups of some other tribe in a different portion of the square,” where “a regular set-to with short sticks followed, between the men, and broken heads ended the day’s entertainment” (123).

Finally, we can add that in Haitian Creole, the expression “*fè kalinda*” means “to frolic” (Valdman 2007:321), and that the terms *calinda* and *bamboula* are still used in Puerto Rico in reference to a subgenre of *bomba* music (Alegria 1956:123–34; Rivera 2010:181).

### *Interpretations*

Our overview of primary sources revealed that the term *calenda* has consistently been linked to Black performance culture in Louisiana and the Caribbean. Yet the variety of meanings and explanations that authors have attributed to it makes it hard to link the *calenda* to a specific performance type or to trace its geographical origin. For instance, as Julian Gerstin suggested, it is tempting to consider Labat’s description of the *calenda* as an “adaptation of [a French] *contredanse*” (2004:8). However, in 1882, the British missionary worker John Weeks observed a similar dance among the Central African Bakongo, where “two lines are formed—one of men and the other of an equal number of women.” The drum “is placed at one end of the line, and all begin to clap, chant, shuffle, and wriggle together.” A man then “advances, dancing, and a woman from the opposite line advances a few paces and they dance thus a few moments, usually a yard or so apart, but sometimes they approach nearer and strike their abdomens together.” Then “they retire, and others take their places, and so on, right down the lines; and thus they proceed over and over again” (1914:128). While it cannot be excluded that by the late nineteenth century, the *contradanse* had

also influenced Central African dancing, these puzzling parallels are illustrative of the difficulties in tracing the *calenda* back to a specific type of performance. Despite these difficulties, several scholars have presented theories on the meaning and origin of the *calenda*.

One of the most speculative theories is that of Lee Warren in *The Dance of Africa* (1972), that the *calenda* was “a fertility and courting dance from the coast of Guinea” that gave origin to the *sarabande*, “a formal dance which came to Spain from the Arab conquerors and in turn from Spain to France.” According to Warren, the Cuban Yuka dance had also been “derived from the *Calenda* through the Yuka dance of Chad in Central Africa” and “from the Yuka developed the American Rumba.” Also the fandango had been “derived from the *Calenda*” so that “the Rumba, the Fandango and the American Shimmy are all sisters under the skin” (45–6). Fradique Lizardo also included a long list of dances from the Dominican Republic (los palos, los congos, la capitania, la bomba, la jacana) that, according to him, “probably all have the same origin, namely the *calenda*” (1974:83). Henry Krehbiel’s theory from 1914 was no less creative; he claimed that the term *calenda* was derived from the Spanish expression “que linda,” meaning “how pretty” ([1914] 1962:116).

Jules Faine considered the *calenda* to be a “popular dance of Spanish origin” that had first been introduced in the Caribbean and from there “spread all over the Spanish territories in the Americas” (1937:219). This interpretation was followed by Robert Germain, who defined the *calenda* as a “very lascivious dance of Spanish origin” as well as “a gathering of blacks from several dwellings to dance the *calenda*” (1980:227).

Kinser, on the other hand, argued that “*calinda* or *calenda* . . . was very probably an African word broadly adopted in the New World” but failed to elaborate on this hypothesis (1990:39). Courlander admitted that “it is evident that writers tended to use a single name, such as *Chica* or *Bamboula*, to cover virtually any kind of dance festivity,” so that attempts to pinpoint such terms to one specific performance tradition were bound to fail (1960:127). He cautiously suggested that the *calenda* “could be an African dance with an African name, or a European dance taken over in part and adapted by the slaves, or a European name attached to a number of dances traditional among slaves” (Courlander 1963:191). Lise Winer also offered several possible meanings of the *calenda*—from “a dance of African origin” or a “type of song and rhythm accompanying stick fighting” to an “African-based dance-like combat”—and added that “it has come to mean different things in different places.” Winer suggested that the term might be of Kimbundu origin, as derived from the prefix *ka* + *lenda*, meaning “to oppose” (2009:484). M. Thomas J. Desh-Obi (2008:30–6) and Yvonne Daniel (2011:165, 220) also claimed that the *calenda* was of Central African origin and connected the performance to stick fighting in cattle-raising areas of colonial Angola. Daniel distinguished between “*kalinda* as combat practices with sticks” and “*kalenda* as unarmed dance practices” (220). Auguste Bazerque (1969:68, 79) as well as Caridad Santos Gracia and Nieves Armas Rigal (2002:74) claimed that the term *calenda* was of African origin, yet not from the Kongo region but rather from the Gulf of Guinea. Ramiro Guerra assumed that the terms *calinga*, *calinda*, *caringa*, and *calenda* all “originate from Guinea” but suggested that the dance itself “could either be Hispanic or African” (1989:135).

Based on evidence that militias in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue were tasked with the dissipation of those participating in its gatherings, Alfred Métraux argued that “the word *calenda*, which today is no longer used, most certainly designated Vodou” (1958:26). Albert Valdman followed this theory and assumed that the *calenda* was a secret nocturnal dance that existed before the Haitian Revolution (2007:321). Benjamin Hebblethwaite also claimed that it “probably served to conceal voodoo ceremonies” (2012:244). Similarly, Liliana Crété defined the *calenda* as “dances with sacred undertones” ([1978] 1981:226).

Gerstin was among the first to provide an extensive study on the *calenda* (2004). He referred to the large variety of meanings attributed to the *calenda*: “as a line dance . . . as couples within a dance ring . . . as stick fighting, as a type of satirical song . . . and . . . as a challenge dance,” and he suggested that slaves might have used “a single term for multiple purposes,” because when “dances spread from island to island slaves adapted and altered them” (2004:24). He linked this theory to Henry Breen’s observation that in mid-nineteenth-century St. Lucia, “any outdoors dance was called a *bamboula*, any indoors dance a ball” in order to point out that it was not uncommon to use the same term in reference to different forms of slave performance culture (Gerstin 2004:24). Gerstin suggested that “French slavery was instrumental in spreading the dance complexes *kalenda*” all over the Caribbean and Louisiana, which he supported with the argument that “though some of these places are usually associated today with British dominion, each was colonized by the French before the British, and remained French until lost or ceded to the British in the Napoleonic Wars” (2004:30). Unfortunately, Gerstin does not seem to be familiar with Esteban Montejo’s memoirs and thus failed to provide a credible explanation for why the dance was so popular in Cuba, an island that was never ruled by the French. In a later article, Gerstin claimed that the term “apparently derives from ‘*calendas*,’ ecstatic dances in Catholic churches,” but he did not develop this theory (2007:125). In 2010, Gerstin presented a revised version of his 2004 article, claiming that the dance techniques indicated that the *calenda* was likely brought to the Americas by “slaves from the Congo-Angola region” who then “adapted these practices into early transculturated forms known variously as *kalenda*, *bamboula*, *djouba*, and *chica*,” and “transported by the French,” these slaves then “carried the first three of these dances widely around the Caribbean” (32).

Shane Bernard and Julia Girouard claimed in 1992 that the *calenda* was “a term of Latin origin applied to an African dance or dances . . . of Guinean origin” (48). While it remains unclear upon what evidence their claim of the Guinean origin of the performance was based, Bernard and Girouard’s reference to *calenda* being a term of Latin origin went back to an old theory, first presented in 1891 by William Wells Newell. In the 1891 edition of his “Waste-Basket of Words,” Newell had claimed that the *calenda* was “a survival of the Latin *Calendae*, Calends” and referred to European medieval songs about the *Calenda Maia* (the calends of May) that accompanied dances and that, “formerly serious . . . degenerated into satire” (70–1). For a long time, Newell’s theory that “the Latin word, in Louisiana and the West Indies, has outlasted its use in Europe” was not taken seriously. Significantly, William Read even considered it “preposterous” to assume that a Latin term would have survived in the context of Black performance culture (1939:121). Read’s criticism may relate to the fact that he,

like most other scholars, failed to seriously explore Iberian culture as the most likely transmitter of the *calendas* to the Americas. As will be shown in the next section, the *calendas* existed as a festive tradition on the Iberian Peninsula until the late nineteenth century, and the term continues to be used to this day in Mexican festive culture.

### Calendas in Iberian Culture

In ancient Rome, the first days of the month were known as the *kalendae* (kalends). The kalends of January were of particular importance since they were the beginning of the calendar year, which coincided with a series of festivities involving masquerading, mockery, and cross-dressing. As Max Harris (2006) has convincingly shown, the festive traditions relating to the kalends expanded rather than diminished once the Roman Empire adopted Christianity and survived much longer into the Christian era than any other Roman festival. Chasteen confirms that “during the entire first millennium of Christianity in Europe, church authorities worried occasionally about the persistence of pagan dance rites called (in Spanish and Portuguese) *calendas*” (2004:167). Harris also claims that “kalends masquerading during the Christian era did, in all likelihood, exercise some influence, even if indirectly, on European (and even, eventually, American) carnival customs” (2006:59). That such charivari during the Christmas period did, in fact, travel to the Americas can be seen in the work of Le Gentil de La Barbinais. When visiting the Convent of St. Clare in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, in 1717, he witnessed a “nativity farce” that started with “charivari songs” during which the nuns danced and jumped so wildly that it reminded the French globetrotter of a Lundu dance. It culminated with a satirical speech by one of the nuns about men and their mistresses, which she delivered in “corrupted Portuguese, just like slaves use to speak” (La Barbinais 1728:149–51).

It can, in any case, be confirmed that the Latin term *kalendae* continued to be used for a long time in the context of celebrations in the periphery of the ancient Roman Empire, as reflected in the Romanian Christmas carols known as *colinda românească* (Brătulescu 1981), the Spanish *villancicos de calenda* (García Martín 2011:454–60), and the Portuguese *calendas janeiras, maias, fébruas* (Vasconcellos 1904:849–61). According to Theophilo Braga in his classic study *O povo português nos seus costumes, crenças e tradições* (1885; *The Portuguese People and Their Customs, Beliefs, and Traditions*), the term *calendas* (also called *quendas* in Portuguese) used to refer to a variety of festivities that began 12 days before Christmas and ended 12 days after Christmas, corresponding to the moment when Mary started her search for a safe place to give birth (known in Spanish as *Las Posadas*) until the visit of the Magi and the revelation of the incarnation of the infant Christ. Epiphany festivities in Iberian culture thus traditionally marked the end of the *calendas* and initiated the beginning of a new festive period, that of carnival (Braga 1885:323). Considering this connection to the *calendas*, it may not be a coincidence that in medieval Spain, carnival used to be called *carnestolendas* (Ruiz 2012:47). We also find a parallel to the Twelve Days of Christmas or Twelvetide in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, with the Twelfth Night marking the beginning of the carnival season, a practice that to this day exists in New Orleans (Sublette 2008:113). In Iberian (Ruiz 2012:38–9, 255–6) just as in English

folklore, Twelfth Night celebrations traditionally included mumming, dancing, and mock sword or stick fighting, famously recalled in Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night* (1602) and Harrison Ainsworth's novel *Mervyn Clitheroe* (1857).

Of particular importance during festive occasions on the Iberian Peninsula were morality plays called *autos sacramentales/sacramentais*, which involved music, dance, and dramatic performances playing out the struggle between good/civilized/Christian and evil/primitive/heathen. Among the most popular ones during the *calenda* season were the *pastorelas* that told the story of shepherds who are following the Star of Bethlehem to find the infant Christ. Along the way, they are confronted by Lucifer and his fellow devils or other enemies of Christ (Pharisees and Jews), who try to turn them away from their course. Luckily, the Archangel Michael and his angels intervene to defend the shepherds on their journey. Not surprisingly, considering the struggle between good (angels) and evil (devils) in *pastorelas*, these traditions often featured mock war performances (Chaves 1942:8; Mauldin 1999:3–6). In the context of the peninsular wars, a variant of the eternal struggle between good and evil, known as *Moros y Cristianos/Mouros e Cristãos* (Moors and Christians), became highly popular. In this mock fight performance inspired by Carolingian mythology, the Moors initially seem to obtain victory but are eventually defeated and forced to bow down in order to be baptized as Christians (Amades 1966:9–114; Harris 2000:32, 132–52). According to Juan Bautista Rael and Michael J. Doudoroff, *Moors and Christians* “has probably involved the direct participation of more people than any other folk play; and it has evidently served as an important vehicle for the expression of some deeply-held cultural values” (1981:vi). It is well known that the Church used such performance traditions for missionary purposes in the colonies, since they allowed the integration of indigenous festive traditions into a Catholic framework.

It can also be confirmed that Iberians used the word *calendas* at an early stage of colonizing the Americas. The Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, for instance, used the term consistently in reference to *fiestas*, *ceremonias*, and *sacrificios* in the Aztec festive calendar in his late sixteenth-century *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* ([1585] 2009:96–170; General History of the Things of New Spain). Moreover, collections of seventeenth-century *villancicos* from Mexico include dozens of songs designated as *calendas* (Stevenson 1974:8–87).

To this day, the word *calenda* survives in Latin American celebration culture. It is used in connection not only to the Christmas period, but also to celebrations anticipating any major Catholic holiday, and has meanwhile become a synonym for *fiesta* (popular feast). In the Mexican province of Oaxaca, for instance, *calenda* festivities traditionally take place in anticipation of the holidays dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of Assumption, the Virgin of Guadalupe, or other Catholic saints. These *calendas* usually start with a band playing traditional fifes and drums, which, accompanied by firecrackers and the playing of church bells, leads a procession that includes the *monos de calenda* or *marmotas de calenda*, giant puppets or stilt walkers; *chicas oaxaqueñas*, women dressed in traditional clothing carrying pineapples or baskets with floral arrangements on their heads; and *diablitos*, young men dressed as devils. The processions are followed by dance performances. A typical dance for Oaxaca is the *danza de la pluma*, consisting of men wearing gigantic feathered headdresses and

handwoven tapestries on their backs, who dance with colorful handkerchiefs tied to their wrists and belts with jingle bells tied to their legs. While playing maracas, they perform a mock war dance inspired by *Moors and Christians* with spectacular leaps and twists (Toor 1947:347, 352–3).<sup>3</sup>

Explaining the term *calenda* with reference to the Iberian *calenda* festivities clarifies much of the scenery. Labat's observation that Spanish nuns used to dance the *calenda* on Christmas Eve is no longer surprising, nor is the fact that the term ended up being used in reference to a broad variety of performances, from ritual stick fighting to line dancing. If interpreted from an Iberian perspective, the *calenda* does not, in fact, refer to a specific dance or song, but to a multiplicity of performances that derive from festive forms of entertainment that had once taken place during the *calendas* period around Christmas or in anticipation of major Catholic holidays. In this respect, we could establish a parallel to the Pinkster festival in New York and New Jersey, celebrated on Pentecost. Once introduced by the Dutch in seventeenth-century New Netherland, the annual Pinkster revelries were abandoned by descendants of Dutch settlers after the American Revolution, but the holiday continued to be celebrated by the Black community until the mid-nineteenth century. Like *calenda*, the term *Pinkster* did not refer to a specific dance or song but to a variety of forms of entertainment that would typically take place during that festive period on the calendar. And the term was used as such by the Dutch-owned slave community (Dewulf 2017).

The original meaning of *calenda* escaped eighteenth-century French and British observers, who were unfamiliar with Iberian festive culture. It is interesting to observe, however, that Le Page du Pratz did not use the word as a synonym for dance. Although ambiguous in meaning, his reference “sous prétexte de *calinda* (ou de danse)” was mistranslated in the English translation of 1774 as “under pretense of *Calinda* or the dance” ([1758] 1774:366). The “de” in “de danse” should be understood as “(sous prétexte) de danse,” and the phrase should be translated as “under pretense of *calinda* (or [under pretense] of dancing).” Le Page du Pratz thus distinguished between *calinda* and dancing. The same applies to Dessalles' document from seventeenth-century Martinique that prohibited “gatherings of slaves, dances and *kalendas*” (1847:296–7). In both cases, the term can be best translated as “feast.”

Iberian culture also provides a credible explanation for the recurrent references to the use of belts with jingle bells in the context of *calendas*. In the sixteenth century, the use of a belt with jingle bells, known as *cascabel/cascavel*, was so popular in Iberian dance culture that the expression *danzas de cascabeles* became a synonym for popular dances (Brooks 1988:35, 150). The Iberians exported this feature to other parts of the world. For instance, Pedro Vaz de Caminha's letter on the discovery of Brazil in 1500 refers to Portuguese dancers using belts with little bells, which they exchanged for parrots with Native Americans who had been impressed by a Lusitanian dance performance (Caminha [1500] 1947:51–3). Such belts with jingle bells and rattles fixed on one's waist, shoulders, and legs used to be a common feature in Black performance culture all over the Americas. What Moreau de Saint-Méry in Haiti called a *bram-bram sonnette* came to be known in Cuba as *gangarria* and in Brazil as *guizo* or *gunga* (Cabrera 1979:77–8; Ávila 1967:454–5).

The existence of an Afro-Iberian substratum also helps us to understand the presence of other Iberian elements of Black cultural traditions in parts of the Americas

that were later conquered by the French, Dutch, Danish, or English. Examples are the tradition of worshipping St. James the Greater (Santiago) as deity of war in Haitian vodou (Cosentino 1995:250), the Trinidadian *jab-jabs* that were inspired by Spanish *diablitos* (Crowley 1956:205–14), the bonfire performances in honor of St. John on the island of Curaçao (van Meeteren 1947:179–84), and the Afro-Haitian custom of burning an effigy of Judas (McAlister 2004:116–9). Hein Vanhee (2002) and Terry Rey (2002) even argued that Iberian-Kongolese Catholicism might be at the origin of vodou itself. Whereas it was traditionally assumed that vodou consisted of a set of West African—predominantly Yoruba, Ewe, and Fon—religious practices that were later overlaid with French Catholic elements, Vanhee and Rey claim that many of the Catholic elements in vodou related to Luso-Kongolese Catholicism. They argued that the roots of vodou were to be found in the blending of Portuguese Catholic and indigenous Kongolese traditions in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Kingdom of Kongo, and that indigenous West African and Catholic French elements had only been added later in Saint-Domingue. This interpretation of vodou also corresponds to what Ramiro Guerra labeled the “double syncretism” of Kongolese culture. What started as a Luso-Kongolese syncretism in Africa was followed by a second process of syncretization with other European and other African cultures upon arrival in the Americas (Guerra 1989:41).

In any case, it should be stressed that customs such as the Afro-Haitian worshipping of St. James or the burning of an effigy of Judas are not mere imitations of Iberian traditions. Rather, these traditions acquired new meanings within Black communities through a process that can be best explained with reference to Fernando Ortiz’s concept of *transculturación*, involving the absorption and subsequent reinvention and reinterpretation of certain European cultural elements ([1951] 1985:298). It is likely that this process of syncretization had already set in on the Iberian Peninsula and on the African Atlantic islands before the first enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas. As an example, we can mention *batuque* music from the Cape Verde Islands. This drum music was long considered a prime example of indigenous African heritage, until local folklorists José Maria Semedo and Maria R. Turano were able to demonstrate that its rhythm corresponded precisely to that of recitations of the mysteries of the rosary in call-and-response form (1997:59–90). Cape Verdean *batuque* might well be one of the earliest examples of Afro-Iberian syncretization in the area of music.

Semedo and Turano made their discovery in the context of a study on *tabancas*, the Cape Verdean variant of mutual-aid and burial societies known in Latin America as brotherhoods (*irmandades/hermandades*) or confraternities (*confrarias/cofradías*). As will be shown next, brotherhoods played a crucial role in the continuation of Afro-Iberian traditions within the Black community.

### *Calendas and Brotherhoods*

Brotherhoods were Catholic associations of lay people that functioned as mutual-aid and burial associations. They were dedicated to either a saint or the Virgin Mary. In Iberian cities with large African slave populations such as Lisbon, Cádiz, and Seville, so-called Black brotherhoods developed, composed of free Blacks and slaves (Lahon 2005; Moreno 1997). These societies were subdivided according to the slaves’ nations,

usually named after the place or region in Africa where slaves had embarked, such as (São Jorge da) Mina, Mozambique, or Kongo (Tinhorão 1988:191).

Brotherhoods possessed a hierarchical structure in which European aristocratic titles were used. This strict hierarchy was accompanied by a democratic decision-making process. For instance, according to Chapter XXVI of the Black brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary in Lisbon, members who were willing to be candidates for prince, count, judge, treasurer, queen, and king had to submit their requests to an electoral commission (Saunders 1982:105–7, 150–65). These election ceremonies were accompanied by parades, dances, and a communal dinner. Parades traditionally included a flag-bearer holding the brotherhood's banner and a marching band. The king and queen were usually protected from the sun by a sunshade and wore crowns. These parades occurred on major Catholic holidays, and the subsequent festivities during which collections were held and booths sold food and drinks served as a source of income for brotherhoods (Barcia 2009:61–4). Research by Lynn Brooks on Corpus Christi processions in seventeenth-century Spain revealed that “dances by the blacks” were traditionally performed “with much noise” produced with pipes, drums, guitars, and tambourines. Documents would typically also refer to the tinkling of the “little bells on the men's leggings” during their “violent movements and funny gestures” (1988:189). These Black performances on Catholic holidays became highly popular among Iberians, whereas foreign visitors often expressed disgust. A revealing example is Charles Frédéric de Merveilleux's comment in 1720 that the “lascivious and infamous dances” by “two negro kings with their courts” disturbed him, whereas “the Portuguese were full of enthusiasm” (Merveilleux [1726] 1983:209).

In 1495, the Portuguese introduced a brotherhood for the Black population on the Cape Verde islands, and in 1526, they did the same in São Tomé (Green 2012:105; Brásio 1952–1971, Vol. I:472–4). Both brotherhoods were dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. Until the creation of the bishopric of Luanda in 1596, São Tomé was the center for Catholic operations in Central Africa. As such, the island's brotherhood became a model for Portuguese missionary activities on the African continent, most notably in the Kingdom of Kongo. A list of questions submitted to the Kongolese ambassador in Lisbon in 1595 reveals that by the late sixteenth century, the capital of Kongo counted already six confraternities, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, the Holy Sacrament, the Immaculate Conception, the Holy Spirit, St. Ignatius, and St. Anthony (Cuvelier and Jadin 1954:187; de Lucques [1718] 1953:202).

Through these brotherhoods, the rosary cult, with its chaplets, canticles, veneration songs (known as *loas*, a term still used in Haitian vodou), and call-and-response prayer sessions accompanied by rhythmic instruments, was to have a major impact on local performance culture. Documents from the Cape Verdean island of Santiago, for instance, indicate that in the mid-eighteenth century, it was still common to see “gatherings of the kings of the brotherhood of the Rosary” and that “in all neighborhoods of the island women and men were elected to serve as kings and queens, who every Sunday and holiday stage parades with their drums and flutes in order to collect money” (Pereira 2005:338, 352). Other eighteenth-century documents refer to parades of “black kings with their soldiers” and to a “governor of the blacks,” who had “judges” and “an army composed of free blacks and black slaves” (Barcellos

1900:244–5). Similar groups still exist today in the island’s poorest neighborhoods. Like the ancient brotherhoods, these *tabancas* function as mutual-aid associations and ensure that members receive a decent funeral. They are led by a “king” or a “governor,” who has his own delegates and “army” and who represents the community in negotiations with the authorities. On the feast day of the *tabanca*’s patron saint, dues are collected, a procession is organized, members gather for a communal dinner, drums are played, and dances take place. The lack of alternatives in terms of social protection played an important role in the remarkable longevity of these mutual-aid organizations. The eagerness to keep the traditional performance culture alive needs to be understood in the popular Catholic tradition of making vows. Participation in brotherhood performances is essentially a form of *ex-voto*, an expression of gratitude to the Virgin or a saint for the fulfillment of a vow (Cardoso 1933:39–43).

A similar process of brotherhood king election ceremonies has been observed among slaves of the Kongo nation in the American diaspora. In these brotherhoods, the parallels to king elections in Kongo with their inherent *sangamento* dances are striking (Souza 2002:210; Heywood and Thornton 2007:212–3). *Sangamentos* were mock war performances. To the sound of drums, marimbas, and ivory horns, men carrying swords would show their agility in an imaginary war scene. These performances were of particular importance at a time of transition of power. Whenever a new king of Kongo or one of his regional representatives was elected, *sangamentos* were performed as part of the delegation of power (Thornton 1998:30–5). As Cécile Fromont has convincingly shown, *sangamentos* and other rituals linked to king election ceremonies in the Kingdom of Kongo thrived in the context of Black brotherhoods of the Kongo slave nation in Brazil, where they came to be known as *congadas* (2014:24–5).

While it was long assumed that Black brotherhoods were associated with slave culture on the Iberian Peninsula and in Iberian colonies only, it is likely that mutual-aid and burial societies modeled upon Afro-Iberian brotherhoods also existed in other parts of the Americas (Dewulf 2015a). As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury argue, “approved institutional structures . . . were not always necessary for Africans and their descendants to build fraternal structures” (2013:9). Examples of slave mutual-aid organizations with surprisingly similar characteristics to Afro-Iberian brotherhoods can, in fact, be found all over the Americas, including territories with a French, English, Dutch, or Danish colonial history. Regarding British Guyana, for instance, James Rodway claimed in 1893 that “it had been customary for years for the Negroes of every nation in a district to choose head-men or ‘Kings.’” The duties of the kings were “to take care of the sick and purchase rice, sugar, &c., for them, to conduct the burials, and see that the corpse was properly enclosed in a cloth, and that the customary rites and dances were duly observed.” Rodway specified that the burial and mutual-aid society he had discovered had been established by Blacks of the Kongo nation and that members had the power to force their leaders to step down (1893:295–7). When the English missionary Francis Le Jau approached the slave community in South Carolina in 1710, he was surprised to find that some “were born and baptized among the Portuguese,” which prompted him to impose as a rule that they would only be admitted to communion upon renouncing the “errors of the

Romish Church . . . the Chief of which is praying to the Saints” (1999:27–30). The anonymous author of the “Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina” in 1739 observed that “amongst the Negroe Slaves there are a people brought from the Kingdom of Angola in Africa, many of these speak Portugueze . . . and . . . profess the Roman Catholic Religion” (quoted in Smith 2005:13–5). When Thomas Turpin arrived in the South Carolina Sea Islands to do missionary work, he observed that the Black population had “societies organized among themselves” that “appeared to be very much under the influence of Roman Catholic principles” (1834). These societies may relate to the observation by Sam Gadsden, born on the island of Edisto in 1882, that “we had some black kings around here in the old days . . . and they really ruled the colored people” (quoted in Lindsay 1975:72). Also in the above-mentioned Pinkster festival in New York, Blacks would take advantage of the holiday to elect a king, and did so with rituals that recall Afro-Iberian brotherhood customs (Dewulf 2017:58–73).

More examples can be found in the Caribbean. On the Virgin Islands, Thurlow Weed wrote in 1866 that “the slaves on each estate elect their Queen and Princess, with their King and Prince, whose authority is supreme” (1866:345). Already in the 1760s, the Moravian missionary worker Christian Oldendorp had noted during his stay on the Virgin Islands that it was common “primarily by the Negroes from the Congo” to perform “a kind of baptism . . . characterized by pouring water over the head of the baptized, placing some salt in his mouth, and praying over him in the Congo language.” According to Oldendorp, this practice was of Portuguese origin and involved baptismal fathers and mothers who “adopt those whom they have baptized . . . and look after them as best they can. They are obliged to provide them with a coffin and burial clothing when they die” ([1770] 1987:263). These references by Oldendorp correspond to the observation by Moreau de Saint Méry that “there are a lot of Kongolese [in Saint-Domingue] . . . who have knowledge of Catholicism . . . which they obtained through the Portuguese” ([1798] 1875:39–41).

We also find organizations with characteristics similar to brotherhoods in Trinidad. In 1805, slaves on the island had been observed forming “convoys” or “regiments” that were led by a “king.” The groups used to march with flags and bands and, furthermore, included queens, ambassadors, judges, admirals, generals, and, as a clear indication that they already existed during the Spanish era, also police officers called *alguazils* (Cowley 1996:13). In their feasts, these regiments drank toasts “to the King’s health.” Furthermore, they collected money, cared for the sick, and buried the dead (Mullin 1992:223–5). They probably relate to groups that in a police ordinance, quoted in the *Port of Spain Gazette* (November 12, 1853), were described as “Africans of the Congo nation, who associated themselves together as ‘the Congo society’, and who had purchased certain premises . . . known as the Congo yard,” where “they hold public dances” and “when any of the society die . . . the dead body is brought to this yard to be ‘waked.’” On November 8, 1889, the *New Era* referred to them as “secret brotherhoods, with rituals and symbols resembling . . . those of the Masonic fraternity.” In 1893, Marie Bertrand de Cothonay reported about two groups of former slaves in Trinidad who used to organize a celebration that started with a High Mass and a procession that took them to a hut that “they had given the pompous name ‘palace.’”

They had also “named a black man as their king.” During three days and nights, “bacchanalian celebrations took place” at the palace, and “the king, who was elected by acclamation, had arranged the necessary funding, invited the guests, presented the blessed bread, etc. and opened the dance” (Cothonay 1893:62–3). It is likely that these groups relate to those described by Hamilton in his report on the Canboulay Riot. In fact, Daniel Crowley’s research revealed the former existence of “Congo Bands” in Trinidad, which consisted of men wearing a *shaplé* (French *chapulet*) or a rosary around their necks, and of *Jab-Jabs*, which were bands of Blacks dressed as devils, all elements that are typically identified with Afro-Iberian brotherhoods (Crowley 1956:198, 205–14).

As John Thornton has argued, “if [*sangamento*] dancing passed to America, it might be found in the martial types of dancing that one meets in occasional accounts of stick fighting” (2012:394). Kongolese *sangamentos* provide, in fact, a credible explanation for the attachment to stick fighting in Trinidadian culture and other parts of the Americas. In this respect, they correspond to Brazilian *congadas* that have similar mock war dances with sticks (Casculo 1979:242–5; van der Poel 2013:241–5). It also corresponds to Leaf’s assumption that *calenda* stick fighting in Trinidad once used to occur with swords rather than sticks, to Courlander’s observation that the dancers in the performance he witnessed in Jérémie held their sticks “like sabers,” to Hamilton’s reference to Black kings in Trinidad, and to Flint’s and Castellanos’ references to a king in their descriptions of the Congo dance in New Orleans. Not by accident, Ned Sublette’s groundbreaking research on Black musical culture in Louisiana made him conclude that mutual-aid and burial organizations similar to Cuban Black brotherhoods (*cabildos*) must also have existed among the Crescent City’s slave population (2008:114–5). It is, in fact, revealing that the most iconic Black performance traditions of the city where Le Page du Pratz once observed *calindas*—from the coconut-throwing Krewe of Zulu, the city’s many second-line clubs to the Mardi Gras Indian gangs—all developed in the context of mutual-aid and burial societies (Smith 1994:25–9, 51; Dewulf 2015b).

### Conclusion

This article presents a new theory on the origins of the mysterious term *calenda*. Unlike previous theories, the assumption that the term entered the Americas in the context of the Iberian colonization as a reference to a festive period on the calendar allows a credible explanation for the broad variety of meanings and interpretations we find in primary sources. Understanding the *calenda* from an Iberian perspective also explains the recurrent references to belts with jingle bells and the fact that the same performance was shared by Africans and Spaniards. It underlines the importance of connecting performance traditions (wrongly) considered to be typically Caribbean and/or Louisianan to the broader Atlantic and calls for a new paradigm in the analysis of Black slave culture in the diaspora. While the earliest scholars working in this field were mainly interested in an assumed process of assimilation according to European standards, later generations rightly pointed out the need to look for indigenous African continuities as well as for the creation of syncretic cultures and innovations in the

New World. However, this article suggests the need to complement the latter with an increased focus on the amount of contact Africans had with European—primarily Portuguese—cultures *before* they were shipped as slaves to the Americas, and also to apply the concept of syncretism to the analysis of African cultures. Since the transatlantic trade had made the entire western African coastal area part of an intercultural Atlantic zone, it is only natural that enslaved Africans not only brought indigenous African traditions to the New World, but also syncretic traditions such as those that had developed in the context of Afro-Iberian brotherhoods.

The many references to “slave kings” suggest a proximity between the proliferation of *calendas* in the Americas and Black mutual-aid and burial societies modeled upon such brotherhoods. Brotherhoods provide a credible explanation for the continuous attachment to practices with Afro-Iberian roots. Naturally, the changing realities Blacks were experiencing required constant adaptations of these practices. Brotherhoods were also in constant dialogue with each other, even across borders. For instance, research by Linda Rupert revealed that in the eighteenth century, “several religious brotherhoods (*cofradías*) in Coro [Venezuela] had direct ties to similar societies in Curaçao” (2012:179). We could also refer to the case of Joaquín Belaguer, king of the Kongo brotherhood in Puerto Príncipe, who admitted that his involvement in the Cuban Aponte Rebellion in 1812 had been inspired by Henri Christophe’s coronation in Haiti. According to Childs (2006:161–3), members of Belaguer’s brotherhood spread rumors about support not only by the king of Haiti to their revolt, but even by the king of Kongo himself. At the same time, however, brotherhood rituals had to remain recognizable in order to maintain group identification. Brotherhoods and their inherent practices can, therefore, best be understood as a balancing act between traditionalism and adaptability.

Even after abolition, a mixture of poverty, lack of opportunities, and suspicion of outsiders encouraged groups to keep relying on each other instead of on others to secure a minimum of social protection, human dignity, and self-respect. In this respect, it is revealing that interviews by David Draper with members of some of New Orleans’ poorest neighborhoods about the city’s Black performance culture made him realize the importance of mutual-aid associations. These organizations provide financial aid to members in need, assist those who get imprisoned or hospitalized, and cover funeral expenses. To adult members of societies such as the Mardi Gras Indians, he claims, the music and dancing is “of secondary importance in comparison with the instrumental qualities of being a member of the mutual-aid association” (1973:23).

Draper’s observation confirms that the history of Black performance culture in the Americas cannot be understood without taking into account the social conditions in which people live(d). Studying this history in connection with mutual-aid and burial societies makes it clear that there was no such thing as unrestrained joy among the victims of slavery. After all, such organizations existed because the only ones Blacks could really trust for the provision of aid were their own people. It would, therefore, be wrong to understand the dances that occurred during festive *calendas* as an escapist attempt to forget about problems. Rather, they were part of a social structure that responded to these problems. Their dancing was, quite literally, a form of resistance.

## Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from materials in languages other than English are by the author.

2. I use the term “Kongo” instead of “Congo” in order to distinguish between the ancient Kingdom of Kongo and the later Belgian and French colonies in the region that achieved independence in 1960 and are today known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (capital: Kinshasa) and the Republic of the Congo (capital: Brazzaville).

3. Examples can be found on the following links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlwxmDQR0dc>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUrU0nPQ9kw>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOGSNkplzYI> (accessed July 17, 2016).

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