Matthew Francis Rarey

Insignificant Things

AMULETS *and the* ART OF SURVIVAL *in the* EARLY BLACK ATLANTIC

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Visual Arts of Africa and Its Diasporas

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Amulets and the Art of Survival in the Early Black Atlantic

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To Jacques and José Francisco.
To Crispina, Vicente, Lobão,
and Luis. To Torquato, João,
and José. To all those who sought
protection in their time of need,
and to all those who still seek it.

May harm never find you.

Contents

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A core overview of the book's main arguments, mostly derived from chapters 1 and 2, appeared as "Assemblage, Occlusion, and the Art of Survival in the Black Atlantic" in *African Arts* in 2018. A shortened version of chapter 3 appears as "Leave No Mark: Blackness and Inscription in the Inquisitorial Archive," in *Black Modernisms in the Transatlantic World* (2023). Finally, a small section of chapter 4 appeared in my essay "Counterwitnessing the Visual Culture of Brazilian Slavery," in *African Heritage and Memories of Slavery in Brazil and the South Atlantic World* (2015). I thank all these publishers for their support of these previous publications.

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Map 1 The Atlantic Ocean. Map designed by Tim Stallman.

Map 2 West Africa and the Sahel. Map designed by Tim Stallman.

Map 3 The Bight of Benin. Map designed by Tim Stallman.

INTRODUCTION

Significance, Survival, and Silence

If our search for the enduring and the beautiful cannot be reconciled with the ugly facts of a painful historical present, perhaps it is to the ugly, the mean, and the seemingly insignificant that we need to address our attentions.
David Doris, *Vigilant Things*

Any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences.
Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

Inside the pages of trial record (*processo*) 2355 of the Lisbon Inquisition, there is a curious addition, an unexpected insertion, an object seemingly out of place: a small fabric pouch, slightly more than an inch wide, sewn into its binding (figure I.1). Made of one continuous piece of textured fabric, its left side still displays its original finishing whip stitch used to seal the amulet (figure I.2). By contrast, a tear in the right side opens onto a glimpse of the pouch's contents, while the white strings at top testify to a previous, almost haphazard, repair. Its once green exterior now faded to a patchy brown and its form now flattened to near imperceptibility between the pages, for the past three centuries this object has subtly warped the fifty-one handwritten folios that surround it. This object's unassuming form, however, belies the transoceanic circulations of people, objects, and ideas that led to its creation; the awesome, dangerous forms of power and protection it provided its user; the significant, coordinated efforts to eliminate it; and the nascent system of global surveillance into which it decisively intervened.

I.1 Bolsa de mandinga attached to the Inquisition record of Jacques Viegas, Lisbon, Portugal, 1704. Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 2355; PT/TT/TSO-IL/028/02355. Image courtesy of the ANTT.

Between the mid-seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, pouch-form amulets (*bolsas*) like this one—often, but not exclusively, referred to as *mandinga* in the records of the Portuguese Inquisition—found a diverse clientele in Madeira, Cape Verde, Brazil, Angola, and Portugal. The governance of the Portuguese Empire bound together these regions, as did the movements of Africans' lives and ideas during the Atlantic slave trade: a system of transcultural destructions, reciprocal flows, and reinventions scholars have come to call the Black Atlantic world.[1] Surviving testimonies describe these objects' diversity of forms and powers. Usually in the form of a fabric or leather pouch, some attracted new lovers, while others provided luck in games of chance.[2] Some bolsas used by enslaved people explicitly challenged that legal status: one turned its user invisible to escape his enslaver, and another stopped the movement of a slave ship.[3] But most commonly, users, witnesses, and inquisitors all agreed that these amulets protected individuals from intimate personal violence. Though documents suggest that people of all backgrounds and social classes used bolsas,

I.2 Detail of figure I.1, showing original finishing whip stitch used to seal the amulet.

a disproportionate number of trial records, including many of the most detailed, focus on enslaved Africans who had spent time in Brazil; Africans who—like the objects they made and disseminated along the way—spent their lives navigating and reinterpreting conflicting visual and ritual practices on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

The pouch shown here—one of only two surviving examples in the records of the Portuguese Inquisition—entered the archive in July of 1704, when authorities received it as evidence in the trial of Jacques Viegas. Jacques, an enslaved West African "native of the Mina Coast" (*natural da Mina*), was about twenty years old when he was arrested in Lisbon on charges of "witchcraft and the use of fetishes" (*bruxaria e feitiçaria*) the previous month. After his arrest, Jacques entered the Holy Office and held up this object for inquisitors to see as he made his confession. Between June and October, inquisitors interrogated Jacques about the object's origins, construction, and use. Jacques testified that he acquired it from Manuel, another Black man in Lisbon, who manufactured pouches that could protect their wearers from knife wounds, gunshots, and malevolent forces. Through the torn seam in its side one can see its empowering contents: black hairs, seeds, and cotton, all wrapped inside a folded piece of paper (figure I.3).

I.3 Bolsa de mandinga attached to the Inquisition record of Jacques Viegas. Its contents are visible through the torn seam on the side. Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 2355; PT/TT/TSO-IL/028/02355. Image courtesy of the ANTT.

The secrecy of this amulet's contents, however, contrasted with the spectacular public performances that confirmed its efficacy. During his May 1704 deposition, Manuel Correa, a white Christian-born man (*cristão velho*; literally "Old Christian") testified that he had sought out Jacques in hope he could provide protection from violence, as Manuel was engaged in a series of quarrels.[4] Jacques obliged and gave him a small amulet whose powers Jacques demonstrated by holding it while plunging a sword into his own chest. Awestruck, Correa recounted that Jacques did this "with great force; but it did not hurt him, only bending the sword."[5] This proved that it was no ordinary object: it was *mandinga*. While for eighteenth-century Portuguese speakers this term commonly referred to talismanic objects with perceived African associations and otherworldly powers, to inquisitors this term confirmed Jacques's "pact with the Devil." And so they sentenced Jacques to a public penance of his faith (*auto-da-fé*), a public flogging, and three years of exile to the Algarve, in southern Portugal. It was at least the second forced migration of his young life. But while Jacques would never return to Lisbon, his pouch remains there, preserved inside the decaying pages used to imprison it and its former owner.

* * *

This book is a history of this object and an exploration of the interpretive possibilities it folds into the troubled archives of Atlantic slavery. Jacques's *bolsa de mandinga* ("Mandinga pouch") exemplifies a discourse covering three centuries and four continents in which enslaved and other marginalized people turned to apotropaic objects as tactics of survival. In so doing, they created unprecedented, portable archives of their lives and milieux. Yet these objects' visually banal form, surreptitious display, and inherent mobility did more than facilitate their survival in the context of forced migration and its concomitant quotidian violence. Rather, these aesthetic strategies helped them to avoid unwelcome gazes and close visual inspection, tactics that would seem to counter their significance as protective agents and archival sources. This book, then, is an attempt to write through an irreconcilable contradiction: an art history of the Black Atlantic that centers objects designed to avoid analysis.

Insignificant Things does not approach these objects as a distinct set of works, but rather as an evolving discourse that intersects with early modern debates over race, identity, diaspora, vision, and value. The book argues, first, that the wide circulation of bolsas and the mélange of inclusions reveal the complex and mutual imbrications of cultural practices only later termed *African* and *European*. Indeed, concerns about cultural authenticity mattered little to Jacques. As an embodiment of its user's search for safety in a violent world, Jacques's object bound together a mélange of pragmatically selected materials in new and intimate configurations. In so doing, *mandingueiros* ("mandinga-makers") disavowed claims to authenticity and cultural origin. Second, the book argues that these' objects internal contents—tossed aside by inquisitors but highly valued by bolsa-users—interrogated elite assumptions about the spiritual and economic value of bodies and materials in the context of Atlantic slavery and mercantilism: a point that leads to their eventual characterization by inquisitors, in the early 1700s, as canonical objects of *feitiçaria* ("fetishism" or "sorcery"). And finally, by uniting effective, sought-after apotropaic powers with unassuming forms, mandinga amulets broke down the linkages between violence, visuality, and political power that scaffolded systems of racial and cultural hierarchy.

Exemplary of a material and discursive history of African-associated apotropaic amulets used between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the singularity of Jacques's bolsa de mandinga exists in tension

with the broad, deep contextual terrains one must cover to account for its presence in the archive. Across four chapters this book traces the circulation and use of amulets in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century West Africa before moving out to the wider Atlantic rim. While the narrative makes occasional reference to amulets in regions under Spanish and French governance—primarily Spain, Colombia, Saint-Domingue, and Louisiana—chapters 2, 3, and 4 focus on regions associated with the Portuguese Empire—the Upper Guinea Coast, the Bight of Benin, Angola, Brazil, and Portugal—between the late 1600s and 1835. Looking in and against Arabic-language narratives from the West African Sahel, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European-language travel and merchant trader accounts along the West African coast, the archives of the Portuguese Inquisition, and the records of early nineteenth-century Brazilian police forces, the book's chapters collectively chart a history of the forms these objects took on, the Atlantic circulation of contents their makers assembled and sealed inside them, the social relationships they facilitated, the otherworldly abilities they carried, and the efforts made to alternately suppress and control them.

The objects at the core of this study reexamine long-standing questions in African diaspora art history, slavery studies, and visual culture studies. How, for example, does the use of the West African ethnonym *Mandinga* to refer generically to empowered objects reframe understandings about the emergence of ethnic identities in the wake of the internal African and Atlantic slave trades? What do the contents and construction of these amulets reveal about how those persons forcibly transported through Africa, and across the Atlantic, responded to the new conditions in which they found themselves—in particular, how they protected themselves from the new dangers they encountered? Why did they value these visually benign objects and contents that radically depart from the widely studied corpus of print culture, plastic arts, and monuments also used to represent or memorialize slavery across the Atlantic world? And how, finally, might these bolsas de mandinga pose new possibilities for those seeking traces of Black peoples' lives and livelihoods inside the archive of Atlantic slavery? If the goal of African diaspora art history, as Krista Thompson reminds us, is to "put pressure on such particularized configurations of art and art history that do not get seen as such, and which masquerade as universal," then—in their material interrogation of universalizing claims to power, and in their attempts to avoid visual surveillance in so doing—mandinga amulets are paradigmatic African diasporic objects.[6]

In so doing, *Insignificant Things* argues that mandinga pouches reveal new historical actors, new methods of constructing archives, and new models for considering how those in diaspora represented and navigated their experience in arenas meant to obscure it.

Contexts: Jacques Viegas and Mandingas in the Black Atlantic, ca. 1700

Jacques's trial resulted from seismic cultural political shifts at the turn of the eighteenth century. In the decades before 1700 a series of prominent African states collapsed or fragmented, leaving power vacuums in their wake. In central Africa, the Kingdom of Kongo's 1665 defeat by the Portuguese at the Battle of Mbwila began a period of political disintegration. In the Gold Coast the Akwamu state was supplanted by Asante, who increasingly focused on slave trading between Accra and Ouidah after 1700.[7] And in the land of Jacques's birth—referred to as the "Mina Coast" or "Slave Coast"—competition for primacy in the trade with Europeans fueled warfare among rival states. As late as the 1690s, Allada and Hueda controlled coastal trading centers, but by the early 1700s Dahomey expanded southward from its capital at Abomey and gradually cut off access to internal trade routes as the slave trade intensified.

These developments intertwined with those in the Portuguese colony of Brazil. Since the mid-sixteenth century, sugar—principally cultivated by enslaved Africans laboring in Bahia and Pernambuco—had been Brazil's dominant cash-crop. But in the 1690s sugar planters gradually abandoned their plantations as they joined a gold rush in Minas Gerais. So significant was the Minas Gerais gold rush that it had a quantifiable effect on the empire's population distribution: between three and ten thousand people left Portugal annually for Brazil in the first few decades of the eighteenth century. This emigration likely contributed to a decrease in Portugal's population between 1700 and 1732.[8] To fund expansive mining operations, Brazilian merchants traded gold for captives in West African ports like Accra, Elmina, and Ouidah and quickly dominated the slave trade there.[9] Yet they did so illicitly: since the 1690s, the Portuguese Crown had banned Brazilian merchants—most operating from Bahia—from trading on the Mina Coast.[10] Merchants ignored the order, and Portugal lost control over the colony's economy. Though in 1703 they reversed the decree, the Crown's distant location in Portugal meant that Brazilian traders feared

few repercussions if they ignored the monarchy's attempts to regulate the trade.[11] By 1725, over half of Brazil's population lived in Minas Gerais, and by the end of the eighteenth century, over half of Minas Gerais was enslaved.[12]

Capital flowing from Brazil further destabilized West African political structures. The resulting competition for prisoners of war to enslave and sell to Europeans led to an unprecedented increase in their numbers. Between 1690 and 1700, over 160,000 captive Africans found themselves on ships bound for Brazil or Portugal. Nearly double that of the previous decade, this number accounted for nearly half of all Africans similarly displaced to the Americas or Europe in those same ten years.[13] The person later named Jacques Viegas was one of these.

Jacques's trial makes no mention of his life between his departure from Africa and his arrival in Portugal. Though Brazil was the most common destination for those exiled from the Mina Coast, his trial record's absence of references to Brazil suggest that he disembarked in Portugal. In Lisbon, Jacques encountered a city with a strong African presence. Wolof Muslims enslaved in African networks had been arriving in Portugal since the 1500s, and some had studied at Qur'anic schools in Africa before finding themselves in Iberia.[14] In Spain and Portugal, they and other African Muslims (Portuguese, *mouriscos*; Spanish, *moriscos*) had reputations as healers and keepers of esoteric knowledge.[15] Converted to Christianity by choice or by force, the Inquisition later prosecuted some for using talismanic objects: a practice that preceded that of Jacques's by over a century and a half.[16] In 1556, for example, Luís Duarte, captured by the Portuguese after a battle in Morocco, was arrested by the Inquisition on charges of Islamism; a talismanic paper with Arabic writing served as evidence in his trial.[17] And in 1592, Juan Martín, a morisco living in Seville, Spain, carried Qur'anic papers "hidden on his person" that could heal illnesses and assist in escaping from captivity: an object whose form, display, and function mirrored those later labeled *mandinga*.[18]

Jacques's Lisbon was a crucial node in the Atlantic exchange of bodies, objects, and lives. Many Africans lived in the city, transported there by ships that also offloaded sugar, gold, and animals from Brazil into Lisbon's port. Missionaries and traders in Goa, Java, and Macau sent back spices, textiles, and ivory. Even a century before Jacques's arrival in Lisbon, stores on the Rua Nova das Mercadores, the city's main market street, sourced curiosities from across the globe; one could find Indian textiles and other goods at markets held every Tuesday on Rossio Square.[19] Those

who could afford them assembled ivories, curios, and other exotica in curiosity cabinets or other displays in their homes.[20]

But as one early sixteenth-century painting makes clear, these materials engendered anxieties about the religious life of a city at the crossroads of transoceanic exchange (figure I.4). Its anonymous artist depicts a group of white Europeans being boiled, stabbed, force-fed, and prodded in a vision of Hell presided over by an allegory of Portugal's overseas consumption.[21] The masked figure holds an ivory hunting horn, its form deriving from those produced by Kongo, Edo, and Sapi artisans on Portuguese commission (figure I.5), while its green feathered suit and headdress echoes those produced by Tupi (Indigenous Brazilian) artists for ritual use. One torture even depicts being force-fed a Portuguese coin minted from West African or Brazilian gold.

This punitive vision of white Europeans' lustful consumption from across the Atlantic prefaces a concern that had strengthened by the time of Jacques Viegas's trial: that the intermixture of Atlantic slavery's forced circulation of bodies and goods undermined social morality and the Church's spiritual authority. In 1728, priest and moralist Nuno Marques Pereira spoke of hell as a place filled with "serpents, scorpions, snakes, lizards, toads, and all sort of poisonous creatures," a menagerie of Brazilian-associated

I.4 Unknown Portuguese master, *Hell*, 1505–1530. Oil on oak, 119 × 217.5 cm (46.9 × 85.6 inches). Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, Portugal. Image courtesy of the Direção-Geral do Património Cultural / Arquivo e Documentação Fotográfica. Photograph by Luísa Oliveira and José Paulo Ruas, 2015.

I.5 Detail of figure I.4.

fauna that made clear his perception of Brazil as a land of torments.[22] Indeed, throughout Brazil's colonial period (1500–1821), over half of the population was enslaved; Africans, both enslaved and free, participated in a diverse range of religious practices. The religious experiences of Africans arriving in Brazil included Islam, West African devotions to vodun and òrìṣà, central African forms of ancestor veneration, and Congolese Catholicism. In Brazil, these all commingled with varying forms of popular and institutionalized Catholicism and Indigenous spiritual traditions. Building on Pereira's perception, throughout Brazil's colonial period, as Laura de Mello e Souza describes it, "syncretism was one of the faces of hell," since "African and indigenous beliefs were constantly demonized by elite thought, incapable of comprehending colonial religiosity in its ever more multifaceted expressions."[23]

Portuguese and Spanish Inquisition trials of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, suggest that Africans' religiosities also thrived in the metropole. And though Inquisition records decried the increasing visibility of Africans' practices, many prominent whites in Brazil, Portugal, and even central Africa also participated in them.[24] In social contexts where one's status was based in skin color, descent, and cultural affiliations, white Portuguese clients also looked to Central African *calundu* divination ceremonies as well as to mandinga amulets, even as others decried them.[25] This cultural reality generated new discourses of power and orthodoxy, and in

response the Portuguese Catholic Church constantly moved the proverbial goalposts of permissibility. The Portuguese Inquisition emerged in this context, its existence and priorities bound with the lives of those in Portugal's far-flung empire. From its establishment at the request of King João III in 1536—shortly after the anonymous vision of *Hell*—to its disbanding in 1821, the Holy Office's authority and scope waxed and waned because of royal whims and political opportunism in a pluralistic world. The Inquisition's lifespan, in turn, almost exactly paralleled that of the rise and decline of Portugal's transatlantic slave trade and its governance of Brazil.

Of the Inquisition's three metropolitan tribunals, Coimbra and Évora processed nearly two-thirds of all cases over its three-century run, all from Portugal. And while it tried some local cases, the Lisbon tribunal processed all cases from Africa and Brazil. This distribution suggests that the Inquisition paid comparatively lesser mind to religious life in the colonies. Though by 1610 the Spanish Inquisition had established tribunals in Lima, Mexico City, and Cartagena de Indias, Portugal never established an autonomous tribunal in the Americas.[26] As a result, Brazilian cities like Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro, or Portuguese trading centers on the African coast like Cacheu and Luanda, were imagined as potential havens for practitioners of African religions, Muslims, Jews, and "New Christians" (*cristãos novos*, those raised outside of Christianity but later baptized) escaping persecution in Portugal. Paradoxically, the Holy Office also exiled them to such locales as punishment. While in practice this resulted in fewer cases from Brazil or Africa sent for prosecution in Lisbon, the Lisbon tribunal continued its vigilance through a combination of periodic visitations conducted by the Holy Office, bishops, and other church representatives as well as through a network of commissaries (*comissários*) who identified suspects for prosecution. This nascent system of surveillance also surrogated everyday people: a church edict stated that "any person, man or woman, clergy or religious person, of whatever state, condition, dignity, or class" had a duty to denounce sins against the Church.[27] Though the Inquisition's focus was originally on religious crimes such as blasphemy and Judaism, its expanding Atlantic purview created new categories of sexual crimes, censorship, magic (*magia*), witchcraft (*bruxaria*), and *feitiçaria*, a term that encompassed a range of actions related to the expert manipulation and control of unseen forces and physical objects as well as to the acquisition of illicit knowledge necessary to carry out such spiritual labor.[28] It was under this final category Jacques Viegas was charged and convicted in 1704.

Jacques was brought before the Lisbon tribunal at the time of the Inquisition's most significant focus on Brazil. Brazil's increasing wealth from gold production had sped up the institutionalization of ecclesiastical structures and commissary networks in the colony, which led to more denunciations sent to Lisbon.[29] In turn, the significant population influx in the decades after the gold rush, especially of enslaved Africans, meant that persons of African descent appeared with increasing frequency before the Lisbon Inquisition between 1700 and 1730. This period also encompasses most trial records concerning mandingas. For this reason, both enslaved Africans and inquisitors in Portugal viewed mandingas as having a special connection to Brazil. José Francisco Pereira—an apparently prolific African-born mandingueiro then resident in Lisbon—relayed at his 1731 trial that "since he had spent some time in Brazil, many blacks hounded him to give them mandingas because [they said] he must have brought some from there."[30] The Inquisition, it seems, had already noticed the problem on both sides of the Atlantic: in 1692, in Santarém, Portugal, a Black man named Diogo was denounced for "carrying a bolsa like those dealt with" in inquisitorial decrees (*editais*).[31] And in 1693, agents of the Lisbon Inquisition sent a group of twenty-five decrees concerning the bolsas to Rio de Janeiro, presumably in response to increasing reports of their use there.[32] One of the clearest statements on the Inquisition's suspicion of Brazilian bolsas comes from the Portuguese-born Dominican priest Alberto de Santo Tomás. Working as a missionary in the Bahian countryside from 1703 to 1713, he began to adopt exorcism rituals that paralleled those he denounced, which included producing his own bolsas that his clients wore "around their neck or attached to their clothes."[33] When he denounced himself in 1713, inquisitors dismissed the case—his "exorcisms" found to be in keeping with Catholic doctrine—but they ordered he discontinue distribution of the bolsas.[34]

The story of Miguel Ferreira Pestana further shows how mandingas disavow attempts to pin down their allegiance during this period.[35] A native of Espírito Santo, Brazil, Pestana's Indigenous background contrasts to the predominance of African-born and African-descended mandingueiros who appeared before the Lisbon Inquisition. At his 1744 trial, Pestana described how some years prior he arrested a Black man while working as a *capitão-do-mato* (literally "bush captain," someone employed to find and capture people in flight from enslavement) in the parish of Inhomirim in Rio de Janeiro. After searching the man's belongings, Pestana found a bolsa. At his trial, Pestana claimed—or feigned—ignorance of this object's

form and function, instead asserting that Ventura, a Black man who accompanied Pestana on his searches for fugitives, informed Pestana of its significance. Opening the amulet, Pestana found a folded piece of paper inscribed with "various painted figures and some written letters in a great variety of inks," a description that foregrounds the critical role of written and drawn-on papers inside mandinga pouches.[36] Unable to read the paper's text or interpret its designs, Pestana showed it to Salvador Correa, a literate acquaintance of his who, ironically, would eventually denounce Pestana to the Inquisition. Correa—identified as *mulato* (someone born of one Black and one white parent) on the trial record—then informed Pestana that the paper served to grant good luck in games and "to not be injured," and so Pestana decided to keep the amulet with him, believing it would assist him in his role as a capitão-do-mato.[37]

In its movement from an object assisting someone fleeing enslavement to assisting someone charged with his capture—who, in turn, was later arrested and exiled for its use—Pestana's testimony underscores amulets' seamless movements between competing realms of power, allegiance, and hierarchy. Rather than being understood as an object restricted to a particular class or cultural sphere, bolsa-users and -makers consistently reappropriated and recontextualized them to serve competing interests in an ongoing popular search for safety and success in a dangerous world. In turn, Pestana's narrative—in which a Black man is charged with assisting the capture of fugitives—again underscores the care that must be taken to not equate assertions of Africanness with Blackness, nor either of these with enslavement or resistance, particularly in colonial Brazil. Finally, note Pestana's need to open the object and detail its contents not just to Ventura but also to his inquisitors. Before the Inquisition, he continued to deny any association the object had outside of an inquisitorial vision of Catholic orthodoxy.

Such aspects are not unique to Pestana's case, but rather inflect scores of inquisitorial and police trials associated with the amulets discussed in the pages that follow. The primacy of inquisitorial records as an archival source for bolsas, however, overemphasizes the role of the Inquisition in everyday life, even in this especially busy period. In the entirety of its purview, the Inquisition only received about 1,000 denunciations from Brazil; even then, most concerned New Christians accused of practicing Judaism.[38] Collectively, the Portuguese Inquisition's tribunals only tried 852 people for feitiçaria between 1700 and 1760, and this number included only sixty people of African descent.[39] Given that in 1725 Brazil had, by

one estimate, an African-descended population of between 100,000 and 150,000 people, the overwhelming majority of those using bolsas de mandinga not only never appeared before the Inquisition; they never feared that they would.[40] Imagine how many of these objects were produced but will never be known; consider this certainly massive and now largely disappeared archive: one we can only glimpse through the tear in the side of Jacques's amulet. But, reading the records closely, one sees how Africans knew of the proliferation and promise of these objects as singularly effective forms of personal protection, fabricated through the intertwined histories of religious transformation, material exchange, forced migration, and struggles for power that characterized the early eighteenth-century Atlantic world.

"Insignificant": The Historiography of an Odd Title

On the surface, the title of this book undermines its argument. It reproduces the words and perspectives of inquisitors who, looking into Jacques's amulet—and many others—simply dismissed the importance or meaning of what they saw. Indeed, the book's title reproduces a trial scribe's description of the contents of an amulet worn by Lobão, an enslaved man accused of participating in an African-led rebellion in Bahia in 1835. "Fragments of insignificant things," he wrote.[41] Yet they were not insignificant, for the accusers and accused in such trials had long agreed on the power of amulets used by Africans. As evidenced by Jacques's trial a century earlier, inquisitors had dedicated years to finding and suppressing these objects, and in 1835, Lobão used his in an attempt to overthrow Bahia's slavery society. At its core, then, this book asks why Jacques and Lobão, despite their different historical contexts, looked to these "insignificant" materials as manifestations of apotropaic powers and revolutionary potential.

The book's title is an effort to put into practice the same recontextualizations and against-the-grain readings of elite claims to power that mandingueiros manifested in their own practice. To this end, "insignificant" also registers authorities' anxiety about the autonomy of objects and their users in a slavery society. As will be outlined in chapter 4, in 1835 the scribe used "insignificant" to dismiss the amulet's contents as things that would "signify" to elites because of their legibility inside an agreed-upon system of economic value and power signaling. He thus unwittingly testified to a system of signification and valuation that not only operated

outside of elite understandings, but that interrogated what Martin Jay calls the "scopic regimes of modernity" by strategically recontextualizing and reevaluating its contents.[42]

Almost fittingly, these "insignificant things" have only recently begun to attract sustained analysis, particularly from Brazilian historians.[43] All recent studies of mandingas, including the present text, build on Laura de Mello e Souza's pioneering 1986 work on colonial Brazilian popular religiosities, *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross*, which first looked to Portuguese Inquisition records to outline mandinga amulets' wide use across Brazil's social strata. Souza placed this diverse clientele in dialogue with repeated references to the amulets' visibly Catholic inclusions of orations, altar stones, and eucharistic hosts, labeling them "the most syncretic of all magical practices" in Brazil.[44]

Following Souza, research on bolsas expanded into the wider Atlantic, focusing on the transoceanic experiences of the eighteenth-century African-born mandingueiros whose work also forms the backbone of *Insignificant Things*. Daniela Buono Calainho's 2008 book *Metrópole das mandingas*, for example, analyzed the scope and structure of Africans' diverse religious systems in eighteenth-century Portugal and their association with feitiçaria. For Calainho, the "syncretic" contents of mandingas again reflect selective choices by their makers; thus, she concludes that Africans' practices transformed in the context of Catholicism and inquisitorial repression, but retained "fundamentally African characteristics."[45] Vanicléia Silva Santos, also writing in 2008, took an Atlantic-wide perspective on mandinga-production in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, concluding that mandingas were "symptomatic of the encounter between various African ethnic groups in Brazil" and that they occupied an identity "between Catholicism and Bantu and Guinean knowledges."[46]

These conclusions show that mandingas' material dimensions are critical to their interpretation, with amulets' Catholic characteristics emerging as points of focus, contention, and consternation.[47] Authors read them as difficult-to-interpret transculturations, as early articulations of contemporary Afro-Brazilian religiosities, or as efforts to mask or dialogue indigenous African beliefs with foreign influences.[48] In each case, mandingas are registered through the degrees of relationship to a kind of originating African thought system. *Insignificant Things*, by contrast, significantly expands and historicizes these objects' African context as part of scholars' continued efforts to resist what Henry John Drewal critiques as a prevailing conception of African cultures as "static, passive . . . anachronisms."[49]

Chapter 1, for example, shows how amulets of nearly identical external form and function to what are later labeled mandingas emerged in West Africa prior to the rise of the Atlantic slave trade. Initially conceived as Islamic-associated amulets to protect long-range gold traders and their caravans, they accumulated new layers of meaning with the expansion of human trafficking in the Sahara.[50] By the sixteenth century, as the transportation of captives from Senegambia to Iberia and the Americas inaugurated the discourse of mandingas in the Atlantic world, these amulets were already transcultural objects that served to protect their wearers from displacement and forced labor. Thus, this book aims to situate mandingas not as solely Luso-Brazilian artifacts associated with Catholicism, nor as purely African devices. Rather, they embody the historical grappling of Islam, Catholicism, and varied other African religions, even prior to their seeming emergence outside of Africa.

In turn, this book for the first time situates *mandinga* as a popular discourse, not as a discrete set of identifiable objects. As José Pedro Paiva notes, early eighteenth-century bolsas de mandinga did not differ substantially from amulets already widely used in Portugal.[51] Rather, these were identified as mandinga because of their new African associations—a desperate inquisitorial attempt to distinguish between mutually constituted ritual systems only later labeled "African" and "Catholic." In this way, the mandinga-as-discourse intervenes in changing understandings of the natural and cultural world, particularly in the wake of increasing material exchange, human migration, and cultural transformation brought by the expansion of empires like Mali, Dahomey, Oyo, and Portugal; the increasing power of Portugal's Inquisition; and a need to process, if not avoid, the violence of daily life. The diverse clientele of bolsas suggests that these struggles crossed lines of race and class but were particularly sensitive for those who were cast out of or displaced from their homelands and communal networks.

This discursive, as opposed to solely object-based, orientation allows the book's core framework to move far beyond studies of the religion and cultural lineage of mandingas that so far have dominated work on them. The present text develops arguments put forth by Cécile Fromont and me in earlier essays, placing mandingas not just as emblems of cultural practices from Africa or embodiments of new religious universes but as strategic responses to interpersonal violence, cultural displacement, and institutional power emerging from the intersections of slavery, commodity exchange, and religious transformation in the Black Atlantic.[52] The book thus continues work of scholars like Toby Green and Thiago Henrique Mota, who

have shown how the rise of material trade and human trafficking in West Africa impacted religious systems there.[53] *Insignificant Things* also uses mandingas to show how the rise of the African and Atlantic slave trades, and the concomitant material exchanges they led, directly impacted belief structures and the objects associated with them, but does so by expanding this argument out into the Atlantic, showing how Africans' ritual practices continued to be shaped by the realities of material exchange and slavery in and out of West Africa.

Elsewhere, scholars debate the role of these objects in reference to the social status of their makers and users, primarily enslaved Africans. James Sweet, for example, characterizes bolsas de mandinga as thoroughly transcultural objects, and yet also as singular productions of various African groups to respond to the quotidian problems faced by the enslaved.[54] While I build on this argument here, especially in chapter 2, I expand it to show how bolsa-makers intentionally interrogated wider power structures inside the amulets they produced. This argument pushes into a potential characterization of certain bolsas as a form of resistance to slavery, as has been asserted by Rachel E. Harding.[55] Roger Sansi, however, cautions against considering bolsas de mandinga as a way enslaved people resisted their legal status. Building off Souza's conclusions, he rightly noted that few of their users were African, that most contained Catholic designs or elements, and that very few, proportionally, were used by the enslaved as a means of resistance or escape.[56] Yet Sansi's structure, where resistance seems opposed to Catholic imagery, not only discounts the radically inventive ways mandingueiros recontextualized the array of ritual symbols they encountered, it also potentially obscures what I emphasize in chapters 3 and 4: Black people's attempts at survival itself as resistance and revolutionary act in a world founded on slavery.

Significance, Insignificance, and the Scraps of Black Atlantic Cultural Production

In his 1993 text *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy uses the image of a ship in motion as a chronotope for the Black Atlantic world. A ship, he says, "focuses attention on the Middle Passage, on the various projects for a redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists, as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts."[57] Building on this metaphor, American

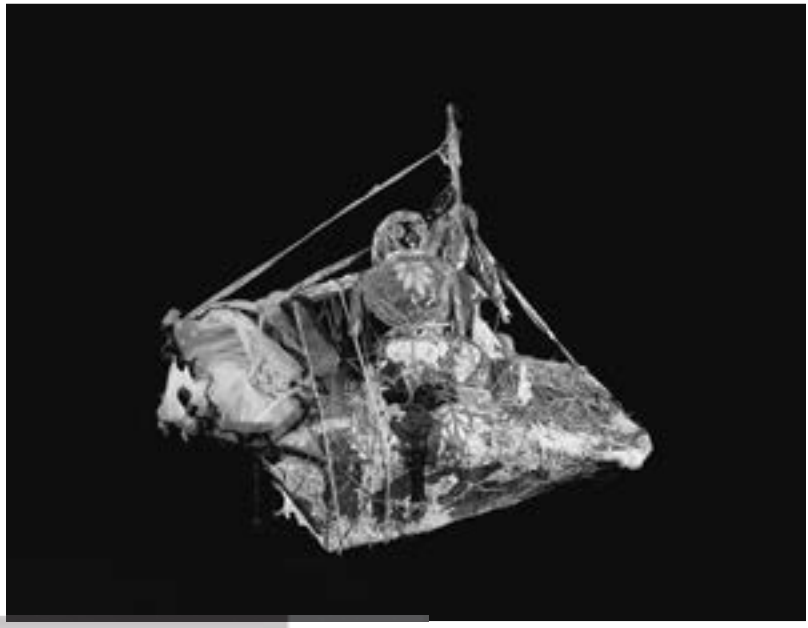
and British writers have credited *The Black Atlantic* with demonstrating how African diaspora cultural production is not an ahistorical "survival" of static African societies—a point expanded on later—but rather is defined by a collective memory of exclusion from the promises of modern national citizenship and political equality. As such, for Gilroy, Black Atlantic cultural formations fundamentally constitute and challenge conventional meanings of vision, identity, and modernity in the so-called West.[58]

Gilroy's focus on enslavement as an organizing principle of Black cultures intersects with long-standing investigations into the role of representations of enslaved subjects and allegories of freedom. Scholars have looked to paintings, print culture, sculpture, landscapes, monuments, consumer goods, and visual technologies—as well as to the legacies and reworkings of each of these by contemporary artists and in the public imaginary—to foreground slavery as a visualized practice of power negotiation.[59] And since, as Kimberly Juanita Brown notes, "studies of the black Atlantic and its subjectivities have always been studies of visual culture(s)," scholarship on the visual culture of slavery frequently disavows the limiting frameworks of geography, nationhood, and temporality in order to tease out the circulating webs of imagery and icons that worked, and continue to work, to render visible the intertwined dynamics of racialization and subjection.[60]

Yet in his focus on English-speaking Black people in the United States, Britain, and the Caribbean, Gilroy's work elided previous scholarship that traced the Black Atlantic's discontinuous cultural flows between Brazil and West Africa and that foregrounded the study of visual culture in this nexus. From the 1940s onward, for example, the French-born, Bahia-based ethnographer Pierre Verger utilized meticulous archival research and a relentless photographic eye to trace cultural dialogues sustained by Africans and Afro-Brazilians as they traveled back and forth between Bahia and the Bight of Benin.[61] Though Verger's project was to document the culinary, artistic, architectural, and ritual resonances between present-day societies on either side of the Atlantic, in so doing, he framed Black cultural production as a product of Black peoples' forced movements and collective agency. Thus, while in Gilroy's work Africa became a kind of absented locus for the intellectual "redemptive return" of displaced Black people, for Verger, Africa was a space of cultural dynamism linked to, but not defined by, the slave trade.[62]

Building on both these threads, *Insignificant Things* looks to Africans' movements and innovations between Africa, Portugal, and Brazil to re-

cast both the materials and discourses of the visual culture of slavery. It does this in two ways. The first is embodied in another vision of a ship, specifically the one fabricated by Haitian artist Pierrot Barra the same year Gilroy published *The Black Atlantic* (figure I.6). Its sequins, fabrics, and string—media discarded, pulled, and reassembled from the Atlantic world's transcultural storehouse—here constitute the sculpture as much as they envelop it. Performing the roles of both captain and captive, the central figure seems overtaken by the beauty and weight of that which binds it to the vessel. At home in its own dislocation, the agent of its own capture, Barra's *Boat* conjures into the present those new worlds that were forged and lost in the bellies of slave ships: a vision of African cultural production in diaspora that, following the lead of J. Lorand Matory, exists because of, not in spite of, its participation—by force and by choice—in translocal and transcultural dialogues.[63] Like many artists creating work to serve the *lwa* of Haitian Vodou—in this case, Agwe, spirit of the sea and



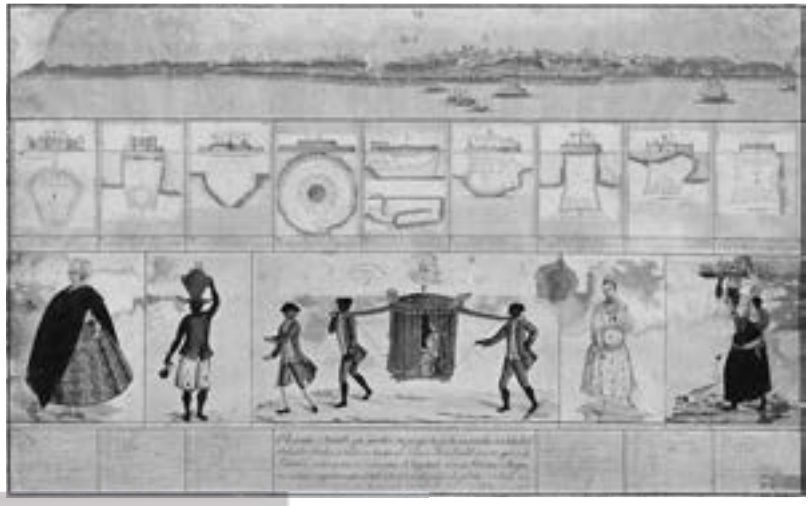
I.6 Pierrot Barra (Haitian, 1942–1999), *Boat*, 1993. Wood, satin, plastic, sequins, beads, pins, metallic ribbon, lace 86 × 45 × 94 cm (33.8 × 17.7 × 37 inches). Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, California. Museum Purchase, Manus Fund, X94.76.7. ©Photo courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA.

patron of fishermen—in the workshops of Port-au-Prince in the 1990s, Barra made new forms from inexpensive, cast-off, and recycled materials, or as Sibylle Fischer terms it, Caribbean *rasanblaj* ("reassemblage") made from "the trash in the streets."[64] In this way, Barra's vision of Black Atlantic artistic production recalls the archival methodologies of Jessica Marie Johnson, who similarly points out that any history of persons of African descent "during the period of slavery must build a narrative using fragments of sources and disparate materials," or what Saidiya Hartman calls the occluded registers and the disparate locations of the "scraps of the archive."[65] The material lives of mandinga amulets traced in this book suggest that Black artists have long created portable archives of Black Atlantic slavery and visual culture assembled from those very scraps cast off by elites.

By positioning unassuming artworks at the center of transatlantic debates over power and authority, *Insignificant Things* challenges traditional narratives about the political role of cast-off materials and ephemera, instead foregrounding them as critical interventions in the emergence of visualized racial formations. Such a framework will not be new to Africanist art historians, however. Suzanne Blier, for example, demonstrated how West African Vodun's incorporation of novel, foreign, and "detritus" materials emerged from the psychological and collective trauma of the slave trade in the Kingdom of Dahomey in the eighteenth century.[66] I also bring David Doris's idea of Yorùbá trash assemblages (*ààlè*) as sources of "affecting power" to bear on mandingas.[67] Paralleling their makers' experience of dislocation and recontextualization, bolsas de mandinga contained an array of items that interrogated cultural boundaries, religious orthodoxies, and artistic hierarchies, and did so from inside a small pouch engineered to facilitate transfer from person to person. In this way, the mandinga amulets of the early 1700s embody a mobile version of what Cécile Fromont has termed a "space of correlation," where their makers explored cultural transformation and sociopolitical efficacy away from the oversight of masters, inquisitors, and other elites.[68] In turn, since mandingas present one of the few cases where Europeans actively sought out objects derived from the spiritual practices of Africans, *Insignificant Things* uses the lens of accumulation aesthetics to read Portuguese Inquisition records themselves as assemblages that willingly incorporated the counterhegemonic objects they sought to suppress.

I also emphasize that mandinga amulets are not unique in their accumulative and fragmentary aesthetic principles, but rather adopted aesthetic

logics equally critical to the construction and discourse of imperial power. Consider, for example, a collage that subtly articulates the relationship between imperial visual culture and cut-and-paste aesthetics in context of the eighteenth-century south Atlantic. Produced in May 1779 by Carlos Julião, an Italian-born colonel and artist in the Portuguese army, *Elevation and façade showing in naval prospect the city of Salvador* presents a view of Bahia's capital city as its ruling classes wished it to be (figure I.7).[69] At the bottom, a row of urban types defined by racial category, social status, and cultural origin conveys the stability of social rank and structure; at the center, nine plans of Salvador's forts and garrisons collectively render the ideal of a protected and secure city; and at the top, Portuguese imperial flags fly over merchant ships crossing a panoramic vista of a bustling, productive harbor. In piecing together *Salvador*, Julião drew every fortress, ship, person, and label elsewhere, carefully cut them out, and then pasted them together on the background: a once blank slate now populated with the bricolage of empire. While these images work in concert to manifest the idealized qualities of a colonial port city, Julião's choice to bind them together in a collage highlights that dream's artificial construction. This act of assemblage



I.7 Carlos Julião, *Elevasam, Fasade, que mostra em prospeto pela marinha a Cidade de Salvador da Bahia de Todos os Santos na América Meridional . . .* , 1779. Painted collage. Gabinete de Estudos Arqueológicos e da Engenharia Militar, Lisbon. Image courtesy of the Gabinete de Estudos Arqueológicos da Engenharia Militar / Direcção de Infra-Estruturas do Exército.

calls attention to the movements and flows of cultures and identities that always link the here to the elsewhere, to that which is literally off *Salvador*'s map. The crossing of ships and bodies back and forth between Africa, the Americas, and Europe—whether entering the bay with enslaved Africans to work sugar plantations, or leaving the harbor with the refined cane sugar their labor created—was essential to Salvador's economic and political viability as a node in the Black Atlantic web.

If assembling *Salvador* from the fragmented histories and memories that circulate through the Black Atlantic constitutes the imagined colonial city, these processes of extraction, dislocation, and reassemblage also invoke its potential unsettling. Transplanting histories of enslavement and Atlantic cultural flows, as well as the ways such histories are formed through the politics of transplantation, are as much a part of *Salvador* as the military fortifications and symbolic trappings of Portuguese imperial authority: for at the bottom right, at the edge of the collage, a West African-born fruit seller carries a bolsa.[70] While this visible rendering of countercolonial aesthetics works inside *Salvador*, its piecemeal assemblage also asks us to think about what remains unseen underneath those pasted fragments, what provocations and possibilities exist along the ridges where the body, the fortress, and the flag were glued into *Salvador*.

In this sense, *Insignificant Things* foregrounds the seeming indecipherability and visual banality of bolsas not just as matters of current scholarly debate but as their core aesthetic strategies. Principles of visual indeterminacy, occlusion, and assemblage governed their production as a strategic innovation in a society marked by systemic violence and ever-shifting cultural boundaries in Africa as well as in diaspora. By hiding their internal contents, mandingueiros experimented with an ever-changing assemblage of carefully chosen activating substances; a strategy that may also explain why, as Amy J. Buono notes, art historians thus far "have largely ignored the mandinga pouches," given that "the more 'artistic' elements are hidden from view inside the pouch itself."[71] Buono's conclusion parallels that of David Doris, who in discussing Yorùbá ààlè, lightly castigates an art historical discourse that had, prior to his work, all but discounted these forms. "Some objects," he notes, "do not sit comfortably within the bounds of art history, a fact that suggests less about their inherent cultural excellence than it does about the impoverishment of an alien discourse that would seek to delimit so narrowly the possible objects of its study."[72] I cannot disagree, and indeed *Insignificant Things* represents an effort to expand how and why certain objects command the attention of scholars. But I am also

suggesting that aesthetic logic of bolsas de mandinga was intended to, in a sense, *prevent* them from being objects of study. If, as outlined in chapters 3 and 4, slavery can be understood as a set of visual practices that sought to "render black subjects transparent to a visualizing gaze" while also erasing them from public visibility, then the visually banal construction of mandingas reflects a strategic effort to reckon with the slavery's visual contradictions.[73]

Survival, Silence, and Archival Reckonings

"Survival" in this book's subtitle references two intertwined discourses in the historiography of the Black Atlantic and theorizations on the archives of Atlantic slavery. First, in the mid-twentieth century, Melville Herskovits searched for African cultural "survivals" in the context of proving the historical depth of African-descended peoples' history in the United States and the Americas more broadly.[74] Prior to Herskovits's work, most writers framed the Middle Passage, as well as the effects of plantation slavery, as ground-clearing losses from which Africans emerged devoid of cultural identity. Herskovits instead argued that an "African baseline of tradition" persisted in the societies of the Americas, and could be detected through careful analysis of Black performative, linguistic, and artistic practices.[75] The Africanist art historian Robert Farris Thompson later also sought to identify the "persisting strands of these ancestral patterns" of "African visual traditions" in the Americas as constitutive of what he coined as the "Black Atlantic visual tradition."[76]

One unfortunate legacy of Herskovits's work was a tendency in African diaspora art history to frame African societies as static, de facto antecedents to American history, as opposed to vibrant, shifting cultures that continued to evolve before, during, and after the rise of the Atlantic slave trade.[77] Indeed, one of this book's central goals is to show that the histories of mandinga amulets must be placed in dialogue with specifically historicized artistic practices on the African continent, for the collective impacts of the internal and oceanic slave trades profoundly altered cultural life there, as they did in the Americas and Europe. Interpreting amulets as a discourse of protection and survival allows for a framing of their genealogy as an ever-evolving interrogation and surreptitious appropriation of regimes of power, whether they be in the fifteenth-century West African Sahel or the halls of the Lisbon Inquisition in 1704.

As easily countered as Herskovits's work is today, his contribution was in framing African-inspired cultural practices as a counterarchive of historical evidence, an embodied record of the survival and transformation of African ideas and histories exiled from their homeland. In the words of the editors of a 2015 issue of *Social Text*, perhaps it is best to see Herskovits's work as an early challenge to "what types of evidence count when it comes to making claims about the lives of the dispossessed."[78] "Survival" in this book then also references the ongoing search for ethical engagements with the archives of Atlantic slavery. For Herskovits, slave ship registers recorded not cultural losses but important information on the origins of the enslaved, and first-person accounts from travelers in the Sea Islands and plantation owners in the US South presented incontrovertible evidence of the historical depth of African cultures in the Americas. Scholars today express new laments as they ethically approach the violence of archival production. In a 2015 essay articulating this problem, Simon Gikandi describes the archives of Atlantic slavery: "Between the dungeons on the West African coast and the shores of the Caribbean and the Americas," he wrote, "the African slave inhabits another archive, one that didn't concern itself with the unity of things that were being said or done by the European traders. In this archive, a place of pure negativity, all enslaved Africans could hope for was an occasional stammer in the cracks of European speech . . . that sought to exclude them."[79] Gikandi's summary built on arguments of the previous decade, which took the archives of Atlantic slavery as spaces strategically designed to narrate the experiences of the enslaved and dispossessed by obscuring or eliminating them. In this framework, archiving is inseparable from the production of hierarchies of power, a point that leads to ground-clearing conclusions such as those of Antoinette Burns, who argues that "*all* archives are, in the end, fundamentally unreliable" because of the power dynamics inherent to their creation.[80]

This problem has taken on a particular resonance for the critical turn in Black Studies that informs this book's methodological underpinnings. Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, and Jared Sexton, for example, have all worked to trace what they frame as the difficulties of glimpsing historical experiences of enslaved subjects through documentation intended to obscure them—an approach the 2015 *Social Text* issue editors call the transformation of "archival lack into a methodological tool. Imperial archives, these authors contend, often record blackness or black life only as an absence of human subjecthood, as when the enslaved enter the historical record as a number, a mark, or a notice of death."[81] Hortense

Spillers's landmark essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," still fresh more than three decades after its publication, undergirds much of this thinking.[82] Implicitly defining Blackness as a series of othered subject positions that axiomatically function outside of legal orders of race and gender, Spillers argues that any effort to collectively articulate a Black identity remains haunted by what Coco Fusco terms the "originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation" that accompanied Black peoples' entrance into and formation of the modern world.[83] For Saidiya Hartman, this situation requires a kind of critical speculation that eschews citationary practices—or as Hartman terms it, "critical fabulation"—to provide an ethical engagement with the histories of those so violated.[84] *Insignificant Things* heeds these cautions, specifically Lamonte Aidoo's charge to foreground Inquisition records' "inherent silences and erasures," as the testimonies they contain were produced under the duress of harsh interrogation; where the guilt of the accused was all but presumed; and where the testimony itself was recorded by a scribe feverishly trying to keep up with the conversation unfolding in front of them.[85]

This book thus foregrounds this backdrop—a current perception of archival lack created in service of racially deterministic histories of violence; recent reckonings with modernity's continued disarticulation of Black lives; and writers' and artists' efforts to redress that disarticulation—to ask how mandinga amulets may add to or reframe it. On one level, Spillers's, Hartman's, Sharpe's, and Sexton's own archival sources, primarily from the nineteenth- and twentieth-century English-language United States, played a role in framing their own conclusions. By contrast, the records of the eighteenth-century Portuguese Inquisition veritably overflow with testimonies and personal details: Luiz Mott properly characterizes the more than 40,000 inquisitorial records held at the Torre do Tombo National Archive in Lisbon as an "inexhaustible source of information" on the lives of "Luso-Afro-Brazilians."[86] When in 2014 I first saw Jacques Viegas's amulet in this archive, its mutual entanglement with the surrounding inquisitorial trial record forced me to reckon with this scholarship that to that point undergirded most of my writing, for that amulet materializes the survival of Jacques's life in the heart of the archives of Atlantic slavery. His mandinga may well be the oldest surviving object produced by an African enslaved in the Atlantic trade whose name and biography are known with some certainty. And throughout this book we will see how mandinga amulets facilitated broad, independent, even transoceanic African-led social networks that remained largely outside the vision of inquisitorial authorities.

But recall that the central function of mandinga amulets was to protect their users from bodily violation. Hartman's writings rightfully take her readers to task in asking what would it mean to develop a critical practice of finding a means of survival in these archives, to map the quotidian, even banal work of what Christina Sharpe names "living in the push toward our death."[87] For Hartman and Sharpe, the creative labor of making and caring for Black lives in the constant wake of Black death necessitates charting paths forward through slavery's archives not as a matter of scholarly access or intellectual labor, but as an ethical imperative in order to, as Stephanie E. Smallwood summarizes, "piece together a picture of a place, a time, and an experience that does not otherwise figure in the archival record."[88] In their own ways, these authors thus collectively ask that we interrogate what goes into framing an object as archival, for the term presumes a disconnection from living communities and ancestors which—as Sharpe insists—necessitate continued care and protection. Bolsas de mandinga, at least as produced and utilized by all those who sought refuge from violence—in particular African, Black, and enslaved clients—seem to have already responded to the imperative Sharpe, Hartman, and Smallwood each outline. For as their users consistently noted, the work of mandingas was to materialize survival as an everyday activity, to pull together from the transcultural storehouse of Black Atlantic material culture to fabricate new ways of simply living and being in a violent world predicated on their subjugation.

And yet the two connotations of survival embodied in Jacques's amulet rest against the reality that in the end, Jacques's amulet did not protect him from the violence of the Inquisition, of repeated exile, or of the archival registers that remain the only evidence of his life. Indeed, the casual, matter-of-factness with which his trial record inscribes his final punishment exists in tension with the protracted and bureaucratic protocols of care that remain in place for the preservation of the amulet he used. Kept in a climate-controlled storeroom and accessible to researchers only with a series of high-level permissions, the designation of his object as archival ensures its continued survival on the precondition of its nearly sanitized disconnection from those who made and used it, or those descendants who still require its protective powers to resist ongoing threats to Black life.[89] As such, the "art of survival" deployed in this text is an effort to take up, and rest uncomfortably inside, the contradictions of finding an object charged with the preservation of Black lives inside an archive predicated on its erasure. The amulet's literal binding into the inquisitorial record materializes

their mutually dependent dialectic. As such, I consider that binding as a reflection not on the amulet's failure to protect its owner, nor on the seeming inability of the inquisitorial archive to incorporate it physically or conceptually. Rather, I see it as what Munira Khayyat, Yasmine Khayyat, and Rola Khayyat frame as a one of many "unexpected genealogical sources" of the archives of slavery, sources one should "should claim rather than disavow."[90] The bolsa and the Inquisition record mutually informed each other and coevolved by pushing and pulling against the discourses and possibilities the other embodied, sometimes literally, as we will see in chapter 3, when a particular bolsa used in Lisbon incorporated documents produced by inquisitorial authorities. In their mutual entanglements, these two necessarily incomplete archives dialectically embody the dual threads of violence and visualization.

The Chapters

The book's four chapters, placed in chronological sequence, progressively trace the history of mandinga pouches from their named emergence in sixteenth-century Senegambia through their use in the Revolt of the Malês, a major rebellion led by enslaved Africans in Bahia, Brazil in 1835. Each chapter also functions as a stand-alone analysis of a specific aspect of the pouches: the first chapter considers the objects' names, the second their form and contents, the third and fourth their use. While Jacques Viegas's story serves as the unifying opener for the book's first three chapters, each chapter also expands out to further trials, such as the case of Crispina Peres, a woman arrested in Bissau in 1656 accused of a series of religious crimes; Vicente de Morais, an Mbundu soldier at the Portuguese garrison of Muxima, in Angola, arrested in 1716; José Francisco Pereira and his partner José Francisco Pedroso, two prominent mandingueiros arrested in Lisbon in 1730; and finally José, a Yorùbá man arrested in Salvador, Bahia, in 1835. In each case, I work to flesh out the scant information in the trial record with a critical reading of its silences, but I also add to them with contemporary accounts, archival information, and religious records that illuminate both the inquisitorial and wider cultural context.

Chapter 1, "Labels," begins by noting that while the object Jacques used was called *mandinga*, at his Inquisition trial he identified himself as *Mina*. The chapter uses this point to trace the parallel emergence of *mandinga* and *Mina* as labels for peoples and circulating commodities in the Atlantic

between the sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries. Making use of extensive new analyses of travelogues, engravings, maps, dictionaries, and select inquisitorial cases, the first half of the chapter shows how and why the Portuguese rendering of the ethnonym *Mandinka* was slowly de-coupled from its West African ethnic referent, and, by 1700, emerged as a widely known synonym for *feitiço* (from which derives "fetish"), a word referring to a range of invisible malevolent forces as well as to the material objects that controlled, manipulated, or counteracted them. Principally, this occurred because of foreigners' confusion over the profusion and globally sourced variety of apotropaic objects used in Senegambia's pluralistic coastal societies (often by persons calling themselves *Mandinka*), which collectively confounded their expectations over the sartorial and material performances of religiosity. This ironic effort to define Mandinga-ness as a form of cultural ambiguity leads to the chapter's second half, which notes how the term *Mina* emerged as an ethnonym used to mark those captured and sold in the Bight of Benin. Many of the mandingueiros arrested by the Inquisition in Portugal and Brazil identified themselves using this term. Thus, Atlantic-wide cultural discourses created new labels (Mina) for those people made into objects (the enslaved) at the same time a group of objects (mandingas) radically transformed the meaning of the ethnonym that marked them. Providing new context for debates about the rise of African ethnonyms in the wake of the slave trade as well as for the continuing debates over how to label the origins of African objects, the chapter uses the framework of labeling to place African mandingueiros at the forefront of contemporary debates over the rise of classification and the role of origins.

Chapter 2, "Contents," begins by reproducing the list of the contents of Jacques Viegas's mandinga pouch written into his Inquisition trial, before reproducing and analyzing scores of ekphrastic descriptions of the contents of mandinga pouches that typically accompanied their confiscation and placement in Inquisition records. In so doing, the chapter builds on the debates about classification begun in the previous chapter to position enslaved Africans—so often reduced to passive victims in an emergent early modern system of global material circulation—at the forefront of early modern collecting practices. Pushing against previous scholarship's reliance on terms like *Catholic*, *Islamic*, and *African* to label the contents of the pouches, this chapter shows that debates over the alternately quotidian, foreign, and liminal contents of mandingas were in fact some of the first arenas in which such terms were debated, challenged, framed, and defended. Methodologically, the chapter takes stock of the

mélange of contents described inside the pouches by drawing close parallels between strategic practices of assemblage and occlusion, the rise of the Atlantic discourse of fetishism, and the rise of early modern collections to position Africans as key interpreters of objects on the move. To that end, the chapter uses against-the-grain readings of inquisitorial testimonies to re-create the circuits of material exchange and sale among and between mandinga-makers and users, even between Brazil and Portugal, thus showing how enslaved Africans managed to maintain, in some cases, transoceanic networks of commerce and exchange. The chapter's second half delves into the contents assembled by one mandingueiro, José Francisco Pereira, around 1730, to carefully trace how he created mandingas to subtly challenge Portuguese claims to authority over their empire and his life. Drawing analogies between the contents of José Francisco's pouches and materials drawn together from archives and museum collections in Africa, Europe, and Brazil, the chapter offers an analysis of José Francisco's intellectual orientations to show how the objects he made critically reframe circuits of exchange, classification, and modernity in the Black Atlantic.

Chapter 3, "Markings," begins by foregrounding two aspects of Jacques Viegas's case: first, that his pouch—like many others—contained paper as a key constitutive element; and second, that the pouch he used was meant to protect him from bodily violation. Responding to Hortense Spillers's outlining of the intimate relationship between archival writings and markings of violence against the enslaved, the chapter investigates the common incorporation of written papers in mandinga pouches as challenges and reckonings with imperial archives, inquisitorial procedure, and the expectation of enslavement as a condition defined by embodied violence. Providing a series of close analyses of unpublished handwritten papers, drawings, and orations once contained inside mandinga pouches and today sewn into inquisitorial records, the chapter first traces how the act of inscribing designs and words with ink onto paper and placing them inside the mandinga pouches emerged in conversation with wider practices of inscription in the African diaspora. Yet the papers also demonstrate how their users strategically reconceptualized, or took advantage of, fluid relationships between papers, bodies, and textual evocations in order to respond to otherwise contemporary theorizations of the simultaneous "hypervisibility" and "invisibility" of enslaved subjects and the obfuscated legibility of Black histories in the archives of slavery.

Chapter 4, "Revolts," investigates the prominent use of leather pouches containing Islamic prayers by Yorùbá participants the 1835 Revolt of the

Malês. This event, for the first time, clearly demonstrated the revolutionary possibilities contained inside these amulets, alternately labeled *mandinga* and *patuá* during in this period. Analyzing the trial records of revolt participants, the chapter ties together the discourses from each of the previous three chapters: the shifting roles of ethnic and object-labeling among the revolt's participants; the role of writing, particularly in Islamic talismanic papers; and the amulets' stated ability to protect their users from violence while attempting to overthrow Bahia's slavery society. As such, the chapter also seizes on a series of contemporary responses to the revolt, which launched a widespread fear not just over African cultural practices, but over long-hidden underground systems of material and information exchange through such pouches: a kind of "revolutionary aesthetics" dormant in unassuming objects and their contents. The book concludes with a coda considering the links between resistance and agency in African diasporic thinking, and the implications of this link for the visualization and interpretation of African-associated objects.

Notes

Introduction

1 See R. F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, xiii; Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*; and Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*.

2 ANTT-IL, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 72, Livro 266, f. 77–91; ANTT-IL, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 108, Livro 300, f. 48r–50A.

3 ANTT-IL, Processo 15628; ANTT-IE, Processo 7759. On this latter trial, see Sweet, *Domingos Álvares*.

4 ANTT-IL, Processo 2355, f. 9r–10v.

5 ANTT-IL, Processo 2355, f. 10v.

6 K. Thompson, "Sidelong Glance," 30.

7 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 81. See also Green, *Fistful of Shells*, 286.

8 Costa et al., *Economic History of Portugal*, 166.

9 Lopes and Marques, "Outro lado da moeda," 7. See also Law, "Gold Trade of Whydah." For a discussion of the impact of Brazilian gold trading on the Gold Coast, see Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 9–32.

10 Soares, *People of Faith*, 47–49.

11 Soares, *People of Faith*, 49.

12 Higgins, *"Licentious Liberty,"* 3.

13 TASTD, "SlaveVoyages: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade—Estimates," https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates, accessed March 27, 2022.

14 Tavim, "Educating the Infidels within," 457; Mota, "Wolof and Mandinga Muslims," 10.

15 Cook, *Forbidden Passages*, 122.

16 Tavim, "Educating the Infidels within," 457; Mota, "Wolof and Mandinga Muslims," 1.

17 ANTT-IL, Processo 3932. On this case, see Khwali, "Mouriscos e escrita."

18 Cook, *Forbidden Passages*, 126–27. Cases concerning African-associated amulets also appear Spanish Inquisition cases from the Americas, especially Cartagena; see Guerrero-Mosquera, "Bolsas mandingas en Cartagena."

19 Gschwend, "*Olisipo, Emporium Nobilissimum*," 142.

20 Recent work suggests that far from being prestige goods, so-called Afro-Portuguese ivories, particularly spoons, were found homes across the social spectrum. See Gomes, Casimiro, and Manso, "Afro-Portuguese Ivories."

21 For a discussion of this painting that largely parallels my own conclusions, see Nagel, "Hell Is for White People."
22 As quoted in Souza, *Devil and the Land*, 84.
23 Souza, *Devil and the Land*, 87.
24 Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 144–52.
25 Cagle, "Imperial Tensions, Colonial Contours," 227.
26 In 1561, the Portuguese crown established a fourth overseas tribunal in Goa whose jurisdiction extended from the Cape of Good Hope to all Portuguese territories in Asia. In 1621, the Spanish King Felipe IV, reigning as Filipe III in Portugal, ordered the creation of a fifth tribunal in Brazil, but it never materialized. The Portuguese Holy Office—still independently administered during the 1580–1640 Iberian Union between the Portuguese and Spanish crowns—preferred to maintain peninsular control over inquisitorial activity in the colony rather than cede their power to another tribunal. See Marcocci and Paiva, *História da Inquisição Portuguesa*, 220–21, 305–7.
27 As quoted in Siqueira, *Inquisição Portuguesa*, 237.
28 Documentation on these types of crimes or accusations is limited prior to the establishment of the Inquisition. See Moreno, "Feitiçaria em Portugal no século XV."
29 Marcocci and Paiva, *História da Inquisição Portuguesa*, 317.
30 ANTT-IL, Processo 11767, f. 27r.
31 ANTT-IL, Correspondência Recebida de Comissários, Livro 922. As cited in Calainho, *Metrópole das mandingas*, 97.
32 ANTT-IL, Livro de Registro de Correspondência Expedida, Livro 20, f. 3v.
33 As cited in Mott, *Bahia*, 32, 35. The original trial record is ANTT-IL, Processo 597, f. 1–4.
34 Mott, *Bahia*, 36–37, 39.
35 On this case, see Corrêa, *Feitiço Caboclo*.
36 ANTT-IL, Processo 6982, f. 43r.
37 ANTT-IL, Processo 6982, f. 43v.
38 Santos, "Bolsas de mandinga," 109.
39 Calainho, *Metrópole das mandingas*, Appendix I, Table 4 (unpaginated). See also Paiva, *Bruxaria e superstição*, 208.
40 Bucciferro, "Forced Hand," 306.
41 *AAPEB* 53 (1996): 112.
42 Jay, *Force Fields*, 114–33.
43 For early mentions of African-associated amulets in the secondary literature, see Bastide, *African Religions of Brazil*, 144; and N. Rodrigues, *Africanos no Brasil*, 92–96.
44 Souza, *Devil and the Land*, 130.
45 Calainho, *Metrópole das mandingas*, 70. See also Calainho, "Mandingueiros negros no mundo," 18, 26–27.
46 Santos, "Bolsas de mandinga," 21, 22.

47 See for example Souza, *Devil and the Land*, 130–41; and Calainho, *Metrópole das mandingas*, 77.

48 Dider Lahon, for example, sees strands of Yorùbá cosmology and West African Vodun practices through mandingas' Catholic veneer. See Lahon, "Inquisição, pacto com o demónio."

49 Drewal, "Mami Wata and Santa Marta," 209.

50 Calainho (*Metrópole das mandingas*, 183) suggests that the amulets spread from the Mande to other Bantu and African groups before leaving the continent during the slave trade. But I suggest a much more complex process of dissemination based not on object movement, but on discursive transformation. Though Calainho has taken care to note that *mandinga* did not equate to mandinga users, she stops short of a discursive explanation for their use, instead assuming the objects were disseminated from a Mande homeland. In turn, V. S. Santos does broadly discuss the relationship between the Saharan gold trade, the expansion of the Mali Empire, and Portuguese interest in the coast during the rise of the Atlantic slave trade; in this context "religion was a strategy of mediation and negotiation" ("Bolsas de mandinga," 38), but does not fully elucidate how amulets operated as strategies of protection this nexus.

51 Paiva, *Bruxaria e superstição*, 113–14.

52 Rarey, "Assemblage, Occlusion, and the Art"; Fromont, "Paper, Ink, Vodun."

53 Mota, *Portugueses e Muçulmanos*; Green, *Fistful of Shells*.

54 Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 181–83.

55 Harding, *Refuge in Thunder*, 30–31.

56 Sansi, "Sorcery and Fetishism," 24–25.

57 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 4.

58 For a discussion of Gilroy's impact in African diaspora art history in the United States, see K. Thompson, "Sidelong Glance." See also Patterson and Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations," 12–13; and Barson and Gorschlüter, *Afro Modern*.

59 Scholarship on the visual culture of slavery is vast. I present here a few representative selections published since 2000: Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery*; Copeland, *Bound to Appear*; Finley, *Committed to Memory*; Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture*; and Wood, *Blind Memory*.

60 Brown, *The Repeating Body*, 12.

61 Verger, *Trade Relations*.

62 See also Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*.

63 Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 1.

64 Fischer, "Atlantic Ontologies."

65 J. M. Johnson, *Wicked Flesh*, 5; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 5.

66 Blier, "Art of Assemblage."

67 Doris, *Vigilant Things*, 34.

68 Fromont, *Art of Conversion*, 70.
69 Bahia was a captaincy under Portuguese rule until 1822, and then a province in the Brazilian Empire between 1822 and 1889.
70 An earlier version of the image of the fruit-seller is discussed in chapter 2.
71 Buono, "History, Achronicity, and the Materiality," 25–26.
72 Doris, *Vigilant Things*, 16.
73 Copeland, "In the Wake of the Negress," 481. See also Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*; Browne, *Dark Matters*; and K. Thompson, *Shine*.
74 Herskovits, *Myth of the Negro Past*.
75 Herskovits, "The Negro in Bahia," 395. On Herskovits's methodology, see Matory, "The Homeward Ship," 96–100.
76 R. F. Thompson, *Aesthetic of the Cool*, 24.
77 Matory, "The Homeward Ship," 97.
78 Helton et al., "Question of Recovery," 5.
79 Gikandi, "Rethinking the Archive of Enslavement," 86.
80 Burns, *Dwelling in the Archive*, 26.
81 Helton et al., "Question of Recovery," 4. See, for example, Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts"; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; and Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism." For historical scholarship prioritizing the framework of archival lack, see most importantly Morgan, *Laboring Women*; and Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*.
82 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
83 Fusco, "Bodies That Were Not Ours," 5.
84 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.
85 Aidoo, *Slavery Unseen*, 7.
86 Mott, *Bahia*, 31.
87 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 10.
88 Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 8. See also Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 199.
89 See Huerta, *The Unintended*.
90 Khayyat et al., "Pieces of Us," 269.

Chapter 1: Labels

1 ANTT-IL, Processo 2355, f. 42r.
2 ANTT-IL, Processo 2355, f. 14r.
3 ANTT-IL, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 72, Livro 266, f. 291v.
4 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82. See also Sexton and Copeland, "Raw Life"; and Moten, "Case of Blackness."
5 Sisòkò, *Epic of Son-Jara*, 104n20, 104n21. See also Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali*, 54. *Mali* itself is a Fula (rather than Mande) language term for Manden; see Delafosse, *Langue mandingue*, 9. Throughout this chapter, *mandinga* (not capitalized) will refer to amulets labeled in the records with