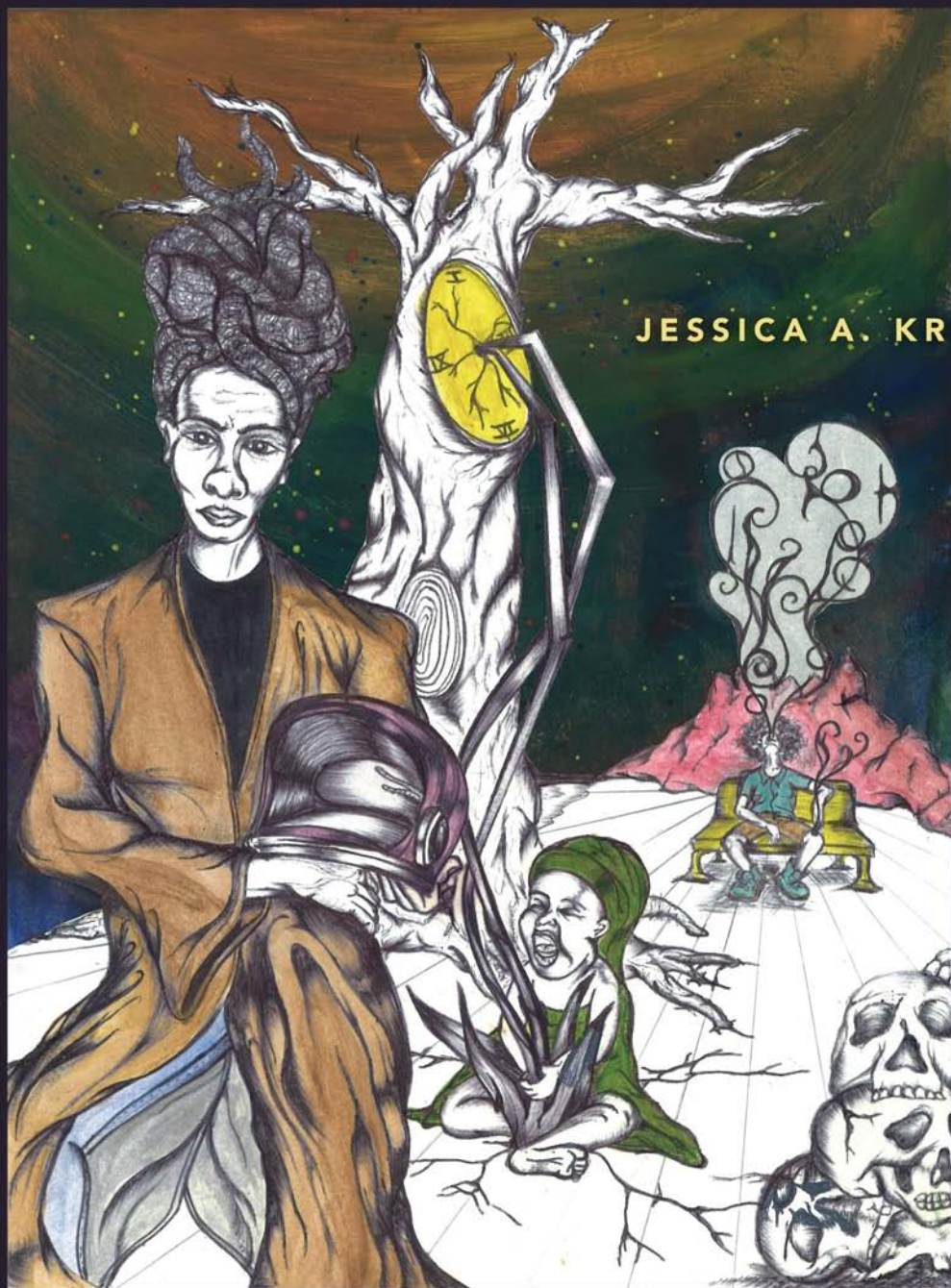


FUGITIVE MODERNITIES

*Kisama and the
Politics of Freedom*

JESSICA A. KRUG



Fugitive Modernities

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Fugitive Modernities

Kisama

AND THE POLITICS OF FREEDOM



JESSICA A. KRUG

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

On September 3, 2020, author Jessica Krug admitted that she lied about her identity for her entire career, having falsely appropriated an Afro-Caribbean identity. In this book, Krug alludes to this false identity implicitly in the opening of the book below, as well as explicitly on page 189.

I HAVE LONG BELIEVED that love is not possible in translation, and yet, inevitably, I find myself interpreting ways of seeing the world, of being, of knowing, from one context to another, daily. It goes far deeper than language.

This is a book about the political imagination and intellectual labor of fugitives. It is about people who didn't write, by choice. And yet, it is a book. A textual artifact created by someone who learned to tell stories and ask questions from those who never read or wrote, but who loves the written word. It is an act of translation. It is a love letter.

It is an inadequate and perhaps unintelligible love letter to and for those who do not read. My grandparents, who gave me the best parts of themselves, music and movement and storytelling, the inclination to ask and the soul to listen. My ancestors, unknown, unnamed, who bled life into a future they had no reason to believe could or should exist. My brother, the fastest, the smartest, the most charming of us all. Those whose names I cannot say for their own safety, whether in my barrio, in Angola, or in Brazil.

It is a love letter for all of those who have been murdered fighting for freedom, and all of those who stay dying because we have not yet achieved it. It is a love letter for my siblings in solitary, from Rikers to San Quentin, for my cousins being held on gang charges, for my femmes turning tricks. For those who will never be cloaked in the protective veil of innocence woven from five centuries of theft and dismemberment.

It is a love letter for the youth in Angola who find new languages to articulate their unwillingness to smilingly comply with their own murder at the hands of those who claim the right to rule over the sunken-eyed corpse of hollow revolutionary slogans.

It is a love letter for all of us who have no choice but to dream an entirely different way forward.

I wouldn't be here, writing this love letter, if I myself were not formed from the love of all I've named and all I can't name.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For years, I told everyone who knew I was writing a book that my entire acknowledgments section would be cribbed from Biggie: “This book is dedicated to all the teachers who told me I’d never amount to nothing . . .” And while there is no small part of me that is still tempted to leave it there, to stunt on every institution and person who has ever stood in my way, by framing my work or Biggie’s like this, we reinforce the pernicious idea that amounting to something can be measured by the metrics that I inherently reject.

I don’t know if I’ve amounted to anything or not, but I know that the love and labor of a worldwide community of people has made this book possible.

But those who know already know, and listing them here is superfluous. Community is not built through an economy of gratitude.

And so I won’t name individuals here, because there are other, better ways of telling you how essential you are, how critical we are.

Institutions and funders operate under different logics, however. Here, I acknowledge the substantial financial and institutional support for this project, from its inception, from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the SSRC, Fulbright-Hayes, the Department of Education, George Washington University, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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NOTE ON CARTOGRAPHY

Visually depicting space and power—cartography—is a political act in every sense. Maps represent things not as they are, but rather as we need or want them to be for particular purposes. The conventions of mapmaking to which we are accustomed today are rooted in the very violent histories with which I grapple in this book. It is impossible to separate a north-up map or the typical centering of the Atlantic Ocean from the relationships of power that brought millions of Africans across this ocean in chains.

Thus, the maps in this book depart from convention. They do not center the Atlantic Ocean. They do not orient north.

In each case, these maps attempt to represent the political orientation of the historical actors in whom I am interested: fugitives. They did not face the ocean nor assume that power was ever northward. Reorienting these maps is an important part of this book's intervention, a critical element of reconceiving narratives of modernity.

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LIST OF ARCHIVES AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGI	<i>Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain</i>
AHM	<i>Arquivo Histórico Militar, Lisbon, Portugal</i>
AHNA	<i>Arquivo Histórico Nacional de Angola, Luanda, Angola</i>
AHU	<i>Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, Portugal</i>
BdA	<i>Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, Portugal</i>
IHGB	<i>Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil</i>
MMA	<i>Monumenta Missionária Africana</i>

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INTRODUCTION

Fugitive Modernities

Chronotope, Epistemology, and Subjectivity

In 1632, seven Portuguese captains ventured north from Rio de Janeiro into a region of Brazil to which Europeans had not yet directly brought their violence. There, they encountered a group of indigenous people and among them, one Black (*preto*) man. Because this meeting took place at a great distance from any established towns or plantations, the Portuguese captains were “perplexed” and asked the man “who he was and how he came to be” in the area. When he responded that he was an emancipated slave, the Portuguese asked him if he was Brazilian-born. He replied that he was not, but was rather “of the nation of Quissamã.”¹ After noting that they did not see the man afterward, and surmising that he had fled from his master and was wary of their queries, the Portuguese captains named the location after him. It bears the name Quissamã to this day.² The same year, the former governor of the Portuguese colony of Angola, Fernão de Sousa, wrote from the colonial capital of Luanda of the fragility of the Portuguese military, slave raiding and trading, and plantation enterprises in the region that they had occupied for more than a half century, complaining that the “souas on whom we border are many and powerful, and warlike; in the province of Quissama . . . [they are] all non-Christians and our enemies.”³

While the maroon in Brazil identifies Kisama as a nation and de Sousa casts it as a place, both drew on the same set of globally circulating signifiers that I refer to as “the Kisama meme.” By the 1630s, the nonstate,

nonliterate, and largely fugitive adults and children who fashioned the Kisama meme—a construction of Kisama as synonymous with a particularly belligerent, obdurate form of resistance to all outside authority or state power, African and European alike—had not only forged a political praxis that would shape action, discourse, and archives until the present, but had also ensnared diffuse people far from the ocean and mobile, merchant capital into a dynamic reputational geography. This is a study of the people who crafted and contested the changing ideologies concerning political legitimacy and the relationship of violence to community that bubbled beneath the seemingly still surface of the Kisama meme in West Central Africa and the Americas. This is a story of conflict *through* violence and conflict *about* violence in an era marked by unprecedented forms and scale of aggression against individuals and communities. The Kisama meme, and the reputational geography it engendered, not only drew fugitives from a broad swath of West Central Africa but also pulsed through the Americas, informing the intellectual repertoires and political technologies of fugitives from the seventeenth century forward. Narrating the history of political ideas of those who never wrote a word requires new methods, and creative application of older ones; tracing a five-century history of people whose existence was largely predicated upon and defined by their eschewing the very practices through which identities normally gain salience and political thought enters the archives necessitates new kinds of questions.

West Central Africans in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries experienced violence of unprecedented forms and catastrophic scale. While the Portuguese established regular diplomatic relationships with the expansionist Kingdom of Kongo beginning in the late fifteenth century, Portuguese merchants quickly expanded their trade in captive people to the south. As the Portuguese, and later the Dutch, moved along the coast and into the interior following the formal establishment of the colony in Luanda (1575), compelling the states like Kongo and Ndongo with whom they allied, fought, and traded to procure an ever-increasing number of captives for sale, these states directed their forces toward their neighbors. For the vast majority of those in the region, who did not live under the suzerainty of any powerful state, everyday life was fraught with peril. More than three and a half million West Central Africans were eventually bound in chains on board slave ships and transported to the Americas, most from Luanda and Benguela; at least twice that number

were killed in the wars instigated by this trade. Countless more were uprooted, alienated from family, community, and home, and cast into alien lands where they attempted to reconstitute viable communities. It is within this world that thousands of fugitives created and contested the meaning of Kisama as a political signifier, within this context of totalizing terror that Africans and their descendants in the Americas drew from diverse repertoires of nonstate fugitive political ideologies to make a life in the endless echoes of death. Within this context, what did these geographically and sociopolitically disparate seventeenth-century men mean when they identified “Kisama,” either as a nation of origin or as the center of anti-Portuguese resistance? What did the fugitive in Brazil intend to convey when he spoke of himself as part of a “nation” which—even by seventeenth-century standards—without centralized authority, common political institutions, or shared and distinctive linguistic practices, hardly qualified? To gloss Kisama as a simple toponym referring to the arid lands between Angola’s Kwanza and Longa Rivers is to miss the cross-regional, trans-Atlantic political processes through which thousands of the most individually weak and vulnerable people in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Angola collectively fashioned dynamic political identities oriented around renouncing state formations, martial idioms for social organization, and resisting slavery, the slave trade, and imbrication in market economies. To grasp the meanings with which these fugitives imbued Kisama, too, requires embedding ourselves in a different epistemological framework, or system of ideas, that, in turn, fosters new chronotopes, or visions of time, and notions of subjectivity, or views of personhood.

We know this unnamed figure in Brazil through a Portuguese-ascribed racial designation (“preto”) and, more importantly, through a political affiliation he himself claimed (“of the nation of Quissamã”). We can also discern his social silhouette through the political discourse evinced by his fugitivity that preceded this encounter with the Portuguese, and his subsequent decision to flee yet again, after. This otherwise anonymous man in Brazil is the first person whom I have located in archival records who identified *himself* as Kisama, and it is no coincidence that he, as a fugitive, claimed membership in a “nation” that, by the 1630s, was renowned throughout Angola and the broader world as the home of resisters and runaways. While this archival Polaroid can only leave us guessing as to the political or social capital such an assertion would have carried for an African man seemingly alone in a community of indigenous Brazilians, the

Brazilian maroon expected his Portuguese interlocutors to understand his description of origins as a claim concerning political orientation. Kisama meant something to him, something that transcended the matter of origins that fascinated his Portuguese interlocutors then as much as it preoccupies scholars now, and he expected it to mean something, to convey something resonant about politics and space, even in this alien and alienating land. And it did. The synchronicity of these moments in Angola and Brazil, too, hints at a hidden history of revolutionary ideology circulating through Africa and the Americas in the early seventeenth century—a history silenced both as it was happening and as it was later narrated.⁴

Fugitive Modernities is the story of the political actions and intellectual labor that constituted the terrain of meaning and signification upon which these actors and others evoked Kisama in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries until the present, from West Central Africa to the New Kingdom of Grenada (modern-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panamá), Brazil, and beyond. At its root, it is the history of thousands of individually vulnerable fugitives from unprecedented violence and social and political rupture who constituted new communities that were collectively viable. Rather than embracing ideologies of centralization and hierarchy, however, these fugitives forged an ethos centered on the horizontal integration of newcomers. In both a material and symbolic sense, their very survival was predicated on martial skill and on projecting a reputation for military success; however, unlike other novel political entities of the period, those who evoked Kisama identities systemically rejected a martial idiom for social organization. As war became an integral part of life in West Central Africa throughout the seventeenth century and beyond, both older political entities and new formations placed warriors and warrior identities at the center of their schematic maps of social and political life. Warfare was essential, and in many societies, warriors, warrior masculinities, and the practices associated with warfare became the guiding paradigm for social and political life. Not so for those who constituted Kisama. And while those who became and made Kisama rejected centralized political authority and unification, to the frustration and disgruntlement of both African and European state leaders from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, much of what it meant to be Kisama derived from the reputation of one Kisama soba, Kafuxi Ambari.

A history of Kisama requires a comprehensive reimagining of the terrain upon which we tell stories. Time, personhood, space: none of these are universal or apolitical categories.⁵ Power imposes limitations on our imaginations, and this is nowhere more apparent than in this, an effort to tell the history of radical political ideas and practices that relies on sources and disciplinary practices fundamentally and inescapably rooted not only in different epistemes, or ways of knowing, but in ways of knowing that emerged as part of centuries of systemic murder, torture, rape, commodification, and bondage of the people whose lives and ideas are meant to sit at the center of this story. It is not enough to excavate evidence of existence, of political being, from an archive of terror. Rather, it is essential to employ the epistemes through which those who created Kisama made political and moral sense of the bloody milieu within which they lived, loved, and made new worlds.

In many important ways, this is a five-century, multicontinental biography of Kafuxi Ambari that challenges how we conceive of biography, life history, and subjectivities. As Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully note in their efforts to write the life history of Sara Baartman, “Biography . . . emerged at a particular time and place in Europe’s imagining of the self. . . . It emerged along with the idea of the possessive individual, the person who has agency, autonomy, a vision of self. This idea of the person, of the self, is not so easily transferred to anytime and anyplace and to worlds where there is no clearly possessive subject, no ‘me,’ ‘myself.’”⁶

So what are the possibilities for narrating life stories that emerge from alternate epistemes of self and subject? If the fundamental unit of being is not the liberal subject—the atomic individual with rights and obligations ensured by the legal apparatus of state—but rather a collective self, fashioned through the instrumental deployment of historical memory and rituo-political choreography, then, unsurprisingly, biography *must* function differently.⁷ It cannot be bound by the limits of an individual life span or chained to the teloi or chronotopes of state. Instead, it must take seriously the ways of conceiving time and being that derive from and foster other political logics. To render Kisama’s history through Kafuxi Ambari’s biography and the reputational geographies he helped engender, I draw from archival sources intermeshed in their own generation with

oral sources, and oral sources recurring to archival records—an effort to discern the oblique contours of complex political, intellectual, and social histories through the life of a single, rather atypical figure—with all of the caveats that microhistories inevitably entail.⁸

Here, it is useful to situate Kafuxi Ambari's nonstate subjectivity and the history of time, personhood, and ideology that I am endeavoring to tell in the context of a broader historical idiom, employed by Kimbundu speakers both in geographical Kisama and north of the Kwanza River: the Jita Kwatakwatera.⁹ "Jita Kwatakwatera" translates directly as "War of Acquisition." The reduplication of the term *kwata* to *kwatakwatera* serves to emphasize the unitary focus on acquisition, to the exclusion of the social reciprocity that normally governed political and economic relationships in the region. When Kimbundu speakers refer to the Jita Kwatakwatera, they collapse a period beginning with the commencement of intensive slave raiding in the late fifteenth century all the way to the extractive economies of forced plantation agriculture in the twentieth century. More ruling party inflected versions of the chronotope end the Jita Kwatakwatera with the uprising among cotton cultivators in the Baixa de Kasanje in 1961; living in the twentieth century doesn't change the materiality of slavery. Others, more wary of the ongoing topographies of extraction and exploitation in Angola, explain that the offshore petroleum comes from the bones of the enslaved whom the Portuguese tossed off of ships, and only when the oil is exhausted will the Jita Kwatakwatera truly end. By framing history in this way, Kimbundu speakers make an argument about change over time that connects moral community to capital and politics—an idiom and argument far more effective than any provincially European chronotope.

Time is always an argument about power and morality. Epochs like "the Enlightenment" and "the Age of Revolution" posit a Whiggishness—a belief in progress over time—that surely crushes the bones of those on whom that progress for a few is built. This is a history set in the Jita Kwatakwatera, and the choices and practices of the people whose story I tell—those who fled made Kisama, or some other fugitive modernity in Angola, those who reweave fugitive fabrics of community anew in the Americas—were conditioned by the bloody topographies of time and being within which they lived. But they could and did create other worlds, and using notions of subjectivity and time grounded in the political and moral epistemology of Kisama can help us access those worlds.

Telling Kisama's history in part as a biography of Kafuxi Ambari involves adopting a concept of personhood unfamiliar to many readers. When people within geographical Kisama refer to Kafuxi Ambari, they do so as if they are speaking of an individual. Specific elements of these histories, however, can be linked through external epistemologies—colonial archives—to events over a number of centuries in the written record. Scholars traditionally refer to this practice as positional succession, or “the notion that social roles or positions termed ‘names’ . . . with permanently defined rights and obligations exist independently of actual living persons.”¹⁰ However, this notion of positional succession serves more as a strategy of translation and less as an explanation of a radically different episteme. Positional succession as a construct assumes a contractual, statist notion of community and political and social order, and imposes it on contexts, like Kisama, where it does not belong.

Kafuxi Ambari was not a title, like “king” or “pope,” but rather a living embodiment of the essence of an enduring subjectivity. In this sense, then, “Kafuxi Ambari” and names of other sobas referred to a particular structural relationship with both the ancestors and the living, a specific social contour of power and legitimacy.¹¹ Far from being easily synonymous with political titles, this widely dispersed practice in Africa points to notions of selfhood and identity centered on the incorporation of sedimented pasts into an embodied present—a nonlinear construct of time and being. Kafuxi Ambari was not a position to which any and all could aspire. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, European and African conceptions of chronology and leadership were often far closer than a twenty-first-century person would imagine. Just as Kisama-based narrators speak of Kafuxi Ambari as a singular entity across the centuries, so too do records generated by the colonial officials and priests who were present in Angola from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries refer to Kafuxi Ambari as one individual.¹²

This fortuitous archival silence compelled me to look for ways of understanding Kisama history that had more to do with how those who created Kisama in the seventeenth century understood time, being, and the world, and how their descendants, living in the brutal twenty-first-century machinations of the Jita Kwatakwata, comprehend the relationship of time, being, and narrative, and less to do with the imperatives of a liberal academic habitus. Because a conception of Kafuxi Ambari as a being who transcends the time of discrete, liberal selves is essential to

understanding the emergence and contestation of the fugitive politics of Kisama, I refer to Kafuxi Ambari in the same terms and using the same pronouns as my sources: as a single person. What follows is thus the fractal biography of one man over centuries and continents, and the permutations of his reputation and evocation in disparate political and social spaces, toward remarkably consistent ends.

This is, of course, an act of narrative and conceptual imagination on my part. Narrative is *always* an act of selection, framing, editing, adjusting, silencing, and amplifying, and neither radical positivist nor constructivist pretensions alter the reality that choices regarding narrative structure always reflect and construct relations of power. While I certainly disagree with Benedict Anderson's famous notion that literacy is the basis for imagining modern political communities—this entire book may be read as a grounded rejection of Andersonian logics—there is an undeniable connection between narrative and social reality.¹³ Indeed, there is something metanarrative about *Fugitive Modernities*; I am trying to tell the story of the ways in which those in Angola and the Americas, and their interlocutors globally, told the stories that made Kisama a potent tool of political conjuring.¹⁴ Those whose political praxis and imagination created Kisama chose to eschew writing and forms of oral history and tradition that reinforce hierarchy, just as they rejected warrior identities and masculinities as the central ethos for their society. I take these choices as seriously as I do the political, aesthetic, and narrative conventions of my own indigenous language of hip hop, and use them to guide this story and the politics underpinning the ways in which I tell it.¹⁵

I do not pretend to offer an unmediated glimpse into the history of Kisama in this text. Communication is *always* mediated, and authenticity forever the armor of power, acknowledged or otherwise. Many of my sources will be familiar to students of West Central African and African Diaspora history. In my footnotes, you'll find the same assortment of military, colonial governmental, judicial, and missionary sources from the same colonial archives that grace the pages of all canonical works in the field. While I gesture backward in time, I principally begin my story in 1594, when Kisama first leaves its most profound imprint in the colonial archive, and indeed argue that the events of 1594 are essential to the geography of reputation at the core of Kisama's history. This is an approach to archives that, while building on the insights of Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Ann Stoler, Luise White, Nancy Rose Hunt, and others, owes much,

too, to the work of Neil Kodesh and others who insist on reading archival sources through the epistemic lens of oral histories, with sensitivity to genre and setting.¹⁶ My assertion that the history of Kisama is a biography of Kafuxi Ambari is, of course, my own narrative polemic, rooted in the voices and silences through which people in Kisama construct their own stories, and always aware and wary of the contours of power of the world in which we live.

Ten years ago, Saidiya Hartman asked, “How can a narrative of defeat enable a place for the living or envision any alternative future?”¹⁷ Hartman’s question compels us to do far more than weigh between a narrative pole of agency that obfuscates horror or one of totalizing brutality that erases being. She challenges us to accept neither the inhuman anti-Blackness of the archive nor the problematically one-note heroics as the threads linking our present to our past. Taking Hartman’s query as a starting point, in *Fugitive Modernities*, I engage ways of knowing about time, being, and political imagination that come from those who built worlds outside of state hegemony in the past, and ask how these imaginations help us ask questions of our present that can open a future always already foreclosed to the children of slaves in a liberal capitalist state hegemony.

Bemoaning archival silences places the historian in the role of the slave catcher, prowling through the darkness to capture the bodies of those fleeing violence and terror to subject them to bright searchlights, interrogations, and all manner of disciplining/disciplinary brutality.¹⁸ The absence of those in whose histories I am most interested from the archives is a reason to celebrate, not mourn. The extent to which Kisama is and has remained a blank spot on the map, materially and symbolically, represents the degree to which the fugitive politics of Kisama has been successful. Of course, not all who evade the violence through which African people and their descendants in the Americas enter the archives live and die unmarked by the viciousness of state and capital.¹⁹ However, it is certain that none who enter the archives do.²⁰ *Fugitive Modernities* is not a romance, nor is it a tragedy.²¹ I claim not to uncover or recover anything so much as to take seriously the intellectual work of fugitives and to ask how the epistemic, ontological, and chronotypical paradigms they devised—their ways of conceiving knowledge, categories of being, and the nature of time—compel not only a different narrative of Kisama history, or of Angolan history, but also of the history of modernity itself.

Here, I differ both methodologically and politically from the approach of other scholars like Marisa Fuentes, who powerfully critiques, “The manner in which the violent systems and structures of white supremacy produced devastating images of enslaved female personhood, and how these pervade the archive and govern what can be known about them.”²² While I share Fuentes’s impetus to make clear the imperial nature of archives, to register that these archives not only record material acts of violence, but themselves engender discursive and epistemic aggression, this is not the story of archives nor of those whose regimes of power they buttressed. Archives, state power, and capitalism do not represent the only ways of knowing about the world past or present, and it is the forms, shapes, and content of the other stories possible through these other regimes of knowledge that interest me. I stand on the shoulders of those without whose important critique of archives and the practice of history this work would be impossible, but I remain committed to fugitivity as both the focus of this history and as a paradigm.

Like Aisha Finch, I too perceive the archives as a “pedagogy of state terror [that] contains a variety of teachings for those who study its history.” In writing about La Escalera Rebellion in nineteenth-century Cuba, Finch problematizes both scholarly and popular views of the action and agency of enslaved and fugitive people in the Americas that efface the political and intellectual labor of those who do not enter the archives, and fixate instead on the totalizing violence of state. And so too, like Finch, here I endeavor to write a history of the rural, non-elite, nonmercantilist, nonliterate thinkers and actors who “knew those lessons [of totalizing state violence, as encoded in the archives], but defied them anyway.”²³ Indeed, it is these histories of ideas and political action at the greatest distance from the institutions of power that create archives that hold the greatest potential for opening new terrain of political imagination and action.

Meaning from the Margins: Against Identity and the Black Atlantic

Located at the ground zero bull’s-eye of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, between the Portuguese colonial ports of Luanda and Benguela—the first- and third-highest volume ports of the trans-Atlantic slave trade,

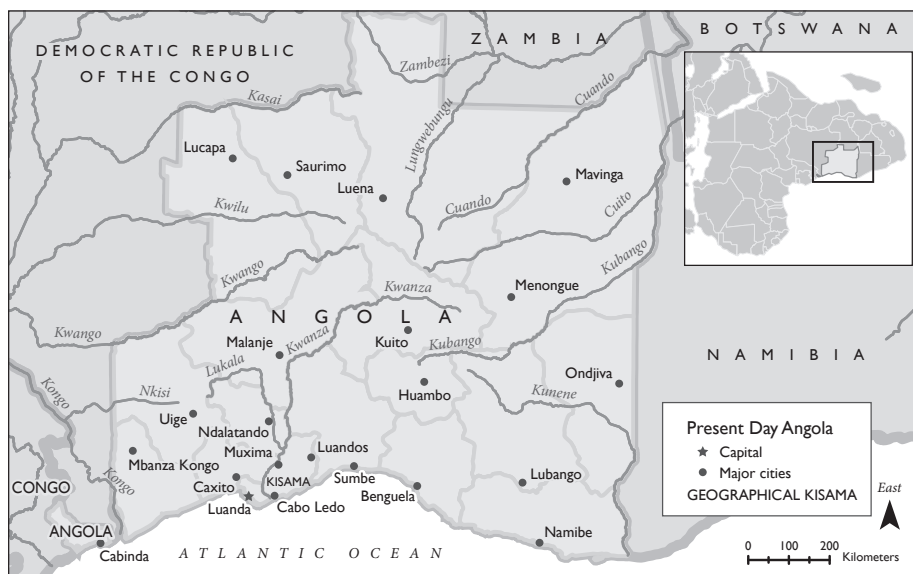
respectively—residents and interlocutors of geographical Kisama inescapably shaped and were shaped by the features of violence, capital, and subjugation that are often bundled under problematically benign terms like “the (Black) Atlantic” or “modernity.”²⁴ However, beginning in the late sixteenth century, the particular political, intellectual, martial, social, and cultural responses of African people to the mounting violence that accompanied the expansion of both slavery and the slave trade in the region led to the emergence of Kisama identities associated as much with resistance, military efficacy, spiritual power, political decentralization, and the harboring of fugitives as with the earlier connection to high-quality rock salt. The story of how Kisama grew to convey particular political meanings is at once intensely local and profoundly global. It requires grounding in the deep past of West Central Africa, but also in the complexities of Central American and Caribbean pirate cultures, and the labor, gender, and ideological contours of the lives of Africans and their descendants within and against the institution of American (hemispherically speaking) chattel slavery.

By any measure, geographical Kisama is a small, remote place. The territory between the Kwanza and Longa Rivers occupies roughly 8,700 square miles, or about the same area as the state of Massachusetts.²⁵ While it is only approximately forty miles from Luanda to the nearest part of geographical Kisama along the Atlantic coast, the social distance from the capital has long been considerably greater. Since at least the sixteenth century, the region has been relatively sparsely populated, at least in relation to the Central Plateau and the Lukala and Bengo River valleys, in no small part because of its endemic aridity.²⁶ Though the relationship between the natural dryness of the land and the subsistence patterns of those living on it undoubtedly changed during the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century period on which I focus here—perhaps most importantly, through the adoption of the American cultigens manioc, maize, and sweet potatoes, as I discuss in chapter 3—the regularity of drought in the region does seem to be an enduring feature.²⁷ While a lack of rain may have been a long-standing attribute of the region, we should read the historical descriptions of the region’s depopulation through endemic disease and drought with a degree of skepticism. Beyond the highly questionable methodology (read: varying degrees of poorly informed speculation) through which these observers obtained their estimates, it is worth noting that the high mortality that early twentieth-century German soldier

and ethnographer Ernst Wilhelm Mattenklodt's source attributes to sleeping sickness belies the large number of those killed and displaced in Portuguese early twentieth-century efforts to fully occupy the land and impose forced cultivation of cotton on the people living there. Later colonial accounts of population are suspect because they reinforce Portuguese arguments in favor of declaring the area first a game reserve (1938) and later a national park (1957).²⁸ Twentieth-century colonial, state, and conservationist actors interested in maintaining the region as a game park and national park have instrumentally forged a national and international imagination of the region between the Kwanza and Longa Rivers as devoid of human settlement and history—a blank space on the map.²⁹ Indeed, despite all of the advancement of technology and outsider knowledge about the region, even today, most maps show nothing in the region save the national park and, perhaps, the colonial fort at Muxima on the banks of the Kwanza River, and Cabo Ledo, the government's fantasy aspirational tourist surf destination at the bar of the river. In the most literal sense, then, Kisama has been and remains an empty space in the imaginary within and about Angola, on the maps that define and delineate the modern nation-state as they did the imperial designs on the colony.

Some of the most prominent historians and anthropologists of Africa have long studied West Central Africa, and seventeenth-century Angola in particular, but Kisama always plays at the margins of this work. The historiography tends to focus either on the machinations of states and their considerable archival corpus, or on those who generated archives through their purchase and sale of human beings.³⁰ In a sea of literature about Kongo, Ndongo and Matamba, and, in recent years, the port of Benguela, there are only two works that focus on Kisama, beyond sporadic footnotes: Beatrix Heintze's 1970 article (translated in abridged form from German to English in 1972) and Aurora da Fonseca Ferreira's 2012 book.³¹ Heintze treats Kisama as critical in a broader regional politics as a haven for fugitives, and Ferreira largely narrates earlier Kisama history by way of locating it in a twentieth-century ruling party narrative of resistance. But neither Heintze nor Ferreira interrogates the relationship between Kisama's strategic marginality, its absence from archives, and the means through which a particular kind of fugitive modernity emerged in Kisama.

As marginal as Kisama is in the literature of Angolan history, it is nonexistent in Diasporic texts. Kisama has not left an obvious mark in the Americas in the same way that other African ur-identities, like Yoruba



Map Intro.1 — Present Day Angola. Map by Heather Rosenfeld.

or Kongo, have. There are no practices or people in the Americas labeled Kisama who reverberate with anthropological and cultural/nationalist visions of Blackness. In terms of seemingly straightforward toponymic connections, there are only a handful of places in the Americas that are named Kisama—two towns in Brazil (including the one in Rio de Janeiro mentioned above and another in Sergipe), one in Panamá, and one in Chile. What can these toponyms tell us, however? In the case of the town in Rio de Janeiro, even the apparently obvious connection between the self-proclaimed provenance of a single seventeenth-century individual and the name of the town obscures centuries of political and social imaginations and imaginaries. There is no clear, direct link between the seventeenth century and today that does not pass through the reentrenchment of slavery in Rio and beyond in the nineteenth century, and the subsequent growth of sugar plantations around Quissamã, but stories of origins inevitably excise these bloody complexities.

Indeed, the Brazilian municipality's account of the origins of the name moves beyond relating the maroon's tale at the beginning of this book, further contending that Kisama (Quissamã) is "a word with Angolan

origin which signifies ‘fruit of the land that is located between the river and the sea’ and gave its name to a city 80 km from Luanda, at the mouth of the Kwanza River, that was the principal origin of blacks who were sold or traded in Brasil.”³² This highly imaginative account of the lexicon, geography, historical relations, and demography of the trans-Atlantic slave trade dates to a twenty-first century visit of Angolan government officials to the area. Overlooking the tangled interrelations of politics, ideologies, identities, and economies over a global four centuries not only blurs our concept of *Kisama*’s particular histories—and Quissama’s—but it also obfuscates the very nature of history itself. If history is naught but a telos of a bounded people who were always already coherent, in possession of a self-evident identity, then—even from the perspective of storytelling—what conflicts can possibly drive the narrative? Such quests, understandably animated by a desire to salve the gaping wounds of centuries of the slave trade, slavery, and its colonial life and legacies in both the Americas and Africa, replace the burden of an unknowable history with answers that stifle a possibility of political imagination and creativity beyond moribund colonial statist anthropological views of Africans. Replacing “tribe” with “ethnicity” or “culture” doesn’t render these ways of thinking of Africa any less one-dimensional, and substituting the derision of white supremacy (“Africans were primitives!”) with flattened, state and state-aspirational politics (“Africans had kingdoms, too! And our ancestors brought the practices of these states with them to the Americas!”) not only ignores the histories and worlds of most African people but it promises that our political imagination will remain hollow, stillborn, forever shackled to a fantasy built on the very violence we seek to address.

As James Lorand Matory keenly observed, since its inception throughout the Americas, and particularly in the United States, African Diasporic scholarship has been preoccupied by questions of identity that center geographical origins and are animated by geographic logics.³³ Though some, like Mariza de Carvalho Soares, Luis Nicolau Parés, and James Sweet, have pointed to the multiplicity and fluidity of African identities, arguing that over a lifetime and depending on context many Africans, both on the continent and in the Americas, claimed multiple identities, even for these more process-oriented scholars, identity is still, primarily, a function of geographic origin.³⁴ Others focus on the role that European (mis)conceptions played in assigning nation labels to African people in the Americas. Pablo Gómez, echoing scholarship by Mariana Candido and others, char-