Womanhood, Gender, Resistance and Authority In and Through Candomblé of Salvador, Bahia

Senior Thesis

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Capítulo 1: Introdução - Introduction

I. “Lenda das yabás” - Legends of the Yabás

On December 8, 2013 at the Centro Cultural Ensaio in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil I was transported into the realm of the Afro-Brazilian ancestors through a play called “Lenda das Yabás” directed by Fábio S. Tavares. The actors in this play were a part of the Companhia de Teatro Terra Bralis. The play portrayed the legends of six Yabás in human form, Yansã, Obá, Ewá, Oxum, Nanã, and Iemanjá depicted in the playbill in Figure 1 on page 7. The story was told through the central performance of six Afro-Brazilian women. The audience was welcomed into the space of performance by smoke, incense, drumming and singing. This along with the decorations of white cloth, buzios and iko provided an immediate sensation that the audience was being invited into a divine realm to anyone familiar with religious practices of the African diaspora. The performance took place inside a circle of chairs on which the audience sat bringing the spectators into close proximity to the performance. As with any successful performance, the audience experienced the play in a deeply personal and emotional way, especially because of the deliberate closeness to something that those who do not understand the epistemology of Candomblé would see as distant and divine. What followed was for me a life-changing experience that inspired my decision to pursue research on the role and authority of women in Afro-Brazilian religions specifically focusing on the most well-known, Candomblé.

Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion created through a combination of various West African traditions that combines “divination, sacrifice healing, music, dance and spiritual

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1 “Legends of the Yabás”
2 Female orixás
3 Cowrie shells traditionally used in African and Afro-Atlantic cultures for spiritual, decorative and/or other reasons including for the clothing of some orixás.
4 Dried raffia traditionally used in African and Afro-Atlantic cultures for spiritual, decorative and/or other reasons including for the clothing of some orixás.
possession.”

The religious practice requires the worship and cultivation of orixás, which often represent elements of nature. The orixás are both male and female and their legends portray them in human-like yet powerful ways. These traditions were brought over by enslaved Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade that was officially abolished in Brazil in 1888. Therefore, “The study of African slavery in Brazil is fundamental to the study of the Afro-Brazilian experience of the 4.8 million Africans who arrived on its shores.”

In addition to the yabás represented in the play, there were also male orixás, Xangô, Exú, Oxossi, Olorum, and Ogun, but they served as a backdrop to the women’s desires, power and intelligence. The plot was based on Oxum’s desire to be the only wife of Xangô by separating him from Yansã and Obá. She attempts to do this, with the assistance of Exú, using her intellect and trickery. Yansã and Obá respond accordingly in what becomes a chaotic series of intertwined events similar to that of a novela. The personalities of each orixá are evident throughout the play falling in line with the many legends and songs that give them their individual identities. Each of the women have goals and are determined to create for themselves the lives they choose through their own autonomy and wit. There is also a central theme of the power the yabás have alongside the men and the control they have over their own destinies.

Additionally, this play depicts the leveled playing field of rivalry that exists between the male and female orixás. The concept of the “battle of the sexes” through the depiction of the orixás is

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6 African deities and ancestral spirits in Quêto and Nagô traditions; referred to as voduns in Jejê traditions
7 Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna. *Slavery in Brazil*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14
8 A Brazilian soap opera
something that is common in West African traditions and will be further explored in later chapters.

Figure 1: “Lenda das Yabás” Playbill (Fábio S. Tavares, Centro Cultural Ensaio- December 8, 2013)
The Black feminist work within this play is not only in the depiction of the yabás as powerful, free, and intelligent but also as flawed. The intersection of race and gender for Black women, including in Candomblé communities, has made it so that the expectation of upholding community, men, children, and self does not leave room for being flawed in real human ways. These multiple layers of oppression, also described as a “multiple jeopardy” or “multiple consciousness” by Deborah K. King in “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology”9 in 1988 (who continued the work of an earlier Black feminist, Anna Julia Cooper10 writing near the end of the nineteenth century), has made it so that Black women are often held to unfair standards without receiving recognition for their accomplishments, while also being reprimanded especially harshly if perceived to have failed or to be flawed in addition to causing many other hardships. Any mistakes or downfalls of the Black community such as high incarceration rates of Black men become the fault of the Black woman due to “failed mothering”. There also commonly exists a perception that the single mother household in Black communities exists due to the incapacity of the Black woman to “keep a man around”. These examples can be seen across the African diaspora including in the US and have been discussed by other Black feminist scholars such as Frances Beale11 and Patricia Hill Collins12,13 to name a few. This burden is no different for the Afro-Brazilian women of Candomblé who have taken on or been made responsible for the spiritual, economic and

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10 Anna Julia Cooper, “The Status of Woman in America”, A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South (Xenia, OH: Aldine Printing House, 1892)
political authority of their communities. The Black woman’s burden has also been discussed by Afro-Brazilian feminists such as former governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Benedita da Silva\textsuperscript{14,15} and anthropologist and activist Léila González\textsuperscript{16}. Afro-Brazilian women have accomplished so much that they are made to be responsible for upholding the community meanwhile not receiving the recognition they deserve and not being allowed room for mistakes and flaws\textsuperscript{17}. This thesis will demonstrate the work done through Candomblé however two non-governmental organizations doing powerful work for the lives of Black women in Brazil are Geledés, Instituto da Mulher Negra (1988, São Paulo) and Casa de Cultura da Mulher Negra (1984, Santos). There is no attempt to portray the yabás as perfect or impervious to pain, sensual pleasure, pettiness, joy, or fear but as real and raw in the ways that Black women realistically have and continue to exist; there is no attempt to mask these realities. Therefore, this production leaves room for praising the realities of Black womanhood and Black female authority, as it exists both in and outside of Candomblé through the legends of the yabás. Though the audience physically transitioned out of this divine space when the play was over, the legends served as parables to which the morals learned were not meant to stay in that space, but remain pertinent to the understanding of social structures in place that seek to police, disregard and appropriate Black female living, culture, and accomplishments.

Watching this play almost a year and a half ago led me to pursuing further research on the relationship between womanhood, gender and authority in Candomblé. This story of the

\textsuperscript{14} Benedita Da Silva, Gevanilda Gomes Santos and Octavio Ianni. \textit{O Negro e o Socialismo}, (Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2008)
\textsuperscript{15} Benedita Da Silva. \textit{Benedita Da Silva: An Afro-Brazilian Woman’s Story of Politics and Love}. (Food First Books, 1997)
\textsuperscript{16} Alex Ratts and Flavia Rios. \textit{Lélia Gonzales}, (Selo Negro Edições, 2010)
\textsuperscript{17} Ailton Pinheiro, “Mulheres de Axé”, Governo da Bahia, 2011
yabás was a lens through which to contemplate the multi-faceted roles that women take on in the religion of Candomblé. This stream of thought has brought about this thesis, which seeks to understand the work that Afro-Brazilian women have done through Candomblé to preserve culture, traditions and life. I argue that through the spiritual, economic, and therefore political authority and leadership of these women, Candomblé has become a means by which systematically oppressed communities have been able to provide for themselves at least some of what the state does not provide for them. Additionally, the presence of Afro-Brazilian women through representations of Candomblé has become both central to Bahia while simultaneously being marginalized by the state and nation. The persecution of Candomblé has occurred historically through it being outlawed, and worshippers being prohibited from practicing during slavery continuing to 1934 with a law placing all Afro-Brazilian religions under the jurisdiction of the Federal Police’s Division of Customs and Divisions. It was not until 1976 that Candomblé was legalized though this has not completely sheltered terreiros from police and military violence continuing until the present day.

Though the work of resistance has not been done solely by women and has occurred throughout Brazil, this paper will focus on Afro-Brazilian women who are a part of Candomblé in Salvador, Bahia, often referred to as “the capital of black Brazil” with 80 percent of the city.

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being Black or mixed race\textsuperscript{22}. When speaking of authority in Candomblé I am speaking of both the perceived and real authority of insiders and outsiders of Candomblé, I am exploring both personal experience and official scholarship. \textit{Lenda das Yabás} serves as an ideal starting point as it depicts the power and autonomy of women in Candomblé and in Afro-Atlantic cultural understandings of female divinity. The eleven images that are interwoven in this work are also pertinent to the theorization of gender and female authority as it relates to food, consumption, economics, spirituality, celebration, community, transitioning spaces, embodiment, politics and the state. Understanding the labor of Afro-Brazilian women through Candomblé is important both in showcasing their successes and accomplishments while also critically analyzing the problematic relationship between them and the state of Bahia, nation of Brazil, and even the international gaze.

\textbf{II. A duplicidade de centralidade e marginalização - The Duplicity of Centrality and Marginalization}

Understanding the duplicity of the centrality and simultaneous marginalization of Afro-Brazilian women throughout Brazil\textsuperscript{23} is crucial to understanding the historic\textsuperscript{24} and present day relationship between Afro-Brazilian women of Candomblé and the state of Bahia\textsuperscript{25}. The centrality yet marginalization of Blackness in Brazil is evident in that about 80 percent of the


\textsuperscript{23} Kia Lilly Caldwell. \textit{Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black Women, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity} (Piscataway, NJ), 2007)

\textsuperscript{24} José João Reis.1995-1996.

population is estimated to be of African origins, yet Afro-Brazilians are underrepresented in positions of power, receive the least access to systems of effective education and live with the highest levels of poverty. Africanist traditions remain central to Brazilian music, food, and culture, yet rarely do their creators receive recognition. Instead, what is Afro-Brazilian culture is attributed to nationalist “Brazilian” traditions. This ignores the hybridity of what it means to be Brazilian with its dominant African influence, in order to disassociate from Africa and Blackness, which still carry several negative connotations. The presence of Candomblé and the significance of the Afro-Brazilian women representing it are not given full recognition based on the same racist philosophies that attempt to mask Afro-Brazilian representations with terminologies of nationalism. The role of nationalism therefore in relation to Candomblé shows the ways in which the work that Afro-Brazilian women have done in creating and preserving culture becomes swallowed by elitist ideas of what it means to be Brazilian. The idea of Brazil being a “racial democracy,” the belief that Brazil has escaped racism and racial discrimination based on miscegenation, first put forth by Gilberto Freyre in his 1933 book, Casa-grande & senzala: Formação da família brasileira sob o regime da economia patriarcal, has had a major influence on Africanist traditions being appropriated for the creation of a larger, supposed homogenous Brazilian national culture. This idea of recognizing only the mixture and rarely giving credit to the Afro-Brazilian individuals responsible for the creation of Brazilian culture

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29 Larry Rohter, 2012
such as food, music, and dance come directly from the ideas of Freyre that were embraced and preached by the elite.\footnote{France Winddance Twine. \textit{Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil}, (Rutgers University Press: 1997)}

Images of Candomblé, especially those of Black women are in Brazil often seen as symbolic representations of Bahia and sometimes the larger Northeast the emergence of which began in the 1990s.\footnote{Eric P. Rice. 2000} Figure 2 on page 15 speaks to the importance of the image of Black women in white clothing, \textit{turbantes},\footnote{Head-wrap} wearing \textit{contas}\footnote{Beaded necklaces that represent specific orixás worn traditionally by members of Afro-Brazilian religions to contain their head orixá} and holding or preparing food, typically for sale in the state of Bahia. This image is the cover of a July 2013 pamphlet of “Patrimônio Cultural Na Bahia”\footnote{Cultural Heritage in Bahia} containing information about important cultural sites throughout the state. The bottom image is of an Afro-Brazilian woman behind a food stand covered with traditional Afro-Brazilian foods smiling warmly as if to greet hungry customers. For this to be an image on a pamphlet of this kind shows the centrality of Black women to the identity of Bahian culture. Additionally, foods that I am identifying as Afro-Brazilian would often times be named “Bahian” instead of linking them to the specificity of their African roots. Modern images of women similar to this often represent Bahia circulating internationally from the flyers inviting tourists to experience the cultural, joyous and historic experience awaiting them in Bahia to the billboards at the airport in Salvador.

Photographs taken by Melville J and Francis S. Herskovits during anthropological field trips to Brazil show that the visibility of Afro-Brazilian women in Salvador through the selling of food was already present in the 1940s. Figures 3-5 further depict this centrality by showing the
historical presence of Black women preparing and selling foods on the streets in 1941 and 1942. These are only three images of much anthropological research that has focused on women in Candomblé for many years\textsuperscript{36}. Therefore, it can be seen that the presence of Black women producing consumer products on the streets of Bahia has been historically central to international academic scholarship as well as capitalist profit for the state, nation, and international academics. These images have been consumed as readily and ravenously as the delicious food that they make. The very bodies therefore of Afro-Brazilian women has been consumed and commercialized through images of food and Candomblé meant to represent a larger, de-Africanized, and neutralized state and national culture. This thesis is interested therefore in demonstrating the work of these women behind the scenes that is not officially recognized meanwhile their image and cultural representation becomes appropriated by the state and consumed (both literally and figuratively) by privileged bodies. I am also interested in outlining what outside scholarship has failed to display about the authority, success, and marginalization of these women. Figure 6 was taken in Bahia in 1990 by Chester Higgins Jr., as a part of his global Black Religion Project and on its own is yet another example of outside scholarship’s isolated focus on Afro-Brazilian priestesses and food consumption. However, paired with Figures 7-8 the viewer can gain a more holistic understanding that the presence of these women is not solely to serve state commerce or satisfy the physical and exotic hunger of tourists but that there is a larger community, rituals, and importance to these women that does not center on the marketing of culture, but on the preservation and necessity of spiritual Afro-Brazilian practices. It is through the leadership and authority of Afro-Brazilian women that there exists the possibility of the preservation of tradition, provision of spiritual, economic and physical

\textsuperscript{36} Melville J. Herskovits. “The Social Organization of the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé”, (Clark Atlanta University: 1940-1956)
sustenance to Afro-Brazilian communities. It is also these accomplishments, as well as the pairing of racism and capitalism, that has led to the state-sponsored appropriation and consumption of Black female bodies leading to the emergence of Afro-Brazilian women as figureheads standing in for Bahian culture, yet not receiving full citizenship and full recognition of their importance.

What has occurred therefore is that representations and images of Afro-Brazilian religions have become synonymous with Bahian culture and these religions, including Candomblé, are being depicted by images of Afro-Brazilian women. Many of these images, however, are being named as *patrimônio cultural da Bahia* and are often disassociated from African culture only to be named by language focusing on the state and nation. Though I am using racialized language of “Afro-Brazilian” or “Black”, these women are often referred to as *Bahianas*[^37]. Being described as looking “Bahian” often means having and not disguising Black features such as wearing afro hair naturally or adorning oneself with *turbantes*, beads, flowing fabrics, African prints, or jewelry. Therefore, being Bahian represents images and displays of African culture, but Brazilians often avoid this direct linkage except for those who participate in Black-conscious thought.

[^37]: The Bahian women
Figure 2: "Patrimônio Cultural Na Bahia" (Cultural Heritage in Bahia) 4th Edition July 2013; Pamphlet mapping major cultural heritage sites of Bahia issued by the Instituto do Patrimônio Artístico e Cultural da Bahia-IPAC (Institute of Artistic and Cultural Heritage of Bahia), the Bahian Government’s Secretary of Culture and the Instituto Patrimônio Histórico-IPHAN e Artístico Nacional (National Institute of Historic Heritage)
Figure 3: Melville J, and Francis S. Herskovits Collection- Research/ Professional Series- Anthropological field trips Brazil 1941-1942 (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture-NYC; Digital ID #1996705, January 20, 2015)
Figure 4: Melville J, and Francis S. Herskovits Collection- Research/ Professional Series- Anthropological field trips Brazil 1941-1942 (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture-NYC, January 20, 2015)
Figure 5: Melville J. and Francis S. Herskovits Collection - Research/Professional Series - Anthropological field trips Brazil 1941-1942 (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture-NYC, January 20, 2015)
Figure 6: Chester Higgins Jr.- “Black Religion Project: Candomblé Bahia, Brazil; 1990 Yoruba Priestess with Yemenja Offering” (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture-NYC; Digital ID #90-34-19, January 20, 2015)
Figure 7: Chester Higgins Jr.- “Black Religion Project: Candomblé Bahia, Brazil; 1990 Yemenjah Rites Umbanda Cult” (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture-NYC; Digital ID #90-34-18, January 20, 2015)
Figure 8: Chester Higgins Jr.- “Black Religion Project: Candomblé Bahia, Brazil; 1990 Candomblé in Brasil” (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture-NYC; SCP #93-87-21-8, January 20, 2015)
III. Linguagem e tradução – Language and Translation

In addition to my experience in Salvador, Bahia in 2013, my identity is central to this project and has the most influence in my methodological choices in the use of language. I am an Afro-Brazilian woman originally from São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. In 1999 at the age of six I immigrated with my parents and brother to the United States and received my education here. I returned to Brazil in 2013 and lived in Salvador, Bahia attending university there, working and volunteering at a well-known terreiro called Gantois, and essential, becoming a part of Bahian life. In many ways Salvador, Bahia felt more like home than my home in the United States. I am not an initiate of Candomblé practices, although I identify with many of the philosophies and am connected to it through my ancestral lineage. I take the time to say this in order to situate myself between generations of non-Brazilian scholarship on Black women and Candomblé and perspectives from within the community. In these ways I am approaching this paper from the lens of an academic and cultural insider-outsider.

I recognize that this is a unique role in academia and have made methodological decisions based on this. One of these is my refusal to translate certain words or passages. As a person who navigates between English and Portuguese in academic and social settings I place a large focus on the contextual value of certain words and their inability to hold the same weight when translated. I am always aware of the loss of meaning when I am forced to switch a word in one language in my mind to its translated version for a different audience, whether it be Portuguese, English, or Spanish. I am also always aware of what it means to be transitioning through barriers of identity and language similarly to what is described by Gloria Anzaldúa in, Borderlands/La Fronteira: The New Mestiza, in which she describes “la conciencia de la
This conciencia de la mestiza or mestiza consciousness is defined by Anzaldúa as, “A consciousness of the Borderlands,” and is described her poetry, “Because I, a mestiza, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time…” Therefore in this paper there will be many words that are not translated in the text but only in the footnotes because of the value of maintaining language in its original context. There are also contextual differences to words that would translate into the same word. For example when using the word “santos,” meaning “saints,” I will maintain the Portuguese usage when referring to orixás and translate it into the English “saints” when referring to Catholic saints. I do this in order to preserve the specificity of words linked to traditions of Candomblé. When dealing with Afro-Atlantic traditions there are various spellings of words and terms depending on where in the Americas the particular tradition landed and transformed. I will be using the most commonly used spelling of these words in Bahia, Brazil in this paper. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Additionally, questions of translation also speak to metaphoric concepts. Translating or not translating certain words is a way to remind the reader of the insider/outsider dynamic that is sometimes ignored in academic scholarship. The need for a scholar to receive translation in a field they are studying or claiming expertise in is a reminder that being a scholar should not grant legitimacy into an insider category. During my research I was aware of this because my identity navigates both spaces. The authority of some scholars on topics of Candomblé despite

39 Anzaldúa. 1987, 77
40 Ibid.
mistranslations or misunderstanding aspects of language and Brazilian culture often remains unchallenged by other outsiders who are not able to see these inconsistencies and praise their work. Photography also creates a paradox between seeing and having the right to see. Often with photography of marginalized communities there is an imbalance of power that allows for the documentation of a community usually through a scholar-“subject” relationship. Though problematic because of this power dynamic, the photographs allow the audience to see a historical database that may not otherwise exist. The question at hand, however, becomes what is being seen and what has being lost? The party with power (usually anthropologists or scholars) has made conscious decisions to document something and not something else and even in the images used at the beginning of this paper it is important to think critically about these questions. Isolated images are often intended to stand in for an entire experience or community and this is never truly possible. Specifically when dealing with Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions, there are philosophical theories of what capturing a ceremony that is taking place with the presence of orixás does to the spiritual experience or to the orixá itself. Therefore within my work, I consciously chose not to include images of festas\textsuperscript{43} where embodiment is taking place, both out of respect and because of my own spiritual belief. Those who would like to experience and see these moments in order to understand the process of embodiment should do so through being present and adhering to the process of the rituals through which these moments occur. A photograph cannot possibly translate the divine experience of the drumming, movement, collective images, singing, smells, tastes, and spiritual presence of an Africanist religious ceremony.

\textsuperscript{43} Ceremonies in Afro-Brazilian religions, usually to the honor of one or multiple orixás or ancestors
It is also important to me that the reader navigates spaces of insider/outsider while embarking on the journey of reading this paper because of the daily navigation necessary of peoples of African descent especially in formerly colonized nations. This identity creates an ambiguous identity of being both insiders and outsiders in their own country, whether in Brazil or the United States. There is always a micro-society of those of African descent within a larger national culture. This larger national culture sometimes appropriates aspects of Africanist culture when it is profitable while simultaneously denying people of African descent their full citizenship. Black people therefore have had to learn to transition between these spaces, finding national identity and community in Blackness while also finding ways to engage with larger national identity. This status of second-class citizenship makes it so there is constantly a negotiation between self, identity, language, and nation and therefore a grappling with an insider-outsider existence. For Afro-Brazilians and especially Afro-Brazilian women this navigation is also always present when grappling with being a part of a nation that does not respect, protect or provide for them, but instead discriminates and devalues their bodies and existence based on both race and gender as has been outlined by the multilayered oppression of Black female living.\footnote{Keisha-Khan Y. Perry. \textit{Black Women Against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil}, (University of Minnesota Press: 2013)}

Questions of translation within this thesis also seek to tackle the translation of philosophy. Academia and scholarship tend to exist in binary ways such as right/wrong, male/female, good/evil, and secular/non-secular\footnote{Vanessa K. Valdés. \textit{Oshun’s Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas}, (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 2014)} These binaries commonly exist from the European rationalism of the world and the way it operates. Unlike the classic European epistemology of religious thought that separates the physical from the metaphysical, African
spiritual traditions do not function through these methods making them often seen as irrational and illegitimate and making it difficult for scholarship to discuss them without coming into conflict with these ideologies. Scholarship is often interested in making definitive statements about whatever is being studied, however, I am recognizing that African spirituality operates through the fluidity and many colors of nature and therefore cannot be summed by black and white statements regardless of how tempting it may be based on a scholar’s cultural upbringing or formation. Many myths, beliefs, and statements in African traditions provide the possibility of coexistence with various philosophies that to outsiders may be seen as inconsistent, and therefore incorrect. However, these dualities or multiplicities are often a part of an outlook that recognizes that we live within conflict and duality even when we do not recognize it, and that many things, especially those defined as spiritual, cannot have one streamlined explanation. One example of this is that the orixás themselves are represented by various genders and can be received by people of any gender. In this way, not even the “gods” exist within rigid identities but instead are alive in fluid and ever changing ways. Classic European thought has preached a belief that there is always one correct explanation to everything in the natural world of thought, which conflicts directly with many Africanist philosophies including Candomblé. I am interested in translating some of the many understandings of womanhood and gender as they exist fluidly in Candomblé, and the ways in which scholarship has attempted to define certain ideologies without fully recognizing the impossibility of singularly defining a belief system that operates through many ideologies.

IV. Use of this Thesis

This thesis comes in response to a long tradition of scholarship focused on race in Brazil\textsuperscript{47}, second-class citizenship in Brazil\textsuperscript{48}, womanhood and gender in Candomblé and the African traditions from which Candomblé is derived\textsuperscript{49, 50}. Ruth Landes\textsuperscript{51} writing in the 1930s focused on the importance and centrality of women to discussions of Candomblé. However, scholars after her such as J. Lorand Matory\textsuperscript{52} have critiqued her narrow focus on women, there continuous to be scholarly debate on which genders can and cannot serve in certain roles in Candomblé. These debates often times come with a lack of distinguishing the nuances that determine who has taken on certain roles historically and in present day. One of these is the variation in \textit{nações}\textsuperscript{53} that came together to create Candomblé. Because scholars writing on Brazil have concentrated largely on iorubá traditions\textsuperscript{54}, many outsiders view Candomblé practices as only legitimate or correct if they are in line with what has been said of these traditions. Additionally, Brazilians both in and out of Candomblé have varying and sometimes contradicting views on how African traditions, nationhood, womanhood and gender relate to Candomblé. Due to these factors and others, those who hear of Candomblé may be quick to say it is a woman-led Afro-Brazilian religion where women assert their authority. Some go further to

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{47}] Edward E. Telles. \textit{Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil}, (Princeton University Press: 2006)
\item [\textsuperscript{48}] France Winddance Twine. 1997
\item [\textsuperscript{50}] Channette Romero, \textit{Activism and the American Novel}, (University of Virginia Press: 2012)
\item [\textsuperscript{51}] Ruth Landes. \textit{The City of Women}, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947)
\item [\textsuperscript{52}] Matory. \textit{Black Atlantic Religion}, 2005
\item [\textsuperscript{53}] Portuguese word for nations referring to the ethnic groups from which Afro-Brazilians descended
\end{itemize}
say that this is a representation of the ways the Bahian state or Brazilian nation has respected and made space for women otherwise they would not have so much authority and presence in Candomblé. Though it is true that women are central to Candomblé this does not mean that they are the only presence of importance in the religion or that this centrality eliminates the possibility of their marginality in Brazilian society. Additionally, considering the diversity of nações is crucial to recognizing the complexities of this discussion and the variation of traditions in all Afro-Brazilian religions but even when focusing in on just Candomblé. My discussion on the diversity of nações will dispel the one story narrative of all Candomblé operating based on one iorubá tradition and show the many ways this is a syncretic and varied religion. Because I am focusing largely on one woman, Valnizia de Oliveira’s story, who is of iorubá lineage, as a lens for these topics, my discussion will still focus largely on this tradition. However, I dedicate time to showing how the variation of nações is crucial to understanding the multiplicity of Candomblé.

Those who are critical of Candomblé, especially those of the Christian or Evangelical communities, have used the moments when orixás or ancestors embody members of Candomblé to show that these are actually demonic spirits taking over the bodies of weak and vulnerable subjects. Edir Macedo, bishop of Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus expresses this perspective in his book *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* This perspective is often believed and backed by the fact that many of those who dance and receive orixás during festas are women who are already stereotyped as weak and vulnerable which falls in line with this argument. This

56 Universal Church of the Kingdom of God
allows for embodiment to be seen as a matter of weakness and succumbing to dominant forces and not as an honor and an answering to a spiritual calling. Additionally, commentary has been recorded of those inside and outside the Candomblé community that to be “ridden” by an orixá or ancestor as a man is a signifier of being gay because of these same stereotypes or embodiment and of male queerness \(^5\). Looking closely at the ways in which initiates understand their calling will indicate that participating in Candomblé and embodiment is not a matter of irrational or vulnerable devotees being overpowered by a spirit but a demonstration of a powerful relationship with the orixá or ancestor and a willingness to be a physical representation of what cannot be seen without their human bodies. This willingness to receive is in fact a demonstration of autonomy and an exercise of spiritual authority. Since notions of the sexual and gendered character of Candomblé houses of worship have also been used to show the power and authority of women in Brazil, I will show that while this is true to some extent, it also masks the extent to which Afro-Brazilian women are still oppressed and marginalized by the state. Most importantly, however, I seek to clarify the role of Candomblé and the extent to which initiation and participation tackles issues of providing resources that the state does not. Additionally, though the space of Candomblé may be seen “strictly spiritual” by a Eurocentric influenced audience that makes the distinction between secular and non-secular, Afro-Brazilian religions stem from Africanist traditions of which life is not compartmentalized as “spiritual” and “non-spiritual” but that all aspects of life are spiritual, economic, political, personal and community-driven. Therefore, highlighting the work that women have done through Candomblé is not just about spirituality but also about providing for themselves and for community in all aspects of life.

\(^5\) Landes, 1947, 37
Throughout this thesis I will use the narrative of Valnizia de Oliveira\(^\text{59}\), which helps to demonstrate the political, economic, and social resistance and work that has been done by women in Candomblé through their spiritual authority. I will also dispel the assumption of weakness and vulnerability in initiation and embodiment as well as the assumption that authority within Candomblé means a lack of racism, sexism and marginalization throughout Bahia and to show how an insider’s account destabilizes the scholarly accounts.

Capítulo 2: Debates Escolar Sobre Autoridade e Gênero - Scholarly

Contestations on Authority and Gender

The endurance and survival of Black bodies and traditions in the Americas is inherently a matter of resistance as it has required a constant fight against imperialist systems that have tried to do away with these forms of existence\(^{60}\). According to The Latin American Studies Center, “homicides have risen 132 percent during the last 30 years, -- from 11.5 per 100,000 people in 1980 to 27 per 100,000 in 2011.”\(^{61}\) Most of these deaths occurred in Brazil’s most impoverished urban areas, home to larger numbers of Afro-Brazilians than wealthier neighborhoods\(^{62}\). In this way, Black diasporic resistance can be seen as the ability to continue to exist, create and believe. Candomblé is a powerful example of this. This chapter outlines three publications on Candomblé. In so doing, it argues that the scholarship is determined by the social location of the author and the historical context in which they write. Critically reviewing these works shows us how Afro-Brazilian religions are over-determined from without. In reviewing the work of scholarship on Candomblé it is important to recognize why the author is writing, what is at stake, and what affects this work has on the traditions themselves. Candomblé is incredibly complex in its practices, variations, deities, and hierarchical structure of authority. Perceptions of spiritual authority are matters that are highly contested by both those from inside and from outside the Candomblé community. Individual biases as well as varying traditions have caused it so that the opinions on who gets to have authority in these traditions are highly contested.

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\(^{60}\) Lourdes Garcia-Navarro. “In Brazil, Race Is A Matter of Life and Violent Death” (NPR: November 9, 2014)


\(^{62}\) Keisha-Khan Y. Perry. 2013
In *The City of Women*, Ruth Landes presents Candomblé as an overwhelmingly women-run religion in which men are not allowed in many aspects of leadership or possession but must fulfill specific roles such as that of *ogäs*⁶³. Ruth Landes was a white, female anthropologist from the United States who was researching in 1938 and whose book was published in 1947. The power she had in influencing perspectives on spiritual authority was linked very closely to her privileges as a white American in academia. Because of this what she writes as her “discoveries” and the support she receives from Brazilian scholars, Candomblé as a traditionally and rightfully matriarchal religion is accepted as truth. However, in *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* J. Lorand Matory critiques Landes’s work as distorted and not representative of all of Candomblé. In some nações such as Jejê and Angola, he argues, men take a much greater leadership role than in the iorubá traditions. J. Lorand Matory is an African American, male anthropologist whose book was published in 2005. Matory works to debunk many of the misconceptions Landes makes by displaying historical examples of men as equally vital in high positions of leadership.⁶⁴ Valnizia de Oliveira offers a third perspective in *Resistência e Fé: Fragmentos da Vida de Valnizia de Oliveira*⁶⁵ in which she outlines a generational accessing of authority and mentions both men and women in leadership who are of different nações. Valnizia de Oliveira is an Afro-Brazilian woman, *mãe*⁶⁶ at the Terreiro Casa Branca in Salvador Bahia and is the most contemporary of these authors writing a reflective text in 2008 days after her 50th birthday. These commentators' perspectives

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⁶³ Landes, 1947, 81; From iorubá meaning “master or lord”; A sponsor or non-possession male priest; assists in animal sacrifices, keeps order in temple, sponsors activities, also generic name for various male functions within the Candomblé house.  
⁶⁴ Matory, 2005, 190-199.  
⁶⁵ *Resistance and Faith: Fragments of the Life of Valnizia de Oliveira*  
⁶⁶ Meaning “mother” and short for “Mãe de Santo” meaning “mother of the Saint” is a chief female priest
are shaped by differences of generation, social status, and profession. Though working in the same scholarly discipline as Landes, Matory’s work comes at a historical period when anthropology had different assumptions. Because of this, he and de Oliveira are also likely to have different racial suppositions than Landes about Afro-Brazilians. De Oliveira is not a formal scholar but a participant in addition to being Brazilian, unlike the other two, also making her perspectives different from Landes and Matory. Because of these differences in background and goals in writing there is something at stake for each writer and a desire to authenticate themselves that can be seen through their work. Not only is seeing who has spiritual authority in Candomblé important, but it is also to analyze who is seen as having the authority to discuss and analyze these traditions and why these voices get listened to in academic and eventually social settings as the ultimate truth whether they are from inside or outside of a specific community.

In 1938, Ruth Landes landed in Brazil after having recently completed her PhD in anthropology from Colombia University with the mission to make an anthropological study of “Negro life” there. Her goal in producing the later renowned book The City of Women was to create a study of the “Brazilian Negro” and their customs as well as better understand the ability for whites and blacks to coexist in Brazil and bring this report back to the United States. In theory, the understanding of Afro-Brazilians was meant to educate a liberal, elite, academic and white community on how to better coexist with “American Negros” through the experiences that Landes would extrapolate from Brazil. The City of Women eventually allowed Brazilian elites to gain some understanding of what was happening in this seemingly untouchable community without having to actually visit Candomblé houses. In this way, Landes, an outsider to the country and of Candomblé, was able to receive prestige and recognition by the State as knowing

67 Landes, 1947, 1
the truth of this community because of the power of being a formally educated person from the United States. In order to do this, Landes first stops in Rio de Janeiro in order to gain a better understanding of Portuguese and begins her initial moments of immersion into Brazilian life.

One of her initial experiences includes a moment when an Argentinian man who is appalled by the studies she is planning to conduct exclaims, “Are you going to that monkey land!...What they’re all blacks, as backward as in Africa!” to which she makes a mild attempt to defend saying, “You would change your mind if you met a charming, well educated Negro. And some of them are as fair as I am—you might not recognize them!”68 From this experience at the very beginning of the book, it is clear that Landes is bringing problematic ideas of race into her studies. Her response was based on ideas of politics of respectability and shadeism that say that a “good negro” would be an Afro-Brazilian or Afro-American who adheres to her standards of education and behavior or who is fair skinned. These biases, while not disregarding her work, should be considered by the reader when looking at her content. Though very much interested in bringing a “positive” understanding to Candomblé, she continuously refers to Afro-Brazilians as “Brazilian Negros” and describes the culture and community in problematic racialized and gendered terms that were comprehensibly a part of her understanding of the time period but that also hold relevance to the content displayed.

Ruth Landes’s position as a woman also greatly influenced her experiences and her writing. Upon arriving in Salvador, she became aware that she would face barriers as a white woman roaming alone through the city and Candomblé houses and that due to protective secrecy within the community, it would not be easy to access the information she needed. Landes very strategically realized what she needed to do in order to complete her mission; “I should have to

68 Landes, 1947, 5
persuade the Bahians to take me into their life. I should have to force my way into the flow and become a part of it. To study the people I should have to live with them, to like them and I should have to try assiduously to make them like me—In this mentality, there is a desire to get information at all costs possible with little recognition as to whether this community wanted her to live among them as part of their lives and that they did not have to like her if they did not want to and should not be forced to. Landes’s saving grace was a man by the name of Dr. Edison Carneiro – a twenty-seven year old she describes as “pardo”—who is a scholar that studied “Brazilian Negroes and Candomblés” and who had already had spent time in jail for opposition to Vargas’s dictatorship regime. During the dictatorship scholars involved with Afro-Brazilian religious organizations were accused of being communists and were subject to arrest. Landes also was questioned and eventually asked to leave the country for her involvement with the Candomblé community in Salvador. This was also a time of continued persecution against members of the Candomblé community by the military and as previously mentioned, practicing an Afro-Brazilian religions was still illegal. Through him, Landes received not only access to people of the Candomblé community and a scholarly legitimacy, but also the male protection that she was searching for. “In this land where the tradition locked single women in the home or threw them in the gutter. I should have been unable to move about unless escorted by a reputable man. Now here he was. Furthermore he was the best possible reassurance to the Negroes that I was no an upper-class spy or mere busybody…” In this way, it is possible to see how Landes’s

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69 Ibid., 16
70 Of mixed or “mulatto” racial makeup in Brazil
71 Landes, 1947, 13
73 Landes. 1947, 14
strategic relationships were what offered her social and scholarly authority within Candomblé houses and around various people and events.

As can be assumed by the title, Landes places great emphasis on Candomblé being a female dominated religion. Matory, however, denies the assertion made by Landes that Candomblé is a matriarchal religion by saying that women have not historically and are not strictly the only high priests and that the work presented by Landes influenced a misconstrued school of thought that men do not have a place in these positions.\textsuperscript{74} In chapter four of \textit{City of Women}, Landes tells of an encounter with an Afro-Brazilian man of almost eighty years old named Eliseo Martiniano do Bomfim who was well known both in Bahia and in Brazil as a whole. Martiniano was born during slavery to parents who had bought their own freedom and who sent him to Lagos, Nigeria as a sort of mecca to learn about the roots that slavery had disconnected them from. Because of this, Martiniano had very strict ideas about both the gender roles within the houses as well as who should have authority over orchestrating these traditions. He asserted that there was only one woman who did things the correct way, but she had recently passed away. This woman was an \textit{iyalorixá}\textsuperscript{75} who was well-known, well-respected and a great friend to Martianiano by the name of Mãe Aninha. Martianiano no longer trusted women in Candomblé’s leadership saying that, “they want to make money, and they want to get men… most of them are too young to be dedicated to the gods…the blood is still hot in her!”\textsuperscript{76} He also believed that men should not be allowed to be “mounted” by the “gods” unless they were gay men. Martiniano believed that Candomblé should be restored to its “African purity” and that if it has not returned to those roots, it would no longer be worth practicing. For Martianiano, spiritual

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{74} Matory, 2005, 190-192
\textsuperscript{75} Female chief priest; Interchangeable with mãe de santo
\textsuperscript{76} Landes, 1947, 32
\end{flushright}
authority was reserved for older women only and that a deviance from these traditions was a
disgrace to Candomblé as whole. Matory adds a layer to this discussion that Landes fails to
mention, which is that these ideologies of queerness in male possession priests do not fall in line
with West African iorubá traditions. The idea of “upright men” or “homosexuals” had never
been a conversation in his experiences with Sàngó priests, “I argue simply that the Afro-
Brailians have *reinterpreted* West African metaphors of spirit possession in the light of Brazilian
gender categories.”

Without the historical and traditional West African understandings, Landes
takes one man’s opinions and legitimates it as a rule of thumb for the entire religion of
Candomblé. Because of the influence she obtained through her writing, this had larger
implications of causing many Brazilians and members of the international community to believe
that only women could be *montadas* and the men who “allowed” this to happen to them were
undeniably gay.

In writing *Black Atlantic Religion*, Matory seeks to counter perceptions of Afro-
Brazilians and their spiritual institutions as primordial and primitive that shaped the work of
earlier anthropologists such as Landes. Additionally, Matory asserts that in writing *The City of
Women*, Landes contributes to two major misunderstandings of spiritual authority in Candomblé.
The first is the idea that women are traditionally better suited or naturally more capable of
serving the orixás. A significant portion of Landes’s development of this argument comes from
the previously mentioned conversation that she had with Martianiano. Martianiano’s ideas of
spiritual authority were based on prejudices against female liberal sexuality as well as the
potential of deviant male sexuality. His concerns of young women being focused on money and
sex (even more so if they were dancing among heterosexual men), as well as the potential of men

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77 Matory, 2005, 212
78 “Mounted”
De Oliveira Pereira 38

who dance being gay, were not strictly based on traditional values but on his own biases of
gender roles and identities. Matory explains that the idea of African purity is distorted in its
presentation through Martianiano’s story as, “many West African òrìsà possession priests, who
necessarily danced for the gods, were cross-dressing men. Indeed they were the most publicly
visible priests.”

In Candomblé, male leadership in all nações has been an old phenomenon and in the 19th
century, men outnumbered women in priesthood in Bahia, including in Nagô and Jejê, which
Landes claim to be exclusively of female leadership. Between the first and second halves of the
19th century the percentage of male leaders outnumbering female leaders declined from 88
percent to 58 percent. Additionally, at this time there was also a decrease in Afro-Bahian men in
the general population after the abolition of slavery. By bringing in historical understanding of
these traditions, Matory counters ideas presented in The City of Women about who should or has
had spiritual authority. Although Matory confirms that there was an increase in female leadership
at the time of Landes’s studies, he asserts that she, “ignored the significant number of leading
male priests in the Nagô nation and instead identified the male priesthood chiefly with a variant
of the Nagô religion in which Indian spirits, or caboclos, were worshipped
predominantly.” Additionally, the divide that Landes draws between female-led Nagô houses
versus caboclo temples is inconsistent with the fact that the traditions of both are intertwined as
caboclos are worshiped in Nagô houses and Nagô orixás are present in caboclo worshiping
houses. Landes was interested in countering US sexism by proving that she had found a “cult
matriarchate,” even in a sexist country such as Brazil, in which women ruled a religious

79 Matory, 2005, 193
80 Ibid., 192
81 Matory, 2005, 191
establishment. She believes that she has discovered that, “women are the chosen sex…I take it for granted just as I know in our world that men are the chosen sex.” Matory believes that in Landes’s desire to prove this “discovery” to US academics she created a distorted representation of evidence and created a narrow story of the rich and diverse Afro-Brazilian traditions. Landes created an “otherworldly Bahia” in painting a one-sided image of women in leadership as the epitome of “African purity” and was successful in changing the minds and interactions of Candomblé’s bourgeois allies and therefore the relationship of the religion to Brazilian society due to her perceived authority on the matter.

In addition to having significant influence in validating misunderstandings about women in Candomblé, Matory also added that Landes contributed to, “an ongoing tradition of privileging the Jejê and Quêto/Nagô nations over the Angola nation, the Congo nation and the caboclo worshippers, on the grounds of the Quêto/Nagô nation’s alleged African purity…” As both Matory and Landes mention, all nações have the possibility of having both mães and pais de santo, but no Quêto/Nagô houses are more likely to have male priests. Although Landes does add to privileging Jejê nações, this is not as much the case as with Quêto/Nagô where she directs the majority of her “legitimizing” focus.

Chapter six of Black Atlantic Religion titled “Man in the ‘City of Women’” begins with a quote by Pai Francisco from 1992 that reads, “If you just sing Jejê songs at your festival, you’ll end up singing alone…. So, we have to sing Quêto songs too.” Pai Francisco Agnaldo Santos usually known as “Francisco of Xangô” is a pai de santo of a mostly Jejê house. Because of this, he practices the worship of voduns not orixás and is more accurately a son of Sobô the Jejê

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82 Landes, 1947, 202
83 Matory, 2005, 190
84 Meaning “Fathers of the Saint”; a male chief priest
85 Matory, 2005, 224
equivalent of Xangô. Pai Francisco is better known by a iorubá orixá because, “being outnumbered, out-sponsored, and out-publicized by the Quetô/Nagô nation, the Jeje nation has found it difficult to resist forms of Quetô/Nagô influence that result in a loss of its own specifically Jeje “purity.”

For this same reason, Pai Francisco is hesitant in calling his terreiro a purely Jejê house and fears that his power and influence along with those of other Jejor Angola priests or priestesses are draining away. Matory relates this decline in the influence of male priests as well as none Quetô/Nagô nações to Landes as well as other scholars such as Arthur Ramos and Édison Carneiro saying that since their writings in the 1930s, “Brazilian scholars and Northeastern journalists have given a bad name to male priests and to any hint of commerce in Candomblé. Male priests have not been able to demand the same resources from the state and the state-subsidized tourist industry that some priestesses receive.”

In this chapter, Matory uses the story of Pai Francisco’s difficulties in being seen as a legitimate source of spiritual authority to demonstrate how Landes’s distortions of Candomblé’s society had a substantial impact not only on academic portrayal of the community but also on the practical necessities that this portrayal influences.

The perceptions of who has spiritual authority are important not only within the Candomblé community in order to maintain its hierarchical structure but also for access to resources and state recognition. For priests of all genders, tapping into Brazilian mass media and academic networks has become a way of accessing financial resources and benefits and social validation. However, these resources are not equally accessible for male and female priests according to Matory; “Since the 1960s, Northeastern and female-led temples have enjoyed disproportionate access to outside sponsorship, while male priests in Bahia and the Center-South

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86 Ibid., 225
87 Ibid., 229
are forced to rely on commercial strategies."³⁸⁸ Mãe Nicinha, the best-known mãe de santo in the Jejê nation, articulated post-Landeau positions to Bahian newspapers in 1986 playing on the idea of what media saw as who was “meant” to have spiritual authority in Candomblé in order to receive support for her house, Bogum; “Men do not get possessed by the voduns and are just ogãs [nonpossession priests or sponsors]. The matriarchate is total in the Jejê nation…the same custom observed in the regions where the Jejês live in Africa.”³⁸⁹ The Bogum temple was in desperate need of repairs at this time and the survival of the Jejê nação was in danger. Mãe Nicinha was therefore trying to access state money by validating her house through the misconstrued ideas of scholars that was now seen as ultimate historical truth despite its misalignment with the facts of West African traditions. These perceptions of matriarchal spiritual authority have benefitted women in gaining access to economic power and state recognition but has harmed the leadership of men and the ability for male-run houses to prosper. Pai Franscisco has struggled because of his position as a male priest to receive state largesse, however, it has benefitted him in gaining less lucrative commercial opportunities. Although the misconception of a solely matriarchal religion has been beneficial to mães de santo in receiving state largesse, the existence of a patriarchal state has caused women of the Nagô houses to have to trudge “along in obscurity and submission to the patriarchs of the Bahian Federation of the Afro-Brazilian Cult.”³⁹⁰ Consequently, power and authority within Candomblé has been influenced by outside scholarship, and the messages the state receives as to who is legitimate enough to receive state largesse³⁹¹.

³⁸⁸ Matory, 2005, 230
³⁸⁹ Ibid.
³⁹⁰ Matory, 2005, 260
³⁹¹ Matory, 2005, 264
The third author Mãe Valnizia, focuses on matters of spiritual authority and has a different perspective as *a mãe de santo* who is writing to share her story and not to contribute to the tradition of academic and scholarly analysis of Candomblé from the outside in. Mãe Valnizia is a part of the Terreiro da Casa Branca in Salvador, Bahia where she was initiated in 1976. She is of Aiyrá, an *orixá* of the family of Xangó and is the great-granddaughter of Flaviana Bianc of Oxum who was a prominent *iyalorixá* in leadership of the Terreiro do Cobre beginning in the 20th century and appeared in writings by Edison Carneiro, Ruth Landes and Jorge Amado. Mãe Valnizia is described in the foreword entitled, “*Apresentação*” by Eliane Costa Santos as, “*Mãe biológica, líder spiritual, educadora, médica, psicóloga, administradora, mobilizadora social, promotora cultural entre outras,*” therefore giving her a wide lens on the world. This book is written and published in Portuguese carrying an energy that comes from, and is for, the Brazilian community, rather than those written in English for an English speaking audience. Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira writes *Resistência e Fé: Fragmentos da Vida de Valnizia de Aiyrá* formatted in what she describes as fragments of memory on May 19, 2008 at Ilha de Itaparica in a location called, Coroa, nine days after her 50th birthday. She begins the “*Introdução*” saying, “Sinto que estas linhas estão sobre a inspiração da minha ancestralidade—penso que a vida se encontra num limite entre o orun e o aiyê.” Mãe Valnizia explains her intentions are of a

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92 Presentation
93 De Oliveira, 2009, 6; “A biological mãe, mãe de santo, spiritual leader, educator, doctor, psychologist, administrator, social movement mobilizer, promoter of culture and much more.”
94 Meaning “crown”
95 Introduction
96 From iorubá, the spiritual world that coexists and parallels Aiyê
97 From iorubá, the physical world that coexists and parallels Orun
98 De Oliveira, 2009, 8; “I believe that these lines are under inspiration of my ancestors—I think that life meets at the limit between orun and aiyê”
cathartic release of her own story written with the fluidity of the sea where she is physically present going back and forth in memory and time with the support and blessings of her ancestors.

Mãe Valnizia recognizes the cross between political and personal as she writes this memoir and follows with her intentions of acknowledging the resistance of her actuality and her faith, “Tenho o propósito de que a minha forma de enfrentar o mundo ajude a constituir fé para os que me acompanham e os que estão chegando nessa vida. Resistência e fé sempre foram marcas de nossa raça e de nosso povo, de nossa religião, então na minha vida não poderia ser diferente.”99 Mãe Valnizia is aware and intentional with the ways that her role in Candomblé is a form of resistance not just for herself but also for an entire community during every part of her journey. It is therefore in the telling of her story that Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira demonstrates the resistance of the faith of Candomblé and of survival as an Afro-Brazilian woman.

99De Oliveira, 2009, 8; “I have the goal that my methods of facing the world help to constitute faith for those that accompany me and those who are entering this life. Resistance and faith have always been markers of our race, of our people, and of our religion, therefore in my life it could not be any different.”
Capítulo 3: Caminhos de Iniciação- Pathways to Initiation

I. Entendimentos de iniciação- Understandings of Initiation

Misconceptions about Candomblé have included seeing the process of initiation as an expression of vulnerability or a lack of autonomy due to the power of the orixás. Those who fervently oppose Candomblé such as Edir Macedo claim that initiation is the result of manipulation by the “demônios” of Afro-Brazilian religions. This lack of autonomy has once again been justified by the gender of many initiates being women and therefore seen as being most susceptible to being manipulated and is linked to the ideas revolving around possession and vulnerability. Even from within the Afro-Brazilian community there is sometimes a hesitance to embrace Candomblé even when seeing the importance of its roots and work believing that one can become “trapped” in the rituals and obligations. The pathway to initiation therefore has not often been discussed in terms of the authority and control that it provides for women who are marginalized and often are not able to take control of many aspects of their lives. It can be in many cases a solution to a problem that has traditionally been solved by community and spirituality or that the state is not providing a solution for, such as health. When hearing from members of the Candomblé community, such as Mãe Valnizia, the significance that initiation has not only spiritually but also physically and even economically can be clearly seen. Additionally, by looking at Brazilian anthropologist, Marcio Goldman’s essay entitled, “An Afro-Brazilian Theory of the Creative Process: An Essay in Anthropological Symmetrization” another point that is rarely discussed in scholarship becomes evident, which is the importance of

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100 “Demons”
101 Macedo, 1997
the process of transformation in initiation. This process is a moment of deciding to acknowledge the orixá that is believed to already exist in every person and bring it out from within. This process of bringing a deity out from oneself signifies a process of working along with the orixá that is in and is a part of everybody regardless of class, race or sex. From birth, each one of us ‘belongs to’ a general orixá. But only some of us will be called to initiation, and only in this moment will we receive ‘our’ personal orixá.”103

As has been mentioned with other aspects of Candomblé, the decision to become an initiate varies from person to person. One thing however, seems to explain the reason for becoming a part of Candomblé regardless of personal differences, “O orixá chama você, você não vai para o orixá se eles não quiserem”104, a sentiment that has been expressed to me Gantois, a terreiro in Salvador as well as stories of initiation told in the work of Matory105, Mãe Valnizia106 and many others.. What this means is that there is a faith system around the process of entering Candomblé that suggests that if an orixá wants a particular person, he or she will be “called” in a way that is undeniably the work of the orixá and the person will either join or may suffer the consequences. The consequence can range from something serious such as constant health problems or the deaths of loved ones, or more simply an unfulfilled life. Within the community, the general sentiment is also that those with the harshest and more persistent the callings are, the more necessary that person is to the terreiro and the greater importance they will serve to the history of Candomblé. During the process of Mãe Valnizia coming into Candomblé she was told, “Ah! Meu Deus, essa é a menina esperada!”107 In the story that Matory tells of Pai

103 Goldman, 2009, 114
104 “The orixá calls you, you do no go to the orixá if they do not want you to”
105 Matory, 2005, 238
106 De Oliveira, 2009, 22
107 De Oliveira, 2009, 28
Francisco he says, “Everybody knew that I had a road to follow, everybody knew…that I would become a pai-de-santo’… he was destined for great things.”

While for Mãe Valnizia and Pai Francisco this was a matter of being summoned and answering a divine calling of purpose and leadership, in some cases, coming to Candomblé is a way to find a solution to a problem be it financial, physical, emotional or social such as finding community, and not necessarily a pathway to formal leadership. This occurs both through rituals and maintaining an alter for one’s orixá but also through making connections in the Candomblé community. Still this ability to provide solutions for oneself and one’s community through traditions that colonization and the elite attempted to be eradicate is demonstration of authority and resistance against white supremacy. This is crucial in understanding the role that Candomblé has served people in disadvantaged social positions beginning during the time of slavery and continuing to modern day. For many Brazilians, especially Afro-Brazilians, Candomblé has been a way to receive necessary resources that the state does not provide based on discrimination and a lack of resources. What is most meaningful is that this is being provided for the community, by the community and is relying on the preserved ancestral and Africanist knowledge that colonization and white supremacy attempted to systematically eradicate. This will be seen in even greater detail through the telling of the life of Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira.

In large part this survival and resistance has remained in the hands of the women. This happened for many reasons, some being the female leadership of a particular culto, the leadership of terreiros being passed from woman to woman, as well as the rampant killing of

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108 Matory, 2005, 238
109 Goldman, 2009, 117-118
Black men by slave drivers and police violence or high incarceration rates after emancipation. Black women have historically become the pillars of the Black community in having to take responsibility for the survival and support of men, children and memories or histories. Both men and women have been responsible for the preservation and conservation of Candomblé, however there is a particularity to the work that women have done and the ways in which their roles both inside and outside of the terreiro have provided resources and support to a members of society that the elite and most politicians do not invest in. Initiation into Candomblé therefore has been and continues to be a showing up in response to a responsibility to the divine and to community in order to continue the traditions and healing needed especially for women who often carry this responsibility. This does not mean that entering Candomblé will rid a person of all their problems or difficulties however; it is in many ways a way to respond to difficulties and to have the support of the elders, ancestors and orixás. Additionally, Candomblé is not an exclusive religion. It is not reserved to only those of African descent, Brazilians, those of a certain class or those who are initiated. Anyone who feels they need something that Candomblé has to offer can approach a terreiro and communicate their needs to a mãe or pai de santo who will do what they can to provide this person with their needs.

II. O caminho de iniciação de Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira- The Pathway to Initiation of Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira

Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira, came into Candomblé through a direct and intentional calling by her orixá. In her experience, it was undeniable that she was being led to come be initiated into Candomblé. Mãe Valnizia was raised Ladeira Manuel Bomfim, known as present day Engenho
Velho da Federação but moved to Rua Vila Paraíso when she was ten years old.\textsuperscript{112} Both are lower class, mostly Afro-Brazilian neighborhoods in Salvador, Bahia. She grew up around a community that was filled with participants of Candomblé, participants of Catholicism, participants of both or those who did not practice either religion and all of these were interwoven in her upbringing. Her mother did not take her kids to Catholic Church nor to Candomblé. She claimed that she did not take them to Catholic church because she worked too much and did not have the time and would not take them to terreiros because she had reservations towards the religion believing that, “\textit{Quem está dentro não sai e quem está for a não deve entrar}”\textsuperscript{113}, despite coming from a lineage of iyalorixás and religious resistance movement activists. Their father however, had taken the children to Candomblé when he was still alive but he passed away when Mãe Valnizia was still a baby.\textsuperscript{114}

Besides Valnizia’s familial ties to Candomblé, her personal experience began on her way to school when she would peep into the window of Terreiro do Cobre as a child. At seven years old, she and her friends would go to the Terreiro Casa Branca to try to obtain chicken \textit{tripas}\textsuperscript{115} for a traditional dish called \textit{cozinhado}\textsuperscript{116} that Valnizia loved making in her \textit{ quintal}\textsuperscript{117}. She and her friends would go to the back door of the terreiro after school without her mother knowing, and would ask Morena de Omolú, a Iyabassé\textsuperscript{118}, for the \textit{tripas} of the chicken which were left over from the sacrifices and dishes made for the \textit{orixás}. The love and care that she received from

\textsuperscript{112} De Oliveira, 2009, 10-11  
\textsuperscript{113} De Oliveira, 2009, 30; “Those who are in it do not get out and those who are out of it should not get in”  
\textsuperscript{114} De Oliveira, 2009, 15  
\textsuperscript{115} The insides of the animal  
\textsuperscript{116} Chicken \textit{tripas}, jackfruit seeds, pumpkin seeds, seeds of “\textit{coco de maroto}”, and the stem of a flower called “graxa”  
\textsuperscript{117} A backyard or open space behind a house.  
\textsuperscript{118} A woman that is responsible for preparing the foods for the \textit{orixás}
Morena de Omolú provided her with a significant longing and desire to be an insider of Candomblé and not just a recipient of its resources from the outside. Tia Morena de Omolú became her egbomi\(^{119}\) when she was initiated years later. Valnizia’s coming into Candomblé therefore came through a seeking out of resources, sustenance and joy as this dish was something that brought her much happiness and satisfaction emotionally and physically.

At seven years old, Valnizia’s health also became very bad and she was sick every day. At ten years old her health became even worse. At school she was not able to follow along and her legs would get so swollen that sometimes she was not able to go to school and no doctors could not find what was medically wrong with her, sometimes dismissing her without a proper examination or with a shot to numb the pain.\(^{120}\) Her mother would say that she was perturbada\(^{121}\). One day Dadinha, who was in charge of Oxossi in Casa Branca called Valnizia’s mother and asked, “Moura, você não acha que esta menina tem história de santo? São muito estranhas, as coisas que ela tem.”\(^{122}\) Her mother responded saying, “Dadinha, então essa menina vai morrer, porque eu não tenho condições de fazer o santo dela, isto é, se é que é santo como você esta dizendo, pois o pai dela não deixou nenhuma pensão para mim. Ela é pertubada, isso sim.”\(^{123}\)

Valnizia’s mother always said that the reason she would not take her to be feita was for financial reasons because there are fees that need to be paid during the process of initiation. Valnizia, however recognized that there was more to the reasons her mother did not want her to be feita mainly based on her own reservations about Candomblé.

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\(^{119}\) A woman who helps initiates who has already completed the initiation process

\(^{120}\) De Oliveira, 2009, 21-23

\(^{121}\) Perturbed.

\(^{122}\) De Oliveira, 2009, 22; “Moura, do you think this girl has a history of santos? These are very strange things that she has”.

\(^{123}\) “Dadinha, then this girl is going to die, because I don’t have the conditions to “fazer” (make) her saint, that is, if this really a santo like you say, her father did not leave any pension for me. She is perturbed that is all.”
After some time of looking for cures and not receiving help, including at the local, free clinics, Dadinha took Valnizia to the house of Seu Lelinho, a man who was son of Iyansã and who recebia\textsuperscript{124} a cabolco\textsuperscript{125} who was called Tupá. Seu Lelinho was very well known in the community and many people went to his house. He gave her a drink to heal her that had a snake in it. She drank it and then Seu Lelinho said that he had to \textit{“fazer uma cura”}\textsuperscript{126} on her arm and she did not understand why he would do this and ran away all the way to Engelho Velho da Federação. She did not want to go back to his house but Dadinha told her that he would not cut her arm anymore so she went back. He gave her a consultation and he said that she needed more help than he could give her. He gave her a \textit{“banho de descarrego”}\textsuperscript{127} and said that the problem was a \textit{santo} that needed to be \textit{feito}. He called her mother and told her that if her \textit{santo} were not \textit{feito} she would go crazy. Her mother responded in the same way as always, \textit{“Sou viúva e não tenho dinheiro.”}\textsuperscript{128} The sicknesses persisted and when she was thirteen years old, Leandro Bomfim, son of Omolú\textsuperscript{129} and a member of the Angola \textit{nação} did some work on her and said that she was also of Omolú. She became obsessed with that \textit{orixá} and would distribute popcorn every Monday after placing popcorn on an image of São Lázaro\textsuperscript{130} that she had at home. At this time she did not know that São Lazaro was a Catholic saint and Omolú was an \textit{orixá} of Candomblé but today she does not celebrate both.

When she was fourteen years old she had the worst year of her life. She got terrible headaches everyday to the point where her sister had to take her to the emergency room every

\textsuperscript{124} Literally meaning “received” and is another way of saying being embodied by
\textsuperscript{125} Ancestral spirit of the indigenous traditions
\textsuperscript{126} Make a cut
\textsuperscript{127} A cleansing of leaves and herbs for healing and purification
\textsuperscript{128} De Oliveira, 2009, 22; “I am a widow and have no money.”
\textsuperscript{129} Orixá known for healing
\textsuperscript{130} The Catholic saint equivalent of Omolú
day. The doctors would give her shots so that the pain would go away and when she would get home the pain would return. The pain was coming from the center of her head. One day she would not let the doctor give her any more shots so she ran away. That day her sister, Siana, took her to Terreiro do Cobre to ask for rescue.\textsuperscript{131} At the time it was her avó\textsuperscript{132} Maria Eugênia (her great aunt, sister of her avó, that they also called their avó) that took care of Cobre. A woman, Dona Heloísa, who had lived with her avó for many years and had access to the \textit{porrão dos banhos}\textsuperscript{133} was there. Siana told her what had been happening to Valnizia and told her to take a bath of abô and drink three drops of it. She did what she was told and went home. That night she felt better but the next day she awoke still feeling the same way. This journey of trying to find a cure continued without much success for many years.

By the time Valnizia was fourteen years old she was fed up with hearing that her problem was spiritual, was still getting headaches and sicknesses but could not believe that this is the way that the orixás call upon her. She began working as a waiter and earning her own money in order to help our around the house. Between fourteen and sixteen years old she continued to have issues and her mother continued to refuse to bring her to be initiated in Candomblé but the orixás found another way. In 1974 her sister Té decided to talk to their cousin Iyá Nitinha and told her of all the things that were happening at home. On a day of \textit{festas}, Té took Valnizia to meet this cousin at the Terréiro da Casa Branca. Yyá Nitinha did a \textit{jogo de buzios}\textsuperscript{134} in order to determine what was wrong with Valnizia. After this \textit{jogo de buzios} it was determined by Iyá Nitinha and another woman by the name of Mãe Tatá of Aiyrá that she would be \textit{feita} right away. Mãe Tatá

\textsuperscript{131} De Oliveira, 2009, 23-24
\textsuperscript{132} Grandmother
\textsuperscript{133} Vase with healing baths
\textsuperscript{134} A tossing of cowrie shells done by mães or pais de santo in order to receive an answer from the orixás or ancestors about something, including discovering what someone’s head orixá is or what need to be done to help them with a problem.
had made a promise that if anyone also of Aiyrá were to come to the terreiro, she would do all she could for them without charging them.

In 1976 Valnizia became pregnant with her first child at the age of sixteen and also began the process of initiation. Along with the other people, mostly women in her *barco*\(^\text{135}\) they began the journey. After her daughter was born, the women would go get the baby to spend time with her mother in the *terreiro* as she could not leave during the process of initiation, and return her to Valnizia’s husband. Her husband did not agree with her participation in Candomblé and the marriage did not last long, however, the women of the terreiro became her family and support system in raising her daughter and in growing and prospering spiritually as well as economically.

In the years that followed, Valnizia had many difficulties in her finances. She worked several jobs a *faxineira*\(^\text{136}\), a dancer, a waiter in restaurants and hotels among others. Still in the years between 1979 and 1982, the difficulties continued. Though her health problems had passed her problems were now professional and economic. She went to her elders, Mãe Nitinha and Mãe Caetana and they instructed her to make an offering to Xangô of Terreiro do Cobre. In 1982 she began working at a high school and for Bahiatursa, a tourism organization of Bahia, and was able to better sustain herself. She represented Bahia both around Brazil and internationally traveling to Europe and some countries in Africa. These opportunities came through an *ogã* of Casa Branca son of Oxossi that supported her in embarking on these endeavors. Valnizia also credits her economic successes to the food offerings she made to Xangô at Terreiro do Cobre. She continued therefore to use the money she earned to sponsor the *festas* for Xangô including the food for the orixá and for the community.

\(^{135}\) Cohort of initates

\(^{136}\) The profession of a woman who cleans
The importance of this story is in seeing the autonomy, choice and empowerment in both being called and responding to a call. In many religious institutions it is seen as a high honor to be called to religious leadership but in the case of Candomblé this calling is often plagued with fear and misconception that very intentionally circulate traditions of African origins. In Valnizia’s case as with many others, Candomblé provided a way for her to be spiritually and physically healed as well as find ways to be economically successful through connections made as well as offerings and prayers. The process of being feita is about bringing out from within the deity that already exists. It is empowering in that there is a belief that an orixá already exists within all of us and can be “brought out” or feita through the initiation process under the guidance of a mãe or pai de santo. This therefore means that there is already a power within the individual that is working alongside that of the orixás. This mingling of the two is important and makes it so that the support and necessary resources already exist for each member of this community from within themselves. Through the feeding and caring for the orixá, the orixá is able to care for them and are therefore caring for and providing for themselves.

III. Sendo feito- Being “Made”

Marcio Goldman talks about the process of being initiated or feito as a person or an object in Candomblé. He explains, “The saint and the filha-de-santo (saint-daughter) are born from a union of the orixá and the initiate. What is meant by ‘to make the saint’ or ‘to make the head’ is not so much to make gods; rather, in this case human beings and orixás make up a saint and a person. I say ‘in everything that exists and can exist in the universe: social groups, animals, plants, flowers, food, stones, places, days, years, colors, flavors, smells. All beings belong to determined orixás, and at the same time some must or can be consecrated, prepared, or made for
them.” The importance of this is tremendous especially in the context of a marginalized, demonized, systematically oppressed, lower class Afro-Brazilian population. To be taught that they too are of an orixá and can have this orixá be manifested in plain sight or through their very bodies. Additionally, the authority and power of the iyalorixás who are able to bring this experience out of individuals who would outside of their community are seen as disposable to the state. Faith in many spiritual practices allowed for the desire and motivation of many people of African descent to continue resisting and surviving. The leadership of women and direct connection to the African continent in Candomblé allows for a particular empowerment that is unique to this practice and the work it has accomplished. The lesson to members of Candomblé is that there is a tremendous power inside each of us that needs only to be lapidado similarly to a diamond before its beauty is unleashed. According to Goldman, this concept has often been misunderstood by scholarship seeing the saint as being constructed in initiates not brought out from within.

In maintaining a balance of axé, it is important that those who receive help from Candomblé also give in the form of proper sacrifices otherwise the orixás or ancestors will take for themselves because something is not being freely given. If an object is feito to become one’s personal divinity for example, it must receive proper sacrifices otherwise it can become a negative force instead of a positive one, “Faced with my perplexed look, he explained that once prepared or baptized, the Exu would require periodic offerings to be made: palm oil, alcoholic beverage, honey, and especially the blood of an animal from time to time…” Those who are

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137 Goldman, 2009, 114
138 France Winddance Twine. 1997
139 Goldman, 2009, 119; The word describing the process of gem cutting.
140 Vital life force of Candomblé
141 Goldman, 2009, 118
initiated are made clear about these responsibilities before committing to this process. Again, in order to maintain the balance of energies, there has to be an exchange and there is also something that the person has to give in return. Throughout Brazil there are many negative stereotypes towards Candomblé. Aside from the racist and discriminatory ideas that demonize Africanist culture and traditions, many of these misconceptions come from this clause about receiving from Candomblé. There are people who have seen devastation occurring in the lives of those who either joined or received from Candomblé. Commonly this is because they either did not give what they were told to by a mãe or pai or they did not give at all. Active reciprocity and an intellectual and organized system exists that does not drag people in but allows a conscious decision to be made. The concept of not being allowed to leave expressed in Mãe Valnizia’s story also may stem from someone not having adhered to the regulations of the religious practice and suffering from those consequences. Despite previous perceptions, there is an active decision to become a participant with the understanding of the nuances that are involved in being a part of the Candomblé community and the rituals and responsibilities involved. These stories are also a lens through which to see how issues of spirituality and control have been understood in Candomblé communities.
Capítulo 4: Gênero e Linhagem em Candomblé- Gender and Lineage in Candomblé

I. –Entendimentos de gênero e liderança- Understandings of Gender and Leadership

The discussion of lineage is crucial to understanding the relationship between spiritual authority and gender. In order to understand leadership and authority it is important to know how it is obtained. As has been mentioned previously, there has been a large focus on the centrality of women in Candomblé by previous scholarship. Female power is important and has proven to be resilient and provide for the survival of the religious teachings of Candomblé. Because Candomblé leadership is often passed on generationally, leadership has many times been passed down from women to women. This dominance in leadership of terreiros\textsuperscript{142} by women is a major reason that many have come to believe that the title of “priestess” (iyalorixá or mãe de santo) is the only title of leadership allowed or acceptable in Candomblé. Though female priestesses are seen often in Candomblé, there are also male leaders called pães de santo or babalorixá.

Additionally, different nações of Candomblé have different guidelines about the roles that men and women may have in terms of leadership in the terreiro. Through the story of Valnizia de Oliveira’s heritage and coming into leadership, we can see one example as told by a member of the community of how women access power in Candomblé. Additionally, this chapter outlines the regulations of the Egun traditions in order to depict a male-dominated example of Candomblé. This chapter is about establishing two examples of how leadership is obtained generationally through lineage in order to show the structures that organize leadership in Candomblé. This is important in order to understand that there is a hierarchical system in place that many times has resulted in leadership by women. Unlike Landes’s assumptions that women

\textsuperscript{142} The religious house of Candomblé containing temples, offerings, a space for festas and a space for community
have simply taken over Bahia through Candomblé, there are thoughtful and rigid responsibilities that certain families have to carry out similarly to those of royalty. Depending on the particular tradition, the ways that these responsibilities are passed along vary but cannot be defined as “wrong” or “right” for Candomblé but rather adhering or not adhering to one’s particular tradition. Though lineage is one important way of obtaining leadership, it is not the only nor can it be judged an overarching “correct” way. Once again, scholarly conversations about being priests or priestesses have revolved around correct or incorrect, a debate which becomes unproductive when seeing the multiple layers and many differences among Candomblé traditions.

II. Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira crescendo em autoridade- Mãe Valnizia de Oliveira Growing in Authority

“Na verdade, minhas maiores referências foram das mulheres. Elas ê que me davam dicas do que é a vida, ajudavam a me criar, cuidavam de mim.”

Valnizia was born on May 10, 1959 and as has been discussed, was initiated into Terreiro da Casa Branca in Salvador. In this chapter specifically, her story allows us to see the importance of generational and blood lineage in acquiring spiritual authority in Candomblé. The lineage from which she comes of leadership in terreiros has been passed down in a matrilineal fashion through the teachings of iorubá traditions. Valnizia’s great-great-grandmother was Margarida de Xangô who came from Kossô in present day Nigeria, as a slave. She maintained the ancestral history of her homeland by establishing the Terreiro do Cobre at the end of the 19th century. Flaviana Bianc de Oxum, Valnizia’s great-grandmother took leadership of it when Margarida

143 “Truth is, my biggest influences were of the women. They are the ones that gave me hints about what life is, helped me to create, took care of me.”
De Oliveira Pereira passed away and though there were two non-consanguineous leaders since then, Valnizia now is in leadership of the terreiro.

The quote that opens this section comes from a moment when Valnizia is describing her upbringing in the neighborhood in which she was raised with pride, resilience and faith in the mainly Afro-Brazilian, poor, urban center of Salvador, Bahia. Some of these women were guiding her outside of directly spiritual practices but rather in economic practices such as Dona Enecrildes, a woman who informally taught young women in the community the “artes culinárias” of making cakes, sweets and other candies that could be sold for self-sufficiency. Others such as Dona Antonia focused on education and would hold classes in her home in order to reinforce or supplement what the kids were not learning in school. Many however were impacting her spiritual growth in either because they had leadership roles in Candomblé or because they talked about and lived by philosophies and reverence to the orixás. The \textit{parteiras}\textsuperscript{145} and the \textit{rezadeiras}\textsuperscript{146} serve as important examples of her experiences with the presence of the orixás from a small age. These acts of taking care of health were not done separately from the rituals of conjuring the orixás and of prayer. The \textit{rezadeiras} specifically handled each sickness with its own unique \textit{reza}\textsuperscript{147} that usually called to Omolu and Nana\textsuperscript{148}, and Ossain\textsuperscript{149}. It is important to note that these are examples in which providing members of a state-neglected community, mainly being led by women influenced by Candomblé, are taking on the provision of healthcare. Not only is this in the form of \textit{reza} to the orixás but also in utilizing and passing on knowledge of herbal medicinal healing and the power of the \textit{folhas} instead of relying on

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\textsuperscript{144}De Oliveira, 2009, 17; “Culinary arts”
\textsuperscript{145}Ibid., 16; Midwives
\textsuperscript{146}Ibid.; Healers
\textsuperscript{147}Prayer and ritual
\textsuperscript{148}Both orixás associated with healing/health
\textsuperscript{149}Orixá associated with \textit{folhas} (leaves and vegetation) and medicinal herbs
\end{flushleft}
Eurocentric methods of healing. After being initiated into Candomblé, Valnizia continues to utilize *folhas*, pray and make sacrifices to these same orixás when there is a need for healing for herself or those around her. Even the desperate need for her own physical healing was what ultimately brought Valnizia to Candomblé. Though Valnizia does mention that there were men who were in leadership in other terreiros and who were also a supportive and important part of her community, the female presence always took precedence in her own personal journey.

The Terreiro do Cobre became deactivated for many years and the state was starting to take possession of it. Valnizia and her sister, Té, started to hold meetings there so that it would not seem abandoned. Over time, people started coming that wanted to be initiated but could not be because there was no *iyalorixá* at Terreiro do Cobre. Valnizia thought that she was too young to assume this role of leadership but after speaking with the orixás she was told it was time for her to initiate others into Candomblé. In July 1992, she initiated her first group of eight *iyaôs* and through a great deal of stress learned how to lead this process from her elders and from the women who were being initiated. Since then she has lead many initiations one in April of 1993, February of 1994, and in April of 1994. All of the people who are initiated under her leadership become known as her *filhos* and *filhas*, sons and daughters. Valnizia expresses that she loves and respects each of her *filhos* uniquely based on who they are. This love and respect is a significant part of the responsibilities of a *mãe de santo* or *pai de santo*. The responsibility of authority is not simply spiritual but involves the creation of a family and taking on the role of a mother or father under the guidance of the orixá of the house, “*Nós estamos todo tempo*”

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150 *Initiates*
151 De Oliveira, 2009, 35
aprendendo, porque a vida é um constante aprendizado—aprendemos errado, acertando, ensinando, trocando, observando, fazendo; e assim, a família de Xangó vai crescendo.”

Valniza de Oliveira like many other mães de santo, has also taken on responsibilities of bettering the lives of members of the community through her position of leadership. She began a society called Sociedade Beneficente e Religiosa Filhos de Flaviana Bianc\(^\text{153}\) to provide projects of educational opportunities for the children of the community. This society received funding from Fundação Palmares, the first federally funded public institution dedicated to the promotion and preservation of Afro-Brazilian art and culture. In 1995, she began a course to help alphabetize children in the community who were not receiving an adequate education in their schools. This project was called “Projeto Experimental de Educação do Terreiro do Cobre”\(^\text{154}\) and went from working only with children to also working with adults. Those who belonged to the family of the house such as the filhas and ogãs were the ones who were responsible for teaching courses that later expanded to Portuguese, Mathematics, History and Citizenship in addition to simply alphabetizing. Many terreiros in present day Salvador such as Gantois, where I taught English in 2013, continue to participate in educational projects. Additionally, there have been many terreiros involved in the movement against religious intolerance as well as movements for the perseveration of the environment as nature is an integral part of Candomblé, “A religião do Candomblé para mim é vida, é resistência. Cada Orixá, Vodun e Inquice representa a natureza.”\(^\text{155}\)

\(\text{152}\) De Oliveira, 2009, 35; “We are always learning, because life is a constant learning process—we learn wrong, fixing, teaching, exchanging, observing, making and in this way the family of Xangó continuous to grow”\n\(\text{153}\) Beneficent and Religious Society of Flaviana Bianc\n\(\text{154}\) Experimental Project of Education of Terreiro do Cobre\n\(\text{155}\) De Oliveira, 2009, 40; “The religion of Candomblé for me is life and resistance. Each Orixá, Vodun and Inquice represents nature”.\n
III. Tradições Variadas e O Culto Egun-Varying Traditions and the Egun Culto

Understandings of Candomblé are informed by the varying traditions of specific nations, languages and ethnic groups. When enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil, a variation of rich culture and traditions were also transported and became mingled and intertwined and informed how Brazilian national culture developed. Yet, through the many Afro-Brazilian religious practices many of these distinctions have been maintained through houses that maintain focus on the differentiation of roots and origin. When focusing in on Candomblé, careful scholarship acknowledges that it is not a monolithic religion and that many slightly differentiated traditions still fall under this category. The nations from Africa received different names when in the Americas but their origins can still be noted based on their specificities. In Brazilian Candomblé, three major nations have survived with the most prominence, the Jêje (of Fon rites), the Nagô/Ketu (of Yoruba rites) and the Congo/Angola (of Bantu rites). Yoruba and Fon mythologies were often mixed creating the Jêje-Nagô model, which has often been considered the predominant syncretic tradition in Bahian Candomblé. The scholarship about Candomblé has spent a great deal of time trying to highlight which Candomblé practices are “authentic”, “pure”

157 Capone, 2010, 267; “The term ‘Nagô’ is a contraction of the term used by the Fon of Dahomey (now Benin) to designate the Yoruba who live in their country. According to Cornevin (cited by Ceccaldi 1979, 178) this word derives from inagonu, a term used by the Dahomians to designate their Yoruba enemies. This was later transformed into Anagonu, then into Anago, which became Nagô in Brazil”
158 Capone, 2010, 270; “The term ‘Bantu’ originates in linguistic studies—especially those of Guthrie and of Greenberg, who, following the model of Indo-European languages, classified African languages into several families, such as Sudanese and Bantu languages. The names of these two large linguistic groups also came to define the different African peoples who spoke these languages. Thus, in Brazil, the Nagô (Yoruba) and the Jeje (Fon) were classified with the Sudanese, and the Angola and Congo with the Bantu”
159 Yvonne Daniel, Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 98
or “degenerate”, or who is “right” or “wrong” for performing traditions in certain ways. Much contestation has focused specifically on gender roles and who “can” or “cannot” behave or perform in certain ways. It is important when talking about Candomblé to also talk about the specific tradition that is being referred to so as to not narrow understandings to one specific tradition. The importance of doing so is in ensuring that outside scholarship is not responsible for providing narrowed down or monolithic representations of a diversely rooted, syncretic religion. When discussing gender roles, the stratification of leadership and womanhood within Candomblé, these distinctions are of high importance because different traditions operate differently.

Stefania Capone works to create clear distinctions between nations and traditions in Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and Tradition in Candomblé. Capone speaks of her own misinterpretations of Candomblé due to the narrowing down that had taken place in “classic” Candomblé texts of the 1930-1960s, “Almost all the authors referred to one tradition, that of the Nagôs, and emphasized the absence of tradition in the other nations, Bantu in particular”. Capone concludes that at the heart of contestations is the question of power and it has become difficult for scholars to analyze Afro-Brazilian religious fields without entering into conflict with their audience, colleagues or members of the religion. Previous scholars or outsiders writing on Candomblé have made assertions on certain topics without making the necessary distinctions so as to not make generalizations. When this happens, an idea of Candomblé gets put forth that often shapes how those from outside of the community and sometimes within view a particular topic. Two topics that have been affected but this is the idea of religious superiority in Candomblé being linked to racial superiority as well as the concepts

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160 Capone, 2010, 2
around the roles of women. At the end of the nineteenth century missionaries depicted Yoruba organizations as superior while described Bantu cultures as inferior. Charles Letourneau later cited by Nina Rodrigues wrote about the, “religious evolution in different human races” which was meant to support the supposed inferiority of Bantu nations.\textsuperscript{161} Nina Rodrigues furthered this argument by asserting that the Nagôs of Bahia (Yoruba) were the true “aristocracy” among the enslaved Africans brought to Brazil. His main informant was Martiniano Eliseu do Bomfim, a proud and historic leader of the Nagô traditions. “Nina Rodrigues was the first to play down any other cultural contribution of African origin in relation to the culture and religion of the descendants of the Yoruba.”\textsuperscript{162} This trend continued in Candomblé scholarship and even in Bahia leading to an academic, social, and political disregard for non-Yoruba traditions. Partially because of the range of mixture of influence that has taken place for Afro-Brazilian religions (Candomblé, Umbanda, Macumba etc.) to exist and the many variations of cultos existing within them creating even more variation but also confusion as scholars have tried to dissect the “truth” of these religions. Also because of the syncretic nature of Afro-Brazilian religions there has been a large emphasis placed on asserting “purity” both from inside (participants) and outside the community (scholarship). Although each terreiro has its own way of practicing Candomblé that may vary slightly, many want to assert that their own practice is the “correct” and “true” practice most aligned with traditional values. The racial hierarchy between Nagô, Bantu or Angola religions as well as the hierarchy between which culto within these practices in the “purest” way has led to constant debates of who is being most authentic. The question then arises of authentic in relation to what: African, Yoruba, Bantu, Fon or Bahia?

\textsuperscript{161} Capone, 2010, 4
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
Most importantly in relation to this project, are the ways in which this search for authenticity has impacted the ways gender and womanhood are perceived within Candomblé. In these traditions both men and women are in positions of spiritual authority and leadership as pães de santo or mães de santo respectively. Much debate among Candomblé participants and scholars has centered on what gender should be in leadership or should partake in certain roles such as dance, food preparation, drumming and being at the forefront of leadership of terreiros. The simple answer is that both can be in leadership contributing in the many ways that Candomblé benefits its community, however the nuances of this response are far more complicated.

As previously mentioned, within different nações also exist various cultos in which practices and norms including those of gender, vary. Though this paper focuses on the role of women specifically in Candomblé, it is important to see the ways in which male leadership is also central to the traditions of some terreiros and that this does not debunk the importance of womanhood but situates the possibility of authority from any gender identification. One example of a male dominated culto is that of the Egun. “O Culto dos ancestrais na Bahia: O Culto dos Egun” by Juana Elbein dos Santos and Deoscóredes M. dos Santos a chapter in O culto aos orixás, voduns e ancestrais nas religiões afro-brasileiras discusses the history and specificities of Egun cultivation. It is categorized by the modern ethnology of Nagô. The majority of the Nagô roots currently found in Bahia are derived from the Kétu, Òyó, Êgbádó and Êgbá lands in West Africa. Within Nàgô teachings, there are variations based on the specific geographic location from which certain traditions are derived. The Éguns or Égúngún are the ancestral spirits cultivated in some iorubá traditions. Nagô tradition believes in the immortality of the ancestral spirits and the

163 Juana Elbein dos Santos, Deoscóredes M. dos Santos, O culto aos orixás, voduns e ancestrais nas religiões afro-brasileiras, “O Culto dos ancestrais na Bahia: O Culto dos Egun” (The cult of the ancestors in Bahia: The Cult of Egun), 2004
164 The cult for the orixás, voduns, and ancestors in the Afro-Brazilian religions
cultivations of these ancestors through various rituals. These spirits are believed to inhabit the òrun, which is loosely translated into a heavenly realm. The goal of the Egun cult is to manipulate the ancestors into a visible presence therefore preserving the community between the living and the dead. Unlike orixá cultivating Candomblé traditions, the Egun are summoning the spirits of the ancestors not that of deities/forces of nature. Though women can be a part of the Egun culto, they hold minor roles and cannot inhabit the space of the immortal ancestral spirits. Nina Rodrigues wrote the first scholarly reference to the culto Egun in Bahia in 1896. Africans in Bahia established various Egun terreiros during the first decades of the 19th century. Some of these are Terreiro de Veracruz, Terreiro de Mocambo, Terreiro de Tuntum, Terreiro da Encarnaçao and Terreiro do Corta-Braço. The leadership of Terreiro de Mocambo and Terreiro de Tuntum was passed down generationally. Marcos Pimentel or Marcos-o-Velho was an African man who began the Terreiro de Mocambo, returned to Africa to learn more about Egun religious practices bringing back the assento of Egun Olúkotún, considered one of the ancestors of the “authentic” iorubá race. Marcos Pimental and his son, Marcos Teodoro Pimental founded a second terreiro, Terreiro de Tuntum that Marcos Teodoro Pimental took over after his father passed away. Similarly to Valnizia’s story, the leadership in these terreiros are being inherited generationally however in this case the leadership remains in the hands of men not women.

The Nagô traditions believe in the immortality of the ancestral spirits. In the Egun culto the spirits of male individuals that have passed are evoked and embodied receiving the names

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165 Dos Santos, 2004, 228
166 The ‘seat’ that is the house of the orixá or the Egun; it is a part of the altar of the house or of each initiate. During ceremonies the spiritual power of the orixá or Egun moves from the assento to the head of the person it is embodying (Sansi, 2007, 24).
167 Dos Santos, 2004, 229
Égun, Egúngún, Babá Égun or Babá. The main goal of the Egun culto is make these ancestral spirits visible by manipulating the linkage between life and death. In this way the importance of Egun traditions is to preserve the continuing relationship between life and death as well as maintaining control between the relationships of the living with the dead. The Egúngún serve to bring, “Seus descendentes e seguidores os benefícios dos conselhos e bêçãos, porém não podem ser tocados e sempre permanecem isolados dos vivos. Sua presença é rigorosamente controlada pelos òjé e ninguém pode se aproximar dos Egúngún.” Similarly to the orixás, the Egúngún serve as protectors and advisors to the community and the individual and are summoned through ritual drumming, singing and dance.

Frequently reappearing in iorubá myths is the concept of the battle between the sexes of which sex is supreme, even among the orixás or the ancestors. In the Egun myth, it was not easy for men to reach a supremacy over women and it took much patience. There are several myths about how the Egun culto came about but one in particular highlights the battle between the masculine and feminine ancestors. Its is told as following:

In the beginning of the world, the women intimidated the men of that time and would do as they pleased. Because of this Oya (better known in Afro-Brazilian cultos as Iyãnsan) was the first to invent the secret or the masonry of the Egúngún. This way, whenever the women wanted to humiliate their husbands, they would meet at a crossroad led by Iyãnsan. She would be there with a huge monkey dressed in appropriate clothes together with the trunk of an igi (a tree). The animal would do everything that Iyãnsan commanded. After special ceremonies, the monkey would appear and demonstrate its abilities under the orders of Iyãnsan. The men would run away petrified at what was happening. Finally the men decided to put an end to this embarrassment. They then went to the house of Orúmila (the god of the oracle Ifá). After consulting the oracle, Orúmila explained all that was happening and what the men had to do. He told Ogun to make an offering, ebó, of roosters, clothing, a sword and a used hat and to put it all on the crossroad at the foot of the tree after the women meet. Later that same day as the women

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168 Dos Santos, 2004, 232
169 Ibid.; “Their descendants and followers the benefits of advice and blessings, therefore they cannot be touched and must always remain isolated from the living. Their presence is rigorously controlled by the òjé (Egun priest) and nobody can get close to the Egúngún”
met up to celebrate the rituals, there appeared in front of them a fearsome figure. The vision was so fearful that Iyânsan, who led the women, was the first to flee. Because of the strength and power they possessed, the disappeared from the face of the earth. Since then, the men took power over the women and are the sole leaders of the culto. They prohibited any women from participating in the secrets and any masonry society. However, as the saying goes, it is the following that makes the rule. In rare cases there continues to be the permission of the participation of women. This explains the reason that Iyânsan- Oya- is cultivated and honored by all as the queen and founder of the secret society of the Egúngún on earth. This myth also emphasizes the priority and power of women (Dos Santos, 2004, 236).

This myth is serves grave importance in relation to the study of gender and Candomblé because it indicates two main points. The first is that even in the formation of a male dominated culto women are still discussed as having a central and powerful role. According to this myth, it was the women who created it but in a batter for power and revenge the men took it over, however, must still attribute the original leadership to Iyânsan. Additionally, it is important to see the trickery and rivalry that exists between men and women even in ancient myths. It shows that there is a balanced back and forth of power where men do not see themselves as inherently superior, but only are above women if they are able to “win” due to equal level skill, power and deception. There is a respect in rivalry when both sides are seen as equals going head to head against one another. Additionally, these longstanding debates over the power and authority of men vs. women have trickled also into the realm of scholarship. Attempting to understand who is at the forefront of Candomblé is a debate that very possibly emerges from these myths and the interpretations and behaviors of the Candomblé community as a result informing the perceptions of scholarship.
Capítulo 5: Comida, Sustentabilidade Econômica e Intolerância Religiosa -

Food, Economic Sustainability and Religious Intolerance

I. O significado da comida - The Significance of Food

There is a strong relationship between food, gender and Candomblé, as food and community are defining aspects of the religious practice\textsuperscript{170}. Food coming out of the terreiros is used to feed the orixás in sacrifices, to feed those who come to the festas and sometimes the larger community\textsuperscript{171}. There are specific dishes with strong ties to African cuisine that are cooked for these occasions usually including Dendê\textsuperscript{172} oil, quiabo\textsuperscript{173}, beans, rice, chicken, shrimp and corn meal. Different meals are preferred by different orixás and are made specifically as offerings to them and for the days of their specific festa. The knowledge of foods has been passed down mainly in the hands of women, as the cooking is primarily a role reserved for the women. Understanding which orixá prefers which food and what the recipes and rituals of preparation are is a responsibility that is passed to each Iyabassé. This is extremely important, as it is a way to sustenance and that without, the orixás would not be satisfied and therefore would not complete their duties of protection and blessing for the members of the terreiro. Food and the responsibility of providing food is therefore important in both for the physical and the spiritual sustenance of the community and this responsibility falls largely on the hands of women due to the gendered nature of roles\textsuperscript{174}.

\textsuperscript{172} Palm Oil
\textsuperscript{173} Okra
\textsuperscript{174} De Oliveira, 2009, 17
Candomblé foods has also proven to be a way of providing financial sustenance for Afro-
Brazilian women and their families since the days of slavery when women were able to buy their own freedom through the sales of food\textsuperscript{175}, especially acarajé\textsuperscript{176}. With a severe lack of access to formal education for this demographic, the education received in terreiros around food preparation has and continues to provide many with an occupation even outside of terreiros selling these food products to the larger state and nation. Many of the successes of food sales such as that of acarajé and feijoada\textsuperscript{177} have become state and national dishes. These are moments in which the work of Black women in Candomblé becomes representative of a state or nation with little to no recognition for the roots and labor of the women who have preserved the traditions and disseminated them to a larger consumer pool. There is a duality to the food production of Afro-Brazilian which is that on the one hand, food provides economic resources while on the other, it also has become appropriated by the state making it possible to separate these women and the roots of these foods from their importance. In doing this the spiritual components of these foods, each dish being dedicated to a specific orixá and carrying its own importance has become separated from the food itself allowing consumers to simply and mindlessly eat without recognition for the meaning of what is being consumed. The foods of the orixás have to many become simply the foods of the state of Bahia or the country of Brazil.

In Mãe Valnizia’s case many pleasant memories of her childhood have to do with the foods associated with Candomblé. The annual festivals were and continue to be a huge part of

\textsuperscript{175} Ailton Pinheiro, 2011
\textsuperscript{176} Kim D. Butler, \textit{ Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brasilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador}, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998); “Fritter of seasoned and skinned black-eyed peas, fried in palm oil”
\textsuperscript{177} Traditional national Brazilian dish of beans and meat which originated from the foods of enslaved peoples in Brazil
Brazilian life and especially in Afro-Brazilian communities. These festivals tend to be syncretic celebrating both Catholic saints and Candomblé orixás. Mãe Valnizia outlines the months of the festival season starting with June and the São João celebrations. August was the month of celebrating Omolú and São Lázaro, which included throwing popcorn to people on the streets every Monday. In September the celebrations would focus on São Cosme and carurú would be distributed. During October the community would host a festa in the street for Children’s Day, a national holiday in Brazil, and the leaders of the neighborhood would pass candy out to all the kids. Finally, in December was the celebration of Santa Bárbara and Iansã during which acarajé was made in the terreiros and passed out. It was also during only Christmas season that the state of Bahia would the kids of lower class families cheap toys that would break quickly upon receiving them but that the kids were very grateful for having received. Sundays were also a special day for cooking favorite and most special foods. These events are significant because they provided for a financially underprivileged community both food and joy. These festivals are organized and orchestrated largely by leaders of the Candomblé community, which often times were women. Part of the labor done by Candomblé therefore in these spaces is to provide celebrations that meet the physical, emotional and spiritual hunger of the community. Ruth Landes also describes the interactions between community and food in her book:

The crowd of children bobbed around... I noticed young women there, one of them pregnant and seeking a happy outcome through the kindness of the child saints; there were adolescent girls...some old women brought in great platters, each piled high with a different delicacy. One platter held caruru (okra sliced and prepared in a special manner, seasoned with palm oil and pepper); another held roasted sliced peanuts; another had boiled chicken; another, vatapá—a tasty preparation of manioc flour seasoned with palm oil and pepper and mixed with boiled shrimps; others, still, held...
acarajé, large smoking yams, and sticks of sugar cane prepared for sucking... One platter at a time was laid in the center of the floor on a cloth. Then the old man called, “Advance children, upon the caruru!” The children dived for it with a howl, gobbling the food in lightning time, eating with mouth, hands, and arms. The more they ate, the more wealth the gods would bring to the household—both wealth and joy.\footnote{180 Landes, 1947, 119}

This moment took place during a ritual to honor the twin orixás usually represented by children, in order to bless the children and the future families of the women who are pregnant. The joy and satisfaction of the children would determine if the orixás accepted the offering. The willingness to provide food for children in the community can be seen in other examples such as Mãe Valnizia’s love for cozinhado as a child.\footnote{181 De Oliveira, 2009, 13} The importance of these moments of feasting cannot be overlooked especially in the context of a demographic that lived and continue to live in significantly impoverished conditions lacking in food and sustenance. The provision by these women within the community becomes overlooked when the focus becomes a capitalist provision of food for Brazilian Candomblé outsiders or foreign tourists. Even in the homes of middle and upper middle class Brazilians, these women often provide these dishes for their families as domestic servants, leaving behind their spiritual significance in order to feed the children of others.

Focusing in on the sale of acarajé, a staple throughout Bahia we see the conflicting duplicity of profit for self and profit for the state. Acarajé is representative of Afro-Brazilian women because they are almost always (occasionally men also sell acarajé) physically present and dressed in all white with white or colorful headdresses when selling them on the streets. The dough of mashed back-eyed peas is fried fresh at the stand and the customer can choose to put
vapatá, shrimp and *pimenta* inside of it. This form of commerce dates back to the days of slavery and has continued to present day as could be seen in the images at the beginning of this thesis. This visual of the “Bahiana de Acarajé” has become a representation of both Bahian culture and cuisine and a marker of the Afro-Brazilian presence. However, it is not always known or directly associated with Candomblé. For those who know and understand the correlation between the two, there is either a respect for the survival of this tradition or a demonization of the food, business and production of *acarajé* depending on the perspective of the individual. Many are able to consume this food product while still demonizing and detaching it from its association to Candomblé.

One example of this is an experience I had on a Friday night in 2013 during my six month stay in Salvador. I was invited by some Bahian acquaintances to go have *acarajé* and beer, a common combination and huge nightlife attraction, in Rio Vermelho. Fridays are the day in which all those who participate or reverence traditions of Candomblé wear all white. One of the women, of mostly European makeup, told us what she thought was a humorous story of how frightened she was by “uma figura”, with “cabelo todo em pé” dressed in all white standing outside of her job leaning up against a wall. In the moment, she had been so appalled by the presence of this elderly man that she took a photo of him and Instagrammed it. As she passed around the photo, I was shocked to see a beautiful, Black man with a grey and white afro, in all white linen clothes leaning casually enjoying the Bahian sun. Though she didn’t directly racialize by naming Blackness, her anti-Black rhetoric calling him a “figura” and describing his hair in derogatory ways made it clear that his race was why she was so frightened by his presence. To

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182 Diced tomato, pepper sauce that is very hot
183 Butler, 1998
184 A Brazilian way of saying a strange looking figure or person
185 Hair standing on its ends
me there was nothing frightening about this image but instead reminded me of my grandfather
and of the strength and beauty of the African diasporic presence in Brazil. It made me imagine
what he may have been dreaming about as he soaked in the sun of the orixás. I did not respond
because I could not understand her demonization of this man for not hiding his religious belief as
she consumed the foods of his ancestors and spiritual traditions. I did not know what it meant
about how she thought of the women she had just purchased her meal from or me, who was
sitting across from her, the only one in the group wearing an afro along with my brown skin
proudly “todo de pé”.

A few hours later, after we had thoroughly consumed and enjoyed the meal, we drove
home in the same car and passed by a young man in all white. “Deve ser macumbeiro”186, she
said, “Eu deveria abaxar a janela e gritar ‘macumbeiro!’”187. Her cousin who was driving
asked her not to and for this reason she did not. Besides the blatant contradiction of consuming
while demonizing the foods of African traditions, she was also in a long term relationship with a
man of obvious African and indigenous roots which she would resort to leaning on whenever she
said something she knew was problematic around me saying, “Eu não sou racist, meu namorado
é Negro”188. Though these moments shook me, these contradictions were not surprising under
the context of the murky but blatantly racist Brazilian systems of miscegenation, race, and
oppression189. This mixture has intentionally made it so that Blackness can be consumed,
donemonized and reverenced all at the same time. This is precisely the centralization and
marginalization of Afro-Brazilian people, especially women, that has been discussed. When

186 “Must be a macumbeiro” (the derogatory word for a participant of Afro-Brazilian religions)
187 I should roll down the window and scream ‘macumbeiro’
188 “I am not racist. My boyfriend is Black.”
189 Carl N. Deglar. Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the
United States, (The University of Wisconsin Press: 1986)
receiving American study abroad students this same woman continuously talks up and prides herself on Bahian culture that she considers herself very much a part of, yet reacts in these ways when the Blackness that has created Bahian culture is displayed in ways that make her uncomfortable especially through spirituality.

II. Feminismo afro-Brasileiro, intolerancia religiosa- Afro-Brazilian Feminism, Religious Intolerance

Outside of the immediate neighborhoods of terreiros, Candomblé and Afro-Brazilian cuisine have been historically and in present day important to the liberation of Black women. Mulheres do Axé\(^{190}\) directed by Ailton Pinheiro focuses on the voices of women in Candomblé. Mãe Makota Valdina Pinto from Terreiro Tanuri Junçara an older, dignified Afro-Brazilian woman in the film speaks to modern feminism fighting for women to be outside of the domestic sphere. She reminds the audience that these were the jobs that emancipated Black women from slavery and from systems of Anti-Blackness that attempted to keep Black people away from financial security. She believes that it is important for women to continue to fight for equal opportunities but not at the sake of diminishing the gendered and emancipatory roles of laundresses, housewives, seamstresses and cooks. This does not mean that women should remain in these spheres but Black feminism requires recognition of this past. In this film a woman by the name of Alaíde do Feijão\(^{191}\) tells her story of how cooking has become a family business passed from mother to daughter. Her mother had a tray at the Comércio\(^{192}\) where she sold feijoada, mocotó, sarapatel and Bahian food. Her children, Alaíde included, would go sit with her throughout the day and help her sell and Alaíde became the most attached to the idea of cooking.

\(^{190}\) Ailton Pinheiro, 2011

\(^{191}\) Alaíde of Beans

\(^{192}\) A huge food market in Salvador
and selling. In 1974 and 1975 Alaíde do Feijão took over the business. She moved to Pelourinho and that is how she was able to survive and support her family. To conclude her story she states, “Imagine aqui ná Bahia uma mulher, negra, mãe solteira sobreviver so do feijão. O resultado de tudo isso eu devo a os orixás”\(^{193}\) Despite what the scholarship of Ruth Landes has made it to seem that women are dominating and at ease in Bahia, this is clearly still not the case eighty years later in 2011 as expressed by Alaíde do Feijão. She emphasized the difficulty of survival for herself as a low income, Black woman in Bahia, the same location that Landes claimed to be an almost paradise for the women of Candomblé.\(^{194}\) Though this way of survival was difficult it was the trade that she inherited from her mother and with the help of the orixás she was able to survive and support a family through the selling of food.

The sale of acarajé has become a source of much debate and religious intolerance in Brazil, especially in Bahia. In the last few years there has emerged a competition between the original producers and sellers of acarajé, the women of Candomblé and evangelical groups selling “bolinhos de jésus”\(^{195}\). These evangelical groups have begun selling the same product with a different name marketing them as being related to Jesus instead of to orixás which they refer to as demons. These groups often set up sales directly next to a “Bahiana’s” stand and tell customers about the “demons” to which acarajé is offered in order to convince them to buy bolinhos de jesus instead. Some have even gone so far as to vandalize and destroy the acarajé stands or the terreiros to which the women belong. In early June 2013 before I traveled to Salvador, Bahia for the first time, I was warned by an evangelical pastor in São Paulo to never

\(^{193}\) Ailton Pinheiro, 2011; “Imagine here in Bahia, a woman, Black, single mother [trying] to survive only from selling beans to support her family. The result of all this I owe to the orixás”

\(^{194}\) Landes, 1947, 248

\(^{195}\) “Jesus Cakes”
buy or eat these “coisas chamadas acarajé”\textsuperscript{196}. He warned me that though they seem like harmless food products, they are first offered to “other gods” and all those who consume this popular and delicious food are being deceived into consuming sinful behavior and worshipping of false gods. He told me that tourists are especially susceptible to this trap as they do not know the religious affiliations or that they are one of the many things in Salvador “que veio da África”\textsuperscript{197} Despite his brown skin and obvious African ancestry, he said Africa as though it was a disgusting and forbidden land from which nothing good can come. This anti-Africa, anti-Black and anti-Candomblé mentality is rampant in Brazil and has caused tremendous difficulty for the women who are providing for themselves and their families through the sales of foods whose recipes have been guarded and preserved for many generations.

Despite this, these women have gained much success and have established organizations to protect their rights such as the Associação das Baianas de Acarajé e Mingau\textsuperscript{198} that work with the city of Salvador and state of Bahia to ensure workers and entrepreneur rights for the women who sell acarajé and mingau. The leadership of these women in organizations such as this one have made a defining statement that they will continue to take up space. The issue of food sales is both a battle over economic sustainability, the right of Afro-descendant women to provide for themselves and their families as well as a political battle over the right to occupy public space. The backlash of evangelical groups stem from both a competition of business and who can have the largest economic gain and is a message that those of Afro-religions should not be allowed to occupy public spaces. These women have however, continued to take up this space and have made their very presence on the streets of Salvador and symbol of Black feminist resistance.

\textsuperscript{196} Things called acarajé
\textsuperscript{197} “That came from Africa”
\textsuperscript{198} Association of Bahianas of Acarajé and Mingau
Additionally, they have also become symbolic of the city and state making it so that not only are they taking up space but also are representatives of these spaces despite racism, sexism and religious intolerance. Food therefore comes to stand in for the preservation of culture, traditions, economic freedom, and resistance against the removal of Black female bodies from public spaces.

In addition to activism around the sale of acarajé and mingau, women of Candomblé have also been central to activism around anti-Religious Intolerance Movements in Salvador, Bahia. The rampant religious intolerance has not only threatened Candomblé spaces, but also destroyed terreiros and taken the lived of many members of Afro-Brazilian religions199. Both police brutality and evangelical groups that are often protected by the police have committed violence against Candomblé communities. Through the activism of leaders of the Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions, many marches, protests and policy changes have occurred that have worked to gain protection for these communities. At the forefront of this movement against religious intolerance are often older women who are Mães of the terreiros they are fighting to protect. These women therefore answer to not only a spiritual and economic responsibility for their community but also a political responsibility to protect the lives and well-being of their “children” and larger Afro-Brazilian community. The fight is not just about the preservation of Candomblé but is an anti-racism struggle with a focus on the protection and preservation of life, culture and traditions. Despite the work that has been done there is still much violence that occurs and members of the Candomblé community routinely suffer from discrimination, violence, persecution and death.

199 Keisha-Khan Y. Perry. 2013
The responsibilities placed on the women of Candomblé are not without consequences. It is often discussed in Black feminist theory that though the work of Black women have been formative to the survival of the Black community, it also comes with the layers of burden of gender and race. Though these women have fought for so much, the emphasis on their strength often times dismisses their vulnerability and lack of support and protection. To be responsible for the physical, spiritual, emotional, financial and political well-being of a community is no small task and though many of these women pride themselves on their work, there is also the reality of expecting too much from Black women as the providers of the community. In the battle for religious tolerance, many Afro-Brazilian women have lost their lives with little to no repercussion on the part of their murders. *Mulheres de Axé* tells the story of one such woman, Mãe Gilda de Ogum who unfortunately had to lose her life in order for the issues of the Candomblé community to receive at least some attention. Equede Irajolde de Oxalá from Terreiro de Oxumaré makes a powerful statement that summarizes one aspect of the importance of what Afro-Brazilian women have done in preserving Candomblé despite all efforts to make them forget their past. “*Ainda é bem que essas mulheres não se esqueceram dessa responsabilidade que elas tinham de trazer toda essa história para aqui. E o Candomblé foi o responsável por guarder essa história e resgatar destas mulheres seu auto-estima*”\(^{200}\)

\(^{200}\) Ailton Pinheiro, 2011; “It’s a good thing that these women did not forget the responsibility that they had to bring this history here. Candomblé was responsible for guarding this history and rescue these women their self-esteem/self-worth.
Capítulo 6: Conclusão - Conclusion

“I’ll tell them about the women. I think they will help make Brazil great. Will Americans believe that there is a country where women like men, feel secure and at ease with them, and do not fear them?”

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I begin the conclusion with this quote because it was this conclusion to Landes’ The City of Women that in large part was responsible for outside scholarship to see the position of Afro-Brazilian as “secure and at ease” because of their presence in Candomblé. Through seeing the centrality and marginality of their presence in the city of Salvador, the statement omits some crucial details about the realities of Black women in Brazil. It is tremendously important that the women of Candomblé or as mulheres de axé, receive the deserved recognition for their ability to have established a position of dominance among oppressive systems of racism and sexism. However, it is also crucial to not romanticize their realities and jump to the assumption that a visual presence in Bahia means the impossibility to be marginal to the state and the space that they occupy in society. There is a multiplicity to Black womanhood in its strength, resilience, vulnerability, flaws, accomplishments, roles, joys, pain and creation that must be spoken about holistically. It cannot therefore be said with certainty that Black women in Brazil feel secure and do not live with fear or are feared because of their identities. The space that these women occupy in the state of Bahia is still problematic and still necessitates actively demanding political, economic, social, emotional and spiritual inclusion, provisions and protections that they are not receiving.

Additionally, this thesis works to show some of the many ways that these women have used their authority and leadership in the community to provide that which the state is not. As

201 Landes, 1947, 248
Mãe Gilda de Ogum stated, the preservation of Candomblé through the leadership of women has provided necessities, history and memory for a community that otherwise may not have had this. The work done in initiation is the moment of showing up, autonomously to become a part of this spiritual practice and have the divine be brought out from within oneself. This falls directly in line with the provision of self-worth for Afro-Brazilian women in a society that tells them they are not worth life, comfort, prosperity or joy. Past scholarship from outside of the Candomblé community has often missed these important contributions to life and focused more broadly on answering questions about the regulations of Candomblé itself and what should or should not be done. These debates have often circled around the people who should be central to the conversation and have not always allowed the importance of what Candomblé has done and what it is to so many people to radiate.

Candomblé is something different to many people. To some scholars it has been a way to legitimize their authority in the field of anthropology or Afro-Brazilian studies. For members of Black-consciousness in Brazil, it is a representation of “the homeland” of Africa in a country that displaces Blackness even as it praises and appropriates it. For these people, even those who are not religious, Candomblé and its symbols of clothing and objects, are a way to establish they Black pride and declare that they are “Bem Black”. It is a way to affirm identity and pride in our ancestors. For tourists it’s a beautiful representation of a happy, musical and enchanting land, and something to consume. For the capitalist elite it is something that can be dispensed into the city of Salvador in part as representations of culture and make a profit. For many it has meant survival and divine spirituality, yet for those who oppose it is “macumba” and a demonic presence that should be done away with. Regardless of these differing perspectives, Candomblé

202 Directly translated to “Very Black” but representing pride in one’s African heritage
has become synonymous with Afro-Brazilian female bodies dressed in white clothing. All of these ideas and others have been mapped onto Black women’s bodies illustrating the burden of being all to some and nothing to others simultaneously. The roles they have taken on for their communities has still not allowed them entry into the rights of full citizenship nor full recognition of their humanity. The elite desire the image to be simple, Afro-Brazilian women in “traditional garbs” on the side of the street, selling food for consumers who will spend in the city bringing the state money who should remain silenced, uneducated and impoverished. The women of Candomblé have however, adhered to this narrative and have done powerful and important work in their communities, on the streets, in academia and influencing policy change showing that their axé cannot be covered up, silenced or ignored. They have and continue to provide for themselves and their communities in ways others have not, demanding to take up space and be both seen and heard in effective and revolutionary ways.
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