

Mothers in the Family of Saints: Gender and Race in the Making of Afro-Brazilian Heritage

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the women of Candomblé, and to each person who facilitated my experiences in the terreiros.

Acknowledgements

Without a doubt, the most important people for the creation of this work are the women of Candomblé who have kept traditions alive in their communities for centuries. To them, I ask permission from my own *lugar de fala* (the place from which I speak).

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The experiences I had at the Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Gomeia in Portão, Lauro de Freitas a few years later were among the most important for the development of this work. It was at the temple founded by Mãe Mirinha that I understood the meaning of the priestess' leadership not as representative of “nations” or orthodoxy, but as relationships among generations of

families within predominantly black neighborhoods. The community initiatives developed by the temple's cultural group, Afro-Bankoma, contribute to spreading beauty, dignity, and respect for Candomblé and its initiates. The social projects organized by the temple, led by the current priestess Mãe Lúcia, demonstrate how the religious centers are also centers of knowledge, social movements, and community solidarity. I am particularly indebted to Gêssica Neves, who invited me to ceremonies, events, and celebrations, and opened the Mãe Mirinha Memorial for me. Throughout my research, connecting with temple members of my own generation, particularly young women, facilitated my access to these spaces and certainly my understanding of the generational processes that sustain the Candomblé religion.

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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Figures.....	xii
Abstract.....	xv
Introduction.....	1
Situating Candomblé in Bahia, Brazil.....	4
Revisiting Matriarchy.....	20
Methods and knowledge production.....	34
Chapter 1: Mothers in the Family of Saints.....	42
The Candomblé Family.....	45
Matriarchal Lineages.....	55
Gender, Sexuality and Ritual Roles.....	70
Conclusion.....	78
Chapter 2: Public Priestesses in the Media.....	80
Mother Senhora: <i>Mãe Preta</i> in the media.....	83
The Fame of Mother Menininha.....	91
African Mothers against folklorization.....	104
Beyond the Black Mother.....	115
Conclusion.....	122

Chapter 3: Africa in the Nation: Candomblé as Brazilian Cultural Heritage	125
The Characters of Nações	129
African territories in Brazil	133
Becoming <i>Tombado</i>	140
Conclusion	151
 Chapter 4: Terreiro Memorials: Preserving Family Heritage	 153
Religion as heritage.....	155
Memorials for Mothers: Ritual embeddedness	167
Conclusion	184
 Chapter 5: Fathers in a City of Mothers.....	 187
Joãozinho da Gomeia and Nagô Matriarchy.....	189
(Un)veiling homosexuality in Candomblé.....	206
Masculinity in the Family of Saints	214
Conclusion	220
 Conclusion	 223
 Appendices.....	 230
 Glossary	 240
 List of Temples	 243
 Bibliography	 245

List of Figures

Figure 1: Public invitation to celebrate the 80-year anniversary of Mother Xagui’s initiation into her Tumbancé lineage of Candomblé. (Salvador, Bahia, January 12, 2016).....	42
Figure 2: The only existing photograph of the Angloan Mother Maria Nenem (Maria Genoveva do Bonfim), often reproduced by her ritual descendants in ceremonial halls, on Facebook and temple blogs online.	65
Figure 3: Zélia Gattai, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Jorge Amado e Mother Senhora at the Axé Opô Afonjá Temple. (Salvador, 1960: Zélia Gattai Archive, Fundação Jorge Amado).	88
Figure 4: Mother Menininha with the Bahian Governor, 1976. (Salvador: Diário de Notícias, Fundação Gregório de Mattos).	100
Figure 5: Mother Menininha and Family (Salvador: Diário de Notícias, Fundação Gregório de Mattos).	103
Figure 6: Reynivaldo Brito, “As sacerdotistas do candomblé” (Salvador: A Tarde, October 15, 1983).	111
Figure 7: Jubiabá’s chair located in the Terreiro Mokambo in Salvador. Photo by the author.	163
Figure 8: Ritual tools (ferramentas) belonging to Mother Menininha’s Oxum, on display at the Memorial Mãe Menininha at the Terreiro Gantois. Photo by the author.....	175
Figure 9: Memorial Mãe Mirinha in the Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Gomeia, Portão, Bahia. Photo by the author.	181

Figure 10: O Estado da Bahia, “O mundo religioso do negro da Bahia” (Salvador, August 6, 1936). Journalists from the major Bahian newspaper, led by Edison Carneiro, visit the Goméia Temple.	195
Figure 11: Daughter-initiates of Joãozinho da Gomeia at the Lavagem do Bonfim, 1939. Photo by Ruth Landes. Ruth Landes Papers, (National Anthropological Archives. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute).	197
Figure 12: Joãozinho da Gomeia featured on the cover of the national magazine O Cruzeiro (Rio de Janeiro, September 23, 1967).	200
Figure 13: Screening of the documentary clip “100 Years of the Bate Folha Temple” during the centennial seminar on December 3, 2016 at the Terreiro Bate Folha, Salvador. Photo by the author.	230
Figure 14: Program for the seminar “Mother Mirinha do Portão: 70 years of preserving African descendant culture” hosted by the Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Gomeia.	231
Figure 15: Mãe Lúcia with her daughter-initiates from the Afro-Bankoma cultural dance group, after the seminar.	232
Figure 16: Members of the Sisterhood of Good Death (Irmandade da Boa Morte) during their annual festa in Cachoeira, Bahia. Photo by Jonatas Campelo.	233
Figure 17: Newspaper article on the event “80 anos dos Obás de Xangô” hosted at the Opô Afonjá temple on July 13, 2016.	234
Figure 18: Newspaper article publishing matriarchy in Candomblé following Mother Menininha’s death in 1986. Antonio Risério, “O matriarcalismo negro no Brasil” (Folha de São Paulo, August 17, 1986) accessed in the Ruth Landes Papers.	235

Figure 19: “Mother Menininha (seated) and her little daughter, 6 years old, at Gantois”, September 14, 1938 (Ruth Landes papers, Photographs, Brazil: Bahian blacks and candomblé, 91-4_361)..... 236

Figure 20: Ruth Landes at Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, August 1939 (Ruth Landes papers, Photographs, Brazil: Bahian blacks and candomblé, 91-4_0332). 237

Figure 21: A portrait of Mother Aninha published in her obituary written by Edison Carneiro in the newspaper O Estado da Bahia published on January 4, 1938, accessed at the Biblioteca Barris, Salvador..... 238

Figure 22: Portrait of Aninha, 45 years of age, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, October 9, 1938 (Ruth Landes papers, Photographs, Brazil: Bahian blacks and candomblé 91-4_0383). 239

Abstract

Candomblé temples produce histories and subjectivities at the nexus of Africa and the Americas. The dissertation combines historical and ethnographic methods to show how Candomblé priestesses and “matriarchy” are constructed, ritually valued, and externally rewarded as key sources of African heritage in Brazil. The dissertation tacks between the concept of Black matriarchy as understood within the ritual family of saints and as appropriated in the public and political sphere.

The convergence of the central symbol of *gestation* in the religion’s initiation process on one hand, and understandings of sex and kinship as defined by birth, on the other, make women especially respected because of their vital role in perpetuating both ritual and biological lineages of African descent. When biological and ritual notions of kinship align through the figure of “matriarchy,” claims to ancestral knowledge and African religious authority exert the strongest impact on the Brazilian public. Temples able to persuasively present the ideals of “African” matriarchy are therefore most successful in gaining recognition from the state as bona fide sites of cultural heritage.

Popular and scholarly depictions of Candomblé have differentiated the *nações* (nations) by the gender of their leader, upholding the “matriarchal” status of the Yoruba, while portraying the Angolan nation as predominantly male-led, and less African, often placing Angolan temples at a disadvantage in the cultural heritage market. My research demonstrates that regardless of the temple’s ritual nation or the gender of their ‘official’ leader, Candomblé practitioners value

Black Mothers as the most powerful cultivators and propagators of the African ancestral force in Brazil.

Within the ritual family traditional notions of femininity as domestic motherhood restrict female-born initiates who must perform labor based on their biological sex. The reverence for Black Mothers specifically within the family of saints creates a hierarchy among the possible expressions of gender and sexuality, some of which are deemed more valuable and permissible in the ritual system than others. The ethnography demonstrates how femininity is a more accessible ritual category than masculinity, contributing to the prominence of the “effeminate male” figure in the family of saints. However, full expressions of gender non-conformity are restricted by biological understandings of sex, marginalizing masculine cisgender women, as well as transgender and travesti initiates.

By revisiting the histories and contemporary roles of the Candomblé priestesses—the Mothers—in Brazil, the dissertation documents how select priestesses seek recognition from the state as official Afro-Brazilian “heritage,” for the stakes of financial resources and land titles. The state’s recognition of Candomblé as cultural heritage has mostly been contingent on the presence of Black female leadership, widely considered as a crucial “African” contribution to social organization in Brazil. The problem is that cultural heritage policies directed towards the Candomblé temples draw from tropes of Black women as key cultural figures without addressing structural inequalities, religious racism or the legacies of state persecution that continually affect Candomblé communities.

Introduction

In July 2016, the Black Women’s Network of Bahia held an event at the central public library in downtown Salvador.¹ The organizers began with a Manifesto entitled “Stop Killing Us,” which documented how Black women experience the greatest inequalities of the Brazilian nation. The network was formed to continue the activist work of the Black Women’s March Against Racism, Violence and for Good Living, which mobilized 50,000 Black women from all over Brazil to march in the nation’s capital of Brasília in November 2015, during President Dilma Rouseff’s second term. The second paragraph of the Manifesto reads, “the base of the social pyramid continues belonging, with excellence, to Black women who sustain the country without taking advantage of the riches produced.”² The Manifesto highlights the “indifference and naturalization of our suffering and death,” and provides data such as 60% of maternal mortality occurs among Black women compared to 34% among white mothers and that “between 2003 and 2013 the number of homicides of white women dropped by 9.8% whereas the homicides of Black women rose by 54.2% in the same period.”³ Detailing the complicity of the state, the

¹ Rede das Mulheres Negras da Bahia, Julho das Pretas (Biblioteca Barris: Salvador, July 13, 2016).

² Rede de Mulheres Negras da Bahia, “Parem de nos matar! Manifesto” (Salvador, 13 de julho de 2016). Original in Portuguese: “A base da pirâmide social ainda continua pertencendo, por excelência, às mulheres negras que sustentam este país sem usufruir das riquezas que são produzidas. Em verdade, na maior parte das vezes nos falta o básico para que possamos construir uma vida com dignidade.”

³ Rede de Mulheres Negras da Bahia, “Parem de nos matar! Manifesto” (Salvador, 13 de julho de 2016). Citations in Portuguese: “A indiferença e a naturalização de nosso adoecimento e morte persistem e isso na maior parte das vezes, não é manchete na grande mídia.” / “Segunda o ministério da saúde, 60% da mortalidade materna ocorre entre mulheres negras, contra 34% entre mães brancas.” / “Entre 2003 e 2013 o número de homicídios de mulheres brancas caiu 9.8% enquanto os homicídios de mulheres negras aumentaram 54.2% no mesmo período.”

media, educational and medical institutions in the systematic killing of Black women, the final item on the manifesto reads, “we die when we don’t know what we die of...”⁴

Mothers in the Family of Saints looks to the head priestesses—the Mothers—of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé to examine the concept of matriarchy as understood within the ritual Candomblé family and the uptake of matriarchy as a principle of African heritage in the Brazilian public sphere. I argue that reverence for Black women within ancestral rituals of Candomblé takes precedence to the secondary distortion of the head priestesses to public audiences and in cultural politics. The interplay between the private and public interpretations of the Candomblé Mother align with what Patricia Collins presents as the tendency by which oppressed groups are only listened to “if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group. This requirement often changes the meaning of our ideas and works to elevate the ideas of dominant groups.”⁵ The present work highlights the centennial voices, knowledge, and wisdom of Candomblé leaders to shift the focus of knowledge production and authenticity away from anthropologists and the state. Public, non-initiated interpretations of Candomblé in national discourses have associated the Candomblé Mother with the domestic slave and wet nurse, limiting the head priestess to an established order of Brazilian race and gender relations. I revisit the histories and contemporary roles of Candomblé Mothers in Brazil to honor how the priestesses have shaped Brazilian life and history, maintained ancestral knowledge in conditions of severe discrimination, and cultivated generations of initiatory families on sacred land.

⁴ Rede de Mulheres Negras da Bahia, “Parem de nos matar! Manifesto” (Salvador, 13 de julho de 2016). Original in Portuguese: “Morremos quando não sabemos do que morremos...”

⁵ Patricia Hills Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), ix.

Approaching the Candomblé temples as institutions that produce histories and subjectivities at the nexus of Africa and the Americas, the historical and ethnographic research demonstrates how Candomblé priestesses are widely considered the embodied sources of African heritage in Brazil. The ideology of a Brazilian racial democracy depends on the public celebration of iconic racialized figures, such as the Mãe Preta, which both veils and sustains racial and gendered violence and inequalities.⁶ Popular understandings of Candomblé as a religion led by Black women strengthened with key Candomblé Mothers in the national spotlight as part of the cultural shifts of the 1970s and 1980s. Through a double-edged conceptual engagement with the *Mãe Preta* (Black Mother) as understood ritually within the Candomblé family of saints (*família de santo*) and as appropriated through national imaginaries of Brazil, the dissertation addresses how, when and why Candomblé priestesses align themselves with the national folkloric image of the Mãe Preta—sometimes to secure resources, and prestige—but most importantly, I argue, because the figure, even when folklorized and decontextualized, possesses elements that resonate with the Mothers’ roles in the ritual family as the vital life force.

This dissertation moves beyond totalizing portrayals of Afro-diasporic religions that often derail into utopian visions and imaginaries. The research explores multiple meanings of gender, privileging an analysis of the ritual understandings of the head Mother as generativity and a privileged link to the ancestors within the initiatory family of saints. The ethnography demonstrates how male leaders can also inhabit ritual femaleness through the initiation of ritual children as a gestational process. Yet at least since the 1960s, the power of the Candomblé

⁶ Smith, *Afro-Paradise*, 5. “Afro-paradise is a paradox that hides the economies of black suffering that sustain it.” Kia Lilly Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black women, citizenship and politics of identity* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 56-57; Patricia S. Pinho, *Mama Africa: Reinventing Blackness in Bahia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

Mother has been stereotyped in the media and cultural politics through pacified narratives of the Mãe Preta that contribute to discourses of exceptional racial harmony and cultural miscegenation in Brazil. To move beyond the appropriation of Candomblé Mothers in discourse and national imaginaries, the analysis amplifies understandings from leaders of Candomblé through their careful interactions and omissions in the public sphere.

Situating Candomblé in Bahia, Brazil

Brazil is a majority Afro-descendant nation, though struggles to achieve Black citizenship have marked Brazilian politics since its inception in 1500, and particularly since the abolition of slavery in 1888. The denial of citizenship rights to Black Brazilians is constitutive of its democracy, which has a short and interrupted history relative to empire and dictatorship.⁷ The Northeastern coastal city of Salvador da Bahia was the colonial capital of Brazil from 1549 to 1763 and in the nineteenth century, the urban center with the greatest concentration of freed Africans and Blacks.⁸ Current estimates place Brazil as the site of arrival for an estimated 5 million African captives, constituting 46% of the total 10.7 million African captives that disembarked during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.⁹ By 1800 Brazil held close to 1 million people enslaved, constituting “the largest single concentration of African and creole slaves in any one

⁷ Christen Smith, *Afro-Paradise*, 82. “The state defines citizenship and national belonging in contraposition to blackness. Thus, blackness is the stage upon which the nation performs itself.” Brazil was a colonial colony from 1500 to 1822, an independent empire from 1822 to 1889, a republic from 1889-1930, dictatorship from 1930-1945, democracy from 1945-1964, a dictatorship from 1965-1985, and a democracy from 1985-2016. Many mark the 2016 “impeachment” of democratically elected President Dilma Roussef of the Worker’s Party (PT) to be a parliamentary coup, marking the end of democracy and a return to authoritarian policies in a long alternating history of dictatorship and democracy in Brazil.

⁸ The ports of Bahia received an estimated 1.73 million African captives through the importation of human cargo for forced labor via the trans-Atlantic slave trade between 1561 and 1860. Slave labor in Brazil was used primarily for sugar plantations in Bahia (17-18th centuries), mining in Minas Gerais (18th century), coffee in the Southeastern regions of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (19th century). David Eltis, *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (Yale University Press, 2008), 16-17.

⁹ “Estimates”, Transatlantic slave trade database (www.slavejoyages.org).

colony in America at this time.”¹⁰ With an additional half million free people (formerly enslaved), Brazil was also the largest center of Black and mixed-race freed people of color in the Americas.¹¹ The prominence of colonial government buildings, Catholic churches, forts and trading ports mark the downtown of Salvador, popularly deemed “the city of 365 churches.” Although the legal slave trade ended in 1850, Brazilian and Portuguese ships continued to import African captives to Brazilian ports until the 1870s.¹² The continued arrival of African captives, predominantly Yoruba-speaking populations from Dahomey and the fallen Oyó empire, impacted the identity formation of Bahians, as well as the ritual traditions practiced within the Candomblé temples.¹³ By the 1860s, the Yoruba, referred to as Nagôs in Brazil, “accounted for close to 80 per cent of the African slaves in Salvador.”¹⁴

In 1888, Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish the institution of slavery. The Brazilian Empire fell the next year as Brazil established its First Republic (1889-1930), with few initiatives to integrate Afro-Brazilian populations into national civic and economic life. The 1890 civil code in Bahia made illegal all cultural manifestations and public acts deemed “African”—including Candomblé rituals, capoeira, and any form of African drumming.¹⁵ Despite the many attempts at legal repression, Afro-Brazilian cultural groups carved out spaces to become established, and reproducible in institutional forms. J. L. Matory demonstrated how an

¹⁰ Herbert S Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 37.

¹¹ Herbert S Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 37; João José Reis, *Domingos Sodré um Sacerdote Africano: Escravidão, liberdade e candomblé na Bahia do século XIX* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008).

¹² Beatriz G. Mamigonian, *Africanos Livres: A Abolição Do Tráfico de Escravos No Brasil* (Companhia das Letras, 2017).

¹³ Luis Nicolau Parés, *The Formation of Candomblé: Vodun History and Ritual in Brazil* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (F. Cass, 2001).

¹⁴ João José Reis, “Candomblé in Nineteenth Century Bahia” (*Slavery & Abolition*, 22:1, 2008), 124.

¹⁵ Beatriz Góis Dantas, Stephen Berg (trans.), *Vovô Nagô e Papai Branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, Edições Graal Ltda, 1988); Scott Ikes, *African-Brazilian culture and regional identity in Bahia, Brazil* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013); Angela Lunning, “Acabe com este santo, Pedrito vem aí...” (*Revista USP* 28, Feb 1995/6).

“Afro-Atlantic Dialogue” was essential to the creation of transatlantic identities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of which the Yoruba figured prominently as a diasporic African ethnic group.¹⁶ Kim Butler argued that in late nineteenth century in Bahia, “Africa became the source of new post-emancipation identities” and Candomblé was the privileged site to re-invent and institutionalize African ethnicities.¹⁷

In contrast to the Yoruba, Bantu peoples were enslaved in higher numbers in the earlier phases of the slave trade and taken to Brazil in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Bantu peoples from the Congo-Angolan regions of Central West Africa, particularly as religious leaders, are not present in the historical record to the same degree as the Yoruba-descended temples.¹⁸ The *nações* or nations of Candomblé mark the ritual traditions of different sects of the religion associated with ethnic groups enslaved in Africa and brought to Brazil. I interpreted the strategic perpetuation of nations by key actors in Candomblé as way to ensure that the legacies of African ethnic groups—Jeje, Ijexá, Congo, Angola, Ketu, Nagô—are not forgotten. The concern is not about accurately identifying the heritage of Brazilians, but rather memorializing the historical contribution of people whose labor remains in the colonial buildings and urban infrastructure of most Brazilian capital cities, but whose lives and life histories are more often than not made invisible in the country’s development. Candomblé rituals and the initiatory family transform the history of slavery into a noble past of strength and survival, maintaining the

¹⁶ J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, transnationalism and matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Kim Butler, “Africa in the Reinvention of Nineteenth-Century Afro-Bahian Identity” (*Slavery & Abolition*, 22:1, 2001), 135. Rachel Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and alternative spaces of blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, kinship, and religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Luiz Mott, “O calundu-Angola de Luzia Pinta: Sabará, 1739” (*Revista IAC*, no. 1, 73-87, December 1994).

complexity of the numerous trajectories and peoples involved—especially those who are not represented in the historical record composed of academic, fiscal and state documents.¹⁹

With the end of the slave trade and slavery in Brazil, the differentiation of African ethnicities became ritualized as the traditions of the Candomblé temples, regardless of the ethnic identity and biological genealogy of their founders or adherents. The differentiation of African ethnicities into nations also created hierarchies within the field of Candomblé, increasingly measured by African purity and authenticity.²⁰ Temples that can trace direct descent from African founders operate within an economy of African authenticity, creating competition among affiliated houses.²¹ In 1936, Edison Carneiro articulated a cultural hierarchy of civilizations, reinforcing ideas of Nagô superiority in contrast to the “mythical poverty” of both Bantu and Amerindian ritual practices and cultural manifestations. Because of the perceived weakness of a disintegrated Bantu cosmology and absence of an institutionalized and urban ritual practice that the Yoruba had, Carneiro argued that the Bantu Blacks had to “fuse themselves with the equally poor myths of the savage Amerindian, producing the so-called *candomblés de caboclo* in Bahia.”²² The caboclo ritual traditions, and the Congo-Angolan nations that practice and incorporate the caboclo rites alongside the adoration of African deities, reflect a prioritization of

¹⁹ Saidiya Hartman points to how the discipline of history like the Atlantic slave trade produces “disposable lives.” The Candomblé nations, maintained through oral histories and ritual practice within the temples, work against the “social and corporeal death” of the African captives within the historical record. Saidiya V. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts” (*Small Axe*, Indiana Univ., Bloomington, no. 26 (2008)), 12. See also Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the production of history* (Boston: Beacon, 1995).

²⁰ In Salvador the African-born community recreated itself as an alternative community with its own cultural constructs that counteracted the oppressive mainstream society. The Candomblé nations were not necessarily a direct retention of homeland cultures, but the key feature was “the perceived differences between the alternative community and the mainstream.” Kim Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedom’s Women*, 219-221.

²¹ Capone, *Searching for Africa*; Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods*; Miguel C. Alonso, *The Development of Yoruba Candomble Communities in Salvador, Bahia, 1835-1986* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô Nagô e Papai Branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal Ltda, 1988).

²² Edison Carneiro, *Religiões Negras e Negros Bantos* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1981), 62. Original in Portuguese: “Foi a mítica pobríssima dos negros bantos que, fusionando-se com a mítica igualmente pobre do selvagem ameríndio, produziu os chamados *candomblés de caboclo* na Bahia.”

Brazilian rites and Portuguese language over African ones, perceived by some Afro-centrist leaders of Candomblé as a threat to the consistency and continuity of African religious practice on Brazilian soil.

Post-abolition, Bahia's political power and relevance could no longer compete with the political concentration of the Southeast, remaining relevant instead through a pre-modern cultural nostalgia.²³ The elite politicians of the First Republic adopted the social policy of *embranquecimento* –whitening—as a proposed “solution” to Brazil's “negro problem.”²⁴ According to historian Thomas Skidmore, “during this period the ‘whitening’ ideology gained scientific legitimacy, because racist doctrines came to be interpreted by Brazilians as supporting the view that the ‘superior’ white race would prevail in the process of racial amalgamation.”²⁵ As part of this project, prominent Brazilian intellectuals began investigating the “race problem” in Brazil, focusing on expressions of African culture in the majority Black state of Bahia.²⁶ Increasingly, North American scholars studied in Bahia to compare the purported racial harmony of Brazil with the official racial segregation of the U.S.²⁷ In the early twentieth century scholars examined the “acculturation” process of Afro-Brazilians into an idealized white society, and some accentuated the idea that prejudice was not based on skin color, emphasizing instead a

²³ Anadelia Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum: Race, reform and tradition in Bahia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Ikes, *Africa-Brazilian Culture*.

²⁴ Kim Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedom's Won: Afro-Brazilians in post-abolition, São Paulo and Salvador* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998); George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Paulina Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in twentieth-century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

²⁵ Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1974), 46.

²⁶ Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum*; Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods*.

²⁷ Black U.S. writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, E. R. James, Franklin Frazier and Lorenzo Turner travelled to Brazil to evaluate the supposed “racial paradise”. David J Hellwig, *African-American Reflections on Brazil's Racial Paradise* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

class-based perspective on inequality.²⁸ The perpetuation of African religion, music and dance were prominent examples of this supposed integration of Afro-Brazilians into the nation, and proof of Brazil's exceptional retention of "Africanisms."²⁹

In the 1930s, president and then dictator Getúlio Vargas promoted Bahia as central to Brazilian culture and national identity (*brasilidade*), attributing the state's importance to the preservation of Brazil's past.³⁰ The idea that Afro-Bahians had "cultural autonomy" to preserve their traditions in contrast to the modernization of Brazil's South was naturalized throughout the course of the twentieth century, with the help of intellectuals and artists.³¹ Bahia contributed to the national imaginary an unchanging African heritage, represented through literature and other cultural products that focused on agricultural production and the formation of the Brazilian family, both intimately tied to slave labor.³² Through this period Brazilian regionalism separated different areas of the country as representative of the ethnic and racial make-up of the country, pacifying the history of slavery and simplifying historical processes according to ethnically delineated territories.³³

At least since the 1930s, Candomblé leaders have defined their religious practice in the public sphere and negotiated their position in Brazilian society. With the proliferation of the

²⁸ Arthur Ramos, *O Negro Brasileiro* (Sao Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1940); Donald Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil: A Study of Race Contact at Bahia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1942); Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, *A Two-Headed Thinker: Rudiger Bilden, Gilberto Freyre, and the Reinvention of Brazilian Identity* In: Ned Blackhawk and Isaih Lorado Wilner (eds.), *Indigenous Visions: Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas* (Yale University Press, 2018).

²⁹ Melville Herskovits, "The Negro in Bahia, Brazil: A problem in Method" (*American Sociological Review*, 8, 394-402, 1943); Melville J Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper, 1941).

³⁰ Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum*, 5; Ikes, *African-Brazilian Culture*.

³¹ Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum*, 1.

³² Freyre, *Casa Grande*; Zita Nunes, *Cannibal Democracy: Race and Representation in the Literature of the Americas* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

³³ The associations by race and ethnicity were broken down in generalized terms as the following: Amazon – indigenous, Southeast – European and Modern. Northeast –Black and uncivilized. Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: Sao Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2015); Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won*; Beliso de Jesus, *Electric Santería* describes a similar process in Cuba.

Candomblé religion in post-abolition Salvador, in the early twentieth century a prominent priestess born to African parents founded the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, and crowned the city as “Black Rome.” Discursively locating Bahia as the epicenter of Black religions in the Americas, Mother Aninha (Eugênia Santos) propagated this vision widely, and it continues to reverberate in characterizations of Salvador’s place in the Afro-American diaspora.³⁴ Mother Aninha was also monumental in influencing the 1934 federal law that guaranteed freedom of religion, credited to her lobbying the president Getúlio Vargas.³⁵ Although the 1934 Brazilian constitution gave nominal freedom to African religion in a declaration of religious equality, the Bahian state continued their persecutory policies from the colonial period, requiring temples to pay for licenses to conduct their ceremonies and subjecting temples to police raids until 1976.³⁶

The myth of racial democracy purports that slavery was relatively humane in Brazil as compared to other slave societies and that, consequently, race relations in Brazil are more harmonious, racial categories are fluid, racism is “cordial,” and the Brazilian national identity is a result of consensual racial mixing.³⁷ In the 1970s, Black Brazilian activists like Abdias do

³⁴ Mother Aninha first mentioned the term “Roma Negra” to Donald Pierson during his fieldwork. Pierson, *Negro in Brazil*. Ruth Landes also highlighted this in *The City of Women*. The term was then taken up in popular culture, including in works by Jorge Amado and the song “Reconvexo” by Maria Bethania, a famous singer and initiate of the Gantois temple. See also Christopher Dunn, “Black Rome and the Chocolate City: The Race of Place” (*Callaloo*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Summer 2007), 849-850.

³⁵ Castillo, *Entre a Oralidade e a Escrita*; Matory, *Black Atlantic Religions*.

³⁶ Jocélio T. Santos, *O Poder Da Cultura E a Cultura No Poder: A Disputa Simbólica Da Herança Cultural Negra No Brasil* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2005); Wilson Caetano de Sousa Júnior, *Corujebó: Candomblé e polícia de costumes (1938-1976)* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2018).

³⁷ The iconic text that established national myths that supported the theory of racial democracy was Gilberto Freyre and Samuel W. Putnam, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946). North American scholars often contributed to theories of racial democracy in Brazil, see Donald Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil: A study of race contact at Bahia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1942); Ruth Landes, *The City of Women* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1947); Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971). Black Brazilian activists in the 1970s more publicly critiqued the myth of racial democracy particularly as a barrier to widespread Black consciousness in Brazil. See Abdias do Nascimento and Elisa Larkin Nascimento, *Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the genocide of a black people* (New York: Afrodiaspora, 1979). More recent work has studied sociologically and ethnographically the expressions of race in Brazil as well as the totalitarian expressions of racial democracy in Bahian state policies. See Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The significance of skin color in*

Nascimento worked to make clear that the “myth” was itself an act of genocide in its concealment of the “social lynching” of Black Brazilians through racialized violence and discrimination.³⁸ In the last decade U.S.-based Black feminist scholars have emphasized that although the “validity of blackness as a social category” has been hotly debated among scholars and state-agents, the lived experiences of Black people leave no doubt as to the materiality of race as an enactment of state terror.³⁹

“Bahia: A Mãe Terra do Brasil.” In its official slogan, the state government proclaims Bahia the motherland of Brazil, invoking its colonial history as the birthplace of the nation in explicitly gendered terms. Reproduced in television advertisements, the radio, billboards, tourist propaganda and official documents, the state government widely commemorates its “firstness,” despite being among the poorer and more underdeveloped regions in the country. Bahia’s colonial history, majority Black population and economic precarity are all tied to the state’s prominence in the long history of slavery, focused in its coastal city of Salvador. In an attempt to recast the legacy of slavery, since the 1930s the Bahian state has invested in appropriating cultural figures once stigmatized by the slave past into symbols of its cultural richness, attracting tourism and resources both within Brazil and internationally. The rhythms, foods, aesthetics, dance and iconography of the Candomblé religion are present in nearly every cultural product celebrated and exported as Bahian, at the same time the Candomblé temples experience extreme

Brazil (Princeton University Press, 2004); Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*; Pinho, *Mama Africa*; Smith, *Afro-Paradise*.

³⁸ Abdias do Nascimento, *Mixture or Massacre*, 8: “Among the mechanisms of the social lynching of Black people are forced miscegenation, color prejudice, racial discrimination, and an immigration policy designed for the explicit purpose of whitening the country and taking the means of survival away from Africans.”

³⁹ Keisha Khan Perry, *Black Women*, xviii.

land insecurity and economic vulnerability that continually threaten their ritual practice and mark their social position as an enduring legacy of the colonial past.⁴⁰

The state's persecution of Candomblé at the same time it was appropriated as the primary African contribution to Brazilian culture points to a central debate in Afro-Brazilian politics. Many scholars have grappled with cultural approaches to blackness in Brazil, including by Afro-Brazilian cultural groups themselves. Michael Hanchard recognizes how cultural practices "have been the key site for political mobilization" for Afro-Brazilians, though the culturalist approaches "have also been an impediment to certain types of counterhegemonic political activities because of their reproduction of culturalist tendencies found in the ideology of racial democracy and in Brazilian society more generally."⁴¹ In response, Patrícia Pinho highlights how efforts by Black Bahian cultural groups (the *blocos Afro*) confront Brazil's notions of racial harmony to "produce a distinct black identity [that] challenges the myth of racial democracy."⁴² Keisha Khan Perry characterizes the culturalist perspective as, "folkloric aspects of black culture are suitable for public consumption at all levels of society, but actual black people are not as easily welcomed in those spaces."⁴³ More than cultural organizations, Candomblé leaders have engaged with these debates in the public sphere. The limits of culturalism mark the constraints around which Candomblé has interacted with popular discourses of race in Brazil and most significantly, how Candomblé leaders have been interpreted as cultural figures in the Brazilian mainstream.

⁴⁰ On the continuation of colonial problems in Latin America, see Jeremy Adelman, *The Problem of persistence in Latin American history* (Psychology Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimiento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 21.

⁴² Pinho, *Mama Africa*, 78. For more on Ilê Aiyê's approach to black activism in 1970s Salvador, See Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 285-286.

⁴³ Perry, *Black Women Against the Land Grab*, 22.

Black cultural groups like the *blocos afros* have contributed to producing and disseminating the myth of Mama Africa since the 1970s as a strategy of empowerment and a reclaiming of Black identities by Black people. For Afro-Bahian cultural groups, Mama Africa is “a source of purity” in contrast to the ideals of racial mixture. The myth presents a wholesome image of a Black Bahian woman with “large, generous, accessible breasts, continually dispensing the essence of Black life.”⁴⁴ Representations of Mama Africa by Black cultural organizations flourished in the 1970s together with the *movimento negro* (Black Movement).⁴⁵ However, Mama Africa has roots further back into the twentieth century, sharing key characteristics with the Mãe Preta “that are far from liberating.”⁴⁶ Likely because Mama Africa was a symbol of resistance to uplift Black consciousness and Black pride, state tourist initiatives co-opt the myth in projects that present Bahia as an “Afro-paradise,” concealing the violence, discrimination, and inequalities to which Black organizations respond.⁴⁷ Pinho’s work shows how “Mama Africa has been milked by a local elite that profits heavily from black cultural production and its representations of blackness, old and new.”⁴⁸ Similar dynamics characterize the fraught relationship between Candomblé communities and the Bahian state. The rising folklorization and banalization of Candomblé in the 1970s and the public imaginaries of Candomblé Mothers created tensions between Candomblé religious leaders, the media, and the state. Recognizing and protecting the sources (*matrizes*) of what is now considered popular Bahian culture mark the priorities and motivations for Candomblé communities to engage in the media and public cultural politics.

⁴⁴ Pinho, *Mama Africa*, 30.

⁴⁵ Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 286.

⁴⁶ Pinho, *Mama Africa*, 30.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Afro Paradise*; Pinho, *Mama Africa*; Erica Lorraine Williams, *Sex Tourism in Bahia: ambiguous entanglements* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013). The possibilities of co-opting Black cultural products are what Hanchard points to as the dangers of culturalism. Hanchard, *Black Orpheus*.

⁴⁸ Pinho, *Mama Africa*, 214.

In dismantling the dictatorship and constructing a new Brazilian democracy, protecting historic Candomblé temples from eviction from their ancestral land became a primary concern, alongside securing land rights for maroon-descended *quilombo* communities.⁴⁹ The historic Yoruba temples in Salvador were the first to receive scholarly and government recognition as representatives of “African” culture in Brazil because of their status as *matriz*, deriving from the Latin *mater* for Mother, also referring to the womb. *Matriz* suggests an identifiable point of origin, invoking the metaphor of birthing offspring within a network of affiliative descent. Recognition for Angolan temples took decades longer, and still the Angolan nation is far less represented in scholarship, the media and politics.⁵⁰ As the cultural policies oriented towards Afro-Brazilian religion developed into the twenty-first century with certain Afro-Brazilian politicians finally achieving higher positions than ever before, especially in the Worker’s Party (PT), the Bahian state and Brazilian federal cultural agencies became increasingly concerned with the politics of ethnic representation in a multiculturalist framework.

In the field of Candomblé, what was first deemed a struggle to protect “Black monuments” transformed the already existent differentiation between Candomblé nations into a further competitive field of recognition and prestige.⁵¹ The consecration of Candomblé histories into state policy through the registration of select temples as state and federal heritage sites

⁴⁹ Jan Hoffman French, *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil’s Northeast* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Ordep Serra, *Os olhos negros do Brasil* (Salvador: Editora UFBA Press, 2014).

⁵⁰ This trend began with Raymundo Nina Rodrigues’ work in the late nineteenth century, which already created a hierarchy between the Sudanese (Nagô) Africans and the Bantu Africans. This division was then perpetuated in Edison Carneiro, *Religiões Negras e Negros Bantos* (originally published in 1939); Landes, *The City of Women* (1947) and Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality” (1940). The only full length ethnographies of Angolan Candomblé are Ordep Serra, *Águas do Rei* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1995) and the doctoral dissertation by a French-born Candomblé priestess initiated by Joãozinho da Goméia, Gisélle Binon-Cossard, “Contribution à l’étude des candomblés au Brésil: le candomblé Angola” (Ph.D. dissertation, Paris-I-Sorbonne, 1970). See more discussion of this division in the field of Afro-Brazilian religions in Capone, *Searching for Africa*, Introduction.

⁵¹ Luis Nicolau Parés, “Nota sobre a noção de propriedade nos processos de tombamento dos candomblés” in *Políticas de Acautelamento do IPHAN para templos do culto afro-brasileiros* (Salvador: IPHAN, 2012); Serra, *Os olhos negros*.

further reinforced the delineations between Candomblé nations, characterized by historical narratives marked by ethnicity, race and gender. While claims to Nagô superiority, especially in the realm of culture, was present since the late nineteenth century in the field of Afro-descendant politics in Salvador and scholarly representations, the nascent hierarchy of prestige then took on a new competitive quality with political recognition and financial stakes involved.

In a speech delivered at the “Meeting of Nations” at the Center for Afro-Oriental Studies (CEAO) at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) in 1984, one of the most prominent spokespersons of the Angolan Nation, Esmeraldo Emetério de Santana from the Tumba Junçara Temple, highlighted the importance of the concept of *milonga*. He explained how many nations influenced what is now considered part of “Angola”, including *cambinda*, *moçambique*, *munjola*, *quicongo*,

...all of it became what they themselves call *milonga*. *Milonga* is mixture. They mixed everything together because in the *senzala* (slave quarters), they had all the ‘nations’ and, when possible, they would do any one of their ritual obligations... the same thing happened with their chants...⁵²

The national designations of Candomblé hold the weight of this longer history, despite unclear and sometimes unverifiable origins, the legacy of the Transatlantic slave trade and slavery in Brazil are present elements of Candomblé memory and practice.⁵³ The transmission of knowledge through generations in the Candomblé initiatory family works as a counter-current against mainstream Brazilian’s persistent distancing from an African past. The founders of the

⁵² Esmeraldo Emetério de Santana, “Encontro de Nações” (Salvador: CEAO, UFBA, 1984), 36. Original in Portuguese: “então virou o que eles mesmos chamam *milonga*. *Milonga* é mistura... foi assim que eles fizeram. Misturaram, porque eles, na senzala, tinham, ali, de todas as ‘nações’, e, quando era possível, eles faziam qualquer coisa das obrigações deles... a mesma coisa fez-se no cântico.”

⁵³ J. Lorand Matory, “Free to Be a Slave: Slavery as Metaphor in the Afro-Atlantic Religions” (*Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 37, Fasc. 3, Out of Africa? 2, 2007, pp. 398-425).

temples, many African-born, brought to Brazil ritual, historical and cultural knowledge, and practices from their homelands.⁵⁴

The Ketu temples feature more prominently than any other Candomblé nation in the Black movement as a project of maintaining African purity given the country's emphasis on racial mixture and the legacy of whitening as the idealized disappearance of Black people and their cultural practices in Brazil. A coalition of Candomblé Mothers of prestigious, historic Ketu temples in the 1980s led an anti-syncretism movement to rid Candomblé temples and rituals of any Catholic elements, which had been historically present in the religion.⁵⁵ Notably, some representatives of the Angolan nation spoke against this public initiative, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the many cultural elements that contribute to their religious practices as Brazilian, and not purely African.⁵⁶ The adaptability and incorporation of local rites and languages that characterize the *milonga* of the Angolan nation could be read as a historical strategy of self-preservation given the conditions of several centuries of living within the restrictions of a slave society, rather than complicity in the discourses of Brazilian racial democracy and the whitening process. Bantu influences act like sorcery as they infiltrate the fabric of Brazilian cultural life, though largely unattributed. For example, the impressive number of Bantu words incorporated into Brazilian Portuguese makes it a distinct language from the

⁵⁴ Reis, *Domingos Sodré*; James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2011); Lisa Earl Castillo, "Bamboxê Obitikô and the Nineteenth-Century Expansion of Orisha Worship in Brazil" (*Tempo*, Vol. 22, n. 39, p. 126-153, jan-abr., 2016).

⁵⁵ On the historical syncretism between Candomblé temples and the Catholic Brotherhoods in Brazil, see Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a sociology of the interpenetration of Civilizations* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Elizabeth Kiddy, *Blacks of the Rosary: Memory and history in Minas Gerais, Brazil* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Stephen Selka, *Religion and the Politics of Ethnic Identity in Bahia, Brazil*. University Press of Florida, 2007).

⁵⁶ *A Tarde*, "Mãe de santo defende sincretismo religioso" (Salvador, August 11, 1983); Anselmo José da Gama Santos, "Terreiro Mokambo: Espaço de aprendizagem e memória do legado banto no Brasil" (M.A. dissertation. Universidade Estadual da Bahia, 2008).

dialects spoken in Portugal, so that in many respects Brazilian Portuguese is also an African language.⁵⁷ The fact that some African purists and Afro-centrists view the Angolan stance as complicity in the process of Brazilian assimilation constitutes a major fissure along the axes of Blackness and Africanness that I analyze in the making of Afro-Brazilian religious heritage.⁵⁸

Bantu influences permeate Brazilian cultural manifestations like capoeira, samba, and even the word Candomblé originates from the Bantu word for a public party with drumming. The Angolan Candomblés adopt rituals and languages from other groups, including from Nagô (Yoruba) Candomblé and the native Brazilian Caboclo spirits. The public ceremonies at Angolan houses look like the ceremonies at Nagô temples, the main difference being the ritual language used. The physicality and choreography of the mediums in spirit trance do not diverge significantly (from the perspective of somebody not initiated into the religion). The deities use similar iconography, clothing, and objects, though are called by different names. Most relevant for this discussion, the temple's physical structure and familial organization do not diverge based on nation, uniting Candomblé as one religion along shared physical and social characteristics. The content of the ritual language is not a trivial matter, however, as the spoken words are required for deities to manifest in the material world, and in the bodies of the initiates through

⁵⁷ Yêda A. P. Castro, *Falares Africanos Na Bahia: (um Vocabulário Afro-Brasileiro)* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks Ed, 2001).

⁵⁸ Other scholars have previously separated Africanness and Blackness as terms and concepts in their analysis of Brazil, and Afro-Brazil specifically. Paul Christopher, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods: The transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2002); Pinho, *Mama Africa*; Stephan Palmié, *Africa of the Americas: Beyond the search for origins in the study of Afro-Atlantic religions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008); Stephan Palmié, *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* (The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Livio Sansone, *Blackness Without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Todd Ramón Ochoa, *Society of the Dead: Quita Manaquita and Palo Praise in Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Sheila S. Walker, "Africanity vs. Blackness: Race, Class and Culture in Brazil (NACLA, September 25, 2007): "So, in Brazil there can be white people of African origin, an inconceivable contradiction in the United States."

what is popularly understood in Anglophone contexts as spirit possession.⁵⁹ Angolan temples characterize their deities (*nkisis*) as forces of nature rather than ancestral heroes and historical figures, as is the case for Yoruban deities, the *orixás*. Internal rituals and the ritual knowledge (*fundamentos*) passed along in the initiation process differ based on nation.⁶⁰

In the last systematic mapping of Candomblé temples in the city of Salvador in 2008, 24.2% of the 1,410 temples identified as belonging to the Angolan nation, and 52.8% of the Ketu Nation—“Ketu” referring to origins in a specific city-state within Yoruba-speaking territory in what is now Nigeria.⁶¹ Popular and scholarly characterizations have differentiated Candomblé nations by the gender of their leader, upholding the “matriarchal” status of the Yoruba, while portraying the Angolan nation as predominantly male-led, and therefore less African.⁶² Such a portrayal confers patriarchal leadership as a Brazilian characteristic and matriarchal leadership as a key feature of African heritage in Brazil. The sociological data from 2008 does not support the thesis of gendered distinction by nation, as 63.7% of all temples identified were led by women and the Angolan nation specifically also had majority female leadership.⁶³ The ethnographic and historical research I conducted between 2016 and 2018 on fifteen temples, six of the Angolan nation and nine of the Ketu, reveal that regardless of the temple’s ritual nation or the gender of

⁵⁹ In Brazilian Portuguese, Candomblé initiates referred to a person as “incorporado” or “incorporada” when they were in saint. Other common terms are “caiu em santo” –the medium “fell into saint.” My analysis adopts the emic word “incorporation” to describe when an initiate is *in* saint, as a union of medium and spirit. Paul C. Johnson, “An Atlantic Genealogy of “Spirit Possession” (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 2 (2011): 393-425).

⁶⁰ My ethnographic research intentionally does not present these details, to respect the boundaries placed on me as a foreign, uninitiated observer invited into the temples for research purposes.

⁶¹ Jocélio Teles dos Santos, *Mapeamento dos terreiros de Salvador* (Salvador: Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais, UFBA, 2008). I consider the Ketu nation to be equivalent to the Nagô nation, as temples historically identified more as Nagô and more contemporarily as Ketu.

⁶² These ideas are attributed to beginning with the works of Landes and Carneiro in the 1930-1940s, though were not always reinforced by Candomblé initiates in my research. This work revises these notions, which had impacted cultural heritage policies because of the intimate relationship between anthropologists and cultural policy.

⁶³ Santos, *Mapeamento*, 23.

their ‘official’ leader, Candomblé practitioners value Black Mothers as the most powerful cultivators and propagators of the African ancestral force in Brazil.

While Ketu temples have aligned more with the discourses of African purity and collaborated with Black political movements in order to become the first Candomblé temples consecrated as “Black monuments” by the Brazilian and Bahian state governments, Candomblé temples of all nations have majority Black leadership. Regardless of nation, the majority (58.3%) of the head Mothers and Fathers of the temples identify as *preto* and another 30.4% as *pardo*. These two categories together constitute a Black identity in Brazil, despite their distinction in a spectrum of colorism and racial mixture, in which *pardo* is Afro-descendant, but also incorporates other racial backgrounds.⁶⁴ When combining these two groups (*preto* and *pardo*) under these rubrics, as of 2008, 88.7% of Candomblé leaders were Black.⁶⁵ In 2008 in the city of Salvador, only 4.6% of leaders identified as white, despite the spread of Candomblé since the 1980s into urban regions of Southern Brazil, where some half of leaders and initiates present as white.⁶⁶ During ethnographic research I worked closely with Candomblé Fathers of Angolan temples who were considered white (*branco*) by Bahian standards, in part because they were not from Bahia. Both asserted that they had African ancestry, but in the racial landscape of Bahia, they did not qualify as Black.⁶⁷ They often adopted a public stance and participated in cultural

⁶⁴ These divisions between racial categories have been debated between U.S. scholars. I generally adopt the more recent call from the Black movement to widen the category of blackness to incorporate more people for greater racial consciousness. On debates regarding racial categories in Brazil see Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The significance of skin color in Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2004); Nelson do Valle Silva, “A Research Note on the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, (vol. 35, no. 2, Springer-Verlag, 6/2000, pp. 18–27).

⁶⁵ Santos, *Mapeamento*, 24.

⁶⁶ Antônio Flávio Pierucci and Reginaldo Prandi, “Religious Diversity in Brazil: Numbers and Perspectives in a Psychological Evaluation” (*International Journey of Sociology*, vol. 15 (4), 2000).

⁶⁷ It is common that in Bahia, white people (*branc/a*) can have some African ancestry, but within the system of racial colorism, are not considered Black. This is a major distinction between racial categories in Brazil and the United States, for example. I am careful not to reinforce a binary understanding of race or import the U.S racial

heritage policies, successfully securing the coveted cultural heritage status from the Bahian State agency IPAC.

Separating a ritual African identity from blackness complicates approaches to Candomblé temples as exclusively Black communities or Black monuments. Candomblé temples have produced Africanness through ritual body politics tied to the processes of initiation and the formation of initiatory families. Significantly, African heritage can be adopted by non-Black people in the family of saints through the processes of initiation and ritual affiliation to Black Mothers. Approaching Blackness as a subject position and not a cultural element is essential when determining who benefits from the advancements of cultural policies that result from Black-led cultural initiatives to repatriate and redirect resources as part of the reformulation of Brazilian democracy in the 1980s.

Revisiting Matriarchy

Mothers in the Family of Saints tacks between the concept of matriarchy as understood within the ritual family of saints and the uptake of matriarchy as Black female leadership in the public sphere of Brazilian culture and politics. Matriarchy as a concept has had multiple, sometimes contradictory, expressions and interpretations in social thought and political culture. The term matriarchy was “invented” by nineteenth century evolutionary social scientists from the works of Johann Bachofen, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Frederick Engels, to name a few.⁶⁸ Like most of the

context onto Brazil, which has been marked by a multiplicity of racial categories, rather than a color line based on a “one-drop rule.” Furthermore, a Black and white division of citizenship perpetuates the erasure of indigenous peoples, among other ethnic minorities, in the formation of the Americas both historically and contemporaneously. See Telles, *Race in Another America*; Pinho, “White But Not Quite”; Degler, *Neither Black nor White*; Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (eds), *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto, 2nd edition, 2010).

⁶⁸ Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings by J.J. Bachofen* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967); Lewis Henry Morgan, 1870. *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human*

established anthropological cannon from that period, none of the early theorists of matriarchy were themselves women.⁶⁹ Bachofen, Morgan, and Engels constructed matriarchy through myths and processual historical narratives as a precursor to patriarchy in the stages of supposed universal human evolution. These frameworks presented matriarchy as an earlier stage of development in a teleological progression to patriarchy as the highest stage of civilization.⁷⁰ Bachofen's study of classical myths focused on mother rite, defining matriarchy as "mother love," approaching women as reproducers associated with nature, whereas men were associated with the mind. Matriarchal religion coincided with the rise of agriculture and the proliferation of "earth goddesses" prior to the "Apollian age," when men conquered women and father right prevailed as the final stage of evolution.

The male social evolutionists looked to the past to naturalize the present subordination of women, and constructed matriarchy as a foil to the social and political system of patriarchalism. Elizabeth Fee notes how "modern anthropologists have characterized the work of their nineteenth-century forebears as politics masquerading as science," riddled with blatant racism and "pseudo-scientific apologetics of early imperialism."⁷¹ Contrasting with Bachofen's evolutionary progression, according to Fee, Henry Maine's *Ancient Law* "attempted to demonstrate that the power of the father had always been the basis of law and of society," so that

Family. By Lewis H. Morgan (1870); Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society; or, Researches in the lines of human progress from savagery through barbarism to civilization*. Cleveland: World Pub. Co, 1963); Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972). For a more comprehensive analysis of the nineteenth century social theorists involved in this project, see Elizabeth Fee, "Sexual Politics of Victorian Anthropology" in *Feminist Studies*. Vol. 1, No. 3/4, Special Double Issue: Women's History (Winter - Spring, 1973), pp. 23-39.

⁶⁹ Catherine Lutz, "The Gender of Theory" in Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (eds.), *Women Writing Culture/Culture Writing Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁷⁰ To different ends, Engels' work critiqued patriarchal civilization to highlight the destructive elements of capitalism and the division of men and women's labor in class society. Matriarchy still existed as a precursor to capitalism, though a more desirable goal than exploitative class-society. Engels still placed matriarchy in the primitive stage of human evolution. His work was revisited by Marxist feminists in the 1970s including Eleanor Leacock, Karen Sacks and Kathleen Gough.

⁷¹ Fee, "Sexual Politics".

the patriarchal father “held absolute authority over his wife, children, servants and slaves.”⁷²

British imperial anthropology was dedicated to “documenting and glorifying the triumph of man over nature,” reinforcing the subordination of women as a marker of superior civilization, and a conquest of nature.⁷³ Elizabeth Spelman demonstrates how, starting with the works of Plato, the category of woman together with homosexuals, slaves and children, were placed in the inferior category of the body in relation to the superior male category of the mind.⁷⁴ Spelman argues that dualisms do not necessarily lead to misogyny, though historically dualists have employed their categories to political ends, often to control others based on essentialist divisions.⁷⁵

Debates on matriarchy have often centralized around the African continent and for the diaspora, Africa as homeland. In the social evolution models projected by European anthropological imperialists, Africa figured centrally as a site of a “primitive” stage of human development.⁷⁶ Responding to Bachofen, W.E.B. Du Bois reinforced the idea that “Africa is the land of the mother.” Du Bois stated,

... the spell of the African mother pervades her land... This does not seem to be solely a survival of the historic matriarchy through which all nations pass. It appears to be more than this, as if the black race in passing down the steps of human culture have the world not only the Iron age, the cultivation of the soil and the domestication of animals but also in peculiar emphasis the Mother-idea.⁷⁷

⁷² Fee, “Sexual Politics”, p. 25.

⁷³ Fee, “Sexual Politics”, p. 26.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Woman as Body; Ancient and Contemporary Views” (*Feminist Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 1982). Such associations between mind and body have parallels in Descartes as well. Associating women with matter also align with understandings of women as “vessels” in theories of spirit possession. See I.M Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (England: Penguin Books, 1971); Janice P. Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); J. Lorand Matory, 1994. *Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁷⁵ Spelman, “Woman as Body”.

⁷⁶ As Fee reminds us, “primitive was often synonymous with evil.” (“Sexual Politics”, p. 38).

⁷⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Morals and Manners among Negro Americans*, 1914 quoted in Vernon J. Williams Jr., *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and his contemporaries* (University of Kentucky, 1996), p. 75.

In Bahia and throughout the Afro-American diaspora, the reverence for Africa as the birthplace of humanity and the feminine character of African land are popular ideas that also permeate cultural heritage policies.⁷⁸ Decades after Du Bois, African scholar Cheikh Anta Diop accentuated Black Africa as the main example of classical matriarchy, which did not globally transition into patriarchy. Diop challenged Bachofen with a geographical rather than a temporal framework to matriarchy, characterizing Black Africa by a sacred reverence for the mother, and secondary status of the father.⁷⁹ According to Ifi Amadiume, Diop presented matriarchy as “the establishment of a fundamental African moral philosophy,” the superstructure of early African social formations.⁸⁰ The Yoruba and Igbo of present-day Nigeria often figure as central case studies to challenge Western understandings of gender and their application around the world.⁸¹ The focus on the role of women in Yoruba society is particularly relevant for debates on matriarchy in Brazil, given that the Yoruba were prominent in the trans-Atlantic slave trade to nineteenth Century Bahia, when the most iconic matriarchal temples of Candomblé were established in Salvador.⁸²

To challenge the concept of matriarchy through ethnographic inquiry rather than social evolutionism, mid to late twentieth century anthropology focused on distinguishing matriarchy from matriliney. Much of this ethnographic work occurred in African kinship systems, where

⁷⁸ Pinho, *Mama Africa*.

⁷⁹ Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (Chicago, Illinois: Third World Press, 1978). Original published in 1959.

⁸⁰ Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex In African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 24, 54.

⁸¹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters*; Ifi Amadiume, *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: the Igbo Case* (London: Karnak House, 1987); Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Matory, *Sex and the Empire*; Olajuble Oyeronke, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003); Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

⁸² Pierre Verger, *Flux Et Reflux De La Traite Des Nègres Entre Le Golfe De Bénin Et Bahia De Todos Os Santos, Du 17e Au 19e Siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1968); Miguel C. Alonso, *The Development of Yoruba Candomble Communities in Salvador, Bahia, 1835-1986* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

descent was tracked through the mother.⁸³ The stakes of these debates revolve around who maintains control over women and how offspring are identified, which were especially relevant questions in American slave societies where slave status passed through the mother's womb.⁸⁴ In her opening to the 1972 edition of Engel's *The Origin of the Family*, Kathleen Gough stated that there is "no true 'matriarchal' as distinct from 'matrilineal' society in existence or known from literature, and chances are there never have been."⁸⁵ Eleanore Leacock similarly claimed that what Engels called matriarchy was actually matriliney, noting the key difference between the two systems being the possibility for women to lead and exert political power outside the realm of kinship.

When Candomblé temples define themselves as "matriarchal," they signify that the temple is led exclusively by female head priestesses and succession is through the Mother, who also orders the kinship system. These dynamics were first documented in scholarship by Ruth Landes, trained by Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas. Ruth Landes invoked the concept to document Black female power in the Candomblé religion of Brazil but did not theorize the term in relation to the discipline's prior social evolutionism. Instead, Landes adopted an idiosyncratic use of the term as represented through ethnographic particularism. As a "deviant" in her discipline, she characterized Candomblé as a "cult matriarchate" to refer to women's authority and leadership in

⁸³ A. R., Radcliffe-Brown, "The Mother's Brother in South Africa" In *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses*, 15-31. New York: Free Press, 1952); A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1950); David Murray Schneider and Kathleen Gough, *Matrilineal Kinship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Kinship and the local community among the Nuer" In *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, eds A.R. Radcliffe-Brown & D. Forde, 360-91 (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1950).

⁸⁴ Camilia Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom: Women of color, gender and the abolition of slavery in Havana and Rio de Janeiro* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, reproduction and the meaning of liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

⁸⁵ Kathleen Gough, "The Origin of the Family" in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press).

the Candomblé religion.⁸⁶ Landes' conclusions on Black female leadership in Candomblé were dismissed and undermined by her anthropological contemporaries, yet the 1967 publication of *The City of Women* in Brazilian Portuguese⁸⁷ reinvigorated the debates on matriarchy in Candomblé around the time that Second Wave Feminist writers debated the possibilities of matriarchy as a social model to advance the global struggle for women's rights.

In the 1970s, actors in the women's movement employed matriarchy as a "vision of power" for women's potential liberation.⁸⁸ Feminist anthropologists critiqued such deployments of matriarchy, which "conceived of our liberation on the model of women's societies and African queens."⁸⁹ Joan Bamberger pointed to "the Myth of Matriarchy," claiming that no matriarchies persisted anywhere, and primary sources recounting them were lacking. Bamberger argued against the myth,

The elevation of women to deity on the one hand, and the downgrading of her to child or chattel on the other, produce the same result. Such visions will not bring her any closer to attaining male socioeconomic and political status... The myth of matriarchy is but the tool used to keep woman bound to her place. To free her, we need to destroy the myth.

Practitioners of Candomblé have not destroyed the myth (of matriarchy, or Mama Africa), nor have women reached equality or liberation in Brazilian society. On the contrary, practitioners have appropriated the term from anthropological discourse to refer to mother reverence and hierarchies within their ritual kinship system.

⁸⁶Sally Cole, *Ruth Landes: A Life in Anthropology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003); Ruth Landes, "A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality" (*Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 35, 1940).

⁸⁷ Ruth Landes, *A Cidade Das Mulheres* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1967).

⁸⁸ Paula Webster, "Matriarchy: A Vision of Power" In *Toward An Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna R. Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

⁸⁹ Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "A theoretical overview" In Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, Louise Lamphere and Joan Bamberger (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 42; Rohrllich (ed.), *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge* (Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1975); Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1997).

Following the global debates on matriarchy in the 1970s, African feminists called for a re-evaluation of the concept of matriarchy, to think more broadly about the possibilities of social organization, gender expressions and relations between the sexes.⁹⁰ African scholars affirmed the power of women in their own contexts but questioned the use of the concept of matriarchy as a counterpoint to patriarchy. In the conclusion to *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, Ifi Amadiume calls for a reflection beyond matriarchy, to consider other factors such as mother right, matrifocality, matricentrism, and feminine orientation, as possible aspects of a matriarchal culture. She affirmed that matriarchy and patriarchy are simply ideologies and not complete realities. There are no societies where only men have power, and women have none. Where that power is located, under what conditions, how it is used and by whom are questions worthy of investigation. This study takes Amadiume's call for scholars to reconsider the type of power women have in Candomblé and pay close attention to the complicated dynamics between sex and gender.⁹¹ The relations between men and women in various spheres of life cannot translate easily into the concepts of domination and subordination, nor is a mere reversal of patriarchy through female domination a desired goal.⁹² The ethnography of the family of saints investigates the complex relationships between men and women in the Candomblé family given distinctions in gender and sexuality, considering how they are defined and by what criteria.

The trope of the Black matriarch specifically operates within contentious fields of representation and power at the intersections of race and gender in American societies built through African-based slavery. The term "matriarch" has fallen out of fashion in U.S. based anthropological scholarship since the 1970s, responding to critiques of white feminists'

⁹⁰ Amadiume, *Male Daughters*; Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*.

⁹¹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 189.

⁹² Paula Webster questioned if power in the hands of women could be wholly different from what it has been in the hands of men. ("A Vision of Power", p. 153).

projection of overly simplistic “matriarchal utopias,” especially in “Third World” contexts like in Africa and Brazil. Black feminists also point to the 1965 publication of the Moynihan report, which stigmatized single Black mothers in the U.S., blaming the “matriarchal structure” of the Black family as the cause for the “Negro community’s” purported “social retardation.”⁹³ The report claimed that the Black family had no Father. According to Hortense Spillers, the father’s “symbolic function marks the impressive missing agencies in the essential life of the black community,” contrasting with the ideal model of identifiable paternity in the white U.S. family.⁹⁴ Myths and naming practices exercised by the elite define the societal values that “manipulate ideas about Black womanhood” by “exploiting already existing symbols, or creating new ones.”⁹⁵ In the North American context, the matriarch trope presents a “notorious cliché” of the “emasculating female”⁹⁶, contributing to racist stereotypes of Black women. As argued by Angela Davis, “the slave system did not—and could not—engender and recognize a matriarchal family structure... It would have been exceedingly risky for the slaveholding class to openly acknowledge symbols of authority—female symbols no less than male.”⁹⁷ Since the 1970s, there has been a broad consensus among feminists and womanists that matriarchy as a total social system is not a means to liberation. Yet, the exercise of female power within families, ritual contexts, and cultural production, to name a few arenas of social life, continue within systems dominated by white male supremacy and should not be undermined as generative forces of social change.

⁹³ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”, 66; Patricia Hills Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015).

⁹⁴ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby”, 66.

⁹⁵ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 76.

⁹⁶ Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role”, Page 4.

⁹⁷ Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” (*The Black Scholar*, November – December 1981), Page 4.

In Brazil, the matriarch trope works alongside the myth of Mama Africa. The myth has been upheld through the prominent cultural figure of the Mãe Preta, presenting an imaginary of a maternal, strong, asexual, domestic worker and selfless provider, to both Black and white children. Through the transmission of blood or milk, the Mãe Preta confers an “African” identity to her children, regardless of their race. Through cultural monuments and products produced by white and Black actors since the 1920s, the Mãe Preta has been a contentious site for articulations of the country’s racial identity. Given the strong historical trajectory in Brazil of highlighting racial mixture through a purported racial democracy, the Mãe Preta has been nominally celebrated for her role of providing the “African” element in nurturing a uniquely mixed-race Brazilian identity from a position of servitude and disenfranchisement. The Mãe Preta symbol shares key characteristics with the “controlling image” of the Black Mammy in the U.S. context, with important distinctions.⁹⁸ The Mãe Preta and Black Mammy are both associated with the role of the wet nurse to white children as a practice of American slave societies. Both figures are portrayed as willfully performing labor reminiscent of the female domestic slave, working in the kitchen and offering maternal labor and guidance to both Black and white children.

Representations of the Black Mother in Brazilian national discourses of racial mixture and ethnic tourism conceal and pacify the historical processes that produce race-based violence and inequalities affecting Black women. The present ethnography of Brazilian cultural heritage policies reveals how academics, cultural initiatives, and the media approach the Candomblé Mother as a cultural figure, sometimes conflated with the Mãe Preta trope. To counter the distortion that occurs through public interpretations of the Candomblé Mother, the research

⁹⁸ Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*, 73. Caldwell comments on the contemporary status of the Mães Pretas as equivalent to the Black Mammy. Pinho also makes this association in *Mama Africa*, 30.

details how the family of saints deploys the matriarch title (*matriarca*) ritually to revere the head priestesses of the Candomblé temples. The ethnography demonstrates how the matriarch remains a respected figure within the initiatory family, conferring the title to the Candomblé Mother as the ultimate authority at the top of the initiatory hierarchy and a conduit to the ancestors within historically Black families, neighborhoods and communities. The contemporary matriarch title within Candomblé families refers to both elderly Black women at the top of the ritual hierarchy and deceased historic leaders recognized as the originators of their Candomblé nations in Brazil. In the recognition of Candomblé as cultural heritage, Black female leadership is a central criterion, considered a primary element of African social organization in Brazil, contrasting explicitly with colonial and Catholic patriarchy.

Despite the longstanding presence of the Mãe Preta and the Candomblé Mother in Bahian life, J.L. Matory attributes the beginning of the matriarchal understanding of Candomblé to Ruth Landes' projection of a "transnational community of women" during her research from 1938 to 1939. Matory claims that Landes' thesis of matriarchy, motivated by her own political commitments, "clearly changed the minds and conduct of Candomblé's leading bourgeois allies and, consequently, the conditions of that religion's production in Brazilian society."⁹⁹ Previous research on the history of anthropology demonstrates the contrary, however, that Black Candomblé priestesses like Mother Menininha informed Landes' concepts of matriarchy, reflecting the organization of her Gantois temple, which had been operating in Salvador since the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 193.

¹⁰⁰ Ruth Landes' archives also reveal the prominence of Angolan and Caboclo Mothers during her field research in 1939 to 1939, which she did not represent in her ethnography *The City of Women*. The prominence of Candomblé Mothers of all nations of Candomblé can be traced at least to this period, and oral histories also extend to the nineteenth century with Mariquinha Lembá in the Angolan Paketan lineage. See Andreson, *Ruth Landes e a Cidade das Mulheres*.

In scholarship on Candomblé, debates on gender, nation and tradition often highlight the weight of anthropological characterization in defining these categories and their delineations.¹⁰¹ Stefania Capone and J.L Matory place great emphasis on the power of anthropological representation in shaping Candomblé discourse.¹⁰² To respond, the research here focuses on the ritual system of Mothers within the family of saints to highlight the ritual knowledge that informs anthropological characterization, rather than the other way around. It is my contention that the tenant of Black female leadership in Candomblé cannot be attributed to Landes's scholarly work, though the specific use of the term "matriarch" to refer to the Mothers might have been influenced by her ethnography. Landes' work was not read in Brazil until its translation into Portuguese in 1967, around the same time the "nationalistic cult" of the Mãe Preta became visible on a national scale.¹⁰³ Even if Candomblé priestesses and initiates did read *A Cidade das Mulheres*, could Landes' work possibly have more influence on them than the ancestral practices in the temples, which operate on the time scale of centuries, not mere decades? The contemporary ethnographic research presented here argues that the Mothers are particularly revered within the ritual family and considered privileged links to the ancestors because of ideal type feminine qualities of generativity and reproduction. Based on the oral traditions through generations of Candomblé, the valorization of Mothers in the family of saints reflects ritual practice rather than secondary anthropological and media representation.

While the research presented here does not reinforce the notion that matriarchy as Black female leadership and mother reverence in Candomblé was a secondary invention by

¹⁰¹ Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô Nagô e Papai Branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, Edições Graal Ltda, 1988); Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Capone, *Searching for Africa*.

¹⁰² Capone, *Searching for Africa*; Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*.

¹⁰³ I believe that the incentive to publish a translation of Landes' book *The City of Women* in Brazil was based on the rising public importance of Candomblé Mothers, but not that Landes' book influenced the public importance of those Mothers in the Brazilian context. This question of causality differs greatly from what is presented by Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*.

anthropologists, it is possible that through the 1960s to the 1980s, the valorization of matriarchal figures within the family of saints rose due to the privileged public cultural status given to the priestesses of matriarchal temples.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, in response to the public circulation of those images and discourses in recent decades, Candomblé initiates may use the matriarch title more explicitly to refer to the head Mothers. To be seen as relevant in cultural heritage policies that deem Black female leadership a central tenet of Africanness in Brazil, Angolan temples may have more recently emphasized Black female leaders in their lineages. Nevertheless, historical research through oral histories and archives show that Black head priestesses have been historically present in the Angolan nation, though less publicly celebrated and represented. The limited extant historical sources from Candomblé practitioners I could access did not confirm the use of *matriarca* to refer to Candomblé Mothers prior to newspaper reports in the late 1960s.

The matriarch title as applied to the Candomblé Mother largely celebrates her femininity and maternity as sources of Black resistance and power. When deemed a matriarch by her child-initiates and journalists in the media, the Candomblé priestess is revered and respected within the ritual system. Because the relationships among initiates are not constructed through exploitative power structures, the veneration for the Black Mother differs significantly from the state's co-optation of the myth of Mama Africa. The significant similarities between the Black Mammy, the Mãe Preta and the matriarch tropes in the U.S. and the Brazil stem from a common process articulated by Spillers, by which the terms borrow their "narrative energies from the grid of associations, from the semantic and iconic folds buried deep in the collective past, that come to

¹⁰⁴ The term "matriarchal temple" refers to a temple that has been historically run by head priestesses and determines matriarchy to be a tenet of their nation and family. The rise in the myth of Mama Africa and the public circulation of Candomblé symbols and rituals following the end to state persecution of Candomblé in the 1970s contributed to more public reception consumption of Candomblé leaders and rituals. Pinho, *Mama Africa*; Johnson, *Secrets, Gossips and Gods*; Selka, *Religion and the Politics*.

surround and signify the captive person.”¹⁰⁵ The stereotypes applied to Black women, and particularly as commentaries on Black motherhood, are built through parallel histories of targeted enslavement and dehumanization towards Black families and communities.

Since Ruth Landes’ work, scholarly debates on matriarchy in Afro-Brazilian religions have placed significant weight on the gender of the temples’ leader as head Mother or Father, rather than analyzing why women are privileged within the ancestral family.¹⁰⁶ Without ethnographically interrogating the role of Mothers in the Candomblé initiatory family, such analyses dismiss matriarchy because of dubious historical origins in Africa or the mere presence of male leaders, ultimately reinforcing an all or nothing vision of matriarchy as complete female domination with African precedents.¹⁰⁷ Though without reinforcing the term matriarchy, scholarship on Candomblé has continued to emphasize female leadership within the Candomblé communities and the great reverence for elder women and female deities in the religion, contrasting explicitly with the Catholic Church and a patriarchal society at large.¹⁰⁸ The social organization of Candomblé inverts the Brazilian social order of gender and race, where, as stated

¹⁰⁵ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 69.

¹⁰⁶ James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Júlio Braga, *Candomblé: a cidade das mulheres e dos homens* (Editora Vento Leste, 2014); Luis Nicolau Parés and Lisa Earl Castillo, “José Pedro Autran e o retorno de Xangô” (*Religião e Sociedade*, vol. 35, Issue 1, pp. 13-43, 2015).

¹⁰⁷ Africa has been a privileged site for the investigation of possible pre-colonial, pre-capitalist matriarchies, and often used as a justification for the prevalence of female leadership in Candomblé. See Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*; Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa*; Bamberger, “The Myth of Matriarchy”.

¹⁰⁸ Klaas Woortmann, *A família das mulheres* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro/CNPQ, 1987); Kim Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedom’s Won: Afro-Brazilians in post-abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Rita Segato, “The Color-blind Subject of Myth; or where to find Africa in the nation” (*Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 27, pp. 129-151, 1998); Rachel Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and alternative spaces of blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Maria Salete Joaquim, *O papel da liderança feminina na construção da identidade negra* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2001); Teresinha Bernardo, *Negras, mulheres, e mães: Lembranças de Olga de Alaketu* (São Paulo: EDUC, 2003); Cheryl Sterling, “Women, Space, Power, and the Sacred in Afro-Brazilian Culture”, *The Global South* (Vol. 4, No. 1, Special Issue: Latin America in a Global Spring, pp. 71-93, 2010); Maria Gabriela Hita, *A casa das mulheres n’outro terreiro. Famílias matriarcais em Salvador* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2014).

in the opening manifesto, Black women are “the base of the social pyramid.” In the Candomblé temples, by contrast the Black Mothers are at the top of the pyramid in the ritual family.¹⁰⁹

Yet the primary reverence for Black women within the ritual family and the celebration of the Black matriarch outside the Candomblé context do not necessarily confer greater power to Black women in Brazilian society writ large. It is in this sense that this work qualifies Landes’ projection that Salvador could be a city of women and prior feminist visions that matriarchy could be a path to women’s liberation. As previously cautioned by Paula Webster, “reverence, a highly ambivalent expression of awe and fear, but most clearly of distance, does not necessarily result from or lead to the high status or power of the revered object that is symbolically presented.”¹¹⁰ The reverence for Black motherhood specifically presents restrictive notions of femininity through ideals of fertility, maternity and domesticity embedded within matriarchy. When warning against essentialist approaches to race and gender in Bahia, Brazil, Patrícia Pinho reminds us how “feminist and anti-racist research has already shown how arguments based on nature are very rarely contested.”¹¹¹ In the United States, Patrícia Hills Collins identified how “portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. Black women’s oppressions.”¹¹²

Specific to the role of African women in slavery, Angela Davis points out, “as her “biological destiny, the woman bore the fruits of procreation; as her social destiny, she cooked, sewed, washed, cleaned house, raised the children. Traditionally the labor of females, domestic

¹⁰⁹ Rita Segato “The Color-blind Subject” cited in Sterling, “Women-space”, 80; Mikelle Omari-Smith, “Candomblé: A Socio-Political Examination of African Religion and Art in Brazil” cited in Sterling, “Women-space”, 81. See also Ruth Landes, *The City of Women* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1947).

¹¹⁰ Webster, “Matriarchy: A Vision of Power”, 143.

¹¹¹ Pinho, *Mama Africa*. Patrícia Hills Collins ads, “These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social justice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (*Black Feminist Thought*, 77).

¹¹² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 76.

work is supposed to complement and confirm their inferiority.”¹¹³ Traditional notions of femininity as domestic motherhood restrict female-born initiates of Candomblé who must perform labor based on their biological sex, which is also reinforced by the family’s rituals and traditions.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the reverence for Black Mothers specifically within the family of saints creates a hierarchy among the possible expressions of gender and sexuality, some of which are deemed more valuable and permissible in the ritual system than others. The ethnography demonstrates how femininity is a more accessible ritual category than masculinity, contributing to the prominence of the “effeminate male” figure in the family of saints, but restricting full expressions of gender non-conformity by marginalizing masculine cis-gender women, as well as transgender and travesti initiates.

Methods and knowledge production

Candomblé leaders often emphasize the need to produce knowledge about their own communities, rather than relying on university-trained scholars and white mediators. Religious leaders historically formed alliances with scholars, artists, and the intelligentsia to seek greater protection and defense in the public sphere and control the means of representation when Candomblé was publicly persecuted as a Black religion. Since Candomblé became a free religious practice in 1970s Bahia, initiates have gained greater access to higher education and the means to self-representation through autonomous knowledge and media production.

Consequently, the role of the foreign researcher has been increasingly questioned by religious

¹¹³ Davis, “Black Woman’s Role”, 7.

¹¹⁴ Allen, “Brides without husbands”, 26: “lesbian women primarily find affirmation in the religion through their femininity and not their sexuality. As women, their femininity accords them access and acceptance in the religion due to the perception of it as a matriarchy and the reality of women’s importance in the practice of the religion.”

leaders. Makota Valdina, a prolific spokesperson of the Angolan Nation, publicly expressed her frustration,

The Anthropology groups at the universities seemed to be the only holders of knowledge, which is not true. I try to speak about Candomblé in a different way, from the perspective of those who live the thing. The *negro* moved on from being an object of study to a group studying their own history.¹¹⁵

As a Black woman and prominent leader of the Angolan nation, Makota Valdina sought to center Black women specifically as the public representatives of Candomblé. She presented a vision that “every woman was born to be a mother and if she does not have biological children, she has to generate ideas.”¹¹⁶ She used the Portuguese verb *gerar* to accentuate women’s unique ability to generate, gestate, spawn—invoking the female qualities of fertility and reproduction through the womb. Importantly, women’s purpose to gestate is not limited to Mothers that birth their own children. Gestation takes many forms—from the creation of projects (intellectual, creative, activist) to the construction of humans in the making and rebirthing of people through the initiation process of Candomblé. Makota Valdina’s message points to the exceptionality of women as having this unique generative ability to produce and reproduce, placing women as vital to the creation of Candomblé families and perpetuating ancestral lineages. The emphasis placed on maternity and gestation as the central processes of connecting to the ancestors in Candomblé frames this dissertation’s considerations of gender, sexuality, and ritual roles in the religion and beyond.

¹¹⁵ Lydia Silva and Ana Maria Viera (orgs), *Mulheres do Vento, Mulheres do Tempo* (Salvador: A Mulherada, 2011), 105. Original in Portuguese: “Makota Valdina se incomodava com a forma como candomblé era estudado. As universidades, principalmente os Núcleos de Antropologia, pareciam ser os únicos detentores do conhecimento, o que não era verdade. Então, ela buscou ser uma intelectual para ‘desconstruir’ o saber que era passado. ‘Tento falar do candomblé de uma forma diferenciada, com a visão de quem vivencia a coisa. O negro deixou de ser objeto de estudo para estudar sua história.’”

¹¹⁶ Silva and Viera, *Mulheres do Vento*, 105. Original in Portuguese: “Toda mulher nasceu para ser mãe e se não tiver filhos biológicos, ela tem que gerar idéias.”

Within this landscape of Black leadership in Candomblé temples of Salvador, not all temples adopt a public stance, nor do all temples show interest in speaking with foreign researchers. Certainly, the selection of temples that constitute this research analysis reflect those that are already oriented towards the public and have an agenda for accepting white, foreign researchers into their sacred space as an indication of, and an advertisement for their relative prestige, authenticity, and fame. As a researcher I situated myself at the nexus of public debates about Candomblé in Brazilian society and offered my status as a foreign scholar as a potential asset in their quest for recognition and visibility—so that I too have become part of the making of heritage. Even though select Candomblé leaders seek a public and even political orientation, my research suggests that the majority prefer autonomy through isolation and reclusion as a symptom of long-seeded distrust of the government and centuries of violence. I made clear that my goals coincided with the broader aims of Candomblé practitioners to protect their land, gain widespread respect, and combat the racist stereotypes that are placed on the religion as “Black magic,” or “the thing of the devil” (*coisa do diablo*) as frequently condemned by evangelicals. This work and my scholarly career aim to contribute to the broader project of dismantling racist understandings of African-descended religions of the Americas.

It may seem difficult for an uninitiated foreign scholar to argue for the primacy of ritual understandings of Black women’s roles in Candomblé and downplay anthropological representation. Although I was not part of private, internal ritual contexts to intentionally respect the boundaries of public knowledge, my ethnographic experiences in sixteen different temples (see a full list of temples in the appdenix) were permeated with references to the ritual structure, expressions of relationships among the family of saints, and the explicit reverence for Black women as the guardians of ancestral knowledge. Engaging in public scholarship projects and

showing up for public events that encouraged my participation inform my analysis of gender and race in the construction of Afro-Brazilian heritage.¹¹⁷ These events and projects hosted within the temple territory meant that ritual practices and knowledge always permeated the carefully curated public performance and pedagogy.

An episode from the first seminar I went to during my Ph.D. research at the seminar “Collective Construction of a Public Politics to Preserve the Memory of Candomblé” hosted by the Mokambo Temple in Salvador in 2016 presents a snapshot of how I was placed within the hierarchies of Candomblé. At twenty-six years old, my life experience did not qualify me as an authority in any field, much less the public politics of Candomblé. No other foreigners or “outsiders” were present at this event; the panelists and small audience were all initiates of Candomblé or representatives from local cultural agencies. Following the long day of panels, one of the presenters called on me in front of the group to find out more about me. He was at least seventy-years old, a respected leader of Candomblé, published author, and university professor. He asked me to stand up and introduce myself, which seemed to be typical protocol, and then he explicitly directed me to “bless” and “compliment” the “Black woman” in the front of the room who had presented on the panel. He referred to her only as the *mulher negra* as a test to see if I had paid attention to her name. I got up, presented myself and my purpose in that space, greeted the panelist, Vanda Machado, and gave her a customary kiss on the hand. Presumably, I

¹¹⁷ The public scholarship projects I worked on included a documentary project for the centennial celebrations of the Bate Folha Temple in 2016 with a group from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), interviewing all 65 members of the temple and compiling oral histories. With the Terreiro de Jauá, I executed a digital archive project, installed a photo exhibit, and conducted oral history interviews to commemorate their fifty-year anniversary. Public seminars I attended included the 2017 and 2018 editions of the “Rediscovering Our History” organized by the Tumba Junçara temple; the two-day commemorative events for the seventy-year celebrations for Mother Mirinha, the founder of the Angolan temple Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia in Portão, and events associated with the 2018 World Social Forum, bringing together activists, community leaders and intellectuals to advance movements for racial, gender and environmental justice, where Candomblé figured prominently. A more detailed list of events and sources are listed in the bibliography.

demonstrated sufficient language skills and understanding of cultural codes as I received applause in the *barracão*—the ceremonial hall. I interpreted the call out to also acknowledge how white women often disrespect and make invisible the contributions of Black women. Revering Vanda Machado in front of everyone in that room situated me as a novice within the hierarchy of Candomblé, where elderly Black women are the most respected authorities.

In the context of researching with Candomblé temples and families, it is difficult to separate ethnography from oral history, and only rarely did I find an appropriate situation for formal, recorded interviews. Oral histories of Candomblé founders and family lineages are ever-present in discussions among the contemporary ritual family and were represented explicitly by temple representatives in public memorials, seminars, and cultural heritage events. Additionally, many of the oral histories were recorded and compiled by previous mediators as part of the cultural heritage cases (*processos de tombamento*) analyzed to understand how temples self-present to the state. Additional oral histories were published in books written by temple representatives. Others were relayed to me through the process of elaborating public scholarship projects collaboratively with initiates. The mixed methods utilized to access historical narratives and sources from several temples follow the many ways Candomblé practitioners document, produce and disseminate information about themselves. The present approach differs significantly from previous ethnographies of Candomblé that rely on a close affiliation to and representation of one temple. Instead, this analysis offers a comparative perspective across temples of different nations, with varying degrees of African “authenticity”, size, leadership, and traditionalism to investigate the differentiated field of Afro-Bahian religious organizations.

During fieldwork I worked extensively with male priests—Fathers—of Angolan temples, and their ritual families always included Black women as recognized ritual authorities. I worked

in temples led by Fathers to avoid the myopia of only studying temples led by Mothers to prove the predominance of female leadership.¹¹⁸ In my conversations with select Fathers, both in private and in public, several expressed to varying degrees their identification as gay men, allowing me a select window into delicate concerns regarding sexuality among the family. In the elaboration of this ethnography I strategically employ pseudonyms to protect personal information related to research subjects, and in cases where securing formal authorization was impractical given the ritual contexts. When analyzing public presentations, seminars, debates, and cultural policy initiatives, I make sure to present the names of those involved as self-identified and represented in public settings. For oral histories, I offer the names and information as recounted to me or presented publicly.

To update the discussions of matriarchy in Candomblé, the first chapter presents the “matriarch” figure of the family of saints ethnographically to understand the internal hierarchies of race and gender, where Black women are the most privileged connectors to the ancestors. Among Candomblé initiates, the “matriarch” title is used to mark authority, address historical continuity, and celebrate Black female leaders and founders of lineage. I argue that the centrality of gestation in the initiation process and understandings of sex and kinship defined by birth make women especially respected as Mothers because of their vital role in perpetuating both ritual and biological lineages of African descent in Bahia. The ethnography provides context and definitions for the major terms and figures within the Candomblé “family of saints” to understand the dynamics of race, gender, and relationships among initiates. Rather than

¹¹⁸ This critique was presented in Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*. Building off critiques of Ruth Landes’ work also by Braga, Ramos and Herskovits, for example. Arthur Ramos, “Pesquisas Estrangeiras Sobre o Negro Brasileiro”. In *A Aculturação Negra no Brasil* (Biblioteca Pedagógica Brasileira, Vol. 224. Companhia Editora Nacional, 1942); Melville Herskovits, “Review of The City of Women” (*American Anthropologist*, Jan-Mar 1947); Braga, *Candomblé*, Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*.

proposing limitless gender flexibility in ritual, the analysis points to the restrictive notions of femininity within the initiatory family, which sometimes contribute to naturalizing Black women in roles of domesticity and maternity.

The second chapter offers a media analysis of the Candomblé Mothers' public personas from the 1960s to the 1990s and demonstrates how they have been associated with the Mãe Preta imaginary of the slavery past. The Candomblé priestesses' presence in the media helped solidify them as the authorized cultural brokers of Candomblé, during a key moment of its expansion into international networks alongside growing initiatives for the monumentation of African heritage in the Americas. The prominence of Candomblé Mothers in the media, as representatives of Brazil through international cultural products, and as cultural figures in local politics transformed the public's understandings of the Candomblé temples as territories led by Black women. With new national platforms, audiences and means of media representation, the priestesses shared their own notions of motherhood and biological ties to Africa through the ritual system. Prominent priestesses engaged with the media during the Brazilian dictatorship, cautioned against folklorization and increasingly presented an anti-colonial, African purist front to produce alternative knowledge about race, gender, and religion in Brazil.

Chapter three analyzes the characterization of Candomblé "nations" by the race and gender of their founders. Given the priorities of democratic multiculturalism, select representatives of African "nations" became recognized as heritage through criteria that failed to address the widespread issue of land insecurity and scarcity of resources among Candomblé communities. The analysis demonstrates how Black female leadership became associated with African heritage through cultural policies that defined ethnic territoriality in the Brazilian democracy (1985 - 2016).

Through ethnographic research in temple memorials, chapter four approaches ritual memorialization among Candomblé families as a historical practice, arguing that the internal methods of safeguarding ritually charged objects among historic temples were adapted to the composition and public orientation of Candomblé memorials as ritual embeddedness. The ethnography reveals how the concern for tracing ancestry and preserving historical genealogies is a key feature of the Candomblé religion, adapted to the context of the memorials. When founders of Candomblé nations become patrimony, the material artefacts once belonging to them are no longer only preserved and sacralized by the ritual family, but also increasingly by the state. This recent opening has created space for new leaders to represent the nation on their own terms. At the same time, it also created more opportunity for new leaders, even those disconnected from the historically Black communities in Bahia, to enter the field of Afro-Bahian religious politics, sometimes yielding material benefits.

The final chapter approaches the “effeminate male” figure in Candomblé to understand the definitions of femininity and masculinity in the ritual structure and examine the public’s reception of prominent Fathers from the 1930s to the present. The “effeminate male” position in Afro-diasporic religions has become somewhat of a trope. In the context of twentieth century Brazilian Candomblé, Joãozinho da Goméia became the blueprint for the stereotype; his fame inspired other gay men to follow his lead and enter the religion because of its feminine and expressive potential for gay men. I argue that femininity is a more accessible ritual category than masculinity and investigate how the policing of gender and sexuality occur within the initiatory family at the level of one’s ritual role. Although Candomblé rituals and deities present a continuum between masculinity and femininity, the need to fit into and perform only one role limits the possibilities for a full range of expression of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 1: Mothers in the Family of Saints



Figure 1: Public invitation to celebrate the 80-year anniversary of Mother Xagui's initiation into her Tumbancé lineage of Candomblé. (Salvador, Bahia, January 12, 2016).

A public invitation circulated in 2016 Salvador, Brazil to celebrate the eighty-year anniversary of Mother Xagui, the head priestess of the Angolan Candomblé temple Terreiro Tumbancé. The commemoration was organized for her ritual birthday, marked by her initiation into the Candomblé religion. The title “Matriarca Néngwa Xagui” celebrates her status with the use of the term “Matriarch” in Portuguese followed by the Angolan ritual term for mother, “Néngwa” and her known name Xagui. This invitation is one of many examples in which the term *matriarca* (matriarch) is used to refer to elderly Black women as leaders of ancestral African lineages in the contemporary Brazilian Candomblé religion. The many examples of Matriarchs from Angolan ritual lineages are particularly compelling, as scholarship has qualified

female leadership as a feature of the Yoruba-descended nations of Candomblé, characterizing the Angolan nation as male-led.¹¹⁹

Although women still lead most Candomblé temples in Salvador, recent scholars have emphasized that not all Candomblé houses are led by women and Fathers have led select temples since the religion's foundation in Brazil.¹²⁰ Since Ruth Landes' work, scholarly debates on matriarchy have placed significant weight on the gender of the temples' leader, rather than analyzing why women are privileged within the ancestral family.¹²¹ Without ethnographically interrogating the role of Mothers in the Candomblé initiatory family, such analyses dismiss matriarchy because of dubious historical origins in Africa or the mere presence of male leaders, ultimately reinforce an all or nothing vision of matriarchy as complete female domination with African precedents.¹²² Instead, I revisit the question of matriarchy in Candomblé through the ethnographic study of on-the-ground relationships between Candomblé Mothers and Fathers and within their respective sets of initiates—“family of saints”—to make visible the mechanisms that produce lineages and generations of kinship within the initiatory family dedicated to ancestor reverence.

¹¹⁹ Ruth Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality” (*Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 35: 386-397, 1940); Edison Carneiro, *Religiões Negras e Negros Bantos* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1991); Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô Nagô e Papai Branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, Edições Graal Ltda, 1988). The nations are associated with African ethnic groups, languages and rites; the most common in Brazil today are Ketu, Nagô, Jeje, Angola, Congo and Caboclo. The Ketu and Nagô nations use Yoruba as the ritual nation, whereas the Congo-Angola houses use Bantu languages.

¹²⁰ The last systematic study in 2008 suggested 63.7% of Candomblé temples are led by women. Jocélio Teles dos Santos, *Mapeamento dos terreiros de Salvador* (Salvador, Brazil: Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais, UFBA, 2008).

¹²¹ James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Júlio Braga, *Candomblé: a cidade das mulheres e dos homens* (Editora Vento Leste, 2014); Luis Nicolau Parés and Lisa Earl Castillo, “José Pedro Autran”.

¹²² Africa has been a privileged site for the investigation of possible pre-colonial, pre-capitalist matriarchies, and often used as a justification for the prevalence of female leadership in Candomblé. See Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (Chicago, Illinois: Third World Press, 1978); Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (London & New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1997); Bamberger, “The Myth of Matriarchy”.

With ethnographic material produced through interviews, participant observation and oral histories with Candomblé leaders and initiates, this chapter presents the contemporary prevalence of the “matriarch” figure to argue that matriarchy in Candomblé be understood through the framework of ritual gestation and re-birth. The research confirms expressions of gender, reproduction and sex as symbols employed in ritual, while also pointing to the endurance of biology and birth as concepts that continue to inform race, kinship and gender among Candomblé initiates.¹²³ Research conducted among different Candomblé nations demonstrates that the prevalence of women as ancestral sources of knowledge and leadership is consistent among Candomblé nations and regardless of the gender of the temple’s founder. Additional historical research presents the prominence of several Angolan Mothers who have been marginalized from scholarship and popular representations of the religion since the nineteenth century. To intervene in the debates on matriarchy, I make three related claims: First that matriarchy remains a powerful term and concept in Candomblé because it pools multiple meanings of gestation in the propagation of family lineages. Second, even male priests, “Fathers,” rely on notions of matriarchy to build their authority. Third, Candomblé’s idealization of matriarchy as the basis of religious authority reinforces traditional gender roles and sex in certain respects, even as Candomblé affords opportunities for gender experimentation and multiplicity.¹²⁴

¹²³ Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (eds), *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Aisha Beliso de-Jesús, *Electric Santería: Racial and sexual assemblages of transnational religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

¹²⁴ These findings reflect previous critiques from feminist anthropologists since the 1970s that matriarchy reinforces traditional gender roles and does not offer a way out of women’s universal subordination. See the debates in Louise Lamphere and Joan Bamberger (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford University Press, 1974). See also Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1997); This research encourages future scholarship to investigate the rising tensions among trans initiates confronting the rigidity of binary understandings of sex in orthodox Candomblé houses.

The following case studies investigate the role of Mothers in the initiation process and within the family of saints to consider the importance of gender, sex, and sexual orientation in the Candomblé family. Two births are recognized among Candomblé initiates—both biological and ritual—and kin networks are also expressed through these terms. The Candomblé Mother represents the intersection of biological and ritual roles centered around childbirth and mothering in a religion that worships the African ancestors and initiates generations into Brazilian Candomblé to keep ancestral lineages alive. Finally, the matriarch role in Candomblé is racialized, so that elderly dark-skinned Bahian women with visible African descent are the most privileged ancestral religious leaders. Such women are considered the “matriarchs” of Candomblé because of their biological and ritual proximity to the African ancestors, as well as Bahia’s ideological place as a “closer Africa” in a diasporic “map of Africanness.”¹²⁵ The ethnographic examples presented here demonstrate how multiple light-skinned Fathers base their religious authority on their ritual birth from Black Candomblé Mothers through initiation to legitimate their African heritage.

The Candomblé Family

In the Candomblé religion, the act of initiation as birth establishes relation between new kin and permits identifiable lines of descent to control ritual practice within Candomblé family lineages. The religion operates within broader social concerns in Brazil of tracking and identifying race understood as “biological” through blood lineages that form affiliation within identifiable racial groups—as blood carries racialized physical characteristics passed through birth from a gestating

¹²⁵ Pinho, *Mapping Diaspora*. Pinho highlights this perspective among African American “roots tourists” from the U.S, but the idea also resonates with Brazilian tourists who visit Bahia from other regions of the country.

mother.¹²⁶ I do not insist on biology as an analytic to reify “natural” divisions or characteristics, but rather approach it ethnographically because Candomblé initiates differentiate between kin made through ritual initiation and kin made through physical birth.¹²⁷ Most pertinent for my analysis is that both are conceptualized as gestational processes.

In ethnographic interviews conducted in multiple Angolan temples, initiates described their experience in the *roncô*—the private ritual quarters where initiates are made into the family—as a gestation. Scholarship on African diaspora religions has been attentive to the reconfiguration of personhood through the initiation process as a re-identification and re-orientation of self when initiates are reborn in union with a specific deity and into a family lineage.¹²⁸ Through the process initiates are placed within the family’s hierarchical relationships based on their divine calling, determined by the head Mother or Father by consulting the deities (*orishas, nkisis, voduns*)¹²⁹. Although initiation situates individuals within a new network of kinship, sex as expressed at birth continues to inform ritual and social practice. Though not necessarily the case, the initiate’s biological family may affect their spiritual potential and importance within the temple’s family lineage. Independent of the circumstances of their birth

¹²⁶ Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*; Nascimento, *The Sorcery of Color*; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Pinho, *Mama Africa*.

¹²⁷ Twenty-first century kinship studies move beyond a distinction between biological and other types of “fictive” or metaphorical kin to approach the field of “mutuality of being” through socially constituted relatedness in culturally specific contexts. Sarah and Susan McKinnon (eds), *Relative Values: Reconfiguring kinship studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Jane Carsten (ed), *Cultures of Relatedness: New approaches to the studies of kinship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is – And Is Not*. (University of Chicago Press, 2013); Susan McKinnon and Fenella Cannell, *Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship* (Santa Fe : SAR Press, 2013). For these reasons, my analysis does not reinforce the primacy of biological family, but rather uses the term as an adoption of the ethnographic distinctions. I also employ the terms “physical birth” and “anatomy at birth” to describe the distinction of kin made through birth from a gestating mother, as well as the determination of one’s sex through this process.

¹²⁸ Vivaldo da Costa Lima, *A família de santo nos candomblés jejes-nagôs da Bahia: um estudo de relações intragrúpis* (Salvador: UFBA, 1977); Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, Gods*; Jesus, *Electric Santería*; Roberto Strongmann, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou* (Duke University Press, 2019).

¹²⁹ The deities have different names depending on the ritual nation. Orishas (Ketu/Nagô), or nkisis (Congo/Angola), and voduns (Jeje). I have used phonetic English spelling to reflect pronunciation.

family or racial identity, initiates enter the family of saints for many reasons. Physical ailments, accidents, diseases, personal and economic crises are frequent causes for initiation. In the absence of good medical care, familial support or financial resources, people in crisis seek out Candomblé families. Initiation provides support and comfort through the construction of new kinship networks.

Consider Lucía¹³⁰, who was biologically born into a “first generation family” that has been active in her temple since its foundation in the early twentieth century. Despite her close family connection to the temple, Lúcia was not initiated until she was an adult and she claims that the process made her feel like a baby. Having grown up around the temple and with her initiated relatives, she acknowledges that after her initiation the elders’ care for her intensified,

Our initiation is a gestation. Only afterwards do you come to understand that it is a gestation and that these people take enormous care of us. It really is as if we were a baby. Do you know what it’s like to wake up and have 60-year olds feed hot porridge into your hands? They take complete care of us young ones. Actually, they care for us throughout our lives as long as we are here, because in their eyes we will always be the youngest ones, and they are always the oldest. But once you are initiated, the care is even greater, they take things further.¹³¹

Explicitly describing initiation as a gestation, Lúcia suggests that she was reborn as a baby because age in Candomblé is measured from the act of initiation, so that seniority is determined by the amount of time one has been initiated into the religion. A young person who was initiated early in life may be considered older, wiser and more ritually knowledgeable than an older person who was initiated late in life. In such a case, the biologically younger person is higher in the hierarchy and holds more authority in the ritual context than an elderly person recently initiated. Lúcia’s narration makes clear that her affiliation to the temple intensified following

¹³⁰ Pseudonyms were used in the elaboration of the ethnography.

¹³¹ All translations were done by the author from Portuguese to English.

initiation, and that her place was further solidified as a member of both the biological and the ritual family, despite her nascent status as an adult initiate.

Consider Anajara's comments on the tension between her biological Mother Maristella, and her ritual mother Mother Gee following her initiation,

I have gone to Candomblé [houses] ever since I was two years old. My mother took me to every candomblé, that is my *biological* mother, she would take me to every Candomblé. So I know Candomblés in the Lower City, the Upper City and the Recôncavo. And my Mother Gee, when I got out of the *roncô* [ritual quarters] she said, hey look Kueganu¹³², this daughter is mine! And you will not be taking my daughter to [other] candomblés anymore because I want her to do one year of *resguardo* [refrain from ritual activities]. So it was really my Mother Gee's prerogative, because of a liturgical issue, of our liturgy.

Throughout the narration, Anajara qualifies the “biological” relationship with her mother Maristella, whereas her ritual Mother Gee remains unmarked. To clarify when a family member was not ritually constituted, initiates frequently use the term “biological” as a distinct relational status defined by the process of physical birth. Anajara expresses how following her initiation, Mother Gee claimed ownership over her as her daughter-in-saint (*filha de santo*) and guided her actions above her biological mother, Maristella. Brazilian scholar Vivaldo da Costa Lima noted that while not uncommon to have biological kin within Candomblé families, biological kinship is replaced by kinship constituted through initiation through rites of passage in the Candomblé religion.¹³³ As another iteration of rebirth, upon initiation each initiate is given a new name in the African language of the temple's tradition, which is used to address each initiate among the family. In the above passage, Mother Gee uses Maristella's ritual name, Kueganu, rather than her legal birth name, further emphasizing her authority as Mother to both Maristella and Anajara. Because Mother Gee is mother to both Anajara and Maristella as their initiator, within the family

¹³² Kueganu is the ritual name (*dijina*) of Anajara's mother, Maristella. Spelling is approximate based on oral recitation.

¹³³ Lima, *A Família de Santo*, p. 20.

of saints their biological mother and daughter relationship becomes one of sisters in saint (*irmãs de santo*).

The acknowledgment of “biological” relatives as derived from the act of physical birth from a gestating mother distinguishes from kin established through initiation. Despite the primacy of ritual kin following initiation, physical birth remains relevant in Candomblé rituals as it is the mechanism for producing generations of human initiates, and for tracking family lineages to African ancestors. To further highlight the importance of gestation, Candomblé families worship feminine deities associated with water, the embryonic fluid of fertility and maternity—most notably Oxum and Yemanjá¹³⁴. The following ethnographic example from an Egungun temple shows how Candomblé rituals value the gestational capacity of women as the force that guarantees the propagation of lineages, even in temples nominally led by men.

In Yoruba, the egungun are deceased relatives in heaven who maintain constant watch over their descendants on earth. The cults of the Egungun are characteristically run by male initiates as women are not allowed to initiate, though they participate selectively, perform central roles and can hold titles within the family. I arrived at the Egungun temple with privileged members of the family, introduced as a special guest by my host Conceição, who is highly respected because she is the biological granddaughter of the prestigious male founder. Conceição provided a detailed tour of the temple and introduced me to her sisters, sister-in-law, aunts, nephews, great-nephews and other relatives. The ceremony was like a family reunion, as the temple unites three historically and ritually important biological families from three Candomblé lineages in Salvador. When the ceremony started, the ancestral deities—Babás—called family members to the front of the ceremonial hall to discuss personal matters in the Yoruba language in

¹³⁴ I use the Brazilian Portuguese spelling for the deities. However, the “x” in Portuguese is pronounced as “sh” and the “m” more like an “n” in English. Anglophone spelling would be Oshun.

front of the entire family. Conceição told me that each person has a name associated with their position, given to them by the ancestors. The affiliated family members knew to pay attention and respond to the ancestor when called. At times the ancestor thanked the person for preparing or doing something in a pleasing way. Other times, the ancestor seemed irritated and people appeared hesitant to approach it. At certain moments the Babá spirit lunged towards the men and chased them with the sharp objects; at one point I was certain one was up in a tree. I often heard people talking about the possibility of the men receiving a beating, though no women were under that threat.

After several Babás came and went, the ceremony culminated with a very special *Oxum*—the specific patron deity of the deceased Mother Senhora do Opô Afonjá, who died in 1967. Mother Senhora has the prestigious status of being a biological descendant of Iyá Nassô—remembered as a “Yoruba Princess” and founder of the matriarchal lineage of the Terreiro Casa Branca.¹³⁵ Oshum exhibits characteristics that are considered feminine in Brazilian society—she is known for her elegance, sensuality and vanity. She wears expensive, vibrant jewelry and is associated with fresh waters that have the power of purification and fertility. Oshum danced in front of the family and called her mediums before her. She gave a beautiful bouquet of flowers to a young woman in the family who reflected her divine qualities and demeanor. Towards the end of the ceremony once Oshum had left the ceremonial hall, elderly women helped pour water from a decorated cauldron to hand out to everyone present. Conceição told me that the water is purifying, and especially good for the uterus. The fifty women who had been seated in the lines of chairs now waited for little yellow plastic cups of ritual water. Most were impatient, and with

¹³⁵ See the media characterization of Mother Senhora as the “Black Mother of Brazil” in *A Tarde*, May 13, 1980 and Matory, *Black Atlantic Religions*; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Deoscoredes Maximiliano dos Santos, *História de um terreiro nagô: crônica histórica* (São Paulo: Carthago & Forte, 1994).

good reason. Conceição kept commenting that the men were getting more of the water, “and they don’t even have uteruses!” Conceição’s frustration that the men were pushing their way to the front to get a cup of Oshum’s water first was not only a grievance against selfish masculine behavior, but a recognition of the biological dissonance between them and the ritual substance specifically destined for women to improve their gestational force. The women around me made sure to get me a cup, encouraging that I too take care of my fertility.

My experience at the Egungun temple made clear that even when men are leaders of temples and key participants, the rituals remain attentive to caring for the physical uterus as the mechanism of reproduction—and that men also participate in feminine rituals. In a temple like the Egungun that prioritizes the union of biological families to maintain communication with the African ancestors, the care to protect fertility provides a means to guarantee the continuation of the family lineage. The ethnographic example suggests that the Candomblé family values the gestational capacity of women in order to continue both the biological and ritual families of African descent because without healthy reproduction, the Candomblé family lineages cannot continue. Candomblé Mothers have ancestral potency because they birth children into a biological lineage and birth numerous other children into an African ritual lineage through initiation. In contrast, Fathers can only birth children into the ritual African lineage. The role of initiator as a gestating mother is the vital relation established within the Candomblé family, making the question “who initiated you?” the most relevant for evaluating the child’s spiritual power and potential—*axé*. Fathers who initiate children also play this role of reproducer of

lineages. Although, the role of initiator is feminized, and an attention to the female body's potential to gestate remains central to the rituals that produce Candomblé families.¹³⁶

Candomblé Mothers who were born into Black Brazilian families with generations of Candomblé practice are the most respected as sources of African ritual knowledge because of the double transmission of blood and *axé*¹³⁷— the vital energetic force of the ancestors. Axé is shared among the family of saints and transmitted through the initiation process. Analytically separating family constituted through initiation as ritual gestation and family constituted through physical gestation makes clear how both blood as biological inheritance and axé as an ancestral inheritance bond Candomblé family and constitute the force of one's ritual power. Candomblé Mothers belonging to biological family lineages with generations of Candomblé leadership in Bahia are considered the most prestigious and potent holders of axé.¹³⁸

Because biological family connections to Africa are most visibly read through skin color in the racial colorism of Bahia, Brazil, white and white-passing initiates are generally considered by Candomblé initiates to have less axé and therefore less ritual force. Nevertheless, white Brazilian initiates with no identifiable markers of African descent gain access to axé, perform rituals, lead temples, initiate children, and perpetuate lineages through their incorporation into the family through initiation as gestation. While there are many white initiates and increasingly white Mothers and Fathers of temples (especially spreading in Southern Brazil), clearly the elderly Mothers with visible African descent from Bahia are most valued as sources of ancestral

¹³⁶ I do not mean to suggest that Candomblé Fathers are all feminine, or that all initiators must exhibit feminine qualities. I am arguing that the roles of initiator and head of the family are based on qualities of maternity. This may also be an explanation for why Candomblé has attracted so many “effeminate” male priests to occupy this position. See also Peter Fry, “Male Homosexuality and Afro-Brazilian Possession Cults”. In: *Latin American Male Homosexualities*, Stephen O. Murray (ed). (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

¹³⁷ The Anglophone spelling and pronunciation would be “Ashé”.

¹³⁸ Lima, *A família de santo*; Luis Nicolau Parés and Lisa Earl Castillo, “Marcelina da Silva: A Nineteenth-Century Candomblé Priestess in Bahia”, *Slavery & Abolition* (Vol. 31, Issue 1, pp. 1-27, 2010).

knowledge—full of axé. For these reasons, white-passing Fathers work especially hard to affiliate themselves with Black Candomblé Mothers to benefit from their recognized ancestral force and widespread respect.

Consider the tensions and distinct trajectories of two Candomblé leaders who were initiated by the same Mother, referred to here as Mother Mel. Lara is the biological granddaughter of Mother Mel and is the current Mother of the temple originally founded by her grandmother in 1948. Lara inherited Mother Mel's legacy as a member of both her biological and spiritual lineage, and currently leads the temple on the same ritual territory in the predominantly Black neighborhood her family called home. Maintaining Mother Mel's ritual practice on her religious territory in the neighborhood she supported throughout her life is a main priority for the current family of saints. Mother Lara describes her Mother Mel as an extraordinarily strong woman, a fighter and a community leader. In 2003 the temple was registered as a state cultural heritage site by the Institute for Historic and Artistic Patrimony (IPAC). In 2018, the temple organized seminars, ceremonies, and public activities to commemorate seventy years since Mother Mel's foundation of the temple, which attracted broad public and political support.

Throughout her 41-year reign as the Mother of her temple, Mother Mel initiated many children to whom she was not biologically related. In the 1970s Mother Mel initiated Tata Marcos, a white-passing man from Rio de Janeiro, who became a special confidant and the only child to live with her full time in the temple. Following her death, which caused a succession crisis in her temple, Tata Marcos split and founded his own temple in Salvador to continue her lineage of the Angolan nation. The authority to open his own temple, and its legitimacy in the eyes of others, was based entirely on his spiritual inheritance from Mother Mel and her initiators

in the Angolan nation, descending back to the late nineteenth century. His ceremonial hall is decorated with painted portraits of her as the Mother of the lineage. In addition, because of his degrees in higher education and connections to influential figures, Tata Marcos has been very successful in receiving political and financial support for his temple, which in 2016 was also registered as a state cultural heritage site by the Bahian state government. He also garnered support to construct a new, well-designed and well-funded formal memorial inside the temple that displays his spiritual inheritance through the genealogy of Mother Mel. Furthermore, the memorial and private archive inside the temple include historical and personal materials belonging Mother Mel –including a rare personal photo album of her life that is kept hidden and distance from her other family, possessed instead in Tata Marcos’ private collection.

While Tata Marcos has been successful politically as a Candomblé Priest, a tension remains regarding his biological ancestry as a man of European descent. In Bahia, a state with a vast majority of Afro-descendants, Tata Marcos is considered white, though he strategically identifies himself as the following,

I am from Rio de Janeiro. My mother was from São Paulo, the daughter of an Italian mother and a Portuguese father, and my father was from Pernambuco, the son of a slave and an Indian... I am of Candomblé, and I think I am the union of the Brazilian people.¹³⁹

Tata Marcos’ self-presentation presents the ideal of racial harmony uplifted by conservative discourses of Brazilian racial democracy.¹⁴⁰ His careful formulation of biological inheritance attempts to place himself as a legitimate heir of the Candomblé religion, distancing himself from

¹³⁹ This statement was presented in the state evaluation for his temple to be registered as a Bahian state cultural heritage site by IPAC. I have kept the priest anonymous for this analysis.

¹⁴⁰ The theory of racial democracy is the dominant trope of race relations in Brazil, constructed as a counterpoint to the U.S. racial segregation throughout the 20th century. Largely credited to Gilberto Freyre and his seminal work, *The Masters and Slaves* (1933), written after his training with Franz Boas in New York, the theory posits a uniquely Brazilian racial harmony based on the cultural influences of African, indigenous and European heritages. See Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*, Chapter 1; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Nascimento, *The Sorcery of Color*.

his perceived whiteness. The need to justify his family ancestry as only half-European and include that his father was “the son of a slave” further points to the importance of having even minimal proof an African biological family as a member of the Candomblé religion. The authority he has constructed as an inheritor of the Angolan nation, however, comes directly from his initiation by Mother Mel rather than any contribution from his birth family.

The distinct trajectories of Mother Lara and Tata Marcos demonstrate the extent to which the biological racial family remains a potent force for the proper continuation of lineages in Candomblé. The work that Tata Marcos must do to legitimate his place in Mother Mel’s lineage is more seamlessly achieved by Mother Laura through her biological affiliation and rightful inheritance of the temple as a member of both the biological and ritual family. I have heard from Black initiates at other temples, including some individuals who have publicly stood beside Tata Marcos, that they do not actually take his authority seriously as a true possessor of axé. While they may appreciate the work he does to defend the religion and publicly represent it in the face of religious intolerance and racism, his ritual authority does not come close to that of Mother Mel, Mother Gee, or of other respected Candomblé Mothers who come from a family of clear African descent and generations within Candomblé temples in Bahia. The example emphasizes that while access to the family may be granted through initiation as gestation, the most potent leaders of Candomblé have both biological inheritance and ritual inheritance from Africa, with clear racial connotations.

Matriarchal Lineages

In many Candomblé houses today, both men and women lead as the heads of the Candomblé family. However, specific lineages are “matriarchal,” requiring female leadership by head

Mothers as a feature of what they define as their African heritage.¹⁴¹ Few lineages, by contrast, are “patriarchal,” and my research suggests that most temples in Brazil today have no gendered designation for the temple’s leader. I argue that whether the Candomblé lineage is matriarchal, patriarchal, or mixed gender, the Candomblé family continues to value the Mothers as key to the perpetuation of ancestral ritual knowledge and practice. Since the provocative work of Ruth Landes in the 1940s, scholars have debated the importance of Candomblé Mothers as religious leaders in a context of American racism and the Brazilian colonial legacy of Catholic patriarchy.¹⁴² However, mid-twentieth century scholarship characterized female leadership as particular to the Yoruba-descended (the Ketu or Nagô) nations, portraying the Bantu descended (Congo-Angolan) nations as led by men and frequently, gay men.¹⁴³ The Angolan Nation in Bahia has historically been recognized for its male leaders, most notably Manoel Bernardino do Paixão, Manoel Ciriaco de Jesus, Joãozinho da Gomeia, founders of the Bate Folha, the Tumba Junçara and the Gomeian lineages respectively.¹⁴⁴ No recent scholarship has specifically

¹⁴¹ For the rest of this analysis I use the term “matriarch” and “matriarchal” to refer through an ethnographic category to the head priestesses and the organization of temple leadership around women. As stated in the introduction, the form of descent through the Mother resembles more of what is understood as matriliney in anthropological scholarship.

¹⁴² Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”; Landes, *The City of Women*; Melville Herskovits, “Review of The City of Women” (*American Anthropologist*, Jan-Mar 1947); Woortmann, *A família das mulheres*; Mark Healey, “The Sweet Matriarchy of Bahia’: Ruth Landes’ Ethnography of race and gender” (*Disposition* XXiii.50, 1998, pp. 87-116); Patricia Birman, *Fazer estilo criando gêneros: Possessão e diferenças de gênero em terreiros de umbanda e candomblé no Rio De Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UERJ, 1995); Mariza Correa, “Prefácio: Esboços no espelho” in Ruth Landes, *A Cidade das Mulheres* (2a edição, Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2002); Maria S. Joaquim, *O papel da liderança religiosa feminina na construção da identidade negra*. (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2001); Sally Cole, *Ruth Landes: A Life in Anthropology* (University of Nebraska Press, 2003); Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Hita, *A Casa das mulheres*.

¹⁴³ Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”; Edison Carneiro, *Os Candomblés da Bahia* (Bahia: Museu do Estado – n. 8, 1948).

¹⁴⁴ Other notable male Angolan leaders in late 19th century Salvador included Gregório Macuende and Miguel Archanjo de Souza.

revisited the debates on gender in the Angolan nation, analyzed here comparatively with the more familiar characterizations of “matriarchal” Yoruba lineages.¹⁴⁵

The highly respected Mothers of Candomblé who gain the title of *matriarca* share common, identifiable traits. The most respected Candomblé Mothers were born biological women of visible African descent, have an advanced age of initiation and occupy leadership positions as head Mothers of their temple. The most iconic matriarchs are those that can document their biological ancestry to the African continent – for example Mãe Aninha, Mãe Olga de Alaketu, Mãe Senhora and Mãe Menininha. Especially privileged are the Mothers who inherited the ritual traditions of orthodox Candomblé temples within the Iyá Nassô lineage founded around the 1830s in the Casa Branca Temple.¹⁴⁶ The following analysis shows that when biological and initiatory kin align in the family of saints, claims to ancestral knowledge and African religious authority are most respected among Candomblé members and are most legible to the Brazilian public.

Generations of anthropologists have written about the foundation of the Engenho Velho (also called the Casa Branca) temple by an African woman referred to as Iyá Nassô in 1830s Salvador.¹⁴⁷ The origin story of Casa Branca as the first recognized and institutionalized

¹⁴⁵ I refer to Yoruba lineages as those that use the Yoruba language in ritual, though they may identify as part of the Ketu or Nagô nations of Candomblé. The most recent scholarship to question Ruth Landes’s claims to matriarchy in Candomblé explicitly is Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*. He argues that Ruth Landes imposed the framework of matriarchy onto the Bahian Candomblé religious structure as a North American feminist project. He claims that both she and Edison Carneiro ignored “copious evidence against their own interpretive models”, especially the presence of male fathers-of-the-saint and heterosexual male priests. However, their scholarship informed popular conceptions of the religion, as he concedes: “Yet Landes’ tendentious interpretation of this evidence clearly changed the minds and conduct of Candomblé’s leading bourgeois allies and, consequently, the conditions of that religion’s production in Brazilian society” (p. 193). For a more detailed discussion of Ruth Landes’ arguments, field work experience in Bahia and relationship with Edison Carneiro, see Jamie Lee Andreson, *Ruth Landes e a Cidade das Mulheres: uma releitura da antropologia do Candomblé* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2019).

¹⁴⁶ Mother Aninha, Mother Menininha, Mother Olga de Alaketu and Mother Senhora are among the most iconic examples.

¹⁴⁷ Carneiro, *Os Candomblés*; Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a sociology of the interpenetration of Civilizations* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Pierre Verger, *Orixás* (Salvador: Corrupio, 1981); Lima, *A família de santo*; Capone, *Searching for Africa*, p. 213-214.

Candomblé temple in the history of Brazil helped to characterize African female leadership as a central tenant of the religion's development.¹⁴⁸ Recent historical research confirms that Iyá Nassô's daughter, Marcelina da Silva (ritual name Obá Tossi), was an African-born woman who lived in Bahia as a slave in the 1820s. In 1837, she made a voyage back to Africa before returning to Brazil to replace Iyá Nassô as the head priestess of the Casa Branca Temple.¹⁴⁹ Iyá Nassô is not a Yoruba name but rather a ritual title, corresponding to ritual obligations of great importance to the palace of the King of Oyó in present-day Nigeria.¹⁵⁰ Due to their close proximity to Africa through biological family, transatlantic travel and ritual networks, the temples that descend from Iyá Nassô (including Gantois and Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá) are the most celebrated centers of African culture in the country.

Two key examples of highly celebrated Candomblé priestesses demonstrate how the overlap of ritual and biological family lineages makes the ritual power of the Mothers as representatives of African ancestry in Brazil. Take Mother Senhora, the biological great granddaughter of Marcelina (Obá Tossi –the first daughter-initiate of Iyá Nassô at the Casa Branca), who led the Opô Afonjá temple from 1942 to 1967.¹⁵¹ Because of Senhora's biological and spiritual connection to Obá Tossi, intellectuals, artists, the media and Candomblé practitioners revered her as a twentieth century embodiment of the African ancestors, confirmed through both ritual and consanguineal family ties.¹⁵² In a similar vein, the Candomblé priestess

¹⁴⁸ This process is explained in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁹ Castillo and Parés, "Marcelina da Silva", p. 5. The research also suggests that Iyá Nassô was Francisca da Silva, a Nagô woman who owned Marcelina da Silva as a slave and took her on the 1837 voyage together with Marcelina's daughter Maria Magdalena. The authors assert that slave owning among the same ethnic group of Nagôs (Yoruba-speakers) in Salvador was a strategy to keep kin groups close and living together. Marcelina da Silva herself owned other African slaves once she was freed. She died on June 27, 1885.

¹⁵⁰ Vivaldo da Costa Lima, "Ainda sobre a nação de queto" IN *Faraímará: Mãe Stella 60 anos de iniciação* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1999), p. 69, 71.

¹⁵¹ Lima, "Ainda Sobre", p. 77. A quote from Maria Senhora said to Vivaldo da Costa Lima.

¹⁵² A full discussion of Mother Senhora and her trajectory as a widely celebrated "Black Mother" is presented in Chapter 2. See also Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion* and Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*.

Mother Menininha, was the great granddaughter of the freed African woman Maria Júlia da Conceição Nazareth, founder of the Gantois Temple in 1849.¹⁵³ The Gantois Temple and its sister temples Casa Branca and Opô Afonjá have been characterized by their centennial female leadership with traceable biological ancestry from West Africa. The temples descending from Iyá Nassô explicitly define themselves “matriarchal” as a principle of their religious practice and a central tenant of their African heritage. They have also gained the greatest public visibility, government recognition and attention from the media and academic scholarship.¹⁵⁴

Despite the prevalence of African female leadership in the most historic Candomblé temples of Salvador, the gender requirement of the temple’s leader is based on the ritual rules of each specific lineage. The Bate Folha temple, for example, is considered the longest running temple of the Congo-Angolan nation, founded by Manuel Bernardino da Paixão officially in 1916. Since its foundation, the temple has been run by five successive Fathers and the temple officially presents its heritage as requiring male leadership. My ethnographic research shows, however, that even patriarchal temples like Bate Folha that have been led by men for over one hundred years have powerful Mothers as ritual authorities. In fact, most male-led houses I worked with referred to an elderly dark-skinned woman as their source of African ancestral knowledge.¹⁵⁵

Mother Gee, the oldest living member of the Bate Folha temple at 94 years of age, was initiated by the second Father of the house, Tata Bandanguame (Antônio José da Silva). Her own

¹⁵³Cida Nóbrega and Regina Echeverria, *Mãe menina do Gantois: uma biografia* (Salvador: Corrupio, 2006); Lisa Earl Castillo, "O Terreiro Do Gantois: Redes Sociais E Etnografia Histórica No Século XIX." (*Revista De História*, 2017).

¹⁵⁴ Capone, *Searching for Africa*; Sterling, *Brazilian Rites, African Roots*.

¹⁵⁵ As emphasized by scholar Cheryl Sterling, “[Fathers] are often certified and endorsed in their roles because of a relationship to a [Mother]. Either the [Father] inherits a terreiro from his biological mother or is sanctioned to open a terreiro from his Mother- initiate (*Brazilian Rites, African Roots*, p, 28). The original text uses the ritual Portuguese term “Pais” for Fathers and “mães-de-santo” for Mothers.

biological grandmother, who was born likely in mid-19th Century Salvador, took her to the Bate Folha temple as a child. As she recounts, “I frequented the temple during the times of the founder, Seu Bernardino”. She remembers how “[Bernardino] did not want to initiate me, because I was a child and he did not like to initiate children. So, I stayed there, I stayed for some time, until Seu Bernardino died.”¹⁵⁶ Her proximity to the founding period of the temple’s trajectory makes her the central reference in her lineage. As the spiritual leader of the house, she guarantees the legitimacy of the ritual foundations to future generations of initiates. Although the Bate Folha temple is still led by a male priest as the public representative of the temple, dealing with political matters and logistics, he too looks to Mother Gee as the ancestral force of the lineage.

The patriarchal tradition of Bate Folha is sanctioned by the founding deity of the temple, Bamburecema (referred to as Iansã in the Ketu/Nagô nations). She rules the land and the Bate Folha family as the guidance from Bernardino’s personal deity. Bamburecema is the force of a strong woman warrior, associated with winds, lightening and storms; she is volatile and explosive—strong-headed and opiniated. Several oral histories recount the fervor of Bernardino’s Bamburecema, who granted him fame and financial fortune throughout his lifetime. The temple’s oral history recounts how during his consultations (*jogo de búzios*), Bernardino would receive his deity through spirit possession in order to address the spiritual necessities of his clients. In one session, his Bamburecema helped a wealthy white woman with a serious personal problem. As a gesture of appreciation, the client offered to provide the funds

¹⁵⁶ Interview at the Terreiro Bate Folha (Agência Experimental, UFBA, September 14, 2016). Original in Portuguese: “não quis me recolher porque eu era menina e ele não gostava de recolher menina, aí eu fui ficando, ficando e tal, até Seu Bernardino falecer”. Carla Nogueira of the Bate Folha Temple assured me that the claim that Bernardino did not initiate “girls” referred to her age and not her gender, meaning that Bernardino did not initiate children, not just specifically girls.

necessary for him to purchase and found his own temple.¹⁵⁷ Because of this incident, to this day Bate Folha affirms that the land was granted by Bamburecema, who is the “owner” of the land and the temple’s patron deity. A member of Bate Folha once told me that after the second Priest Bandaguame died, Mother Gee sought out a divine consultation with one of the most widely respected Candomblé leaders of the time, Mother Menininha, to ask the deities if she could lead the Bate Folha temple as the head Mother. Mother Menininha’s consultation confirmed that only men can lead the house, stating that Mother Gee could not take over the position because Bamburecema does not allow women to lead Bate Folha.¹⁵⁸

Despite the official sanction of patriarchal leadership, my research suggests that Mother Gee is currently considered the living ancestral force and most respected member of the Bate Folha lineage. Her presence is essential at every initiation, ritual offering and ceremony. During the public *festas* (ceremonies), once the deities arrive in the bodies of the initiates, she leads them at the front of a line of approximately a dozen deities while they slowly make their way into the ceremonial hall. The repeated visual of her, a 94-year-old dark-skinned woman, leading the procession of spirits as a divine communicator and their trusted guide, makes it hard to accept the “patriarchal” liturgy of the temple. During the ceremonies she is the first to enter the ceremonial hall—even before the head priest. She is then seated in the most privileged chair as she oversees the ceremony, taking care of the deities and initiates as needed. During every visit to the Bate Folha temple I have been greeted by the head priest as the host who socializes and

¹⁵⁷ Erivaldo Sales Nunes, “Contribuição para a história do candomblé Congo-Angola na Bahia: O Terreiro de Bernardino do Bate Folha (1916-1946)” (Doctoral thesis in History. Salvador: Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2016), p. 248-9. Personal conversation with Dona Olga Conceição Cruz, September 16, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ There’s a lot to be said about why Mother Menininha would interpret the lineage this way—perhaps as a means of differentiation, because her house is led only by women. A skeptic might propose that she didn’t want to compete with Mother Gee in the religious economy of Candomblé in Salvador. Or perhaps through personal affiliations with Bernardino (they were close during his lifetime), Mother Menininha wanted to respect his wishes of establishing a patriarchal tradition. A religious viewpoint accepts the decision not as a reflection of human interpretation or choice, but as “the will of the gods”.

manages the event logistics. In contrast, I can only greet Mother Gee when she is free from ritual demands. During ceremonies, she is the first to rise and the first to go to bed—perhaps awake and on her feet for nearly twenty-four hours. On days without ritual obligations, I had to wait patiently in the temple while others confirm in the main house that she is available and in good condition. Paying respects to Mother Gee is both expected for visitors and delicately managed by the initiates who protect her. Once granted access to her, I bend down to kiss her hand as a blessing and sign of reverence. Never in such circumstances does she rise from her chair—she is tended to by all who orbit around her.

Additional historical research on leaders in the Angolan nation confirm the presence of Angolan Candomblé Mothers in Bahia at least since the nineteenth century. The absence of these women in popular historical narratives of the religion is in part due to the collaborations between scholars and the matriarchal temples descending from Iyá Nassô, which in the early twentieth century came to publicly define the Yoruba-descended houses as led by women and the Angolan-descended houses as led by men. The scholars involved in this project—most notably Edison Carneiro and Ruth Landes—based such assumptions on the visible presence of male priests leading well-known Angolan temples in Salvador. During their research in 1938-1939 Salvador, the pair encountered narratives of the male Angolan priests Bernardino, Ciriaco and Joãozinho da Gomeia, including gossip surrounding their sexual orientation.¹⁵⁹ Landes also

¹⁵⁹ Researching Ruth Landes' field notes in the National Anthropological Archive (NAA) of the Smithsonian Institute revealed that she herself never met Bernardino, but only heard other people talk of him. Her notes make it seem that he was very well known among other Candomblé houses. One note exclaimed "Bernardino views himself as 'the King of Candomblé'". Several notes show that Mother Menininha especially spoke of him often to Landes while she visited the Gantois temple. A list made by Edison Carneiro placed Bernardino alongside other homosexual male priests recorded in Landes' notebook (though I cannot conjecture as to why they were making such a list). Landes visited Tumba Junçara and met Ciriaco, but little else is recorded about him. Regarding Joãozinho da Gomeia, one of Landes's central informants (Zezé) called him a "viado descarado"—a pejorative slang applied to a gay man, translated something like a "raunchy fag". She met Joãozinho at the Lavagem do Bonfim (a popular Catholic festival) in Salvador and later wrote that he is "visibly a homo, go[es] around in trousers and taken

conducted extensive research with Angolan Mothers Sabina and Idalice, though she did not highlight them as principal examples of matriarchs in her 1947 ethnography, *The City of Women*. Instead, the published ethnography focuses on the Yoruba lineage of women from the Casa Branca, Gantois and Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temples through the central figures of Mother Aninha, Mother Meninha, Mother Flaviana and Mother Maximiana.

A key Mother of the Angolan nation, Maria Nenem (Maria Genoveva do Bonfim, 1865-1945), has yet to be included in analyses of matriarchy in Candomblé. Edison Carneiro recognized her as a prolific Mother of Angola, though she is entirely absent from Ruth Landes's ethnography, which came to define the conversation of female leadership in the Candomblé religion. Carneiro noted how Maria Nenem initiated an enormous load of children (*filharada*) in her house, some of whom move on to establish and lead their own houses in the Tumbensi lineage.¹⁶⁰ Vivaldo da Costa Lima also acknowledged the large size of her initiatory groups, remarking on the "famous case of the late Maria Nenem, who left an enormous generation of children on 'the side of Angola.'"¹⁶¹ One of her adopted children, Manoel Boiadeiro, recalled in an oral history that she was his "Angolan Mother", who "did not have legitimate sons or daughters, but raised many children."¹⁶² In 1936, Donald Pierson characterized the sect of Maria Nenem as "that most influenced by the Angolan tradition."¹⁶³ Oral histories registered by the Bahian State confirm, "she became well-known in Bahia for adopting many children and raising them as if they were her biological children until adults... Considered one of the most beloved

officially as a man". Box 9: Series 1: Research Materials – Notebooks. Ruth Landes Papers, NAA, Smithsonian Museum.

¹⁶⁰ Carneiro, *Os Candomblés da Bahia*, 82.

¹⁶¹ This statement comes from an interview with a woman initiated by Maria Nenem in an initiatory group (*barco*) of 21 initiates. Cited in Lima, *A família de santo*, 77.

¹⁶² This statement comes from an oral history I conducted with Tata Laérico Sacramento, recalling words from his conversations with Manoel Boiadiero in the 1990s.

¹⁶³ Donald Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil: A study of race contact at Bahia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 278.

Candomblé priestesses in Salvador during her time, she was also called the ‘Mother of Angola’, even though she was not the founder of the nation.”¹⁶⁴ She earned this title for initiating two of the most prominent figures in the Angolan Nation, Manoel Ciriaco de Jesus, the founder of Tumba Junçara, and Manoel Bernardino da Paixão, the founder of the Bate Folha Temple.¹⁶⁵

Maria Nenem lived twenty-three years of her life with slavery as a legal institution in Brazil. Of her life trajectory prior to arriving in Bahia, almost nothing is known. All oral histories agree that she was “Gauchá” (of European descent) from the South of Brazil, but she was initiated by an African man named Roberto Barros Reis. The Tumbensi lineage claims that Roberto Barros Reis was an African captive from Angola, enslaved in Bahia in the nineteenth century to the wealthy and politically important Barros Reis family.¹⁶⁶ Maria Nenem’s initiation by Roberto Barros Reis legitimizes her ritual foundations as having derived directly from the African continent, though she herself does not have verifiable African ancestors in her biological family lineage. She died at 81 years of age on April 22, 1945 in Salvador, and two local newspapers published her obituary with confirmation of her role as a Candomblé priestess, describing her as “one of the most traditional cultivators of the African sects in this capital”.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ IPAC, *Processo de Tombamento: Tumba Junçara* (Salvador: IPAC, 2018), 41.

¹⁶⁵ The Bate Folha temple claims that their founder, Bernardino, was initiated by an African man from the Congo, Manoel Nkosi, in the Recôncavo region of Bahia, where Bernardino grew up. They assert that he was not initiated by Maria Nenem, but rather performed a secondary ritual called *tirar a mão de vumbe* when Manoel Nkosi died. This ritual takes away the “hand” of the first initiator and transfers the “head” of the initiate to a new ritual leader, in this case Maria Nenem, once his first initiator died. For this reason Bate Folha claims to be Congo-Angola, as a mixture of the rituals Bernardino inherited from Manoel Nkosi and Maria Nenem. See also Erivaldo Sales Nunes, “Contribuição para a história do Candomblé Congo-Angola na Bahia: O Terreiro de Bernardino do Bate Folha (1916-1946)” (Doctoral thesis, Salvador: UFBA, 2016), 288.

¹⁶⁶ Esmeraldo Emetério de Santana, “Nação Angola” IN *Encontro de Nações* (Salvador: CEAO, UFBA, 1984), pp. 36, 37; IPAC, *Processo de Tombamento: Tumba Junçara* (Salvador: IPAC, 2018), p. 41.

¹⁶⁷ *A Tarde*, April 13, 1945.

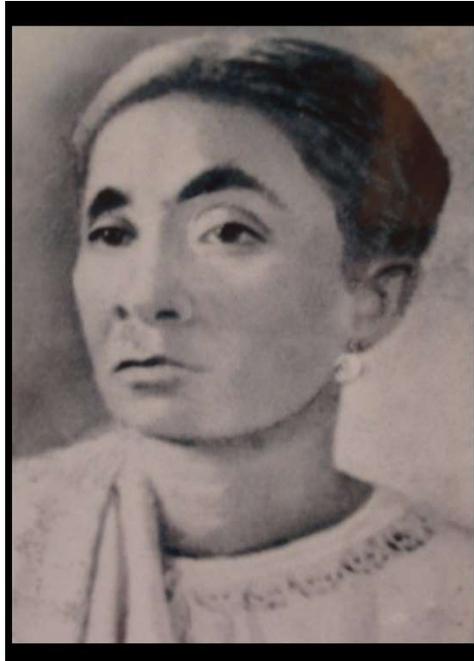


Figure 2: The only existing photograph of the Angloan Mother Maria Nenem (Maria Genoveva do Bonfim), often reproduced by her ritual descendants in ceremonial halls, on Facebook and temple blogs online.

Maria Nenem's ritual son Manuel Ciriaco established his temple Tumba Junçara in 1919. The state evaluation of their history, conducted through interviews with the temple leaders, presents their historical trajectory as the following:

The lineage [...] is represented by the matriarch Maria Genoveva do Bonfim, known by the name Maria Neném, with the *dijina* [ritual title] of *Tudenda day Nzambi*. She was born in 1865 in Rio Grande do Sul and was initiated and “made” into Candomblé by Roberto Barros Reis, a freed slave from the province of Cabinda, Southern Africa, probably in the beginning of the 20th Century.¹⁶⁸

In contrast to Bate Folha's explicit male leadership, Tumba Junçara does not have gender requirements for their leader, allowing both priests and priestesses to serve as heads of the temple. Throughout their hundred-year history they have had two male and two female heads of

¹⁶⁸ IPAC, *Processo de Tombamento: Tumba Junçara* (Salvador: IPAC, 2018), p. 41. As demonstrated later in this chapter, Roberto Barros Reis died in 1892, therefore if he initiated Maria Nenem, the date could not have been as projected here in “the early 20th century”.

house, with the current Mother Iralides Maria da Cunha leading the temple for over three decades. Despite the founding of the temple by Ciriaco, they explicitly refer to Maria Nenem as their *matriarca* (Matriarch). I argue that Maria Nenem has not been celebrated as a prominent matriarchal figure because she does not have verifiable African ancestry, she was not born in Bahia (the epicenter of African heritage in Brazil), and because she was a Mother in the Angolan nation, which after her death, became characterized by the male leaders she initiated.

During research leaders of the Angolan nation presented discourses to justify their underrepresentation in scholarship—the Angolan temples are more secretive, more hidden and distant from the city center; they were uninterested in hosting researchers and appearing in the press, in contrast to the Yoruba matriarchal temples that gained such public visibility and fame.¹⁶⁹ The oral histories surrounding Mariquinha Lembá, an Angolan Mother of the Paketan lineage, reflect these narratives. The most prominent, accessible narrative I could access of Mariquinha Lembá’s legacy states that during her life spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, she would not talk to white people. Such claims are repeated by her spiritual descendants in the 21st century, often with an attitude of Black pride. Consequently, her lineage is little represented in the academic narratives of Candomblé traditions, which were mostly produced by white and foreign scholars.¹⁷⁰ Her legal name was Maria Rufino Duarte and her

¹⁶⁹ While it is possible that Angolan houses were more closed off than temples of other nations, it is also worth considering the economy of secrecy in Candomblé. See more of such analysis in Johnson, *Secrets, Gossips and Gods*.

¹⁷⁰ Two main scholars who started the field of academic Candomblé study in late 19th Century Bahia were Brazilian men of European descent, Nina Rodrigues and Artur Ramos. The most influential foreign white scholars who studied Candomblé in the 20th century included Donald Pierson, Ruth Landes and Melville Herskovits from the United States, as well as Roger Bastide and Pierre Verger from France. For a more detailed discussion of the foundational scholars in the field of Afro-Brazilian studies, see Anadelia Romo, *Brazil’s Living Museum: Race, reform and tradition in Bahia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Cole, *Ruth Landes*; Stefania Capone, “Transatlantic Dialogue: Roger Bastide and the African American Religions” in Stephan Palmié (ed.), *Africas of the Americas: Beyond the search for origins in the study of Afro-Atlantic Religions* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 255-292; Maurício Barros de Castro and Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos, “Um Verger, dois olhares: A construção da africanidade brasileira por um estrangeiro” (*Caderno CRH*, Vol. 29, Issue 76, 2016), 149.

birth year is unknown, though she died in 1928 and was likely older than Maria Nenem. Mariquinha Lembá's chosen silence in public and academic narratives is considered by many Candomblé members a sign of her loyalty and dedication to her religion, as well as indignation with white observers and recorders who often meddled in and misrepresented the religious traditions. Mariquinha Lembá's distrust in white inquirers must be contextualized within the long history of religious persecution and repression of Candomblé by the state, as well as the racially deterministic narratives produced about the religion in written works by academics and journalists of her time.¹⁷¹

Interested in narratives of a nineteenth century Angolan Mother, I sought out oral histories of Mariquinha Lembá from members of the Angolan nation. When asking one Angolan Father, he responded, "she is impenetrable, you won't find things about her." With time I came to find that Mariquinha Lembá's memory is safeguarded by the politics of race in the Paketan lineage, which has been led primarily by women in majority Black neighborhoods, particularly in the Lower City of Salvador.¹⁷² Like Maria Nenem (and unlike the Nagô matriarchal lineages), Mariquinha Lembá also initiated influential men into the Angolan Nation, who gained visibility in the Candomblé scene of Salvador in the mid-twentieth century, most notably Nikássio Manoel dos Reis. Unlike Maria Nenem, however, Mariquinha Lembá initiated few children into her lineage, as she was very rigid, valued silent observation and took great care in guarding her

¹⁷¹Rachel Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*; Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum*; Angela Luhnig, "Acabe com este santo, Pedrito vem aí..." (*Revista USP* 28 (Feb 1995/6)).

¹⁷² Santos, *Mapeamento dos Terreiros de Salvador*. The sociological mapping of Candomblé temples throughout the city of Salvador showed a high concentration of Angolan temples led by women in the lower city (*cidade baixa*), especially the neighborhoods Alto da Terezinha (p. 67), Alto de Coutos (p. 68), Curuzu (p. 92), Paripe (p. 122), Periperi (p. 127), Pero Vaz (p. 130), Pirajá (p. 131), and principally in the Plataforma neighborhood with twenty-six Angolan temples, nineteen of which were led by a female priestess (p. 133). Clediana Ramos, "A casa que vela por uma nação" IN: Aristides Alves (Coord.), *A Casa dos olhos do tempo que fala da nação Angolão Paquetan* (Salvador, Bahia: ASA Foto, 2010).

religious foundations (*fundamentos*).¹⁷³ Nikássio continued her Paketan lineage and initiated influential women who gained fame, especially Maria Olho de Gato and Dorotéa de Carvalho. Through introductions from other Angolan leaders, I met Taata¹⁷⁴ Edinho, a contemporary Paketan Father and the ritual grandson of Dorotéa de Carvalho. What follows is his account of Mariquinha Lemba's memory, mediated through his close relation with his Candomblé Mother (not biological), Kasindê (Angelina Santana), who was initiated by Dorotéa de Carvalho, his "grandmother in saint." Taata Edinho perpetuates Mariquinha Lembá's lineage through his temple's ceremonial calendar, ritual language and the pantheon of deities worshipped.

During our conversation, Edinho presented Mariquinha Lembá as being from a royal Angolan family, who was enslaved and brought to Brazil. In distinct moments, he slowly her life story, paraphrased here: "She was the first in the Paketan nation in Brazil, a daughter of a king and queen." Her parents were from Angola, they were the *Sobas*¹⁷⁵ Riala and Mahuta. They came to Brazil and founded an African cult as enslaved people— "but they knew how to write! Not every slave was stupid."¹⁷⁶ The narrative restored dignity to his lineage at that same time Tata Edinho confronted stereotypes of the descendants of slaves, and the tensions between our distinct positions. According to Tata Edinho, Mariquinha Lembá was 17 years old in 1843 and died in 1928. The chronology he presented placed her as born in 1826, dying at about 102 years of age.

What Tata Edinho knew of Mariquinha Lembá came from his relationship with his Candomblé mother, Angelina Santana (1932-2002). Because he was initiated by Mother

¹⁷³ Ramos, "A casa que vela", 65. This work focuses on the Terreiro Mutá Lambô ye Kaiongo in the Cajazeiras XI district on the outskirts of Salvador.

¹⁷⁴ Taata (also spelled Tata) is the ritual title for the Father of the temple in the Angolan temple.

¹⁷⁵ Title for pre-colonial Angolan tribal chiefs.

¹⁷⁶ Conversation with Taata Edinho at Terreiro Unzo Mim Kizangira, June 28, 2017.

Angelina, he inherited her ritual Paketan knowledge, as well as familial knowledge about the founders of their lineage, their lives, and philosophies. Tata Edinho's inherited the ritual foundations from his Candomblé Mother, and her initiatory connection to the founder, Mariquinha Lembá. Tata Edinho's Candomblé Mother knew Mariquinha Lemba's ritual name, her *dijina*, to be Emeluanhia, which he defined as the beauty and perfection of the rising sun; the sun that brings the light, clarity; the white light. "That is what my Mother Kasinde, Angelina Santana, my priestess told me," he exclaimed with authority and confidence as her loyal son. Upon my asking, Taata Edinho confirmed that "sadly" no photos of Mariquinha Lembá exist because "her people didn't take photos... And now that we don't have any, what do we do?" He lamented that in contrast other old houses in Salvador that have photos of their elders, his ritual ancestors did not engage with circulating their discourses through public representation. "My people were like that, they didn't take photos, so there you see how closed off they were."¹⁷⁷ In the absence of documents, material records or photos of the person Mariquinha Lembá, her ritual descendants are the only guardians of her memory as an Angolan priestess in Bahia.

Taata Edinho characterized the meaning of the term "Paketan" as "combatants of the sacred land" in the Kimbundu language. He offered additional explanatory terms like "soldiers" and "forces", providing a cosmological vision of their purpose as missionaries of the Angolan Paketan Candomblé in Brazil. His interpretation suggested that Paketan adherents are to defend the sacred land in a confrontational, ideological, and racialized battle between Africans, their descendants and white colonists in the Brazilian context of slavery and colonization. The Paketan discourse draws upon metaphors of war and battle, reflecting their combative stance towards white society, produced within historical conditions of systemic inequalities, institutional racism

¹⁷⁷ Conversation with Taata Edinho at Terreiro Unzo Mim Kizangira, June 28, 2017.

and discriminatory policies that have always threatened the lives of Black Candomblé practitioners.

As presented through these ethnographic and archival episodes, all Candomblé lineages, even those that were founded by a Father or led by men throughout their history, have ancestral authorities and family leaders entitled “matriarchs” by their ritual descendants. Despite the prevalence of men as the public faces of many Angolan temples, historical research confirms the centennial presence of Mothers within the nation. Maria Nenem may not have gained the prestigious status of a “matriarch” within academia and in the media, in part because her family ancestry was not clearly of African-descent, nevertheless her ritual descendants dispersed throughout Brazil now consider her the “matriarch” of their Tumbensi lineage. Mariquinha Lembá, who is remembered as Angolan royalty by her ritual descendants, did not gain the fame of comparable Candomblé leaders of the Yoruba houses descending from Iyá Nassô because she refused to make alliances with foreigners, scholars, politicians and the media to give her lineage public visibility and prestige. Nevertheless, she remains a central reference for temples that prioritize Black leadership in Black, peripheral neighborhoods of Salvador. Finally, although the public face of the Bate Folha temple is maintained by the “head father” (who also presents as white in Bahia), Mother Gee is central to the African authenticity of the house as the most respected and longest living ancestral force of the temple.

Gender, Sexuality and Ritual Roles

Candomblé temples in twentieth and twenty-first century Bahia operate within broader social expectations attributed to men and women, often reinforcing the domesticity and maternity of women. Although Candomblé temples have historically accepted gay, lesbian and queer initiates without discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation (or race, age, class and nationality), the

ritual system continues to depend on the binary division of sex to define ritual roles, spatial restrictions and taboos between men and women.¹⁷⁸ My ethnographic research suggests that the mythologies and gender spectrum among the pantheon of deities present more gender flexibility than their application in the social relationships among initiates in the family of saints.

Scholars of West African and Afro-Brazilian religions have emphasized how men can inhabit feminine qualities and roles in ritual just as women can inhabit the masculine.¹⁷⁹ For example, the gender of the initiate's personal deity does not have to correspond with their own sex. The non-correlation between the initiates' sex, their sexual orientation and their deity's gender have inspired analyses that highlight gender as context-specific, separated from sex tied to a fixed, biological body.¹⁸⁰ Marina Teixeira and Aisha M. Beliso-de-Jesús propose that Candomblé practice requires a reconceptualization of femininity and masculinity as not necessarily associated with biological maleness and femaleness, but rather conceived of as affiliations with orishas and their characteristics, which inform individual identities and social roles.¹⁸¹ Robert Strongmann proposes a vision of liberation, "allowing for a wider range of subjectivities than the more rigid Western model, the modular African diasporic discourse of personhood becomes a vehicle for the articulation of noncompliant identities that are usually constrained by normative heteropatriarchy."¹⁸² Offering a less optimistic picture, Beliso-De Jesús

¹⁷⁸ Patrícia Birman, *Fazer estilo criando gêneros: Possessão e diferenças de gênero em terreiros de umbanda e candomblé no Rio De Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UERJ, 1995).

¹⁷⁹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*.

¹⁸⁰ For example, Robert Strongmann suggests "the commingling of the human and the divine produces subjectivities whose gender is not dictated by biological sex", characterizing this as "a leading feature of nearly every aspect of Afro-diasporic cultural production" (*Queering Black Atlantic Religions*, p. 3). See also Birman, *Fazer estilo*; Matory, *Black Atlantic Religions*. On the non-correlation of sex, gender and sexual orientation, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Gender and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge University Press, 1990).

¹⁸¹ Marina Leão Teixeira, "Lorogun- Identidades sexuais e poder no candomblé". In: *Candomblé, desvendando identidades: novos escritos sobre a religião dos orixás*, Beatriz Dantas (ed.) (São Paulo: EMW Editores, 1987); Aisha Beliso-de Jesús, "Yemayá's Duck: Irony, Ambivalence, and the Effeminate Male Subject in Cuban Santería" in *Yemoja: Gender, sexuality and creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas*, Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola (eds.) (New York: SUNY Press, 2013).

¹⁸² Strongmann, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions*, p. 21.

claims that “vexed sexualities are experienced phenomenologically as seemingly counter colonial, alternative, or subversive sites but also hail problematic affectivities that reify imperial, colonial, and liberal imbalances of global power.”¹⁸³ African scholars have also documented alternative expressions of gender in similar ritual contexts, arguing that the gender divisions and associations of Western and Christian contexts differ significantly from the gender relations in pre-colonial West Africa, specifically regions in present-day Nigeria, which figured prominently in the slave trade to Brazil. These scholars demonstrate the ways in which West African categories of gender are inconsistent with Western binaries of men and women, male and female.¹⁸⁴

Because of these gender-flexible characteristics, as well as their historical positioning in economically peripheral Black communities, Afro-Brazilian religions have approached by some scholars as “sanctuaries for the oppressed.”¹⁸⁵ Peter Fry’s research demonstrates how, for example, through the ritual use of cross-dressing, Candomblé offers self-expression and aesthetic appeal to gay men. Fry’s analysis focuses on the social aspects of the religion and structural advantages that accept and allow for self-expression of those otherwise oppressed or excluded from dominant Brazilian society (including women, and especially Black women). Teixeira notes that sexuality is “inscribed in the logic of the social life of the temples,” so that conversations about gender and sexual orientation are often at the forefront among initiates.¹⁸⁶ Although Candomblé temples have historically provided a safe space for lesbian and gay people

¹⁸³ Beliso-De Jesús, *Electric Santería*, 144.

¹⁸⁴ Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); James L. Matory, “Homens Montados: homossexualidade e simbolismo da possessão nas religiões afro-brasileiras” in *Escravidão e Invenção da Liberdade*, João José Reis (ed). (Salvador: Editora Brasiliense, 1988); James L. Matory, *Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

¹⁸⁵ The term comes from Fry, *Para o Inglês*, p. 65, though similar ideas are presented in José Reginaldo Prandi, *Herdeiras do axé: sociologia das religiões afro-brasileiras* (São Paulo: Ed. Hucitec, 1996) and Harding, *A Refuge*.

¹⁸⁶ Teixeira, “Lorogun”, 1987, p. 41.

without discriminating on the basis sexual orientation (or race, age, class and nationality), the ritual system continues to depend on the binary division of sex to define ritual roles, spatial restrictions and taboos between men and women.

In most lineages, both men and women can be the *rodantes* –the spirit mediums who receive the deities through spirit possession, though previous scholarship and my ethnographic research confirm that most spirit mediums in Candomblé are women, with a prevalence of gay men in this ritual role.¹⁸⁷ The predominance of women as spirit possession mediums has been noted in a variety of religious traditions outside of Brazil.¹⁸⁸ Both J.L Matory and Patrícia Birman account for this demographic phenomenon by designating the role of the deity as masculine and the medium as feminine.¹⁸⁹ Such formulations approach the feminine subject as passive, vulnerable and more susceptible to spirit possession, while theorizing the deity as a mounting and penetrative force.

In orthodox houses that have been functioning for over a century, an initiate’s role is determined by a binary understanding of anatomy at birth, considered by most initiates as

¹⁸⁷ Landes, “A Cut Matriarchate”; Fry, *Para o Inglês*; Fry, “Male Homosexuality”.

¹⁸⁸ Ioan Lewis approached spirit possession as a social phenomenon that offered power to marginal groups, often women in “peripheral cults”. Structural approaches likewise considered the marginal, or the liminal figure as potentially powerful in ritual, offering women and homosexuals, for example, a significant role or a temporary reprieve from their oppression. I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An anthropological study of spirit possession and shamanism* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971); Janice P. Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Michal Lambek, *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery and Spirit Possession* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Adeline Masquelier, *“Prayer Has Spoiled Everything”: Possession, Power, and Identity in an Islamic Town of Niger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Mary Keller, *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power and Spirit Possession* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁹ Patrícia Birman argued that initiates whom “receive the saint” enter into a “feminized” world, whereas those participants who are not possessed occupy the masculine pole (*Fazer Estilo*, p. vii). Matory discusses the cross-dressing Sango priests and illustrates that their transvestism “underlines not ‘man’ and ‘woman’, but ‘husband’ and ‘wife’” (Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, 176). In both Brazilian Candomblé and Yoruba Shango cults, the initiate is referred to as a “bride” (*iyawô*) of the deity. Although the devotees cannot be described as “grooms” or “husbands” in relation to the gods, the sexual orientation of male initiates and male priests are not in question in the Yoruba context. Rather, brideliness signals the “penetrating and fertilizing power of the god” based on a sexual metaphor of submission to a dominating force. The metaphor of “wife” in relation to the god (as “husband”) reflects the hierarchical quality of the husband-wife relationship in the patrilineal house (Matory, 199).

permanent and unchangeable, even with medical intervention. Scholars have noted how the principles of masculine and feminine in Candomblé govern the division of work and the social hierarchy of the temple.¹⁹⁰ For example, in orthodox houses only those born male can be *ogãs* (or *tatas* in the Angolan nation), and only those born female can be *ekedis* (*makotas* in the Angolan nation). Only *ogãs* play drums to summon the deities during ceremonies and perform animal sacrifice. They also maintain the temple structurally and financially, represent the temple publicly and help with everyday maintenance and preparations for ritual activities. Only *ekedis* take care of the incorporated spirits, accompany the mediums possessed by deities during ceremonies and perform the labor associated with traditionally feminine tasks such as cooking, sewing, and cleaning to prepare for ceremonies and offerings. Candomblé rituals require constant labor typically associated with “female” roles, such as cooking and sewing, and only the infrequent need for “male” jobs, like animal sacrifice and drumming.¹⁹¹ The *ogãs* perform heteronormative masculine roles and should never succumb to spirit possession, though they invoke it for the mediums through the rhythms and chants performed through ceremonial drumming. *Ekedis* are women who aid the possessed mediums during ceremony, but do not enter trance. They are considered the female counterpart to the male *ogãs*.¹⁹² Spirit possession is a rather infrequent event, nevertheless it is the most significant referent in Candomblé ritual as “everything originates in possession and is affirmed by it.”¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Teixeira, “Lorogun”; Jim Wafer, *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomblé* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods*; Kelly Hayes, *Holy Harlots: Femininity, Sexuality, and Black Magic in Brazil* (University of California: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2011).

¹⁹¹ Hayes, *Holy Harlots*; Wafer, *The Taste of Blood*.

¹⁹² Johnson, *Secrets, Gossips, and Gods*, 202.

¹⁹³ Vivaldo Costa Lima, Arlete Soares, *Lessé Orixá: Nos Pés Do Santo* (Salvador: Corrupio, 2010), 264.

Lesbianism in Candomblé, and “particularly black female same-sex sexuality continues to be an understudied topic in the discipline.”¹⁹⁴ The few scholarly investigations into non-heterosexual relationships among female initiates demonstrate how they keep their same-sex relationships discrete and do not publicly adopt the label “lesbian.”¹⁹⁵ Few scholars acknowledge and even fewer have thoroughly investigated the wide range of sexualities in the family of saints, focusing instead on male homosexuality.¹⁹⁶ Another tension to lesbianism in Candomblé is the religion’s valorization of traditional femininity and maternity as the archetype of motherhood. Because men can occupy the medium role, but women cannot occupy the ogan role, women who seek masculine expression are not able to perform the tasks designated for men in the religion, most obviously playing the drums and performing animal sacrifice. The taboo of women performing these roles resides in a binary understanding of sex at birth. I argue that because the Black Mothers are the most celebrated leaders of the religion, women who adopt unconventional expressions of femininity or identify as masculine have less footing in the liturgical structure of the religion, and do not find the possibilities of self-expression in the same way that gay men who express femininity can.

Marina Teixeira goes so far to argue that in Candomblé the feminine is “subjugated to the masculine,” because for “women who like women’ there is no possibility that they could be considered men” in terms of the division of ritual labor.¹⁹⁷ All female-born initiates are put immediately into the “broad category of women,” whereas the category of man is more

¹⁹⁴ Andrea Stevenson Allen, “‘Brides’ without Husbands: Lesbians in the Afro-Brazilian Religion Candomblé.” Article (*Transforming Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (4/2012): 17–31), 17.

¹⁹⁵ Allen, “Brides without husbands”, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Pierre Verger, “A contribuição especial das mulheres ao Candomblé do Brasil” (*Artigos*, vol. 1 São Paulo: Corrupio, 1992) mentioned that homosexuality is not limited to males in a response to Landes. Cited in Strongmann, *Queering*, 235.

¹⁹⁷ Teixeira, “Lorogun”, 45.

restrictive.¹⁹⁸ Responding to the possibility of one sex “dominating” the other, I invoke Amadiume’s call for scholars to reconsider the type of power women have and pay close attention to the complicated dynamics between sex and gender.¹⁹⁹ While I do not agree with Teixeira’s overall assertion that masculinity dominates in Candomblé, her point about the ability for male-born initiates to perform feminine roles highlights the relative restrictiveness for female-born initiates, who are prescribed to perform femininity and female labor. The valorization of femininity as a connective force to the ancestors is so powerful that it even attracts male initiates who cannot safely present as feminine in the outside world, to access it through ritual identity-making. On the contrary, women who do not identify with femininity or who seek sexual relationships with other women can never assume a clear identity—as lesbian, masculine, bisexual, or other—because of the strong expectations and determinism of being female. The same reverence for gestation that makes women privileged ancestral authorities also limits their gendered expressions as they remain within feminine expectations of fertility, heterosexual sex, reproduction, and maternity.²⁰⁰ Traditional notions of femininity as domestic motherhood restrict female-born initiates who must perform female labor as prescribed by the family’s rituals and traditions.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Teixeira, “Lorogun”, 45. Original citations in Portuguese: “Em relação ainda às ‘mulheres que gostam de mulheres’, não há quase possibilidade de elas serem consideradas *homens*, sobretudo, em termos da divisão de trabalho religioso. Seu sexo biológico as conduz imediatamente ao enquadramento na categoria ampla mulher, apesar de ocuparem posições elevadas como *Mãe-de-santo* ou *Eke di*. A figura feminina está, pois, sempre subjugada à masculina, sobretudo, no que diz respeito às atividades religiosas essenciais à manutenção e reprodução dos grupos de culto, o que lhes acarreta diminuição de poder.”

¹⁹⁹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 189.

²⁰⁰ This argument resonates with previous feminist critiques of the “domestic” sphere of women’s power and the limits of motherhood for liberation. Rosaldo and Lamphere, *Woman, Culture and Society*; Rich, *Of Women Born*.

²⁰¹ Allen, “Brides without husbands”, 26: “lesbian women primarily find affirmation in the religion through their femininity and not their sexuality. As women, their femininity accords them access and acceptance in the religion due to the perception of it as a matriarchy and the reality of women’s importance in the practice of the religion.”

One traditional priestess, Mother Stella, was publicly celebrated for her leadership as a traditional Mother of a prestigious, centennial temple in Salvador, at the same time those affiliated with Candomblé knew the “open secret” of her sexuality. This fact was not highlighted in the media, and only those close to her would divulge this fact when relevant to a topic during private and personal conversation.²⁰² The Mother’s sexual preferences were relevant to understanding her relationship to another woman, who had become very close to the head priestess as a primary confidant. Members of the initiatory family who had served the Mother and lived with her for years never gained the same access, and therefore expressed frustration that an outsider had made her way to the top of the family hierarchy so quickly. The romantic element of their relationship made the quick and strong affiliation between the two women more understandable, if not permissible and approved by the rest of the family. The issue, however, was not the gender of the Mother’s romantic partner, but rather the infiltration of that individual into the family through means other than the liturgical initiation and series of ritual obligations on a strict timeline. As the Mother at the very top of the ritual hierarchy, veiling her sexuality in the public sphere could be a strategy given the axes of oppression she already faces outside the temple territory as an elderly Black woman and defender of African religion in Brazil. Presenting herself as lesbian would expose her to another element of societal oppression and ridicule, which would likely hurt the religion’s broader cause for public acceptance and government protection.²⁰³ Furthermore, it could impact the public’s perception of her as an orthodox Mother, given the hyper-valorization of gestation and fertility.

²⁰² With controversies surrounding her death and the aftermath at the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, the media did mention in their reports her “*companheira*”, a polite yet discrete way of referring to a female companion.

²⁰³ Jim Wafer proposes that the mother and the father-of-the-saint as leaders occupy an androgynous category. Building off Melville Herskovits, J.L. Matory suggested that the prestigious Mothers of elite African “purist” houses are more effective leaders because they are not burdened by commitments to men. Jim Wafer, *The Taste of Blood*:

Conclusion

This chapter proposes that the power of femininity is derived from the ancestral connection that comes from gestation, so that women in Candomblé are looked to as authorities for receiving and communicating with the ancestors. While the Candomblé religion allows men to lead the houses as Fathers and receive the spirits as mediums, they must participate through and embody feminine modes. As demonstrated ethnographically, Fathers also initiate their ritual children and perform the labor of gestation to rebirth them into the Candomblé family. For these reasons great attention has been given to the prevalence of the effeminate man in Candomblé as an example of gender fluidity, whereas much less attention has been given to masculine women, or lesbian experiences in the religion. My research reveals that the valorization of femininity and fertility in the religion and the reinforcement of binary gender divisions presents a social context that further engrains traditional gender roles through ideal types of maternity and domesticity. Consequently, the racialized matriarch archetype as associated with the head priestesses can also reify the proper place of Black women in these domestic and matronly roles, especially outside of the ritual context where her authority does not apply equally.

Moving beyond scholarship that seeks to disqualify matriarchy in Candomblé because of the prevalence of male priests, the chapter exposes case studies of white male priests who seek proximity to the prestigious Black Candomblé Mothers within the hierarchy of Candomblé leadership because of their racial and gender identity. Priests, priestesses, and initiates with little to no African biological ancestry are less valued because of their increased distance to African family lineages. The opposite is also true; priestesses with prominent African biological ancestry initiated into historic houses of multiple generations of ritual lineages are the most sought-after

Spirit possession in Brazilian Candomblé (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 147; Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 213-214; Allen, "Brides without husbands", 25.

and recognized sources of ritual knowledge in the Candomblé religion—the Matriarchs. Such an analysis highlights the female leadership of Candomblé through the idiom of matriarchy as a distinct deployment of the term, which had previously been used in European and North American racial evolutionary thought and became a trope in feminist movements. Among Candomblé initiates, the “matriarch” title is used to mark authority, address historical continuity, and celebrate Black female leaders, though when taken out of context can produce discriminatory effects, discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

The examples presented also demonstrate the orthodoxy of historic temples that divide ritual roles based on sex as defined at birth, challenging previous scholarship that highlights gender flexibility in African Diasporic religions. To reaffirm, I do not insist on biology as an analytic to reify “natural” divisions or characteristics, but rather approach it ethnographically because Candomblé initiates differentiate between kin made through ritual initiation and kin made through physical birth. Most pertinent for my analysis is that both are conceptualized as gestational processes. I argue that understandings of gestation and sex at birth remain prevalent concerns in the division of ritual roles and the hierarchies of prestige and ritual power in Candomblé. The family of saints presents a case study where Black Mothers are valued, precisely because they perpetuate families of African descent and maintain communication with the ancestors in the African territory of the Candomblé temple in Brazil.

Chapter 2: Public Priestesses in the Media

Candomblé priestesses rose in unprecedented public visibility beginning in the 1960s as part of a larger process in which new cultural dialogues in Brazil began to define Candomblé temples as African territories led by Black women. Beginning with the crowning of Mother Senhora with the national title of the “Mãe Preta” in 1965, Candomblé priestesses were associated with the Mãe Preta²⁰⁴ figure of slavery, celebrated in the public sphere as the maternal source of African heritage in the unique racial mixing process of Brazil. During the 1965 ceremony in Rio de Janeiro, the folkloric director presented Mother Senhora as the origin of the country’s “racial harmony,” via his interpretation of the role of the Mãe Preta in the process of breastfeeding and birthing Brazil. He proclaimed the Mãe Preta to be “one of the [most] touching figures of our folklore. Born out of a social reality, of the slave who helped the Misses (*Senhoras*) nurse her children.” He characterized her, “whether as a slave or as a nanny,” as “love and unity,” and “without a doubt, the backbone of our racial harmony.”²⁰⁵ Almeida celebrated her as a folkloric figure of the past rather than highlighting the contemporary context of her religious leadership. He explicitly placed the value of the Mãe Preta to the female slave’s labor as a wet nurse—a form of racialized labor that did not resemble Mother Senhora’s acting position as the head priestess of one of the biggest and most respected Candomblé temples of Brazil. During the ceremony Mother Senhora made the following statement,

It is with great joy that I receive this honor and, in the name of all the orixás, I bless my white and black children in all of Brazil, and I make

²⁰⁴ The Mãe Preta is comparable to the Black Mammy in the U.S. context. See Kia Lilly Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black women, citizenship and politics of identity* (Rutgers University Press, 2007).

²⁰⁵ Speech re-printed in A Tarde, “A mãe preta do Brasil”, May 13, 1980 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos); Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*, 73. Caldwell comments on the contemporary status of the Mães Pretas (equivalent to the Black Mammy) as “the continuation of colonial social and economic relationships.” The figure of the Black Mother is also “commonly cited as evidence of racial and cultural fusion in Brazil.”

the vow on Mother's Day in 1965 that we all have peace and wellness in this Brazil that is the best land on earth.²⁰⁶

Mother Senhora strategically adopted the Mãe Preta title, extending her maternity as a head priestess to “white and black children” alike. Through the transmission of blood or milk, the Mãe Preta confers an “African” identity to her children, regardless of their race. A year following the 1965 crowning, Mother Senhora won a medal from the National Order of Senegal for representing a “symbol of the African presence in Bahia.” A local Bahian newspaper published an article interviewing Mother Senhora, exclaiming that she considered having been elected the “Black Mother of the year” “one of the greatest thrills of her life.”²⁰⁷

From the 1960s onwards, the occasional public conflation of the Candomblé priestess with the archetype of the Mãe Preta contributed to a folkloric re-writing of the slave past constructed from the nostalgic vantage point of the white gaze. At the same time, however, select Candomblé priestesses utilized the cultural figure of the Mãe Preta to exert further influence in the public sphere as prominent cultural, intellectual, and political leaders, recognized widely as privileged embodiments of African heritage in Brazil. This chapter presents the public lives of four emblematic Candomblé priestesses with verifiable African family ancestries who became subjects of popular and national discourses in the second half of the twentieth century, highlighting their roles as cultural brokers with significant public impact beyond the ritual sphere. To become symbols of Afro-Brazilian culture, the Candomblé priestesses Mother Senhora, Mother Menininha and Mother Olga do Alaketu had to embody the African past through verifiable consanguineal family traced back to the African continent in times of slavery.

²⁰⁶Deoscóredes Maximiliano Santos, *História de um Terreiro Nagô* (São Paulo: Max Limonad, 1988), 31. Original in Portuguese: “É com grande alegria que recebo esta homenagem, e, em nome de todos os orixás, abençoo meus filhos brancos e negros de todo o Brasil, e faço votos para que no ‘Dia das Mães’ de 1965 tenhamos todos paz e bem-estar neste Brasil que é a melhor terra do mundo.”

²⁰⁷ *Jornal da Bahia*, “Senhora Surpresa Com a Condecoração Pensou que a Medalha Fosse Enfeite”, July 2, 1966 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

Beginning with Mother Senhora's "crowning" as the Mãe Preta of Brazil, by the 1980s a coalition of head priestesses asserted themselves as African purists and authorities to take greater control over their own representation. Into the twenty-first century, Mother Stella shifted beyond the Mãe Preta stereotype into the overlapping roles of public intellectual, Black political icon, and respected producer of knowledge beyond the ritual sphere, representing a change in Brazilian racial politics in the fields of education and culture. Rather than trapped or oppressed by the Mãe Preta archetype, the priestesses used their public visibility to articulate their own narratives of African history to define the public politics of race and culture in the construction of the Brazilian democracy.²⁰⁸ Revisiting their life histories through newspaper articles, photographs and oral histories reveals their lasting legacies as political actors who defined Candomblé as a religion in the public sphere, while also contributing to an increasingly gendered meaning of African heritage in Brazil.

The media coverage of key Candomblé Mothers during this period exposed popular perceptions of Black female leadership in the Afro-religious context of Candomblé, constructed as a separate sphere in contrast to the political and colonial institutions characterized by historic male leadership. Throughout the dissertation I argue that the understanding of Candomblé as a religion led by Black women strengthened as a key component of the cultural shifts of the 1970s and 1980s that were later incorporated into the democratic, multiculturalist policies of the early Brazilian democracy. Although debates on female leadership in Candomblé began earlier in the history of anthropology, the political ramifications, and the public visibility of the Candomblé

²⁰⁸ The military dictatorship lasted from the coup in 1964 until 1985. The 1988 constitution marked the implementation of democratic governance in Brazil. Jan Hoffman French, *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Tianna Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and ethno-racial rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

Mothers as key subjects of African identity in Brazil intensified in these later decades of the twentieth century. As Candomblé was no longer subject to state regulation in 1976, the priestesses participated in the narrative construction of their roles as Mothers of Brazil to emphasize the country's African ancestry and highlight Black female leadership as one of the most important tenants of the Candomblé religion in Bahia. The publicly renowned priestesses strategically associated themselves with the cultural symbol of the Mãe Preta as well as “matriarch.” Adopting these positions in public yielded prestige, visibility, and gave them an entry point to participate in the public dialogue and definition of the Candomblé religion in a new cultural era when the Brazilian dictatorship sanctioned racial democracy as authoritarian policy.

Mother Senhora: *Mãe Preta* in the media

Candomblé Mothers as maternal, elderly Black women have been historically associated with the enduring popular Brazilian stereotype of the Mãe Preta, informed by the wet nurse of a patriarchal slave society. As a cultural figure, the Mãe Preta gained prominence in the Southeast of Brazil during the modernist movement of the 1920s, dominated mostly by “nostalgia for a bygone patriarchal slave society” given new social transformations following the abolition of slavery in 1888.²⁰⁹ Throughout the 20th century, the Mãe Preta figure ambivalently served as a projection of distinct visions of Brazilian nationalism and its relation to African heritage, gender and race in Brazil including by Black thinkers and activists.²¹⁰ The “nationalistic cult”²¹¹ of the

²⁰⁹ In 1926 in the then national capital of Rio de Janeiro, a group of white men launched a campaign to build a monument to the Mãe Preta, promoting the “Mãe Preta as the mother of all Brazilians and portrayed black and white men as brothers”. The initiative earned support of several black individuals and organizations in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Paulina Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in twentieth-century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 77, 69.

²¹⁰ Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*.

²¹¹ James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, transnationalism and matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 200-204.

Mãe Preta developed out of the Modernist intellectual and cultural movement of the 1920s and gained further momentum from Gilberto Freyre's seminal work, *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933).²¹² Credited with the beginnings of the nationalistic ideal of racial democracy, Freyre focused especially on the role of Black women as domestic slaves, raising the master's children, who were sometimes also hers, as a central role in producing the unique racial harmony allegedly present in the mixed-race Brazilian family. With little recognition of racialized or sexualized violence, Freyre helped bolster the fantasy of the sexualized mulata (mixed-race woman) contrasted with the maternal, selfless Mãe Preta archetype.²¹³ J.L. Matory suggested that the twentieth century Candomblé priestesses "benefited enormously from their superficial likeness to a major character in the Freyrean mythology of the Brazilian nation—the beloved, Mammy-like nursemaid called the 'Black Mother' (*Mãe Preta*)."²¹⁴

The crowning of Mother Senhora was hosted on May 13th in the Maracanã stadium in Rio de Janeiro to commemorate the fourth centennial of Rio de Janeiro and the abolition of slavery on the same day in 1888 as part of a UNESCO-led celebration of African culture in Brazil.²¹⁵ The newspapers described the evening as full of music including, "500 atabaques" (ritual drums used for Afro-Brazilian ceremonies), a performance by the Afro-Brazilian orchestra and a parade organized by the "Espírito-Umbanda Confederation" that "told the story of the Black cults in Brazil, with thousands of sons and daughters of faith dancing, singing and playing

²¹² The original work by Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala* was published in 1933 in Brazil. The English translation was published in 1946.

²¹³ Caldwell makes clear just how important Freyre's work was as "the primary architect of the Brazilian version of racial democracy." He acted as "a prominent spokesperson for issues of race and national identity in Brazil" until his death in 1987. She also argues that his work naturalized "the association of Afro-Brazilian womanhood with manual labor and sexuality." Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*, 32, 55.

²¹⁴ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 200.

²¹⁵ Edward E. Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 50.

typical instruments, in which approximately 80,000 spectators were present.”²¹⁶ Representatives of Umbanda in Rio de Janeiro, a separate Afro-Brazilian religious sect more common in the Southeast, invited Mother Senhora, suggesting her national reach as a leader of Brazilian religions of African descent.

During the ceremony, the Director of the Folkloric Service, Renato de Almeida, made a speech that narrated her importance as a symbol of Brazilian culture, credited to her physical embodiment of an African past with consanguineal family ties to African royalty. He presented the “legend [that] runs in Salvador that Mother Senhora descends from a very ancient dynasty of Africa” with descendants of kings from Oyó, Nigeria. He celebrated her status as the “great-great-great granddaughter of the Yoruba princess” that founded Engenho Velho (Casa Branca), recognized as the first Candomblé house in Brazil.²¹⁷ The prominently celebrated Candomblé priestesses Mothers Senhora, Menininha and Olga presented throughout this chapter demonstrate how the overlap of demonstrable ritual and biological family lineages descending from Africa constitute the particular power of the Mothers as representatives of African heritage in Brazil.

Recent historical research confirms that Mother Senhora’s biological grandmother, Marcelina da Silva (ritual name Obá Tossi), was an African-born woman who lived in Bahia as a slave in the 1820s and 1830s. In 1837 she made a voyage to Africa, returning to Brazil to replace

²¹⁶ A Tarde, “A mãe preta do Brasil”, May 13, 1980 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: “Confederação Espírito-Umbandista organizou desfile contando a história dos cultos negros no Brasil, tendo milhares de filhos-da-fé dançando, cantando ou tocando instrumentos típicos, no que foram presenciados por perto de oitenta mil assistentes.”

²¹⁷ Generations of anthropologists have written about the foundation of the Engenho Velho (also called the Casa Branca) temple by an African woman referred to as Iyá Nassô in 1830s Salvador. Edison Carneiro, *Os Candomblés da Bahia* (Bahia: Museu do Estado – n. 8, 1948); Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a sociology of the interpenetration of Civilizations* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Pierre Verger, *Orixás* (Salvador: Corrupio, 1981); Vivaldo da Costa Lima, *A família de santo nos candomblés jejes-nagôs da Bahia: um estudo de relações intragrupais* (Salvador: UFBA, 1997); Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and tradition in Candomblé* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 213-214.

Iyá Nassô, the head priestess of the Casa Branca Temple.²¹⁸ Iyá Nassô is not a Yoruba name but rather a ritual title of great importance to the palace of the King of Oyó in what is today Nigeria.²¹⁹ Mother Senhora knew that her great grandmother was Marcelina (Obá Tossi), and that her lineage descended from Iyá Nassô.²²⁰ Mother Senhora was initiated into Candomblé at just 7 years of age by her ritual Mother Aninha (Eugênia Anna Santos), who founded the Opô Afonjá temple in 1910.²²¹ Aninha was born to African parents of the Grunsi ethnicity in Salvador in 1869 and was initiated by Iyanassô at the Engenho Velho Temple.²²² Because of the legendary status of Mother Senhora's spiritual and biological inheritance from the Iyá Nassô lineage, she became a living example of an African priestess in Brazil and was the first Candomblé priestess to figure prominently in the media as the "Mãe Preta."

In 1952 Mother Senhora had received, through the communications and transatlantic travels of her ritual son, the French photographer Pierre Verger, the title of Iyanassô from the Oba Adeniram Adeyemi, the Alafin (King) of Oyo, Nigeria.²²³ According to her biological son, Deoscóredes dos Santos, the event renewed and strengthened the religious ties between Africa and Bahia, as "Mãe Senhora maintained a constant exchange of gifts and messages with kings and other important people from the cult[s] in Africa".²²⁴ After receiving this prestigious title

²¹⁸ Lisa Earl Castillo and Luis Nicolau Parés, "Marcelina Da Silva: A Nineteenth-Century Candomblé Priestess in Bahia" (*Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 31, no. 1, Routledge, 1/3/2010, pp. 1–27).

²¹⁹ Vivaldo da Costa Lima, "Ainda sobre a nação de queto" In: Cléo Martins and Raul Lody (orgs), *Faraimará: Mãe Stella 60 anos de iniciação* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1999), 69, 71.

²²⁰ Lima, "Ainda sobre a nação", 77. This quote from Maria Senhora was said to Vivaldo da Costa Lima.

²²¹ Notably during her initiation, Senhora received from Mother Aninha the *cuiá*—a ritual object that belonged to her great-grandmother Marcelina Obatossi. Such an object is conventionally only given seven years after initiation, making Senhora exceptional at a young age, chosen early on to succeed Aninha as head priestess because of her familial and spiritual lineage. José Félix dos Santos and Cida Nóbrega (orgs), *Mãe Senhora: saudade e memória* (Salvador: Corrupio, 2000), 15; Santos, *História*, 10.

²²² Santos, *História*, 9. It is worth noting that Xangô is the patron deity of the kingdom of Oyó, but that the Opô Afonjá temple also proclaims that they are descendants of Ketu. To understand this possibility, see Lima, "Ainda sobre a nação Queto".

²²³ Santos and Nobrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 23; Santos, *História*, 18.

²²⁴ Santos, *História*, 18-19 quoted in English in Capone, *Searching for Africa*, 217.

from Africa, Senhora was widely considered the spiritual founder of the Candomblé temples in the Ketu nation in Bahia, most significantly Engenho Velho, Gantois and her Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá.²²⁵ The symbolic value of this title granted her an authority as the “legitimate custodian of the true tradition of the Nagôs.”²²⁶ Furthermore, her strategic position in a multi-generational royal African family became politically important in the diplomatic efforts of the Brazilian dictatorship during African decolonization, as she hosted “African ambassadors and cultural emissaries at her candomblé, and representing for them, in turn, Brazil’s internal Africa.”²²⁷

Mother Senhora, like her Candomblé Mother Aninha, was also an independent businesswoman who sold African products through commercial networks in the historic center of Salvador.²²⁸ Senhora ran a food vendor’s tent called the Vencedora (the Winner) at the Mercado Modelo, a central public market in the lower city of Salvador, where she became acquainted with the Bahian intelligentsia, including the Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado.²²⁹ As acting head priestess from 1942 to 1967 at the Opô Afonjá temple, Mother Senhora received international visitors, especially from Africa, Europe and North America. The 50th anniversary celebration of her initiation in 1958 attracted the press, members of other Candomblés, intellectuals from Rio

²²⁵ Santos and Nobrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 24. Original in Portuguese: “Senhora, abolindo o tempo passado graças a essa distinção, tornou-se espiritualmente a fundadora dessa família de terreiros de candomblé da nação Keto, na Bahia, todos originários da Barroquinha.”

²²⁶ Capone, *Searching for Africa*, 218.

²²⁷ Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 242.

²²⁸ Retrospectively, her family asserts that Senhora “maintained many of the habits instituted by her mãe-de-santo, like having her economic security assured by activities independent from her priesthood.” Santos and Nobrega, *Mãe Senhora*.

²²⁹ Santos and Nóbrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 21. Original in Portuguese: “mantinha muitos dos hábitos instituídos por sua mãe-de-santo, como ter sua manutenção econômica assegurada por atividade independente do sacerdócio.” Her granddaughter remembered that she made a living “selling various products that she received from Africa or the sweets that she prepared with the help of a team of adopted children.” Santos and Nóbrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 22. Original in Portuguese: “Vivia o sacerdócio como uma missão. O seu sustento material era obtido pela venda de variados produtos que recebia da África ou de guloseimas que preparava com a ajuda da sua equipe e dos filhos adotivos.” Mother Senhora had significant ties with the local elite and international intelligentsia including the French photographer and ethnographer Pierre Verger, Argentinian painter Carybé, ambassadors from Ghana, Senegal and Dahomey, among other Brazilian politicians, writers and artists including Vinícius de Moraes, Dorival Caymmi, Mário Cravo, Milton Santos, among many others. For a more comprehensive list see Santos, *História*, 27.

and São Paulo, and representatives from the President Juscelino Kubitschek and the Minister of Education.²³⁰ At the turn of the 1960s Mother Senhora was sought out by international artists, local intelligentsia and politicians as a national symbol of African heritage.



Figure 3: Zélia Gattai, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Jorge Amado e Mother Senhora at the Axé Opô Afonjá Temple. (Salvador, 1960: Zélia Gattai Archive, Fundação Jorge Amado).

Consider the photo of Mother Senhora with Jean Paul-Sarte and Simone de Beauvoir, taken in 1960 by Zélia Gattai, Jorge Amado’s wife and a prolific photographer. The photo was taken five years prior to Mother Senhora receiving the national title of the Mãe Preta in Rio de Janeiro. Mother Senhora initiated Jorge Amado to be her ritual son, giving him the position of

²³⁰ Santos, *História*, 19. One journalist was “impressed with the quantity of presents that were offered,” including a “portrait of Senhora made especially for Opô Afonjá by Carybé”, the Argentinian painter.

obá as part of a committee of male representatives for the temple. Rather than in a position of servitude as suggested by the portrayal of the Mãe Preta in slavery, in this photo Mother Senhora is the only person who remained seated, while the foreign visitors paid their respects to the head priestess, standing behind her as the leader reigning over her religious territory. Like Mother Aninha who hosted members of the 1937 Afro-Brazilian congress for festivities at her temple, Mother Senhora did the same during the Fourth Luso-Brazilian Colloquium at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) in 1959. At that event Jorge Amado gave a speech that declared, “Mother Senhora’s Candomblé for Xangô has been—permanently and always will be—a house of culture and Bahian intelligentsias.”²³¹ Notably, Jorge Amado, considered white in Bahia, accentuated his place in relation to the Black Mother, “we are the result of a mixture of slaves and masters, but it was in the dramatic breast of the [female] slaves that we slurped the sap of life. This is why we are strong...” Drawing from metaphors of birth and female fertility, Amado claimed “the African is our umbilical cord and it is fixed to our souls.”²³²

When remembering Mother Senhora her consanguineal and ritual family frequently mention her breasts as a notable feature. Mother Senhora physically birthed one child, Deoscóredes Maximiliano Santos (known as Mestre Didi, 1917-2013), who became a prominent Candomblé priest and renowned artist with transatlantic ties. He received the title of Alagbá, the highest male authority of the Egungun cults and founded the Asipá temple in Salvador. Reflecting on Mother Senhora’s 100-year legacy, her granddaughter Inaicyra Falão dos Santos commented on her small stature, stocky figure and that “she had large breasts, which left her

²³¹ Santos, *História*, 24. Original in Portuguese: “No terreiro do Ilê Opô Afonjá recebia a visita de embaixadores africanos, políticos conhecidos, escritores e artistas famosos, gente de teatro, televisão, etc... Durante o IV Colóquio Luso-Brasileiro, Jorge Amado falou em nome da Mãe Senhora e realçou no seu discurso que: ‘Este candomblé de Mãe Senhora tem sido—permanentemente e sempre—uma casa da cultura e da inteligência baiana.’”

²³² Jorge Amado in Santos and Nobrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 26-27. Original in Portuguese: “somos resultantes da mistura de escravos e senhores, mas foi no seio dramático das escravas que sorvemos a seiva da vida. Por isso somos fortes e nosso é o dia de amanhã... O Africano é nosso umbigo e a ele está presa nossa alma.”

almost without a lap.”²³³ Her grandson also noted her physicality, “she was regal, strong; delicate in her intimacy,” characterizing her “great breasts” as “sources of love and motherly care.”²³⁴ Juana Elbein dos Santos, the Argentinian anthropologist who married Senhora’s son Mestre Didi (Deóscordes Santos), also noticed her “hearty breasts” upon the first impression of meeting her.²³⁵ A statement by her successor Mother Stella similarly accentuated this aspect of her appearance, “pudgy body, hearty breasts, big eyes, beautiful smile, small stature, short legs...She was an Ebony Goddess!”²³⁶ Even though Mother Senhora only had one biological son, her large breasts were a notable feature that reinforced her role as a Mother to many. The Mãe Preta in the racial democracy discourse, reinforced in Amado’s speech, and the Candomblé Mother in the initiatory family both provide spiritual and moral guidance, maternal comfort, and sustain family lineages to children both born from her body and adopted. Through the transmission of blood or milk, the Black Mother confers an “African” identity to her children, regardless of their race.

In contrast to the portrayal of the Mãe Preta by the folkloric director at the national ceremony, after Mother Senhora’s death in 1967 at 79 years of age, members of her ritual family emphasized her vital role of Black Mothers as a conduit to the ancestors and the afterlife. They exclaimed that the death of a spiritual mother is “even worse than physical death” as she joins in the land of the afterlife, together with “the ancestors of black mothers and of all the other

²³³ Santos and Nobrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 33. Original in Portuguese: “Vovó era de pequena estatura, mas forte em relação ao seu peso. Tinha seios grandes, que a deixavam quase sem colo.” The word “colo” in Portuguese can be translated as “lap” and also “cleavage”.

²³⁴ Santos and Nobrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 38. “A grande mãe que cuida, orienta, era soberana, forte; delicada em sua intimidade, sensível o suficiente para antes de dormir ritualizar seu corpo, fazendo uso do talco fino, entre outras partes, embaixo dos grandes seios, fontes de amor e carinho da mãe, em um tempo só seu.”

²³⁵ Santos and Nobrega, *Mãe Senhora*, 40. Original in Portuguese: “sentada numa poltrona dupla de vime, ampla saia rodada aberta ocupando todo o assento, me deparei com mãe Senhora. Estava inclinada para frente, fartos peitos, soltos sob a impecável camisa de cambraia, mão esquerda apoiada no queixo.”

²³⁶ Gabinete do Vereador João Carlos Bacelar, “Mãe Senhora”, June 18, 2000 (Salvador: A Tarde Archive). Original in Portuguese: “era uma figura que emanava simpatia e segurança. Corpo rechonchudo, seios fartos, olhos grandes, lindo riso, pouca estatura, pernas curtas—fazia tudo com a mãe esquerda. Era uma Deusa de ébano!”

descendants of the Great kingdom of Ketú, which left us the rich heritage of our tradition and culture.”²³⁷ Her family highlighted Black Mothers as sources of rich heritage, because they link the present to the past and initiate children into the ancestral lineage. As argued in the first chapter, the Mother in the family of saints connects the ancestors as the generator of life and privileged communicator with the deities. Narratives from both members of Mother Senhora’s family and external observers celebrated her maternal qualities and upheld her position as the Black Mother of Brazil. Both internal religious respect and external recognition focused on the physical embodiment of her connection to Africa as a Black Brazilian woman, which gave her transnational capital throughout her lifetime that carried onto the next generations at her temple.²³⁸ Mother Senhora willingly aligned herself with the Mãe Preta not just for prestige or resources, but most importantly, I argue, because the figure, even when folklorized and decentralized, possesses elements that resonate with the Mothers’ roles in the ritual family as the vital life force.²³⁹

The Fame of Mother Menininha

After Mother Senhora’s passing in 1967, the media representation of Candomblé shifted to another elderly Afro-Bahian priestess who had been ruling the Gantois temple since 1922. Towards the end of her life, Mother Menininha (Maria Escolástica Nazaré) was renowned as the longest acting Candomblé Priestess as her reign spanned the greater part of the twentieth century. Just as Mother Senhora had set the stage as a nationally renowned Candomblé Priestess, she also

²³⁷ Jornal da Bahia, “Xangô Determinou Ontem que Ondina Valéria Substitua Mãe Senhora”, January 23, 1968 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

²³⁸ Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 242.

²³⁹ It is important to note the power of this image and its potential to control the life circumstances of Black women beyond the selective celebratory and prestigious status granted to the exceptional cases of recognizable African royal ancestry. Patricia Hills Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*, 56-57.

left a lacuna to be filled in her absence.²⁴⁰ The media coverage that had gained momentum for Mother Senhora as the Mãe Preta then shifted towards Mother Menininha, who came to fill the role now prescribed for an exceptional, publicly celebrated Candomblé priestess.

Mother Menininha had been a leading religious figure in Bahia for most of the twentieth century, and her family had been the principal informants for the first studies of Candomblé that began in the late nineteenth century.²⁴¹ From 1938 to 1939 Mother Menininha hosted the North American anthropologist Ruth Landes in her temple, and influenced Landes' understanding of the religion as a matriarchy. In the written ethnography, she demonstrates how she was impressed by Menininha's position of power, admiring the position she occupied as "in these matriarchal surroundings."²⁴² When consulting family photographs of Menininha's Mother Pulqueria, Landes exclaimed, "I examined the picture again, noting the twisted turban of striped African cloth, the housewifely dress of the Bahian, the gold bracelet, large as an Elizabethan cuff, on each arm, the ropes of ritual beads on her chest, the heavy gold earrings hanging beneath the turban. Obviously she was a wealthy woman, who had never known menial or slave labor."²⁴³ Describing her person, Landes characterized her as upper class among Afro-Bahians, "people said she was proud of her dainty hands and feet, which had not a single blemish because she had not been obliged to do rough work. She was about five feet tall, fat and dark, with kinky hair," but still living in humble pre-modern conditions, with "a large tooth conspicuously

²⁴⁰ Her successor at the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, Mother Ondina, did not embody the royal African lineage through her own biological family heritage, and gained limited public attention during a short reign.

²⁴¹ The first Brazilian scientist to study Candomblé was Nina Rodrigues, who focused on the Gantois temple and conducted several interviews and studies with Mother Menininha's biological Mother, *Pulchéria* Maria da Conceição Nazaré (1840-1918), the second head priestess of the temple. Nina Rodrigues, *O Animismo Fetichista Dos Negros Baianos: Fac-simile Dos Artigos Na "revista Brasileira" Em 1896 E 1897* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, 2006);

²⁴² Ruth Landes, *The City of Women* (University of New Mexico press, 1994), 81.

²⁴³ Landes, *The City of Women*, 82.

missing in the front of her mouth. Her clothes were not pretty or neat.”²⁴⁴ Even at that time, relatively early on in her reign at Gantois, Mother Menininha was proud of her prominent place as a Candomblé leader,

All Bahia knows us, all Brazil knows us. We are the oldest temples in the whole land. At ceremonies the terreiro is so crowded you would think the entire city had turned out. They like to watch us because they know we are genuine, they know that everything under my direction comes straight from the old Africans as taught me by my Mother Pulcheria.²⁴⁵

Comparing the temples to the European context, Mother Menininha exclaimed, “We mothers are like the royal houses, we pass our offices to kinsfolk only, usually women.”²⁴⁶ In the conclusion of *The City of Women*, Landes conceded, “I had become African in my prejudices, as African as...Menininha.”²⁴⁷ Early in her life, Mother Menininha had already influenced the public representation of Candomblé, placing herself and her family as the authentically African centers of religion in Brazil, associated with matriarchal leadership.²⁴⁸

Although Mother Menininha figured prominently within the Candomblé community and early twentieth century scholarship, her public visibility heightened only after she was about eighty years old as part of the growing initiatives to celebrate African heritage in Brazil. During this period, she reached iconic status in the Tropicalia cultural movement, revered by famous artists and politicians in Brazil and gained international notoriety through Brazilian cultural

²⁴⁴ Landes, *The City of Women*, 79.

²⁴⁵ Landes, *The City of Women*, 80.

²⁴⁶ Landes, *The City of Women*, 82.

²⁴⁷ Landes, *The City of Women*, 200.

²⁴⁸ Ruth Landes’ field notebooks reveal that she spent a great deal of time with Mother Menininha, attending ceremonies at the Gantois temple, and even did a *jogo de búzios* consultation in which Menininha suggested she might have a “cargo de ião”—requiring initiation into the religion. She even spent Christmas of 1938 with Menininha’s family, revealing her intimate proximity to the community. Furthermore, Landes’ main informant was Zezé from the Gantois temple, and she often went over to Zezé’s house to learn more about the initiation process, roles and ritual calendar. Ruth Landes Papers, Box 9: Series 1: Research Materials – Notebooks (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute).

products exported widely.²⁴⁹ After Mother Senhora's death, a prominent newspaper called Mother Menininha "Senhora's successor" and the "biggest representative of Candomblé in Bahia," even though she had been the acting priestess of a different temple, Gantois, since 1922. The article highlighted her as a coveted leader, "she only appears in days of big ceremonies" and called her the "pope of black religion."²⁵⁰ The journalist used the modified word "Papisa" to transform "Pope" into a feminine subject, accentuating the female leadership of the African territories in stark contrast to the official patriarchy of the Catholic Church.

An analysis of photographs taken and archived by journalists at the biggest newspaper in the state of Bahia, *A Tarde*, reveals just how much media attention was given to Mother Menininha as an iconic Candomblé Priestess in the late twentieth century. The archive holds photographs taken during events covered by the newspaper, including negatives from photographic prints prior to the use of digital photographs, which began in 2003. The archive includes folders for twelve different Candomblé Mothers (and one additional "Miscellaneous" folder with materials from priestesses who did not have enough to constitute their own folder).²⁵¹ Whereas every other Mother included in the archive had just one associated folder with images of them taken by journalists, Mother Menininha had *five* separate folders filled with images and articles.²⁵² In addition, the organization of archival materials reflect the extreme gendered

²⁴⁹ Some examples include Dorival Cayammi's "Oração de Mãe Menininha", Clara Nunes and Clementina de Jesus' "Embala Eu", as well as covers, renditions and mentions of her in the songs by Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethania, and Gilberto Gil.

²⁵⁰ *A Tarde*, "Alunas de histarte viram Candomble", October 15, 1969 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: "Sucessora de Senhora, por indicação dos búzios, Maria Escolástica Nazaré (Menininha) é a maior representante do candomblé na Bahia. Ela só aparece em dias de grande festa. É a papisa da religião negra."

²⁵¹ I located folders with photos and articles of Mãe Carmen (Gantois), Mãe Hilda (Ilê Aiyé), Mãe Ondina (Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá), Mãe Nicinha (Terreiro de Bogum), Mãe Lourdes, Mãe Cleuza (Gantois), Mãe Jovinha, Mãe Menininha do Gantois, Mãe Sehora (Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá), Mãe Roxa de Oxossi, Mãe Ruinhó (Terreiro do Bogum), Mãe Stella de Oxossi (Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá) and a general folder titled "Mãe de Santo (misc.)". *A Tarde* Archive. Salvador, Brazil.

²⁵² The five folders in total contain approximately 189 photographs taken of Mother Menininha by journalists and 74 articles published about her in the *A Tarde* newspaper alone.

imbalance in the media coverage, as only four folders there are associated with Pais-de-Santos (Candomblé Fathers), each much thinner than the twelve folders holding materials on the media production of the Candomblé Mothers.²⁵³

According to the *A Tarde* archive, the most intense media coverage of Mother Menininha occurred between 1978 and 1986, concentrated around the celebration of her ninetieth birthday on February 11, 1984 and her death on August 13, 1986. Mother Menininha became a key figure in the establishment of new national discourses of race and African heritage that marked the building of a multiculturalist Brazilian democracy in the late 1980s. She was predominantly celebrated as a symbol of national culture by white and mixed-race Brazilians interested in portraying the Candomblé religion as universal, rather than linking her leadership to the Black movement.²⁵⁴ In the “right-wing cultural nationalism” as portrayed by the state, “Brazil’s Africanness was a folkloric, ancient, and depoliticized presence, heavily mediated by cultural and racial mixture, and contained by processes of nationalization.”²⁵⁵ The public initiatives that featured Mother Senhora and Mother Menininha in a new light were part of a larger political project that promoted “repressive, instrumental uses of Brazil’s African culture and purported racial harmony.”²⁵⁶ In this process, Mother Menininha became the representative of African heritage in Brazil—a living national patrimony—rising in tandem with the centrality of

²⁵³ For a more complete study of images of Afro-Brazilian religion in the *A Tarde* archive, see Clediana Patrícia Costa Ramos, “O Discurso da Luz: Imagens das religiões afro-brasileiras no arquivo do Jornal A Tarde” (M.A. dissertation, Salvador: UFBA, 2009)

²⁵⁴ For more on the “culturalist” perspective of black movements and the distinctions between regional approaches to race-based political mobilizations between Salvador, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, see Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 281; Kim Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in post-abolition, São Paulo and Salvador* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁵⁵ Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 253-254.

²⁵⁶ Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 254.

Candomblé in public debates on culture, democracy and race, focused in the capital city of Salvador da Bahia, understood as the most African region of Brazil.

Like Mother Senhora, Mother Menininha's fame and respectability were largely credited to her ancestral connection to the founding women of the Iyá Nassô lineage of the Casa Branca temple, which became the defining measure of orthodoxy, African purity and tradition in Brazilian cultural politics.²⁵⁷ To become symbols of Afro-Brazilian culture, Mother Senhora, Mother Menininha and Mother Olga do Alaketu had to embody the African past through verifiable consanguineal family traced back to the African continent in times of slavery. Born on February 10, 1894 in Salvador to parents Joaquim and Maria da Glória, Maria Escolástica da Conceição Nazareth (Mother Menininha) was a descendant of Africans from the Egbá-Arakê nation of the (present day) Southeast of Nigeria. She was a great granddaughter of the freed Africans Maria Júlia da Conceição Nazareth, founder of the Gantois Terreiro in 1849, and Francisco Nazareth de Etra.²⁵⁸ The national newspaper *Globo* reported, her most distant known ancestor to be Okanrendé, born in the Nigerian city of Abeokutá. He and his wife “both ended up on a slave ship” for political reasons.²⁵⁹ Her direct family connection to the experience of slavery was a key aspect of her cultural relevance as a living symbol of African heritage in late twentieth century Brazilian politics, increasingly committed to memorializing the history of slavery through policies informed by multiculturalism.

²⁵⁷ These were the first temples to receive the protection and status as cultural heritage sites from the Brazilian Federal Government – IPHAN. Capone, *Searching for Africa*; Steven Selka, *Religion and the Politics of Ethnic Identity in Bahia, Brazil* (University Press of Florida, 2007); Ordep Serra, *Os olhos negros do Brasil* (Salvador: Editora UFBA Press, 2014).

²⁵⁸ Lisa Earl Castillo, “Social Networks and Historical Ethnography of the Gantois Terreiro in the Nineteenth Century” (*Revista História*, São Paulo, n. 176, 2017).

²⁵⁹ O *Globo*, “Menininha e seu reino, o Gantois”, July 3, 1973 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: “Seu mais distante ancestral conhecido chama-se Okanrendé, nascido em Abeokutá, cidade da Nigéria. Era casado com Okalá, moravam os dois nesta cidade, no bairro de Axé. Por razões políticas acabaram em um navio negreiro”.

Mother Menininha publicly proclaimed to be a practicing Catholic throughout her lifetime, though her devout Catholicism did not conflict with her prominent role as a Candomblé Mother. After confirming that she grew up in an African-descended family lineage and followed the “sect” founded by her grandmother from a young age, she also conceded, “I have a little [bit] of Catholic religion because in my family I met [a] great belief in Catholicism. I did my first communion, I went to mass... I am of Candomblé.”²⁶⁰ She makes clear that although Bahia is not Africa, “it is a piece of it.” In the interview, Mother Menininha proclaims that her grandmother was “from Nigeria, a true Nigerian”, but that she also knew the names of the Catholic saints and the Holy Trinity. The interview was conducted by Sônia Magalhães, the wife of the mayor Fernando Wilson Magalhães, and a mother herself. The full-page interview was published in the Women’s section in the month of May to commemorate Mother’s Day. The text is overlaid with a blown-up photograph of Mother Menininha, tinted pink for the occasion. The author highlights Mother Menininha as a figure who “embodies with dignity and beauty and above all an aura of mystery and fascination the true Ecumenical Mother—one of Bahia’s mysteries.”²⁶¹ The article includes the lyrics of the song “Oração de Mãe Menininha”, written by the famous samba singer and composer Dorival Caymmi, written in her honor. The song repeatedly calls her “my mother” and describes her in superlatives: “the most beautiful star... the brightest sun.... the beauty of the world... the sweetest mother... the people’s consolation.”²⁶² The journalist and Mother Menininha sang the song together during the interview, and Mother

²⁶⁰ A Tarde, “Mãe Menininha do Gantois, a mãe ecumênica”, May 28, 1977. Original in Portuguese: “Tenho um pouco da religião católica porque encontrei na minha família muita crença no catolicismo. Fiz primeira comunhão, ouvi missa...Sou do candomblé.”

²⁶¹ A Tarde, “Mãe Menininha do Gantois, a mãe ecumênica”, May 28, 1977. Original in Portuguese: “O suplemento Mulher quis trazer hoje para seus leitores alguém que encarna com dignidade e beleza e sobretudo com uma aura de mistério e fascínio a figure de uma verdadeira Mãe Ecumênica—um destes mistérios baianos—Mãe Menininha do Gantois.”

²⁶² “Oração de Mãe Menininha” by Dorival Caymmi, published in A Tarde, “Mãe Menininha do Gantois, a mãe ecumênica”, May 28, 1977.

Menininha confessed that “that young man really came a lot to my house. I like him a lot. His wife is a great friend of ours, really great. The daughter, the son, they are all friends. This song is really beautiful.”²⁶³

The same Bahian intelligentsia, artists and politicians that had encircled Mother Senhora went on to frequent her Gantois temple, including writers and artists like Jorge Amado, Carybé, and Mário Cravo as well as the mayor Clériston Andrade, who “offered Menininha [a commemorative] plaque.”²⁶⁴ The *Tribuna da Bahia* highlighted the temple as “a house of charity, where nothing commercial exists,” characterizing the initiates as “majority orphans, without the conditions to survive, who arrive at the door and are received by Menininha.” The article continues, “[Gantois] is currently the only house that maintains the nagô tradition” and “Menininha speaks Yoruba as if it were Portuguese and today that is very difficult to encounter.”²⁶⁵ As explored through Mother Senhora of the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, Gantois was not the *only* house to “maintain the nagô tradition” and Mother Senhora and her son Mestre Didi were part of Afro-religious Bahian communities that also spoke Yoruba.

Journalistic representations of Mother Senhora and Mother Menininha represented them through superlative terms in news channels that had previously omitted Candomblé priestesses as leaders. In the new field of representation, the national media associated them with the limited

²⁶³ A Tarde, “Mãe Menininha do Gantois, a mãe ecumênica”, May 28, 1977. Original in Portuguese: “Este moço vinha muito mesmo em nossa casa. Gosto muito dele. A senhora ele é muito amiga nossa, muito mesmo. A filha, o filho, todos são amigos. Este canto é muito bonito.”

²⁶⁴ Diário de Notícias, “Orixás em festa por Menininha”, February 25, 1971 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: “escritores e artistas, liderados por Jorge Amado, Caribé e Mário Cravo, com a presença do Governador do Prefeito Clériston Andrade, oferecerão a Menininha a placa...”

²⁶⁵ Tribuna da Bahia, “Menininha fez 78 anos de idade e vai fazer 50 como mãe de santo”, February 11, 1972 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: “Muita gente define o terreiro de Menininha como uma casa de caridade, onde nada existe de comercial. Não há interesse em fama nem dinheiro... As iaôs são meninas, na sua maioria órfãs, sem condições de sobrevivência, que batem à porta, de Menininha e lá são recebidas, ficam sustentadas pela casa durante períodos...” “É atualmente a única casa que mantém a tradição nago.” “Menininha fala iorubá como se fosse português e hoje em dia é difícil encontrar.”

archetype available for elderly Black women in Brazil, the Mãe Preta. As previously analyzed by J.L. Matory,

In the words of journalists, novelists, songwriters, and state tourist agents, she appeared to personify the nostalgic, infantile, and narcissistic dreams of the privileged class in a postslavery society. She was self-sacrificial, self-effacing, long-suffering, generous, constantly available, free of malice, plump, ‘simple’ (*simples*), possessed of ‘wisdom’ (*sabedoria*), and always sweet (*doce*). She was equally maternal to blacks and whites.²⁶⁶

Mother Menininha attracted unprecedented political support from the Bahian state and local politicians in Salvador.²⁶⁷ In 1976 she was photographed with the Bahian Governor, Antônio Carlos Peixoto de Magalhães (known as ACM), in her private room within the Gantois temple. Born to Portuguese parents in Bahia, ACM supported the 1964 military coup and became the mayor of Salvador from 1967 to 1970. He rose to the position of governor of Bahia, serving multiple terms between 1971 and 1994.²⁶⁸ As of 2020, his grandson, referred to as ACM Neto, was the mayor of the city of Salvador. The multi-generational ACM family represents the oligarchy of Brazilian politics as politically important families establish patronage relationships with the majority poor and Black constituents. The governor’s relationship to Mother Menininha constituted a strategic alliance in his broader project of connecting with “the people” (*o povo*) through authoritarian government. Antonio Carlos Magalhães “was said to be an initiate, or at least a client of Mãe Menininha, and this mutual client-patron relationship often came to the public eye.”²⁶⁹ From this alliance, he profited from being recognized as a true Bahian who identified with the religious traditions of his people. He was also instrumental to ending the state control of Candomblé with a reformed Bahian state law in 1976.

²⁶⁶ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, p. 202.

²⁶⁷ Cida Nobrega and Regina Echeverria, *Mãe Menininha: uma biografia* (Nova Foneira, 2006).

²⁶⁸ ACM was the governor of Bahia from 1971 to 1975, 1979 to 1983 and 1991 to 1994.

²⁶⁹ Maria Paula Adinolfi and Mattijs Van de Port “Bed and Throne: The ‘museumification’ of the living quarters of a candomblé priestess” (*Material Religion*, Vol. 9, issue 3, 2013), 293-294. A colleague, Vanessa Castañeda, who researchers with the Baianas de acarajé in Salvador, confirmed that they assert that ACM was initiated by Mother Menininha at the Gantois temple.

The elimination of the state control of Candomblé in 1976 meant that initiates, temples, and leaders no longer had to hide their ritual practices. This new opening also allowed for the growing public representation of the religion in popular culture—making it public and attractive to an unprecedented level. To navigate these cultural shifts, artists and the media turned especially to Candomblé Mothers as the public authorities of the Candomblé community. The Mothers took on this role with the same approach, epistemologies, and perspectives with which they had historically led their own communities. Significantly, politicians, artists and journalists went to them; the Mothers stayed put in their territories to be selectively consulted, and to maintain protection through the careful ritual hierarchy.



Figure 4: Mother Menininha with the Bahian Governor, 1976. (Salvador: Diário de Notícias, Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

Mother Menininha received illustrious visitors in her bedroom, which underwent a “museumification” because of its international notoriety.²⁷⁰ In celebration of her ninetieth birthday, the Bahian Museum of Art (Museu de Arte da Bahia) inaugurated an exhibit called “Mother Menininha’s Influences on Bahian Culture.” At the opening, the painter Luiz Jasmim affirmed “every Bahian artist, absolutely every one of us, has the influence of Mother Menininha do Gantois in our culture.”²⁷¹ The national newspaper, *O Globo*, celebrated her birthday with the headline “The Mother of Bahia” and reported that she was honored at Bahiatursa, the state tourist agency, so that all the Bahians and the “friends who visit Bahia” could know of Mother Menininha and her Gantois temple.²⁷² In the same year, Mother Menininha received a visit from the President of Guiné.²⁷³ Gantois continued the trend of trans-Atlantic religious relationships established by Mother Senhora of the Opô Afonjá temple. She became a larger than life cultural icon, attracting national and international visitors as the most trusted source of African heritage in Brazil.

Mother Menininha’s death at ninety-two years of age in 1986 was national news. By the time of her passing, *O Globo* characterized her as not just “the most important mãe de santo of Bahia,” but “one of the most loved and venerated Bahian personalities, a true living legend.” The article once again emphasized that “her mother and three aunts came to Brazil as slaves” and that she was “immortalized in the verses of Dorival Cayme and venerated by all the famous Brazilians, like Gal Costa, Maria Betânia, and the writer Jorge Amado, the painter Carybé, the ex-governors of Bahia Antônio Carlos Magalhães, Roberto Santos and the current governor, João

²⁷⁰ The temple received government support for its infrastructure, historical preservation and social programs. Maria Paula Adinolfi and Mattijs Van de Port “Bed and Throne: The ‘museumification’ of the living quarters of a candomblé priestess” (*Material Religion*, Vol. 9, issue 3, 2013).

²⁷¹ Adinolfi and Van de Port, “Bed and Throne.”

²⁷² *O Globo*, “A Mãe da Bahia”, February 10, 1984 (Rio de Janeiro: Centro Nacional de Folclore e Cultura Popular).

²⁷³ *Jornal da Bahia*, “Presidente da Guine vai a Mãe Menininha”, July 5, 1984 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

Durval Carneiro.”²⁷⁴ The conservative national magazine *Veja* similarly emphasized that she was “the great lady of a religion that was once a slave cult.”²⁷⁵ National news sources placed Mother Menininha as representative of Brazil’s recent acceptance of Candomblé as Brazilian popular culture, transformed dramatically from its persecution since the times of slavery.²⁷⁶ Mother Menininha as the leader of a former “cult of slaves” from a family lineage descending from enslaved Africans placed her at the center of a changing discourse that heightened the public visibility of Candomblé. At the same time, optimistic media portrayals of Mother Menininha often portrayed her life story as an example of how slavery was now a past overcome and transformed into a noble future through new cultural initiatives.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ O Globo, “Mãe Menininha morre e o seu velório é no Gantois”, August 14, 1986. Original in Portuguese: “Mãe Menininha era uma das mais amadas e veneradas personalidades baianas, uma verdadeira lenda vivia da Bahia. Ialorixá do terreiro do Gantois desde 1922, foi escolhida por indicação dos próprios orixás --segundo os especialistas--para suceder sua tia Pulquéria. Ela descendia em linha direta de africanos da cidade de Egba Aké, na Nigéria: sua mãe e três tias vieram para o Brasil como escravas, fixando-se em Salvador.”

²⁷⁵ *Veja*, “Memória Reverenciada: A Bahia chora a morte de Mãe Menininha, grande dama de uma religião que já foi culto de escravos”, August 20, 1986.

²⁷⁶ Johnson, *Secrets, Gossips, Gods*, 152, 157

²⁷⁷ Such media portrayals contribute to the myth of Mama Africa and the dangers of portraying Bahia as an Afro-Paradise. See Pinho, *Mama Africa* and Smith, *Afro-Paradise*.



Figure 5: Mother Menininha and Family (Salvador: Diário de Notícias, Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

Broad, sweeping statements of Mother Menininha in the media placed her as the embodied source of African heritage, yet uniquely Brazilian. Like Mother Senhora, she was considered the Mother of all Brazilians in the way that even white Brazilians claim a level of African ancestry either through blood or custom.²⁷⁸ In the aftermath of her death, “the preservation of Mãe Menininha’s memory could not come across just as an individual matter: it had to be framed as the ‘preservation of Afro-Brazilian culture’, or the preservation of Afro-Brazilian memory.”²⁷⁹ According to J. L. Matory, “Mãe Menininha has been the greatest beneficiary of this Black Mother imagery” as “her image was appropriated in the bourgeois nationalist cult of the Black Mother during the 1970s and 1980s.”²⁸⁰ Mother Menininha’s sixty-four-year leadership at the Gantois Temple and her charismatic, social and affective personality

²⁷⁸ Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil*, 37: “Brazilian notions that whiteness can be composed of nonwhite elements have had a marked impact on the construction of white identities on the subjective level.” Rita Segato, “The Color-blind Subject of Myth; or where to find Africa in the nation” (*Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 27, 1998), 147. “The Brazilian white is ‘polluted’... no Brazilian white is ever fully, undoubtedly white.”

²⁷⁹ Adinolfi and Van de Port, “Bed and Throne”.

²⁸⁰ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 202- 203.

attracted the attention of the most famous and influential artists, politicians and intellectuals, shaping the public perception of the Candomblé religion in Brazilian national life. Mother Menininha became a Brazilian cultural icon in a turn towards “public Candomblé.” Because Candomblé had never been in the mainstream of Brazilian popular culture, journalists and artists too often associated her with the prescribed roles associated with the Mãe Preta, relying on a particular retelling of the history of slavery through Freyrian mythology.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, Mother Menininha utilized her position to publicly represent and disseminate information about Candomblé to unprecedented scales and audiences. Her message and role as the most sought after authorized bearer of African heritage in Brazil helped solidify the public’s understanding of the Candomblé temples as spaces led by Black women, later represented and reinforced in cultural heritage policies.

African Mothers against folklorization

The Second World Conference on Orisha Traditions held in Salvador in 1983 united religious leaders from multiple continents, including Africa, the Caribbean and South America to find strategies to maintain and preserve the orisha traditions, create schools and religious institutions in each region, and articulate among the geographically distant ritual practices with shared histories.²⁸² The conference coincided with new political efforts to protect the Candomblé territories against land speculation, which was compounded by increasing urbanization in Salvador. The efforts to register the oldest continuous Candomblé temple, Casa Branca, as a

²⁸¹On Mother Senhora as Mãe Preta see Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 242. On Mother Menininha in “Public Candomblé” see Johnson, *Secrets, Gossips, Gods*, 157-158. On characterizing Mother Menininha as a matriarch, see Antonio Risério, “O matriarcalismo negro no Brasil” (Folha de São Paulo, August 17, 1986) accessed in the Ruth Landes Papers. See full article in Figure 19 in the appendix.

²⁸² Josildeth Gomes Consorte, “Em torno de um manifesto de ialorixás baianas contra o sincretismo” in Carlos Caroso and Jeferson A. Bacelar, *Faces Da Tradição Afro-Brasileira: Religiosidade, Sincretismo, Anti-Sincretismo, Reafricanização, Práticas Terapêuticas, Etnobotânica E Comida* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2006), 87.

cultural heritage site by the federal institute IPHAN, shifted national conversations to include, for the first time, the monumentation, preservation and protection of Afro-Brazilian culture.²⁸³

The spotlight on Salvador as an epicenter of African religions in the Americas presented an opportunity for a coalition of Candomblé priestesses, led by Mother Stella, Mother Menininha, Mother Tete, Mother Olga do Alaketu and Mother Nicinha do Bogum to exert their authority as cultural brokers of the religion, declaring it for the first time independent from the historic syncretism with the Catholic Church in Brazil. The declaration asserted that the colonial Brazilian institutions and the African religious practices were distinct, as the Candomblé priestess explicitly and politically aligned themselves with African identity and history.

Like Mother Senhora and Mother Menininha, Mother Olga de Alaketu (Dionísia Francisca Régis) belonged to verifiable royal African family lineages as a descendant from the royal family of Ketu, making her a recognized source of African heritage in the public eye.²⁸⁴ From the 1960s to the 1980s, the role of the Candomblé Mother shifted with each figure in the spotlight, as they defined their discourse to new public audiences. Whereas Mother Senhora and Mother Menininha were celebrated as Black Mothers through an appreciation for their maternity in the creation of a mixed Brazilian race, Mother Olga was consulted in public conversations that were increasingly concerned with the potentially polluting forces of racial mixture and Brazilian adaptation in contrast to the preservation of “African purity” in the temples.²⁸⁵

In 1973, Mother Olga spent a month in Africa by the invitation of the Itamaraty (Brazilian foreign service) to participate in the first meeting for the Festival of Black Art, held in

²⁸³ Ordep Serra, “Casa Branca, Monumento Negro” In *Os olhos negros do Brasil* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2014).

²⁸⁴ Her Alaketo temple asserts through oral histories that it was founded in the seventeenth century, though historians can only confirm the temple date between 1833 and 1850. Costa Lima, *A família*, 28. Lisa Earl Castillo, “O Terreiro do Alaketu e seus fundadores: história e genealogia familiar, 1807-1867” (*Afro-Ásia*, vol. 43, 2011), 216.

²⁸⁵ For more on discourses of purity in Candomblé, see Dantas, *Vovó Nagô*; Capone, *Searching for Africa*.

Lagos in November of 1975. A newspaper headline “Olga, happy after visiting her origins,” claimed that she went “exclusively to participate in the meeting,” though she also visited government palaces and royal houses, and was often asked to “speak about my people.” It was the second time she had visited Africa, and she affirmed that Brazil “is beloved there, especially Bahia.” She commented on the quality of the schools in Dakar, Ketu and other places, and lamented if “it was like that here, Brazil would be better.” The report finalized with her opinions on religion, “Candomblé is taken seriously. People abide by religious norms. Big temples exist there, not like here, where any dive bar [*biboca*] is called a Candomblé”.²⁸⁶ The article ends with her confirmation that the rituals in Africa are the same as the ones in Brazil, reinforcing her authorized position as the broker of these debates in the public sphere.

By 1979 Olga de Alaketu had such public status that *A Tarde* printed a full-page interview with a quarter-page portrait of her, written by the journalist Reynivaldo Brito. At 53 years of age, Brito called her “one of the most respected Mothers of Brasil,” portraying her as “a beautiful black woman [*negra*]... Like every woman, she is vain and likes to present herself well-dressed.”²⁸⁷ He used royal vocabulary to accentuate her exceptional status as she “rules with complete authority in Alaketu, which, in Yoruba, means a piece of the sky. This piece of the sky is in Salvador, where she feels at home, completely dedicated to her religion, the Candomblé.”²⁸⁸ Once again, the journalist focused on superlatives, coining her to be “the only Bahian priestess

²⁸⁶ Diário de Notícias, “Olga feliz depois de rever origens”, December 12, 1973 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: “O candomblé é encarado seriamente. As pessoas cumprem religiosamente. Existem os grandes terreiros, não é como aqui, onde qualquer biboca é chamada de candomblé”.

²⁸⁷ Reynivaldo Brito, “Olga de Alaketo: O candomblé cura e mata”, May 8, 1979 (Salvador: A Tarde, Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: “É uma negra bonita... Como toda mulher, é vaidosa e gosta de se apresentar bem vestida.”

²⁸⁸ Brito, “Olga de Alaketo”. Original in Portuguese: “Olga recebe seu santo e reina com toda sua autoridade em Alaketo, que, em iroubá, significa um pedaço do céu. E este pedaço do céu está em Salvador, onde ela se sente à vontade, completamente voltada para a sua religião, o candomblé.”

[Ialorixá] that lives traveling in and out of the country. She has been to Africa many times.”²⁸⁹

Journalistic efforts such as this, however biased and flawed, allows for a mediated record of Olga de Alaketu’s voice and perspective. The newspaper article includes extensive quotations directly from Mother Olga, embedded within the journalist’s narration. Often the article reads something like an advice column, as Mother Olga used the platform to share her perspective on relationships, national culture, religious intolerance, and violence in her community.

Throughout the article Brito makes clear that the figure of Olga de Alaketu disrupts greater society’s stereotypes of Candomblé and Black women. He wrote that throughout the two-hour conversation, the priestess “revealed that she is willing to frequent, with her attendance, [high] society because she was born that way.”²⁹⁰ Likely responding to the reporter’s previous claim about her “vanity”, Mother Olga retorted,

It is nothing of vanity. My Candomblé Mother was a teacher and she spoke five languages. She was cultured and she went into society and was always by my side. She spoke even Latin, guarani, she was a very well-connected figure. Her name was Dionísia Francisca Regis, she raised me this way and that’s why I think I have to live this way. I will live like this until the end.²⁹¹

The journalistic emphasis on the Candomblé Mothers going into “society” and interacting in high class bars and restaurants, traveling in airplanes around the world, and speaking multiple languages seem to shock the public narrative of the Black Brazilian condition. While presenting Mother Olga and her lineage as surprisingly part of the upper echelons of society, Brito indirectly exposed the common assumptions about those who belong to what was widely considered a “religion of slaves” with majority Black initiates in poor neighbors—that they are

²⁸⁹ Brito, "Olga de Alaketo". Original in Portuguese: ““É também apontada como a única Ialorixá baiana que vive viajando pelo país fora... Já estive várias vezes na África.”

²⁹⁰ Brito, "Olga de Alaketo". Original in Portuguese: “Na conversa com o repórter, que durou mais de duas horas, a Ialorixá revelou que esta sua disposição em frequentar, com assiduidade, a sociedade é porque foi criada assim.”

²⁹¹ Brito, "Olga de Alaketo". Original in Portuguese: “Não é nada de vaidade. A minha mãe-de-santo era professora e falava cinco idiomas. Tinha cultura e frequentava a sociedade e sempre estava a meu lado. Ela falava até o latim, o guarani, e era uma criatura muito relacionada. Ela se chamava Dionísia Francisca Regis, me criou assim e por isto acho que tenho que viver assim. Viverei assim até o fim.”

uneducated, do not go out into “high society” and rarely travel away from home. Dona Olga helped to combat such stereotypes through her self-presentation. Brito wrote, “even though she has the opportunity to learn English and French, she prefers to continue speaking Portuguese and Yoruba, which are languages of her culture.”²⁹² Consistent with her leadership in the anti-syncretism movement, Mother Olga took an anti-imperialist stance as an African Mother.

Brito described the persistence required speak with Mother Olga, as she “does not like to give interviews and even less to be photographed.” He expressed surprise that she was concerned with affairs outside of the “queendom” of her temple—commenting that she was “dynamic” and involved in social issues and networks that extend beyond the limited sphere of her Candomblé temple. Mother Olga highlighted especially her concerns regarding the folklorization of Candomblé. In the article she comments on the prevalence of Fathers and Mothers who were not properly initiated, but who end up representing the religion publicly. Mother Olga criticized the “rampant use” of the names of orishas and the priestesses in popular music, warning composers to “be careful with exaggerations.”²⁹³ She expressed disdain at the use of the ritual clothing during Carnival, expressing, “for me, Carnaval is carnaval and Candomblé is Candomblé. We cannot allow Candomblé to be diminished.” By pointing her finger at false representatives, she further accentuated her place as the authentic source of African ritual knowledge in Brazil, confirmed by her frequent invitations to Africa and connections to royal African families. She explained how she did not go to many other Candomblés, unless especially invited, “I know the Gantois Temple a little, I went a few times, because my Mother was a distant relative of

²⁹² Brito, "Olga de Alaketo". Original in Portuguese: “A mãe-de-santo Olga de Alaketo fala o iorubá com fluência e diz que, embora tenha a oportunidade de aprender o inglês e o francês, prefere continuar falando o português e o iorubá, que são línguas de sua cultura. Fala ainda algumas coisas em angola”.

²⁹³ Brito, "Olga de Alaketo". Original in Portuguese: “Outra coisa é a utilização desenfreada que está acontecendo com alguns compositores que colocam em suas músicas nomes de Orixás e mesmo de mães-de-santo. A esses eu tenho a dizer que tomem cuidado com os exageros.”

Menininha do Gantois.” She continued that she still goes to Irene’s house, the daughter of Felisberto Bomboxê, “who was an African. I know his whole race in Africa. We have known each other for many years, we were raised here, together.”²⁹⁴ Mother Olga occupied the privileged position of holding intimate knowledge of racial groups in Africa and their relation to the community of Candomblé leaders in Salvador.

Mother Olga then pivoted to discuss the rising issue of tourists, exclaiming, “they do not bother me... the problem is knowing how to deal with them, because most of the time they are not used to entering in a Candomblé temple.” In general, she said that “she gets along very well with tourists” and that they are mostly respectful. Some of them became her friend and others subsequently became associated with the temple: “They arrived and became impressed and today they are people of the cult.” Even though she was critical of the widespread representation of Candomblé in popular music, she mentioned how the composers Antônio Carlos and Jocafi collaborated with her on a song and another, Martinho da Vila, used her name in a song. She mentioned that although the last singer did not know her, he told her that he wanted to honor her, and they got to meet later in Rio de Janeiro. She continued, “I am a traveled woman, who gets around. But I only go where I can present myself, because I have a name and a position to cherish inside my cult.” Mother Olga accepted music with reference to Candomblé as long as she was consulted, and it had nothing to do with the deities or rituals. She made clear that she does not let people go to the temple to get musical rhythms or take photos of the initiates while they are dancing in trance. Such acts she considered to be a “great sacrilege.” Mother Olga’s concern, shared among other prominent Afro-descendant Candomblé leaders today, was about

²⁹⁴ Brito, "Olga de Alaketo". Original in Portuguese: “Vou ainda na casa de Irene, que é filha do finado Felisberto Bonboché, que era africano. Conheço a raça dele toda na África. Nos conhecemos de muitos anos, porque fomos criados aqui, juntos.”

maintaining control over the secrecy and religious purposes of Candomblé as it becomes increasingly known and celebrated in the public sphere.²⁹⁵ Towards the end of the interview, Mother Olga highlighted how she was often invited to travel, visit new cities and do exhibitions as a key representative of Candomblé in global demand. In one visit to the United States, they asked her to do a “demonstration”, which she did, though she made clear that she “never evoked the [ritual] obligations of the cult.” Even so, her presentation appeared in films and books. She also went to Africa with her child-initiates and said that she receives “letters and presents from friends that I left there.” Mother Olga’s sentiment ambiguously refers to friends that she “left” behind after her travels, leaving the reader wondering if she is also referring to family left behind through the separation resulting from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Approximately four years later, the same journalist, Reynivaldo Brito, published a full Saturday spread entitled “The Priestesses of Candomblé,” highlighting the strong role of women as leaders of the religion with photographs of Mother Meninha, Mother Olga do Alaketu and Mother Mirinha do Portão. The focus of this article points towards the broader trend from the 1960s to 1980s in which Black female leadership became increasingly represented as African heritage, most explicitly within the Candomblé temples. Whereas the focus on the “Mãe Preta” of Candomblé began in the 1960s with Mother Senhora, by 1983 the media had covered so many Black priestesses as examples of their culture, that the exceptionalism and superlatives of the initial coverage transformed into more general statements to recognize the leadership of women in Candomblé more broadly. The article claimed that the “famous Mothers like Aninha, Senhora, Meninha do Gantois, Olga de Alaketu and Mirinha do Portão... exercise all of the spiritual and

²⁹⁵ Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods*.

moral authority together with an immense entourage” and that “the Mother is the protector of all her people inside and outside of the Candomblé.”²⁹⁶



Figure 6: Reynivaldo Brito, “As sacerdotistas do candomblé” (Salvador: A Tarde, October 15, 1983).

The article continues to highlight the great power of the Mothers, especially their “spiritual leadership,” which is never suggested to extend to the political sphere. Predictably, the emphasis on fertility and childbirth figured centrally, “She protects her daughter-initiates as if she really had conceived them. And the respect from the daughter to the mother is even reminiscent of a matriarchal regime.”²⁹⁷ Once again, Brito invokes the royalist language, “she is

²⁹⁶Reynivaldo Brito, “As sacerdotistas do candomblé”, October 15, 1983 (Salvador: A Tarde). Original in Portuguese: “a mulher tem presença marcante no candomblé, devido principalmente às famosas mães-de-santo como Aninha, Senhora, Menininha do Gantois, Olga de Alaketo e Mirinha do Portão que exerceram e exercem toda a autoridade espiritual e moral junto ao imenso séquito que as cercaram e as cercam. A mãe-de-santo é a protetora de toda sua gente dentro ou fora do candomblé, mas isto só é possível depois de um longo aprendizado, convivência diária, prática de um conjunto de cerimônias secretas e conhecimento profundo dos segredos de seita.”

²⁹⁷ Brito, “As sacerdotistas”. Original in Portuguese: “Ela protege suas filhas-de-santo como se realmente as tivessem concebido. E o respeito da filha para com a mãe lembra até o regime matriarcal”.

a true queen, and some are even venerated like the case of Mother Menininha of Gantois.”²⁹⁸ The rest of the extensive article includes detailed descriptions of the gendered hierarchies of Candomblé, with descriptions of the roles of the Fathers, the *ogãs*, the daughter-initiates (*filhas de santo*), and the *equedes* with supporting arguments from the classic text by Edison Carneiro, *Os Candomblés da Bahia*, which confirmed that women hold the “significant functions in Candomblé,” but that the “the men are not left out,” recognizing the importance of famous Fathers like Joãozinho da Goméia and Luis Munçoca. The *ogãs* are presented as the auxiliaries to the Mothers, for the “maintenance of order,” to solve disciplinary and financial problems; “they represent something like the true bodyguards of the priestesses.” This discussion on gender ends with a reference to Carneiro’s 1948 ethnography, resulting from his research with Ruth Landes, remarking that in the ritual hierarchy “without a shadow of doubt, women hold all the permanent functions of Candomblé, while the men are reserved just for temporary and honorary [functions].”²⁹⁹

In the middle of the printed interview, Brito remarks that the Mother Olga “revealed that she believed in God.” She likened the temple to the Catholic Church, where people go when they are sick, persecuted, seeking refuge, comfort, and to resolve their problems. Abruptly, the article then shifts to a subsection on psychiatry of the religion, focusing on the insights from the professor Rubim de Pinho—an *ogã* of the Axé Opô Afonjá temple “of the now deceased Mother Senhora.” The article remarks on how Candomblé has “passed on to give status to its sympathizers” and that “many intellectuals are now *ogãs* of famous temples in Bahia.” Shifting

²⁹⁸ Brito, “As sacerdotisas”. Original in Portuguese: “É uma verdadeira rainha e algumas chegam a ser veneradas como é o caso de Mãe Menininha do Gantois”

²⁹⁹ Brito, “As sacerdotistas”. Original in Portuguese: “Segundo Edison Carneiro em seu livro *Os Candomblés da Bahia*, “este esquema de hierarquia revela, sem sombra de dúvidas, que as mulheres detêm todas as funções permanentes do candomblé, enquanto aos homens se reservam apenas as temporárias e as honorárias.”

from a focus on the Mothers, the journalist seeks Professor Pinho's opinion as a member of the World Health Organization in "Traditional Medicine," having published work "in dozens of scientific journals throughout the world." He then weighed in on a non sequitur debate about the possibilities of mental treatment through religion, arguing that "there could be motives that make defensible religious assistance by the Candomblé Mother or the spiritual leader, in the same way that we admit the advantage of such a treatment by a [Catholic] Father or Pastor."³⁰⁰

Discussing whether religious treatment administered by the Candomblé Mothers could cure illness through a psychiatric perspective reads as a drastic shift away from the initial focus on female leadership and the gendered hierarchy of Candomblé. Yet, the need to ask the opinion from a scientific authority, affiliated with the religion (perhaps as a way to elevate his own cultural status), rather than take seriously the experiences of the Mothers and their initiates, points to the way that conversations about Candomblé were constrained in public discourse as folklore, yet under constant scrutiny by legal and medicinal institutions. Furthermore, the continued need to ask psychiatric questions is part of a longer history of approaching spirit possession rituals through pathology and mental illness, within a racial evolutionary hierarchy of development.³⁰¹ Although the article presents itself initially as a proclamation of female leadership in Candomblé, the journalist Brito and the Professor Pinho contribute to a broader project that at best misunderstands and at worst undermines Black women's authority in public debates and community health.

³⁰⁰ Brito, "As sacerdotisas do candomblé". Original in Portuguese: "Mesmo naqueles casos que existem clara indicação para um tratamento psiquiátrico formal pode haver motivos que tornam defensável uma assistência religiosa pela mãe-de-santo ou pelo líder espírita, do mesmo modo que nós admitimos a vantagem deste tratamento pelo padre ou pastor"

³⁰¹ Rodrigues, *O animismo*; Arthur Ramos and Richard Pattee, *The Negro in Brazil* (Washington, 1939); Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum*; Paul Christopher Johnson, *Automatic Religion: Nearhuman agents of Brazil and France* (University of Chicago Press, 2020).

Mother Olga do Alaketu's presence in the media, alongside Mother Senhora and Mother Menininha, helped solidify the role of the Candomblé Mothers as the authorized cultural brokers of Candomblé, during a key moment of its expansion into international networks alongside growing initiatives for the monumentation of African heritage in the Americas. The flipside to the "liberation" of candomblé was its folklorization, profanation and banalization. Mother Olga do Alaketu cautioned against the state cooptation of Candomblé and its consumption in Brazilian popular culture. In 1973, Mother Olga lamented,

Why doesn't anybody go out with a candlestick or a wafer in the middle of the street? Well, because they would be censured. Nobody takes an altar for Our Lady of Conception and goes out singing a samba for carnival.³⁰²

Whereas the government protected the sanctity of Catholicism and censored any profanation of its idols, it never once offered equal respect to Candomblé temples and rituals. Rather, the government position towards Candomblé went from centuries of persecution, violence and restrictive regulations to a nominal opening, yielding advantages in the arenas of tourism, popular cultural and propagating a favorable racial image of Bahia.³⁰³ Yet, despite the limitations of the Mãe Preta role projected onto Candomblé priestesses, Mother Olga defined and shared her own position on her African heritage and ancestry, advocating for anti-syncretism and anti-colonialism. She maintained a close relationship to Africa as homeland and was consulted as a privileged authority of African rituals and affairs in the geo-political landscape of the Brazilian dictatorship, which coincided with Panafricanism and African decolonization.

³⁰² Diário de Notícias, "Olga feliz depois de rever origens", December 12, 1973 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos). Original in Portuguese: "Por que ninguém sai com um castiçal e a hóstia pelo meio da rua? Ora, porque seriam censurados. Ninguém apanha um andor de Nossa Senhora da Conceição e sai por aí cantando samba de carnaval.

³⁰³ Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, p. 245. "Architects of the regime's cultural policies leaned on select aspects of Brazil's African heritage—particularly those deemed quaintly folkloric and politically unthreatening—to illustrate Brazil's racial harmony, even as the state produced this apparent absence of racial grievances through censorship and police intimidation." See also Scott Ikes, *African-Brazilian Culture*; Johnson, *Secrets, Gossips and Gods*.

Beyond the Black Mother

As Candomblé figured centrally in public debates on the history of slavery, contemporary culture, and religion, more and more Candomblé priestesses were featured in the media, and the “Mãe Preta” archetype diffused from the previous model of an iconic figurehead. After Mother Senhora’s death in 1967, her Opô Afonjá temple was taken over by Mother Ondina, known as “little mother” (*mãezinha*) because of her “gentleness and kindness.” She adopted many children, though she left no biological children.³⁰⁴ Her reign at Opô Afonjá, considered by the time of her death to be “the most prestigious candomblé temple”, did not last very long, as she passed in 1975. The next year, Mother Stella de Oxossi (Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos) was chosen by divine consultation to be the head priestess. At that time, Stella was fifty years of age, had been initiated for thirty-five years and was “one of the oldest daughters of Mother Senhora.”³⁰⁵ Her longstanding connection to Mother Senhora granted her legitimacy as the chosen ruler of the temple, which lasted until her death in December 2018. Over the course of her lifetime Mother Stella led to re-define the public discourse of Candomblé. She championed the anti-syncretism movement, promoted transatlantic educational and religious connections between African leaders and her temple, established the Ohun Lailai Museum to preserve the legacy of her predecessors, and became a vanguard as the first prominent Candomblé published female writer in a religion of oral traditions. Her published books, writings as a newspaper columnist and self-representation through documentaries and public interviews transformed the notion that the Candomblé religion should be represented and propagated by white mediators, educated outsiders, elite artists, or

³⁰⁴ A Tarde, “Stella de Oxossi é a nova Yalorixá do Opô Afonjá”, March 22, 1976 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

³⁰⁵ A Tarde, “Stella de Oxossi é a nova Yalorixá do Opô Afonjá”, March 22, 1976 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

society's established "intellectuals." Her religious leadership and public pedagogy made her the authoritative public figure of Candomblé in Bahia until her recent passing into the orun.

The anti-syncretism manifesto first initiated by Mother Stella in collaboration with other prestigious public Mothers generated great media attention and debate. Shortly after the conference, *A Tarde* published the headline, "Priestesses say that Candomblé is a religion." Reporting on the content of the manifesto, the article highlighted that "the most respected" Candomblé priestesses united to "reaffirm that candomblé is a religion, and not a folkloric manifestation, sect, animism or primitive religion." With the declaration, the priestesses confronted the public, "Candomblé cannot continue to be treated as an exotic thing." In many respects, Mother Stella led this initiative as a spokesperson, reflecting on how even though Candomblé had been gaining respect, the priestesses believed that Candomblé was still seen as "a thing of the devil; primitive African practices or syncretic."³⁰⁶ Mother Stella directed this an example of these grievances to the media itself, lamenting how the temples were "included in the folklore columns of the Bahian newspapers."³⁰⁷ In the article, she also admitted that she was not worried that Candomblé would *become* fashionable, because "it already has." In the final section of the article entitled "Stars," Stella lamented how "now everybody wants to be [part] of Candomblé," and that the desire to become famous could ruin all the work the priestesses had done to be taken seriously as a religion. Stella's 1983 interview suggests that the newspaper coverage of the priestesses since the 1960s had contributed to this folklorization, something that Mother Olga do Alaketu was worried about in the 1970s.

³⁰⁶ A Tarde, "Stella de Oxossi é a nova Yalorixá do Opô Afonjá", March 22, 1976 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

³⁰⁷ A Tarde, "Ialorixás dizem que candomblé é religião", July 9, 1983.

The debates on syncretism continued in the media for the next several months as *A Tarde* covered the issue through multiple angles. Despite the warnings from Stella about the media's participation in representing Candomblé as an "exotic thing", they returned a month later with the headline, "With syncretism or without, Candomblé will always be an attraction," published in the "tourism and automobiles" section of the paper.³⁰⁸ To address the priestess's demands, a meeting was set between the state tourist agency, Bahiatursa, the Association of Afro-Brazilian Cults, the state secretary of education, temples leaders, and members of the carnival groups. Because only Candomblé Mothers had declared the end of syncretism, the media focused on them as the brokers of these debates, and the articles ask no opinions from the Candomblé Fathers. According to Selka, the anti-syncretism movement was "seen as both an affirmation of female authority—an assertion that the mãe de santo no longer has to 'ask permission' to practice her religion from the Catholic priest—and of African culture and that "the refusal of syncretism is an affirmation of liberty."³⁰⁹

Not every Candomblé Mother supported the anti-syncretism movement. Five priestesses signed the manifesto, all representatives of the Nagô houses of Candomblé.³¹⁰ A prominent Candomblé Mother of the Angolan nation, Mirinha do Portão, did not participate in the anti-syncretism movement. Mother Mirinha also figured prominently in the media, reaching public status comparable to Mother Menininha and Mother Olga do Alaketu.³¹¹ Including an Angolan Mother in a public portrayal alongside Yoruba Candomblé Mothers demonstrated how Black female leadership became a defining feature of African heritage as constructed in Brazil,

³⁰⁸ *A Tarde*, "Com sincretismo ou não, o candomblé será sempre atração", August 7, 1983.

³⁰⁹ Selka, *Religion and the Politics*, 78; Ivone Gebara, "A Recusa do sincretismo como afirmação da liberdade" In *Faraimará—O Caçador traz alegria: Mãe Stella, 60 anos de iniciação* (Rio de Panerio, Pallas, 1999), 409.

³¹⁰ Consorte, "Em torno de um manifesto", 78.

³¹¹ *A Tarde*, "As sacerdotistas do candomblé". Although she does not have a dedicated folder in the *A Tarde* archive, my research found eighteen articles printed about her from 1971 to her death in 1989 and several other posthumous articles.

independent to claims to African ethnic origins.³¹² Mother Mirinha’s position diverged from the other priestesses, representing a distinct discourse in her “nation” of Candomblé.³¹³ Rather than taking the stance towards African purity, prominent leaders of Angolan nations to this day defend that their religion is uniquely Brazilian and a product of cultural mixture. In the aftermath of the Conference, an *A Tarde* journalist interviewed Mother Mirinha and claimed she was “refusing to participate in any debate on the subject.”³¹⁴ She defended the historic syncretism because “that is how I learned Candomblé and it is that way that I will die.”³¹⁵

Mother Mirinha did not align with the sentiments of the “African Mothers,” yet the media still included her in the portrayal of Candomblé priestesses as a “matriarchal regime.”³¹⁶ In 1986 following the death of Mother Menininha, a (white) Brazilian anthropologist wrote in a major newspaper from São Paulo that “Ruth Landes perceived correctly that the world of Candomblé was a type of matriarchy in a patriarchal society... In Bahia, the ‘Mother’ is never a subjugated or marginalized woman. She is respected and venerated.”³¹⁷ The “astonishing matriarchism” that he described necessarily came from the “domestic organization of the old Bahian society—an

³¹² Mother Mirinha also appeared in Jorge Amado’s novels, had close alliances with Bahian state politicians, and was a cultural leader in public festivals such as the Lavagem do Bonfim and the Lavagem de Itapuã, which she started in the 1950s.

³¹³ *A Tarde*, “As sacerdotistas do candomblé”.

³¹⁴ *A Tarde*, “Mãe de santo defende sincretismo religioso”, August 11, 1983. Original in Portuguese: “Mãe Mirinha do Portão, que disse não estar preocupada com as discussões sobre o sincretismo e se recusa a participar de qualquer debate sobre o assunto.”

³¹⁵ *A Tarde*, “Mãe de santo defende sincretismo religioso”, August 11, 1983. Original in Portuguese: “Foi assim que conheci o candomblé e é nisso que morro”, diz a mãe-de-santo, acrescentando que, para ela, Santa Bárbara será sempre Iansã; São Jerônimo, Xangô; São Jorge, Oxossi e Santo Antônio, Ogum. E tem mais, segundo Mãe Mirinha: ‘Sou católica, gosto de missa e aprecio D. Avelar Brandão, a quem tomo a benção e ele abençoa.’

³¹⁶ *A Tarde*, “As sacerdotistas do candomblé”.

³¹⁷ Antonio Risério, “O matriarcalismo negro no Brasil” (Folha de São Paulo, August 17, 1986) accessed in the Ruth Landes Papers. Original in Portuguese: “Ruth Landes percebeu corretamente que o mundo do candomblé é uma espécie de enclave matriarcal numa sociedade patriarcal... Na Bahia, a ‘Ialorixá’ nunca é mulher subjugada ou marginalizada. É respeitada e venerada.

inheritance from slavery, but still spreading today from the Candomblé.”³¹⁸ Increasingly, the term matriarch was adopted in the media and among Candomblé initiates to characterize this respect for the head Mothers and the female founders of temples.³¹⁹ At least by 2005, the Candomblé priestesses themselves embraced the term “matriarch” to characterize their position of authority to public audiences.³²⁰ Compared to the Mãe Preta’s association with servitude and racialized violence in the formation of the Brazilian family, the “Matriarch” title referenced African heritage through a politics of difference, distinct from Brazilian patriarchy and Catholicism, while also allowing for a “vision of power” for the priestesses to adopt in the public sphere.³²¹

The priestess’s commitment to accentuating and preserving African elements of their religion and purge any colonial Brazilian elements of Catholicism occurred in a “moment of great expansion of the orisha cults and the initiation of an increasingly white population.”³²² Increasingly, people from Southern Brazil initiated into Candomblé and established temples in the urban centers of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with connections to the “authentic” temples of Bahia.³²³ Candomblé’s increased presence in popular culture, the initiation of middle-upper class

³¹⁸ Antonio Risério, “O matriarcalismo negro no Brasil” (Folha de São Paulo, August 17, 1986) accessed in the Ruth Landes Papers. The article opens with reference Freyre’s analysis of the Bahian Family rooted in relationships of the slave system. Original in Portuguese: “...espantoso matriarcalismo existente na organização doméstica da velha sociedade baiana—herança da escravidão, mas ainda hoje espraiando-se desde o Candomblé.”

³¹⁹ A Tarde, “A força das ialorixás” (Salvador, December 20, 1996); Correio da Bahia, “Yiá de Salvador” (Salvador, March 07, 2004). These articles explicitly use the term “matriarch” in their descriptions of the Mothers’ power and position.

³²⁰ “A Cidade das Mulheres”, Direction and Production: Lázaro Faria (Salvador: Casa de Cinema da Bahia, 2005, 1 DVD (72 min).

³²¹ For more on the “politics of difference” in ethno-racial struggles, see Tianna Paschel, *Becoming Black Political: Movements and ethno-racial rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2016). On the uses of matriarchy in women’s movements as a “vision for power” see Paula Webster, “Matriarchy: A Vision of Power” In: *Toward An Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna R. Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

³²² Consorte, “Em torno de um manifesto”, 80. Original in Portuguese: “num momento de grande expansão do culto dos orixás e do ingresso nas suas fileiras de uma população cada vez mais branca.”

³²³ Reginaldo Prandi, *Os Candomblés de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Hucitec/EDUSP, 1991).

artists, scholars, politicians and celebrities into the Bahian temples changed the social landscape of the temples that had become consecrated as the most African in the cultural heritage politics (discussed in the subsequent chapters). Mother Menininha herself married a lawyer who Edison Carneiro characterized as “a man as fair in complexion as she is dark. She has two daughters, Cleoza and Carmen, both fair, getting a good education, and both of them priestesses.”³²⁴ These light-skinned daughters took on the leadership role of the Gantois temple following Mother Menininha’s passing. Although the house still receives government support as a federal cultural heritage site and remains central reference for Afro-Bahian culture in the city of Salvador, the demographics of the house have changed drastically.³²⁵ Neither Mother Cleoza nor Mother Carmen aligned with the characteristics of the “Black Mother”—of which dark complexion is the most visible sign of a connection to the African past. Perhaps because of the diminishing prominence of dark-skinned priestesses as leaders of the Candomblé communities, Black Mothers have become more intensely memorialized and sought-after as the authentic sources of Candomblé knowledge and practice as the true possessors of axé.

Instead of Mother Menininha’s daughters, into the twenty-first century Mother Stella took on the prominent public role as a Candomblé priestess of the “authentically” African temple Opô Afonjá. Temples that can trace direct descent from African founders, particularly of the Iyá Nassô lineage, operate within an economy of prestige associated with African authenticity.³²⁶

³²⁴ Landes, *The City of Women*, 76.

³²⁵ I went to the ceremony “Festa de Oxalá” on September 23, 2019 at the Gantois temple and noted the prominence of lighter-skinned initiates and visitors. Even though the temple is in a predominantly black neighborhood in downtown Salvador, the temple grounds are pristine, very well-maintained with the exquisite ornamentation that certainly require significant resources. It felt like a high class, elite environment for the cultural intelligentsia of Brazil.

³²⁶ Capone, *Searching for Africa*; Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods*; Miguel C. Alonso, *The Development of Yoruba Candomble Communities in Salvador, Bahia, 1835-1986* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô Nagô e Papai Branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal Ltda, 1988).

Over the last two decades, Mother Stella’s temple has been the primary destination for North American tourists, African dignitaries and foreign researchers seeking contact with African culture in Brazil. In her book *Meu Tempo é Agora* (My Time is Now), Mother Stella used exclusively the Yoruba term *Ìyálorisá* to describe her position as head priestess and those before her, “In our house, the *Ìyálorisá* brings together the conditions of Mother of the Orisa and the Mother of the *Àse*, in the sense of a sacred element. It is [she] who unites man and the Orisa through the initiation process and distributes the *Àse*. Only she has the right to start and finish the cycle of initiation,” which earlier in the text she described as a “gestation.”³²⁷

Yet the media most predominantly used the term “matriarch” to refer to her, which she adopted in a public self-portrayal in the documentary “A Cidade das Mulheres,” based on the title of Ruth Landes’ book.³²⁸ Unlike Mother Menininha and Mother Senhora, who were “daughters” of the feminine deity Oxum, Mother Stella was a daughter of Oxóssi, a masculine hunter of the forest. She never married a man or birthed children from her body, and it is a “public secret” that she has had significant romantic relationships with several women who were affiliated with the temple. Furthermore, rather than a domestic, fertile, matronly Mother-figure as Mother Senhora was characterized, Mother Stella is widely respected as a writer and public intellectual.³²⁹ She was the first Candomblé Mother to publish multiple books and write a weekly column in the *A Tarde* newspaper.³³⁰ In 2009 she was honored with the title of “Doctor” (Ph.D)

³²⁷ Stella, *Meu Tempo É Agora*, 68: “Em nossa Casa, a *Ìyálorisá* reúne as condições de mãe do Orisa e mãe do *Àse*, na aceção de elemento sagrado. É quem une o homem ao Orisá pelo processo de iniciação e quem distribui o *Àse*. Só ela tem o direito de iniciar e completar o ciclo de iniciação.”

³²⁸ “A Cidade das Mulheres”, Direction and Production: Lázaro Faria (Salvador: Casa de Cinema da Bahia, 2005, 1 DVD (72 min).

³²⁹ The back cover of her book *Meu Tempo É Agora* presents her as “the first primary source to offer ancestral knowledge without an intermediary” (written by the Ogã Oscar Dourado).

³³⁰ Mãe Stella de Oxóssi, *Opinião* (Salvador: A Tarde, 2012). In the last few years the Opinion column was passed over to Mãe Valzinha of the Terreiro do Cobre, who has also published several books on her childhood, oral histories of the temple, and moral lessons. Valnizia Bianch, *Reflexões: escritas de Mãe Valnizia Bianch* (Salvador: Edição do Autor, 2019).

from the State University of Bahia (UNEB).³³¹ More than ever Candomblé Mothers can control their own representation and disseminate knowledge about their ancestral practices on their own terms. Even given this new semantic field of representation, many have stepped into the “matriarch” role, which was first defined by Mother Menininha as an internal ritual practice, prior to her ascension as a national cultural figure or the publication of any anthropological texts on the subject.³³²

Conclusion

My field research coincided with the final years of Mother Stella’s life. In my few visits to the Opô Afonjá temple, I met visitors from the United States, scholar-practitioners from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), reporters and even camera teams.³³³ Only on one occasion did I have the opportunity to meet and bless her personally. I waited in a line and once it was my turn, she barely looked at me, having poor eye sight at 91 years of age, but also because surely to her I was just another in the many generations of foreign visitors. During a public ceremony for the patron deity of the temple, Xangô, I witnessed her reign over the immense community of initiates she commanded as head priestess. To begin the ceremony, the ogans and equedes left the ceremonial hall to do a procession with a food offering. Upon their return, every member of the house laid down on the ground or kneeled in concentric circles around the offering in the center of the expansive hall. A heavy hush fell upon the whole crowd of what I estimated to be between 100 and 150 people. For that moment, the only voice heard by all was Mother Stella’s—

³³¹ Clediana Ramos, “Doutora Mãe Stella de Oxóssi” (A Tarde: Mundo Afro Blog, September 10, 2009).

³³² This responds to J.L Matory’s assertion that Ruth Landes imported the idea of matriarchy onto Candomblé, rather than representing discourses from her interlocutors. See Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Jamie Lee Andreson, *Ruth Landes e a Cidade das Mulheres: uma releitura da antropologia do candomblé* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2019), 103-111.

³³³ I participated in the event “80 anos dos Obás de Xangô” hosted at the Opô Afonjá temple on July 13, 2016, where I met Mother Stella. I was interviewed and appeared in the press coverage of the event. Clarissa Pacheco, “Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá celebra 80 anos do obás de Xangô” (Salvador: Correio da Bahia, July 13, 2016).

fragile with age—accompanied by her *adjá* (metal bells) shaking in her hand to communicate with the deities. She led the chant for Xangô in Yoruba, and the entire room responded in perfect rhythm in call and answer form for several minutes. After finishing the chant, Mother Stella revealed the covered offering of carurú and took the first portion with her hands from a large ceramic pot. Sequentially those most important in the hierarchy, including the “Small Mother” (Mãe Pequena) and other elderly women took their handful, followed by the order of the remaining initiates in the hierarchy, and finally the guests and observers.

As Candomblé spread further into public debates on racial politics and popular culture, the media especially turned to the Mothers of Candomblé as sources of maternal comfort and moral guidance, building on their role as ancestral leaders and sources of wisdom in the religious communities. Without the nuance, understanding or even true respect for their religious practices, the media often reinforced old stereotypes of the Mãe Preta role reflecting an order of Brazilian race relations marked by a nostalgia for the slave past. Nevertheless, the Candomblé priestesses in the media solidified themselves as the authorized representatives Candomblé, during a key moment of its expansion into international networks alongside growing initiatives for the monumentation of African heritage in the Americas. The prominence of Candomblé Mothers in the media, as representatives of Brazil through international cultural products, and as cultural figures in local politics transformed the understandings of the Candomblé temples as territories led by Black women—increasingly referred to as matriarchs—ruling in the Candomblé temples in contrast to nearly every other political, religious and economic institution in Brazil. With new national platforms, audiences and means of media representation, the priestesses shared their own notions of motherhood and biological ties to Africa through the ritual system. Prominent priestesses engaged with the media during the Brazilian dictatorship,

cautioned against folklorization and increasingly presented an anti-colonial, African purist front to produce alternative knowledge about race, gender, and religion in Brazil.

Chapter 3: Africa in the Nation: Candomblé as Brazilian Cultural Heritage

Mother Stella de Oxóssi, head priestess of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá—the second Candomblé temple to be registered as a federal cultural heritage site—appealed to the federal government in a letter on January 25th, 2000 to also extend the protection to the Angolan temple Bate Folha,

The act that officialized the registration of the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá Candomblé marked definitively the presence of the Federal Government as a guardian of the black ethnic groups of our country. Building on the satisfaction of seeing the registration of our great nation that composes my temple Opô Afonjá, traditional, rigorous in its precepts and a refuge of our ancestry, I took the liberty of asking Mr. Minister Weffort and Mr. Carlos Heck to look at the destinies and futures of a Candomblé of another nation, of the Angolan people, also essential for the memory and religiosity of black people...

... Bernardino Manoel da Paixão was the first and great spiritual leader of this temple and of the Angolan nation, transforming Bate Folha into a spiritual center and a respected culture, admired and sought after by all...

... Therefore, Mr. Superintendent, I understand that during the year that Brazil completes 500 years, a period in which the black people, their longing, their force, their religion, their culture and their soul became engrained in the Brazilian soul, I ask that your greatness orient our paths in search of the protection of this area by IPHAN, where the great gods of the Angolan nation exist until today, blessed and worshipped by our black people.”³³⁴

Using the year 2000 as an opportunity to reflect on Brazil’s 500-year history, Mother Stella highlighted the importance of recognizing the many African ethnic groups that contributed the Brazilian nation. “Satisfied” by the federal protection of her temple and “our great nation” (the Nagô nation established at her temple by Mother Aninha in 1910), Mother Stella pushed IPHAN to go further in its reach to protect Candomblé temples as material patrimony and

³³⁴ Mãe Stella de Oxóssi, “Pedido de Tombamento do Candomblé Bate Folha”, *Processo de Tombamento: Terreiro Bate Folha* (IPHAN, 2000), 2-3. Original in Portuguese: “O ato que oficializou o tombamento do Candomblé Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá... marcou, definitivamente, a presença do Governo Federal como guardião da etnia negra em nosso país. / Aproveitando a felicidade de ver contemplada a grande nação que compõe o meu terreiro Opô Afonjá, tradicional, rigoroso em seus preceitos e refúgio de nossa ancestralidade, tomei a liberdade de pedir ao Senhor Ministro Weffort e ao Senhor Carlos Heck, que olhassem para os destinos e a existência do candomblé de outra nação, do povo Angola, também essencial para a memória e a religiosidade dos negros.../... Bernardino Manoel da Paixão foi o primeiro e grande líder espiritual deste terreiro e da nação Angola, transformando o Bate-Folha num centro espiritual e cultural respeitado, admirado e procurado por todos.../... Assim sendo, senhor Superintendente, entendo que no ano que o Brasil completa 500 anos, período em que os negros, sua saudade, sua força, sua religião, sua cultura e sua alma impregnaram a alma brasileira, peço que Vossa Senhoria oriente nossos caminhos em busca da proteção do IPHAN para uma área onde os deuses da nação Angola permanecem até hoje abençoando e zelando por nosso povo negro.”

prominent spaces for Black citizens. The letter demonstrates how by this point in Black political mobilization in Brazil, Black leaders utilized the cultural politics of recognition to extend the rights that had been granted to select temples as the highly restrictive status of Black monuments. Using her position as spokesperson for the Black community in Bahia, Mother Stella called to protect other temples through a politics of multiculturalism, to also consider the legacies of the “Angolan people” as cultivated by the rituals of the Bate Folha Temple.

Redirecting resources and rights to Black and indigenous citizens figured centrally in the project to build the Brazilian democracy in the 1980s, operating within a “global ethno-racial field oriented around multiculturalism, indigenous rights, and antiracism.”³³⁵ In Brazil and Columbia, these efforts resulted in “more than symbolic recognition,” leading also to the redistribution of resources including land, government positions and affirmative action policies.³³⁶ As recognized Black leaders of Brazil, Candomblé priestesses figured prominently in the fight to gain collective land rights for their temples. They framed their struggle through multiculturalist discourse to emphasize the ethno-religious “nations” of Candomblé to advocate for their “claims to difference.”³³⁷ The Candomblé temples’ fight for recognition as Black monuments is consistent with strategies throughout Latin America that use political openings in the sphere of cultural policies to redirect resources, of which land is central, to Black populations.³³⁸ The application of cultural heritage status to Candomblé temples both

³³⁵ Tianna Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and ethno-racial rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 3.

³³⁶ Tianna Paschel, “The Right to Difference: Explaining Colombia’s Shift from Color Blindness to the Law of Black Communities”, *AJS*, vol. 116, no. 3 (November 2010), 763.

³³⁷ Black movements adopting an ethnic differentiation frame as a claim to difference, so that cultural assimilation was not the end goal. Often an “ethnic difference framing proves a more effective political strategy for achieving rights for black populations than a racial equality framing”. Paschel, “The Right to Difference”, 729, 764.

³³⁸ Tianna Paschel argues that Colombia utilized an ethnic difference framing, whereas Brazil achieved a racial equality framing in their black movements. The case of the Candomblé temples shows how a case for ethnic difference also succeeded for a limited group of historic temples deemed cultural heritage sites, but ultimately the

symbolically represented the importance of Afro-Brazilians in the construction of the nation, and redistributed land as a resource from a colonial legacies of land ownership to select Afro-Brazilian religious communities.

Through analyzing petitions, campaigns and cases from Candomblé temples to government cultural agencies, this chapter examines how shifts in the politics of cultural patrimony during the democratization process in Brazil consecrated into law protections for a small number of temples defined by their African ethnic territoriality. The research materials present how ethnic difference among the “nations” of Candomblé proved a compelling argument accepted by Brazilian federal and Bahian state cultural institutes to protect the most historic temples who could historically prove their role as *matriz*—originators of their “nation.” The registration of these temples symbolically incorporated multiple African ethnic groups as defined through ritual practice into the narrative of the historical development of the Brazilian nation through legal procedures that had been only applied previously to protect colonial and Catholic monuments. Democratic multiculturalism allowed for the symbolic nomination of select temple representatives of African “nations”, though left the widespread issue of land insecurity and scarcity of resources among Candomblé communities unaddressed through the limited reach of cultural policies.

The Angolan nation has been popularly characterized by male leadership and narratives of racial mixture consistent with national discourses of Brazilian miscegenation. In contrast, the Nagô nation is celebrated for its decidedly “African” heritage and matriarchal leadership through centennial temples. The examples of key historic temples founded by African and Afro-

problem of land insecurity for black populations could not be addressed through such policies. Paschel, “The Right to Difference”, 735. See also Jan Hoffman French, *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil’s Northeast* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Keisha Khan Perry, *Black Women Against the Land Grab: the fight for racial justice in Brazil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

descendant women reinforced the primacy of matriarchy as a feature of African territories, contrasting with the patriarchal trends of land ownership and religious leadership in the Brazilian Catholic Church. Casa Branca and its affiliate temples Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá and Gantois (Ilê Axé Iyá Omin Iyamassê), which descend from the same initial African founder Iyá Nassô, have been the emblematic examples of authentic African heritage through Candomblé.

The twentieth-century dialogue between the religious communities, anthropologists, politicians, and the media helped to discursively define Candomblé temples as African territories paralleling similar claims to land as *quilombos* and indigenous reservations, given the necessary reconstruction of an African homeland in Brazil as a consequence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.³³⁹ Many historic Candomblé temples in Salvador were founded by African-born ritual leaders on lands that were partitioned from plantations in the late nineteenth century. The prevalence of African-born leaders and their descendants in the establishment of the temples points to their materiality, encouraging a discussion of Africa in Brazil beyond pure discourse or constructed imaginaries of a lost homeland.³⁴⁰ As African territories, Black women are often understood to be the natural owners of the land, consistent with the feminization of Africa as motherland.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô Nagô e Papai Branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, Edições Graal Ltda, 1988); Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and tradition in Candomblé* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Mariana Ramos de Moraes, *De religião a cultura, de cultura a religião: Travessias afro-religiosas no espaço público* (Belo Horizonte: Editora PUC Minas, 2018).

³⁴⁰ Cheryl Sterling, *African Roots, Brazilian Rites* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 35: “too many deliberately remembered that African past, recoded it to suit their prevailing contestations, and passed it down to future generations to be dismissed.” She responds to work that emphasizes the ideological and discursive ideas of Africa in Brazil rather than the material continuities, including works such as Patricia S. Pinho, *Mama Africa: Reinventing Blackness in Bahia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and Tradition in Candomblé* (Durham, N.C: Duke Univ. Press, 2010); Livio Sansone, *Blackness Without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁴¹ Pinho, *Mama Africa*. Also see discussion of W.E.B. Du Bois in the introduction.

The Characters of Nações

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the great influx of Yoruba-speaking captives into the port of Salvador da Bahia changed the ethnic landscape of the Afro-Bahian population.³⁴² In Brazil, the Yoruba-speakers were referred to as Nagôs, which in the second half of the nineteenth century “became almost equivalent to African.”³⁴³ The Nagô ethnicity became the most identifiable mark of Africanness, despite the continued presence of Africans of other ethnicities—Fon-Ewe, Hausa, Angola, Congo, among others.³⁴⁴ Even in the nineteenth century Candomblé was characterized by “creolization and ethnic and racial mixing”, as the temples were led and frequented by people of all races.³⁴⁵ Those affiliated with the Nagô temples adopted Nagô as an ethnic identity, regardless of their biological family background. According to Cheryl Sterling, by identifying as Nagô, Africans of multiple ethnicities “subsumed their other ethnic and religious identities and homogenized the remembrance and re-articulation of Africa.”³⁴⁶ Kim Butler similarly portrays how Afro-Brazilians “constructed new forms of ‘African’ identity which could be maintained long after Africans stopped arriving via the slave-trade.” Through continued trans-Atlantic travels, Africa was both a physical place and “a collectively idealized image,” which “played a significant role in the evolution of Bahian identities.”³⁴⁷ Nicolau Parés claims that the nineteenth century established “the conceptual basis for a notion of Africa as the

³⁴² Luis Nicolau Parés, *The Formation of Brazilian Candomblé: Vodun history and ritual in Brazil* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Pierre Verger, *Flux Et Reflux De La Traite Des Nègres Entre Le Golfe De Bénin Et Bahia De Todos Os Santos, Du 17e Au 19e Siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1968).

³⁴³ João Reis, "Candomblé in Nineteenth Century Bahia" (*Slavery & Abolition*, 22:1, 91-115, 2001), 118.

³⁴⁴ Reis, "Candomblé in Nineteenth Century", 118.

³⁴⁵ Reis, "Candomblé in Nineteenth Century", 118.

³⁴⁶ Cheryl Sterling, *African Roots, Brazilian Rites* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 22.

³⁴⁷ Kim Butler, "Africa in the Reinvention of Nineteenth-Century Afro-Bahian Identity" (*Slavery & Abolition*, 22:1, 2001); J. Lorand Matory, "The English Professors of Brazil: On the diasporic roots of the Yoruba nation" (*Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Jan., 1999, pp. 72-103).

original *locus* of a tradition,” which characterized the development of Candomblé nations and rituals to reinvent “continuities in order to overcome a disrupted past.”³⁴⁸

Nineteenth century Candomblé was a “pan-African and Afro-Brazilian synthesis,”³⁴⁹ which set the stage for contemporary understandings of *nações* (nations) as ethnicities later consecrated as elements of African heritage. Candomblé nations granted an ethnic identity independent of biological heritage, which was unknown to most Afro descendants who could not retain their family lineages due to the violent ruptures caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Consequently, those African founders of temples that could keep continuity with family lineages from West Africa were considered exceptional and gained more religious followers. On the flipside, white initiates could also take on an African ethnic identity through initiation. Although the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade “did not eliminate all of the historical consciousness of many African descendants, who know their ethnic origins well,” the twentieth century Candomblé nations “came to rest on spiritual affiliation, predominantly though not exclusively involving Bahians of African descent, women in particular.”³⁵⁰ Stephan Palmié asserts that the nations in the Afro-Latin diaspora are not based only on the diversity of African origins.³⁵¹ J.L. Matory agrees that each “is a product of interaction among nations” and “the class differences between nations and, consequently, between diverse nations’ ability to travel and promote their interests among New World elites.”³⁵² The visibility and resources afforded to the Nagô temples, then,

³⁴⁸ Luis Nicolau Parés, “The Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony in Post-Abolition Candomblé” (*Jornal de la Societé des Americanistes*, 2005), 13.

³⁴⁹ Rachel Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and alternative spaces of blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 40-41

³⁵⁰ Vivaldo da Costa Lima, “O conceito de ‘Nação’ nos Candomblés da Bahia” (*Afro-Ásia*, n. 12, 1976), 77; Reis, “Candomblé in Nineteenth Century”, 132.

³⁵¹ Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Exploration in Afro-Cuban modernity and tradition*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); J. Lorand Matory, “Free to Be a Slave: Slavery as Metaphor in the Afro-Atlantic Religions” (*Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 37, Fasc. 3, Out of Africa?, 2007), 401.

³⁵² Matory, “Free to Be a Slave”, 401.

should not be considered a form of ethnic purity or superiority, but rather the aggregation of support from the Afro-descendant population of multiple backgrounds that increasingly came to identify as Black.³⁵³

The orthodoxy of a nation is defined by the known origins of the founder.³⁵⁴ For the Nagô temples, the founder Marcelina da Silva (Iyá Nassô) was both ethnically and ritually Nagô. She also maintained transatlantic connections that guaranteed the authenticity of her African ritual foundations.³⁵⁵ Because of her multiply reinforced Nagô identity through religion, ethnicity and biological family, her legitimacy as an African religious leader was generally uncontested and legible to scientists like Nina Rodrigues, who was informed by biological racism and determinism.³⁵⁶ The overlap of ritual and biological family lineages from Yoruba regions continues to be a marker of prestige, orthodoxy and Africanness, as explored through the celebrated Black Mother figures of the twentieth century, Mother Senhora, Mother Meninha and Mother Olga de Alaketu.

In contrast, founders of the Congo and Angolan temples have less direct and demonstrable relationships to their respective ethnic homelands. Contemporary Angolan Candomblé leaders justify the relative uncertainty of origins as resulting from their deeper historical timeline, as African captives from these regions arrived in Brazil in the earlier phases of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.³⁵⁷ Religious leaders from Central West Africa established

³⁵³ Butler, *Freedoms Given*; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Reis, “Candomblé in nineteenth century”.

³⁵⁴ Costa Lima, “O Conceito de Nação”, 74, 77.

³⁵⁵ Vivaldo da Costa Lima, “O candomblé da Bahia na década de 1930” In: *Cartas de Edison Carneiro a Artur Ramos: De 4 de Janeiro de 1936 a 6 de Dezembro de 1938* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1987); Lisa Earl Castillo, *Entre a oralidade e a escrita: a etnografia nos candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2008); Butler, *Freedom’s Given*; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*.

³⁵⁶ Anadelia Romo, *Brazil’s Living Museum: Race, reform and tradition in Bahia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

³⁵⁷This discourse is often included in the justification for recognizing Bantu heritage sites in the IPAC cases (processos de tombamento). I also heard this justification orally from many Angolan leaders in seminars and oral

ritual organizations called *calundus* and practiced divination and healing practices as early as the seventeenth century, though during that time period they could not institutionalize their temples like the Nagôs of the nineteenth century could.³⁵⁸ Several historical factors contribute to this difference. The Nagôs had greater social and economic capital in late nineteenth century Bahia to establish their temples and guarantee their continuation through generations into the present.³⁵⁹ Additionally, priests from Angolan Candomblés often narrated that Bantu peoples were nomadic, taking their ritual practices with them in movement rather than fixing to the land in the way that Candomblé temples function today, based on the Nagô model, which was fixed in city-states in the regions of present-day Nigeria and Benin.³⁶⁰

The Angolan nation has been popularly characterized by male leadership and narratives of racial mixture consistent with national discourses of Brazilian miscegenation. In contrast, the Nagô nation is celebrated for its decidedly “African” heritage and female leadership through centennial temples. Regardless of nation, I argue, Black Mothers are revered as ancestral authorities and memorialized through the preservation and display of ritual and personal objects by their descendants. Angolan temples have been popularly characterized by male leadership and narratives of racial mixture consistent with national discourses of Brazilian miscegenation, and therefore less invoked in anti-colonial efforts based on Africa as the homeland. The historical

histories. For a written example, see Anselmo José da Gama Santos, “Terreiro Mokambo: Espaço de aprendizagem e memória do legado banto no Brasil” (M.A. dissertation. Universidade Estadual da Bahia, 2008).

³⁵⁸ James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, kinship, and religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Luiz Mott, “O calundu-Angola de Luzia Pinta: Sabará, 1739” (*Revista IAC*, no. 1, 73-87, December 1994).

³⁵⁹ Lisa Earl Castillo and Luis Nicolau Parés, “Marcelina Da Silva: A Nineteenth-Century Candomblé Priestess in Bahia” (*Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 31, no. 1, Routledge, pp. 1–27, 2010).

³⁶⁰ This narrative was especially presented to me by Laércio Messias do Sacramento, the head priest at the Terreiro de Jauá. He has a library full of historical sources on the rituals of Angola, participating in something like a “re-bantuization” process (like the re-africanization initiatives of the Nagô temples). The main historical source he referred to was Óscar Ribas, *Uanga - Feitiço* (Luanda, Angola: Ministério da Cultura, Comissão Organizadora da Conferência Internacional sobre a Vida e Obra de Óscar Ribas, 2009).

narratives of each nation have influenced their incorporation into cultural policies determining African heritage and territoriality in Brazil, where temples led by generations of women on the same plot of land for at least a century have been privileged.

African territories in Brazil

Land insecurity for Afro-descendant populations in Brazil is a historical continuity and the primary motivator for Candomblé communities to petition government agencies for their registration as heritage sites. Place-making for many Black and indigenous resident communities of the Americas is a historic process to gain the rights to citizenship and means to long-term community establishment for populations most physically vulnerable to displacement due to economic and racial inequalities. At present, the only constitutional rights for Black occupants of land in Brazil are granted to *quilombo* communities, narrowly defined as descendants of runaway slaves, often located in rural areas, and enforced through dysfunctional bureaucracies.³⁶¹ In urban areas, where the majority of the Brazilian population lives, “forced displacement is aided by the lack of legal recourse of residents in poor neighborhoods... the *povão*, the Blacks who occupy Salvador’s poorest neighborhoods, are unable to prove their legal right to the land they have lived on for generations”.³⁶² Resulting from sustained political mobilization, select historic Candomblé temples facing eviction, land invasions, speculation, urbanization, deforestation and pollution of waterways since the 1980s have successfully adapted the laws of cultural heritage to transform the land ownership into permanent use rights. Following the registration (*tombamento*), the government guarantees to protect the continuity of the site’s original

³⁶¹ French, *Legalizing Identities*.

³⁶² Perry, *Black Women Against the Land Grab*, 10. Perry’s work shows how “Localized community struggles for housing, land, and clean water take place against the backdrop of blacks’ historical struggles for emancipation and the global black struggle against enslavement and the multitudinous symptoms of colonialism and racial domination evident in modern-day society” (176).

structures and purpose—in the case of Candomblé temples to sustain ritual practice of an African “nation”, informed by ritual traditions associated with ethno-linguistic groups from West Africa.³⁶³

While sites to worship African deities were diverse and widespread throughout Brazil since the early sixteenth century, the establishment of Candomblé *terreiros*³⁶⁴ as institutionalized religious communities fixed to the land developed in the nineteenth century, dated by the foundation of the first Candomblé terreiro Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká by formerly enslaved African priestesses in the city of Salvador in the 1830s.³⁶⁵ Several generations of scholars have examined the foundation of the Terreiro Casa Branca, and recent historical research by Lisa Castillo and Nicolau Parés confirms the founder Marcelina da Silva (Iyá Nassô) was a formerly enslaved woman of the Nagô ethnicity who gained freedom in nineteenth century Salvador, became a slaveowner of other Africans within her kinship network, and traveled between West Africa and Brazil in the development of the temple and consecration of rites.³⁶⁶ Because of its documented origins, notoriety, sustained oral history and transmission of initiatory knowledge through the spiritual family on the same piece of land since the 1830s, Casa Branca is considered the *matriz*, the originator of all other Candomblé temples in Brazil and subsequently the model for African

³⁶³ The Candomblé “nations” (*nações*) are religious identities that refer to sources of ancestral knowledge derived from ethno-linguistic regions of the African continent during the 18-19th centuries (for example- Ketu, Nagô, Congo, Angola, Jeje).

³⁶⁴ This chapter uses the term *terreiro* instead of temple to mark the territoriality of the physical space and its importance to Candomblé rituals.

³⁶⁵ Luis Nicolau Parés has emphasized the Jeje foundations of Candomblé in the 18th and early 19th centuries and describes the process through which Nagô houses (of Yoruba descent) gained predominance following Casa Branca’s foundation. Luis Nicolau Parés, *A Formação do Candomblé: história e ritual da nação jeje na Bahia* (Campinas, SP: Editora Unicamp, 2006); Luis Nicolau Parés, “The Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony in Post-Abolition Candomblé. *Jornal de la Societé des Americanistes*, 2005, p. 139-159; Luis Nicolau Parés, “The ‘Nagôization’ Process in Bahian Candomblé” in Tony Falola (ed.), *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005, p. 185-208). See also Vivaldo C Lima, *A família de santo nos Candomblés jejes-nagôs da Bahia: Um Estudo De Relações Intragrupais* (Salvador, Bahia: Corrupio, 2003).

³⁶⁶ Lisa Earl Castillo and Luis Nicolau Parés, “Marcelina da Silva: A Nineteenth-Century Candomblés Priestess in Bahia, *Slavery and Abolition*, 31:1, p. 1-27).

ritual authenticity. Casa Branca's established status combined with impending encroachments on their land in the early 1980—threats of building a gas station on their sacred territory—placed them to become the first Candomblé temple registered as cultural heritage in Brazilian history.

Many temples were founded on small plots located within larger properties owned by wealthy plantation owners of the nineteenth century. The large landowners, beneficiaries of colonial policies and exploitative economic hierarchies, owned more land than they used or could even monitor, making areas of the properties susceptible to occupations by runaway Africans, quilombos and clandestine religious communities.³⁶⁷ Following abolition, the plantations were sold and broken up into smaller parcels, though many African descendants had a difficult time purchasing their own plots of land, instead establishing use rights or rental agreements to remain on their sites of worship. For example, the Gantois Temple was founded in 1849 on the extensive Garcia Plantation, a part of which was bought in 1844 by the Belgian Gantois family, to which the temple took its name. The Belgian family were wealthy slave traders with no direct affiliation to the temple's founders, who had relative autonomy to worship on their temple plot. Until at least the early twentieth century during the leadership of Mother Menininha, the Gantois temple community was still paying rent for their land, without legal ownership.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ Episodes of African landownership in the break-up of plantations in Salvador in the nineteenth century are documented in João José Reis, *Domingos Sodré um Sacerdote Africano: Escravidão, liberdade e candomblé na Bahia do século XIX* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008); Parés, *A formação*. I also located many archival sources confirming this pattern in the Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia (APEB), discussed further along in this chapter. For more information on the urban development related to land in Salvador, see Ana Amélia Viera Nascimento, *Dez freguesias da cidade do Salvador: aspectos sociais e urbanos do século XIX* (Salvador: UFBA, 2007); Elisabete Santos, et al (orgs.), *O Caminho das Águas em Salvador: Bacias hidrográficas, Bairros e Fontes* (Salvador: CIAGS/UFBA, 2010).

³⁶⁸ Lisa Earl Castillo, "Social Networks and Historical Ethnography of the Gantois Terreiro in the Nineteenth Century" (*Revista História*, São Paulo, n. 176, 2017); Lisa Earl Castillo, "Maria Julia da Conceição Nazareth: Documentos Históricos" (Salvador: Terreiro de Gantois, August 21, 2018). Personal conversation with Lisa Earl Castillo, April 11, 2019.

The Tumba Junçara Temple is situated in the Engenho Velho de Brotas neighborhood, which “has its origins in the construction of slave houses around a plantation in the nineteenth century... still today, there are remnant maroon communities in the area and many Candomblé temples.”³⁶⁹ Since the temple’s foundation in 1938, of the original territory used for their rituals, only 40% remains due to land invasions and housing construction.³⁷⁰ Oral histories from temple members state that during their founder’s time the temple was the main reference for the neighborhood, which as a broken up plantation, and that most people who lived there were connected to the terreiro or relatives of the initiates. With increased urbanization and the expansion of a major avenue (Avenida Vasco da Gama) very close to the temple, the population of the region increased dramatically. From the 1990s onward few of the local inhabitants were connected to the terreiro, and hostility increased along with the demand for adequate space for housing a booming majority Black population. Conflicts in the neighborhood have been rising and the state does not adequately provide health, childcare, infrastructure, pavement or public safety in the region.³⁷¹

Founded in 1910, the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple is popularly considered among the most “authentically African” terreiros in Bahia largely because of the life trajectory of the founder, Mother Aninha (Eugenia Anna dos Santos) and her initiatory affiliation to the Casa Branca Temple. Mother Aninha founded the temple in 1910 “to transform the Candomblé temple into a kind of Africa. She reunited ‘diverse African tribes’ in one space. Mother Aninha dedicated each

³⁶⁹ IPAC, *Processo de Tombamento “Tumba Junçara”* (Salvador: IPAC, 2018), 4.1 Levantamento histórico; Santos, *O Caminho das Águas*, 58. Original in Portuguese: “Do Bairro Engenho Velho de Brotas ‘teve origem com a construção de casas de escravos em volta de uma fazenda no século XIX... ainda hoje, existem remanescentes quilombolas no local e muitos terreiros de candomblé.”

³⁷⁰ IPAC, *Processo de Tombamento “Tumba Junçara”* (Salvador: IPAC, 2018), 4.1 Levantamento histórico. Original in Portuguese: “A área atual resulta dos 40% perdidos da área original, devido às invasões e construções para fins de moradia”

³⁷¹ Oral histories from the Seminar “Redescobrimdo Nossa História”, hosted on August 3, 2018 at the Tumba Junçara Temple in Salvador.

house to an orísá, thereby individualizing the religious practices.”³⁷² Besides a religious leader, Mother Aninha was also a financially successful merchant, facilitating the importation of African ritual materials as a commercial trader with shipments between Bahia and West Africa. Her commercial success contributed to her financial independence and allowed her to legally buy the large piece of land in the São Gonçalo neighborhood of Salvador where she built her terreiro of 39,000 square meters. At the time of Mother Aninha’s purchase of the property in 1909, it was divided by a plot formerly owned by the deceased wealthy and politically important slaveowner, the Commander José Barros Reis and next to another smaller property previously owned by a freed African man Abrahão Barros Reis, formerly enslaved to the Barros Reis family. Abrahão Barros Reis was “born on the coast of Africa to unknown parents” and died in Salvador in 1894 with a will that nominated his wife Lucinda Seuplvida, a freed African woman as his legal heir.³⁷³

The Bate Folha Temple was also established in the region owned by the Barros Reis family, and historical documents confirm that Roberto Barros Reis, another formerly enslaved African man and founder of the Angolan nation, first acquired these lands prior to the current temple’s establishment by Manoel Bernardino da Paixão, in 1916.³⁷⁴ The Dark Forest region presented other attractive advantages, especially during the era of state persecution of the Candomblé religion when Bernardino founded his temple. The distance from the city center and

³⁷² Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos, *Meu tempo é agora* (2ª edição, Assembleia Legislativa do Estado da Bahia, 2010), 20.

³⁷³ Escritura de compra: Dona Eugenia Anna dos Santos in *Políticas de acautelamento do IPHAN: Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá* (Salvador: Ministério da Cultura, 2015), 116. Original in Portuguese “natural da Costa d’Africa, filho de paes incognitos” suggests he was from the Costa da Mina, present areas of Benin, Nigéria and Togo.

³⁷⁴ The land title issued to Manoel Bernardino da Paixão details the same unusual description presented as Roberto Barros Reis’ land in his inventory of 1892, “six *tarefas*” of an “empty lot” embedded in the lands of Sacho José Bernardo dos Santos with neighbors Christovão Elias Seixas and Manoel Camillo. APEB, Escritura de Compra, Livro 1279, f. 33; Erivaldo Sales Nunes, “Contribuição para a história do Candomblé Congo-Angola na Bahia: O Terreiro de Bernardino do Bate Folha (1916-1946)” (Doctoral thesis, Salvador: UFBA, 2016), 162.

the relative isolation within the dense Dark Forest were strategies for preserving Afro-Brazilian rituals that depend on access to natural elements and the cultivation of plants and animals. Bate Folha members highlight the importance of their spiritual connection with the land. Dona Hêda expressed how “the temple is a sanctuary. These trees here all have life. And what we are doing here is being witnessed, not by the matter, but by them. They exist, they are forces.”³⁷⁵ Because of this profound connection with the sacred land, the late Makota Kátia Alexandria affirmed, “this house is, as I always say, a place where nobody should enter with shoes on. This here is a sacred space. This was already a Candomblé [temple] before Bernardino was able to get these lands for him.”³⁷⁶ While respecting the official foundation date of 1916, Bate Folha members recognize that the founder, Bernardino, likely established his presence in the region prior.³⁷⁷ Dona Olga, the oldest living member and historical authority in the temple, believes that Bernardino must have been functioning as a Candomblé priest in the region and preparing to found the temple by 1910 or 1912.³⁷⁸ Tata Muaguanxi, the current priest of Bate Folha, affirms that the oral tradition claims “Seu Bernardino occupied the Bate Folha lands since 1908-1910”, likely when he was just 15 or 17 years of age.³⁷⁹

In the reflections of elderly Bate Folha initiates, the historicity of the very land is recognized and respected. They identify themselves as inheritors of the land, passed through

³⁷⁵ Interview with Heda Maria dos Santos Leitão, Terreiro Bate Folha (Agência Experimental, UFBA, September 28, 2016). These “forces” in the religious context of Congo-Angolan Candomblé are the *nkisis*, the deities worshiped as energies contained within the natural elements, which all depend on the land for their cultivation and adoration. Original in Portuguese: “é um santuário. “Esses arvoredos todos aí têm vida. E o que é que nós estamos fazendo aqui está sendo presenciado, por matéria não, por eles, eles existem, são forças.”

³⁷⁶ Interview with Kátia Alexandria Barbosa, Terreiro Bate Folha (Agência Experimental, UFBA, October 5, 2016). Original in Portuguese: “essa casa, é uma casa que eu sempre digo que era um lugar que ninguém devia entrar aqui de sapato, isso aqui é um espaço sagrado, isso aqui já foi candomblé antes de Bernardino conseguir essa terra pra ele”.

³⁷⁷ Kátia Alexandria Barbosa, Terreiro Bate Folha (Agência Experimental, UFBA, October 5, 2016).

³⁷⁸ Nunes, “Contribuição para a história”, 259.

³⁷⁹ Nunes, “Contribuição para a história”, 184.

generations of African and indigenous residents that utilized the space and depended on it for their survival and health. Continuing that legacy is a central mission of the Bate Folha temple. Members still recall the presence of Africans of other “nations” on the land that is now their part of their terreiro, which was registered as Brazilian National Historic Patrimony by the federal government in 2003. This registration means that the federal government considered the physical property of 15.5 hectares to be a national monument and cannot be altered in any way without government approval. The anthropological evaluation of the temple for the federal case presented Bate Folha as “a monument that marks in national memory the strong presence of the Bantu people, who Brazil owes much of its formation”.³⁸⁰ Currently there is still a Jeje *assentamento* (a permanent altar) on the Bate Folha Temple property.³⁸¹ The Bate Folha members have respected and preserved the altar, belonging to deities (*voduns*) of the Jeje nation, which predates the foundation of their Congo-Angolan terreiro in 1916.

As these historical materials and oral histories demonstrate, Candomblé temples functioned within racialized geographies established by African-born leaders and the following generation of Afro-descendants in Brazil.³⁸² The legacy of these historical actors as upheld by the ritual families in the present-day Candomblé temples is a primary concern for the religious communities in dialogue with cultural agencies to guarantee the future of their religious practice, defined within the ritual nation of their founders. Understanding the cultivation of land by Africans and their descendants encourages a material approach to African land ownership, rather than merely an ideological construction of a new homeland.

³⁸⁰ Ordep Serra, *Os olhos negros do Brasil* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2014), 335. Original in Portuguese: “um monumento que marca, na memória nacional, a forte presença dos bantos, a quem deve o Brasil muito de sua formação.”

³⁸¹ Nunes, “Contribuição para a história”, 168.

³⁸² João José Reis, *Domingos Sodré: um sacerdote africano* (Companhia das Letras: São Paulo, 2008); James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2011); Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*.

Becoming *Tombado*

Until the registration of the first Candomblé Temple as national heritage in 1986, no Black or indigenous monument had been protected by IPHAN or incorporated into the official list of material Brazilian patrimony. The federal law (decreto-lei n. 25) of 1937 created IPHAN (the Institute for National Historical and Artistic Patrimony) and the legal instrument of *tombamento*³⁸³ as part of the 1937 Brazilian constitution, to protect “material and immaterial property” and to solve the question of legal ownership of properties constructed by the Portuguese colonial governments.³⁸⁴ The 1937 law determines the property’s national value through its “attributed cultural value,” verified by an appointed council from IPHAN, which has the authority to decide whether a property merits state protection. As highlighted by Brazilian scholar Maria Fonseca, cultural value is produced, appropriated and re-elaborated as a social practice among social actors—there is no inherent value to patrimony.³⁸⁵ Rather, cultural value changes with the shifting values of the nation and the social actors involved in its discursive and political construction. In the late twentieth century the instruments that had protected colonial monuments since 1937 transformed the law into a public recognition for historic Candomblé temples as a victory for Black politics in the construction of the Brazilian democracy.³⁸⁶

As part of the political re-opening towards the end of the military dictatorship, in the 1980s federal and state initiatives began establishing projects to map cultural monuments,

³⁸³ In Brazilian legal terms, the process of becoming national heritage is called *tombamento*, a word based on the national archive of Portugal Torre do Tombo, established in 1378 in the capital of Lisbon. In Brazilian Portuguese the verb *tombar* means “to fall” or “to tip over”, ironically making explicit the action that it is protecting against. Once something is “tombado” it can never legally be taken down, as the state guarantees the future of what was established historically because of its national cultural value. Nota do Tradutor, *Cartas Patrimoniais* (Brasília: IPHAN. Ministério da Cultura, 1995).

³⁸⁴ Maria Cecília Londres Fonseca, *Patrimônio em Processo: Trajetória da política federal de preservação no Brasil*. Editora UFRJ, IPHAN, 2005), 38.

³⁸⁵ Fonseca, *Patrimônio*, 41.

³⁸⁶ Serra, *Os olhos negros*.

recover historical memory and protect Afro-Brazilian and indigenous sites through institutional measures. The National Pro-Memory Foundation (Fundação Pró-Memória) created in 1980 initiated the project Ethnicities and National Society (Projeto Etnias e Sociedade Nacional) to “recover indigenous memory” through microfilming historical documentation in the Museu do Índio. Soon the Foundation organized a meeting of Black leaders from all parts of Brazil in Palmares, Alagoas, resulting in the creation of the Zumbi Memorial to honor the African maroon leader, a powerful and popular symbol of resistance to Portuguese colonization and Black pride in Brazil.³⁸⁷ The Pro-Memory Foundation also paired with the Municipal government of Salvador and the Cultural Foundation of the State of Bahia (FUNCEB) to create MANMBA (Mapping of Black Religious Sites and Monuments in Bahia) “with the basic objective to identify the principal monuments of this nature and define a politics for their effective protection.”³⁸⁸ The project focused on two case studies to alert the municipal government of urgent threats against the Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká temple and the São Bartolomeu Park, both key sites of Afro-religious worship in Salvador. The mapping identified over 2,000 Afro-religious sites in Salvador and the final report focused on the land encroachment and real estate speculation onto the oldest Candomblé temple in Brazil, the Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká (Casa Branca) temple.

The anthropologist leading the MANMBA project, Ordep Serra, initiated a petition to IPHAN to protect the Casa Branca Temple and save their land use rights. According to an oral history provided to me by Serra, that private land where the temple functioned was owned by the family of Príncipe Catarino, who were,

³⁸⁷ Ordep Serra, “Casa Branca, Monumento Negro” IN *Os olhos negros do Brasil* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2014), 247.

³⁸⁸ Serra, “Casa Branca”, 248.

...owners of great extensions of land [in Salvador], that they don't utilize, nor do any improvements, but they charge rent to poor people. And the people that were settled there irregularly paid this rent, and the Príncipe [family] had this project to reduce the temple to only the *barração* [ceremonial hall] and the house of Oxóssi, which is right behind it. The rest would be occupied by buildings, already implanted with a gas station, which was even called the Prince Station, so it was a concrete threat. The Terreiro Casa Branca has a recognized importance, it is the matrix of hundreds of temples. It's enough to say that Gantois came out of there, Afonjá came out of there, many others throughout all of Brazil, not just Bahia. It was a very dramatic situation. They couldn't petition for adverse possession because they paid rent and the law for squatter rights at that time is not the one we have now, it was more rigorous against poor people. So I brought the idea of proposing *tombamento*.³⁸⁹

The appeal received great resistance as he recalls, “important members of the IPHAN technical team came out as absolutely against the measure. The idea of registering a Candomblé really bothered them. It was to them wholly absurd... ‘without architectural value’.”³⁹⁰ That the Casa Branca temple did not legally own their land was a “principle objection” raised by the infamous IPHAN council that made a strong case against the temple’s *tombamento*, claiming the temple was on “private property” owned by an individual unrelated to the religious group and that the owner’s interests conflicted with the temple’s proposal.³⁹¹ The argumentation to deny Casa Branca’s future on the land by conservative members of IPHAN’s council clearly demonstrates the government’s defense of legal mechanisms to displace economically and racially marginalized populations through the legal protections of colonial inheritance, further

³⁸⁹ Oral History interview with Ordep Serra (Salvador, July 20, 2018). Original in Portuguese: “A propriedade do terreno era de... A família Príncipe Catarino, que são donos de grandes extensões de terra aqui, como não utilizam, não fazem nenhuma benfeitoria, mas cobram arrendamento de gente pobre. Então esse pessoal que estava lá instalados irregularmente pagava-se esse arrendamento. E ele tinha projeto de reduzir o terreiro ao barracão e a casa de Oxóssi, fica logo atrás. O resto seria ocupado por edifícios, já tinha implantado lá um posto de gasolina, que se chamava Posto Príncipe, por sinal. E era uma ameaça concreta. O Terreiro da Casa Branca tem uma importância reconhecida, é matriz de centenas de terreiros. Basta dizer que o Gantois saiu de lá, o Afonjá saiu de lá, muitos outros no Brasil inteiro, não só na Bahia. E era uma situação dramática. Não se podia pedir uso capião porque eles pagavam arrendamento e a lei de uso capião naquela época não era a atual, era mais rigorosa contra os mais pobres. Então eu levei uma ideia de postular o tombamento”.

³⁹⁰ Serra, “Casa Branca”, p. 225.

³⁹¹ Ordep Serra, “Casa Branca, Monumento Negro” in *Os olhos negros do Brasil* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2014), p. 256.

exacerbating inequalities stemming from the original theft of indigenous land and African labor in the establishment of the Brazilian nation.

Ordep Serra consulted the Casa Branca community to ask how they wanted to conserve their temple as a monument. To determine how to remodel the Oxum plaza in the temple, he sought out a *jogo de búzios* cowry shell divination with the temple's head priestess, who asked the deity Oxum what she wanted for the project. Serra presented the possibility of asking the most famous Brazilian architect, Oscar Niemeyer to remodel the plaza. During the divination he asked, "What does Oxum think?" The priestess replied, "Oh yes, that could be, because he is a [son] of Oxossi." Serra presented this as "Oxum's motive, pronounced through the consultation." He continued, "this is a curious element of the story. She said what she wanted, that it had to be a fountain, that it had to have this and that... so everything was consulted this way." Following the *tombamento* of Casa Branca, Serra was "suspenso" as a ritual son of the deity Iansã linked to the Casa Branca temple. Because of his success as an anthropological mediator sensitive to ritual procedures, he was then sought out by other temples "by orders of Iansã" to perform the anthropological evaluations.³⁹²

With sustained pressure from academics, public intellectuals, renowned artists, celebrities, and support from local and national politicians, IPHAN approved Casa Branca even with the remaining consenting votes. The landowner ceded its control of the property to allow for the temple community's ritual use of the space, which by that time they had been using for over 150 years, and prevented the construction of a gas station with permanent land protection by the federal government. Subsequently the Candomblé temple became understood as a heritage territory in several senses, as it combines different models: "it is a temple, like a historic church

³⁹² Oral history interview with Ordep Serra, July 20, 2018 (Salvador, Brazil).

or monastery; it is also a nature reserve, like parks; additionally, it is a sort of ‘ethnic reservation’, much like an Indigenous reservation.”³⁹³ Over the subsequent decades the application of heritage site status to Candomblé temples was an uneven process that created great demand from temples seeking land rights. Heritage policies were never created to address large scale land redistribution, though Black religious leaders succeeded in adapting the heritage law to the historic temples, deemed originators of nations.

Following the precedent of Casa Branca, the government agencies considered “matriz” the primary criteria to authorize its protection because of its “firstness”, assuming greater proximity to African ancestry and continuity of rituals, especially for houses that are representative of a ritual “nation” or ethnic group in the formation of the Brazilian people. IPHAN appoints an anthropologist to perform an official evaluation of the proposed monument to make a case for its historical importance to the Brazilian nation. Ordep Serra was the first anthropologist to perform the anthropological evaluation for the Casa Branca process of 1982, and according to him, he practically invented the model on his own because there was no precedent for it.³⁹⁴ Because of his role in the precedent-setting case and his long-term affiliations with local and national politicians, Ordep Serra has performed at least a dozen anthropological evaluations of terreiros at the federal and state levels, all of which have been *tombado* successfully (except one, which was withdrawn by the head priestess for internal reasons).³⁹⁵

Nearly fifteen years passed before the next Candomblé temple, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá was registered by IPHAN in 2000. By then the national political landscape had changed greatly under the President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Worker’s Party (PT), as the request passed with

³⁹³Roger Sansi-Roca, *Fetishes and Monuments: Afro-brazilian Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 118-119.

³⁹⁴ Oral history interview with Ordep Serra, July 20, 2018 (Salvador, Brazil).

³⁹⁵ Oral history interview with Ordep Serra, July 20, 2018 (Salvador, Brazil).

unanimous approval. The first temples to gain cultural recognition were of Yoruba ritual descent in Salvador (belonging to the Ketu and Nagô nations of Candomblé). The temple names use the Yoruba word *Ilê* for “house” or “home”, followed by the name of the founder (eg. Iyá Nassô, Iyamassi) or a historical reference to Yorubaland (eg. the warrior Afonjá or the city of Ketu). Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá is considered to be a “reduced model” of the Yoruban palace—the *Afin* of Oyó, incorporating a forested space and micro-representations of the city-states with their own hierarchy established among the many houses (*ilês*) for the deities (*orixás*).³⁹⁶ Heritage cases claim that in Yorubaland each individual orixá was worshiped in a separate temple, whereas Brazilian terreiros unite many orixás worshipped in one single temple. Each temple has a patron deity, though the Candomblé family worships and “feeds” a pantheon of deities on the religious site, each with their own altar (*assentamento*) and house (*ilê*). This adaptation is presented in the heritage cases as a practical modification given the limited space and jurisdiction available for Africans and their descendants in a slave society, often practicing in secret, or requiring strategic defense against persecution.³⁹⁷

Klas Woortman argued that the Candomblé terreiro is a “microcosm of an African social space,” a “transposition of the Yoruba clan (as a concept, principle) made through its reincorporation into the religious system”.³⁹⁸ At the same time the evaluations highlight the temples for their difference as African territories, they also emphasize the places as uniquely Brazilian in their social, ritual and spatial organization, which do not coincide with practices on

³⁹⁶ Muniz Sodré, “Axé do Opô Afonjá” IN *Políticas de acautelamento do IPHAN: Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá* (Salvador: Ministério da Cultura, 2015), 34.

³⁹⁷ Nicolau Parés argues instead that the vodun cults of the Jeje nation (from the Dahomey Kingdom) practiced the “organizational model” of worshipping multiple divinities in one space, and that rather than a “local ‘invention’ resulting from new sociocultural conditions in Brazil”, the Nagô houses based themselves on the Jeje precedent. Parés, *A formação*, p. 18.

³⁹⁸ Klas Woortmann, *A família das mulheres* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1987), 253, 256. Cheryl Sterling also emphasizes the terreiros as a “mini-Africa, an independent entity outside the jural and political authority of the Brazilian state, both in its territorialization and its institutional framework...” (*African Roots*, 26).

the African continent. For example, in his support of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, the journalist Antonio Risério claimed, “this creation results from the adverse conditions of slavery, generating a new cult model adapted to local circumstances.”³⁹⁹ The architectural evaluation by Márcia Sant’anna further reaffirms the temple’s unique Brazilianness, “this peculiar spatial organization of the Candomblé terreiros seeks to recreate, in a reduced area, the African religious geography, with its cults dispersed in various cities.” In her appeal, Sant’anna argues, “the Candomblé terreiro as we know it is a Brazilian invention.”⁴⁰⁰ It is worth noting that although certain temples are deemed more authentically African, even the purist houses are considered Brazilian by the state.

Afro-Brazilian journalist, sociologist and Candomblé initiate Muniz Sodré argued, “through the sacred, the Black people remade a fragmented reality on Brazilian land. The terreiro implicated the self-foundation of a group in diaspora. It was a *constructed* group, re-elaborated with new ancestors: the founding mothers (*Iyá*) of the temples”.⁴⁰¹ Sodré makes clear that the Mothers are the owners of the land and founders of the established African territories in Brazil through a material connection to the ancestors. As an African territory uniquely constructed and preserved in Brazil, the terreiro is marked as a space that differs from the dominant ethnicity, and even inverts the traditional hierarchical structures of Brazilian society.⁴⁰² Black female

³⁹⁹ Antonio Risério, “Axé do Opô Afonjá” in *Políticas de acautelamento do IPHAN: Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá* (Salvador: Ministério da Cultura, 2015), p. 33

⁴⁰⁰ Márcia Sant’Anna, Parecer n. 020/99/DEPROT. 22 de abril de 1999 IN *Políticas de Acautelamento do IPHAN: Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá* (Salvador: Ministério da Cultura, 2015), 133, 126.

⁴⁰¹ Sodré, “Axé do Opô Afonjá”, 35.

⁴⁰² Antonio Risério, “Axé do Opô Afonjá” in *Políticas de acautelamento do IPHAN: Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá* (Salvador: Ministério da Cultura, 2015), 34. On the inversion of hierarchies, see Mikelle S. Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred: Yoruba Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Rita Segato, “The Color-Blind Subject of Myth: Or, Where to Find Africa in the Nation”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 27, 1998, pp. 129-151).

leadership is a key feature of this inversion, as outside the temples Black women are the most disadvantaged social, political and economic demographic of the Brazilian nation.⁴⁰³

Today ten Candomblé terreiros are registered with IPHAN as national heritage sites. At the Bahian state level, IPAC has registered over twenty other temples in the state of Bahia as both material and immaterial patrimony.⁴⁰⁴ Following the registration of Bate Folha in 2004, no other Angolan temple was recognized by IPHAN until the recent approval of the Terreiro Tumba Junçara in 2019. The push to incorporate and protect more temples of “Bantu Heritage” into the discourse of African heritage in Brazil is a recent political and religious movement. Building on the possibilities of multicultural identity politics, select politically influential Angolan leaders have fought for inclusion into the national narrative of Afro-Brazilian history and religiosity. The vast majority of temples petitioning for protection to Brazilian municipal, state and federal governments, however, may never receive a response because the demand has superseded the policy based on monumentality first adapted to protect the land of the Casa Branca temple as the originating house—the *matriz*. Since then, movements to seek rights through cultural heritage policies have exposed the widespread structural issues faced by the vast majority of Candomblé temples throughout Brazil, which cannot be addressed through symbolic and discursive policies of multiculturalism under IPHAN.

In the opening vignette Mother Stella argued for a heritage policy of multiculturalism, in which all African ethnic groups represented through Afro-Brazilian religions have equal rights to

⁴⁰³ Kia Lilly Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black women, citizenship and politics of identity* (Rutgers University Press, 2007); Elisa Larkin Nascimento, *The Sorcery of Color: Identity, race and gender in Brazil* (Temple University Press, 2008).

⁴⁰⁴ The instrument of the *registro* was adapted by IPAC to protect Candomblé temples under the category of “immaterial patrimony”.

protection by the state.⁴⁰⁵ Scholars have pointed to the limits of multiculturalism as a tactic of neoliberal governance that publicly accommodates the needs of subaltern classes, but does very little to improve their life circumstances.⁴⁰⁶ Jan French highlights how the right to land is integral to the conception of social justice, particularly among Afro-descendant and indigenous populations in Brazil.⁴⁰⁷ Because cultural heritage is defined by monumentation and antiquity, not every Candomblé temple facing land insecurity can gain protection from the state on those grounds.⁴⁰⁸ Given that tombamento is the only current means to establish permanent and collective land use rights for territories that qualify as Black monuments, diverse temples throughout Brazil have increasingly petitioned the state for protection. The cultural agencies have responded that to protect all Candomblé temples would undermine the value of the instrument, which is meant to select the most iconic and representative monuments of the Brazilian nation.⁴⁰⁹

Despite the difficulties in reaching the highly coveted cultural heritage status, some Candomblé leaders have successfully created strategic narratives to present themselves within the terms deemed valuable by the cultural agencies. A few influential leaders in the sectors of religion, academia and politics have great influence in defining what counts as national or state heritage, and therefore who is granted the benefits of the registration, which include public visibility, prestige, political support, infrastructural renovation, and most of all, permanent land

⁴⁰⁵ For a more detailed study of Candomblé and liberal multiculturalism in the Brazilian democracy, see Elina Inkeri Hartikainen, “A Candomblé Politics of Respect: Forming an African Religious Public in Multiculturalist Brazil” (University of Chicago: Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, 2013).

⁴⁰⁶ Charles R. Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 34, issue 2002, pp. 485-524. Discussed in French, *Legalizing Identities*, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Jan French, *Legalizing Identities*.

⁴⁰⁸ Luis Nicolau Parés, “Nota sobre a noção de propriedade nos processos de tombamento dos candomblés” in *Políticas de Acautelamento do IPHAN para templos do culto afro-brasileiros* (Salvador: IPHAN, 2012).

⁴⁰⁹ IPHAN, *Políticas de acautelamento do IPHAN: Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá*. Salvador: Ministério da Cultura, 2015.

use rights for religious activities. One Candomblé priest stated that the anthropologist responsible for his case never even stepped foot in his temple, though he achieved approval as a Bahian state cultural heritage site in 2006. On the flipside, other Candomblé leaders I spoke with expressed no interest in engaging with the state as heritage. One priestess told me she only talks to outside people (*gente de fora*) to change prejudice against Candomblé and help diminish religious intolerance, that often arise from misunderstandings.⁴¹⁰ She was critical of other temples that have links to the government, claiming they lose their “energy,” depleting the spirits of the deities. She said she wanted to keep her house “pure” rather than “selling out” and taking money from the wrong people. Another priest made it very clear that he has no need to do interviews with researchers, and that he doesn’t care if his house “has a name,” because he knows it already has a name and history, making no difference whether or not academics know about it. He bluntly asserted that he does not care about tombamento because he does not trust the state. He wants to take care of his terreiro himself, and never wants to have to ask somebody else for permission to build or modify his land (*roça*).⁴¹¹

Select anthropologists and politicians have great representational authority in defining cultural patrimony and authorizing historical narratives, which gain their own weight and afterlives as they circulate in public discourse. The patrimonial politics have created a recursive cycle that reinforce certain tenets of the religion, representationally diminishing the diversity of ritual practice and social organization. One of these tenets is that the most authentically African houses are led by African and Afro-descendant women, based on the Casa Branca Temple and

⁴¹⁰ This priestess told me a powerful story about her daughter, who at ten years old was bullied at her school for being a macumbeira (pejorative term for Candomblé initiate). Despite being teased by Christian boys at her school for weeks, when the priestess’ daughter defended herself and talked back to the boys, she was called in by her daughter’s teacher, who claimed she acted inappropriately and rudely.

⁴¹¹ Following tombamento any structural changes to the terreiro must be approved by the governing agency prior to action.

the Iyá Nassô lineage as *matriz*. Although the state conferred more resources to the matriarchal temples, the public authorities did not seamlessly accept Black female leadership as a political priority, rather leaving the feature to the exceptional and differentiated social and physical space of the terreiro.

The dissonance between the cultural agencies' interpretation of Candomblé and the internal value systems of the temples is evident in the interaction between Mother Lúcia, head priestess of the Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia, and an IPAC technician in 2003. IPAC contracted a sociologist who asked elementary open-ended questions during the interview to evaluate the temple, demonstrating his minimal knowledge of the Candomblé religion and often confusing Mother Lúcia, who appeared uncertain how to respond given the framing and limited shared knowledge base. At one point, the interviewer "asked" a question through a command considered disrespectful when addressing the chief priestess in her territory, "Tell me (*Diga-me*) about the organization of the terreiro". Mother Lúcia responded with a puzzled follow up question, "organization in what sense?" "Hierarchical", he replied. She then explained the gendered structure of Candomblé leadership, "the organization is hierarchical, like in every Candomblé house. The Mother-of-the-saint is above everything else, afterwards the *ogãs* (male initiates), which in our case [of the Angolan nation] are the *tatás* and *makotas*", referring to her Angolan ritual language. Jumping on the opportunity to emphasize male participation in the religion, the interviewer immediately asked, "And what is the role of the *ogãs*?" Mãe Lúcia responded, "Ogãs have the role of taking care of the temple, fulfilling all of their obligations, chanting during the rituals. Religious obligations."⁴¹² Her vague response respected ritual secrets while maintaining her position as the authority on the subject. Although Mother Lúcia is

⁴¹² Interview with Maria Lúcia Santana Neves Santos, *Processo de tombamento: Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia* (IPAC: Salvador, 2003), 34.

unequivocally at the top of the hierarchy within her temple, when appealing for state protection and justifying her community's worth to a male state technician, apparently unfamiliar with Candomblé, she is subjected to opposing institutional hierarchies and power inequalities.

Conclusion

Ethnic difference among the “nations” of Candomblé proved a compelling argument accepted by Brazilian federal and Bahian state cultural institutes to protect the most historic temples who could historically prove their role as *matriz*—originators of their “nation.” The registration of these temples symbolically incorporated multiple African ethnic groups as defined through ritual practice into the narrative of the historical development of the Brazilian nation through legal procedures that had been only applied previously to protect colonial and Catholic monuments. Attributed to the origin story of Casa Branca as the *matriz* house, African female leadership became understood as a feature of Candomblé authenticity. Democratic multiculturalism allowed for the symbolic nomination of select temple representatives of African “nations”, though left the widespread issue of land insecurity and scarcity of resources among Candomblé communities unaddressed through the limited reach of cultural policies.

While the discursive value of Candomblé monumentation clearly bolsters the cultural institutions' claims to diversity and inclusion of historically marginalized populations, ultimately contributing to Brazil's “mestiço nationalism,”⁴¹³ the material benefits of that status are not guaranteed.⁴¹⁴ The cultural institutions' promises to “preserve” African culture through institutional and infrastructural means presents a host of other issues stemming from the

⁴¹³ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 204.

⁴¹⁴ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 204.

assumption that the state can and should play a role in maintaining religious traditions that have functioned independently and autonomously for centuries.⁴¹⁵

Many examples through my field research confirmed how Candomblé families guarantee the continuation of their own ritual practice and fight for their land, regardless of state policy. One initiate of Bate Folha illustrated how their land has divine protection; when land invaders tried to burn down the Bate Folha forest, she said the land was protected by Iansã's wind, which blew the fire away from the temple's property, eventually putting it out. Her story showed how the temple has a great force protecting it, and the Bate Folha family has always depended on their own forces more than any federal or state government bureaucracy, even after being nominated a federal heritage site. The cultural institutes were not intended to protect these kinds of monuments, and they are ill-equipped or even resistant to meet the specific demands of Afro-religious communities in Brazil, who often complain of the institutes' negligence and false promises following their registration.

⁴¹⁵ Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects*; Jan French, *Legalizing Identities*; Townsend Middleton, *The Demands of Recognition: State anthropology and ethnopolitics in Darjeeling* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

Chapter 4: Terreiro Memorials: Preserving Family Heritage

In 2003 Mother Lúcia (Maria Lúcia Santana Neves) of the Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia received a technician from IPAC – the Bahian State Institute for Cultural and Artistic Patrimony—to evaluate her temple, collect data and conduct interviews with the leaders. Mother Lúcia had inherited the temple following the death of her ritual Mother Mirinha do Portão over a decade prior and petitioned IPAC to protect it as a cultural heritage site. While appealing to the technician, she presented the issue as much bigger than her,

The importance of [registering as a cultural heritage site] is exactly to know that not just the people in the Temple—the initiated, the adepts—but also an agency at the level of the government is concerned with this [place] and won't let it die.

Speaking of her Mother, Mother Lúcia exclaimed, “she lived to preserve this culture and not to preserve herself.”⁴¹⁶ Deflecting possible accusations of self-interest or fame in the process, Mother Lúcia argued that her temple was a rare legacy of Bantu heritage in Brazil, Mother Mirinha “was one of the people who sought to fight to preserve the Bantu culture, which are few, the temples of Bahia and Brazil that preserve and cultivate the Bantu culture. And [they are] less and less known.”⁴¹⁷ Mother Lúcia eventually succeeded in being the first temple of the Angolan Nation to be registered by the Bahian state agency.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Processo de tombamento, “Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Goméia” (Salvador: IPAC, 2003), 52. Original in Portuguese: “... a importância do tombamento é justamente saber que não só as pessoas que estão no Terreiro, os iniciados, os adaptos, mas sim um órgão também a nível de governo se preocupar com isso e não deixar que isso morra.”

⁴¹⁷ Processo de tombamento, “Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Goméia” (Salvador: IPAC, 2003), 38. Original in Portuguese: “Foi uma das pessoas que procurou lutar, pra preservar a cultura ‘BANTU’ que são poucos os Terreiros na Bahia e no Brasil que preservam e cultuam a cultura ‘BANTU’. E tanto quanto pouco a pouco conhecido.”

⁴¹⁸ Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia was the first temple of the Angolan nation at the state level, approved in 2003. This occurred with the anthropologist and babalorixá (male priest) Júlio Braga was the director of IPAC. The Bate Folha Temple was registered at the federal level by IPHAN in 2005. Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia has not been approved at the federal level.

In the field of cultural politics, the Brazilian state has historically recognized Yoruba temples as the primary centers of African heritage.⁴¹⁹ Analyzing the hegemony of the Yoruba in the field of Candomblé since the nineteenth century, Nicolau Luis Parés notes that “the effect of individual charisma on religious change has not been sufficiently stressed in Afro-Brazilian studies.”⁴²⁰ The impact of charismatic leaders in defining the characteristics of their “nations” (*nações*) is not specific to the Yoruba, as prolific priests and priestesses of all nations have become larger than life figures sacralized by their ritual children, though unevenly recognized by the state and represented in the media. Like the processes described by John Collins in his study of the historic center of Salvador, Pelourinho, consecrating heritage in these settings also transforms *people* into patrimony.⁴²¹ Charismatic and prolific leaders of Candomblé lineages are sacralized by the ritual children they initiate into their nation. When the temple orients as “public Candomblé,” the legacy of the head Mother or Father may be positioned as representative of Afro-Brazilian culture writ large.⁴²²

The preservation of family lineages historically within the temple families demonstrates that the concern for tracing ancestry and preserving historical genealogies is a key feature of the Candomblé religion, adapted to the context of the memorials. A comparative ethnography between the Nagô Gantois Temple and the Angolan Terreiro São Jorge da Gomeia reveals how memorialization practices within the ritual family and the temple territory are embedded within the internal system of preservation and historical authentication unique to the Candomblé

⁴¹⁹ The centennial temples with Black Mothers from the Iyá Nassô lineage were the first to be recognized as cultural patrimony, so that Yoruba hegemony persisted in the emerging field of Afro-Brazilian heritage in the 1980s

⁴²⁰ Parés, “The Birth of the Yoruba,” 13

⁴²¹ John F. Collins, *Revolt of the Saints: Memory and Redemption in the Twilight of Brazilian Racial Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.

⁴²² Paul C. Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods. The transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 155-159.

religion.⁴²³ . Regardless of nation, I argue, Black Mothers are revered as ancestral authorities and memorialized through the preservation and display of ritual and personal objects by their descendants. What I call ritual embeddedness results from multi-generational familial practice of preserving historical objects belonging to the temple's founders and leaders, only recently adapted for a public audience. When founders of Candomblé nations become patrimony, the material artefacts once belonging to them are no longer only preserved and sacralized by the ritual family, but also increasingly by the state. The implementation of heritage policies favors individual leaders and temples—sometimes through political connections—who can subsequently construct and define the national historical narratives and guarantee their future legacy in the public sphere.

Religion as heritage

The negotiations between Candomblé temples and the state are permeated with epistemologies and ritual procedures that inform how academics, politicians and Candomblé leaders involved in the process interact and interpret one another through distinct logics and motivations. Luis Nicolau Parés named this dynamic between the cultural agencies and the Candomblé communities the “deaf dialogue,” in which neither truly hears one another because the “motivations and expectations of the two groups follow radically distinct logics.”⁴²⁴ Parés outlines the different priorities of the two institutions—whereas IPHAN privileges monumentality, cultural exceptionality and the origins of Candomblé nations, the temples

⁴²³ Roger Sansi, *Fetishes and Monuments: Afro-Brazilian Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (Berghahn Books, 2007), 99: “In Candomblé there have always been treasures that served as remembrances of the past... but these objects were not presented for public appreciation, nor were they displayed as part of a cultural and historical narrative. It is only recently that Candomblé practitioners have come to see their relics as having a museological value. That is to say the objects are seen not only as relics of a particular house but also as symbols of Afro-Brazilian civilization.”

⁴²⁴ Parés, “Notas”, 83. Parés draws from Wyatt MacGaffey (1994) in the characterization of the cultural communication problem between the Portuguese and Congolese in the 15th century.

privilege the reconstruction of their infrastructure, regulation of tourism, financial benefits for their leaders, and the materiality of their altars. He concludes that the registration of Candomblé terreiros has created a “bureaucratization of the sacred” through “legal formalization and standardization.”⁴²⁵ Parés concedes that although it might be a “deaf dialogue”, it seems to satisfy both parties involved.

Thousands of objects taken from Candomblé temples by the police are still held in private and public historical institutions including the IGHB and MAFRO (Afro-Brazilian Museum).⁴²⁶ Priestesses of prestigious and historic houses in Salvador have tried for years to get objects back, though they have been largely unsuccessful because of their inability to document the identities and trajectories of the objects back to their rightful homes in the temples.⁴²⁷ Coinciding with the rise of Candomblé in national heritage debates during the construction of the Brazilian democracy in the 1980s, Mother Stella of the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple took on the first initiative to create a museum inside of her temple to memorialize the founder and priestesses that preceded her—Mother Aninha, Mother Senhora and Mother Ondina.⁴²⁸

On August 3, 2018, the historic Angolan Temple Tumba Junçara hosted the seminar “Rediscovering our History,” organized annually since 2012 under the leadership of the head priestess Nengua Mesoenjii (Mother Iraildes). The event brought together the Engenho Velho de

⁴²⁵ Parés, “Notas”, 88.

⁴²⁶ The collection of Candomblé objects at the Afro-Brazilian Museum of the Federal University of Bahia – UFBA used to be housed in the Estácio Lima Museum.

⁴²⁷ Correio da Bahia, “Após 93 anos, peças sagradas para o candomblé são identificadas e catalogadas” (Salvador, January 24, 2016).

⁴²⁸ According to an informational pamphlet given to me at the Opô Afonjá temple in 2011, the museum was created after Mãe Stella’s first trip to Africa in 1980. She narrated her experience, “In Nigeria, I visited some museums and one of them had a very simple proposal: to tell the story of the city through everyday objects of its inhabitants. I remembered all the material that we had in the terreiro, Mãe Aninha’s clothing, Mãe Senhora’s objects, all spread around... So in 1982 we opened the Ilê Ohum Lailai (The House of Old Things), considered the first museum created inside a house of an Afro-Brazilian religious cult”. The narration of the experience is also presented in Azevedo Santos, *Meu Tempo É Agora*.

Brotas neighborhood, local Candomblé leaders, representatives from the Tumba Junçara lineage throughout Brazil, professors, and students from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and representatives from the local, state and federal governments. When Mother Iraildes entered the ceremonial hall with a line of women following behind her to mark the beginning of seminar, the audience members stood up to honor her highness in the ritual order. A prominent male initiate (Tata) emceed the event in front of a long table decorated with a Brazilian and Angolan nation flag next to one another and presented hostility towards the historic relationship between the temple and academia. He made it clear that academics cannot come to Tumba Junçara “any which way,” that one has to “step in here slowly,” because the head priestess Mother Iraildades “has her own council.”⁴²⁹ He exclaimed that the temple does not need “intermediaries,” or other people to interpret their own history; they can do it themselves. The temple’s message rang clear that day: we know our own history, we will register it ourselves and share it with whom we wish, when we wish. We control our own representation, and we need to occupy public positions of power to construct policies that truly serve us.

Tumba Junçara offered an intentionally confrontational tone as an escalation of their long negotiation with IPHAN for pending approval as a Brazilian cultural heritage site. The urgency for their approval stemmed from land insecurities and encroachments onto their temple in the neighborhood, as well as the upcoming commemoration of their centennial in 2019. To not be swiftly approved at this moment reflected negligence on the part of the cultural agencies, which had approved other centennial temples facing similar issues.⁴³⁰ A panel of three women

⁴²⁹ This information is paraphrased from the seminar “Redescobrimo nossa história” hosted at the Tumba Junçara temple on August 3, 2018. Original quotes: “não pode chegar aqui de qualquer jeito” / “tem que pisar aqui devagar” / “a mãe de santo tem sua própria assessoria”. The term translated as “council” could also refer to a media team, security, posse, as a means of protection indicative of her role at the top of the ritual hierarchy.

⁴³⁰ Not approving a centennial temple might be considered particularly egregious given how few centennial temples are still functioning today, and that only one from the Angolan nation at that time had been considered a cultural heritage site.

represented the cultural patrimony agencies at the municipal, state and federal levels in the ceremonial hall that day, up for scrutiny. The emcee seemed hesitant to facilitate this panel and passed the mic over to a doctoral student and former IPHAN employee, Desirée Torres, who had been helping with the negotiations. Torres strategically highlighted the fact that Angolan Candomblés in particular had so few stories written about them, that the field is open for them to represent themselves in a democratic context where the Ketu temples had already done the ground work for Candomblé to be considered national heritage. She noted the absence of a discourse of purity in Tumba Junçara, highlighting instead the importance of them recognizing their mixture and multiple influences as a *milonga*, though still Angolan.⁴³¹

Before the three government representatives had a chance to talk, the eldest Father Tata Emetério held up a large bounded printed inventory at the front of the room, waving it around and emphatically slamming it down on the table in front of the government authorities. He explained that inside of this document contained all the historical materials, artifacts, and stories from Tumba Junçara as well as their oral histories, passed on through generations, written down, photographed, and organized by members of the temple. The IPHAN technician responsible for representing the temple's case looked at the thick booklet that had made a resounding thud with hesitant eyes and exclaimed, "I only have a week to write my report!" Tata Emetério reinforced that all the documentation had been previously turned in, and that this symbolic act was to make sure IPHAN had no excuses—that it had gotten lost, for example—confronting them face to face

⁴³¹ Milonga is defined by members of Tumba Junçara as mixture of African peoples due to the conditions of slavery. Esmeraldo Emetério de Santana, "Encontro de Nações" (Salvador: CEAO, UFBA, 1984), 36. Original in Portuguese: "então virou o que eles mesmos chamam *milonga*. Milonga é mistura... foi assim que eles fizeram. Misturaram, porque eles, na senzala, tinham, ali, de todas as 'nações', e, quando era possível, eles faziam qualquer coisa das obrigações deles... a mesma coisa fez-se no cântico."

to respond. All that material and historical proof of their cultural value was now quite literally in IPHAN's hands.

That day I could not see the contents of the large document, but the month prior at the IPAC (Bahian State Institute for Artistic and Cultural Patrimony) archives I located an inventory, which likely composed at least a portion of what was presented at the seminar. The inventory was the result of a prize offered by IPHAN in 2014 for the “cultural patrimony of the peoples and communities of traditional African descent.” It presented a catalogue of the historical items with photographs held by the temple since its foundation, recorded and categorized. Most of the ritual items catalogued are still in use, including the Xére, an object of authority and hierarchy, from the time of the temple's foundation in 1919. Other notable items include the ritual tools used by the founder, Manuel Ciriaco's patron deity, Kavungo, which are still used to call the deity to “dance” in the ceremonial hall. A significant object remains from the current head priestess' initiation in 1953, which she keeps at the temple. The chairs (used as thrones for the temple's leadership) from Ciriaco as well as his caboclo spirit from the 1940s are also still in the house. The temple also has several sculptures of Catholic saints, placed at the back of the ceremonial hall, including one for Saint Anthony commemorating the date of the temple's founding on the saint's holiday June 13th, 1919.

Tumba Junçara pushed for recognition and appealed to be integrated into the state apparatus because of the material protection associated with the federal cultural heritage title, but also because the title would consecrate their place as the second oldest Angolan temple still functioning in Brazil. Although the Bahian state and Brazilian federal heritage policies seek to identify and protect the origins of Candomblé nations as representative of Brazil's multicultural landscape, the implementation of the policies are influenced by other factors including personal

charisma, political connections and the criteria of historical legitimation as upheld by anthropologists in collaboration with the government.

Whereas heritage is meant to be collective as relating to national identities and histories, the implementation of heritage policies favors individual leaders who become sacralized into the historical narrative and guaranteed the infrastructure for their future legacy in the political sphere. Contemporary religious leaders without historical connections to Candomblé territories or Black Bahian communities can enter the field of African cultural heritage in Bahia by intentionally compiling material evidence to assert the authenticity of their lineage. Consider the success of Anselmo José da Gama Santos, known as Tata Anselmo, founder of the Terreiro Mokambo, established by purchasing land in 1996 in a poor, peripheral region outside of the city center of Salvador. Tata Anselmo is from Rio de Janeiro, has a master's degree in Education from the State University of Bahia (UNEB) and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in the same university.⁴³² He often appears in public events, seminars, popular festivals and government events as a representative of the Angolan nation.⁴³³ In a speech he gave during the 2017 ceremony celebrating the temple's registration as a state cultural heritage site, Tata Anselmo presented his position that the temple, "has been developing the work of maintaining the African Bantu tradition in a vigorous way with great importance for the Candomblé of Bahia and Brazil."⁴³⁴ He constructs his lineage in the Angolan nation from,

⁴³² Jocélio Teles Santos and Luiz Chateaubriand C. dos Santos, "Pai de santo doutor": escolaridade, gênero e cor nos terreiros baianos" (*Afro-Ásia*, 48, 2013). This article cites the rising prevalence of Candomblé Fathers who are also educated in universities as the two sites of knowledge production influence each other. He also cites the long history of white and elite leadership in the temples.

⁴³³ Including seminars hosted by him in his temple, lectures given at academic conferences and government cultural events. He also takes a prominent public position in the popular festival, a Lavagem do Bonfim, which has been characteristically led by black women. The changing demographics of the leadership of this public festival are commented with frustration by current leaders of the orthodox matriarchal houses.

⁴³⁴ "Cerimônia de tombamento" (Terreiro Mokambo, April 23, 2017). Original in Portuguese: "Tendo sido fundado em 18 de janeiro de 1996, o terreiro Mokambo Onzó Nguzo za Nkisi Dandalunda ye Tempo vem desenvolvendo um

...my ancestral great-grandfather Jubiabá, ancestral grandfather to Joãozinho da Gomeia, [and] ancestral mother Mirinha do Portão, who since the beginning of the nineteenth century have done a significant job in maintaining the continuity that I now have in my hands. It is through this [registration as a cultural heritage site] that this history will be preserved for the strengthening of our tradition. And to express the importance of the Bantu tradition in the ethnic and cultural formation of the Brazilian people.

Notice how Tata Anselmo's trajectory, which he claims traces back to Jubiabá in the nineteenth century, hangs exclusively on his initiation by the Black Angolan Candomblé Mother, Mirinha do Portão.

In 2016, the Mokambo temple received a grant from the Bahian State Institute of Artistic and Cultural Patrimony (IPAC) of BR\$89,000 to construct an archive and a memorial inside the temple. Due to his educational level and close relationships with the Bahian political and intellectual elite, the Mokambo memorial was granted the support of professional museologists and archivists to research and organize material to be deposited and maintained in the temple. The memorial highlights the legacy of Bantu peoples in Brazil and constructs the ritual genealogy of Tata Anselmo and the Mokambo temple through material objects and photographic sources on display. The memorial presents the Angolan nation of Brazilian Candomblé as the inheritor of Bantu culture and a legacy that has often been obscured and undervalued in the popular narratives of Afro-Brazilian heritage. The memorial includes several large panels with historical information and maps on routes of the slave trade, highlighting the region of West Central Africa (especially Congo-Angola) as the primary source of Africans enslaved and brought to Brazil through the transatlantic slave trade. Two other large panels provide biographies on Tata Anselmo's predecessors in his particular lineage of the Angolan nation, presenting the trajectories of Jubiabá (Severiano Manoel de Abreu), Joãozinho da Gomeia (João

trabalho de manutenção de tradição africana banto de forma vigorosa e de extrema importância para o candomblé da Bahia e do Brasil.”

Alves Torres Filho), and Mother Mirinha do Portão. The Kisimbiê memorial and archive present historical proof of Tata Anselmo's trajectory in the Angolan nation, which is contested by other temples in the Gomeian lineage. The memorial also reproduces newspaper clippings on Jubiabá to highlight the most remarkable and valuable piece in the collection, Jubiabá's chair. Anselmo's acquisition of the historic chair from the IGHB (Geographic and Historical Institute of Bahia) illuminates his political connections, ambitions and the methods of constructing his legacy through a dialogue with institutions of historical preservation in Salvador.

Jubiabá was a prominent Caboclo priest in early twentieth century Salvador. He and his temple were often targeted by the police during the state's persecution of African ritual practices. In one police raid on October 6, 1921, the police arrived at a *caboclo* ceremony and "took Jubiabá by surprise" at his temple, proceeding to steal ritual objects including "a collection of charms, formulas for recipes, medicinal leaves, from his pharmacy, as the exploiter besides fooling his victims even illegally exercises medicine, giving prescriptions. A chair was also apprehended, with a symbolic inscription."⁴³⁵

⁴³⁵ A Tarde, "A Feiticaria (Policia cerca a casa de Jubiabá)" (Salvador: October 6, 1921). Original in Portuguese: "uma colleção de manipauos, fórmulas de receituário, folhas medicinaes, da sua pharmacia, pois o explorador alem de enganar as suas victimas ainda da exerce ilegalmente a medicina, passando do receitas. Foi também apprehendida uma cadeira, com uma inscrição symbolica."



Figure 7: Jubiabá's chair located in the Terreiro Mokambo in Salvador. Photo by the author.

Tata Anselmo claims that Jubiabá initiated Joãozinho da Gomeia in Bahia, serving as the source of knowledge for Joãozinho's Angolan rituals. Joãozinho da Gomeia became the most prolific figure of Angolan Candomblé in the twentieth century and initiated likely thousands of people into his sect, including Mother Mirinha de Portão, who then initiated Tata Anselmo.⁴³⁶ Oral traditions and religious descendants of Gomeia disagree on Joãozinho's initiation story and the sources of his ritual knowledge. Mother Lúcia's temple, Saint Jorge Children of Gomeia, for example, does not highlight Jubiabá as the primary source of ritual knowledge or the founder of

⁴³⁶ Anselmo José da Gama Santos, "Terreiro Mokambo: Espaço de aprendizagem e memória do legado banto no Brasil" (M.A. dissertation. Universidade Estadual da Bahia, 2008). See a more in-depth discussion of Joãozinho da Gomeia in Chapter 5 "Fathers in a City of Mothers".

their Gomeian lineage. Rather, Joãozinho da Gomeia is their starting point for their Angolan nation and they do not attempt to go further back in their historical trajectory.

Despite the obscurities and controversies surrounding the ritual origins of Jubiabá and Joãozinho da Gomeia, Tata Anselmo defiantly presents Jubiabá as his spiritual great grandfather, explicitly using ritual kinship as a means of legitimizing his inheritance from one of the key founders of what he presents as a unitary and cohesive “Angolan nation” of Brazilian Candomblé. He constructed this narrative so convincingly that he became the first leader of a Candomblé temple to acquire a repatriated object from the police raids that were so common of the twentieth century, and apprehended Candomblé objects from numerous temples in Salvador. Jubiabá’s chair is unique in the collection of Candomblé objects taken by the police because its ownership is inscribed on the material object itself. There are no doubts as to the origins of the chair, which are corroborated by historical records of the police raid in Jubiabá’s temple. By presenting historical records of Jubiabá and the specific raid in which the chair was taken, Tata Anselmo was able to trace the IGHB’s acquisition of the chair and claim rightful ownership through his lineage of Candomblé. A daughter-initiate of the Mokambo temple confirmed that it was through the research process of constructing the memorial that they discovered the records necessary to petition the IGHB to get the chair back and include it in the Kisimbiê memorial.

In this case, spiritual inheritance in Candomblé was recognized as a viable means of ownership by the IGHB, reflecting a broader change in cultural politics and sensitivity to the logics of Candomblé kinship from historical institutions in Salvador. The chair’s acquisition was facilitated by an employee at the IGHB—a friend to Tata Anselmo who often appears at seminars and ceremonies at the temple. At the delivery ceremony on October 28, 2015, the president of the IGHB stated that Jubiabá’s chair “did not belong to us, but we guarded it and

preserved it for 90 years, which is our job as an institute” and, “returning the chair is justice” as part of their “politics of tolerance and equality.” He affirmed, “Anselmo is the titular descendant” of the chair, and the “Delegacy of Games and Customs⁴³⁷ was an abuse” to the Candomblé community. According to the IGHB president, the board of directors accepted unanimously the decision to return the chair to the Mokambo Temple.

During the ceremony, Tata Anselmo confirmed that Jubiabá’s chair was the first piece taken from the police to be returned to “its origin,” and highlighted the government’s historic prejudice against Candomblé, citing the pain and suffering of “our ancestors.” He also emphasized the chair’s importance as a “symbol of power” in the Candomblé context, marking hierarchal roles and nobility granted to religious leaders. Tata Anselmo publicly declared convincingly that Jubiabá initiated Joãozinho da Goméia, thereby reinforcing his legitimacy as the chair’s inheritor, though certainly not the only one, as Joãozinho da Gomeia initiated likely thousands of children into his lineage. To close the ceremony, he exclaimed with tears in his eyes, “Come on, Severiano, let’s go home.”⁴³⁸

The clear initiatory genealogy as presented by Tata Anselmo were true also means that several other current leaders could claim ownership of the chair. Members of other Bahian temples have criticized Tata Anselmo as the proper recipient of the chair for many reasons. For one, Anselmo himself is from Rio de Janeiro and his temple is relatively new in Salvador, established only twenty years ago. The memorial includes a plaque that displays his status as an “honorary Bahian citizen,” something granted to him as an adult, rather than granted by birth and upbringing—greatly contrasting with the Bahian Mothers leading their communities in Bahia for

⁴³⁷ The Delegacia de Jogos e Costumes was the governing body regulating Candomblé until its abolition in 1976.

⁴³⁸ Video recording, “Ceremônia de entrega da cadeira de Jubiabá”. Salvador: IGHB, October 28, 2015. Accessed at the Mokambo Archive on June 23, 2017.

generations. In addition, there is no historical continuity between Anselmo's temple and that of Jubiabá, in contrast to other centennial houses like Gantois, Bate Folha, Casa Branca, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, Alaketu and Tumba Junçara that have established a clear succession of leaders on the same land from their foundation to the present. In those cases, the logic of inheritance is arguably clearer and more direct. Yet, of these temples, only Gantois currently has a functioning memorial with government funding and support comparable to Mokambo.

This example shows how religious leaders can establish themselves, produce fame and gain followers in the contemporary field of Bahian Candomblé, even within an economy of prestige where historicity is privileged. Mother Stella warned about this possibility in the mid-1970s, when she lamented how “now everybody wants to be [part] of Candomblé,” and that the desire to become famous could jeopardize the work the priestesses had done to be taken seriously as a religion.⁴³⁹ Tata Anselmo strategically constructed his temple to further bolster his status as an inheritor of the Bantu lineage in Bahia. While the heritage policies seek to identify and protect the origins of tradition, they often result in greater access to previously occult ritual and historical knowledge, which can then be reproduced by new actors. The visibility and public recognition his temple gained are influenced by his personal charisma and established connections rather than a multi-generational historical trajectory on the ritual territory.

In contrast, Tumba Junçara's struggle to protect their land and ancestral practices among a majority Black community of initiates aligns with political struggles for racial equality and representation situated within the neighborhood they have operated in for a century.⁴⁴⁰

Comparing the two struggles show how the politics of recognition in Candomblé do not always

⁴³⁹ A Tarde, “Stella de Oxossi é a nova Yalorixá do Opô Afonjá”, March 22, 1976 (Salvador: Fundação Gregório de Mattos).

⁴⁴⁰ The struggles for land protection for Tumba Junçara, among other temples, are discussed in the following chapter.

coincide with the politics of redistribution to Black Bahians.⁴⁴¹ This recent opening of cultural heritage policies in Candomblé created more space for new leaders to enter the field of Afro-Bahian religious politics and culture, and represent Bantu heritage, sometimes yielding material benefits. Initiates that do not share biological family lineages with Black Bahian communities can become representatives of African cultural heritage through the initiation process of Candomblé that separates ritual and biological lineages.

Memorials for Mothers: Ritual embeddedness

Among the Candomblé family, historical practices to preserve materials from the temple's founders and successive leaders are intertwined with ritual practices of maintaining knowledge of the ancestors and ancestral languages. The ethnography presented here reveals how the construction of internal memorial spaces builds on generational practices of preserving ritual objects and historical information belonging to the founders and successive leaders. This section compares the memorials constructed for two Afro-Bahian Candomblé Mothers—Mother Menininha of the Nagô nation and Mother Mirinha do Portão of the Angolan nation. Mother Menininha's Memorial represents the Gantois Temple's long historical trajectory traceable to nineteenth century West Africa and the subsequent prestige and institutional support gained from the propagation of this exceptional multi-generational African family in Brazil. The Mother Mirinha memorial, in contrast, has a shorter documented chronology, though the founding priestess had an immense transformational impact on her local community of Portão. The attention given to these two priestesses as emblematic symbols of their Candomblé nations—Nagô and Angola—further demonstrates the importance of charismatic leaders in the definition

⁴⁴¹ These debates are developed further in the subsequent chapter, alongside the “deaf dialogue” hypothesis of Luis Nicolau Parés, “Nota sobre a noção de propriedade nos processos de tombamento dos candomblés” in *Políticas de Acautelamento do IPHAN para templos do culto afro-brasileiros* (Salvador: IPHAN, 2012).

of lineages, and Mothers specifically as the generators of ethnicities in the politics of cultural patrimony writ large.

As presented in Chapter two, Mother Menininha was the most publicly celebrated Candomblé priestess during her long life, which spanned nearly the entire twentieth century. Born on February 10, 1894 in Salvador to parents Joaquim and Maria da Glória, Maria Escolástica da Conceição Nazareth was a descendant of Africans from the Egbá-Arakê nation of the (present day) Southeast of Nigeria. She was a great granddaughter of the freed Africans Maria Júlia da Conceição Nazareth, founder of the Gantois Terreiro in 1849, and Francisco Nazareth de Etra.⁴⁴² The Gantois Temple is internationally recognized for its consistent, one hundred and sixty plus years of female leadership with biological ancestry from West Africa. During her lifetime, Mother Menininha became *the* emblematic example of a Candomblé priestess, reinforcing the role as traditionally occupied by maternal Black women. Her image disseminated through mass media, portraying her as “a friendly black grandmother, wearing black-rimmed spectacles and the traditional white crinoline dress of the Bahian priestess”.⁴⁴³ Her sixty-four-year leadership at the Gantois Temple and her charismatic, social and affective personality attracted the attention of the most famous and influential artists, politicians and intellectuals, shaping the public perception of the Candomblé religion in Brazilian national life. As previously highlighted in scholarship, “the preservation of Mãe Menininha’s memory could not come across just as an individual matter: it had to be framed as the ‘preservation of Afro-Brazilian culture’, or the preservation of Afro-Brazilian memory.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴²Cida Nóbrega and Regina Echeverria, *Mãe Menininha do Gantois: Uma biografia* (Salvador: Corrupio, 2006); Lisa Earl Castillo, “Social Networks and Historical Ethnography of the Gantois Terreiro in the Nineteenth Century” (*Revista História*, São Paulo, n. 176, 2017); “Memorial Mãe Menininha do Gantois” (Terreiro do Gantois Blog, 2017, www.terreirodogantois.com.br).

⁴⁴³ Adinolfi and Van de Port, “Bed and Throne”, 292.

⁴⁴⁴ Adinolfi and Van de Port “Bed and Throne”.

Given Mother Menininha's significant impact on the Candomblé community and her monumental importance as a national cultural figure, soon after her death members of the temple began appealing to public authorities to support the creation of a memorial to preserve the personal, ritual and professional items accumulated and used throughout her life. The initiative began with Mother Menininha's biological daughter and successor, Mother Cleuza. At the time, children of the Gantois temple held positions in Bahian state cultural institutions and a major media agency; together they mobilized the technical and financial support to create the memorial, which opened in 1992.⁴⁴⁵ The memorial was designed as a "Museumification of her living quarters,"⁴⁴⁶ maintaining the physical structure of the very room where she received illustrious visitors and commanded the temple from the comforts of her home imbedded within the religious center. The curated space is explicitly called a Memorial, rather than a museum, dedicated to the life of Mother Menininha specifically, highlighting her accomplishments through medals, diplomas, certificates and letters, as well her original ritual clothing, jewelry, orisha instruments and other objects of great ritual and material value. Because of the public recognition of the Gantois Temple, the infrastructure for the Memorial is of the highest quality, guaranteeing the future preservation of the over 500 pieces of Candomblé history and ritual, presented as having greater significance than just the personal life of Mother Menininha.

Items on display in the first room of the memorial include the centennial stamp printed by the Brazilian federal government to celebrate 100 years of the Gantois Temple as well as a special edition coin printed by the federal mint for the same occasion. My guide, an older light-

⁴⁴⁵ ACM also "requested the museologists and restorers at the Museums Board of the Cultural Foundation to restore the pieces, make a project of the memorial and implement it. Financial support was provided by Nizan Guanães, a filho-de-santo of Mãe Menininha who owns one of Brazil's most successful advertising agencies, called 'Africa. Adinolfi and Van de Port, "Bed and Throne", 296.

⁴⁴⁶ Adinolfi and Van de Port "Bed and Throne".

skinned woman and daughter-initiate of Mother Menininha, emphasized that very few copies of the coin were made, and that only the most illustrious children of Gantois still have them (like the famous singers Maria Betânia and Gal Costa). On the wall in the same room are regally framed certificates and diplomas—one from the French Ministry of Culture granting Menininha do Gantois the title of “Commandeur de L’orde des artes et des lettres” dated October 9, 1985. When presenting this item, my guide emphasized that the title is *customarily* only given personally in Paris, but that Mother Menininha was the *only* person to receive it outside of France because, she exclaimed, “my mother never left here for anything.”

A “Civic and Cultural Medal” granted by the International Institute of Genealogy from the state of Rio de Janeiro on her birthday, February 10, 1978 is proudly framed on the entrance wall. The honor recognizes Mother Menininha’s national ascension as a woman with a traceable African family history. The extraordinary aspect of Mother Menininha’s family history is of course not simply that she *has* African family ancestry, or that her parents and relatives were enslaved, but that she has knowledge of her family origins on the African continent. Most African descendants in Brazil did not have access to the institutions and familial resources to guarantee the preservation of that knowledge. For people of African descent implicated in the history of the transatlantic slave trade, knowing one’s origins is for the privileged few. Being born into the family that founded the Gantois temple guaranteed the preservation of knowledge of Mother Menininha’s genealogy. The preservation of her family lineage further demonstrates that the concern for tracing ancestry and preserving historical genealogies is a key feature of the Candomblé religion, adapted to the context of the memorials.

Upon turning the corner from the opening historical gallery to Mother Menininha’s “museumified” personal bedroom, our guide reinforced with enthusiasm, “this is her room as she

lived with her things organized the way she lived. It is very emotional.” Mother Menininha of Gantois did not visit others, she was visited. Her living quarters served as the operational room of her Queendom, summoning visitors, politicians, artists and intellectuals from near and far to sit at the foot of her bed, drawn to *the* source of Africa in Bahia, often to seek divine consultation at her *jogo de búzios* table. The site of her personal bedroom as a place of both rest and work reflects the hybrid nature of the Candomblé memorials as a union of opposite characteristics—public and private, sacred and political, personal and professional. My sensation as a first-time visitor of the memorial and admirer of the Candomblé women was of honor and privilege to gain access to the most intimate space of the celebrated Mother Menininha, approximating as close as now materially possible to the living entity. This feeling is intentionally fabricated by the museum designers and is not novel in the memorialization of internationally celebrated figures to expose their “extraordinary ordinariness” and the “backstage of celebrity lives.”⁴⁴⁷

My guide affirmed that the room’s furniture is original, including the radio that Mother Menininha listened to every night, a small refrigerator and stove, the bed with her small shoes placed at the foot, and the iconic cane that she used to poke the *iaôs* (new initiates) when they got in her way. The scenic arrangement of her bedroom was presented as if she were to once again climb out of bed and take a slow walk around the temple. The preservation and display of the physical materials of her life resembled traditional museum practices, but also the arrangement of sacred objects in the composition of altars to the orixás (the *assentamentos*).⁴⁴⁸ In Candomblé cosmology, certain objects attract divine entities and are charged with spiritual power, demanding they must be taken care of and stored properly. Mother Menininha’s ritual

⁴⁴⁷ Adinolfi and Van de Port, “Bed and Throne”, 258.

⁴⁴⁸ Sansi, *Fetishes and Monuments*, 29: The *assentos* are part of the Mothers’ “‘distributed person’ - the umbilical cord linking 'mother' and 'daughter'.”

children could not simply store out of site or throw away (*jogar fora*) the material remnants of the great matriarch, considered to have saintly status in the context of her temple, and given her impact on the local community and Brazilian culture globally.⁴⁴⁹

While touring the memorial, my guide commented that on Mother Menininha's birthday February 10th, the Gantois temple "feeds" every one of their saints—providing food offerings at the altars for the orixás. On that day she stated that no initiated person (in the case of Gantois, exclusively women who receive the deities as spirit possession) can enter the room without *bolando em santo* (physically incorporating the deity through spirit possession). On Mother Menininha's birthday, the saints are brought to life with food offerings and Mother Menininha's descendants receive the spiritual entities worshipped in the temple. Keeping the orishas well-fed, is a primary concern for the Candomblé family to maintain the health, stability, and success of the family. It became apparent to me that Mother Menininha's living quarters is not simply a "museumification" process, but a process of transforming her living quarters into a functional altar, keeping her presence alive through her material objects and encouraging her to stay at home for her eternal rest, maintaining dominion over her temple as a spiritual guide.⁴⁵⁰ The spiritual power (*axé*) represented in the physical materials used by Mother Menininha's Oshum during ritual possession, then, is inseparable from Mother Menininha's own power and the divine presence of her patron deity, Oshum. Preserving the object also preserves the deity,

⁴⁴⁹ While the display of materials is extensive, at the end of the tour my guide showed the door to a back room of reserve materials in two large steel armoires in storage, which she stated holds between 800 to 1,000 pieces of clothing, some of which are stored randomly. Other items include jewelry, additional gifts and objects that need restoration, or simply cannot be put on display due to the limited space of the current memorial, which is already extensive.

⁴⁵⁰ Roger Sansi, "Miracles, Rituals, Heritage: The Invention of Nature in Candomblé" (*The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, vol. 21, No. 1, 2016), 64, 66: "In Candomblé cosmology, "Orixás are present both in people and things: in the body of an initiate and in shrines... Axé is not an objectified power: it is not something that people have as property, but is something that they *are*; it is not detachable from them as persons, but inalienable."

which as suggested by this ethnographic example, still has the power of activation through her ritual descendants in the sacred space of her living quarters.

When entering Mother Menininha’s “museumified” bedroom, my guide pointed out her “santinhos”—three small Catholic saint figurines prominently featured in her room because “My Mother was *very* Catholic.” Her Catholicism is not presented as a point of tension with her African heritage as constituted in Brazil or her participation in Mother Stella and Mother Olga do Alaketu’s anti-syncretism campaigns. Three saints are incorporated into ritual acts of the Gantois ritual calendar—in June for Oxóssi, in July for Nanã and São Roque in August. A procession of Gantois initiate take these exact figurines in an ornamented straw basket to Catholic Mass at a historic Catholic Church and then are returned to their proper place in the temple for the Candomblé ritual act, which coincides with the Catholic calendar. During my visit, Saint Roque was still in the basket on display in the ceremonial hall (*barracão*), having been taken from the memorial to Catholic Mass and back to the temple for the celebration of its orixá, Omolu⁴⁵¹ the previous Sunday. The *barracão* was decorated with beautiful panels and figures made of straw with Omolu’s figure adorned with cowry shells. The small white male face of São Roque stood peeking out from an overflowing basket of white and red flowers, engulfed by abundant green leaves. São Roque was placed underneath a much larger statue of São Jorge on horseback (the patron deity of the Gantois Temple), though both male European saints were overshadowed by the domineering command of Oshum, the ultra-feminine goddess of fresh water and fertility, painted as an expansive mural behind the main altar where the current head priestess, Mother Menininha’s biological daughter Mother Carmen, and her “small” mothers (*iyakerere*) sit as the contemporary authorities of the temple.

⁴⁵¹ Omolu is the deity that wares off sickness and plague during a high season of viruses and sickness in August.

The guide referred to the Catholic saints as “santinhos,” the diminutive and affective term that explicitly belittles them in comparison to the primary worship of the orishas. The diminutive also refers to their small size, as they are placed as figurines—almost toys—on top of Mother Menininha’s bedroom dresser and in the baskets brought to Mass. As objects they too have religious meaning, though far insignificant to the primary worship of the orixás, who would never be referred to as small or insignificant in the diminutive “inho”. Rather, Oxum reigns Gantois as the feminine legacy of Mother Menininha and the African women before her. The luxurious aesthetic of Oxum is well-represented through Mother Menininha’s memorial, which showcases clean and orderly ritual objects used by Mother Menininha’s Oxum, including pieces like the *adebés* “which you cannot find anywhere else in the world” and an *adejá* that had only been seen from a Nigerian princess who once visited the temple. She emphasized that “not one of them is the same”—they are beautiful and unique tools (*ferramentas*) exclusive to Mother Menininha’s Oshum, an international and historical reference for the elegance, wisdom and maternal power of the great mother of fresh waters. Her shining gold fans, bells, and knives made of the finest and brightest material are displayed as material proof of Gantois’ continuation of the ways of the ancestors, as well as the refinement of their temple.



Figure 8: Ritual tools (*ferramentas*) belonging to Mother Menininha's Oxum, on display at the Memorial Mãe Menininha at the Terreiro Gantois. Photo by the author.

To compare the ritual practices of memorialization in two temples of different nations, both founded by Black Mothers, we now turn to Altamira Maria da Conceição, known by her religious title Mother Mirinha de Portão. Throughout her lifetime she was a community leader, a nurse, midwife and a widely celebrated Candomblé priestess. Born on December 21, 1924 in Portão, Bahia, she was initiated into the Angolan Candomblé tradition in 1933 at nine years of age by the Father Joãozinho da Gomeia in Bahia. Joãozinho was a controversial figure, explored in detail in Chapter 5 of this work, described by the temple members as “a famous *pai de santo* who over many years challenged the bourgeois Brazilian society, having recorded the first album of Angolan Candomblé [chants], he contributed greatly to the elevation and preservation of Afro-Brazilian Culture”.⁴⁵² Joãozinho reached national fame after moving to Rio de Janeiro in the 1940s, figuring prominently in the media and serving as a spiritual consultant for national politicians, including the president Juscelino Kubitschek.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Processo de Tombamento “Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia” (IPAC, Salvador, 2003).

⁴⁵³ More contextualization of Joãozinho and his legacy—not sure where this goes in the dissertation yet.

In 1948, Mother Mirinha founded her own Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia (The Children of Gomeia Temple “to continue the legacy of Gomeia, a symbol of preservation of the Bantu culture in Bahia.”⁴⁵⁴ Mother Mirinha’s temple in Portão is the only continuous, extant temple in the Gomeian lineage in Bahia. Her full title “Mother Mirinha of Portão” proudly incorporates the name of her neighborhood Portão, a predominantly Afro-Brazilian and low-income coastal region in the Lauro de Freitas county to the north of Salvador, which during her upbringing was quite rural with minimal infrastructure or civic resources. A nurse by vocation, together with her religious leadership Mother Mirinha had an immense impact on her community. Her largest initiative was the creation of the first hospital in the county, made possible by her close alliances with politicians in the metropolitan region of Salvador. Her temple is still an important reference for the Portão region and the Angolan nation of Candomblé, and although the lineage began with a man, the temple has been led by two women for the last seventy-one years.

Mother Mirinha’s biological granddaughter Maria Lúcia Santana Neves was chosen as the heir following her death and has continued her legacy as the acting priestess of the temple since the early 1990s. Mother Lúcia, who opened this chapter, describes her Mother-priestess and biological grandmother as “a very strong woman, a fighter... A person who helped the community... a person who, with little schooling, was able to reach Mayors, Governors, [in order] to bring things to Portão [and to] take the name of Portão with her.”⁴⁵⁵ When the technician from the Bahian cultural agency visited Mother Lúcia, the Mother Mirinha

⁴⁵⁴ Pamphlet “Seminário Mãe Mirinha do Portão: 70 anos de preservação da cultura de Matriz Africana” (Portão, Bahia, April 28-29, 2018).

⁴⁵⁵ Processo de Tombamento “Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia” (IPAC, Salvador, 2003), 21. Original in Portuguese: “Mãe Lúcia fala da Mãe de Santo e biological grandmother: “uma pessoa muito forte, lutadora, batalhadora. Uma pessoa que ajudou muito a comunidade... corria pra cá e ela tentava ajudar. Uma pessoa que apesar do pouco estudo que tinha conseguiu ir até Prefeitos, Governadores, trazer coisas para Portão, levar o nome de Portão.”

Community Museum had not yet been constructed but was in a stage of planning and preparation. The evaluation states that “Mother Lúcia das Neves (Mameto Kumurisi) searches to preserve the memory of Mother Mirinha, initiating the fight for the creation of the Mother Mirinha Memorial, in the sense of preserving and communicating to young people the priestess’ trajectory.”⁴⁵⁶ The president of the temple’s Civil Society Raimundo Nonato das Neves characterized the Mother Mirinha of Portão Community Museum as a project “in a maturing phase,” highlighting that the temple has a museum technician working on the project. He also mentioned the near completion of an oral history project composed of recorded and re-recorded interviews on the life of Mother Mirinha as a central component of the project.⁴⁵⁷ A posthumous article from a local newspaper further emphasized Mother Mirinha’s importance to the Portão community, calling her “the greatest symbol of Portão”, and because of this wide recognition, “her name was given to one of the post cards of the city, the ‘Mother Mirinha do Portão Tourist Terminal.’”⁴⁵⁸ In 2018, when I conducted research at the temple, that very terminal was in a state of disrepair and government abandonment.

The year 2018 marked seventy years of the temple’s founding by Mother Mirinha. The temple organized several events to honor the founding priestess, including special ritual celebrations and an intensive public seminar from April 28th to 29th called “Mother Mirinha of Portão: 70 years preserving the culture of African descent.” I participated in public ceremonies and the seminar and after months of trying to access the memorial as an individual researcher

⁴⁵⁶ Processo de Tombamento “Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia” (IPAC, Salvador, 2003), 8. Original in Portuguese: “Adoecer em 1988, falecendo em 18 de fevereiro de 1989. O terreiro fica fechado durante 01 ano - através dos búzios a nomeação da neta mãe Lúcia das Neves (Mameto Kumurisi) “que desde então busca preservar a memória de Mãe Mirinha, desencadeando desde então a luta pela criação do memorial Mãe Mirinha de Portão, no sentido de preservar e comunicar aos mais jovens a trajetória daquela Ialorixá (Mameto em Banto).”

⁴⁵⁷ Processo de Tombamento “Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia” (IPAC, Salvador, 2003), 19.

⁴⁵⁸ Jornal Lauro de Freitas, May 1995, n. 6 – accessed in Processo de Tombamento “Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia” (IPAC, Salvador, 2003).

(they often provide guided tours to international or local educational and political groups), I finally received an invitation from Mother Lúcia's biological daughter, Géssica, to visit the memorial on August 10th, together with celebrations for Tempo –the most widely celebrated Angolan deity associated with air and time observed by all Angolan temples on that same day.

Upon my arrival, I was greeted by a young Black woman incorporated as a *vunje* child spirit. She seemed to find me amusing—a solo *gringa*—and asked if I was there for the *limpeza* (the spiritual cleansing for the Tempo celebrations). I replied yes, having been notified of this aspect of the visit, and said that I had scheduled to meet with Gessica. One quick shout and Gessica appeared suddenly, though upon first glance I could just as quickly see that she was not who I had anticipated for my guided visit of the memorial. Her African child spirit, who I later came to know as *Conchinha* (little shell), was very happy to see me. She gave me a big hug and promptly opened the memorial for me, as if we were embarking on a secret mission together. My entrance to Mother Mirinha's memorial space facilitated by the ritual encounter was suddenly fast and rather disorienting. The Gessica I had seen at previous events at the temple was now acting and talking very differently, as she and many other women in the terreiro were incorporated with the *vunje* child spirits. She exclaimed to her other *vunje* friend that I was there to spend the day with them, as if it were a play date, and that I would eat *carurú* with them (the preferred ritual food of the child spirits—which I also enjoy, but later found out was a word that simply meant any kind of food) and stay the evening, implicating me in the full day of festivities and plan of activities that were largely opaque to me. Another *vunje* entered the memorial with us and explained that this was their New Year's celebration (August 10th, the party for Tempo). There was truly a festive air in the temple, which was decorated for the occasion and open for visitors seeking their spiritual cleansing and blessing from Tempo.

Soon my time alone with Conchinha in the Memorial was bombarded by new child spirits swarming in and out with an air of jubilation. One offered me a raffle ticket for a chance to win perfume, which I signed up for as to not disappoint the eager children. Soon after another one came in and asked if I had my *pano* (cloth) for the *limpeza*, which I did not, but no worry I could buy one from Conchinha for a small price, though I did not understand the nature of the financial transaction at first because they used a different word for money. After some simple explanation that I had to pay in true Brazilian currency, I happily purchased the item to fit the ritual code as much as possible given my foreign, non-initiate status. Without much time to engage with the memorial, yet another young woman came in with a beautifully adorned basket filled with green and white necklaces dedicated to Mother Mirinha's patron deity *Gongombira*, wrapped as little gifts, also for sale. In the festive and collaborative spirit, I gladly purchased the hand-made trinkets for a reasonable price. Luckily that day I came prepared with some cash, having learned from my mistake the previous year, when the priest at a different Angolan temple scorned me in front of everyone for not making a proper financial offering to Tempo.

During my "guided visit" in the memorial, Conchinha spoke a pidgin language that periodically replaced common Brazilian Portuguese words with Candomblé ritual words, drawing upon a mixture of African languages often unintelligible to me given the pace of conversation and the childish tone of expression. The *vanjes* or *eres*, which I had previously encountered at a *caboclo* ceremony and after *festas* at other terreiros, often speak in a bashful tone and mumble to non-incorporated adults, who to them amusing in their conventions. Conchinha herself had a strong lisp and often slurred her words. The *vanjes* speak fluently among one another and like to create mischief, often giggling and playing, getting into innocent trouble and fully embracing the carefree spirit of uninhibited childhood.

In my projected anticipation of this visit, Conchinha was not my preferred museum guide. She was largely uninterested in “explaining” the pieces on display and fielding my academic inquiries. She delivered no rehearsed speeches or tight historical narratives, greatly contrasting with my experience at Mother Meninha’s Memorial at Gantois. At one point another woman, a *makota*, unincorporated and fully adult, came in and helped translate some of Conchinha’s phrases, though she was clearly busy herself taking care of the *vunjes* running around the temple and hosting the many visitors coming for the Temp cleansings. Conchinha casually gestured to pieces in the memorial, offering quick snippets of sporadic and incomplete information. Most of what I saw on display were Mãe Mirinha’s everyday personal objects and ritual objects used by her deities, the *nkisis*. I asked if any of the objects were used anymore and unlike the *santinhos* at Gantois, Conchinha exclaimed that of course not, that the *nkisi*’s ritual objects and tools belong to their one and only owner and cannot be used again. The same is true of the ritual objects from Mother Meninha’s Oxum; the use restriction of ritual materials in Candomble incentivizes the creation of memorials, to preserve the ritual objects that are so intimately connected to celebrated and beloved leaders, honoring their power despite their current separation from the living entities that once activated them. The objects on display are now material memories of a life gone, though a legacy very much alive, reflected through the health of the spiritual family and the maintenance of rituals passed through generations of practice.

The scale of Mother Mirinha’s memorial and its conditions of preservation are incomparable to the infrastructure at Gantois or Mokambo, which are funded by the government and famous private donors, bolstered by tourist initiatives in the center of Salvador. In contrast, the modest memorial in the peripheral region of Portão resembles something like a family living

room, constructed in honor of the deceased matriarch and founder of the temple, while also upholding the importance of the current head priestess. There were many portraits and paintings of Mother Mirinha and of the current priestess Mother Lúcia. Some of the photos, like one of Mother Lúcia with former president Dilma Rousseff, were casually propped on top of cabinets of ritual objects. Many framed images and objects were not mounted on the wall, which was covered in simple bamboo sheets, serving as the wallpaper in the small square room.



Figure 9: Memorial Mãe Mirinha in the Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Gomeia, Portão, Bahia. Photo by the author.

With scarce verbal statements, Conchinha emphasized that Mother Lúcia travels around the world, gives lectures and presentations, and meets with important religious and political leaders. The Angolan masks prominently displayed in the memorial provided physical proof of those travels and her contact with the contemporary regions of Bantu-descent. Some of the masks had accompanied captions with written captions and information on the associated deities and their ritual uses on the African continent—reinforcing the continuity of the ritual practices at

the Children of Gomeia Terreiro in Bahia with the “sources” of knowledge in Central West African countries.⁴⁵⁹

The memorial incorporated limited historical documentation on Mother Mirinha’s life; I could only identify her obituary underneath the music album “Rei do Candomblé” created by Joãozinho da Gomeia of Angolan chants. I did not have the chance to find out if the temple has a more extensive archive of written material on Mother Mirinha, though the state evaluation included materials provided by the temple such as newspaper excerpts and the statute for the civil organization, suggesting a modest archive within the temple. The most prominent materials on display were from Mother Mirinha’s daily life and the ritual moments that marked her power and prominence as a religious leader. On display were her many iconic pairs of eyeglasses, as well as a special cup and saucer she used, alongside more expensive items like earrings, necklaces, rings, and bracelets. Though far from a museumification of her living quarters as in Mother Meninha’s Memorial, the veneration and respect for Mother Mirinha shown through the modest accommodations, reflecting the ritual embeddedness of Candomble memorials in the familial and ritual space of the terreiro.

I took impressions as fast as the snapshots on my camera—as Conchinha’s patience was clearly on a tight leash and she was anxious to get onto the cleansing. Sensing the limited time granted for the visit, I signed my name on the small list of visitors in a notebook and noticed that nobody had signed into the memorial for a few weeks. Everybody else in the temple that day was uninterested in visiting the memorial, clearly occupied with other more celebratory activities. I know the memorial is only opened on special occasions, because I had tried for years to find the

⁴⁵⁹ Some people refer to this as a re-Bantuization process, similar to re-africanization initiatives in the Yoruba-descended temples (discussed in Capone, *Searching for Africa*).

right circumstances to gain access and like most Candomblé memorials, there are no consistent hours of operation.

On my way to the temple that day I had stopped to buy a sweet treat as a gesture of gratitude for the invitation, not knowing the *vunjes* would be hosting me. Luckily, sweets are the offerings for the child spirits. Pleased with my chance decision, after the memorial visit I surprised Conchinha with the gift. Conchinha jumped in excitement and called her friends over to devour the sweets within a few short minutes, granting me an invitation to sit with them, though I was not an effective conversational companion given their language. As I sat with the *vunjes*, young children of the temple were playing in the festive spirit, scooting around in paper boxes, pulled by older initiates as if an imaginary train. I waited my turn for the cleansing around Tempo's sacred tree alongside initiates and local visitors. While waiting, I befriended a near deaf elderly woman who had been initiated by Joãozinho da Gomeia in Rio de Janeiro decades ago. After the cleansing, I was invited to eat with the temple family and celebrate the birthday of another older woman who had also been initiated by Joãozinho da Gomeia. Clearly the temple family had rejoined since the initial years following Mother Mirinha's death and the ascension of the young Mother Lúcia. The older generation was firmly beside the new initiates; the Children of Gomeia family united again. They sang an birthday song in the ritual African language together with the beating of ceremonial drums, played energetically by young boys. Mother Lúcia cut the cake and distributed it among the temple members by order in the hierarchy. Géssica took the first cut piece to the base of Tempo's tree, now full of offerings after the long day of limpezas.

Although Mother Mirinha's temple was founded in the mid-twentieth century and to my knowledge she does not have documented knowledge of her family ancestry in West Africa, like

Mother Menininha, she is a powerful symbol of Afro-Brazilian cultural and civic life. During visits to several temple memorials, it was evident when the materials were displayed in a new way based on old customs of preserving historical artefacts, versus when those artefacts were intentionally constructed for public consumption and political gain. For Mother Mirinha and Mother Menininha's memorials, the presentation "does not at all diminish the sacred nature of this site, but actually articulates it in a new way."⁴⁶⁰ What I call the ritual embeddedness of these sites reflects the composite ways in which Candomblé historicity and ritual practice infiltrate the field of cultural patrimony, remaining faithful to the family's goal of maintaining ancestral lineages. Furthermore, the Candomblé temples led by Black Mothers craft the memorialization of their founders and leaders on their own terms. Even though the presentation may strategically appeal to a public audience, the Mothers' legacies remain at home rather than expropriated to historical institutions that have been complicit in the persecution, discrimination, and violence against Candomblé temples. The organization of Candomblé memorials inside the temples allows for greater control over the narratives shared publicly and the preservation of the objects that carry the ritual power of their deceased owners.⁴⁶¹

Conclusion

The integrated and multi-purpose uses of the memorials as historical and ritual spaces are testament to the creativity and adaptability of Candomblé temples as their leaders advocate for their value and insertion in Brazilian national life and history, as well as their material protection

⁴⁶⁰ Adinolfi and Van de Port, "Bed and Throne", 285.

⁴⁶¹ Sansi also characterized the memorials for Mother: "the display focuses on the *maes do santo* who have been the link, the mediation between the interior, hidden value of *axe* and the public value of Afro-Brazilian civilization." Sansi, *Fetishes and Monuments*, 96.

by state institutions. While the objects on display are only those suitable for public visitation, unlike the altars (*assentamentos*) tucked away in private ritual quarters, their intimate material connection to the deceased leaders who serve as iconic representatives of African “nations” in Brazil instill in them historical power and increasingly national relevance.

As seen through the many ethnographic examples presented in this chapter: the ritual uses of the Catholic *santinhos* as they transit between the memorial, the Catholic Church and the Gantois ceremonial hall; the Gantois initiates who upon entering the memorial on Mother Menininha’s birthday become incorporated by the *orixás*; and the tour of Mother Mirinha’s memorial offered by the African child spirit Conchinha during the ritual celebration of Tempo, Candomblé memorials are intimately integrated into the ritual activities and historical authentication processes of the terreiro and the family of saints. I argue that the internal methods of safeguarding ritually charged objects among historic temples were adapted to the composition and public orientation of Candomblé memorials. The memorials’ public gaze, though limited in reach as many are still difficult to access, modifies the traditional “secretism” of ritual altars and objects unacceptable for public consumption to prominently display appropriate materials from deceased Candomblé leaders, asserting their legacies as national heroes within the boundaries offered by Afro-Brazilian heritage.⁴⁶² As Roger Sansi posited, “there is an affinity between the practice of the production of heritage in cultural policy and the practice of production and reproduction of ancestry, ritual tradition and lineage in Candomblé.”⁴⁶³ The practices can be learned through religious inheritance, but they can also be recreated with the support of academic, government and historic institutions.

⁴⁶² On secretism in Candomblé, see Johnson, *Secrets, Gossips and Gods*.

⁴⁶³ Sansi, “Miracles, Rituals, Heritage”, 61.

In recent decades, leaders of the Angolan nation have asserted themselves as rightful beneficiaries of cultural heritage policies, seeking the same status and protections granted to the Nagô temples since the mid-1980s. To do so, they reinforce historical narratives of their founders, of their ethnic group, and opened themselves more to the public by organizing events and seminars inside the temples. This recent opening has created space for new leaders to represent the nation on their own terms. Though, it has also created more space for new leaders to enter the field of Afro-Bahian religious politics and culture, and represent Bantu heritage, sometimes yielding material benefits. Initiates that do not share biological family lineages with Black Bahian communities can become representatives of African cultural heritage through the initiation process of Candomblé that separates ritual and biological lineages. Nevertheless, Black Mothers such as Mother Mirinha do Portão and Mother Menininha remain the privileged representatives of African cultural heritage both to the families and to the state.

Chapter 5: Fathers in a City of Mothers

“Even though our Candomblé is essentially a matriarchy, when some men begin to receive roles given by the orisha themselves, to take care of houses, then it mixes. Today both men and women incorporate the orisha. It is not specified. It is not of our will.”⁴⁶⁴

Throughout the twentieth century, as Black female leadership became the measure of orthodoxy in the “African sects” of Candomblé, male religious leaders faced an uphill battle for recognition and legitimacy.⁴⁶⁵ Ideas that male leaders of Candomblé were less African, less orthodox and therefore less prestigious gained traction through the cultural politics in the later decades of the twentieth century, as the government and media rarely included Candomblé Pais-de-Santo—Fathers—in public debates. Furthermore, homophobic stigmas and stereotypes based on charismatic figures in the development of Candomblé—particularly Joãozinho da Goméia—defined gay⁴⁶⁶ male leadership as a central feature of the Angolan nation, creating associations that to this day affect the public visibility and legitimacy of the Angolan temples in contrast to the “traditional” temples of the Jeje-Nagô, Ketu and Yoruba-descended houses defined by their matriarchal leadership. Examining the media coverage and scholarship on Candomblé Fathers in the early 20th century show how the progression towards reaching a public consensus on Black female leadership as a central tenant of African heritage was neither swift nor clear in the religion’s development.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview with Ana Louisa Talaiby (Lauro de Freitas, July 19, 2016). She is the head priestess of her own temple.

⁴⁶⁵ Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil; Power and tradition in Candomblé* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); James L. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, transnationalism and matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Alonso, Miguel C., *The Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities in Salvador, Bahia, 1835-1986* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁴⁶⁶ I use the terms “gay” and “homosexual” interchangeably but privilege “gay” in my own analysis to speak to a contemporary Anglophone audience. I use the term “homosexual” from the scholarship of the 1930s to explore the concepts and reproduce the term as it was used by Candomblé initiates and leaders during my ethnographic research. I use the term queer when referring analytically to a broader field of sexuality that is not determined by heteronormativity or binary gender. In my research sites the terms “gay” and “homosexual” refer to men who engage in sexual relationships with other men, the term “lesbian” refers to women who engage in sexual relationships with other women, and I never heard the term “queer” used as an identity label.

As described in detail in the first chapter of this work, men play essential roles in the Candomblé family. A few select temples have patriarchal lineages, and as of 2008, 36.3% of the 1,408 temples in Salvador were led by Fathers.⁴⁶⁷ Not all temples affiliated with the matriarchal lineage of Iyá Nassô continue the tradition of female leadership and male leaders have been historically important in centennial temples and continue to lead politically significant temples today.⁴⁶⁸ As demonstrated ethnographically in the first chapter, contemporary Fathers often base their legitimacy and authority on their ritual birth from Black Mothers, or work especially hard to construct strong affiliations to Black Mothers as the recognized sources of African heritage in Brazil. Among the ritual family, the centrality of Black Mothers is based on understandings of initiation as gestation, the adoration of femininity and fertility, and the Mothers' roles as connectors to the ancestors through the propagation of family lineages.⁴⁶⁹ Such formulations of motherhood point to the endurance of biology and birth as concepts that continue to inform understandings of race, kinship and gender among Candomblé initiates in a binary-sex system.⁴⁷⁰

This final chapter approaches the “effeminate male” figure in Candomblé to re-examine the definitions of femininity and masculinity in the ritual structure and track the public's reception of prominent Fathers from the 1930s to the present. In the first chapter I argued Landes' claim that “the men who play the role of priest are striving for oneness with the ‘mother’

⁴⁶⁷ Jocélio Teles dos Santos, *Mapeamento dos terreiros de Salvador* (Salvador, Brazil: Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais, UFBA, 2008), 23-24.

⁴⁶⁸ Prominent male leaders include historical figures like Bamboxé Obitikô, Pedro de Autran, Martiniano do Bonfim, Pai Agenor and contemporary leaders like Pai Air (Pilão de Prata), Babá Pece (Terreiro Oxumarê), Tata Anselmo (Terreiro Mokambo), to name a few. Luis Nicolau Parés and Lisa Earl Castillo, “José Pedro Autran e o retorno de Xangô” (*Religião e Sociedade*, vol. 35, Issue 1, pp. 13-43, 2015); Vilson Caetano de Sousa Júnior and Air José Souza de Jesus (Org.), *Minha vida é orixá* (Salvador: Ifá Editora, 2011); Lisa Earl Castillo, “Bamboxé Obitikô and the Nineteenth-Century Expansion of Orisha Worship in Brazil” (*Tempo*, Vol. 22, n. 39, p. 126-153, jan-abr., 2016)

⁴⁶⁹ Chapter two demonstrated how the media capitalized on the importance of priestesses in the family of saints as the source of Afro-Brazilian culture and through intensive coverage especially from the 1970-1980s both reinforced and propagated the idea that black Mothers are the most legitimate leaders of the temples.

⁴⁷⁰ Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (eds), *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Aisha Beliso de-Jesús, *Electric Santería: Racial and sexual assemblages of transnational religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

figure” be reconsidered through the framework of women’s ability to perform both physical and ritual birth in the initiation of children into the Candomblé religion and propagation of family lineages.⁴⁷¹ The valorization of femininity as a connective force to the ancestors can also apply to male initiates, who may perform femininity through ritual identity-making. The ethnographic and historical materials challenge portrayals of Afro-diasporic religions as matriarchal or queer utopias, as the policing of gender and sexuality occur within the initiatory family at the level of one’s ritual role, influenced by the broader homophobia of Brazilian heteronormative and masculinist culture.

Joãozinho da Gomeia and Nagô Matriarchy

Publications by Ruth Landes and Edison Carneiro in the 1940s contributed to the ideological construction of the matriarchal houses as the privileged examples of African heritage, reproducing the opinions and discourses of key interlocutors, especially Mother Menininha of the Gantois temple.⁴⁷² Ruth Landes was the first scholar to audaciously write about homosexuality in Candomblé in the 1940’s. Her work was considered particularly shocking and vulgar precisely because most conversations about homosexuality, at least in scholarship and as related to Candomblé in the public sphere up until that time, were veiled. The 1930’s was a foundational period for Candomblé in Bahian society as prominent religious leaders helped organize and define the religion through collaborations with scholars, politicians, journalists and

⁴⁷¹ Ruth Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality” (*Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 35, 1940), 393.

⁴⁷² Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”; Landes, *The City of Women* (New York: The Macmillan Co. 1947); Edison Carneiro, *Os Candomblés da Bahia* (Museu do Estado, 1948); Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô Nagô e Papai Branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, Edições Graal Ltda, 1988); Jamie Lee Andreson, *Ruth Landes e a Cidade das Mulheres: uma releitura da antropologia do candomblé* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2019).

public initiatives.⁴⁷³ In many ways, the Candomblé structure in contemporary Bahia derives more from the notions of “tradition” and orthodoxy as established by the leaders of this period than as a historical continuity with the times of Brazilian slavery or pre-colonial African practices. Examining this period offers important perspective on the roles of Candomblé Fathers prior to the popularly accepted notion that the Candomblé Mothers were the privileged symbols of African heritage in Brazil.

Edison Carneiro, a *pardo*⁴⁷⁴ Bahian ethnologist and journalist, published multiple articles about Candomblé Fathers in the local newspaper, *O Estado da Bahia* in the 1930s. During this period Candomblé temples faced heavy police persecution and were required to pay for a government license prior to conducting any ceremony. Up until this point, the media coverage of Candomblé focused almost exclusively on reports of the police raids, celebrating the imprisonment of Candomblé leaders with an approach that condemned the religion as Black magic and a threat to Bahian society.⁴⁷⁵ As an advocate and close friend of many Candomblé leaders, Edison Carneiro helped to change the media’s tone by featuring interviews with the Fathers and Mothers in the newspaper. He also organized the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress in 1937 Salvador and hosted several foreign researchers, facilitating their experiences in the

⁴⁷³ Prominent Candomblé leaders Martiniano do Bonfim, Mother Aninha and Mother Meninha collaborated with scholars Donald Pierson, Ruth Landes, and Edison Carneiro during this period. Vivaldo da Costa Lima, “O candomblé da Bahia na década de 1930” In: Waldir Freitas Oliveira and Vivaldo Da Costa Lima (eds.), *Cartas de Edison Carneiro a Artur Ramos: De 4 de Janeiro de 1936 a 6 de dezembro de 1938* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1987); Paul C. Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods. The transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Anadelia Romo, *Brazil’s Living Museum: Race, reform and tradition in Bahia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Dantas, *Vovó Nagô*; Marcoston, *Ruth Landes e a Cidade das Mulheres*.

⁴⁷⁴ This is the mixed-race category within the broader understanding of “black” in Brazil. *Preto* is the darkest skin color, though *pardo* is included as slightly lighter in a spectrum of colorism. Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The significance of skin color in Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴⁷⁵ Júlio Braga, *Na Gamela Do Feitiço: Repressão e Resistência Nos Candomblés Da Bahia* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 1995); Angela Luhnig, “Acabe com este santo, Pedrito vem aí...” (*Revista USP* 28 (Feb 1995/6)); Yvonne Maggie Alves Velho, *Medo Do Feitiço: Relações Entre Magia e Poder No Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, Orgão do Ministério da Justiça, 1992).

temples, forming key relationships and alliances between religious leaders and scholars.⁴⁷⁶

Perhaps the most important scholarly association he made in the field was with the American anthropologist Ruth Landes, whose subsequent work was the first to define matriarchy as a key tenant of the Candomblé religion, provoking heavy criticism from the Brazilian scholar Arthur Ramos and later her colleague, the former student of Boas, Melville Herskovits.

Ruth Landes arrived in Bahia, Brazil in 1938, one year following the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress. Over nine months of research, Landes worked closely with Edison Carneiro in temples he introduced her to and met with the prominent Candomblé leaders of the time including the Yoruba⁴⁷⁷ babalorixá Martiniano do Bonfim, the Caboclo Mother Sabina, and the orthodox Black Mothers Menininha do Gantois, Tía Massi (Casa Branca) and Flaviana (Terreiro do Cobre). To highlight the traditionalism of the Yoruba matriarchate, Landes' arguments depended on the constructed foil of Candomblé Fathers of the Angolan nation, especially João da Pedra Preta, who she presented as a sexual vagrant and delinquent, alongside the Caboclo Mother Sabina, considered white in the Bahian context.⁴⁷⁸ Because the Caboclo nation was nearly synonymous with Angolan ritual practices during that time, Landes and Carneiro helped

⁴⁷⁶ Andreson, *Ruth Landes e a Cidade das Mulheres*; Biaggio Talento and Luiz Alberto Couceiro, *Edison Carneiro O Mestre Antigo: Um estudo sobre a trajetória de um intelectual* (Assembleia Legislativa da Bahia, 2009); Luiz G. Rossi and Heloisa Pontes. *O Intelectual Feiticeiro: Edison Carneiro e o Campo De Estudos Das Relações Raciais No Brasil* (Campinas: Editora UNICAMP, 2015).

⁴⁷⁷ Martiniano do Bonfim was born to Yoruba parents in Bahia and returned to Nigeria several times throughout his life to build transnational orishá religion in Salvador. See Lorenzo D. Turner, "Some Contacts of Brazilian Ex-Slaves with Nigeria, West Africa", *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan, 1942); J. Lorand Matory, "The English Professors of Brazil: On the diasporic roots of the Yoruba nation" (*Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Jan., 1999, pp. 72-103);); Lisa Earl Castillo, *Entre a oralidade e a escrita: a etnografia nos candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2008).

⁴⁷⁸ Only recently the Bahian anthropologist and babalorixá Vilson Caetano Jr. found Mother Sabina's will. Prior to this, the only documentary evidence available for historians was Landes' ethnography *The City of Women*. Landes' field notes also document much more about Sabina's caboclo practices, her life and family in Salvador. Sabina Lúcia dos Santos was born in Vila de São Francisco in the county of Santo Amaro da Purificação on February 5, 1889. At the time she wrote her will in 1968, she was single with no children; she had no biological descendants. In the 1930s she was considered rich, for having a newly constructed temple with nice furniture and electricity. (APEB, Judiciário, Inventário: 09/3993/08 cited in Vilson Caetano de Sousa Júnior, *Corujebó: Candomblé e Polícia de Costumes (1938-1976)* (Salvador: Editora UFBA, 2019), 208-210). All these factors contribute to Mother Sabina's characterization as white and unorthodox in comparison to the black Nagô Mothers.

create a lasting divide in the field of studies by which the Black Mothers became the measure of African orthodoxy and the Caboclo/Angolan Nation became an example of a corrupting tradition of modernity, and racial mixture.⁴⁷⁹ The hierarchy among nations, in which the Yoruba-descended traditions gained the greatest prestige and recognition as authentic, in comparison to a corrupting or degrading Bantu-descended tradition, is also reflected in other African diasporic contexts.⁴⁸⁰ Furthermore, the differentiation among nations has a gendered dimension in Cuba as well, where the Bantu-descended sect Palo tends to be represented as a ‘cosa de hombre’ (a man’s thing).⁴⁸¹ Aisha Beliso-de-Jesús reinforces how “diasporic assemblages are sexed and gendered in relation to each other” so that variations of African diasporic religion are understood through gendered hierarchies that exist in Cuba more broadly.⁴⁸²

Landes briefly met João da Pedra Preta at least once during the public festival, the Lavagem do Bonfim. In her fieldnotes, she wrote that he was “visibly a homo” who “goes around in trousers and [is] taken officially as a man.”⁴⁸³ As informed by Carneiro, who expressed a markedly homophobic stance towards gay leaders, the *Caboclo* nation especially had priests who receive the saints and “dance” in possession.⁴⁸⁴ Landes’ encounter with João da Pedra Preta

⁴⁷⁹ Capone, *Searching for Africa*; Dantas, *Vovó Nagô*.

⁴⁸⁰ Palmié wrote that the Bantu-descended palo “is said to be more crude... violent... fast and effective”, also uncivilized in comparison to the Yoruba-descended Ocha. Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Exploration in Afro-Cuban modernity and tradition*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 164. Beliso-De Jesús similarly reported from her ethnographic research that “ocha-centric rhetoric... relies on perceptions that palo is evil and unvirtuous.”

⁴⁸¹ Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 164: “In contrast to *regla ocha* [the Yoruba-descended sect in Cuba], which counts a large number of homosexual adherents... palo cult groups are characterized by a pronounced homophobic atmosphere, and many women have told me that they dislike the machismo that pervades social relations within a ‘*casa de palo*.’” Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús, *Electric Santería: Racial and sexual assemblages of transnational religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 50. On the gendered divisions of Rada and Petwo pantheons of the Iwa deities in Haitian Vodou, see Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola, a Vodou priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴⁸² Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús, *Electric Santería: Racial and sexual assemblages of transnational religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 193.

⁴⁸³ Ruth Landes Papers, Box 9: Series 1: Research Materials- Notebooks, Folder: Notebook Brazil XX, April 30, 1939 (Washington, DC: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institute).

⁴⁸⁴ Ruth Landes’ research notebooks include extensive documentation of Edison Carneiro’s fixation on the homosexual priests. Some of his comments highlight his critical and homophobic stance towards them.

during the festival presents their critical perspective towards the Father who “straightens his hair” as a “mulato” (mixed-race) rather than a “pure” African descendant,

I looked at the young father with interest because he was notorious for his love affairs with other men and for his failure to command discipline from the daughters of his caboclo temple. He was supposed to be a wonderful dancer, and I could imagine it from his light, graceful figure.⁴⁸⁵

In contrast to the homosexual male priests, Landes constructed the image of the mothers-of-the-saint as those that follow the African traditions, command, and control the temple, particularly spirit possession as an act reserved exclusively for women. She wrote that in the Yoruba houses, “only women are suited by their sex to nurse the deities... the service of men is blasphemous.”⁴⁸⁶ Besides João, the Caboclo Mother Sabina provided another key example of a Candomblé that was corrupting the Yoruba tradition. The source of skepticism for both Father João and Mother Sabina was that they had not been properly initiated. Landes’ ethnography includes multiple episodes of orthodox Mothers complaining that Sabina and João would fall into trance in non-ritual contexts, do divinations and consultations to make money, and let men “dance” (receive the gods through possession) in their temples. All of this was contrary to the rules established by the Nagô “matriarchs” and generated tensions and conflicts that were amplified by the scholarly writings by Landes and Carneiro.

In the Nagô candomblés, the men held the role of *ogans* or the “protectors” of the temple with specific ritual tasks and responsibilities. According to Landes, “friction within the Nagô cults is not due to masculine jealousy, for the men in the cult rarely complain of the authority and demands of the women.”⁴⁸⁷ The ogans are heterosexual men who perform specific male labor,

⁴⁸⁵ Ruth Landes and Sally Cole, *The City of Women* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 238.

⁴⁸⁶ Landes, *The City of Women*, 238.

⁴⁸⁷ Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”, 391.

whereas homosexual men are considered “feminine” and can therefore “serve the gods” as spirit mediums.⁴⁸⁸ Regarding the Caboclo Fathers, Landes claimed, “Passive homosexual fantasies are realizable under the protection of the cult, as men dance with women in the roles of women, wearing skirts and acting as mediums.”⁴⁸⁹ She continued, “the ten or so ‘fathers’ whom I knew had come from the ranks of the street prostitutes and boy delinquents, and from the town’s ruffians.”⁴⁹⁰ She expressed a clear prejudice against the gay Caboclo Fathers as a less “pure” form of candomblé—one of the streets, of racial mixture and sexual delinquency—in comparison to the orthodox and well-maintained tradition of the Nagô mothers.

Despite criticisms, throughout his lifetime João became most best known for his orishá dancing, performing in theaters and nightclubs and at carnival, unafraid to take Candomblé into “show business.”⁴⁹¹ Contemporary ritual descendants of Joãozinho and even Brazilians unaffiliated with Candomblé recall how Joãozinho could “float” and “fly” when he danced in trance. One Bahian said that after Joãozinho, gay men wanted to become Candomblé Fathers because of the glamour and fame he accumulated throughout this life, showing how it was an acceptable space for effeminate men to express themselves. In many ways, the persona of Joãozinho da Gomeia became the blueprint for an increasingly public stereotype of the “effeminate male” Father of Angolan Temples.

⁴⁸⁸ Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”, 326.

⁴⁸⁹ Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”, 394.

⁴⁹⁰ Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”, 396.

⁴⁹¹Lody, Raul and Vagner Gonçalves da Silva, “Joãozinho da Goméia: o lúdico e o sagrado na exaltação ao candomblé” In: Vagner Gonçalves da Silva (org.), *Caminhos da Alma: memória afro-brasileira* (São Paulo: Sel Negro Edições, 2002).



Figure 10: O Estado da Bahia, “O mundo religioso do negro da Bahia” (Salvador, August 6, 1936). Journalists from the major Bahian newspaper, led by Edison Carneiro, visit the Goméia Temple.

The media coverage on Candomblé Fathers in the 1930s demonstrate that a public consensus on Black female leadership as a central tenant of African heritage was not a teleological progression in the religion’s development and its articulation with the state. Early in his career as a Candomblé priest, the *O Estado da Bahia* published a full interview with João including several photographs of altars and initiates, based on a visit to the temple facilitated by

Edison Carneiro in August 1936 (who does not appear to be the author of the article).⁴⁹² At the time of the interview João was twenty-two years old and had been a Candomblé priest since he was fifteen. At this point in João's life, the media made no comment on his sexuality or presented femininity, instead remarking that João did not give off a "difficult" or "complicated" impression, but that he was "a common guy, who dresses like everybody [else] and speaks the language of the people of Bahia."⁴⁹³ Upon arriving to the temple, the journalist noted that the house was "inoffensive" and "honest", remarking on its commonness, which did not "reveal the function that its owner exercises." During the visit, João told his story of how he entered into the religion,

I never thought about these things, believe me. I am a son of Inhambupe, and there is no Candomblé there... Look. I was working in a store in Calçada. I was fifteen years old. Then I got this headache, so strong that bugs were coming out of my nose. Do you know where I went to cure myself? At a house of Candomblé. I had tried every kind of medicine. It was in the Candomblé that I knew I was being chased by my saint.⁴⁹⁴

João's story resembles most initiates who found a cure to an incurable problem through initiation. He notably recalled that he went to a Candomblé Mother (mãe-de-santo), his godmother, who obligated him to "make" his saint through initiation. He continued to explain that shortly after that she died, and that his deity obligated him to succeed her in the leadership of the Candomblé.⁴⁹⁵ João's statement that he was first initiated by a Candomblé Mother contradicts

⁴⁹²O Estado da Bahia, "O mundo religioso do negro da Bahia" (Salvador, August 6, 1936).

⁴⁹³ O Estado da Bahia, "O mundo religioso do negro da Bahia" (Salvador, August 6, 1936). Original in Portuguese: "Elle não tem nada de difícil, de complicado, de feito para impressionar. É um rapaz commum, que se veste como todo mundo e que, como todo mundo, fala a linguaem do povo da Bahia."

⁴⁹⁴O Estado da Bahia, "O mundo religioso do negro da Bahia" (Salvador, August 6, 1936). Original in Portuguese: "Passando atravez do 'terreiro' vamos conversando com João da Pedra Preta: - Pode nos dizer como se tornou pae-de-santo? Elle para, sorri um pouco. - Eu nunca pensei nessas coisas. Acredite. Sou filho de Inhambupe, lá não tem candomblé... Veja. Eu estava empregado num armazem da Calçada. Tinha quinze annos. Ahi eu tive uma dor de cabeça tão forte que alguns dias depois me sahiam bichos pelo nariz. Sabe onde eu fui me curar? Numa casa de candomblé. Já tinha experimentado tudo quanto foi remédio. No candomblé foi que eu soube que estava sendo perseguido pelo meu santo."

⁴⁹⁵ Original in Portuguese: "A mãe-de-santo de la era minha madrinha. Feita de Yansa. Ella me obrigou a 'fazer' o santo. Aconteceu que, pouco depois, ella morreu e eu tive de substitui-la na chefia do candomblé. Sabe por que: Fui forçada pelo meu santo."

prevalent oral histories propagated by current leaders, who describe him as having been initiated by the Caboclo Father Jubiabá (Severino Manuel de Abreu), or even question whether he was initiated at all.⁴⁹⁶ He then stated that his saint was Oxossi, the god of hunting, known as Saint George in Catholicism and declared, “my nation is Angola.” Such a public statement shows how from a young age João publicly adopted this religious identity, even as many of his contemporaries identified him, at least publicly, as part of the Caboclo denomination, perhaps as a way to downplay the African origins of the rituals, and to escape persecution.⁴⁹⁷

As portrayed in Landes’ description and a photograph taken at the 1939 Lavagem do Bonfim, João initiated many women—particularly Black women—in his temple in the Gomea neighborhood of Salvador, established in 1935.



Figure 11: Daughter-initiates of Joãozinho da Gomeia at the Lavagem do Bonfim, 1939. Photo by Ruth Landes. Ruth Landes Papers, (National Anthropological Archives. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute).

⁴⁹⁶ The prominent Father Tata Anselmo publicly affirms that Joãozinho da Gomeia was initiated by Jubiabá. See also Gisele Binon Cossard, *Contribution a l'estude des candomblés au Brésil: le candomblé Angola* (Faculté des Letres et Sciences Humaines, Paris, 1970), 277. Lody and Silva, “Joãozinho da Gomeia”, 154.

⁴⁹⁷ The Caboclo nation is characterized by Native Brazilian deities rather than African ones. However, the Angolan Candomblés worship both the Caboclo deities and the Nkisis, equivalent to the orixás of the Ketu-Nagô nation.

This photo taken by Ruth Landes in early 1939 points to how, despite being a Father, João's practice of Candomblé reproduced elements consistent with a "matriarchal" tradition. One daughter initiated by João, Altanira Maria Conceição Souza (later known as Mother Mirinha do Portão), continued his legacy in Bahia long after he left the Gomeia temple in Salvador and relocated to Rio de Janeiro. Mother Mirinha was initiated into Candomblé by Joãozinho da Gomeia in 1933 at nine years old.⁴⁹⁸ At that time João was known by the name of his infamous caboclo spirit, the "Pedra Preta" (Black Rock). Only after establishing his temple in the Gomeia neighborhood of Salvador did he change his public name to Joãozinho da Gomeia.⁴⁹⁹ After departing to Rio de Janeiro, he took the name of his temple with him and established another Gomeia Temple in the Duque de Caxias neighborhood, located in the majority Black and poor periphery region outside of the city center of Rio de Janeiro. Joãozinho very likely left Salvador due to conflicts with the orthodox Nagô Mothers and the traditionalism of Bahia. In 1948 his daughter Mother Mirinha do Portão established her own temple, carrying the Gomeian lineage forward with the temple name "Saint George, Sons of Gomea" (Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomea). The altar (assentamento) belonging to João's Caboclo Pedra Preta, which he did not take with him to his new temple in Rio de Janeiro, was transferred to Mother Mirinha's temple, currently the only functioning temple in the Gomeian lineage in Bahia.⁵⁰⁰

Joãozinho da Gomea was informally entitled "The King of Candomblé" by the Queen of England in 1940 in Rio de Janeiro and became the first priest to record and commercialize an

⁴⁹⁸ IPAC, Processo de Tombamento "Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia" (Salvador, 2003).

⁴⁹⁹ The nickname makes his birth name João diminutive in the endearing way of Brazilian Portuguese with "inho".

⁵⁰⁰ Having João's caboclo altar at the Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Gomeia marks the material continuity between his Gomeia Temple in Salvador and the temple founded by Mãe Mirinha. Current members of the Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Gomeia present the altar as a sign of their privileged authenticity and rightful inheritors of his lineage.

album of Angolan Candomblé chants by the same name.⁵⁰¹ When Ruth Landes returned to Rio de Janeiro in 1966, she picked up a carnival pamphlet in English called a “Guide to the City”. Under the entertainment section was, “Macumba—An African ritual brought to Brazil by the slaves”, encouraging tourists to visit the temples— “the most outstanding of them all is the ‘Terreiro de Joãozinho da Gomeia.’”⁵⁰² By appearing in theaters, on the front of national newspapers, nightclubs, carnival processions and sharing the music and aesthetics of Candomblé as a part of wider Brazilian culture, he threatened the ideologies of the African Mothers dedicated to combating the presentation of the religion as folklore. While his gender, sexuality, and approach to the artistic elements of the religion threatened the ritual order defended by orthodox priestesses of the time, as a Father he still performed the role of initiating an expressive number of daughters into his lineage. Because he initiated so many children in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro and often appeared in the press, his name and lineage are well known and still celebrated today. The Samba School Grande Rio honored him in the national Carnival procession of February 2020 and in 2019 an original play toured the country as a retelling of his life story.⁵⁰³ Over the last few years, scholars, initiates and state agents have been working on excavating his temple site in Duque de Caxias to protect the temple artifacts and land as cultural patrimony.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ Elizabeth Castelano Gama, “Mulato, homossexual e macumbeiro: que rei é este?” (Dissertação de mestrado, UFF, Niterói, Brasil, 2012), 14. The album he launched is called “Rei do Candomblé” and is available on Youtube.

⁵⁰² Ruth Landes Papers, Box 20: Series 2: Research Materials Brazil, June 1966 (Washington, DC: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Museum).

⁵⁰³ The play based on his life was called “Joãozinho da Gomeia: de filho do tempo a rei do Candomblé” and was performed at the Teatro Gregório de Mattos, 5 de outubro, 2019 as part of a national tour. See the coverage of the carnival group: *Correio*, “Grande Rio faz homenagem ao pai de santo baiano Joãozinho da Gomeia”, February 24th, 2020.

⁵⁰⁴ Rodrigo Pereira, “Memória do Terreiro da Gomeia: entre a materialidade e a oralidade” (*Religião & Sociedade*, vol. 37, no. 3, Sept./Dec. 2017).

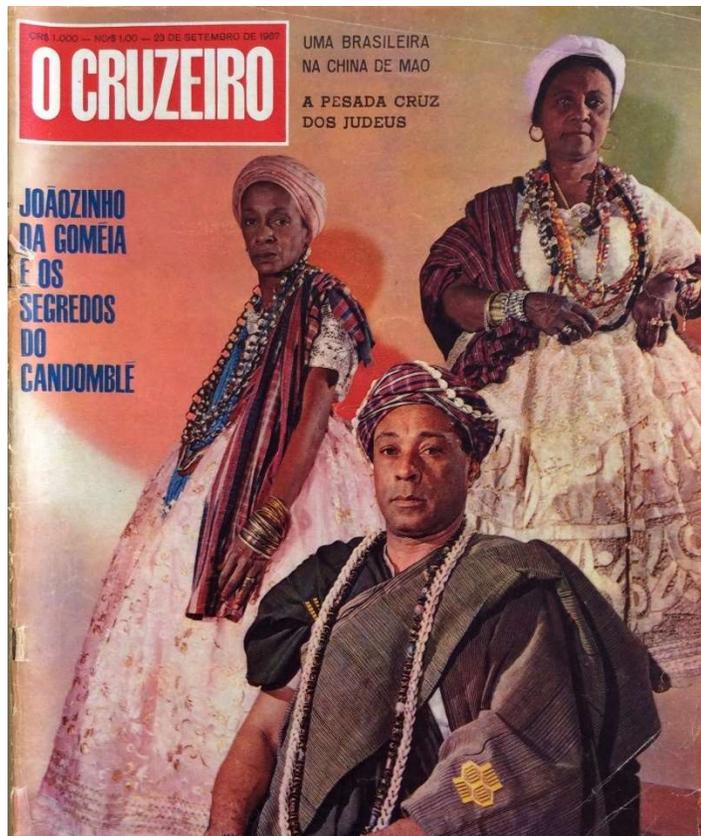


Figure 12: Joãozinho da Gomeia featured on the cover of the national magazine O Cruzeiro (Rio de Janeiro, September 23, 1967).

Joãozinho da Gomeia's funeral in 1971 was a national event. One contemporary Angolan Father of the Gomeian lineage claimed that it was the largest gathering of people he had ever seen in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. His funerary rite (axexê) was conducted in Salvador, and attracted broad support from both Mothers and Fathers from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Porto Alegre, Recife and Bahia.⁵⁰⁵ He left several women to lead his temples; Mother Sandra took over his Temple in Duque de Caxias; Mother Samba Diamongo led the Gomeia Terreiro in Salvador until her death in 1979; and Mother Mirinha do Portão ran the Temple Sons of Gomeia, which

⁵⁰⁵A Tarde, "O Axexê de Joãozinho da Gomeia" (Salvador, May 4, 1971).

continues today under the leadership of her biological granddaughter Mother Lúcia.⁵⁰⁶ In this way, even though Joãozinho did not find a place for himself among the leadership of Candomblé Mothers in Salvador, his legacy persisted through his prolific initiation of daughters, which was consistent with, and ultimately contributed to, the matriarchal structure of the religion. Although Joãozinho da Gomea is well remembered among his initiate-descendants, and still considered a national cultural figure, he could not constitute his lineage by the same criteria as the Nagô Mothers who founded their temples and propagated their family lineages in Bahia for over a century.

Nearly a decade after his death, during the height of media coverage on the famous Black Mothers of Candomblé, an impromptu article from the *Jornal da Bahia* addressed the abandonment of his temple in Bahia through a somber lens. The report painted a grim picture of a dead lineage, a family abandoned and a fragile legacy, stark in comparison to the descriptions of centennial temples and prominent priestesses in Bahia during that time. The journalist began the article by suggesting that it is not always true that “when the man dies, the fame lives on.” In the case of Joãozinho da Gomea, he wrote, “Sometimes all that is left is a vague image, which has the tendency to extinguish completely with the passing of time.”⁵⁰⁷ The article continues by stating that whereas a decade ago Joãozinho was the most famous “pai-de-santo,” now few people talk about him in his neighborhood of Gomeia. The location that had once “reverberated with drums, daughter-initiates and ogans who received the diverse afro-religious entities,” at the time of the article had “a soccer field sporadically used for drug consumption.” The article ends

⁵⁰⁶ These are the leaders in the Gomeian lineage that I came across in my research. There are certainly many more descendant temples I don't know of, especially in Rio de Janeiro.

⁵⁰⁷ *Jornal da Bahia*, “Goméia, uma memória a ser preservada” (Salvador, April 03, 1980).

with a brief statement from Dona Nenem, 67 years of age, who belonged to the Gomea temple, looking with a heavy heart at a tree planted by Joãozinho more than thirty years ago,

Just like Mr. Pedra Preta told me, everybody could leave here, but I would always stay looking at this tree. He fulfilled his promise. If Mr. Joãozinho was also faithful to his caboclo, none of this would have happened... the house could have continued...⁵⁰⁸

The judgement made by a bitter Dona Nenem and amplified by the journalist, was that Joãozinho abandoned his home in Bahia and chased after national fame, losing what was most important in the process—family continuity and respect from ancestral lineages in Bahia.

The Mother who took over the Gomeia Temple in Salvador, Samba Diamongo, became a respected leader of the Angolan Nation, in part because her life history and appearance aligned with the criteria of the prestigious Black Mothers. In the newspaper report on her death, the journalist associated her with Mother Menininha, because both were “daughters of Oxum,” but also because they were both Black priestesses and privileged representatives of their Candomblé nations. Samba died unexpectedly in a car accident only eight years after Joãozinho. Consistent with the gendered media coverage of Candomblé of the late 1970s, the article reporting on her death downplayed Joãozinho’s importance in Samba’s trajectory and delegitimized his religious leadership. The report claimed that he “never was, at least during his life, a *babalaô*”⁵⁰⁹ and that although he was a “famous figure in the black cults”, he was nothing but a “medium for the caboclo sessions.”⁵¹⁰ Such phrases questioned the religious foundations of Joãozinho, while

⁵⁰⁸Jornal da Bahia, “Goméia, uma memória a ser preservada” (Salvador, April 03, 1980). Original in Portuguese: “Bem que ‘seu’ Pedra Preta me disse que todos podiam sair daqui, mas eu sempre ia ficar olhando para esse pé de planta. Ele cumpriu sua promessa. Se seu Joãozinho também tivesse sido fiel ao caboclo, nada disso teria acontecido, mesmo que ele fosse chamado por Zambí... a casa poderia ter continuando.”

⁵⁰⁹ The term *babalaô* here refers to a male priest, which I use interchangeably with Father. Being a “medium for caboclo sessions” was a way to degrade him in a hierarchy of authenticity and orthodoxy.

⁵¹⁰ A Tarde, “Samba Diamongo, filha de Oxum, leva para o túmulo quase todo segredo do Candomblé de Angola” (Salvador, June 8, 1979). Original in Portuguese: “Joãozinho, jamais foi, ao menos em vida, um *babalaô*... esse famoso personagem do culto negro, de vivência compreendida entre Salvador e o Rio de Janeiro, nada mais era que um medium da ‘sessão de caboclo’ de Jubiabá.”

upholding the authority of Samba, most explicitly through the article’s headline, “Samba Diamongo takes with her to the grave nearly all the secrets of Angolan Candomblé.”

The article asserted that Joãozinho’s legitimacy was based on Samba’s, even though she was younger than he was in the ritual hierarchy: “without the presence of Samba, her knowledge and her hierarchical post, Joãozinho would mean nothing among the respected members of the Bahian temples.”⁵¹¹ This article suggests that by the late 1970s, Samba Diamongo was seen as a more legitimate leader of Angolan Candomblé than Joãozinho. At least as portrayed by this journalist, her position as a Black Mother made her a religious authority, whereas Joãozinho’s ancestral knowledge and leadership was questioned based on his gender and sexuality, deemed unorthodox.

In 2018 the Geographic and Historical Institute of Bahia hosted an event called “Rereading the 2nd Afro-Brazilian Congress” to reflect on the historic 1937 event hosted in Salvador. One of the speakers, Marlon Marcos, is a long term Candomblé initiate, a doctor in Anthropology and openly gay man who registered oral histories from elderly leaders of Candomblé temples from a variety of nations.⁵¹² His speech included an extensive discussion of the differences between how Bernardino, founder of the Bate Folha Temple, and Joãozinho da Gomeia publicly addressed their sexuality as Candomblé Fathers. He noted that both danced in the circle as *rodantes*—mediums that received the spirit—and they both received a deity (Matamba) who was the Angolan equivalent of the Nagô goddess, Iansã.⁵¹³ Bernardino “had a seriousness as a priest,” which depended on him “veiling” his sexuality in contrast to Joãozinho,

⁵¹¹ A Tarde, “Samba Diamongo, filha de Oxum, leva para o túmulo quase todo segredo do Candomblé de Angola” (Salvador, June 8, 1979). Original in Portuguese: “Sem a presença de Samba, seu saber e postura hierárquica, Joãozinho nada significaria entre os mais respeitáveis membros dos terreiros baianos.”

⁵¹² Marcos, Marlon Viera Passos. “Iyá Zulmira de Zumbá: uma trajetória entre nações de candomblé” (Salvador, UFBA: Tese de Doutorado, 2016).

⁵¹³ From Marlon Marcos, “Joãozinho tinha uma matamba (como Bamburecema) como segundo nkisi que ele carregava (uma concorrência com Bernardino).”

who openly presented his. Oral histories confirm that Bernardino “pronounced himself as contrary to Joãozinho da Gomeia,” affirming that he did not have a past because he had not been truly initiated into Candomblé. Both Fathers visited the Gantois temple and sought proximity to Mother Menininha—the broker of Candomblé orthodoxy and traditionalism throughout the twentieth century. Marcos recounted episodes where the two met in the Gantois temple, and when Joãozinho arrived, Bernardino would leave the place because he didn’t think that [Joãozinho] was a serious religious leader. Furthermore, Bernardino saw how Joãozinho was maltreated because of his sexuality; something that Bernardino wanted to avoid. In order to distinguish himself, Bernardino enforced something of a respectability politics, which continue at his temple today. Joãozinho’s practices of publicly assuming his sexuality, cross-dressing, representing his femininity made subject to ridicule by the more traditional Candomblés. In the words of Marcos, Joãozinho was closer to what today would be considered Trans and “Bernardino didn’t want anything to do with that or be associated in that way.”

Although Joãozinho initiated many Black daughters who ultimately contributed to the matriarchal tradition of Candomblé, his contemporary lineage also includes many gay Fathers. Current male leaders in the Gomean lineage adopt a stance of marginalization and victimization in contrast to the fame, prestige and material resources granted to the temples led by Black Mothers, resulting from the shifts in the politics of cultural heritage during the Brazilian democracy. In addition, scholar-practitioners from the Angolan Nation express disdain for the works of Landes and Carneiro and the impacts their arguments had on the development of cultural, gender and racial politics in the field of Candomblé in Bahia. Their works made visible the acceptance of gay male leaders of Candomblé, particularly in the Caboclo and Angolan nations, sometimes causing embarrassment (*vergonha*) and conflict given the increasing

valorization of the Mothers, based on notions of heterosexual maternity, fertility, and reproduction. The portrayal of Candomblé priests as gay can be used as another motive for the religion's discrimination, marginalization, and persecution, especially by Christian and homophobic sectors of Brazilian society.

João da Pedra Preta entered the Bahian Candomblé scene at a young age as a public personality with an affinity for performance based in the expressive dances and aesthetics of his religious practice. Early in his religious leadership he gained fame through the success of his Caboclo, adopting the identity of the "Angolan Nation" with an approach that challenged the orthodoxy of the female led Nagô houses from the Iyá Nassô lineage. Because of his charisma and unapologetic public personality, he left an impression on the leading scholars of the 1930s who published works that ultimately delegitimized his version of Candomblé, upholding the preeminence of the orthodox Mothers like Menininha and Olga de Alaketu. As Joãozinho da Gomeia in Rio de Janeiro, he was celebrated by the media and later accused of abandoning his Bahian home and chasing after stardom, commercializing aspects of the religion through theatrical performance, carnival processions, and disseminating cultural products of Candomblé. Joãozinho embraced the folkloric side of the religion to the orthodox Mothers' disdain, especially as they campaigned to gain greater respect and recognition for African heritage as cultural brokers in Brazil. Even though his public persona, gender and sexuality did not qualify him as a traditional Bahian leader of Candomblé, his prolific initiation of children, and especially daughters who carried on his legacy by leading temples in his lineage, maintained consistent with matriarchal structure of the religion, creating a lasting and definitive legacy as an effeminate Father of Angolan Candomblé.

(Un)veiling homosexuality in Candomblé

In present-day conversations and oral histories about Joãozinho da Goméia, nobody leaves a shadow of doubt about his sexuality—it is common knowledge that he was gay and his femininity was a key element of his performance and aesthetics as a spirit medium (*rodante*). Later in his life after reaching celebrity status in Rio, he created a scandal by appearing in Carnaval as a *travesti*⁵¹⁴, provoking a conservative reaction from the Association of Candomblé and the orthodox Mothers Menininha and Senhora.⁵¹⁵ Surprisingly, the media rarely emphasized this aspect of his life, as Joãozinho’s sexuality, while formative for his person, was not the main point of discussion; it was not presented as a cause for the fame, impact and respect he accrued throughout his lifetime.

Candomblé is a religion of the chosen, which does not discriminate based on sexual orientation, race, nationality, or any other identity factor. Nevertheless, not everybody in the family of saints is comfortable with openly expressing and accepting a full range of sexual orientations and gender identities. While Candomblé offers gender flexibility in the relationship between initiates and their deities, the initiates as people are still immersed in a broader homophobic society with sexual and behavioral expectations.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁴ Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago (Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁵¹⁵ Cross-dressing is a common and acceptable practice during the exceptional moment of Brazilian carnival, especially among men who perform femininity in the ritual inversion of roles. Gisele Cossard recalled, “Houve um escândalo porque Joãozinho apareceu no carnavál como travesti. A Associação de Candomblé quis expulsá-lo. Houve pressão.... De Senhora e de Menininha do Gantois. Acho que Joãozinho escreveu uma carta ofensiva a Menininha.... Anos depois tudo se alcamara de novo... Joãozinho foi à Bahia... fez um bori no terreiro de Menininha.” In Lody and Silva, “Joãozinho da Gomeia”, 167. For more on this topic, see James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁵¹⁶ Marina Teixeira, “Lorogun- Identidades sexuais e poder no candomblé” In: Beatriz Goiás Dantas, *Candomblé, desvendando identidades: novos escritos sobre a religião dos orixás* (São Paulo, SP: EMW Editores, 1987); Andrea Cornwall, “Gendered identities and gender ambiguity among *travestis* in Salvador, Brazil” In: Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfame (eds), *Dislocating Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1994); Andrea Stevenson Allen, “Brides’ without Husbands: Lesbians in the Afro-Brazilian Religion Candomble” (*Transforming Anthropology*, Vol. 20, N. 1, pp. 17-31, 2012); Peter Fry, “Male Homosexuality and Afro-Brazilian Possession

In *Queering Black Atlantic Religions*, Roberto Strongmann recounts an experience with a Candomblé Father in Portugal. Reflecting on that moment, he posits,

I know he is queer, even though we have never used that term or any other to label ourselves. It is a tactical understanding. Words would make the obvious redundant. Most pai-de-santo are queer, statistically.⁵¹⁷

Strongmann chooses the word “queer” as part of his own approach and methodology, writing for a contemporary Anglophone audience. Importantly, the Portuguese Pai does not use any label at all. Nevertheless, Strongmann determines his sexuality to be “obvious.”⁵¹⁸ Reflecting common knowledge and popularly accepted notions, Strongmann makes the broad statement that most Candomblé Fathers are queer.⁵¹⁹ In this ethnographic reflection, Strongmann astutely describes how Candomblé leaders, initiates and sympathizers address homosexuality—as something like an “open secret,” as a veiled truth that does not need explicit definition or probing.⁵²⁰

Importantly, he presents skepticism regarding gay men’s position in Candomblé, presenting his train of thought that “gay men are auxiliaries of reproductive heterosexuals” and “Candomblé does not seem to offer an alternative to gay male socialization in Western societies.”⁵²¹

Consider the experience of Tata Eduardo, who in an oral history interview, emphasized how “Bahia is still very conservative in regards to sexuality and homosexuality”; something that tourists do not notice when just passing through.⁵²² As a man from Rio de Janeiro, initiated into

Cults”. In: MURRAY, Stephen O. (ed.). *Latin American Male Homosexualities*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995.

⁵¹⁷ Roberto Strongmann, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou*. Durham: Duke University Press, 215.

⁵¹⁸ This was likely informed by his own subjectivity and interaction with the Pai, as shortly after Strongmann describes going on a double date with the Pai and both of their male partners.

⁵¹⁹ Given that Candomblé Fathers themselves seldomly use the term “queer,” though, we may question how to apply this category to them. Beliso-De Jesús offers a concept of “racialized queerness,” which “points to the experience of not fitting in a world that is ontologically measured through global Westernized regimes of feeling.” *Electric Santería*, 145.

⁵²⁰ Strongmann, *Queering*, 233: “Pierre Verger’s queerness is something of an open secret in Candomblé circles.”

⁵²¹ Strongmann, *Queering*, 215.

⁵²² Erika Williams highlights the global status of Bahia as a “site of desire” where “cultural and sexual economics of tourism are linked to Salvador’s industry,” and notions of hypersexualized blackness. Erica Lorraine Williams, *Sex Tourism in Bahia: ambiguous entanglements* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 3, 5.

the Gomeian lineage, Tata Eduardo may have expected to find openness in the field of sexuality and Candomblé. In contrast to his expectations, Tata Eduardo recalled experiences he had at a Candomblé temple in the 1970s in Salvador, describing it as a “veiled repression” of homosexuality. When he arrived there from Rio de Janeiro, he made a point to talk to the temple’s head Father to, “let him know that I am homosexual... I did not want to keep it hidden... it was important that the pai-de-santo knew who I was a person.” After Tata Eduardo shared his sexuality, his Father responded “No, it’s not a problem here, your behavior is serious, so we do not have any objection.” The Father’s words imply that because Tata Eduardo did not present himself as outwardly homosexual, exhibiting “serious” comportment, his homosexuality was unthreatening and permissible within the temple’s model of acceptability.⁵²³

In the following years Tata Eduardo frequently visited the temple and became closer to his “siblings-in-saint.” He often brought a client with him from Rio de Janeiro, a woman he provided with spiritual consultation in exchange for financial support for his religious activities. In one instance, he overheard his sister-initiates gossiping in the internal ritual quarters of the temple, “No! Not my brother! That woman is his *bolachinha* [girlfriend].” Tata Eduardo only caught the end of the conversation, but quickly interjected, “What is the story here, gals?” They responded, “Oh, nothing, we were just saying that Mrs. What’s-her-name is your girlfriend.” Tata Eduardo, without reservation, replied, “No, she is not. I am homosexual.”⁵²⁴ The sister-initiates then started laughing, as if it were a joke, and Eduardo retorted, “I am not joking. I don’t have a woman. I have never had one and I never will.” Tata Eduardo recounted how the women

⁵²³ I do not mean to suggest that all Candomblé temples work this way. Surely each family will differ based on its individual tradition and the social, gender and racial composition of its initiates. Nevertheless, the ritual division of labor is not all-accepting of all expressions of gender and sexuality, as discussed further throughout the chapter.

⁵²⁴ Tata Eduardo belongs to an older generation in Brazil who use the term “homosexual” as his identity label rather than more recent terms in Brazil like “gay” or “viado.”

just stood there, “astonished to see me accept this with tranquility, understand? They wanted to hide it and I would not let them. Take this cover away from me, I don’t want it. But this is Bahia. It is still this way, actually.” Tata Eduardo made it clear to his Father, to his sister-initiates and to me, that he had no interest in veiling his homosexuality. As a current Father himself, he openly presents himself alongside his husband, who is also an initiate of his temple.

Tata Eduardo then brought up Ruth Landes who, like many Angolan Fathers, he views with disdain because of how she portrayed the gay Fathers as inferior and illegitimate. Tata Eduardo mentioned the famous ones —Ciriaco, Procópio, Bernardino, Joãozinho—and struggled to find the words to express “something [that is] very typical in Bahia, this *não faz de conta* [act like it doesn’t matter],” referring to a tendency to conceal or downplay one’s homosexuality, which may be well known, but should not be widely acknowledged. Such a social attitude applied to the Fathers in the 1930s and continued in the temple he was a part of, until the 1990s. For example, the subject of the temple founder’s sexuality remains at the level of *não faz de conta*. Tata Eduardo exclaimed that among the current initiates, the founder’s sexuality “is something that has an official version and another that is unofficial.” The official version negates, dismisses, or avoids altogether any claim to the founder’s homosexuality, whereas the unofficial version remains at the level of a public secret among the current initiates. Throughout the oral history Tata Eduardo presented his opinion clearly: homosexuality should not be hidden or veiled as a cause for debate, gossip or doubt. If a person is sure of their sexuality and wants to assume it publicly, this should be accepted by the initiatory family, not ridiculed, or dismissed as irrelevant.

The following ethnographic vignette suggests that whereas ritual roles are meant to coincide with sex, debates about one’s proper place in the initiatory family vary based on the

initiates' sexual orientation. In another instance, Tata Eduardo narrated the following account to me to explain his separation from the orthodox house where he had been affiliated for over fifteen years. The decision to establish his own temple has everything to do with the rigidity of ritual roles based on biological sex and sexual orientation, which has not been emphasized in the scholarship on Candomblé. Tata Eduardo explained that in the mid-1990s at his prior temple there was a young boy, Paulinho, who Eduardo estimated to be gay. Paulinho was initiated as an ogã, but Tata Eduardo was skeptical of the ritual role designated to him because he was almost certain that the boy was misrecognized as an ogã, and rather was chosen to be a rodante. Initiates cannot perform these two roles as they are mutually exclusive. He expressed his doubt to the head Mother, who replied that other members of the temple believed that putting him in the traditionally masculine role of ogã might "straighten him out." Placing him in the role of spirit medium, she implied, might further encourage his effeminate tendencies, understood as homosexual in the Candomblé context. The justification offered by the Mother suggests that other Candomblé initiates consider the medium position as one occupied by gay men and that performing the rodante role as a spirit medium who dances during the ceremonies might even encourage gay behavior. The assumption is that sexual orientation is not a fixed part of one's identity like sex at birth, but rather based on circumstance, relationships and context. If Tata Eduardo's claims about the orthodox temple's position on Paulinho's role and sexuality are true, then they discouraged gay tendencies among men who are placed in the masculine, heteronormative role of ogã as to police the boundaries of who is permissibly queer and in what context.

As Tata Eduardo further narrated to me, around the same time he was running a small consultation studio in Salvador where he performed cowry shell divination (jogo de búzios).

When Paulinho visited his studio for a consultation, he immediately became possessed by a spirit. For Tata Eduardo, this confirmed Paulinho's position as a rodante rather than an ogã. Because the orthodox temple refused to recognize this, Eduardo agreed to initiate Paulinho into his newly established temple. After the initiation, Eduardo brought him and other new children-initiates to give their blessings to the elders at the Bonfim Church and arrived unannounced at the orthodox Temple. He was received by the head Mother, who opened the private ritual quarters for him and his children to share the orthodox ritual traditions. He said that everything was fine, and they were invited to stay for lunch, but they declined and returned to their own temple.

A few days later, a representative from the orthodox temple arrived at Tata Eduardo's new temple unexpectedly and announced that Paulinho was no longer welcome because he was an ogã in their house, so he could not become possessed as a rodante. Eduardo didn't understand why the head Mother would change her attitude, since Paulinho and his other children were previously welcomed by her. Supposedly other initiates at the orthodox temple expressed their discontent with Tata Eduardo for disregarding the role destined for Paulinho, suggesting that he had betrayed the head Mother by initiating him to be a rodante at his new temple. When the head Mother finally took the stance that Paulinho could no longer "step in my temple," Eduardo replied, "if my son cannot enter, then neither can I." He never returned to the orthodox temple, though he frequently talks about his time there and especially his proximity to the head Mother as the source of his ritual knowledge, despite this conflict.

The fear among other ogãs that Paulinho was a rodante was also a fear that he might be gay or could "turn gay". Generally initiates whom "receive the saint" as mediums are considered to enter into a "feminized" world, whereas those participants who are not possessed (the ogãs

and ekedis) occupy the masculine pole.⁵²⁵ Sexual metaphors permeate discourse on spirit possession in both Yoruba theology and Brazilian Candomblé. The spirit “mounts” female and effeminate subjects as a penetrative force that enters and dominates passive bodies.⁵²⁶ The pejorative terms *adé* and *bicha* in Brazilian Candomblé refer to men who are “passive homosexuals,” or those who are supposedly penetrated in the sexual act. The distinction between active and passive in Brazilian sexual discourse also informs interpretations of spirit possession.⁵²⁷ In Brazil, being a man (*homem*) is less defined in terms of sexual orientation than in terms of “preference for the inserter role in sex”, so men who penetrate are not considered homosexuals, whether or not they have sex with other men.⁵²⁸ Likewise, women who are not penetrated such as *sapatões* and *monokós* (referring to stereotypes of “butch lesbians”) are considered masculine and active. These scholars have suggested that the binary of active and passive in Brazilian sexuality is then applied to the relationship between the spirit and medium in spirit possession, expressed within the Candomblé temples.

The story between Tata Eduardo, Paulinho and the head Mother makes clear that ritual roles are associated with sex at birth and sexual orientation, especially in orthodox houses.⁵²⁹ From the perspective of the orthodox temple, Tata Eduardo betrayed the head Mother’s authority by claiming to know one of her children better, placing Paulinho in the *rodante* role and contradicting the role first given to him as an *ogã*. Paulinho’s decision shows how initiates seek a

⁵²⁵ Birman, *Fazer estilo*, vii.

⁵²⁶ Matory, “Homens montados”, Birman, *Fazer estilo*.

⁵²⁷ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (eds), *Dislocating Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge University Press, 1994); James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁵²⁸ Cornwall and Lindisfarne, *Dislocating Masculinity*, 113.

⁵²⁹ Other orthodox houses include Terreiro Casa Branca, Terreiro Gantois, Terreiro Ilê Ashé Opô Afonjá, Terreiro Alaketu, Terreiro do Cobre and Terreiro Pilão de Prata, for example. Orthodox is defined here by antiquity and dedication to keeping rigid rules protected by “tradition” as the ways of the ancestors.

Candomblé family that accepts their sexual orientation and places them in what they consider their proper ritual role, defined through sexuality and gender.

Judgments regarding who is permissibly gay and in what context depend on the person's role in the family and how that person "behaves." The policing of gender and sexuality occur among the initiatory family at the level of the one's ritual role. As confirmed previously in scholarship, the rodante role is occupied by majority feminine subjects—both cis women⁵³⁰ and gay men who perform femininity. Tata Eduardo himself is a rodante—he followed Joãozinho da Gomeia's trajectory by gaining fame through his Caboclo and performing divine consultations while possessed by his spirit. At the orthodox temple in Salvador, he was also recognized as a medium, so that his Father considered his homosexuality appropriate, likely because it aligned with his ritual role. Tata Eduardo encountered from his sister-initiates, however, incredulousness and resistance to his homosexuality. It is also possible that they were trying to courteously hide his sexuality by accentuating that he had a "girlfriend."⁵³¹ It is important to recognize how women, both daughters and Mothers, can contribute to the heteronormativity of the temples, as they are privileged as women because of what is perceived as their innate-born femininity and fertility.⁵³²

⁵³⁰ I use the term cis women to refer to women born as females who also present as women. The term cis men refers to men born male who also present as men.

⁵³¹ It is possible that the sister-initiates considered the girlfriend to be equivalent to a "beard" in the U.S. LGBTQ nomenclature.

⁵³² It is fathomable that some women in Candomblé seek to defend their own position, as it is one of the few institutions and social organizations in the Americas that privilege women, and particularly black women, as authoritative leaders, though I do not have concrete data on this from my research.

Masculinity in the Family of Saints

Most accounts of gender flexibility in Candomblé have focused on the male-born initiates who find a “sanctuary” to perform a feminine identity in ritual.⁵³³ Building on a counter-current in the field of scholarship, this final section argues that masculinity is less accessible to initiates as a divine Afro-diasporic subjectivity than femininity.⁵³⁴ In a binary ritual and kin system based on the division of male and female, male-born initiates are accepted in the divine feminine position more seamlessly than female-born initiates are accepted as masculine or can perform male roles. When Candomblé Fathers initiate their children and receive the spirits as mediums, they do so in feminine modes. As demonstrated ethnographically in the first chapter, Fathers also perform the labor of gestation to birth initiates into the Candomblé family. For these reasons great attention has been given to the prevalence of the effeminate man in Candomblé as an example of gender fluidity, whereas much less attention has been given to masculine women, or lesbian experiences in the religion. In contrast to the wide range of sexualities and gendered performance available to male initiates, women’s sexuality is narrowly defined by fertility for the heterosexual reproduction of family lineages.

Regardless of sex, the initiate is considered and named a bride (*iaô*) to their deity in West African and Afro-diasporic rituals of ancestor worship. That male initiates are also “brides” to the deity has been used to theorize the medium role as a feminine one, and to separate the correlation of sex and gender in the relationship between medium and spirit.⁵³⁵ Such

⁵³³ Landes, “A Cult Matriarchate”; Fry, “Male Homosexuality”; Seth Leacock and Ruth Leacock, *Spirits of the Deep: A Study of an Afro-Brazilian Cult* (Garden City, N.Y.: Published for the American Museum of Natural History [by] Doubleday, 1972);

⁵³⁴ This term refers to the idea that “the Afro-diasporic self is removable, external, and multiple” especially related to gender and sexuality. Strongmann, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions*, 10.

⁵³⁵ James L. Matory, *Sex and the Empire that is No More: Gender and the politics of metaphor in Oyo Yoruba religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Patrícia Birman, *Fazer Estilo Criando Gênero: Possessão e diferenças de gênero em terreiros de Umbanda* (Rio de Janeiro: RELUME-DUMARA, 1995); Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and sex in African society* (London: Zed Books, 1987).

formulations approach the feminine role as passive and more susceptible to spirit possession, while theorizing the deity as a masculine penetrative force. In Brazil, the supposed “passive homosexuals” to whom Landes refers are also pejoratively called *bichas* or *adés*. According to popular notions of sexuality and gender in Brazil, the *travestis* and *bichas* are not considered “true” men because they receive rather than give sexual penetration. A man who penetrates, even during sexual intercourse with another man, is not considered gay.⁵³⁶ Scholars have suggested that the binary of active and passive in Brazilian sexuality then applies to the relationship between the spirit and medium in spirit possession, “homosexualizing male initiates’ possession experiences.”⁵³⁷ Furthermore, “The commensurability of Brazilian ideas about sexuality and Candomblé conceptions of possession affirm gay male participation in the religion and even in the society at large.”⁵³⁸ Such scholars suggest that the prevalence of homosexual men in Candomblé is in part that they are attracted to the feminine role of spirit medium accessible to male-born initiates and female-born initiates alike, as confirmed by Mother Talaiby in the opening of this section.

Based on research developed in Nigeria, Matory utilizes the African context to compare the metaphors used to describe the logic of corporal possession and sexual penetration in Brazil. The verb *montar* in Portuguese (and *gun* in Yoruba) is used in reference to the saint (*orixá*) that descends into the body of the possessed person, but also refers to the sexual act. The god is a

⁵³⁶ Wafer, *Taste of Blood*, 35; Cornwall, “Gendered identities”, 122; Matory, *Black Atlantic*, 19. For a more details on this debates, see Grieve M Arboleda, Stephen O. Murray, and Clark L. Taylor, *Latin American Male Homosexualities* (Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Pr, 1995). It is possible that this idea has been reified by scholarship and less observed in social practice. An update to this scholarship is necessary. In my experiences in Bahia I have often heard that it is more understandable and permissible for a man to penetrate a travesti (male cross-dresser as a woman) in the active role, rather than to be penetrated by another man—signally passivity associated with femininity.

⁵³⁷ Allen, “Brides without husbands”, 21; Birman, *Fazer estilo*; Matory, *Sex and the Empire*.

⁵³⁸ Allen, “Brides without husbands”, 25.

power that penetrates and fertilizes the person.⁵³⁹ All who receive the saint as rodantes are called *iaôs* in candomblé, reinforcing their feminine role. Because they are also considered feminine, *bichas* and *travestis* can also receive the saints in Afro-Brazilian religions. In Matory's argument, the "matriarchal" candomblés and homophobic Brazil consider the *adê* to be an illegitimate and even contaminating person.⁵⁴⁰ Whereas Matory says the *adês* are discriminated against, Teixeira and Cornwall claim they are the privileged subjects in Candomblé because they have the best of both worlds; they are respected as biological males and can adopt femaleness in religious activities.⁵⁴¹

Those who do not receive the saint, in contrast, are considered masculine. These include the *ogans*, heterosexual masculine men, and the *equedes*, initiated women who participate in the rituals without getting possessed. Others, like the *monokós*, are women who receive male *orixás* during spirit possession. Like the *adês*, the *monokós* are ambiguous and can cross boundaries, without filling the roles that are normally reserved for either men or women. Whereas *adês* are permitted to perform femininity, "there are limited options for *monokós* to become as if 'men'," as biology takes precedence.⁵⁴² Gay men and perceived passive men are not "emasculated in the religion" because their feminine ritual roles "do not negate the widespread belief in the biological divide between women and men" as "gay men are unquestionably allowed to act like

⁵³⁹ Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, 199.

⁵⁴⁰ James L. Matory, "Feminismo, nacionalismo, e a luta pelo significado do adé no Candomblé: ou, como Edison Carneiro e Ruth Landes inverteram o curso da história" in *Revista da Antropologia* (São Paulo, USP, vol. 51, n. 1, 2008, pp. 107-120); Beliso-de-Jesus, makes the same argument for "el pato" in Cuban santería in A. M. Beliso-De, Jesús, "Yemayá's Duck: Irony, Ambivalence, and the Effeminate Male Subject in Cuban Santería" In: Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola (orgs), *Yemoja : Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 44.

⁵⁴¹ Cornwall, "Gendered identities"; Birman, *Fazer Estilo*; Teixeira, "Lorogun", 43, original in Portuguese: "possuem flexibilidade, ou melhor, uma ambiguidade que les permite ora ser vistos como mulheres ('viados', 'bichas'), ora como *homens*, de acordo com o que está sendo valorizado no momento, se a condição biológica masculina ou a feminina adotada na instância não religiosa. Não tem peso considerados 'ativos' ou 'passivos'."

⁵⁴² Cornwall, "Gendered Identities", 112, 128.

any other men in ritual and ceremonial settings.”⁵⁴³ The effeminate men can perform femininity ritually at the same time they are free from “feminine labor.” In contrast, Monokós and masculine presenting equedes are still required to do women’s work and, at least in orthodox houses, should refrain from performing male tasks like drumming and animal sacrifice.⁵⁴⁴

The female labor of the equedes include the domestic tasks commonly attributed to women in the home. As one Mother explained to me, “there are functions that only men do, playing the drums, killing the animals, taking care of the instruments, these activities are specifically for the men. The kitchen, the ceremonial hall, these are specifically for women.”⁵⁴⁵ An effeminate man would not be allowed in the kitchen, but a masculine woman would be required to do the cooking and cleaning for the food offering preparations. Notably, the task of taking care of the “barracão” (ceremonial hall) is meant for women. Equedes are not initiated to receive the deities as *iãos*, yet they are the only members of the family who can take care of the mediums while they are in spirit. Elderly equedes, though they may never reach the position of *Iyálorixá* (head priestess and a spirit medium), are highly regarded in the family of saints. One prominent Equede of the matriarchal Casa Branca Temple, Equede Sinha, wrote an autobiography entitled “Equede: The Mother of All,” where she characterized the kitchen as “the heart of the whole house” because it is the place where *axé* is produced in the form of food and

⁵⁴³ Allen, “Brides without husbands”, 21. See also Birman, *Fazer Estilo*; Rita Segato, “Inventando a Natureza: Família, sexo e gênero no Xangô de Recife” In: Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura (ed.) *Candomblé: Religião de Corpo e da alma* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2000); Teixeira, “Lorogun”.

⁵⁴⁴ Teixeira, “Lorogun”; Allen, “Brides without husbands”. This is not to say that women never drum, never learn how to drum, or may not step up in dire situations. I want to emphasize that this is the ideal division of ritual labor on gendered lines, that are observed particularly in the orthodox, historic temples that defend these customs as the ways of the ancestors.

⁵⁴⁵ Interview with Ana Louisa Talaiby (Lauro de Freitas, July 19, 2016. Original in Portuguese: “Tem funções que só são de homens, o toque do atabaque, a matança dos bichos, o cuidar com os instrumentos isso é uma atividade especificamente dos homens. Né a cozinha, o barracão, essas são específicas das mulheres.” For a detailed ethnography of the kitchen as a space of ritual and social practice in Afro-Cuban Lucumí traditions, see Elizabeth Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

drink offerings for the deities.⁵⁴⁶ All of these attributes recall Landes' perception from her research that "only women are suited by their sex to nurse the deities."⁵⁴⁷

A masculine, heterosexual Angolan Tata⁵⁴⁸ presented to me the gendered division of ritual labor. He is the lead drummer and highest male figure in the family hierarchy, due to his advanced age (70+) and his position as the biological son of a respected Tata who belonged to the first generation of the now centennial temple. He represents the temple and the head priestess in public and has been involved in cultural politics in the city of Salvador throughout his lifetime. In an interview with me, he noted that male functions are essential in Candomblé, "we know perfectly well that men are more connected to the chores, the part of sacrifice, preparing the animals, this part of going into the forest to collect herbs, [take care] of the drums, the organization and ornamentation of the temple..." However, he made perfectly clear that "when the person is manifested with the entities, only the women can take care of them. When the people leave their trance... they need somebody to give them assistance, and only the woman knows how to do this. I cannot do all that correctly, really only a woman can."⁵⁴⁹ Quickly he clarified that he supports modern ideas that a woman can do anything that a man can and vice-versa, with one important exception, "I can do anything that [women] can do, I only cannot generate another being, [because] this completeness, only [women] have, this sublimation, only

⁵⁴⁶Alexandre Lyrio and Dadá Jaques (org), *Equede: A Mãe de Todos* (Salvador: Barabô Editora, 2016).

⁵⁴⁷ Landes, "A Cult Matriarchate."

⁵⁴⁸ Tata is the equivalent of Ogan in the Angolan Nation and is also the title for head Fathers of the Angolan nation.

⁵⁴⁹ Anonymous interview with the author (Salvador, September 30, 2017). Original in Portuguese: "Mas no Candomblé a gente sabe perfeitamente que os homens são ligados mais aos afazeres, é a parte de sacrificar, emolar os animais, essa parte de ir pra mata colher folha, ver os engomas, como é que está a organização a ornamentação do terreiro... quando a pessoa está aí como se diz...manifestado com as entidades, é elas que cuidam. Quando as pessoas sai daquela transe, dá uma assistência, precisa de uma pessoa para dar aquela assistência, que só a mulher sabe fazer. Eu não tenho como acertar tudo isso, só uma mulher mesmo. Então eu realmente tiro meu chapéu com tudo isso mas também quero dizer que nossa religião é uma religião completa..."

for her, given by god...”⁵⁵⁰ This Tata’s discourse reinforces the idea that birth defines sex and the distinctive abilities of men and women. He ended the discussion on gender and ritual roles with pride, highlighting that they are complementary between men and women; “our religion is a complete religion.”⁵⁵¹

The complementarity of male and female in Candomblé, the hyper-valorization of feminine fertility and the division of ritual roles based on sex present challenges to accepting trans and non-binary initiates into the ritual family. While scarce scholarship has investigated the experiences of queer Black women in the Candomblé family, I know of no study on trans or non-binary initiates. Even though Joãozinho da Gomeia presented himself as a *travesti* during carnival and used skirts in his dance performances, he was still “taken officially as a man.”⁵⁵² Unlike MTF trans women, he himself did not identify or present himself as a woman.⁵⁵³ His femininity did not negate his maleness, understood as a characteristic of birth. Gender flexibility in Candomblé has been limited to cross-dressing within binary categories of masculinity and femininity, also reinforced in rituals and the division of labor. With the recent increase in trans visibility and politics in the city of Salvador, initiates of a younger generation express tensions regarding trans initiates, especially in orthodox temples. Trans initiates who transition between genders following their initiation cause tension precisely because they challenge the binary of male/female roles in ritual practice. For example, a person born a cis-man and initiated into Candomblé with a male role would not be allowed to change their function and perform female

⁵⁵⁰ Anonymous interview with the author (Salvador, September 30, 2017). Original in Portuguese: “Se temos que dividir os afazeres, dividiremos, eu posso fazer tudo o que elas podem fazerem, só não posso gerar um novo ser, que essa plenitude, só ela que tem, essa sublimação, só ela, dado por deus...”

⁵⁵¹ Anonymous interview. Original in Portuguese: “nossa religião é uma religião completa.”

⁵⁵² Ruth Landes Papers, Box 9: Series 1: Research Materials- Notebooks, Folder: Notebook Brazil XX, April 30, 1939 (Washington, DC: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institute).

⁵⁵³ (MTF) Male to Female Trans. It is possible that today, with the advancements of gender and sexuality in popular society and LGBTQI political initiatives, Joãozinho would have presented a different public identity.

ritual roles following a gender transition. The preoccupation among Candomblé practitioners to identify and maintain biological sex demonstrates the persistence of “natural” sexed identity through physical birth within a value system that also engages ritualized gender.

Conclusion

Although Candomblé rituals and deities present a continuum between masculinity and femininity, the need to fit into and perform only one role limits the possibilities for expression of gender and sexuality, especially as it may change throughout one’s lifetime. At the same time, the *não faz de conta* (it doesn’t matter) policy also allows for the veiling of one’s sexual life and preferences, relegated to the initiates’ private life. One Angolan priest, who has never disclosed his sexuality to me or in his public relationships, made it very clear that “sexuality is for out there” (*sexualidade é lá fora*) at the same time he exclaimed, “we put sex above everything” in order to serve the deities.⁵⁵⁴ When pressed to comment on the tensions regarding initiates who transition between genders, he replied, “Candomblé takes care of the soul, surgery does not change the soul—masculine or feminine. This has nothing to do with the body of the person. But we accept everybody... We will not reject anybody who comes to the temple. We will adapt, there is no formed position on this subject.”⁵⁵⁵ Chiming in on the conversation, an elder Makota (female initiate) of the temple added, “you have to maintain the traditions.” To myself I thought, “even the gender binary.”

Scholars have accentuated the prevalence of gender flexibility and alternative expressions of sexuality through analyses of discourse, metaphors, and myths. In contrast, few ethnographies

⁵⁵⁴ This idea is reinforced by the policy that Candomblé initiates (siblings) of the same temple should not have sexual relationships.

⁵⁵⁵ Original in Portuguese: “Candomblé cuida da alma, cirurgia não muda a alma - masculina ou feminina. Isso tem nada ver com o corpo da pessoa. Mas, acolhemos todos.”

have dedicated research to understand the gay, lesbian and queer initiates' experiences in the Candomblé family. The “effeminate male” position in Afro-diasporic religions has become somewhat of a trope, a stereotype, like *el pato* in Cuban santería, “not an actual person or *real* community, but rather the discursive religious subject.”⁵⁵⁶ In the context of twentieth century Brazilian Candomblé, Joãozinho da Goméia became the blueprint for this trope. His fame inspired other gay men to follow his lead and enter the religion because of its feminine and expressive potential for gay men. However, the policing of homosexuality as presented ethnographically in this dissertation and the backlash to Joãozinho da Goméia's form of religious leadership, his perceived unorthodoxy and exclusion from the prestigious leaders of the religion reveals more about the lived experience of queer Candomblé initiates. Masculine, heteronormative, and homophobic stances perpetuated among some initiates continue to restrict free expressions of gender and sexuality within the family of saints, for both male and female initiates.

The flexibility of femininity as an accessible category, regardless of condition of birth, and the comparative restrictiveness of masculinity speak to more than these specific ritual systems; these dynamics also speak to the reception of gendered identities outside of the ritual context. The heterosexual masculine subject outside of the temple walls benefits from social protections and political privilege; the feminine subject, regardless of their sexuality, is oppressed, discriminated against and marginalized in nearly all public and private institutions, further compounded by race and colorism. The male-born initiates who experience benefits of being men in the social and political sphere can also take advantage of the accessibility of femininity—and specifically Black femininity—as it is worshipped in the Candomblé temples.

⁵⁵⁶ Beliso-De Jesús, “Yemayá's Duck”, 44.

The inverse is *not* true. Black female-born initiates of Candomblé can never fully inhabit the masculine in the ritual system nor in the world outside.

Conclusion

Within the Candomblé temples, initiatory families venerate Black Mothers as the most important links to the ancestors, at the top of a rigid hierarchy. Mothers who were born into Black families with demonstrable African lineages and generations of Candomblé leadership are the most respected sources of African ritual knowledge because of the double transmission of blood and *axé* – the vital energetic force of the ancestors. While kin relations established through ritual initiation are independent of the conditions of biological birth, the religion operates within broader social concerns of tracking and identifying race through “biological” blood lineages that form affiliation within identifiable racial groups in Brazil—as blood carries racialized physical characteristics passed through birth from a gestating mother. I argue that when biological and initiatory kin align claims to ancestral knowledge and African religious authority exert the strongest impact on the Brazilian public, as represented in the media and recognized through the politics of cultural patrimony—exemplified through the celebration of the Candomblé Mother as the emblem of African heritage in Brazil.

No recent scholarship has revisited the debates on gender in the Angolan nation of Brazilian Candomblé, analyzed here in comparison with the more familiar characterizations of “matriarchal” Yoruba lineages that have gained the most recognition in Afro-Brazilian heritage politics. The Angolan nation has been historically characterized by male leadership and narratives of racial mixture consistent with national discourses of Brazilian miscegenation. In contrast, the Nagô nation is celebrated for a public consensus regarding its “African” heritage, of which Black female leadership is a key element. Historical research reveals that several Angolan Mothers have not figured prominently in national narratives and popular characterizations of the Candomblé religion but are nonetheless revered in the oral histories from their ritual

descendants. Whereas previous scholarship emphasized the patriarchal foundations of Angolan temples, the historical and ethnographic research presented here demonstrate that whether the Candomblé lineage is matriarchal, patriarchal or of mixed gender, all nations of the Candomblé family value the Mothers as essential to the perpetuation of ancestral ritual knowledge and practice.

Throughout the dissertation I have argued that the understanding of Candomblé as a religion led by Black women strengthened as a key component of the cultural shifts of the 1970s and 1980s that were later incorporated into the democratic, multiculturalist policies of the early Brazilian democracy. By the end of the twentieth century, select Mothers of historic Candomblé temples in Salvador gained public attention as “matriarchs,” celebrated in cultural politics and the media for their authority within the limited jurisdiction of the African territory. Within the multiculturalist orientation of the Brazilian democracy, Candomblé temples were defined through an inversion of the racial and gendered hierarchies of the Brazilian social and economic order. The discursive cultural initiatives to recognize Black female leadership did little, however, to advance racial equality, redistribute resources, or grant political representation to most Candomblé initiates, because they continued to operate within the historic discourse of racial democracy that associated the Candomblé Mother with the Mãe Preta of slavery.

Next, this work evaluated how, when and why Candomblé priestesses align themselves with the national folkloric image of the Mãe Preta—sometimes to secure resources, and prestige—but most importantly, I argue, because the figure, even when folklorized and decontextualized, possesses elements that resonate with the Mother’s roles in the ritual family as the vital life force. The Mãe Preta in the racial democracy discourse and the Candomblé Mother in the initiatory family both provide spiritual and moral guidance, maternal comfort, and sustain

family lineages to children both born from her body and adopted. Through the transmission of blood or milk, the Black Mother confers an “African” identity to her children, regardless of their race. Distinguishing between Blackness and Africanness in these processes considers the ritual formation of African culture in Brazilian national discourses without neglecting the material inequalities, race-based discrimination, and violence that characterize the lived experiences of Black populations in Brazil. Several ethnographic examples demonstrate how light-skinned Fathers base their religious authority on their ritual birth from Black Candomblé Mothers through initiation to legitimate their African heritage. Some of these light-skinned Fathers have been successful in redirecting state resources intended for Black populations as a reconfiguration of rights in the construction of Brazilian democracy from the 1980s to the present.

Through evaluating memorialization practices within initiatory families and the public presentation of foundational narratives, I argue that national lineages of Candomblé are defined through gendered and racial characteristics of their founders. Whereas heritage is meant to be collective as relating to national identities and histories, the implementation of state heritage policies favors individual leaders and temples who become sacralized into the historical narrative and guaranteed the infrastructure for their future importance and legacy in the public sphere. The memorialization practices adapt internal ritual modes of revering ancestors, preserving spiritually charged material objects, and presenting historical narratives to a public. Cultural heritage policies reinforce the dominant narratives of each Candomblé nation and the importance of the founders, limiting the full range of Candomblé histories and trajectories. The ethnography tracks the twenty-first century struggle to recognize the particularities of Bantu heritage in contrast to the Yoruba and incorporate the Angolan nation into understandings of Afro-Brazilian history, culture, and religion at a national level.

Taking seriously the materiality of Candomblé rituals and the historicity of the temples, I approach the making of Afro-Brazilian heritage as more than a discursive initiative led by cultural agencies interested in a multiculturalist project. Rather, the making of Afro-Brazilian heritage responded to movements led by the temples and supported by Black activists to guarantee land rights and honor the African territoriality of the sacred lands where generations of initiatory families had practiced the same rituals established by their founders. Central to this discussion is the consideration that African-born and first-generation African-descendant religious leaders founded temples in nineteenth and early twentieth century Bahia. The prevalence of African-born leaders and their descendants in the establishment of the temple territories encourages a discussion of Africa in Brazil beyond pure discourse or constructed imaginaries of a lost homeland. Ultimately, I showed how the cultural policies contributed to the discourse that authentically African temples were founded by and led by Afro-descendant women.

The field of cultural heritage reflects and reinforces the dominant narratives of each Candomblé nation and the importance of their founders. The transformation of Candomblé territories from autonomous, protective, and secretive spaces to public sites of national heritage begs the question: did the valorization of matriarchal figures within the family of saints rise due to the privileged public status given to the priestesses based on the matriarchal model of the Iyá Nassô lineage? J. L. Matory attributes the beginning of the matriarchal understanding of Candomblé to Ruth Landes' projection of a "transnational community of women" during her research from 1938 to 1939.⁵⁵⁷ This dissertation and prior works have demonstrated how matriarchal figures like Mother Menininha informed the discourse of matriarchy in Landes'

⁵⁵⁷ Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 193.

works, reflecting the organization of her Gantois temple, and the sister temples Casa Branca and Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, which had been operating in Salvador since the nineteenth century.⁵⁵⁸ Based on contemporary ethnographic research, I have argued that the Mothers are particularly revered within the ritual family and considered privileged links to the ancestors. It is possible that Angolan temples have emphasized Black female leaders in their lineages more forcefully and publicly in recent decades in response to these shifts. However, based on the oral traditions passed through generations of Candomblé, my analysis considers the valorization of Mothers in the family of saints to reflect ritual practice rather than a response to anthropological and media representation.

In this study, I revisited the concept of matriarchy within Candomblé through the ethnographic study of on-the-ground relationships between Candomblé Mothers and Fathers and within their respective sets of initiates—“family of saints”—to make visible the mechanisms that produce lineages and generations of kinship within the initiatory family dedicated to ancestor reverence. To intervene in the debates on matriarchy, I presented three related claims: First that matriarchy remains a powerful term and concept in Candomblé because it pools multiple meanings of gestation in the propagation of family lineages. Second, even male priests, “Fathers,” rely on notions of matriarchy to build their authority. Third, Candomblé’s idealization of matriarchy as the basis of religious authority reinforces traditional gender roles and binary

⁵⁵⁸ Ruth Landes’ archives also reveal the prominence of Angolan and Caboclo Mothers during her field research in 1939 to 1939, which she did not represent in her ethnography *The City of Women*. The prominence of Candomblé Mothers of all nations of Candomblé can be traced at least to this period, and oral histories also extend to the nineteenth century with Mariquinha Lembá in the Angolan Paketan lineage. See Andreson, *Ruth Landes e a Cidade das Mulheres*.

gender in certain respects, even as Candomblé affords opportunities for gender experimentation and multiplicity.⁵⁵⁹

This dissertation moves beyond simplistic or overly optimistic approaches to Afro-diasporic religions as matriarchal or gender-flexible paradises, without disregarding the liberating potential of Afro-diasporic rituals and mythologies. Rather, the work situates Candomblé within the restrictive social order and prescriptive identities that still permeate the family of saints because of its positionality in the Brazilian context.⁵⁶⁰ The ethnographic materials expose the policing of gender and sexuality within the initiatory family at the level of one's ritual role and the influences of homophobia, masculinism and Brazilian heteronormative ideals in the Candomblé family. The valorization of femininity, procreativity and fertility reinforce traditional ideals of domesticity and reproduction as the proper place of women, and particularly Black women, in Brazilian society. Because Black Mothers are the most celebrated leaders of the religion, I show how female initiates who pursue unconventional expressions of femininity or identify as masculine have less footing in the liturgical structure of the religion, and do not find the possibilities of self-expression in the same way that gay men who align with femininity can. Male initiates can adopt the divine feminine position more seamlessly than female-born initiates can be accepted as masculine or perform male roles.

Responding to the limitations of expressing gender identities outside the ritual sphere, my analysis places the religion within the restrictive social context of the Brazilian nation to expose the forces that undermine the transformative potential of Black female and queer empowerment

⁵⁵⁹ These findings reflect previous critiques from feminist anthropologists since the 1970s that patriarchy reinforces traditional gender roles and does not offer a way out of women's universal subordination. See the debates in Louise Lamphere and Joan Bamberger (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford University Press, 1974).

⁵⁶⁰ Because this work is not an investigation of rituals or mythologies, I do not diminish their potential for liberation, but to their application, as initiates are not isolated from outside society that does not embrace Candomblé epistemologies, only folklorized symbols. Allen, Teixeira, Fry.

in Candomblé. My research reveals how the valorization of femininity and fertility in the religion and the reinforcement of divisions based on sex can further engrain traditional gender roles through ideal types of maternity and domesticity. Consequently, the racialized matriarch archetype as associated with the head priestesses may also reify the proper place of Black women in the domestic and motherly roles. At the same time, in no other social context besides Candomblé are Black Brazilian women presented as authoritative leaders. While the forces that have contributed to the folklorization and banalization of Candomblé may seek to undermine the priestess' power in the public sphere, the family of saints continues to respect and revere the Mothers on their own terms.

Appendices



Figure 13: Screening of the documentary clip “100 Years of the Bate Folha Temple” during the centennial seminar on December 3, 2016 at the Terreiro Bate Folha, Salvador. Photo by the author.

Sábado - 28abr
Local: Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Goméia.

Domingo - 29abr
Local: Terminal Turístico Mãe Mirinha de Portão.

9h - Credenciamento e Boas Vindas.

10h - Visita Guiada
Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Goméia

11h - De Altanira Maria da Conceição Souza a Mãe Mirinha de Portão.
Professor Gildásio
Academia de Letras de Lauro de Freitas
Mametu Kamurici
Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Goméia

12h - Almoço.

14h - A importância de um Terreiro de Candomblé como celeiro cultural promotor de políticas públicas.
Mãe Jaciara
Axé Abassa de Ogum
Raimundo Komananji
Acbantú

15h - A necessidade de Políticas Públicas para as Comunidades Tradicionais de Matriz Africana
Fábya Reis
SEPROMI BA

16h - Paineis da Memória

17h - Encerramento.
Exibição da chamada / Documentário Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Goméia - 70 Anos.

9h - Terminal Turístico Mãe Mirinha de Portão: Espaço de Reconhecimento da Cultura de Matriz Africana.
Moema Gramacho
Prefeita de Lauro de Freitas

10h - Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Goméia: 70 anos de salvaguarda da cultura de Matriz Africana.
Mametu Kamurici
Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Goméia
Vanda Machado
Salvaguarda e Matriz Africana
Eduardo Oliveira
Filosofia Africana - Além dos espaços sagrados UFBA - DMMDC Rede Africanidades

11h - Apresentação do Bloco Afro Bankoma.
"Exposição e Manifestações Culturais de Matriz Africana"

Seminário
Mãe Mirinha de Portão:
70 anos de preservação da cultura de Matriz Africana

Realização
Associação de Terreiros de São Jorge Filho da Goméia

Apoio
MAMDC
ACELANTO
PREFEITURA LAURO DE FREITAS

Patrocínio
IPAC SECRETARIA DE CULTURA
BAHIA GOVERNO DO ESTADO

#70anostsjfgomeia
Compartilhe essa idéia!

Figure 14: Program for the seminar “Mother Mirinha do Portão: 70 years of preserving African descendant culture” hosted by the Terreiro São Jorge Filho da Gomeia.



Figure 15: Mãe Lúcia with her daughter-initiates from the Afro-Bankoma cultural dance group, after the seminar.



Figure 16: Members of the Sisterhood of Good Death (Irmandade da Boa Morte) during their annual festa in Cachoeira, Bahia.

Photo by Jonatas Campelo.



Figure 17: Newspaper article on the event “80 anos dos Obás de Xangô” hosted at the Opô Afonjá temple on July 13, 2016.

I participated and met Mother Stella for the first and only time. I was interviewed and appeared in the press coverage of the event. Clarissa Pacheco, “Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá celebra 80 anos do obás de Xangô” (Salvador: Correio da Bahia, July 13, 2016): “The American historian Jamie Lee Anderson, born in California, who came to Bahia for a Master’s degree in Ethnic and African Studies at UFBA, waited to get to know for the first time the history of the Obás. There, she met visitors from Michigan, also from the USA, and ended up translating for them. ‘I did my research on the history of matriarchy and this temple is part of that history. I also never met Mother Stella personally. I [only] know the temple by its history, but now I get to know it through the ceremony,’ said Jamie, who has been in Brazil for five years.”

O matriarcalismo negro no Brasil

ANTONIO RISÉRIO
Especial para o Folha

A morte da "Ilorixá" Menininha do Gantois me fez pensar num aspecto importante da história da mulher no Brasil. Gilberto Freyre, já falava dos modos radicalmente diferentes da mulher negra e da mulher branca se comportarem, no Brasil colônia, em relação ao espaço urbano. Na Bahia, em especial, era sinal de distinção, de fidalguia, evitar a rua e o ar livre, coisa que chegou a preocupar o médico Lima Santos. O espaço público citadino era estigmatizado no ambiente social branco.

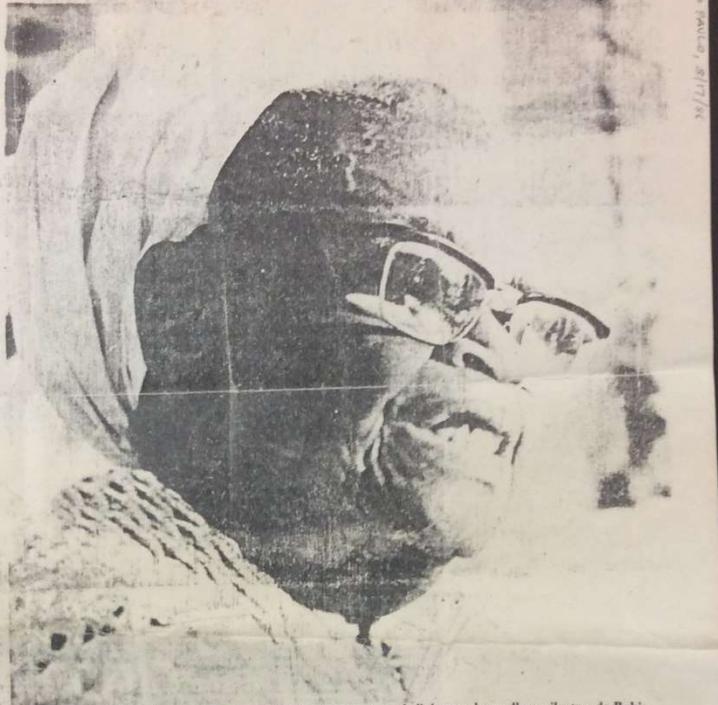
Se era assim com os senhores, pior para as sinhas. Havia as exceções de praxe, é claro. Aquelles senhores patriarcais, passando dos engenhos rurais para os sobrados urbanos, mantiveram mulheres e filhas enclausuradas, entregues aos "cafunes afrodisíacos" das mucamas (Roger Bastide estudou o lesbianismo, no ensaio "Psicanálise do Cafuné"). Freyre lembra ainda que a denominação sexual patriarcal gerou dois modelos femininos: o da senhora gorda, prática e caseira; e o da moça franzina, romântica e neurótica, inspiradora de boa parte da má literatura brasileira, com seu tão típico culto sublimado do "sexo frágil", que o escritor pernambucano flagra pelo avesso psicanalítico, identificando ali o culto narcisista do macho patriarcal.

Não importa como tenha sido, o certo é que sinhas e sinhazinhas foram, na vida brasileira, mulheres pálidas e omíscas. "Nunca numa sociedade aparentemente européia, os homens foram tão sós em seu esforço, como os nossos no tempo do império", escreveu Freyre. A análise é aplicável apenas à classe dirigente. Bem outra era a realidade em meio a pretos e mestiços, homens e mulheres pobres, todas pessoas da rua e da praça, com seus cantos de trabalho, suas reuniões, seus batiques e seus namoros.

Iniciativas de relevo

É que a negra ou mulata — ainda que liberta, ainda que possuindo escravos — mais se distingue das sinhas e sinhazinhas. Vamos encontrar as primeiras em campo aberto e muitas vezes empenhadas em campanhas e iniciativas históricas de relevo. Foi o caso, por exemplo, voluntaristas, originárias de Ketu, de que fala Pierre Verger: a "Iyalusô Danadana" e a "Iyanassô Akatá" (ou Obaká), que, auxiliadas pelo "Babá Anssiká", fundaram no início do século 19 um terreiro na camômbilé na Bahia (subterrâneo, com entrada pelo oco de uma árvore, segundo a tradição verbal); era o "Iyá Oni Axé Airá Iutilé", casa que deu origem aos famosos terreiros da Bahia, como a casa branca doengenho velho, o "Gantois" (Ilé Iyá Ossin Axé Iyamansé), o "Axé do Opô Afijá".

A morte da "Ilorixá" Menininha do Gantois, à espera da cerimônia "Iorubana" do "axexé", faz pensar agora no quanto está viva esta linhagem de mulheres ilustres da Bahia. São as grandes mães-de-santo. Em 1938, numa temporada de estudos baianos, a norte-americana Ruth Landes perguntou ao etnógrafo Edison Carneiro: "Não é pouco comum que mulheres cheguem à notabilidade no Brasil?". Resposta de Carneiro: "Não na Bahia, no mundo do camômbilé, a coisa aqui é outra". Em outra ocasião, ouvindo Carneiro se referir a um "complexo de inferioridade" do pai-de-santo Bernardino, Ruth pediu explicações. Carneiro: "É um homem, dona Ruth, num mundo dominado por mulheres".



Menininha do Gantois, uma das mais conhecidas representantes da linhagem das mulheres ilustres da Bahia

Nestor Duarte, na época estudando a história da mulher negra no Brasil, andava impressionado com a independência e a coragem das pretas. Duarte via, na projeção feminina no camômbilé, um fator de equilíbrio, a contrabalançar o predomínio dos homens na vida secular. Duarte a Landes: "Essa espécie de mulher tem vivido com independência para o tempo por incontáveis gerações — que não posso imaginá-la dependente e trancada em casa, ainda que se ligue à classe média". Antes de esposa-de-fulano, a sacerdotisa do camômbilé surge como intermediária entre os homens e os deuses.

Poucos maridos

Há uma curiosa conversa entre sobre o assunto Edison Carneiro e o quase candidato a governador do Rio de Janeiro, Nelson Carneiro, sobre o assunto. Eles iam subindo a mata escura, na cidade da Bahia, quando a inexperiente Ruth perguntou a Edison sobre os maridos das mulheres do camômbilé. "Maridos? Não há muitos, de qualquer modo não são digno de confiança", respondeu Edison. Ruth concluiu então que a "Ilorixá" Mãe Menininha do Gantois não se casara legalmente com Alvaro Macdowell pelas mesmas razões porque outra "Ias" e "Iaos" não se cansavam. "Teria perdido muito. De acordo com as leis daquele país católicos e latim, as esposas devem submeter-se inteiramente a autoridade do marido. Quão incompatível é isto com as crenças e a organização do camômbilé. Quão inconcebível para a autoridade feminina".

Estas mulheres não foram treinadas para ser apêndice dos homens. Casamento não é objetivo existencial supremo. A "Ilorixá" não é a doméstica abnegada. Não é assimilável ao estereótipo da "rainha do lar". Ela é "mãe" de uma comunidade, não de uma família. Seu território não é a casa, mas a comunidade, o terreiro, o "egbe". E este território se expande em muitas direções.

Ruth Landes percebeu corretamente que o mundo do camômbilé é uma espécie de enclave matriarcal numa sociedade patriarcal. Este fato não poderia ter maior importância em uma sociedade materialista, mas acontece que a religião está presente nos menores detalhes do cotidiano baiano e brasileiro. Na Bahia, a "Ilorixá" nunca é mulher subjugada ou marginalizada. É respeitada e venerada. E esta projeção própria vai se refletir subjetivamente na linguagem: uma dona-de-casa tem filhos, uma mãe-de-santo faz filho.

Existe uma espécie de culto filialista entre os homens da Bahia inexplicável pelo espantoso matriarcalismo existente na organização doméstica da velha sociedade baiana — herança da escravidão, mas ainda hoje espraiando-se desde o camômbilé. Em sua observações sobre a vida social nas Antilhas, Jean Benoit disse coisas aplicáveis a realidade baiana. Sublinhou na vida familiar do arquipélago, a coexistência da família na família nuclear, unida pelo matrimônio e tudo em meio a camadas populares.

Eixo estável

Aqui, segundo Benoit, nota-se uma débil coesão da unidade habitacional,

a instabilidade das uniões e a poligamia aceita sem maiores complicações.

O parentesco de sangue é forte, "mas está em total discrepância com os comportamentos relativos a residência. Ainda Benoit: "nestas condições, frente a norma expressa que é o matrimônio, se desenvolve uma constelação de comportamento centrado na família matriarcal. Orientada em torno de uma mulher ou, em torno do eixo mãe-filho, o lugar matriarcal pode oferecer imposições distintas, mais só esse eixo permanece estável". A importância do marido — pai na organização doméstica e muitas vezes menor do que a da parental.

Mas importante é que a instabilidade das relações, em oposição a firmeza do eixo mãe-filho, faz da mulher-mãe a personagem central da casa. E é natural que esta preponderância da mulher-mãe, eco da vida doméstica do sistema escravista, reforçada pela estruturação matriarcal da vida "camômbileza", se estenda a outros setores da vida social.

Acho que a presença nítida da mãe, em oposição à apagada figura paterna, na poesia de Caymmi, deve ser pensada neste contexto. Hoje a explosão amorosa e publicitária, em torno da morte da zeladora do "Axé" da Bahia, em contraste com o silêncio que cercou as mortes das "Ilorixá" Aninha Senhoras, é algo revelador. O camômbilé se impôs na textura social brasileira. Isto talvez seja muito bom para o país.

ANTONIO RISÉRIO à porta, lenhista e mulher de "Camômbilé"

Figure 18: Newspaper article publishing matriarchy in Camômbilé following Mother Menininha's death in 1986. Antonio Risério, "O matriarcalismo negro no Brasil" (Folha de São Paulo, August 17, 1986) accessed in the Ruth Landes Papers.

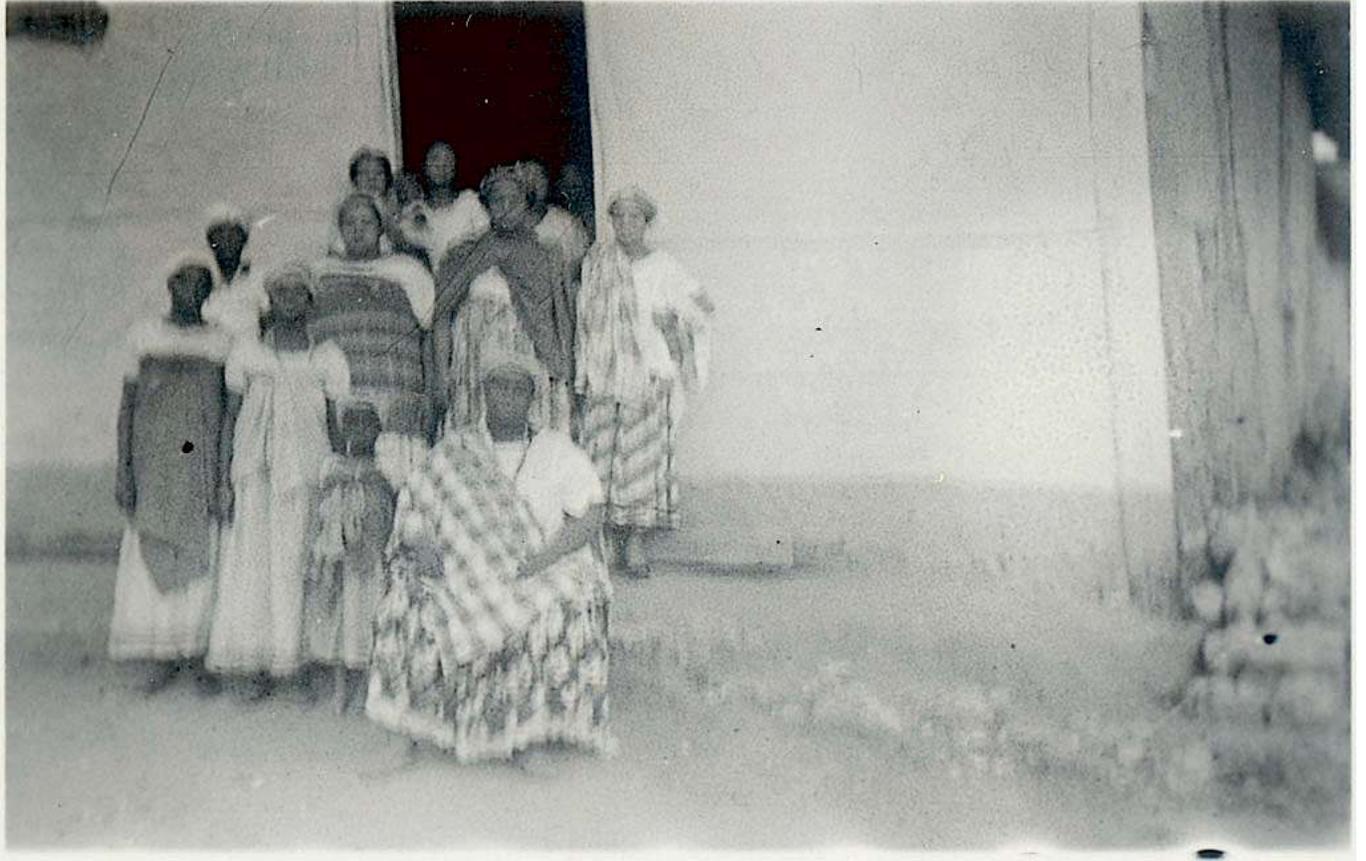


Figure 19: "Mother Menininha (seated) and her little daughter, 6 years old, at Gantois", September 14, 1938 (Ruth Landes papers, Photographs, Brazil: Bahian blacks and candomblé, 91-4_361).



Figure 20: Ruth Landes at Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, August 1939 (Ruth Landes papers, Photographs, Brazil: Bahian blacks and candomblé, 91-4_0332).

a União das Seitas Afro-Brasil-
 ras na Bahia. Não poupou esfor-
 ços no sentido de conseguir a rea-
 lização dessa grande aspiração
 colectiva.

Prestigiu-a, com o seu nome,
 com a sua solidariedade, com o
 seu trabalho. O triumpho da



A ultima photographia de
 Anninha que falleceu aos
 68 annos de idade

União se deve, em grande parte,
 á sua acção intelligente.

**O CENTRO CRUZ SANTA DO
 ACHE' DE ÔPÔ AFONJA'**

O candomb'é de Anninha — o
 Aché de Ôpô Afonjá foi tambem
 dos primeiros a tentar uma so-
 ciedade de "Ogans" e filhas de
 santo, reunindo-os em torno da

Figure 21: A portrait of Mother Aninha published in her obituary written by Edison Carneiro in the newspaper O Estado da Bahia published on January 4, 1938, accessed at the Biblioteca Barris, Salvador.



Figure 22: Portrait of Aninha, 45 years of age, Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá, October 9, 1938 (Ruth Landes papers, Photographs, Brazil: Bahian blacks and candomblé 91-4_0383).

Glossary

Adjá – metal bell shaker used by the Mothers to call the deities into ceremony.

Angola – A “nation” of Brazilian Candomblé with Bantu ritual origins.

Assentamento – permanent altar consecrated for a deity on the temple grounds.

Babalorixá – Male priest of the Yoruba tradition, not necessarily the head of a temple, can act as an independent diviner.

Baianas (de acarajé) – Women vendors who use Candomblé foods and ritual garb to sell and make an independent living on the street. They have become the “postcards of Bahia.”

Brasilidade - Brazilian culture and national identity, a term used by Getúlio Vargas beginning in the 1930s.

Caboclo – Native Brazilian spirits worshipped in rituals on Candomblé temples, particularly in the Angolan nation.

Dijina – Ritual name given to Angolan Candomblé initiates following their initiation, as part of their rebirth.

Equede – Female initiates who do not receive the spirits during ceremonies. They take care of the mediums and perform female labor.

Familia de santo –The family of saints constituted through initiation into a temple lineage.

Fundamentos –Ritual foundations, sacred knowledge that can only be known by initiates.

Festa – Party. Term used for public ceremonies at the temples.

Filhos de santo – Literally children of the saint; initiates in the family.

Ião – Bride in Yoruba, referring to a recent initiate into Candomblé, both male and female.

Iyá Nassô – The ritual title given to the African founder (Marcelina da Silva) of the first Nagô temple in Salvador, Casa Branca.

Iyálorixá – Yoruba term for Mother of the saint, head priestess.

Jeje – Nation of Candomblé, with origins from the Fon-speaking peoples of the fallen Dahomey empire.

Ketu – A nation of Candomblé with Yoruba ritual origins. Synonymous with Nagô nation.

Mãe de santo – Mother of the saint, head priestess.

Mãe Preta – Black Mother, cultural figure and popular trope of Black Motherhood.

Nkisi -deities of the Angolan nation.

Makota – Angolan term for equede. Female initiates who do not receive the spirits during ceremonies. They take care of the mediums and perform female labor.

Matriz – Matrix, Mother house. The origin of a lineage.

Nação – Nation, sects of Candomblé referring to ethno-linguistic regions of West Africa and groups enslaved into the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and brought to Brazil.

Nagô – An ethnonym referring to Yoruba-speaking captives brought to Brazil during the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Also, a nation of Candomblé.

Ogan – male initiates who do not receive the saint in ceremony. They drum, perform animal sacrifice and represent the temple in public.

Orixá – deities in Yoruba ritual traditions.

Oxum – Female deity of fresh water, associated with feminine qualities of fertility.

Pai de santo – Father of the Saint, head priest. I use the term Father.

Pardo – “Brown” racial category in Brazil. Referring to an African-descendant person with other racial backgrounds.

Preto – Black racial category in Brazil.

Rodante – spirit medium that receives the deity in ceremony. Both male and female.

Religões de matriz africana – religions of African descent / African inspired religions.

Rônco – the internal ritual quarters where initiation takes place.

Tata – Male initiate and Father of Angolan Candomblés.

Tombamento – the registration as a cultural heritage site at the state or federal level.

Terreiro – Candomblé temple grounds, consisting of multiple physical structures dedicated to the deities, initiates and visitors spaces.

Vodun – term for deity in the Jeje nation.

Xangô – Male deity of war, justice, associated with fire.

Yemanjá – female deity, considered the Mother of all orixás, goddess of the ocean. Associated with fertility and maternity.

List of Temples

Breakdown of research sites

(N) = Nagô/Ketu

(A) = Angola/Congo

Total: 16 temples (9 Nagô, 7 Angola)

Nagô temples

1. Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá (N)
2. Gantois (N)
3. Ilê Axé Odé Yeyê Ibomin (N)
4. Ilê Oxumarê (N)
5. Ilê Asé Ojisé Olodumare (Casa do Mensangeiro) (N)
6. Ilê Axé Oyá Tunjá (N)
7. Ilê Asipá (N)
8. Pilão de Prata (N)
9. Terreiro Alaketu (N)

Angola Temples

1. Terreiro Bate Folha (A)
2. Terreiro de Jauá - Manso Kilembekueta Lemba Furaman (A)
3. Tumba Junçara (A)
4. Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia (A)
5. Terreiro Mokambo (A)
6. Unzo Mim Kizangira N'Paketans (A)
7. Tumba Junçara (Rio de Janeiro) (A)

Breakdown of field research interactions

Single visit for public ceremony:

1. Ilê Oxumarê (N)
2. Ilê Asé Ojisé Olodumare (Casa do Mensangeiro) (N)
3. Ilê Axé Oyá Tunjá (N)
4. Ilê Asipá (N)
5. Pilão de Prata (N)
6. Terreiro Alaketu (N)

Single visit to speak with leadership (including oral histories)

1. Ilê Axé Odé Yeyê Ibomin (N)
2. Unzo Mim Kizangira N'Paketans (A)
3. Tumba Junçara, Rio de Janeiro (A)

Multiple visits, conversations with leaders, and attended events

1. Terreiro Mokambo (A)
2. Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá (N)
3. Terreiro Bate Folha (A)
4. Terreiro de Jauá - Manso Kilembekueta Lemba Furaman (A)
5. Tumba Junçara (A)
6. Terreiro São Jorge Filhos da Gomeia (A)
7. Terreiro Gantois (N)

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⁵⁶¹ Additional interviews and oral histories have remained anonymous or unidentifiable. For a full description of methods and the overlap of ethnography and oral history in Candomblé, see the “Methods and Knowledge Production” section in the introduction.

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