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**Circles of Care:
Healing Practices in a
Bahian Candomblé Community**

Hannah Lesshaft

PhD in Social Anthropology

University of Edinburgh

2016

For Mark

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Hannah Lesshafft

Edinburgh, 28th December 2016

Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of healing and care in a *terreiro* (house of worship) of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé. My research is based on one year of ethnographic fieldwork with a Candomblé community in South Bahia, Brazil, during which I took part in the rituals, ceremonies, and everyday activities of the *terreiro*, and eventually became a ‘daughter of the house’. While the *terreiro* is at the heart of this study, I also draw upon observations and experience from the local neighbourhood, the nearest city Ilhéus, the state capital Salvador, and the city of Rio de Janeiro, where I started my journey, to complement and contextualize what I encountered inside the *terreiro*. I argue that *cuidado*, or care, is key to the cultivation of Candomblé’s vital force *axé*, and hence to achieving well-being and power in a socially exclusive society that is often perceived as profoundly uncaring. My thesis demonstrates that the circulation of *axé* and *cuidado* between humans and gods (*orixás*) is an essential part of Candomblé healing, understood as a process of reflexive self-transformation. Far from being altruistic or self-denying, then, *cuidado* effectively becomes a form of self-care. Subverting dichotomous logic, Candomblé *cuidado* is used to create and negotiate (healing) power through its capacity to simultaneously connect and divide. This thesis explores how boundaries are both transgressed and reinforced by way of *cuidado* in terms of transformative healing; kinship relations with the *orixás*; the exchange of human faith (*fé*) for divine *axé*; and performances on ‘divine stages’ and ‘profane stages’. Finally, *cuidado* is also used as a moral-political argument for the recognition of Candomblé in public health campaigns, in the context of an often-dysfunctional public health system. The analysis of dynamics of *cuidado* and boundary work in a *terreiro*, under consideration of the broader national context, makes this thesis an original contribution to the literature on Afro-Brazilian religion and healing. My ethnography also adds to the growing literature on the anthropology of care, especially in medical anthropology, and it pushes forward the discussion by explicitly reflecting on the circulation and negotiation of power through care.

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Introduction

Axé!

I felt a tingling sensation in my feet as we stood in a circle in the *barracão* (ceremony hall). We were in the middle of a night-time ritual in the Candomblé house in Bahia, Brazil, where I conducted my fieldwork, and the *orixás* (gods) were dancing to the drums with decisive, energetic movements. The room was only weakly illuminated by a gas lamp standing next to the central pole, underneath which the secret objects called *fundamentos* (foundations) were buried. Here the *axé* (spiritual energy) had been planted like a seed when the house was opened a few years ago, and the group kept it strong and growing by way of frequent ritual performances. I turned to the woman next to me, a daughter of the wind *orixá* Iansã, and told her: “Strange, my feet are hot and tingling”. She was not surprised: “Yes, it’s the energy, the *axé* you are feeling. You will often feel that.” While I still wondered where this sensation came from, her shoulders began to shake. With a scream, she ‘turned into’ her *orixá* Iansã and started dancing in circles around the central pole with the others, radiating *axé*.

This thesis is based on one year of fieldwork (2013/14) with the community of a Candomblé house in South Bahia, which I call the Odé Terreiro. In the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé, everything revolves around *axé*, the spiritual power that provides health, protection, and prosperity. An initiated member of the *terreiro* explained to me: “*Axé* is force. *Axé* is vitality. *Axé* is everything that Candomblé does, it is the force, the energy, *axé* is prosperity; it is the light.” *Axé* could make anything possible. No wonder that people would go to Candomblé *terreiros* to benefit from the power of *axé* in their quest for health and well-being.

However, chasing after *axé* leads into the fog. There is so much mystery established around *axé* that it seems practically impossible, and even irrelevant, to capture analytically what the term means. “You cannot explain *axé*, you can only feel it,” the *terreiro* members would often tell me. And as they stopped me from asking more questions, they went on with their work to make the *axé* grow. As Paul Christopher Johnson details in his ethnography *Secrets, Gossip and Gods*, vagueness and secrecy

are essential to power in Candomblé and are actively created with great effort (2002:171). Consequently, the attempt to pin down and explain *axé* misses the point entirely. *Axé* is essentially mysterious and enigmatic; but it also is a relational and performative sort of power (Sansi, 2007:42,46). Therefore, instead of trying to reveal the nature of *axé* itself, my study asks how it is cultivated in the *terreiro*. I identify this cultivation work as acts of care (*cuidado*).

Why care?

In the beginning, I did not expect to study care, or *cuidado*. When I arrived in Bahia, I was ready to investigate magic, fetishes and spirit possession in Candomblé healing practices; and indeed, at first sight, these concepts looked far more exciting than ‘care’. However, in retrospect I must acknowledge that when I was writing my study proposal at an office desk in grey-skied Scotland, like other researchers before me (Van de Port, 2011:xvi, Voeks, 1997) I was enthused by the idea of an enchanting, tropical Bahia: a world with dancing gods, living fetishes, and real magic. As Mattijs Van de Port (2011:50) and Maya Mayblin (2014a) note, at the airport of Salvador a sign actually welcomes tourists to enter a ‘land of magic’, an image used to stimulate foreigners’ imagination and please their desires for the ‘exotic’. Certainly, magic, fetishes, and spirit possession remain intriguing and useful analytical concepts. But my study participants in the *terreiro* did not frame their practices in these terms. They were busy with providing *cuidado*, or care.

“Yeah, sure”, the *ialorixá* (Candomblé priestess) replied, shrugging her shoulders, when I asked her if what she was doing was ‘magic’. But she herself never referred to her practices in terms of magic. Instead, she pronounced that she ‘cared’ for her the *terreiro* members and for the *terreiro*, as well as for the clients who visited her for paid oracle consultations. The members of the *terreiro* group also ‘cared’ for the *ialorixá*, and their reciprocal care relationship was expressed in kinship terms: She called them ‘my children’ (*meus filhos*) and they called her ‘my mother’ (*minha mãe*). Like ‘magic’, ‘spirit possession’ did not turn out to be a meaningful expression in the Odé Terreiro either, as I will explain in more detail later (page 12 ff.). And when I started a photo project with the aim of finding out more about ‘fetishes’ (here: material objects that embodied the vital force *axé*) – it failed.

I had imagined the photo project as something akin to the portraits of the German photographer August Sander in the 1920s (Lange, 2001), who documented life in Germany by portraying people at their workplaces or homes, often together with significant objects. To understand their relationship with powerful objects, or fetishes, I asked the members of the Odé Terreiro to choose an object that contained *axé* for a portrait. Over the following weeks, I took a range of pictures: Amanda wanted to be photographed with the peacock they had bought for Oxossi's *feira*; João posed with a plate of *feijoada* (a traditional bean and meat dish); Milena picked red flowers for the wind *orixá* Iansã; Lucas held a lump of mud in his hands; and Vitor sat on a chair looking at his own image in a golden mirror. However, after some time I dropped the project. The photos did not help me to grasp the power of *axé*, and I felt the project was not going anywhere, until Matheus brought it up again several months later:

You said that you wanted a photo with a thing, and back then I did not know what to choose [...] and today if you asked me this: 'I want to take a picture with something that represents Candomblé for you, the *axé*, the energy', then I would show you only my hands. Because for me Candomblé is a religion of care (*cuidado*). I feel cared for, and every time I care for myself I feel stronger to care for others. I think that this is Candomblé. The healing (*cura*) of Candomblé is in this *cuidado*.

Revisiting the photos with *cuidado* in mind was more revealing. The peacock had been bought as a present for Oxossi, and the ritual slaughter of the animal at the *feira* contributed to the hunter *orixá*'s presence - his *axé* - in the *terreiro*. João's *feijoada* connected him with his enslaved ancestors, he said, and cooking and eating it was a way of keeping their memory alive and drawing strength from it. Milena, a daughter of Iansã, added the red flowers to her mother's shrine (*peji*) to keep it pretty and revitalize its *axé*. Lucas' lump of mud represented the mud humans originated from, he said, and it reminded him to respect and protect nature. Finally, Vitor looked at the mirror that symbolized an aspect of his father *orixá* Logun Edé¹, and saw himself in it. Making himself look beautiful for Vitor was also a way of caring for his *orixá*.

¹ Logun Edé is the son of the *orixá* of beauty Oxum (symbolized by the golden mirror) and the hunter *orixá* Oxossi.

Cuidado was a commonly used term in the *terreiro*. And when I started paying more attention to acts of *cuidado*, it struck me that the distinction between care-giving and care-receiving was often blurred. In the Odé Terreiro, people interchangeably referred to rituals or other spiritual work as caring for oneself (in the reflexive form *se cuidar*) and as caring for (*cuidar de*) others, such as the *orixás*, the group, the house, the *ialorixá*, or black ancestors. While in the former case, subject and object are one and the same, in the latter they are distinct. Therefore, focussing on acts of *cuidado* helps to understand that the healing force *axé* thrives on the perplexing possibility of being same-and-other at the same time. In short, my study explores an ethnographic case where care for others is simultaneously care for oneself.

In medical anthropology, the binary of care-giving and care-receiving is prominently articulated in Arthur Kleinman's work (2012, 2015). He frames caregiving as a "moral experience" (2012:title), and he states:

Caregiving is a defining condition of what it means to be human. Its scope is broad and encompasses care of children, care of the sick, care of older people or those who live with disabilities. (Kleinman, 2015:23)

While Kleinman clearly distinguishes between the roles of care-giver and sufferer, or care-receiver, the medical anthropologist Laura Lynn Heinemann (2014) highlights the multi-directional character of care relations in her ethnography of organ transplant receivers. Heinemann frames relations of care as "reciprocal webs of obligation" (2014:title), that help understand, in her ethnographic example, why *receiving* an organ transplant can as well be an act of *caregiving* for dependent family members, or as she puts it "for the sake of others" (2014:title). She argues that practices of care always depend on the immediate dynamics of shifting needs, which obscure the boundaries between patient and caregiver (Heinemann, 2014:79).

My analysis of care relations in Candomblé pushes the discussion of care-giving and care-receiving in medical anthropology further. If we picture the linear model with care-giving on one side and care-receiving on the other, in the Odé Terreiro both end points of the line come so close together that they connect – at least partly. As Isabella, an initiated member of the Odé Terreiro, made clear: "From the moment I started caring for my Old One [*orixá*], my health improved" (see Conclusion).

Instead of passively being healed, in this way the *terreiro* members actively engage in their own healing through the circulation of *cuidado*. When caring for others becomes an act of caring for oneself, it loses its altruistic or self-sacrificial character. At the same time, self-care also loses its self-indulgent, ego-centred attributes, and both melt into a circular, relational practice of generating strength, well-being, or, here: *axé*. The dynamic, circular understanding of *cuidado* that I encountered in the Odé Terreiro offers an alternative to linear models, according to which care-givers provide the resources, and care-receivers gain health in the process.

‘Knowing how to care’ (*saber cuidar*) for the trickster Exu (Chapter One) and identifying one’s kinship relations with the *orixás* (Chapter Two) are the first steps in cultivating *axé* for healing. By paying close attention to the dynamics of *cuidado*, this thesis seeks to analyse healing practices. It asks what healing is and what and who is being healed in the context of a semi-urban Brazilian Candomblé *terreiro*. In my analysis, *cuidado* comprises recognition, respect, inclusion (*acolhimento*), and adherence to religious rules including secrecy; and it generates faith (*fé*, Chapter Three) as a kind of ‘relentless optimism’ that counters experiences of social exclusion, violence and humiliation, namely sexist, homophobic and racist discrimination.

In my field site, *axé* was continuously strengthened through the performance of *cuidado* that established a bridge between humans and the divine. When the *ogã* (high rank *terreiro* member) chanted to the *orixás* while preparing a leaf solution, he awakened the leaves’ *axé*. When Matheus decorated a golden mirror for the *orixá* of beauty, Oxum, he increased the *axé* of the house. And when Rafaela cleaned the shrine of her father *orixá* Omulu, she strengthened his presence, his *axé*, by caring for him. But how do such acts of *cuidado* relate to healing?

Cuidado in this context is more than a practice of strengthening and nurturing others. It rather is a process of relationship building that allows *axé* to circulate between different actors, who (ideally) all benefit from it. In its reciprocity, I argue, *cuidado* effectively turns into self-care, or *auto-cuidado*. But the thesis title ‘Circles of Care’ not only expresses the reciprocal character of *cuidado* as it circulates between different actors in the Candomblé house. Picturing the inside and outside of a circle,

the image also highlights the boundary-work that *cuidado* involves. I argue that practices of *cuidado* in the *terreiro* continuously establish both: connection *and* separation, intimacy *and* distance.

My ethnography therefore stresses that *cuidado* not only displays connecting but also dividing properties, for example when it manifests in protective boundary-making around an in-group that holds religious authority and secret knowledge (Chapter Four). Finally, *cuidado* as a form of health care also plays a key role in the public health dialogue between Candomblé organizations and state health institutions (Chapter Five). Far from being a disinterested altruistic practice, on all these levels *cuidado* is directly linked with building relationships and negotiating power (the enigmatic *axé*) within them. When caring for *orixás*, ancestors, or for the group, *terreiro* members created relationships with ‘others’ who returned and amplified their *cuidado*.

In this reciprocal dynamic, the boundaries between self and other, and between human and divine, become blurred and emphasized at the same time. The circulation of *cuidado* and *axé* results in a complex net of relations between humans and *orixás*, as well as among humans. These relations of *cuidado* are reflected in the kinship that is established between humans and *orixás*, and among *terreiro* members.

Paradoxically, by way of transgressing boundaries (e.g. between the divine sphere *orun* and the human world *aiyê*) the distinction between the two sides is redefined and strengthened. Moreover, while on the one hand the Candomblé community calls for racial equality and social inclusion, on the other hand they also distinguish Candomblé as an essentially black *religião de cuidado* (religion of care) in a racist, uncaring society. In this duality of breaking down and constructing boundaries by way of *cuidado* I locate the source of healing and power in Candomblé: the divine force *axé*.

From the clinic to the *terreiro*

The central role of *cuidado* for my research became apparent relatively late in my fieldwork and writing up. My motivation to conduct a study about religious healing, however, dates back much earlier, to a time when I worked as a medical doctor in Berlin. In this section, I will briefly outline how I became interested in religious

healing as to give insight into the underlying questions and perspectives that drove this study.

As a junior doctor, I used to carry out medical procedures following treatment guidelines, textbooks, and colleagues' advice, and I became accustomed to performing the doctor's role. However, this process of acquiring professional *habitus* (see Bourdieu, 1984) remained largely unreflected upon. Byron Good describes how medical students gradually adopt a specific way of speaking, seeing and enacting the world throughout their studies (1993), an adaptive process that has been described as the 'hidden curriculum' of medical studies (Taylor, 2003, Hafferty, 1998). I put on my white coat in the morning – a symbol of medical authority – switched on the computer, and started calling in my patients.

While noting down the relevant information about their problems, doing physical examinations, establishing diagnoses and treatment plans, I also caught glimpses of illness narratives, life stories and the social backgrounds of my patients, and attempted to provide emotional support, without getting too involved. After all, I only had a few minutes per consultation. Over time, I increasingly felt that the mechanistic procedures I performed and the rather superficial relationships I had with my patients did not take into account the relevance of the performative and relational side of medicine, or what is often referred to as the 'art of healing' (Gadamer, 1996, Kaptchuk and Croucher, 1986). Six years of medical school had not taught me how best to perform my role as a doctor, nor how to engage creatively with my patients' expectations, imagination and sociality to support their healing processes.

Consequently, patients interested in alternative therapies like homeopathy, acupuncture or religious healing put me into a catch 22-situation. As these practices do not comply with the biomedical scientific standards, I did not agree with the systems of knowledge to which they adhere. However, I was convinced that the performance of such treatment, which often involves consultations of several hours, could provide crucial support for the patient's well-being. But how could a doctor promote therapies she did not believe in? On the other hand, if the patients benefitted from such treatments, how could she reject them? This dilemma was one of the

reasons why I left medical practice and turned to medical anthropology, asking how ritual practices are employed for healing. Instead of deprecating them as illusion or deception, I am interested in how performative skills, social relationships and the cultivation of faith can improve health.

Biomedicine attributes healing that is brought about by ritual and positive expectations to the placebo effect, or meaning response (Moerman and Jonas, 2002). But interestingly, belief in the treatment does not even appear to be necessary for achieving a health benefit (although practice and belief are sometimes hard to distinguish). Ted Kaptchuk et al. (2010) argue that placebo treatment can be successful even when the patient knows that the administered pills contain nothing but sugar; in other words: the *practice* of a therapeutic procedure (e.g. taking a pill) seems more important than the *belief* in its properties.

Many studies demonstrate the impact of the ‘meaning response’ on patients’ wellbeing. For example, blue or green pills have more tranquillising effects, while red and orange pills are more stimulating (De Craen et al., 1996), and four pills per day seem to be more effective in the treatment of gastric ulcers than two pills, even when they contain no active ingredient (Moerman 2000). Kaptchuk and Croucher even draw parallels between the performance of medical surgery, with its “smells of strange gases” and “sounds of whirring motors”, and Navaho religious healing rituals with incense and drumming (Kaptchuk and Croucher, 1986). And in an Editorial of the medical journal *The Lancet*, Jeremy Laurant writes: “Magic is acceptable. The placebo effect may be one of the most underused weapons in the medical arsenal. We should find ways to exploit it.” (Laurant, 2010) As a medical doctor I started to wonder if a performance-oriented approach could make religious healing accessible for atheists like me (see my master's dissertation: Lesshaft, 2012).

I chose the Brazilian religion Candomblé as a rich field for exploring healing performances. Its ritual practices involve strong bodily engagement (Daniel, 2005, Sabino and Lody, 2011, Seligman, 2010, Seligman, 2014, Van de Port, 2011, Voeks, 1997), including purifying herbal baths, dancing, dressing up as gods, and what is usually referred to as spirit possession. Moreover, Candomblé has been described as

emphasizing the role of practice over belief (Bondi, 2009, Johnson, 2002). As Johnson reports from his fieldwork in a *terreiro*:

I repeated frequently to Mother B. that I did not actually believe in the orixás and that I even remained solidly agnostic about gods in general. While she found that utterly absurd, she found it equally trivial and always reassured me that it did not matter in the least. “The question is whether you perform the rituals, not whether you believe in them,” she said. (Johnson, 2002:13)

Such emphasis on the performance of rituals instead of belief not only worked well with my interest in performativity and health but also made it easy for me to participate and to learn how to care for the *orixás*. Moreover, Candomblé has been described as non-exclusive towards other medical and religious practices (Voeks, 1997), which meant that my background as a non-religious doctor would not be perceived as an immediate contradiction of their healing practices.

Before turning to a description of my field site and fieldwork methods, I will now position my research in relation to anthropological literature: first, on Candomblé as a system of healing; second, on the concept of care; and third, on theories of boundary-making.

Candomblé healing

Healing has often been emphasized as a central element of Candomblé (Capone, 2010:127-128, Gomberg, 2011, Harding, 2000:77, Marmo da Silva, 2007, Seligman, 2014, Matory, 2005, Voeks, 1997, Verger, 1967). In the 19th century, Candomblé created responses to the extreme hardship of the lives of black people in Brazil, Rachel Harding (2000) notes, and she explains that “[c]entral to these responses were the conjoined emphases of healing and cultivating *axé*” (2000:77). Still today, according to Stefania Capone (2010:127-128) and Rebecca Seligman (2014:9), illness and the quest for healing are common motivations to choose to become initiated into Candomblé. Mystical healing was evidence for the power of the *orixás*, says Capone (2010:128), in the sense of: if they heal, then they are real. And Seligman, in her study on Candomblé mediumship, notes that many of her

informants became involved with Candomblé in acute “moments of vulnerability” in their lives, and receiving the *orixás* in trance was at the core of the “passage from suffering to well-being” (Seligman, 2014:9). As suffering and healing are such central tropes in Candomblé, it can be understood as a ‘cult of affliction’.

The term ‘cults of affliction’ was coined by Victor Turner (1972), and Peter Fry and Gary Howe (1975) then applied it to Umbanda (an Afro-Brazilian religion similar to Candomblé) and Pentecostalism in Brazil, to stress that healing was an important way of entry to both. Later, Stephen Selka (2010) and John Burdick (1990) in their studies on Afro-Brazilian religion in Bahia (including Candomblé) describe cults of affliction as religious groups that “recruit adherents through suffering” (Burdick, 1990:155) and “appeal primarily to those who are sick” (Selka, 2010:293).

It must be noted that Turner originally used the term in a slightly different way in his study of the Ndembu in Southern Africa (1972). There, cults of affliction are not religious groups, but rituals to appease angry spirits:

What I have called cults of affliction are performed for individuals, who are said by the Ndembu to have been ‘caught’ (*ku-kwata*) by the spirits of deceased relatives whom they have forgotten to honour with small gifts of crops and beer, or whom they have offended by omitting to mention their names when prayers are made at the [...] treeshrines. (Turner, 1972:292)

Turner’s definition is important, as it emphasizes the needs and agency of spirits that cause affliction as they demand food and respect. Similarly, Roger Sansi argues that in Candomblé humans were not free to decide if they wanted to join a *terreiro* or not, as this choice lay with their *orixás* (2007:23). When humans do not fulfil their religious duties, he adds, the *orixás* might not heal but even *cause* physical, mental and social problems (Sansi, 2007:24), like the Ndembu spirits who ‘catch’ neglectful persons. These limits of individual agency that Sansi brings up present Candomblé healing not as a therapeutic technique that one can choose freely, but instead as a way of life that one must follow to satisfy the *orixá*’s wish.

It is uncertain, then, who seeks healing in Candomblé: the person or their *orixá*? To push this question further: Who is being healed in Candomblé? Is it the person, their

orixá, or both? And does it make a difference? I am going to argue that although humans and *orixás* belong to different spheres of reality, the boundary between them is not always quite clear. Healing, therefore, can be a reason for a person's *orixá* to push for their initiation, or for a person to seek balance by coming to terms with their *orixá* (see especially Chapter Two). But whoever makes the choice, certainly suffering and illness are common motivations for engaging with Candomblé. As Seligman says: "Sometimes affliction is the door" (2014:67).

As healing is such a central aspect in Candomblé, *terreiros* have been called "hospitals of *orixás*" or "spiritual first-aid points" (Gomberg, 2011:11). Candomblé is practiced in the whole of Brazil, in rural areas as well as in cities, and their clients and members come from diverse social backgrounds (Gomberg, 2011:188). Consequently, over the last decade Candomblé affiliates have been campaigning for the acknowledgment of the role of *terreiros* for public health in Brazil (Marmo da Silva, 2007). But how do people heal in Candomblé?

The literature on Candomblé healing has focused on the use of plants (Verger, 1967, Voeks, 1997), spirit possession and mediumship (Cohen, 2007, Seligman, 2010), the moving body (Daniel, 2005), motivations to pursue healing in a *terreiro* (Gomberg, 2011, Marmo da Silva, 2007), and mental health (Lima, 2010, DeLoach and Peterson, 2010). This thesis contributes an investigation of the underlying dynamics of *cuidado* in a Candomblé *terreiro*, while paying attention to self-transformative processes that create kinship, faith, art, political consciousness and public visibility. By doing so, I seek to build on and extend previous studies by synthesizing different aspects of Candomblé healing under the notion of *cuidado*. I will now briefly expand on some of the prominent topics in the literature on Candomblé healing, namely: plants, spirit possession, and the body.

Healing Plants

We were sitting on a wooden bench in the *barracão* (ceremony hall) and the *ogã* had just come back with bundles of leaves from the forest, when the *ialorixá* told me: "Without leaves there is no Candomblé. The Nagô have this saying: *Ko si ewê, ko si orisà*: Without leaves, there is no prayer. Without leaves, there is no *orixá*." I would hear this saying repeatedly throughout my fieldwork, as it is an often-quoted

aphorism in Candomblé (de Arruda Camargo, 2014:6). Leaves are known to carry high amounts of *axé* (Voeks, 1997). Accordingly, they are essential for healing and indeed for all Candomblé rituals – and even, as the *ialorixá* expressed, for the possibility of praying and the existence of the *orixás* themselves. Leaves are everywhere where *orixás* are worshipped.

In Bahian *terreiros*, leaves serve medicinal, liturgical or ornamental purposes (Gomberg, 2011:187, Pires et al., 2009). Like Candomblé traditions, the plants that are used stem from Africa, Europe and Brazil (Voeks, 1997). Each species can have different functions and, according to Robert Voeks, most herbal prescriptions are used to treat ordinary, everyday health complaints, not dissimilar to over-the-counter Western medicines (ibid.). Such use of herbal remedies explains the great pharmacological interest in the plants of the Brazilian rainforests, and in Bahia oftentimes people assumed that my study on Candomblé healing was concerned with the identification and use of medicinal plants. However, if there was any truth in that assumption, it would be that I was interested in the ritual use of the plants and their *axé*, for example how they are used in the leaf bath that ‘closes’ the body to harm (Chapter Three), rather than in phyto-pharmacological effects. “With few exceptions, a sacred species that has been improperly harvested becomes ‘just a plant’, devoid of spiritual energy”, says Voeks (1997:93). My thesis argues that in the Odé Terreiro this spiritual energy, *axé*, is cultivated and grows, very much like plants themselves, through acts of individual and collective *cuidado*. Leaves alone do not transmit *axé*; it is the way they are used and incorporated in practices of *cuidado* that matters.

Spirit possession – or not

Just like *axé* is embodied in plants and other material objects, the *orixás* become embodied in humans, usually during ceremonies, but sometimes also spontaneously, outside of ritual settings (Wafer, 1991). The manifestation of the *orixás* in human bodies has almost always been described as ‘possession’ of the human by the *orixá*, either ‘spirit possession’ or ‘possession trance’; and it has been at the heart of anthropological research in Candomblé (Bastide, 2007, Cohen, 2007, Csordas, 1987, Goldman, 2007, Johnson, 2002, Matory, 2005, Murphy, 1994, Sansi, 2007, Seligman, 2010, 2014, Van de Port, 2005a, Wafer, 1991, Nina Rodrigues, 1932).

The notion of ‘spirit possession’ is based on a clear alterity between the human and the *orixá*, between self and other. The spirit possesses, while the human is being possessed. Moreover, the term possession denotes an involuntary and even violent character of the event, emphasized in accompanying terms like ‘invasion’ of the human body (Prandi, 2001b:524). If the dividing lines between humans and gods are crossed, it seems, one must dominate the other. But if that is the case, it is unclear why possession and domination by a spirit should be part of an empowering healing experience.

In the Odé Terreiro, instead of ‘being possessed’ or ‘mounted’ by spirits, my informants spoke about ‘receiving’ or ‘turning into’ the *orixá* (*receber* or *virar no orixá*). “Possession is what the Protestants do”, the *ialorixá* told me, and indeed the term echoes the Christian notion of possession for which the only cure is exorcism. Moreover, Johnson (2014:1) criticizes that the term ‘possession’ was used as an “ungainly catchall” and highlights that possession implies that a person can be someone else’s property, like a slave. The rejection of the term ‘possession’ in the Odé Terreiro might therefore be a way by which the Candomblé community distinguishes their religion from Pentecostal churches, which are very hostile towards Candomblé (Cerqueira-Santos et al., 2004), as well as from what the *ialorixá* in my field site called *coisificação* (thingification or reification) of people. So, if we step away from the notion of ‘possession’, is it possible that Candomblé practice and experience of relationships with the *orixás* offer a different picture, one where difference and sameness overlap, at least temporarily? My study argues that attention to the practice of *cuidado* in Candomblé can help us to understand how human self and divine other can merge *and* be separated at the same time, what I call ‘being same-and-other’ (Chapter Two).

In short, although I refer to relevant literature on ‘spirit possession’ in Candomblé, this term does not seem fitting in the Odé Terreiro. Instead of ‘possessing’ human bodies, the *orixás* were part of a person’s true self (Chapters Two and Three). When humans ‘turned into’ the *orixá*, their sameness was expressed precisely *by* being different. Or the other way round, the *orun* is never as palpably distinct from the *aiyé* as in the moments when the two come to overlap.

The role of the body for healing in Candomblé

Independently of whether one ‘incorporates’ the *orixás* in trance or not, in Candomblé every person is related to two or even three mother and/or father *orixás*, and the human body plays an important role in this kinship relation. These spiritual parents are defined through divination by the *ialorixá* or *babalorixá* (Candomblé priestess or priest, respectively), using the cowry shell oracle as described in detail by Julio Braga (1988). As health is ascribed to spiritual equilibrium (Voeks, 1997, Marmo da Silva, 2007, Gomberg, 2011), establishing a balanced relationship with the father or mother *orixá* lies at the core of Candomblé healing.

Not every member of a Candomblé house will become initiated, but in those who do, the link with the *orixás* is directly inscribed into the physical body. During the ritual called *fazer o santo*, literally ‘making the saint’ (Gomberg, 2011:156, Sansi, 2007:21 ff.), the novice’s body is literally opened by an incision in the scalp as a portal for receiving the *orixá* (Johnson, 2002:119-120). As part of the initiation, also a stone (*otã*) that embodies the *orixá* is added to the shrine (*peji*). Sansi points out that through the process of ‘making the saint’, the *orixá* (or *santo*) is *built* in the person and body of the initiated as well as in the *orixá*’s shrine (Sansi, 2007:25, Sansi, 2011). My study contributes a discussion about how the *orixás* are built or, as I say, how their presence is ‘cultivated’ through continuous acts of *cuidado*.

As the incorporation of spirits in trance is a profoundly physical process, in his ethnography of the Songhay in Niger, Paul Stoller describes it as an embodied phenomenon and an “arena of sensuous mimetic production and reproduction” (1997:65) that both creates bodily experiences and is created by them. Similarly, Thomas Csordas postulates that “the body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the subject of culture”, or in other words as the existential ground of culture” (1990:5). In the context of Candomblé, Csordas’ notion of the creation of culture through the perceptive body emphasizes that *orixás* are ‘realized’ (in the double meaning of the word) through the bodily experience of their presence. These experiences range from a tingling sensation in the feet to the full-fledged incorporation of the *orixá*. As Voeks (1997:95) describes, after Candomblé initiation, a sensuous stimulus like the aroma of the ceremonial leaf solution (*banho*

or *abô*) can be enough to bring about what he calls trance possession. However, I want to stress that religious healing should not be reduced to simple physiological conditioning as an automatic response to a learned trigger.

For decades, anthropologists have referred to Erika Bourguignon's distinction between *trance* as a "universal biopsychological capacity" and *possession* as linked with the belief that a spirit takes complete control over a person (Bourguignon, 1973:11). Though Michael Lambek (1989) warns that such a division naturalizes trance as a psycho-physiological process isolated from religious experience, some anthropologists still follow this approach. For example, Rebecca Seligman (2014) recently published a mixed methods study on spirit possession and healing in Candomblé as to demonstrate haemodynamic differences between Candomblé adherents who incorporated *orixás* and those who did not. She went so far as to wire up Candomblé mediums in a lab and to measure their cardiovascular responsiveness with an "impedance cardiograph"² apparatus during life course interviews.

In my view, this type of mixed-methods approach can only result in undermining the validity of both quantitative and qualitative study results. Despite my background in medicine, my research project does not aim in this direction. Instead, throughout my thesis I attempt to carve out what Candomblé healing is from a different epistemological standpoint, by observing how *cuidado* is practiced, and how the *terreiro* group members experience and strengthen the *axé*.

I have often been asked: "So does Candomblé healing work?" but this question is not easy to answer. My study has not been designed to judge Candomblé's efficacy in reducing clinical symptoms and curing diseases. Indeed, the question of whether it 'works' depends on one's criteria for healing and definition of success (Waldram, 2000). James Waldram notes that "[m]edical anthropology continues to be vexed by the issue of traditional medical systems and practices" (2000:603). He argues that efficacy can be conceptualized in very different ways and that, therefore, biomedical standards and investigations are not *per se* helpful to comprehend other healing

² Impedance cardiography measures blood flow parameters, such as heart rate and cardiac output, with electrodes on the thorax, similar to an ECG.

practices. In the case of Candomblé, healing is related more to finding one's way (*odu*) in life (Chapter Two) than to biomedical parameters that can immediately be measured and evaluated. My study participants described the *terreiro* as a 'place of peace' where they can gain strength, protection, and *axé* (Chapter Three), and they perceived that caring for the *orixás* and being part of the *terreiro* group improved their wellbeing. In this sense, they would say that yes, Candomblé worked for them.

Although I disagree with Seligman's research methods, my ethnography supports her description of healing in Candomblé as a lifelong process of self-transformation (Seligman, 2014). However, healing self-transformation in the Odé Terreiro does not describe creating a new self, but 'realizing, finding and accepting oneself', best expressed in the often-used verb *se assumir*. Several months after joining the *terreiro*, Rafaela told me:

It is a pleasure to be who we are, it is so good. I had no idea what this was, Hannah, I had no idea. To be happy simply for who you are, I did not know. [...] I did not know who I was, I had not found anything that was so deep in my soul like this. Because Candomblé moves my body. The emotion I felt during the dance ritual of Father Oxalá in the *terreiro* was very strong, very beautiful. It gave me an energy that was so great [clapped her hands], and that is a part of me, that is who I am.

As the vignette at the very start of the introduction already suggests, bodily engagement, and specifically dancing, is an important aspect of creating *axé* and healing in Candomblé. Yvonne Daniel (2005:55) explains that dance and music performances create a social cohesion between the living, the ancestors and the *orixás*. When this cohesion contributes to well-being, ritual performances of Candomblé can be understood as a form of 'social medicine' (Daniel 2005). Therefore, a strict line between healing and religious or social practices cannot be sought.

To elucidate the role of the dances, it is worthwhile to link Daniel's *dancing wisdom* (2005) with Brenda Farnell's notion of the *moving body* (1994). Farnell places the moving body that says 'I can act' at centre stage, and thereby offers an alternative to the rational, intellectualist 'I think', and the subjectivist, phenomenological 'I can feel, experience, sense' (Farnell, 1994:934). Here, the person is seen as an agent who

is capacitated by culture and society to enact their body. In contrast to a model of ‘spirit possession’ that involves complete domination by an *orixá*, Farnell’s ‘I can act’ of the moving body gives some agency and control back to the human. My ethnography shows that the body in Candomblé is not a passive thing to be healed, but actively engages in the relationship with the *orixás* and in acts of *cuidado*.

However, it can be argued that strong physical and spiritual bonds with the *orixás* may not only induce empowerment, self-transformative healing and well-being, but also domination and involuntary ties with a religious group and demanding gods. Jim Wafer’s account of everyday life with oftentimes rude and capricious Candomblé spirits (Wafer, 1991:34) exemplifies the ways in which ‘spirit possession’ may as well be an undesired condition. Sansi also notes that subordination and obligation to the *orixás* precede the regaining of agency through initiation (2007:24). Therefore, my study also pays attention to the question of power, violence and coercion in the relationship between humans and *orixás*, as well as in the wider Brazilian society (see especially Chapter Three). Power relations, I will argue, are negotiated through practices of caring (and not caring).

Powerful care

Care has long been discussed as a philosophical concept (Foucault, 1990, Heidegger, 1963), especially in the field of ethics and feminist literature (Tronto, 1993, Noddings, 1986, Mayeroff, 1971). But according to John Borneman, anthropologists have not paid enough attention to practices of care (1997:42, see also Pichelstorfer, 2012). The discussion of care gained significant momentum in anthropology only recently (Drotbohm and Alber, 2015), namely in the works of medical anthropologists (Kleinman, 2012, Kleinman and Van der Geest, 2009, Heinemann, 2014, Fassin, 2008, Mol, 2008, Livingston, 2003, Pine, 2013, Yates-Doerr and Carney, 2015).

With growing interest in an anthropology of care, the “increasing fuzziness and imprecision” of the term becomes apparent (Drotbohm and Alber, 2015:1). My native language German, for example, offers many translations for care: *Fürsorge* (as

in *Gesundheitsfürsorge*, health care system), *Sorge* (as in *Seelsorge*, pastoral care), *Pflege* (as in *Krankenpflege*, nursing), *Betreuung* (as in *Kinderbetreuung*, child care), *Sorgfalt* (diligence) and the reflexive verb *sich kümmern* (taking care of something or someone; from the noun *Kummer*, worry). This multiplicity of meanings held together in the bracket of ‘care’ demonstrates the breadth of the term. Moreover, the philosopher Joan Tronto (1993) highlights that *how* people care depends very much on the socio-cultural setting. Ethnography is therefore well-placed to play a key role in the discussion. As Kleinman and Van der Geest conclude: “There is only one way to figure out what care is in a particular cultural setting: by listening to those who are directly involved in it and by observing their actions” (2009:160). My research sets out to do precisely that.

In medical anthropology, most research on care has focused on medical care and nursing (Heinemann, 2014, Kleinman and Van der Geest, 2009, Fassin, 2008, Mol, 2008, Pine, 2013). Only few medical anthropologists have investigated care in other contexts, one of them being Julie Livingston with her ethnographic research on care for elderly women in families in Botswana (Livingston, 2003). But recently, Emily Yates-Doerr and Megan Carney have proposed to demedicalize health by investigating practices of health care outside of the medical spectrum (2015). Their study of Latin American women in the USA and Guatemala identifies “the kitchen as a site of care” (Yates-Doerr and Carney, 2015:title), and calls for an expanded understanding of health care that includes social, political and environmental dimensions. My study adopts such an expanded notion of (health) care.

In the *Odé Terreiro*, processes of healing and cultivating *axé* were closely linked to acts of *cuidado*, and I am using ‘care’ as the closest English translation. While care in English describes both a practice and an affective state, the Portuguese term *cuidado* in the *terreiro* was mainly used in the former sense of a practice of providing for the well-being of others, while the affective aspect of *cuidado* was more implicit in the practice. In addition, *cuidado* also means caution, as articulated in the expression *ter cuidado* (literally ‘to have care’), which is best translated as ‘to take care’ (Chapter One). To highlight the cultural specificity of care in the context of healing in Candomblé, I therefore use the noun *cuidado* wherever possible. For

grammatical reasons, however, I am going to use the verb ‘to care for’ instead of the Portuguese *cuidar*, as otherwise the reader would stumble over constructs like “they *cuidaded* for the *orixás*”. This solution is not ideal, but it will keep reminding us of the unavoidable gaps and inaccuracies created by intercultural translation work.

The Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines care, first, as “the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something” and, second, as “serious attention or consideration applied to doing something correctly or to avoid damage or risk”. Both definitions resonate with my experience in the field where great care was taken to maintain the *orixás*’ presence in the Odé Terreiro and in one’s life, to nourish them and strengthen the *axé*. *Cuidado* included great attention to detail, intense reflexivity, and identity work. As I mentioned above, *cuidado* in the sense of ‘take care!’ also implies protecting oneself from potential harm (Chapter One). Therefore, caring (*cuidar*) in my research goes beyond the narrow notion of helping the weak in their daily tasks (e.g. the elderly, sick, or children). In the Odé Terreiro, as my ethnography will show, *cuidado* is a set of practices which aim to generate *axé* (power) through social relationships.

Care as self-care

According to Evelyn Glenn (2000) care is “a practice that encompasses an ethic (caring about) and an activity (caring for)”. While ‘caring about’ refers to affect and attention, ‘caring for’ describes activities to provide for someone’s needs (Glenn, 2000:86). With Kleinman and Van der Geest (2009:159): the first is emotional, the latter is technical/practical. In care, sometimes these meanings come together, other times they do not. And although care can be practiced in a very pragmatic way, the term often has a certain aura of altruism and self-sacrifice about it, as though by caring for others one was by definition not caring for oneself. The notion of inherently altruistic care has specifically contributed to the expectation of caring professionals, like nurses, to perform “selfless service on behalf of or for others” (Gormley, 1996). Similarly, in his work on moral anthropology, Tzvetan Todorov presents care as a “morally superior act” (1996:103, quoted in: Borneman, 1997:43).

My thesis questions this view and presents an ethnographic example where caring for others – for example, the *orixás* – is at the same time also a practice of self-care.

When the boundary between self and other blurs, the distinction between altruism and egoism loses meaning. But at the same time, separation is necessary to enable interaction in the first place. Moreover, to be of a divine, higher order, and to provide *axé*, the *orixás* must be separated from the humans. Therefore, while the permeability of boundaries between the *aiyê* (human world) and the *orun* (divine world) is necessary for accessing *axé*, it is the setting apart of the two spheres that makes *axé* so mysterious and powerful.

Michel Foucault describes the ‘care of the self’ as a practice of intensifying the relations of oneself to oneself (Foucault, 1990:43). Notably, Foucault uses the Latin term *cura sui* (from the verb *curare*), which translates not only as ‘care’ for the self but also as ‘cure’ of the self. The fact that *curare* can be translated as both curing and caring reflects the proximity between the notion of *cura* (cure or healing) and *cuidado* (care) in the Odé Terreiro. As Annemarie Mol notes in *The Logic of Care*: “In practice, after all, the activities of care and cure overlap” (2008:1).

Among the ancient Greco-Roman elite, Foucault (1990) explains, the care or cultivation of the self consisted of a set of techniques (*tekhnē*) that were performed *by the self on the self* by way of increased attention to the self, knowledge about oneself, and acts of self-fashioning. Developing his theory of the care of the self, Foucault uses expressions such as to ‘develop oneself’, ‘transform oneself’, ‘return to oneself’ and ‘reunite with oneself’ (Foucault, 1990:46) that link with the expressions *se cuidar* (to care for oneself) and *se assumir* (to assume or find oneself), which I encountered in the Odé Terreiro. My ethnography shows close parallels with Foucault’s concept of ‘care of the self’ as a reflexive practice of active self-creation, especially in Chapter Two on kinship with the *orixás*.

Notably, Foucault mainly describes individualized techniques of the self, such as physical exercise, meditation, memorization, abstinence, and studying with the aim of educating and shaping the self (1990:51). While Foucault’s earlier work theorizes the power relations that constitute the subject, his work on self-care foregrounds elements of individual freedom. In the social sciences, this turn sparked considerable interest in ‘practices of freedom’ that form political subjects, but it has also been criticized for its individualist focus and for neglecting the power relations that

Foucault himself had analysed so thoroughly in earlier works (Dumm and Schoolman, 1996, Myers, 2008, Wong, 2013). In Foucault's defence, he does mention (albeit as an aside) that the 'care of the self' is not fully self-contained, but can also intensify social relations (Foucault, 1990:53).

My ethnography emphasizes the social character of self-care. Similar to Stefan Ecks, who employs Foucault's concept of self-care to understand East Indian preoccupations with digestion in the context of "(post)colonial anxieties about power, modernity, and sovereignty" (Ecks, 2004:76), my thesis argues that self-care in the Odé Terreiro responds to historical and contemporary realities of violence and social exclusion in Brazil (see specifically Chapter Three). Self-care, in this light, reaches far beyond the self.

As I noted above, Heinemann's term 'webs of care and moral obligation' (2014) captures well the complex, multidirectional, and morally charged character of care relations. Heinemann's insistence on the importance of social relations in health care links with Mol's concept of the relational 'logic of care' as opposed to the individualistic 'logic of choice' (2008). While the logic of care acknowledges the impact of care relationships on patient decisions, Mol criticizes the logic of choice for being based on liberalist ideals of patient autonomy. Mol's work stresses that humans are *not* isolated individuals who make their choices independently, but that they are involved in care relations, whether they want it or not:

The logic of choice assumes that we are separate individuals who form a collective when we are added together. In the logic of care by contrast, we do not start out as individuals, but always belong to collectives already [...] (Mol, 2008:12)

The unescapable centrality of care relations for humankind is also expressed in Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) where he establishes care (*Sorge*) as the essence and 'structure of being' of human life (Heidegger, 1963). Care, in his theory, involves two necessary movements of human being-in-the-world: the movement towards others, and into the future³. The relation with the future

³ *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) was originally published in 1927. But it needs to be acknowledged that when Martin Heidegger 'moved into the future', he moved away from caring for others

becomes clearer in the translation of *Sorge* as concern or worry. For Heidegger, care is the base for human existence. Similarly, Tronto (1993) views care as a central aspect of an interrelated humanity. She offers the following definition:

On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That would include our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Tronto, 1993:103)

Tronto (1993) criticizes the reduction of care to the harmonious image of the mother with her baby, and she stressed the political dimensions of care by noting that it can potentially upset hegemonic power and cause conflict. For example, in her article *Revolution as Care Plan*, Adrienne Pine (2013) describes that in Honduras after the coup in 2009 nurses turned into activists against political violence, as adequate patient care was only possible through radical social change. Along these lines, I will also pay attention to how the practice and notion of *cuidado* is used in the social struggle for racial equality and empowerment, and for the visibility of Candomblé as a politically black religion. Chapters Four and Five argue that *cuidado* as practiced in the *terreiro* is also picked up by Candomblé NGOs to support the moral-political accusation that Brazilian society does *not* care about the health and well-being of the black, gay and impoverished population. These NGOs presented *terreiros* as alternative health care providers in the face of a dysfunctional public health service (*Sistema Único de Saúde*, SUS) and inaccessible private clinics.

In a similar vein, Kleinman describes hegemonic market rationality in health care as detrimental to “caregiving as a moral experience” (2012:title). He identifies caregiving as an alternative to market ideology: “Caregiving is one of the foundational moral meanings and practices in human experience everywhere: it defines human value and resists crude reduction to counting and costing” (Kleinman, 2012:1550). Here, care appears as an inherently good practice that unites humans against evil. Finally, Kleinman and Van der Geest depict care as “devotion to the

(including his Jewish student and lover Hannah Arendt), by supporting the Nazi party which he joined as early as 1933 and remained a party member until the end of WWII.

other”, and they conclude that caregiving “is concern and compassion, and, in a larger sense, love” (2009:160-61). This idealized notion of care, however, does not take into account that care can create substantial power imbalances between care-givers and care-receivers. Instead of being the opposite of power, I argue that care actually produces power – either by empowering others, oneself, or both. Similar to the gift, which displays a “voluntary character, apparently free and disinterested but nevertheless constrained and self-interested” (Mauss, 2002:4), care is of reciprocal character and can create (or express) status, dependencies, and obligations. This thesis does not aim at producing a universal theory of care. But it adds to an understanding of care dynamics by presenting an ethnographic account of *cuidado* as a healing practice in Brazil that shapes social relationships, power, and boundaries among and between people, gods, and health institutions.

Breaking and building boundaries

“When you knock at the door of the white man, he will ask you where you are from and what you want. When you knock at the door of a *terreiro*, we only ask: ‘Have you eaten yet?’” (Mãe Darabí)

In my fieldwork, it became apparent that *cuidado* and healing in the *terreiro* were linked with a lively engagement around distinction and boundaries. My thesis therefore includes discussions of border-lines between opposites (Chapter One), humans and gods (Chapter Two), faith and *axé* (Chapter Three), and the inside and outside of the *terreiro* group (Chapters One, Four and Five). While often the connective and compassionate aspects of care relations are stressed (Heinemann, 2014, Kleinman, 2012, Kleinman and Van der Geest, 2009), my study therefore also turns to dynamics of division and separation in practices of care. *Cuidado* in this context emerges as a transcending process of building ‘bridges’ by which binary oppositions are simultaneously overcome and substantiated.

Concepts of boundaries have been widely studied in the social sciences (for an overview see: Lamont and Molnár, 2002). In anthropology, Fredrik Barth (1969) argues that ethnic boundaries are not given but negotiated by inclusive and exclusive interactions. Arnold Van Gennep’s (1960) and Turner’s (1995) ritual studies

famously elucidate the important role of liminality (from Lat. *limen* = threshold) and temporal boundaries in rites of passage. More recently, Marilyn Strathern has criticized the concept of the boundary as “one of the least subtle in the social science repertoire”, an obstacle for grasping more ambiguous realities, and suggests to rather use concepts like hybrids and networks (1996:520). With this in mind, in the context of this thesis, boundaries should be understood as being of fluid and at least partially permeable character (Van de Port, 2011:215) in the sense of lines of contact, communication and negotiation, and not as absolute separators that divide closed systems.

Accordingly, in his essay *The Open City* (2006), Richard Sennett speaks about ‘ambiguous edges’ between different parts of a city, and he presents these as places of communication and exchange. Sennett here defines the border as “an edge where differen[t] groups interact” in contrast with the boundary as an “edge where things end” (Sennett, 2006:8). This distinction between borders and boundaries might be very useful for his investigations of city structures, but in my research the difference between the two is not always so clear.⁴ Instead, I propose to look at boundaries as socially defined demarcations between groups, namely between humans and *orixás*, and between Candomblé in-groups and out-groups.

Boundaries between such interacting groups display varying degrees of permeability, and my thesis investigates how this permeability is managed and negotiated in the context of Bahian Candomblé. Belonging to an in-group as distinguished from an out-group is an important feature on both micro- and macro-levels of social life. Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May argue that ‘we’ and ‘they’ “do not stand just for two separate groups of people, but for the distinction between two totally different attitudes – between emotional attachment and antipathy, trust and suspicion, security and fear, cooperativeness and pugnacity” (1990:39). While at birth one has no option to choose one’s social ‘we’ group, later in life roles and group membership can, to an extent, be questioned and renegotiated.

⁴ In fact, it seems that the line between a border and a boundary in Sennett’s sense is ambiguous itself, and hence resembles more what he defines as a boundary than a border.

Apart from younger children, the members of the Odé Terreiro had all made a conscious decision to join Candomblé, and almost all of them had adhered to other religions before. Defining themselves as members of the *terreiro* group (the ‘we’ group) was an important aspect of the process of self-transformation involved in Candomblé healing, and it provided a sense of belonging and security. Bauman and May note:

What happens inside this group, I understand well – and since I understand, I know how to go on, I feel secure and at home. The group is, so to speak, my natural habitat, the place where I like to be and to which I return with a feeling of relief.(1990:39)

The protection the *terreiro* in-group provides will be described throughout the thesis. Importantly, the different chapters will pay attention to the use of *cuidado* in the production and enactment of group membership and distinction from others, and the ways it is involved in political positioning, public visibility and the negotiation of power.

Boundary negotiations of African ‘purity’ and Brazilian ‘mixedness’

The boundary between ‘pure’ Africanness and Brazilian ‘mixedness’ has long been a key discussion in the literature on Candomblé as well as among its practitioners. As Sansi (2007:47) argues, by being concerned with African ‘purity’ in Candomblé and rejecting its ‘syncretism’, the Afro-Brazilianist tradition has denied its historicity. Instead of joining the quest for pure African values, Sansi identifies two central processes by which Candomblé was made into ‘Afro-Brazilian Culture’: objectification, as “mutual construction of subjects and objects that takes place in history”; and appropriation, as “the process by which strange things become familiar, as parts of the self” (Sansi, 2007:4). In the past, the religion was objectified as sorcery, malady, and crime, later as folklore and, finally, as Afro-Brazilian Culture, and the objectified images of Candomblé have continuously been appropriated and re-appropriated by different actors (ibid.). Far from being neutral observers, anthropologists have played an important role in this process of defining the religion (Dantas, 2009, Sansi, 2007).

In the late 19th century, Nina Rodrigues categorised Candomblé as a psychologically primitive African religion (see ‘Brief History of Candomblé’). He stressed the ‘natural’ boundaries between the ‘races’, and viewed syncretism and racial mixture as degeneration (Sansi, 2007:50). However, from the 1930s onwards racial mixture (*mestiçagem*) became a marker of Brazilianness in a nationalist attempt to differentiate the country from its neighbours (Matory, 2005:154). The African elements in this mixture, including Candomblé and black or *mestiço* bodies, came to be seen as erotic and exotic (Sansi, 2007:52). In his influential book *The Masters and the Slaves* Gilberto Freyre writes:

[...] we almost all of us bear the mark of that [Negro] influence. Of the female slave or “mammy” who rocked us to sleep. Who suckled us. [...] Of the mulatto girl who relieved us of our first bicho de pé [a type of flea], of the pruriency that was so enjoyable. Who initiated us into physical love and, to the creaking of a canvas cot, gave us our first complete sensation of being a man. (1986:278-279, quoted in: Matory, 2005:155)

Although Freyre here tries to make a point for Brazil’s mixedness, the division line between the caring female slave and mulatto girl for sex on the one side and the ‘us’ (i.e. white men) on the other is clear.

Similarly, Afro-Brazilianist researchers separated black from white aspects in religious syncretism, a term first coined by Arthur Ramos (Herskovits, 1958:xxii); and they were especially interested in ‘pure’ African traditions. The interest in Candomblé as art and culture brought about the ‘folkloric movement’, a group of folklorists under Edison Carneiro that was active between 1947 and 1964. Like other researchers before him, Carneiro sought an “authentic Africa” that had been “transplanted” to Brazil (Maggie, 2015:104). He also played an important role in the foundation of the ‘Union of Afro-Brazilian Sects’ that distinguished between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’, ‘impure’ *terreiros* (Maggie, 2015:106). The myth of African purity in Candomblé was pushed further in the work of the anthropologist Roger Bastide, who distinguished traditional Candomblé religion from ‘syncretized sects’ (Capone, 2008:281), and his close friend, the photographer Pierre Verger who spent several years in West Africa to rediscover the roots of Candomblé.

Since the 1980s, African essentialism in Candomblé has been championed by a group of Candomblé representatives around Mãe Stella de Oxossi, *ialorixá* of the famous *terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá in Salvador. In a great effort to ‘re-Africanize’ Candomblé, they reject syncretism as a colonial heritage and a sign of oppression, and they call for the removal of all Catholic traditions, symbols, and images from Candomblé. This disregard for syncretism, as a ‘mask’ that had never actually covered the true ‘face’ of traditional Candomblé, has also been promoted by recent researchers (Capone, 2008:281).

But the re-Africanist movement has been criticized for drawing “rigid boundaries between what does and does not pertain to true Candomblé” (Van de Port, 2011:215), as well as for representing only a partial view (Sansi, 2007:23) and an overly simplified approach to the ‘myth of Africanness’ (Pinho, 2010:4). In contrast, my study does not search for ‘authentic African traditions’. I agree with Patricia de Santana Pinho (2010) when she insists that “culture is political” and that ideas and inventions of Africa and Africanness in Brazilian Candomblé are produced and used as sources of empowerment in a specific historic situation. My thesis therefore does not make judgments about the value of ‘mixture’ or ‘African purity’, and does not question if Candomblé is or ought to be ‘African’ or ‘Brazilian’. Instead, it presents Candomblé as a dynamic and diverse religion that keeps responding and adapting to its political and social environment by negotiating social boundaries.

In my fieldwork, I encountered different practices and voices. While one person said “Welcome to Africa!” when I entered the *terreiro*, another would state on a different occasion, “I am not African, I am Brazilian, and my religion is, too”. And although most rituals in the Odé Terreiro were held in Yorubá, we also performed a day-long prayer ceremony for Saint Anthony. In line with Pinho (2010:4) who investigates “how Afro-descendants have created, produced, manipulated, and employed culture for their own benefit”, I am interested in how claims of distinction and identification are used and enacted, and I ask how they can be theorized in terms of *cuidado*. Furthermore, my ethnography will show that despite Candomblé’s positive image and visibility in the city of Salvador (Van de Port, 2011, see also Sansi, 2007), public representations of Candomblé as ‘devil worship’ (Chapter One), ‘sorcery’ and

‘folklore’ (Chapter Four) are still significant today, especially in more peripheral locations. In response, the members of the Odé Terreiro undertook continuous effort to distinguish their religion from devil worship by stressing the value of *cuidado* and healing in Candomblé.

In summary, my study contributes specifically to anthropological conversations on Candomblé healing, care, and boundary work. In particular, it discusses Candomblé healing as a process of self-transformation by accessing power (*axé*) through *cuidado* and building social relations. These relations of *cuidado* are therefore directed at others (*orixás*, or other people) and at oneself at the same time. Boundaries between self and other, as well as in-group and out-group, in this context appear as delineations that can be both pronounced and crossed through acts of *cuidado*. Despite the abundant anthropological literature on Afro-Brazilian religion, Candomblé healing has not yet been described in terms of practices of circulating *cuidado*, like the ones I found in the Odé Terreiro. Before I elaborate on these topics with my ethnography, I am first going to turn to the history of Candomblé to contextualize my study, followed by a description of my field site and fieldwork methods.

Background: A brief history of Candomblé

Slavery and the birth of Candomblé

Candomblé is rooted in the history of slavery and colonialism in Brazil, much like Vodou in Haiti and Santería in Cuba. Facing the dramatic decline of the native Brazilian population through genocide, forced labour and imported diseases, the Portuguese (and from 1630 to 1654 Dutch) colonizers in Brazil turned to slave labour from Africa, mainly from West and Central African countries (Nigeria, Dahomey, Angola and Congo, among others). From the beginning of Portuguese colonial rule in 1500 to the abolition of slavery in 1888, over 10 million Africans were violently transported to Brazil – though it is estimated that less than five million survived the transatlantic passage (Klein and Luna, 2010:151, Curto and Lovejoy, 2004:11). These survivors embarked together with their gods, ancestral spirits, religious knowledge, and a great need for protection, spiritual and otherwise.

Brazil was the main point of arrival for slaves travelling to the Americas – initially through the North-eastern ports in Salvador and Recife (Mattoso, 1986:21), before Rio de Janeiro and other ports in the Southeast gained importance in the 19th century (Klein and Luna, 2010:133). Salvador da Bahia was Brazil’s capital until 1763, and because of its central role in the slave market, the city was called the ‘Black Rome’ of Brazil (Ickes, 2013, Matory, 2005:40). In Salvador, slaves were sold by public auction and private sale (Mattoso, 1986:55). Here, they were often separated from family members and countrymen, as slave owners – following the motto ‘divide and rule’ – preferred to own Africans from different regions in order to impede fraternization and resistance (Johnson, 2002:104). As these slaves started creating new social ties among themselves, their religious practices met and mixed, on plantations as well as in the cities.

Agricultural production was the main reason for the colonization of Brazil, but from the 18th century onwards, the majority of slaves were actually used as labourers in food manufacturing, transport, fishing, commerce and domestic labour (Harding, 2000:1, Klein and Luna, 2010:116-118). Slave owners in Brazil were a heterogeneous group that included the masters of vast plantations, as well as small-scale farmers with very few enslaved workers, and merchants who used slaves as market vendors. Some slave owners preferred paternalistic manipulation to open coercion, as long as their slaves remained obedient (Mattoso, 1986:89). Even freed slaves without wealth could have their own slaves (Harding, 2000:11, Klein and Luna, 2010:116). In the 19th century, Candomblé adherents were mainly freed Africans (Reis, 2011:57) who lived in cities, as these offered more freedom and unobserved spaces than the plantations (Klein and Luna, 2010:118, Parés, 2013:102). However, acknowledging the diversity of masters and slaves in Brazil must not cover up the violence of the system.



Figure 1: Bust of Escrava Anastacia, Salvador, 2014.

Physical punishment, rape and horrendous living and working conditions were common experience for slaves (Harding, 2000:4), and their masters systematically induced fear to counter active or passive resistance and insubordination (Klein and Luna, 2010). The cruelty towards slaves is embodied in the figure of Escrava Anastacia (Figure 1), a female slave of the 18th century who was forced to wear a metal face mask for years, leading to lasting deformation of her skull. It is said that she had blue eyes and special healing powers. Although not recognized by the Catholic Church, in Bahia, Anastacia is venerated by many as a saint, and today her bust is exhibited in the back yard of the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary of Black People (*Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos*) in Salvador. While such a display in a Catholic Church is a rare exception, the memory of violence against enslaved ancestors plays a central role in Candomblé. Therefore, healing in my thesis also includes the acknowledgment of historical injustice and the regaining of self-value among the descendants of African slaves.

Under Portuguese rule, enslaved Africans had to be baptized upon arrival, as the Catholic Church considered them to have immortal souls (Klein and Luna, 2010:191-192). Through forced Christianization, ethnic mixing, and contact with indigenous people, Afro-Brazilian religious practices evolved that merged the gods and traditions of different African origins with indigenous *caboclo* spirits and Catholic Saints (Capone, 2010, Matory, 2005, Voeks, 1997). The interactions of religious traditions differed from place to place, producing a wide range of different Afro-Brazilian religions, including Candomblé, Umbanda, Tambor de Minas, Batuque, and Xangô. As traditions of slaves who, in the eyes of their exploiters, resisted

civilization, African-derived religions were prohibited under the slave laws of 1822 (Johnson, 2001:10).

Consequently, Candomblé was practiced secretly. Shrines were hidden in back rooms of dwellings, and worshipping the *orixás* was often camouflaged in public as prayer to Catholic saints (Johnson, 2002:70, Wafer, 1991:56). According to Johnson (2002), the secrecy that was practiced as a measure of protection effectively contributed to an aura of mysterious power. And while the European masters induced fear in their subalterns by way of physical violence, they in turn lived in fear of potent African sorcery (see Parés and Sansi, 2011). Bastide, for example, describes the practice of leaving a black chicken stuffed with tobacco on the doorstep of an enemy to cause his death (Bastide, 2007:300). As Voeks puts it: “Magic represented one of the few weapons of resistance in the African’s arsenal”, and it created considerable anxiety among the Portuguese elite (1997:46). Candomblé therefore was an important means of regaining agency by subverting domination by European masters⁵ (Harding, 2000, Reis, 2011, Voeks, 1997). Afro-Brazilian religion also played an important role in the *quilombo* communities in the hinterland where runaway slaves found refuge, as well as in the Brazilian slave uprisings in the aftermath of the Haitian rebellion of 1791-1804 (Klein and Luna, 2010:209-211).

Candomblé and ‘modernization’ after Brazil’s Independence

After Brazil gained independence in 1823 without a revolution, it remained ruled by the Portuguese Pedro I, and subsequently his son Pedro II. Slaves and even freed people were restricted in their religious freedom, and the police used the whites’ fear of black rebellion as an excuse for violently raiding Afro-Brazilian religious gatherings (Johnson, 2001:13). In the second half of the 19th century, several universities in Brazil were founded, among them the medical school of Salvador (Chapter Five); and the intellectual elite that developed in Brazil was influenced by European liberalism and open to the idea of abolitionism. After the civil war and abolition of slavery in the USA in 1865, Brazilian reformers envisioned a moderate and slow end to slavery in Brazil without putting the agricultural economy in danger

⁵ It should, however, be noted that African sorcery as well as healing practices were sometimes also accessed by members of the white elite (see Voeks 1997:49).

(Nabuco and Conrad, 1977:xx), and the process was slowed down even more by the war between Brazil and Paraguay (1864-70). Brazil became the last country to abolish slavery in the Western world when in 1888 Princess Isabella, a daughter of Pedro II, enacted the so-called 'Golden Law'. But although the Golden Law is often celebrated as a victory for freedom, in fact it was economy-driven. By 1880, most coffee plantations already depended mainly on salaried workers, and modern machinery was introduced to save human labour (Burns, 1993:223). After abolition, for many descendants of slaves, Candomblé remained a "wounded heritage" (Araujo 2015:2) that connected them with their African origins, enslaved ancestors, and to the associated loss and mourning. For the white elite, however, African traditions were "the racialized antitype of the nation's civilized future" (Matory, 2005:166) and hence an impediment to the modernization of the Brazilian nation.

In the year after the abolition of slavery, the First Brazilian Republic (1889-1930) was declared in a military coup. The new republic was a deeply authoritarian system in which the military had final authority, and in fact overthrew two constitutional governments (Burns, 1993:234, Levine, 2003:78). Brazil's colourful new flag carried the positivist slogan *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress). Positivism, shaped by the French philosopher Auguste Comte, propounded national progress based on scientific and technological advances, and was popular among the Brazilian *intelligentsia* and the wealthy elite (Harding, 2000:159). In practice, "progress" aimed at economic development, and "order" included police brutality and domination by the *coroneis*, or local oligarchs (Levine, 2003:15, Skidmore, 1974:80). Although the republic on paper guaranteed religious freedom to its citizens, repression of Candomblé continued. Afro-Brazilian religion was not considered a religion, but a primitive 'cult', and as such it remained illegal under three articles that prohibited unlicensed medicine, sorcery, and popular forms of curing (Johnson, 2001:19). The disregard for Afro-Brazilian 'cults' explains why Candomblé followers insist so much on its recognition as a religion.

After the abolition of slavery, black people made up a great part of the Brazilian population, and the white elite was obsessed with the fear of racial 'degeneration' of the nation (Telles, 2004). Over the years, the idealization of racial purity made way

for the idea of ‘whitening’ (*embranquecimento*) the Brazilian nation, and miscegenation emerged as the solution to the ‘Negro problem’. The state actively encouraged European immigration, on the one hand to attract business, but on the other to enact an anti-black eugenic ideology, underpinned by the conviction that generations of racial mixing would ‘whiten’ Brazil, rendering it a superior nation (Harding, 2000:159, Skidmore, 1974:173, Telles, 2004). While ‘whitening’ was supposed to create distance from the African roots of Brazilians, Candomblé today can be seen as a counter-movement of culturally ‘blackening’ Brazil, and creating “alternative spaces of blackness” (Harding, 2000), thus reinforcing the link to Africa as well as the memory of slavery (Chapter Four).

Military coups and the myth of ‘racial democracy’

In 1930, the First Republic ended in the same way it had begun: with a military coup. The subsequent dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1930-45) led to the centralization of the government and the establishment of an authoritarian regime, the ‘New State’ (1937). Vargas’ populist nationalism co-opted the workers’ movement, suppressed the ‘Brazilian Black Front’ party (Araujo 2015:4), and built on the idea that Brazil now had overcome racial discrimination – though the white elite remained in power. The sociologist Gilberto Freyre⁶ famously coined the term ‘racial democracy’, suggesting harmony between black and white Brazilians and promoting miscegenation. While the black population remained underprivileged, the myth of racial democracy became important ideology of the era (Levine, 2003:101,113) and is still influential in contemporary Brazil (Htun, 2004).

Throughout the nation-building project, especially during the 1940s and 50s, the nationalist narrative incorporated Afro-Brazilian heritage, which to a degree lost its politically black edge in this process (Araujo, 2015:3, Johnson, 2002:181).

Intellectuals and artists of the time – such as the writer Jorge Amado and the sculptor Carybé in Bahia – celebrated Brazil’s racial mixture, and ‘Afro-Brazilian Culture’

⁶ Gilberto Freyre is a politically ambiguous figure. In 1930 he went into exile as a communist and after his return to Brazil he was imprisoned under Vargas. However, his theories were very useful for Vargas’ nationalist project to conceal racial inequalities and consolidate the *status quo* (Levine 1999:101). Later, Freyre moved to the political right and supported the military dictatorship (1964-1985).

became popularized in music, visual arts and the social science (Sansi, 2007:13). Capoeira advanced from a marginalized, oppressed practice to a national symbol, and was established as martial arts training in police academies and schools (Araujo 2015:4). But while capoeira, carnival and local samba schools became assimilated by the state as symbols of Brazilianness, at the same time the persecution of Candomblé continued, with the aim of eliminating African “barbarism” and witchcraft (Matory, 2005:163, Araujo, 2015:4). There are important contradictions to note, namely that President Vargas himself intervened to protect certain Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners (Matory, 2005:163). And while some whites had consulted Candomblé practitioners in secret since times of slavery, in the 1950s, middle-class white Brazilians started to openly join Candomblé houses (Araujo, 2015:5).

After Vargas’ suicide in 1954 and several short democratic interim governments, another coup established the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985. By the 1960s, most Brazilians lived in the cities, owed to intensified industrialization under Vargas and substantial migration from the interior (Sansi, 2007:14). Class differences were rigid; one third of Brazilians could not read or write, and higher education was only accessible for the elite and the military (Levine, 2003:122-123). When President Goulart demanded land reform and nationalization of the oil industry in 1964, the conservative upper and middle classes protested. A few weeks later, armed forces drove Goulart into exile and installed a military dictatorship. The political police raided labour unions, student associations and private homes, and imprisoned hundreds without legal defence. Over the coming years, the population was kept under control by censorship of the press, brutal torture, and murder of dissidents (Levine, 2003:127-132), and Brazil received massive military assistance from the USA (Burns, 1993:453). From 1967 to 1976, Bahian Candomblé leaders faced persecution, and had to register with the Secretariat of Public Security (Matory, 2005:173).

Under the military dictatorship, black political activism only gained significant momentum in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when police repression decreased (Htun, 2004). However, the Unified Black Movement (or MNU, founded in 1978) was never able to gather support comparable to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in

the USA. Mala Htun attributes this to the persistent ideology of racial democracy and a corresponding lack of racial consciousness among black Brazilians (Htun, 2004:65). The role of Candomblé for the black movement was ambiguous. While the religion served Afro-Brazilians as a means of resistance to celebrate their African origins (Harding, 2000), Candomblé was also partially co-opted by the nationalist political elite. From the 1960s on, generals and politicians sought blessings from certain Candomblé leaders, including the *ialorixá* of the famous Gantois Terreiro in Salvador⁷ (Matory, 2005:169). Ruling-class support of Afro-Brazilian culture was a patronizing attempt to connect to the *povo*, or people (ibid.), and at the same time it was also a means to strengthen the economy through tourism, foregrounding exotic displays of Afro-Brazilian culture to celebrate the Brazilian nation. As Van de Port notes, Candomblé had become fashionable (2005b:10). In response to Candomblé's growing popularity, from the 1970s onwards, Afro-Brazilian artists and intellectuals mounted a strong resistance against the identification of their culture with depoliticized 'folklore' (Sansi, 2007:14). As my study will show, public recognition of Candomblé, and its appropriation by state institutions and the tourism industry, are still being negotiated today (Chapters Four and Five).

The 1980s saw a relaxation of state oppression, the so-called *abertura* (opening), which signalled the beginning of a gradual democratization process. In 1985, the dictatorship ended with the election of a civilian president. But as the ruling class remained in power, the historian Bradford Burns describes the early New Republic as a "masquerade of democracy, form without content, rhetoric without meaning" (Burns, 1993:445). In the 1980s, a national economic crisis hit Brazil, exacerbating the political differences between the rich and the poor (Sansi, 2007:14). The working class mobilized, with trade unions in the cities and the Landless Movement in the countryside; and, inspired by the USA, more workers and artists openly identified with the Black Movement. African culture and the memory of slavery received increasing public attention, and Afro-Brazilian heritage became the object of an authorized discourse (Araujo, 2015:4, Sansi, 2007). Since the 1990s, the Institute of

⁷ For example, Antonio Carlos Magalhães, Governor of Bahia for eight years during military rule, was photographed kneeling before the *ialorixá* Mãe Menininha (Matory 2005:169).

Historic and Artistic National Patrimony (IPHAN) has declared several longstanding Candomblé *terreiros* national heritage sites (Araujo, 2015:4).

Re-Africanization and affirmative action

In recent years, many Candomblé leaders have been calling for a ‘re-Africanization’ of the religion, discarding all Catholic features in favour of ‘pure’ African traditions – resulting in a form of competition for ‘African-ness’ among some of the more traditionalist *terreiros* (Wafer, 1991:57). The idea of African purity in Candomblé echoes Bastide’s principle of compartmentalization that depicts *terreiros* as a ‘cultural encystment’ of Africa in Brazil (Capone, 2008:259). Mãe Stella de Oxossi, *ialorixá* of the well-known *terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá in Salvador, is an important protagonist of the re-Africanization endeavour who called for black people to assume “the religion of their roots” (quoted in Wafer, 1991:56). Consequently, all images of Catholic Saints were removed from her *terreiro*, and Mãe Stella’s slogan “Iansã is not Saint Barbara!” is often cited (Selka, 2007:24). Although my study did not take place in a fully re-Africanized *terreiro*, it will address how the notion of Africanness is used as a means of empowerment in political discourse as well as in ritual practice.

In the early 2000s, Brazilian racial policy underwent a radical change. For the first time in Brazilian history, the state officially admitted that racial inequalities are in fact a serious problem (Htun, 2004:61). Pressure from the black movement and international agencies brought about the implementation of ‘affirmative action’, including a quota system for black and indigenous students at public higher education institutions (Telles, 2004:10). Quotas as “race-based anti-racist laws” (Pinho, 2010:11) remain a polemical and contested issue in Brazil. According to Edward Telles and Marcelo Paixão, the public debate around quotas and racism has strengthened racial awareness, and national census data now indicates an increased tendency to self-declare as non-white (2013:11).

However, the quota system has been criticized as being inappropriate for Brazil’s “style of racism which is subtle and shameful, not explicit or structural” (Htun, 2004:73). This subtle and shameful racism is expressed, for example, in notions of beauty or *boa aparência* (good appearance), defined by European facial features and

straight hair (Pinho, 2010, Edmonds, 2010). In this context, adherence to Candomblé can be understood as a means of seeking power by creating black identity and social networks, instead of simply integrating black people in traditionally white middle- and upper-class institutions like universities.

The *ialorixá* of the Odé Terreiro had a strong political consciousness and well-informed opinions on the political situation, especially regarding racism and black activism. Politics were not directly discussed inside the *terreiro*, but the *ialorixá* put great effort into establishing awareness about social equality, respectful behaviour and accountability. Oftentimes she would call the whole group in the *barracão* and hold an *ad-hoc* talk about moral values and rules of conduct, as well as about self-worth and life opportunities. She was very proud of her religious children's achievements. For example, when one of her religious sons was admitted to university, she exclaimed "You see, you can achieve whatever you wish to do! Go to university – this, too, is *axé*." In this light, the Candomblé *terreiro* provides a structure of alternative education where people from lower class backgrounds or shattered families can develop self-esteem and emotional stability within a reliable social network that is built on mutual respect.

Recently, the political right has again gained power in Brazil, and the democratically elected president Dilma Rousseff (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT), Workers' Party) was suspended from office in May 2016. Her impeachment was confirmed by the senate in August 2016 in what turned out to be yet another Brazilian *coup d'état*. Since the Workers' Party gained power in 2003, with President Inácio Lula's election, the social welfare system has been significantly restructured, especially with the Zero Hunger (*Fome Zero*) and Family Stipend (*Bolsa Família*) programmes. Although the implementation of these programmes was not without problems (Hall, 2006), they aimed at improving the lives of the poorest of the poor in Brazil. But with the recent economic recession, the Workers' Party and President Rousseff have become less popular. Ultimately, she was trialled for corruption, while right-wing vice-president Michel Temer stepped in as president – although he is facing an impeachment process for corruption himself and is not even allowed to run as a presidential candidate. In contrast to the previous diversity under Rousseff, Temer's

cabinet is all male and all white. Another influential figure of the political right, President of the Chamber of Deputies Eduardo Cunha, has been accused of bribery and money laundering with the Evangelical Church *Assembleia de Deus*. And Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing congressman who is planning to run for presidency, openly advocates against affirmative action, and supports a military government. He even publicly honoured the official responsible for the torture of Dilma Rousseff during the military dictatorship.

In response to Rousseff's suspension from office in May 2016, the well-known *ialorixá* Mãe Beata de Iyemonjá from Rio de Janeiro wrote an open letter:

[...] I am not going to give way to the genocide of the black population, the femicide of us women, racism, religious intolerance and homophobia and lesbophobia.

This shameful coup represents a backlash to the conquests of Human Rights as they are written in our federal constitution, and therefore to the basic exercise of our democracy.

I will not let myself be used by an authoritarian class that does not want us to have access to our rights that used to be only given to the privileged and the so-called well-to-does (*bem nascidos*), thought it was those arrogant castes that until today have enslaved our minds and lives.

May my mother Iyemojá Ogumté nourish and bear fruits in our heads for better days in our arduous lives as citizens!

Long live my Brazil, long live democracy!

No to the coup against life!⁸

For the Candomblé community, *cuidado* and boundary work may become even more important as sources of power and protection against racial, religious and homophobic discrimination, as reactionary forces continue to establish their power in Brazil.

⁸ The full letter has been published in an online blog on 31st March 2016: <http://olhardeumcipo.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/mae-beata-de-yemonja-afirma-que-nao-vai.html> [accessed 11th June 2016]

Field site and fieldwork methods

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork from September 2013 to August 2014 with the community of a Candomblé *terreiro* near the city Ilhéus in South Bahia. As the *terreiro* is dedicated to the hunter *orixá* Oxossi, or Odé, I call it the “Odé Terreiro”.

When planning this research in 2012/2013, I anticipated that after arriving in Brazil I would spend several weeks visiting *terreiros* in Bahia to identify one that best fit my research purposes. I chose to start looking for a field site *terreiro* in the state of Bahia because it is known as the “cradle of Candomblé” (Jensen, 1999), and because I had already conducted fieldwork in Northeast Brazil for my medical doctoral research in 2006/07 and was familiar with the region. However, I did not wish to do research in Bahia’s capital Salvador, as the city has already been the focus of anthropologists for decades (Bastide, 2007, Santos, 1986, Van de Port, 2005b, Sansi, 2007, Seligman, 2010). My main selection criteria for the field site were: size, activity, security, accessibility, and my own impression of the place. *Terreiros* can be of very different size and structure; some comprise several houses and a large farmyard, while others only consist of a back room with a shrine in a private house. I was looking for a *terreiro* big enough to give me the opportunity to experience some community life, where healing consultations and religious rituals were practiced several times per week.

To my surprise, I found my field site almost right away, in the second *terreiro* I visited. I first was introduced to a *babalorixá* in a small town near Salvador, but as I did not feel very comfortable with him and was warned about the street violence in the town, I returned to Salvador. There I contacted an *ialorixá* near Ilhéus whose contact I got from a researcher I had met earlier. Mãe Darabí was a very approachable and energetic black woman, and after I had explained my research project to her she invited me to attend a *feita* in her *terreiro*. A week later I took the overnight bus to Ilhéus and stayed with her in the Odé Terreiro for five days. I was impressed with the ongoing rituals and the friendly *terreiro* group and, despite my initial caution, by the end of the week I had decided to stay (Chapter Two).

The field site

Bahia is one of the biggest states in Brazil, situated in the impoverished Northeast region of the country. Bahia was the economic and political centre of colonial Brazil, due to its position on the coast and near rich agricultural land surrounding the Bay of All Saints (Kraay, 1998:4). With the decline of the sugar plantations in the 19th century, tobacco, coffee and cocoa plantations gained importance in the region. Cocoa production was especially pronounced in the South of Bahia near my field site, and it lasted until the late 1980s when the *vassoura de bruxa* (witches' broom disease), a fungus infection, destroyed a great part of the cocoa plantations (Pereira et al., 1996). Today, the main industry of Bahia is tourism, concentrated in Salvador and its nearby palm-framed beaches, and to a lesser extent in the city of Ilhéus in South Bahia. Given its large population of Afro-descendants and its celebrated Afro-Brazilian culture, Bahia has been labelled "the most African part of Brazil" (Dantas, 2009:3).

The city of Salvador (around three million inhabitants), capital of Bahia, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Brazil, and its famous samba groups and carnival celebrations attract over two million visitors every February (Van de Port, 2011). Tourism in Salvador focuses on the historic city centre Pelourinho where the military police guard the bars, hotels, restaurants and cultural institutions, while gang violence and poverty shape the back streets. Once an important slave port, the city has become the "capital of Afro-Brazilian culture" (Sansi, 2007:1) and a significant point of reference in the African diaspora (Pinho, 2010:8) with an 'Afro-Brazilian Museum' and 'Folkloric Ballet' (Chapter Four). Candomblé is presented as the spiritual-cultural foundation of African-Bahian culture (Ickes, 2013:1), and images, songs, symbols and monuments of Candomblé are omnipresent in the city centre of Salvador. In 2008, the state-funded mapping project counted 1,410 *terreiros* of Afro-Brazilian religion in Salvador (Teles dos Santos, 2008). Some of them are well-known (like the Casa Branca, Terreiro Gantois, and the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá), but the great majority are small houses. During my fieldwork, I visited Salvador almost every month for a few days to take dance classes, visit cultural institutions, and attend conferences (Chapter Five) and religious celebrations like the *Lavagem do*

Bonfim. Although Salvador was not my primary field site, these visits added important contextual and ethnographic material to my research.

Ilhéus is a city of around 200,000 inhabitants that is located 200km south of Salvador, about an eight-hour bus ride away. With its small historical city centre and its long beaches, Ilhéus also attracts some tourism, but the cultural attractions are limited. In the past, the city organized its own carnival celebrations (Goldman, 2013:194-197), but this was stopped a couple of years before my research due to outbreaks of violence. Moreover, the Municipal Theatre was closed for the whole year of my fieldwork. One of the few visitors' attractions is the 1920s house of the writer Jorge Amado, Ilhéus' most famous son, and the *Bar Vesúvio* that features in his novel *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela*. But although the writer's face appears in a bust, murals, and images in the centre, in the whole city I could only find one small bookshop (unless one counts the numerous Evangelical book stores). The State University Santa Cruz (UESC) is near Ilhéus, however, and I joined their research group of Afro-Bahian Studies during my fieldwork. A recent mapping project led by one of their researchers (Amim, 2013) documents 184 Candomblé and Umbanda *terreiros* in the region around Ilhéus, the *Bacio de Leste* (Eastern Basin) with 530,000 inhabitants. One of them is the Odé Terreiro.



Figure 2: Political map of Brazil, with the city of Ilhéus highlighted.
Source: <http://www.mapsopensource.com/brazil>



Figure 3: The house of the Odé Terreiro, 2014



Figure 4: Terreiro members hanging up palm leaves to protect the barracão from spirits of the dead, 2013



Figure 5: A terreiro member on her way to fetch water from Oxum's font, 2013

The Odé Terreiro is located in the lush *Mata Atlântica* (Atlantic Forest), about fifteen minutes by foot from a suburb of Ilhéus. It comprises several buildings: a small house with two rooms and a kitchen, a ceremony hall (*barracão*) and several clay huts with shrines (*pejis*) to the *orixás*, as well as a freshwater lagoon with a little waterfall and a spring in the forest. Nobody lived there permanently, but the house members were expected to frequently visit the *terreiro* and stay overnight for rituals. For the first six months, I lived in the suburb in the same house with the *ialorixá*. It was a simple place by the motorway. Many people there had no jobs or cars, often sat in front of their houses on plastic chairs, and at night people on the street drank *cachaça* (cane spirit) and listened to loud music from the radio. The place had a bakery, two small supermarkets, a pharmacy, a Catholic church, and, so I was told, sixteen Evangelical communities. The biggest was a Pentecostal church just across the road from where we lived, and every Wednesday and Saturday I heard their sermons, which always ended in shouting and screaming, amplified and sent into the suburb through enormous speakers. As the *ialorixá* above me did not approve of their noise, she played music on her powerful hi-fi system as loud as possible. And between these competing walls of sound on both sides of the road ran a constant traffic of roaring trucks and buses. Our windows were holes in the wall without glass, and the noise level was maddening. After six months, I moved to a quieter part of Ilhéus by the beach and started commuting to the *terreiro*.

The *ialorixá* of the Odé Terreiro, Mãe Darabí, was a charismatic artist and black activist, who came from a poor background with little formal education (Chapter Two). She went to the Odé Terreiro several days per week to offer oracle consultations, perform rituals and organize *festas* (worship celebrations). The *terreiro* group consisted of people from diverse social backgrounds, many (but not all) of whom had dark skin colour. For example, the *ogã* (male high rank member) was a black capoeira teacher and night watchman, and the *axogum* (responsible for the ritual killing of sacrifice animals) was a white university lecturer and artist. Other high rank house members were the *ekedi*, who worked in a bakery, and the *iaôs* (initiated novices), a school teacher and a waitress in a fast food place. Among the lower ranks (*abiãs*) were children as well as a university lecturer, a cook, and a high

school student, just to list a few. The *ialorixá* insisted that inside the *terreiro* social status differed profoundly from outside (see Chapter One).

The Odé Terreiro was the off-spring of a bigger Candomblé house in a nearby city. This ‘father’ *terreiro* was led by the *babalorixá* and university professor Ruy Póvoas (or Pai Katulembá), author of several books on Candomblé to which my thesis will refer. I here call it the Ijexá Terreiro, as it belongs to the small Ijexá ‘nation’ (*nação*), which is part of the bigger Nagô group, and refers to the city Ilexá in today’s Nigeria. Usually three main Candomblé traditions, or ‘nations’, are distinguished regarding their geographical origins in Africa (Capone, 2010, Matory, 2005, Voeks, 1997:317). The Nagô nation is rooted in Yoruba culture from a region now stretched between contemporary Nigeria, Benin and Togo. They use Yoruba language in their rituals and worship *orixá* deities. The Bantu nation mainly refers to traditions from Angola and Congo, with *n’kisis* deities. The Jeje nation is linked to Ewe, Fon, and Gen languages, and worships *vodun* deities with origins in the ancient Kingdom of Dahomey in the region of present-day Benin. To my knowledge, my study is the first ethnography of an Ijexá community.

These religious ‘nations’ are not homogeneous, as each has been shaped by a variety of African, European and Native American influences, as well as by adaptations to the specific social environment in Brazil (2005). Candomblé is thus a very diverse and dynamic religion (Bonilla, 2011, Capone, 2010). In fact, every *terreiro* practices a unique version of Candomblé according to the local history and to the creativity of their leader and the community. The mapping project by Amim (2013) in the Eastern Basin region around Ilhéus lists 13 different nations, with Angola as the biggest group and Umbanda, Ketu, and Ijexá as smaller important nations. Other categories include Amburaxó, Alaketu, and mixed names like Angola-Umbanda, Jeje Vodum Angola, and Jeje Nago (Amim, 2013:29). As no scripture defines orthodox tradition, it is difficult to treat Candomblé as if it were a fixed entity. My thesis therefore does not attempt to speak for the whole of Candomblé, but it presents the ethnographic example of one Ijexá *terreiro* in South Bahia. I will now move on to the description of my fieldwork methods.

Fieldwork and the role of researcher

During my fieldwork, I conducted participant observation by taking part in daily life and in rituals in the Odé Terreiro, and additionally I recorded semi-structured in-depth interviews. On some days, I would stay in the *terreiro* only for a morning or an afternoon – for example, when the *ialorixá* had oracle consultations and carried out shorter rituals. But oftentimes we would also stay overnight, going to sleep soon after nightfall and waking up at 4 or 5am with the cry of the roosters that were kept behind the house for ritual sacrifice. These overnight stays could extend to a week during *festas*, and up to three weeks during the initiation process of the two *iaôs* (Chapter Four). Over time, I gradually became more directly involved in the ritual performances, as I washed and held chickens for sacrifice, helped set up pots and bowls of food for the *orixás*, and engaged in the chanting and dancing. But I also participated in everyday tasks like cleaning the house, going to the market, making food for the group, and washing laundry; and these activities were essential for becoming part of the group. One day when I was scrubbing the gas stove, the *ialorixá* stated, in passing, “You see, this is how you learn Candomblé.” While my status as a European researcher and medical doctor often set me apart from the others, in these instances it seemed pleasantly suspended. This was another advantage of using the perspective of care: I could easily participate in acts of everyday *cuidado*, as in contrast to ‘magic’ or ‘spirit incorporation’ they included concrete and worldly tasks that anybody could perform.

In other moments, however, my role as a participant observer sometimes made me feel intrusive. When I scribbled down quick field notes in the *terreiro*, I often had no place to do so unnoticed, and I felt slightly uncomfortable. But after a couple of weeks with the group, one of the house members told me that the *ialorixá* had asked him to take notes about me, too, and how I developed in the group over time. He never showed me his notes, but our mutual note-taking diminished my feeling of inappropriate observation and documentation.

The members of the Odé Terreiro group were welcoming and inclusive. Apart from spending time together in the *terreiro*, I sometimes visited them at their homes, or they took me with them to the beach for a weekend. However, meeting with them

always meant fieldwork and balancing my role as a researcher, which could be draining. For a part of my fieldwork, I struggled with loneliness in the place where I lived, and felt the need to protect myself against assaults and sexual harassment. Over and above these pressures, I feared the poisonous snakes in the *terreiro* (Chapter Three). While this created a certain distance between me and the *terreiro*, in these times of vulnerability I was also most susceptible to the rituals, peaceful atmosphere, and social support the *terreiro* offered. This contradiction in my personal experience of the fieldwork process might have informed my argument about the simultaneous movement of overcoming and drawing boundaries, and it possibly increased my attention to acts of care and self-care.

During my fieldwork, I was cared for in many ways by the *ialorixá* and the *terreiro* group. They welcomed me, they gave me food and a place to sleep, they made sure I was feeling well, and they introduced me to the world of Candomblé. The *ialorixá* was aware of the importance of their *cuidado* for my stay, and she often commented on it. Several times she asked me to tell my mother in Germany not to worry, as she was taking good care of me in Brazil. Their *cuidado* made me feel grateful, but also indebted to the *ialorixá* and the group, and I sometimes felt the need to create more distance and be independent to avoid further obligations. This feeling of indebtedness has surely influenced my perspective on the power dynamics in the economy of *cuidado*.

The *ialorixá* and the *terreiro* group also expected a certain commitment to Candomblé from my part, even outside of the *terreiro*, especially on Fridays when one can wear only white and must not drink alcohol, eat spicy food, or consume palm oil. I followed these rules over the year, and to an extent also after my return from the field, but I sometimes felt that I was appropriating their culture without having much choice about it. Wearing only white on Fridays was not easy, but it was invaluable for me to get an idea about the effects of religious stigmatization, even when it was only subtle and not comparable to the discrimination faced by others. The white clothes marked me as a Candomblé follower, and although I was never physically or verbally abused, I received (and suspected) judgmental looks in the street, including from the Pentecostal owners of the bakery where I often had

breakfast. Other obligations included financial contributions, especially for *festas* and construction work in the *terreiro*, as well as frequently performing rituals to strengthen my spiritual link with the *terreiro* and my father *orixá*.

How far an anthropologist should get involved in Candomblé groups is a much-debated question (Seeber-Tegethoff, 2005, Omari-Tunkara, 2005, Van de Port, 2005b). Many ethnographers have been initiated into the religion, including Roger Bastide, Edison Carneiro, Rachel Harding, Joseph Murphy, Arthur Ramos, and Pierre Verger. And since the late 1980s, it became common practice for anthropologists of Afro-Atlantic religion to narrate their own experiences of possession (Wafer, 1991, e.g. Murphy, 1988), what Johnson refers to as the *scholar possessed* (Johnson, 2016). On the other hand, Van de Port argues that a Candomblé *terreiro* was not a “universe on its own” (Van de Port, 2005b:3), and that a study of Candomblé does not necessarily demand religious immersion but may as well be based in society outside of a *terreiro*. I chose to conduct fieldwork with a Candomblé community because I was interested in their direct experiences and practices of healing in the *terreiro*; but at the same time, as I noted above, I also draw on my conversations, observations, and collected material from outside of the *terreiro*.

I did not plan to become initiated, but it remained a possibility as the *ialorixá* made clear to me that this decision was made by the *orixás*. Six months into fieldwork, she revealed that my *orixá* had asked for a ritual that would make me become a daughter of the house (*abiã*), but she also made clear that this was *not* an initiation. In May 2014, I underwent a ‘washing of the head’ ritual, stayed in a room of the *barracão* for three days, and received my ritual clothes and necklaces for use in the *terreiro*. The other house members from then on were my brothers and sisters. I even had occasional experiences that might be called spiritual, like perceiving the presence of an *orixá* in the room when I was half-asleep at night, or the mentioned tingle in my feet during a ritual. But I was never close to turning into the *orixá*; I did not become a *scholar possessed*.

Apart from participant observation and countless informal conversations, I conducted 28 semi-structured interviews. Sixteen of these were with members of the Odé Terreiro: four with the *ialorixá*, four with initiated house members (two women and

two men) and eight with non-initiated members (five men and three women). I also interviewed four initiated members of the Ijexá Terreiro (one woman, three men). Moreover, I conducted two in-depth interviews and two group discussions with people who were not house members but who sometimes visited the *terreiro* for consultations and rituals, as well as three interviews with persons not associated with the *terreiro* (two dance teachers and an NGO representative). The interviews lasted between 20 and 120 minutes, and I audio-recorded and (with exception of the group discussions) transcribed them completely. At the end of my fieldwork, in July 2014, I presented my findings to the *terreiro* group and we discussed them (Chapter One), and I also audio-recorded and transcribed this discussion.

My interviewees were between 18 and 71 years of age, and of different social backgrounds, skin colour, and positions in the *terreiro* hierarchy. I conducted most of the interviews inside the Odé Terreiro, where I tried to find a space with adequate privacy – either in the small room, the ceremony hall, or behind the house – although unavoidably, people passed by or sometimes entered the room. A few interviews were recorded in the interviewee's or my home or workplace, or at the local university. I carried out all interviews and participant observation in Portuguese, as I speak the language fluently, having conducted previous research projects in Brazil.

Research ethics

Ethical considerations received priority attention during my fieldwork as well as during the writing of this thesis. My research proposal underwent level 2 ethical review and was accepted by the Ethical Committee of the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Edinburgh, in August 2013.

As the *ialorixá* explained in the beginning of my fieldwork, the 'law of Candomblé' consisted of 'respect, rules, and secrets' (Chapter Four). Being respectful towards others, following the rules of the house, and guarding its religious secrets were basic duties expected of me, and I continuously made great effort to act accordingly. However, given the great number of unwritten rules, I could not avoid accidental missteps – as, for example, when I carried chilli plants into the *barracão* (Chapter One). But as I learned, the relevant point regarding the rules was to make an effort, not to be infallible. Rather than perfect behaviour, acknowledging my mistakes and

trying to improve turned out to be most important for building trust relationships with my informants, as it demonstrated my willingness to learn. This learning process through paying attention and avoiding to repeat mistakes is part of developing experiential ‘deep knowledge’ (Chapter Two) in Candomblé, and following the rules of the *terreiro* binds in with the practice of *cuidado* that became the central theme of my thesis.

As secrecy in Candomblé is directly linked to sacredness and spiritual power (Johnson, 2002), it is my responsibility to respect the limits of what I am allowed to publish in my thesis and what not. Moreover, being observed and questioned by an anthropologist could put people at unease, especially when they felt obliged to protect their secrets but also wanted to help me with my study. Therefore, my research never aimed at exploring, let alone revealing, secrets⁹. I have done my best to respect and protect what my study participants thought should be kept secret; and I did not attempt, for example, to peek into the secret room or lift lids from pots that held sacred objects. Instead, I was more interested in *how* secrets were protected and revealed, or as Michael Taussig puts it: in their “skilled revelation of skilled concealment” (Taussig, 2003:273). The respect for the semi-permeable boundaries of what can be reveal also means that the use of photos in this thesis is limited.

Throughout my fieldwork I took a great number of photos, and generally the study participants appreciated this; often they posed for photos and asked me to share my photos with them. However, the *ialorixá* made clear that I was not allowed to take pictures when people were incorporating the *orixás*. Only once she asked me to take photos of key moments during an initiation ritual when the initiates were in trance (Chapter Four), but this remained an exception, and I will not publish these photos.

Apart from protecting secrets I was entrusted with, I also had to protect myself and my informants from physical harm. As street violence is a problem in Bahia (Chapter

⁹ A classic example of anthropological intrusion is Evans-Pritchard’s study of the Azande, where the ethnographer attempts to unveil the ‘tricks’ of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1976:65ff.). The suspicion that his native assistant kept information from him drove Evans-Pritchard to dig deeper: “[An] ethnographer is bound to triumph. Armed with preliminary knowledge nothing can prevent him from driving deeper and deeper the wedge if he is interested and persistent” (ibid.: 65).

EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E. 1976. *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Three), I avoided walking outside alone at night, and I never put my informants in a situation of unusual risk (e.g. by making them travel on public buses alone at night). A more ethically conflicted situation arose regarding the extremely poisonous snakes on the *terreiro* grounds (Chapter Three). On several instances, it was only a matter of luck that no one stepped on a snake curled up on the doorstep or by the tools that were kept behind the house. This was especially scary during night time rituals when we were barefoot in the forest. In this situation, my ethical obligations as a medical doctor were at odds with my obligations as participant observer. My medical training made me feel responsible for the health and safety of my informants in the *terreiro*, some of whom were children who habitually played barefoot in the grass, and I feared having to provide emergency aid for a snake bite without adequate equipment. As an ethnographer, I was not in a position to interfere with the *terreiro* community's usual practices by 'correcting' their behaviour, especially where ritual practice was concerned. But I felt the need to at least increase awareness about the immanent health threat, and therefore I repeatedly expressed my concern about the snakes to the *ialorixá* as well as other house members, especially the children and their parents. Moreover, I started wearing rubber boots - which was highly impractical - and encouraged others to do so, too (see Chapter Three). I also kept a first aid box in the *terreiro* and gave the *ogã* an information leaflet about the different types of poisonous snakes and spiders to raise awareness. As far as I can tell, the members of the *terreiro* were neither offended by my remarks on safety in the *terreiro*, nor did they change their behaviour. Although I briefly considered changing my field site to a different *terreiro* half way through my fieldwork, after a conversation with my supervisor I decided to stay and to take preventative measures. One of these was to do more research outside the *terreiro*, for example by visiting Candomblé-related events in Salvador and Ilhéus, which inform Chapters Four and Five.

In terms of informed consent, the first person to agree that I could conduct a study in the Odé Terreiro was the *ialorixá*. When I first met her, I explained my research objectives and methods to her, and she invited me to stay with them for a year. When she officially introduced me to the group, I made clear that they could opt out at any time without giving reasons, that they could contact me if they ever had doubts or concerns about my study (even after fieldwork had ended), and that they were not

obliged to answer any of my questions. No one expressed concerns with my study. It is, however, possible that some house members participated because the *ialorixá* told them to do so, rather than because they wanted to. I confronted this problem by stressing individually that they did not have to answer my questions, and did not insist when they repeatedly did not turn up for an interview or kept postponing it. For the first interviews, I handed out an information sheet and informed consent form to sign. However, I soon stopped this practice, as it created a formal and bureaucratic atmosphere that interfered with the relaxed conversation I was looking for. Instead, I repeated my study objectives and their rights to withdraw and asked for oral consent before each interview, which I included in the audio-recordings.

As is common practice in anthropological research, I generally use pseudonyms for my informants in this study. However, the *ialorixá* emphasized on several occasions that she would like me to use her title or religious name, Mãe Darabí. The *babalorixá* of the Ijexá Terreiro is a well-known academic, writer and public figure in the region, and he has published several books on Candomblé that I will use in this thesis, and therefore I will also reference his secular name, Ruy Póvoas. Another exception to the use of pseudonyms is Marinho Rodrigues, whom I interviewed in his official role of co-ordinator of the NGO RENAFRO, and whose name has already been openly used in Marcio Goldman's ethnography *How Democracy Works* (2013).

The practice of using pseudonyms is problematic in cases where my informants clearly stated that I could use their real name, especially with the explanation that they were proud of their engagement in Candomblé and of their *terreiro*, and did not want to hide their group membership. Sjaak Van der Geest states that the use of pseudonyms can be problematic, as it can take the form of "ethical paternalism" (2003:17) when the researcher decides to hide their informants' identity despite the latter's wish to see their names in print. But given the stigma sometimes attached to Candomblé (Chapter One), especially on part of Pentecostal groups in the region, I decided to use pseudonyms even in cases when individuals expressed that they wanted their names published to protect the identities of other group members who might not wish to be recognized. Surely, if someone with an investigative mind-set tried to uncover the identity of specific people, they could draw conclusions from the

descriptions and the kin relations between individuals and *orixás* which I name in my thesis. But the use of pseudonyms will, at least, complicate this endeavour. For the same reason, the names of the *terreiros*, Odé Terreiro and Ijexá Terreiro, are pseudonyms, too. To give the reader a preliminary idea about the structure and content of this thesis, I will now provide a brief overview over the five chapters.

Thesis overview

This ethnographic account of healing in a Candomblé *terreiro* draws out the dynamics of boundary work and power involved in relationships of *cuidado*. Chapter One leads the reader into the world of Candomblé and the Odé Terreiro through the trickster *orixá* Exu. Although demonized as the devil and the epitome of evil by many Brazilians (most of all by fundamentalist Pentecostals in the region), in the Odé Terreiro, Exu was respected and worshipped as the dialectical force that enables change and healing to occur. But despite his positive reception in the community, Exu kept throwing up black-and-white binaries, as well as dangerous ‘hot energy’. How can Exu both ignite conflict and facilitate healing at the same time? While the Candomblé literature usually links healing to the *orixás* Ossaim and Omulu, my study contributes a discussion about Exu’s essential role for healing processes. Through acts of *cuidado* for Exu, I argue, his potentially dangerous hot energy can be turned into a trigger for healing self-transformation.

Chapter Two will then turn to the process of self-transformation by exploring the building of kinship relations between the members of the *terreiro* and the *orixás* that is mediated by acts of *cuidado*. This chapter argues that kinship relations between humans and *orixás* make it possible to both overcome *and* reinstate the boundaries between human self and divine other. The process of recognition of oneself in the *orixá* and recognition of the *orixá* in oneself is described in the emic concept of the double mirror. Such self-reflective narrative identification of humans and *orixás* contributes to healing in that it helps people to develop self-acceptance and to find their *odu*, their ‘way in life’ that brings *axé*, health and well-being. In this way, *cuidado* for the *orixás* effectively turns into self-care.

Chapter Three investigates the spiritual economy between the humans and the *orixás*. It establishes *fé* (faith) as a human force that is engaged in a circular process of reciprocal amplification with the divine *axé*. *Fé* is based on experiences of *axé* that follow acts of *cuidado*, for example in the leaf bath (*banho*) that *terreiro* members take to protect their bodies from harm. These experiences add up over time and establish subsequent expectations of receiving *axé* and being spiritually strengthened and protected. Developing this *fé*, I argue, is not a side product of the religious work of *cuidado* in the *terreiro*, but an essential aspect of healing by way of developing a ‘relentless optimism’ despite previous experiences of humiliation, fear, and violence.

The following two chapters will gradually shift the focus away from the immediate *terreiro* group to contextualize their healing practices in a wider societal context. Chapter Four describes the distinction between the ‘sacred stage’ of Candomblé inside the *terreiro* and the ‘profane stage’ outside, as expressed in the *ialorixá*’s repeated exclamation “This is not theatre!” *Cuidado* here involves protecting the boundaries of the sacred stage by following a body of religious rules, but it also includes art practice that can transgress the guarded boundaries of the *terreiro* and appear on profane stages, for example in dance and theatre productions. Careful boundary work that allows a certain public visibility while avoiding ‘folklorization’ of Candomblé can thus be understood as a form of social healing in the sense of demanding social recognition as well as respect for religious boundaries.

Chapter Five picks up the question of boundary management by looking at the involvement of Candomblé NGOs in state-funded public health campaigns. *Cuidado* is a key term that Candomblé organizations use to stress the value of *terreiros* for Brazilian public health in the face of an insufficient and exclusive public health system. *Cuidado* here, again, appears as a morally charged category. The slogan “We do. We care.” of a Candomblé NGO expresses the double character of *cuidado* as it on the one hand unites the state and the *terreiros* in their objective to provide health care, and on the other it divides them as the NGOs accuse the state health system of a lack of *cuidado*, especially for the black population. Co-operative public health projects between *terreiros* and the state here express claims for citizenship and appear as sites of ongoing power negotiations.

The conclusion finally draws all chapters together and presents the case of Isabella, a daughter of Omulu who suffered from chronic rheumatic arthritis, to illustrate Candomblé healing through acts of *cuidado* and self-care that lead to the emergence of *fé* and *axé* — or what Isabella’s medical doctor called her ‘lion inside’.

Chapter 1. Exu opens the doors

Exu stirs things up. He is hot, rude, smart, bold and radical, and surely the most controversial of all the *orixás*. Exu (pronounced ‘eshu’) is the many-faced trickster who stretches between different dimensions of reality with mind-blowing ease. As the *orixá* of communication, Exu is always referred to in the first place in Candomblé before anything new can be started and before all other *orixás*. From a Candomblé perspective, it is unsurprising that I encountered him immediately upon arrival in Rio de Janeiro, even before I had found my field site in Bahia.

I followed the crowds deep into the maze of the busy Madureira market in Rio de Janeiro, moving in the midday sun past shirtless street sellers with hoarse voices, down the narrow paths between overloaded stalls, and into a building full of little shops selling cheap clothes and random stuff like tin buckets, animal food and woven baskets, until I finally found what I had come for: ‘The World of Orixás’, *O Mundo dos Orixás*, a small Candomblé shop.

Innumerable ritual objects were piled outside, but what first caught my eye was a life-sized statue of Exu, looking at me with a smug smile. Seeing Exu here was quite fitting, as he is often associated with the hustle and bustle of market places, where he creates confusion and thrives on turbulence. Exu is also the guardian who protects the entrances of Candomblé *terreiros*. The one I was looking at wore a white suit and hat, which revealed he was an *Exu Malandro* – an elegant, bohemian dandy (Fig. 6).

I entered the shop. Colourful necklaces hung down from the ceiling and I passed by boxes of sea shells, rows of ritual crockery, and shelves filled with candles, incense sticks and soap. “Super Bath” I read on the bottles of liquid soap that came with different name tags: “Open the Ways”, “Break the Evil Eye”, “Get a Man”, “Get a Woman”, “Call Money”, “Win Every Battle”, and “Rosemary”. I chose a green bottle of “Super Bath Rosemary” for myself, but the sticker said, “Only for Ritual Use” and I placed it back on the shelf.

Turning around in the crammed shop, I found myself eye to eye with a second Exu, a bearded one with a black hat and a grin on his face. He was bare-chested, with red

trousers and black boots, and people had pinned pieces of paper on the tripod in his hand. The top one, written in thin pencil letters, read: “Close the roads of the souls, so that mine finds rest”. This was Exu *Tranca Rua* (‘Lock the Street’), the gatekeeper who holds the keys to close or open ways in life. The cigarette ash on his forearms and the alcohol bottles at his feet made clear that this Exu received offerings and was engaged in ongoing ritual work. Inside the shop! I was excited to be standing so close to the ‘real thing’, but I felt intrusive and backed off towards the counter. All I bought in the *Mundo dos Orixás* that day was a pack of incense sticks, but meeting Exu had been worth the trip.



Figure 6: Exu Malandro at the entrance of the market stall, Rio de Janeiro, 2013



Figure 7: Exu Tranca Rua inside the market stall, 2013

Markets, as well as crossroads, front doors and graveyards, belong to the liminal spaces that constitute Exu’s reign (Capone, 2010:9, Hayes, 2008). He resides in the interstices between the human world *aiyê* and the divine world *orun* (Póvoas, 2011:243), and he mediates exchange between the two (Bastide, 2007:252).

“Exu opens doors, breaks down barriers, facilitates communication between the equal, the similar, the diverse and the different”, the *babalorixá* Póvoas explains (2011:243). But Exu also has the power to block entrances, to confuse people and sabotage their efforts, and to close channels of communication with the divine sphere. It is he who opens doors to a fulfilled life, or slams them in our faces. And as the note on the tripod made clear, he can also protect people by blocking the way of unwanted ‘souls’ or other trouble.

Exu can do things that seem extraordinary, even unimaginable: “Exu can have killed a bird yesterday with a stone he threw today!” writes the Candomblé initiate Pierre Fatumbi Verger (2011:13). When he sits down, so I was told, his head touches the roof. But when he stands up, Exu is not higher than the carpet. That is Exu: the dissolution of logic, order and rules; a restless, ruthless force of contradiction. I have been taken with Exu ever since I came across Stefania Capone’s depiction of him as the “Master of paradox” and “principle of revolution” (2010:39 and 43) in Candomblé, and during my fieldwork he became all the more significant. But what is his role in *cuidado* and healing?

In Candomblé, health is often linked to spiritual balance, and healing is the process of establishing ‘spiritual equilibrium’ (see Voeks, 1997:76). ‘Equilibrium’ was brought up frequently when people talked about health in the Ode Terreiro. Gomberg explains that for “equilibrium/health”, one needed to re-establish “individual order” through harmonious relationships with the *orixás*, which in turn created *axé* (Gomberg, 2011:144). “Health is experienced by [Candomblé] adepts as an equilibrium of vital forces”, José Marmo summarizes (2007:172).

At first sight then, Exu appears as the opposite of health and healing. His disruptive energy creates confusion, disorder and *um calor que te queima*, a heat that burns you. As Voeks writes, he is “a problematic *orixá*, as enigmatic as he is unpredictable”, in short: “Exu is disequilibrium” (Voeks, 1997:75-76). And yet, I argue that for healing, Exu is indispensable. His ‘heat’, as dangerous as it may be, is necessary to trigger change, self-transformation, and ultimately healing. But how can he be both disruptive and balancing at the same time?

This chapter leads through Exu into the world of Candomblé, setting the scene for other chapters to come. It takes a closer look at the restless Exu as a dialectical force that creates liminal spaces and makes the impossible possible. Like all tricksters, Exu is “paradox personified” (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975:148), and his ability to create chaos is ultimately what holds the world together. But his controversial character also prompts warnings about the dark side or ‘black line’ of Candomblé, and throughout the chapter I will slowly come to terms with the black-and-white divide Exu keeps producing *and* subverting.

Early warnings

The morning after my visit to the market, I was waiting for a taxi in front of my hostel in Rio de Janeiro when I recognized Exu in a stencil graffiti on the wall. He seemed to be everywhere. When I entered the taxi, I saw Candomblé necklaces dangling from the front mirror. “Exu is really opening the doors for me”, I thought, “This driver is a *filho de santo!*” His name was Fábio, a spiritual son of the *orixás* Ogum and Yemanjá. “With Candomblé you manage to enter a parallel world”, he explained while driving me to the airport. “It’s a spiritual parallel world. When you pray, when you are in the session, you can enter.” But I would have to take care, he warned me: “because in Candomblé there is the white line (*linha branca*), for healing and so on, but also the black line (*linha preta*), those who do spiritual works to harm.”

I was surprised about his depiction of black and white binaries in Candomblé. “So that really exists?” I asked him, “I never know if that is real or just prejudice.” – “No, no, that exists”, he said, and added that ‘negative energy’ was harmful in itself: “There is a lot of anger out there. When I am near an angry person, with negative energy, I feel that. And I have to protect myself.” – “And how do you protect yourself?” I wondered. “With these”, he replied and pointed to the blue and red bead necklaces on the mirror. “I also pray a lot and do the cleansing (*limpeza*). It is so important to pray. To take just five minutes to be in peace.” - “So, when I visit a *terreiro*, how will I know if it is of the white or the black line?” I asked him. “That is easy”, he said, “You will feel it. When you enter you will already feel the good or bad energy. [...] It is very important that you feel good in that place.”

Although Fábio did not mention Exu on our way to the airport, his warning and the distinction between the ‘white line’ and the ‘black line’ in Candomblé do relate to the trickster *orixá*. When these distinctions are made in Candomblé or Umbanda – between a white and black line, a right or left-hand side, and higher or lower houses – then usually the black line, the left hand side, and the low position of buildings are linked to Exu and black magic (Hayes, 2008:11). “*Tenha cuidado*” (Take care), Fábio said when I left the car. I boarded the plane with his advice in mind, and continued my journey to Salvador, capital of Bahia.

In Salvador, I shared a hostel room with Manuela, a young woman from a nearby small town who was in the city for a work meeting. She found Candomblé ‘scary’ (*dá medo*) and stated: “You are very brave to do research on Candomblé. They speak very badly of it”. I asked back: “Who does?”, and she looked at me: “Well, everybody. In school, everywhere”, and like Fábio she immediately referred to the ‘dark side’ of Candomblé. In church they had been told Candomblé was evil, and she added: “When you hear something that often, you start believing it.” After a long chat Manuela suddenly opened up, and I was surprised to hear that she frequented a Candomblé *terreiro* herself. Her mother incorporated a female Exu, called Pomba Gira. A few days later, Manuela invited me to visit her mother’s house.

Pomba Gira: the prostitute, the queen

Manuela’s mother, Dona Sabina, was a slim black woman in a simple dress who lived alone in a small house in the countryside, with a few hungry cats and long-legged chickens in the backyard. In the past, her life had been very troubled, she told me, especially during a time when her son became very aggressive, even violent. But she finally met a *pai-de-santo* (Candomblé priest) who explained that a Pomba Gira was attacking her and her family, and that she would have to care (*cuidar*) for the demanding spirit, so that they could live in peace. Since she had learned how to care for her Pomba Gira, her life had become much better and easier. She sometimes received Pomba Gira in trance in the *pai-de-santo*’s *terreiro*, or more precisely, in the *terreiro*’s lower house (*casa baixa*).

Pomba Gira was the protector of prostitutes, Dona Sabina told me, and added that although she never had to prostitute herself, Pomba Gira now protected her, too. Pomba Gira is often depicted as a prostitute or gypsy woman (*cigana*); sexy, powerful and mysterious. Kelly Hays characterizes her as a “dangerous seductress whose behaviour contravenes the norms of proper feminine comportment”, and as “the antithesis of the docile, domestic, maternal female” (Hayes, 2008:2 and 6). Similarly, Jim Wafer¹⁰ (1991) describes in detail her temperamental character and her desire for alcohol, dance and men.

When I asked about her life, Dona Sabina told me she grew up without her parents around, and later raised her own four children in poverty, having been abandoned by each of their respective fathers. When her daughter Manuela was still small, Dona Sabina had to give her to another family, as she could not take care of all her children alone. “Life was very basic”, Dona Sabina said, looking down to her hands. And she quickly added: “We are sinners. Every day we sin. Suffering is what we pay for our sins.” In contrast to this articulation of Catholic subjugation, her Pomba Gira was a vain, loud woman in a bright red dress who drinks champagne, smokes cigars and loves beautiful, expensive things, Manuela said. And Dona Sabina added: “When I receive her, it’s like a sensation of floating”.

Dona Sabina had initially been troubled by her Pomba Gira, but when she recognized her and learned how to care for her and how to ‘receive’ her in trance, the female Exu unfolded a liberating quality – as the comment about the “floating sensation” implies. Caring in this context meant acknowledging Pomba Gira’s presence in Dona Sabina’s life, respecting her and giving her the correct treatment, including specific rituals, presents and dresses that reflected her character. In this way, Dona Sabina had turned the previous attacks into protection.

The figure of Pomba Gira has been explored in more detail in Hayes’ article *Wicked Women and Femmes Fatales* (2008). Hayes presents the case of Nazaré, a married woman who suspects her husband of cheating. But it is her Pomba Gira, and not Nazaré, who finally catches the husband in bed with their house cleaner, throws him

¹⁰ Wafer refers to the various female Exus as *exuas*, but as I did not come across this term during my fieldwork, I will stick with Pomba Gira, or “the girl” (*a menina*) as she was often called.

out of the house and punishes him with bad luck. He later returns to Nazaré who “took him in not as a scorned wife, but as a triumphant victor” (Hayes, 2008:17).

Pomba Gira’s empowering character was also expressed in a song that I heard several months later, when the *ialorixá* of the Odé Terreiro invited me to attend a celebration of International Women’s Day at the leisure centre of a local trade union. There she gave a talk about her own difficult life as a black, single woman in Bahia, before honouring Pomba Gira with a song for the “Queen of Candomblé”. In a bright dress and with loud voice, she sang:

Move, people, there comes the woman, Move, people, there comes the woman, It’s Pomba Gira, Queen of Candomblé. Oh, how beautiful she is, This black ¹¹ sorceress. I know what she wants, She likes men, and she also likes women.	<i>Arreda, gente, lá vem a mulher, Arreda, gente, lá vem a mulher, É Pomba Gira, rainha do Candomblé. Oh, que bela está, Essa nega feiticeira Eu sei o que ela quer, Ela gosta de homem, também gosta de mulher.</i>
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With Pomba Gira, marginalized women are celebrated as strong, beautiful, and a threat to male domination. Her subversive character might be attributed to the ‘lower house’ or even to a ‘black line’ by some. However, in my ethnography in the Odé Terreiro, the worship of Pomba Gira and other Exus is not opposed to healing; it is part of it.

Entering the *terreiro*

Exu, in his various forms, became an important figure during my research in the Odé Terreiro. When Mãe Darabí first invited me to visit her *terreiro*, she noted that the following Sunday was the perfect point of time to commence my study, as they were planning an offering for Exu (*ipadé*) to start a week of celebration (*feira*).

¹¹ Black in the sense of skin colour, not of black magic.

On our way from the main road to the *terreiro*, we followed a hidden trail into the forest. Passing by a bamboo hut, each person uttered a short “*Agô, Exu!*” to greet Exu before entering the *terreiro*. “You are invading the sacred, therefore you have to ask Exu for permission”, the *ialorixá* explained. Inside the hut was Exu’s seat (*assento*), and I became used to saying “*Agô, Exu!*” every time I passed by this place. I was not aware of it at the beginning, but later I understood this “*Agô!*” as a performative speech-act that acknowledged – or even created – an invisible boundary around the *terreiro* in the moment of stepping through. Behind Exu’s *assento* began the sacred space.

Trickster figures in general have been linked to social and material boundaries, and Helen Lock describes the trickster as the “archetypal boundary crosser” (Lock, 2002:2). Exu’s presence at the entrance to the *terreiro* stresses an argument made by Lewis Hyde in his book *Trickster Makes this World* that discusses how “disruptive imagination creates culture” (2008) in different cosmologies. Tricksters do not only *cross* boundaries, Hyde states. They also *create* and change them.

[B]oundary creation and crossing are related to one another, and the best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found, sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold, in all forms. (Hyde, 2008:7-8)

If Exu, as a prototypical trickster, is to be found at the boundary, the passage at the entrance to the *terreiro* was the natural location for his *assento* in the small bamboo hut. At least this is how I initially understood his presence at the entrance: Exu was the guardian, and therefore he was at the gate. However, over time I noted that Exu was not only sitting *at* the entrance, but that he actually was part of it – and by constituting the entrance, he seemed to have an influence on what it was that was being entered.

Visitors would often comment on the beautiful forest, and pass by the little hut without taking much notice of it. But once I had learned to say my ‘*Agô*’ at this place I started paying more attention to Exu’s *assento*. Usually there would be plates with offerings on the ground. And people not only uttered a formal ‘*Agô*’ in passing, but they engagedly greeted him with variations like “*Agô, Exu, agô!*” and “*Laroiê, agô,*

Exu". Once they had asked Exu for permission to enter the *terreiro* grounds, the house members stopped their usual chatting and walked in silence, and they would stay quiet until they had changed into their ritual clothes and received the *ialorixá*'s blessing inside the *terreiro*. The recognition of Exu's presence at the entrance made it possible to enter a sacred space where different rules applied, social roles changed, time passed differently, and extraordinary things could happen. A visitor, who only walked in, did not enter the same place.

The *ipadé* ritual

Exu's presence was not only palpable when we crossed the boundary of the *terreiro*. It was also evoked when the community made contact with the divine sphere (*orun*) by way of ritual acts. For Exu's *ipadé*, we walked up the muddy forest path when the *ogã* (high-rank house member) started hitting the drum next to Exu's *assento*. The *ialorixá* called out: "*Laroié!*", Exu's salutation, and the group shouted back: "Exu!" Accompanied by the drum, she loudly intoned Yoruba songs that the group repeated, some with strong voices, others more shyly. They all wore ritual clothes and turbans, and several people held black and red roosters tight in their arms.

The *axogum*, a high-ranking member responsible for ritual sacrifice, led a black male goat to the door of the hut on a rope. There he held it fast, so that each of us could bend down to whisper a wish or message for Exu into its long, soft ear. Later, he slit its throat inside the hut, and then the *ogã* artistically arranged the goat's head, feet and testicles on big plates, together with the chickens' heads, wings and feet. The *ialorixá* spilled red palm oil (*dendé*) over the offerings. *Dendé* oil is seen as hot and stimulating, but for Exu it is the other way round: "It calms him down", she said. We left the plates at the side of the path for Exu to eat.

After the offering, the *ialorixá* knelt down to consult the oracle. She placed a cola seed (*obí*) on a plate, and when its four pieces symmetrically fell on their backs, she exclaimed: "*Alafia!*" – Exu had announced acceptance of the offerings. The group was cheering: "*Alafia! Alaaafia!*" which, as they told me, means 'success', 'health' or 'good outcome' in Yorubá. We started clapping, and the singing and drumming changed to popular samba songs.

In the afternoon, a second celebration took place by the lagoon at a small stone hut, another 'seat' of Exu's. During this ritual, I was officially introduced to the community by the *ialorixá*. She asked me to present my study objectives to the group, and then handed me a bowl with *farofa* (manioc flour) and red *dendê* palm oil. "Mix this with your hands", she said, "and talk with Exu". I asked a bit foolishly if I could speak German with him and she laughed: "Well, he found you there, so I guess he'll understand you anyway." Afterwards, the *ogã* scattered a small heap of gun powder on the ground, and told me to stand next to it, facing the lagoon. When he set it on fire, it exploded with a 'whooshing' noise. The group welcomed me with shouts: "*Laroié! Laroié, Exu!*" and the *ialorixá* gave out champagne in red glasses to the women, in honour of *Pomba Gira*. Exu had cleared the way.

Over the year I took part in many *ipadé* rituals in the Odé Terreiro. Each of them was a bit different, but the basic structure was always the same. They involved animal sacrifice, usually a black goat and chickens, as well as cigars, chillies, money, and gun powder. There was always blood, *dendê* oil, and alcohol, mostly *cachaça* and gin. All these objects and liquids served as channels to Exu, as they embodied his characteristic hot 'energy'. We spoke with him through the goat's ear and the bowls of *farofa*. We mumbled words into *cachaça* bottles, cigars, *amalãs* (white corn cakes in banana leaves), candles and coins in our hands. And I started to understand that although Exu is always somewhere around, his energy could be evoked, bundled, or concentrated through rituals that created a spicy atmosphere which made him more palpable, smellable, tastable, and *present*.

Several months into fieldwork, my notes on Exu rituals became less precise. I started mixing up the events and forgot to mention details. It all became blurry; I remember the ceremonies in a dizzying kaleidoscope of black and red coloured cloths, cigars, plates with chicken heads, and dancing people. In my memory, sharp smells and quick movements abound, people dance, the goat's head looks up from the plate, gun powder whooshes, all accompanied by rhythmic drumming, clapping, singing and shouting. *Laroiê, Exu!* The smoke burns in my eyes and suddenly it all made sense as I stood there in the sun. In my field notes, I scribbled down: "It's an invocation. Exu arises from the smoke, from the smell of *cachaça* and the pots of *farofa!*"

Van de Port describes the overstimulation of the senses in Candomblé rituals as a practice that allows one to give up control over “authorship of the world” (2011:66) and to let oneself be “written by the world” (2011:17). The mind-boggling sensual impressions of rhythms, smells, chants, movements and ritual objects allow for an experience of the extraordinary by ‘letting go’ of habitual rules of logic. However, in the case of Exu’s *ipadé*, this ‘giving up control’ was limited. In contrast to other *orixás*, Exu was never received in trance in the Odé Terreiro, as his energy was far too hot to be tolerated.¹² But although Exu cannot be totally controlled, given his subversive nature, the members of the Odé Terreiro carefully managed his explosive power; and they framed this handling of Exu as *cuidado*. Exu had to be ‘cared’ for, and this involved precise knowledge and minute attention to detail. As an initiated member of the Odé Terreiro, Mila, stated: “[Exu] is there, the guardian, moving the energy, and you have to care for him, you have to know how to care for him (*saber cuidar*).” And her religious sister Paula added: “To know how to deal with him”. Exu could not be tamed – but he could be made a powerful ally.

Cuidado therefore was related to knowledge of ways to feed and strengthen Exu, while at the same time containing his hot energy. Failing to perform the ritual in the right way would result in him not giving *alafia* in the *obi* oracle, and might even provoke his anger. Therefore, the *ialorixá* was highly focused and paid attention to every detail of the *ipadé*. Before the ceremony started, she reminded us to stand in the right order: women on the left, men on the right, and within these groups we found our places according to rank. From setting up the *farofa* bowls on the ground to hitting the drums and cutting the chickens’ throats, every step in the ritual process was strictly regulated. During the ceremony, the *ialorixá* kept giving orders and correcting errors. “Do you still not know how to fill the bowls?” she interrupted harshly when a woman mixed up the order of water, dendé oil and *cachaça*. She often reminded her religious children of the need to carry out the rituals flawlessly, as every minor inaccuracy might spoil the whole process. This was not a ritual to give up control, as Van de Port describes Candomblé ceremonies (2011), but rather it

¹² This was different in other *terreiros* where Exu frequently takes control over human bodies in trance WAFER, J. 1991. *The taste of blood: Spirit possession in Brazilian Candomblé*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press., like in the one Dona Sabina frequented.

was aimed at *gaining* some control by building a relationship of *cuidado* with Exu. Of course, Exu's disobedient force defies domination. But he certainly appreciates a good cigar.

***Cuidado!* Take care!**

The double act of caring for Exu while at the same time protecting oneself against him is expressed in the double meaning of the term *cuidado* as 'care' and 'caution'. As stated in the introduction, *cuidado* refers to acts of caring in the sense of sustaining someone or something, at the same time the exclamation '*Cuidado!*' expresses a warning: 'Be careful!' or 'Watch out!' In the Odé Terreiro, we were advised to take great care with Exu, and while we celebrated his presence and danced to his rhythms, we also took precautions against his overwhelming force. During an *ipadé* ritual, all participants covered their heads against Exu's force, usually with a white turban or cap, and they wore the protective blue *agujemi* (necklace) of the warrior *orixá* Ogum. After the ritual, they needed to keep their heads covered or be inside the house at the hours of six o'clock (approximately the time of dusk and dawn) and twelve o'clock (when shifting to the next day, or from morning to afternoon), as these are liminal times when Exu is especially active. And the *cuidado* for Exu – including the '*Agô*' at the entrance, the *dendê* oil to calm him down, and the reverence given to him before all other *orixás* – was also a way of pleasing him and protecting the *terreiro* against his 'heat'. Caring for Exu was a serious issue, and I was told several times that one must not mess with Exu, because one could never know what he would be up to.

Just like visible efforts to protect secrets add to their mysteriousness (Johnson, 2002), protection against Exu pronounces his power. And his hot, fast and potentially dangerous energy makes him an ardent guardian and warrior, especially as a defender of the exploited against their torturers. Exu's role as a protector is expressed in Abdias do Nascimento's poem *Padé de Exu Libertador* (1983:11):

Close my body to the dangers,
transport me in your wings of
your expansive mobility,
include me into your lineage

*Fecha o meu corpo aos perigos,
transporta-me nas asas da
tua mobilidade expansiva,
cresça-me à tua linhagem*

of preventive irony
 into my uncontrollable passion.
 Let me mature in your
 unabused language,
 let us scandalize the puritans,
 unmask the hypocrites,
 sons of a bitch,
 to reach catharsis of
 cultural impurities.
 Let us exorcize domestication
 of gestures and other things
 imposed on our black people.
 [...]

*de ironia preventiva
 à minha indomável paixão.
 Amadureça-me à tua
 desabusada linguagem,
 escandalizemos os puritanos,
 desmascaremos os hipócritas,
 filhos da puta,
 assim à catarse das
 impurezas culturais.
 Exorcizaremos a domesticação
 do gesto e outras
 impostas a nosso povo negro.
 [...]*

This poem was written during the military dictatorship (1964-85), and the strong language reflects the urge for liberation from the violent injustice of death squads, political oppression, executions and torture performed by police and the army. Despite the democratic reforms over the last 30 years, Afro-Brazilians remain disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of health, education, and living standards (Matory, 2005:156, Theodoro, 2008), and the black population is still especially vulnerable to violence and homicide (Waiselfisz, 2012). Exu (and his female form Pomba Gira) therefore not only re-establish dignity by turning class, gender and racial hierarchies upside down. Their burning force also plays an important role in defending black people as well as other vulnerable groups, such as gay people, or women threatened by male aggression.

Exu não é o cão – “Exu is not the devil”

After the *ipadé* ritual, I told the *ialorixá* that I wished to stay for my fieldwork. I had considered Fábio’s advice to take my gut feeling seriously, and I felt good in the *terreiro* community. I also found nothing scary about the rituals, and I did not expect to need the ‘courage’ Manuela had mentioned. However, I kept struggling with Exu’s role and the ‘black-and-white’ or ‘good-and-evil’ categories Fábio and Manuela had brought up. Did such dualism exist in the Odé Terreiro? And was Exu involved in *creating* these dichotomies, or in *dissolving* them?

In the *terreiro*, I frequently came across stories about Candomblé outsiders who conceptualized Exu as the epitome of evil. One afternoon, Alessandro and Wilson

came back from the market where they had bought spicy red chillies for an Exu ritual. They chuckled and recounted how a saleswoman had become nervous when they started picking only the red pods from a mixed heap of red and green chillies: “Oh guys, but this is not for a wrong thing (*coisa errada*), is it?” she had asked, and Alessandro performed his reply for us with an innocent face: “Nooo, *Senhora!* We just want to make a really spicy sauce.” With amusement, he told us that she had started preaching immediately about how Jesus was great and ‘babapi babapo’, to which he had replied “Yes, yes, *senhora*, amen”, bought the red chillies and left.

The portrayal of Exu as the Christian devil has been widely described (Bastide, 2007, Capone, 2010, Hayes, 2008, Prandi, 2001b, Wafer, 1991) and dates back to the demonization of the Yoruba deity *Eṣu* by colonizers in West Africa (Póvoas, 2011, Prandi, 2001b). In Afro-Brazilian Umbanda, Exu is often presented as a devilish entity, even by practitioners themselves. As I expressed my interest in Exu, one of the newer *terreiro* members gave me an Umbanda book called *No Reino dos Exus*, “In the Kingdom of the Exus” (Bittencourt, 2011). After four pages of bible quotations, the author states that the legion of Exus was reigned by *Lúcifer* and *Béelzebuth* (Bittencourt, 2011:19), the first of whom is described as appearing with horns and a cape, and the latter as a monstrous goat. But in the Odé Terreiro, such depictions of devilish Exus were rejected as a sign of ongoing misrepresentation and oppression of black culture. Similarly, Prandi explains that these Umbanda Exus had “nothing to do with the lively, cheeky, and playful messenger of the Yoruba gods” (2001b:54, my translation), to which the more traditional Candomblé *terreiros* refer (Capone, 2010:43).

The demonization of Candomblé, and specifically of Exu, has been exacerbated in recent decades with the growing influence of Evangelical churches in Brazil. In a study about healing practices in neo-Pentecostal communities in Brazil, Elder Cerqueira-Santos, Silvia Koller and Maria Lisboa (2004) state that these churches are set on an outright “War against the Devil”, who must be defeated by way of exorcism. And Patricia Birman states that the “Pentecostal war against diabolical evil” is especially vivid in peripheral communities and *favelas* (2011:209). In this *guerra santa* (holy war), neo-Pentecostals employ military terms like ‘soldiers’,

‘battles’, and ‘munition’. During masses, ‘demon’ Exus are identified by their names (e.g. Tranca Rua, Exu Caveira, or Pomba Gira), invoked in trance possession, and forced to ‘confess their guilt’ before they are humiliated and expelled by the pastor (Cerqueira-Santos et al., 2004:87).

Póvoas associates this “distorted image of Exu” (2011:242) with a profound prejudice against Afro-Brazilian religion. Such prejudice has even resulted in physical aggression against Candomblé followers and the destruction of *terreiros*, especially by members of neo-Pentecostal churches (Silva, 2007). Póvoas dismisses demon-like Exu statues as “absurd configurations” that are marketed to make money from ignorance (Póvoas, 2011:244). As the *ialorixá* Mãe Darabí explained: “Exu does not have horns, for us he has a crown, because he is king.” She also disliked the representation of Exu as a ‘slave’ of the other *orixás*, a representation found in Umbanda (Bittencourt, 2011) as well as in some Candomblé *terreiros* (Capone, 2010:44, Sansi, 2007:32-33, Wafer, 1991).

Given these circumstances, I was surprised to find one of the despised devilish Exu statuettes in the common room of the *terreiro*. And why was it facing the wall? “We don’t like these representations here”, a community member explained, “that’s why he is turned away.” When cleaning up under the table there one afternoon, I also found a dirty plastic bag with a goat skull inside, part of a monstrous clay sculpture with pointed teeth. “Oh, throw it away for God’s sake!” the *ialorixá* exclaimed.



Figure 8: Horned Exu statue facing the wall in the *terreiro*, 2013

And she added: “I keep receiving these terrible presents of Exu as a demon. Why doesn’t anybody give me a sculpture of a beautiful black man?”

In honour of Exu, whose anarchic beauty had been so widely denied, I bought five chilli plants, so that we did not have to rely on uncomprehending market sellers any

longer. But when I arrived at the *terreiro*, the *ialorixá* sent me out of the hall: “Don’t carry those chillies through the *barracão*, for God’s sake!” she exclaimed and added she did not want to have Exu’s energy in there. I was surprised. What was wrong with Exu’s energy now? She told me to plant the chillies behind Exu’s *peji* (hut) where one could not see them. “Children of Oxalá have a *quizila*¹³ with chillies”, she explained, “They should not be near them.” To draw out why Exu must stay outside the *barracão* although he is not evil, I will now turn to the antagonistic relationship of Exu and Oxalá before I tell the story of Exu’s two-coloured hat.

Black and white: Exu and Oxalá

Squatting in the shade behind the hut I dug holes for the chilli plants, I felt a bit disappointed. Why was Exu, and with him my chillies, excluded from the *barracão*? Indeed, his *ipadé* rituals always took place outside. And Exu’s colour, black, should never be worn, not even at home or the workplace – while on Fridays all members of the *terreiro* dressed in white to honour the *orixá* Oxalá. In his classic book *The African Religions of Brazil*, Bastide explains that when Catholics identified Exu with the devil, Oxalá was in turn associated with Jesus Christ (Bastide, 2007:251, Prandi, 2001b:51). In contrast to the chaotic trickster Exu, Oxalá has been described as the “god of purity and peace” (Matory, 2005:140). But if Exu was not considered evil in my community, what was this black-and-white contrast between Oxalá and Exu all about?

Exu appears as Oxalá’s opposite in many aspects. Oxalá is characterized as cool, controlled and spotless, while Exu is so hot that gun powder is set on fire during his rituals to ignite his explosive force. Oxalá is quiet, and in his honour it is forbidden to drink alcohol and have sex on Fridays. In contrast, Exu is loud, loves drinking, and is always horny. Moreover, in the ritual dance *xiré*, Exu comes first and Oxalá last. And while Oxalá is closest to the divine *orun*, Exu is closest to humans. I learned more about Oxalá’s and Exu’s antagonistic relationship when I took part in a three-day long festival in the Odé Terreiro in December, called the ‘Waters of Oxalá’ (*Águas de Oxalá*). On the first night of the event, the *ialorixá* called us into the hall

¹³ *Quizilas* are intolerances that humans share with their specific *orixás* (see Chapter Two).

where we sat down on straw mats to listen to the story (*itan*) of Oxalá's journey. We lightened some candles, as it was getting dark.

Oxalá had planned to visit his son Xangô's kingdom, the *ialorixá* told us. But the *Ifá* oracle warned him that he should not go, as he would encounter trouble. Being strong-willed, *Oxalá* ignored the warning and started his journey anyway. Soon he met *Exu* on the way. The *ialorixá* continued:

Exu threw salt all over him, and Oxalá had to stop and wash all his clothes. The next day Exu threw charcoal on him. Oxalá had to stop again and slowly wash all his clothes and hang them to dry. And on the third day, Exu threw *dendé* palm oil on him, and Oxalá had to wash his clothes again, as he would never walk with dirty clothes.

When Oxalá finally reached his son's kingdom, so the *itan* goes, he saw Xangô's horse alone on the road, and he mounted it to bring it back to his son. But Xangô's guards mistook him for a horse thief, and locked him up in jail. As a result, the kingdom suffered from drought, crops dried up, and women stayed childless. Only when the *Ifá* oracle was consulted, Xangô found out about his father's imprisonment, and liberate the old man. Asking for forgiveness, Xangô served a huge banquet and ordered that the whole kingdom should be thoroughly washed – giving the festival its name, the Waters of Oxalá (as *Águas de Oxalá*).¹⁴

At first glance, Oxalá appears to be the patient victim of Exu's mischief and Xangô's order. However, I wondered if Exu had not in fact tried to prevent the worst by challenging Oxalá's unwise decision to travel. In this light, Oxalá started to seem quite stubborn: first he ignores the oracle's warning, then he chooses to wash his clothes over and over again, instead of turning around or walking on in a stained dress. And finally he does not even speak out against his unjust imprisonment, but instead he makes his son feel guilty forever. When I asked the *ialorixá* about Oxalá's and Exu's roles in the *itan*, she stated that Oxalá indeed was not perfect, as he refused to obey the *Ifá* oracle. "Exu", on the other hand, "is like a child. He just plays around, but he is not evil." I wondered if Exu, who challenges all norms and hierarchies, might have tried to prevent Oxalá from running into trouble, or to teach

¹⁴ For other versions of the *itan*, see Miranda Rocha (2000:76 ff.) and Verger & Carybé (2011:75 ff.)

him to speak out against injustice; but she did not think that Exu had any intentions of doing good or doing harm. He just liked to wind people up.

The two-coloured hat

Exu's trickery and mischief cause confusion. But if his provocations led to violence, I was told on several occasions, the responsibility lay in humans, not in Exu. This is well-illustrated in the *itan* of the red and black hat. The *babalorixá* of the Ijexá Terreiro wrote it down as follows:

As the elders tell us, in the village of Ajalá there were two brothers who were very close. They never argued, and they never got annoyed with one another. Their friendship was so strong that it was known about in all the other villages and everybody talked about them with admiration.

One day, Exu came along and heard some comments about them. So he wanted to test how strong their friendship really was. He found out that the two brothers worked on a field that was divided into two parts by a street. And they worked singing, cutting the woods with their sharp machetes, conversing about this and that. Exu put on a red and black hat, so that from each side one could only see one single colour.

Then Exu walked along the street, passed between the two brothers and greeted them, saying: Good morning, united brothers!

And the brothers responded to Exu in one voice. But Exu walked between them, always looking forward and kept walking until he disappeared around a curve. Then, one of the brothers asked the other: Who was that man with the red hat?

And the other responded: You liar! That man had a black hat!

The brother who saw the man with the red hat felt offended and, angry for the first time, returned the offense. And the one who had seen the man with a black hat became annoyed as well. They started arguing, in a misunderstanding without comparison. Their anger grew so much that they ended up attacking each other with words. Their offences became worse and they started walking towards each other, armed with their machetes. They fought so much that they killed each other. And as they had no heirs, their field was left to wild animals and weeds.

That is the reason why today, in the villages, the elders say:
Remember the two-coloured hat. Not everything is what it seems
to be....¹⁵

In the *itan*, the hat is both red and black at the same time, but both brothers make the mistake of taking their own perspective as the only truth. The reason why they killed each other was not that Exu forced them into a fight, but that they were incapable of accepting that what was true for one, the red or the black side of the hat, was not true for the other. “Not everything is what it seems to be”, the elders conclude: the other side of a black hat can be red, and the other side of brotherly love can show narrowmindedness and aggression.

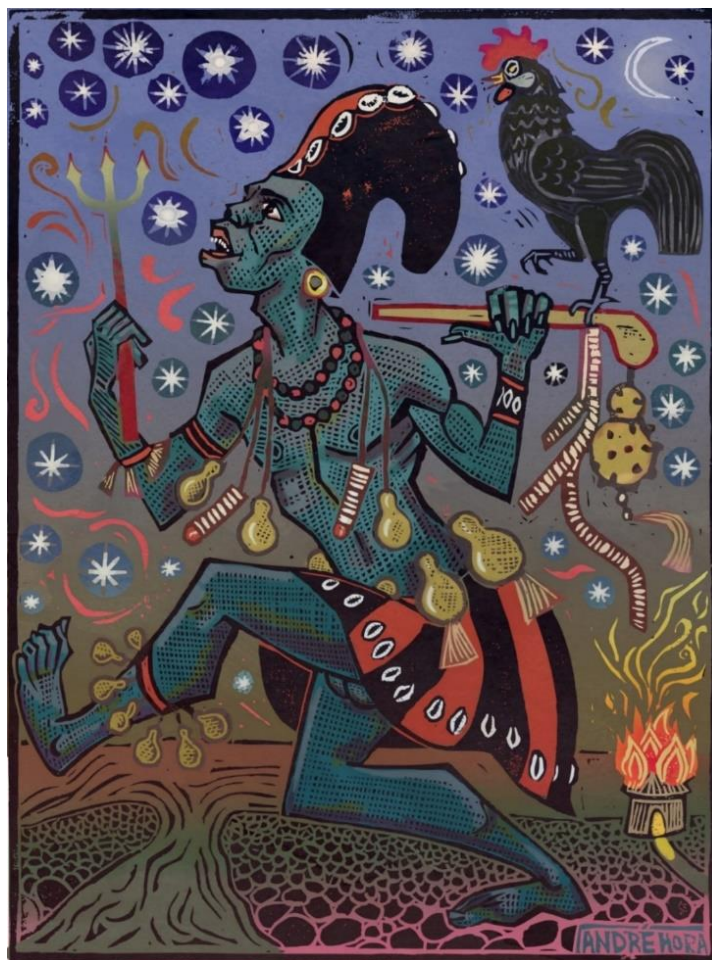


Figure 9: Exu. Artwork by André Hora, Manchester

¹⁵ Ruy Póvoas: *O Chapéu de Duas Cores*. Published online:
<http://www.ijexa.com.br/index2.php?page=itan8> [website accessed 29/05/2016; my translation]

Exu is the other side of the story

I was still unsure about the dualistic opposition of Exu and Oxalá. Did the same story apply to them, perhaps? Were they two sides of the same hat? I asked Pai Leonardo, a religious brother of the *ialorixá* from the *Ijexá terreiro* about his thoughts, and he explained that Exu was the *orixá* of movement and change, without whom nothing new is created. “Exu is life. With only Oxalá, the world would stand still”, he said, and added: “We all carry Exu in us, he is localized here [pointing to the back of his neck] and in the genitals.” He also explained that Oxalá was a father figure, while Exu was the first-born son, although – typical to Exu’s counter-logic – Capone says that he was also the youngest child (Capone, 2010:38). *Exu Bara* is the force of life, I learned, and *Exu Iangui* renews and establishes the equilibrium of the cosmos (Póvoas, 2011:244, Capone, 2010).

I reencountered *Exu Bara* in a theatre play that I attended in Salvador. It was called *Exu – Boca do universo* (‘Exu – Mouth of the Universe’) by the NATA theatre company¹⁶. Several Exus were dancing and singing in colourful clothes and make-up, and the theatre crew was wearing T-Shirts with the slogan: “A body without Exu is a body in coma!” As Exu presides over the sexual act (Póvoas, 2011:244), in the center of the stage they had erected a huge penis made of wires. Pai Leonardo had explained to me earlier that an important element of Exu Bara was blood: it not only is essential for life as such, but it is also relevant for sexuality and procreation, as it brings about erection, and menstrual blood symbolizes fertility.

¹⁶ *Núcleo Afrobrasileiro de Teatro de Alagoinhas* (AfroBrazilian workgroup of the Theatre Alagoinhas), directed by Fernanda Julia (2014): <http://tcanucleo2013.blogspot.co.uk/p/nata.html> [accessed 12th January 2015]



Figure 10: Exus in the theatre play 'Boca do Universo', NATA 2014. Online source: http://festivaldoteatrobrasileiro.com.br/sp_exu.html

The same theatre play also referred to Exu's power of contradiction in the song *Sim, Sim, Não, Não!* ('Yes, Yes, No, No!')

Whatever may be the size of the problem
 Whatever may be the x in the equation
 Whatever, whatever may be the struggle, the
 dilemma,
 Whatever may be the core of the question.
 Yes, yes, no, no (4x)
 [...]
 Father of all ways,
 Guardian of each of them.
 Oh Master of the universe
 Since the great explosion
 Sovereign of destiny, God of chaos, of
 confusion!
 Yes, yes, no, no! (4x)

*Qualquer que seja o tamanho do problema,
 Qualquer que seja o X dessa equação.
 Qualquer, qualquer que seja a peleja, o
 dilema,
 Qualquer que seja o centro da questão.
 Sim, sim, não, não (4x)
 [...]
 Pai de todos os caminhos,
 Deles todos guardião.
 Oh senhor do universo,
 Desde a grande explosão.
 Soberano dos destinos, Deus do caos, da
 confusão. Sim, sim, não, não! (4x)*

This song describes Exu's dialectical force of ambiguity and contrast, of affirmation and simultaneous negation. It presents Exu in his roles as Guardian of the ways, Master of the universe, and the God of chaos. Likewise, the *babalorixá* Póvoas (2011:244) explains that Exu *Ianguí* acts as the organizing principle of the world. It might seem counterintuitive that a force of confusion and transgression should be responsible for cosmic order. However, in a Candomblé worldview, Exu's central role expresses the importance of dynamic change for building a stable reality.

When using the term dialectical, I do not mean a simple confrontation of opposites. Instead, I want to express that contradiction, confusion and conflict instigate change

and development, which brings Exu very close to Hegelian dialectics. This proximity is remarkable, as Exu's love for magic and confusion at first sight seems incommensurable with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's rationalist philosophy. But, in typical trickster fashion, Exu reveals similarity in difference. The force of contradiction and vitality in Candomblé that he embodies is actually not dissimilar to the dialectical principle that Hegel establishes as the driving force of the world. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel explains that when the contradictions are driven to an extreme in the dialectical model, the involved concepts come alive to each other: "they hold the negativity in them which is the inner pulse of self-movement and life" (2010:284).

Hegel's dialectic does not construct fixed antagonisms; instead it takes on the *problem of opposites* (Norman, 1980:26) by demonstrating the interconnectedness of the opposing sides. Dialectics describe processes of change, in which a concept or a *thesis* brings about its opposite, or *anti-thesis*, and in their struggle they arrive at a *syn-thesis*, a unity that dissolves the conflict but continues to carry (*aufheben*) within it the previous opposition. Any synthesis in itself becomes the start of a new contradiction, and hence keeps the world in motion. I do not want to go so far as to say that Exu represents Hegelian dialectic, and certainly Exu and Oxalá do not seem to merge to form a 'synthesis', but instead keep recreating their contrasts and contradictions over and over again. But the parallelism prevails, and Hegel's encyclopedia entry on logic fits Exu like a second skin: "Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there is dialectic at work" (Hegel, 2009:148).

Lewis Hyde makes a similar point when he argues that a trickster figure is not only a boundary crosser, but that tricksters can also bring "to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight" (Hyde, 2008:7). In fact, it seems that by transgressing moral, social and logical boundaries, Exu is again doing two things at the same time: he questions the validity of categories and highlights ways of imagining the impossible; but by doing so, he also effectively establishes something new, with its own necessary limitations. His liberating act of breaking down boundaries therefore does not leave us in the ruins of a deconstructed world, but instead enables us to

realize new possibilities of reality construction. Similarly, in her book *Crossing Boundaries* (1996), Julie Thompson Klein argues that ‘noise’ as a seemingly unstructured disturbance is in fact a source of new patterns and possibilities. Klein (1996:84) quotes William Paulson (1988): “What appears to be a perturbation in a given system turns out to be the intersection of a new system with the first”. In short: Exu’s noise and chaos trigger transformation and renewal.

Black-and-white oppositions in Candomblé also bring up the question of black and white skin and racial politics. As outlined in the introduction, the Re-Africanization movement in Candomblé has gained considerable influence since the 1980s, and several well-known Candomblé *terreiros* have expelled ‘syncretic’ features of their religion in an attempt to ‘purify’ African traditions. This movement has been criticized for denying the historical development of Candomblé in the context of slavery (Van de Port, 2011, Wafer, 1991), but it also receives support from the black movement for its affirmative identity politics (Sansone, 2003). So where is Exu in this discourse? Would he be an advocate for mixture, messing up the boundaries between ‘pure’ African and European cultures? Or is he to be found in the re-Africanists’ rejection of syncretism, in resistance against the ‘myth of racial democracy’ and miscegenation ideology? From what I have argued above – that Exu is the dialectical principle of contradiction and change – the answer must be: both.

In the context of the ideology of ‘racial democracy’ despite ongoing racist discrimination, Exu’s role would be to make lines of demarcation and racial inequalities visible in Brazilian society. But in the attempt to create ‘purified’ African religions, his principle could as well bring back paradoxes and mixture into the discussion. In fact, several authors have pointed out that the ‘traditions’ that are celebrated as purely African in orthodox Nagô *terreiros* have been greatly influenced by European anthropologists who provided ethnographic descriptions and classification systems (Capone, 2010, Matory, 2005, Wafer, 1991). Here we find a typical Exu paradox: when re-Africanists try to strip off the ‘white’ influence on Candomblé, they at least partially reproduce it.

Jim Wafer (1991) criticizes traditionalists who, in their quest for purity, have abandoned the ‘carnavalesque’ character of Candomblé, despite its important role in

the subversion of white domination since colonial times. The Bakhtinian concept of the ‘carnavalesque’ describes the undermining of hegemonic discourses by way of introducing a multitude of confusing, humorous and uncontrollable voices (Bakhtin, 1984), echoing Exu’s ability to create chaos and disorder. In the end, Exu can subvert any discourse by bringing out its opposite. But even more importantly, he creates the possibility that opposites are not exclusive, but can exist side by side.

Envisioning Exu as ‘the other side’ of order, and as a dynamic principle of contradiction and movement, serves to underscore the importance of opposition and dialogue for the existence of the world in Candomblé cosmology. It also clarifies why Exu, despite being the master of the universe, has to be kept outside of spaces like the *barracão* (ceremony hall), and with him the red hot chilli plants I had bought. Exu holds an outsider position in relation to the Candomblé pantheon, with Floyd Merrell (2005:134): “He is the Other Other in addition to the One and the Other” (the Other being the *orixá*). His place is the in-between, the shift, the place that is neither one nor the other, but both at the same time.

“Exu makes you leave your comfort zone”

Almost a year after my first stay in the Odé Terreiro, as I prepared to leave Brazil, we gathered in the *barracão* to discuss my research. The *ialorixá* was sitting in her carved wooden chair, and the other members of the *terreiro* group sat down on straw mats in a half circle. We were 16 people, and they had arranged a bouquet of flowers from the forest on the plastic table where I put my audio-recorder for taping the discussion. I presented my preliminary thesis outline and invited them to give feedback to each chapter. Exu received by far the most attention, maybe because of his ambiguous nature, or because it was the first chapter. This meeting summarised topics that were of special importance to the members of the Odé Terreiro. Several people stressed the importance of clarifying that Exu is not evil (*ruim*), but that his energy could turn against people if they did not know how to care for him.

Margarida, an elderly *terreiro* member, explained:

He is evil when evil persons want to put the evilness (*ruindade*) into him as to do bad things (*fazer maldade*) to someone. But he is a good thing (*coisa boa*). When you know how to deal with him, to treat him well, always for the good side. [...] Doesn't he like to smoke? Then give him a cigar! He will treat you well, he won't bother you. On the contrary, he will always protect us.

This statement concurs with the notion that the 'dark side' of Candomblé derived from human motives, and not from the *orixás*. Vinicius, a young member of the group, summarized this point: "If you do good, you will get the good for yourself. If you are seeking evil, the consequences will come to you, too." In this sense, Exu acts as an amplifying mirror for human intentions.

Camila, a young medical doctor and *terreiro* member, told us that she saw Exu's power of change as necessary for getting better in life. When she joined the group, she recounted, she was going through difficult times. "I tried to get better, but I had to leave my comfort zone, leave my family, leave my son. It was a difficult moment, but it opened new ways." She concluded that she had needed this difficult process for personal growth (*crescimento*). Similarly, Rafaela told us that she asked Exu for 'inspiration' when she starts something new, or when she travels: "I feel this force. I feel confidence when I ask him for help, to bring me on the way. [...] Because this force gives a person the power to transform, to use all the good they have."

In my talk I had suggested that Exu helped to find new ways, but that he could also trip us up (*botar pé na frente*, lit.: "put a foot in the way"). But Paula was concerned with the image of a 'foot in the way'. She asked if I linked Exu with illness, then, as something that makes you sick, rather than linking him with cures. Matheus jumped in to answer:

Yes. Can I intervene? [This] question of disturbance (*atrapalhar*) in the search for a cure, I see it like this: people tend to accommodate with their suffering, they tend to accommodate with their pain. And when Exu enters to move things, to say: 'No. It is possible to change. It is possible for this to be different', then sometimes this is uncomfortable (*incomodar*). It disturbs the little world that you created around you, to protect you from greater suffering. Because every process of cure also creates suffering,

because it is change, you have to overthrow – [it is] a process of deconstruction. [...] His foot [in the way] is: you wake up for life, you can overcome [your suffering]. You can get better.

Later, he added: “I see Exu as this spark, as this inspiration (*essa fagulha, essa centelha*) of wanting to do more, wanting to seek more.” Healing requires change and transformation to overcome suffering, which stresses Exu’s indispensable role in it. *Cuidado* turns Exu’s hot energy into a healing force.

Conclusion

The corn used for making popcorn is not what it is supposed to be, it only becomes what it really is through the activating force of the fire. Many people think that their way to be is the best way to be, but they do not have an idea of what they could become. Just like in the popcorn pot: you always find some burnt, hard corn grains called *piruá*. The *piruá* cannot imagine what it is capable of. And you, what are you? Popcorn or *piruá*?

(*Itan* ‘The Great Transformation’, presented at a conference about health of the black population in Salvador, 2013; see Chapter Five)

This chapter entered into the ‘world of Candomblé’ through Exu, the ‘lord of limen’ (Turner, 1988), and asked about the trickster’s role in healing. Although Exu is not a classical healer *orixá* like Ossaim and Omulu (who will be introduced in the next chapter), his creative chaos is a necessary trigger for self-transformation, and therefore for healing in Candomblé.

My encounter with Exu in the marketplace, where he guarded an entrance and received alcohol and cigarettes to open or close ways in life, highlights his role as gatekeeper. Although Exu is often identified with a harmful ‘black’ side of Candomblé, throughout the chapter I have argued that he does not correspond to dualisms of good and evil. Manuela’s mother Dona Sabina, for example, transformed from a troubled, poor, single woman into a loud and vain ‘queen’ when she incorporated the female Exu Pomba Gira in trance. Here, Exu enabled an empowering role reversal to happen and opened up a different reality. As protectors of the marginalized, Exu and Pomba Gira turn social hierarchies upside down and restore dignity in the oppressed and humiliated.

Exu not only crosses and subverts boundaries – he also emphasizes and even constitutes them, as discussed with the performative ‘*Agô!*’ greeting. When Exu’s presence is acknowledged at the entrance to the *terreiro*, this recognition formalizes the crossing of the threshold and effectively establishes the *terreiro* as different from the outside world – as a sacred space where other rules apply and unbelievable things can happen. Inside the *terreiro* (but still outside the *barracão*), *ipadé* rituals evoke Exu’s ‘hot energy’ by providing food, drink, chillies, alcohol, and the blood of sacrificed animals. These acts of *cuidado* for Exu build a channel at the beginning of any *fiesta* to reach out into the *orun*. But dealing with Exu also comes with dangers, as expressed in the term *cuidado* – which means ‘care’ as well as ‘take care!’ and the rituals were highly controlled to protect the participants from his volatile force. *Cuidado* for Exu is therefore an ambiguous mode of both nurturing and containing his hot and potentially disruptive energy, which plays an important role for triggering healing and self-transformation in Candomblé. Exu pushes people out of their “comfort zone” which urges them to seek change and get better.

In this chapter, I have presented Exu as the gatekeeper of Candomblé’s permeable boundaries and I have used terms like bridge, door, and channel to describe these boundaries as thresholds that separate and connect at the same time. Mircea Eliade brings up this paradox in *The Sacred and the Profane*: “The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds— and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.” (Eliade, 1959:25) Embodying the paradox of separating connection, Exu needs to be involved in any attempt to make contact with the world of the *orixás*. The next chapter will now pay attention to the process of healing self-transformation through building kin relationships with the *orixás* by way of oracle divination and acts of *cuidado*. Exu’s counter-logic and the notion of boundaries as simultaneously connecting and separating will help understand the kinship relations between humans and *orixás*.

Chapter 2. Children of gods: kinship with the *orixás*

When I first arrived at the Odé Terreiro, the *ialorixá* introduced the present group members to me. I noted that she immediately mentioned each one's *orixá*, too. There were Rafaela, daughter of Omulu, Hugo, son of Xangô, Matheus, son of Oxossi, and others. Only I was simply and profanely Hannah, the researcher. Before long, I automatically associated everyone with their *orixá*, and I recognized the coloured bead necklaces (*agujemi*) that indicated their *orixá*. The *terreiro* members usually addressed them as parents: “my father Xangô,” for example, or “my mother Oxum”. In fact, I noted that Mãe Darabí often called the house members not by their names, but simply as “that daughter of Oxossi” or “that son of Oxum,” which at first struck me as careless. When one day I was in the car with Lucas, son of Iansã, he commented on this habit: “Yes, she sometimes forgets our names. But she never forgets our *orixás*”. I wondered why he looked so satisfied when he said this.

I also noticed that the house members commonly framed their *terreiro* visits and their participation in rituals as ‘taking care of one’s father or mother’ (*cuidar do seu pai/da sua mãe*), referring to their parental *orixá*. But they interchangeably also used the expression ‘to care for oneself’ (*se cuidar*), and hence part of the healing they sought in Candomblé. It seemed that caring for their *orixás* was, effectively, also self-care. But how can caring for someone else, here a mother or father *orixá*, be a therapeutic practice? What do Candomblé followers gain from their divine kin relations?

In the first chapter, I argued that rupture and confusion, personified in the trickster Exu, were necessary to initiate the self-transformative healing processes in Candomblé. The second chapter will now look at this transformation process. Literature on healing in Candomblé has mainly focussed on medicinal plants, ritual sacrifice and ‘spirit possession’ (Seligman, 2010, 2014, Verger, 1967, Voeks, 1997), but my ethnography shows that a crucial aspect of healing in the Odé Terreiro was the open-ended, reflective self-construction as children of *orixás*, mediated by practices of *cuidado* for the *orixás* and experiences of receiving their *axé*. I will show

that the process of building kinship with the *orixás* blurs the boundaries between human self and divine other, albeit without fully removing them.

Mayblin (2014b) describes a similar paradox of intimacy and distance between humans and Catholic saints in rural Brazil. On the one hand, people identified with the saints and even addressed them as godparents (*padrinhos*), whose gendered physical body made them ‘people like us’ who eat, bleed, and suffer. But on the other hand, “saints of the house do not work miracles” (Mayblin, 2014b:274), meaning that in order to be effective, the saints must not become too familiar. Therefore, Mayblin explains, the relationship with the saints needs to be carefully balanced, they must be “neither too close nor too distant from us” (2014b:279), but somewhere in between. In the relationships with the *orixás*, I see a different logic at work, one that requires Exu’s ability to hold contradictions. Instead of being kept at intermediate distance, the *orixás* are at once the most intimate essence of the humans, and also radically different. Like Exu’s red and black hat, they are both. As I will show in this chapter, kinship relations with the *orixás*, not as godparents but as ‘my father’ and ‘my mother’, make the duality of being same-and-other possible.

The *ialorixá* determined people’s parent *orixás* in the cowry shell oracle, as I will discuss in detail below. The primary *orixá* – usually mentioned together with the person’s name – is located in the head, and is therefore called the ‘*orixá* of the head’ (*orixá da cabeça*). Most members of the *Odé Terreiro* could also name their secondary *orixá*, the ‘*orixá* of the lap’ (*orixá do colo*). They cared for their *orixás* in *terreiro* ceremonies, as well as in small everyday acts – for example, when a child of Oxum, the *orixá* of beauty, put yellow flowers in the window on a Saturday (Oxum’s day); or when a child of Xangô, *orixá* of thunder and justice, ate food with the red *dendê* oil that Xangô loves. Some initiated *terreiro* members, among them the *ialorixá*, also knew about their third *orixá*, the so-called *adjunto* (adjunct); but this one was less commonly referenced as a parent. Apart from the kin relations with the *orixás*, the members of the *Odé Terreiro* were brothers and sisters to each other, and all were children of the *ialorixá*. These kinship relations in the group were taken very seriously, however, in this chapter I will focus on the relations between humans and

orixás as to draw out processes of self-construction across the boundaries between the human world and the divine.

In the appendix, I provide a kinship chart of active members of the Odé Terreiro with a colour-coded scheme for the *orixás*. Clearly, certain *orixás* are more common than others. Among the 30 Odé Terreiro members who participated in my study, the most common *orixás* of the head were the king Xangô (seven), the hunter Oxossi (five), and the wind deity Iansã (four). Children of the warrior Ogum and the beautiful Oxum were slightly less common (three each), and only few persons were children of the feared Omulu, the old sage Oxalá, the healer Ossaim (two each), the rainbow-snake Oxumaré, and the effeminate Logun Edé (one each).¹⁷ None of the *terreiro* members had the well-known *orixá* of the sea, Yemanjá, the old Nanã, or the jealous Obá as their *orixá da cabeça*, although some named them as their *orixá* of the lap. Other *orixás* and spiritual entities like Exu, Caboclo, Iya Mí, Baba Egungun, Tempo, Iroko, and Olokun were revered in the *terreiro* community, but the former four were too dangerous and the latter were too abstract and unapproachable to function as spiritual parents.

The Brazilian *orixás* originate mainly in regionally worshipped Yoruba *oriṣa* deities of West Africa¹⁸. The Yoruba *oriṣas* were, or still are to this day, situated in geographic places such as cities, temples, or rivers – like the Osun River in central Yorubaland and the Shango cult in the ancient Oyo Empire (Voeks, 1997:55). When the African deities from different places were brought to Brazil with the colonial slave trade, some proliferated and were adapted to the new social reality in South America, while others disappeared (Voeks, 1997:55). Johnson identifies three main consequences of the transformation from regional to individualized African gods in Brazil (2002: 66-67). First, each individual *terreiro* member must care specifically for their own parental *orixá*, instead of the whole community doing so. Second, *orixás* from different regional origins are revered under one *terreiro* roof. And third, there has been a gradual transition from worshipping hundreds of different African

¹⁷ This only refers to *orixás* of the head.

¹⁸ Not all *orixás* are derived from Yoruba culture. For example, Nanã, Oxumaré and Omolu have been integrated from Jeje traditions (Harding 2000:59).

deities (see also Voeks, 1997:54) to a smaller and more standardized pantheon of around 16 *orixás* worshipped in Brazilian Candomblé houses.

Johnson concludes that in Brazil the *orixás* became “personal deities and archetypes” on the one hand, and “fictive kin reconstructed within the broader category of Africanness” on the other (2002:66-67). Both the individualized and the relational aspects of the *orixás* are fundamental for the construction of self in Candomblé. Like Johnson, the Candomblé followers I met frequently referred to the *orixás* as ‘archetypes’ (see also Póvoas, 2010, Póvoas, 2011), indicating a certain reflective distance that I will pick up on later. Despite this, they took their kin relations with the *orixás* very seriously, and had I related to them as ‘fictive kin’ in a conversation, this would surely have been taken as ignorance, if not an insult.

The term ‘fictive kinship’ has been criticized by David Schneider (1984) and Janet Carsten (2004), as it implies an ethnocentric judgment about what counts as ‘real’ kinship, traditionally defined as relating to sexual procreation. In her book *After Kinship*, Carsten describes kinship as an “area of life in which people invest their emotions, their creative energy, and their new imaginings” (Carsten, 2004:9). What makes the kin relationship with the *orixás* so real is that in the Odé Terreiro the *terreiro* members relate to themselves and to others through their parental *orixás*, and in turn they also relate to the *orixás* through themselves and other group members. Marshall Sahlins defines kinship as “‘mutuality of being’: people who are intrinsic to one another’s existence – thus ‘mutual person(s),’ ‘life itself,’ ‘intersubjective belonging,’ ‘transbodily being,’ and the like” (2013:2). Sahlins’s ‘mutuality of being’ precisely describes the kinship relations between *orixás* and their human children that I found in the *terreiro*. As this chapter will demonstrate, *orixás* and humans are intersubjectively connected, they constitute each other and even share bodily features. I will argue that this intimate connection makes it possible to experience *cuidado* for the *orixás* as self-care.

While kinship studies generally focus on relationships between people, this chapter provides a study of how human-*orixá* kinship is established and sustained in a Candomblé community. In the Odé Terreiro, the individual embodies their mother or father *orixás* and carries their *axé*. For example, when a group member enters the

terreiro from outside, they are not addressed directly by their name, but are greeted instead with the Yoruba salutations of their *orixá* – with a shout of “Atotô!” for Omulu, for example, or “Kaô Kabiesile!” for Xangô. The humans are seen to be bringing their *orixás* to the temple, and the group acknowledges and welcomes the divinity within them. Throughout this chapter I am going to show that being a child of an *orixá* in the Odé Terreiro community means recognizing similarities with an ‘other’ (the *orixá*) in one’s personality and also in one’s body, with the aim of ‘really finding oneself’ (*se achar verdadeiramente* or also *se assumir*) as part of healing.

The fact that the *orixás* in the Odé Terreiro were addressed as African kings, heroes and queens subverts dominant class, race and gender relations (see Pomba Gira in Chapter One), and gives room to rebuild self-esteem despite deep-seated racism, homophobia, sexism, and rigid class structures in Brazil. The members of the Odé Terreiro often stressed that long-term healing lay in self-discovery and the building of self-respect; and this chapter will discuss that process in detail.

Listening to people’s life stories in the *terreiro*, it became obvious that the quest for personal development had not just started there. Most *terreiro* members had adhered to other religions, including Catholicism, Pentecostalism and Kardecist Spiritism, or had been involved with psychotherapy, shamanism and New Age spirituality before they came to the Odé Terreiro (see also Chapter Five). They also commonly mixed different spiritual practices. Even just a quick look at the magazines in a street stall in Salvador showed that the demand for spiritual and psychological self-help was high. At one stall in the city centre major headlines included: “Astral Journey” (*Christian Magazine of Spiritism*); “Holistic Health” (*Spiritual Way*); “How to defeat depression” (*Secrets of the Mind*); “Mission of God” (*Christianity Today*); “Where are we going [after death]?” (*Mysteries of the Universe*); “How to deal with stress and anxiety” (*Emotional Diseases*); “Beads and their secrets” (*Wisdom of Umbanda*); and “Activate your positive energies and be happy!” (*Astros*, with a free ‘lucky gem stone’). In Bahia, Candomblé was only one of many ways to search for ‘spiritual well-being’.

But the relationship with the *orixás* is more than inward-looking self-exploration. Johnson’s statement that the *orixás* were not only highly personalized deities, but

also kin who established a bridge to Africa (2002:66-67) highlights that *orixás* are both individual and collective. As I will draw out in this chapter, an *orixá* is the internal essence of the self, but also an external figure who has his or her own stories and favourite foods, and who embody natural elements, such as water or fire, as well as, of course, other people. In short, *orixás* are self and other at the same time. This ‘being same-but-different’ is expressed perfectly in kinship relations. And Candomblé’s peculiar balance between being self and other, or divine and human, allows for experiences of healing and building self-esteem in a brutally exclusive society (see Introduction and Chapter Three).

Mãe Darabí, daughter of Oxossi and Oxum

The *ialorixá* of the Odé Terreiro, Mãe Darabí, was a charismatic woman with a strong voice, contagious laughter and quick wit. Her father *orixá* was Oxossi, the quick-footed hunter, and her mother was Oxum, the deity of beauty and fresh water (*agua doce*, literally ‘sweet water’). Her third, or ‘adjunct’, *orixá* was the ever-changing rainbow snake Oxumaré, but she mainly referred to the other two. The Odé Terreiro belonged to her father Oxossi. “I am only taking care of it,” she declared.

Over 30 years ago, her *babalorixá* in the Ijexá Terreiro determined her *orixás* in the cowry shell oracle, and she has nurtured and developed her relationship with them ever since. As a former theatre actress she still occasionally recites poetry or acts on small stages, but today the oracle consultations are her main source of income, as is true for many *ialorixás* and *babalorixás* (Braga, 1988:89). In the *terreiro*, Mãe Darabí displayed personality characteristics of the hunter Oxossi, such as being focused, determined and strict (remember how she corrected her religious children when they made mistakes in the *ipadé*, Chapter One). “My father Oxossi has claws” she explained. But at the same time, she also has a caring, soft and *carinhoso* (affectionate) side; and when she appeared on stage, she shone like her mother Oxum in yellow dresses, wearing big, golden jewellery.



Figure 11: Oxossi. Artwork by André Hora, Manchester



Figure 12: Mãe Darabí, the ialorixá of the Odé Terreiro

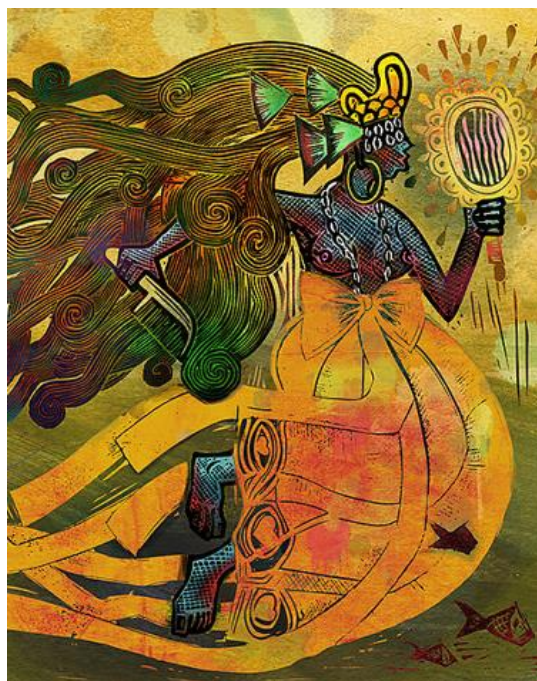


Figure 13: Oxum. Artwork by André Hora, Manchester



Figure 14: Mãe Darabí during a poetry recital in Salvador, 2014

Mãe Darabí's *orixás* Oxossi and Oxum were not only linked with different aspects of her personality; they also responded to the motives of hunger and neglect that ran through her life story. Her family descended from enslaved cocoa plantation workers, and she grew up in very poor conditions in a clay hut. Mãe Darabí told me that her father was a cocoa plantation worker until he lost his eyesight, owing to exposure to aggressive insecticides. Her mother was a washerwoman. On several occasions, Mãe Darabí mentioned that she had often been sent to bed hungry as a child, and that she knew "how hunger hurts". In her school and neighbourhood, she had also suffered from racism and social exclusion. During a public presentation for International Women's Day, in her beautiful yellow dress, she talked about an incident during her childhood:

I sometimes went to church to receive the wafer. And my neighbour knew that I was not baptized, and in front of everyone she asked if I was baptized and I said I wasn't, and she put her finger in my mouth and took the wafer from my mouth. In those times, I cried when these things happened. Today I tell this, so that people know what happens.

Corresponding to her struggle with hunger, Mãe Darabí's father Oxossi, the hunter, is characterized as providing food in abundance, and a big painting in the *barracão* depicted him carrying a hunted bird. Her mother, Oxum, the *orixá* of tender love, comforts her children in her warm embrace when they feel hurt, excluded, and lonely. She is the 'archetype of the Great Mother', as the *babalorixá* Póvoas describes her (Póvoas, 2010). Oxossi and Oxum gave her force and showed her her *odu*, her way in life, Mãe Darabí made clear, and thus helped her become the strong and respected woman she is today. However, this process of self-transformation had not always been easy.

The *odu*: finding one's way in life

One afternoon, Mãe Darabí told me how she became *ialorixá* – a process that involved stress, inner conflict, and physical symptoms, including debilitating vertigo and fainting. We sat on plastic chairs in the open *barracão* of the Odé Terreiro after the *ialorixá* had finished her consultations for the day, and she recalled the time when she had joined the Candomblé community of the *Ijexá Terreiro* in her early

twenties. It was during her initiation ritual as *iaô* (spirit medium) that her *babalorixá* revealed to her that Oxossi wanted her to become *ialorixá* and to open her own *terreiro*. However, for decades she avoided following this call, as she feared the responsibility and commitment that leading a spiritual community requires.

And the years passed by, I was not able to continue doing theatre, or anything else. And a lot of bad things started happening in my life, because I did not manage to stabilize myself emotionally, professionally. I even suffered hunger because the doors did not open for me.

Well, twenty years went by. And after these twenty years, with all my *obrigações* (obligations, here: specific rituals) completed that we go through during the initiation; first after one year, then after three years, after seven years, 14, and 21. And when I had completed all my *obrigações*, people appeared and asked me to take care of them, but I sent them to other *terreiros*. People from various places sought me and I, no, I gave them to others, I sent them to houses of my brothers of *axé*, to my own *terreiro* where I was daughter. But this was not what my *orixá* wanted.

And then there came a time when things got so bad that I could not keep my body in balance any more. I fainted constantly, I went to the doctor, but this wasn't for a doctor to treat, and I knew the cause.

The cause, she explained, was her refusal to follow her *odu*, her predetermined way in life, which included becoming *ialorixá*. Finally, after a long process that she described as mediated by various *orixás*, she found a piece of forest with a lagoon and a small house. When her father Oxossi communicated that he accepted the place as the site for his *terreiro*, she decided to sell her city flat to buy the piece of forest with the support of her religious community. I asked her if her health improved.

Ah, a lot! After I had accepted the [religious] children that the *orixá* entrusted to me, everything got better. You see that he put me in a place where I will not be hungry. I have fruits, I have chickens, I have fish, and there is no way that I could suffer hunger. I have children, wonderful persons who come to me. [...] This gives security, I feel supported (or sheltered: *amparada*). [...]

When we accept our history, when we accept our way, everything becomes lighter, everything becomes easier. [...] This is a kind of cure, this is a cure (*cura*). When we accept, we heal. It was a healing, because I lived fainting. I was hungry. And when we

suffer hunger, we fall ill spiritually, physically, emotionally. And I don't have this problem anymore. To the contrary, I need to lose weight.

Mãe Darabí's relationship with Oxossi demonstrates the complex process of constructing one's identity as a child of the *orixás*. Importantly, it includes reflexive identification in the sense of recognizing oneself in the *orixás*. Shared character traits, such as being focused and strict like Oxossi, imply a certain sameness between *orixás* and their children. At the same time, Mãe Darabí addressed Oxossi as a powerful force of nature who provides for her, hence denoting his superior alterity. Mãe Darabí's story already hints at something I am going to take up further in Chapter Three: the circulation of *cuidado* in the *terreiro*. As she was caring for the children Oxossi sent her, she also received his care and gained equilibrium in life. But it was not all about caring for Oxossi: she also had to make far-reaching life decisions to follow her *odu*.

The notion of the *odu* as the ideal life course, which does not simply happen but which must be actively found and accepted, sounds empowering. But Mãe Darabí's suffering from vertigo and lack of life opportunities can also be read as divine punishment, or as Oxossi forcing his will onto her. Throughout my fieldwork I struggled with the question of whether the *orixás* imposed their will onto their children and punished them, or not. However, when I asked Mãe Darabí if the *orixás* punished, she vehemently shook her head. It was not that Oxossi forced her to do anything she did not want, she clarified, but rather that he tried to help her fulfil her destiny and live well.

Something similar had happened to Vitor. He was a young gay man from an indigenous village who had met the *ialorixá* when she gave theatre classes at an agricultural school. She had not yet accepted her call to be *ialorixá* at the time, but he kept asking her questions about how he could become a *filho de santo* (lit. 'child of the saint'; Candomblé follower). When she finally opened the Odé Terreiro, he started attending ceremonies there. Vitor frequently received the *orixá* Logun Edé in his body, and about a year before my arrival at the *terreiro*, Logun Edé had already announced his wish for Vitor to be initiated as *iaô*.

But Vitor did not become initiated. He was scared of the commitment, and he escaped to São Paulo. “It’s a lot of responsibility, you have to have a lot of *cuidado* with other people, dealing with others. And I was afraid,” he explained. But in São Paulo everything just got worse, he told me. He found a job but soon lost it, he was lonely and depressed, and in an accident he cut off two of his fingers with a saw. In the end, it was Mãe Darabí’s father Oxossi who saved him, he told me. One day he met her in São Paulo, and when they both incorporated their *orixás*, Oxossi allowed Vitor to return to the *terreiro*. “And do you think you had any choice in this?” I asked him. He replied: “I did. I had the choice between being happy and unhappy. Because I was really very unhappy (*infeliz*)”. And he stressed that in the *terreiro* he had brothers and sisters with whom he could laugh and chat, and that they helped each other out. Here it is important to note that in the Odé Terreiro initiation was not generally seen as a gift (Sansi, 2007: 28), but as something the *orixá* asked for when the human *needed* it to get better. Similarly, in the case of my own ritual, the *ialorixá* made clear that Ossaim had asked for it because my *ori* needed it. “You will see, it will make you feel lighter and better,” she said (and indeed, it did).

Both Mãe Darabí and Vitor initially tried to escape their father *orixá*’s determinations for their lives, as they feared the commitment and *cuidado* that was expected from them. But they found themselves in vulnerable, precarious situations. As a black, middle-aged woman in the Bahian periphery, Mãe Darabí’s prospects of a theatre career were minimal, despite her charismatic appearance; and Vitor’s unemployment and depression in the megacity of São Paulo left him feeling isolated and hopeless. Although both suffered physical and emotional harm, they did not explain it as a punishment from the *orixás*, but rather as the result of their own decisions to shy away from their *odu*. At times when they felt lost and hopeless, the *orixás* suggested otherwise: There *was* a way to happiness. Following Oxossi’s wish that she opened a *terreiro*, in Mãe Darabí’s case, or for Vitor, that he returned to the Odé Terreiro, improved and stabilized their life situations and health. And although (or because) following their *odu* came with significant religious obligations, it also created security and a social network they lacked otherwise.

My aim here is not to ultimately answer whether *orixás* punish their children or not, but rather to understand how finding one's *odu* can be understood as part of a healing process, even if it is at the cost of two fingers and years of fainting. According to Póvoas, Mãe Darabí's *babalorixá*, your *odu* or 'destiny' is "what you are, what you cannot negate about yourself, and if you negate it you will be unwell, you will never be happy" (Póvoas, 2011: 177; my translation). When finding the *odu* is understood as a life goal that leads to happiness, then being pushed towards the *odu* by the *orixá* can indeed be seen as help, not punishment, even if it is against the individual's will. Such coercion in one's supposed best interest describes a paternalistic relationship *par excellence*, and in the end it does not seem to grant much autonomy to the child of an *orixá*. But what happens if the authority – here, the *orixá* – is understood as, in essence, oneself? To discuss the relationship between humans and *orixás* further, I will now look at the dialogue between them in the example of my own oracle consultation in the Odé Terreiro when my father *orixá* was revealed, which came with hints that my stay in the *terreiro* was part of my *odu*.

O jogo de búzios – The cowry shell oracle

In the West African Ifá Oracle, the *babalaô* priest defines the *odu* by using 16 palm nuts on a string, or *opelé* (Omari-Tunkara, 2005:36-37, Póvoas, 2011:165, Cossard, 2006:86). Throwing the *opelé* reveals one of 16 principal *odus*, each explained with a system of stories (*itans*). And these 16 *odus* can be combined 16 times, resulting in 256 groups of verses through which the destiny of the consulter is interpreted (Omari-Tunkara, 2005:36-37, Póvoas, 2011:165, Voeks, 1997:70). But the institution of the *babalaô* did not survive the transatlantic passage to Brazil, and although the notion of the *odu* remains important in Candomblé, it is not commonly identified in the Ifá Oracle (Póvoas, 2011:167). In the Odé Terreiro, one's *odu* was not revealed at once, but emerged bit by bit over time, through communication with the *orixás* and self-reflection. The *odu* expressed itself in three main ways: through the words of the *orixás* when they manifested in human bodies; through turning points and periods of success and well-being in life; and most importantly through communicating with the *orixás* in the cowry shell oracle.

A few days after my arrival in the *terreiro* I had an appointment with Mãe Darabí, and I was curious to find out who my parent *orixá* would be. In the morning, I was received in the *terreiro* by Anderson, a capoeira teacher and son of the warrior *orixá* Ogum. He was dressed in white, the preferred colour in the *terreiro*, and asked me to note down my name and my mother's name in a notebook and to pay 150 Reais (about 50 pounds) into a little wooden box on the messy table. I sat down on a plastic chair in the main room, while Mãe Darabí got ready for the oracle consultation. In the meantime, I chatted with Hugo, a 19-year old son of Xangô, the *orixá* of justice and fire. Hugo was waiting for a consultation, too, he told me: today Mãe Darabí was to reveal his secondary *orixá*.

It was my turn first. I followed Anderson to the room where Mãe Darabí was sitting at a small round table with a flat woven oracle plate, like the 'basketry tray' described by Bascom (1993). I caught sight of some small cowry shells (*búzios*), four bigger sea shells, and several coins in the tray. A white candle was burning on the table, next to a glass of water. "Sit down, my dear," the *ialorixá* invited me while looking into her notebook. We were both dressed in white: she in various layers of embroidered clothes with a big turban and various colourful bead necklaces, and I in a simple white skirt and blouse I had bought in the market. She picked up the cowry shells from the oracle plate and, moving them slowly between her hands, she started to sing. I understood some names and salutations of the *orixás*, and she explained that she was asking for permission for me to conduct my study there. She tossed the cowry shells and bent her head over the woven tray to count how many of them had fallen on their backs. She nodded. The *orixás* had given permission for me to stay.

But I was unsure if I wanted to stay in the community, or whether I should see other *terreiros* first before making a choice. When Mãe Darabí tossed and counted the *búzios* a second time, she stated that uncertainty was blocking my way and that I had to focus and make a decision. I felt a bit pressured, but I did not feel that I needed to reply to the *orixás*' statement. What was going on here, I thought, was a negotiation about my study, and I would take my time to decide. She then cast the *búzios* a third time, to find out who was the *orixá* of my head. But she could not read anything in the oracle. My *orixá* did not present himself, she said, and we should repeat the

consultation again next week. It seemed like she had opened a door for me, but shut it when I hesitated to enter. “The *orixás* won’t tell you what to do,” she noted when I left, “you have to make the decision yourself.”

I decided to stay. And in the next oracle session Mãe Darabí revealed my *orixá*: Ossaim, the healer and guardian of the leaves. She described ‘persons of Ossaim’ (*peçoas de Ossaim*) as reserved and mysterious. Ossaim himself lived hidden in the forest, she explained. “Nobody sees him, but he sees everything.” Was she hinting at my status as an observing researcher? Telling me about Ossaim, she immediately put him in relation to other *orixás* by mentioning two *itans* (stories). She told me that Iansã, the curious *orixá* of the wind, wanted to get access to Ossaim’s secret knowledge about the leaves’ magic, and therefore she created a great wind that whirled Ossaim’s guarded leaves through the air. Inscribing the story into the environment, Mãe Darabí noted that from now on every falling leaf was to remind me of my father Ossaim. She also told me that one day, Ossaim found the wounded Oxossi in the forest and cared for him for three days until he was cured. Since then, her father Oxossi and my father Ossaim were companions. “They walk together,” she said, and smiled at me.

Back in the house, the others cheered when I told them that I was Ossaim’s daughter. “*Ewe ô!*” some shouted, Ossaim’s salutation in Yoruba language, and hugged me with affection. Something had changed. I was not only the odd European researcher anymore; I was a daughter of Ossaim, the mysterious healer in the forest. As the only child of Ossaim in the *terreiro*, from then on I was called for tasks like planting trees and flowers, or setting up a small herb garden. It made me feel a bit useful. “Why would I do the planting when I have Ossaim’s hands by my side?” Hugo asked when we planted herbs by the spring. I was content to have been defined a child of Ossaim, as it often made my behaviour acceptable to others, although it might otherwise have been seen as strange. For example, when I had a vegetarian plate while everybody else ate the meat of a sacrificed goat, Hugo commented: “A true daughter of Ossaim. She only eats leaves.” And when I rejected the *ialorixá*’s friendly offer to move into her small flat with her, she responded: “I understand that. We forest people need our own space.” I felt recognized in the double sense of being *seen* as well as being

valued. Being a daughter of Ossaim became part of my narrative self (see Sökefeld, 1999) in the field, principally because it worked within the relationships in the *terreiro*, but also because it seemed to fit so well. It also justified my presence in the community as part of my *odu*, as Mãe Darabí noted that I had been sent because her *terreiro* needed Ossaim's energy. She was not surprised that I had come all the way from Scotland, as her *orixá* Oxossi, the hunter, reaches out far to find his people. When later a friend of the *ialorixá* asked me why anyone would choose to leave the medical profession to study Candomblé, she simply threw in: “*Pois é*, (Yeah,) it's her *odu*.”



Figure 15: *Ossaim, the forest healer. Artwork by André Hora, Manchester*

The setup of Mãe Darabí's cowry shell oracle (*jogo de búzios*) corresponds with descriptions in the Candomblé literature (Bascom, 1993, Bastide, 2007, Braga, 1988, Cossard, 2006). *Jogo de búzios* translates as 'game of shells' or 'throwing of shells', and it is the most frequently practiced divination method in Candomblé. In general, 16 cowry shells are used (Cossard, 2006:85), although other numbers (4, 7, 12, 13 or 21) have been mentioned (Braga, 1988:86).

According to Braga, the *jogo de búzios* is one of the most important tasks of an *ialorixá* or *babalorixá* (1988:79), and Póvoas states that it created “the most intimate contact between the human and the divine” (2011:161; my translation). While the oracle is consulted for all kinds of questions, the identification of a person’s *orixá* is a necessary first step to situate the person and understand their problems, and therefore it is one of the most commonly performed tasks of an *ialorixá* (Cossard, 2006:79).



Figure 16: The consultation room of the Odé Terreiro, 2013



Figure 17: Cowry shells as used in the oracle, 2014

When I was called into the consultation room, I expected to witness an oracle session that defined the *orixá* of my head through the formation of cowry shells in the tray, as described by Bascom (1993), Braga (1988), and Cossard (2006). These authors published lists that relate the number of shells that fall on their backs (‘open’ position) to the *orixás*. For example, three open shells are said to correspond with Ogum, the warrior, and Yemanjá, *orixá* of the sea, four with Oxossi, and so on (Braga, 1988:119, see also with slight differences: Bascom, 1993:7, Cossard, 2006:86). But this divination was different.

Even though Mãe Darabí tossed and counted the cowry shells, my *orixá* was not defined until I had decided about my stay. Her focus was on dialogue and intuition, rather than on simply deducing a fixed answer from the shell formation in front of her. Mãe Darabí clarified that the numbers were not that important, and that she used the oracle to enter communication with the *orixás*. In the beginning, she made contact with all *orixás* by greeting them, thus invoking and announcing their presence. The *orixás* then spoke when she threw the cowry shells, she explained. “[The *orixás*] show things through the *jogo*, but they also show them through thought (*pensamento*) and vision (*visão*).” Therefore, she not only used the oracle as a medium for communication with the divine, but she acted as a medium and shared sensory information with the *orixás*, namely hearing and seeing, even without going into trance. I asked her: “What is this *visão*?”

- What the *visão* is?
- Yes, what does it mean?
- It’s when you look – when I look at you, and the *orixá* shows me, for example, he shows me you are going to publish a thesis. Right? So. It’s not me who says it. He shows, and I use his *olhar* (sight or gaze) to see it. [...] So, we use this language: the *orixá* whispers in my ear that Hannah is going to publish a thesis. You understand?
- I understand. So, you hear the voice of the *orixá*?
- We often hear it. You, too, hear it, you, too have *visão*. Everybody has *visão*. But this is developed when you work with it. Just like you develop your studies, because you study, you work, you invest. You invest in books, you invest in research. And in the same way we invest in *axé*.

The investment Mãe Darabí spoke about included the seven-year long initiation process of an *ialorixá*. During these learning years, Mãe Darabí was not directly taught to read the oracle formations, and was not allowed to observe consultations by her *babalorixá*. Instead, she worked on strengthening her relationship with her *orixás*, to develop the *visão*, intuition, and deep knowledge she needed for the *jogo de búzios*. “You can read about those numbers in the books,” she told me later, “but that won’t tell you much about the oracle.” She made clear that, although popular and academic literature provided a lot of theoretical knowledge on Candomblé, the relevant intuition and ‘deep knowledge’ could not be found in books and articles (see further: Van de Port, 2011:14). It lay in the relationship with the *orixás*.

The intuition developed through sustained contact with the *orixás* over the years is conceptualized as a mysterious capacity that goes beyond simple book knowledge, as it involves a relationship with the divine sphere. Johnson (2002) argues that secrets are important sources of power, and that the performance of secretism is more important than the actual content of the secret. Accordingly, Mãe Darabí’s *visão* gains value and authority precisely because it is not fully comprehensible, and thus a mysterious power and skill. Sansi points out that to be able to communicate with the *orixás*, one needed the ‘gift’, or *don*, as not everything was learned in initiation (Sansi, 2007:28). But in the Odé Terreiro the *visão* was not a gift; and it was also not simply learned in initiation.

As Mãe Darabí stated, “everybody has *visão*”. And indeed, sometimes *terreiro* members, initiated or not, mentioned that they had heard or seen *orixás*. One afternoon, I walked through the kitchen and overheard Matheus saying: “Tonight I am going to turn into the saint.” He had never received his *orixá* in trance before, so I was excited. “Wow, you are going to receive Oxossi tonight?” I asked, and the whole room burst into laughter. “Sister, no! I just said tonight I am going to do the washing up!” he said laughing. But a few hours later at a ceremony, Matheus received Oxossi for the first time. Later I commented to the *ialorixá*: “It was funny, I had completely misunderstood him earlier,” and she responded, “No, you didn’t, you understood perfectly. You heard his *orixá* speaking”.

So, while one could hear the *orixás* talk through their children spontaneously, the *jogo de búzios* was a way to communicate with the *orixás* in a more structured setting. But at the same time, the dialogue between the diviner and the consulter, two humans, is at the heart of the oracle. This is not a contradiction if we understand that humans as they embody their father and mother *orixás* and bring them to the table. When parental *orixás* are understood as a person's inner essence, they can speak and act through their children, and are therefore already involved in human dialogue.

Mãe Darabí told me that both the *orixá* of the diviner and the *orixá* of the consulter showed things through the *jogo*. When a person was 'open', their *orixás* were more easily recognized. The *babalorixá* who initiated Mãe Darabí, wrote about divination:

All this requires ability, practice and knowledge of the reader of the oracle. But the interpretation also depends on the nature of the client. Some heads are open books, when they sit in front of the person who throws the shells and the signals are already anticipated. Other heads are more mysterious, and their reading requires more attention and ability. (Póvoas, 1999:226, my translation)

The consulter is therefore an active participant in the dialogue that unfolds in an oracle session. In accord with Voeks (1997), Mãe Darabí explained that certain personal characteristics and physical traits already hint at their head *orixá*, that is, at the 'archetype' (Póvoas, 2011:197) that is dominant in the individual. For example, children of Iansã, the female warrior, can often be recognized from afar, as they are energetic, curious and chatty. Children of Omulu, in contrast, are slower and often suffer from skin diseases. However, such exterior aspects are only indications that need to be confirmed in the oracle session to become valid (see also Braga, 1988:91). Through the cowry shell oracle, the *ialorixá* defines a person's *orixá* with sacred authority. But the process of divination (*adivinhação* – literally: guessing) includes the subjective, intuitive interpretation of cues in dialogue with the consulter.

In summary, the *jogo de búzios* constitutes a method of entering into dialogue with the divine aspects of a human. Far from just a reading of pre-defined shell formations, in the Odé Terreiro the oracle relied heavily on the trained intuition of the diviner, as well as on the participation and openness of the consulter. Therefore, as long as I had not committed to staying in the *terreiro*, the *ialorixá* was not able to

‘see’ my father *orixá*. The *jogo de búzios* should be understood as a reflective social process that defines the kinship of the consulter with the *orixás* and, consequently, his or her role within a diverse community.

“Who tries to fool the oracle, only fools himself”

I felt that the identification of Ossaim as my *orixá da cabeça* hit the nail on the head, as I immediately recognized myself in his characteristics. But sometimes people were not content with the kinship determinations made in the *jogo de búzios*. “In the beginning, I didn’t want to be a son of Oxossi,” Matheus told me one evening when we were sitting on the steps in front of the *terreiro* house. He explained he had been disappointed when an *ialorixá* of a different *terreiro* had defined him as a son of Oxossi, as he had found other *orixás* more interesting. When he visited a second *ialorixá* to challenge the oracle, he claimed he was a son of the elegant Logun Edé. But when that other *ialorixá* looked at the cowry shells, she just shook her head, he told me. “That must be a mistake,” she said to him; “you are a son of Oxossi.”

For Matheus, this confirmation proved that the oracle spoke the truth. But Mãe Darabí would only laugh at such attempts to challenge the oracle. “Who tries to fool the oracle, only fools himself,” she asserted. On the one hand, she defended the oracle’s divine authority with the common assumption that gods cannot be tested. But on the other hand, she also expressed that, as the *jogo de búzios* relies on honest dialogue and on the openness of the consulter, lying or hiding reduced the whole process to absurdity: If one doesn’t show oneself, how could the *orixá* be seen?

Before an oracle session, the *ialorixá* performs a range of preparatory measures, as has also been described by Gomberg (2011:116). This preparation is necessary to sharpen her *visão*, to connect with the consulter, and to ask the consulter’s *orixá* and ‘head’ (*ori*) for permission to engage with them. Mãe Darabí detailed:

I take a leaf bath, I burn incense, I use the white powder (*pemba*) of Oxalá. Before the *jogo* I concentrate, I converse, I ask the *orixá* for permission, for *agô*, to be able to understand that person, so that the head, the *ori* of the person allows me to be able to read what the *jogo* tells me.

But what is this *ori*, the head of a person, that has to give permission for the oracle to be read? In the *terreiro* community, the term *ori* was generally used to denominate the physical head as the seat of reason and willpower, but also of the divine. “Your head is the altar of the *orixá*, you have to take care of it,” Mãe Darabí said. As the *ori* was seen as sacred, people took care not to touch each other’s heads, and the head had to be covered during rituals for Exu to protect it from his ‘hot energy’ (see Chapter One). Póvoas defines the *ori* as follows:

The *ori* is not only a physical head. Before everything it is a cosmic entity, constituted of one of the elements of the universe, and it results in a total sum of *axés* (energies): that of the blood family, that of the divine parents, and that of the natural element. This *ori* is identified with a certain cosmic force, an *orixá*. It is the *orixá* who, in last instance, defines the fate of who is going to be born, giving him/her an *odu*, i.e. a way (*caminho*). (Póvoas, 2011:201; my translation and italics)

Instead of translating the *ori* into more familiar concepts like mind, personality, or soul, I will take it as an idiosyncratic element of a person that is spiritually connected with the ancestors, the *orixás* and nature. The *ori* is the linking pin between the profane and the divine within a person. And, importantly, it is the *ori* that chooses the *orixá* in the first place, and not the other way round. Mãe Darabí told me that even an *orixá* cannot do anything the *ori* does not want. She explained:

We believe that it is us who choose with which *orixá* we come to the earth. It is the human who chooses. When I came to the world, I chose to be of Odé [a name for Oxossi]. When you came to the world, you chose to be of Ossaim. When Marga came to the world, she chose to be of Iansã.

Therefore, when we don’t accept this, we won’t be happy, nothing will happen, very few good things. Because we don’t accept our own choice! So, you create a contradiction with yourself. The conflict is you. You transform into conflict.

The idea that the *orixás* were initially chosen by a person’s *ori* corresponds with Júlio Braga’s note that “the diviner seems to be a conciliator of a person with himself; of the divine world with the profane world” (Braga, 1988:80). Although the *orixás* are higher beings than humans, ultimate agency lies within the human’s *ori*. Mirroring the dialogical character of the *jogo de búzios*, which depends on the

participation and openness of the consulter, the link with the *orixá* also relies on the person's own choice. Strengthening connections with one's father or mother *orixás* is therefore seen as a way to harmonize inner conflicts and to build a strong and coherent sense of self.

In the end, Matheus accepted Oxossi as his father, despite his initial resistance. He told me he had been “blocking his own happiness,” but after several months as a son of Oxossi he found himself “more and more realized, happier and more complete.” And he added: “This was the cure in Candomblé that made me feel I had found myself.” But what happens if this ‘cure’ does not occur, if one does not feel comfortable with one's *orixá*, or with the *ialorixá/babalorixá*? Could one change kin relations later? In Carla's case, this was possible.

Carla's case: Changing kin relations

One afternoon, I was sitting in the *barracão* with a small group of *terreiro* members and visitors. Squatting next to me on the floor, Carla of Oxossi was sewing a skirt. Carla was a visitor, and she told me she had just left a *terreiro* community in Salvador, where she had been unhappy for years. Suddenly she started shaking and the *ialorixá* came over to raise her to her feet and take care of her. “*Kao Kabiesilé!*” Mãe Darabí greeted Xangô, the *orixá* of fire and justice. Carla's body was trembling and rocking from one side to the other. “Give your daughter stability,” the *ialorixá* asked Xangô, and then she shook her sacred rattle (*xerê*) to call Carla back. Slowly, Carla stood still and opened her eyes. “We need to check this daughter-of-Oxossi business,” Mãe Darabí decided, as Carla returned to sewing the skirt. “Who keeps responding is Xangô, not Oxossi”.

The *ialorixá's* comment indicated that Carla's head *orixá* had been identified incorrectly in the other *terreiro*. Notably, this notion arose from the interpretation of Carla's bodily expression during trance, rather than from the cowry shell oracle. However, authority to decide on this matter lies in the oracle, so the *ialorixá's* suspicion needed to be confirmed in the *jogo de búzios*. And indeed, in the *jogo* Mãe Darabí later determined that Carla was a daughter of Xangô, not Oxossi.

Carla had been unhappy in the other *terreiro*, and her trembling and staggering during the spontaneous *orixá* incorporation had, in Candomblé terms, physically demonstrated her spiritual instability. In the other *terreiro* she had felt like a humiliated servant, she told us, and hence her recognition as a daughter of the king of justice, Xangô, responded well to her need to re-establish dignity and self-esteem. The *ialorixá* asserted that Xangô had not wanted to reveal himself in the other *terreiro* because it was not the right place for her. This conclusion implied two assumptions: First, the other *babalorixá* was not able to establish a connection with Carla's true inner deity, which caused Carla suffering. Second, Xangô showed himself in the *Odé Terreiro*, where Carla's pain and her personality were finally recognized, which was a sign that the new *terreiro* was the right place for her. Competition between *terreiros* is also a possible motif for the *ialorixá* to demonstrate authority and to draw new members to their own group. However, Mãe Darabí was always very cautious not to interfere with other *ialorixás* or *babalorixás*, and she would only invite people who were actively looking for a new *terreiro* community to join her. In her view, the *babalorixá* had not made a mistake, nor read the cowry shells incorrectly; but he had not been right regarding Carla's *orixá*, either. He could simply not see Carla's true self. "Sometimes [the *orixá*] is not shown to one person and is shown to another. That is why we have to be very careful when we do the oracle (*quando jogamos*)". Following her explanation, the 'wrong determination' of an *orixá* means that the person who carries the *orixá* had not found the right place to be truly recognized. The well-being of the person and the recognition of her *orixá* were therefore seen as closely interrelated; and after I had returned home from the field I heard that Carla, now a daughter of Xangô, was feeling much better.

Carla's case makes clear that oracle divination in Candomblé is not necessarily seen as creating "truth beyond doubt," as Martin Holbraad argues in his work on divination in Cuban Santería (2012:54). The oracle's statement on kinship relations with the *orixás* can be unclear, negotiated, questioned and changed, as the example of Carla, as well as of Matheus and myself, demonstrate; and I met several people whose *orixás* had changed after initial adaptation problems. These problems were

often described as the *orixás* ‘fighting’ over one’s head, or *ori*.¹⁹ Coming to terms with one’s father or mother *orixá*, or – as in Mãe Darabí’s and Vitor’s cases – with one’s *odu*, was a difficult task that required patience, self-reflection, openness and acceptance. In the *terreiro*, this reflective process was crucial for establishing and sustaining health and well-being.

Cuidado and being-same-and-other

As my ethnography shows, the self-transformative healing process in Candomblé does not only start with initiation, but much earlier, with the identification of the mother or father *orixá* in the cowry shell oracle (see also Voeks, 1997:89). I argue that the kinship ties between humans and *orixás* allow the boundary between ‘self’ and ‘other’ to be crossed without breaking it. These kin relations enable them to be both at the same time, in the sense of Sahlins’ “mutuality of being” (2013). And while much of the Candomblé literature on healing has looked at events of ‘spirit possession’ (see Introduction), I found that building kinship relations with the *orixás* in the Odé Terreiro was a much more subtle and prolonged process of identity construction and recognition that took place in small everyday acts, like greeting a child of Oxossi with “*Oké arô!*” or hearing an *orixá* speak through a person.

Kinship relations are often linked with an ethics of care (Borneman, 1997:6, Drotbohm and Alber, 2015), and as I mentioned in the Introduction, children of an *orixá* in the Odé Terreiro were expected to care for their mothers and fathers by keeping their *pejis* (shrines) clean, putting fresh water into their earthen pots, and lighting candles. These acts of *cuidado* also implied knowledge about the specific tastes and preferences of the *orixás*. For example, Ossaim not only received fresh water but also a flask of *cachaça* because “he walks with Exu”; Oxossi liked his *peji* adorned with leaves, ferns and cow horns; and Oxum preferred yellow flowers, perfume and mirrors (Figure 18). In the *ebo* ceremony, every *orixá* received their favourite food, which was prepared specifically for them. Oxossi, for example, eats

¹⁹ The fact that this fighting over the head can happen in adulthood, although the *ori* was said to choose the *orixá* before birth, indicates a break with chronological thinking. It gives room for questions about the notion of time in the human-*orixá* relationship, an interesting topic for further study. In my field site, it was often stated that time passed differently inside the *terreiro*, again setting it apart from the world outside (see also Prandi 2001).

sweetcorn and coconut (Figure 19). Importantly, this knowledge is not explicitly taught, but is acquired by paying attention. When I asked the *ialorixá* about Ossaim’s food, she simply said, “You will find out yourself, pay attention.” But *cuidado* was not only seen as a service to the *orixá*; it was also a necessary attitude towards others and towards oneself. And both the *orixás* and the *ori* of a person were fed during rituals. When I had my ritual to become a daughter of the house, apart from the food bowls for Ossaim there was a pot of boiled white corn sitting next to my straw mat. “This is for your *ori* to eat,” the *ialorixá* said, “it will make you feel stronger”.



Figure 18: A terreiro member painting a mirror for Oxum, 2013



Figure 19: An adorned plate of sweetcorn and coconut for Oxossi, 2014

As the *orixás* were carried (*carregado*) in their human children, one had to show the latter the same respect as the former. The *ialorixá* underlined that caring for a human meant caring for their *orixá* at the same time:

And if you don’t have *cuidado* for the other – when I don’t care for you, I do not respect your *orixá*. That’s why I always say this about having *cuidado* with a child of an *orixá*. Because if I don’t, I don’t show respect for Ossaim. Because Ossaim brought you here and he trusted me that I take care of you.

The *cuidado* and recognition people receive as children of an *orixá* generates respect, self-respect, and rules of conduct. For example, Renan of Oxum, a high-rank member of the Ijexá Terreiro, suffered from Morbus Parkinson. His right arm trembled considerably, visible to all. But in the Candomblé community his divine characteristics as a child of an *orixá* were recognized, as became clear when Renan spoke about his empowering experience of being celebrated as a son of Oxum, instead of being pitied as a trembling sufferer. He told me:

In the beginning, I was ashamed [of the tremor]. But then I went to some *terreiros*, [...] and the people liked me a lot. They receive me with applause, with drums and all. And I said: ‘You are receiving me and I am trembling.’ – ‘But your trembling doesn’t matter. What matters is your beauty, we like to listen to you, we like the way you are, trembling or not.’ That animates me. So, you don’t see me here trembling. You see me, Oxum’s beauty.

Renan’s identification with Oxum strengthened his self-esteem and made him feel accepted. But the practice of showing respect for the *orixás* through *cuidado* for their human children also brings out the *difference* between the two, as exemplified in the ritual greeting of the *ialorixá*. Upon entering the *terreiro*, all members of the group lay down on the floor in front of the *peji* shrines of Oxossi and Oxum, and then in front of the *ialorixá*. I learned how to lie flat on my belly, how to lower my forehead onto my fists as children of male *orixás* do²⁰, and how to receive her blessing by kneeling in front of her. At first, I had difficulty following this ritualized greeting. I had never bent down before anyone, and did not understand why it was necessary. But the *ialorixá* explained that lying down in front of her had nothing to do with her, and everything with her father Oxossi:

It’s not just you coming here, dressing the clothes, clapping the *paô* (chant), and throwing yourself on the floor to receive my blessing. Me, if it wasn’t for the *orixá*, I wouldn’t want that. I wouldn’t want it, because I do not enjoy seeing people at my feet. Who am I that you would do that? But it is this way because it is in respect of the *orixá* I carry. When you do that, you do it for Odé [Oxossi]. When I do that with my father [*babalorixá*], I do it for my father Oxalá. [...]

²⁰ Children of female *orixás* bend their hips sideways instead.

When relating to a person, one therefore also relates to the *orixá* they ‘carry’ (*carregar*), even when they are not ‘turned into the *orixá*’ in trance. Therefore, while the literature on Candomblé ‘spirit possession’ (see Introduction) looks at instances of “spirits entering the person’s body” (Cohen, 2007:123), my ethnography, by contrast, makes a point of showing that people *already* embody the *orixás* – even when they never ‘receive’ them in trance. Caring for the children of *orixás* will please their divine parents and strengthen the *axé* on both sides. And while as a German ethnographer I felt like an outsider, in my role as a daughter of Ossaim I felt very much accepted in the group.

There are many such instances of being-same-and-other as a child of an *orixá* in the *terreiro*. For example, when the *orixás* appeared in human bodies during *festas*, they frequently ate plates of food that the community presented to them. Afterwards, when the *orixás* had left, the people who had incorporated them often walked into the kitchen and ate big plates of food while asking questions about the *festa*, and complaining about their absence from the event. Van de Port calls this phenomenon the ‘post-possession amnesia’ (Van de Port 2011:200). Their hunger and oblivion not only stressed that they had not faked the incorporation, but also that they were different to the *orixás*. On the other hand, for example, children of Oxalá emphasized their similarity with the father *orixá* by abstaining from spicy food in everyday life as their father did not tolerate it, and therefore it was not good for them either.

Rebecca Seligman states that ‘spirit possession’ created a “particular identification between *filhos* and their possessing others, through which they come to understand and experience the characteristics of these others as their own” (Seligman, 2014:35). Similarly, Emma Cohen states that the resemblance between humans and gods was most apparent in ‘possession’: “Spirits who possess people, as obvious as the point may be, are invariably and inescapably incarnate in human form” (Cohen, 2007:123). But what I find intriguing is that in the Odé Terreiro it seemed to be the other way round: it is in instances of embodying the *orixás* that their *otherness* is pronounced. “When the *orixá* comes, the human goes to sleep,” the *ialorixá* told me. Similarly, Emma Cohen reports that in a *terreiro* in North Brazil the “own spirit” was said to “lie down,” “dream,” “sleep,” or “remain watching” during ‘possession’ (Cohen,

2007:123). In contrast to this distancing during incorporation, the everyday proximity to their parent *orixás* came through in people's personalities and their reactions to certain foods, which I will describe below.

In summary, in the Odé Terreiro, people kept oscillating between distinction and identification with the *orixás* – hence creating a balanced, reflective relationship. This back-and-forth movement of being-same-and-other is perhaps best captured in the emic image of the 'double mirror'.

The game of the double mirror

One afternoon I discussed the identification of humans with their parent *orixás* with Aureliano, a poet and philosophy professor, and son of Xangô. To explain the kinship with the *orixás*, Aureliano came up with "the game of the double mirror" (*jogo do espelho duplo*) in which humans and *orixás* recognize themselves in each other through endless reflections between them. The mirror image is partially *identical* (what we see in it exists, just as we see it) and partially *different* (it is a reflection of something else). When seeing ourselves in the father or mother *orixá*, the first mirror image, the *orixá* becomes alive and sees him/herself in us, the second image, Aureliano explained. These reflections are thrown back and forth onto each other infinitely, which creates a situation where it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish the human from the divine reflection, and vice-versa.

The term *jogo* ('game', but also 'throwing' from *jogar*, 'to throw') that Aureliano used does not imply that identification with the *orixá* is not serious. Rather, as in the *jogo de búzios* oracle, it relates to the back and forth swinging of a lively negotiation; a dynamic interaction that follows certain rules, but remains open and gives room for surprises and learning. Both the human and the *orixá*, as well as their respective mirror images keep changing, continuously revealing more and more about each other. While getting to know the *orixá* as their divine *other* and inner *self*, the humans start to understand themselves better. Or as Aureliano said: they learn to see their negative traits without shame and their positive characteristics without vanity. In this way, the 'game of the double mirror' can be understood as a reflective process of self-recognition, self-acceptance and self-transformation through a divine other.

The mirror is a well-known psychoanalytical trope, and Luis F. Duarte notes that psychoanalysis was an important force in the ‘psychologization’ of Brazilian society from the beginning of the 20th century onwards (Duarte, 1999:148-49). Although Aureliano, a university lecturer, was not immediately engaged with psychoanalytical theory, it may well have informed his thinking. Jacques Lacan pays great attention to the ‘mirror stage’ in the development of a child as the point of time when the child starts recognizing herself in the mirror, usually between the ages of six and eighteen months (Lacan, 2013). He points out that the mirror image gives the child a *Gestalt* that it can only perceive in its exteriority of the body. The function of the mirror stage, according to Lacan, is to relate the human *Innenwelt* (interiority) with the *Umwelt* (environment) through the identification with the *imago* of the counterpart (Lacan, 2013:257-258). Aureliano’s double mirror also expresses this relationship, especially as the *orixás* are not only embodied by the individual, but also by the environment, as Oxum is the rivers and lakes, Oxossi is the forest, Xangô is fire, etc. But in contrast to Lacan, Aureliano’s mirror is double, and both human and *orixá* recognize themselves and each other in infinite counter-reflections. Looking in the double mirror, therefore, is an act of objectification that involves recognizing both identity *and* alterity in the mirror image. Here, human and *orixá* are subject and object at the same time; they are both looking and being looked at.²¹

“But who is the image of whom here?” the cognitive anthropologist Emma Cohen asks, when discussing the resemblance between humans and *orixás* (2007:122). This question relates well to the double mirror, and I kept wondering about it during my fieldwork. Cohen argues that we were “predisposed automatically and easily to make gods in our own image” (ibid.), because our minds operated in a way that intuitively expected agents to be human-like. ‘Spirit possession’, for Cohen, was an example of the tendency to represent gods as humans. My thesis, in contrast, does not try to explain the cognitive mechanisms behind Candomblé religion, but it asks how *terreiro* members experience healing. In my fieldwork, I came across contradicting

²¹ Although Sigmund Freud did not use the mirror term, his concepts of transference and counter-transference, i.e. reflection of the patient’s subconscious onto the therapist, and vice-versa (Racker 1968), display a similar reflexive mutuality.

and unclear answers. The *orixás* once had been humans themselves before turning into gods, I was told, but they also preceded humanity. I understood I was asking a chicken-and-egg question. What came first? Personally, I see the egg as coming before the chicken, and the human before the *orixá*. But this says more about my own linear thinking and about what I think chickens and *orixás* are. In the end, I realized, it did not matter whether human or *orixá* were first. What matters is their relationship.

Creating a reflective relationship with the *orixás* helped *terreiro* members to improve their self-esteem, and can be therapeutic in this sense. Many had experienced humiliation, violence, and social exclusion, which had dramatically affected their feelings of self-worth. These experiences included poverty, as in the *ialorixá*'s story, domestic violence, chronic disease, or being the victim of homophobia and racism. Understanding themselves as children of *orixás* and as part of a *terreiro* family gave *terreiro* members the ability to reconstruct their hurt self-image and to build confidence. The psychologist Michele Crossley (2000) stresses the importance of flux and change in the study of selves and identity. Crossley proposes that after traumatic events or life periods, individuals often attempt to rebuild a "sense of order, meaningfulness and coherent identity" (2000:529) by way of new life narratives. In this sense, the double mirror can be understood as a way of reconfiguring one's life narrative as the child of an *orixá*.

The self-transformative process of identification as a child of the *orixás* also links well with Aaron Antonovsky's model of *salutogenesis* (1997, 1996). Salutogenesis (the 'origin of health') is a term Antonovsky invented in contrast to pathogenesis (the 'origin of disease'). Criticizing the biomedical and psychological axiom that the human organism is naturally healthy and, in case of disease and suffering, needs fixing, Antonovsky argues that health and illness were not dichotomous. His alternative model locates health and illness on a continuum, with the individual constantly shifting between the two poles; and his research focuses on what he calls 'salutary factors', i.e. behaviours, attitudes and practices that promote health (Antonovsky 1996). In his work with holocaust survivors in Israel, Antonovsky noticed that some of his clients coped much better with their traumatizing

experiences than others. He identified a strong ‘Sense of Coherence’ as a ‘generalized resistance resource’ for coping with stress. This Sense of Coherence has three major aspects: *comprehensibility*, or the belief that life events are explainable and do not occur arbitrarily; *manageability*, or the confidence to be competent to deal with problems that may arise; and, most importantly, *meaningfulness*, or the conviction that what happens in life is purposeful.

Antonovsky’s notion of a strong ‘Sense of Coherence’ as a resource for health, resilience and well-being resonates with my experiences in the Candomblé community. Many ‘children of the house’ told me that finding out more about their *orixás* and being in contact with them through ritual acts made them realize themselves and feel more complete – much like Matheus indicated, when he said “the cure in Candomblé” was that he felt he had found himself (see above). The three aspects of the Sense of Coherence (comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness) also appear in Mãe Darabí’s narrative at the beginning of this chapter. Her *odu* to become *ialorixá* can be seen as a predictable structure for her life, and it explains her fainting when she refused to follow the destiny her *orixá* had chosen for her. By interacting with the *orixás* and the religious community, she can mobilize divine and worldly resources to meet challenges.

Self-esteem, or *auto-estima*, was often stressed as an important aspect of well-being in the Odé Terreiro, principally by the *ialorixá*. Psychological studies in the USA claim that high self-esteem created resilience for dealing with PTSD (Bradley et al., 2005), and that among Catholic US Americans it was positively related to loving-accepting god images (Benson and Spilka, 1973). And while in the USA it has been a trope for decades, Alexander Edmonds points out that “self-esteem is now becoming a global notion” (2010:76). In Brazil, the notion of *auto-estima* has been adopted by social movements as well as various forms of therapy; and even the mass media interventions of the Brazilian National AIDS Programme mention the value of self-esteem for health (Biehl, 2004:108, cited in: Edmonds, 2010:76). Like *cuidado*, in the Odé Terreiro *auto-estima* was posed in opposition to racist, sexist, classist or homophobic discrimination and other experiences that trigger feelings of inferiority.

Through kinship relations, the divine properties and *axé* of the *orixás* rub off on their human children, thereby strengthening their self-esteem. When Renan talked about his mother Oxum, his eyes lit up:

Wealth, gold, *axé*, the mother, the Great Mother, the mother who creates us, the mother who nurtures us, the mother who gives intuition, who gives force, *axé*. My mother. Who carries Oxum carries the *axé* of wealth. But this wealth is not just money, it is wealth of everything, of *axé*. A person of Oxum is someone who cannot refuse a cup of water to anybody. [...] Oxum works with lightness, with kindness, with improvisation (*jogo de cintura*), and with charms.

As Oxum's son, Renan recognized these characteristics in himself, and while it would not be acceptable to boast about his own beauty or kindness in the same way, it was perfectly acceptable and even encouraged to do so about one's parent *orixá*. Renan concluded our interview with the statement "I would like to leave this world, when I die, and come back as a head of Oxum again. It makes me feel so good and I would like to be her son again if I can."

What I have described as being-same-and-other can also be understood as a process of both externalization and internalization. Rebecca Seligman (2010) describes Candomblé 'spirit possession' as part of a cognitive discourse, but also as an embodied practice that is effectively employed as a method to heal a 'disrupted self'. In two case studies, she explains that performative identification with *orixás* can be used both to *internalize* desired characteristics, and to *externalize* undesired attributes. Her first case study presents Lucia, an elderly woman who had entered Candomblé in a state of emotional instability after the loss of her father and traumatic experiences during the military dictatorship. Through initiation, she felt more emotionally balanced, as she could integrate the calmness and prudence of her father *orixá*, the old sage Oxalá, into a biographical 'turning-point narrative' (Seligman, 2010:310). The second case is Pedro, a young man who had managed to work on his alcohol problems and aggressive behaviour by attributing them to his *orixá*, the warrior god Ogum, and acting them out in spirit possession. According to Seligman, being 'possessed' by Ogum was a means for Pedro to physically release

his violent tendencies in a socially accepted manner, while at the same time embedding it in a coherent narrative.

The parallel movements of internalization and externalization in Seligman's analysis as well as her emphasis on self-transformation resonate very much with experiences of healing and kinship with the *orixás* in the Odé Terreiro. However, Van de Port (2011:20) reminds us to be careful not to simply label baffling and inexplicable phenomena as 'technologies of the occult' in an overly functionalist manner. Rather than using academic modes of sense-making to dissect and explain Candomblé practices, he insists upon keeping in mind what he calls 'the rest-of-what-is', the unexplained and unexplainable – or, as they say in the *terreiro: o mistério*, the mystery. Therefore, instead of treating internalization and externalization as psychological coping techniques, I stress the contradictory but transformative potential that is created in the 'game of the double mirror', when humans and *orixás* swing infinitely between identification and distinction.

When the father or mother *orixá* is defined in the oracle, at first one deals with a somewhat generic, stereotypical *orixá*, and starts learning about 'Oxossi, the hunter', or 'Oxalá, the sage' – shared archetypes, as Póvoas puts it (2011, 2010). But over time, the *orixá* takes on a more personalized appearance. Each *orixá* unpacks into a variety of 'qualities' (*qualidades*), or characters with different names, stories, traits and colours. Iansã, for example, is said to have nine qualities, some of which are fierier and others slower; and their clothes vary from bright red to brown and pink. Two children of Iansã can therefore have quite different mothers. On top of this, *orixás* also come with a heritage (*herança*) from the biological family of the person. Matheus' father *orixá* Oxossi, for example, only wore white clothes instead of green (Oxossi's usual colour), because of an inherited link with Oxalá. Ultimately, every person carries a manifestation of the *orixá* in him/herself that is unique in the world. Only initiated Candomblé followers know the unique name of their mother or father *orixá*, but they keep it a secret. "It would be too risky if everyone knew," the *ogã* explained to me. The name of one's *orixá* was dangerously personal and revealing, compared to one's own name, as the *orixá* is an intimate essence of the self.

The close relationship between humans and *orixás* came up in an intriguing conversation between Clarice, a daughter of Oxum from the Ijexá Terreiro, and her Catholic husband Ricardo. Clarice framed the relationship between humans and *orixás* as the “divinization of humans” and the “humanization of gods”, which links to the double mirror, as humans and *orixás* take on each other’s attributes. Ricardo, in contrast, defended the notion of a distant Catholic God.

Clarice: I start from the principle that we are divine in the same way as the gods are human. In my relationship with the universe, it is me who permits the humanization of the gods and I permit my divinization. It goes in both directions. [...]

Ricardo: This relation of the human with the divine in Candomblé, when looking at it from outside, like I do, for me this is not possible that the human is made divine and the divine is made human [*que o humano se diviniza, e o divino se humaniza*]. Because in my education and in Catholic theology these are different spheres, the humans and God.

Clarice: For me a god is water, fire, earth, air. And I have earth, fire, water, and air in me, I am composed of these. So, I am an extension of the god, I am a god! Now I am not talking of this powerful God who determines about life and death. No, I am talking about the divine force that creates a space where you can be [divine], too.

When humans and gods intertwine, the tension of being-same-and-other can create cracks in the walls of orderly categories. With reference to Terry Eagleton (2009), Van de Port explains that “difference, alterity and discrimination rein [the] symbolic order” of the world we live in, “for in the symbolic order a phenomenon can only be something by *not* being something else” (Van de Port, 2011:23-24). But he acknowledges that this order is never fully orderly; it is always transgressed, subverted, and changed by the unfitting ‘rest-of-what-is’ (2011:24). In this rest Eagleton locates Lacan’s ‘Real’ that we can never fully grasp. We can only be reminded of it by “the way it acts as a drag on our discourse” (Eagleton, 2009:144, quoted in Van de Port, 2011:24). In the context of Candomblé, the drag of one mirror image on the other gives room for the rest-of-what-is; it creates a gap where the impossible can happen, and where *axé* grows.

“It’s a pleasure to be who you are”

Notably, behaving like one’s *orixá* was considered to be liberating and effortless:

“You don’t need to teach this, the person will get there,” the *ialorixá* said. To illustrate the experience of liberation and happiness that can come with kinship with the *orixás*, I will introduce Rafaela.

Rafaela is a daughter of Omulu (the god of suffering) and Iansã (the female warrior). She is in her fifties, works in a bank in the city, and used to give accountancy courses at the university. Rafaela has curly grey hair and wears glasses that turn dark in the sun. For decades, she has suffered from depression, and she had sought help from a wide range of therapeutic approaches, including psychotherapy, anti-depressant drugs and meditation before joining the Odé Terreiro. She told me about her process of identification with her *orixás*:

For 50 years I lived with a different identity than I feel now. [...] Right after the *obrigação* ritual I felt a very strong energy of Iansã. What is energy of Iansã? It is the energy of the exuberant woman, to be more released, to be happier, more playful. But then, more recently, this energy diminished a bit, and I feel more the energy of the Old One [Omulu]. And now I feel more capable to live more authentic relationships. [...] Today I feel that I love myself. That is a feeling that I never had, and today I feel it. I feel good with myself, I feel capable to love, and the greatest difficulty for me in a relationship: to receive love. Because I did not learn that in my life, to receive love. And sometimes one doesn’t have to do anything, but just be who we are. And that’s it. It’s a pleasure to be who you are, it’s so good. I had no idea what this is, Hannah, no idea. To be happy simply for being who you are, I had no idea. I did not know who I was. I had not found anything that was so deep in my soul, like this is. Because Candomblé moves my body.

[...] And people say, you are prettier, and things like that. Maybe now these people are seeing what I have always been, what I could not show. What is revealed now has been in me before, only that now it is visible. More lightness, because dance gives me lightness, happiness to play with life, to flow with life. I am just living my life the way I choose to live it. With dance, with Candomblé. Because really, being stuck in a bank or university, teaching, that won’t make me happy.

Rafaela perceived the characteristics of her *orixás* as aspects of her own personality, and therefore respect and love for the *orixás* go hand in hand with self-respect and self-love.

In Antonovsky's salutogenetic terms, Rafaela was developing a strong Sense of Coherence, as she is building up comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness in relation to the *orixás*. But Rafaela's enthusiastic narrative makes Antonovsky's theory (1996) look somewhat anaemic. Although he speaks of a *Sense* of Coherence, Antonovsky refers mainly to beliefs, convictions and more or less abstract emotions. What is missing, it seems, is the sensuous bodily engagement, the movement through a sacred space, the tingling sensation of *axé*, and the dancing that gives Rafaela "lightness, happiness to play with life, to flow with life".

While terms such as 'self-reflection,' 'identification,' and even the double mirror focus on cognitive functions, Rafaela emphasises that "Candomblé moves [her] body".²² Similarly, many *terreiro* members who have undergone psychotherapy stressed that Candomblé practices involved the body much more, while modern psychoanalysis and psychotherapeutic practice in Brazil relied on talking and mental processes. They generally perceived the bodily enactment of kinship relations with the *orixás* as healing, empowering and liberating, be it through dancing, receiving *orixás* in trance, or being in touch with their elements (for example drinking water from Oxum's font). Kinship relations with the *orixás* are fundamentally embodied.

The embodiment of kinship with *orixás* is reflected in the Candomblé literature, where the sensuous, moving body has received attention in regard to 'spirit possession', for example in the works *Dancing Wisdom* (Daniel, 2005), *Ecstatic Encounters* (Van de Port, 2011), and *The Taste of Blood* (Wafer, 1991). But in the Odé Terreiro, the bodily characteristics of father or mother *orixás* were frequently recognized in the everyday. For example, Rafaela had been troubled with blemishes on her body for many years, which had remained medically unexplained and difficult to treat. When I met her, she had just experienced another outbreak which she related to her intense connection with Omulu. Her father Omulu, the *orixá* of suffering, is

²² The importance of bodily involvement in Candomblé will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

known to be covered with scars – since his mother abandoned him at the seaside where his skin was hurt by crabs, before Yemanjá, the *orixá* of the sea, found him and cared for him. Rafaela therefore meaningfully reframed her symptoms as a sign of relatedness with her *orixá*. She still hoped that the blemishes would disappear, but they did not distress her so much anymore, as she accepted them as part of who she was, a daughter of Omulu.

The resemblance in both physical attributes and personality traits mirrors the concept of inheritance that is found in human-human kinship relations. Indeed, the idea of bodily connectedness between humans and *orixás* goes so far that a *terreiro* member told me that Ossaim's genetic information was actually engrained in my DNA. Although this genetic notion might not be true or relevant for all members of the group, it shows that ideas of spiritual and biological kinship are peculiarly entangled.

Quizilas: embodied taboos, inherited life lessons

To learn more about their *orixás*, many *terreiro* members read up on them at home, and I saw a range of Candomblé books on bookshelves in their houses. One of these books is Monica Buonfiglio's non-academic *Orixás, Anjos da Natureza*, 'Angels of Nature' (2004), which I borrowed from Paula. The book includes sections on archetypes, myths, health, work and love. It states that children of Xangô, like Paula, were more prone to cardiovascular disease, while as a daughter of Ossaim I had weak joints, especially the knees. It also suggests typical professions: administration, law, and politics for children of Xangô, and ecology, philosophy, and herbalism for children of Ossaim. Moreover, it includes details about children of which *orixás* make good love matches, and generally looked very similar to astrological life advice. The *ialorixá*, however, insisted that such books were not relevant. Again, focusing on the 'deep knowledge', she stressed that it was more important to take herbal baths, to participate in ceremonies and to care for the *orixás* by making them presents and respecting their taboos.

These taboos are called *quizilas*, and they vary depending on the *orixá* father or mother. For example, children of Oxossi must avoid eating *cajá* fruits; children of Iansã are not allowed jackfruit (*jaca mole*) and ram meat; children of Oxalá do not

tolerate chillies; and children of Xangô cannot enter graveyards. The *ialorixá* explained to me that people suffered if they disobeyed their *orixá*'s *quizilas*, and that this suffering was another reason why identifying the *orixá* was so important for healing. Matheus presented a strong embodied aversion against *cajá* fruits, Oxossi's *quizila*. When we were walking back to the suburb from the *terreiro* one afternoon, he suddenly made a noise, 'uahhh', looked to the ground and then showed me his arm. "Do you see this? All goose-bumps! I had not even noticed there were *cajás* lying on the ground!" he exclaimed. His bodily reaction seemed to prove his strong bonds with the *orixá*. Why Oxossi had a problem with *cajás*, he did not know.

The understanding that learning, in the sense of acquiring deep knowledge, is a bodily process is also expressed in Stoller's phenomenological account of 'sensuous epistemologies' among the Songhay in Mali and Niger (Stoller, 1997). The Songhay, Stoller explains, not only embody cultural memory during 'spirit possession' events; they also "learn about power and history by 'eating it' – ingesting odours, tastes, savouring textures and sounds" (1997:3). Stoller's critique of a 'mentalist' approach to religion emphasizes the essentially bodily character of religious experience that also underlies the physical connection with the *orixás* in Candomblé. By embodying the *quizilas*, people experience themselves as similar to their parent *orixás*; not in a metaphorical sense, but *in the flesh*.

Sometimes the bodily aversions only develop over time, as happened in the case of Antônio, a son of Xangô from a nearby *terreiro* of Angola tradition. He told me that according to the *itans*, Xangô was once dancing on a graveyard when the *orixá* Ewa almost frightened him to death by showing him the graves where the spirits of the dead resided. Therefore, children of Xangô are to avoid graveyards. He told me:

I always studied cemeteries and death, I even published a book on it. But as my *n'kisis*²³ have this *quizila* with death and cemeteries, I made it my own thing (*eu fiz isso uma coisa minha*). And today I have great difficulty to enter a graveyard, as strange as this may appear. It turned into reality.

²³ *N'kisis* are *orixás* in the Angolan Candomblé tradition.

He described this new reality as a ‘true feeling of terror’ (*pavor*) of graveyards, thus indicating that Xangô’s *quizila* had emotional and even physical effects on him. Specific *quizilas* are often explained with mythological stories (*itans*), although they are not always known by community members, as in Matheus’ case. By taking seriously the *quizilas* of their divine mothers and fathers, the *filhos-de-santo* therefore not only demonstrate knowledge about these *orixás*; they also perform and live the *orixás*’ character traits, and re-experience the *orixás* life stories in their human (or perhaps more-than-human) bodies. One can say: the children of the *orixás* become concrete manifestations of their divine parents in the world.

Following the *quizilas* also integrates the relationship with the *orixás* into the daily life of the *terreiro* members. It reminds them to be reflective and careful in their behaviour and to recognize their weaknesses and strengths. Iansã’s *quizila* to avoid soft jackfruit, for example, is linked to a story Póvoas (2002) wrote out.

Iansan’s *itan*

Oxalá woke up early with the wish to travel. Look, this is a rare thing to happen. It is so rare that the other *orixás* immediately agreed to his call to participate. They left by dawn. Oxalá is like that: he only starts things before sunrise. And there they went, in single file. Everybody walked without hurry, for Oxalá is slow, and he always walks behind.

Iansan, used to the agony of her tempest, started getting impatient. She looked to one side, and to the other, she gazed at the horizon so far away. And she got more and more nervous. She started thinking: Ah, if I were alone... I would be there in no time.

If only Xangô, her partner of agony, would be coming with her... but no: Xangô today had decided to side up with the older one... The agony grew so much that she could not bear this turtle walk any longer. So, she broke out of the line and walked ahead alone. Then, far ahead, she stopped. She stayed underneath a jackfruit tree and watched the group that moved so slowly because of Oxalá. At that moment, she already thought of what to do after she returned from the journey and made a thousand plans. And her wind ran through the forests, taking with it green and dry leaves.

When she was standing there, by herself, a ripe jackfruit dropped right on her head. She was covered from head to toe in sticky, sweet jackfruit juice. She cried out loud and did not know what to do. She felt alone and helpless and decided to walk towards the group to join them.

Everybody noted the fruit juice, but nobody said anything. Looking to the ground, she passed by Oxalá and took the last place in the row behind him. Iansan only overheard the last phrase of a conversation between Oxalá and Omolu, the oldest among the old ones:

‘That is how it goes... As you know well, these rushed people must learn... Who only walks running will have to return many times to overcome their agony.’ (Póvoas, 2002:63-64)

The *itan* stresses that children of Iansã need to learn how to deal with their inherited restlessness. Their personality is a divine and valued heritage, but throughout life they must learn to gradually redirect their energy in productive ways to reach equilibrium and well-being. Póvoas explains: “To take away the agony of these persons [children of Iansã] is like fixing a plane in full flight. If the plane stops, it will fall. If it continues to fly, it will not reach its destination” (1999:225). In other words, a child of Iansã needs their mother’s fast energy to live, but they must control it and engage with it to avoid problems. A child of Iansã is not to be blamed for their fiery character; to the contrary, it is their greatest resource in life. But the *itan* urges them to develop patience, and every time they withhold from eating jackfruit, they are reminded of their mother’s lesson.



Figure 20: Iansã [or Iansan]. Artwork by André Hora, Manchester

Conclusion

Having discussed Exu's role as a trigger for self-transformation in Chapter One, this chapter turned to the question of how this transformative process takes place through building kinship relations with *orixás*. It presented identity construction in the *terreiro* as a reflective process between humans and *orixás* in which the boundaries between self and other are continuously crossed and reiterated.

The construction of oneself as a child of an *orixá* starts with the cowry shell oracle, which reveals the father or mother *orixá*. In contrast to most anthropological literature on the subject, I argue that the oracle reading is not simply a matter of decoding shell patterns to make a statement of truth. Instead, it is used to create an ongoing dialogue between humans, and between humans and *orixás*. This dialogue is based on the intuition or *visão* of the *ialorixá* and on her interaction with the client, and it plays an important role in the negotiation of roles and relationships in the group. My ethnography stresses that one's identity as a child of *orixás* is not static, but is involved in a continuous reflective process that is expressed in the emic 'game of the double mirror'. This process facilitates self-acceptance, as well as respect for others as carriers of a divine force.

In the Introduction, I said that understanding how people heal in Candomblé can shed light on what it is that is being healed. Kinship relations with the *orixás*, as presented in this chapter, reveal that generating self-esteem and, as Rafaela said, self-love, is an essential aspect of the transformative healing process in Candomblé. The construction of kinship bonds with *orixás* can subvert humiliating social hierarchies that put blacks, poor people, women, homosexuals, and other marginalized groups at the bottom of society. In this way, addressing an *orixá* as the divine essence of a person turns out to be a form of empowerment and social healing.

The *orixás* are localized within the person, and they share personality as well as bodily features with their children, hence blurring the boundary between them. Yet, at the same time the boundary is also enhanced in that the *orixás* are also profoundly different from humans, and more powerful. Acts of *cuidado* are necessary to stabilize one's relationship with the inner father or mother *orixá* and to negotiate the similarity

and difference between them. These acts of *cuidado* include rituals to feed one's 'head' (*orí*) or the *orixás*, but also the obligation to follow certain rules and respect others as children of *orixás*. As humans and *orixás* are same-and-other at the same time, caring for the *orixás* becomes an act of self-care, and vice versa.

There is a discomfoting twist in the kin relationship with the *orixás*, however. Despite the experiences of empowerment and healing described above, the agency of an individual is subsumed to the will of one's *orí*, the necessity to follow the *odu*, and to the force of the *orixá* to make sure they do. When the *orixá* is conflated with the self, then any doubt about or resistance to the *orixá*'s demands (or to their interpretation by the *ialorixá*) is framed as an inner conflict in which the person ultimately is expected to accept the *orixá*'s will as their own. And despite the mutuality of the double mirror and the being-same-and-other, the superiority of the *orixás* is clearly indicated by their position as mother or father, and the positioning of the human as a child. Stepping out of the kinship relation (and of the *terreiro* group), in consequence, not only means turning against one's parent *orixás* and the community, but also against oneself. Therefore, deep identification as a child of an *orixá*, engrained in one's body, self-image and social relations, brings with it great obligations and social as well as emotional dependencies that can be hard to break. The *ialorixá*'s vertigo and Vitor's lost fingers indicate that escaping from the expected commitment can become very difficult – which makes the kinship terminology even more convincing.

After this discussion of building tight-knit kinship relations in a reflective process mediated by *cuidado*, in the next chapter I will turn to the spiritual economy between humans and *orixás* and to the circulation of *fé* (faith) and *axé* between them.

Chapter 3. Learning to have fé (faith): anticipating axé

Elas me ensinaram que a fé é um dom que se aprende, uma conquista diária, um tesouro que se ajunta, se guarda e se partilha.

They taught me that *fé* is a learned gift, a daily conquest, a treasure that one gathers, guards and shares. (Matheus, referring to the hands of the *ialorixá*)

We were sitting around a small plastic table in front of the *terreiro* house, when Jacqueline said she was afraid to visit the indigenous communities nearby and that she preferred staying in the *terreiro* instead. Jacqueline was an anthropology student from Manaus (Amazonas) who accompanied an indigenous rights activist from the Amazonian Tucano people to visit a local indigenous community. On their journey, they had stopped by the Odé Terreiro, and Mãe Darabí had invited them to stay for a few days. At the time, the indigenous Tupinambá people were fighting for their land, and organized demonstrations and land occupations. The members of the Odé Terreiro were not involved in the indigenous land movement, but they harboured an attitude of solidarity towards them, in opposition to the dominant white elite. News reached us about violent actions on the part of the Military Police, including the murder of indigenous activists²⁴. But when Jacqueline expressed her concerns about her safety in the protest, Aureliano, son of the fire god Xangô, eagerly responded that she should not be afraid, as “fear only attracts danger”. When Aureliano stated that it was best to abandon fear altogether and to trust in the *orixás* instead, I began to feel uncomfortable. I tried to make the point that there was a difference between being fearful and being careful (*ter medo e ter cuidado*) in a violent situation, but Aureliano responded that too much *cuidado* (here: caution) was not helpful either. Much more important, he stated, was to learn to have *fé* (faith).

Aureliano did not clarify what exactly one should have *fé* in. Oftentimes members of the *terreiro* would use the term in the phrase “with *fé* in the *orixás*” or also “with *fé* in God,” as Brazilians frequently exclaim. But usually, my informants would use ‘to

²⁴ The aggressions against the indigenous people in the region continue. On the day I am writing this passage (4th of May 2015), I read that an indigenous health worker (named Pinduca) of the Tupinambá in Olivença has been found shot dead, and his wife severely wounded.

have *fê* (*ter fê*) on its own, like Aureliano, and the meaning of this expression is not easily pinned down. The members of the Odé Terreiro mostly used *fê* in the sense of a general attitude towards life: a perspective of hope, trust, and confidence despite social insecurity and the risk of violence. In my eyes, this *fê* is best described as a courageous positive outlook despite all odds, a kind of relentless optimism²⁵.

The healing effects of faith and ‘learned optimism’ have been acknowledged in medicine, with more or less resistance, for a long time (Levin, 2009, Seligman, 2002). In 1910, the Oxford Professor of Medicine Sir William Osler writes in a paper with the title *The Faith that Heals*: “Intangible as the ether, ineluctable as gravitation, the radium of the moral and mental spheres, mysterious, indefinable, known only by its effects, faith pours out an unfailing stream of energy while abating no jot nor tittle of its potency” (Osler, 1910:1470). Since then, researchers of psycho-neuro-immunology and the placebo effect have tried to come to terms with the power of faith in medicine, and anthropological studies have provided many detailed descriptions of healing rituals in cultures around the world (for an overview, see: Csordas and Lewton, 1998).

But while people in the Odé Terreiro often brought up the importance of *fê*, this concept is peculiarly absent in the Candomblé literature, where the focus is on the vital force *axé*. What is this *fê* that Aureliano spoke of? Is it simply a way of abandoning fear and fatalistically accepting the consequences? Such an understanding suggests that *fê* made people careless and passive – and instead of bringing well-being, carelessness might actually pose a danger to them. But my ethnography shows that the members of the Odé Terreiro actively and intentionally created *fê* as a protective force. How does *fê* then relate to *axé*, *cuidado* and healing?

In this chapter, I will explore the use, meaning and creation of *fê* in the Odé Terreiro, and its relationship with *axé* and *cuidado* in the process of healing. What makes *fê* so powerful is that it is more than a mere belief in something. Instead, it is employed as

²⁵ I came across the term ‘relentless optimism’ not in Brazil, but in a wall painting on a subway in Stokes Croft, a part of Bristol where poverty, underground art, and drug use shape the street image. Although it is not a Brazilian expression, it seems to capture the notion of *fê* very well. Thanks to Mark for showing me the wall painting.

a powerful force that *does* something: it effectively changes reality. Aureliano's comment highlights that in the same way as fear attracts danger, *fé* provides protection. As the chapter will show, *terreiro* members cultivated and employed their *fé* as a positive dynamic force for their own well-being. Like *axé*, *fé* was an essential element of religious life in the Odé Terreiro, and both were intentionally created through acts of *cuidado* and the production of social relations in the *terreiro*. As I said in the Introduction, *axé* is the mysterious vital force that provides health and well-being. But as it anticipates and intensifies the experience of receiving *axé*, *fé* is a (if not *the*) driving force in the process of Candomblé healing.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents ethnographic examples of violence in Bahia as a background to the religious creation of *fé* as a protective force. My informants portrayed the *terreiro* as a realm of safety and peace where they could develop *fé* as a protective response to a stressful and dangerous world outside. The second section takes a closer look at the interaction between *fé* and *axé*. By way of an ethnographic description of the leaf bath (*banho*), it establishes both as co-constitutive, dynamic and experiential forces that overlap and shape each other. Notably, the vagueness of both *fé* and *axé* is not necessarily detrimental to their significance. Much to the contrary: by not clearly defining their essence, *fé* and *axé* gain a mystical dimension that contributes to their power. The third section looks at *fé* in relation to Christian religion in Brazil. In the Odé Terreiro I encountered a remarkable tolerance towards other religions as different ways of creating *fé*. This relativistic notion of *fé* was posed as a moral argument against evangelistic preaching by Pentecostals, and as such it formed part of a political statement against homophobia, racism, sexism, religious hypocrisy and social injustice.

Violence and *fé*

Yvonne Maggie notes that the most important power of Afro-Brazilian religion was “to provide protection for their followers” (2011:147). My thesis confirms that members of the Odé Terreiro sought security and protection in their religion: by way of rituals (Chapter One), by building kinship relations with the *orixás* (Chapter Two),

and by strengthening their own *fé* (this chapter). They often framed seeking protection in Candomblé as *se cuidar*, caring for oneself.

To illustrate what the *terreiro* members sought to be protected from, I will first provide ethnographic examples of their experiences of street violence, domestic violence and social exclusion, before opening the discussion about the power of *fé*. As mentioned in previous chapters, all *terreiro* members lived in nearby cities or suburbs, and they came from different social backgrounds. Some lived and worked under precarious circumstances, like Regina whose small income from work at a fast food stall provided for a family of five, while others had more financial security, like the university lecturer Aureliano. But all were affected by the omnipresence of violence in Brazil, which has been a topic of various ethnographies (e.g. Goldstein, 2013, Scheper-Hughes, 1993, Van de Port, 2011). They established their *fé* in dialogue with their fears, vulnerabilities, and the social reality of everyday life in Bahia.

Street violence

We had just arrived at the Odé Terreiro one morning in October, and were putting on our white clothes, when Mãe Darabí received a phone call from the *Ijexá Terreiro*: The son of one of her religious sisters had been killed in a nearby town. He was a motorbike taxi driver (*mototaxista*) who was assaulted and shot dead when he refused to give away his motorbike. “Those people just go for the killing!” the *ialorixá* exclaimed, and she went back to her room to get ready for an oracle consultation. Immediately, all present started sharing their own stories of assaults, and everyone had something to tell. Clearly, street violence affected everyone in one way or another.

When Aureliano was in a public bus that was attacked, so he told us, the other passengers believed he was involved with the thieves, as they did not take any money from him. He had tried to explain to them that he had no money on him as he was only wearing shorts; but, he recounted with amusement, the bus passengers got so angry that he had to jump out of the bus window and run away. The client who was waiting for her oracle consultation jumped in and told us that she had been assaulted

once when in her car: the robbers stole the car and she had to walk home by foot. The next morning, she went to a Catholic Church to pray to St. Judas, the ‘patron of impossible things,’ and in the afternoon she received a phone call from a prostitute who had found the stolen car in a side street together with all her papers. The client paid the financial reward to St. Judas, however, not to the woman who had called her. Mãe Darabí then joined in and told us about a time she was *not* attacked, because one of the muggers had recognized her and shouted: “Not her! She always gives us cigarettes!” By then we were all laughing. It was Hugo’s turn next, and he recounted a story of a *babalorixá* who was assaulted in the street and suddenly incorporated Iansã, the female warrior *orixá*. The scared thieves did not know how to deal with the furious goddess and ran away. “You see, the *orixás* not only dance; they also fight for us,” he said to me. The sad news of the morning had triggered amusing stories of triumphs and escapes from street violence.

The group’s response to the murder of a young man shows how stories of escape and victory were emphasized to counter narratives of victimhood. In this way, they articulated a feeling of control over their lives, in opposition to the common depiction of uncontrolled street violence. Aureliano’s story of his escape through the bus window inverts the roles of thief and victim in a humorous way, as he ended up being chased as a thief himself. The client’s account did not attribute the reappearance of her stolen car to the woman who called her, but to her prayer to St. Judas; and in this way, she established the idea that she had managed the situation herself, making clear that the reappearance of her car was a matter of faith. The *ialorixá*’s story, on the other hand, indicated that personal contact with marginalized individuals – here, by sharing cigarettes with them as an act of *cuidado* and respect – can prevent violent attacks. And finally, Hugo’s account of an *orixá* fighting off a group of offenders demonstrated the possibility of being spiritually protected in the streets.

The humorous tone of the conversation about a tragically murdered young man can be understood as a way to cope with pain and suffering, a possibility discussed in Donna Goldstein’s ethnography *Laughter out of Place* (Goldstein, 2013) about violence in a favela in Rio de Janeiro. “Humour is one way of bearing witness to the

tragic realities of life and an expression of discontent,” Goldstein writes (2013:15). But while joking about violence may provide short-term relief, in this chapter I examine the longer-term strategies employed by members of the *terreiro* community to actively cultivate a position of *fê* as a kind of relentless optimism that gives them a feeling of security in an environment where violence is a constant threat.

Violence in the streets of Bahia affects the security and well-being of the population immensely. Robberies and assaults are commonplace experiences, as the described conversation illustrates, and newspapers and TV news provide pictures of horribly disfigured crime victims on a daily basis. Between 2000 and 2010, the numbers of reported killings by firearms in Bahia State increased by 216%, from 1,523 to 4,818 per year; that is, from 10.5 to 25.3 out of every 100,000 state residents (Waiselfiz, 2013:16 and 19). Statistics from the Map of Violence (Waiselfisz, 2012) show that most victims are young black men. The Military Police itself plays a role in street violence, as they are responsible for around 2,000 deaths every year (Bueno et al., 2014:125). Bahia is classified as a state with low transparency around police violence, but even so, 344 killings by police officials were registered in 2012 (*ibid.*).

In April 2014, I witnessed a three-day long strike by the Military Police in Bahia, during which over 80 people were killed and many more injured in street fights and robberies. The strike ended when the army was sent to Salvador and the strike leader, a politician who was accused of using the strike to gain votes, was arrested. This event made palpable the extent to which violence is kept down with violence in Bahia. In the context of violence, I also started to better understand Aureliano’s comment that one needed to ‘learn to have *fê*’: Being fearful and hypervigilant all the time is mentally and physically exhausting, and it is hard to sustain for long. I noticed in myself that, at first, I was concerned whether the wobbly little lock on my house door would hold strong; but over time I ‘learned’ to worry less and less. But despite this gradual habituation, I noticed how much tension fell off me when I moved to a better-off area of the city halfway through my fieldwork.

Guilherme's story: from small confusions to great deservability

During my fieldwork, I heard many stories of street violence and how people coped with it. One of these was told by Guilherme, initiated member of the Odé Terreiro and son of the warrior *orixá* Ogum. He lived with his wife Leticia in a simple apartment in Salvador and got by with different small jobs. He could not visit the *terreiro* as often as he wished, because the long-distance bus ticket of 100 Reais (roughly 30GBP at the time) was very expensive for him. Before he joined the group a few years ago, he had experienced troubled life episodes.

[...] I went through some small confusions (*pequenas confusões*) before I got to know the *terreiro*. I was shot twice. [...] When the bullet entered, it punctured the aorta and got out through the back; and the other bullet is still inside. I stayed in the ICU for three days. [...] And then there was another confusion with my cousin, and I got a bullet in the forehead. You see the mark here? This was the bullet. So, my cousin died, and where the shots came from, nobody knows. They passed by firing, I don't know. [...] The doctor] said that by the width of a razorblade I would have had a brain injury. So how can I not have *fé* in the *orixás*? I've been through a lot, and I believe I have a mission. I have a way to walk with the *orixás*. I feel this every day of my life, in every moment of my life. [...]

In this quote, Guilherme downplays being shot twice as “small confusions”, in a similar way to Donna Goldstein's informant from a Rio shantytown, who talked about a “little accident” when his friend was shot dead by a local street gang (Goldstein, 2013:174). But despite the euphemistic expression, in fact Guilherme took the events very seriously. He had survived gun shots in his heart and in the head, and his survival, he felt, could not be a coincidence. Interpreting the life-threatening incidents as signs for his spiritual mission, he decided to change his life and take up following Candomblé again, as he had done as a child. As he felt he had been saved by the *orixás*, he found that his own mission now was to take care (*cuidar*) of others. People turned to him with serious problems, he told me, and he did all he could do to support them. By doing so, he tightened his links with the *orixás*, and he felt more in control over his life again.

In the previous chapter I argued that caring for the *orixás* is a way of caring for oneself. Here, I add that caring for others in need also contributes to self-care.

Following Candomblé and helping others was a way to ‘deserve’ (*merecer*) the *orixá*’s protection. “When you seek deservability (*merecimento*), your life flows,” Guilherme explained. This approach gives an interesting twist to the discussion of *fé*: it does not relate so much to faith *in* the *orixás* as such, but to the faith *that* one deserves to receive their help. What his *orixá* Ogum asked from him, Guilherme stated, was to be “a serious man who does things correctly.” By becoming this ‘serious man’ and acting responsibly, Guilherme not only avoided street fights in the first place and gained self-respect; by caring for others, or fulfilling his ‘mission’, he also actively created a feeling of being worthy of divine protection, in turn strengthening his *fé* that he will receive *axé*.

Domestic violence

During my fieldwork in Bahia I also frequently heard accounts of domestic violence, including rape, harsh family conflicts, and disrespectful behaviour at home. Despite the common romanticized depiction of ‘the Brazilian home’ (*o lar brasileiro*) as a “loving space where harmony should reign over confusion, competition and disorder” (Da Matta, 1984), the intimate space of the *lar brasileiro* can be a dangerous place. While most victims on the street are men (Waiselfisz, 2012), domestic violence mainly affects women. Jodie Roure (2009) speaks about a national epidemic of domestic violence in Brazil, as about one in four women have experienced violence at home. Roure details: “Every fifteen seconds, a woman in Brazil is beaten by her intimate partner or ex-partner, a Brazilian woman is hindered by her aggressor from leaving the home, and another Brazilian woman is forced to have sexual relations against her will” (Roure, 2009:92).

Regina’s story

One of these women was Regina of Xangô, a sparky 34-year old woman with short, curly hair who came to Bahia from São Paulo. She is one of the two *iaôs* (spirit mediums) who were initiated in the Odé Terreiro during my fieldwork. During one of the initiation rituals in the *barracão*, the visiting *babalorixá* from the Ijexá Terreiro said about her:

She arrived here persecuted by a husband who was a snake in human form, wasn’t he? [Audience: He was!] He was an inhumane snake! But then she

met Giovanna in Sao Paulo. [...] And Giovanna and Darabí helped her, they rescued her, they organized a ticket for her escape, otherwise she would have died! She had to leave that foul house there, the house with that man, because now she is daughter of Xangô, the king! [Audience: heyyy! Applause and shouts]. And Xangô will give her light and glory, strength and power to be successful in her life. [Audience: Axé!] Because long live those who have a man, and those who don't they live long as well, and maybe much better! [Audience: Laughter, Applause]

Regina had joined the Odé Terreiro after a row of social disasters, including her abusive husband and great financial problems, but she always struck me as a remarkably cordial and upbeat woman. When Regina told me her life story, it reminded me of Van de Port's comment about his Bahian partner Victor, whose past had "so much rottenness in [it] that you cannot but wonder how so much decency sprouted from it" (Van de Port, 2011:105). In São Paulo, Regina had worked as a house servant (*empregada*) and earned a minimum wage. Her husband did not contribute much to the household, she told me; he was an alcoholic and drug-addict, a *vagabundo*, as she called him. Regina had married him when she was still a teenager, but their marriage had soon turned against her. Emotional and physical abuse was common, and he had frequent affairs with other women.

After years of enduring the situation, Regina was introduced to Mãe Darabí by her aunt Giovanna, a member of the Ijexá Terreiro. The *ialorixá* was visiting São Paulo and performed a cowry shell consultation for Regina. Later that day, Mãe Darabí incorporated her father Oxossi, who turned to Regina to ask if she wanted to leave São Paulo. Regina told me that she answered this question with "three times yes." When, a few weeks later, her drunk husband beat her heavily with a metal chain, her daughter called the police and Regina escaped with the help of several *terreiro* members. She now lives in Bahia and takes care of her two children, granddaughter and mother. The *ialorixá* often pointed out that single women bear the double burden of being mother and father at the same time. But in the *terreiro* Regina became part of a network of brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers, who also care for her.

[...] So, I am happy, I am calm, I am in my father [Oxossi]'s house, with my family: my biological family (*familia de sangue*) and my spiritual family (*familia espiritual*). I have a father, a mother, I have brothers and sisters that I never had before. People to hug, to smile,

to rant together, to teach. Because what is important and enjoyable is the respect we have for each other here in the house.

Regina is still waiting for her divorce to go through, three years after she denounced her husband to the police. “But my father Xangô is justice, he will do me this favour, he has already helped me so much,” she said. “And this divorce will go through soon. It will. I have *fé*.” Like Guilherme, Regina expressed that she was saved by the *orixás*, and like Mãe Darabí she felt sheltered and cared for in the *terreiro* community (see Chapter Two). Her experience of changing her life to the better with the support and *cuidado* of the *terreiro* group and the *orixás* gave her *fé* that she would also succeed in the future, hence making her develop more resilience and ‘relentless optimism’ to face her problems.

Social Exclusion

Stories like Guilherme’s and Regina’s are not rare. Stemming from poverty and social inequality, they are but individual examples of widespread, everyday violence in Brazil. Social suffering in a deeply exclusive society like Brazil is rooted in structural violence, a term that medical anthropologists have used to highlight the link between socio-economic inequality and physical, emotional and mental distress and illness (Farmer et al., 2006, Kleinman, 2000, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). In a meeting of the study group of Afro-Brazilian religions in the local university, the *babalorixá* of the Ijexá Terreiro stated with indignation:

If you ask me what kind of society Brazil is, I tell you, Brazil is a country of social exclusion. It excludes the black people (*o povo negro*), it excludes the homosexuals, the women, it excludes the poor people. That is what Brazil is, in its essence, it is exclusive.

In fact, most *terreiro* members had experienced some kind of discrimination related to homophobia, racism, sexism, and/or sheer poverty. As to homophobia, almost half the men in the Odé Terreiro were openly gay, and they had often been harassed or called *viado* (‘faggot’) at their workplaces, in the streets or at home. In contrast, Candomblé has for decades been associated with the gay male community (Johnson, 2002:55, Wafer, 1991), and Candomblé symbols even feature in Bahian gay parades (Van de Port, 2005b:11). Birman’s ethnography in Rio de Janeiro argues that fluid

gender roles and the possibility for men to incorporate female *orixás* in trance make the religion very attractive for sexually ‘passive’ gay men, often referred to as *bichas* (Birman, 1995). Unsurprisingly, gender-bending was common in the Odé Terreiro. One night during a ritual in the *barracão*, an *ogã* advised the visitors: “Men sit here and women over there,” and with a throwaway hand gesture he added: “And those who are undecided can sit wherever they want.”

Many group members were visibly black, and related frequent experiences of direct or indirect racial discrimination. According to Van de Port (2005b), Candomblé *terreiros* have been linked with the Black political movement since the late 1970s. Long before that, however, the religion already provided structures of resistance against slavery and white domination (Harding, 2000). Although skin tones varied in the group, blackness was celebrated in the Odé Terreiro, and I will discuss the link between the *terreiro* and the Black movement in more detail in Chapter Four.

Almost all the women with children in the Odé Terreiro were single mothers and struggled with the financial, emotional and organizational burden of raising their children alone. In in the suburb where I lived with the *ialorixá*, most women I knew were single mothers, and often had various children from different men. Therefore, their presence in the *terreiro* might simply mirror the social demography of the place. But as I noted in Chapter One, many researchers have pointed out that in Candomblé women are powerful (Póvoas, 2010, Hayes, 2008, Harding, 2000), and in the Odé Terreiro they were referred to as warriors (*guerreiras*) and queens (*rainhas* [Portuguese], or *iabás* [Yoruba]). The *ialorixá*, a single mother herself, always emphasized the importance of women’s empowerment and the value of their work for society. One day I accompanied her to a dance performance in the city, where we watched a group of determined young girls dancing, raising their fists and calling out: “Courage, tenderness, principles, adventures: woman! Sister, comrade, warrior: woman!” – “É isso, meninas!” the *ialorixá* shouted, “That’s it, girls!”

Social exclusion also relates to a lack of public health services, especially in poor neighbourhoods of the city (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five). Apart from the difficulty of gaining access to medical care in the first place, I heard complaints that doctors were often distant and uninterested in the health problems of

their patients, and those who could afford them used private health services offered by modern clinics in the city. But in the impoverished suburb where I lived with the *ialorixá*, the local community health post (*posto de saúde*) had been closed for over two years. I was told it was ‘under construction’, but every time I walked by, I only saw it decaying further and further. It looked like a monument to ‘not caring’.

Finally, the *terreiro* members were subject to religious intolerance, principally on the part of Pentecostals from big congregations such as the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) and *Assembleia de Deus* (Assembly of God), or smaller fundamentalist Protestant churches that are thriving in Brazil (Birman, 2011, Gonçalves da Silva, 2005, Selka, 2010). As I mentioned in Chapter One, over the last decades Pentecostal churches have intensified their ‘holy war’ or ‘spiritual battle’ against evil, which they see manifested specifically in Afro-Brazilian religions (Gonçalves da Silva, 2005, Sansi, 2007).

In contrast to experiences of neglect and social exclusion outside of the *terreiro*, my informants presented Candomblé as a religion of social inclusion and care. The *ialorixá* stated: “Religion is not just singing and dancing,” but also meant caring and providing for each other. Looking into history, Rachel E. Harding refers to Candomblé *terreiros* in 19th century Brazil as a ‘refuge in thunder’, or alternative spaces of blackness in a society dominated by a white elite. She points out that Afro-Brazilian religions were forms of collective resistance to the atrocities of slavery and exploitation (see Chapter Four). And still today, the Odé Terreiro community provided its members with a sense of security, mutual help and recognition. They referred to the *terreiro* as a space of safety and peace in an environment of violence, discrimination and stress: as a sacred haven free from fear, where they could rest, heal and develop their *fé*.



Figure 21: View from the barracão onto the lagoon of the Odé Terreiro, 2014

So far, I have outlined the social reality of everyday violence in Bahia, using the stories of Guilherme and Regina to illustrate their *fé* as an optimistic attitude that builds on the experience of overcoming difficult or even life-threatening situations. *Cuidado* here contributed to *fé* in two ways: Guilherme's story illustrated how *providing cuidado* for others established a feeling of deserving protection and *axé*; and in Regina's case, experiences of *receiving cuidado* created trust that things will work out in the future, too. Both aspects are relevant for the discussion about care-receiving and care-giving (see Introduction). While 'receiving' and 'giving' usually go with a gain on one side and a loss on the other, in this instance both receiving *and* giving *cuidado* contribute to developing *fé* that good things will happen. Again, as in the previous chapter, *cuidado* turns into self-care. Promising a high return and good relations with the *orixás*, acts of *cuidado* are part of a spiritual economy in which *axé* is expected. *Fé* is this anticipation of *axé*, and it is understood and used as an effective force in itself.

Next follows an exploration of how *fé* and *axé* are created and experienced in the leaf bath (*banho*), which will lead to a more detailed discussion of the role of *fé* in the spiritual economy of the Odé Terreiro. I will then explore in more detail where the term *fé* comes from and why, in contrast to *axé*, it has not received much attention in the context of Candomblé until now.

Fé and axé

In contrast to other Candomblé concepts, like the Yoruban *axé*, *orí* or *odu* (see Introduction and Chapter Two), *fé* is a Portuguese term derived from Latin *fides* (faith, trust, belief), and I never came across an equivalent Yoruba expression in the *terreiro*. In Christian doctrine, faith denotes a religious virtue, and according to the Bible it is a divine gift (Rom. 12:3) received by hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). And one constantly hears this word in the streets of Bahia. Enthusiastic Evangelical preachers in public places try to convince by-passers to have *fé* in Jesus Christ; and the Catholic Church also commonly uses the term in leaflets, posters, and sermons. But *fé* has also been vernacularized in Brazilian everyday expressions, such as *com fé em Deus*, ('hopefully'; literally: 'with faith in God'), or *de boa fé* ('acting honestly' or 'in good faith'). Certainly not everybody who casually utters the word in this way uses it in a religious sense; in fact, *fé* is so overused that it has become as trivial as other common expressions of Christian origin, such as *graças a Deus* ('thank God') or *pelo amor de Deus!* ('for God's sake!').

The members of the Odé Terreiro frequently pronounced *fé* in association with Candomblé's vital force *axé*. For example, when someone would say: 'With *fé* in the *orixás*, we will see each other next month,' the others would answer with a loud 'Axé!', just like Christians pronounce 'Amen'. Indeed, *fé* and *axé* are not hermetically sealed concepts, but they are closely interwoven in the socio-religious practices in the *terreiro* group. *Axé* is a Yoruba term, but according to Harding (2000:222) the concept is shared in Candomblé communities of Bantu and Jeje tradition, too. *Axé* has been described as a force, energy, or principle that is essential for the existence of life and the world as a whole (Prandi, 2005), and Robert

Thompson calls it the ‘power-to-make-things-happen’ (1983:5). *Axé* also indicates authority, power, and wisdom (Matory, 2005:123). And finally, the community of a *terreiro* itself can be seen as collective *axé*, and its members are united by this circulating divine force, uninterrupted since the *terreiro*’s foundation.

As I argued in the Introduction, *axé* always remains somewhat mysterious and ethereal. “*Axé* means force, and force for me is energy,” Hugo explained. And the *babalorixá* of the Ijexá Terreiro kept it similarly vague: “Ah, it is this energy that comes from the universe itself, the force of *axé*, the force responsible for being. Things are because *axé* exists.” What *axé* really is could only be experienced, but not fully described with words – just as Candomblé’s ‘deep knowledge’ could not be found in books (Sansi, 2007, Van de Port, 2011; see Chapter Two). Stressing the inferiority of written words, the *babalorixá* wrote a little dedication into one of his books for me: “For Hannah, without words, because words, sometimes, disturb” (*sem palavras, porque as palavras, às vezes, atrapalham*). In this sense, *axé* fits in the category of ‘*mana*-terms’ as introduced by Pascal Boyer (1986:52) to describe some kind of mystical force that ultimately remains elusive. These concepts escape the limitations of a concrete definition, as they suggest infinite potential. Like *axé*, *fé* is also a ‘*mana*-term’ that cannot fully be grasped in words. My informants often used both terms in line with other terms marked by opacity, such as ‘energy’ (*energia*), ‘force’ (*força*) and ‘mystery’ (*mistério*) – and it is precisely this indeterminacy that makes both *axé* and *fé* so powerful. Therefore, I am not trying to approach them by capturing them in a neat definition, but by exploring their relationship to each other and their link to practices of *cuidado*. To carve out their role in healing, I will now present a description of sacred leaf baths (*banhos*), which will lead to a more detailed discussion about *fé* and *axé* as two ambiguous, overlapping and inseparable aspects of religious life in the *Odé Terreiro*.

Closing the body: the leaf *banho*

Upon arrival in the *terreiro*, and before putting on their white clothes, the house members went down one by one to the small waterfall in the forest to take a ‘bath’ (*banho*; pronounce: bun-yo). The *banho* serves, firstly, to cool down the ‘hot’ street energy they are carrying and to make them feel calm, and secondly, to ‘close the

body' (*fechar o corpo*) to negative influences. A 'closed body' (*corpo fechado*) is defined as being immune to injury, be it of spiritual, emotional, or physical nature, while an 'open body' (*corpo aberto*) is vulnerable and can be attacked easily (see also Sansi, 2011:274). The *corpo fechado* is a protected body.

To close the body to danger, *terreiro* members use a solution of leaves in water which they fetch from a container by the house. First, they clean themselves with soap in the small waterfall by the lagoon, amidst tropical flowers and lush vegetation. Standing naked on the wet stones, they then pour the leaf solution over themselves to impregnate their body with *axé*. The leaf solution should run over the whole body and should not be rubbed off with a towel, so they step into the sacred white clothes with tiny leftover leaf pieces sticking to their still dripping wet skin.



Figure 22: A house member in the waterfall of the terreiro. Photo: Guedes Caputo 2015

The first time I took a leaf *banho* (or *abô* in Yoruba), an initiated woman came with me and said: “This will be an extraordinary experience for you, you will feel so strong and fresh after this *banho*. You will feel the energy.” I kept thinking about her comment each time I took a leaf bath afterwards, and indeed they felt very refreshing and vitalizing. Not surprisingly, the *banho* was part of ‘taking care of oneself’ (*se cuidar*), and the *ialorixá* often reminded me to use leaf preparations, even after my return to Scotland. But interestingly, the *axé* that one feels (or is expected to feel) in

the *banho* is not simply an effect of the leaves on the body; it is supposed to increase with the *fé* that one acquires over time. “The more *fé* you have, the more effective the *banho* will be,” the *ialorixá* said. A person’s *fé* strengthens the *axé* of the *banho*.

Moreover, the *axé* of a *banho* also depends on the *cuidado* and the *fé* with which the leaf solution was prepared. One morning when I arrived at the *terreiro*, I saw Thiago, an initiated son of the hunter *orixá* Oxossi, sitting in the *barracão*. Thiago had collected leaves in the morning according to the *ialorixá*’s instructions, and now he was making a fresh *banho* solution in a metal bucket. I felt lucky, as I had expected to use the *abô velho* (old *abô*), the old leaf preparation that is kept in the big earthen pot under a bush outside the house. *Abô velho* is supposed to be very effective as to its high content of *axé*, but it smells of rotten plants and harbours mosquito larvae, so I preferred to wait until the fresh one was ready. I sat down on the floor while Thiago rubbed the leaves in his hands and mixed them with the water, which gradually took on a green colour. The *ialorixá* walked by and reminded him to sing for the *orixás* while preparing the *banho*, so he started a song for the warrior Ogum to activate the leaves’ *axé*.

In Candomblé, the *ialorixá* explained to me, all the leaves were sacred, but their spiritual energy, their *axé*, had to be awakened before they could be used. This awakening (*despertar*) occurs when specific rules are followed and the *orixás* are greeted and honoured, as in Thiago’s singing. When picking the leaves, one must ask the forest *orixá* Ossaim for permission by uttering the Yoruba ‘*Agô, Ossaim*’. The number of leaf types always should be odd²⁶, and they are to be cut or picked only with the right hand. For normal *banhos*, perfumed leaves such as basil, rosemary, mint, lavender and Surinam cherry (*pitanga*) were combined with forest leaves like *rin-rin*, *beto*, and jackfruit tree leaves, and for healing preparations the *ialorixá* uses specific leaves according to the patient’s needs. Preparing a *banho* was not just an act of rubbing leaves; it required focus and contact with the *orixás*, similar to a prayer.

²⁶ The link between odd numbers and supernatural forces might originate from European traditions. Virgil, for example, claims “The deity is pleased with the odd number”, and Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* says: “There is divinity in odd numbers” (quoted in Schimmel 1993: 14).

SCHIMMEL, A. 1993. *The mystery of numbers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thiago activated (or awakened) the leaves' *axé* with *cuidado* for the *orixás*, in the sense of acknowledging them, showing respect, and following the rules precisely. This way of caring corresponds with one of the Oxford Dictionary's definitions of care as "serious attention or consideration applied to doing something correctly" (see Introduction). The leaves' *axé* is only accessible by relating to Ossaim. By asking Ossaim for "*agô*", i.e. for permission to pick leaves, Thiago first confirmed Ossaim's authority over the healing power of plants, and secondly announced that he was about to cross the boundary to the divine realm – just like he did when greeting Exu upon entering the *terreiro* (Chapter One). Later, he also imbued the *banho* with Ogum's protective force when singing for him. In this way, Thiago's *cuidado* towards Ossaim and Ogum became materialised in the *banho*, and its *axé* could then be passed on to the *terreiro* members. It could also be transferred to objects, and the *ogã* used to sprinkle his motorbike wheels with leaf *banho* to prevent road accidents.

Taking the leaf *banho* as protection against negative influences is also linked with the sensual experience of standing in the dizzyingly beautiful tropical forest, feeling the cooling plant juice running down one's naked body. Several members of the group told me how much they enjoyed this moment, when their stress and worries were washed away and they felt strong, fresh and full of *axé*. In his book *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé*, Voeks writes that the leaf bath could have a "profound psychological impact" and that an initiated person could go into trance just from its smell (Voeks 1997: 95). I have never heard of anyone in the *terreiro* going into trance during a *banho*, but it was certainly seen as a moment of contact with the divine sphere. This proximity with the *orixás* during the leaf bath marks an experience of reaching into their world and feeling empowered by their *axé*.

But there is more at stake here than receiving and feeling *axé*. *Cuidado* and taking a *banho* are intentional acts; they aim at generating a good relationship with the *orixás* and at well-being. "Here in Candomblé everything is an exchange," the *ialorixá* explained. Accordingly, when one adheres to the rules of the *terreiro* and pleases the *orixás*, their protection and *axé* is expected to follow. *Cuidado*, then, is not an end in itself or an act of the moment, but it implies a projection into the future. Like the gift that expects reciprocity (Mauss, 2002), *cuidado* awaits *axé* in return. And this

expectation of something good to come, this *fé*, is not only a side aspect of the spiritual economy between humans and *orixás*. It is a power in itself.

The economies of *axé* and *fé*

While *axé* and *fé* are closely linked, a crucial difference is that *axé* is of divine origin, while *fé* is human. The *axé* of the leaves is activated when certain rules are followed and the *orixás* are addressed by humans with *fé*.²⁷ Importantly, both forces are reciprocal and build on each other. Human *fé* is just as important for the *orixás* to thrive as the divine *axé* is for humans.

“*Fé*,” the *ialorixá* clarified, “is the force of the *orixá*; it comes into existence through the human” (*A fé é a força do orixá; vem através do humano*). I was not sure I had understood her correctly. “Are you saying that human *fé* is the force of the *orixá*?” I asked, and she simply replied: “Yes.” I was thrilled. As the *ialorixá* described it, the Candomblé followers and *orixás* in the *Odé Terreiro* were involved in a symbiotic relationship, in the sense that both sides depended on a mutually beneficial interaction. Instead of asking the chicken-and-egg question of ‘who was first’ (see Chapter Two), she presented the *orixás* and humans as co-constituting and strengthening each other. Thus, she suspended the subject-object dichotomy along with a unidirectional cause-effect relationship. What unites humans and gods are the circulating powers of *axé* and *fé*, mediated through acts of *cuidado*.

The circulation of *fé* and *axé* explains why the statement that *axé* is the force of the *orixá* does not contradict the *ialorixá*’s affirmation that *fé* is also the force of the *orixá*. *Fé* comes from the human and gives force to the *orixá*, and in extension to the whole system of circulation. Without this reciprocal relationship, both sides will suffer: when humans forget about the *orixás* and stop performing the rituals, *axé* is lost and the connection with the African ancestors is broken. Likewise, when humans don’t feel the *orixás*’ *axé* and stop performing the rituals, they will lose their *fé* and with it the protection of the *orixás*.

²⁷ Notably, when a leaf *banho* is made correctly and with *fé*, it was still supposed to have an effect on a person, even if that person does not have *fé*.

While *fé* and *axé* are different, in that the first originates in human experience and the latter in the divine world, they are at the same time very similar. First, like *axé*, *fé* is seen as an *effective* force which makes things happen. This understanding is expressed in Aureliano's statement at the beginning of the chapter, when he noted that fear attracted danger while *fé* was protective. In a violent environment, having faith that one will not be harmed might or might not be effective to ward off attacks, but in my informants' experiences it surely reduced stress, anxiety and the feeling of vulnerability. Moreover, the *ialorixá* made clear that *fé* was an important element of Candomblé healing, as the more *fé* one had, the more effective a cure was.

Secondly, *axé* and *fé* are both *experiential* forces, in that they are linked to physical and spiritual experiences, rather than to rational explications. For example, sensing the *orixá's* 'energy' during sacrifice rituals and dance ceremonies, or feeling light and peaceful after a bath with sacred leaves, was understood to be more important than gathering factual, 'superficial' knowledge about the religion. And as the *ialorixá* made clear, *fé* is gained through experiences of direct contact with the divine, and not through logical reasoning.

Thirdly, *fé* and *axé* are *dynamic* forces that can be produced and strengthened through *cuidado* and contact with the *orixás*; they can be diminished, received, and transferred to others. When the Odé Terreiro was founded, secret objects called *fundamentos* (foundations) were buried in the centre of the *barracão*. They are carriers of *axé* that were taken from the Ijexá Terreiro, where the *ialorixá* was initiated. Like seeds, they were planted in the new *terreiro*, and their *axé* was made to grow and flourish through cyclical ritual acts. Similarly, when a new person comes to the house, *fé* is not expected to be suddenly present, but it is gradually developed over time. Or to stay with botanical terms: *fé* is cultivated at an individual pace.

Finally, *fé* and *axé* are *relational* forces. They come into existence through relationships and are essential for the connection between the *aiyê* (human world) and the *orun* (divine sphere). The *ialorixá* made clear that receiving a treatment always goes with giving something back. "So, when I receive, I offer something to the *orixá*. What I offer is gratitude. And this gratitude is transformed into strengthening." Both Guilherme and Regina had expressed great gratitude to the

orixás after they had survived dangerous episodes. Gratitude is not the same as *fé*, as it comes after the fact (after receiving *axé*) while *fé* is anticipatory. As Regina said about her divorce: “But my father Xangô is justice, he will do me this favour, he has already helped me so much.” Her *fé*, her expectation to receive help, was based on previous experiences of support.

Understanding *fé* and *axé* as circulating forces of human and divine origin, respectively, fits well with the *ialorixá*'s comment that a strong *fé* increased the effect of the ritual *banho* (and hence of the *axé* one received). A sacred stone carries *axé*, but it does not have *fé* like humans. *Fé* and *axé* now appear as distinct but corresponding forces that can be exchanged. But in contrast to a simple give-and-take exchange, *axé* and *fé* are supposed to multiply in circulation. Taking a leaf *banho* on the wet rocks in the forest with *fé* will bring a sensation of relief, well-being and strength, which is defined as *axé*, and in turn strengthens *fé*. Receiving *axé* results in ever-stronger *fé*, in a sort of a positive-feedback system or an upward spiral that goes back and forth between humans and *orixás*.

Fé and Belief

As I have shown, in the Odé Terreiro the term *fé* was used in the sense of trust and confidence acquired through bodily and religious experience. Importantly, *fé* is different from belief. The *ialorixá* explained that the difference between believing (*acreditar*) and having *fé* was that the former is something one *thinks*, but the latter is something one *feels*. *Fé*, she noted, developed over time through experiencing the powers of the *orixás*. The two of us were sitting in the *barracão*, and she pointed at a bench to clarify her case. She could believe that this wooden construction is indeed a bench, she explained, but she might not have faith that it would not break under her weight. And it was the same with the *orixás*: “It’s the mystery. You don’t see it, you feel it.”

‘Believing’ (*acreditar*) here is a cognitive capacity, while ‘having *fé*’ is always experiential. A person would arrive at a Candomblé *terreiro* with hope (*esperança*), she said, but not with *fé*, and she added: “one arrives searching, and *fé* is what one acquires.” Providing a personal example, she told me that when she entered

Candomblé, she believed (*acreditava*) in her *babalorixá*, but she had no *fé* in him. Over time, however, he gradually taught her to have *fé* by “showing, conversing, [and] exploring” (*mostrando, conversando, explorando*). After having entered Candomblé, she felt that her life became easier, and things started to work out for her. It was through this practical experience that the *ialorixá* ‘learned to have *fé*’.

Max Bondi (2009:6), with reference to Marcio Goldman (2005), characterizes Candomblé as a ‘praxeological’ religion that puts cosmology in service of ritual production and not the other way round. In keeping with this argument, Johnson (2002) – who underwent initiation in a Candomblé Nagô *terreiro* in Rio de Janeiro – describes telling his *ialorixá* that he did not actually believe in the *orixás*. As I mentioned in the Introduction, her reply was pragmatic: “The question is whether you perform the rituals, not whether you believe in them” (Johnson, 2002:13).

In her book *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*, about magic and witchcraft in contemporary England, Tanya Luhrmann also states that people’s acts were not primarily guided by beliefs. She argues that it often is the other way round and beliefs were adopted to legitimize practices (Luhrmann, 1991:310). This finding concurs with the ritual theory of Catherine Bell, who criticizes the understanding that belief is primary and ritual secondary, as had been assumed by earlier anthropological theories of Edward Tylor, James Frazer, William James, and also Emile Durkheim (Bell, 1992:14-15). Ritual does not simply follow or enact belief, she argues; it produces practical knowledge that effectively shapes human experience and perception of the world (Bell, 1992:221).

Luhrmann uses the term ‘interpretive drift’ to describe the process of slowly changing one’s manner of interpreting events when partaking in specific (ritual) activities and becoming part of a new group (Luhrmann, 1991:307). Borrowing Luhrmann’s term underlines the gradual process of developing *fé* in the Odé Terreiro, which was based on physical, spiritual and social experiences, and the anticipation of receiving *axé*. It brings out the creation of *fé* not as a sudden epiphany or a rational conviction, but as a continuous hermeneutic process of interpretation, experience and rationalization (Luhrmann, 1991:312-313) and hence of slowly acquiring a new set of assumptions about the world. But while Luhrmann presents the ‘interpretive drift

towards belief' as a kind of byproduct of ritual action, *fé* in the Odé Terreiro occupies a more central position; and I dare to say that the cultivation of *fé* is a main purpose of ritual practice, and of practices of *cuidado* in the Odé Terreiro.

I am not sure whether during my fieldwork I reached any mentionable level of *fé*. But I noticed that, much like the magician apprentices in Luhrmann's work, I started integrating explanation patterns from the *terreiro* into my own thinking. These patterns would usually emerge as quick causal connections, like 'I enjoy being in the forest because I am Ossaim's daughter,' or 'it is windy because today is Wednesday, day of Iansã' – though I would brush those unwanted thoughts away as quickly as they appeared. But I was surprised at how often these thoughts popped up in my head, and at the emotional reactions I started to have to them, even though I did not rationally *believe* in them.

Social references can indeed be very effective, even if an individual does not believe in the underlying explanations. Ethnographic examples for the effect of magic and witchcraft on outsider anthropologists can be found in Jeanne Favret-Saada's *Deadly Words* (1980) and Paul Stoller's and Cheryl Olke's *In Sorcery's Shadow* (1987). Favret-Saada (1980) demonstrates that when she learned about witchcraft in a French village, she got more and more 'caught up' in it herself because the whole village related to her in terms of witchcraft. Similarly, Stoller, who became a sorcerer's apprentice among the Songhay in Niger (Stoller and Olkes, 1987:148), states that Songhay magic worked for him not because he believed in it, but because he was integrated in the narrative and social reality of magic. This entanglement went so far that he experienced paralysis of his legs caused by a sorcerer's attack, which he eventually managed to reverse by using protective charms (Stoller and Olkes, 1987). These reflections bring up the question of whether fear is indeed the opposite of *fé*, as suggested by Aureliano in the introductory vignette – or whether one is the other's flipside, its inverted but intrinsically connected form.

Snakes and lost fingers: the other side of *fé*

Despite the empowering impact of cultivating *fé* and its important role for healing and protection in the Odé Terreiro, I could not help but wonder about its negative

consequences. In this chapter's opening vignette, Aureliano stated that fear attracted danger, and I countered that fear could also be protective when it comes to avoiding dangerous situations. Was it healthy to have *fé* when Jacqueline was scared of police violence? Moreover, if people developed religious *fé* in an embodied experiential process, in the sense of Luhmann's interpretive drift, could they still make free decisions? And remembering Vitor's lost fingers and Mãe Darabí's vertigo from Chapter Two: what happens if one does not pay one's share in the exchange with the *orixás*? In the *Odé Terreiro* I struggled to find clear answers to these questions. But I found snakes.

The first snake appeared when Tuca and Jacqueline, our guests from the Amazon, were there. In broad daylight, it was curled up on the stairs of the little waterfall where we took daily showers. After some screaming and shouting, it was killed with Tuca's help, who – unlike the *terreiro* members present – luckily had some knowledge about snakes. It was a *Surucucu*, or bushmaster (Lat. *lachesis*), and later I found out that this pit viper is one of the most poisonous snakes in South America. When I mentioned my worries about snake infestation to the *ialorixá*, she explained that the snake had only appeared because of our indigenous guest, and that the *orixás* would protect us. But during my year with the *terreiro* community I came across several poisonous vipers in close vicinity to the house, and if someone had accidentally stepped on them or passed by too closely, we would probably not have reached a hospital in time. What made the situation worse was that we usually walked barefoot, even during night time rituals in the rainforest. To prevent being bitten I bought a pair of rubber boots, although it was very impractical to wear them in the *terreiro*. I felt anxious about the risk of deadly snake bites, but despite my warnings, the other *terreiro* members did not take any precautions. I worried. I had no *fé*. And I started perceiving the *terreiro* as a dangerous place.

One evening I went out for a pizza with Guilherme, son of the warrior *orixá* Ogum, and his wife Leticia, daughter of Iansã. The heavy tropical rain was hitting the tin roof of the small restaurant, and Leticia told us how she once took a shower with one of the girls in the waterfall at night time when it started to rain. Suddenly, she said, they saw a snake hanging over them from the rim of the lagoon, and they jumped

away screaming, just before it fell on the ground by their feet and disappeared into the jungle. Guilherme explained there were a lot of snakes by the waterfall because they caught frogs there, and I mentioned that this scared me.

Guilherme: It's a thing, it's a big thing to have *fé*.

Me: Yes, it is difficult to deal with fear.

Guilherme: *Fé* develops with time, you know, it has to evolve.

Leticia: I think the more *fé* that is around, the more *axé* is in the *terreiro*, too. Because you have to see that we are in the middle of all those snakes. And as Guilherme said, no one ever had a snake accident. Why do you think that is? Coincidence? No, no, that would be too much. It is our *fé*.

Leticia presented the absence of snake accidents as proof that *fé* effectively protected us from snakes. But I had reached the limits of my capacity to 'suspend disbelief' and to create *fé*. I wore my rubber boots, black emblems of stubborn doubt. Even months after my return to Scotland I still received joking messages from *terreiro* members, saying things like, "We are thinking of you, especially when we take a shower in the waterfall. We remember your boots!" I did not mind them making fun of me, but I felt that my precautions and my inability to trust in the *orixás*' protection stressed my role as an outsider more than my German accent and my white skin did. However, I was only there for a year. If I were to stay in the community for good, maybe I would at some point have left the boots at home, too.

Why *fé*? Or why not?

Throughout the chapter I have argued that *fé* is a central force in the Odé Terreiro, closely related to *axé*. But while *axé* is a central concept in the Candomblé literature, *fé*, by contrast (and to my knowledge), has not been studied by anthropologists in this context before. So why is *fé* such an underexplored notion when it was so paramount in the Odé Terreiro?

First, the members of the Odé Terreiro used *fé* in a specific way that fitted their context; and therefore, in different historical and social settings, *fé* might not have been relevant to the practice of Candomblé. Going back to the 19th century, many early Candomblé leaders were still African-born (Harding, 2000:78), and hence they

would have given less importance to the Portuguese term *fé* compared to Yoruban concepts like *axé*.

Secondly, it might also be the case that *fé* has not been of interest to the exploring anthropologists, even if it mattered to the community. As Sansi (2007) points out: what Candomblé is today has been shaped by religious leaders together with anthropologists, and therefore both should be taken into account together. Although Nina Rodrigues has described the syncretic integration of Catholic elements into Candomblé already by the late 19th century (Rodrigues, 1988), Afro-Brazilianist researchers have been more interested in ‘pure’ African traditions (Sansi, 2007:47). In this line, Bastide established that the “principle of compartmentalization” in Candomblé was a way to preserve pure African religion in Brazil (Bastide, 2007), and Edison Carneiro’s folkloristic movement searched for the ‘authentic Africa’ in Candomblé (Maggie, 2015:104). Bastide’s theory of cultural encystment has given way to the re-Africanization movement in Candomblé, which rejects syncretism as a ‘mask’ (Capone, 2010:278). The re-Africanists see Christian elements in Candomblé as a colonial contamination of African religion; and therefore, it is not surprising that *fé* as a Portuguese term linked with Christianity has not featured prominently in ethnographic descriptions of the ‘traditional’ Candomblé houses in Salvador, such as Axé Opô Afonjá, which stress their African heritage over European and Christian traditions. James L. Matory holds against these ‘purists’ that Candomblé is not an isolated “transplant of a ‘frozen’ Africa” (Matory, 2005:76), but a diverse and dynamic religion. Similarly, Van de Port describes Candomblé as a “set of symbols-and-practices-on-the-move” (2005b:7), and he criticizes the tendency in the literature to emphasize the African traditions of Candomblé over other societal factors (2005b).

The Odé Terreiro, opened only two years before my arrival, was not a strictly re-Africanized *terreiro*. Although everything African carried a certain mystical power, we also had pictures of São Jorge and Santo Antônio on the wall. Most chants for the *orixás* were in Yoruba, but on rare occasions we also sang for Jesus in Portuguese. The same was true for the Ijexá Terreiro, where the *ialorixá* was initiated. Her *babalorixá* came from a mixed family: his mother was a black farm worker and

Candomblé follower, and his father a white landowner (Póvoas, 2011). He often stressed the mixed heritage of his *terreiro*, and subsequently of the *terreiros* of his religious *filhos* (children). Sometimes, Mãe Darabí preferred ‘pure’ African forms, for example the Yoruban term ‘*ialorixá*’ instead of the Portuguese ‘*mãe-de-santo*’. But she also told us that Santo Antônio had helped her in the past, and therefore she would always celebrate his name. In a very ‘praxeological’ manner, she had *fé* in Santo Antônio because he had cared for her.

I suspect that another reason why *fé* is important in the Odé Terreiro lies in the loud voice of evangelicalism in Bahia, and in the legitimization discourse of Candomblé. Twice a week I heard the pastor through the huge loudspeakers they had installed in the *Assembleia de Deus* church opposite our house, and his roaring voice reverberated through the neighbourhood. Although I could not understand whole sentences in the dramatic sermons, the shouting constantly included the word *fé*. As I mentioned previously, Brazilian Pentecostal churches display an open hostility towards Candomblé, which they deprecate as a ‘cult’. For many *terreiro* members, therefore, it was important to be acknowledged as a full-fledged religion, and they argued that Candomblé *fé* had the same value as any other *fé*. In these conversations, the meaning of *fé* as an attitude of trust and ‘relentless optimism’ (having faith) was mixed with *fé* as a system of religious belief (having *a* faith), e.g. the Christian faith. By stressing the importance of Candomblé *fé*, the *terreiro* members backed up their demand for recognition as a religion. This use of the term does not mean that *fé* was only a rhetorical tool to increase Candomblé’s value in ‘the religious marketplace’ in Bahia (Selka, 2010), but it needs to be acknowledged that the religious discourse outside the *terreiro* impacts the religious life inside.

The *terreiro* members used their claim that Candomblé *fé* was just as valuable as Christian *fé* not only to stress *similarities*, but also to mark *distinctions* between them. In the Odé Terreiro, *fé* was not simply a Christian notion integrated into an African belief system, as a simple understanding of syncretism would have it. Candomblé *fé* was different. In contrast to the Evangelicals’ claim to possess exclusive truth (Selka, 2010:298), it came with a surprising amount of relativism.

Religious relativism

What I found most distinct and surprising about the concept of *fé* in the Odé Terreiro was that religious truth was not considered absolute. Accordingly, other religions were not seen as ‘wrong’, but as different ways to create *fé* and spiritual protection. The *ialorixá* valued Brazilian indigenous religions, European Paganism, and Hinduism highly as she saw them as counterweights to Christian hegemony. I never heard anyone criticize Catholic or Evangelical Christians regarding their faith, but rather in response to acts of intolerance.

It was important for the *ialorixá* to make clear that she did not try to convince anybody to take part in Candomblé. “If somebody comes to my door, I will receive them. But we do not walk around telling others what to do,” she said with determination. As *fé* comes with time and experience, it could not be forced or argued for anyway. The members of the Odé Terreiro brought up religious tolerance several times as a characteristic of Candomblé, and they framed it in explicit opposition to the aggressive propaganda of Pentecostal Churches.

This respect towards other religions is best expressed in an interview with Lucas, son of the wind and fire *orixá* Iansã. We were sitting by the lagoon in the afternoon sun after all the housework had been done, and he explained:

Lucas: If we look at other stories, at other religions, you will see that they all converge. Religions converge.

Me: So, is there not one true religion?

Lucas: No, no, no, no, no. I cannot say that Catholicism is wrong, that the Catholic’s *fé* is wrong. There are problems in Catholicism, but there are also problems in Candomblé. In the end, we are humans. The religions are made by people, by humans, with their differences, similarities, their agonies, their histories, their fears. [...] I don’t believe that my religion is better than any Evangelical, or any Catholic. I don’t think it is. Buddhists, Islam. But I think that my *fé* is my *fé*. That is enough for me. I don’t discuss other peoples’ religions. What I discuss are human attitudes. Human attitudes can be discussed and criticized.

I was very surprised that while *fé* was as a source of protection and certainty, at the same time it could also be “made by people” according to their specific necessities and histories. This attitude makes it possible to understand religion as a social construct *and* to have faith in it – or, better, to derive faith *from* it; and I found this to

be a very radical understanding. Similarly, Póvoas, the *babalorixá* from the Ijexá Terreiro, criticizes judgmental white people who take Exu to be the devil (see Chapter One), “thinking that they were the only people on the face of the earth who have created an *imaginario*.” (Póvoas, 2011:242) The depiction of his own religion as an *imaginario*, possibly in the sense of Lacan’s ‘imaginary’, strikes me as an unexpectedly secular perspective for a Candomblé *babalorixá* who frequently receives *orixás* in trance incorporations.

Religious tolerance also included respect towards other ways of practicing Candomblé, and I noticed that the acceptance of such practical differences was mainly bound to the question of whether they worked or not, rather than whether they were ‘authentic’ or right. In the Odé Terreiro we had to adhere strictly to the religious rules, as adherence was deemed essential for the effectiveness of the rituals and for the *axé* of the house. Following the specific rules of the *terreiro* was a sign of *cuidado* and respect. It created a feeling of belonging and order, it demonstrated knowledge gained through immersion, and it drew a line between the *terreiro* and the outside world where different rules applied. But at the same time, these rules, too, were relative. One example is Olinda’s pigeon.

Olinda was a daughter of Iansã from a *terreiro* of the Angolan tradition, and the wife of a member of the Odé Terreiro. She often participated in our ceremonies and incorporated her *orixá* in the *barracão*. One morning, we woke up at 4 am to get ready for an early ceremony. I was rolling up my straw mat and putting on a white skirt by the flickering light of a candle, when I overheard a conversation outside the room. Olinda informed the *ialorixá* that she was having her period and asked if she could still hold the pigeon for sacrifice. “No way!” (*De jeito nenhum!*), the *ialorixá* exclaimed, as women are not allowed to handle any sacred objects when menstruating – especially not food for the *orixás*. But then she hesitated and asked: “Are you allowed to do that in your house?” – “Yes, I am,” the young woman answered, and to my surprise the *ialorixá* decided: “Then it is okay.” Later, in the *barracão*, Olinda was holding a pigeon like the others, and the *orixás* accepted her offer. For Olinda and for her *fé*, it was important to obey the rules of her Angolan

house, and these differences did not interfere significantly with the ritual procedure of the Odé Terreiro.

But religious tolerance in the Odé Terreiro goes beyond the pragmatic notion that *fé* as a source of protection could be created in different religious traditions. It should also be considered as a political and moral statement of distinction from dominant Christianity in Brazil.

Moral and political distinction

In his comparative study of Evangelical Christianity and Candomblé in Bahia, Selka (2010) stresses that it is important to recognize the moral discourses that underlie social identity and religious affiliation. He notes that many people attended Bahian Candomblé *terreiros* and Evangelical churches for similar reasons, such as healing and solving personal problems; that their socio-economic profiles did not differ significantly; and that they frequently shifted into and out of religious groups (Selka, 2010:293). Taking this observation further, Matory (2005:182) relates the “religious market” in Brazil to a neoliberal economic framework, and thus highlights the heavy competition among religions. Indeed, many of my informants had previously been members of Catholic as well as of Pentecostal churches. A client of the *ialorixá*, who had come for oracle consultations and later became a member of the house, put it bluntly: “I have tried so many groups already. If this doesn’t work here, then I’ll join the Evangelicals” (*os crentes*, literally: the believers). There were many ways to create *fé*.

Despite such religious mobility (or maybe because of it), moral distinctions are clearly drawn in the competitive ‘religious marketplace’ in Bahia. Selka (2010) notes several parallels in the ritual-magical healing procedures of Pentecostalism and Candomblé – for example, when Candomblé spirits become embodied in Pentecostal congregations. But these parallels lead to even more polarized moral distinctions. Pentecostals accuse Candomblé followers of devil worship, malice, and sinful lifestyles, and Candomblé members in turn charge Pentecostals with religious intolerance, self-righteousness and homophobia (Selka, 2010, Birman, 2011, Gonçalves da Silva, 2005).

Moreover, despite the great number of black people in Pentecostal churches (Prandi, 1995), many Candomblé followers complain about Pentecostal prejudice against Afro-Brazilian culture (cf. Selka 2010:297). Candomblé, in contrast, is linked with a strong political consciousness. Roger, a black photographer with dreadlocks and dark-rimmed glasses, joined the Odé Terreiro during my fieldwork. Before, he had been in an Evangelical church for nine years, but he found that their practices did not comply with his moral values and political ideas. He recalled his impression when he first met Candomblé followers:

I noticed how they are politicized, how they are preoccupied with the demands of the people, in contrast to the Evangelicals. This caught my attention. When I talked with some of the Candomblé followers I also perceived their strong character, their self-assertion. I also like that. And as I am black and I am part of the Black Movement, it was inevitable that I got involved. I want to know more about my roots, I want to know more about my history, the history of my people. And here is the best place to learn about these things.

His observation that Candomblé followers are ‘preoccupied with the demands of the people, in contrast to the Evangelicals,’ again underscores an attitude of care for the people as a distinctive moral-political feature of Candomblé. Roger presented Candomblé as a religion of black empowerment, which was a major reason for his religious conversion. Such an explicit emancipatory positioning is directly opposed to Pentecostals in Brazil, who are known for their politically conservative values (Mariz, 1992:S63, Sánchez-Walsh, 2003:xx). Like Lucas, Roger acknowledged that the *fé* of different religions was equally valid. However, their politics were not.

Regarding Catholicism, the moral-political distinction was less clear. *Terreiro* members were more critical of the Roman-Catholic Church than of Catholic folk practices. Like Roger, Clarice, a daughter of Oxum, had joined Candomblé out of commitment to the Black Movement. Clarice came from a Catholic background, but she yearned to ‘own’ or ‘assume her blackness’ (*assumir a minha negritude*) and to rediscover ‘the values of her [black] ancestry’ in Candomblé. “I could not make this connection with my ancestry in my [Catholic] religion,” she said. Her political engagement, however, was deeply rooted in Catholic Liberation Theology, and she had been involved with the Brazilian base church communities (CEBs, *Centros de*

Estudos Bíblicos) of the 1970s and 80s which strove towards radical social change.²⁸ She made clear: “I don’t hesitate to position myself when it is about the impoverished, the disempowered. [...] Because I don’t identify with the oppressor, no matter what culture they are from. I identify with the impoverished, with the oppressed.” Clarice felt much closer to popular Catholicism and its ‘commitment to the people’ (*compromisso com o povo*) than to the institution of the Catholic Church.

The proximity of popular Catholicism and Candomblé also manifests in the *rezadores*, traditional faith healers who use Catholic prayers, herbs, and magical objects to ward off the evil eye (*mau olhado*) and other ailments. One of the initiated members of the Odé Terreiro was a *rezadeira* herself, and the group admired her knowledge and skills. In her ethnography on rural Catholicism in Brazil, Mayblin (2010) notes that *rezadores* employ their *fé* as a healing power: “A *rezador* is defined as someone who has a *fé* (faith) strong enough to overpower evil and channel God’s healing through the power and technique of their prayer” (Mayblin, 2010:81). When Mayblin asked the most renowned *rezadeira* in the region why people sought her more than others, she replied: “Because my faith [*fé*] is very strong. People see how strong it is. That is why they come” (Mayblin 2010:84). Here, the Biblical phrase ‘faith can move mountains’ is taken literally, and as in the Odé Terreiro, *fé* appears as an effective force used for healing.

Mayblin (2010) explains that the power of *fé* in rural Catholic traditions stems from its association with suffering, which is highly morally valued. This, however, was not the case in the Odé Terreiro, where joy and empowerment were stressed over suffering. Ceremonies in the *terreiro* always involved cheerful dancing and singing; and especially the *ipadé* for Exu (see Chapter One) included ritual cleansing from suffering, pain and sorrow. The *ipadé* usually ended with dancing samba on the grass, laughing and joking, and drinking small amounts of *cachaça*. Beta, a client who came to the *terreiro* for oracle consultations, told me in an interview at her home: “I think the principles of Catholicism [are] that everything is wrong, everything is bad. But I have overcome that in my life already.” For Beta, the

²⁸ For a comparison between Pentecostal churches and CEBs see Mariz 1992.

Catholic Church was a morally dubious institution that valued privilege and money while preaching sacrifice and suffering.

During my fieldwork in the *terreiro* community, I often heard the Catholic Church being accused of moral corruption. Matheus, son of the hunter *orixá* Oxossi, had spent seven years in a Roman-Catholic seminary, but he left it in frustration just a few weeks before his ordination to priesthood was to take place. During his time in the seminary, Matheus had suffered from various physical symptoms that he described as somatization of psychological distress – and he had fallen in love with one of his male colleagues. Everybody knew about their relationship, he told me, and one of the main reasons he had left the Catholic Church was what he called their ‘religious hypocrisy’:

I felt that my relationship was something very wrong, but they said ‘No, it is not wrong, as long as the people outside don’t know about it.’ So, I was stuck in this situation that I did not know what to do, and all this created a lot of suffering.

How could he trust the priests if they asked him to lie? he asked me; how could he feel loved when he had to deny a part of himself? But despite his critical stance, the *fé* that *terreiro* members like Matheus had developed previously in Catholicism was still considered valid. However, not all Candomblé *terreiros* share this stance, and Carla told me that she had suffered in a Candomblé group in Salvador because they expected her to abandon her Catholic *fé*:

I think I negated what I had learned in my family, because it came from Catholic religion, you understand? I negated it, but it was extremely important for me. Because it created my values with which I made this person that I am today. And I turned my face to what I had already learned. Truth is I needed to bring it all together.

Similarly, Matheus stressed the experiential character of *fé* and claimed that he still held on to his Catholic *fé*, because he had truly (*de verdade*) felt it. He explained:

I have never abandoned my *fé*. So, if I said to you today that I only have the *orixás*, that would be a lie. I have all the saints for whom I had devotion, all of them. Because if I abandoned that *fé* that is like saying that my old *fé*, my past, was a lie. I know it was not a lie, because I experienced it.

In summary, I suggest that one of the reasons why *fé* has not received much attention in the Candomblé literature could be the lack of interest in a Euro-Christian term among Afro-Brazilianist researchers and re-Africanized *terreiro* communities, who give preference to ‘pure’ African concepts. But in the Odé Terreiro, *fé* was an important source of protection and well-being. It also supported claims for Candomblé to be recognized as a religion, or as a religious faith, while at the same time distinguishing Candomblé from religious intolerance and proselytism. In this sense, the use of *fé* plays an ambiguous role in positioning Candomblé as both ‘same’ and ‘different’ to Christian religion in the moral and political discourse of the competitive “religious marketplace” in Brazil.

Conclusion

Fé is a crucial aspect of religious practice in the Odé Terreiro, where it was frequently mentioned and actively cultivated in conjunction with *axé*, the enigmatic force necessary for healing. Attention to how the two opaque spiritual powers intertwine and co-constitute each other sheds light on a spiritual economy between humans and *orixás* that is mediated by acts of *cuidado* and aims at creating ever increasing health and well-being.

Bearing in mind Van de Port’s critique that Candomblé literature needs to pay more attention to social realities outside the *terreiros* (Van de Port, 2005b:3), I started this chapter with ethnographic accounts of violence from which my informants sought protection. Guilherme survived being shot in the heart and in the head, but instead of feeling helplessly vulnerable afterwards, he developed *fé* in being protected by the *orixás*, and in his spiritual mission to help others. Regina escaped her abusive husband, and the *terreiro* provided not only a supportive social network but also empowered her as a daughter of the king Xangô, *orixá* of justice. This support gave her *fé* that things would get better. In general, the *terreiro* community presented Candomblé as a religion of *cuidado* for the marginalized in opposition to the social exclusion and ‘uncare’ that characterizes Brazilian society.

Both *fé* and *axé* were employed as effective, experiential, dynamic, and relational forces. They are co-constitutive, and their interplay establishes a symbiotic

relationship between the humans and the *orixás*. In the exchange of *fé* as a human force and *axé* as a divine force, a positive feedback system is established. When kept up, the spiritual exchange should always provide more protection and well-being for humans, and more force for the *orixás*. But an economic relationship comes with obligations to reciprocate, and I could not find a clear answer as to whether the relationship with the *orixás* also created fear of being punished if one's *fé* and *cuidado* for the *orixás*' *axé* were insufficient.

Considering that religious practices form part of a wider societal dialogue, the latter part of the chapter looked at the way the Candomblé *terreiro* distinguished itself from other religious groups. Members of the Odé Terreiro exhibited a remarkable tolerance towards other religions and recognised them as sources of *fé*. This culturally relative position was used as a critique of the proselytism and self-righteousness of Pentecostals in the region. It also links to a moral-political statement against homophobia, racism, sexism, hypocrisy and social inequality, and it displays an intriguingly pragmatic understanding of religion. Moreover, use of the term *fé* also gave weight to Candomblé practitioners' demands to be recognized as a religion instead of a demonic cult.

In conclusion, *fé* emerges as a central, effective force in the Odé Terreiro, and it is strengthened over time in contact with the *orixás* and with the *terreiro* group. In analogy with the double mirror (Chapter Two), the circulating movement of *fé* and *axé* engages humans and *orixás* in a continuous feedback loop. I suggest that *fé* both strengthens the *orixá*'s power to protect humans, and that the 'relentless optimism' it provides is a source of health and well-being. As such, *fé* appears not as a side product but as a main purpose of religious activity in the Odé Terreiro.

The *terreiro* is the sacred place of peace where *cuidado* is practiced and *fé* develops. In this light, the demarcation of the *terreiro* by uttering "agô" at Exu's *assento*, as described in Chapter One, makes even more sense. The next chapter will now take a closer look at how the permeable boundaries between the sacred and the profane are established and managed.

Chapter 4. “This is not theatre!” Boundaries of the sacred

“You all know how much I love theatre. But this is not theatre! (*Isso não é teatro!*)” the *ialorixá* exclaimed with a hard look at Daniel and Fernanda, who had come in through the side door. Pointing her finger to the door, she sent them back to enter the *barracão* again through the main entrance, “for God’s sake!” We were in the middle of a night-time ritual that was interrupted in this moment. The *ialorixá* was sitting on her wooden throne, and in the candle-light her shadow flickered on the floor. We waited in silence until the two children had walked around the building in the dark and entered again, this time through the portal facing the lagoon. They sat down on the straw mats with us, and the ritual continued with burning incense and chanting for the *orixás*.

Of course, we all knew how much the *ialorixá* loved theatre. As a former actress, she had established a small artists’ foundation in the neighbourhood that organized events and art workshops, including theatre classes for local children. “It gives self-esteem, it makes people believe in themselves,” the *ialorixá* explained, noting that theatre had empowered her to become the woman she is today. I saw several of her public performances, mainly poetry recitals in nearby cities as well as in the state capital Salvador; and her glamorous presence on stage was impressive, with bright-coloured clothes, big gestures and vivid intonation. Her *babalorixá* once told us during a Candomblé ceremony that when he first met her, she was a young actress ‘on the theatre stage’ (*no palco do teatro*). As if hinting at a continuity of performance work in her role as a religious leader, he added that now she was acting ‘on the great stage of religion’ (*no grande palco da religião*), adding that art was an important part of religion.

At first glance, her comment ‘this is not theatre!’ seems to express a clear distinction between theatre performance as pretence or make-believe, and religious ritual performance as real and effective. But the *babalorixá*’s remark suggests a closer link between the two. By exploring the puzzling relationship between art and religion inside and outside of the Odé Terreiro, in this chapter I demonstrate that while both are frequently distinguished from one another – as in the *ialorixá*’s exclamation – at

the same time they are also interrelated, to the extent that “the divine does not live without art” (see below). In previous chapters, I have described the semi-permeable boundary between the *terreiro* and the outside community, and between humans and the *orixás*. This chapter presents the policing of boundaries between the ‘profane stage’ and the ‘sacred stage’ as an act of *cuidado* that contributes to the creation and demonstration of power and authority in Candomblé. Practicing *cuidado* in the Odé Terreiro includes paying attention, making an effort, and showing respect for the secrets and the sacred. As a practice of boundary work between the sacred and the profane stages, *cuidado* includes two main elements: artwork, which connects the stages, and following a body of rules, which distinguishes them. Practicing *cuidado* implies knowledge and creates legitimizing authority to cross and manage the boundaries between the sacred and the profane by controlling visibility and concealment of Candomblé elements.

The chapter is divided into two sections. It will start with a section on the sacred stage, which describes the *saída* ritual of the initiation of two *iaôs* (*orixá* mediums) in the Odé Terreiro. This ritual will draw out the role of artistic work and the ‘Law of Candomblé’ for the setup and enactment of the sacred stage. An incident during which the *ialorixá* criticized me for wearing a turban in the *terreiro* will then lead to a discussion about ‘folklore’ in Candomblé and the repercussions of not respecting religious boundaries. The second section will then look at the profane stage of Candomblé, and the ways in which public performances negotiate the boundaries between sacred and profane spheres. Starting with the emblematic figure of the *baiana* in the streets of Salvador’s touristic city centre, it will then lead to a political theatre play in Ilhéus, and back to Salvador for an *orixá* dance class. ‘Recognition’ relates both to public reputation (which requires visibility) and to protecting the boundaries of the sacred (which requires concealment). How do the different actors on the profane stage of Candomblé manage the dynamics of visibility and concealment? And how does their boundary work affect the power in Candomblé, its *axé*?

The *saída* ritual: Performing the sacred stage

In the days before the start of their initiation, Lucas (son of the wind *orixá* Iansã) and Regina (daughter of the fire *orixá* Xangô) were very anxious, almost as if they had stage-fright. They were preparing for three weeks of seclusion in the *roncô* (the secret room), and the subsequent *saída* ceremony, when they would leave the room and start their seven years as *iaôs* with a new African name. One morning, we went to the market together to buy fabric and materials for their rituals. On the way back home, Lucas told me: “You cannot imagine how nervous I am. I’m also proud, in a good way you know, but I am really anxious.” When I asked what terrified him, he answered: “It’s so much responsibility! We are the first ones to be initiated, the *saída* is a historical moment and I am afraid to mess it up.” Lucas was not the only one who was nervous that something could go wrong. One evening, even Oxossi appeared, to tell the *ialorixá* that she did not need be anxious and that she should ask her children to help her prepare the initiation. She had reason to be nervous, as her *babalorixá* would be present at the *saída*, and the first initiation of *iaôs* was also an act of legitimizing the *terreiro* – and her, as its *ialorixá*. The tension leading up to the *saída* ritual was palpable in the whole *terreiro* group, and it made the preparations feel even more important.

Lucas and Regina went into seclusion together as a *barco*²⁹, and over the next weeks, the *ialorixá* made sure that there were always initiated house members present who practiced *cuidado* by cooking for them, and provided them with what they needed. I heard their chants from the *roncô* every morning at 4.30am. And outside, we, too, performed numerous rituals that were minutely orchestrated, involving chanting and drumming, offerings, dancing, and frequent *orixá* incorporations. In this way, the whole group contributed to the initiation process. In addition, we were expected to take special care of ourselves during these weeks by following specific rules, to strengthen and protect the initiates in seclusion – even when we were not in the *terreiro*. We were not allowed to drink alcohol, we should only wear white, and we needed to stay inside at six and twelve o’clock at day and night, the times when Exu

²⁹ Literally ‘boat’, in relation to the transatlantic passage of slaves; here, a group who is initiated together.

was most active. Moreover, we should try not to bring the hot ‘street energy’ into the *terreiro* by repeatedly coming and going, as the *iaôs* were very vulnerable. Even when the *ogã* accidentally cut his hand with a knife during a goat sacrifice and I insisted he needed to have it stitched in the hospital, he decided not to leave the *terreiro* to avoid contaminating the sacred space with ‘negative energy’ upon his return. Keeping the *terreiro* free from spiritual pollution, to borrow the concept from Mary Douglas (2003), was an effort to protect the *iaôs* and to separate the *terreiro* as a sacred space from the outside world; it was an act of *cuidado*.

The preparation of the *iaôs*’ initiation was an instance of intensified *cuidado* work, and the whole *terreiro* group was expected to help. This work of *cuidado* also involved preparing the *terreiro* for the *saída* ceremony (the day when they leave the *roncô*). We painted the floor of the *barracão*, we cleaned Oxum’s spring of old leaves and planted new flowers by its side. And over the three weeks, the children of the house spent hours on end making bead necklaces and other ritual objects for the two *iaôs*. These necklaces are “symbols of status, protection and affiliation with Candomblé,” Heather Shirey (2012) explains, and they are important bearers of *axé*. The *axé* of a bead necklace is awakened by ritually washing them in a leaf *banho*, as Shirey (2012) states. But in the Odé Terreiro it was also linked with the *carinho* (kindness), attention, effort and time – in short, with the *cuidado* – the group put into threading the beads onto thin nylon strings for the *iaôs*. It was unthinkable to buy ready-made necklaces in a shop. These bead necklaces were part of the ritual clothing in the *terreiro*, and they were important for maintaining contact with the *orixás*. Each of the *iaôs*, in addition, would receive a hand-made straw necklace (*mokalé*) with a fringe on each side. One of the fringes points to the ground and the other to the sky, and the *mokalé* is used to connect the human world (*aiyé*) with the divine world (*orun*) through the body of the initiate. In this way, the *iaôs* themselves embodied the semi-permeable boundary between the sacred and the profane.

Again, this *cuidado* was not only aimed at the *iaôs* and their *orixás*; it anticipated collective *axé* in return. The *iaôs* in seclusion relied on the group’s support and protection while they were in a liminal, transformative state, and in return their initiation process would strengthen the presence of the *orixás* and lead to an

enormous growth of *axé* in the *terreiro* – especially because it was the first time an initiation happened. As described above, important elements of the *cuidado* leading up to the initiation were emotional involvement (such as the anxiety about ‘messing things up’); making artwork like bead necklaces, flower bouquets, and ritual objects; and following the rules, including wearing white and keeping the *terreiro* free from ‘street energy’. All these efforts enacted what I, with reference to Émile Durkheim (1961), call the sacred stage. *Cuidado* is a crucial element in producing the sacred stage.

Durkheim identifies the sacred and the profane as two opposite realms, and indeed as the most profound dichotomy of all:

In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another [...] the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common. (Durkheim and Swain, 1961:53-54)

And although he acknowledges that a certain degree of communication between the two must exist, Durkheim maintains that the sacred and the profane are separated by a ‘logical chasm’ (Durkheim and Swain, 1961:55), a deep division that makes it impossible to be both at the same time. Before him, Rudolf Otto (1958) had described the sacred as the ‘wholly other’ (*das ganz Andere*), and in the same vein Mircea Eliade postulates that there was an “abyss that divides the two modalities of experience – sacred and profane [...]” (Eliade, 1959:14). But as I said in Chapter Two, such dichotomies are never altogether orderly and stable, as they are challenged and subverted by what Van de Port calls the ‘rest-of-what-is’ (2011). In this thesis, therefore, I am not so much concerned with established categories as such – e.g. self and other, or sacred and profane – but with the way the boundaries between them are enacted, crossed and negotiated in the context of Candomblé healing. Instead of a ‘chasm’ or an ‘abyss’, I take the boundaries between the sacred and the profane as lines of contact or, with Sennett (2006), as ‘ambiguous edges’ where interaction and change happen, where relationships are built, and where *axé* can thrive. Following Exu’s dialectical love for contradiction, in the previous chapters I argued that acts of *cuidado* are important means of such relational

boundary work, as they separate and connect at the same time. In the case of the ‘sacred stage’ I now argue that *cuidado* brings together two somewhat conflicting elements: *artwork* to connect with the divine sphere, and *rules* to demarcate boundaries between the human and the divine (“This is not theatre!”), and to legitimate the authority to cross them.

In addition to the artwork and the rules, the whole setup of the ‘sacred stage’ with its scripts and roles, its choreographies and stage fright, stresses its performance character. *Cuidado*, as I have described it, contributes to framing the sacred stage – by decorating the *barracão*, making bead necklaces and drumming for the *orixás*. But what if it is also the other way round, and the sacred stage is set up to show a performance of *cuidado*? In other words, is it possible that *cuidado* is not only a means of creating the sacred stage, but that establishing the sacred stage is also a means of *cuidado*? In that case, the work of *cuidado*, with its art and rules, would build its own stage where it then becomes the main act. Like the movement of *fé* and *axé* (Chapter Three), *cuidado* here is involved in a circular dynamic of marking off the sacred and enacting it. And the whole event is skilfully managed by the *ialorixá*, who in the process both applies and confirms her authority.

On the day of the *saída* ceremony, we rushed around doing last-minute preparations: decorating the ceremony hall with leaves and flowers, cleaning the house, cooking, and dressing up for the special occasion. The *ialorixá* called us into the *barracão* and gave instructions regarding how to behave when the visitors from the Ijexá Terreiro arrived. She reminded us to receive the *babalorixá* with singing and clapping, and to have a white adorned cloth (*alá*) ready to hold above him as a sign of respect. Then she asked one of the girls to come to the front and to show her bright, big smile. “Look, this is what I want to see! If you can achieve only half of this smile, you are doing well. There is nothing worse than coming to a *terreiro* full of miserable people,” she said, and sent the girl back to sit down on the floor. She then looked around and criticized one of the *abiãs* for wearing white jeans instead of his religious clothes. She called out: “Oh my God, this type of trousers!” and she decided: “Take off your turban and go to the back. This is not theatre!”

But although she stressed, again, that this was “not theatre,” it was certainly a performance for an audience: the *babalorixá* was about to arrive with many visitors. Everything had to be perfect and to run smoothly – simultaneously ensuring the efficacy of the rituals (*alafia*, see Chapter One), making contact with the *orixás* and enabling the two initiates to pass through the liminal space and transform into *iaôs*; as well as confirming the *ialorixá*'s role, not as an actress, but as an experienced *terreiro* leader. To delve deeper into the sacred space and explore its enactment, I will now look at how the *sáida* ritual performance unfolded.

The *Sáida* Ritual

The visitors from the Ijexá Terreiro arrived, and we greeted them with ritualized clapping, chanting, and kneeling before elders, but also with hugging, chatting and joking. This event marked the initiation not only of the two *iaôs*, but in a way also of the Odé Terreiro itself, and everybody had to play their role well in front of the visitors. When the drums called, the ceremony began with the ritual entrance of all members of the Odé Terreiro and the Ijexá Terreiro into the *barracão*. The circular *xirê* dancing started, and several Candomblé followers received their *orixás*.

Eventually, the *iaôs*, also incorporating their *orixás*, were led onto the ‘sacred stage’. Their hair and eyebrows had been shaved off, which made their faces look strangely unfamiliar, and they were painted with white dots. On top of their heads they wore small clay horns, which covered a wax cube that embodied their *orixás*, now physically linked to their bodies. Throughout the evening they entered the *barracão* three times from the secret room, each time in different dress and body paint. Finally, they appeared in their most beautifully adorned outfits, and, driven by the rhythms of the drums, they fully incorporated their *orixás* and danced. Lucas’ Iansã, the *orixá* of wind and fire, whirled around the room with intense energy and freedom, and Regina’s Airá, a form of the thunder and justice *orixá* Xangô, followed suit with determined, proud steps, holding a double-sided hatchet in his hands.

This was ‘not theatre’, as the *ialorixá* had insisted, not only because the *orixás* were dancing instead of human actors, but also because something else was happening: in the *sáida* ritual the initiates were effectively becoming *iaôs*. Victor Turner described

ritual and theatre as different ‘cultural genres,’ because they *do* different things, even when their dramatic structure is very similar: A well-performed ritual has a transformative capacity in a way a theatre performance does not (Turner, 1988:80). In a comparison between ritual and theatre, Richard Schechner (2004:130) locates them at the end points of a performance continuum, where ritual is characterized by ‘efficacy’ and theatre by ‘entertainment’. Although theatre can be much more than mere entertainment (for example Bertolt Brecht’s Epic Theatre or Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed), theatre tends to be more reflective than ritual in that it is a show put on for an audience that watches, rather than for the ritual experience of the actors. According to Van Gennep, rituals “accompany a passage from one situation to another” (2011:10), and Turner stresses that the transformation on what I call the sacred stage implies the “ingress of power into the initial situation” (Turner, 1988:80). The power that is created in the transformative *saída* ritual is the mystical *axé*. But as I said in the previous chapter, *axé* also denotes authority (Matory, 2005:123), and in this sense the *saída* was also a legitimizing event for the *ialorixá* and her *terreiro*.

For the *iaôs*, the ultimate transformative moment was the name-giving ritual at the end of the ceremony. Late at night, after much dancing and drumming, the *babalorixá* who lead the ritual chose an initiated son of the rainbow *orixá* Oxumaré to ask the initiates their names. The son of Oxumaré stepped in, linked arms with the initiate (or rather with the *orixá* the initiate was incorporating), and they walked around the ceremony hall in a circle. “So, will you tell me what your name is?” he asked, and the initiate whispered an answer in his ear. “What?! Has anyone heard anything?” he called out to the audience, who cheered and responded “Noooooo!” – “So, can you tell me now, what is your name?” he insisted, and the same was performed a second time. When he asked for the third time, the initiate suddenly jumped up with a loud scream, spun around in a circle and shouted out an African name. At this point the whole room started applauding and shouting ‘*Axé!*’ People hugged each other and some cried emotionally. Then the same naming ritual was performed again with the second initiate.

I had not understood the names properly, and so the next day I asked the *ogã* about them. But he just smiled. “Nobody understands the name, you are not supposed to understand it,” he explained. The name that was shouted out was the name of the specific and unique *orixá* linked with the initiate (see Chapter Two). From then on, the initiate had a new African name, but it was not the same as the deity’s name called out during initiation. In fact, I was told, the *orixá*’s name was secret; knowing it was too dangerous, and made the initiates vulnerable. I suggest that what happens here is that the specific *orixá* comes into the presence of, and is acknowledged by, the *terreiro* members, while at the same time the deeply personalized *orixá* is turned into a secret: into a powerful name that is heard but cannot be understood. This name is only revealed to the initiate and few high-rank group members. At the end of the ritual, the person is transformed into an *iaô*, a Candomblé initiate with a new African name. For a year afterwards, they must adhere to certain rules, like only wearing white, not drinking alcohol, and sleeping on a straw mat on the floor.

The name-giving ritual I have described looks like a classic performative speech-act in the sense of J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Performative utterances turn into facts in their pronouncement, as in the example, ‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*’ (Austin, 1962:5). But in the *saída* name-giving, there are two interesting deviations from Austin’s performativity. First, the name is not *given to*, but is *revealed by* the *orixá*. At the same time, the reluctance with which it is pronounced also gives some agency and authority to the *terreiro* member who asks for the name, as it is his insistence that makes the *orixá* speak out. Secondly, although the name is publicly announced, it is simultaneously concealed; one cannot, and is not supposed to, understand it. In Chapter Two, I argued that there was an indeterminate power in the ‘being-same-and-other’ of the human and their mother or father *orixá*. Likewise, the shouting out of the *orixá*’s name momentarily offers a glimpse into the individual’s inner being, but the opening is immediately closed as the full revelation would be too dangerous. Similar to Johnson’s theory of secretism, which suggests the need to periodically ‘secrete’ some ‘secrets’ in order to demonstrate their power (Johnson, 2002), Taussig states: “The real skill of the practitioner lies not in the skilled concealment but in the skilled revelation of skilled concealment.” (2003:273). The name that others *hear* but do not *understand* in the

saída ritual is just such a skilled concealment, which hints at something bigger – at a secret that is guarded by the *ialorixá* and few other initiated members. In this sense, it is an important aspect not only of the *iaô*'s initiation, but also of the performative production of power and authority in the Candomblé house.

I have presented the *saída* ceremony of the two *iaôs* in the Odé Terreiro as an example of a performance on the 'sacred stage', and I have stated that art and rules are important elements of *cuidado* and boundary-work in this context. The sacred stage was prepared by arranging the visit of members of the Ijexá Terreiro, decorating the *barracão*, making ceremonial dresses, sacred necklaces and offerings, dressing up for the occasion, and instructing the house members to receive their guests with a big smile. All these preparations were accompanied by a certain anxious tension, akin to stage fright, before the event. And like a successful theatre performance, the event ended in joyful cheers and applause. I will now look at art and its relationship with the divine, before I move on to the rules that are employed to set apart the sacred from the profane.

“The divine does not live without art”

The *ialorixá*'s insistence that 'this is not theatre' implies that there *are* similarities between theatre performance and ritual performance, as otherwise it would not be necessary to insist on their distinction. In this chapter I have already brought up the performance character of the sacred stage, and have suggested that art is an important mediator between humans and the *orixás*. As the human-*orixá* relationship is built on reciprocal exchange, offerings are made frequently – especially when the human child of the *orixá* is asking for help, protection, or healing. These offerings are artistically decorated objects, like beautifully arranged flower bouquets, or adorned mirrors for Oxum and Yemanjá, the female water *orixás*, and they are almost always accompanied by music.

Much of the time people spent in the *terreiro* was dedicated to artistic work, and the *ialorixá* made a point of stressing its importance. “The attire, the dresses, the arrangements of the food on the plate, all this needs art,” she made clear. And children of the *terreiro* frequently spent entire afternoons making necklaces or

decorating presents for the *orixás*, often accompanied by chanting. This artwork materialised *cuidado*, and it was a form of value that would contribute to *axé* and *fé*. It was also a way to connect with the divine, and in an interview the *ialorixá* explained:

I consider art in itself something extremely spiritual. I actually think that the human is different from the artist. The artist for me is a divine being. When he steps onto the stage and acts, when he paints the canvas, when he sings or makes food, because for me a kitchen chef is also an artist, a culinary artist. So, for me all this is extremely spiritual. For me in that moment it is a divinity who performs this role, and later he returns to be human, annoying, ignorant [...]. There are so many poets who say the most beautiful things, and in real life they are a ‘piece of coal’³⁰. There are so many fine artists who paint divinely well, and then they are true cheating rogues (*picaretas cafajestes*)!

Here she presents art not in contrast to the divine, as suggested by her exclamation ‘this is not theatre!’, but as divine itself. By doing art, the human turns into a divine being, and hence art appears as a means of losing human limitations and reaching out into the sphere of the gods. Victor Turner says that “[r]eligion, like art, lives in so far as it is being performed” (Turner, 1988:48); and similarly the *ialorixá* noted, “The divine does not live without art.” In this sense, the sacred stage needs to be enacted artistically to be sacred.

Religion, according to Birgit Meyer, is a practice of mediation to overcome the distance between human beings and the divine realm (Meyer, 2006:290) – but this definition presupposes a distance in the first place, as in Durkheim’s ‘chasm’ and Eliade’s ‘abyss’ between the sacred and the divine (Durkheim and Swain, 1961, Eliade, 1959). I have already discussed several instances of such mediation practice in the Odé Terreiro, including Exu’s boundary-crossing, the cowry shell oracle, building kinship relations with the *orixás*, the double mirror, the cultivation of *fé*, the experience of the leaf bath, and now the setup of the sacred stage. In all these moments of connection (or boundary-crossing), there always emerges a simultaneous act of separation (or boundary-drawing), as if the two could not go without each other. Distance and proximity are constantly negotiated.

³⁰ A piece of coal instead of a diamond.

In the case of the *ialorixá*'s management of the sacred stage, this double movement of connection and separation is summarized in her statements that 'the divine does not live without art' and that 'this is not theatre'. In fact, the elevation of art as divine gives her authority as a religious leader, as she is an artist herself and hence an expert in transgressing the boundary between the human and the divine. She knew that art, and theatre in particular, could empower people and 'make them believe in themselves,' as she had experienced it for herself as a young actress (see Chapter Three). But the authority she derived from her involvement with art as a divine force also meant that she needed to distinguish her religious performance on the sacred stage from the artistic performance on the theatre stage.

Here, it is worth mentioning that, although theatre is a performance art, saying 'this is not theatre' is not the same as saying 'this is not art'. In common language in Brazil, the word theatre (*teatro*), when applied outside of a formal performance setting, is often used to describe acts or behaviour that are put on, in the sense of being fake or make-believe. In contrast, the sacred stage is set up to make change happen, not to represent something else, create illusions, or to entertain an audience. The *orixás* were not being danced, they were dancing; and to the *terreiro* members, their appearance confirmed that contact with the divine sphere had been established successfully.

I suggest that the sacred stage was framed as even more sacred and real when contrasted with pretence, fakes, and lies. Although no member of the Odé Terreiro ever questioned the reality of the *orixá* incorporations in my presence, several of them told me about fake incorporations they had seen elsewhere. One *terreiro* member, for example, had once seen a *caboclo* in a human body who was drinking a lot of *cachaça* liquor, and when the *caboclo* left, the man who had incorporated him was still completely drunk. She concluded that therefore he must have been faking it from the start, probably to get others to buy him *cachaça*. In the Odé Terreiro, people often complained about hunger after an incorporation during which the *orixá* had eaten – a phenomenon that Van de Port (2011:200) calls 'post-possession amnesia' – which separated the human from the *orixá* and hence served to demonstrate the authenticity of the event. When I asked the *ialorixá* if she had ever seen anybody

faking an *orixá* incorporation, she responded that she had not, because in the Ijexá Terreiro where she was initiated “it is impossible that anybody fakes it, principally because of this *babalorixá* we have. He would never allow it, never”. However, she said that there were other places where fake incorporations happened, “just like there are people who say they are a doctor and they are not.”

The *ialorixá*'s comment on false doctors pointed out that the existence of frauds did not lead anyone to question the authority of real doctors – and, by extension, the existence of fakers should not lead one to question the *orixás*. On the contrary, the fact that some people tried to appropriate their authority actually seems to strengthen it. As Umberto Eco notes in his theory of semiotics: “If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth”³¹ (1976:7). In this sense, just as controlled and partial revelation is used to stir the imagination and make secrets more powerful (Taussig, 2003, Johnson, 2002), the acknowledgment that others may be faking *orixá* incorporations can give even more meaning and potential to what are considered the ‘real’ events of divine presence in a human body.

Mãe Darabí explained that theatre actors, like herself, were especially well-prepared to embody the *orixás*, as both theatre and the incorporation of the *orixás* demanded “concentration, respect, *cuidado* and understanding.” But one needed to recognize that there were different kinds of artists, she made clear: artists “who use their gift to give health and facilitate transformation,” and others “who only want to make money.” In the same way, she stated, some *ialorixás* or *babalorixás* abused their power for “dirt and evil” (*sujeira e maldade*). Art, then, can be employed as a powerful technique to bring the divine to life; and the potential misuse and deception that come with it even seem to underline its efficacy. To simultaneously create and control this power, the members of the Odé Terreiro followed and performed the rules, or what the *ialorixá* described as the ‘Law of Candomblé’.

³¹ Thanks to Jacob Copeman for this reference.

The Law of Candomblé

At an early stage of my fieldwork, the *ialorixá* explained to me that in contrast to the ‘Law of the White man’ with its many complicated books, in Candomblé there was only one law. This ‘Law of Candomblé’ consisted of three points: first, respect (*respeito*), second, rules (*preceito*), and third, secrets (*segredo*). When these three principles were practiced, she said, over time one developed faith (*fé*). Being respectful towards the others and the *orixás*, following rules like entering the *barracão* through the main door and wearing the right type of trousers, and protecting the secrets was necessary for relationship building with the *orixás* and for exchanging forces across the human-divine boundary (as discussed in the previous chapters).

By applying these rules, the *terreiro* was framed as a sacred space that was different from the outside, a space where the world of the *orixás* was more readily accessible. As Leticia said in Chapter Three, in the *terreiro* they felt protected, and she thought it could not be a coincidence that no one had ever been bitten by a snake. Setting up a place where people felt safe and cared for surely was an important part of the healing process, and it gave them the possibility to rest, reflect and grow *axé* – while outside the *terreiro* they often faced struggles in their daily lives, and felt stressed and vulnerable. Following specific rules also increased what Guilherme in Chapter Three called deservability (*merecimento*), resulting in *fé*, self-esteem, and *axé*.

Rules are such an essential aspect of religion that Durkheim describes them as a necessary element of sanctity and rituals: “Sacred things are those which the interdictions protect and isolate,” he argues in the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, and that “rites are the rule of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects” (Durkheim and Swain, 1961:56). In this way, while art is linked with the divine, rules of comportment are used to distinguish what is sacred and imbued with spiritual powers from what is not. The sacred character of things, then, depends on the rules by which they are protected; and I understand Turner in this way when he says that the “rules ‘frame’ the ritual process, but the ritual process transcends its frame” (1982:79).

The *ialorixá* was in control of the boundary between the worlds. As a gatekeeper, she was responsible for ensuring that the rules in the *terreiro* were followed, in order to mediate the relationship with the *orixás*, protect the sacred, and grow *axé*. However, what ‘respect’, ‘rules’ and ‘secrets’ meant exactly was not set in stone, but was left at least partly to the *ialorixá* to interpret, redefine or adapt. An ethnographic example that touches on all three aspects is the taking of photos in the *terreiro*. During my fieldwork, I was not allowed to take pictures of the ‘sacred stage’ – that is, of ritual activities, shrines and persons incorporating the *orixás*. But to my surprise, the *ialorixá* explicitly asked me to document the ‘historical event’ of the *saída* ceremony with my camera. She had consulted her *babalorixá* about his opinion on this matter first. Smoking his pipe by the lagoon, he told her: “In my *terreiro* it is not [allowed], but here you can decide.” His response is yet another example showing that the rules are not fixed, but depend on the leader of the house. She decided I should take pictures when the *orixás* appeared for the first time, but not of the other times – especially not when the *orixás* were dancing in their complete ceremonial dress.

It is this adherence to rules of religious performance and conduct, even when they are adapted and changed, that divides the realm of the human from that of the divine. As religious rituals interact directly with divine forces and with human spiritual development, their performance needs to be protected against negative influences. Respect, obeying the rules and keeping the secrets created *fé* and *axé*, the transformative healing power, while disrespect, transgression and transparency harmed it. As the *ialorixá* said:

[A public stage performance] can be shown to any person, in the state he or she is in. It doesn’t matter if that person has taken a leaf bath or not, if he or she has been drinking or using drugs, if he or she just came back from the *motel* [sex hotel], it doesn’t matter. And on the Candomblé stage, on the sacred stage, I will work with the divine, I must be purified (*purificada*), the people there also have to be purified, treated, as to obey the divine.

When I asked her if this purification was necessary to establish the sacred space, she answered: “The limit. The limit. It’s the limit, the limit. Because in a theatre I cannot say: ‘Hannah, don’t come in, you’ve been in a bar’.” She expressed that the performance of rules of purity, like taking a leaf bath and not drinking before a

ceremony, constituted a limit between the profane outside world with its draining ‘street energy’ and the *terreiro* as a sacred space.

Johnson (2002:3) noted that the performance of ‘secretism’ (what Georg Simmel called *Geheimnistuerei*, literally ‘secret-doing’) was essential for the creation of power and authority in Candomblé. Likewise, I argue that the performance of following rules is a decisive aspect of religious life in the Odé Terreiro. Rules imply structure, knowledge and authority; and following them comes with the expectation (or *fê*) that *orixás* will bring *axé* and well-being to the community. In other words, by following the rules, humans gain what Agumbaidé calls ‘deservability’ (*merecimento*, Chapter Three) in their relations with the *orixás*. As with secrets, the performance of rules seems to be even more relevant than their specific content. The ‘Law of Candomblé’ is therefore part of the *terreiro*’s politics of generating authority and power, and its three aspects (respect, rules, and secret) imply knowledge and are part of the practice of *cuidado*.

Wearing a turban: caring for the *ori* or “just folklore”?

A couple of months into fieldwork, I was invited to attend a *caruru* in the Odé Terreiro. *Caruru* is a Bahian dish of African origin made from okra, shrimps and palm oil, and it was served to celebrate the Catholic Saints Cosmas and Damian and their counterparts the *ibeji*, Candomblé’s child *orixás*. As this was a *feira* for child spirits, the ‘sacred stage’ of the *barracão* was decorated with colourful banderols, balloons and trays of sweets, and the house members added bright colours to their festive clothing. They were dressing up for the *feira* in front of a little mirror when one of them gave me a multi-coloured cloth and helped me wrap it around my head as a turban, before we went over to get a plate of *caruru* that was served in the *barracão*.

Weeks later I learned that it had not been appropriate for me to wear a turban at this event. The *ialorixá* pointed out that religious clothes had specific meaning and reflected the status of a person as well as the occasion. “Otherwise it becomes just folklore,” she said. She did not see the covering of my head during a ritual as an expression of respect for the religion, like in Islam and Judaism, but as a lack of

recognition of the turban's religious significance. Like a tourist, I had appropriated a cultural practice that suggested my head was 'cultivated' when in fact it was not.

When I asked the *ialorixá* about the turban in an interview, she explained:

When you go through the rituals you understand the importance of covering your *ori* in certain moments. And then you know why you are doing it. When you only come in without this knowledge, without going through the rituals, [...] then this has no meaning for you. It does not matter if you are with the turban that day, or another day without. Because it won't have meaning, it doesn't have importance to you.

The turban (*pano*) is a means of spiritual protection for the head (*ori*) of a person. As I explained in Chapter Two, the *ori* plays a central role in Candomblé, as it is seen as the seat of the father or mother *orixá*, and hence as the locus of the self. However, when someone covered their head with a *pano*, it was important that they were aware of its religious significance and were not just copying others. Therefore, visitors generally did not cover their head in the *terreiro* (except during Exu rituals; see Chapter One), as their *ori* had not been ritually prepared for it.

In the *terreiro* community, wearing a *pano* was an in-group marker that expressed knowledge about the rules and the importance of caring for the *ori* (see Chapter Two), as well as for the *orixás*. As I laid out in Chapter Three, such *cuidado* strengthens a person's *fé*, and with it the *orixás* and their healing powers. As a sign of belonging to the *terreiro* community, the *pano* delineates the boundaries between those who actively contribute to the *axé* of the house and those who just come to visit or to get advice from the *ialorixá*. Worn without meaningful intention, the *ialorixá* described and devalued wearing a *pano* as 'folklore' and as a disregard of the boundaries and hierarchies of the Candomblé community.

This emphasis on meaning does not necessarily contradict the more practice- and experience-led approach that I have presented in previous chapters, if meaning is understood to stem from practice and experience. Victor Turner said that decades of fieldwork had taught him that meaning "is not mere cognitive hindsight but something existentially emergent from the entanglement of persons wholly engaged

in issues of basic concern to the central or representative actors, the formulators of ‘positions’ or life-stances” (Turner, 1988:33). In the current example, then, wearing a *pano de cabeça* should not be interpreted simply as a cognitive symbol of status, but rather as a religious practice that grows out of the social dynamics of the *terreiro* group and of the wider society.

In the Odé Terreiro, the use of the *pano* relates to group structures and hierarchies; it expresses house membership as well as the gender of one’s *orixá* (children of female *orixás* wear the end bits sticking out at the sides) and the occasion (festive *panos* are more elaborate), and it states commitment to the rules, values and positions of the house. Moreover, the *pano* is involved in ritual performances in conjunction with all the bodily and spiritual experiences they involve. Therefore, it is performative in Austin’s sense (1962), in that it is given to a person during a ritual when they become a group member; it participates in the ritual transformation of the person into a ‘child of the house’. From that point on, the *pano* forms part of the *terreiro* member’s religious identity. They put it on together with their sacred clothes and necklaces after the invigorating leaf bath (Chapter Three) that demarcates their purified arrival at the *terreiro*.

In contrast, my wearing of a *pano* on the day of the *caruru* highlighted my unclear role as a participant observer in the community, and the potential intrusion that came with it. As an involved outsider, I often faced controversial instructions from different people on different occasions – including whether I was to sit on a chair or on the floor, join in the singing or keep quiet, hold chickens during rituals or just stay in the back row. The *ialorixá* did not always give clear directions either, and in the end the problem was solved when I was made an official member of the house nine months after I had arrived. As part of that process, I eventually received my personal *pano* (which I was expected to wear from then on) alongside my *agujemi* necklaces, a straw mat and a metal mug with my name on it; and I was expected to care for my *ori* and follow the *terreiro* rules like the others.

But notably, there were certain *terreiro* rules that non-members of the house had to follow, too, independent from whether they had ‘meaning’ to them or not. Most importantly, visitors were not allowed to enter with black clothes, as these related to

Exu's hot energy (see Chapter One) and would disturb the spiritual order of the *terreiro*. It seemed that the difference between the rules for house members and those for visitors was that the former were actively adding to the *axé* in the *terreiro*, while the latter should merely avoid contaminating the sacred space of the house with disruptive 'street energy'. While *doing* something like wearing a *pano* without knowledge and status was seen as 'folklorisation' of the religion, *not doing* something out of respect, like not wearing black in the *terreiro*, was expected from visitors. In other words, prescriptive rules applied only to members of the house, while proscriptive rules applied to all who visited the *terreiro*. These rules established the *terreiro* as a sacred space that was set apart from the profane outside world, and they drew a line between the house members who had insider knowledge, and the visitors who did not.

Like the *pano*, other material objects, such as the coloured bead necklaces (*agujemi*), could not be used by outsiders. The *ialorixá* explained that to people 'who have no knowledge' of the religion, these were only pretty necklaces; but to those 'who care for the *orixás*,' they were protective *agujemis*. She explained, "That is the question of folklore (*folclore*), for them it is a joke. And for us it is not a joke." Again, she emphasized the distinction between 'us' and 'them', between those who cared and those who did not, and she described *cuidado* as based on knowledge and commitment. Candomblé beads are 'symbols of status, protection, and affiliation with Candomblé' (Shirey 2012:36), and as such any profane use defies their religious purpose. The same is true for meaningful objects in other religions; but the unauthorized use of, say, crucifixes or rosaries is hardly ever seen as a devaluation of Catholicism. So, what does 'folklore' mean in this context, and why does the *ialorixá* perceive it as such an offense to her religion?

Folklore and appropriation

Definitions of 'folklore', Dan Ben-Amos (1971) points out, have varied widely and must be understood in their specific historical situations. Early folklorists, "clouded by romantic mist" (Ben-Amos, 1971:4), regarded antiquity, anonymity and simplicity as characteristics of folklore, while later attempts of definition paid more attention to its mobile and transcultural character. Folklorists have classically

referred to folklore as “wisdom or knowledge of a small, tradition-oriented group” (Abrahams, 1971:16), and Ben-Amos states that definitions of folklore referred to either “a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a kind of art” (1971:5). But ‘folklore’ as the *ialorixá* used it has a negative connotation that implies meaninglessness and devaluation.

Matory (2005:122) notes that ‘folklorisation’ has been condemned by Candomblé leaders since the 1970s (see also Sansi, 2007:14). He describes folklore as the “display of Candomblé ritual objects, music and dances in Carnival parades and nightclub shows, all of which fascinate tourists and generate revenue for the North-eastern state governments” (Matory, 2005:182). But folkloric appropriation of Candomblé does not only occur when something is taken away from the protected space of the *terreiro* to be displayed outside, whether it be a sacred stone (Sansi, 2005b) or *orixá* dance; it can also happen when inviting outsiders into the *terreiro*. Johnson notes that famous old *terreiros* in Salvador that opened their ceremonies to tourists have a certain reputation of “falseness and folkloric superficiality” (Johnson, 2002:10). In this sense, folklore diminishes authority in Candomblé. If the boundaries of the sacred are not protected, the power goes³².

The *ialorixá*'s insistence on the Law of Candomblé and her control of boundaries between the sacred and the profane, are therefore necessary to uphold power and religious authority. Every religion, Durkheim states, is organized around a plurality of cults of sacred things (Durkheim and Swain, 1961:56). If the religious group disappears, and one of the rituals are maintained “in a disintegrated condition,” he says, the ritual survives as folk-lore (Durkheim and Swain, 1961:57). Durkheim's definition is important, as folklorisation implies that the group to which given ritual practices belonged has ceased to exist, and that no one holds ownership or authority

³² The Re-Africanization movement in the renowned Candomblé *terreiros* of Salvador can also be understood as an attempt to draw boundaries between pure African religion and syncretic elements, in order to reinstall authority and ‘authenticity’, despite opening their *terreiros* to tourists.

over the use of that practice. It is then open to reification, appropriation and consumption in uncontrolled, ‘disintegrated’ manner.

Here it is important to note the fundamental difference between *objectification* and *reification*, two concepts that are all too often used synonymously. Hegel (2013) establishes objectification as a necessary condition of human existence. Through objectification of their work, human subjects bring objects as products of their work, ideas, and creativity into the world. As long as the link between the subject and the object remains intact, this is a process of self-realization; indeed, for Marx, the subject only exists by way of the objectification of their actions in the social world (Klaus and Buhr, 1969:1117). The problem arises when the object is alienated from the subject in a process of reification – that is, when the object is turned into an independent thing (Lat.: *res*), cut off from its relationship with the subject, who in turn loses all control over its use (Marx, 1990:163 ff.). The objectification of Candomblé elements as such does not pose a problem, as long as the authority over their presentation remains in the hands of the religious community and it is not reified as folklore.

Tina Gudrun Jensen explains that the reification of Candomblé as folklore was used as part of Brazil’s nation-building ideology to build the myth of ‘racial democracy’ (1999:281). Similarly, Van de Port details that in the Vargas era (1930-45), national politics strove to “strip of (or rather: sublimate) [Candomblé’s] religious, occult and carnal dimensions” (Van de Port, 2011:131), and to integrate Candomblé elements into mainstream Brazilian culture. In the 1960s, however, a rebellious artist and youth movement reinvested in Candomblé as a counter-hegemonic and spiritually powerful religion, and since the 1980s Candomblé has often been approached as a ‘religion of resistance’ to the dominant politics and culture of the white, rich elite (Van de Port, 2011, Parés, 2012) – while Afro-Brazilian culture also became more open to members of the white middle class.

Certainly, different public images of Candomblé coexist in Bahia. While picturesque *orixá* dances are applauded in Salvador’s touristic centre, elsewhere Candomblé communities are accused of devil worship (see Chapter One) and are even physically attacked by fundamentalist Christians (Selka, 2010, Cerqueira-Santos et al., 2004),

especially in more peripheral locations. Historically, the Christianisation of dominated populations went hand in hand with the devaluation of native religious practice as ‘paganism’, ‘cults’, ‘sorcery’ or ‘folklore’ (Parés and Sansi, 2011). But while the first three terms imply a particularly dangerous wrongness as opposed to Christian doctrine, ‘folklore’ reduces mythology, tales, music and dances to harmless cultural heritage, a remnant of the past that bears no power in itself.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the notion of *fé* needed to be understood in the context of Christian dominance, as many Candomblé communities still struggle to be recognized as legitimate, valuable religious groups. Likewise, in this chapter, the *ialorixá*'s insistence that ‘this is not theatre’ emphasizes her objection to the depiction of Candomblé as ‘folkloric’ performance rather than a respectable Brazilian religion. To find out more about the public representation of Afro-Brazilian culture, I will now turn to the ‘profane stage’ outside of the *terreiro*. The following section will present the figure of the *baiana*; a theatre performance about a slave rebellion; and Afro-Brazilian dance classes in Salvador.

Outside the *terreiro*: Candomblé on the profane stage

Anyone who has visited the historic centre of Salvador, capital of Bahia, must have come across the dressed up *baianas* with their big turbans and Candomblé necklaces – and has probably been asked to pay for a photo with them. *Baianas* are emblematic figures in Bahia. They often sell *acarajé* (deep-fried bean balls) from street stalls, wearing big 19th century style dresses that resemble the religious outfit of an *ialorixá*. Traditionally, *baianas* were mainly daughters of the fiery female *orixá* Iansã (whose favourite food is *acarajé*); but today they do not all practice Candomblé themselves.

When I attended the yearly festival of *Bonfim* in Salvador in January, among the thousands of people walking to the Catholic Church of *Senhor Bonfim*, I encountered numerous dressed-up *baianas* alongside dance performers, drunk locals, political activists and flocks of tourists. Sansi notes that since the 19th century, the festival of *Bonfim* has been transformed from a Catholic procession to an ‘Afro-Brazilian cultural icon’ (Sansi, 2005a:182), and he characterizes the *baianas* as the embodiment of ‘folklore’ in this event. Indeed, when exposing their necklaces and

exaggerated clothes to the public gaze and tourist cameras, nothing about the *baianas* looked sacred, in the sense of being protected by religious rules and boundaries.

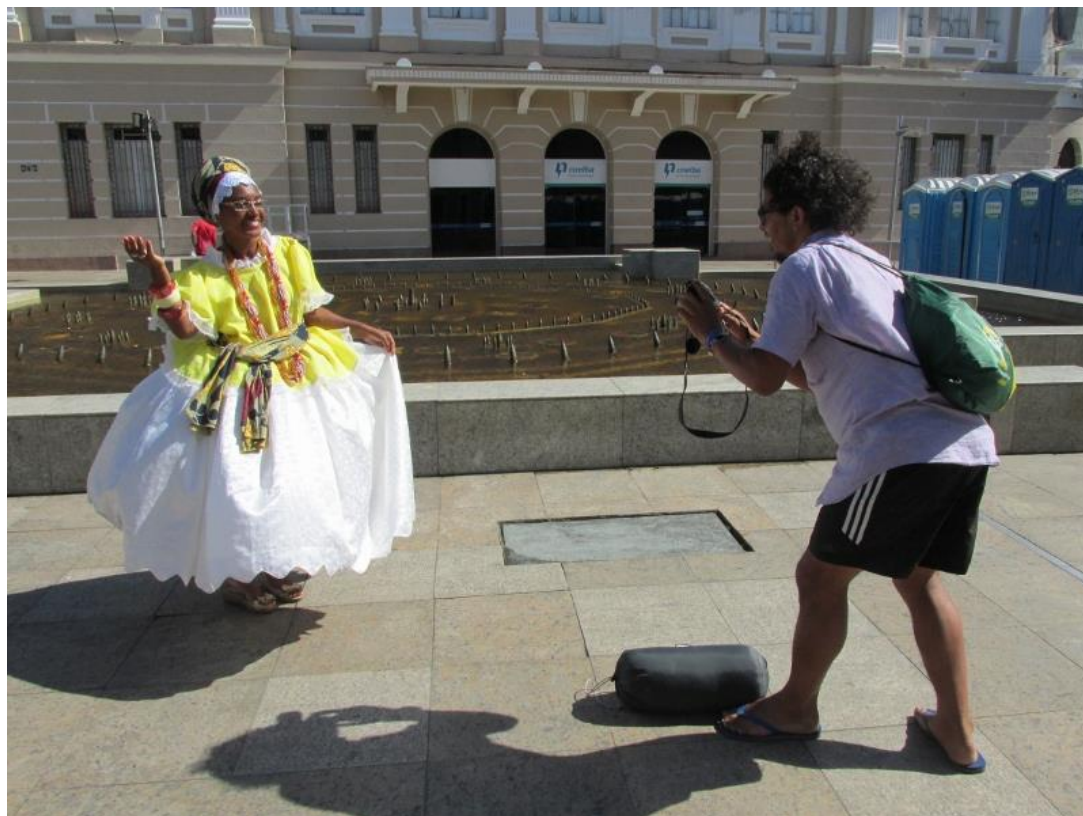


Figure 23: Tourist taking a photo of a baiana in the historic centre of Salvador, 2014

Van de Port (2011) writes that the tourist industry has been a major driving force behind the commercialized ‘Candombléization’ of the city of Salvador. Since the 1970s, the Bahian tourism agency Bahiatursa has promoted Candomblé as a tourist attraction (Parés, 2012). Travellers are welcomed at the airport to enter ‘the land of magic’ (Van de Port, 2011:146), and their taxi to the city centre drives them past huge *orixá* statues in the lake *Tororó*³³. Tourism has not only shaped the public image of Candomblé, Van de Port says, but it also opened up *terreiros* to the tourist’s gaze (2011:148). Hotels organize excursions to *terreiros*, souvenir shops sell *orixá* statuettes and T-Shirts, and the city’s well-known *Balé Folclórico* (Folkloric Ballet) presents daily shows of the ‘Dances of the *Orixás*’.

³³ For a detailed discussion of Candomblé monuments in Salvador, see Sansi 2007.

I attended several of these dance shows, and was impressed by the dramatic staging and skilful movements; but at the same time, I was put off by what to me looked like a shallow way of marketing Candomblé that seemed to have little to do with everyday life in peripheral communities like the Odé Terreiro. In a small café in Pelourinho, the historical city centre, I chatted with a waiter who was himself an Afro-Brazilian dancer. He criticized the expression ‘dance of the *orixás*,’ and stated they should instead be called ‘choreographies of the *orixás*,’ because they only *copied* the dance styles of the *orixás*. In line with his critical comment, I was quick to label the public display of Candomblé imagery and performances, including the dance performances and the big dresses of the *baianas*, as commercialized appropriation and ‘not the real thing.’

I expected that such tourist-oriented versions of her religion would be a major aspect of the *ialorixá*’s concern about ‘folklorisation’. But surprisingly, they were not. While she found my turban folkloristic, when I asked her about the *baianas* with their enormous turbans – who to me looked like caricatures of an *ialorixá* – she praised their art. Why would she approve of their exaggerated representations of Afro-Brazilian culture? She explained:

There, they are not devaluating, and neither disrespecting [Candomblé]. Moreover, they use exaggeration because it is artistic work. It is not a folklorisation (*folclorização*) of the religion. They are [showing] the art that is in this religion. That is not devaluating.

Likewise, she expressed her admiration for the dancers of the *Balé Folklorico*, as they showed respect towards the traditions and they knew what they were doing:

All dancers in this company are people of *axé*. They are persons who, when they present this dance, ask [the *orixás*] for permission beforehand. So, they don’t folklorise the ritual, they don’t present the ritual, they present a choreography. They don’t stage (*interpretar*) the *orixá*.

In her role as gatekeeper between the sacred and profane realms, the *ialorixá* emphasized the importance of publicly demonstrating the artistic value of Afro-Brazilian culture. Her statement that the dancers were people of *axé* implied that they

had knowledge about the religious background of their performances, and were committed to respecting rules and boundaries of what could be shown and what was to be kept secret. In contrast to such artistic adaptations, she stated, Afro-Brazilian culture was folklorised in performances during the annual 'Folklore Day', when white school children were painted black and pretended to receive an *orixá* on stage. However, the *ialorixá* acknowledged that such ridicule was not common practice anymore, "because we are working on these questions." But formerly, Candomblé followers sometimes even provided their sacred clothes for such performances, which she described as an act of abuse and ignorance. The clothes of the *orixás* were only to be used during the rituals inside the *terreiro*, she insisted.

It is important, then, who represents Afro-Brazilian culture with what intention and background knowledge. While the *ialorixá* objected to school performances set up by ignorant teachers as 'folklorisation', she appreciated artistic adaptations by 'people of *axé*' as important celebrations of black culture in Bahia. On the basis of this distinction lies the political question of whether a performance is used to belittle or to reclaim and vitalize African heritage, and if they used original attire or artistic representations. The *ialorixá* explained that what was exhibited and in what form needs to be determined by Candomblé practitioners, who ought to be in control of this partial visibility.

The semi-permeable character of the boundary between the sacred and the profane stages allows outsiders to recognize the importance of Afro-Brazilian culture with public artistic performances and representative images, while the secrets (*fundamentos*) and sacred objects that contain *axé* remain protected in the *terreiro*. The importance of hiding sacred objects from the public gaze is described vividly in Sansi's article *The Hidden Life of Stones* (2005b), which presents a case where a *terreiro* was raided by the police and a sacred stone (*otã*) was confiscated and publicly exhibited in a museum before political activists could enforce its removal from public view. Sansi writes: "The *otã* cannot be displayed in public. As opposed to other objects, it is not a work of art, not an artefact; and its immanent power must be respected, it must be hidden, it cannot ever be seen" (2005b:148). Again, it is the performance of concealment rather than the actual content of the secret that gives

power and authority to Candomblé practices and objects (Johnson, 2002, Taussig, 2003).

Accordingly, when the Odé Terreiro organized a ‘Day of Afro-Brazilian Culture’, it was not set up in the *terreiro*, but in the suburb where the *ialorixá* lived and where she was known as a Candomblé leader, in the midst of Pentecostal churches. As Afro-Brazilian art receives much more attention in the capital city than in the periphery, she wished to celebrate African traditions in her neighbourhood near the *terreiro*. And to my surprise, the *terreiro* members did this by dressing up with colourful clothes and by wrapping big turbans around the heads of anybody who was up for it. Here, the turban had no immediate religious meaning, but it represented Afro-Brazilian aesthetics and served to improve the *terreiro*’s public image in the local community. Stressing the artistic value of Afro-Brazilian culture, the *ialorixá* wished to increase visibility of Candomblé as a rich, admirable, and living religion.



Figure 24: The turban workshop. Photo: Guedes Caputo, 2014

I have explained that my wearing a turban on the ‘sacred stage’ during a Candomblé ritual was criticized as folklore, while in contrast the big exaggerated dresses of the *baianas* in Salvador as well as the turban workshop in the neighbourhood near the *terreiro* were seen as artistic presentations of African culture on the public or

‘profane stage’. Folklore, as the *ialorixá* used it, implies ignorance, devaluation and disrespect. In contrast, what she called artistic presentations actually enhanced the public recognition of Afro-Brazilian culture. It is therefore important not simply to judge such performances on the ‘profane stage’ as either empty commercialization or cultural resistance, but to acknowledge that they can be both at the same time. It all depends on who is in control of the public representations, and whether the boundaries between the sacred and the profane are protected.

The slave rebellion on the theatre stage

Political theatre has a long tradition in Brazil. From Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1995) to the short theatrical pieces called *místicas* performed at meetings of the Landless Workers’ Movement (Flynn, 2015), stage performances have played an important role in fostering political conscientization, demanding social justice, and creating group identities. Today, many Candomblé practitioners are involved with local and national art scenes; and among the members of the Odé Terreiro, there were theatre actors, a poet, a dancer, and a sculptor. In an interview, the *ialorixá* made clear that both the sacred and the profane stages had been important for her to develop self-respect and to heal from experiences of humiliation and social exclusion.

I come from a reality, as you already know, where we are taught not to like ourselves, for being poor, for being black, we are taught to think we are ugly, taught to think we aren’t worthy (*que não presta*). Taught to think that [our] hair is bad, because it is too curly. So, theatre showed me something different. [...] When I started doing theatre, I started to understand my reality, I started to assume myself (*me assumir*), principally my colour. [...]

And then, when I entered the religion, I entered something different. And that also gave me strength because I assumed my origin. My root is Afro-Brazilian, I am not African. I am Afro because I have an origin there, I come from there; I cannot negate Mother Africa. And from there I recognized (*assumir*) my religion. And when I recognize my religion, I am making myself stronger. With everything you assume of yourself, you make yourself stronger.

While having previously made the claim that ‘this is not theatre!’ during a Candomblé ceremony, here she describes her engagement with theatre as starting the process of ‘making herself stronger’ that continued in her religious activities. When she was young she performed with the Bahian actor, dancer and choreographer Mario Gusmão (1928-1996). Gusmão was the first black actor to graduate from the theatre faculty of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and during a public event the *ialorixá* stated that it was he who “brought awareness of our African roots” to the region. Repeating the belief that art is divine, she added that he was not dead because “the artist does not die, he transcends.”

Performances of Afro-Brazilian identity on sacred and profane stages, then, go hand in hand. But how do Candomblé practitioners enact theatre stages? How do they negotiate visibility and concealment on the profane stage? In Chapter One, I quoted the *ialorixá*'s song for Pomba Gira and songs from a theatre play about Exu in Salvador. In this section, I am going to look at a theatre performance closer to the Odé Terreiro, in a circus tent in Ilhéus where the People's Theatre (*Teatro Popular*) presented a play about a slave rebellion in Ilhéus.

The *Teatro Popular* worked closely together with Mãe Ilza, leader of the well-known Terreiro Matamba Tombenci Neto, who had also worked with Mario Gusmão in the 1980s. I had the chance to watch the *Teatro Popular*'s ‘Afro-rock opera’ *1789* in which she featured prominently, together with many of her religious children. The foreword to the written play describes Mario Gusmão as a “lighthouse for a movement of resistance and recognition of black culture in a Brazil that was enslaving and still cultivates contemporary realities of exploitation of a cheap workforce in the new-old capitalist order” (Lisboa, 2013:9, my translation). Based on historic accounts, the play portrays the slave rebellion of 1789 in the cocoa mill Engenho de Santana near Ilhéus.



Figure 25: Online announcement of the play '1789' at the Teatro Popular of Ilhéus, Bahia, 2014.
 Source: http://comunidade.tiamarita.blogspot.co.uk/2013_11_17_archive.html

When I arrived at the theatre tent, a trickster-like figure on a unicycle led us inside – an obvious reference to Exu. The play began with a depiction of the terrible working conditions of a fictive chocolate factory in the year 2089, which led the future workers to fight for their rights by organizing a strike. All actors wore white clothes and Candomblé-like turbans. Then we were sent back in time 300 years, into the midst of the slave rebellion of 1789, which ended with the *Carta de Ilhéus* – the first official demand for slave rights in Brazil (Lisboa, 2013).

Breaking up the fictionalised dialogues, the theatre production also included a video in which another *ialorixá* testified how policemen invaded her *terreiro* during a raid in 2010, and how they tortured and humiliated her when she incorporated her father Oxossi.³⁴ The short documentary showed an extreme breach of religious boundaries, and it stressed the continuity of violence and religious intolerance today. In another scene, the 80-year-old *ialorixá* Mãe Ilza appeared on stage in a golden dress and sang. Her ancestors had been among those insurgent slaves 225 years ago, and the

³⁴ For more information, please see the online news article: <http://www.correio24horas.com.br/detalhe/noticia/mae-de-santo-acusa-policiais-militares-de-tortura-em-ilheus/>.

changing between past and future in the play created the notion that they continued to fight today and in the future. The play ended with the rebels – both from the 18th and 21st century – lining up and demanding “better education!”, “free health care!”, “religious tolerance!”, “respect for the elderly!”, and to “fight corruption!” with their fists raised in the air.

By linking Candomblé with the struggle for workers’ rights and social justice across the centuries, the political content of the theatre play *1789* goes well beyond demonstrating the value of Afro-Brazilian art on the profane stage. Here, Candomblé is not presented as a religious practice that has survived oppression in the sense of Marshall Sahlins’s ‘resistance of culture’, but indeed as a ‘culture of resistance’ that fights oppression (Sahlins, 2002:56); and the play implicitly asked Candomblé followers to get active and to take part in social movements like their religious ancestors did in the 18th century. The jumping back and forth between the insurgent slaves of the past and the factory workers of the future in the theatre play mirrored the dissolution of linear time that occurs in the Candomblé *terreiro* when the past manifests in the present (Prandi, 2001a). The slaves in the cocoa mill and the chocolate factory workers were played by the same actors, with identical white clothes and turbans, and they were linked through kinship and their culture of resistance.

These links were also pronounced in the *Odé Terreiro*, where dressing similarly to Brazilian slaves, walking barefoot, eating with the hands and sleeping on straw mats established a bridge to the enslaved ancestors as well as to a mythical Africa. In this way, when humans connected with the *orixás* in the *Odé Terreiro*, they mobilized what they called *memória ancestral*, ancestral memory. Indeed, the *babalorixá* of the *Ijexá Terreiro* could trace his roots back to Mejiḡã, his great-great-grandmother, who had been an *ialorixá* of Oxum, the *orixá* of beauty, in the city of Ilesa in today’s Nigeria (Póvoas, 2012:38-39). In the early 19th century, Mejiḡã was abducted from her home country and was deported to Ilhéus, where she worked as a slave in the cocoa mill Engenho de Santana: the same cocoa mill where in 1789 the slave rebellion had taken place. Despite racist oppression, the memory of Mejiḡã, daughter of Oxum, was transmitted orally from generation to generation, and as Póvoas says:

[u]ntil today Mejiçã's descendants are enthusiastic to relate how she developed strategies of insurgency that, in the underground, propelled the transmission of a knowledge that clashed frontally – and even today clashes – with the knowledge of the ruling elite. [...] Negation, expropriation, measures to make us invisible, nothing had the force to mute these voices. (Póvoas, 2012:39-40)

Through Mejiçã and other ancestors, every member of the Odé Terreiro was directly linked with Africa, a political reference and source of mysterious powers. Ancestral memory explained why the *ogã* was such a good drummer, how the *ialorixá* knew how perform the cowry shell oracle, or how the house members communicated with their mother or father *orixá* on the sacred stage. Collective ancestral memory was part of their physical and spiritual existence, they told me, and – much as in psychoanalytical tradition – they stated that if this memory was suppressed and not recognized, it would cause suffering. To heal, it was therefore essential to acknowledge, activate and express one's ancestral memory, as part of what *terreiro* members called *se assumir*, to assume and respect oneself.

The theatre performance used Candomblé imagery and references, and so Mãe Ilza made an effort to protect the boundary between the sacred and the profane. For example, the actors had wrapped their turbans in strange, irregular ways, with knots and bits sticking out here and there, which distinguished them from the way turbans were worn in a *terreiro*. And as the title 'rock opera' suggests, the music was played with electrical guitars and drum kits, and not with sacred wooden drums as in the *terreiro*. And yet, Mãe Ilza was aware that the boundary was not fully closed by these gestures; so she had performed a ritual with the actors before the presentation, to protect their heads from the 'energy' they were dealing with (*mexendo*) and to ask the *orixás* for permission to stage the play. But by performing a religious ritual as preparation for a theatre play, she effectively brought the sacred and the profane stages very close to each other, with 'energy' spilling over, while controlling the semi-permeable boundary between both. This protection of boundaries while allowing some contact with the divine was an act of *cuidado* for the sacred sphere: it kept the sacred intact; and while it honoured the *orixás*, it also gave special value to the performance. Such boundary-work could not have been done by anyone other than an *ialorixá*, as it demanded knowledge, skill, and religious authority. But how

are the boundaries between Candomblé's sacred stage and Afro-Brazilian profane performances managed when there is no *ialorixá* to take care of them?

Afro-Brazilian culture has shaped the performing arts in Bahia, be it theatre presentations, dance schools, capoeira groups and the famous carnival celebrations, or simply casual dancing to samba music at home or in a bar. Numerous song lyrics relate to Candomblé, and the *orixás* often feature in paintings, films and literature, most notably in the novels of Jorge Amado (1912-2001), famous son of the city Ilhéus near the Odé Terreiro. To find out more about the negotiation of boundaries between the sacred and the profane stages of Candomblé, I will now turn to a workshop called 'Orixá Dance Movement' that I attended in Salvador's city centre.

The Afro-Brazilian dance workshop

I jumped off the overcrowded bus in Pelourinho, and in the bright morning sun I rushed through the traffic-packed streets and then crossed the touristy central square. With no time to get a coconut water on the street, I entered the Dance School, changed into blue leggings and a white shirt, and headed upstairs to the gym room for my first class. When I opened the door, I was surprised: Everybody was dressed in black, Candomblé's 'forbidden colour'. In this class I was a bright blue clumsy clown in the middle of elegant dancers in black, and I felt I stood out more than during the dance rituals on the sacred stage in the *terreiro*.

When I asked the dance teacher Rosangela about the black clothes, she responded that this came from modern dance, and that in a *terreiro* she would never wear black. She also made clear that she was not a Candomblé follower. As the dancers did not evoke the *orixás* on the stage, she explained, they could wear black without any problem. It even seemed as if wearing black in the dance class was a performative statement that 'this is not religion,' the opposite of the *ialorixá's* 'this is not theatre' during the ceremony. But despite this clear distinction, in the dance practice, the separation of the sacred and the profane was not so clear-cut, as the dance class also aimed at evoking 'the *orixá's* energy'. Rosangela worked with dancers from all over the world, and among those attending the dance course with me there were people from Argentina, Germany, Israel, USA, and Spain, as well as some Brazilians. And

although the foreigners did not have a direct link with Afro-Brazilian culture, they had strong emotional reactions to the *orixá* dances. Almost every day I saw someone cry. In an interview, Rosangela explained to me that this happened because people were healing through dance:

Rosangela: Obaluayé, the god of diseases, in reality is the essence that makes you heal yourself [...] So when you dance the dance of Obaluayé, you are healing yourself and you are dancing for cure (*cura*).

Me: Even outside the *terreiro*?

Rosangela: Even outside. Because the messages are the same. The interpretation can be done through the body of a dancer who dances a movement that symbolizes this essence; and in the *terreiro* it is not a symbol, it is a presence.

While the dance school was not a sacred space, the dancers could still make use of Obaluayé's essence through corporeal experience and expression. Earlier I said, with reference to Victor Turner (1988), that the sacred and the profane stage pertained to different cultural genres, as the former transforms people and creates *axé*, while the latter mainly presented performances. But in the case of the dance class, when dancers cried and healed through the essence of the *orixás*, the distinction is not so clear.

Mãe Darabí's view that artists were divine *when doing art*, and Rosangela's claim that by dancing in a gym one could connect to the *orixás*' essence and heal, express that the boundary between the sacred and the profane stages is permeable. Something of the *orixá*'s presence slips through onto the profane stage and can be experienced by the dancers, even when they wear black clothes and might never have set foot in a *terreiro*. But prompted about the difference between art and religion, Rosangela, like the *ialorixá*, brought up the opposition of religious rules versus artistic freedom:

Religion has rules, it has a certain discipline you have to follow so that you go in the direction of the functionality of this cult. [...] Art is freedom and everything is allowed. You have the freedom to express yourself in the way you choose.

In contrast to a *terreiro*, in her classes the dancers were only practicing the 'vocabulary' of the *orixás*' dances, Rosangela said. Moreover, in Candomblé the

drums that call the *orixás* had to ‘eat’ (i.e. they were treated with certain foods like honey or palm oil) before a ceremony, while she only used plain drums that had never been ritually prepared for calling the *orixás*. Therefore, people would never receive an *orixá* in her dance class. But while keeping a respectful distance from the *terreiro*, Rosangela did evoke something of the *orixá* on the profane stage, even if it was just a shadow of what people experience in (or imagine about) Candomblé.

There is a vibration, there is a quantic energy [...]. You are filling yourself [with energy]; that is why people cry. Sometimes people scream and make noises, because this is a different type of trance. It is the trance of recognizing your presence with the essence of the *orixá*. But you are not dancing the *orixá*. You allow yourself to understand what this essence is. But you will never dance the *orixá* unless he manifests in you [in a religious setting].

Clearly, to a certain degree Rosangela used the *orixás*’ mysterious power effectively in her classes, and was aware of her dances’ proximity with the sacred. Of course, as someone who was not initiated in Candomblé, she was not allowed to call the *orixás* into presence, and she had to take great care not to cross the boundary into religious practice. But other Afro-Brazilian dancers, like the late Augusto de Omulu (1962-2013), are initiated into Candomblé, and dance both in the *terreiro* and in dance classes. In an interview, Mestre Augusto described the beginning of his career in the 1970s, when the dances of the *orixás* were presented as ‘folklore’. Echoing Mãe Darabí, he objected to the folklorization of his religion:

This term folklore today makes me very uncomfortable, because they used and are using the figure of the *orixás* and also a lot of the *fundamentos* (secrets) of the religion. So, I felt they were hurting the religion, because the folklore used Candomblé on the stage, in the theatre, as a spectacle. So I started to work differently. (Ferreira, 2014:233)

Like Rosangela, he used the steps of the *orixás* as templates and merged them with classical ballet and modern dance movements. In this way, he said, he respected the religious boundaries and secrets, and he alerted his students to the difference between the religious and the non-religious. And while some students were disappointed with his modern dance approach, Mestre Augusto pointed out its value to “reveal to the

world these powers, this wealth, this potential that our culture has” (Ferreira, 2014:235).

In all presented examples, from the *baianas* to the theatre play and the dance workshop, Candomblé references in the public domain hinted at ‘something more’ behind the doors of the *terreiros* that was not and must not be shown. The *ialorixá*’s emphasis on the artistic value of the presentations, and the notion that the artists knew about the rules of Candomblé and the limits of what they could present, demonstrated that artists often cared about religious boundaries and thus protected the *axé*. But stressing the boundaries between the sacred and the profane goes beyond protecting what is going on inside the *terreiro* – it also creates curiosity about the mysterious power and practices of Candomblé in the public sphere, while reserving ultimate authority for religious leaders.

Conclusion

It was the last month of my fieldwork, and I was about to discuss my research findings with the community of the Odé Terreiro, who had gathered in the *barracão*. But before I could start, the *ialorixá* asked one of the initiated *terreiro* members: “You, son of Iansã, go and do her *pano* (turban),” adding, “so that it is right for the photos.” Lucas replied “Yes, my mother,” stood up from his straw mat, and asked me for permission to touch my *ori* (head). I lowered my head and everybody quietly watched him undo and rearrange my white turban. The night before, the *ialorixá* had incorporated her mother Oxum, *orixá* of beauty, who had told the *ogã* to decorate the room for my presentation with flowers. In the morning, a table had been set up for my talk with a golden cloth and tropical flowers and leaves. The community sat on the floor in a half circle, and the *ialorixá* confirmed that I should present standing: “That is how Oxossi wants it.” With the turban, the flowers, and my body in the right position as decided by the *ialorixá* and her *orixás*, I could then start my presentation.

Over the previous months, I had practiced wrapping the *pano* around my head, and I thought I had done a good job with it that morning. I had carefully avoided creases, and had twisted up the ends, which I then wrapped around my head tightly and

tucked neatly underneath the cloth. When I had first participated in rituals like the *ipadé* for Exu (Chapter One) or the *caruru* (see above), others had put the cloth on my head. But after I had received my personal *pano* towards the end of my stay, I had learned to do it myself. However, in the moment of my research presentation, the *ialorixá* made clear that I still not mastered it. But why was it important to put me in my place just when I was about to end my fieldwork? Putting the *pano* on my head appeared as a demonstration of expertise and authority, and the comment that it should look right for the photos stressed her control over public representation, in this case by the European anthropologist.

This chapter looked at ways in which different actors delineated and negotiated the boundaries between the sacred stage in the Candomblé *terreiro* and the profane stage outside. The *ialorixá's* insistence that 'this is not theatre' emphasized the difference between the sacred stage where the Law of Candomblé was followed, and the profane stage, with more artistic freedom. When the members of the *terreiro* greeted Exu at the entrance, took purifying leaf *banhos*, and put on the *agujemi* necklace of their father or mother *orixás*, they performed the boundary around the sacred space that set it apart from the world outside. At the same time, artists on the profane stage also performed boundary work that legitimized their use of Candomblé elements, for example when the *baianas* used exaggerated turbans, when theatre actors put on their turbans in odd ways, and when dancers in the *orixá* workshop wore black clothes that would be forbidden in a *terreiro*. By doing so, they stressed that 'this was not religion.' But at the same time, the boundaries between the stages were also blurred and crossed. This blurring occurred in the *saída* ritual, with the protagonists' stage fright-like fear to 'mess things up' and in the smiles rehearsed before the event. And on the other hand, when Mãe Ilza performed a ritual with the actors before staging the theatre play, she added a pinch of sacredness to the profane stage.

As I have already argued in previous chapters, *axé* does not lie only on the 'other side', in the world of the *orixás*; it arises through contact between the human and the divine at the permeable boundaries, or 'ambiguous edges' (Sennett, 2006). The ambiguity of the boundary resides in its double character as a divider and connector, like a door that can be opened and shut. When the door is opened too far, the sacred

stage loses its secrets and *axé*, and that is the point at which the *ialorixá* sees religion descending into folklore. But when it is completely shut and the religion remains invisible to the outside world, it loses its public mystery, social recognition and political influence. Managing the boundary between the sacred and the profane stages of Candomblé is therefore a way to maintain and create power.

In his chapter on resistance in Candomblé, Parés (2012:9) notes that the “accumulation of *axé* (life force, vital energy) on which Candomblé is based, can easily be equated with or transformed into social and political power.” I want to add that this process also goes in the other direction, in that social and political power can transform into *axé*. The visibility and public reputation of Candomblé as a valuable part of Brazilian identity adds to the *axé*, and can even constitute social healing in the sense of countering the devaluation of black culture as primitive, sorcery, and devil worship. In the history of Candomblé, religious boundaries have been violated through persecution, police raids, appropriation by the ruling elite, folklorization and, still today, attacks on *terreiros* by Christian fundamentalists. Therefore, the insistence that authority over the boundary work must lie in the hands of religious leaders is an act of reclaiming power, control, and respect.

The authority to set up the sacred stage and control its boundaries is legitimized with *cuidado*, and deep knowledge. *Cuidado* relates to the protection of the sacred against invasion and alienation, and it builds both on artistic work and on the ‘Law of Candomblé’ and the many rules that come with it. The sacred stage is set up by decorating the *barracão* with flowers and leaves and purifying it with incense, drumming and dancing, and following the orders of the *ialorixá* precisely. Having established the sacred stage as a space that is “wholly different” (Otto, 1958), contact with the divine sphere can take place and become effective. Here, members of the house experience healing self-transformation as I have described it in previous chapters: they create proximity with the *orixás*, and some even embody them in trance; they acquire deep knowledge in the ritual process; and they strengthen their *fé* and feel *axé*, the divine power. And while *cuidado* and authority are used to set up the sacred stage, the sacred stage also serves as an elevated platform to perform *cuidado* and authority. This is what happened when the *ialorixá* had my turban

corrected in the *barracão* before my talk: while she displayed *cuidado* by helping me out and making sure that everything was right, she also demonstrated her authority and stressed that I still had a lot to learn.

Chapter 5. “We do. We care.” Candomblé and Public Health

Eles só jogam pipoca! – “They only throw popcorn!” the medical doctor in my local health post (*posto de saúde*) summarized her views on Candomblé healing. We were sitting in the consultation room, as she had kindly agreed to receive me during her lunch break for a chat about her views on Candomblé healing. I had just moved to this part of town from a poorer suburb, and while the health post in the suburb had been closed for two years already, I was not surprised to find a functioning health post in this better-off neighbourhood of Ilhéus. The doctor told me she had attended a Candomblé ceremony once herself, a few years back, because she had been curious about their practices. But immediately, she made clear that she had found the whole performance very silly, getting up from her chair to mock the *babalorixá* by imitating him throwing popcorn (*pipoca*) and dancing “like a madman” (*como um louco*), as she put it. “Popcorn! Can you imagine that!” she exclaimed with a loud laugh and fell back into her chair. She was not aware that popcorn was of high symbolic value in Candomblé, as it relates to the pox-marks on the body of Omulu, the *orixá* of suffering and healing. Instead she ridiculed the ceremony she had attended as ‘mad’ (*louco*) and used this experience to explain her disinterest in Afro-Brazilian healing.

I cannot say whether she never went back to a Candomblé *terreiro*, or whether she told me that story because she did not want to lose face as a Brazilian medical doctor in front of a European researcher. During my fieldwork, I met various people across the social classes who denied their involvement in Candomblé at first, and only later started talking about it. However, the doctor’s depiction of the *babalorixá* as a madman is an example of rejection and ridicule of Afro-Brazilian religious healing on the part of a medical professional. The *terreiro* members I talked to often perceived medical doctors as prejudiced towards Afro-Brazilian healing practices, and usually they would not tell their doctors about their involvement with Candomblé. Several members of the Odé Terreiro commented that medical doctors did not want to learn about other forms of healing anyway.

Indeed, my own communication with medical faculty of the local university seems to confirm this claim. I had planned to give a lecture on Afro-Brazilian healing for students of the medical school at the local university in South Bahia; but although the medical faculty first accepted my suggestion, in the end they cancelled my talk with the explanation that it did not fit into the curriculum. A few months later, I met Marinho Rodrigues, the local coordinator of the NGO RENAFRO (National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health) in Ilhéus, who told me about similar experiences RENAFRO had faced when organizing a talk about the health of the black population at the medical school. Though they had publicized the talk widely, not a single student had turned up. He stressed that medical students, most of them privately educated and from privileged white backgrounds, were not particularly interested in the black population, and even less so in Candomblé. Having grown up in a Candomblé *terreiro* where he now occupied a high-rank position, Marinho emphasised the importance of educating medical professionals about Afro-Brazilian healing practices. When I asked him what he would like to say to medical students, he replied:

So, if I had the opportunity to say something to them, I would say they are missing out on a great opportunity to have a better training as doctors, as health workers, as health professionals. [...] People need to be humble enough to accept the knowledge of the other who has a different experience and who has something to offer. And I feel sad when I see that these opportunities are rejected in such a rude, ignorant way that only brings suffering to our society, instead of well-being. So, if you think you know everything and that only university will give you the knowledge you need, you are very wrong, especially when speaking about health. In a country like Brazil we face many health problems, and we are a very diverse society, so oftentimes medicine should be applied in different ways to different people. And they [the medical students] miss out on this contact with the people in such an important time of their lives, in their training. [...] They will need to understand this. If not, we will see our country getting sicker and sicker, because it does not receive the treatment it deserves. And one of the best treatments that exists is affection. This *cuidado*, this touch, this contact. If we maintain the distance, our country will only keep getting sicker.

And he concluded the interview with saying: “I think that the *terreiro* communities have a lot to teach to traditional medicine [here: biomedicine]. They have a lot to teach. I think we need to exchange.” So, what might this exchange look like?

This chapter is about instances of contact between biomedicine and Candomblé *terreiros*, and about the use of the notion of Candomblé *cuidado* in the context of public health. Since the 19th century, the Brazilian public health discourse has had a significant impact on the role of Afro-Brazilian *terreiros* in Brazilian society and on the legal regulation of their religious practices in particular (Johnson, 2001). While under slave law Candomblé was prohibited as ‘sorcery’, after the abolition of slavery, Candomblé was framed as a ‘civil threat to public health,’ and its practice was regulated under sections of the Penal Code of 1890 that addressed the illegal practice of medicine, magic, and curing (Johnson, 2001). Psychiatrists linked ‘spirit possession’ with mental illness (Stone, 2011), and this pathologization of Afro-Brazilian religion influenced the studies of early Candomblé researchers, like Nina Rodrigues and Arthur Ramos, on the ‘psychopathology’ of Candomblé (Capone, 2010:183). Although the most recent penal code of 1984 continues to prohibit “sorcery, predicting of the future, explanations of dreams and the like” (Johnson, 2001:30), the integration of Candomblé into Brazilian national identity has shifted the discourse, and made collaborative health projects between the state and Candomblé organizations possible.

Such collaborative projects are part of participatory public health schemes that have been implemented in Brazil since the post-dictatorship democratization process. In global public health, ‘community participation’ has been a key word since the 1970s, building on notions of citizenship that stress “the right and duty of people to participate in public and community affairs,” as well as on the “institutionalized health system’s inability to provide for all health related needs” (Zakus and Lysack, 1998). But participation is an ambiguous public health category that can be framed in different ways. In the case of Tanzania, for example, Rebecca Marsland (2006) shows that participation is framed simultaneously as ‘empowerment’ and as ‘citizens’ duty’; and such ambiguity can provoke tensions among the different actors involved. Public health co-operations, like the ones between *terreiro* organizations and Brazilian state health bodies, can then become stages for the negotiation of public recognition, power and social control. On the public health stage, I argue, *terreiro* organizations use healing practices and *cuidado* as a moral-political argument in the legitimization discourse of Afro-Brazilian religion.

In contrast to the *cuidado* provided in the *terreiro*, my informants often depicted Brazilian society outside the *terreiro* as unjust, dangerous and profoundly *uncaring* – especially towards the black population. Indeed, results from national censuses show that the black population suffers most from poverty and poor health care (Barata et al., 2007, Htun, 2004, Brazilian Health Ministry, 2013). Racial health inequalities are especially relevant in Bahia, the state with the highest proportion of black population in all of Brazil. In response to the health inequalities between black and white Brazilians, in 2006 the Brazilian National Health Council introduced the National Policy of Integral Health of the Black Population (PNSIP) into the national public health system, *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS). Among the objectives of the PNSIP is the “promotion of recognition of popular health knowledges and practices, including those preserved in religions of African origin” such as Candomblé (Brazilian Health Ministry, 2013:19).

Unlike public health activists like Marinho, who participate in state-funded campaigns to promote the recognition of Candomblé healing and to demonstrate that its practitioners do not “only throw popcorn,” the members of the Odé Terreiro were not involved in such initiatives. They used biomedicine and Candomblé healing as two complementary and in no way contradictory sources of health and well-being, as I noted in Chapter Four, and the *ialorixá* did not hesitate to send people to see a medical doctor when she thought it was necessary. But despite her appreciation of biomedicine, the *ialorixá* declared she did not want to be involved with public health campaigns. Drawing clear boundaries, she stated her *terreiro* would not collaborate with state bodies whatsoever, as they always had hidden agendas. Her response made the relationship between Candomblé and public health seem even more intriguing. To find out more about the dynamics of collaborative projects between *terreiro* organizations and public health bodies, I attended several public health events.

This chapter is based on the public health events I visited in Salvador and Ilhéus. It starts with a Health Fair at a Candomblé *terreiro* in Salvador, followed by a symposium on Afro-Brazilian religion in Salvador’s old medical school. Both events emphasized the boundaries between biomedicine and Afro-Brazilian healing, despite the call for collaboration and integration. I will then turn to the NGO RENAFRO, a

protagonist on the Afro-Brazilian public health stage, to discuss their strategies of cooperation with state health institutions. Their promotion of *terreiros* as health care providers and “strategic tools” for public health brings up the question of co-optation – but who is co-opting whom here? I will investigate this question in more detail in the case of RENAFRO’s state-funded HIV and AIDS campaigns that use *cuidado*, as practiced in the *terreiros*, as a key argument to claim recognition for Afro-Brazilian religion. Finally, I will revisit a meeting for the “Health of the Black Population” in Salvador to draw out how activities of Afro-Brazilian health NGOs link with resistance against racist discrimination.

Cuidado in this context does two things at the same time. It stresses the similarities between the state and the *terreiros* as both provide health care, while it also emphasizes the differences, in that Candomblé *cuidado* builds on the recognition of people’s needs for warm, accepting inclusion (*acolhimento*) and holistic care that the medical system fails to offer.

The Health Fair: biomedicine by the side of the *terreiro*

Health Fairs (*Feiras de Saúde*) are a prime example of public health collaboration between *terreiros* and governmental bodies, and they are organized by Candomblé communities and NGOs in cooperation with the Health Ministry and public health institutions. They are educational events intended to promote community awareness about healthy living, as well as prevention and treatment of certain diseases. In the city of Salvador, I visited a Health Fair in the well-known Candomblé *terreiro* Casa Branca do Engenho Velho (White House of the Old Sugarcane Mill).



Figure 26: Poster for the Health Fair at Casa Branca, 2013

The Casa Branca has been organizing Health Fairs since 2000, with the aim of promoting contact between the Candomblé community, the local population, and state institutions by using the *terreiro* as a “place of promotion of health information and services” (Gomberg, 2011:80). This Health Fair was the 11th of its kind, a leaflet told me. The leaflet (see Figure 26) shows leaves and a metal staff with seven spikes and a bird on top: the symbols of Ossaim, the mysterious healer *orixá* who lives in the forest. It is also cast all in green, Ossaim’s colour. But despite the use of Candomblé imagery, the text below the picture mentions only biomedical services offered at the Health Fair. It reads:

The Candomblé *terreiros* are also spaces of health. Therefore, the work group of Health of the Black Population organizes Health Fairs, offering services such as: mouth hygiene, measuring blood sugar and blood pressure, vaccination for children and adults, cats and dogs, apart from talks about teenage pregnancy, sickle cell anaemia, albinism, food security, women’s health and prevention of STD/AIDS.

The description of *terreiros* as ‘spaces of health’ could have included information about Afro-Brazilian religious healing practices, but the subsequent list of medical services suggests that the *terreiro* community merely contributed the venue, while biomedicine provided the content of the educational event. There was no mention of Candomblé healing with rituals for the *orixás* or even herbal medicine. Rather than an exchange of knowledge and practices between biomedical and Candomblé health practitioners, as Marinho had called for, this leaflet announced that medical personnel would provide services and education for the *terreiro* community, and not the other way round.

On my way to the Health Fair I was getting excited about seeing the famous Casa Branca, allegedly the very first Candomblé *terreiro* in Salvador and officially a national heritage site since 1984. But upon arrival, I realized that the Health Fair did not take place on the grounds of the *terreiro* uphill, but instead at the foot of the hill, next to the parking lot. I could see the white-painted stone stairs leading up to the *terreiro*, but we did not go upstairs. The Candomblé community provided a space for the Health Fair, indeed; but the *terreiro*’s closed doors also reinforced the boundaries between the *terreiro* and the public health event.

In a white pavilion, a young woman was measuring blood pressure while her colleague measured visitors' weights and heights; and an employee of the public health and science institute FIOCRUZ³⁵ explained how fighting rat infestation could prevent leptospirosis. Two medical students distributed health education leaflets from the Health Ministry, and others told a group of children about measures to prevent dengue fever. Sitting around a long plastic table, representatives of the local health secretary, the City Council, FIOCRUZ, and NGOs held talks about public health without much reference to Candomblé. And the *ialorixá* of the Casa Branca, Mãe Tatá, did not make an appearance. Only few people had come to listen anyway, and the whole event felt somewhat staged and lacking in enthusiasm.



Figure 27: A health worker measuring the blood pressure of a terreiro member, 2013

³⁵ FIOCRUZ is the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Brazil's most influential health science and technology institution, founded in 1900. It is named after the physician who established sanitation and mass vaccination programmes against infectious diseases such as the bubonic plague, yellow fever, and smallpox at the beginning of the 20th century. Oswaldo Cruz was the public health official who organized the vaccination programme that led to the Vaccine Revolt in 1904 in Rio de Janeiro, where Candomblé communities defended their *terreiros* against intrusion by public health officials (see below). FIOCRUZ's presence at the Health Fair highlights the continuity of negotiations between *terreiros* and the state around control and participation in public health campaigns.



Figure 28: Medical students weighing children during the Health Fair, 2013

The Health Fair, which at first had looked like a response to Marinho's passionate call for exchange between Candomblé communities and medical professionals, turned out to be a rather lifeless event that brought public health to the doorstep of a *terreiro*, but not further. Despite the promotion of Health Fairs as collaborations between public health institutions and Candomblé *terreiros*, a dialogue was not established. While the medical care professionals might have seen the one-sidedness of the event as a sign of the superior status of biomedicine, to me the blatant absence of religious elements hinted at the power inside the *terreiro* that was kept hidden behind the walls uphill. Similarly, Van de Port (2011) describes another *terreiro* in Salvador, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, where absences, silences and closed doors served as a performance of secrecy to enhance the *terreiro's* power and mystery. He states:

[T]he performance of secrecy is all about foregrounding silence; suggesting but not saying; closing off rather than opening up; veiling rather than revealing; creating shadows, twilight zones and a pervading awareness of that which is absent. (Van de Port, 2011:202)

At the Health Fair, such performance of concealment was also a performance of *cuidado*. As the previous chapter argues, managing boundaries is an act of *cuidado*; and setting up the profane stage of the Health Fair next to the car park of the Casa Branca emphasized the power of the sacred stage that lay uphill, behind the walls of the *terreiro*. In this way, the *terreiro* quietly performed *cuidado* by showing that they protected the *axé* they cultivated inside; while the public health providers outside, with their leaflets and weighing scales, in turn also used the stage to demonstrate their efforts to attend to the needs of – or care for – the Afro-Brazilian population.

A few months after the Health Fair, I attended a meeting of the study group of Afro-Bahian culture at the local university. The *babalorixá* of the Ijexá Terreiro mentioned that he had been asked by public health officials whether he would agree to have a Health Fair in his house. His answer was clear: he had rejected the offer immediately, and explained that he was not interested in being integrated into biomedical practice. He drew a clear line between the sacred space of his *terreiro* and the public health system outside. In his opinion, biomedical health education and diagnostics should be performed in medical schools and hospitals, not in a *terreiro* where they practiced a different kind of *cuidado*. Like the *ialorixá* of the Odé Terreiro, he protected his *terreiro*'s autonomy by avoiding the public health stage altogether.

Boundary work between Candomblé *terreiros* and public health authorities has a long history in Brazil, which is illustrated in the Vaccine Revolt of 1904 in Rio de Janeiro, then capital of Brazil. At a time of significant advances in microbiology and infectious disease management, national law made smallpox vaccination obligatory and the authoritative state apparatus enforced its mass administration (Hochman, 2009). However, the vaccination programme had been preceded by another public health intervention: state officials had declared houses of the urban poor to be unhealthy dwellings, and subsequently destroyed them. Having lost their homes and their trust in public health authorities, the poorer population mobilized against the administration of the smallpox vaccine. Gilberto Hochmann (2009) explains that Candomblé *terreiros* played an important role in the uprising of 1904, as they preferred their *ialorixás* and *babalorixás* to practice a simple form of variolation

(inoculation with infectious material from smallpox lesions) in the *terreiros*, instead of being pressured into a state-controlled programme. The revolt was eventually defeated by the military after the government had declared a state of siege (see Figure 29).



Figure 29: "War against compulsory vaccination!...", depicting soldiers riding on syringes opposed by an angry population armed with tools and household instruments. Published in the *Revista O Malho* (29th October 1904), reproduced in Hochmann (2009: 235)

The Vaccine Revolt of 1904 is a strong historic example of resistance against public health regimes in an authoritative state, and of the defence of *terreiros* as spaces distinct from the outside society. It can be understood as a struggle of biopower (Foucault, 2008) in a modernizing society, where the state enforced implementation of population-based health control, under threat of the law and military intervention. In contrast, in 21st century Brazil, neoliberal biopolitics rely more on "flexible and heterogenous arrangements" (De la Dehesa and Mukherjea, 2012), including the participation of a variety of state and non-state actors, from the World Bank to private investors and even Candomblé *terreiros*. In the global health context, Stephen Collier and Aihwa Ong (2006) refer to such biopolitical networks as 'global assemblages', stressing their character as heterogenous and dynamic configurations. Within these configurations, the *terreiro* organizations' simultaneous calling for

participation and co-operation on the one hand, and their creation of boundaries on the other, presents Health Fairs as sites of continuous negotiation of control, power, and authority between Candomblé *terreiros* and public health institutions. But this kind of negotiation did not only revolve around the protection of *terreiro* boundaries. It also took place inside the prestigious old medical school of Salvador, where I attended a symposium on Afro-Brazilian religion.

The Symposium: Candomblé activists in the old Medical School

Shortly after my arrival in Bahia, I took part in the “First Symposium of Studies of Afro-Brazilian religion” in Salvador, organized by the Centre of Afro-Oriental Studies (CEAO) at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). Researchers, *terreiro* members and NGO representatives discussed diverse topics, including health care in Afro-Brazilian religion. While in the case of the Health Fair, biomedicine was brought to a *terreiro* (and halted at its doorstep), the symposium brought Afro-Brazilian religion to the Medical School of Salvador.

Salvador’s medical school is the oldest in Brazil. A plaque above the entrance states that the building in the historic city centre was inaugurated in 1893, but the medical faculty was founded even earlier, in 1808. With its columns, ornamental façade, marble floors and high ceilings, the medical school boastfully embodies its colonial inheritance. This used to be the workplace of Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906), the famous medical professor and Candomblé researcher, whom Thomas Skidmore describes as “the most prestigious doctrinaire Brazilian racist of his era” (1993: 58). In evolutionist tradition, Nina Rodrigues saw Afro-Brazilian religion as a sign of low development, while positivist science was at the pinnacle of human evolution (Van de Port, 2011:73). Convinced of the inherent racial inferiority of Africans, in the late 19th/early 20th century Nina Rodrigues observed numerous Candomblé ceremonies, and explained trance ‘possession’ as a psychopathological phenomenon (Capone, 2010).

The CEAO that organized the symposium was founded in 1959, over 50 years after Nina Rodrigues’ death, with the objective of strengthening Afro-Brazilian studies

and engagement with the black community. From the beginning, it maintained close relationships with Candomblé *terreiros* in Salvador (dos Santos, 2008:296). Among its scholars were important Candomblé figures, including Mestre Didi of the *terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá. In the 1970s, the CEAO enraged doctors of the old Medical School – the heirs of Nina Rodrigues – by planning to build an Afro-Brazilian Museum on the ground floor of the medical school building, to display and promote African and Afro-Brazilian art. The CEAO faced strong opposition from the medical doctors, who did not want to see ‘primitive religion’ exhibited in their prestigious institution. The medical professor Raymundo de Almeida Gouveia complained about the unfortunate plan to integrate a ‘Museum of the Black’ into the ‘First Temple of Brazilian Medicine,’ and the medical community delayed the opening of the museum for five years (Sansi, 2007:90). The Museum of Afro-Brazilian Culture finally opened in 1982, and has since become an important point of reference for tourists, scholars of Afro-Brazilian culture, and Candomblé practitioners.

Although the CEAO Symposium took place in the Medical School (which is still in use today), over the three days of the event I did not encounter a single medical doctor or student. Instead, many members of Candomblé and Umbanda *terreiros* had come to the conference. In the airy corridors, overlooking the palm tree garden, they drank coffee in their religious dress, complete with colourful turbans and necklaces. There was a victorious atmosphere in the air as the medical school was taken over by Candomblé members. Even João, a young member of the Odé Terreiro in South Bahia, had come to Salvador “to learn and to strengthen his *axé*,” as he phrased it, although the *ialorixá* had told him not to travel for health reasons. But he had decided to come anyway, despite never having attended a conference before. Sitting next to João in the auditorium, I could not help but wonder how he felt listening to hours and hours of talks in the somewhat intimidating environment of the old medical school. While the Candomblé community had taken over the prestigious institution – a space of the white elite – the medical school in turn seemed to have imprinted an academic format onto the event. Candomblé practices have long been influenced by academic scholars (Dantas, 2009, Sansi, 2007); and by appropriating the university as a profane stage for an Afro-Brazilian Symposium, the Candomblé organizations also took on the discussion style that came with it.

During the Symposium, the call for exchange and for the recognition of Candomblé's value for Brazilian society echoed through the lecture halls and corridors of Salvador's medical school. José Marmo from the RENAFRO network ('National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health') argued that in contrast to the Brazilian public health system, the strength of Candomblé healing lay in practices of listening, welcoming (*acolher*), and the creation of integrity, belonging and social networks. He criticized the SUS as insufficient and unable to perform *cuidado* in the same way. Expressing his wish for distinction, he added: "I don't want to dance the dance of the others anymore!" Here the 'others' were the white Euro-Brazilian elite, who disregarded not only the *needs* of the Afro-Brazilian population, but also their cultural *resources* and social contributions.

Most of the speakers at the Symposium were part of the Afro-Brazilian religious community. In the opening panel, a researcher from the UFBA presented his study on mental health in Candomblé. Himself a *terreiro* member for over 20 years, he described cases of sadness, depression, isolation, and headache, which were treated with ritual cleansing of the body (*limpeza*) and sacrifices for the *orixás* (Lima, 2010). During the discussion that followed, a member of the audience used the term 'traditional medicine' – and suddenly it struck me that he was not referring to Candomblé healing. Had he just called biomedicine 'traditional medicine'? I turned to my neighbour and whispered: "What traditional medicine does he mean?" She replied: "The conventional medicine they normally use here," and a quick movement of her head made clear that she meant the old medical school. Again, this was a clear statement of distinction; and it seemed like the speaker was saying 'this is our place' and 'this is not our place' in the same breath.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I often came across Candomblé followers who described hegemonic biomedical practices as 'traditional medicine', like Marinho did in the introduction of this chapter. This terminology should not be overanalysed, given that 'traditional medicine' was also used to describe herbal remedies or spiritual healing on other occasions. But in the context of the symposium, where the adepts of Afro-Brazilian religion gathered in the old medical school, the use of the

term ‘traditional medicine’ explicitly linked biomedical practice with the past and thus challenged its hegemonic position in health care.

Despite the call for dialogue and cooperation between *terreiros* and public health institutions, both the Health Fair and the Symposium made visible efforts to display contrasts between biomedical and Afro-Brazilian healing practices. In this light, both events appear as sites of distinction and the demarcation of boundaries *by way of* collaboration. In the case of the Health Fair, the Candomblé community provided the space and biomedicine contributed the content; and in the case of the Symposium, it was the other way round. But in both instances, a dialogue was not created – the Health Fair took place outside the *terreiro*, and medical practitioners were notably absent from the symposium in the medical school.

The double movement of, on the one hand, appropriating the medical school for a symposium on Afro-Brazilian religion and, on the other, insisting on the distinction between ‘their’ traditional (hegemonic) medicine and ‘our’ Candomblé healing, draws out a paradox that has emerged in previous chapters. Boundaries – between black and white, self and other, sacred and profane, or state institutions and *terreiros* – are simultaneously transgressed and reinforced. *Cuidado* is a useful concept in this context, as it both *unites* the public health system and the *terreiros* (in their aim to provide health care), and it *separates* them (in terms of the specific ways of delivering it). To better understand the power dynamics at work, I will now take a closer look at RENAFRO, the Afro-Brazilian NGO that most prominently engaged in public health activism.

RENAFRO and the quest for recognition

The main actor on the stage of public health co-operations between *terreiro* organizations and the state was RENAFRO, the ‘National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health’, an organisation particularly concerned with campaigns against HIV and AIDS. The national organization was led by *terreiro* members, like Marinho, but it received funding and structural support from state institutions, mainly the Brazilian Ministry of Health.

RENAFRO was founded in 2003, at a time of political change, after President Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva of the Worker's Party (PT) assumed office. Other Brazilian presidents before Lula had already been in more or less visible contact with Candomblé leaders³⁶, but Lula was the first who in the 1990s openly included visits to various Candomblé *terreiros* in his electoral campaigns (Dos Santos, 1999:210). Lula publicly proclaimed his links with the black movement, and embraced the politics of affirmative action initiated by his predecessor Fernando Henrique Cardoso. President Lula made the Afro-Brazilian musician and *candoblecista* Gilberto Gil Minister of Culture; and in 2003, he created the Ministry for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR), which included Afro-Brazilian activists on its staff (Paschel and Sawyer, 2008:203)³⁷. In the same year, the Ministry of Health launched the AIDS III project with a loan from the World Bank, which built on decentralized funding of local NGOs to promote prevention and treatment of HIV infection (Garcia and Parker, 2011). RENAFRO is one of those NGOs, and it has been linked closely with state bodies from its inception.

RENAFRO's work is based on four sectors: "Women of Axé," "Men of Axé," "Communication," and "Youth of *terreiros*," each of which holds annual national meetings. The main objectives of these sectors, as stated on RENAFRO's website³⁸, are explicitly directed at social empowerment for the *terreiro* communities, especially in the field of health care. These objectives are: to strengthen the role of the women of *terreiros* in political decision-making; to stimulate the participation of men in *terreiros* in the area of health care; to attain visibility and better health education for *terreiro* communities; and to give young people from the *terreiros* room to speak out for their rights.

³⁶ The most well-known example is President Getúlio Vargas, who had an audience with Mãe Aninha in the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá in 1937 – which, according to Júlio Braga (1995: 177-78), led to official permission for *terreiros* to play the drums.

³⁷ However, government support also caused controversies and resistance within the black movement, as exemplified in the march for the slave leader and national hero Zumbi in 2005. As a result of internal divisions over the question of whether the march should be organized by the SEPPIR or civil society, two marches took place – one that included political parties and government representatives, and another that was called the "real" civil society march.

³⁸ Website of RENAFRO: <http://renafrosauade.com.br/> [accessed 22/02/2016]

I first learned about RENAFRO during the Symposium of Afro-Brazilian Religions in the medical school, where they distributed postcards of *orixás*. I received one with a picture of Ossaim, the forest healer, which read:

Ossaim – Lord of mysteries and of the secrets of the leaves. The *terreiros* are spaces of health promotion and important partners in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Another postcard, depicting the fiery female warrior *orixá* Iansã, said:

Iansã – Lady of the winds, of movement and transformation. The participation of the *terreiros* in the social control of Public Health policies contributes to guaranteeing the quality and performance of the SUS.



Figure 30: RENAFRO postcards of the orixás Ossaim (left) and Iansã (right)

Like the leaflet that announced the Health Fair (Figure 26), the postcard of Ossaim promotes *terreiros* as ‘spaces of health,’ while the postcard of Iansã stresses their role in supporting the Brazilian public health system SUS. But reading the texts closely reveals a decisive tension: while Ossaim’s postcard describes *terreiros* as “important partners,” Iansã’s card states they should be involved in the “social control of Public Health policies.” This simultaneous call for *partnership* with and *control* by *terreiros* expresses the power dynamics at stake. While a partnership is bi-directional and collaborative, control expresses a uni-directional exertion of power.

The whole set also included postcards of other *orixás*: Obaluaiê, *orixá* of infectious diseases, Yemanjá, *orixá* of the sea, and Xangô, *orixá* of fire, each of which comes with a public health slogan printed on the back of the card. Together the postcards represent various aspects of *cuidado* in Candomblé: creating healthy spaces (Ossaim), gaining social control (Iansã), protection (Obaluaiê), solidarity and acceptance (Yemanjá), and social justice (Xangô). These are classic topics of public health campaigns around the world; yet, here it is noteworthy that they are presented as linked with the *orixás* and hence as expressions of Candomblé *cuidado*.

Chatting with one of the women who handed out the postcards, I learned that RENAFRO was a network of over 30 groups of *terreiro* members in different Brazilian states. The postcards were used for health promotion and awareness among *terreiro* members, she told me, but also to make the public aware of the role of Afro-Brazilian religion in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In other words, the campaign had a double purpose: directed inwards, it was set up as an effort to improve the health of the *terreiro* communities; but directed outwards, it was a political demand for recognition of the *terreiros* as actors in Brazilian public health. RENAFRO's demand for social recognition builds on *cuidado* as a distinctive feature of Afro-Brazilian healing. In their publications (Marmo da Silva, 2007:175, RENAFRO, 2007:2, RENAFRO, 2009:2, RENAFRO, 2014:6), RENAFRO describes the kind of *cuidado* practiced in *terreiros* as an 'art' and also as '*acolhimento*,' which can be translated as welcoming inclusion and cordial acceptance. In an article, José Marmo da Silva, RENAFRO's national coordinator, who spoke at the Symposium in the medical school, explains under the subheading *Os terreiros e a arte de cuidar* (The *terreiros* and the art of caring): "all the ritual procedures are also therapeutic procedures, as they involve *cuidado*, kindness (*carinho*) and attention, thus strengthening the vital energy (*axé*)" (2007:174).

In a similar vein, a RENAFRO video called 'Caring in the *Terreiros*' (*O Cuidar nos Terreiros*) shows the renowned *ialorixá* Mãe Beata from Rio de Janeiro who states: "In the cult of the *orixá*, we learn to be cared for, above all else, and to care for the other. It is this *cuidado* we need!" All *orixás* were involved in a process of *acolhimento*, which she explains with the Candomblé *itan* (story) where Yemanjá,

orixá of the ocean, finds the hurt infant Omulu by the sea and takes him on as her son. Another *ialorixá* in the video adds that some people only came for this accepting *acolhimento*, for “a kind touch that sometimes they cannot get at home and they need it”; and she states that this *acolhimento* was an important element of *cuidado* in the *terreiros*. RENAFRO contrasts this form of inclusive, kind *cuidado* with the more mechanical and functional (though in reality often *dysfunctional*) health care offered by the Brazilian health system.

Brazil’s health care system is based on a public-private mix of service providers, which creates great inequalities in access to healthcare. While the poorer majority relies on the services of the Unified Health System (SUS), mainly funded through taxes and employers’ healthcare spending, the wealthier population has access to the state-subsidised private sector (Paim et al., 2011). Historically, under the military dictatorship (1964-1985), health care was organized in centralized bureaucracies that put the private sector at an advantage (Maio and Monteiro, 2005, Paim et al., 2011). But during the 1970s, social movements started mobilizing for Health Sector Reform (De la Dehesa and Mukherjea, 2012, Neto et al., 2009). The SUS was implemented in 1990, based on the Constitution of 1988, which poses health as a ‘citizen’s right and the state’s duty’. The health reform was accompanied by decentralization; and the introduction of the Family Health Programme (PSF) and community health agents helped improve access to health services for the poorer population (Victoria et al. 2011). However, in the 1990s, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso encouraged health care privatisation (Paim et al., 2011), thereby keeping access unequal. And although health funding increased after 2003 with the Worker’s Party (PT) government, even then most of the state health funding went into the private sector (Hennigan, 2010). Today, the SUS is still chronically underfunded and overburdened, medication is often not available, and physicians and health workers are notably absent in peripheral regions (de Campos, 2013), like the suburb where I lived with the *ialorixá*. João Biehl’s ethnographic exploration of *Vita*, a place built “on a hill of absolute misery” (2013:131), where sick and dying AIDS patients and drug addicts were left “animalized” (2013:134), is probably the most gripping description of destitution and social abandonment in Brazil’s public health context.



Figure 31: A RENAFRO flyer with the slogan, "Renafro 10 years. We do. We care."

RENAFRO's display of *cuidado* in their public health campaigns needs to be understood in the context of these profound health inequalities, which continue to exist in Brazil despite the Health Sector Reform and 13 years of PT government. Modern private clinics that offer hi-tech treatments stand in contrast to the run-down health posts (*postos de saúde*) on which most people rely. The lack of public funding demonstrates that the state does not fulfil its constitutional duty to provide universal health care, and RENAFRO takes this up in their slogan "We do. We care." (*Nós fazemos. Nós cuidamos.*) The emphasis that 'we care' comes with moral weight, echoing Kleinman's notion of 'caregiving as a moral experience' (2012; see Introduction). This moral dimension highlights the association of *cuidado* with claims of recognition and power. In the context of the 'religious marketplace' in Brazil, Selka describes a 'struggle for moral distinction' (Selka, 2010; see Chapter Three), an expression that aptly fits the use of *cuidado* in RENAFRO's campaigns. The statement 'we care' implies that the *terreiro* communities have the capacity to offer care when the public health system fails, and that therefore they should be recognized for their valuable contribution to society. But more than that, it implies that *terreiros* provide a specific form of *cuidado* the exhausted medical system is not

able to offer: one that is built on kindness (*carinho*), inclusion (*acolhimento*) and attention (Marmo da Silva, 2007:174).

Accordingly, in their publications, RENAFRO proclaims Afro-Brazilian religion as an important resource for public health:

The Afro-Brazilian religions use a model of *cuidado* and health care that results in the improvement of life quality of the adepts and the community around them. The *terreiros* combine a symbolic and real repertoire of alternative information/education/attention in their health care and education practices. They can thus become important strategic instruments for tackling disease and promoting health. (Marmo da Silva, 2007:177; my translation)

But Marmo da Silva leaves open the question for whom exactly *terreiros* could be strategic instruments: for individuals, for the black population, or for state-controlled health interventions? As he writes “strategic instruments for tackling disease,” he seems to be referring to a variety of collaborating actors. At the end of his paper, Marmo da Silva mentions challenges to building partnerships, including defensive attitudes from both health professionals and *terreiro* leaders (2007:177), a concern exemplified in the doctor’s ridicule in the introductory vignette to this chapter, and in the *babalorixá*’s rejection of health fairs in his *terreiro*. A RENAFRO meeting I visited in Ilhéus shed light on the negotiation of power and recognition that comes with their public health campaigns.

The RENAFRO meeting: defining distance and proximity with the SUS

Just before I started my fieldwork, a local RENAFRO group was founded in Ilhéus. This group was made up mainly of members of a prominent Candomblé *terreiro*, and it collaborated with the local Health Council as well as a network of other *terreiros* and health workers. One morning, Hugo, a young member of the Odé Terreiro, pushed a folded paper under my door: an invitation to the ‘First Meeting of Health of the Black Population and the *Terreiros* of Ilhéus,’ organized by RENAFRO with the support of the Secretaries of Culture, Social Development, Health, and Education. As none of the *terreiro* members was available to attend it with me, I went alone.

The event took place in a hotel in the city centre, but despite the somewhat formal venue, the setup of the meeting had a distinct Afro-Brazilian touch to it. It started with chants for the *orixás*, blessings and greetings (*saudações*), and then we all had breakfast together: black coffee, sticky sweet rice and boiled manioc. Later we got together in groups to discuss the SUS. As far as I could tell, all of the roughly 30 participants were members of Candomblé *terreiros*. The majority reported they had no properly functioning health post in their neighbourhood, some health posts were only open on certain days of the week, or only offered limited services. A lady said:

There used to be a nurse who did wound dressings and vaccinations, but today there is only one doctor. Thank God she is there, but that is all we have. When you need a wound dressing, or you need your blood pressure taken, they don't do that. The vaccination room is closed, no family planning service, no care for pregnant women, they only do the medical consultations.

Another woman said that their health post only provided basic care, when it was open at all, and that in the pharmacy “they usually don't have anything.” And a third one added her discontent with the attitude of doctors who did not have any personal links with the community and who “don't even care to know the people in the community.” Many other participants nodded, sitting in their plastic chairs with crossed arms and frowns on their faces.

Suddenly a woman in religious clothes stood up and announced, “I am going to break the protocol!” which made everyone laugh, despite the charged atmosphere. She asked for permission to say a prayer in this “situation of calamity,” and started singing for the *orixás* right away. A few moments later, everyone was on their feet; someone had brought a hand drum and a triangle, and we were dancing in a circle, laughing about the situation. Such unexpected moments of singing, laughing and dancing were common at Candomblé public health meetings and distinguished them from more formal medical settings. In fact, it seemed that these moments of cheerful loosening up stressed the distinctive features of inclusive Afro-Brazilian *cuidado* in contrast with the SUS. Unlike the academic character of the Symposium, here the dancing and singing contributed to a sense of togetherness; it created a feeling of an

in-group in the face of social exclusion and inequality, and it brought some *axé* from the *terreiros* into the meeting.

By the end of the day, the participants had set up a list of demands. There was general consensus that the public health system was not what it promised to be, and someone renamed it the “Unicorn Health System” (*Sistema Unicórnio de Saúde*) because of its elusive character. However, there was some disagreement about the appropriate role and level of involvement of *terreiros* in public health services. For example, my group proposed to implement health education courses and family planning units in the *terreiros*; but the plenary decided that it was not the role of a *terreiro* to become an extension of the SUS, and deleted these points. Again, as in the case of the Health Fairs, the claim for inclusion in the public health system went hand in hand with drawing boundaries. The list of demands from this meeting then fed into the ‘Charta of Ilhéus’ – named after the slaves’ Charta from 1789 (see Chapter Four) – published by RENAFRO one year later. RENAFRO’s Charta is made up of 13 points that reflect the call for recognition of *terreiros* as institutions of health and culture (see appendix). Its demands include that state health bodies guarantee the human right to health to the black population, and specifically the population of the *terreiros*; that the National Health Council includes *terreiro* leaders in the National Health Conference; and that the United Nations officially recognize and support the work of RENAFRO.

In general, the RENAFRO meeting depicted the SUS as a valuable project, but insufficiently staffed and equipped, and inadequate to the task of providing the holistic health care it promised. Stressing their distinction with the medical system, they framed their event with Afro-Brazilian food for breakfast and religious singing and dancing during the breaks. In contrast to Marmo da Silva’s depiction of Candomblé *terreiros* as ‘strategic instruments’ for health promotion (2007:77), in the RENAFRO meeting, the boundaries between *terreiros* and the SUS became more visible, exemplified in the decision that *terreiros* should not offer medical services as extensions of the official health system.

This intense boundary work, together with RENAFRO’s portrayal of *terreiros* as strategic instruments, brings up the question of co-optation. Peter Wade (2007)

points out that when the black movement focuses on promoting Afro-Brazilian culture in the public sphere, they open it up to co-optation by capitalism or the state. In the previous chapter, I discussed this problem in regard to the tourism-driven commercialization of Afro-Brazilian Culture in Salvador. In the arena of public health, the objectification of Candomblé as a care provider and a ‘strategic instrument’ for public health also comes with possibilities of appropriation. But is the state appropriating the *terreiros* for public health campaigns? Or is it the other way round – such that Candomblé organizations appropriate public health institutions to gain official recognition for their health work, hence countering the prevailing notion of Candomblé as a devil worship cult? To tackle these questions, I will now look at how RENAFRO presents and utilizes Candomblé-specific *cuidado* in their state-funded HIV/AIDS campaign material, namely cartoons and postcards of the *orixás*.

RENAFRO HIV campaign: co-operation or co-optation?

As part of their HIV/AIDS campaign, RENAFRO published a cartoon booklet called *Laroiê* (RENAFRO, 2013). *Laroiê* is the ritual Yorubá salutation of Exu, the *orixá* of communication and change (see Chapter One). This publication uses Afro-Brazilian religious imagery to inform *terreiro* communities about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, while also stressing the *terreiros*’ role in public health. It was organized and edited by RENAFRO, but the Brazilian Health Ministry financed the printing. This financial support explains why the foreword was written by the Health Ministry’s ‘Secretary of Strategic and Participatory Management,’ who declared that their objective was to make the *terreiro* population aware of the importance of their participation in public health policy. But before I open the booklet, I will give some background information about participative HIV/AIDS programmes in Brazil.

The Brazilian National AIDS Programme (NAP), launched in the 1980s, has been very successful in prevention and treatment, and publications to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in local populations have long been part of its policy. In 1992, the Brazilian government received a 250 million USD loan from the World Bank to reverse the ‘Africanization’ of AIDS in Brazil (Biehl, 2004). Especially after the

implementation of the AIDS III programme in 2003, the NAP targeted marginalized groups that were particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, such as black and gay people, and championed community participation (De la Dehesa and Mukherjea, 2012, Garcia and Parker, 2011). This strategy included partnerships with NGOs and religious groups, which has shown to be effective in many HIV programmes in Africa and Latin America (Garcia and Parker, 2011), although it has also been criticized for channelling activism into particular institutionalized paths and fostering financial dependencies (De la Dehesa and Mukherjea, 2012). In 2000, the programme 'AIDS Pastoral' was set up to institutionalize the collaboration between the Brazilian Ministry of Health and religious groups (Murray et al., 2011), although unsurprisingly, the conservative wing of the Catholic Church and Evangelical pastors were not easily integrated into HIV projects, given their positions on homosexuality and condom use as sinful (Paiva et al., 2010, Rios et al., 2011). In contrast, Afro-Brazilian religions were more open to promoting sexual health campaigns (Murray et al., 2011).

Afro-Brazilian religious groups have been involved in HIV programmes since the 1990s; and in 1991, the Religious Studies Institute (ISER) started the HIV project 'Odô-Yá' (Yemanjá's salutation) with *terreiros*, using Candomblé legends to educate about HIV/AIDS. Marmo da Silva and Marco Antonio Chagas Guimara (2000:119) explain that four aspects made Candomblé *terreiros* particularly interesting partners for HIV programmes: first, their positive and open attitude to sex and sexuality; second, their ritual use of razor blades to make incisions in the skin; third, the high number of homosexuals in the religion; and fourth, the participation of low-class blacks, as previous campaigns had reached mainly the middle-class white population. In the 1990s, they note, knowledge about HIV was not widespread, and many Candomblé followers believed that they could not be infected, or that AIDS was a ghost (Marmo da Silva and Chagas Guimara, 2000:120). To educate the *terreiro* communities through the Odô-Yá programme, ISER produced fliers, posters, and postcards that related to the legends of the *orixás* and trained *terreiro* members as public health educators. But as notions of divine protection from HIV prevailed (similar to Leticia's attitude in Chapter Three towards snake bites), the Odô-Yá project started entering what I have called the 'sacred stage' in the *terreiros*.

The Odô-Yá programme sponsored religious celebrations, including drumming and traditional food, during which they gave seminars about HIV/AIDS to Candomblé communities (Marmo da Silva and Chagas Guimara, 2000:121). In the 1990s, the Odô-Yá project was used to educate *terreiro* groups about biomedical models, but later, the collaboration between state organs and *terreiros* gave more room for stressing the value of Afro-Brazilian forms of *cuidado* – leading to statements like Marinho’s, that medical students needed to learn about the inclusive health care provided by the *terreiros*.

In an ethnographic study on Afro-Brazilian religion and HIV campaigns, Jonathan Garcia and Richard Parker explain the engagement of the *terreiros* in terms of “their role in civil society as centres for *acolhimento* (inclusion and care),” rather than in terms of their need for biomedical education (2011:1933). All their fourty informants mentioned that *acolhimento* was an important element of their religious work and HIV prevention. As one *ialorixá* said: “We in Candomblé do not have prejudice against masculine or feminine homosexuality, or against prostitution; at least in our house, we include everyone” (Garcia and Parker, 2011:1933). Likewise, the RENAFRO publications presented *acolhimento* in the sense of welcoming hospitality, a warm ‘taking someone in’ and providing support as an important aspect of Candomblé *cuidado*.

Garcia and Parker state that *acolhimento* was similar to ‘integrality’, a key principle of the SUS, as both addressed vulnerability and marginalization and advocated for holistic care. But like the participants of the RENAFRO meeting in Ilhéus, Garcia and Parker’s informants also pointed out that the SUS did not live up to its objectives, while a *terreiro* offered spiritual support and respectful caring; according to one Candomblé priestess, “things that people from the health post do not have time to do” (Garcia and Parker, 2011:1933). In addition, Biehl and Adriana Petryna (2011) note that Brazilian public health has become increasingly pharmaceuticalized, instead of focusing on primary care and disease prevention. The claim that the SUS was not able to provide the integral health care to which it aspired, especially for marginalized populations, gives room for the Candomblé organizations to promote their inclusive, empowering *cuidado*.

So how does RENAFRO’s *Laroiê* cartoon booklet (2013) advocate sexual health and *cuidado*? The first cartoon shows Orunmilá, creator of the earth, asking Exu to finish the work by putting genitals on the human body. Exu accepts the task and approaches a naked couple who resemble black Adam and Eve. First, he puts the genitals on their feet, but the humans complain about their discomfort when walking. He then places them under their noses, but this time they cannot bear the constant smell. When located in the armpits, the sweat irritates the sexual organs. So finally Exu puts them between their legs and “the days pass with no reclamations brought to Exu.” (RENAFRO, 2013:8) In the end, Exu summarizes the message of the story:

Your body is the house of the gods and goddesses, and for this reason it must always be cared for. Being healthy means paying attention to all body parts, including the sexual organs. We gave you the perfect localization and now it is necessary that you care well for them so that they stay free from diseases. (RENAFRO, 2013)



Figure 32: Final image of the Exu cartoon in *Laroiê* (RENAFRO, 2013)

The second cartoon shows Oxum, the *orixá* of beauty, whose life is not improving despite her efforts and hard labour. The oracle tells her to give offerings to the king, but when she sees all the wealth he accumulated whilst his people were suffering, she gets angry and shouts: “Unjust King!!!!” (RENAFRO, 2013:15). She calls other people to the palace, and to appease her the king orders his servants to give her all

the presents she wants. She happily takes them and distributes them among the crowd outside the palace. They cheer, but she says, “My life is not different from yours. I merely reclaimed what was ours by right and we were heard” (ibid.:17). She resumes: “It is important that the population fights for their rights!” (ibid.:18).

The cartoons of the RENAFRO HIV/AIDS campaign depict self-care (in Exu’s cartoon) and resistance against social injustice (in Oxum’s cartoon) as crucial



Figure 33: Final image of the Oxum cartoon in Laroiê (RENAFRO, 2013:18)

dimensions of health and healing in Candomblé. What is striking is that the cartoons do not comply with normative male and female qualities in Candomblé. The trickster *orixá* Exu is usually depicted as a hypermasculine, strong man (see Chapter One), and he is generally linked more with danger than with *cuidado*. In contrast, Oxum usually embodies gentleness and tender care (Póvoas, 2010), and only rarely appears with rebel characteristics like in the cartoon. This role reversal emphasizes that in a patriarchal society like Brazil, lack of protection and care-taking among young men and the subordinate role of women create specific vulnerabilities in both groups, making them more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases, specifically HIV/AIDS (Fleming et al., 2016).

Wade (2008) insists that both the promotion and the co-optation of Afro-Brazilian religion are profoundly political in nature. If the *terreiros*, together with their myths and images of *orixás*, are used as ‘strategic tools’ in state-funded public health campaigns, it is therefore important to understand what campaign material like RENAFRO’s *Laroiê* booklet and their *orixá* postcards do. Looking at the images in the booklet and on the cards, they strike me as somewhat Disneyfied cartoon figures, posing for a health campaign with slogans to go with them. Where has the ‘caution’ in the *cuidado* for Exu gone (Chapter One), if he is used as a cartoon figure for health advice? These *orixás* are not protected in a *terreiro*; the ‘permeable boundary’ between the sacred and the profane is wide open, and they look like somewhat flat symbols of Candomblé *cuidado* for public usage. In contrast with the complex, sometimes ambiguous, and always mysterious *orixás* I encountered in the Odé Terreiro, these simplistic images were readily traversable across the religious and public domains. They are neatly drawn figures, ready to be handed out at public health events; maybe the postcards end up stuck to a fridge door, maybe they are thrown away, or maybe they are taken abroad by the odd anthropologist.

If we take the figures and characters of the *orixás* as the ‘local knowledge’ participatory public health projects are after, it is clear that they have been strategically adapted as tools for the HIV and AIDS campaign. As David Mosse notes regarding participatory development programmes, local knowledge “is itself constructed in the context of planning and reflects the social relationships that planning systems entail” (Mosse, 2001:17). In other words, participation of local groups in health programmes can as well further top-down state politics. On the other hand, RENAFRO’s state-funded material, developed by Candomblé practitioners, aims at increasing the public visibility and recognition of Afro-Brazilian religions by establishing *terreiro* communities as key players in public health policies. Instead of merely pointing out the *vulnerability* of the black population, the campaign material depicts Afro-Brazilian religion as a cultural *resource* to improve the population’s health. In this way, the *terreiro* organizations move away from saying, “we need care and education” to a statement of power: “we care and educate.”

By stating their agency in the public health discourse, RENAFRO effectively makes a link between *cuidado* and citizenship (*cidadania*) for *terreiro* members, and by extension for the whole (Afro-)Brazilian population. As I mentioned above, the implementation of the SUS was the result of a health reform movement in the 1970s, and the right to universal health care as stated in the Constitution of 1988.

Citizenship after the end of the military dictatorship therefore came with an empowering shift from *needing* to *deserving* state-delivered health care, and Biehl and Petryna report that this change led to a situation where patients in Brazil are even suing the government for medical treatment (Biehl and Petryna, 2011). RENAFRO's partnership with health care bodies and the provision of *cuidado* in the *terreiros* goes a step further, as they claim full citizenship not only by demanding healthcare but also by providing *cuidado*, hence stressing their contribution to the health of the country. As Marinho said in the introductory vignette, if this care work is not recognized, "our country will only be getting sicker."

Now the ambivalence of co-optation between Candomblé organizations and state health organs in the context of public health campaigns becomes more apparent. In the end, who is strategically co-opting whom? While the governmental funding bodies involved use Afro-Brazilian religion for the promotion of public health campaigns, Candomblé activists are also utilizing public health campaigns for the promotion of Afro-Brazilian religion and citizenship. In regard to Brazilian HIV campaigns, Garcia and Parker (2011) describe the process of the state accessing marginalized populations through the channels of the *terreiros* as capillarity (*capilaridade*). Capillarity refers to the small blood vessels that provide distant body parts with blood – a fitting image in the context of an HIV campaign – as a metaphor for the penetration and infiltration of local communities and networks. What we see here is a process of mutual co-optation by way of collaboration between public health bodies and *terreiros*: The top-down capillarity in which the public health organs reach out to the Candomblé groups encounters a bottom-up capillarity as Afro-Brazilian groups reach up to access funding, visibility, recognition and social control through state institutions.

Indeed, the capillary network – to stay with the image – that grows in both directions has become so enmeshed that a clear line between biomedical and state institutions on the one hand and Candomblé organizations on the other cannot always be drawn. RENAFRO is deeply linked with medical and state institutions, despite the boundary drawing that emerged in Marmo da Silva’s exclamation, “I don’t want to dance the dance of the others anymore!” at the symposium in Salvador. Candomblé representatives have taken on positions in governing bodies, like Marinho, the RENAFRO coordinator and Candomblé *ogã* who also works in the cultural secretariat; and José, the national coordinator, who is an *ogã* as well as a dentist for the SUS. But if Candomblé groups like RENAFRO are so entangled with the capillary network of state institutions, where does this leave space for resistance? An important topic for RENAFRO and other Afro-Brazilian religious organizations is resistance to race inequalities in health care. I will now turn to the last public health event covered in this chapter – a meeting on “Health of the Afro-Brazilian Population” in Salvador – to discuss dynamics of race, *cuidado* and resistance.

Care, race and resistance

Demands for visibility and recognition of Afro-Brazilian religion are linked closely with demands for visibility and recognition of the black population in Brazil, and as I will argue below, this link is important for framing Candomblé *cuidado* as a form of resistance against racial discrimination. Since the policy changes in the early 2000s, when the government officially acknowledged the disadvantaged position of the black population (see Introduction), political initiatives have specifically targeted the relationship between race and health in Brazil (Maio and Monteiro, 2005, Htun, 2004). I attended a one-day meeting under the name of “Health of the Black Population” in the main public library in Salvador, which focused on black men as an especially vulnerable group with high mortality. Over the course of the day, representatives of the state (the Health Secretary and the City Council), Public Health

bodies (FIOCRUZ, SUS), Candomblé NGOs (ACBANTU³⁹, SIOBÁ⁴⁰), and a Public Health professor (UFBA) addressed men's health, social determinants of health, institutionalized racism, and Candomblé healing.

Afro-Brazilian religion was an important cultural reference at this meeting. Before the talks started, several *ialorixás* and *babalorixás* in the audience were greeted, and a young boy led the singing of songs for the *orixás* – namely Omulu, the *orixá* of suffering and disease. The audience got up, many joined in the singing and clapped hands, and the event was opened with the permission (*licença*) of the *orixás*. In a way, this was odd. This meeting was not about Afro-Brazilian religion, but about the health of the black population in Bahia – a population that in its great majority does not adhere to Candomblé (Prandi, 1995). But as Johnson (2001) stresses, the Brazilian public health discourse has been of great relevance for the public image of Afro-Brazilian religion since the abolition of slavery, and as I have argued above, public health campaigns offer stages for negotiating biopolitical power and social recognition for Candomblé organizations. Marking their territory in health activism, the Candomblé NGOs effectively framed the “Health of the Black Population” event in the public library as theirs, before the representatives of state institutions started their talks.

The speaker from the public health institute FIOCRUZ started by presenting the main problem to be discussed during the day: the fact that young black men were frequently the victims of violence and homicide in Bahia, an observation corroborated by the ‘Map of Violence’ (Waiselfisz, 2012). This government publication shows that the number of homicides in Bahia has increased dramatically

³⁹ ACBANTU is the Candomblé NGO “National Cultural Association for the Preservation of the Bantu Patrimony” (*Associação Nacional Cultural de Preservação do Patrimônio Bantu*), active in 13 states in Brazil. It was founded in 2000, “with the objective of bringing together people and groups to give visibility to the Black Brazilian Civilization” (my translation; see their website <http://www.acbantu.org.br/missao>; accessed 18/08/2016).

⁴⁰ SIOBÁ is another Afro-Brazilian NGO, a “Religious and Beneficent Brotherhood of *Ojès, Ogans* and *Tátas*” (*Irmandade Religiosa e Beneficente de Ojès, Ogans e Tátas*) based in Salvador, Bahia. Their mission is to “honour, defend, preserve, promote, organize, mobilize, articulate and contribute to the development of the relations of the religions of African origin with their tradition and the environment” (my translation; see their website <http://irmandadesioba.blogspot.co.uk/>, accessed 18/08/2016).

over the last ten years, and that by far most victims are black men. Following the FIOCRUZ presentation, a representative from the City Council addressed social causes for the vulnerability and high mortality of young black men, namely low education, hard work, living and working in dangerous places, and limited access to health services through the SUS. She also demanded better health care for other vulnerable groups, namely indigenous people, homosexuals, *quilombo*⁴¹ communities, rural workers, the handicapped, and prisoners. Her talk highlighted the point that health inequalities in Brazil are a problem of social exclusion and class, and not only of racism. But the subsequent talk by the representative of the Health Secretary brought the discussion back to the black population by stressing that they were disproportionately disadvantaged and that the institutionalized racism of the Brazilian state needed to be recognized.

I was perplexed when the last speaker went on to demand that all medical doctors should note down their patient's 'colour' in their medical file. People should insist, "Register my colour, doctor!" she said, handing out leaflets with the title "What is your race? What is your colour?" (Figure 34). Reading the leaflet made me feel uncomfortable. I was at an anti-racist meeting for the promotion of health equality, and the organizers were speaking in favour of racial classification in medical care? The leaflet was directed at patients of the SUS, and it read:

What is your race, what is your colour? Only you can tell.

This information is just as important as your age and your sex, as it helps health professionals to identify citizens' necessities, considering that health problems affect the young, old, blacks, whites, men, women, etc. in different ways. Skin cancer, for example, is more common among white persons, while sickle cell anaemia affects mainly black persons.

The collection of this information allows the City Health Council (*Secretaria Municipal de Saúde*) to plan and realize preventive actions and health promotion for different groups.

⁴¹ *Quilombos* were communities of former slaves who either escaped their masters or had been liberated. Today, several thousand of these communities still exist in Brazil; most have no electricity, schools, or medical facilities. Their almost exclusively black inhabitants are among the most underprivileged in Brazilian society.

Therefore, each time a health professional fills in a form with your data, he should ask you: “Which is your colour?”

These are the options of race/colour used by the health services in Salvador, and they are the same as in the census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE.

It is the health professional’s duty to ask you what your skin colour is, and you have the right for this information to be respected.

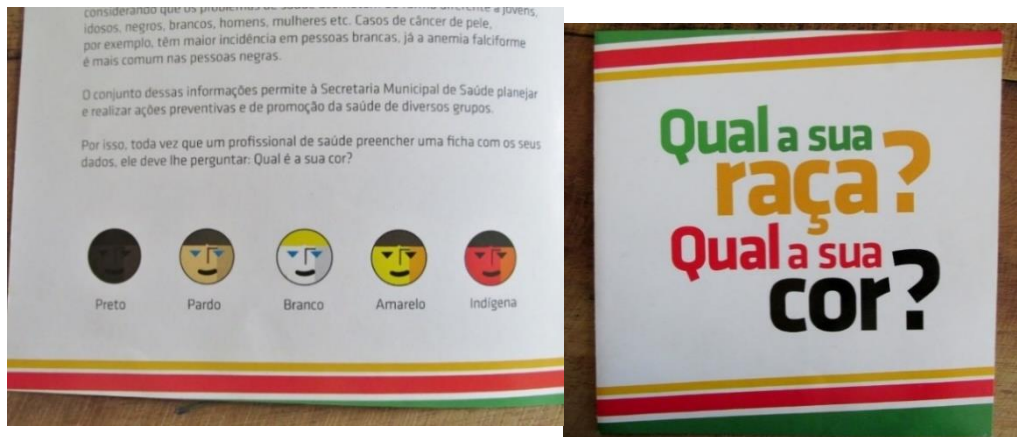


Figure 34: The leaflet “Which is your race? Which is your colour?” distributed by the local Health Secretary of Salvador, Bahia, 2013.

Such reified racial categorization in a medical setting, the stress on biological difference, and the insistence that patients choose one of the five options – “black, mixed, white, yellow, or indigenous” – seemed very problematic. Racial profiling in medical practice is highly contested, as it conflates social and biological categories and can even lead to serious medical errors (Wolinsky, 2011, Braun et al., 2007). To me, this leaflet felt like a slap in the face of my understanding of anti-racism, especially as I come from Germany, where administrative racial categorizations have been widely abolished as a consequence of Nazi racial fanaticism. But in Brazil, the race discourse is different, as the 20th century has been dominated by the myth of ‘racial democracy’ (see Introduction) and “[f]or decades, talking about race... was heretical” (Htun, 2004:61). After the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, discussions about race became more open. But Brazilian public health policies did not pay much attention to racial inequalities until the 21st century, when NGOs in the black movement collaborated increasingly with state agents and international institutions (as exemplified in the HIV and AIDS campaigns above), and the state committed to affirmative action (Maio and Monteiro, 2005, Htun, 2004).

Since the 1990s, racial classifications like the one shown in the leaflet have been institutionalized in the national census organized every ten years by the statistical institute, IBGE. Mara Loveman et al. note that the census question about racial classifications by administrative bodies has been contested in the national debate in Brazil; but this debate was less about the legitimacy of using racial categorizations *per se*, and more about the specific categories that should be used (Loveman et al., 2012:1466-67). In 1990, black activists in Rio de Janeiro organized a campaign to substitute the category *preto* (Portuguese for the colour black) with *negro*, a term that asserts racial pride (Edmonds, 2010:126), in order to include the question of race instead of just describing skin colour (Bejarano, 2010). The category *pardo* (mixed or brown), in contrast, like *moreno* and *mulato*, has been criticized for perpetuating the ideology of *mestiçagem* (Edmonds, 2010:126, Loveman et al., 2012:1467). However, the IBGE, and subsequently the leaflet from the Ministry of Health, continued to use *preto* and *pardo* as categories, instead of the more politicized *negro*.

Black social movements have insisted on racial statistics in order to make visible the precarious socio-economic conditions of the black population, and to identify specific needs and problems (Bejarano, 2010). As the representative of the City Council at the event made clear, health differences are caused by class and social exclusion; but due to Brazil's historical and contemporary racism, they are also indexed by skin colour. For example, while blacks make up 70% of the poorest decile of the population, they only represent 15% of the wealthiest decile (Htun, 2004:63). Matheus Maio and Simone Monteiro argue that a black/white polarization fosters racial consciousness as a precondition for the fight against inequalities (2005). And this racial polarization, which enables the identification of a disadvantaged black population, also provides a base for Afro-Brazilian religious organizations to represent black people, independent of religious affiliations.

When the representative of the Health Council distributed the leaflets, she stated that "Candomblé has always been a space for the promotion of health." Many Candomblé and Umbanda communities are openly involved in black activism (Van de Port, 2005b), and health here has an intrinsically socio-political dimension. In a racist society, she noted, religions based on African values and traditions were counter-

cultures of resistance. She explained further that, despite being stigmatized and demonized by society, Afro-Brazilian religions helped their followers to regain health, balance and self-value. Stressing this point, in a documentary presented at the event, the *makota* (high rank in Candomblé Angola) Valdine Pinto stated: “I don’t like calling Candomblé religion. Candomblé is resistance.”

While other Candomblé representatives often insisted that Candomblé should be recognized officially as a religion and not a cult (see also Capone, 2010), the *makota* here emphasized its political significance. Both statements – that Candomblé is a religion, and that it is *not* religion but resistance – ask for respect and for the recognition of the value of Candomblé, albeit in different contexts. In the light of the historical prohibition of Candomblé (Johnson, 2001, Parés and Sansi, 2011) and increasing Pentecostal aggression against *terreiros* (Silva, 2007, Birman, 2011, Cerqueira-Santos et al., 2004), the demand for recognition as religion goes together with the demand for state protection against religious intolerance. But in the secularized public health context, the claim “Candomblé is resistance” stresses the political role of *terreiros* to combat persisting inequalities in Brazil. If Candomblé is not a religion but resistance, then affiliation is not a matter of private *belief*, but of a necessary political *positioning* against social injustice.

Similarly, Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara regards *terreiros* as “dynamic political entities in the sense that they directly or indirectly operate as centres of cultural resistance and power” (2005:8). She uses the term ‘political’ “not in the usual sense of governmental bureaucracy or administration but in the counterhegemonic sense of agency or resistance (whether covert or overt)” (2005:9). The notion that resistance against oppressive structures may manifest both as covert forms of non-compliance and overt, loud struggles, has been noted before by Kleinman, who explored the relationship between social change and healing (1997:126); and Taussig’s ethnography about shamanic healers in Colombia (1987) provides a powerful example for the role of healing practices as a form of resistance against colonial violence and a culture of terror. With James Scott, such acts of resistance in the background can be seen as ‘weapons of the weak,’ small everyday acts of dissimulation and sabotage that defy domination on a ‘hidden stage’ (Scott, 2008).

In this sense, Candomblé healing can be understood as cultural resistance in itself, even when it is only practiced quietly in the *terreiro*. But Smith Omari-Tunkara's insistence that Candomblé *terreiros* are to be understood as 'political' in the sense of counterhegemonic resistance is at odds with the interlinked capillary networks between Candomblé organizations and governmental public health institutions that I have described in this chapter. Like the theatre stage of the slave rebellion play *1789* in Chapter Four, the public health stage is used to present Candomblé not as a 'resistance of culture' in the sense of traditions that have simply been preserved over time, but as a politicized 'culture of resistance' that is intentionally and consciously oppositional, to borrow Sahlin's terms (2002:56-57).

If Candomblé is presented as resistance, it has to be asked: resistance against what? From the public health campaigns described above, one can conclude that the focus is on resistance against the social disadvantage of black people in Brazil. I have explained how racial categories are used to make inequalities visible in order to demand social inclusion. However, as the Health Council representative stressed at the "Health of the Black Population" meeting, resistance against racist humiliation and degradation strengthened "balance and self-value" and is therefore also a form of personal empowerment. In a similar vein, Smith Omari-Tunkara notes that the resistance performed by Candomblé communities "psychically balance[s]' Afro-Brazilian feelings of marginality in 'Luso-Brazilian circles'" (2005:11). In other words, as I have noted in Chapter Two, Candomblé enhances self-esteem.

Here, the notion of *cuidado* in Candomblé again becomes relevant. *Cuidado* adds another dimension to resistance, as a means of healing the wounds of racism and social exclusion through empowering strategies of self-recognition, community-building and providing for each other and for the *orixás*. Therefore, resistance here goes beyond the demand for social inclusion. In this context, resistance is effectively a practice of *cuidado*, while at the same time *cuidado* manifests as an act of resistance. It is this double character of *cuidado* as a form of resistance, and resistance as a form of *cuidado*, I argue, that lies at the heart of the Candomblé organizations' involvement with public health.

The way that Candomblé representatives frame their role as a kind of avant-garde movement of the marginalized, provides them with a very strong moral position. Promoting *cuidado* then is not simply a charitable way of helping the suffering, nor is it a hidden ‘weapon of the weak’ (Scott, 2008), but rather a public performance of power and resistance against social and racial inequality. And although many *terreiro* members are white and/or middle-class, this resistance against social injustice is a powerful element in their call for recognition of Afro-Brazilian religion. As a source of political power, the position of the Afro-Brazilian NGOs demands what I have described earlier: equality with the recognition of difference.

Interestingly, the public health institutions that collaborate with *terreiros* make use of the same public statement against racial discrimination. Actually, collaboration between the SUS and the *terreiros* might not be very effective as a national public health strategy, as it focuses on a relatively small target group. However, involving *terreiros* can be an effective strategy for the SUS and the Ministry of Health to claim that they cared for the marginalized black population, and thereby lived up to the requirements of the PNSIP (National Policy of Integral Health of the Black Population; see p.202). This is not to put the collaborative work of RENAFRO and the SUS into discredit, but to understand the underlying power dynamics. These dynamics involve the negotiation of authority, the creation of societal recognition and visibility, access to funding, and the public performance of *cuidado*.

As I noted in the introduction of this chapter, however, the members of the Odé Terreiro were not actively involved in public health activism. Instead of debating the role of Afro-Brazilian religion in conferences and meetings, they gave food and flowers to the *orixás*, built a family-like community, and did ritual work to strengthen their *axé*. When discussing resistance in Candomblé, Nicolau Parès (2012) states that religious practice can be louder than political slogans. By staying away from public health campaigns, the *ialorixá* effectively protected her *terreiro* from co-optation by state institutions and avoided mixing medical and religious health care. While Afro-Brazilian religious organizations like RENAFRO performed their work of *cuidado* by ‘growing capillaries’ into public health bodies, the Odé Terreiro performed *cuidado* by avoiding them.

Conclusion

This chapter is about co-operation and boundary drawing between Candomblé organizations and public health institutions. It shows that participatory public health programmes, such as HIV and AIDS campaigns in Brazil, are stages where Candomblé organizations negotiate social power and recognition by connecting with and distinguishing themselves from state health institutions. The notion of *cuidado* effectively links the SUS with the *terreiros* in their stated aim to provide public health care, but it also distinguishes them in that the *terreiro* organizations emphasize that they provide a *cuidado* based on kindness, recognition, attention and inclusion that the SUS fails to offer, especially to the impoverished black population.

In the previous chapter, I argued that artistic performances that use Candomblé elements on the ‘profane stage’ outside the *terreiros* cannot easily be judged as empty commercialization and folklore on the one hand, or cultural resistance on the other. As Candomblé imagery, practices or myths appear in the public sphere, they are open to objectification and appropriation, and hence bear the risk of losing meaning and power. In the example of the tourist industry, the display of Candomblé imagery can turn the religion into picturesque but empty ‘folklore’. Similarly, the Candomblé communities face the risk of being turned into strategic instruments in public health campaigns. But the public staging of Candomblé also brings about the opportunity to promote visibility, social influence and recognition of the religion.

Negotiating social power on the public health stage, RENAFRO depicts *terreiros* as *partners* for state health institutions, in congruence with Marinho Rodrigues’ insistence that biomedical institutions and *terreiros* needed to exchange. But RENAFRO also demand social *control* of health policies by *terreiro* organizations. The tensions between *terreiro* organizations and state organs are clearly expressed in comments such as José Marmo’s “I don’t want to dance the dance of the others anymore!” during the Symposium of Afro-Brazilian religion in the medical school. The basis for the use of *cuidado* as a means of both linking and distinguishing Candomblé and public health institutions lies in the massive gap between the proclaimed aims of the SUS – universal, free and equal health care – and the reality of a public-private mix in healthcare that creates glaring health inequalities.

Cuidado is a key concept that Candomblé organizations used to mediate partnership and resistance in public health. Statements like RENAFRO's "We do. We care." stress that Candomblé practitioners did not "only throw popcorn," or practiced black magic, but contributed to improving health in Brazilian society. By stressing the value of *cuidado*, Candomblé organizations effectively establish *terreiros* as health care providers and they hold the Brazilian state to account for not fulfilling its duty to provide universal health care for its citizens. By holding up the banner of *cuidado*, with its moral value and political significance, Candomblé organizations aim to increase their social power – and hence also to strengthen their *axé*.

Conclusion. Isabella's Lion

“You could write your entire thesis about Isabella,” Matheus once said to me. And indeed, her story summarizes well the role of *cuidado* in Candomblé healing. An initiated member of the Odé Terreiro, Isabella was a woman in her late fifties with a friendly face and a soft smile - but the life story she told me was shaped by illness and pain. Throughout my fieldwork I met Isabella several times, both in the city of Salvador, where she lived, and in the Odé Terreiro, her ‘house of peace’, as she called it.

When I visited her in her home one afternoon, Isabella received me with a big hug and made me a fresh passion fruit juice before we sat down at her kitchen table. She told me that since her childhood she had been afflicted with pain and mobility restrictions, and that at the age of twenty she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. During bouts of extreme pain, she recounted, she used to open the medicine cabinet and take at random whatever she found in the desperate hope that it would relieve her agony. At other times, she bit her arms and burnt her legs with an iron to forget about the unbearable pain in her joints. During the worst episodes, she depended on others to help her in daily life, including acts of personal care such as getting dressed, taking a bath, and combing her hair. At that time, she felt humiliated, weak, and scared of the future. Isabella recalled that on the day she was diagnosed with rheumatism, her doctor said:

Your case is advanced, we cannot do anything. Go home and take those pills that do you good, but this is an irreversible case. You need to be aware that soon you will be in a wheelchair, you will not be able to move around much.

She left the doctor's office in despair that day, Isabella told me, and that without her faith (*fé*) in the *orixás* she might have committed suicide there and then. From early on she knew she was a daughter of Omulu, whom she respectfully calls “the Old One” (*o Velho*), as family members had introduced her to Candomblé when she was a child. She used to attend oracle consultations and ceremonies in several different Candomblé *terreiros* in Salvador to ‘care for herself’ (*se cuidar*), until she joined the Odé Terreiro two years before I met her. “I cared for myself in other houses, but it

never was what my father [Omulu] wanted. I hit my head a lot, I was beaten a lot,⁴² I faced a lot of hardship until I found myself,” she said. ‘Finding herself’ involved recognizing, accepting and caring for all aspects of herself, including her father Omulu, the *orixá* of suffering and healing.

During her quest to find a *terreiro* where she could care for herself and her father Omulu, Isabella had started building her own place of worship at her home. She fetched a key from the drawer. I followed her upstairs where she unlocked the door of a little room to show me Omulu’s shrine (*peji*), which was filled with little statues, flowers, and symbols of the *orixá*. With a giggle she told me that when Mãe Darabí had seen the *peji*, the *ialorixá* had exclaimed: “Look at this! You have your own *terreiro* here!” But this *peji* could not substitute for the *terreiro*, Isabella explained, as she missed her religious brothers and sisters and the collectivism (*coletividade*) in the *terreiro*. Her decision to join the Odé Terreiro to “really care” for her father was the best thing she did in her life, she added, as she locked the door.

In the Odé Terreiro, Isabella was always one of the first to get up at dawn to make coffee for everyone, and during the day she kept busy cleaning the house, washing clothes, or preparing food. Being in the *terreiro* energized her, she told me, and taking care of the place made her feel strong. Since she joined the Odé Terreiro she felt much better: “Today, thank God, I am there [in the *terreiro*] with my father Oxossi⁴³, with my father Omulu. And I feel good, I feel great, I am healthy.” Indeed, in the *terreiro* I saw her skilfully mending a skirt with needle and thread, and she did not appear rheumatic at all. She told me she still felt pain, but not as intense as before. She had not ended up in a wheelchair as the doctors had predicted, but she walked around with a straight back. “From the moment I started to care for my Old One [Omulu] in the right way, my health improved,” she said.

⁴² Her phrasing, *Batí muito a cabeça, apanhei muito*, leaves open if someone else hit her, or if she hit her head in the sense of, for example, running against a wall. This indeterminacy hints at the multiplicity of actors within herself, the being same-and-other (Chapter Two) that I will bring up later. In German I would translate her words as: *Ich habe mir oft den Kopf angestoßen, ich musste viel einstecken*.

⁴³ As the Odé Terreiro belongs to the hunter *orixá* Oxossi, Isabella and all other ‘children of the house’ (*filhos da casa*) are Oxossi’s children. However, her main father *orixá* is Omulu, the *orixá* of suffering and illness.

While Isabella thanked the *orixás* for the improvement of her health, however, she also acknowledged that she was now taking the anti-rheumatic drug Methotrexate, which improved her well-being: “I follow my [medical] treatment and I’ve never stopped it, because I know it is a disease of the immune system.” Candomblé healing was perfectly combinable with biomedical treatment for the members of the Odé Terreiro. Hence, Candomblé here offers a complementary mode of therapy, rather than an alternative to medicine. I asked Isabella if she used the force of the *orixás* to strengthen the effect of her medical treatment, and she confirmed that she did:

All the time, every day! My father Oxossi, my father Omulu, have mercy, *malembe* (be calm), please look after your daughter. Every day. I wake up in the morning, I open the window, I pray. [...] Omulu is a constant in my life, he does not separate from me.

Despite the central role of Candomblé in Isabella’s life and a good relationship with her medical doctor, she had never told him about her religious engagement. But he had noticed her impressive improvement, she said with a secretive smile:

This week I met him in the street and he stopped his car to talk with me. He was like: “Isa, how are you?” – “I am well!” – And he: “You have such a great force inside you, you have a lion inside. I would like to see that lion!”

Isabella laughed heartily. She liked the idea of a lion inside her, an image that expressed well the feeling of strength and dignity she had been cultivating over the last years. In the *terreiro* she had not sought a healer who would magically rid her of her pain, but a place where she could care for ‘her Old One’ to actively get better.

Isabella’s story is one of many healing stories from the Odé Terreiro, and other *terreiro* members had different wounds to mend. Some stemmed from experiences of discrimination and humiliation related to being black, gay, or lower class; others were caused by domestic or street violence, social isolation or depression. Coming to the *terreiro* with different life problems, they all sought to acquire *axé* to improve their well-being. As Guilherme explained in the Introduction: “*Axé* is force. *Axé* is vitality. *Axé* is everything that Candomblé does.” In the Odé Terreiro, the *axé* – like Isabella’s ‘lion inside’ – was cultivated and strengthened through acts of *cuidado*.

This thesis has explored dynamics of *cuidado* in Candomblé healing. In contrast to the mysterious spiritual force *axé*, which can be awakened and felt but never fully explained, *cuidado* consists of concrete human activities. There is no mystery attached to *cuidado*; it is an everyday practice and everyone can do it – but in the Odé Terreiro, one needs to *saber cuidar*, to ‘know how to care’. Learning how to care requires an attitude of attention and respect, and it involves participation in ritual performances and the experience of the *orixás*’ presence. The practice of *cuidado* then over time creates embodied, ‘deep’ knowledge and self-transformational relationships with humans and *orixás*. In this way, *cuidado* turns into a key for managing the permeable boundaries between the human and the divine, and provides access to the healing force *axé*.

A very short formula of *cuidado* is the ‘Law of Candomblé’ (Chapter Four) that demands secrecy, respect, and rules. Following this law, the *ialorixá* explained, resulted in faith (*fé*, the human equivalent of *axé*), which is considered a protective force itself. Faith has been discussed as an effective factor in medical therapy (Seligman, 2002, Levin, 2009, Osler, 1910) as well as in Catholic prayer healing (Mayblin, 2010). My thesis argues that the creation of *fé* – what I have called ‘relentless optimism’ – plays a central role in Candomblé healing of the Odé Terreiro and suggests that it is a main outcome of the practice of *cuidado*.

Important aspects of practicing *cuidado* in the Odé Terreiro are attention, effort, deep knowledge, recognition, self-reflection, and respect. Attention implies, for example, learning the rules of the house as well as the songs, rhythms and dance steps of the *orixás* through listening and observation, without asking too many questions. Following the rules requires effort and commitment, for example wearing only white on Fridays and avoiding individual taboos (Chapter Two), and it is part of the learning process to develop deep knowledge that, in turn, creates *axé* and religious authority. Deep knowledge in Candomblé comes with responsibilities; it demands the protection of secrets (*fundamentos*) and hence the enactment and control of religious boundaries that circumscribe the sacred stage. For example, recognizing Exu in the boundary of the *terreiro* and asking him for permission to enter, opens a door to the *terreiro* as a sacred, bounded, and guarded space (Chapter One).

In this study, *cuidado* emerges as a boundary-crossing process that links and at the same time separates both sides of the boundary. Respectfully greeting Isabella with her father's call *Atotô*, for example, emphasizes her ties with the *orixá* and the access to divine power that come with them. Meanwhile, the distinction between humans and *orixás* is important to maintain their superior power. Paying attention to practices of *cuidado* brings permeable boundaries centre-stage and allows us to see how the lines of connection and distinction are drawn and redrawn between different actors.

Managing permeable boundaries

The dynamics of power involved in *cuidado* have been a central theme of this thesis. Take, for example, the *ipadé* ritual for Exu in Chapter One that evoked and nurtured his 'hot energy' by use of *cachaça* and gunpowder – an energy that was so dangerous that all participants had to cover their heads for protection. 'Knowing how to care for Exu' included recognition, respect and precise knowledge about his characteristic preferences; and although Exu could not be fully controlled, by way of *cuidado* he could be made a powerful ally. As I have argued, the management of 'permeable boundaries' (Van de Port, 2011, Wafer, 1991) that both divide and connect is at the heart of the practice of *cuidado* and, by extension, healing in Candomblé. Similar to Sennett's 'ambiguous edge' (Sennett, 2006), the permeable boundary is the place where interaction happens, where one can be same-and-other (Chapter Two), and where power, or *axé*, is created, negotiated, and exchanged.

Permeable boundaries have taken on different forms across my thesis. For example, Exu appeared as a door or a bridge between the worlds of the humans and the *orixás* (Chapter One); and the double mirror provided an interface that allowed for self-reflection and identification with the *orixá* on the other side (Chapter Two), while still maintaining a distance that enabled the circulation of *fé* and *axé* (Chapter Three). The boundaries between the sacred and the profane stages were closed off by rules and crossed by art (Chapter Four), and while the *ialorixá* criticized me for wearing a turban inside the *terreiro*, she organized a workshop for artistic turban wrapping in the local neighbourhood to show the beauty of Afro-Brazilian religion. The visibility and concealment of Candomblé in the public space needed to be carefully balanced

to avoid the dissipation of *axé*, as in the example of the Health Fair that was kept at the doorstep of the *terreiro* (Chapter Five).

Secrecy in Candomblé comes with a contradictory note: Concealment increased the power of the sacred, the secret, and the *axé*; but so did their social recognition (Johnson, 2002). Therefore, caring for and nurturing Candomblé's power required controlled revelation in the sense of *secretism* (Simmel's *Geheimnistuerei*), a term Johnson (2002) uses to describe the performative practice of displaying secrecy (Chapter Four). In Isabella's home, when she showed me Omolu's *peji*, she first knocked at his door before unlocking it and asking for "agô" (permission). Only with the necessary respect and framing as sacred was I allowed to see the room and for a moment marvel at the artistically adorned interior.

In the Odé Terreiro, showing Candomblé art work was seen as important to publicly demonstrate the value and beauty of Afro-Brazilian religion on the 'profane stage', but rules had to be applied to avoid complete exposure and descent into meaningless folklore (Chapter Four). The performance of *cuidado* was used to establish what I called the 'sacred stage'; but the sacred stage was also used to perform *cuidado*, as expressed in Isabella taking care of the shrine and safely locking its door.

Demonstrating *cuidado* then becomes, in itself, a statement of power and authority. In the discussed public health campaigns (Chapter Five), the involved *terreiro* organizations built on the same principle of showcasing their *cuidado* with slogans like RENAFRO's "We do. We care". Here, *cuidado* comes with moral weight. RENAFRO promotes *terreiros* as healthcare providers where the public health system fails, which demands social recognition and political power. Complete absorption by the health system, however, would lead to a loss of boundary control on part of the Candomblé community. As Jim Wafer says when reflecting on his own crossing of permeable boundaries as a Candomblé ethnographer,

On neither side of the boundary are there pure subjects or pure objects. Power relations can never be fixed, but have to be seen in terms of a kind of game in which subjectivity and objectivity, selfhood and otherhood, are tossed back and forth in interlacing patterns that tend to obscure the imaginary line between them. (Wafer, 1991:181)

Indeed, the anthropologist is used to being a liminal creature, both object and subject, with one foot inside the circle, and the other outside. In Wafer's case, he found himself in between the realms of the living and the dead when he received the nickname of an *egum* spirit (a deceased ancestor). I was, perhaps, lucky that I did not come as close to the dead. But I was deeply embedded in relations of *cuidado*, playing a 'game' that made me same and different to my 'brothers and sisters' in the Odé Terreiro. They turned me into an anthropologist, and I turned them into informants, but at the same time we were all providing food for the *orixás* (and for each other), following the rules of the house, and taking our leaf baths, with as much *fé* as possible. And while they shared their stories and shaped my fieldwork experiences in Brazil, their passing through the boundaries of my writing in turn shaped their appearance as actors in the ethnographic vignettes of this thesis. In the end, who wrote whose story? In this sense, permeable boundaries, and their mediation through *cuidado*, complicate questions of authorship, agency and power.

Power lies at the 'ambiguous edges' (Sennett, 2006) as places where social relations are negotiated. Exu – the 'Master of paradox' who inhabits entrances, crossroads and markets - established communication with the divine world *orun*, and his ability to hold contradictions, points to the double task of *cuidado*, to connect and divide at the same time. Establishing strong kinship relations with the *orixás* (Chapter Two) made it possible not only to receive their *axé*, but to identify with the *orixá* and experience sameness with them – for example, when avoiding specific food that the *orixá* does not tolerate (*quizilas*). As Isabella put it, Omulu did not separate from her. At the same time, it is the *orixá's* alterity that enables Isabella to 'call for him' as a source of power and healing *beyond* the self. While much of the literature on care emphasizes its connecting character (Kleinman, 2012, Kleinman and Van der Geest, 2009), the notion of permeable boundaries emphasizes that *cuidado* also has separating qualities, which are necessary for the creation and circulation of *axé*.

Keeping the circles of care in motion

To translate the thesis title ‘Circles of Care’ into Portuguese, I would choose *Rodas de Cuidado*, with *rodas* meaning both ‘circles’ and ‘wheels’, a term frequently used when people gather in a circle for dancing (*roda de samba*), for ‘playing’ capoeira, and, of course, for Candomblé rituals. A *roda* is always in movement, with people dancing, stepping into the middle for a short time, and then joining back in with the others. When the movement stops, the *roda* is over.

Likewise, each of the chapters of this thesis has described forms of movement. In Chapter One, Exu moved across boundaries with mind-boggling speed, pushing people out of their comfort zone, and keeping contradictions productive in dialectical manner. Exu turns reality on its head (or feet) and keeps the world in motion – as without movement, in Candomblé, there is no life, and no *axé*. Chapter Two introduced the double mirror as the interface between humans and *orixás* that continuously throws their reflections back and forth on top of each other, in a never-ending process of recognition and self-recognition, creating what I have called being ‘same-and-other’ at once. In Chapter Three, the spiritual economy between humans and *orixás* took on the form of an upward spiral of circulating *fé* and *axé* that kept growing (at least ideally, unless one became scared of snakes). Chapter Four then saw the boundaries between the sacred and the profane stages of Candomblé constantly in flux, with elements drifting from one side to the other, as exemplified in the example of the turban. To avoid the reduction of religious rituals to meaningless ‘folklore’, this movement had to be controlled by ‘people of *axé*’ who held religious authority and deep knowledge of how to protect the boundaries. Finally, in Chapter Five, public health campaigns turned into stages for the negotiation of social recognition in which *terreiro* organization grew capillaries into state institutions, and vice versa. All these movements across boundaries were mediated by forms of *cuidado*.

The importance of change, movement, and adaptation in Candomblé as a decidedly dynamic religion has been stressed by many anthropologists (Matory, 2005, Wafer, 1991, Van de Port, 2011, Pinho, 2010, Sansi, 2007), who criticize the re-Africanists’ static notion of African traditions and fixed truths (see Introduction). In this vein,

Matory insists that Candomblé continues to change and is not a “transplant of a ‘frozen’ Africa” (Matory, 2005:76), as Herskovits and Ramos had labelled it in the first half of the 20th century (Maggie, 2015). I have made that same point on several occasions in this thesis, for example in the case of Olinda’s pigeon in Chapter Three. For Olinda, the *ialorixá* made an exception to the rule that menstruating women could not participate in rituals, because it was allowed in Olinda’s home *terreiro*. But the fluid character of Candomblé, the value of change for keeping *axé* alive and in circulation (Chapter One), and the constant efforts of self-making and self-improvement (Chapter Two) suggest that Candomblé, while rhetorically foregrounding its character as a ‘religion of resistance’ (Chapter Five), also corresponds with – or echoes – aspects of market liberalism in capitalist Brazil.

The image of the upward spiral that I used to describe the circulation of human *fé* and divine *axé* (Chapter Three) reflects the principle of ever-growing economies and continuous accumulation of wealth or *axé*, without standstill or end. Moreover, the display of Candomblé art (Chapter Four) and *cuidado* (Chapter Five) on public stages fits the demand for self-promotion in what Selka describes as a competitive ‘religious marketplace’ in Brazil (2010). Indeed, caring for oneself through activities that create ‘deservability’ bind in with liberal notions of self-management and responsibility for one’s own health and well-being (Mol, 2008). And even the impressive tolerance towards other religions and forms of faith-making corresponds with a liberal approach, where everyone is the architect of their own fortune.

But at the same time, the concept of *cuidado* also paints a very different picture, one that does not fit in with individualistic ideology. Instead of being self-sufficient, in the Odé Terreiro people relied on social relations for self-care. Indeed, *cuidado* produces exactly what competitive market-driven societies undermine: social relations of mutual responsibility to sustain one another, hence turning fear into faith, and improving self-esteem. As I said in Chapter Five, in a society built on social exclusion and inequality, acts of *cuidado* and self-care of marginalized groups may even turn into acts of political resistance, and vice versa. In this sense, the healing practices in the Odé Terreiro can be seen as responding to a capitalist society (and

history) that produces vulnerability and feelings of powerlessness and leaves people searching for robust networks of care, or *cuidado*.

Isabella noted that it had been ‘the best thing in her life’ to join the *terreiro* and ‘really’ care for her father Omulu, and that since she cared for him in the right way, her health improved. But she also noted she had been ‘hit on the head a lot’ when she tried to care for herself in other houses. The question of who hit her, who was being healed, who pushed for the ‘right care’, and who created and gained *axé* is difficult, if not impossible to answer. Isabella was entangled in a complex configuration of self (Chapter Two). Besides her human self as ‘Isabella’, she had a wilful *orí* (head) that she needed to nourish. The *ori* was the place where her father *orixá* Omulu resided. Omulu was to help her find her *odu*, her ‘way in life’ that presented itself to her.

In this multiplicity of interconnected actors – the human, the *orí*, the *orixá* and the *odu* – maybe there is no point in defining who, ultimately, makes choices. As *cuidado* turns into self-care, neglect turns into self-neglect, and, of course, the other way round. What is more relevant than identifying the original agent, it seems, is the notion that – unlike Foucault’s description of more individualistic forms of ‘care of the self’ (Foucault, 1990) – in the Odé Terreiro self-care (or self-making) is an essentially social, relational process. Self-care unfolds in dialogue with other actors, including the, *orixá*, the *ialorixá* and the group of the *terreiro*. Given the multiple actors involved, healing and self-making require balancing different voices, negotiating boundaries, making allies, and solving conflicts or even identity crises. Social relationships come with the potential of conflict, and as I have argued in Chapter One, crisis can be an important aspect of healing. “Exu pushes you out of your comfort zone”, Matheus had said. And when Carla, in Chapter Two, struggled with changing her life, the *ialorixá* had explained that her troubles were a sign that finally her real father *orixá*, Xangô and not Oxossi, had revealed himself. Similarly, Isabella can reinterpret her being ‘hit on the head’ as a necessary part of getting better by way of learning how to ‘really care’ for her father, hence strengthening her ‘lion inside’ and developing her *fé*, or what I have called ‘relentless optimism’.

I am trying to put myself back into my shoes as a medical doctor, imagining a patient like Isabella, daughter of Omulu. Caring for her father and herself in the *terreiro* was, for her, not an alternative to biomedicine, but a complementary form of treatment that did not stop her from taking her anti-rheumatic drugs. As her doctor, I would have been happy to know that she had a place where she felt at peace and a religious family that took care of her. But through my work as an ethnographer I understood that a Candomblé *terreiro* provides much more than that. Being part of a *terreiro* integrated Isabella into a network of mutual *cuidado* with other people and with *orixás*; and the relationships she built in this way made it possible to create *fé*, even in times of despair and illness, and to experience the healing effects of *axé*. Even I felt the tingle in my feet when the *orixás* were dancing, independent from whether I ‘believed’ in them or not. Isabella’s medical doctor recognized her ‘lion inside’. And Isabella noted that it was her *fé* that had kept her alive when medicine could give her no hope for improvement.

The circulation of *cuidado* in Candomblé emanates *fé* and *axé* – but it is also accompanied with the commitments of a reciprocal network. Neglecting one’s obligations was “not good for you,” as the *ialorixá* put it. In short: *cuidado* comes with strings attached. This insight is not particularly surprising (e.g. see Heinemann, 2014); but taken seriously, the notion of *cuidado*, or care, can provide a shift in the perception of people as independent individuals. Back in Scotland, I noticed that the lens of *cuidado* from the Odé Terreiro had started to make me see people more as shaped by their care networks than by their individual achievements. In the light of *cuidado*, people looked different, with strings emerging from them that connect them with others. Without the care these strings provided, none of them would have survived. But as relations of care come with obligations, they can also be limiting, controlling and demanding. And so, care relations are constantly negotiated.

My fieldwork in the Odé Terreiro is, in itself, an example of the ongoing negotiation of relations of *cuidado*. Only after I had committed to staying in the *terreiro*, the *ialorixá* told me that I was a daughter of Ossaim. I started learning to care for him and for the *terreiro*, and I received *cuidado* from the others that was, at the same time, also *cuidado* for Ossaim. Months later, when I became a daughter of the house,

I received the sacred bead necklaces, *agujemi*, of Ossaim, Iansã, Oxum, Ogum, Oxossi, and Oxalá. When the *ialorixá* put the *agujemis* around my neck during the ritual, she said that she hoped I would come back the following year to have another ritual. However, this was not a binding obligation. Maybe her *visão* had showed her that I was more comfortable with a position at the group's margin, as she loosened the ties by adding that if "this now" (my fieldwork) was my only mission, then that was ok, too. I should never throw away my *agujemis* though, she insisted, as they were made *com muito amor e cuidado* - with much love and care.

Glossary

[Bt. = Bantu; Pt. = Portuguese; Yb. = Yoruba]

Abiã [Yb.]	Non-initiated <i>terreiro</i> member
Abô (velho) [Yb.]	<i>Abô</i> is the Yoruba term for the solution of leaves used for ritual cleansing as a ‘leaf bath’ (<i>banho</i>); <i>Abô velho</i> is an old leaf solution that contains much <i>axé</i> .
Acolhimento [Pt.]	Welcoming and accepting ‘taking in’ of a person; an aspect of <i>cuidado</i>
Agô [Yb.]	Yoruba expression used to ask for permission
Agujemi [Yb.]	Ritually washed colourful bead necklaces that relate to different <i>orixás</i> .
Alafia [Yb.]	Health, success, or well-being
Aiyê [Yb.]	The human world or sphere
Assento [Pt.]	Literally ‘seat’; a place where an <i>orixá</i> has been ritually established with his or her symbols and sacred objects
Auto-estima [Pt.]	Self-esteem
Axé [Yb.]	Candomblé’s vital force; a positive, healing energy; pronounce ‘ashe’
Axogum [Yb.]	High rank in the <i>terreiro</i> hierarchy: person responsible for animal sacrifice
Babalorixá [Yb.]	Male leader of a <i>terreiro</i> (also called <i>pai-de-santo</i>)
Baiana [Pt.]	Literally ‘Bahian woman’; term for women dressed in big Candomblé-style dresses who sell street food, especially in Salvador
Banho (de ervas) [Pt.]	Literally ‘(herbal) bath’; describes both the leaf solution used for spiritual cleansing and protection as well as the act of pouring it over the body (<i>tomar banho</i>); pronounce ‘ bunyo ’

Barco [Pt.]	Literally ‘boat’; term for a group undergoing initiation together
Barracão [Pt.]	Literally ‘big hut’; ceremony hall of a Candomblé house; pronounce ‘bahakao’
Borí [Yb.]	Ritual of ‘feeding the head’ to become a <i>terreiro</i> member
Branceamento [Pt.]	Racist ideology of gradually ‘whitening’ the Brazilian nation over generations to minimize the black population
Búzios [Pt.]	Cowry shells used for divination
Caboclo	Indigenous spirit in Candomblé who bears knowledge about forest plants
Cachaça [Pt.]	Popular Brazilian distilled spirit made from sugarcane
Carinho [Pt.]	Kindness, affection
Corpo fechado [Pt.]	A ‘closed body’ that is spiritually protected against harm, while a <i>corpo aberto</i> (‘open body’) is vulnerable and weak.
Cuidado [Pt.]	Care; act of strengthening others (<i>cuidar</i>) and oneself (<i>se cuidar</i>) in a dynamic and reciprocal network; pronounce ‘kwidado’
Cura [Pt.]	Healing, cure
Dendê [Pt.]	Palm tree used for making red oil used for cooking and rituals
Diciza [Yb.]	Straw mat used for rituals and sleeping in the <i>terreiro</i>
Ebó [Yb.]	Ritual offering for one or several <i>orixás</i>
Fé [Pt.]	Faith; here, a force that effectively changes reality
Farofa [Bt.]	Fried manioc flour, used as food and for rituals
Feijoada [Pt.]	Brazil’s national dish: black bean stew with pork and beef (often contains pig or cow tails, ears, and feet)
Feira de Saúde [Pt.]	‘Health Fair’ to promote public health with information stalls, talks, and health services

Festa [Pt.]	Celebration; especially to ritually worship one or several <i>orixás</i> in the <i>barracão</i> with dancing, drumming, and ritual offerings; pronounce ‘ feshta ’
Filhos [Pt.]	Children; for example, a <i>filho de santo</i> (children of the saint) is a Candomblé follower
Fundamentos [Pt.]	Foundational religious secrets that must not be shared with the public
Iabá [Yb.]	Queen, here: female <i>orixá</i>
Ialorixá [Yb.]	Female <i>terreiro</i> leader (also called <i>mãe-de-santo</i>)
Iaô [Yb.]	Initiated <i>terreiro</i> member who receives one or more <i>orixá(s)</i> in trance
Ipadé [Yb.]	Ritual for Exu (also called <i>padé</i>)
Itan [Yb.]	Story or legend of an <i>orixá</i>
Jogo de búzios [Pt.]	Cowry shell oracle performed by the <i>ialorixá</i> or <i>babalorixá</i>
Limpeza [Pt.]	Ritual spiritual cleansing, for example with a <i>banho</i> or brushing off negative energy from the body with leaves
Mãe [Pt.]	Mother
Mãe-de-santo [Pt.]	Female <i>terreiro</i> leader (also called <i>ialorixá</i>)
Memória ancestral [Pt.]	Ancestral memory that is inherited from African ancestors
Mestiçagem [Pt.]	Racial mixture
Mulata/o [Pt.]	Pejorative term for a mixed-race person; derived from <i>mula</i> (mule)
Odu [Yb.]	The predestined way in life that brings health, well-being, and fulfilment
Ogã [Yb.]	Male high rank <i>terreiro</i> member

Orí [Yb.]	Head; the seat of the <i>orixá</i> in the human body
Orixá [Yb.]	Candomblé deity of African origin; pronounce ‘orisha’
Orun [Yb.]	The world or sphere of the <i>orixás</i>
Otã [Yb.]	Sacred stone that embodies the <i>orixá</i> of an initiated <i>terreiro</i> member. It is kept in the <i>orixá</i> ’s <i>assento</i> and needs to be ritually ‘fed’ frequently.
Pai [Pt.]	Father
Pai-de-santo [Pt.]	Male <i>terreiro</i> leader (also called <i>babalorixá</i>)
Pano (de cabeça) [Pt.]	Literally ‘cloth (of the head)’; turban used in the <i>terreiro</i>
Peji [Yb.]	Shrine or altar for an <i>orixá</i> that contains sacred objects (e.g. the <i>otãs</i>)
Pipoca [Pt.]	Popcorn, ritually used to worship and feed the <i>orixá</i> Omulu
Posto de saúde [Pt.]	Health post; small medical practice of the SUS, Brazil’s national public health system
Quilombo [Bt.]	Black communities, often in rural areas, that historically provided shelter for runaway slaves
Quizilas [Yb.]	Specific intolerances of Candomblé followers that link them with their <i>orixás</i> . For example, children of Iansã are not allowed to eat ram meat, pumpkin, or soft jackfruit.
Rainha [Pt.]	Queen; often used to address female <i>orixás</i>
Rezadeira [Pt.]	Catholic folk healer who uses prayers and herbal remedies
Roncó [Yb.]	The secret room in the <i>terreiro</i> that only initiated house members can enter
Saída [Pt.]	Literally ‘leaving’; the ceremony when initiates leave the <i>roncô</i> after several weeks of seclusion and ritual performances

Terreiro [Pt.]	Literally ‘yard’; Candomblé temple where <i>orixás</i> are worshipped and their sacred objects are kept; pronounce ‘teheyro’
Trabalho [Pt.]	Literally ‘work’; ritual offering that asks for specific favours, often performed for Exu, the trickster <i>orixá</i>
Visão [Pt.]	‘Vision’ that the <i>ialorixá</i> trains and uses to perform the oracle and communicate with the <i>orixás</i>
Xirê [Yb.]	Circular dance in the <i>barracão</i> to the rhythms of the <i>orixás</i> . During the <i>xirê</i> the <i>orixás</i> are called and embodied by spirit mediums.

List of Abbreviations

CEAO	<i>Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais</i> . Centre of Afro-Oriental Studies. (Salvador)
FIOCRUZ	<i>Fundação Instituto Oswaldo Cruz</i> . Foundation Institute Oswaldo Cruz.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PNSIP	<i>Política Nacional da Saúde Integral da População Negra</i> . National Policy of Integral Health of the Black Population.
RENAFRO	<i>Rede Nacional de Religiões Afro-Brasileiras e Saúde</i> . National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health.
SEPPIR	<i>Secretaría de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial</i> . Secretary of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality.
SUS	<i>Sistema Único de Saúde</i> . Unified Health System.
UESC	<i>Universidade Estadual Santa Cruz</i> . State University Santa Cruz. (Ilhéus)
UFBA	<i>Universidade Federal da Bahia</i> . Federal University of Bahia. (Salvador)

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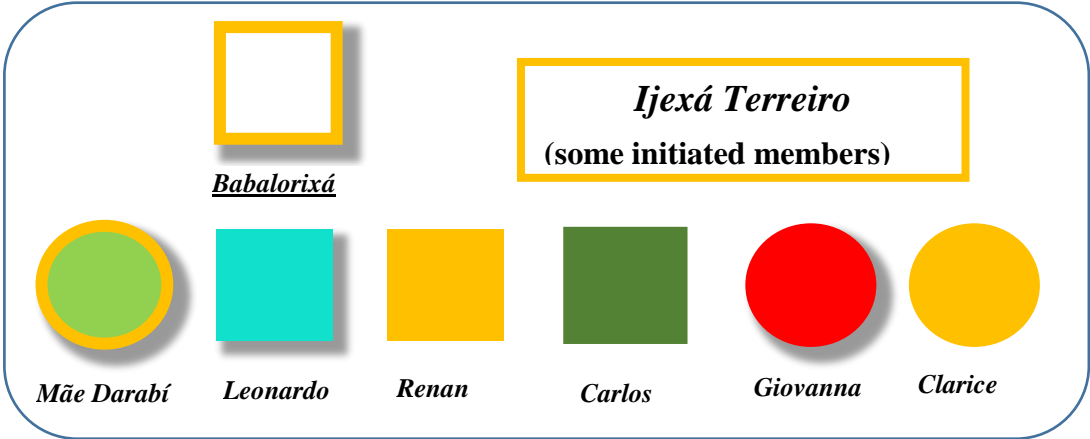
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Appendix 1: Kinship Chart

Diagram 1: Kinship Chart of the Terreiro Community in 2014.

The Ijexá Terreiro has over 50 members, only few of whom are included in this chart.

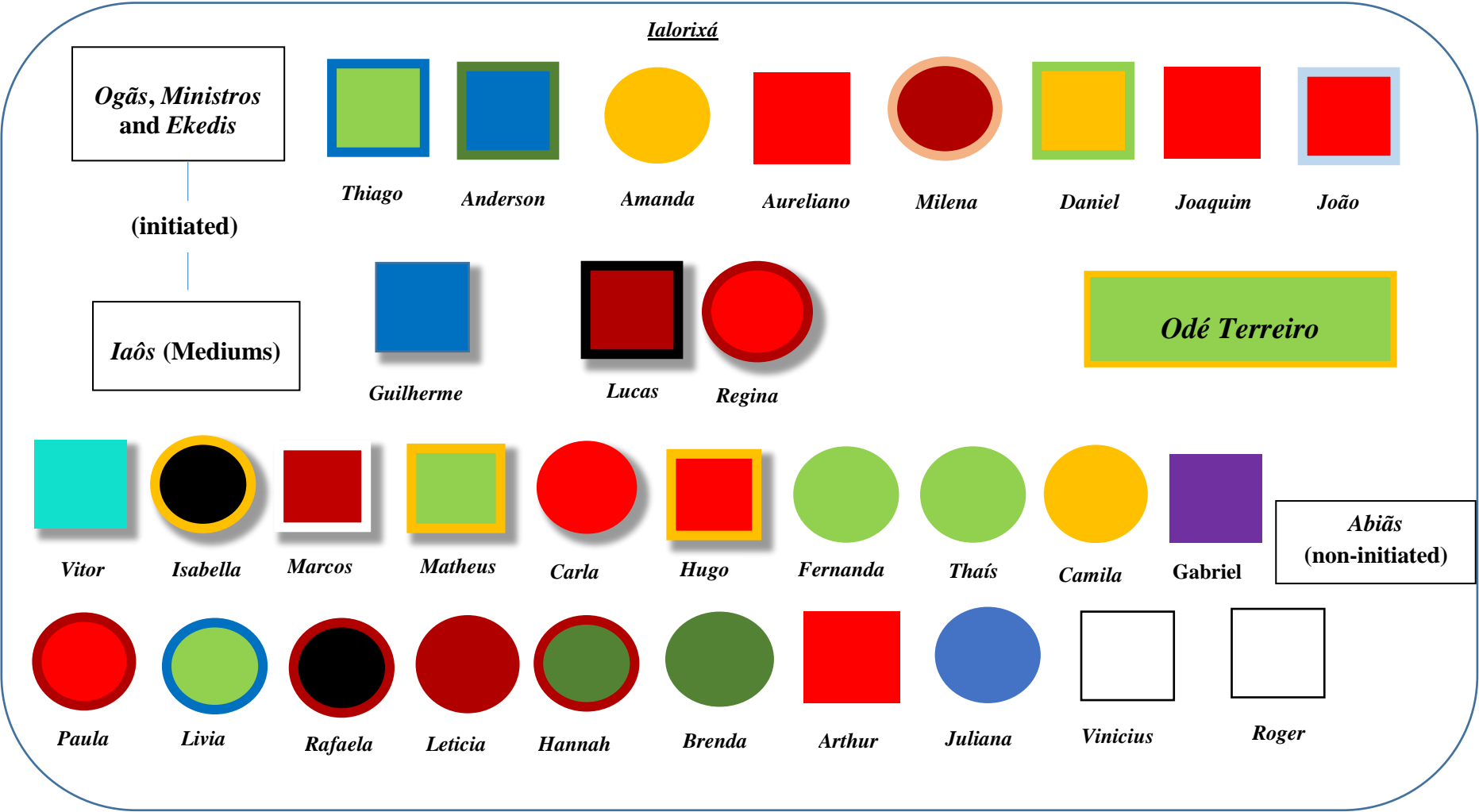


Colours and shapes

- Oxossi
- Iansã
- Xangô
- Oxum
- Ogum
- Omulu
- Oxalá
- Ossaim
- Oxumaré
- Logun Edé
- Obá
- Yemanjá

Inner colour: Primary *orixá*
 Outer colour: Secondary *orixá*
 Cases where I do not know the secondary *orixá* are single coloured.

- Orixá* medium
- Female
- Male
- Both



Appendix 2: RENAFRO's Charta of Ilhéus

We, the leaders of *terreiros* in various Brazilian states, health professionals, culture and education professionals, health counsellors and members of the National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health (RENAFRO), at the meeting on the 14th to 16th of May 2015, in Ilhéus, during the 10th National Seminar of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health: Culture, Practices of Care and Public Policy, realized by the National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health in collaboration with the city council of Ilhéus/Secretary of Culture, considering the importance to promote equality in public policies, guarantee human rights for the black population and the population of *terreiros* with reference to the Federal Constitution, the National Policy of Integral Health of the Black Population (PNSIP), the Statute of Racial Equality and the International Decade of Afro-descendants, recommend:

- 1 – that the Ministry of Health and the statal and municipal Health Secretaries strengthen the activities developed for the black population and terreiro population, guaranteeing the human right to health, as well as consolidating the implementation of Policies of Equity Promotion, especially the National Policy of Integral Health of the Black Population, and undertaking greatest effort to fight racism and religious intolerance in all levels of the SUS (municipal, statal and federal), as well as [assuring] recognition and respect for the knowledges and practices of care of the Afro-Brazilian religions, as the PNSIP is law;
- 2 – that the Ministry of Health includes a classification of colour into all Health Information Systems, as to be able to give continuity to the collected data of colour in the publication Health Brazil;
- 3 – that CONASS [National Council of Health Secretaries] and CONASEMS [National Council of Municipal Health Secretaries] include the topic of health of the black population in their actions, plans, and work agendas, in the states and municipalities, including the health of the population of the terreiros, with focus on the fight against racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious intolerance, and all forms of prejudice and discrimination;
- 4 – that the National Health Council strengthens and guarantees the presence of terreiro leaders at the 15th National Health Conference, as well as in the municipal and statal levels of the conference processes.
- 5 – that the National Health Council includes the topic Health of the Terreiro Population in their guidelines for normal meetings, inviting specialists about the topic to talk about the health promotion work realized by terreiros, as well as the inclusion of demands and priorities of the terreiro population in the SUS;

6 – that the Brazilian State guarantees the right to religious freedom, especially to the Afro-Brazilian religions that suffer constant attacks;

7 – that SEPPIR recognizes the legitimacy of organizations of the Afro-Brazilian movement, such as RENAFRO, as important instruments to promote racial equality; and that it promotes, in its policies, activities and planning, governmental initiatives for the population of the terreiros and continues to support initiatives realized by the terreiros;

8 – that the Ministry of Culture and the Secretaries of Culture recognize terreiros as important spaces of production, preservation, and valorisation of Afro-Brazilian memory and culture and undertakes efforts to guarantee their continuity and offers financial support and rewards for the preservation of these spaces.

9 – that the National Secretary of the Youth valorises and incorporates the demands and necessities of the Youth of the terreiros in public policies as to strengthen the presence of young people of terreiros in the process of political decision-making, for example in the Youth Councils and Youth Conferences;

10 – that the National Council of Youth may develop strategies of valorisation and guarantee of participation of the Youth of Terreiros in the processes of the Youth Conferences;

11 – that the National Secretary of Human Rights engage with the fight of the black youth, realizes activities to combat religious intolerance with focus on Afro-Brazilian religions, and ensures the right to life for the black population;

12 – that the Education Ministry fulfils the Law 10639 that establishes the guidelines for national education and includes in the official curriculum of the Teaching Network the obligatory theme “Afro-Brazilian History and Culture” in all of Brazil;

13 – that the organs of the United Nations recognize and value the activities of culture and health promotion of the terreiros and support activities developed by RENAFRO, by including this group in the discussions and activities of the International Decade of Afrodescendants put forward by the UNO.

Ilhéus, 16th of May 2015.

National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health. [My translation]

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