

UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Dancing Africa in Bahia : dance, embodied authenticity and the consumption of "Africa" in Bahia, Brazil

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0ct5q6rm>

Author

Ahlberg, Meredith A.

Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Dancing Africa in Bahia:
Dance, Embodied Authenticity and the Consumption of “Africa” in Bahia, Brazil

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies (Cultural Studies)

by

Meredith A. Ahlberg

Committee in Charge

Professor León Zamosc, Chair
Professor Roberto Alvarez
Professor Alexandra Isfahani-Hammond

2011

Copyright

Meredith A. Ahlberg, 2011

All rights reserved.

The Thesis of Meredith A. Ahlberg is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Abstract of the Thesis	viii
Introduction	1
Why Bahia?	4
Why Dance?	5
Why Me?	7
Main Research Questions	9
Research Methodology	10
Paper Structure and Logic	12
Chapter 1 - Africa in Bahia and Brazil	14
1.1 Blackness and Africanness in Brazil	14
1.2 Repression and Resistance of African and Afro-Brazilian Cultural Traditions	15
1.3 Cannibalism, Racial Miscegenation, and Racial Democracy	23
1.4 Bahia as Africa in Brazil, Bahian as African	28
Chapter 2 - Embodied Authenticity: Folklore and Dance in Bahia	35
2.1 Dance as the Site of Analysis and the Embodiment of Cultural Traditions	35
2.2 Dance in Bahia	37
2.3 Classical Ballet and Modern-Contemporary Dance in Bahia	41
2.4 Folklore and Folkloric Dance	43
2.5 Para-Folkloric Dance in Bahia	45
2.5.1 Viva Bahia	47
2.5.2 O Balé Folclórico da Bahia	50
2.6 To Preserve or to Interpret: Questions of Authenticity and Technique	57
Chapter 3 - Dança Afro: Racialized Folklore and Dancing Africa in Bahia	65
3.1 Imagining and Performing Africa in the Diaspora	65
3.2 African and Black Dance in Brazil: A History	69
3.3 Dança Afro in Bahia: Popular, Traditional and Elusive	72
3.4 Re-Africanized Aesthetics and Racial Authenticity	75
3.5 Modern-Contemporary Technique in Bahia: The Legacy of Mestre King	81
3.6 African Dance as Authentic Local Folklore in Bahia	89
Concluding Remarks - Dancing Africa and the Search for Embodied Authenticity ...	90

Works Cited.....95

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this Master's thesis would not have been possible without a great deal of support, both financial and personal. As such, I would like to extend my most gracious thanks to the United States Department of Education, The Tinker Foundation, and the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies at UC San Diego for the financial assistance required for the completion of this research, both in San Diego and in Brazil.

I would also like to thank the UC San Diego professors who generously served on my thesis committee, including: León Zamosc, Professor of Sociology, for agreeing to serve as thesis chair almost at the very last minute; Roberto Alvarez, Professor of Ethnic Studies, for his time, patience, and constant support; and Alexandra Isfahani-Hammond, Professor of Literature, for her flexibility and understanding.

In addition, I must extend my greatest thanks to the individuals in Bahia, Brazil who took time from their busy schedules to speak with me and share their stories and insight. In no particular order, I would like to thank Lia Robatto, Emilia Biancardi, Mestre King, Walson Botelho, Marilza Oliveira, Rosângela Silvestre, Nildinha Fonseca, José Carlos (Zebrinha) Arandiba, and Deni Neves, among others.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank Quênia Ribeiro for her inspirational energy and excitement for Brazilian dance, and Michael Goldstein for giving me the chance to teach Afro-Brazilian dance and share with others what I

loved. I would like to thank my parents, James and Pamela Ahlberg, for their unyielding support along my many paths, my brother and sister-in-law, Peter and Joanna Ahlberg, for always encouraging me to do what made the most sense to me, and Nemo Curiel for his consistent encouragement and enduring patience. Finally, I would like to thank all of my colleagues and fellow Master's students at in the CILAS program for their dedication, inspiration, support, friendship and camaraderie.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Dancing Africa in Bahia:
Dance, Embodied Authenticity and the Consumption of “Africa” in Bahia, Brazil

by

Meredith A. Ahlberg

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies (Cultural Studies)

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor León Zamosc, Chair

In Brazil, images and ideas of Africa have been historically linked to the northeastern state of Bahia, more specifically with the former colonial capital and port city of Salvador. While the city boasts a dense population of people of African or mixed African and European descent, a powerful way that Bahia’s blackness has historically been confirmed and perpetuated has been through the continued reproduction of symbols of Africa, both stigmatized and valorized. An essential and

insightful medium through which this Bahian Africa can be seen clearly in Salvador is through the city's dance culture.

This master's thesis analyzes the way imagined African symbols have been consumed, appropriated, and authenticated through particular embodied dance forms in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. This imagined Africa, while both feared and adored, has been effectively re-imagined, consumed, and performed many times in Bahia. This consumption of imagined symbols—both traditional and local, as well as exotic and African—has and continues to solidify stereotypes of Africa as a symbolic form loaded with complex and often contradictory notions of authenticity, one that can be seen as a powerful simulacrum with a life of its own, potentially devoid of any true origin.

Keywords: dance, Bahia, race, Africa, cultural consumption, Brazil

Introduction

In a spectacular display of color, movement, music and drama, Ballet Folclórico of Bahia proved that the famous northeastern state of Brazil doesn't just produce great singers. Known for throbbing, African-centered rhythms and well-known musicians [...] Bahia is the center of Brazil's African cultural scene. (Cummings-Yeates 2000)

Similar to years past, the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia's* US tour in early 2011, entitled *Sacred Heritage*, included pieces considered to be classic Afro-Brazilian and folkloric dances from Bahia, as well as other pieces that emphasize and confirm Bahia's African-influenced cultural origins. The bookmarked-sized flyer created by the group to advertize the tour describes this "vivacious" dance company as a "potent mix of sensuality, athleticism, supercharged rhythms, and spectacular costumes."

In this year's show, the second-to-last piece was a number called *Afixirê*, meaning the "Dance of Happiness" in the Yorubá language of West Africa. "A feast of rhythms, sounds, colors and movements, this exuberant dance celebrates and defines the sensuality and spirit of the Bahian people," the program reads. The program goes on to describe the choreography as a tribute to the legacy left behind by African slaves in Brazil, paying homage to all African countries that influenced and helped form Brazilian culture. Choreographed by internationally acclaimed dancer and choreographer, Rosângela Silvestre, the piece is quite long (17 minutes) and the female dancers, who are highlighted throughout the piece, are topless, except for large daisy collars. The movements are frenetic and the music and choreography are described as containing a mixture of percussive rhythms, movement styles, and

gestures from different parts of Africa. According to the founder and General Director of the company, Walson Botelho, this dance was created to express the happiness that people from Bahia feel in having inherited their African cultural traditions.¹

But why would dancers from the northeast Brazilian state of Bahia have such a desire to express these strong feelings of connection and appreciation for their African ancestry? Moreover, what is it about this dance that makes it “African,” other than a blended mixture of dance styles and musical rhythms that are understood to have come from Africa at some point, even though the time and date of arrival of these particular rhythms in Brazil is unclear? If this information is not clear, how much of the uniquely African quality of this dance is, in fact, imagined? By dancing African-inspired movements, how do Afro-Brazilians interpret and express their respect and appreciation for their African origins?

In Brazil, images and ideas of blackness and Africanness, for lack of a better word, have been historically linked to the northeastern state of Bahia. More specifically, they have been associated with the former colonial capital and port city of Salvador. While this city boasts a dense population of people of African or mixed African and European descent, the most powerful way that Bahia’s blackness has historically been confirmed and perpetuated has been through the continued reproduction, recreation and re-imagining of symbols of Africa. While these symbols have been historically stigmatized and repressed, more recently they have become the

¹ While the company’s administration has described the creation of this work assuming clear intentionality on the part of the company, the choreographer, Rosângela Silvestre, described the dance as, in fact, created in a highly improvisational manner, with the dancers and choreographer creating this celebratory dance together as a group over the course of many rehearsals. This information was obtained through email correspondence with Rosângela Silvestre on May 7, 2011.

tools with which Bahian people publically express their valorization of their African roots. As such, symbols related to Africanness have been appropriated and re-imagined in a variety of ways within the black community, which can be seen in the development of local folkloric performance groups (such as the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*), the preservation of the African-based religious traditions of *Candomblé*, the creation of the *blocos afro*, and the utilization of these symbols in politicized black rights groups as well as community development projects.

One particularly revealing and insightful arena in which the patterns and consequences of this re-imagining, consumption and appropriation of symbols of “Africa” can be seen clearly in Salvador is within the city’s dance community. Just as dance has played (and continues to play) a vital role in the practice of the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*, there has been a long history of the Bahian people looking to African symbols in *candomblé* for inspiration in staged and choreographed dance forms. Today, images, symbols and references to African qualities in dance are utilized in a variety of ways, at times as a referential of local ethnic roots, other times as proof of original and authentic traditions from Africa.

This master’s thesis analyzes the way imagined African symbols have been consumed, appropriated, and authenticated through particular embodied dance forms in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, paying particular attention to manifestations of para-folkloric dance as well as local interpretations of African dance, referred to as *dança Afro*. Based primarily on interviews with prominent Bahian choreographers, dance

teachers, and researchers,² and rooted in analyses of the works of preeminent scholars of postcolonial racial formation in Brazil and the African Diaspora, I assert that the simulacrum of Africa has been effectively embellished, re-imagined, consumed, and internalized in the dance community in Bahia, resulting in a complex web of self-referential symbols, as well as various and often contradictory notions of authenticity in dance aesthetic and style.

Why Bahia?

Today, the state of Bahia, Brazil is characterized as a unique location (and tourist destination) due to its distinctively Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage and unique ethno-racial demography. Over the past half-century, Bahia's image has been shaped, enhanced and sold to the world as a place full of sensual people, cultural richness, and vibrant music and dance. Despite an extensive body of research on the subject of heritage, race, and class in this region of Brazil, few ethnographic analyses have looked at the role of dance in the development, maintenance, and confirmation of racial identities, particularly those marked by African images and symbols.

In addition, Bahia is a particularly interesting place due to its strong historical association with the African legacy, both in Brazil and in the Americas at large. As colonial Brazil was the landing place of approximately a third of all Africans enslaved and exchanged for money in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Brazil is commonly known

² The fieldwork on which this paper is based was undertaken in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil in the period of June - August 2010 as part of the completion of a master's degree program in Latin American Studies at the University of California, San Diego.

to have the largest population of people of African descent outside of the continent of Africa. Some people have gone so far as to claim that many traditions that once thrived in Africa and have since died out, can today still be seen and experienced in Bahia. While scholars of the African Diaspora tend to study the Caribbean, for more than a century, Bahia has been and continues to be a hot-bed for studying the intersection of many critical social and cultural issues related to post-colonial race relations, cultural tourism, and the re-construction and enhancement of ethnic and cultural performance art and folklore. It is in this context that I attempt to give insight to and analyze how Afro-Brazilian folkloric and ethnic dances are produced, taught, preserved and valorized within the sphere of often caricatured and commodified cultural images of the city and region, in which it is depicted and marked as a miniature Africa in the Americas, which is seen as both authentically African and locally Brazilian.

Why Dance?

Similar to the tradition of passing along oral histories, dance is a symbolically-rich expressive form that serves as a means by which cultural tradition and memory can be embodied, presented, communicated, and preserved. It could even be argued that traditional forms of dance serve to protect human memory through public enactment (Buckland 2001), thus serving as an important device by which cultural groups create and maintain coherent and autonomous identities. By studying the

moving body—including choreographies full of learned and created gestures and cultural symbols, as well as the social context in which the dances were developed and performed—we can gain important insight into how social identities are imagined, negotiated and codified in a particular cultural and historical context.

Despite the form's potential, from the perspective of the academy, the study of dance has traditionally been marginalized, undervalued and undertheorized. In her article, "Memory of an Ephemeral Art" ("*Memória de uma arte efêmera*"), dancer, choreographer, dance scholar and current President of the Secretary of Culture of the State of Bahia, Lia Robatto (2002) discusses the importance of studying the history of dance. She writes:

The history of dance, as it is an art of a fleeting nature, runs the risk of becoming lost with the passing of time, unlike what happens with the history of the fine arts, architecture and literature, for example, which deal with more permanent works (in physical and material terms) that constitute themselves by their own palpable records and testimonials of past cultures and prospects of the future. (15)

In Brazil and Bahia, in particular, dance has been and continues to be thought about and studied not so much as a cultural phenomenon that resides outside the realm of everyday life, a form that could be extricated and examined in a technical way. And as with many performed cultural traditions, dance styles and performance arenas blend, overlap and imitate each other in various ways. In Bahia, more so than in other parts of Brazil, there exists an informal dance culture that is a central part of everyday life for many people.

With music as possibly the only more popular performance genre, dance in Bahia is a highly public and visible form of cultural expression. During the local

carnaval celebrations each year, people fill the streets to dance, sing and celebrate, following their favorite band, partying day and night for nearly a week. For a new visitor to the city of Salvador, dancing and moving bodies can be seen almost immediately, not only in theaters and formal spaces, but in the center of the street. One could easily argue that in Bahia, the stage and the street are nearly one in the same, as can be seen with the region's abundant street performers and performances, a range of stages and performances spaces throughout the city (some more hidden than others). Finally, in the Historical District of Salvador, the *Pelourinho*, there are weekly parties every Tuesday. From approximately 6 until 9pm, a visitor to this neighborhood can hear the drumming and music of local samba-reggae groups, watch the group's dancers, follow their lead, and dance along with a crowd of amateur dancers and revelers, a group composed primarily of tourists, but also including local Bahian people from the *Pelourinho* and surrounding neighborhoods.

Why Me?

This project began very much as an exploration of my own personal experiences coming to know Bahia and Brazil by way of folkloric and Afro-Brazilian dance techniques and traditions. In 2006, I began taking Afro-Brazilian and Samba dance classes in New York City with a wonderfully inspiring teacher named Quênia Ribeiro. The combination of Quênia's joyful approach and personality, the exhilarating movements and complex history of the dances, and the driving percussive

music inspired me to know about Brazil, and Bahia in particular. In May of 2007, I made my first trip to Bahia with the intention of seeing firsthand if the culture there was as rich and exuberant as I imagined and as it was described in all the tourist literature.

Needless to say, folkloric dances and tourist literature do not tell you everything about a place and a people. Upon arriving in Bahia, it was clear that my expectations of this place were based primarily on stereotyped images. Like most stereotypes, there was a grain of truth in the simplified images and stories about the people and culture in Bahia, but the everyday life of Bahian people and the popular dances they enjoyed did not resemble the dances I was learning back in New York. After searching through the city, the dance forms that I knew to be the quintessential essence of Bahian dance were found in two primary places: on the stage of the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* and inside the FUNCEB Dance School (*Escola de Dança da Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia*). Three years after this initial visit, these were the two places I would carry out my research in 2010.

Today, as a dancer and teacher of Afro-Brazilian dance, I am intimately implicated in this research project. When I first began teaching Afro-Brazilian dance in 2008, I had a hard time fully understanding the responsibility that I had taken on as a teacher of traditions of a group of people to which I did not belong, in this case a unique group whose traditions had been historically repressed as a result of the color of their skin and weakened position of power in the colonial social structure of slavery. Honestly, even after carrying out this research, it remains difficult to state

what Afro-Brazilian dance, or better African-dance-according-to-Brazil, really *is* in just a few words, but I feel that I have at the very least gained a better sense of the history and cultural context in which these symbols and embodied forms appeared and were popularized.

Main Research Questions

Throughout the course of this research project, my central research questions have remained focused on the role of race and exoticized imagery in the contemporary dance culture in Salvador, Bahia, in particular by looking at dance forms that rely on historicized images of local folklore or ethnic traditions. Initially, my interest was to look at the way dancers and performers of African descent living and working in Bahia, particularly those working as dancers and choreographers of folkloric dance groups that perform primarily for tourists, perceived themselves and their cultural identity. I wondered if they understood the way the presentation of their dancing bodies and cultural traditions were re-imagined, consumed and taken advantage of, or if they imagined themselves truly as the embodiment of a preserved cultural and social history composed of racial oppression, violence, hidden traditions, and cultural richness. What I found was that this seemingly simple dichotomous relationship between celebratory exploitation and genuine appreciation of Bahian culture is actually highly complex, with perspectives and opinions on the subject often overlapping in contradictory ways.

As usual, more information brings more questions. After spending the summer of 2010 in Bahia, I realized that much of the deep feelings of appreciation for Bahian, and particularly Afro-Bahian, cultural traditions were derived from strong local political movements that appeared in the early 1970s that strove to re-valorize and highlight the *African*, not the local Bahian, traditions that had been repressed and denied public expression in Bahia, both in the dominant rhetoric of the government and among the general population (nearly 80% of whom are of African descent). I began focusing my attention on how African-influenced dance forms based on “African” and “Afro-Brazilian” traditions are constructed, codified, and talked about in Bahia, Brazil. As a result, the project goals developed toward looking at the way Afro-Brazilian dancers strive to embody, preserve, teach, and promote what they consider to be their own cultural history and tradition through the learning, performing, teaching, and embodiment of “African” dance styles.

Research Methodology

In order to gain insight into these questions of embodied authenticity and the role and power of African imagery in dance in Bahia, I utilized primarily ethnographic, participant-observation, and historical and archival research methodologies. The necessary research and interviews were carried out from September 2009 to May 2011, with a ten-week trip to conduct research in Salvador during the summer of 2010.

In Bahia, I spoke to dancers, choreographers, ethnomusicologists, prominent artistic leaders, political leaders (including the current President of the Secretary of Culture of the State of Bahia) and local scholars or race, performance and cultural studies through many different means, including phone calls, email, and arranged meetings and visits to homes and offices. A good number of contacts with dancers and dance teachers were initiated by attending and participating in a variety of dance classes at the FUNCEB Dance School (*Escola de Dança da Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia*), which is located in the historical and tourist center of the city of Salvador, the Pelourinho. In addition to taking dance classes and interviewing contacts, I also visited local libraries and archives in Salvador to gather copies of books, articles, and other printed materials unavailable in the United States. In addition, I attended shows by the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*, both in Bahia and in Los Angeles. Finally, by simply looking at tourist materials collected in Bahia and the internet, I was able to analyze the way the bodies of Afro-Brazilians are portrayed and utilized to promote cultural tourism.

As a non-Brazilian, non-Bahian, non-Afro-Brazilian, white graduate student from the United States attempting to carry out ethnographic research in Salvador, I was confronted with a number of obstacles that made the execution of this research project more complicated than it may have otherwise been. While previous visits to Salvador had prepared me with a strong knowledge of the city and very good language skills, I found it difficult to get people to schedule a time and place to sit down for a period and talk to me. It seems that in Bahia, asking doggedly for interviews and

working hard to pin someone down may be proof that you really want to talk to that person. It seem that behavior that would seem annoying, incessant, and possibly even disrespectful here in the United States, is required in Bahia to get people to sit down with you.

On the other hand, by far the most useful skill that I brought with me to Bahia was my dance ability. This embodied proof that I had invested time and energy to actually *do* the dances I was interested in learning more about ended up an essential component in my being allowed to easily enter the dance community of Bahia. On a few different occasions, only after attending a few dance classes and simply hanging out in the dance school in off hours (often waiting for late-arriving interviewees), people who I had seen (and who had seen me) in dance classes during the previous weeks would approach me and ask where I was from and why I was waiting around. These conversations often developed into insightful discussions about my research and resulted in informal interviews with young afro-Bahian dancers.

Paper Structure and Logic

To help structure the presentation of the paper's central argument, the body has been divided into three sections: the first analyzes the history and power of the image of "Africa" in Bahia; the second looks at dance as an embodied marker of authenticity in Bahian dance, particularly through para-folkloric dance; the third considers how African symbols and aesthetics are utilized and understood in complex and often

contradictory terms of authenticity, especially in *Afro* dance forms. The intention of this presentation structure is to reveal how people in Bahia understand, value, incorporate and embody markers of African cultural traditions. In addition, the case of African-influenced dance forms in Bahia reveals the decontextualizing relationship and exchange between imagined tradition, embodied and intangible cultural forms, and cultural consumption that results in paradoxical and seemingly contradictory understandings of “authenticity,” found in this case in the simulacrum of “Africa.”

Chapter 1 - Africa in Bahia and Brazil

1.1 Blackness and Africanness in Brazil

The city of Salvador, once known simply as Bahia, was the first colonial capital of Brazil. The city's importance in the development of Brazil can be attributed to its central location in a very fertile region, its well-protected bay to harbor trading ships, and its proximity to the plantations of the early colonial period that produced sugar and other agricultural goods to maintain the colonial economy. From the early 1500s until 1850, it has been estimated that a total of 3.65 million enslaved Africans (approximately 35% of all African slaves traded in the trans-Atlantic Slave trade) were brought to Brazil, whereas, to give some relative context, it is estimated that only 645,000 were brought to the United States (Telles 2004). As Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery (in 1888), as powerful landowners fought hard to keep this free labor system in place as long as possible, today it is seen as the country with the most people of African descent outside of the continent of Africa.

With the colony's large agricultural industry centered in the Northeast region, Salvador became an early and long-time port for the importation of enslaved Africans. By as early as 1580, the Portuguese were importing more than 2,000 African slaves a year to work the sugar plantations of Northeastern Brazil, primarily in the states of Bahia and Pernambuco (Skidmore 1999). Even after the colonial capital was moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1763, the city remained a central port for trading with other Portuguese colonies in Africa and served as the landing place of a great number of

enslaved Africans, primarily from what is today the Congo, Angola and the Yorubá regions of West Africa.

As a result of these historic events, the city of Salvador has been marked as one of, if not *the* epicenter of African and Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions. It was referred to as the “Black Rome” in the early 20th century by Mãe Aninha, the leader of one of the most prominent and traditional *Candomblé* houses, Ilê Axé Opó Afonjá (Romo 2010), as well as New Guinea, in reference to the West African country of Guinea (not the island in the South Pacific) (Risério 1981). In addition, the people of Salvador remain phenotypically darker and the region continues to be strongly influenced by Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions. Due to strong links to the continent of Africa, Afro-Brazilians and their culture have also been historically associated with notions of primitive backwardness, resulting in a long history of feelings of shame and prolonged cultural repression.

1.2 Repression and Resistance of African and Afro-Brazilian Cultural Traditions

In Brazil, the history of African culture and people of mixed African-European or African-Indigenous descent has been marked by relations of domination, mistreatment, and social and economic marginalization. Starting with the first African slaves who arrived on the shores of the northeastern coast in the mid-16th century, people of African descent were treated as inferior creatures and their behavior and ‘nature’ was often compared to negative stereotypes of non-human animals (Speigel

1996). The cultural practices—including language, foods, music, dance and religious practices—brought with the slaves from their diverse origins, mostly in Western Africa, were similarly stigmatized and repressed. In Bahia today, these traditions are referred to in combination as the African Matrix (*Matriz Africana*), a term that refers primarily to the practice of the *candomblé* religion, which used dance as a form of prayer, and *capoeira*, which is a martial art said to have roots in African fighting techniques that were hidden with dance-like movements to preserve the form during the time of slavery when fighting among African slaves was illegal.

It is interesting to note that long before the formal appearance of references to these practices in the mid 1800s, enslaved Africans in Brazil, including those in Bahia, had a long history of using movement and dance as a means of communicating and transmitting cultural knowledge. Despite stereotypes about the performative abilities—both with rhythm and body movement—of people of African descent, notions of dance and performance as being very important in West African and Afro-Brazilian culture have not been wholly created in the minds of outsiders. Records show that among many groups of *Bantu* speaking people of Africa the way of introducing oneself was not to tell one's name or place of origin, instead it was to tell the other person what one *danced*. One's dance marked their tribe, customs, religion, and community. In addition, dance was understood to be a way of capturing supernatural life-forces, condensing spiritual energies, reuniting forces from nature and the community (Conrado 2006). This understanding of the power of dance carried

over from Africa to the Portuguese colony and has survived in Bahia through the traditions of the *candomblé* religion.

In addition, in his book, *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil*, Peter Fryer (2000) offers an interesting tale from the early colonial period in which allowing some amount of music, dance and celebration was essential for African slaves:

Dancing was their main relaxation and means of entertainment. But it was more than that: it asserted and reinforced community values, and passed these on to the rising generation. Nothing, not even harsh and cruel punishment, was more bitterly resented by Africans in Brazil and their descendents than restrictions placed on their singing, making music, and dancing. (87)

Fryer continues to recall a case of the slave revolt at the large plantation of Engenho Santana, near Ilhéus in Bahia, in 1789, in which slaves killed their overseer, seized some machinery and ran off to found a settlement in the forest. But when a “peace treaty” was written, determining the conditions necessary for them to go back to the plantation, the slaves made sure there was a clause providing that they would “be able to play, relax and sing any time we wish without your hindrance, or will permission be needed” (87). This anecdote substantiates the claim that dance and music were exceptionally important to the social and communal lives of African slaves in Bahia. It says a great deal if enslaved people were willing to be *voluntarily* re-enslaved in part on the basis that they would be permitted to dance and enjoy themselves as they wish without limitation or consent from their master.

Despite this one advance made by a particular group of slaves, in general the public performance of African-influenced dance and music in Brazil was not tolerated

in Bahia. In *Brazil's Living Museum: Race, Reform and Tradition in Bahia*, Anadelia Romo's (2010) historical analysis of race, culture and public history of Salvador, she discusses the way that this could be seen very clearly at the turn of the 20th Century. White elites in Bahia had become so anxious about the rise in African themed imagery and public displays of African traditions during Carnival that they complained to local newspapers that these displays threatened to "Africanize" the region's image and erode the civilized image they were working to create. These complaints were heard and acted upon by the Bahian state authorities who "declared the use of African costumes and drumming illegal for Bahian carnival beginning in 1905" (Romo 2010, 6-7). In her article on "Afro-Bahian Ethnic Dance," Amelia Conrado also discusses the way *samba* and *batuque* were two dance and music styles that served as cultural and embodied points of reference for resistance movements against the dominant white elite in Brazil. She writes:

The samba, ethnic dance with origins in Angola, established itself as an element of resistance and strength in Brazil, a means by which Africans in Brazil made themselves present and visible since the 16th century, and a way to establish clear a social action and policy against the system in power. [As a result] batuque and samba transformed into two generalized terms to designate the profane dances of blacks in Brazil. (20-21)

Similarly, Romo describes the way that "practices of drumming, capoeira (martial arts), and African-based religions such as *candomblé*—widely denigrated and frequently repressed—represented resistance to the dehumanizing force of enslavement" (6-7).

The Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé* is understood to have formed in Brazil through a blending of multiple African religious traditions primarily from the Yoruba region of what is now Nigeria. The fundamental traditions of this religion were able to survive and develop in Bahia primarily through the syncretic incorporation with imagery from Catholic Christianity. Despite necessary efforts to hide the African roots of the tradition behind the façade of Catholic symbols, the power and resilience of the *candomblé* religion can be seen today in the sheer number of *terreiros* (the term used to refer to the temples and houses of worship) in Salvador. While a common saying in Bahia is that there is a Catholic Church for every day of the year, the city of Salvador today is home to more than 1,150 *candomblé terreiros* (Centro 2011).

As *candomblé* was (and still is) primarily associated with people of African descent, and people of African descent were seen as mentally and racially inferior, the practice of *candomblé* was negatively portrayed as an impure and harmful influence on Brazilian society, and a stain on the reputation desired by the white elite in Brazil. *Candomblé* initiate in the *terreiro* of Mai Menininha de Gantois in Salvador, Maria José do Espírito Santo França (1999) writes that the early colonizers in Brazil not only deemed all African traditions “fetishistic, exotic, pathological, animist, white magic, a system of superstitions, low spiritism, and so forth,” but they also saw the *candomblé terreiros* as sites of “ideological, social, and cultural resistance. These communities have always been seen as sites of racial and social danger, leading to the creation of numerous stereotypes used to justify actions against their operations” (54).

However, despite or possibly even in reaction to powerful efforts to repress the practice of *candomblé*, the *terreiros* and their surrounding neighborhoods, provided participating members the black community in Bahia with a strong sense of cohesion, power, and autonomy:

For Afro-Bahians, *candomblé* provided a counterbalance to the existing inegalitarian society. The social worlds of *candomblé* and other African-based traditions such as *capoeira* provided an alternative community that operated according to a distinct set of values. Poor and elderly black women who, in mainstream society, could not dream of entering the highest spheres of power because of their color, sex, age, and poverty, could become might leaders in the world of *candomblé*. *Candomblé* valued wisdom of age, the ancestral links to Africa, and the power of women. It measured human worth by the individual's ability to achieve harmony with divine energy as opposed to the possessions of material wealth. (Butler 1998, 163)

Therefore, as *candomblé* was nearly exact inverse of the dominant society, it is easy to see how it would be seen as a threat to the Bahian elite, who worked hard to promote the image of a European white idealized society (Romo 2010).

Also in the face of social repression and physical violence against the *candomblé terreiros*, practitioners and leaders remained committed to the preservation and valorization of their traditions. Interestingly enough, starting in 1888 with the abolition of slavery in Brazil, individuals high up in groups of Afro-Brazilian cultural and religious groups in Bahia began making contact with and traveling to countries in West Africa. These visits were carried out in order to gain a stronger sense of what they saw as the original and more authentic forms of their own traditions, many times overlooking the possibility that these stories and practices they were gathering might themselves have transformed a great deal since the traditions first made their way to

Brazil. These travels were also carried out for political reasons, with religious leaders making a clear effort to promote their practices by claiming to know and teach purer traditions, direct from Africa (Matory 2005; Landes 1994).

Candomblé is important for the purposes of looking at African imagery in dance because, within *candomblé*'s complex traditions and belief systems,³ the practice of worship was, and still is, directly related to and dependent on very specific dance forms which have become essential symbolic and aesthetic referentials for many dancers in Bahia today. In the *candomblé* communities, practitioners “learn to dance and sing, just as they learn to speak” (Oliveira 1992, 22). Alongside particular rhythms and songs, dance is an essential way that practitioners are able to invoke and celebrate the deities, the *orixás*. In Yorubá religious traditions, upon which most *candomblé terreiros* are based, practitioners dance the image of the cosmos by moving in a counter-clockwise circle around or near a sacred site, a choreography which keeps the the left side of the body, the sacred side, turned inward toward the center (Drewal 1999). This moving circle around a central point:

[...] enacts the cosmos through its metaphoric crossroads at the center and activates its forces. The same practices live in Brazil, where the crossroads may be even more visibly rendered as the central post of a terreiro around which the [practitioners] dance and the elders sit while songs, rhythms, and gestures call the gods to come [...] to join the party in their honor. (146)

As such, the dances of the *candomblé* are not merely creative expressions of cultural identity, but they are themselves powerful tools by which to call upon and

³ The practice of *candomblé* is not a singular or static tradition. There are many different forms of the religion, with each “nation” (*nação*) having unique rituals, ceremonies, and ways of carrying out their spiritual work.

activate powerful spiritual forces. In her thorough, insightful and personal memoir on dancing in Bahia entitled *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, Barbara Browning (1995) describes the way that dance in the *candomblé* is seen not as an artistic expression of the individual. Instead, the strong and beautiful dancing body is understood to be “divinely gorgeous” (45), appreciated and embodied by the orixá who gives power and grace to the possessed and entranced dancing practitioner. In other words, more important than movement as art, the sacred dances of *candomblé* offer practitioners a particular collection of *embodied* cultural knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible (Daniel 2005).

While it is understood that a dancer is under the spiritual possession of the orixá, practitioners of the religion must also learn the dances of each orixá. In fact, Browning continues, many people in the *candomblé* see themselves as highly trained dancers. “They speak of *técnica*—technique—and use specific Yoruba terminology to describe different kinds of motion. [...] The study of Orixa dances is the study of divine liturgy and is taken very seriously. It marks one not as an artist but as a religious scholar, and it demonstrates the seriousness of belief” (45-46). Interestingly enough, these very same dance techniques would later become symbolic references for dancers seeking to to better know, perform, and embody the original African movements that were so greatly repressed throughout the course of Brazil’s colonial period.

1.3 Cannibalism, Racial Miscegenation, and Racial Democracy

It was not until Brazil's period of industrial and social modernization in the early 20th century that the social stigmas against Afro-Brazilian people and their culture were seriously questioned as they were brought to the forefront in discussions about Brazilian national cultural identity and history, one that included debates around issues and notions of cultural cannibalism, racial mixing and racial harmony.

The term 'cannibal' comes from the Spanish word 'Caníbalis,' a name given to the Carib people of the West Indies who were known to practice anthropophagism—the act or practice of humans eating the flesh of other human beings. This behavior, while known to have existed in many parts of the world throughout history, played an especially powerful role in the imagination of explorers, colonists, and travelers in the greater Caribbean region, including Brazil. With a presupposed fear of being eaten and consumed, a dialectic occurred wherein the merchants and explorers of the Americas, who came with the sole mission of extracting and consuming the region's natural resources and labor, projected their fears onto the native people. In her book, *Consuming the Caribbean*, Mimi Sheller discusses the earliest accusations and fears of New World cannibals:

Many have asked of this seminal moment [Columbus' arrival in the New World] and of all that has followed from it: who was eating whom? Was the Caribbean truly a place where Europeans were at risk of being eaten? Or were they in fact the ones who posed a threat to the bodies, health, and lives of the indigenous people of the region, and later to the enslaved and indentured workers who were consumed in the system of plantation slavery and colonial capitalism? (2003, 143)

In other words, despite the real and physical threat arising from unequal power relations between European colonists and indigenous and slave laborers, fears and stigmatization of the 'barbaric' and wild 'other' helped perpetuate and justify repression and mistreatment of marginalized groups in the greater Caribbean.

As a result of these perpetuated stories and its proximity and similar economic structure to the Caribbean, Brazil as was also stigmatized as cannibalistic, barbaric and primitive. While a range of efforts to try to expel and suppress Afro-Brazilian culture were made continually through the 19th century, the valorization of marginal traditions began to develop publically starting in the early 20th century. More specifically, the early 20th century saw the emergence of a new conceptualization of the idea of cannibalism. In 1928, José Oswald de Andrade, a prominent poet and one of the founders of the highly influential Brazilian Modernist movement in the 1920s in São Paulo, published his seminal work, *The Cannibalist Manifesto*. In this piece, Andrade strove to reverse the negative stereotypes related to myths of Brazilian cannibalism by appropriating the idea behind this gruesome practice as a way for the country to positive assert itself against European postcolonial cultural domination. Instead of being seen as country of man-eating heathens, Brazil was reconceived as a land of cultural fusion and flexible identity, a place that accepts, enjoys and internalizes international influences, cultural forms, and values (Harvey 2002, 106).

This affirmation of blended identity, albeit focused mostly at that time on the incorporation of European and more 'advanced' civilizations, paved the way for the appreciation for racial miscegenation in Brazil. With the publication of his book, *The*

Master and the Slaves (Casa Grande e Senzala) in 1933, Gilberto Freyre emerged with a re-written social history of the northeast region of Brazil, one that viewed racial blending during the time of plantation slavery as a great, if not the greatest, contribution to the creation of Brazilian identity. Freyre's writings strove to valorize the plantation life of the northeast, which had been marginalized in the national arena in favor of the modernized, whitened, and more developed cities of the south, and to re-imagine what it meant to be Brazilian. Despite his efforts to neutralize racial barriers, his writing contained many revealing contradictions about the image of Africanness in Brazil: "Since the Brazilian attitude is one of large tolerance towards people who have African blood but who can pass for white, nothing is more expressive than the popular saying: 'Anyone who escapes being an evident Negro is white'" (Freyre 1951, 97). Despite the contradiction of both acceptance and rejection of blackness, the writing of Freyre thus initiated the myth of Brazilian racial democracy, which made it acceptable, at least in theory, to have traces of African blood and participate fully in all levels of society. Like cannibalism, racial miscegenation thus seemed to overcome and erase negative stereotypes through its appropriation, valorization and re-integration into the image of the new and modern Brazilian identity.

As a continuation of this process of accepting and valorizing non-European cultural traditions, Getulio Vargas' regime began its effort to incorporate marginalized cultural groups, including Afro-Brazilians, into the national scene through the folklorization of their tradition (Riggs 2008). Despite the seemingly good intentions of

government programs such as the Institute of National Historic and Artistic Heritage (*Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* - SPHAN), many Afro-Brazilians, such as Maria José do Espírito Santo França (1999), recognized the need to be critical and weary of projects and efforts that seek to preserve and folklorize Afro-Brazilian religious cults, for these efforts and the resulting images were seen to form part of the strategies of the apparatus of domination, despite the resulting forms' outside appearance as being uniquely Afro-Brazilian. In other words, despite the overt message of appreciation that processes of the folklorization of Afro-Brazilian traditions presented, it was in many ways an effort to freeze African cultural symbols into quaint and archaic remnants from the past (Butler 1998).

In addition, these demonstrations of the valorization of Afro-Brazilian culture can also be seen as underhanded efforts to quell potentially rebellious groups of discontented blacks. Some scholars argue that with the increased incorporation and blending of Afro-Brazilian culture into the national imagination, along with a lack of formal segregation laws, blacks in Brazil did not have a concentrated breeding ground to form ideas of black consciousness or counter-hegemonic racial ideologies. "Even the terreiros (places of worship, usually in a special room of a private house) of *Candomblé* and the Escolas de Samba have been integrated for decades, generating a 'folklorization' of black culture that has had the same co-operative and debilitating effects as *branqueamento* in general" (Winant 1992, 97). In addition, traditional Afro-Brazilian cultural practices were idealized by the government as folkloric relics of a primitive and tribal Africa, freezing the image of this tribal Africa at a distance from

Brazilian life and placing them neatly under the control of the hegemonic group in Brazil, namely the white elite (Crook and Johnson 1999).

In similar fashion, the resulting increase of visibility and public valorization of these cultural traditions also added to the amount of attention paid to Bahia by researchers and scholars from abroad, including travel historians and ethnographers from Europe and the United States. While it is likely that these written accounts of the region's traditions included mostly accurate depictions of how certain traditions were carried out, certain problems arose when these documents were taken as evidence of certain original traditions, religious ceremonies, cultural and social events. The resulting works of these researchers, many of whom wrote detailed accounts of their travels and findings, also contributes to the process of re-constituting and re-imagining of local traditions, in a strange sort of dialectic process of identity formation filtered through the eyes of a select handful of foreigners looking for exotic cultural phenomena. This unintended feedback loop can be seen not only in the way these foreign accounts impacted the way local Bahian people *practiced* their traditions, but also in the way they *understood* their own histories and articulated their traditions and place in Bahian society (Romo 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the valiant and noble effort on the part of the Brazilian government to valorize and appreciate the traditions of marginalized and historically repressed groups, these projects, both intellectual movements and political tactics, did not change the Brazilian people's perceptions of these groups, or the socio-economic or social status of its members in society at large. This disconnect between the rhetoric

of appreciation and the very real and practical neglect on the part of the government, made for an increasingly tense situation in Bahia during the middle years of the 20th century (Risério 1981). This situation erupted in the early 70s in the early years of the military dictatorship and with the introduction of ideas of afro-centricity and black power coming into Bahia and Brazil from the US, the Caribbean, Europe, newly-independent countries in Africa, and other countries in the African Diáspora. During this time, the black movement in Bahia gained significant attention as cultural groups began reappropriating their “African” traditions in an effort to de-stigmatize their culture and call greater attention to the presence and conditions of this marginalized group, often treated as a minority when in fact they constitute a majority of the population (Ferreira 1999, 71).

1.4 Bahia as Africa in Brazil, Bahian as African

If it is true that Brazil’s soul is African, then that soul resides in Salvador. (Eakin 2000, 72)

From the perspective of global hegemonic discourse, “people of African descent have often been depicted as the antithesis of Western modernity and modern subjectivity” (Hanchard 1999, 245), existing in what would seem to be direct opposition to ideas of progress and development. In the global imagination, the continent of Africa exists in an imagined cultural past, stuck in a time of primitive tribal people without technology, modern social and political structures, stuck “outside the narratives of progress that constituted historical time” (Ebron 2002, 83).

While this notion of Africa as residing in a cultural past maintains a hold around the world, communities in the African Diaspora, particularly those in the Americas, have also taken Africa and things African, historical or contemporary, to be part of their *own* pasts. But instead of looking to Africa as place of backward and primitive people, the continent of Africa was re-imagined as a place of noble kings and queens, dignified people with dark skin living peacefully in communal and familial harmony. Africa became the long lost motherland—Mama Africa—the original and native land from which all blacks in the Diaspora were violently torn and where they forever seek to return. In his article, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall (2003) describes how representing Africa as the mother of all of the cultures of the African Diaspora has imposed imaginary coherence on histories marked by fragmentation. He writes: “Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked” (224).

While the national perception of Bahia as the cauldron of Brazil’s African roots played an important role in the increased attention paid to Afro-Brazilian traditions, there was a similar increase among Afro-Brazilians in Bahia to also pay attention to their own connection to Africa. This re-valorized primitivist image of what life was like for the ancestors of Afro-Brazilians before the trans-Atlantic slave trade, created idyllic imagery of tribal Africa. The desire to return or recreate these past social and cultural systems in Bahia can be seen to have been propelled by strong feelings of ersatz nostalgia, a term coined by Arjun Appadurai in his famous work,

Modernity at Large (1996). Originally linked to analyses of the modern commodification and consumption of just about everything, this term refers generally to strong feeling of longing for an imagined past, one that either never existed or one that was never personally experienced by the people who long for it. Appadurai argues that the main way that people fulfill this desire is by consuming commodified symbols, or simulacra, of the past. He claims that as long as modern consumerism is driven by learning about and rummaging through imagined histories, certain symbols will continue to repeat, regenerate and fulfill our need to take back that which is lost, absent, or distant (78).

In Bahia, this consumption of unique cultural symbols of the past can be seen in the formation of what is referred to as *Baianidade* (roughly translated as Bahianness), a known but intangible quality of the place of Bahia, marked by notions of African purity and Brazilian hybridity. In his article, “Black Rome and the Chocolate City: The Race of Place,” Christopher Dunn (2007) discusses the formation of this Bahianness, a quality which he sees as a combination of a “celebratory affirmation of blackness and black culture with notions about cordial, non-confrontational race relations, sensuality, aesthetic beauty, and specific performative competencies captured in the popular saying ‘baiano não nasce, estreia’ (‘Bahians are not born, they debut’)” (850). While he recognizes these characterizations as stereotypes, he asserts that they still have a powerful impact on the way Bahians see themselves, promote their culture and are perceived from the outside.

As such, in Bahia, this process of consuming re-imagined pasts is very much alive and well, with people consuming what they see as their own imagined past and also selling it to the world through tourism. However, the satisfaction obtained by embodying imagined past traditions, themselves recreated and imagined, is not perfectly stable, and the disconnect between imagined memory and real past experiences continues to result in complicated and sometimes contradictory notions of authenticity as it relates to ideas of tradition, roots, and identity. In Bahia, the 1970s saw a rise in the power and prominence of a globally-influenced black movement, thus increasing the politicization of racial issues and the valorization of Afro-Brazilian people and their culture. During this time, ‘cultural activists’ including the creators of new carnival groups, musicians and members of candomblé communities began to challenge the limited way that Bahia’s folklore was represented. In this effort to challenge folklorized images of the region’s unique traditions, cultural leaders sought both to promote historically repressed expressions of Bahia’s African roots and to combine and incorporate these essentialized images in forward thinking creative works (Riggs 2008).

This trend manifested itself primarily alongside and through the formation of afro-centric cultural and *carnaval* performance groups: the *blocos afro*. With the formation and appearance of the first group, *Ilê Aiyê*, in 1974, a multitude of other groups emerged soon thereafter, joining the effort to publically valorize black culture through the appropriation of African and African-diasporic aesthetics, particularly seen in the groups’ costumes and clothing, as well as the performance of music and

dance. In his book, *Blackness Without Identity: Constructing Race in Brazil*, Livio Sansone (2003) describes the way that since the early 1970s, Afro-Brazilian culture in Bahia has undergone a process of “re-Africanization,” which includes a “a conspicuous display of symbols associated with African roots in certain aspects of social life” (65). As these groups began developing their afro-centric ideologies, conducting research and organizing a variety of cultural groups and events, after some time, it became difficult to decipher what ‘African’ meant exactly in Bahia. Sansone (2003) continues in his analysis of this very issue and writes: “Objects, lexicon, and musical beat were labeled African based on observation and superficial association rather than by determining status through careful research. [...] Looking African or sounding African is, in fact, what makes things African” (65). As symbols and their meanings combined and became tucked under one umbrella label, it became harder to tell whether ‘African’ simply referred to a connection to local Bahian traditions with roots in the slave communities on the colonial plantations (such as *candomblé* and *capoeira*), or whether it was a connection to the motherland itself through travels and material goods—namely clothing and religious symbols (Dzidzienyo 1999, 112).

In her article on the history of Samba-Reggae and the way this musical style was created through the social and political projects of the *blocos afro*, Goli Guerreiro (1999) writes:

The black movement in the space of the *blocos afro* is grounded in the generic sentiment of “African Roots.” This reference to an ancestral African origin intends to be a rejection of the Europeanized cultural patterns of the dominant group of society and seeks to assert a collective memory located in an Africa that is highly mythical and generic. That which is appropriated from the vast African repertoire are

elements such as the music and dance, the clothing, a few of the various hairstyles, and diacritic language signals that seek to establish opposition by way of the image of Africanness. (106)

In this bold claim of only loose understandings of tradition from the continent of Africa, Guerreiro is calling attention to the way that these images of Africa in Bahia are primarily the result of self-conscious, creative efforts and understood distinctly through the lens of generalizations and stereotypes about Africa.

It must be mentioned that, for the purposes of this research project, these blocos had a great impact on the way that Africa has been subsequently performed in Bahia, particularly in the dance forms created, choreographed, and performed by the blocos afro. However, in an article about dance forms in these groups, Anna Beatrice Scott (1997) writes about how the *bloco afros* in Bahia re-imagined aesthetic qualities of African traditions and dances, which were gathered and extracted from a wide variety of rather unexpected sources:

The musicians and dancers consider themselves the heirs to a vast cultural richness that stretches across the Atlantic Ocean engulfing the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. Bob Marley is a very big influence on the music, as are traditional Yoruba rhythms and practices that were imported along with enslaved Africans. [...] All groups were influenced by Yoruba ritual dances. Moreover, many dances and costume designs were researched in the most unlikely places: coffee-table photo collections on primitive art and peoples, album jackets and descriptions in songs, ethnographic dissertations, pan-African literature, tourist, ethnographic, and fictional films, and postcards, to name a few. (260)

This seemingly haphazard collection of sources and references, in combination with ideas of black identity from the civil rights movements in the United States, black movements in the Caribbean, and independence movements in Africa, resulted in the

creation of an interestingly diasporic and locally Bahian version of what it means to be and perform blackness and Africanness. While it might seem obvious that the increase in public acceptance of African and Afro-Brazilian culture and a valorization of its diverse forms would result in improving these groups' social status and position in society at large, unfortunately this was and still is not the case in Bahia, where folklorized images of charming, happy, and exuberant black people predominate. There thus remains a quiet tension between the folklorization of local traditions and the consumption of essentialized African aesthetics that today can be seen in two prominent dance forms in Bahia which will make up the subjects for the following two chapters—namely para-folkloric dance and *dança afro*.

Chapter 2 - Embodied Authenticity: Folklore and Dance in Bahia

2.1 Dance as the Site of Analysis and the Embodiment of Cultural Traditions

Similar to the tradition of passing along oral histories, dance is a symbolically-rich expressive form that serves as a means by which a cultural tradition and memory can be embodied, presented, communicated, and preserved. It has even been argued that traditional forms of dance serve to protect human memory through public enactment (Buckland 2001), thus serving as an important device by which cultural groups create and maintain coherency and autonomous identity. In her article, “Dance, Authenticity and Cultural Memory: The Politics of Embodiment,” Theresa Buckland (2001) describes the powerful relationship between dance and cultural memory. She writes:

It can be argued that dance has a particular propensity to foreground cultural memory as embodied practice by virtue of its predominantly somatic modes of transmission. Indeed in traditional forms of danced display, it could be argued that longevity of human memory is publicly enacted, demonstrating the ethereality of human existence and the continuity of human experience, as successive generations re-present the dancing. (2)

By using the whole body—not just certain parts, such as the mouth to speak, the ears to hear, the eyes to see—traditional dance forms often carry and express cultural knowledge and embodied meanings that may not be transmittable simply through verbal or written communication.

Despite its potential as a means of understand cultural phenomena, from the perspective of the academy, the study of dance has traditionally been marginalized,

undervalued, and undertheorized. In her article, “Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies,” Jane Desmond discusses the way this field has been devalued due to societal associations of dance with marginalized groups, including both women and cultural and ethnic minorities. She writes:

That dancing—in a Euro-American context at least—is regarded as a pastime (social dancing) or as entertainment (Broadway shows), or, when elevated to the status of an “art form,” is often performed mainly by women (ballet) or by “folk” dancers or nonwhites (often dubbed ‘native’ dances, etc.) also surely contributes to the position of dance scholarship. However, these omissions signal reasons why such investigation is important. They mark clearly the continuing rhetorical association of bodily expressivity with nondominant groups. (1993, 34-35)

Instead, by studying the moving body—visible in the form of social dances, theatrical and staged performances, and ritualized movements—we can gain insight into how social identities are imagined, negotiated and codified in a particular cultural and historical context.

In addition, in her introduction to the book *Meaning in Motion*, Jane Desmond (1997) also describes the study of dance as one that helps us look at the correlation between the way bodies are displayed publically and the way social identities are transmitted, transformed, perceived, and enacted. She continues: “These are some of the questions that dance studies can lead us into. They are based on the historical materiality of the body [...] and they call for an engagement with the tensions between the figurative and the abstract, and between the narrative and the nonnarrative” (3). In other words, the study of dance can serve as an intriguing and distinctive perspective

from which one can analyze how explicit and implicit cultural forms are produced, related and codified.

Similarly, understanding traditional and past styles of dance, although difficult to achieve due to the form's intangible nature, is particularly important a task as these forms can provide context and history of contemporary art forms. In her article, "Memory of an Ephemeral Art" ("*Memória de uma arte efêmera*"), Brazilian dancer, choreographer and scholar, Lia Robatto (2002) discusses the importance of studying the history of dance. She writes:

The history of dance, as it is an art of a fleeting nature, runs the risk of becoming lost with the passing of time, unlike what happens with the history of the fine arts, architecture and literature, for example, which deal with more permanent works (both in physical and material terms) that constitute themselves by their own palpable records and testimonies that refer to both past cultures and future outlooks. (15)

In other words, as a form of expression that cannot be placed in a museum and preserved like other physical objects and artifacts, dance is an important subject to study, analyze and record for this very reason. As when looking at any living, fluid, and temporary cultural form, the records and testimonies of its history exist primarily in the memories, feelings, and experiences of those who participated, created, or saw the various performances and events, which is reflected in the way this study was carried out.

2.2 Dance in Bahia

In Brazil, and Bahia in particular, dance has been and continues to be a cultural phenomenon that resides intimately within the realm of everyday life, as something that would be difficult to extricate and examine in any kind of essentialized or technical manner. As with many performed cultural traditions, dance styles and performance arenas blend, overlap and imitate each other in various ways, no matter if they are rooted in local folkloric traditions and stories, more cerebral and intellectual styles of modern and contemporary dance, or the many popular dance styles that seem to appear naturally from the energy of the people. In Bahia, in addition to the many professional dance companies and programs, more so than in other parts of Brazil, there exists a prominent dance culture that maintains a central place—both formally and informally—in the everyday life of many people, a culture that sees the stage and the street as nearly one in the same.

Dance in Bahia, as it is in most of Brazil, is a highly public and visible form of cultural expression. During the famous annual celebration of *carnaval*, dance is an essential component of the festivities. People of all races, ethnicities and classes fill the streets following their band of choice, dancing and partying the days and nights away. During the whole year, the city of Salvador, and in particular the historical district of the Pelourinho, is famous for weekly dance and music festivities every Tuesday night. From approximately 6pm until 9pm, a visitor to this neighborhood can hear the drumming and music of local *samba-reggae* groups, watch the group's

dancers, follow their lead, and dance along with a crowd of amateur dancers and revelers, a group composed primarily of tourists, but one that also includes local Bahians from the Pelourinho and surrounding neighborhoods.

In addition to these highly public displays of dance, the city of Salvador also boasts a lively and vigorous dance culture behind loosely closed doors. For a visitor to the city, with the littlest amount of searching one can find folkloric dance performances being staged at theaters (such as the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* which hosts nightly shows in the *Teatro Miguel Santana* in the Pelourinho), professional modern and contemporary dance groups performing shows and hosting workshops at cultural centers and theaters around the city (such as the *Teatro Castro Alves* and its in-house dance company), and dance schools throughout the area where one can drop in for a class in a variety of styles (such as the FUNCEB Dance School – *Escola de Dança da Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia*).

While frequented particularly by dancers of Afro-Brazilian descent, the FUNCEB Dance School is a main place where anyone can study dance today in Bahia. It was also the primary site where I conducted my research. Located in the heart of the Pelourinho (the historical quarter and the most visited tourist destination in the city), this school serves as a central hub for the dance community in Salvador, offering programs for children as well as professionalization programs for adults. While its location would make one think that the dancers and lessons were geared toward the tourist dance industry, this school's programs are offer classes in dance styles of all kinds, including classical ballet, modern-contemporary dance, local folkloric dances,

carnaval dances, and *dança afro*. However, while not formally affiliated the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*, many dancers trained at the FUNCEB Dance School do go on to train, dance and work with this group. With its location in the heart of the tourist area of Salvador, it is surprisingly that the school only has only an informal connection with the tourism industry, as seen through the presence of tourists (like myself) in their nightly classes, which are open to the public. While the number of actual foreigners in each class is very low (I would estimate it to be an average of about 5% of each class are not from Bahia), this school is still the primary place for foreigners to learn and experience different forms of popular and local dances in Bahia.

As one of many respected dance centers in the city, it should be noted that the school has historically been very aware of its place as an alternative to the dance program at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). Historically and in contemporary times, the FUNCEB Dance School is understood as a unique place where a student who chooses to train in folkloric dances, local traditional and carnaval dances, or *dança afro* can all be taken seriously. This place is seen to be different from the dance program at UFBA on the other side of town, where folkloric or traditional dances styles that are not interpreted or enhanced are marginalized and overlooked in favor of Western dances such as classical ballet and contemporary dance. While the image of these two schools is one of opposite approaches is partially accurate, it must be noted that dancers in the professionalization program at the FUNCEB dance school are, in fact, also required to learn and train in contemporary dance techniques. The difference

between the schools therefore seems to be more focused on their unique emphases and approaches than on some kind of perfectly dichotomous or oppositional programs.

Within and beyond the doors of the FUNCEB dance school, the three most common styles of dance in Bahia today are: Classical and Modern-Contemporary Dance, Para-Folkloric dance, and Afro-Brazilian Dance (often referred to simply as *dança afro*). Since the founding of the first university dance program in Bahia in 1957, these three styles have developed in close relation to one another, with nearly equal number of points of overlap and correspondence as points of conflict and tension. As Bahia is marked as the home of African culture in Brazil, all of these dance styles have also grown and developed in the region with a clear and constant reference to a variety of traditions, customs and aesthetics seen to be influenced by or originating in Africa.

2.3 Classical Ballet and Modern-Contemporary Dance in Bahia

While the region is today known for its African-influenced cultural traditions, the history of dance education in Bahia is one that has structurally and aesthetically prioritized classical ballet and modern-contemporary dance training. In Brazil and many other parts of the world, it is commonly believed that a good technical base in classical (European) dance styles provides dancers with a set of seemingly universal strengths and skills to perform any other kind of dance (Andrade and Canton 1996). Training in these techniques is seen as a way to create a clean, blank slate on the dancing body, thus opening up the possibility for consistent lines and reduced

improvisation or personal interpretation of choreographies. In other words, strong classical or modern-contemporary dance training is seen as a way of civilizing dances by allowing for there to be a greater amount of precision and control over the dancers' bodies, both by the dancers themselves and also by choreographers and artistic directors. However, one must be careful not to fall into the trap of believing that this style of dance is somehow perfectly neutral or invisible. As an unmarked category of dance (as it is linked to white, powerful, Western culture) obscures the aesthetic residue left behind when dancers combine this technical training with folkloric or African-inspired styles of movement, which are often left transformed and re-created.

In 1957, Yanka Rudzka founded the first dance program at any university in Brazil, in this case, at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBa). Born in Poland and trained in contemporary dance in Switzerland, she set about creating a fundamental dance program at UFBa that would focus primarily on developing and training young dancers in classical and modern-contemporary styles. However, beyond simply founding this dance program, Rudzka made a point to localize her dances in Bahia by working to more fully and deeply understand the basic archetypes of Afro-Brazilian dance, particular those of *candomblé*. She made a very explicit effort to avoid the trap of representing typical characteristics in stereotyped form, instead claiming to present dances that upheld archetypical forms of the dances of the *candomblé*. The resulting choreographies were said to successfully preserve an authentic base of the religion's traditions, transforming them into symbolic gestures (Robatto 2005), but these perceptions are highly subjective and remain open to interpretation and opinion.

Never the less, Rudzka is known to have initiated some of the first formal explorations of blending traditional Afro-Brazilian folkloric traditions with contemporary dance, recreating and transforming the symbols of a long tradition into choreographed and stylized movement. This process of blending dance styles is visible in various manifestations in Bahia today, including in presentations of *para*-folkloric dance, as well as in the style referred to as *dança afro*. Despite the popularity of combining styles, the resulting hybrid forms and mixtures trigger both positive and negative feelings and opinions about their value and place in Bahia. Many of these mixed feelings are related on one side to ideas of purity, authenticity, and spontaneity of movement (seen to be more traditional, original and non-Western), and on the other to ideas of creativity, hybridity, and dominion over movement (seen to be more modern, rational, individualistic, intellectual and Western). Another early example of such blended forms, which is still seen today, can be seen in the performance of *para*-folkloric dance in Bahia.

2.4 Folklore and Folkloric Dance

Defining 'folklore' is a difficult task since both the term's definition and use have changed over time. The term originally comes from the English, first appearing in written literature in 1846, and refers generally to the knowledge of a group of people, including their beliefs, customs, legends, stories, myths, proverbs, and songs (Edelweiss 1979). The idea of folklore has traditionally been linked with and clouded

by romantic ideas of popular antiquities, and it can be understood to be *organic*, or very much tied to a place, and dependent upon a people's ability to interpret and evaluate it (Ben-Amos 1971).

While some people might think of folklore as simply popular traditions, the notion of some sort of popular culture refers more to the customs and preferences of a people during any time and place, traditions and preferences that change freely and often. Particularly today, with the commercialization of music and dance forms, many cultural trends changes so frequently that it is hard for any one song or dance to stay for more than a few years. Folklore, on the other hand, is understood to refer to traditions that obey certain rules and which do not change frequently over time, passed from one generation to the next, sometimes only through oral communication. In addition, some of the oldest remaining folkloric traditions are only known by certain cultural messengers (*portadores de cultura*) who guard these stories and traditions so as to not allow for the loss of ancestral stories.⁴

In more commonsense terms, the idea of folklore was developed and became something of interest in the context of global modernization. During this period, people have migrated in larger numbers away from smaller communities, and now see their past traditions through the nostalgic lens of folklore. Like symbols and ideas related to the African continent (discussed in Chapter 1), the *concept* of folklore has also developed in a dialectic relationship with, and as an antithesis to, ideas of modernity, progress, and development. As a result, the concept is often associated

⁴ Emilia Biancardi. Interview with the author, August 27, 2010.

with notions of nativity and repeated rituals, which are seen as decidedly *not* creative, improvisational or adaptable. To complicate things even further, a place and people's folklore is frequently utilized as a source of inspiration for artists of all kinds—including those in the fine arts, literature, theater and dance—as well as by politicians looking to make minority groups feel included. In fact, a place's folklore is often brought to life, developed, and sometimes thoroughly transformed through nationalist and regional projects that strive to enhance a sense of local identity by protecting and preserving heritage and patrimony (Edelweiss 1979).

2.5 Para-Folkloric Dance in Bahia

One of the most difficult problems [...] has been the transposition of popular dances onto the stage. All local and regional dances lose their original function upon being transformed into professional shows. They lose their habitat, their natural environment; the peculiar circumstances are transformed and, as a consequence, their essential motivation and expression. (Robatto 1994, 73)

Different from the concepts of a genuine or authentic folklore, local Bahian popular and traditional dances that have been transformed and set to the stage are referred to as *para*-folkloric dances in Bahia. This term was developed to mark a clear distinction between what might be considered in an original form and that which has been transported from its place of origin—be it a small town in the interior, coastal fishing villages, the *candomblé* houses—and set to the stage with choreography, music, lighting and artistic direction.

As defined in the Brazilian Letter from the National Commission on Folklore (*Carta da Comissão Nacional de Folclore*, 1995), para-folkloric groups are defined as groups that present and perform folkloric dances and celebrations and whose members are primarily not original carriers or owners of the represented traditions. These groups are formally organized and learn dances and celebrations, sometimes through rigorous bibliographic research carried out to prevent too much spontaneous change to the dance forms. According to Lia Robatto (2002), different from folkloric traditions which are performed for local communities, para-folkloric groups perform their works in open, public presentations with large audiences, and they strive to research, rescue, valorize, put to the stage, maintain, circulate and promote manifestations originating in particular cultural and ethnic groups.

While knowledge gained by choreographers, set designers, costume designers, and dance teachers is often derived from popular, artistic, and traditional manifestations, the staging of these forms inevitably transforms, resignifies, and renews the original feelings of these traditions. The original cultural forms turn into multifaceted artistic phenomena, hybrid creations based with reference to popular culture (Barros de Paixão 2009). Therefore it is difficult today, in this age of heightened trends toward globalized cultural forms, to think about studying any dance performance or show as an artistic production *of* a particular cultural group, and one must keep in mind the conditions and context of a particular piece as well as the social and aesthetic pressure that come from outside (García 1995).

While today in Bahia there are very few remaining active groups that specialize in para-folkloric performance, para-folkloric dance performances used to be very popular in Salvador, starting around the time of the start of the military dictatorship in 1964. While many artists, musicians, intellectuals, and cultural leaders were persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, and exiled during this time, there was actually a growth and development of para-folkloric dance groups during this time. This apparent contradiction can be explained in the fact that these particular groups were seen as non-threatening and non-political creations, neutral producers of quaint past traditions past. In addition the dictatorship supported and utilized these groups as a way of spreading images of social harmony and peace, as well as to visibly show their appreciation for various marginalized cultural and racial groups, thus attempting to further prove the existence of some sort of racial democracy (Oliveira 2005).

2.5.1 Viva Bahia

In 1962, Emilia Biancardi formed the first para-folkloric Bahian performance group at a time when Afro-Bahian culture was not highly visible or popular, and folkloric forms with strong roots in African-influenced tradition, including capoeira and *Candomblé*, suffered great social and political repression (Milani 2006). In an effort to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of the region, Biancardi had conducted ethnomusicological research in the interior of Bahia during the 1950s, relying primarily on the knowledge and expertise of cultural messengers (*portadores*

de cultura)—older individuals from smaller cities and towns who were experts in local popular manifestations. Based on this research, Biancardi set to the stage traditional popular dances, songs, cultural manifestations, which eventually formed into a repertoire of what would become a base standard as to how to present Bahian, and specifically Afro-Bahian, culture on the stage. As an extreme perfectionist, Biancardi sought to express particular forms of Bahian culture in the most genuine and authentic forms possible, being sure to include in her repertoire many traditions that were on the verge of disappearing (Robatto 1994).

The name of the group, *Viva Bahia*, was not formally set until 1969, at which point it began to tour both within Brazil and internationally. The newly named company performed their repertoire in South America, Europe, the United States, the Middle East and Africa, helping to launch the careers of many Afro-Brazilian dancers, capoeira masters, and musicians. In an interview with Luciano Milani (2006), Emilia Biancardi explains the numbers included in this early repertoire:

It was a work in which dance and songs were reproduced and applied in theatrical performances, with a total respect for the inspiring principles, whether it is the *Candomblé* (where the choreography was inspired directly by the sacred dances of the *Orixás*), the *capoeira* (where the African martial arts are acculturated), the *maculélé*, (recreated with the values of black culture and within the ethical rules of the game), or the *samba-de-roda* (where the *samba*, modified so many times, appears in its original form). (Milani 2006)

In the program from the 1972 *Carifesta* in Georgetown, Guyana, *Viva Bahia* is described as a Brazilian folklore group from Bahia, founded “to increase interest in popular Brazilian culture by means of research and performing without eliminating the spontaneity and authenticity of Brazilian folk music” (Carifesta 1972). The program

announces six numbers including “*Samba-de-Roda*,” “*Capoeira*,” “*Puxada-de-Rede*,” “*Maculéle*,” “*Candomble*” and “*Levada de Lenha*.” Each of the names of these dances, most of which can still be seen today in most remaining folkloric shows in Bahia, is followed by a brief description, including reference to the pieces’ local popularity, historical relevance, African roots, religious foundations, and traditional contexts.

During the early years of *Viva Bahia*, very few of the group’s performers and dancers were formally trained in structured body techniques, such as warm-ups, strength training, stretching, ballet barre work, or body extensions such as those used in Afro-Bahian Dance (Oliveira 2005). It was not until the beginning of the 1970s, when Biancardi invited the dancer, Carlos Moraes, and the choreographer, Domingos Campos, to join *Viva Bahia*, that performers began paying attention to technique. For better or for worse, this shift in training resulted in a shift in the way the dances were presented—moving them away from the simple repetition of learned steps, to dances and movements that were performed by people who were becoming sensitive to understandings of body aesthetics and Western performance styles.

This pioneer group is best known for opening the way for many other para-folkloric groups, and also as the training ground for nearly an entire generation of performers, dancers, choreographers, artistic directors, professionals, and performance masters in Bahia, including Raimundo Bispo dos Santos (Mestre King), Jelon Viera, Neuza Saad, among others. In addition, it was the starting place for Walson Botelho, who would later go on to found and direct the world famous *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*, one of the only remaining para-folkloric dance groups in Bahia today. Similar to Viva

Bahia, but to a greater degree, this group also struggles to balance efforts and pressures to preserve essential traditions and dance forms, while also striving to modernize its technique and style to accommodate to the current political and aesthetic needs of the community and the demands of global art and cultural markets.

2.5.2 O Balé Folclórico da Bahia

Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, as the city of Salvador began to increase efforts to develop into a unique tourist destination, development efforts were focused on architectural improvements, enhancing the city's natural beauty, but also by cleaning up, caricaturing, and highlighting the enticing charm of the "African" character and the color of its people, particularly its lower class population (Riggs 2009). Even today, popular manifestations and Afro-Bahian cultural traditions remain a primary selling point for the tourist industry in Bahia. The main example of this is the popularity and fame of the only professional folk dance company in Brazil, the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*. In Salvador today, the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* hosts a "must-see" folkloric show every single night of the week at 8pm at the *Teatro Miguel Santana*, in the heart of the *Pelourinho*. With its central location, and singular status as the only professional folk dance company in Brazil, the *Balé*, as it is commonly referred to within the dance community in Salvador, remains the primary means through which many people (Bahian, non-Bahian Brazilians, and non-Brazilians alike)

experience the folkloric and African-derived dances of the region, and it serves as a very important launching place for many Afro-Brazilian dancers in Bahia.

Expected and desired or not, this role as a local cultural authority has come with great responsibility, as the group is looked to as a source of knowledge and authentic expression of the region's intangible cultural heritage, in particular the local traditional dances of European, Indigenous and African origin. However, a dance company such as this—one which utilizes symbolic reproductions of cultural traditions in order to maintain a profitable enterprise—ends up constantly teetering on the fine line between valorization and exploitation. In the case of Bahian folkloric and African dance traditions, the dilemma is complicated and amplified when the “African” traditions that the groups rely upon and turn to are, in themselves, enigmatic and there is a very strong push outside the organization to utilize and reformulate these traditions to cater to a developing cultural and ethnic tourism industry.

Since its founding in 1988 by Walson Botelho and Ninho Reis, this company has been consistently performing a core repertoire of standard Bahian and Afro-Brazilian numbers, with additional pieces incorporated each year into their international repertoire, which is different from their nightly shows. It should be of no surprise that the group's core repertoire is nearly identical to that of *Viva Bahia* since, as mentioned above, one of the founders of the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* was a performing member of *Viva Bahia* in the 1970s, as well as a student of Emilia Biancardi, greatly inspired by her research and creative work (Barros de Paixão 2009). As described on the company's website and printed in much of its printed literature,

“the 38-member troupe of dancers, musicians, and singers performs a repertory based on Bahian folkloric dances of African origin and includes slave dances, capoeira (a form of martial arts), samba, and those that celebrate Carnival.”⁵ During their nightly show in Salvador, which has not been changed or adapted in many years, their core repertoire includes many dances originally set to the stage by Emilia Biancardi for *Viva Bahia*, including: the dances from the *Candomblé* (referred to today as the Dances or the Pantheon of the *Orixás*), *capoeira*, *samba-de-roda*, *puxada-de-rede*, and often, but not always, *Maculélé*. These standard pieces are also seen in the group’s international tours, but, as the show in Salvador is only one hour long, the traveling show is expanded to include additional dance and music numbers, many of which are highly creative and some of which include movements that are not local to Bahia or to Brazil.

In this way, one must be careful to not see this group as performing a collection of folkloric dances, nor assume that the forms in which they are being presented are purely local and traditional. While many of these dances contain symbolic elements of the Afro-Brazilian religious and cultural traditions, the *Balé* is recognized for performing creative adaptations of other folkloric dances, such as *Xaxado* and *Bumba Meu Boi*, or distinctly racialized dances, such as *Afixiré* (described in detail in this paper’s Introduction). Some dances, in fact, are founded on dance and musical forms originating within the socio-historical and cultural context of the city of Salvador (Barros de Paixao 2009).

⁵ Balé Folclórico da Bahia website: www.balefolcloricodabahia.com.br/eng/historico.html

In the group's description of their own shows, they make it clear that "The company presents the region's most important cultural manifestations under a *contemporary theatrical vision* that reflects its popular origins"⁶ (emphasis added by author). This nod to contemporary theater is also extended to the strong influence of contemporary and modern dance on the group. In a recent interview, Botelho described the *Balé* as offering dancers "a great diversity of information about many different dance techniques, for example, classical ballet, modern dance, contemporary dance, capoeira, etc. As a result, what we see on the stage is a show that that has a base of Afro-Brazilian dance, in its essence, but seen in alongside and together with other techniques and rehearsed elements."⁷

Looking at and comparing the two main repertoires of the *Balé*, former dancer and current Artistic Director of the *Balé*, José Carlos Arandiba (better known as Zebrinha), describes the nightly show in the Pelourinho as being set and unchanging. He describes the show as a brief introduction to the folkloric and traditional manifestations of Bahia. On the other hand, the international repertoire is more flexible and includes additional numbers based on traditional folklore and popular manifestations (such as Carnival), while always including the group's core repertoire of standard dances. For Zebrinha, an important benefit of the international shows is that people come to understand Afro-Brazilian culture on a deeper level:

For example, in New York I think the show demystifies a little of what makes up afro-Brazilian culture, because the world seems to only remember the image of pretty black and mulatta women with beautiful

⁶ Walson Botelho. Email correspondence with author, May 1, 2011.

⁷ Walson Botelho. Email correspondence with author, May 1, 2011.

bodies and breasts. And when they see the shows, they see that there exists another cultural richness in this country. I think that from there the idea begins to stick, and they explore the other side of the stereotypes of Brazil.⁸

But it is not perfectly clear if these shows actually expose the international audience to a different side of Bahian culture, or if they are simply reifying stereotypes in a new and slightly less exaggerated way. In looking at published reviews of past international tours, it would seem that the impression of Bahia as an exotic place of ethnic and racially mixed, beautiful, vivacious, and talented people is not only alive and well, but is also being reconfirmed through the *Balé*'s performances.

In an article in the *Chicago Sun Times*, Rosalind Cummings-Yeates (2000) wrote her perception of the show, describing the way the grand finale was “as one would expect from a Brazilian dance troupe,” one that emphasized the recreated spirit of carnival “complete with a topless dancer, drummers hopping offstage to play in the aisles, and rousing singing. Leading the audience out of the theater in a dancing, singing throng, Ballet Folklorico of Bahia bared all that represents Bahia: music, moves, and spirit.” In an article in *The Boston Globe*, Ellen Pfeifer (2000) wrote of the audience’s ears being “assaulted” with the loud drumming, while the eyes were “lavished with light and color,” and that the performers themselves constituted the scenery with fantastical costumes and plumage that still covered “a minimum of flesh.” Finally, in an article in the *The Commercial Appeal*, a newspaper based in Memphis, Tennessee, Whitney Smith wrote:

⁸ José Carlos Arandiba. Interview with author, August 25, 2010

Begin with five thundering drummers and two wailing female singers in sparkling floorlength caftans and matching headdresses nearly the size of bushel baskets. Fold in muscular guys in loincloths lunging at each other in combat and muscular women in grass skirts wiggling provocatively onstage. Now you've got the formula for [this] dazzling north Brazilian troupe. (Smith 1997)

While one can sense the tangible appreciation these journalists have for the dance group's performance, much of their description and excitement is rooted firmly in the exoticized, racialized, and sexualized imagery that the *Balé* presents. As a result, it seems that the way international (in this case North American) audiences emphasize and pay attention to these images, particularly those of the exposed and athletic bodies of Bahian "folkloric" dancers, inadvertently serves to reconfirm and propagate stereotyped images of the region, a pattern that would seem to accomplish the opposite of the impact desired and perceived by Zebrinha.

In addition, the *Balé*'s shows are often described and perceived to be of "African" origin, despite the dances being clearly based in a specific and stylized combination of Brazilian folkloric, contemporary-modern, and African-influenced styles. In the same *Chicago Sun Times*' article from 2000, Cummings-Yeates wrote that not only were the dancers talented and exciting to watch, but their performativity and passion, "an important aspect of any successful art form and integral to all *African* genres" was, in fact, "a show in itself" (emphasis added by the author). Her characterization of the passionate dances as exemplary of "African genres" is of particular interest in the context of historical stereotypes and generalizations about Bahia. It is not clear if Cummings-Yates, and many other foreigners who understand Bahia as Africa in Brazil, actually know the region's long history of maintaining

African-influenced traditions, or do they perceive any display of scantily clad black bodies dancing to polyrhythmic percussive music to be ‘African’? The answer is not clear, but the group’s image abroad as primarily representing African dance, not folkloric dance, in Bahia is clear from this newspaper article and others like it.

As one could expect, the 2011 international tour similarly contained dances that highlighted “African” and “Afro-Brazilian” images and aesthetics, and placed an overall emphasis on the dancing black body, complete with exposed flesh, body paint, exposed genitalia, bare breasts, and sensual movements. In a direct reference to the continent of Africa, the *Balé* opened their show with the song “Kwazulu” (written and performed in the Zulu language) as homage to the late Miriam Makeba, who was, according to Walson Botelho, “the voice of Africa for the world.”⁹ Interestingly, the final piece in this year’s show was a number that did not celebrate old traditions from Bahia or from some imagined Africa. Instead, *Samba Reggae* utilized the uniquely racialized carnival celebration of the *blocos afro*, created in the 1970s as part of the region’s effort to valorize and re-Africanize its image (discussed above in Chapter 1). In other words, by appropriating (and folklorizing) the black carnival celebrations of the *blocos afro*, themselves formed from re-imaged symbols of African traditions and Bahian culture, this number by the Balé could be seen as an interesting example of a kind of cultural endocannibalism. While this term refers to the physical consumption of a group’s deceased in an effort to absorb the bodies’ imagined life giving

⁹ Walson Botelho. Email correspondence with author, May 1, 2011.

characteristics, the symbolic consumption, embodiment, and performance of the imagined symbols that make up the simulacrum of Africa.

2.6 To Preserve or to Interpret: Questions of Authenticity and Technique

Dances that do not suffer alterations or changes run the risk of becoming so displaced from their contexts and losing contact with the people, that they simply disappear. (Robatto 2002, 182)

In an interview with Lia Robatto¹⁰ about the current situation of the dance community in Salvador, she describes the way that many, if not most, of the remaining folkloric dance groups, as well as the Afro-Bahian dance groups, are today updating and recreating their choreographies with modern-contemporary and classical dance styles. For her, this trend is quite an interesting occurrence since in other parts of Brazil, such as *Rio Grande do Sul*, there are a great number of active folkloric groups that make a concerted effort to remain as true to their traditions as possible, including the performance of specific songs and dances, with original costumes, hosted in particular spaces and at specific times of year. In contrast, she declares that Bahia is very focused on new things (using the Portuguese word *novidadeira*, which is roughly translated as newfangled), seen in the way that many young Bahian dancers may start out dancing folkloric dance, but then suddenly change styles and begin training and dancing modern-contemporary and classical dance. This change in style, she clarifies, does not simply bring new movement styles, but also a new way of thinking about

¹⁰ Lia Robatto. Interview with author. August 24, 2010.

dance, a new approach with an eye to the future, and a focus on creation and on artistic self-expression.

One might surely wonder why Salvador is, as Lia Robatto describes, a city of new things and new trends. This is particularly interesting since the city is portrayed in history books, novels, as well as the tourist literature, as a very traditional place, where customs have been preserved better than in many other places in Brazil, and some people going so far as to claim that the African traditions in Bahia are better preserved than what is left of ancient traditions in Africa itself. How these two contradictory notions co-exist in Salvador is not perfectly clear. Perhaps it is the history of Bahia as a central port city, where things and people are always coming and going, with new items, goods, songs, activities, games, stories arriving from somewhere else with each boat that arrives. Perhaps it is a reaction to the historical stereotypes of the region—its backwardness, inefficiency, and lazy attitude—which causes people in Bahia to feel anxious to avoid being perceived as *too* traditional or stuck in its ways. Perhaps it is just evidence of a natural transformation of popular culture and knowledge, in this case a move away from simply appreciating long-standing traditions and repeating them in a static form, toward the new generation's updated interpretations of these traditions. Ironically, this process may end up keeping these traditions alive longer, since, as stated above, things that do not change with time and place may suffer the greatest loss—disappearance.

In his book, *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation, and Power*, Anthony Shay (2002) discusses the question of

authenticity as it relates to state and regional folkloric dance companies, concluding that *true* authenticity in staged folkloric (or para-folkloric) shows is simply impossible. He quotes the Artistic Director of the Folkloric Ballet of Mexico, Amalia Hernandez, as discussing the issue of authenticity in a clear moment of double-speak.

She declares:

Authentic? You want authentic? For that you would have to go to the smallest village of my country at a certain hour on one certain day of the year. There outdoors, in the shadow of the church, you would have a true folkloric experience. You might have to wait six months in the village before it happened, but it would be authentic. [...] There is no way to move village dancers directly onto a professional stage. Everything must be adapted for modern eyes—costumes, lighting, steps, *espectaculo*. Without stagecraft and adaptation for size and perspective, the originals look like nothing. (26)

At the very same time, Shay notes that this folkloric company claims hours of research spent gathering and learning dances in the field and studying historical sources, thus validating their authenticity and the genuineness of their staged performances. So how can we justify this inherent contradiction? If it is impossible to authentically portray folkloric dances in a sort of pure or true form, how can they also be understood to be the embodiment of the region or nation's pure cultural traditions?

As discussed above, many dance companies, including the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*, justify this contradiction by describing their works as having roots in multiple styles of dance. For the *Balé* these include folkloric, modern-contemporary and classical, African, Afro-Brazilian, and popular dance styles from Bahia, resulting in a

unique aesthetic blend that is unique to this group, not to Bahia as a state or region.¹¹ In addition, the Balé claims to “seek to maintain tradition in its original form” while also “giving the dancers the possibility to execute it with a greater and improved technique,”¹² which is accomplished by utilizing markedly Western and classical training techniques to build strength, flexibility and aesthetic specificity among its dancers.

This blend can be seen not only in the particular movements that characterize this group’s style of folkloric dance, but also in the impression they leave behind on their audiences. Looking again at international news articles about the Balé’s performances, audience members have often been left with mixed impressions. In an article in the *Boston Herald*, the company is described as being unlike many foreign groups that tour through Boston in the way that, despite its name:

Bale Folclorico da Bahia’s show is not merely an archival presentation of folkloric treasures. This is cultural tradition as filtered through a very contemporary sensibility, with tight choreography and a highly polished theatrical flair. These folks are here to entertain, and that they do. (Campbell 1998)

It would seem that this journalist sees the *Balé* as having created this show for the sake of showmanship and performance, and less for the sake of some kind of authentic cultural expression.

However, in an interesting twist, some dancers and choreographers, see the work of the *Balé* not as stylized creation, but as the expression and preservation of

¹¹ Walson Botelho. Email correspondence with author, May 1, 2011. “In Bahia, the mixture between African, folkloric and modern dance exists insofar as the choreographer or the group has this as a characteristic of their work. There does not exist any mandate that these remain linked. The *Balé* does this because it is our style.”

¹² Walson Botelho. Email correspondence with author, May 1, 2011.

genuine and true folkloric traditions. In a recent interview with Nildinha Fonseca, primary dancer and choreographer for the Balé, she described her understanding of the *Balé's* work:

We, the dancers here, we have this folklore in our blood. More importantly, the proposal is to keep this culture alive because we know that with time these things get worn out. So I believe that my function as a folklorist is to keep it alive, to preserve it. I believe this work is one of the most important ... we must preserve this culture, not let it die out, and not let it become modified.¹³

This is particularly interesting in the way that the use of modern and contemporary techniques in training and in choreography is, perhaps conveniently, *not* seen as a modification to traditional dances. Therefore, it is clear that to some people these modern-contemporary and classical (Western) aesthetics are somehow unmarked, invisible and neutral or even beneficial to the way the dances are presented.

In Bahia, for some dancers and choreographers of Afro-Brazilian dance, this quiet influence of modern-contemporary dance on traditional and non-Western styles of dance has not been an enhancement, but in fact is seen as an aesthetic interference and invasion, imposing techniques and values onto seemingly authentic, non-Western dance styles, in particular, African and Afro-Brazilian dance styles. Afro-Brazilian dance teacher, dancer and choreographer at the Escola de Dança de FUNCEB, Marilza Oliveira, expressed her frustration with the understood need or desire to incorporate Western dance steps into Afro-Brazilian styles. In a recent interview, she laments the incorporation of high, straight-legged kicks, pirouettes, extended legs, relevés, among

¹³ Nildinha Fonseca. Interview with author. August 26, 2010.

other movements into *dança afro* training and performance.¹⁴ Bahian choreographer, dancer, and the first male dancer to graduate from the Dance Department at the Federal University of Bahia, Raimundo Bispo dos Santos (better known as Mestre King), similarly criticizes the Balé for altering traditional dances:

Today, the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* is not dancing the dances how they are. They use a great deal of technique, [making the dances] very stereotyped and the dance has lost a little of its essence. There in the *Balé* there isn't the essence of the countryside. It's not there anymore. Things have transformed a lot. The folkloric dancers used to dance better, and they had a better grip on the cultural traditions. Today, you can see they don't have this anymore.¹⁵

Perhaps these changes in style and aesthetic have been instated in order to improve the selling value of the *Balé's* show, just as folkloric performance are often enhanced, improved and build upon for the sake of showmanship. In fact, Mestre King himself recognizes the power of tourism on the changes that have been made in the *Balé*, as well as other groups in Bahia:

All progress comes with laziness and tourism is good because money comes into the state, but it harms the people of authenticity. If tourists go to go see a folkloric dance group and the capoeira didn't have the high kicks and leaps, they wouldn't like it. [...] I've given up fighting with tourists or tourist guides—dances such as maculélé are simple dances. And now they've been enriched with costumes and choreographies, with big knives. But you should know that the big knives don't have any part in the original dance. They came in later. The person who introduced the knives into maculélé was Emilia Biancardi, to give more emphasis and showmanship for those very tourists.¹⁶

These two cases of dissenting opinions and impressions of the value and authenticity of the work being done by the *Balé* is further evidence of the complicated nature of

¹⁴ Marilza Oliveira. Interview with author. August 24, 2010.

¹⁵ Mestre King. Interview with author. August 28, 2010.

¹⁶ Mestre King. Interview with author. August 28, 2010.

questions of authenticity with regard to staged, choreographed and decontextualized folklore.

In a similar fashion, cultural leaders in Bahia, particularly those in the *candomblé* also have diverse feelings about issues related to preservation and interpretation, particularly with the secular performance of religious rituals and ceremonies. While *candomblé* has only recently been accepted in Bahian society as a religion and not simply a folkloric cult tradition, questions of staging sacred religious ceremonies has been a contentious subject for quite a long time. Today there are two groups of religious leaders, one that feels that any appropriation and staging of the ritual elements of *Candomblé* is unethical and unacceptable. Meanwhile there are other leaders who are more flexible who say that if one part of the elements of the ritual, it is acceptable to use, since if the ritual is performed exactly as it is in the *Candomblé*, it is understood that the Orixás will descend, with people going into trance and becoming possessed. Many of these individuals who support the presentation of Afro-Brazilian sacred rites see this as a means of reaffirming black culture and spreading the black movement in Bahia. However, this issue of being restricted to maintaining only some of the parts of the ceremonial tradition makes it nearly impossible to present an authentic cultural form while still respecting the essence of the dance and avoiding the creation of superficial spectacles with certain forms included for their own sake.¹⁷

¹⁷ Lia Robatto. Interview with author. August 24, 2010.

For many dancers and choreographers in Bahia, the solution to this issue and question of purity and respect for sacred dances is to avoid altogether the task of trying to recreate folklorized dances present sacred ceremonies of the *candomblé*. Instead they work to understand, extract and interpret what they see as fundamental archetypes of Afro-Brazilian and African dances, seeking to preserve not the form of the dances, but their symbolic essences. This alternative and more creative trend in understanding tradition in Bahia has contributed in part to the formation of what is known today as *dança afro*, although it is not without its share of debate and diverse opinions about what and who is performing these essentialized dances in accurate and authentic ways.

Chapter 3 - Dança Afro: Racialized Folklore and Dancing Africa in Bahia

3.1 Imagining and Performing Africa in the Diaspora

Since the precolonial era, Western observers have been fascinated by African performances, and, indeed, often they have looked to these performances for the essences of performativity that might even transcend the need to imagine context, history, or discourse. (Ebron 2002, 10)

Where does African dance come from? For Bahian choreographer and dancer, Rosângela Silvestre, the answer is simple: “*dança afro*, just as the name says, refers to dances from Africa. The movements and rhythms come from the rhythmic traditions from the continent of Africa.”¹⁸ But what is “Africa” if not a politically divided landmass with innumerable unique cultural histories and traditions? In many ways, any attempt at homogenizing or codifying a dance form with such a grandiose name that refers to an entire continent will surely result in a grave inaccuracy. In her book *Dança em Processo*, Lia Robatto (1994) writes:

The continent of Africa has a very rich cultural universe, with manifestations of dance that are quite varied and differentiated. To generalize and standardize all this into one choreographic form would be to ignore a world that only can be understood correctly by way of its totality and diversity. (78)

Similarly, in her book, *Performing Africa*, Paulla Ebron (2002) describes the way that in many ways, performance forms work to produce “The Africa,” a term that “collectivizes Africa and marks the importance of representations that fix the continent as a homogeneous object” (1). In this way, Ebron continues, the continent as a whole

¹⁸ Rosângela Silvestre. Email correspondence with author. May 7, 2011.

becomes both significant and objectified in various contexts, a process that can be seen in the way that the performance of “Africa” and the politics of identity formation based on ideas of “Africa” almost always appear hand-in-hand in a dialectic relationship. Despite being based on generalized ideas of unity and homogenized tradition, the power of the image—the simulacrum—of “Africa” carries enough weight and influence around the world to merit a study of its meaning and place.

This notion of the simulacrum, coined by French sociologist, philosopher, and cultural theorist, Jean Baudrillard, can be understood in simplest terms to refer to a reproduction of a symbol or sign that, in fact, no longer has (or possibly never really had) an original form or referential. It is the imagined image of an imagined image of an imagined image. In his book, *Simulacrum and Simulation* (1994), Baudrillard explains that when a sign or representation loses any connection to an original referential, it takes on a life of its own, and the sign itself becomes the real thing. Baudrillard asserts that, in fact, “History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth. [...] Today one has the impression that history has retreated leaving behind it an indifferent nebula, traversed by currents, but emptied of references” (43). In the context of images of Africa, as they are formed and re-imagined in the African Diaspora, it seems that Baudrillard is correct. The reimagining of Africa’s history, in all its magic and mystery, is the fundamental simulacrum upon which cultural identities have been formed throughout the diaspora.

In his insightful piece, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, Stuart Hall (2003) explains that Africa, that place that is seen as the true and original referential, no

longer exists and its image has been irreversibly transformed. In reference to the ideas of Edward Said and Benedict Anderson, Hall describes this Africa as an imagined geography, one which becomes dramatized through its distance and acquires an imaginative and figurative value that can be named and felt, despite the lack of foundation. Sadly, he writes, “to this 'Africa', which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can't literally go home again” (232). This lack of referential is complicated further when a group, such as Afro-Brazilian dancers, embody (or attempt to embody) their own past and lost traditions through racialized dance forms, re-imagined as authentic, original, and African. In the context of the performance of “Africa” in Bahia, the recreated symbols and re-imagined histories that form *Dança Afro* in Brazil and Bahia do so, in many ways, by relying on this powerful simulacrum.

Additionally, in cases such as Bahia, where issues of race and performance are intimately intertwined, it is important to discuss questions of visibility and invisibility, as well as the implications of different forms of visibility and invisibility. In other words, one must consider who is performing, who is watching, what is the purpose of such a performance, and how are the people being observed and gazed upon being perceived (possibly objectified, appreciated, vilified, or made into a spectacle). Interestingly, being visible and invisible can *both* be seen as negations and recognitions of existence and value, depending on the context and power dynamics at hand. Invisibility can be seen as a potential source of power by enabling a person or group to evade the gaze of more dominant groups, but it can also be seen as a sign of

greater incorporation into the regular, normal and unmarked categories in a particular society.

As David Goldberg (1997) describes in his book *Racial Subjects*, the relationship between social and racial in/visibility is complex. He argues that social invisibility for the less powerful can implicate a lack of existence and uniqueness due to a lack of acknowledgement by dominant groups, while social visibility can enable greater subjective voice and recognition of value. He contrasts these notions to ideas of *racial* in/visibility, in which it is typically understood that the invisible race (white) “could assume power as the norm of humanity, as the naturally given” (84), thus delimiting the less dominant race (blacks) as different, and thus of inferior status. Similarly, in his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, psychologist, philosopher and cultural critic from Martinique, Frantz Fanon (1967), discusses the phenomenon of unavoidable racial visibility of people of African descent, due to the mere exposure of their colored skin. Unlike certain cultural and ethnic groups, like Jewish people, a person with distinct phenotypic characteristics (such as dark skin and African features) cannot avoid being visible and exposed to public perceptions and expectations.

In the context of Brazil and Bahia, this unavoidable visibility due to racial markers is complicated further in its relation to myths of racial democracy, (as discussed in the Chapter 1). According to Fanon, while the black person (or Negro, as he uses generally to refer to all people of African descent) may be accepted in abstract form through rhetoric and social discourse, the reality is that he or she remains heavily stigmatized by stereotypes and racialized expectations imposed from the outside. The

expectation of performed blackness removes an individual's agency and autonomy in forming their own, personal identity based on their work, thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc. Fanon describes this feeling of being created and creating one's sense of self through the dialectic of racial stereotyping. He writes:

A slow composition of my self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me: it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world (Fanon 111).

In this way, an individual of African descent in countries with a history of slavery, and elsewhere, is not able to fully escape racial visibility or the associated expectations and perceptions. By extension, neither is his or her community able to go along unnoticed, strategically invisible or unmarked. In Bahia, one can clearly see examples of this unavoidable racial visibility and a prominent reliance on the simulacrum of Africa in the formation and development of dances that utilize people's race and African origins as central distinguishing markers, seen particularly in the dance style referred to as *dança afro*.

3.2 African and Black Dance in Brazil: A History

According to the *Enciclopédia Brasileira da Diáspora Africana* (Lopes 2004), *dança afro* (roughly defined as African Dance) is defined as “a mode of contemporary ballet with choreographic movements inspired by African-Brazilian dances, notably those of the Orixás (or deities) of *Candomblé*” (227). In Brazil, formal expressions of

“black” or “African” dance are known to have first appeared on the stage in Rio de Janeiro during the 1940s, a time when the city was home to one of the earliest and most prominent black movements in Brazil. While mainly focused on the political, social and cultural aspects related to race issues, the creative side of this movement was driven and lead primarily by the recently deceased Abdias do Nascimento, who founded the Black Experimental Theater in Rio de Janeiro in 1944. The social project and creative works produced by this theater were all part of Nascimento’s lifelong effort to improve the social conditions and society-wide appreciation for black culture in Brazil, fighting against racial prejudices and inferiority complexes through educational, artistic and cultural programs (Hanchard 1994). After the 1947 Black Beauty Contest hosted by the Black Experimental Theater, Nascimento took under his wing that year’s *Rainha das Mulatas* (the Queen of the Mulattas). A young black dancer from Rio de Janeiro, Mercedes Baptista would soon become the premier Brazilian dancer and choreographer of Black Dance (*Dança Negra*) in Brazil. In fact, in the late 1950s, Baptista was selected by the American dancer, choreographer, Katherine Dunham to go to New York to train in North American modern and black dance styles, leaving an irreversible impression and a strong legacy of Modern dance within the Brazilian style of Black or African Dance (Silva 2007).

Even in today’s world of digital archives, electronic books, blogs, and consolidated databases, it is very hard to find a singular definition of this kind of dance. After a thorough internet search, there appears to be one main description of the history of *dança afro* floating around cyberspace, a description that has been

posted and reposted on at least ten different Brazilian blogs¹⁹ about dance and race. With regard to originality or authorship, only one blog seems like a possible original.²⁰ However, in the discussion below the text, the supposed author claims that she has since lost her reference list, all her notes and any memories of where she got all her information. From this, it is not clear if this is a case of an honest computer breakdown and failed memory, or possibly a complete forgery of an imagined and re-created history.

None the less, the text being replicated on these blogs describes the history of *dança afro* as a dance style that appeared in Brazil during the Colonial period, brought over by African slaves who expressed their dance in their religious traditions. The text goes on to describe the general history of certain dances appearing in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the 1920s and 30s that highlight African, tribal, and generally non-Western aesthetic forms. The author pays close attention to the growth of Umbanda and the influence of Katherine Dunham in Southern Brazil as predecessors for the acceptance of African-styled dance in Brazil. The author also makes a clear point that, according to her, African-styled dance only became acceptable in Brazil when it was blended with modern-contemporary and classical styles, so much so that it is actually not just referred to as Black or African dance, but as *ballet*.

¹⁹ A few of the other sites with the complete text or large segments include:

<http://jahevida.blogspot.com/2010/04/historia-da-danca-afro.html>

<http://gustavojunior.blogspot.com/>

<http://dancaeducacao.blogspot.com/>

<http://feirapreta.ning.com/profiles/blogs/danca-afro-brasileira>

<http://www.casadeiemanja.hpg.com.br/dancaafro1.htm>

²⁰ <http://jessicabrandao.wordpress.com/2006/11/08/danca-afro/>

It is interesting to note that both the encyclopedic and the blog descriptions of *dança afro* give precedence and priority to Rio de Janeiro and generally to southern Brazil. While Rio de Janeiro was in many ways the epicenter of black and African dance imagined through the North American lens of modern and contemporary dance, in Bahia, a different kind of dance with the same name appeared in the 1970s alongside the emergence of the *blocos afro* in Salvador.

Similar to the way Black dance emerged in Rio in the 1940s as part of the black movement there, the 1970s in Bahia saw the growth of its own powerful black movement, one which inspired many dancers and political groups to look not only to their roots as people of dark skin and African descent, but more powerfully, to look for directly at the residual influence of their motherland, “Africa,” for inspiration and pride. Also different from the way it was imagined in Rio de Janeiro, *dança afro* in Bahia is seen as not perfectly and consistently linked to modern-contemporary and classical dance and, in fact, despite this dance style’s popularity over the past 40 years, it remains quite difficult to exactly define what *dança afro* is in Bahia.

3.3 Dança Afro in Bahia: Popular, Traditional and Elusive

One could think of *dança afro* as being firmly rooted in loose notions of African cultural traditions and movement styles. Despite its prominent and respected location in the dance community in Bahia, this style of dance consistently skirts around and escapes clear-cut definition. In her insightful article, “*Dança Étnica Afro-*

Baiana: Educação, Arte e Movimento, Afro-Bahian dancer and choreographer, and professor in the physical education department at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Amélia Conrado (2006) discusses the development of *dança afro*, what she calls Afro-Bahian Ethnic Dance, and how it is conceived by its practitioners. From the very start of her piece, she recognizes that this style of dance eludes simple or strict description, due in large part to the way dance teachers are constantly recreating and re-adapting the cultural symbols and basic elements of this dance style. In making her best effort to describe a dance form that is both open to interpretation and often taught and learned on an informal level, she writes:

Afro-Bahian Ethnic Dance represents an expression of the black body, composed of ancestral content recreated informally through educational processes—by way of ethnic organizations—and formally in schools. [...] We have already observed in the streets, classrooms, stages, and spaces exposed to diverse subjects and influences, that this ancestry has been reconceived so that its meanings are open to diverse readings. (23-24)

Even after carrying out a grandiose effort to better understand *dança afro* in Bahia, a project that involved the distribution and analysis of more than 200 surveys of dance teaches and dancers, Nadir Nóbrega Oliveira (1992) agrees with Conrado in the way that, unlike Classical Ballet, this style of dance escapes strict codification. She also found that this dance style is commonly understood to be a mixture of contemporary-modern dance, classical ballet, the dances of the *Orixás*, folkloric dances, Afro-Brazilian dances, and, today, one can even see the influence of dances direct from Senegal and Angola. In her remarkable attempt to delineate what this style is like, Oliveira finds that the only real way to define this dance is to recognize particular

verbs and terms used to describe the movements, as well as certain aesthetic forms and base positions of the movements. For instance, she states that in *dança afro* the feet often rest parallel to one another and dancers are barefoot, the spine is straight but not rigid and slightly inclined toward the front, and the hips are pushed back. The movements are relatively broken, loose and independent, with each part of the body moving along with diverse and varied rhythms. Finally the dancers' bodies often stay in one level (vertically) on the stage or ground. As such, there are few leaps or very high movements as well as very few moments when dancers are rolling on the ground, as compared with modern-contemporary and classical dance, which explores many different levels.

As such, in Bahia *dança afro* is understood to be aesthetically and conceptually distinct from para-folkloric as well as modern-contemporary and classical dance, while there is a mixture of opinions on this subject. Some people, particularly those who are outside of the dance community in Bahia see all variations of *dança afro* as being intimately linked with modern dance, resulting in a form understood as “Bahian Dance with Black Roots.” Furthermore, this mistaken assumption has lead people to see *all* dance forms in Bahia as simply folkloric. Amelia Conrado (2006) in the same article mentioned above makes a point to correct this misleading assumption:

Currently what we can find with respect to the techniques of [Afro-Bahian Ethnic Dance] is that this is not a mixture of African dance with modern dance technique, but what we can say is that recreators of Afro-Bahian dance appropriate some elements of modern dance [into] its training in order to include a certain level of body techniques. (24)

In an interesting twist, Walson Botelho, the founder and Executive Director of the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* has also asserted that the unique blend of the *Balé*'s dances—an explicit coming together of local folkloric dances of various origins with traditional Afro-Brazilian Dance, all based on contemporary-modern technique and training—is also *dança afro*. He describes the *Balé* not as a group that performs only pure folkloric dances, but instead as one that works within “the language of Afro-Brazilian dance, or *dança afro*.”²¹ This may be due to the fact that a great number of the *Balé* pieces are firmly rooted in and make explicit reference to the cultural traditions from the African Matrix (*Matriz Africana*) in Bahia, which includes capoeira, *Candomblé*, and many other African-influenced traditions.

It is therefore clear that the term *dança afro*, both in Bahia and throughout Brazil, continues to exist in a cloud of broad meanings, generally referring to dance styles that make some kind of aesthetic reference—pure and authentic, or not—to African traditions in Brazil or the continent of Africa. In Bahia, two prime areas where one can see manifestations of this style of dance are among the *blocos afro* and in the modern-contemporary dance scene, both of which have been inspired in large part by the movements and gestures of the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*.

²¹ Walson Botelho. Email correspondence with author. May 1, 2011.

3.4 Re-Africanized Aesthetics and Racial Authenticity

Dance for the black person is like an essential life ritual, through which he or she revives customs, myths, principles, initiation principles, creating emotional community bonds, and it speaks of life in *a* subjective, creative and mystical way. In this way, dance strengthens the cohesion, socio-political organization, life lessons, among other things. (Conrado 2006, 19)

In the dance community in Bahia, the symbols, gestures, and essential archetypes of the dances of the *candomblé* religion have become the most powerful marker of African authenticity and the most stable-seeming referential for African traditions in Brazil. However, before making the trip to visit the *terreiros* to seek out the authentic dance forms nestled in religion today, one must be aware of the religion's history of change and transformation.

In her brilliant book on the way that the image of Bahia has been shaped and transformed into a sort of living museum of Afro-Brazilian heritage, Anadelia A. Romo (2010) writes that “Indeed, despite the African heritage of *candomblé*, it is critical to remember that it was not so much faithfully preserved as reinvented” (63). Romo cites the powerful and challenging work of anthropologist J. Lorand Matory (2005), who wrote an extremely thorough book detailing the way that *candomblé* worshippers in Brazil began paying a great deal of attention to their own linkages to Africa starting in the late 19th century, inspired in large part by the Yoruba cultural renaissance in West Africa. In this way, *candomblé* cannot be seen:

as many scholars once assumed, a preservation of an African past transmitted faithfully from before the time of slavery. Ideas of African purity and tradition [...] were not so much a remembered history as a

history being crafted in the late nineteenth century. [...] The end result of this Africanization of *candomblé*, which only further developed in the twentieth century, was to ensure a vibrant place for Africa in Bahia. (Romo 2010, 63)

Although it is not clear exactly *what* was changed or adapted, efforts by *candomblé* leaders in Bahia to rejuvenate and re-Africanize their own traditions (as discussed in Chapter 1) brings into question the validity of any imagined authenticity projected on the dance forms within the religion today, an issue that dancers, choreographers, and dance scholars today ought to, but often do not, take into account.

However, despite questions related to the authenticity of the practices within *candomblé*, the dances of the *orixás* (the deities of the *candomblé* religion) remain seen as some of the most essential and reliable symbols of the African legacy in Bahia. This is due in part to the fact that dance holds a very important place in this religion, where “each step evokes a rhythm, and each song is related directly with the story and with the choreographic evolution just as it is in rural communities in Africa” (Oliveira 1992, 22). As these symbols are seen as a way for people of African descent in Brazil to feel connected with their ancestors’ original rural communities, these dances have gained both popularity and mythical status as powerful gestures. Scholars of *dança afro*, such as Amélia Conrado (2006), see the *candomblé* ceremonies as the most important markers of African culture in Bahia. She writes:

The spirituality of the ceremonies of the *candomblé terreiros* is presented as a characteristic marker of the corporeal expressivity present in the gestures of their adherents and members incorporated or not by their spiritual entities, the *Orixás*, forming in this way a staging/scene of profound and mystical beauty and having in their dances the aesthetic composition of the *axé* that sustains the black ethnicity. That corporeal potential is not restricted to the space of the

terreiro. The territorial transcendence manifests itself by way of the recreation of their dances by social actors who establish in their teachings a movement education. (20)

As such, while it remains difficult to define this style of dance in technical terms, *danca afro* has served as a unique way for Bahian dancers of African descent to construct a separate style of dance that prioritizes the valorization of African roots, one that is based on the aesthetics of the traditions of the Afro-Brazilian community in Bahia, while also founded on a strong base of dance techniques.

Scholars have argued that Brazilian society's long-standing rejection of Afro-Brazilian culture resulted in low self-esteem, negative self-image, sub-human living conditions, and complacent outlook of many Afro-Brazilians in Bahia (Ferreira 1999). However, the pattern of denigration and shame began seeing serious resistance starting in the 1970s, with the appearance in Salvador of ideas of Black Pride and the civil rights movement in the United States. Along with these powerful political ideologies, new carnival performance groups called *blocos afro* were formed as part of an effort to bring the African-influenced cultural traditions as well people of African descent (again, the majority of the population) to the foreground of the annual city-wide celebration. As it might be expected, these *blocos* incorporated symbols and elements from *Candomblé* into their new image of what it meant to be African in Bahia (Guerreiro, 1999).

In addition to their efforts to make symbols of Africa more prominent in the carnival celebrations, a central part of the work of the *blocos afro* is the performance, display and subsequent valorization of the black body. As discussed in Chapter 1, with

the formation of Ilê Aiyê, the first *bloco afro*, a new standard was set as to what African was to look like in Bahia, particularly with regard to music, fashion, hairstyles, and people's openness to African-based religious and traditional practices.

In her analysis of *bloco afro* dance, Anna Beatrice Scott (1997) points out that:

In short, *blocos afro* are performance groups based on looks—skin colors, nose widths, hair textures, eye colors—and a belief that those looks are the signs of a body that needs to matter, be counted, accepted, and celebrated. These signs function as unity-texts and are materialization of the unseen spiritual work that validates and connects all those beautiful black bodies. (260)

Therefore, seeing as the body is understood as the central tool for people to express their Africanness, and that the *candomblé* is also central to understanding the African legacy in Bahia, it is of no surprise that the resulting dances created for their annual carnival celebrations would include *candomblé*-inspired dance. For the *blocos afro*, these dances, also commonly referred to as *dança afro*, and certain musical and percussive forms serve as the most important ways that the *blocos afro* perform their black pride and declare their presence in Bahia.

In her article “The Traces of Samba-Reggae: The Invention of a Rhythm,” Goli Guerreiro (1999) discusses the importance and centrality of *dança afro* in the creation and performance of the *blocos afro*:

The presence of *candomblé* can be observed in the dances prepared within the *blocos afro*. Maintaining the African tradition of inseparability between music and dance, the blocos recreate the dances of the *orixás*. [...] In the context of the *blocos afro*, the ritual dances are stylized [and] cultivated in a much freer way. (107-108)

She continues to describe the way *dança afro* also exercises a strong narrative function in the groups' performances, with some dance numbers choreographed to recreate

specific historical visions, depicting social life of particular places and times, including small villages in Africa where people live in peaceful tribal communities.

Finally, in addition to the creation of dance and musical styles, *blocos afro* often conduct their own research, with varying degrees of rigor and accuracy, on particular countries or political figures from Africa and the African diaspora, which serve as inspiration to the choreographers and songwriters for each year's carnival performance (Guerreiro 1999, 107). In this way, the history of Africa and African people is reimagined through the lens of local "ethics" and then retold through song lyrics and dance forms. This combination of efforts to remain true and faithful to a community's history (which is itself in large part recreated through the melding of various stories, images, impressions, and collective memories) while also creating innovative performance and stories would seem to result in conflicting notions and beliefs. However, notions related to tradition and history are in fact realized in highly creative forms of self-expression, blends that do not seem to cause great conflict for participants, leaders, or members. It is likely that the reason people in these groups are not disabled with debate about authenticity, although it is an issue that is discussed, is because the simulacrum of Africa offers a referential that is stable in the way it is very open to interpretation, allowing each group or individual to understand and utilize its form however they wish.

Although realized in a less political and collective sense, there exists a similar attempt to create *dança afro* through blend historical narratives, creative musical rhythms and dance movements—all harkening back to a primordial Africa. However,

this alternative form exists among dancers and choreographers who train and teach modern-contemporary dance in Salvador, and is a dance style constructed under the stronger influence of Western values of creative expression and technical form.

3.5 Modern-Contemporary Technique in Bahia: The Legacy of Mestre King

Around the world, dances are learned in various ways depending on the place, time and context of the style being shared. In most of the West, dance has historically been understood as a highly technical art form learned in classroom settings, with qualified and trained teachers with specialized knowledge sharing this knowledge and training with their students. In other cultural contexts, dance forms are shared, taught and transmitted in more informal ways, such as group and community gatherings where people learn primarily by imitation and other unexpected and unplanned ways. As described above (in the third section of this chapter), local folkloric and African-influenced dances in Bahia have traditionally been taught and learned in relatively informal ways. However, the strong and increasing influence of Western style learning of dance in Bahia has resulted in more rational and structured teaching methods, which has had a powerful effect on the way dances are performed. This can be seen particularly in the way that the rationalization of dance teaching has triggered a loss in spontaneity of many folkloric and popular dances. In a recent interview with Lia Robatto, she described this pattern of change:

Today, the dances are created in classes, and they are pretty, but they are no longer popular, or really from the people. Today, the learning

style is very rational, with technique and plans. [...] But since it is impossible to fight this trend, one must take the good with the bad. While we lose spontaneity, we gain stability and it is easier to preserve the dances. There are clearer rules to follow and things you can and cannot modify. Of course, this trade off is both good and bad.²²

This insertion of Western rationality and modern-contemporary dance techniques can be seen as a quiet and unconscious effort to clean up and whiten folkloric and African-influenced dance forms through the imposition of standards of aesthetic form which focus on the visual form and result of the dances, and less on any sort of spiritual effectiveness (in dances like those of the *candomblé*) or traditional ways of dancing (like with any of the local folkloric dances). Just as the religion of Umbanda was created in an effort to whiten the traditions of *candomblé* by removing components associated with blackness and black magic and thus make alternative religious beliefs acceptable in Brazilian society at large (Brown 216), so are many dancers and choreographers of *dança afro* in Bahia. While the leaders and members of the *blocos afro* make a strong and highly self-conscious effort to keep their dances and performances true to what they see as African, other dancers and choreographers in Bahia feel that structuring and standardizing *dança afro* with technique, at least for themselves and their students, is a very beneficial thing. These choreographers have created their own styles of dance by utilizing what they see to be the essential and elemental forms, the archetypes, of Afro-Brazilian traditional dances, while rooting their dance styles in techniques from modern-contemporary dance.

²² Lia Robatto. Interview with author. August 24, 2010.

Whether conscious or unconscious, these dancers and choreographers have begun incorporating Western aesthetics and techniques into their expressions of African and folkloric dances, which can be clearly seen in *capoeira*, samba and other performance arts with roots in the experiences of people of African descent in Brazil, including *dança afro*. Interestingly, this absorption of influence of Western logic is often denied or downplayed for the sake of promoting an image of authenticity, found in this case in what are referred to as essences, symbols and basic elements of the non-Western dances. In other words, while many choreographers have been influenced by modern-contemporary dance, it is difficult to get individual choreographers of *dança afro* to admit to this clear influence.

Upon arriving in Bahia and talking to a few people about my project about dance in Bahia, nearly every single person I spoke to recommended I find (and take dance class with) Mestre King. Born Raimundo Bispo Dos Santos in 1943, Mestre King is highly respected in Bahia as an authority on both folkloric and African-influenced dance forms, as well as for his creative modern-contemporary dance works. As the first male dancer to graduate from the dance program at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Mestre King first began performing dance in the 1960s with Emilia Biancardi in her group, *Viva Bahia*, conducting research about local folkloric dances in Bahia. Later he entered the Federal University of Bahia where he learned classical, western and modern-contemporary techniques and was influenced in part by African-American choreographer, Clyde Morgan, who was then a visiting professor at the university. He was later hired to teach dance at the *Serviço Social do Comércio*

(SESC) in Bahia where he subsequently trained nearly the entire next generation of premier dancers and choreographers in Bahia today, such as Rosângela Silvestre, Augusto Omolu, Zebrinha, Nildinha Fonseca, Marilza Oliveira, among many others. While Mestre King openly criticizes the *Balé* for altering traditional folkloric dances through the incorporation of modern-contemporary technique (See Section 2.5.2), he himself is known to have incorporated a great deal of these aesthetics into his productions, including this teaching and presentation of *dança afro*.

Another prominent Bahian choreographer and former student of Mestre King, is Rosângela Silvestre. Born in Salvador, Rosângela received her B.A. in Dance and her M.A. in choreography at the Federal University of Bahia. Trained in the techniques of Martha Graham, Limón, Ballet, she claims Mestre King, Mercedes Baptista, and Clayde Morgan as her primary teachers.²³ She has worked as choreographer and teacher of technical training for the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* and has since been creating her own dance technique, the Silvestre Technique, which she makes an effort to define as distinctly *not* located in any one dance style.

Despite her style often referred to as *dança afro* by others, Rosângela makes it clear that she is *not* a teacher of this style of dance. In an explanation of her ideas about labels for styles of dance, she states:

I prefer to say that dance does not have style. Dance has language that it uses to express and communicate through movement and other elements such as rhythm and words, etc. [...] When I am in the moment of discovering dances, I don't question if I am making a movement of

²³ Silvestre Link: <http://www.silvestrelink.com/rs.php>.

dança afro, modern, ballet, folklore, etc. I allow my body to speak for itself.²⁴

However, while Rosângela makes it clear that she is not a teacher of *dança afro*, she does recognize the powerful influence that African culture has had in Bahia, as in the rest of the Diaspora. She discussed the way that “the African continent has provided the seeds for various manifestations of dance, and this seed has germinated and grown into various forms, depending on the new place where it is planted. These variations make up part of the memory of each person who utilizes these variations creatively.”²⁵ In fact, within her technique and teaching repertoire, Rosângela includes and teaches a class solely on the movements of the *orixás*, according to her interpretation of their essential forms. It is somewhat surprising that these same symbols, so powerfully linked to *dança afro* in other contexts, would be seen as extractable, separable and uniquely stylized movements that merit their own class. She explains this apparent contradiction by defining her technique as a work in progress that is firmly rooted in Brazilian culture, “strengthened with symbols from the African tradition and also all the mythological and spiritual feelings so lived through in a diverse culture rich in movements, rhythms, flavors/styles, colors, etc.”²⁶

Rosângela fits into a unique place in the dance community in Salvador, one where she carefully avoids being placed in a limiting category of one style or kind of dance, while at the same time, building a technique of dance that is heavily influenced by modern-contemporary dance, as well as *dança afro* and folkloric traditions. In this

²⁴ Rosângela Silvestre. Email correspondence with author. May 7, 2011.

²⁵ Rosângela Silvestre. Email correspondence with author. May 7, 2011.

²⁶ Rosângela Silvestre. Email correspondence with author. May 7, 2011.

way, Rosângela's technique can be seen as the inverse or opposite of *dança afro* as we've been discussing it thus far—while she feels free to blend even blend these three styles of dance (and others), she is careful to place her dance within a structure of technique. This structuring of her dance into a particular technique, although she would likely deny it, could be argued to be the means by which her style is replicate and her legacy is kept alive in Bahia and around the world.

Another prominent dancer and choreographer in Bahia is Nildinha Fonseca. A premier dancer and choreographer with the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*, where she has worked for the past 22 years, as well as a very popular dance teacher at the FUNCEB Dance School in the Pelourinho, Nildinha also began her dance training and performance experience with Mestre King. It was with King that she began performing in folkloric shows for tourists in the neighborhoods of Nazaré and in the Pelourinho. While she and the other dancers that worked these tourist folklore shows, were not paid for their work, Nidlinha both recognizes that as an error on the part of the management, but she claims that the training she received with King and the experience she gained performing were invaluable in the long-term. Under King's tutelage, Nildinha and many other dancers developed their skills and became some of the most prominent dancers and choreographers seen today in Bahia, all influenced by Mestre King's aesthetic base of combining African-influenced movements with modern-contemporary dance.²⁷

²⁷ Nildinha Fonseca. Interview with the author. August 26, 2010.

However, while nearly all the dancers and choreographers I spoke with reference Mestre King's influence as positive and worthy of imitation, one dance teacher and choreographer with whom I spoke had different feelings on the subject. Former dancer with the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* and today a popular dance teacher at the FUNCEB Dance School in the Pelourinho, Marilza Oliviera, was also a student of Mestre King. But instead of following in his path and that of Rosângela and Nildinha, Marilza discovered that she did not want to make the same *dança afro*, with the same style and emphasis on modern-contemporary dance:

I discovered that I didn't want to dance anything that looked like what King was making. I think Nildinha's class is really nice, a style that is part of the dance style created by Rosângela and part of the legacy that Rosângela left behind in the *Balé*. [...] For me, Rosângela pushed *dança afro* into the context of contemporary dance, utilizing recreated symbols of the *orixás*. And King similarly worked with the dances of the *orixás* with a few movements changed and mixed a bit with modern dance.²⁸

Instead of wanting to structure *dança afro* within another dance style's language, Marilza believes that "we" (perhaps referring to Bahians, Afro-Brazilians, or black people in general):

carry an ancestral knowledge, and that any dancers who live and work within the black movement can create authentic dance and movements. By just looking around a little, listening a little and striving to understand a little, people can move forward creating dance that reflects and remains true to the traditional archetypes of the *Orixás*, which we were born with, what we carry with us. That's what I did.²⁹

In being asked how she and people like her just know and understand these archetypes, she responded that although she had never been to Africa and she did not

²⁸ Marilza Oliveira. Interview with author. August 24, 2010.

²⁹ Marilza Oliveira. Interview with author. August 24, 2010.

know how Africans dance in the events and ceremonies that take place there, she had heard about it. Similarly, although she was not a practitioner of *candomblé*, she was a researcher who went to the ceremonies with the goal of understanding, to observe how things happen in the sacred space of the *terreiro*. Through this blend of inherited knowledge and focused research, Marilza began to separate and classify what she saw, separating actions and movements of the orixás from the essence of the spirits, their characters, their preferences, and their powers.

People just need to listen, listen to the world since the worlds is asking people to listen and look. I take these archetypes with me into my class. I work with the ground, with weight, and from there I recreate the essence in my dance. [...] And while the influence of contemporary dance on *dança afro* can result in very beautiful, marvelous even, but my interest is in researching, and looking for other things that do not need to be fed and built up. I think that *dança afro* does not need to be fed by classical ballet. We don't need it. We have already brought such richness and beauty, and sometimes we don't look at this and think that we need filling and support, when we don't.³⁰

Marilza's feelings about questions of *dança afro*'s dependency on modern-contemporary techniques is clearly more aligned with people who feel that the African legacy in Bahia is pure and strong enough to exist and continue on without the intervention of technical training and Western aesthetics. Perhaps in the context of the *blocos afro*, these sentiments would have been heard more prominently, but in the FUNCEB Dance School, which is itself closely aligned with (although not formally connected to) the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*, one does not hear these kinds of sentiments talked about so openly. One would expect that these different understandings of the influence of modern-contemporary and classical dance on *dança*

³⁰ Marilza Oliveira. Interview with author. August 24, 2010.

afro would result in more defined divisions and disagreements between dancers and choreographers, but if there was such tension or hard feelings, it was not perceivable to an outsider such as myself and certainly not spoken of so openly, except for a few remarks made by Marilza.

3.6 African Dance as Authentic Local Folklore in Bahia

What happens when dance forms are referenced as *local*, but also powerfully associated with a *foreign* place, such as Africa? As Bahia has re-imagined its local identity as being intimately linked, if not nearly equated, with Africa, what is left of Bahia without this referential?

Instead of somehow resolving these questions, it seems that many people simply live within this prevailing contradiction: on one side, if dance forms in Bahia are seen as locally Bahian, the emphasis on the legacy of locally-driven changes over time gives authority to Bahian people that their dances are uniquely their own. On the other hand, by emphasizing the legacy of pure and original forms that came to Brazil from Africa, Bahian people claim cultural authority by equating themselves with a higher and more original source—Africa, non-Brazil. In the realm of dance and questions of embodied authenticity, this blended understanding of identity and origin, a clear example of double-consciousness (DuBois 2007), is clearly seen in the diversity of dance forms and ways that people talk about dance in Bahia, particularly *dança afro*.

Concluding Remarks - Dancing Africa and the Search for Embodied Authenticity

In this paper, I have attempted to analyze the way symbols of Africa and African traditions have been imagined, utilized, embodied, and performed in dance forms in Bahia—namely, para-folkloric dance, *dança afro* and, to a much lesser degree, modern-contemporary and classical dances. In studying the way these main styles of dance interact in Bahia, it is clear that their boundaries are not clear or set in stone. Similarly, the value that people place on each style separately or on the numerous ways they overlap also varies depending on people's perspectives. Some dancers and choreographers understand dance as an arena to politicize issues of race and cultural valorization (such as with the dances of the *blocos afro*), others see dance styles as aesthetic forms that can and should be used creatively and freely (such as the many variations of *dança afro* that incorporate modern-contemporary and classical dances techniques), and other people who see dance as a way of communicating and promoting a region's complex cultural history to the world (such as the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*).

As I discuss in Chapter 1, Brazil has a long and deep history of being linked to, and sometimes even equated with, the continent of Africa, which is partly the result of the country's intense and long history of importing African slaves. As is often the case of the legacy of enslaved groups, the expression of cultural traditions and practices of Africans and people of African descent in Brazil were (and still are in many ways), at their best, dismissed and downplayed, and at their worse, violently repressed. Finally,

it was not until the early 20th century that Brazilian society began paying attention to the influence of people of African descent and the integral role that they play in the formation of what would come to be known as Brazilian culture. However, not all regions of Brazil are seen to have been influenced to the same degree by the cultural legacy of enslaved Africans, and Bahia, more than any other state in the country is by far seen as the most African state in Brazil. Understood to be the home place of the two most prominent cultural manifestations that make up the African Matrix in Brazil—*candomblé* and capoeira—Bahia has been and continues to be seen today as the utopian African soul of Brazil, the place where black people of African descent are imagined to live and express their authentically African cultural traditions all the time.

Chapter 2 focuses on the way that in Bahia, the creation, production and performance of folkloric dances—African, European, Indigenous alike—is not a simple or purely authentic process. Despite common understandings of the word “folklore,” staged dances must be seen as inevitably transforming and translating the cultures they set out to represent. In addition, as Western dance styles have come to serve as quiet standards of movements and aesthetics, these para-folkloric dances—the term used to refer to folkloric traditions put to the stage—have also become heavily influenced by outside techniques, which have changed the look and feel of their performances.

In the two main case studies of this chapter, the dance groups of *Viva Bahia* and the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia* both underwent their own changes by providing technical training for their dancers. In addition, by traveling and touring

internationally both of these groups are partly responsible for the creation (*Viva Bahia*) and confirmation (the *Balé*) of certain perpetuating stereotypes about Bahia around the world, including racialized, sensual, and exoticized images of black dancing bodies. Finally, the main difference found between these groups is that while *Viva Bahia* focused primarily on accurate portrayals of local folkloric traditions, the *Balé* has expanded the repertoire of folkloric dances to include numbers that refer not only to Bahia, per se, but to Bahia's cultural origin: Africa. With songs from South Africa, dances that utilize and blend African styles of dance in homage to Bahia's cultural source, and performances that recreate the Afrocentric carnival celebrations in Bahia (which themselves utilize recreated and imagined symbols of Africa), the *Balé* has effectively transformed its image to focus on creative expressions of contemporary political and social values, perhaps even more so than on the presentation of traditional and decidedly local forms

In Chapter 3, I analyzed the role of African imagery in dance Bahia as it is realized in a style referred to as *dança afro*. In discussing the ideas of Stuart Hall and Franz Fanon, it becomes clear that, within the African Diaspora, image and symbols of Africa have acquired a very unique place and power, one that was formed in many ways as a reaction to the dismissal and repression of such forms. In Bahia, this trend in re-imagining Africa appeared in the 1970s with the creation of the *blocos afro*, carnival groups that reappropriated and recreated general African imagery, particularly the symbols from the *candomblé*, as powerful sources of inspiration and pride. In an attempt to dance and perform their racial origins each year during

carnaval, these groups have very publically politicized particular movement forms they refer to collectively as *dança afro*.

In a similar attempt to dance a region's ethno-racial origins, many dancers and choreographers in Bahia have attempted to pick out, re-interpret, and creatively present the aesthetic symbols and archetypes of African-inspired dances in Bahia. These dancers though, often do not recognize the way that their creations, seen to be influenced and rooted firmly in local and African aesthetics, have actually been quietly influenced by Western style dances and techniques, seen in the visual forms of the dances, as well as in the very rationalization and standardization of their dance training. Therefore, despite various perspectives that people have on dance and despite the dynamism and constant state of flux in the dance scene in Bahia, it is clear that one thing has remained consistent throughout its history: the reference to and reliance upon specific ethnic and racial markers that link various dance forms to Bahia's perceived origin, Africa.

Through this paper, I hope to have drawn an insightful and accurate portrayal of the dance scene in Bahia and show how the powerful symbol of Africa impacts the way dances are choreographed, performed, and imagined. If I were to continue and expand this research project in the future, an important perspective to take in studying these issues would be to analyze the way the international image of Bahia has been created, perpetuated and reified through the cultural tourism industry and through the internationalization of Afro-Brazilian art forms including both *dança afro* (which is commonly referred to as Afro-Brazilian dance outside of Brazil) and *capoeira*, both of

which are perceived to be firmly rooted in authentic African traditions from Bahia. From the research that I have already carried out, it is clear that the sense of authenticity that is seen as coming from African-inspired and folkloric dances from Bahia is, in part, a fabricated sensation, with innumerable opinions and local perspectives on the issue.

In conclusion, Bahia is a place imagined to be both traditional and African, but this image has been, in many ways, re-imagined and re-created. In Bahia, where marginalized ethno-cultural groups cannot avoid their racial visibility, it would make sense that the performance of racialized folkloric dances or the utilization of African symbols would have the potential to serve as a means by which these marginalized groups become empowered. However, before falling in with the carnival parades and enroll in various African dance classes, we must remember and understand the history and origins of the powerful symbols being utilized, in this case the simulacrum of Africa.

Works Cited

- Andrade, Marilia de, and Katia Canton. 1996. "Overview of Dance Research and Publications in Brazil." *Dance Research Journal* 28 (2): 114-122.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Barros da Paixão, Maria de Lurdes. 2009. "Dança Negra Brasileira na Contemporaneidade: Análise das Criações coreográficas do Balé Folclórico da Bahia e do Grupo Grial de Dança." V ENECULT - Encontro de Estudos Multidisciplinares em Cultura. Salvador, BA: Faculdade de Comunicação, UFBA.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ben-Amos, Dan. 1971. "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context." *The Journal of American Folklore* 84 (331): 3-15.
- Brown, Diana DeG. 1999. "Power, Invention, and the Politics of Race: Umbanda Past and Future." In *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity, and Social Mobilization*, edited by Larry Crook and Randal Johnson, 213-236. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Latin American Center Publications.
- Buckland, Theresa Jill. 2001. "Dance, Authenticity and Cultural Memory: The Politics of Embodiment." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 33: 1-16.
- Butler, Kim. 1998. "Afterward: *Ginga Baiana* – The Politics of Race, Class, Culture, and Power in Salvador, Bahia." In *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics*, edited by Hendrik Kraay, 158-175. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Campbell, Karen. 1998. "Brazilian Troupe's Show Heats up Crowd." In *The Boston Herald*. Published March 14.
- Carifesta. 1972. "Viva Bahia Brazilian Folklore Group from the State of Bahia, Northeastern Brazil." *National Library of Ghana*. Accessed on May 17, 2011. Permanent Link: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00099691/00001>.
- Carta da Comissão Nacional de Folclore. 1995. In *Congresso Brasileiro de Folclore*, 197-204. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: UNESCO.

- Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO), 2011. "Mapeamento dos Terreiros de Candomblé em Salvador." Accessed May 10, 2011. <http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/>
- Conrado, Amelia Vitoria de Souza. 2006. "Dança Étnica Afro-Baiana: Educação, arte e movimento." In *Imagens Negras: Ancestralidade, diversidade e educação*, organized by Maria de Lourdes Siqueira, 17-46. Belo Horizonte, MG: Mazza Edições.
- Crook, Larry and Randal Johnson. 1999. "Introduction." In *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity, and Social Mobilization*, edited by Larry Crook and Randal Johnson, 1-21. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Latin American Center Publications.
- Cumming-Yeates, Rosalind. 2000. "Brazilians Keep Alive African Beat." In *Chicago Sun Times*. Published November 5.
- Daniel, Yvonne. 2005. *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Desmond, Jane C. 1993. "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies." *Cultural Critique* 26 (Winter): 33-63.
- . 1997. "Introduction." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance*, edited by Jane C. Desmond. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Donohoe, Jackie. 2011. "Brazilian Dance Company Showcases Traditional Folk Dances." *The Dartmouth*. Published January 24. <http://thedartmouth.com/2011/01/24/arts/bahia/print>. Retrieved March 23, 2011.
- Drewal, Henry John. 1999. "Art History, Agency, and identity: Yorùbá Transcultural Currents in the Making of Black Brazil." In *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity, and Social Mobilization*, edited by Larry Crook and Randal Johnson, 143-174. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Latin American Center Publications.
- DuBois, W.E.B. 2007. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dunn, Christopher. 2007. "Black Rome and the Chocolate City: The Race of Place." *Callaloo* 30 (3): 847–861.
- Dzidzienyo, Anani. 1999. "Africa-Brazil: 'Ex Africa Semper Aliquid Novi'?" In *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity, and Social Mobilization*, edited by Larry Crook and Randal Johnson, 105-142. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Latin American Center Publications.

- Eakin, Marshall C. 1997. *Brazil: The Once and Future Country*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Ebron, Paulla A. 2002. *Performing Africa*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Edelweiss, Frederico. 1979. *Apontamentos de Folclore*. Salvador, Brazil: UFBA.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. 1999. "A Construção da Identidade do Afro-Descendente: A Psicologia Brasileira e a Questão Racial." *Brasil: Um País de Negros*. Jeferson Bacelar and Carlos Caroso, Eds. Salvador, Bahia, Brazil: CEAQ. 71-86.
- França, Maria José do Espírito Santo. 1999. "Candomblé and Community." In *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity, and Social Mobilization*, edited by Larry Crook and Randal Johnson, 53-58. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Latin American Center Publications.
- Freyre, Gilberto. 1951. *Brazil: An Interpretation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Fryer, Peter. 2000. *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil*. Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Goldberg, David Theo. 1997. *Racial Subjects*. New York: Routledge.
- Guerreiro, Goli. 1999. "As trilhas do Samba-Reggae: A Invenção de um Ritmo." *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 20 (1, Spring-Summer): 105-140.
- Hall, Stuart. 2003. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, 222-237. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Hanchard, Michael. 1994. *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 1999. "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora." *Public Culture*. 11 (1): 245-268.
- Harvey, John J. 2002. "Cannibals, Mutants, and Hipsters." In *Brazilian Popular Music & Globalization*, edited by Charles A. Perrone and Christopher Dunn, 106-122. New York: Routledge.
- Landes, Ruth. 1994. *City of Women*. Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press.

- Lopes, Nei. 2004. *Enciclopédia Brasileira da Diáspora Africana*. São Paulo, Brazil: Selo Negro Edições.
- Matory, J. Lorand. 2005. *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Milani, Luciano. 2006. "Pesquisa para revisão e atualização do livro de Emília Biancardi: 'Ôlelé Maculelê.'" *Portal Capoeira*. Published October 24. Accessed August 10, 2010. <http://portalcapoeira.com/Publicacoes-e-Artigos/pesquisa-para-revisao-e>.
- Oliveira, Nadir Nobrega. 1992. *Dança Afro: Sincretismo em Movimento*. Salvador, Bahia, Brazil: UFBA.
- . 2005. "Grupos Parafolclóricos Baianos: Olhar o passado e entender o presente para redimensionar o futuro." *Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia*. Accessed on November 14, 2010. <http://www.fundacaocultural.ba.gov.br/04/revista%20da%20bahia/danca/parafolclo.htm>.
- Oliven, Ruben George. 2001. "Brazil: The Modern in the Tropics." In *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, edited by Vivian Schelling, 53-71. New York: Verso.
- Pfeifer, Ellen. 2000. "A Bracing Bale Folclórico Bursts into Town." In *The Boston Globe*. Published October 20.
- Riggs, Miriam. 2008. *There's Room for Everyone: Tourism and Tradition in Salvador's Historic District, 1930 to the Present*. PhD diss., University of California, San Diego.
- Risério, Antonio. 1981. *Carnaval Ijexá: notas sobre afoxés e blocos do novo carnaval afrobaiano*. Salvador, Brazil: Corrupio.
- Robatto, Lia. 1994. *Dança em Processo: A Linguagem do Indizível*. Salvador, Brazil: Centro Editorial e Didático da UFBA.
- . 2002. "Memória de uma arte efêmera." *Passos da Dança: Bahia*. Eds. Lia Robatto and Lúcia Mascarenhas. Salvador, BA: Fundação Casa de Jorge Amado.
- . 2005. "Considerações Sobre Arte Contemporânea." *Revista da Bahia*. Salvador: FUNCEB, No. 41, November. Accessed August 8, 2010. <http://www.fundacaocultural.ba.gov.br/04/revista%20da%20bahia/danca/considera.htm>

- Romo, Anadelia A. 2010. *Brazil's Living Museum: Race, Reform and Tradition in Bahia*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press.
- Sansone, Livio. 2003. *Blackness Without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sheller, Mimi. 2003. *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. New York: Routledge.
- Scott, Anna Beatrice. 1997. "Spectacle and Dancing Bodies That Matter: or, If It Don't Fit, Don't Force It." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance*, edited by Jane Desmond, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Shay, Anthony. 2002. *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation, and Power*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press.
- Silva, Junior Paulo. 2007. *Mercedes Baptista: A Criação da Identidade Negra na Dança*. Brasília, Brazil: Fundação Cultural Palmares.
- Smith, Whitney. 1997. "Stunning Bahia Bale Wows with its Muscular Vivacity." In *The Commercial Appeal*. Published May 10.
- Speigel, Marjorie. 1996. *The Dreaded Comparison*. New York: Mirror Books.
- Telles, Edward E. 2004. *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Winant, Howard. 1992. "'The Other Side of the Process': Racial Formation in Contemporary Brazil." In *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture* edited by George Yuidice, Jean Franco, and Juan Flores, 85-113. Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press.