

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Circling With/In The Saint:
Bahian Candomblé's Feminist Poiesis and Dark Horse Kinetics

A dissertation completed in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

by

Mika Lillit Lior

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance Studies

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Professor Anurima Banerji, Chair

Rooted in West and Central African, Amerindian, and popular Catholic influences, Candomblé constitutes a set of ritual practices that cohered among enslaved Africans and their descendants on Brazil's sugar plantations between the 16th and 19th centuries. Across a range of traditionalist and marginalized genres, Candomblé practitioners use ritual dance to invoke and interrelate with African Diasporic and syncretic divinities. This dissertation project investigates how devotees in Bahia—Brazil's colonial capital and Candomblé's formative region—marshal ceremonial dance choreographies to produce revisionary histories, articulate mother-centric body politics and authorize minoritized social actors' illegitimized pleasures and desires.

Based on extensive ethnographic field work, choreographic analysis and historical inquiry, this project approaches ritual dancing as a site of knowledge production and political expression for Candomblé's primarily Afro-descendent, women practitioners, as well as male and trans subjects who are feminized through Candomblé's gender coded logics of mediumship. Whereas ethnographers have generally focused on Candomblé's Africanist-oriented *Orixá* traditions as practiced in the dominant Candomblé houses of Bahia's capital city, Salvador, this

dissertation includes outlying, heterodox temples and their homages to hybrid spirit entities known as *Caboclo* and associated with Brazil's Amerindian Tupi peoples and with mixed-race Afro-Indigenous cowboys. This expanded view allows for the foregrounding of Candomblé's stigmatized Caboclos and their understudied samba dances at temples excluded from scholarly and popular imaginaries of Afro-Bahian religion because of their outlying locations, cultural heterogeneity and transgressive performances of gender, sexuality and national identity.

Building on emic terms of spirit embodiment to propose the model of "circling with/in the saint" (*rodar com* or *rodar no santo*), this dissertation intervenes in representations of Afro-Atlantic religion that rely on the trope of "possession." As a local, movement-oriented and reciprocal process through which devotees interrelate with their guardian entities, circling with/in the saint encompasses the original concepts of Candomblé's *feminist poiesis* and *dark horse kinetics* in order to apprehend how ritual choreographies activate counter-hegemonic discourses in Brazil's systemically racist society with its roots in plantation slavery. Linking matri-focal ontologies with circular, cyclical choreographies used for invocation, Candomblé feminist poiesis fosters performances of ritual gender fluidity that contravene patriarchal norms and valorize procreativity outside of the domestic sphere. While the feminist poiesis informs Candomblé's spectrum of traditionalism, dark horse kinetics features in Caboclos' unruly sambas, layering onto the feminist poiesis as its disjunctive ancillary. Dark horse kinetics include fall and recover (*barravento*), loose (*solto*), broken (*quebradinha*) and driving qualities of motion (*puxado*). Together these improvisatory aesthetic politics destabilize hierarchical regimes within Candomblé and in the broader Bahian society, working to unfix exclusionary discourses of Bahian state independence and modern Brazilian nationalism and drawing on repressed sexualities as contested sites of power to articulate sovereign claims.

The dissertation of Mika Lillit Lior is approved.

Susan Leigh Foster

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2021

To my grandmothers Miriam and Florie

To Mãe Oba, Mãe Nilzete and Dona Cici
and to all the matriarchs
past, present and emerging.

To Tempo

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racism and homo/lesbo/and trans-phobic violence. Life in Bahia turned upside down during my 2018 fieldwork year when, on the heels of feminist Afro-Brazilian human-rights defender Marielle Franco's assassination, a right-wing government came into Federal power while the leader of the Workers' Party remained jailed as a political prisoner. My hope is that this project contributes to the racial justice struggles being fought on the ground and to the recognition of Afro-Bahian and Afro-Brazilian citizenship.

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INTRODUCTION

***Aberturas:*¹ Offerings for a Study of Candomblé's Body Politics**

É é, eu cheguei agora, é é eu cheguei agora

Todo banhando de ouro, arrundiato de joias X2

É é, I am here now, é é, I am here now

All bathed in gold, and covered in jewels X2

-Sung by Pena Verde (Green Feather) Festa de Caboclos, Lauro de Freitas, Sept 1 2018

An incorporated spirit entity, a *Caboclo* named Pena Verde, sang this song of arrival before performing a quick-paced, light-footed solo samba dance at a Candomblé festival in Bahia, Brazil. Three percussionists accompanied the dance on goatskin *atabaque* drums, while initiates and visitors picked up the chant. Soon after, Pena Verde swept members of the crowd into an invocation circle around the perimeter of the courtyard, calling for more Caboclos to join the festival by manifesting in the bodies of their present human devotees.

The Caboclo are hybrid gods associated with Brazil's Indigenous Tupi peoples and with mixed-race Afro-Indigenous cowboys from colonial and postcolonial histories of Bahia. They are cultivated and embodied in Candomblé, a network of ritual practices cultivated by African and Afro-descendent actors brought to Brazil through the transatlantic slave trade between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pena Verde's performance illustrates a signature dynamic of Candomblé: the embodiment, or incorporation, of syncretic divinities such as Caboclo, as well as African-identified divinities, by devotees. The Caboclo festival described above took place on

¹ Translates to openings, but is used in Candomblé to refer to offerings that initiate ritual proceedings.

² Popularized in late 19th century Brazil, Spiritism follows the doctrine of Frenchman Allen Kardec (Moreira-Almeida 2005). This is a condensed and not exhaustive listing of Candomblé's most cited influences.

³ i.e. Bastide 1960; Verger 1976; Parés 2013; Castillo 2010, 2017; Reis 2001; Rabelo 2014; Capone

the grounds of a traditional Candomblé house or *terreiro*, in a suburb outside of Bahia's capital city, Salvador. The indoor sanctuary of the *terreiro* is reserved for ceremonies dedicated to the *Orixá*, Candomblé's West African deities, whose symbols and discourses are associated with legitimacy and orthodoxy in the world of Afro-Bahian religion.

This dissertation addresses ceremonial choreographies including incorporations and invocations of Candomblé's *Orixá* and *Caboclo* at urban, suburban and rural *terreiros* in and around the metropolitan center of the state of Bahia, Candomblé's formative region in Northeastern Brazil. Encompassing West and Central African, Iberian Catholic, Amerindian and Spiritist influences,² among others, Candomblé's social and aesthetic structures are shaped by lived experiences of enslavement, transatlantic travel, inter-cultural exchange, abolition, and identity formation in Brazil. Additionally, Candomblé's progenitors – African and Afro-descendent specialists and their collaborators – adapted their practices to the diverse needs of enslaved, free and freed constituents who co-mingled in Bahia's cosmopolitan colonial and postcolonial worlds. Attending to ceremonies in orthodox and heterodox Bahian Candomblés, my project investigates how practitioners – primarily Afro-descendent women, as well as male and trans subjects who are nevertheless feminized through Candomblé's gender coded logics of mediumship – mobilize ritual dancing as an active process of knowledge production, political expression and identity construction. Whereas many ethnographers of Afro-Bahian religion have focused on Candomblé's orthodox *terreiros* and their traditionalist *Orixá* protocols, this dissertation includes outlying, heterodox *terreiros* and the understudied samba dances featured at

² Popularized in late 19th century Brazil, Spiritism follows the doctrine of Frenchman Allan Kardec (Moreira-Almeida 2005). This is a condensed and not exhaustive listing of Candomblé's most cited influences.

their festas, in order to expand views on Candomblé's choreographic expressions of gender, sexuality and race as these markers intersect with constructions of class and national identity.

Although the institutional development of Bahia's Afro-syncretic religions has received significant scholarly attention,³ Candomblé's dance and performance aesthetics have been generally overlooked for the socio-political import in the histories that they conjure. In particular, Candomblé's choreographies reveal multifaceted constructions of Afro-centric, feminized authority, and of repressed sexualities as contested sites of power that intersect with colonial formations of race, Indigenous claims to sovereignty, and the emergence of the Brazilian nation-state. Since in Candomblé, devotees of any gender may become embodied by a feminine, masculine or, at times, two-gendered deity, these contexts are especially salient for investigating gender flexibility and multiplicity, and require new culturally-specific theories that can account for a range of extra-ordinary gender presentations (Banerji 2018).

At the same time, since the mid to late 1800s, Candomblé has been largely constituted by matrilineal leadership structures that foreground women's procreativity outside of the domestic sphere.⁴ While scholars have attempted to bolster (Sterling 2012; Landes 1947), qualify (Reis 2001; Castillo 2017) or disprove (Matory 2008) the popular consensus on Candomblé's veritable matriarchal origins, through statistical analyses and comparison to related Afro-Atlantic religious societies, my dissertation complicates and contributes to debates about Candomblé's gender ontologies by analyzing dance principles and dynamics in relation to the social structures of four terreiros along a continuum beginning with one of Bahia's oldest, centrally-located and most

³ i.e. Bastide 1960; Verger 1976; Parés 2013; Castillo 2010, 2017; Reis 2001; Rabelo 2014; Capone (2010) and others.

⁴ Butler 2010; Sterling 2012.

recognized terreiros and moving progressively out towards the city's periphery and finally to Itaparica Island, across the Bay of All Saints from metropolitan Salvador.

This expanded view allows me to explore Candomblé's marginalized Caboclo practices and to highlight sites that have been excluded from scholarly and popular imaginaries of Afro-Bahian religion because of their outlying locations, culturally heterogeneous formations and transgressive performances of gender and sexuality. Building on emic discussions of spirit embodiment commonly employed by practitioners, I propose *circling with/in the saint* as a local, movement-oriented and mutually reciprocal process by which devotees interrelate with a diversity of guardian entities. Under the auspice of circling with/in the saint, I theorize the original concepts of Candomblé's *feminist poiesis* and *dark horse kinetics* to apprehend how practitioners mobilize a range of differentiated ceremonial dance aesthetics as forms of knowledge construction and socio-political contestation. Together with Candomblé's alternative economies of subjectivity and community, these ritual techniques operate as counter-hegemonic discourses in Brazil's systemically racist society with its roots in plantation slavery.

1. Historical Background

The lands that comprise the South American country of Brazil were inhabited by numerous Indigenous nations including the Tupi peoples, who inhabited most of the Atlantic coastline of the area when Portuguese settlers arrived in the early 1500s. Established as a port city facing the Atlantic Ocean's Bay of All Saints in 1549, Salvador da Bahia operated as Brazil's colonial capital until the Portuguese administration's relocation to Rio de Janeiro in 1763. Colonists depended heavily on Indigenous forced labor until the importation of African bondspersons began in the mid-sixteenth century. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries,

enslaved, freed and free Africans and Brazilians of African descent in colonial Bahia intermingled with White Portuguese seafarers and plantation owners and with Amerindian inhabitants. Devotional and occult practices from popular Iberian Catholicism, Islamic religion brought to Brazil by Yoruban Muslims (Malês) and Indigenous Brazil and African traditions circulated among Bahia's cosmopolitan and racially stratified populations. Candomblé emerged within this intercultural matrix.

During the transatlantic slave trade era, Brazil received more African bondspersons than any other nation, estimated around five million, and more slaves passed through Bahia than through any other New World port, with the single exception of Rio de Janeiro (Ribeiro 2008). Enslaved African workers formed the foundations of Brazil's sugar plantation economy, the colony's primary export until the mid-seventeenth century.⁵ Today, Bahia is recognized as the birthplace and epicenter of Afro-Brazilian religion, dance, music, and martial traditions of capoeira. However, Bahian Candomblé is not totally determined by the "Afro" in Afro-Brazilian. Candomblé also developed in negotiation with Brazil's patriarchal plantation society and systemic racism, regional and national identity formations and Afro-Atlantic conceptions of women's agency and ritual gender fluidity.

Seen as insurrectionary and degenerative to European codes of decency, Afro-Brazilian religious manifestations were suppressed and policed under Bahia's officially Catholic colonial administration. Brazil proclaimed Independence on September 7th, 1822, signaling the inauguration of the Empire, a unitary state governed under a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary system. However, Bahian territory was contested until Portuguese troops were finally expelled on July 2nd, 1823, making Bahia the last province to join the newly declared

⁵ Schwartz 2009.

Empire. Beginning in 1824, commemorations of Bahian Independence Day in Bahia featured a feathered “índio,” a Caboclo statue, as a central figure of parades through Salvador. These annual festivities fostered nascent Caboclo Candomblés of the city since practitioners could take advantage of legal loopholes in state policies to cultivate their Caboclos as “local divinities” of the streets in these annual municipal festivities.⁶ A few years later, around 1830, three African priestesses of Yoruba origin founded the *Casa Branca de Engenho Velho*, widely recognized as Bahia’s first terreiro (Butler 2010, 140; Cici interview Aug. 2018). Then, after the 1835 Malê revolt, led by enslaved Yoruban Muslims and one of the largest scale slave uprisings in the history of the Americas, a wave of Africans living in Bahia traveled back to the West African coast, bringing with them divinities from the Candomblés and expanding the transatlantic influence of Afro-Bahian religiosity. One of these travelers was Iyá Nassô, a founder of Casa Branca, who later returned to Bahia. In 1850, an iyalexá from Casa Branca established another historic Candomblé, the Gantois (Castillo 2017). These were incredible acts under the Empire’s regime, whose constitution declared Catholicism the official religion and prohibited the erection of non-Catholic holy buildings.

Brazil continued to base its Empire on slavery until 1888, when the nation became the last on earth to declare official abolition.⁷ Nevertheless, legal emancipation did not confer full citizenship upon Bahia’s postcolonial Afro-Brazilian subjects. Instead the reins on African collective gatherings and healing activities were tightened under the 1890 criminal code implemented by the military government, which, fearing the political threat represented by an emancipated Afro-Bahian social body, seized power and proclaimed Brazil’s first Republic,

⁶ See Alberquique 1999.

⁷ Slave trafficking became officially illegal after 1831.

which lasted until 1930 (Parés 2013; Sansi 2007). While this period saw industrialization and an influx of European immigration to the South, encouraged by the regime's "whitening" policies,⁸ Bahia became increasingly culturally and economically marginalized from the nation's center in Rio. Bahian officials of this period undertook a project of urban reform to "civilize" the city, which targeted "mulheres do povo," mostly Black, poor women that did not conform to seigniorial ideals of civic matrimony (Filho 1999).

During Bahia's post abolition period, Candomblé's secret societies and subversive, "alternative spaces of blackness"⁹ ascended onto the public stage as repositories of Bahia's African cultures.¹⁰ United by their shared *nagô*, Yoruba-identified roots and divine pantheons, a triad of matrilineal Candomblés and their priestesses, rose to prominence; the Casa Branca, Gantois and another sister-house, Ilê Axé Opo Afonjá, founded in 1910 (Johnson 2002). Despite Candomblé's syncretic configurations, the high priestesses of these houses were protagonists in the formation of new, pan-ethnic African identities connected to their ancestral and liturgical lineages. The ritual protocols of their houses, authorized by intellectual authorities and by the granting of national heritage status, became valorized as *the* legitimate form of "pure" Afro-Brazilian religion in contrast to Caboclo practices, seen as mixed and corrupted by European, indigenous and capitalist symbols and value systems.¹¹

In the 1930s, Getulio Vargas became the provisional head of the new Republic and helped initiate a set of transformational shifts in Brazil's regional and national configurations.

⁸ Influenced by scientific racism, these policies aimed to progressively eliminate the Black population.

⁹ Harding 2000.

¹⁰ see Anadelia Romo (2010) for a fuller discussion of this process.

¹¹ Popular understandings of Candomblé as female dominated and tolerant of male homosexuality, based on the gender divisions of these *nagô* houses, probably cohered at this time (Butler 2010, Reis 2001).

Vargas promoted new nationalist, modernist discourses; at the same time Brazilian intellectuals, led by Gilberto Freyre,¹² reframed the nation's race "problem" as its own uniquely modern, mestiço identity, due to African and (to a much lesser extent) Indigenous cultural contributions. State politicians needed to position themselves within emergent national narratives and formed contrapuntal configurations of Bahian regional identity or *baianidade*, which embraced symbols of African culture and religion as part of Brazil's African past. Later in the twentieth century, activist reclamations of Candomblé for Bahia's Black liberation struggles rearticulated the practice's racial and political constructs while, in some respects, affirming the same program of essentialization (see Pinho 2010). Since the 1980s, transnational movements to inaugurate a universal Afro-diasporic religion based on Yoruba referents have mobilized Candomblé's Africanist symbols, while excluding codices of Indigenous, popular Catholic and Semitic influences.¹³

Candomblé practitioners maneuver within this field of intersecting transnational, nationalist, regionalist, racialized and politicized identifications. The national and global popularity of Afro-Bahian cultural expressions has not resulted in significant improvements for the majority of the practitioners' quality of life. Rather, Bahia has remained economically and racially marginalized in relation to southern Brazil. Since October 2018, when Brazil's populist right-wing government, led by president Jair Bolsonaro came to power, many of Candomblé's predominantly Afro-descendent and Afro-Indigenous practitioners have contended with the rolling back of progressive policies meant to support low-income families, and the authorization of increasing levels of white supremacist, misogynist and homo- and trans-phobic violence.

¹² Freyre's watershed manifesto, *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933) exemplified the historical shift in scientific thinking about race and reframed Brazil's miscegenation as a positive process by which the best cultural traits were shared across racial lines.

¹³ See Capone 2011; 2016.

These political moves have served to further consolidate hegemonic arrangements of race, gender, sexuality and class in Brazil. I argue that Candomblé devotees make use of its choreographic resources to assert counter-hegemonic discourses that legitimize many practitioners' non-normative identifications and that critique hetero-patriarchal norms. While I do not assert that Candomblé praxis emerges as a direct political response, ritual enclaves operate as subaltern spaces whose vital roles in practitioners' lives has only intensified. Indeed, Candomblé's subaltern sites, though they do resist hegemonic social arrangements, also participate generatively in the making and organization of transformational worlds, wherein the "trans" in transformation links and organizes crossings of gender, sexuality, race and subjectivity at the intersection of vertical and horizontal ritual coordinates.¹⁴

2. Circling With/In The Saint

The construct of circling with/in the saint is central to Candomblé's signature processes of divine embodiment and operates across the ceremonial complexes that I am studying. Whereas many ethnographers attend to Candomblé's initiation rites (i.e. Johnson 2002; Rabelo 2014; Capone 2019), my dissertation focuses on ceremonial festas as focal points of the ritual year. During these critical occasions, the host terreiro can assert and confirm initiatory hierarchies, instruct adepts and the divinities to whom they are consecrated in the temple's procedural regulations, and expand social boundaries and networks of visibility in the public sphere. The manifestation of invited spirit entities in their human devotees is the primary purpose around which sessions and festas are organized.

The characteristic order of events for a ceremonial festa remains intact across the range of practices that my dissertation investigates, although details such as duration, rhythms, order of

¹⁴ Andrew Apter. Personal Communication. March 3, 2021.

invocations, clothing and ritual foods vary according to the household and occasion. The following description offers a skeletal and not exhaustive layout of a prototypical festa. In each instance, ceremonial arrangements begin with intricate preparations for the devotees and spaces involved, including ritual cleansings (*limpezas*), the application of a powdered herb mix (*pemba*) in cosmographic designs to the *terreiro* grounds and significant points on a devotee's body, and dressing in elaborately tied ceremonial whites. In most *terreiros*, sacrificial offerings of libations, fruit and animals – often fowl and, more rarely, a goat or cow – nourish the deities and cement their mutually reciprocal relations with the devotional community. Importantly, sacrificial animals also feed the initiates, visitors and guests. Practitioners meticulously prepare the animals according to alimentary regulations, while viscera, feathers and other parts make up paradigmatic offerings to the gods.¹⁵ These stages precede the arrival of guests to the festa – devotees from neighboring *terreiros*, clientele, family members, invited members of the public, and area residents. Most *Candomblés* have a modest seating area with wooden benches on the sides of the *barração* (sanctuary), with designated areas for women and men to sit separately.

Festas can commence at any time of day but most often begin in the evening. The *xirê* or invocation circle calls in the house's guardian entities through percussion, song and choreographic codes that salute each of the deities and organize them in a sequence. In these dances, *rodantes*, those initiates who circle with their saints, as well as caretakers and elders proceed in single file around the perimeter of the sanctuary. The invocation circle culminates when the honored entities embody their *filhas* and *filhas de santo* with a series of seemingly cacophonous movements that contrast with the even tempo established through the invocative

¹⁵ Elizabeth Perez's *Religion in the Kitchen* (2016) elaborates on how micropractices of the ritual kitchen in Afro-Cuban Lucumi religion (like butchering and chit-chatting) equip practitioners with skills, dispositions and habits necessary for religious norms to be internalized and then reproduced, effectively "seasoning" them into social relations and signifying systems of Black Atlantic religions (9).

movements. According to the temple's codes of conduct, when uninvited entities arrive they may be led to an internal room where an elder converses with and, likely, dispatches the agency in question. Dances of spirit entities ensue for the next several hours, depending on sets of factors including the number of divine agents, their movement and interactive dynamics and their interests. As the dances of the incorporated entidades continue, Orixá and Caboclo alike salute the passageways and entrances of the sanctuary, exchange hugs and sometimes whispers or messages with attendees, and food is served.

Festas also serve as opportunities for *mães* and *pais de santo* to instruct devotees and their divinities on appropriate conduct and socialize the *filha/os* and their *santos* into the terreiro's order. Candomblé's kinship networks locate devotees in relation to their guardian deity or "saint" so that a priestess is a mother of the saint or *mãe de santo*, a priest as a father or *pai de santo*, and an initiate as a daughter or son, a *filha* or *filho de santo*. Devotees are people of the saint or *povo de santo*. As Candomblé constituents in Bahia and across Brazil are self-consciously redefining the grounds on which ideas of Africanist religiosity are fixed in Brazil, some practitioners in Southern Brazil have asserted a preference for the usage of *povo de axé* instead of *povo de santo*, building on the central Yoruba-Atlantic concept of ase, axé in Brazil – metaphysical muscle or the "power to make things happen"¹⁶ – and the Yoruba titles of *iyalorixá* (mother of the Orixá) and *babalorixá* (father of the Orixá) in place of the Lusophonicized *mãe* and *pai de santo*. Although I grappled with the question of embracing or excising the "saints" in my analysis, I elected to maintain the use of *santo*, as a word that traces in linguistic form the legacies of Portuguese colonialism and Afro-Catholic syncretism on Candomblé, because it features most commonly in emic discourses and most accurately reflects the language of my interlocutors' descriptions across regional and ethnic affiliations in Bahia.

¹⁶ Robert Farris Thompson 1983, 5.

This dissertation project intervenes in the history of how Candomblé has been represented, a locus of Afro-Diaspora research, by attuning to indigenous discourses – including interview testimonies but also casual conversation, oral histories, dance lexicons and material culture. As part of efforts to decolonize representations of Candomblé, I develop culturally specific theories based on spoken and non-verbal languages of practice. Candomblé scholars (i.e. Landes 1947; Herskovits 1961; Bastide 1960; Johnson 2002) have viewed its processes of divine incorporation through the analytic category of “possession.” Rather than reproducing the anthropological trope “possession,” despite its demonstrated usefulness across a range of geographical sites and magico-religious practices, I invoke the terminology of “circling with/in the saint” as a direct translation of Candomblé’s Brazilian Portuguese idioms of incorporation. A medium is a *rodante* or one who circles, and the act of embodying a divinity is *rodar com* (to circle with) or *rodar no* (to circle in) *o santo* (the saint).¹⁷

Circling with/in the saint – *rodar com/no santo* – is a culturally specific ontology of spirit embodiment as a relational, choreographic and world-making practice. Without discounting the usefulness of spirit possession as a theoretical terrain, I intend to challenge the power relations inferred by the appellation of “possessed,” which I rarely heard used by Candomblé practitioners, and which invokes images of enraptured subjects flailing uncontrollably, or at least, seized by a force that comes from outside of the body. According to religions scholar Paul Christopher Johnson, spirit possession “remains the standard anthropological classification for ritual events in which a nonhuman entity is understood to *displace* the human person in a given body” (2014, 4, italics mine). In contrast, circling with/in the saint describes an intersubjective,

¹⁷ Additionally, I employ vernacular terms that emphasize local processes of meaning making and invite potentially mutable interpretations, including entities, guardians (*dono/as*), and divinities (*divinidades*). My formulation also draws on Bahian Priest and sociologist Aragão’s (2012) theorization of incorporation as “circling with” an “Other” (“o Outro”).

mutual joining together propelled and attenuated through movement; more specifically, locomotion of a body along circular pathways.

The gist of “possession,” which connotes “ownership by, control over, or physical occupation of” a devotee (Johnson 2014, 2) inappropriately reduces Candomblé’s processes of transmission to unidirectional movements of agency.¹⁸ While the third meaning, that of physical occupation, resonates with emic descriptions of incorporation, the first two invoke experiences that, generally, correspond to novice experiences of spirit embodiment that are not globally applicable to Candomblé’s range of phenomenological expressions. Practitioners’ understandings of ritual embodiment are nuanced, context-dependent and scaffolded into the design of progressive stages of initiation. Through Candomblé’s carefully structured initiatory passages, in fact, divinities become socialized to a temple’s ritual order so that initiates’ experiences of material engagement with their divinities shift gradually over time from uncontrollable and unpredictable to formally-sanctioned, more predictable forms of trance induced by invocation and other specified events.

My dissertation expands on the efforts of recent ethnographies to alternatively frame the relational dynamics of subaltern ritual processes, while generating locally specific terminologies for the study of Bahian Candomblé. Applying a comparative lens to African Diasporic Caribbean and Atlantic dances, Yvonne Daniel deems the “human body that has been transformed by a

¹⁸ African Diaspora dance scholar Yvonne Daniel agrees. On “spirit possession” she declares: “I think these words are too closely aligned with pejorative descriptions and shallow understandings of African-descendant cultures... Since I look primarily at dancing bodies, I use their other terms, “manifesting spirit,” “transformation,” or “transcendence” into an altered state” (in Zutshti 2017). On the other hand, Andrew Apter notes that in Yoruba ritual, devotees incorporation as a process by which a devotee ceases to become “owner” of oneself, just as the day of, and the areas overtaken by, public Orisha festivals, “no longer belong to themselves” (personal communication, March 2021). These perspectives, I suggest, do not contradict. By circling with/in one’s saint, practitioners do give up sole proprietorship of their own bodies/selves, since that ownership or agency becomes distributed, as I explain shortly.

spiritual incorporation” one that is “supra-human” (2011, 16). In her exploration of Cuban Santeria as a diasporic, transnational assemblage, Aisha Beliso-de-Jesus (2015) coins the expression of “copresences” – spirits, deities, priests, video technology and religious travellers that act as spiritual agents— as Santeria ontologies in which a multiplicity of beings are felt and social figures of a past are made present (2015, 9). Emerging within a complex racial-historical matrix, through which colonized racial subjects were and are denied corporeal autonomy (29-30), the idea of copresence intersects and interconnects multiple assemblages of power, challenging hierarchies of animacy and configurations of space-time.

Along these lines, dance scholar Anurima Banerji argues for a similarly non-linear, pluralistic view of mahari dancing in India’s Jagannath temples. In contrast to Beliso-de-Jesus’s copresences as constitutive of “racial and sexual assemblages,” Banerji demonstrates how the dancing body of the Jagannath cult linked deities and the temple into “corporeal geographies” through which the body of the dancer would become “distributed,” an idea that draws on anthropologist Alfred Gell’s theories of distributed personhood (Banerji 2018; 35, Gell 1988). Building on Banerji, I argue that Candomblé’s choreographic praxes feature the distribution, rather than displacement, of personhood and bodily presence (2018), while remaining attuned to how Beliso-de-Jesus’s notion of assemblages, as opposed to conceptions of a unified diaspora, calls attention to polysensory experience and to the temporal-spatial impermanence of hegemonic categorizations of race, gender, sexuality, class and nation (8, 14). Where Beliso-de-Jesus attends to transnational pathways of Cuban Santeria, I construct my case on central principles of Candomblé as practiced in Bahia, Brazil.

Circling with/in the saint constitutes a way of knowing that emerges through Candomblé’s composite body politics as they are crafted and expressed in ceremony. My

dissertation identifies and elaborates upon elements of this body politic in relation to both facets of the term – the body and its movements and the political ethos as well as collective political organization that are actioned. I differentiate between body politics established in orthodox, nagô Candomblé, but that also inform outlying practices, which I group under the rubric of the *feminist poiesis*, and those forged through heterodox practices that engage marginalized entities and stigmatized dance forms, which I gather into a theoretical program I call *dark horse kinetics*. Present in Caboclo’s sambas and their unruly behaviors, Candomblé’s dark horse kinetics layers onto the feminist poiesis as its disjunctive ancillary.

Linking ceremonial choreographies with matri-focal ontologies of a body rendered gender fluid through performance, the feminist poiesis weaves through Candomblé’s spectrum of practices, from urban temples considered original in histories of Bahia’s Afro-religiosity, to outlying communities whose guardian entidades clash with schemas of African cultural continuity and traditionalism. While the feminist poiesis constitutes a counter-hegemonic performance praxis in relation to patriarchal religiosities (i.e. Brazil’s colonial Catholicism and Evangelical Christianity), dark horse kinetics correlates to the feminist poiesis as an improvisatory aesthetic politics that destabilizes hierarchical regimes within Candomblé and in the broader Bahian society.¹⁹ The feminist poiesis is constructed through choreographed spatial patterns and symbols that correspond to distinct entities, allowing for variation depending on the particular performer. Departing from (while still informed by) Candomblé’s orthodox feminist codes, dark horse kinetics describes the choreographed-in-the-moment dances and spontaneous social interactions that mark Caboclo performances.

¹⁹ Although the term “santo” (saint) has been appropriated from Christianity, its use in Candomblé does not reproduce the hierarchical Cartesian divisions of “spirit” and “mind” from the “body” and the patriarchal devaluation of the bodily realm in relation to women and domestic labor.



Figure 1: Gestural invocation sequence performed by mediums at the terreiro Gantois, estimated late 1930s (date and photographer unknown). Collection of Salvador's Public Municipal Photographic Library at the Fundação Gregório de Mattos.

3. The Feminist Poiesis

Candomblé's *feminist poiesis* is useful for interrogating the dialectic between Candomblé's circular idioms and the matriarchal social structures established by priestesses and their collaborators in the 1800s. Though scholars have debated the historicity of Candomblé's matriarchies, either challenging or affirming the idea that Brazil's Afro-religions were

“traditionally” governed by women, few attend to how ritual aesthetics framed as orthodox in popular and practitioner discourses actually relate to the development and maintenance of Candomblé’s social structures. To tease out these connections, I develop the notion of a feminist poiesis that links cyclical aesthetics of Orixá invocation and incorporation with a historical perspective on Candomblé’s structures of matrilineal succession.

Since at least the mid-nineteenth century, female-bodied mediums have predominated in Candomblé’s constituent demographics (Reis 2001; Butler 2010; Castillo 2017, Cici interview May 2018). As a rule, male-identified practitioners whose gender presentations align with dominant constructions of heterosexuality would be initiated as *ogãs*. Although *ogãs* occupy vital roles as drummers who also perform animal sacrifice, as well as “godparents” or honored affiliates who might sponsor a neophyte’s initiation, devotees commonly relate to Candomblé as woman- and mother-centric.²⁰ Nevertheless, historians disagree on the origins of Candomblé’s discourses of female privilege for mediumship and leadership roles. Arguing against what he views as an ahistorical and homophobic reduction of men’s participation in the realm of spirit embodiment, Matory (2005) points to examples of male mediumship on the African continent and in diasporic locations outside of Bahia to disprove accepted narratives of Candomblé’s female dominance.²¹ Yet across a range of ethnic, liturgical and gender affiliations, devotees relate to Candomblé as a “religion of the mother” founded by African priestesses on Bahian soil

²⁰ The title *ogã* can also be bestowed upon a male affiliate of the Candomblé to formalize his bonds with the temple. Similarly to *equedes* (*makota* in Angola Candomblés), women “caretakers of the saints,” *ogãs* are chosen by an ancestral divinity and, by many interpretations, remain “lucid” during ritual works (Alagsy interview 2018).

²¹ As Matory (2005) also suggests, twentieth century observers theorized Candomblé’s divisions of labor through hetero-colonial frameworks, viewing ritual incorporations as analogous to sexual receptivity of a feminized devotee by a masculinized deity (i.e. Landes 1947, Bastide 1960, Pierson 1942, Herskovits 1966). To an extent Wafer 1991 follows this trend; see also Browning’s (1995) and Strongman’s (2019) attempts to complicate the model by discussing Brazilian concepts of passive and active sex roles.

(Cristiam, Celeste, Cici interviews 2018). The framework of feminist poiesis serves to open the field of debate over Candomblé's ideologies of gender and sex, to move beyond backward-looking attempts to assess the matriarchal origins of Afro-Bahian religion and instead expand understandings of Yoruba-Atlantic gender constructions as context-dependent, flexible, ritually fluid *and* deeply engaged with principles of social transformation as cyclical and inextricable from human reproductivity.

Choreographies of invocation (summoning the deities) and incorporation (receiving a deity in one's body) in Candomblé metaphorically figure the mother's body and womb as organizing paradigms of both the opening circle, or *xirê*, and the idioms of circling together. Historically and still to this day, the invocation choreographies of the opening circle at orthodox temples are danced exclusively by female-bodied devotees. Yet, male mediums join their sisters-of-the-saint once their divinities have materialized in bodily form. Thus, the *xirê* is choreographed as a performance of female visibilization. Yet the valuation of femininity as ritually and socially reproductive attains a flexible character, since male-identified mediums may still be consecrated to their Orixá and "put out to dance" in a public ceremony.

The feminist poiesis builds on global constructions of feminism, which has been subject to critiques of essentialism, first-world ethnocentrism and racism by post-colonial writers (i.e. Mohanty 2003) and women of color as well as working class, differently abled, trans/non-binary and queer subjects. In response to feminism's white normativity as well as the need for models that attend to the particular experiences of African and Afro-descendent women's realities normative Black American, author Alice Walker (1979; 1983) first coined the revisionary construct of "womanism," which attends to formations of Black feminism, especially in the United States, while continental African theorist Naomi Nkealah suggests African feminism as a

blueprint for a heterogeneous set of feminisms rooted in indigenous cultural practices (Nkealah 2006; 2016).²² Through the frameworks of Postcolonial and Third-World feminisms as well as intersectional feminism (Crenshaw 2017, Belleau 2007), feminist scholars have pushed against first-wave feminism's erasure of differences such as race, class and social location among women, and argued for an acknowledgement of the different systemic and cultural barriers that women face.

Keeping these analyses and alternative frameworks in mind, I have chosen to deploy a vision of "feminism" that includes womanist, African feminist, Postcolonial and Third World critiques as well as an conceptions of embodied womanhood germane to Candomblé, for a variety of reasons. First, feminism is at the nexus of a new coalition politics being mobilized by women's advocacy groups in Brazil, the *movimento negro* (Black movement), Candomblé alliances and LGBTQ activists in the face of Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing governmental regime.²³ At this historical juncture, Afro-Bahian activists are marshaling ideological positions articulated by feminist and LGBTQ movements for their own intersectional social struggles against the state-sanctioned, racialized, sexualized and gendered oppressions that Black Bahian communities in which the majority Candomblés are situated continue to endure (see Smith 2016).

In these contexts, Black Southern Brazilian feminist and critical race theorist Djamila Ribeiro (2018) builds on the construct of "feminism" to develop Black feminism, *feminismo negro*, which expands on Brazil's Black feminist movement, incepted in the 1970s to locate Black feminism within the anti-racist framework of Brazil's *vidas negras importam* or Black lives matter movement. But because of geographic and cultural divisions between Brazil's

²² Africana womanism elaborates on the basis of US-oriented womanism as a specifically African and non-Western, non-diasporic construct (Hudson-Weems 1997).

²³ Santana 2018, Denny 2015, McCallum 2007.

Southeast, towards which Ribeiro is oriented, and Brazil's Northeastern regions, where I conduct my research, people that I worked with in Bahia were not necessarily familiar or identified with this model. I wish to center Brazilian feminisms, informed by second and third wave feminist critiques and *feminismo negro*, while situating the feminist poesis within Candomblé's longstanding histories of practice, in relation to regional and Yoruban-Atlantic constructions of the body and schematic use of the circle across Afro-Bahian and Afro-Diasporic genres including but not limited to *samba de roda* and *capoeira*, as well as ritual practices of Cuban *Santería* and Haitian *Vodou* (Daniel 2005).

Identifying a unifying thread tying together matri-focal cultural logics and circular dance aesthetics through the figuration of a mother's body in ritual processes, the feminist poesis is marked by gender flexibility even as, conceptually and pragmatically, Candomblé's divisions of labor resonate with elements of biological essentialism, since female-bodiedness is foundationally associated with procreativity. While observers have noted that women dominate Candomblé's mediumship ranks, largely due to their presumable sexual receptivity (Carneiro 1948; Herskovits 1966; Pearson 1942; Landes 1947), I draw on theorists that attempt to complicate gendered readings of spirit embodiments (Strongman 2019; Browning 1995; Wafer 1991; Parker 1991) in order to account for the performativity of femininity in ritual contexts. Though Candomblé's valorization of reproduction as a female bodily capacity may appear rooted in a form of biological essentialism that undergirds both normative patriarchal formations and certain strands of feminist thinking, a closer analysis of ritual process in relation to questions of practitioners' social positioning yields a more complex reading. In contrast to an essentialist view that situates women's aptitudes (of nurture and care, whether as a result of nature or socialization) in a domestic sphere, Candomblé's resituates a feminized capacity for creation,

transformation and care in the extra-domestic and privileged domain of the temple.²⁴

Candomblé's feminist poesis helps contextualizes orthodox performance histories that privilege female bodies for mediumship; at the same, this dynamic is at work in every Bahian Afro-religious ceremony that involves an invocation circle and/or the movement expressions of circling, turning and spinning with a spirit entity.²⁵

Both the feminist poesis and dark horse kinetics sit within the canopy of circling with/in the saint. Present in the festive performances of Caboclos--primarily (though not exclusively) masculine entities associated with New World landscapes and Amerindian or Afro-Indigenous identifications--dark horse kinetics overlap with Candomblé's traditionalist Orixá aesthetics. Furthermore, dark horse kinetics constitutes a transformative principle of Orixá aesthetics, and helps think through and unpack how Caboclo performances may express disjunction with orthodox Candomblé's choreographic regulations and the social hierarchies that they instill.

Whereas Orixá are regal occupants of a heavenly abode, known by the Yoruba term *orun*, Caboclos are *índios* who inhabit *aldeias*, Indigenous villages often controlled by missionaries under colonial rule in Brazil, and Boiadeiros, cowboys who hail from plantation ranches in Bahia's interior deserts. These sites constitute what Brian Brazeal refers to as Caboclos' "mythic geography," the realms from which Caboclos journey to festas in order "to work, play and pray" (2003; 648). Additionally, while Orixá in Bahia emerge under the conditions of enslavement and racial terror, abolition and seigniorial formations of race, gender, and sexuality, Caboclo directly engage these New World histories through narrative elements including song lyrics, samba

²⁴ As Apter explains, Yoruba procreative power reproduces not just human life but social and political orders; female gender can be both socio-politically reproductive, when tethered to fertility, and destructo-transformative when moored in/affixed to notions of witchcraft (2013).

²⁵ Some ceremonies I attended in the interior region did not involve invocation circles but still maintain a feminist poesis in myriad other facets of practice including circular patterns used by manifest divinities.

dancing, costuming and exhibition of behaviors linked to socially marginalized personae of the colonial-Atlantic world. Devotees praise their Orixá with Yoruba-language hymns²⁶ and choreographic symbols including hand gestures and step sequences that respond to rhythmic calls; Caboclos are recognized primarily through their oral repertoires of personal stories, chants in Portuguese, regional accents linked to their geographic locales and improvised dances. Dark horse kinetics offers a framework for analyzing the hermeneutic of flexibility and adaptability that Caboclo practitioners marshal in performance to contest and intervene in cultural and historical processes of the past and present.²⁷

4. Bahian Caboclos and Their Dark Horse Kinetics

A literary idiom often used in political commentary, the dark horse represents an unknown and unexpected winner of a race or other contest (see, for instance, the Oxford English Dictionary). The idiom of the dark horse becomes especially salient for examining Caboclo practices when we consider that they embody social identities and landscapes both spatially marginalized from Bahia's colonial and post-colonial center and economically marginalized from its capital flows, and that resonate with practitioners' every day lived experiences, popular histories and zeitgeists. While Orixás index a West Africanist cosmology of place that mystically and physically separates human from divine habitus (Bourdieu 1977), Caboclos reference a

²⁶ Praise languages vary depending on a temple's ethno-national affiliation. In addition to nagô, Candomblés identify with Jeje-Fon language groups (from Western Nigeria and Benin) and Kikongo (from Congo-Angolan regions). As Parés and Castillo (2010) show, Yoruban as well as Fon and Kikongo terms are used generically across Candomblé lineages (for example the drum titles rum, rumpi and lé are Fon-derived, and many scholars attribute the word Candomblé itself to Kikongo origins (Luhning personal communication 2018, Harding 2000).

²⁷ Brian Brazeal (2003) argues that, since knowledge about the Caboclo turns into power through performance, Caboclo ceremonies are "contexts in which hierarchies can be challenged and reasserted" (644, 642). Brazeal builds his argument on the malleable, under-specified "principles of deep knowledge" that Andrew Apter (1991) locates as building blocks of Afro-diasporic ritual practices of the New World.

continuum of transformative historical processes in rural Brazilian locales that figure largely in the contemporary imaginary, including the colonization and settlement of massive areas of Bahia's Atlantic forest and, more distally, Amazonian regions, the establishment of ranching and plantation societies, and the emergence of Brazilian socio-racial categories including a Euro-descendent white owning class and Brazilian-born Afro-descendent or mixed race "creole" as determinants in economic status and occupation. Anti-heroes and social outcasts, Caboclos charge into ceremonial festas to perform healing works, offer moral guidance and revel in the devotional community's adulations through danced exchange, percussive drumming, and, at times, heavy drinking and smoking. When Caboclos boldly arrive, call each other down, and dance their sambas, they continually re-perform their roles as dark horses, socio-politically speaking, in a ceremonial sphere that contains and produces an alternative oral historical archive.

Dark horse kinetics also addresses a phenomenological distinction between Caboclo and Orixá embodiments and characterizations. Whereas Orixá typically become "incorporated" by human subjects, Caboclos outwardly refer to their mediums as "cavalos" or horses on which they ride in to a festa from their villages and ranches, arriving "montado cavalo" or on horseback. This quality of embodiment differentiates Caboclo arrivals from those of the aristocratic Orixá, and informs their wide-legged samba steps, evocative of galloping equestrian movements. These sambas and choreographies of arrival are part of an aesthetic complex that sustains the many Caboclos who ride horses vocationally, including the cowboys, *Boiadeiros*, hunters, *Capangueros* and *Campinheiros*, and some of the Amerindian personae categorized as *índios*.

Although scholars of Atlantic religions have reproduced the hetero-patriarchal language of "mounting" in describing Candomblé's embodiments (i.e. Matory 2009, Landes 1947), in Bahia I rarely if ever heard practitioners use the mounting and horse imagery in the context of

incorporation by an African god.²⁸ Similar to *rodar no santo*, the idiom of *montado cavalo* (riding a horse) is intersubjective and unstable in terms of its gender identity categorizations.²⁹ Reading the Caboclo as male, and the medium as feminized and penetrated, is insufficient because practitioners of all genders also, as I argue, mobilize their Caboclos to assert their own masculine authority. “Montar” or mounting is also a cyclical choreography in that the “dominant” position of the rider does not remain constant and, rather, is continually brought into question – since the medium herself, the priest/ess, other divinities of the house and, at times, the drummers and/or caller play a role in effecting and maintaining the conditions of incorporation. Instead of attributing absolute agency to either the Caboclo or *rodante*, the analogy of the dark horse gives form to the distributed body of the two actors together as they act circle together.

In Brazilian Portuguese, “Caboclo” typically refers to a person of Indigenous or mixed Indigenous and African ancestry. In Candomblé, Caboclos challenge the fixing of racial identity as they move between perceived categories. Historically speaking, the first Caboclo to emerge as popular icons of Afro-Bahian religiosity appear to have presented as Amerindians and symbolically represented indigeneity in the terreiros (Silva 1994, 19).³⁰ These embodiments address histories of encounter with, and imaginaries of, Indigenous Brazilians of the *Tupian* linguistic group. According to practitioners, Caboclos are Indigenous *donos da terra*, “landlords”

²⁸ Perhaps because twentieth century representations of Vodun practices popularized the discourse of mounting, which seems to be (or was at the time) commonly employed in Haitian contexts (see Maya Deren’s *Divine Horsemen* (1953) and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse* (1938). Southern Brazilian vernaculars of incorporation may also differ from those germane to Bahian contexts. Mounting metaphors do draw on the Yoruba precedents of Afro-Atlantic religions: As Apter notes, “the term ‘gùn’ (‘to mount’ a donkey, etc) is used by Yoruba in Nigeria to describe a person getting possessed” (Personal communication, 2021).

²⁹ Caboclos ride human horses, but the horse or practitioner is authorized as a divine vehicle or medium and, in another idiom of embodiment, is “radiated” (*enradiado*) by the divine agent.

³⁰ Teles dos Santos (1995) and Brazeal (2003), however, drawing on Carneiro (1948) link Caboclo to Imperialist notions of Brazilian Indians based in 1800s European literature. See also Bastide (1960, 471).

or “custodians of the land,” (Teles dos Santo 1995, Perreira, Oba and Alagsy interviews 2018) who were already here on this soil before [the arrival of enslaved Africans].”³¹ However, further inquiry complicates the basic equation of Caboclos with Indigenous personhood. Boiadeiros, explains Candomblé elder Nancy Sousa, are Caboclos, “but they are índios mixed with Africans or Afro-descendants.” Another Caboclo, *Campineiro*, is “neither a Caboclo (as in an índio) nor a Boiadeiro (as in mixed race Indigenous and Afro-descendent).” One devotee explains why the invocations to the Orixá that open a session must be sung in the “national” Candomblé tradition known as Angola and associated with Bantu-speaking African peoples: “Boiadeiro is Angolan. Boiadeiro is considered Brazilian.”³² Yet another Caboclo, the Marujo, is neither Indian nor Black, but “white and Portuguese, not Indian or Black” (Cici May 26 2018). Thus Caboclos index indigeneity and emplacement on Brazilian territory, they also narrate a plethora of intercultural New World histories involving ethnically Amerindian, Afro-descendent and working class Portuguese actors.

Another testimony reveals a glimpse into Caboclos typological unfixability. Mãe Oba clarifies that her Caboclo, Sete Flexas, “is actually an *Exu* disguised as a Caboclo.” She explains that her own *pai-de-santo* forbid the worship of Brazilian Exus –iconoclastic urban hustlers depicted as Black and male and sprung from the trickster Orixá of the same name. Orthodox practitioners have historically viewed Brazilian Exus as demonizations of the Yoruban deity by, hence the transmutation of Oba’s guardian into another category of form.³³ Attending to their core indeterminacy and dexterity in relation to hegemonic identity constructions, I aim to nuance understandings of Caboclos’ significations as they are brought forth in performance. I draw on

³¹ Oba, Adesibi dos Santos. Personal Interviews, Aug. 2015, May 2018. Perreira. Interview. April 2018.

³² Personal communication January 2018.

³³ Interview May 2018. See also Stephania Capone, 2010.

researcher Fabio Alex Ferreira da Silva (2018), who encapsulates the enigmatic nature of Caboclos' presence in Candomblé and gestures to the complexity of their origins:

caboclos [evidence] a ritual modality whose incorporation of other elements ... occurs in a paradoxical process of cosmology: the need to worship the [African ancestors], who, linked to the original territories, could not be transferred to Brazil, enables the absorption of other related entities, in this case, the Brazilian Indians. The caboclo is then seen and worshiped as the *dono da terra* (landlord), [while] the religions of African origin in Brazil, with their territorial conscience, are tributaries of the caboclos (26).

Elucidating the “territorial conscience” of Brazil’s Africanist religions, Silva offers a coherent schematic for grasping the diasporic logic that unifies Caboclo and Orixá cultivations, effecting a shift from binary juxtaposition that gives integrity to both variants on a cosmological plane.

Caboclos with their bravado and sexual proclivities incarnate and hyperbolize ideals broadly associated with “machismo,” that specifically South American construct of masculine virility and pride. However, their tendency to embody female, male, and trans-identified subjects also unbinds these ideals from notions of biological gender and produces a performative critique of gender and sex binaries. While devotees may, similarly, receive feminine and masculine Orixá that do or do not correspond to their own sex and gender identifications, Caboclos’ behaviors, which index indigenous, local and transcultural (Taylor 2003) Brazilian socio-histories and sexual discourses, set them apart from the conceptual paradigms and comportment of their West and Central African counterparts.³⁴ Though Candomblé’s West African antecedents have been privileged in earlier scholarship (Landes 1947; Pierson 1942; Bastide 1960; Herskovits 1966), recent ethnographies significantly theorized the role of uniquely Brazilian entities in shaping Candomblé’s heterodox histories (Wafer 1991; Teles dos Santos 1995; Brazeal 2013; Hayes 2011; Apter 2013a). Furthering their projects, my research positions Caboclo embodiments as spaces in which practitioners engage foundational Brazilian narratives of nationalism, cultural

³⁴ Although Orixá, Vodum and Nkissis in Bahia have of course been fundamentally integrated into Brazilianist identity formations and practices.

encounter and miscegenation and navigate social and spatial marginalization (along intersecting axes of race, gender, sexuality and class). The Caboclo repertoire, I contend, wrestles with processes of racial oppression and eroticization, and lays claim to a collective identity that repositions practitioner communities as protagonists of Brazil's historical past and precarious present.

Caboclos thus engage the political aesthetics of “underdog heroism” that Caribbean theorist Rose Rejouis (2014) attributes to the literary grammar she defines as *dark horse poetics*, in order to stage their revisionary critiques. My model of dark horse kinetics departs from and develops in dialogue with Rejouis's dark horse poetics, a tactics “committed to revealing the unexpected resources within the culture of the “weak”—giving it its tropes and enabling its recognition” (104-105), found within Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1955) ethnography *Tristes tropiques*, based on fieldwork among indigenous Tupinamba peoples of Brazil. Like Candomblé's Caboclo – among whom Tupinamba also features as an *índio* entidade, the dark horse poetics that Rejouis locates in Lévi-Strauss' work is inspired by encounter with South American Indigenous ways of knowing. Dark horse poetics helps us understand Caboclo performance by detailing reflexive modes of challenging imperialist hegemonies that are born out of contact with Indigenous epistemes and that give rise to “always/already syncretic deities” as strategies of resistance and creative self-determination (2014; 103, 109).

Dark horse kinetics expands upon performance scholar Jose Muñoz's theory of disidentification (1999). Munoz coins disidenification to address the transformative implications of artistic performances by “queers of color” during the 1990s in the United States. Disidentification builds on postcolonial and Third World feminist critiques that demonstrate the predication of socially encoded identity scripts on whiteness and heterosexuality, based on race,

sex and gender normativities and phobias. Within this normative, phobic public sphere, the arrival of “hybrid, racially predicated and deviantly gendered identities” at representation and effectively remakes the prevailing order in “locally indispensable” ways that endow racialized subjects with social agency (6). Reading Caboclo performances is both challenging and compelling because, like the performances that Muñoz analyses, they defy dominant expectations of how bodies marked as racial “others” should represent their identities and experiences of the past and present.

However, unlike the performances that Muñoz treats, Caboclo embodiments are enacted by subjects who identify as racialized persons under Brazilian race categories of “negro” or “preto,” (Black) but do not self-identify with the appellation of “queer.” Many practitioners eschew LGBTQ2 designations but embrace Candomblé’s ritual gender fluidity in performance contexts, pointing to a possibility of distinction between the kinds of subjectivities embodied during a given performance and everyday presentations of gender. Devotees do not necessarily align themselves with non-normative sexualities – according to patriarcho-colonial and influential Evangelical constructions – outside of the ritual sphere. While many mediums practice non-normative gender expressions in ceremonial spaces, Candomblé’s gender and sex constructions cannot be reduced to binary, fixed and singular conceptions of female/male and homo/heterosexual. For instance, when priestess Mãe Oba circles with her Caboclo, Sete Flexas, she presents as a hyper masculine *índio* and dances samba in a typically male style,³⁵ but when she circles with the goddess Iansa, her movements reflect the deity’s expressions of female strength and/or gender ambiguity, depending on the context. Mãe Oba identifies neither with the Western category of queerness nor the paradigm of lesbianism, which features in Brazilian

³⁵ Meaning that the legs are kept further apart, the movements of the arms generally circulate closer to the body, and oscillations of the hips are less exaggerated.

discussions of sex but is rarely mentioned openly in Bahian Candomblé circles (see Allen 2012).³⁶ This is not to deny that practitioners can experience gender and sex discrimination but rather to demonstrate that Bahian as well as Afro-Atlantic formations of gender and sex cannot be redacted to Western categories of heterosexual and LGBTQ2 identities.³⁷

Finally, dark horse kinetics expands on Cristina Rosa's (2015) conceptualization of *ginga aesthetics*, an Afro-Brazilianist "corporeal episteme" that underlies both the martial art form of capoeira and the samba dance matrix. Rosa draws on art historian Robert Farris Thompson's (1966) recognition of shared characteristics across a range of West African dance forms including *dominance of the percussive concept of performance, multiple meter and songs and dance of derision*, and dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild's (1998) analysis of how dancing bodies articulate worldviews by deploying Africanist aesthetic principles, to outline a series of principles crucial to understanding the *ginga* aesthetic. Several of the elements qualified by Rosa are valuable for analyzing Caboclos' sambas, most importantly: 1) Polycentrism and polyrhythm, referring to movements generated from more than one body part and/or connected to multiple meters, 2) Call-and-response: conversations back-and-forth between body parts, between two or more dancers, between dancers and musicians, or between performers and audience. 3) Serpentine pathways: undulating sways, twists, circular turns, and movements and

³⁶ In addition to a multiplicity of gender presentations, Candomblé proposes heterogeneous, transmutable understandings of bodily form. The Orixás Iemanjá-Ogunté and Logun-Ede are widely considered hermaphrodites (Cici April 24 2018). Logun-Ede can also transform into a feminine avatar, the divinity Oxum can transform into a crocodile, tiger, fish or bird. Gender, like form, is context-dependent.

³⁷ Along these lines, dance scholar Anurima Banerji asks, "how do we contend with minoritized gender enactments configured as propitious within their own cultural logics, which stand apart from understandings of 'queer' as abnormal, as dissident, as strange?" (20). To comprehend local ideals of masculinity and femininity in South Asian, Odissi dance histories, Banerji proposes the relevant concept of "extraordinary gender" (2018, 21).

attitudes characterized by corporeal fluidity and pliability, and 4) serious play, which emphasizes engages cultural critique and the parodic possibilities of slippages, mimesis and double entendre.

My project contributes to filling a gap identified by Rosa, who notes the dearth of scholarship on how ginga informs or relates to samba dancing (2015, 4-5). For the purpose of talking about how Caboclos move and what these movements mean, I identified several core body techniques in dances for and by Caboclos: falling and recovering (barravento), loose (solto), broken (quebradinha) and driving, impulsive qualities of motion (puxado). Barravento signifies both the oncoming of an entity as well as a specific choreography of fall and recovery. In heterodox contexts, practitioners mobilize the barravento to destabilize internal hierarchies of Bahia's Afro-religious universe. In contrast, loose and broken techniques work to create alternative narratives that unfix and break down exclusionary discourses of 1) Bahian state independence and modern Brazilian nationalism and 2) normative scripts of gender and sexuality as they interact with markers of race and class. I argue that historically marginalized practitioners use loose and broken aesthetics in Caboclos' sambas to authorize historically illegitimized sexualities and desires. Last, the driving and impulsive qualities of dark horse kinetics enable practitioners of outlying, multi-ethnic Candomblés to weave across and interlay trans-oceanic narratives and Bahian historicities, and traverse/transgress taboos of male intimacy and homo-social conduct to valorize male mediumship practice.

5. Methodologies

My project applies methods gleaned from dance and performance studies, ethnography, Brazilian area studies, gender and sexuality studies and history to an examination of Candomblé's choreographic motifs. I combine discourse analysis, choreographic analysis, and

ethnographic participant-observation at four different sites of practice. To further historicize my findings, I conducted oral history and visited municipal and state archives. This interdisciplinary approach allowed me to interpret choreographic praxes in relation to local understandings and idioms of Candomblé and to the structuring effects of state, national and transnational identity discourses on ritual developments.

To begin, I adopt choreography as a theorizing practice, method of analysis and empirical source (Foster 2003; Banerji 2018; Shea Murphy 2007; O’Shea 2007). Choreography defines acts of making meaning through dance, building on the original connotation of choreo-graphy as “dance-writing.” Choreography is work that makes gestural sequences legible. Dance scholar Susan Foster (1998; 2003) conceives choreography as an overarching score that evidences a theory of embodiment and resonates with other systems of representation. Choreography is a plan according to which movement unfolds (2011, 13).³⁸ As ritual directors and performers, then, Candomblé practitioners become choreographic agents that negotiate with, adapt and innovate upon sequences of “received repertoire” for the purposes of presentation in the now (O’Shea 2007). Methodologically, choreographic analysis involves lines of questioning such as “what are these bodies doing?; what and how do their motions signify?; how does the choreography theorize corporeal, individual, and social identity?” (Foster 2003, 397). I applied choreographic analysis at Orixá ceremonies in Salvador terreiros including Gantois, Ilê Axé Opo Aganju, Ilê Axé Oba Ina as well as prominent terreiros such as Casa Branca, Alaketu, and Ilê Oxumarê, in order to establish the aesthetic baseline for what I am calling Candomblé’s dominant forms. I

³⁸ Foster (2011) adds: “Choreography can stipulate both the kinds of actions performed and their sequence or progression. Not exclusively authored by a single individual, choreography varies considerably in terms of how specific and detailed its plan of activity is, and designate “minute aspects of movement, or alternatively, sketch out the broad contours of action within which variation might occur.” (13).

also analyze choreographies at a plethora of Caboclos and Exu/a festas and offerings outside of Salvador in the municipalities of Valença, Ponta de Areia, Cachoeira, Santo Amaro.

Additionally, I studied Orixá and Caboclo dances informally with ritual specialists including Dona Cici, Mãe Oba, and in pedagogical settings with Bahia-based dance teachers Rosangela Silvestre, Vera Passos, Tatiana Ramos and Nem Brito. My practical knowledge of Orixá dance and samba and experience as a dancer in Bahia positioned me to draw connections from Candomblé's choreographies to larger political arenas, and to individual and collective identity configurations. In addition, having danced samba commercially, in North American contexts, provides me with first-hand insight on the aesthetic divergences between globally disseminated, professionalized Rio samba styles and the Bahian sambas danced by Caboclos and their devotees at regional festas. Moreover, I am able to identify aesthetic continuities and divergences between the forms in question and make a strong choreographic analysis across a range of Afro-Brazilian performance genres.

I contribute to dance and performance studies' reflexive efforts to define and engage in practices of decolonization, by utilizing approaches that emphasize commitment to grappling on an ongoing basis with research ethics, questions of ethnographer-participant relations, regimes of representation and the ways that imbalances of power and geo-political mobility can impact intercultural inquiry. D. Soyini Madison's (2011) model of critical ethnography and Madga Kazubowski-Houston's (2010) imaginative ethnography explore the collaborative dimensions as well as limits of approaching ethnographic inquiry as performance, and provided methodological grounding for the integration of cultural theory and performance practice in my study.

Looking at representative examples of Candomblé in particular terreiros, I invoke feminist, postcolonial theorist Lila Abu-Lughod's (1991) "ethnography of the particular," which

redresses representations of culture as monolithic and calls for attention to the particular lived experiences of social actors. In forging my own feminist approach to research and writing, I have developed an appreciation for the productive potential of disorientation and constantly reconsidered questions of positionality, accountability and representation, which are not just theoretical concerns but defining features of my relationships with interlocutors, together with whom the knowledge comprised by this dissertation has been produced.

Over more than seven years of back and forth to Bahia, I conducted structured and impromptu interviews, accompanied ritual cleansings, helped acquire and prepare food and clothing and actively participated in ceremonial and household duties (whenever appropriate). During my fieldwork year in 2018 and 2019, my research relationships took on new familial and social dimensions because my child accompanied me on terreiro visits. My status as a caregiver and head of household intersected with the lived experiences of many women at the terreiros and reinforced social ties, especially at Ilê Axé Oba Ina and Ilê Omin Guian where I conducted much of my fieldwork. When practicing or watching dances and when speaking to people in formal and informal interviews, I employed a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis (Given 2008), in order to apprehend how practitioners frame Candomblé's performance practices and ontologies of gender and sexuality, through verbal and non-verbal means of communication, as well as how Candomblé is viewed in different sectors of Bahian society. Finally, I critically engage primary sources including photographs and journal articles in order to revisit and refine dominant narratives about how ideas of Candomblé practices as either morally respectable or reprehensible were negotiated in twentieth century media.

6. Research Sites and Dissertation Structure

My dissertation employs a moving lens that circles out from the geographic and historic center of Salvador, bringing Candomblé's less visible and more marginalized practices into relief. The spatial logic of my dissertation project, which begins with a discussion of the most public, renowned and discursively traditionalist terreiros and shifts progressively towards peripheralized locations, points to a continuum of how the regulatory operations of state, national and corporate apparatus, as well as foreign and academic gazes and internally-driven orthodox discourses, have acted on Candomblé so that Caboclo and more taboo performances come into view as we enter the capital city's *periferia*. This dynamic does not signify that Caboclo cultivation is absent from the orthodox motherhouses but, rather, less and less underground as one travels away from the urban core. At the same time, the movement that I am tracing is by no means linear or unidirectional out from the center.

i) The Matrilineal terreiro Gantois or Ilê Axé Iyá Omin Iyamassê

Gantois was founded by an African-born priestess, freed enslaved woman originally named Omoniké and Christened as Maria Julia da Conceição Nazaré at the time of her baptism in Brazil. Described by Brazilian social scientist Nina Rodrigues as the exemplary “fetishist temple” in 1896, Gantois is highly recognized as one of Salvador's oldest and most traditional Candomblés. The terreiro's prominent position in the oral histories of Afro-Brazilian religion and culture in Bahia, and its formidable reputation for upholding the traditions of matrilinearity and orthodoxy associated with Candomblé's authenticity, make it an ideal site for elaborating an understanding of the proceedings of a prototypical Orixá ceremony.

Like the Casa Branca founded by Iya Nasso (among others) around 1830, the Gantois observes matrilineal succession rules that limit the head position of *Iyalorixá*, chief priestess, to

female individuals.³⁹ After Maria Julia's passing, circa 1910, her daughter Pulquéria (elsewhere recorded as Pulcheria) took over the terreiro's leadership. According to the genealogies traced by Lisa Castillo (2017), Maria Julia and Francisco Nazaré had seven other children, one of whom bore a granddaughter, Escolástica, the famed Mãe Menininha (1894-1986), who became Gantois's third Iyalorixá. A celebrated icon of Bahia's religious as well as popular imaginary, Mãe Menininha led the terreiro for over six decades. Mãe Menininha's eldest daughter Cleuza succeeded her until, in 1998, her youngest daughter Carmen took up the role. Thus, the terreiro's matrilineal succession structures, instituted by Maria Julia, have been maintained and fortified, fomenting Gantois' status as a beacon of traditionalism in continuity with its founding by "the African mothers."

ii. Ilê Axé Opo Aganju in Lauro de Freitas

Governed by Balbino Daniel de Paula, Pai Balbino de Xangô, Ilê Axé Opo Aganju sits in the suburban municipality of Lauro de Freitas near Salvador's international airport. The first male medium or rodante to be "made" (initiated) by Mãe Senhora, priestess of the celebrated terreiro Ilê Axé Opo Afonjá, Pai Balbino's ritual lineage links the priest to Bahia's famed Ketu houses and their nagô heritage discourses. A distinguished public figure of Bahia's contemporary Afro-religious landscape, Pai Balbino became acquainted with cultural icons including the prolific Bahian author Jorge Amado and the French photographer-turned-babalorixá Pierre Verger, whom he accompanied on voyages to Benin in West Africa.

Though Pai Balbino is steeped in Candomblé's orthodoxy, Ilê Axé Opo Aganju's gender dynamics differ from those of its sister houses Casa Branca, Gantois and Ilê Axé Opo Afonjá.

³⁹ Genealogical relations between Casa Branca and Gantois have been subject to debate. Though Carneiro and Castillo disagree on the terms of the two houses' separation, historians do agree that Omoniké was part of the original Casa Branca Candomblé in Barroquina until its relocation to the current site.

Instead of re-rehearsing or elaborating upon an analysis of Orixá aesthetics and initiatory structures,⁴⁰ my examination centers on a non-officially recognized ceremonial event organized by the filhas and filhos of the terreiro to honor their Caboclos. Summoned to the terreiro's back courtyard on September first 2018, the invocations, incorporations and sambas of the Caboclos at this afternoon festa offer glimpses into how these enigmatic figures challenge authorial stances and social hierarchies of an orthodox household through their movements and interactions.

Though suburban, Lauro de Freitas is connected to Salvador's cosmopolitan currents through major transportation arteries of developed urban infrastructures such as paved roads and the recently erected metro system. The terreiro reflects these information flows, as genealogically Pai Balbino's priesthood directly links to a central branch of Bahia's Afro-religious development and legitimization in the public field. Ilê Axê Opo Aganju possesses relatively large grounds that include a daycare and separate altar buildings. While Ilê Axé Opo Aganju is an orthodox Candomblé that in many ways approximates Gantois' traditionalist stances, the Caboclo ceremony is hosted by the "children" of the house and thus constitutes a fertile space for considering how dark horse kinetics, particularly the choreography of barravento (the turning wind or wind that knocks you over), serve to disrupt and destabilize established configurations of power.

iii. São Caetano's Ilê Axé Oba Ina

Located in São Caetano, a densely populated primarily Black neighborhood referred to by some inhabitants as a "favela," Ilê Axé Oba Ina is a matrilineal compound led by governing priestess, Mãe Oba (Terezinha Barbosa), her six daughters, several granddaughters and a great

⁴⁰ Orixá initiation and jeje-nagô kinship structures have already been the subject of academic texts by authors including Johnson 2002, Vivaldo da Costa Lima 1977, and Rabelo 2014.

granddaughter destined to inherit the priesthood. Situated north of Salvador's touristed beaches and commercial lower city districts, São Caetano borders the bairro Liberdade, home to the Afro-centric, Black-only Carnaval group Ilê Aiye. Incepted in 1974, Ilê Aiye has been instrumental in constructing Black Bahian racial consciousness, launching educational campaigns on African and Afro-Brazilian history (Lusiano Tosta 2010), and forging a new dance style associated with Black Bahian carnival performance – *blocos Afros* (Scott 2002).

Mãe Oba and numerous of her filhas and filhos de santo are similarly involved in the production, codification and staging of choreographic forms mired in Bahia's Black cultural knowledge and expressions. One of Oba's daughters, who also holds the position of Mãe Pequena ("little mother" or right-hand-to-the-priestess) danced regularly in the *Balé Folclórico da Bahia*, Brazil's principal "folkloric" stage company presenting stylized renditions of Orixá choreographies, and several of her initiates teach dance and music for the company and at Bahia's state funded and centrally located dance school, the FUNCEB (Fundação Nacional Cultural da Bahia), where many foreigners including myself come to train. I arrived at the terreiro via these artistic connections, alongside a Canadian *paisana* or countrywoman, the director of a Brazilian dance company, early in my fieldwork year of 2018. Over the next year and a half I would spend afternoons, days and nights there observing and participating in sacrifices, offerings and invocations and conducting lengthy interviews.

While Mãe Oba situates her terreiro within the ethno-national framework of Ketu Candomblé, her house is consecrated to the guardian Sete Flexas, a hyper-masculine Caboclo de pena or feathered Caboclo. The Orixás Xangô and Iansã occupy pivotal positions in the terreiro's devotional economies, but Ilê Axé Oba Ina's biggest and most resource intensive annual festivals venerate Sete Flexas and the Caboclo legions. In addition, the majority of Caboclo mediums at

Mãe Oba's are female-bodied initiates. Ilê Axé Oba Ina thus provides an potent location for investigating how and why Afro-Bahian women create self-definitions through embodiments of Candomblé's masculine, Indigenous-identified agents, as part of (and not antithetical to) frameworks of matri-focal leadership.

iv. Ilê Omin Guian at Ponta de Areia, Itaparica Island

Ilê Omin Guian's leadership structure reflects the mother-daughter power arrangements of both the Gantois and Mãe Oba's temple communities, and links to the previous site as an outlying and non-dominant terreiro whose annual festas tend to highlight Caboclos and their samba dances rather than the rhythms and choreographies of Orixá and other divinities linked to West and Central African identity complexes. As the fourth field site, Ilê Omin Guian represents the most distally located terreiro in my study, spatially and in regards to ethno-nationality, since the reigning priestess Iya Alagsy⁴¹ (Mãe Nilzete Adesibi dos Santos) and her daughter the junior priestess Rosinha cultivate the jeje-oriented gods or Vodun as well as Nkisis from Candomblé's Congo-Angolan trajectories and the "Brazilian" or Afro-Indigenous Caboclos. The Island of Itaparica has been noted in Candomblé scholarship (Santos 1998; Braga 1995) for its concentration of Egun, Yoruba-oriented ancestor cults composed exclusively of male practitioners. However, as Iya Alagsy and Mãe Rosinha work with Orixá, Vodun, Inquice and Caboclo and are not steeped in an Egun lineage, their temple remains outside of even the Island's own more visible ritual networks.

Perched on a hilltop at the Island's northern tip and set apart from Salvador by Bahia's Bay of All Saints, Iya Alagsy's terreiro constitutes the least regulated space, relatively to the

⁴¹ Spellings of the the Yoruba title "Iya" differ. I have followed Iya Alagsy's orthographic preference, which differs from the spelling of Candomblé's founding priestess "Iyá" Nassô.

urban, suburban and inner-city Candomblés that I consider, and the one in which the most taboos practices become visible and re-contextualized. In contrast to Mãe Oba's compound in São Caetano, this island terreiro's Caboclo mediums are an almost exclusively male-bodied cohort. Ilê Omin Guian is also a smaller terreiro, in terms of the size of the leading family and the number of devotees initiated by the house on a regular basis. During the August festival cycles, dedicated to the Caboclos and the Nkissi Tempo, most participants hail from close by or from neighboring corners of the Island. Viewed in the contexts of the terreiro's social and spatial isolationism, transgressive gender dynamics and stigmatized Caboclo and Angola practices, male mediums and their jagged sambas at these ceremonies generatively juxtapose, bisect and interrelate distinct ethno-cultural histories and discourses of Black masculinity (in relation to the spheres of Candomblé, Bahia and the circum-Atlantic world).⁴²

7. Chapter Outlines

The first chapter begins by historicizing Candomblé's genesis in colonial Bahia's cosmopolitan universe. Next, to contextualize the rise to prominence of a certain set of techniques and social configurations and their crystallization into a dominant form of Candomblé under the moniker of the nagô "national" tradition, I elaborate on the formalization of Candomblé's matriarchal systems and stake my position in this controversial debate. This chapter recovers insights from feminist anthropologist Ruth Landes's (1947) ideation of the terreiro as a space of matriarchal authority by drawing on to Andrew Apter's (2013) study, which highlights West African understandings of women's economic agency.

⁴² Joseph Roach (1996) develops the term "circum-Atlantic" to address how cultural performances in cities on the Atlantic rim such as New Orleans, London can reinvent and restore history.

The subsequent chapters each consider a different aspect of Candomblé by analyzing a particular place and ceremony, paired with a discussion of the ceremony's choreographic structures and designs: the full ceremony is described in Chapter Two, where I elaborate the feminist poiesis through a discussion of circling pathways and idioms of incorporation at a semi-private offering for Oxossi, the masculine forest-dwelling hunter and guardian Orixá of the terreiro, during a multiple day ceremonial cycle in May 2018, at the orthodox terreiro Gantois. In this chapter I conjoin Banerji's (2018) theory of the *distributed body* of the *devadisi* temple dancer with Miriam Rabelo's discussion of Candomblé corporeality as predicated on movement and movability (2014, 183)⁴³ to propose another theory of embodiment. I suggest that as they circle with their saints, mediums, who are called *materia* or material in relation to spirit entities, constitute axé-becoming bodies that not only contain but reflect and refract *axé* – metaphysical muscle or energy – unto others and the surrounding space. These axé-becoming bodies, as I show, possess unique capacities that can be actioned outside of the liminal container of the ceremony, to work for personal and collective benefits and, at times, justice-seeking outcomes.

Chapter Three constructs my model of dark horse kinetics as a praxis that nests within the feminist poiesis of Candomblé while articulating an oppositional, avant-garde aesthetic politics within it. I analyze stylistic differences between the Orixá ceremony's opening circle and Caboclo invocations at Ilê Axé Opo Aganju's courtyard festival. Looking at Caboclos' arrivals, I highlight their aesthetics of fall and recovery and the use of the *barra vento* or "turning wind," which indicates a movement and the oncoming on an entity. I argue that Caboclos enact a unique propensity for de-stabilizing and contesting Candomblé's normative social structures. My intervention pivots around a fertile juncture in the festa: the arrival and departure of the house's high priest in the face of his Caboclo's *barra vento*. To unpack the dynamics that drive the

⁴³ Rabelo (2014, 183): "o corpo movel é um corpo transformavel" (a mobile body is a transformable body)

priest's exit, I examine two intersecting spheres of exclusion in Candomblé: the popularly accessible yet officially devalued Brazilian-identified Caboclos, and the ever-visible yet controversial male-bodied medium. While Caboclos offer an avenue for men to attain legitimacy as mediums, Caboclo embodiment remains taboo for public figures from orthodox lineages. Although Candomblé's ritual gender fluidities permit a male-identified actor to have either a masculine or feminine divinity "in the front," (as his primary guardian) in practice male mediumship remains controversial. I attend to mediations between Candomblé's non-binary gender cosmologies, on one hand, and normative constructions of masculinity, on the other. Ultimately I see the priest's flight as a choreography of disembodiment that speaks to the negotiations of agency encapsulated in the making of an axé-becoming body, and show that the maintenance of executive power is always under contestation.

Chapter Four undertakes a close reading of Caboclos' loose, broken and falling – and in conjunction, recovering – aesthetics in solo, partner and ensemble sambas and in juxtaposition to Brazil's popular, nationalized Rio samba. I discuss the aesthetic qualities of loose (*solto*) and broken (*quebradinha*), found in the dances of Caboclo and their largely female mediums at the terreiro Ilê Axé Oba Ina in the peripheral neighborhood of São Caetano. I argue that Mãe Oba and her constituents make use of loose and broken aesthetics to tell a different story about the emergence of the Bahian state and to authorize illegitimized female pleasures.

Whereas women predominate among Mãe Oba's Caboclo mediums, August festas at the Island terreiro of Ilê Omin Guian governed by Iya Alagsy attract a male cohort. Chapter Five investigates how Caboclos embodying male-presenting practitioners at Iya Alagsy's terreiro use movements that cut across, weave through and bisect the ceremonial circle. I look at their movements within the context of the temple's socio-spatial location to analyze how practitioners

braid together various models of Black masculinity through narratives of intimacy engendered in their partner and ensemble sambas. Separated by the Bay of All Saints and the historically divergent development of the Island's economies in relation to those of Bahia's metropolis, Ilê Omin Guian offers a fertile locus point for examining how non-dominant Candomblé practices support performances of transgressive sexualities and socialities for male practitioners excluded from the worlds of orthodox Candomblé and normative Bahian society.

My conclusion speaks to applications of my dissertation's approach to danced ways of knowing as forms of individual and collective self-fashioning in negotiation with or in opposition to epistemic hegemonies and state violence. Pointing to the plethora of gender non-conforming Candomblé choreographies beyond the scope of this dissertation, I gesture to another case study, a festa sequestered in the forests of Valeria north of Salvador, and dedicated to the trickster-vixen class of Brazilian entidades known as Exua and linked to post-abolition streetwalkers and cabaret performers. Then, I open the potential applications of my findings to scholars within and outside of Brazil interested in how practitioners of Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous performance activate claims of bodily and political sovereignty through dance.

Forging a performance-based approach to the study of circum-Atlantic religion, I argue that practitioners marshal Candomblé's aesthetic politics of circling (*rodar no santo*), falling or being knocked over (*barravento*), loose and broken (*solto and quebradinha*) and driving (*puxado*) to create mobile sites across which *axé* is generated and distributed. I position ritual sambas in the universe of Candomblé's Afro-Bahian expressions and point out how their creative engagement with the legacies of regional identity construction and modern nationalism recover historical agency through performance. As a whole, my research draws critical, under-theorized connections between dance aesthetics, corporeal constructions and Bahia's Afro-religious

historical development to show that the body circling with the saints in Candomblé performance is non-singular, ritually gender fluid, and socially reproductive.

CHAPTER ONE:

Choreographies of Gendered Agency: Candomblé's Formation and Formalization

According to oral and written histories, the ideologies and praxes that crystalized into the Candomblé's ritual forms were brought to Bahia and innovated upon by three Yoruban culture-bearers remembered as the matriarchs of Bahia's Afro-religious traditions.⁴⁴ While different versions of their names have been documented, Edison Carneiro (1948, 56) listed the priestesses as Iyá Nasso, Iyá Adêta and Iyá Kala.⁴⁵ On Bahian shores, Iyá Kala initiated another African-born priestess, Omoniké, who is also remembered as a founding mother. Arriving during the fourth cycle of forced African immigration to Brazil, between the late 1770s and the mid nineteenth century, these priestesses hailed from parts of West Africa located today in Benin and Western Nigeria. Large-scale displacements caused by political instability in the second half of the eighteenth century, as the Oyo Empire declined and collapsed, made peoples of "common" and royal heritage from these regions vulnerable to slave traffickers. Thus, twin princesses from the city of Ketu in Oyo, also landed in Bahia during this time, and ultimately erected the terreiro Alaketu, another of the Candomblés in Salvador that has, along with the Casa Branca and Gantois, been central to consolidating discourses of ritual authority that rely dually on demonstrable and/or conceptual linkage to African ancestry, and their leaders' unique ability to communicate with the Orixás (see also Sterling 2012).

This chapter springs from the oral traditions that emphasize Candomblé's inception by female progenitors, the "Yoruban mothers" (Landes 1947). In the colonial Bahia that they encountered, varied magical, oracular, and dance and drum performance-based practices of spirit

⁴⁴ Interviews with Cici, Cunha, Oba, Cristiam 2018. Also Castillo 2018, Harding 2000.

⁴⁵ Religious titles. Iyá is the Yoruban equivalent of mother. Iyá Nassô designates a Xangô priestess.

embodiment co-existed and cross-fertilized with Iberian European occult beliefs and Bahian Indigenous pharmacopeiac healing and trance rituals (see Harding 2000, Reis 2001). During the nineteenth century, major shifts including the 1835 Malê slave revolt, the ensuing transatlantic voyages of Iya Nassô and her travel companions, the banning of slave importation (1831) and eventual abolition of slavery in Brazil (1888), and the consolidation of pan-ethnic African identity discourses in Bahia – in which priestesses and their allies played formative roles – helped determine the institutional trajectories that Candomblé would take.

Because their conditions of practice in Bahia’s cosmopolitan society and racialist economic system differed so greatly from those of the Old World, Bahian Candomblé’s progenitors necessarily and ingenuously adapted their aesthetic and corporeal techniques as well as social structures to accommodate the needs of new ritual communities and their gods. In nineteenth century Bahia, founding priestesses of the motherhouses, their allies and their successors reconfigured ritual structures and kinship arrangements. Continuing into Bahia’s post-abolition (1888) period of social upheaval, these historical actors catalyzed new conceptions of pan-ethnic, African identity to set the groundwork for establishing the religio-cultural trajectories of their own houses, despite their syncretic influences, as most loyal to Yoruban genealogies of practice and therefore “pure” and uncorrupted.

Against the background of abolition and new opportunities of social mobility for Black Bahians in late nineteenth century, leading priestesses and their allies tactically consolidated certain sets of aesthetic and social configurations, which cohered into a prestigious form of Afro-Brazilian religiosity under the denomination of Ketu or nagô identity, in reference to specific regions of Yorubaland, from which the founding priestesses and numerous of Candomblé’s principal Orixá originate. To elucidate Candomblé’s development in relation to the techniques of

the houses that have come to represent Afro-Bahian religious orthodoxy, this chapter explores the hierarchicalization of Candomblé practices and the conceptual linkage of orthodox practice, women's spirit embodiments and African purity. I contribute a gender analysis to the historicization of Candomblé's Ketu or nagô standards of authenticity, arguing that within this process, leading priestesses and their collaborators also established the principles of matriarchal leadership and matrilineal succession that came to frame understandings of orthodox tradition. Relatedly, I suggest, priestesses and their allies built on Yoruban and pan-West African understandings of women's agency and ritual gender fluidity to standardize the coding of mediumship as quintessentially female, at least among the nagô Candomblés.

Often with the help of male counterparts, they forged new circum-Atlantic religious structures that could at once attend to the need for a collective imaginary of Africa and marshal the available resources of the New World to intervene in the constellations of power contemporaneous to their times. The technical innovations that they instituted and transmitted, including the choreographic and rhythmic movement structures of the ceremonial order, the aesthetics of practitioners' dress, altar practices, names of the Orixá, dominant praise languages, novel kinship arrangements and matriarchal leadership principles, endure as dominant structures in Salvador's nagô, Orixá-centric Candomblés today.

Yet Orixás' corporeal economies present a paradox. While a majority of devotees and scholars link Candomblé's spirit embodiments to cultural logics of female privilege, suggesting that women have dominated the ranks of mediumship and (since mid-18th century) leadership because their reproductive bodies are essentially well-positioned for spiritual permeation and procreation. At the same time, as scholars have noted (including Browning, 1995, Wafer 1991, Strongman 2019 and Matory 2005), Candomblé's Yoruban-Atlantic corporealities produce

mutable genders and sexualities that are, or, at minimum, can be, unfixed from the biological body, and function in contextual relation to ritual performance. Strongman in particular proposes a Black, transatlantic understanding of gender as “multiple, removable, and external to the body.” He writes that the “quintessential spiritual body of the African-diaspora is the impregnable body of the initiate in trance” and that, rather than being based on a biological capacity for fertilization, this quintessential body is rooted in a “ritual performance of penetrability” (276). Strongman relevantly clarifies that, in the context of Candomblé’s gender idealizations, biology is secondary (though not irrelevant) to the symbolic, performative languages of conception and birth. My research draws on these insights to forge a theoretical ground on which to address Candomblé’s matriarchal organization.

To begin, I outline the demographic elements of colonial Bahia’s composite, multi-ethnic African communities and introduce determinant ethno-geographic and lineage markers in the shaping of Candomblé’s politics of ritual authority. Exploring Candomblé’s nineteenth century formalization, I touch on historical processes including inter-ethnic collaboration and African-Creole antagonism and the transatlantic voyages of Iya Nassô and her cohort, key players in establishing Bahia’s nagô standards. To link the adaptation of ritual practices to accommodate the new demands met by Afro-Bahian practitioners with performance practices, I offer a choreographic glimpse of how deities from differentiated ancestral lineages manifest in an Orixá ceremony in the Casa Branca originally founded by Iyá Nassô. Next, I address the reconfiguration of discourses of pan-African identity marshaled by successors of the founding mothers and trace their consolidation into taxonomic hierarchies of Afro-Brazilian religions that continue to exert epistemic and political influence on the Orixá and Caboclo practices that my dissertation engages, as well as interpretations of those forms among different constituents of

Bahian society as well as international observers. Finally, I stake out my position on the historicity of Candomblé's matriarchal systems, arguing that founding priestesses neither invented nor passively retained knowledge of African institutional knowledge but rather drew on pan-West African conceptions of women's agency as they defined their traditions and adapted their aesthetic and social operations to the realities of constituents in the New World.

1. Colonial Bahia and the Genesis of Candomblé

Slave traffic to Brazil accounted for 40% of forced African migration to the New World, and Bahia represented an enduring and commercially active port through which more slaves passed than any other, excepting Rio de Janeiro (Ribeiro, 2008). The first cycle of slave traffic to Bahia, beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century with establishment of Northeastern Brazil's sugarcane plantation economies, brought a majority of enslaved persons from the Guinea coast, between present-day northern Senegal to Sierra Leone. During the second cycle, from the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century, enslaved Africans, primarily Bantu language speakers, arrived from Portuguese missions and factories along the West Central African coast from Cabinda to Benguela (Harding 2000; 51, Verger 1976). Bantu peoples constituted the first large-scale source of enslaved labor and influenced the development of Afro-Brazilian culture on multiple structural levels. Linguists have traced the Brazilian-Portuguese terms including *samba*, *batuque* (drumming gatherings), *quilombo* (maroon community), and *Candomblé* itself to Bantu origins (Luhning interview August 2018).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Although there is no consensus about its original meaning, practitioners and linguists agree that the word Candomblé can likely be traced to the Kikongo languages spoken by Bantu Angolan peoples in Bahia. One devotee linked Candomblé's derivative meanings to "dances for the gods," while another interpretation posits Candomblé as a corruption of a Kikongo phrase meaning "little house of the Blacks" or "little house of the Natives" (D'Osogiyán 2015).

Relevant to my focus on Candomblé's engagement with New World spaces and socio-political conditions, the integration of indigenous Brazilian influences and the Caboclo lineages into Afro-Bahian religious practices is linked to Central African attitudes and activities during the colonial era and to the ritual houses that cultivate Bantu-Angolan divinities, the *Inquices* (Teles dos Santos 1995, Augusto interview 2018). These terreiros are known today under the umbrella category of the Angola nation. While the discourse of Candomblé "nations" refers technically to geo-political and ethnic variation among African groups, scholars as well as practitioners note that "national" titles are broadly deployed to stake out positions of moral authority in local micro-political contests as well as to identify a terreiro's liturgical association with specific leaders and their successors.

In the third cycle, from the early 1600s until approximately 1770, enslaved persons including significant numbers of Ewes, part of the group that became known as jeje, departed for Brazil from the shores of modern Ghana. The fourth cycle, from late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century cycle, is also referred to as the cycle of the Bight of Benin. This cycle differed from previous waves of forced African immigration to Bahia in terms of the ethnic composition. During this epoch of the Atlantic slave trade, roughly from 1770-1850, Yorubas represented a majority of the persons transported to the remaining slave-trading societies of the Americas, particularly Cuba and Brazil. Thus, most of the Africans arriving in Bahia in the 1800s originated from ethno-linguistic groups along the coast of the Bight of Benin. Principally, these included Aja-Fon speaking persons known in Bahia as *jejes*⁴⁷ from Dahomey (present-day Togo and Benin) and eastern regions of Ghana, and Hausa Muslims and Yorubas from what is now Nigeria and eastern Benin (Harding 2000, 52; Verger 1976; Parés 2013). Despite or, perhaps,

⁴⁷ "Jeje" in colonial Brazil meant "strangers" and was used derogatorily by Yoruba speaking peoples (Cici May 2018). Jeje does not correspond to an existent or preexisting "nation" in political terms.

due in part to, this diversity of historical actors and ethnic affiliations,⁴⁸ ritual practices aggregated under the moniker of nineteenth century Candomblé cohere in their continuities with documented Afro-Brazilian religio-cultural manifestations from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Police records confirm the presence of divination, “magico-pharmacoepic” healing (based on herbs and leaves as well as other substances), invocation of multiple deities, ritual clothing and adornments, and percussive music and dance in client-based and collective meetings throughout Salvador and the surrounding Rencôncavo towns since the initial phases of Portuguese colonialism (Harding 35; Reis 2001).⁴⁹

The heterogeneous cultural and ethnic landscape of Salvador’s African communities experienced a constant “state of re-creation” with each new wave of immigration (Harding 2000, 52). Arriving from the other side of the Atlantic, the journeys of the priestesses widely regarded as Candomblé’s “African mothers,” Iyá Nasso, Iyá Adêta and Iyá Kala, as well as Omoniké, the founder of Gantois, coincided with the final cycles.⁵⁰ Yoruban peoples already constituted the dominant group of enslaved persons of the Bahia in which they landed, but the heritage backgrounds of the majority of free Africans reflected earlier periods of the human slave trade, which were dominated by persons of Aja-Fon, Hausa and Congo-Angolan descent (Castillo 16).

Called *nagôs* in Bahia, Yorubas, with the exception of Hausa Muslims, shared Orixá-based cosmological systems.⁵¹ The Yoruba-oriented terreiros that dominate Bahian Candomblé

⁴⁸ Of which my summary mentions but a few.

⁴⁹ Scholars disagree over whether the cultivation of multiple deities in one ritual house was an innovation of Bahian Candomblé or a « continuity » from its West and Central African precursors.

⁵⁰ Twin sisters from the royal line of the kingdom of Ketu arrived in this wave and founded another of Bahia’s seminal historic houses, the terreiro Alaketu (see Harding 2000 and Silveira 2003).

⁵¹ Slavers in Brazil employed the term *nagô* to refer to enslaved Africans with a shared point of departure from the Bight of Biafra on the gold coast (see Law 1997). The term was also used derogatively by Jeje

today, evidenced at Gantois, generally self-identify as nagô, even while *Ketu* remains the most common denominator of national affiliation or *nação*. However, in colonial Brazil, the emergence of nagô Candomblé relied on jeje-Fon derivations, established during previous cycles of slave traffic, as evidenced by the titles of the three principle *atabaque* (goat or cow skin) drums: rum, rumpi and lé. Jeje ritual structures permeated in nagô traditions and the *Voduns*, divinities of the Aja-Fon matrix, preside in many temple houses.⁵² In Bahia's socio-cultural milieu, the collective identities of jeje, nagô, Angola and other Afro-descendants were constructed in the context of the Atlantic slave trade, articulated by means of participation in institutionalized forms of social organization and defined in dialogical relationships to one another (2013, 141).

Bahian Candomblé is often defined in terms of its distinct nagô trajectories and Yoruban identity linked to the Ketu region (from which Omoniké also descended).⁵³ However, while the priestesses of Gantois and the Casa Branca, at which Omoniké was initiated, emphasized their West African roots, Central African as well as Muslim, popular Catholic, Indigenous, Spiritist, Judaism and Kabbalah mysticism also contribute to its codices. Possibly one of the original kingdoms of Oyo, Ketu is a "nation" associated with the nagô banner and claimed by many

peoples in Brazil to refer to persons of Yoruba language groups; nowadays nagô generally refers to Yoruban socio-histories, identities and religio-cultural practices.

⁵² Parés uses archival evidence to argue that jeje ritual structures provided the basis for Candomblé's institutionalization, and that these forms were effectively nago-ized in the late 1800s with the "birth of the Yoruba hegemony" (2013, 1).

⁵³ Omoniké came from the *egbá* ethnic group. Her African origins and life history are detailed in Castillo's social history of the Gantois (2017).

Candomblés today; the other two most common are jeje and Angola.⁵⁴ In the colonial and postcolonial Bahia of Omoniké's time, nagô and jeje communities often resided in the same neighborhoods (Cici interview May 2018, Castillo 2017) and collaborated in the establishment and maintenance of ritual communities. Early documentations of Candomblé signal this interdependence; using the term “jeje-nago” in discussions of nagô-based ritual models (Rodrigues 1896), as Dona Cici also continues to do.

Considering oral tradition as well as archival documentation, Lisa Castillo (2017) explores inter-ethnic collaboration in the erection of the terreiro of Gantois. She shows that the founding priestess' husband, Francisco Nazareth, a freed jeje man – barber by occupation and practitioner of “cures of African origin” – was highly involved with the founding of both Gantois and the prestigious jeje Candomblé house, Bogum. The formative nineteenth century alliance between Omoniké and Francisco Nazareth, two historical actors to which Candomblé's origins are attributed, demonstrates the degree to which the religion represents a pan-West African, inter-ethnic and uniquely Afro-Bahian synthesis.

When Omoniké, by then baptized and given the name Maria Julia de Conceição, by which she is typically referred in oral traditions, founded Gantois in the mid nineteenth century, persons of various legal statures, ethnicities and colors took part in Bahia's Afro-religious activities. These included participants identified as Africans, creoles (Brazilian-born persons of African descent) and mulattos (mixed-race individuals) as well as some whites. In the eighteenth century, enslaved and free African-born peoples from different language and ethnic groups intermingled in Candomblés. But by early 1800s, Brazilian-born subjects also took part; municipal police records from Salvador document the involvement of Brazilian-born creoles in

⁵⁴ At least one of the founding mothers, Mãe Aninha, first iyalorixá of Ilê Axé Opô Afonja, came from the Ewe, Gbe-speaking peoples of Ghana, and not from Yorubaland. According to Dona Cici, Aninha always kept a private shrine to the deities of her parents' homeland in the terreiro (Cici interview June 2018).

Vodun worship in 1828 (Reis 2001, 128). The participation of Brazilian-born blacks infuriated local law enforcers and commissioners, many of whom viewed African religious practices as a stain on Brazilian civilization that would dissolve as the demographic shifted towards an increasingly creolized black population.⁵⁵ Beginning in the eighteenth century, biological determinism had ignited the imagination of the upper classes and fueled hopes for Bahia's ascension from "African primitivism to European civility" (Butler 2010; 136-137). The growing presence of Bahian born peoples in Africanist ritual assemblies thus disturbed elites' evolutionary notion of progress, and an 1865 report of a female creole terreiro harboring fugitive slaves (Reis 2001; 130) further inflamed owning-class fears of Candomblé's subversive potential to white social control.

Dating back to the late 1700s, Inquisition officers in Brazil charged African specialists with being greedy and using exploitative means to extort money from innocent customers in order to buy their own freedom from slavery. Many of these accusations were based on ideological contempt for Africanist ritualistic activities, including but not limited to: exorcism, acts of "sorcery" causing healing or illness, offerings to the gods and ancestors, initiation rites including cleansing baths, scarification and seclusion, and dance and drum rituals (Reis 123-125, Harding). At times, bondspersons sought expert assistance to invert the scales of power through poisoning their masters and inviting divine intervention. Drumming and trance dancing, as fundamental elements of "batuque" gatherings organized by enslaved Africans, also helped

⁵⁵ Most Bahian-born African descendants were baptized and their worship of Catholic saints belied ongoing Africanist religious orientations. The widely accepted syncretism "mask" theory holds that enslaved peoples hid their Africanist religious systems behind images of Catholic saints. Heywood and Thornton (2007) present data that may challenge the mask theory, by showing that many bondspersons brought from Central Africa during the early colonial period had in fact already converted to Catholicism for political reasons. The Congolese Queen Nzinga, from whose name capoeira's quintessential movement, the "ginga" derives, was one such convert in the 16th century. Today many Bahians still observe more than one religion, attending, for example, both Catholic mass and Candomblé festivals.

mobilize and spark the 1835 *Malê* slave rebellion as well as smaller uprisings (Reis 2005, 210). Candomblé thus posed risks to patriarcho-colonialism and racialized social relations on various registers including enabling specialists to acquire manumission, causing illness and death to members of the ruling class, hiding runaway slaves and inciting rebellion.

The few whites integrated into ritual societies in the second half of the nineteenth century probably held honorary roles, but one may have been a priestess or *mãe-de-santo*, the term that gained currency in the same time period and is now most common for indicating priestess status (Reis 2001). Although, following the *Mapeamento* (2006), few – less than 10 – organized terreiros existed at this time, Afro-Bahian religious experts gained far-reaching reputations and attracted visitors from other parts of the country and even from across the Atlantic. Their customers represented every social and occupational group including blacks, whites, mulattos, slaves, masters, artisans, public employees, politicians, businessmen, street vendors, professors, students, prostitutes, “ladies,” policemen, criminals, and Catholic priests (128). Yet, “magic” was not the exclusive domain of indigenous peoples and Africans; European witchcraft and amulet making also circulated in Brazil, and experts from different traditions often cooperated with each other to solve all manners of spiritual and physical ailments (126). At the same time, local struggles for prestige within Candomblé also exacerbated long-held antagonisms between African and creole groups.⁵⁶ Within this dynamic environment, interracial and cross-class relations formed an important basis for Candomblé’s pluralistic development.

Travel between Bahia and the West African coast played a pivotal role in Candomblé’s nineteenth century expansion and self-definition.⁵⁷ Among the numerous voyages made by

⁵⁶ Parés 2013, based on archival colonial documents from the Catholic brother and sisterhoods.

⁵⁷ In the 19th century transatlantic activity between Brazil and Africa included the circulation of ideas, and exchange of commercial and specialty goods as well as slave trafficking.

traders, ritual specialists and freed enslaved Africans returning to the continent, the transatlantic journeys of Casa Branca's first two priestesses hold a unique place in the history of Candomblé and the Atlantic world. Iyá Nassô, who built and headed the Casa Branca terreiro in the 1830s, and her successor, Oba Tossi, both African-born women, traveled to present-day Benin in 1837 (historically and today part of Yorubaland), after Iyá Nassô's sons were falsely convicted of inciting the 1835 Malê slave revolts in Bahia.⁵⁸ Oba Tossi, at that time enslaved to Iyá Nassô, accompanied the family as her bondswoman. Iyá Nassô later freed Oba Tossi, who became the Casa Branca's second Iyalorixá.⁵⁹ Iyá Nassô and Oba Tossi are emblematic agents in the transatlantic dialogues through which Candomblé's cosmopolitan foundations and self-representations took shape (see Matory 2005). In addition, their journeys catalyzed the trans-regional development of Afro-Brazilian religion from Bahia to Rio (in the Southeast) and then

⁵⁸ The biggest slave rebellions in Bahia, the 1835 revolts were termed the Malê rebellions because they were led by free and enslaved Yoruban muslim, called Malês in Bahia. The journeys of Iyá Nassô and Oba Tossi, along with those of other priestesses and priests, became features in mytho-historiographies of Candomblé's foundations. However, Lisa Castillo (2017) has recently confirmed the historicity of legendary travels undertaken by Iyá Nassô and Oba Tossi, through finding documentation of their 1837 departure, along with about 1000 other people who left Brazil, in the Bahian state archives. Interestingly, they did not resettle in their home regions but instead in Ouidah in present-day Benin, and several other port cities already involved in transatlantic trade (mostly of slaves), to where they brought non-Native deities and transformed the local practices in West Africa. The dialogical co-creation of African and African-America, in which Iyá Nassô, Oba Tossi and Bamboxê play significant parts, is a focus of Matory's 2008 monograph, in which he argues against conceiving Candomblé as a passively inherited "folk tradition." Instead, Candomblé is a product of the interested actions of Afro-descendent individuals responsible for the transnational construction and reproduction of Black Atlantic religions, with the exception of its matriarchal structures which Matory frames as first world influenced fabrications.

⁵⁹ While the oral traditions remember Oba Tossi as accompanying Iyá Nassô, Lisa Castillo recovered documents proving the latter's indentured status at the time of their travel. Although this alliance illustrates the "paradoxical insistent presence of slavery" in the lives of freed Africans in Brazil, who would then become slave owners themselves, the nature of domination in these relationships differed greatly because many Africans enslaved to free Africans shared a common language, racial identity and culture with their "donos" or masters (*National Humanities Center*, 2018).

Recife (in Pernambuco, north of Bahia), and set the stage for the establishment of the matriarchal paradigm by their successors.

Iyá Nassô and Oba Tossi returned to Bahia (probably in the 1840s) with a nagô priest of Yoruban divination (Ifá), Bamboxê Obiticô, who became a leading figure of the Casa Branca after Maria Julia, the third Iyalorixá of Casa Branca, split the lineage to erect a new terreiro, the Gantois. Bamboxê ultimately constructed a Casa Branca sister-house in Rio de Janeiro. One of the most satisfying connections I made in my historical research was discovering that Bamboxê initiated Tia Ciata, the Afro-Bahian migrant in whose home – also a terreiro – Rio samba was born and first recorded in 1916.⁶⁰ Although Bamboxê arrived on Bahian shores as a slave of Iyá Nassô, who had specifically sought a priest of African divination to help build her empire in Bahia, it was Oba Tossi, by then freed by Iya Nassô, who bought his freedom (Castillo 2017).

The sequence of slave purchases and manumission among these three leading protagonists of Bahian Candomblé forms a remarkable web of social, economic and spiritual interdependence that shines light on the rhizomatic ways that slavery holding as an institution not only shaped but was also shaped by Africans and Afro-descendent slave holders in the Atlantic world. The interwoven lives of African bondspersons and African slave owners who collaborated in Candomblé's institutionalization show just how omnipresent the institution of legal slavery remained in Bahian social and religious life, and point to its diversity of power dynamics (Castillo 2018). Owning class Africans often held language and other cultural referents in

⁶⁰ Although music historians and ethnographers (and dance scholars including Browning, 1995) have noted the historical linkage of samba and Candomblé, two iconic national forms, these genealogical connections have yet to be rigorously traced, which is odd because both Tia Ciata (a key figure of Rio samba) and Bamboxê (as a leader in Candomblé's dissemination from Bahia to other Brazilian sites of practice) feature in historical studies, perhaps because disciplinary divides between music and religious scholarship, and regional divides between scholars focused on Rio and those looking at the Northeast, have informed master narratives of Brazilian culture. *Pelo Telefone*, the first Rio samba ever recorded, was taped at Tia Ciata's house, where Rio's musicians famously congregated and improvised new sounds.

common with their bondspersons and, in the case of Iyá Nassô and Bamboxê, they developed collaborative relationships, both during and after the latter's period of indenture.

Although Bamboxê is remembered as a priest of the Yoruban god Xangô, he is also credited with popularizing the “merindinlogun” 16-cowrie shell system of *Ifá* (Yoruban) divination in Bahia, and with establishing Candomblé's xirê, the sequence of entrance, address and invocation for multiple divinities whose immanent presences are sought at a particular ceremonial event. Bamboxê's complex xirê pattern, significantly “re-territorialized” the space of the Afro-Brazilian terreiro as a site for the incarnation of the Yoruban Orixás (Sterling 2010), supporting live interactions between them, in manifest form, and their Bahian devotees.⁶¹ This novel design, suggests historian Rachel Harding, evidences the need for new structures to support the co-existence of a dazzling array of divinities from various regional backgrounds, each with unique choreographic symbolisms and cultivation rites, in a shared ceremonial space (2000; 100). While Harding views the joint cultivation of deities from varied geo-political and ethnic lineages as a novelty based on the needs of Black communities in Brazil, some scholars suggest that multi-divinity worship in West Africa, possibly due to regional migrations, politically motivated maneuvering and cross-cultural influence, among other factors, preceded the establishment of Candomblé's terreiros on Bahian shores. Regardless, the xirê's innovated arrangements correspond to ceremonial sequences that follow the incorporations of the deities, who then, in turn, execute their codified dances, and salute the drummers, elders, participants and sanctuary entranceways. The reconfiguration of ceremonial orders for Orixá homages mirrors the ways that Candomblé leaders also transformed social structures to resignify the relations of community members within the familia de santo or ritual family. The

⁶¹ See also K. Argyriadis & S. Capone, eds. *La religion des orisha*, 2011, especially their introduction on “relocalisation.”

implementation of novel aesthetic and social regimes attests to practitioners' creativity and flexibility in responding to New World exigencies to contour Afro-Bahia's cosmo-theological world.

A snapshot of the immanent Orixás at an Oxossi festa at the Casa Branca in May 2018 gives an impression of how spirit embodiments of a multitude of entities unfold in ceremonial performance: Ogum comes out first. The powerful warrior and brother of Oxossi, a Ketu king, Ogum is cultivated as an Orixá and, in jeje houses, a Vodun. Two filhas embody him, opening their arms and slicing through the air as they direct their bodies on a forward diagonal for three steps, shift weight, turn 180 degrees and repeat. They stop before the musicians to cross their arms in front of their torsos, the motion of attack. Ogum's dance is full of sharp accents. He swipes his wrists above his head, then down along the sides of his body. He uses triplets to retreat and then approach the enemy swiftly, his advance moves to the earth and up again, crossing his hands before his chest as blades cunningly wielded. His arms and legs never fully extend, so that his force keeps recycling internally and in the movements. Abruptly, he leaves the center of the sanctuary floor and dashes to the door, saluting the portal through which visitors such as myself have arrived.

Next come the Oxossis, seven of them, followed by Xangô and then several of the Orixás incorporated into the Ketu ranks from their Jeje foundations. These include the rainbow snake, Oxumaré (Dan or Besem in Vodun traditions), and then the povos velhos, the old ones: Nana, the primordial grandmother pounding her fists together and on muddy earth; Obaluaiye, who dances with his back hunched over as he walks three paces to one side and then another, giving life, and taking it away with the open and closed palm of his extended hand (Cici 2016). Oxalá is last. In one of his qualities, the father of creation rests tenderly on the back of a younger more able-

bodied Orixá, his son Xangô. In the gallery, we lift our hands, palms open, in the presence of the Orixá. Now Orixá energy pulses and radiates from the human form before me. (May 31 2018)

2. Post-Abolition Bahia and The “Africanization” of Candomblé

The official end of Atlantic slavery in 1888 constituted a moment of social crisis for Bahia’s oligarchic ruling class, and a field of opportunity for Black working-class ex-slaves. Fearing the political danger represented by an emancipated Afro-descendent social body, the military government seized power and proclaimed Brazil’s first Republic in 1889.⁶² Articles of the Republican government’s 1890 Penal Code classified Candomblé as a civil threat to public health, providing the necessary terms for the ongoing repression of Afro-Brazilian religious activities despite the legal separation of church and state. The articles specifically targeted, regulated and criminalized the medicinal and pharmacopeic practices of the ex-enslaved.⁶³ During this period, the Republican administration aggressively encouraged European immigration while prohibiting the entrance of Africans and Asians to Brazil without congressional approval (Johnson 2002, 82). European immigration flowed primarily to the increasingly industrialized South, while in the Northeast, Bahia became increasingly economically marginalized from the nation’s center, which had moved to Rio in 1776.

At this crucial juncture, the female priestesses of the Ketu houses and their successors, having initiated and fostered Candomblé’s nascent structures since the early nineteenth century,

⁶² European-descendent property and slave owners made up Bahia’s elite classes.

⁶³ Three articles of the penal code addressed “illegitimate” practices of medicine: Article 156 prohibited medical practice without legal certification. Article 157 prohibited “spiritism, magic and its sorceries, the use of talismans and cartomancy to arouse sentiments of hate and love, the promise to cure illnesses, curable and not curable; in sum, to fascinate and subjugate public belief.” Article 158 forbade administering or prescribing a “a substance of ... the natural domains for internal or external use, or in any way prepared, thus performing or exercising the office denominated as curandeiro” (Johnson 2001, 19).

galvanized new imaginaries of Africa as a locus of tradition to fortify and authenticate their practices. Influenced by emergent symbolic conceptions of Africa that arrived in Bahia via transatlantic networks and drew inspiration from the late nineteenth century Yoruba ethnogenesis,⁶⁴ Afro-Brazilians sought to restore traditionalism as an anchor for a “neo-African” ethnic identity via Candomblé (Butler 2010, 146).⁶⁵ These religious leaders began to deploy the Brazil-specific Yoruban ethnonym *nagô* as a unifying signifier in the construction of collective identities that could unite black Bahian communities facing racist violence as well as pressures of assimilation. Importantly, these emergent identities also cohered around African aesthetics and epistemological expressions that persisted in practitioners’ own cultural inheritances.⁶⁶

In the late 1800s, ideologies of racial whitening gained currency among politicians concerned with the economic decline of the state in the aftermath of slavery.⁶⁷ Proponents of whitening asserted that miscegenation with white peoples would cause Bahia’s African population to advance culturally and genetically within several generations, allowing Brazil to join the ranks of modern European civilization. Nevertheless, Candomblé “flourished with renewed force, offering religious entrepreneurs a possibility of upward social mobility while favoring new processes of black identity” (Parés 145). By the mid-1900s, dominant ideologies shifted to embrace miscegenation or *mestiçagem* as a key asset in the formation of Brazil’s

⁶⁴ Part of the Lagosian cultural revolution that marked the nationalization of Yoruba as a political identity including numerous ethnic groups with previously distinct polities (see Matory 2005 and Parés 2013).

⁶⁵ Bastide (1960) previously used the term “re-Africanization” to reference this process.

⁶⁶ Neither a paradigm of “invention” nor one of “retention” is sufficient for contextualizing Candomblé’s composite and dialectic development. See also Apter 1991.

⁶⁷ Racial whitening or branqueamento, largely based on scientific racism, purported the pseudoscientific beliefs intended to justify race discrimination and racial hierarchy through the classification of human populations into anthropological types representing physically discrete human races.

tropical, supposedly racially harmonious national culture (see Freyre 1933; Dunn 2001). The broadly accepted paradigm of *mestiçagem* advanced the idea that Africans, and to a lesser extent, Indigenous populations contributed formatively to the development of Brazil's cultural modernity. From 1930 to 1945, president turned dictator Getulio Vargas instituted discourses of cultural nationalism that helped propel Afro-Brazilian iconographies and expressions including symbols of Bahian Candomblé and the sounds of Rio's sambas onto the national and global stage.⁶⁸ Yet, as many critics have shown, the visibility of Africanist cultural contributions also obscures public recognition of Brazil's ongoing regimes of racial violence and enables the erasure of Black lives (Scott 2016; Skidmore 1974).

Returning to the post-abolition era, precisely because the Brazilian-born population was increasing as African-born experts were aging and passing away (and new waves of immigrants were no longer forthcoming), creole women leaders of African-founded houses such as Gantois and Casa Branca were able to claim African identity via their predecessors. At this juncture, tensions between Candomblé communities coalesced around genealogical and racial claims that are differently asserted by African-born persons living in Bahia and by Brazilian-born mixed-race "creole" subjects (Parés 2004). Conterminously, creole congregations dedicated to Caboclo worship became more visible, despite evidence that Caboclo cultivation had been present in Salvador since at least 1823, the year of Bahian Independence from colonial rule.⁶⁹ To compete with the popularity of Caboclo specialists and the authority wielded by typically male African-born leaders, the *iyalorixás* of the Ketu houses tactically construed their practices as "authentic,"

⁶⁸ Vargas overthrew the Republican government in 1930. His nationalist-populist regime officially promoted the modern nationalist discourse of *brasilidade* or Brazilianness. In 1937 Vargas instituted the authoritarian *Estado Novo* or New State rule, which lasted until 1945.

⁶⁹ Albuquerque 1999, Kraay 1999.

under the auspices of continuity with Yoruban religio-cultures. However, in contrast to the either/or idea of cultural invention versus fabrication, the *iyalorixás*, through processes of selective adaptation and recontextualization, actively participated in the canonization of a pan-ethnic, Afro-Atlantic religious culture.

Ironically, though the orthodox priestesses publically rejected *Caboclos*, many still cultivated them behind closed doors (Teles dos Santos 1995, 86-87). As Candomblé transitioned from clandestine societies charged with sorcery and fetishism⁷⁰ to an institutionalized “religion,” the public discourses mobilized by leading figures of Candomblé reflected changing political priorities and ethno-racial hierarchies to push certain “inauthentic” ritual activities underground even as, in practice, cross-fertilization continued to hybridize and complicate Bahia’s religious field. In fact, Candomblé priestesses overwhelmingly, if secretly, identified with *Caboclos*’ double exclusions, as *Caboclos* became marginalized in Candomblé and representative of Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous persons who are marginalized in Bahian society. In chapters three and four, I suggest that Candomblé priestesses take up the opportunities provided by *Caboclo* practices to embody masculine authority associated with New World formations, while maintaining matriarchal frameworks defined by the founding mothers. While the dynamics of *Caboclo* cultivation that I will explore contrast with ceremonial logics described in this chapter,

⁷⁰ In the 1500s, uncovering acts and agents of *feiticaria*, “sorcery,” was a major preoccupation of the Holy Inquisition’s visits to Brazil. Civic and religious authorities, since at least the 17th century, linked *feiticaria* with devil worship and “diabolical arts,” including trance dance and poisonings. Harding (2000) states that, during the colonial era, associations between Blacks and “sorcery developed largely as a result of the attempt of slaves to alter the nature of colonial relations – especially the tension between masters and captives” (23). Charges of being a “*feiticeiro*,” witchdoctor or sorcerer, were punishable in 18th century Brazil and Portugal (24-25). The root word *feitiço* (made thing, fetish) could reference a spell, object or conglomeration of magical substances. As Reis (2001) points out, Indigenous, European and African magico-pharmacopeic practices circulated in Bahia throughout this period. However, *feiticeiro/a* are not terms which with Candomblé practitioners self-identify but rather “Euro-mercantile ideation(s)” (28).

they also reproduce and build upon the choreographic epistemes of Candomblé's feminist poiesis, since they rely on circular and cyclical aesthetic structures for their realization.

As the post-abolition state tried to take over paternalistic control of Afro-descendent women's bodies from plantation owners, especially through social hygiene policies and moral-sexual discourses that stigmatized working class women (see Filho 1998),⁷¹ new divinities emerged at the intersections of Africanist ritual and Bahian contemporary social life. These "Brazilian Exu," hybrids of the Orixá Exu (Esu, in Yorubaland), appear as urban hustlers alongside their equivalents, the Exua, who embody marginalized streetwalkers of this era. Even more than Caboclo, the Exu/as came to represent counterpoints to the schemas of African authenticity that helped legitimize Candomblé in the dominant public sphere.

The founding priestesses and inheritors from around post-abolition to mid 1900s endeavored to define a language of respectability, against the backdrop of Candomblé's continued, but uneven, criminalization, and create protective boundaries around codified Africanist ritual vocabularies and aesthetics.⁷² In the 1930s, for example, Mãe Aninha, founder of the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, and also from the Casa Branca, put forward a de-syncretization agenda that advocated for the removal of populist Catholic referents from the temple's altars.

⁷¹ In his discussion of Brazil's Republican era policies of social hygenization (1890-1937), Alberto Heráclito Ferreira Filho (1999) notes political elites and seingorial classes criminalized samba, along with related Afro-Brazilian dances *maxixe* and *umbigada*, as immoral and incompatible with the socially respectable, de-eroticized feminine models of the bourgeois family (248). Fueled by a concern with disciplining the newly freed Black populace, the Republican government, prohibited Africanist batuques as well as samba, which, with its characteristic hip, belly and buttock isolations and proximity of opposite sex dance partners, scandalized colonial mores. For urban reformers, street women stood in the way of building a civilized city by not embracing the values of civil marriage, virginity, and monogamy and by their roles as heads of households (249). Filho specifically details Republican era models of bourgeois femininity under patriarchal control based on the tropes of the virginal maiden and married senhora.

⁷² Some houses and leaders were targeted by police and criminalized while others enjoyed more protection either because of their secret locations, connections with law officials (in that law officers attended or feared the houses) or perceived adherence to dominant moral and legal codes. See Lunhing year. Also, several historians suggest that Candomblés led by men suffered more persecution than those led by women at this time because of the increasing authority and/or charisma of female leaders.

Early on, Aninha took a leading role in the movement to free Candomblé’s sacred spaces of visual links to centuries of subjugation and forced conversion under Brazil’s Christian colonial administration. However, the integration of Catholic “folk” iconography into Candomblé is also a product of uniquely local processes of religious syncretism propelled by the creative ingenuity of Afro-Bahian practitioners, such as members of the sisterhoods (*irmadades*) who nurtured connections to African divinities as they cultivated patron saints of their churches, and in the seventies Mãe Aninha later reclaimed Afro-Catholic syncretism as part of Bahia’s cultural inheritance. But Lusitanian Catholic symbols, as well as Caboclo and Exu/a⁷³— whose praise songs often invoke Jesus, Saint Benedict, Mary and other popular saints —provided a foil against which *mães de santo* legitimized their own Africanist practices, emphasizing the designated space of the terreiro, ordered invocations, female seniority and matrilineal initiatory hierarchy.⁷⁴

The second Afro-Brazilian Congress of 1937, in which Mãe Aninha participated, represented another formative stage in the Candomblé’s institutionalization. Articles from the journal *Estado da Bahia* exemplify the dichotomous discourses of Afro-Brazilian religion that cohered in the presentations of the second 1937 Afro-Brazilian Congress. The program of the Congress, attended by), American sociologist Donald Pierson and Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, pioneer scholars in the field of Afro-American studies, featured visits to the Casa Branca,

⁷³ Capone (2010) explores the strategic erasure of Caboclo and Exus, as perceived threats to official constructs of African legitimacy, in the discourses of anthropologists and religious leaders (131).

⁷⁴ Recent evidence shows that Candomblé’s Catholic influences predate the arrival of enslaved Africans in Brazil, since many subjects from Central African regions of Congo and Angola had already converted to Catholicism, taken on Christian names and been baptized for motivations both freely chosen and coercively exercised (Heywood and Thornton, 2007). Yet, even Catholicism’s earlier influences on African subjects were still partly results of cultural imperialism, conversion, and colonialism.

Gantois, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá and another Ketu terreiro, Alaketu. The program listed these temples as the most “pure” and “oldest” terreiros in Brazil.⁷⁵

Juxtaposed to the “pure” and “old” Candomblé of Gantois, the Congress program lists a visit to a ritual at a waterfall in Park São Bartolomeu led by pai-de-santo João de Pedra Preta, as a “festa fetichista,” or fetishistic festival (Estado da Bahia Jan 13 1937).⁷⁶ A controversial and beloved male Caboclo priest known for his coiffed hair, elegant cross-dressing, beautiful dancing and openly unorthodox sexual orientations, João de Pedra hailed from Bahia’s rural backlands and famously mixed Ketu, Caboclo and Central African-derived traditions in his practice. The description of João de Pedra Preta’s ritual in the forested park as “fetishistic” in contrast to the “pure” ceremonial events at Gantois, a cultivated grounds with architectural design and indoor sanctuary, shows how distinctions that developed in late nineteenth century Bahia, during which the image of an idealized Africa became central to the formation of a new Afro-Bahian identities have, by the mid twentieth century, become germane to legitimizations and de-legitimizations of Candomblé and influentially shape public opinion on a national and international scale.

The Congress program helped consolidate what Nicholas Parés has called a “conceptual polarity” (153-154) between the ‘pure’ senior female-dominated nagô-Ketu cults versus the ‘syncretic,’ Caboclo and Bantu Angolan-derived cults.⁷⁷ Foreign scholars who situated their

⁷⁵ According to journal articles dated from January 11 and 13 1937 that I consulted in Bahian archives. Brazilian sociologist Arthur Ramos, who had attended the first Congress, organized by Gilberto Freyre (author of *Masters and the Slaves*, 1933) and held in Recife in 1934, hailed as the “most renowned in Brazil” (Estado da Bahia, Dec 1 1936) did not attend the second Congress.

⁷⁶ The term fetishist derives from the Portuguese *fetiço*, a fetish –charm or power object. While Nina Rodrigues used the word to positively describe Gantois in 1896, by mid-1900s “fetishist” seem to connote deviant or occult practice as opposed to structured religion. For an analysis of *fetiço* see Harding 2000. The program notes on the festa fetichista echo a 1914 description of Caboclo in the daily paper, *O Moderno*, wherein the author calls Caboclo a “son of the jungle” with an “aura of virgin forest” (July 3).

⁷⁷ However, new research shows (see Andreson 2020), Angola Candomblés did and continue to operate matriarchally as well.

research at Salvador's prominent houses, some of whom attended the 1937 Congress, reinforced these binaries, reifying ethnic and, I suggest, gendered rivalries that located Caboclo in a world of non-designated and uncontrolled spaces (i.e. outdoors, forest), spontaneous (instead of precipitated) incorporations, male and pre-menopausal female mediums, flamboyant sexuality and lack of formal initiation (Landes 1947, 179-192; Bastide 1960; see also Dantas 1988).

On the heels of the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress, Jewish American anthropologist Ruth Landes' landmark monograph *City of Women* (1947), cast the Ketu priestesses and their allies in a favorable light. Interestingly, one of Landes' interlocutors was Mãe Aninha's advisor, Martiniano de Bonfim, himself a charismatic figure in Candomblé history. In the *Estado da Bahia*'s program listing for the Congress, I found an announcement for the discussion of Martiniano's thesis on "the one god of the black Yorubas," lending credit to arguments that the nagô supremacy at least partially rested on the legibility of Yoruban religion in a dominantly monotheistic Christian society (Harding 2000). Questions of monotheistic legibility colluded with frameworks of nagô purity advanced by priestesses themselves. French sociologist Roger Bastide (1973) assimilated the badge of nagô "purity" into his work; Bastide considered the Bantu Candomblés, to whom the emergence of Caboclo has been linked (Carneiro 1938; Mendes 2014), as assimilationist, commercialized and "distorted" through mixture with foreign elements. Landes, for her part, depicted Gantois' high priestess, Mãe Menininha, and her colleagues as beneficent "Yoruba mothers," while describing the Caboclo priestess Sabrina as opportunistic and seductive (1947, 147; 158; 180).⁷⁸ Sabina's youth and desirability provided a foil to the senior priestesses' moral integrity and commitment to the collective good. Even though male

⁷⁸ Following Landes (1947) and Parés (2013), men and young women likely dominated the Caboclo arena at the mid-20th century. Parés notes that persecuted terreiros in the 1920s were mostly led by men, thus more likely to feature Caboclo cultivation (2013, 315). Landes calls the Caboclo priestess Sabina as an "upstart," entrepreneur, situating her as a foil to the beneficent, post-menopausal Ketu priestesses. Dona Cici and Mãe Oba's testimonies on prevailing menstrual taboos support this dichotomy

American scholars such as Herskovits, together with the Brazilian sociologist Arthur Ramos, dismissed Landes’ findings and resented her feminist approach, they similarly observed and reported Candomblé’s female predominance in subsequent decades.

Caboclos and Exu/as – known by orthodox practitioners as “demonizations” of the Orixá Exu because their syncretism with the Catholic devil – were thus deemed capitalistic, impure and able to “work both sides” (Capone 2010, Perreira interview April, 2018). Based on the oppositional logics of right and left found in dominant Africanist and Euro-centric value systems of the body, “working both sides” implies that certain entidades, usually Exu/a, can be contracted for purposes deemed “good,” and linked to the “right” side, as well those demonized as “evil” and attributed to the “left.” These oppositions echo many practitioners’ own distinctions between, and relations with, various classes of spirits (Barbosa, Cici, Mendoza interviews May 2018). Candomblé’s gestural codes, such as greetings exchanged between novices and seniors of the terreiro during the xirê, turns in place performed by the Orixá, and sequences designed to close and protect the body during ritual cleansings, reflect the privileging of the right side.

Chart insert: Generalizes social value systems associated with Caboclos and Orixás since around the mid 20th century, recognizing that the nagôization of the Orixás has been formative in the process of institutionalizing these distinctions so that as Caboclos gained popularity Orixá practices were also recoded to reflect their increasingly “traditional” status.

| <u>Caboclos</u> | <u>Orixás</u> |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Outside/extra-institutional | Inside sanctuary/institutionally “indoctrinated” |
| Spontaneous possession | Invocation |
| Brazilian | Nagô/Ketu/African |
| Popular | Channeled by initiated specialists |
| Hyper-macho ⁷⁹ | Represent idealized gendered behaviors |
| Hybridity | Orthodoxy and cultural purity |
| Possibly seated but not “made” | Seated and formally made or initiated |

⁷⁹ This category can also refer to transgender performances, since Caboclos’ hypermasculinity unfixes machismo from heterosexual, cis-gendered male markers.

Ultimately, the duality of Africanity = right-handed, righteous and matri-focal cemented by anthropological literature in the mid twentieth century further reinforced the consolidation of power over Candomblé's cultural field by Bahia's senior female priestesses. If Candomblé's progenitors construed notions of traditionalism to reflect their own institutionalization efforts in the wake of legal abolition, their leadership also reflected and refracted West African paradigms of female authority and bio-social reproductivity. Informed by these cultural grammars, both in relation to the perceived impregnability of the fertile woman medium's body, and in correlation of post-menopausal feminine power to senior positions of authority, Candomblé's leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries strategically but also pragmatically reorganized their kinship and governing structures.

As the senior priestesses of nagô-Ketu houses codified their ritual vocabularies, they also deployed discourses that linked female agency with African traditionalism to distinguish themselves from predominantly male African-born priests as well as Caboclo specialists who were often male or non-senior women practicing outside of an established ritual center.

3. Bahian Candomblé's Matriarchal Formalization

I found broad consensus among practitioners about Bahian Candomblé's matriarchal origins and about the continued practice of privileging women for leadership roles today.⁸⁰ Yet, scholars disagree about whether matriarchal leadership really is "traditional" to Candomblé and how much relative influence African women and their descendants in Bahia actually wielded in determining the directions that Afro-religiosity took in the nineteenth century and its aftermath. Since the late twentieth century, several writers have discussed the process by which Yoruban ideals came to dominate the diverse range of syncretic West and Central African practices

⁸⁰ Like many commentators including Browning 1998, Johnson 2020, Butler 2010, Landes 1947.

gathered under the rubric of Candomblé (Dantas 1986; Parés 2004, 2013; Capone 2011, 2016), and offered varied perspectives on the importance of gender in this transition.

By all accounts, during the second half of the nineteenth century, Candomblé moved from distinct communities of practice based on ethnic and language identities, towards a (more) institutionalized form favoring determined Yoruban ritual genealogies over others, especially Congo-Angolan derivatives and cults of Caboclo. Parés deems this process “the birth of Candomblé’s “Yoruba hegemony” and attributes its dynamics to regional competitions for authority between African and Creole groups in Bahia, (2013, 1). Although Parés’ analysis does not focus on gender, he points to a historical tension--rooted in the colonial era and documented in archival documents from the Catholic fraternities--between African-founded Creole houses, often led by women, and African-born specialists of whom a majority of those practicing in Brazil were men. As African-born leaders began to disappear in the late nineteenth century, after the last waves of forced migration through the Middle Passage, Creole women successors of the Yoruba-oriented Ketu houses could claim an aura of authenticity because of their direct descent from African founders.

Similarly, historian Kim D. Butler argues that, during the post-abolition era in Brazil beginning with the official end of slavery in 1888, Africa was used by Afro-Bahians as a reference, authenticator and unifying ethnic signifier for new identities as they moved into the rapidly growing free population of color (2010, 135). Importantly for our discussion, women played decisive roles in mobilizing these new conceptions of Africa, and drove Candomblé’s institutionalization in the New World by securing land and resources for building their terreiros. These religious compounds offered opportunities for enslaved, freed and free Afro-descendent peoples to congregate, take refuge, and cultivate their deities, transforming Bahia’s social

landscapes (Butler 2010, Sterling 2012, Landes 1947, interviews with Cici, Oba, Cunha, Carvalho 2018).⁸¹ The traditions of female leadership maintained by Candomblé's nagô motherhouses, the Casa Branca, Gantois and Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, signified and established matriarchal power as a defining institutional feature of orthodox Afro-Bahian religion.

However, contrary to consensus among practitioners and elders of the religion, Lorand Matory (2005) views Candomblé's matriarchy as having been fabricated by first world feminist anthropologist Ruth Landes, who described Bahia as a "City of Women" in her 1947 ethnography. Matory partially bases his finding on comparative analysis of gender-based divisions in continental African and other African diasporic religions such as Cuban Lucumi and Haitian Vodun, as well as a survey of demographic data from before the turn of the twentieth century in Bahia. For Matory, Landes' interpretive model, which posited women as the bearers of Candomblé's Africanist traditions, constituted a "novel claim" unfounded by indigenous discourses and driven by her Euro-American nationalist-leaning homophobia (2005, 195-196).⁸² Despite emphasizing instead the interested actions of Afro-descendent individuals responsible for the transnational construction and reproduction of Black Atlantic religions, he similarly rejects a linear conception of culture as passively transmitted through space and time, proposing

⁸¹ Nowadays, terreiros continue to build on these precedents, operating as hubs for community engagement and political organizing; several have crèches and/or schools on site that service their primarily Black constituents, host cultural events and, in my fieldwork year, actively formed coalitions to mobilize against right-wing candidate Bolsonaro's election campaign.

⁸² While Matory criticizes Landes as having imposed her own feminist perspective on Candomblé, my ethnographic research shines a different light on Landes. Candomblé elders and practitioners including male-identified mediums remember Landes as an ally, advocate and proponent of positive changes in Candomblé status in terms of becoming publicly and legally recognized. Landes faced political persecution as a Jew in a Brazil under the Nazi-sympathizing president Vargas in the 1940s, and herself became a refugee in Ilê Axé Opô Aponjá before escaping safely out of the country. This historical backstory gives a personal dimension to Landes' framing of Candomblé as a sanctuary for women and complicates Matory's discussion of her nationalist and misandrous motivations.

that social actors with their own heterogeneous investments drove Candomblé's Afro-Atlantic formation as part of the dialogical co-creation of Africa and African-America.

More recently, Lisa Castillo (2017) has excavated Bahia's state archives to revise the oral history and highlight contributions of both men and women, many who crossed the Atlantic multiple times. Similar to Matory, Castillo finds the record of matriarchal predominance in the early 1800s and before questionable, and opines that this finding challenges the matriarchy as tradition theory. Also in the twenty first century, *the Mapeamento dos terreiros de Salvador* (2006), the result of a massive sociological venture to map Salvador's terreiros, confirms female dominance of 63.7% in the leadership of the 1410 terreiros identified by the project. I got hold of the *Mapeamento* through a marvelous act of fieldwork serendipity – a neighbor in Toronto I ran into upon return from my travels had acquired the catalogue on his own recent trip to Bahia and lent it out to me.⁸³ The team of researchers on this project, coordinated by Jocelio Teles do Santo, found the pattern of senior female leadership common to Ketu, Jeje and Angola houses; however, the new generation of younger chiefs are increasingly male (22-23). Interestingly, the *Mapeamento* also reveals that, among the most recurring principal regents of the terreiros, Oxum and Iansã, two *iyabás* or feminine divinities, govern almost thirty percent or 316 of the terreiros. The salience of these two goddesses, add the observers, had been previously noted by Rodrigues at the end of the 1800s and by Edison Carneiro in the 1940s (31). This finding nuances the relative gendering model of masculinized Orixá to feminized medium since women embodying female divinities has clearly been integral and not subsidiary to the worship of male Orixá such as Xangô and Oxossi, to whom the grounds and temple of the motherhouse Casa Branca, are consecrated. Thus, as well as being a “cult matriarchate,” in Landes (1947) words,

⁸³ The *Mapeamento* has been digitized, however the online version fluctuates in availability and was inaccessible for almost two years during my writing period.

Candomblé is also a cult of goddess worship whose female-centricity informs multiple arenas of embodied and devotional practice.⁸⁴

From cross-examining the available literature with my own field research, I suggest that although historians have generally viewed Candomblé's evolution as dynamic and responsive to social conditions, the question of gender, despite having received significant attention, has not been satisfactorily addressed. Roberto Strongman (2019) has significantly theorized the “queerness” of Candomblé, and homosexuality in Afro-Bahian religion has inspired debate as well (see Wafer 1991, Browning 1995). One of the goals of my dissertation is to engage Butler's call for further research to be undertaken on the institutionalization of women's power within Candomblé (2010). I propose that the consolidation of matriarchal leadership was integral to Candomblé's nineteenth century formalization, driven by priestesses and their inheritors who creatively alloyed elements considered novel with those understood as “retentions” from their African antecedents. These social actors, often with the help of male counterparts, forged new trans-Atlantic religious structures that could at once attend to the need for a collective imaginary of Africa and marshal the available resources of the New World to intervene in present constellations of power contemporaneous to their times. The paradigms that they succeeded in implementing remain active today.

In the Bahia of the 1930s that Ruth Landes encountered, the founders of the three leading Ketu-nagô Candomblé houses – Casa Branca, Gantois and Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá, founded by Mãe Aninha in 1910 – had already secured land for their terreiros and consequently, ensured their own institutional bases. These houses now enjoy an elite position in respect to their cultural

⁸⁴ Leda Maria Martins (Hemispheric Institute, 2002) writes that: “Among all, the female deities occupy a very special site in Brazilian religiosity. Emerging from the waters, she may preside over the rites of the Círio de Nazaré, in the Amazon region; however, she may be Our Lady of Aparecida, the saintly mother of the whole country. From the African waters she may also come as Iemanjá, Oxum and Nanã.”

authority and economic status (relative to outlying terreiros), partly due to the anthropological attention that they received, beginning in the late nineteenth century (Rodrigues 1896; see also Dantas 1988). Detailing the significance of the Ketu-nagô moniker in the self-conscious construction of Afro-Bahian identity, Parés attributes the ascent of these temples and their ethno-liturgical practices over others to a homogenizing process that he defines as the “nagôization” of Candomblé (2013). Importantly, although Parés expertly historicizes their rise to prominence of the Ketu sister houses as a hegemonic force within Candomblé, even the most prestigious Afro-religious temples still occupied a marginalized status in Brazil’s systemically racist and misogynist social worlds.

While many of the most centrally-located and publically-recognized houses do affiliate as nagô or Ketu temples, these terreiros also undermined racial subjugation in the colonial-Imperial eras – as spaces for the activation of alternative meanings of Black embodiment and community within the matrix of slavery (Harding 2000, xvii) – served as refuges for enslaved persons and (usually female-headed) families in the twentieth century, and continue to operate as spiritual sanctuaries and energized hubs of socio-political activism led by primarily black Bahian subjects who continue to experience racial oppression today. For these reasons, performance scholar Christen A. Smith describes Candomblé’s *mães de santo* as “social mothers” who have “always been enemies of the Bahian state” (2016). Regardless of race, Candomblé’s constituents are often minoritized in Brazil’s dominant public sphere, because of their non-normative gender and sex identifications and lack of socio-economic privilege.⁸⁵ Although Candomblé has achieved a certain social and cultural prestige, especially among Bahia’s intellectual and creative classes, as

⁸⁵ While most devotees continue to face systemic barriers, some scholars note that elite and white participation in Candomblé increased in the mid-late 1900s (Selka 2013, de Port 2007). Yet when I visit urban, suburban and rural Candomblés, white participation or leadership remain exceptional to the norm.

a signpost in the globalization of Orixá religion (see Capone 2016) and in Bahian heritage and regional identity discourses of *baianidade*, its agents – with notable exemptions of a few priestesses and priests whose leadership skills and status have afforded them a degree of class mobility – remain largely poor and working class.⁸⁶

Additionally, the persistence of myriad “nationalities” to which Bahian Candomblés self-ascribe shows that, despite the eliticization of the nagô-Ketu ethnonym, the heterogenous nature of Bahia’s Afro-religious field has not been erased; the *Mapaemento* recorded fifty different national affiliations of Candomblés in 2006. While the majority of the Salvador Candomblé temples mapped in the project do claim a Yoruban-affiliated “Ketu” identity, practitioners have also extended the term to overarch a broader range of historically diverse practices such as cultivations of Caboclo and other spirit entities not traditionally embraced within nagô orthodoxy. Furthermore, many outlying terreiros engage with the hermeneutics of the Ketu title on their own terms, creating compound designations such as “Keto caboclo,” in response to ethno-racial and class politics of the last several decades. Stigmatized in association with cultural modernity (in contrast to traditionalism) and racial hybridity, Caboclo also embody hyper-masculinities that, despite being conceptually opposed to respectable senior female leadership in Candomblé, by scholars and in practitioners’ public-facing discourses, have been (and still are) mobilized by priestesses to assert their ritual authority along “authentically” Africanist as well as contemporaneously “Brazilian” trajectories.

⁸⁶ I am talking about Bahian contexts. I have heard about *pais de santo*, specifically, living in Europe’s Bahian Diaspora, who have achieved substantial success as leaders of foreign terreiros. Some Bahian priests are subject to criticism from practitioners of other houses over their reputed wealth accrual. But it is my perception and observation that accusations of leaders’ gaining access to economic privilege are usually associated with malpractice (even in colonial era police reports) and serve as a discursive strategy against which practitioners juxtapose their own ethical commitment to their clients and faithful service.

I see Candomblé's feminist, non-binary and Black Atlantic-oriented gender logics as contiguous from mediumship to priesthood--which, like mediumship, is structurally female but can also be occupied by a man.⁸⁷ What I call Candomblé's matrifocality underscores a set of principles that locate the embodiment of a divine Other and the embodiment of ultimate ritual authority on a continuum defined by the possibility and responsibility of motherhood – as a symbolic as well as empirical state. As mentioned, the ideal priestess is a senior female; this imaginary is reflected in the statistical predominance of older women across the range of ethno-national variations in today's Bahian Candomblés. As such, the increasing statistical presence of younger men in the priesthood would not necessarily lead to an inversion of gender dominance (though it could), since many women only become consecrated in leadership roles after reaching post-menopausal status.⁸⁸

Until the turn of the twentieth century, African-born male diviners and healers, mostly free and freed persons, predominated numerically over women and creole priests. However, a different picture emerges when looking at the demographics of participation in ritual events and festivals. Between 1850 and 1888, women maintained a majority of between 60% and 65% of those involved, and close to 44% of the leadership ranks (Harding 2000). While in Africa men or *babalaôs* dominated the tradition of divination, in nineteenth century Bahia both men and women worked as diviners. Yet, among those undergoing rigorous initiation rites, dancing for

⁸⁷ While mediumship is feminized but not exclusively female, the inverse does not hold true; female subjects cannot participate in the male role of ceremonial drumming, at least not publically, though many women have a mastery of the rhythms and can play and teach them. There's at least one exception to this norm in city of Salvador (Cici). Moving into the interior, gender norms and the degrees to which they are enforced significantly vary: in the region of Chapada Diamantina, where local Candomblé is known as Jaré, male drummers make up the majority but women players also perform, even in ritual situations.

⁸⁸ Relevant to this discussion, Strongman (2007) notes in relation to Cuban Lucumi menstrual taboos that acknowledging misoynistic aspects of the religion allows us to see how the "privileging of metaphysical fertilization operates through a discursive evacuation and erasure of material element" (menstrual blood).

the gods, and seeking consultation with specialists, women largely outnumbered men. This factor led to the realization of strong female leadership in the twentieth century (Reis 2001, 120).

The participation of significant numbers of women may partially account for the moral threat that police officers and judges, as well as journalists, perceived in mid-late 19th century Candomblé. For example, editors of the *Alabama*, a black-owned, pro-abolition and anti-African religion periodical published between 1864 and 1871, viewed Candomblé as an “expression of barbarism, superstition and sexual promiscuity” (Reis 118). The late nineteenth century Republican presses’ allegations of barbarism and profanity affixed to poor and working class African women, whose visibility as street vendors and protagonists of popular syncretic festivals that demonstrated the “profane side” of the Catholic Church’s religious celebrations (and featured samba dancing and drumming) were targets of Salvador’s urban reforms efforts (Filho, 248-249).⁸⁹ Additionally, Filho notes that, in Republican era documentation, the expressions "mulatta" and "crioula" (creole woman) are “coated in a sexual connotation, therefore, incompatible with the de-eroticized female roles of the bourgeois family,” drawing a demarcating line between the “barbarism” associated with Afro-Bahian culture and religion, and the project of civilization of the literate Republican elites (250).

Certainly women’s greater participation in both popular syncretic festivals and in temple Candomblés facilitated the eventual shift to an overall matriarchal leadership pattern from early twentieth century to the early twenty-first. However, the model of a coordinated, matrilineal

⁸⁹ On December 7, 1889, for example, Bahia’s Archbishop Luis Antônio Santos strictly prohibited the popular street festival *Lavagem do Bon Fim* (washing of the Church of Bon Fim). On January 17, 1890, devotees disregarded the archbishop's order had their brooms and their clay pots seized by the civic guard. Heraclito Filho adds that the onslaught of Catholic and political authorities against popular festivals was already beginning to become commonplace in the second half of the 19th century (249). In general, popular and elite perceptions of Bahia’s African-inflected religio-cultural activities shifted to reflect Eurocentric ideas of “progress;” according to Van de Port (2007), 19th century observers lamented that media disseminations of Candomblé showcased the state’s “embarrassing lack of civilization,” and casted ritual practices as noisy gatherings in the “filthy and repugnant lifeworld of the black Bahian masses” (2).

priesthood had already been established with the founding of the Casa Branca (Ilê Iyá Nassô) circa 1830, an event that Butler deems the “beginning of Candomblé’s shift to modern form” (140) because of its significance in terms of achieving a permanencing architectural and institutional form. The founding mothers, led by Iyá Nassô and Oba Tossi, together with Maria Julia de Conceição before her departure to Gantois, succeeded in acquiring or loaning land and focused on constructing institutional bases, leading to the crystallization of a standard for Candomblé’s hybrid ritual-residential temples, against which other houses were measured. How did the founding priestesses of the Ketu houses succeed in establishing themselves as doyennes of Afro-Bahia’s religious traditions amidst the heterogeneous milieu of the nineteenth century?

In nineteenth century Bahia, with the influx of arrivals of enslaved Africans, characterized by the heavy presence of Yoruba peoples from the northern sections of present-day Nigeria and from states of the collapsing Oyo empire (Harding 2000, 52), as well as the transatlantic voyages of ritual entrepreneurs, West African understandings of gender circulated broadly and influentially in the public sphere. While the institutional structures that support Black Atlantic religious development in Brazil are resourcefully adapted to the requirements of the New World, Candomblé’s progenitors also drew on Yoruban constructions of female reproductive and economic agency in which they and their contemporaries would have been steeped from their origins and travels. As they built their communities, they conjoined idioms of women’s procreative capacities with female control of financial resources.

As an ethnically diverse group, African women ritual practitioners and their descendants in Bahia collaborated to consolidate monies necessary for maintaining their altars and temples through Catholic-affiliated *irmadades*, sisterhoods, and working as vendors and traders. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Catholic confraternities thrived as mutual aid and

manumission societies for free and enslaved Bahians. Originally organized along ethnic, racial or occupation lines, the Catholic sisterhoods enabled enslaved and ex-enslaved women to collect and pool funds to purchase freedom for their sisters, creating a foundational precedent for female economic enfranchisement that cohered in the social organization of their terreiros (see Harding 122-127).⁹⁰ They also reinforced woman-centered, Africanist religious orientations through cults of Mary such as the *irmadade da Boa Morte*, (sisterhood of the good death),⁹¹ then located at the site on which the first Casa Branca was built.

In Yorubaland, women customarily enjoyed economic independence and controlled the exchange of goods at local and regional markets (see Drewal 1992, Apter 2013). In colonial and post-abolition Bahia, and throughout the twentieth century, aspiring female adepts sold food in the streets, to raise money for resource-intensive initiations as well as to pay personal and family living expenses.⁹² These assertions of female entrepreneurialism and financial agency contested seigniorial norms of respectability concentrated in master-class models of femininity as either virginal or matrimonial (see Filho 1998) and in either case located under the paternalistic authority of a male head of household.

The senior priestesses of Casa Branca, including Maria Julia, also reshaped Candomblé's social organization to forge new systems of religious kinship and office that extended their

⁹⁰ In the 1900s, these houses became similar to *quilombos* (maroon communities) in that they harbored fugitive slaves and women and their children, while men typically lived outside the compound (Cici 2018). In mid-late 1800s, people regularly gathered in domestic homes and attended terreiros for festivals. Only after abolition did terreiros become places of residence for entire communities (Butler 2010).

⁹¹ In various contexts, devotees expressed Africanist religiosity through forming and maintaining cults of Mary. Harding offers the example of the creole sisterhood *Nossa Senhora do Rosario dos Pretos* (Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks) petitioning Queen of Portugal for permission to resume use of masks, dances and singing in an Angolan language to celebrate their patron, the Virgin Mary (2000, 123).

⁹² Black women in Salvador tended to work in labor associations formed by slaves and *libertos* (freed slaves) and dominated small-scale street commerce of sundries, sweets, prepared foodstuffs and household items. Many worked in laundering. Police records and oral histories point to the close historical association of street vending women and Candomblé (Harding 2000, 117-118, Gaspar 2010).

influence. At Casa Branca, details Butler, the “highest administrative and religious office was that of the Iyalorixá, who was assisted by several titled officers in the Candomblé hierarchy” (2010, 141). These were “lifelong positions restricted to women, and subject to confirmation through the Ifá divination system,” meaning that the Orixá would have been consulted and approved of the appointments (ibid). The terreiro’s innovative social structure recreated the spiritual family in the form of a nuclear family, so that, as Butler explains:

an initiate, regardless of his or her natal ethnicity, was ‘born’ into the Candomblé community. The subsequent relationships involved the initiate as a ‘child’ of both a specific orixá (deity) and a spiritual family. The initiating priestess became the ‘mother’ (*iyá* in Yoruba, *mãe* in Portuguese), the initiates became ‘daughters’ or ‘sons’, hence, siblings to each other... age was based upon the date of initiation and superseded chronological age in the determination of seniority. (141)

These kinship bonds of the spiritual family cemented the authority of the motherhouse and head priestess, as the ‘children’ of the community matured and initiated their own spiritual families that formed interrelated, satellite units. Thus, within the preeminent Candomblé houses of the nineteenth century, women’s command of administrative and ritual power served to establish the priesthood as a traditionally female domain (ibid). In addition, like the idea of the Candomblé “nation,” which reconceived identity in pan-African terms untethered to a person’s genetic inheritance along specifically ethnic lines, the *familia de santo* reconstituted terreiro communities as extended families under the guidance and protection of its patron divinities and priest/esses.

Conclusions

In my overview of Candomblé’s nineteenth century developments, I argued that the founding priestesses had foundational roles in the creation of Afro-Bahian religious institutions. Their ingenuity led to the establishment of matri-focal and matrilineal models that have shaped contemporary Candomblé. The Iyalorixás around whom Candomblé’s origin stories pivot

innovated kinship models that addressed the demands they faced in Brazil and expanded their networks of influence. In addition, Afro-descendent women in post-colonial Bahia asserted remarkable economic resourcefulness by raising funds through Catholic irmadades and as food vendors; their agency as individuals and as a pan-ethnic collective built on West African models that normalized senior women's economic independence and roles as providers. In regard to the twentieth century, while foreign scholars may have helped legitimize some Afro-Bahian religious practices on the public stage, priestesses and their allies acted as agents in these projects. Cultural icons such as the Ketu priestesses Mãe Menininha and Mãe Aninha found opportunities to represent themselves through the academic gaze, deploying a discourse that affixed triangulated notions of traditionalism, African cultural purity, female embodiment and senior women's leadership to the Orixá.

Despite the inclusion of male devotees, Candomblé on a systemic level still maintains a unique sphere of visibility for female-bodied and ritually feminized initiates; successive priestesses at the motherhouses have choreographed the female and/or feminized body as an ideal conduit for bringing a guardian entity into relation with the ritual community. They have built on precepts that fundamentally link circling together with biologically reproductive female capacities for gestation and birth. Although based on partially essentialized associations between reproductivity, impregnability and the fertile woman's body, the feminization of mediumship is also grounded in Candomblé's ontologies of gender as unstable and non-binary. The next chapter undertakes a choreographic analysis of the xirê's dance aesthetics and structural social dynamics at the terreiro Gantois, my first field site, to see how formulations of women's agency and logics of female embodiment are both constructed and made fluid in Candomblé performances.

CHAPTER TWO:

Dancing Orixá:

An Aesthetic Sketch of Bahian Candomblé as Glimpsed Through Circular Gestures

-May 18, 2018, Engenho Velho, Salvador, Bahia: “*Not like that,*” Dona Cici, an elder, griot, and esteemed collaborator, tells me as she retrieves juice from the collective kitchen of the Pierre Verger Cultural Center and begins to pour it into individual cups for the kids from my dance class. *The shoulders are rounder, oscillating between on and offbeat, as the feet massage the earth, marching right, left, right, left to trace circular pathways in the sanctuary space.* My frame hunches forward excessively, she says, while my legs are too rigid.

--“*Chest wider,*” Cici shows me, “*chin up, relaxed ankles so the feet sweep the floor.*” That shoulder movement and upper body coordination she calls *ginçar*, a rolling shoulder isolation that counterpoints the undulation of the spine and stepping pattern that propels dancers across the floor in the invocative cycles of Candomblé ceremony, the *xirê*, that begin each ritual proceeding.

--“*Aquele Vodun que está chegando é dono de casa. That Vodun that is arriving is the dono de casa, the proprietor, the ultimate authority of the house.*” The circling of the shoulders in the *ginçar* is one element of the movement that opens the *xirê* and establishes Candomblé’s prototypical circular and cyclical invocation patterns.

Tacka dacka dak tacka dakka dakka dak. The dancers’ feet march in counter-clockwise direction to the rhythm of *avania* led by the *alabê*, head percussionist, as their shoulders rotate up and to the back of the body with the movement of the *ginçar*; their scapulae sliding down as heels hit the ground, following the down accent of the drums.⁹³ This is the first dance of the sacred circle, the *roda*, a key feature of Afro-Brazilian and African Diasporic choreographies at large. In ritual contexts, the term *rodar* describes both the action of circling the sanctuary floor and circling with, or in, the saint – becoming entranced by a divinity. These inter-digitated meanings illustrate the generative power attributed to circling together in Candomblé.

⁹³ Devotees proceed out of the internal rooms of the terreiro (ritual compound; literally yard, from *terra* or earth) to the rhythm called *avania*, played by initiated percussionists, called *ogãs*, on three distinct *atabaques*, calf or goat skin drums – the *rum*, *pi* and *lé*. The *rum*, the tallest *atabaque*, is played by an *alabê*, from the Ioruba *alagbê*, referring to the lead drummer responsible for many of the calls and breaks that I will discuss in later chapters, as well as for feeding and conserving the sacred instruments. Candomblé’s complex drumming patterns and performances impressed pioneer scholar of African American cultures Melville Herskovits, who wrote that, “Aquaintance with these patterns of disciplined musicianship destroys completely any idea one may have had regarding the fortuitous or casual nature of primitive music, or any conception of African rhythm as spontaneous improvisation” (1966, 196).

In the gincar exquisitely demonstrated by Dona Cici in the kitchen of the cultural centre, the elbows mirror each other and trace spheres that ripple in response to the shoulder blades, winging out each time the shoulders drop back and the scapula glide downwards. Loosely fistled hands pull with an accent towards the heart and rebound away. The body is toned, the air is dense. The torso moves incrementally along three axes – vertical, sagittal and horizontal – while maintaining an upright integrity, never dipping. In the dance of avania, dancers’ body postures constantly shift orientations. The dance cannot be read from any one “front;” rather the bodies of the dancers construct a three dimensional, round, porous scene. The gincar’s circular shoulder rotations draw energy from all directions and churn them inwards, charting and activating through texture and effort a spherical space or habitus in which propitious forces may come from any side.⁹⁴ The shoulder rotations and forward accent of the ribcage necessitated by the gincar contra-punctuate the stepping pattern of the avania, creating polyrhythms and dividing the body into a polycentric system (see Rosa 2015) that undergirds Candomblé’s invocations and the ceremonial dances that ensue. The stepping pattern and circular pathway of avania together, Cici relates to me in her musical voice, demonstrate the immanent authority and far-reaching dominion of the house’s aristocratic divinities, their Voduns or Orixás. Like Dona Cici’s teaching interlude in the kitchen, the ceremonial xirê performs as well as instructs key principles of Candomblé’s epistemologies to initiates and to their divinities, who, like their devotees, occupy a range of positions that represent different levels of socialization into the temple community’s hierarchical systems.

Repressed through legal and extra-legal means during the colonial period and to this day, Candomblé’s prevailing aesthetics have been framed in the twentieth century as part of Brazil’s

⁹⁴ Candomblé choreographs the sanctuary in relation to the space outside of the terreiro as well, as Orixás pay particular attention to doors and entranceways.

African cultural heritage by nationalizing agendas, and as integral to Bahia's regional identity discourse of *baianidade*, by state bodies in the post-Vargas era of the 1940s and 50s.⁹⁵ Beginning in the late 70s and 80s, Bahian arts activists also built on the strategically essentialist discourses of nineteenth century Candomblé leaders, mobilizing Orixá symbols in counter-political projects (see Pinho 2010, Risério 1981) that precede and form the foundations for today's *vidas negras importam* (Black lives matter) movement in Brazil. What I am pointing to is a complex dialectic between Candomblé's internal politics, in which Orixá dominance has been described as a Yoruba hegemony (Parés 2013) and broader regional, national and global struggles in which Orixá iconography and practices continue to feature as protagonists of a politics of resistance.

This chapter endeavors to outline Candomblé's dominant aesthetics, beginning with the invocative xirê of an Orixá ceremony at the eminent orthodox terreiro *Gantois*, which I attended as a guest of Dona Cici. Institutionalized under the aegis of Yoruban-derived traditions, these aesthetics have been framed as repositories of Brazil's national heritage and as features of Bahia's Africanist regional identity (Scott 2010). My goal is to demonstrate the linkages between Candomblé's social structures, which have garnered extensive literary attention, with the circular and cyclical principles that practitioners both embody physically and employ conceptually, tracing a contiguous logic between dance aesthetics and socio-religious hermeneutics.

⁹⁵ Prior to 1930, elites held an antagonistic view of Afro-Bahian practices. From 1930-1954, new discourses of cultural inclusion flowing from the South laid the foundations for reformulations of Bahian identity that embraced Afro-Bahian culture as an identity marker. While Afro-Bahian working classes, Candomblé communities, journalists and politicians contributed to this process, Salvador's elites mobilized *baianidade* to oppose Vargas' political and economic centralization of power and insinuate themselves into national narratives. Linked to Afro-Bahian cultural pride, *baianidade* is also entwined with attempts to museumify -- to fix and contain -- Bahia's Africanness in the past -- (Ickes 2015, Romo 2010) and with the political pacification of Afro-Bahians in return for symbolic capital (Armstrong 1999).

Like Gantois' *casa matriz*, the Casa Branca,⁹⁶ the Gantois observes matrilineal succession rules that limit the head position of *Iyalorixá*, chief priestess, to female individuals. The Yoruban title *Iyalorixá*, mother of the Orixá, translates to *mãe-de-santo* in Brazilian Portuguese vernacular; the masculine equivalents are *Babalorixá* and *pai-de-santo*. After Maria Julia's passing, circa 1910, her daughter Pulquéria (elsewhere recorded as Pulcheria) took over the terreiro's leadership. According to the genealogies traced by Lisa Castillo (2017), Maria Julia and her husband had seven other children, one of whom bore a granddaughter, Escolástica, the famed Mãe Menininha (1894-1986), who became Gantois's third *Iyalorixá*. A celebrated icon of Bahia's religious as well as popular imaginary, Mãe Menininha led the terreiro for over six decades. Mãe Menininha's eldest daughter Cleuza succeeded her until, in 1998, her youngest daughter Carmen took up the role. Thus, the terreiro's matrilineal succession structures, instituted by Maria Julia, have been maintained and fortified, fomenting Gantois' status as a beacon of traditionalism in continuity with its founding by "the African mothers."

The Gantois holds several annual festivals in honor of the Orixá Oxossi, a forest-dwelling hunter and one of the temple's primary guardians. As a celebrated and centrally located terreiro, Gantois provides an illustrative case study for the Orixá ceremonies considered "orthodox" by practitioners and researchers since the late 19th century, when Brazilian social scientist Rodrigues described Gantois as *the* exemplary "fetishistic temple" (1896). I detail my experiences of the ritual, in conversation with practitioners' interpretations, to elucidate how the xirê at Gantois' Oxossi offering produces an aesthetic of cyclicity that is key to achieving Candomblé's phenomenological shifts. This aesthetic, key to Candomblé's feminist poesis, involves the cycling of repeated coordinations orchestrated between percussive rhythmic and movement

⁹⁶ Genealogical relations between Casa Branca and Gantois have been subject to debate. Though Carneiro and Castillo disagree on the terms of the two houses' separation, historians do agree that Omoniké was part of the original Casa Branca Candomblé in Barroquina until its relocation to the current site.

phrasing, collectively-traced circular pathways, and the semi-independent forms of each dancing devotee as she rotates her own body within the larger choreography of the circle.

Structurally, this chapter moves between my ethnographic field notes from the ceremony at Gantois and choreographic analysis, asking, how do ceremonial aesthetics of circularity relate to the institutionalization of Candomblé and, in relation, social organization of ritual houses? And, how do Candomblé's non-binary understandings of gender apply to its divisions of labor and constructions of leadership? By linking choreographic strategies with Candomblé's socio-historical structures, I intervene in understandings of gender in Candomblé and shed new light on the meaning of female-centricity in Afro-Brazilian religiosity.

Though many scholars have explored Candomblé's social structures and weighed in on the gendering of priesthood (for example, Matory 2008, Johnson 2002, Landes 1940), few have linked its matri-focality with ceremonial aesthetics and dancing. I aim to link mother-centric social operations with ritual dances and choreographic idioms, showing that a contiguous reproductive logic governs the choreographic figuration of a mother's body in the *roda*, the prominence of women in the *xirê*, understandings of divine embodiment in reconceived terms of pregnancy and birth, and the political mechanisms that inform how kinship is ritual produced. This underlying logic privileges bodies perceived as impregnable and procreative for mediumship, and post-menstrual bodies (thus no longer experiencing a "loss" of procreative force) for leadership. Yet, since Candomblé allows for and, at times, foregrounds, non-binary and contextual gender identities, male-identified devotees can and do embody their *santos* and take up the mantle of priesthood.

Orixás and Voduns, like other entidades, may present as female, male, two-gendered or of indeterminate sex and embody their *filhas* and *filhos* regardless of biological sex. However, as

I show in my historical review of twentieth century influences on Candomblé, I will elaborate on how the imposition of Western sex constructs onto Bahian society effectively homosexualized acts of men becoming entranced. Priest/esses and initiates thus contend with multiple and often conflicting gender and sex ideologies and axiologies in their practices, and, to be sure, male mediums incorporate female deities much more rarely than vice versa. In fact, women's embodiment of masculine authorities is paradigmatic in Bahian Candomblé, as my research demonstrates, beginning with the first priestesses of the Casa Branca and Gantois.

In this chapter, specifically, I focus on how the movement and social dynamics of both invocation and incorporation produce what I deem to be a *feminist poiesis*. Dona Cici speaks to this feminist poiesis when she clarifies that only women initiates dance in the xirê of certain traditional houses, and that the first dance of the xirê, *avania*, declares: "That Vodun that is arriving is the 'dono de casa,'" the proprietor, the guardian, the ultimate authority of the house. The term *poiesis*, from ancient Greek "to make," is particularly apt for the purpose of understanding Candomblé's transformations because it signifies an "activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before." For German philosopher Martin Heidegger, poiesis refers to a 'bringing-forth,' the blooming of the blossom, for example, or the coming-out of a butterfly from a cocoon (1962). The last two analogies underline Heidegger's example of a threshold occasion: a moment of *ecstasis* when something moves away from its standing as one thing to become another. After describing the opening circle and examining Candomblé's vernacular idioms of embodiment, I will flesh out how incorporation or spirit incarnation are treated as threshold occasions of ecstasis in ceremony.

I argue that Candomblé's feminized embodiments of divine Others are jointly understood, across ethno-liturgical divisions, in terms of a mutually reciprocal *circling together*

that has not received adequate treatment in the available literature. I situate circling together within the Bahian Candomblé's feminist poesis, which connects ritual aesthetics and historical formations. This feminist poesis builds, I will show, on the concept of reproduction as a cycle connected to women's bodies and agency to provide an overarching grammar for Candomblé's invocations and incorporations as well as structuring the terreiro as a socially reproductive body. Looking at the cyclical choreographies and embodiments within Candomblé allow for new understandings of the religion's matriarchal structures. My focus on what these movements reveal about constructions of gender updates scholarly conversations about Candomblé's matriarchy, which have fixated on whether or not the religion's female- and mother-centrism constitutes an African "survival" (Bastide 1960, Pierson 1942), a "tradition" tactically invented or reconstituted by Afro-Brazilian priestesses (Butler 2010, Parés 2013), or a misrepresentation based on a first-world feminist agenda (Matory 2005). While these authors have contributed significant insights to the study of Afro-Brazilian culture and my own thinking on the subject, I contend that sociological interests in valorizing or discrediting practices of Candomblé have yielded a lack of attention to choreographic aesthetics and their multi-faceted articulations with female privilege as a principle of social organization.

I am not asserting that male privilege is absent in Candomblé; rather I seek to nuance over-determined assessments of masculine labor that have also inadvertently perpetuated the racialization and sexualization of Black men. Male privilege absolutely exists in various areas of Bahian society that inevitably intersect with ritual entrepreneurship, including access to financial resources, which may enable male-identified adepts to ascend more quickly through expensive initiation phases in order to become consecrated as priests (interview Dona Cici September 2018, interview Ana Rita de Araújo Machado May 2018). However, I consider analyses that frame the

actions of male drummers as *the most* determinant elements of ritual efficacy, since their rhythmic prowess “calls the gods, brings on possession” and “controls the choreography of the dance” (Herskovits 1966; 186, see also Johnson’s similar framework 2002) to have overstated men’s singular importance. These analyses present over-simplified readings of ritual dynamics since they do not acknowledge the agency of the mediums who incorporate Orixás, or the divinities themselves and the choices they make – to manifest, to stay for the duration of a ceremony, and to dance in dialogue with, but not under the control of, male percussionists. The drummers are male, not masculinized, because even though stigmas against men’s dancing in the *roda* as mediums have significantly relaxed since the mid-twentieth century (see Landes 1947, Herskovits 1966, interviews with Cici and Mãe Oba Sept. 2018), the role of percussionist in sacred contexts remains exclusively relegated to male-identified, typically heterosexual initiates.

The latter part of this chapter moves to overview Candomblé’s social constructions of the self. I offer a Candomblé specific ontology of *axé-becoming* bodies across which subjectivity and agency are distributed and worked out. These ritually socialized bodies are re-designed to reflect the energy and affect of axé, metaphysical muscle, onto participants and to execute actions on behalf of the terreiro members as part of a phalanx of other spectral bodies and entidades that make up an executive force. I draw on Anurima Banerji’s “distributed body” and Miriam Rabelo’s concept of initiation as the *institution* of formalized relations between an initiate, deity and ritual society. Drawing on Merleau Ponty, Rabelo (2014) argues that since many devotees’ relationships with their primary entities begins long before their approximation with a particular terreiro, the initiatory cycles through which they pass effectively institutionalize, rather than create, a triangulated relationship between human disciple, Orixá and mãe or pai de santo. I conjoin Rabelo’s findings with Banerji’s theorization of the distributed

body, which she develops through her analysis of mahari dancing in India's Jagannath temples (2018) in dialogue with anthropologist Alfred Gell's theories of distributed personhood. The distributed body that Banerji attributes to mahari dancing is constructed liminally in between single and plural states, offering a model that helps explode the idea of a ritual body as unitary. Building on the work of both Rabelo and Banerji, two practitioner-scholars engaged in the praxes they address, I suggest that the body politics instituted through initiation procedures are actualized in the act of ceremonial dancing, when the distributed bodies of adepts and their entidades become endowed with axé.

1. The *Xirê* of the Saints' Arrivals

May 30, 2018, Federação, Salvador, Bahia: I arrive early, elbows clasped with Dona Cici, the griot in whose genealogical web I find myself gratefully woven into over years of fieldwork in Bahia. Beatriz, a dancer and master's student at Bahia's Federal University, flanks Cici's other side. Together we enter the main building, which is inset on a sloping hill populated by medicinal trees and the built structures that house the temple's Orixás. An *ebomi*, Candomblé elder, and protégé of the French photographer-turned-babalorixá Pierre Verger,⁹⁷ Dona Cici's presence is quickly noted. A senior initiate familiar to me from the *Fundação Pierre Verger*, the cultural center where Dona Cici also works, joins our party and leads us through the back entrance and dressing rooms of the terreiro. Through the open doorways, I catch glimpses of the

⁹⁷ French photographer, ethnologist, and researcher Pierre Verger (1902-1996) lived most of his life in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Verger played a vital role in the movement of people and ideas between West Africa and Bahia in the mid-twentieth century, as well as in the crystallization of the image of Bahia in global imagination, through his photographs (Johnson lecture, 2017). In West African, Verger initiated as a babalaô - a diviner in the religion of Ifá, with access to the oral traditions of the Yoruba. Verger worked closely with painter Carybé and helped found the Candomblé house Ilê Axé Opô Aganju, where Dona Cici is an ebomi. He worked closely with Dona Cici for several decades before his death, after which his home in Vilas Americas became home to his photographic archives and the cultural centre where Cici tirelessly shares her extensive knowledge of Bahia's African peoples and Candomblé's mythological corpus with children, students, researchers, choreographers and teachers.

filhas and *filhos*, sons and daughters “of the saint,” donning impeccably starched white skirts and pants in preparation for the day’s events.

The senior *filha* nods towards an empty wooden bench on the women’s side of the gallery, facing the drummers’ raised dais on the men’s side. The spacious sanctuary is decorated with animal skin pelts in honor of Oxossi, a king of Ketu. According to oral sources, many of Oxossi’s devotees were brought through the transatlantic slave trade to Brazil and Cuba, where he became a principal African deity of the New World (Castillo 2017). The *Cabeça do boi* offering is one of a series of resource intensive rituals in a three-day cycle of May festivities dedicated to this Orixá. Before the ceremony begins, elders and *iaôs* – novices - in turn approach Cici to kiss her hand, the latter conspicuous for their bowed postures and lowered gazes. The Iyalorixá of the house, Mãe Carmen, crosses the sanctuary hand in hand with an *equede*, a female initiate responsible for taking care of, rather than embodying, the Orixás. She takes her seat in the front and center of the scene. “She is the youngest daughter of Mãe Menininha,” notes Cici. “She turns 91 this year.” Then she adds, “here, only women receive the charge of priesthood, which passes through the female descendants in consultation with the Orixás will as divined in cowrie shell readings.”

The ritual opens with an Orixá invocation circle performed in the signature Ketu style of the motherhouses. The drums precede the dancers as three percussionists begin to play the rhythm of *avanaia* with the *paquetas*, thin drumsticks. The *filhas* appear in their layered whites, with thick swaths of cloth tied around heads, waists and chests. Proceeding into the sanctuary, they advance in single file, following a counter-clockwise, circular pathway around the perimeter of the room. The *avanaia* footwork alternates right, left in a two-step pattern, and the *filhas* shift the facing of their upper bodies by just a few degrees as they circulate to create a spherical front.

Interestingly, the counter-clockwise direction of the xirê is common across the Black Atlantic in Afro-diasporic and West African praxes.⁹⁸ The dancers' shoulders rotate up and to the back with the *ginçar*, scapulae sliding down as heels hit the ground, accompanying the accent of the atabaques. Their marching continues around the outer rim of the sanctuary floor, punctuated by a pause every time the drummers stop to change rhythms. In this pause, the filhas bend or kneel to the ground, where they execute specific salutations depending on their stature and the Orixá to whom they are consecrated. A caller leads the incantations for the invited Orixás in sequence, summoning first the masculine entities: Ogum, Oxossi, Omolu, Oxumarê, Ossanyin, Xangô, and then the feminine ones: Oxum, Iemanjá, Oia-Iansa, Oba, Ewa, Nana. Considered the father of Candomblé's Orixá, Oxalá is the last to be called. This diversity is a signature of Candomblé and the Afro-Brazilian religions *en masse*, which bring a multitude of divinities – each with their own geo-historical, ecological, and archetypal associations, together with devotees who similarly embody a kaleidoscopic set of ancestral origins.

Constituted by a particular rhythm, gestural sequence and praise song in Yoruba, each invocation follows a call and response format. The musical structure of the rhythms feature a percussive call within each song cycle, led by the atabaques. In response, the dancers turn around in their own kinespheric space, so that the circle becomes a wheel of semi-independent cogs rotating on the spot before continuing on their forward moving circular trajectory. This multi-layered rhythmic and choreographic program evidences what researcher Juana Elbein dos Santos calls Candomblé's "dynamic systems of orality" (1988). While many of the stepping patterns repeat across multiple calls, each entity has her own symbology, which practitioners execute in a general sense of unison, even while every daughter maintains her own nonchalant rhythmic and

⁹⁸ These iterations include the ring shout in the Southern US, Cuban Lucumi or Santería, Haitian Voodoo and Beninese Vodun.

choreographic variation. This is only the warm-up act, after all, a dance of preparing the body and demonstrating preparedness for embodiment of an Other. As the musicians attune their playing to the dancers' bodies, the dancers similarly track the calls and turns of the atabaques. This interdependent call and response, for dance scholar Susana Martins, demonstrates the directly integrated relation of dance and music with religious phenomenon, in the sense that rhythm develops in function of the movements and gestures (2008, 37-39). Simultaneously led and followed by the drums, the filhas' circular pathways are reflected in the circular communication between dance and percussion and between the chorus and verse of each call.



Figure 2. Filhas kneel during the xirê of the Orixás, terreiro Gantois, estimated late 1930s (date and photographer unknown). Collection of Salvador's Public Municipal Photographic Library at the Fundação Gregório de Mattos.

The bull's head enters on a platter that rests breathtakingly atop the head of a filha, secured by her right hand as she continues stepping in time. An energetic shift is palpable in the room. Immediately, the other filhas begin to “fall out,” stumbling sideways or forward in a rhythmic succession as their Orixás enter and their bodies negotiate with the change. “Estão caíndo no santo,” “falling into the saint, becoming “incorporated,” Cici says. Even as she likens the arrival of an entity to the disorienting experience of falling, Cici describes the resultant state as one of wholeness. The landscape of evenness created by the consistent rhythm of the invocations and the cohesive shape of the circle of dancers gradually gives way to a heterogeneous composition – bodies scatter in the space, equedis remove the shoes, watches and earrings of filhas who are incorporated, take off and re-tie their waists cloths, across one shoulder or over the breasts, depending on the nature of the Orixá they have received. Once their *santos* have settled, the male initiates who have already become embodied by their deities also appear on the sanctuary floor.

Having “fallen” into their Orixás, the initiates, female and male, regain equilibrium as their agencies and bodies are redistributed to incorporate an Other subjectivity whose tangible arrival signals the efficacy of the invocative act. Like the choreographies of the xirê, these incorporations of the Orixá into the bodies of filhas on the sanctuary floor, and the filhos on the side, articulate with the cultural construction of the female, impregnable and maternal body.

3. A “religion of the mother”: Choreographing the Opening Ceremony as a Reproductive Body

While some scholars have questioned the historical accuracy of claims that Candomblé is indeed matriarchal (Matory 2005, Braga 2014), few have attended to how dance elements of ritual practice articulate with emic understandings of women's bodies and reproductive anatomy, which inform gender politics in practical ways and ground Candomblé's pervasive female-

centricity. I contribute to filling this gap by closely reading choreographies of invocation and incorporation evidenced in the *cabeça do boi* offering, in relation to both idioms of spirit embodiment and origin stories. I suggest that the aesthetics of dance and gesture in ritual gatherings are rooted in ideas of female procreativity and that these drive much of Candomblé's social and ritual action. At this point my intention is not to evaluate the historicity of Candomblé's matriarchal status but rather to explore how, in practice, the mother's body becomes an organizing aesthetic principle that produces and confirms a contemporaneous, matri-focal gender politics. I will review various positions on Candomblé's matri-focal structures later in the chapter, and offer my own historical re-reading of the existing literature.

Despite academic challenges to the historicity of Candomblé's matriarchal institutionalism, practitioners of varying ages from early twenties to their eighties, and from different ethno-liturgical "nations," attribute significance to Candomblé's matriarchal foundations. In my interviews, several practitioners referenced matri-focal and female-centric imagery to explain the operations of the cyclical *roda*, the sacred circle. More specifically, when I asked a senior *filha*, Celeste, a retired singer with Bahia's Folkloric Ballet, about the circling of initiates in the *xirê*, she responded by describing the Candomblé *roda* as a form that is circular because "the woman is a cycle, you see? Because the uterus is round" (interview May 18 2018). The circling of the *xirê* that opens Candomblé ceremonies, she posits, creates the shape of a woman's uterus, the major reproductive organ that nurtures a fertilized ovum until becoming a baby that is ready to be born. She continues: "É ventre é ventre, é o nascer. It is belly, it is belly. It is birth. When born here [in Bahia], Candomblé came from a mother." Celeste likens the circle of the *xirê* to a womb, and compares its function to that of a body that contains and nourishes the ritual processes of reproduction, which ultimately effect the manifestation of divinities at a

ceremony or their “birth.” Similarly, Celeste notes that Candomblé itself was “born” from the body of an African mother, an allusion to the founding priestesses of Salvador’s first houses. Interestingly, Celeste’s account draws a parallel between the roda’s figuring of a mother’s body that gives birth to the Orixá at the culmination of the invocative circle, and the birth story of Candomblé as coming from the womb of an African “mother.”

Both Celeste and priestess Terezinha Barbosa associate women’s capacity for pregnancy and childbirth with an aptness for cultural transmission analogized in the act of mediumship – embodiment of an Other. About the performance of the xirê exclusively by women initiates at the Gantois and other orthodox houses, they affirm that [Candomblé] was and is “by women, for women. Women [established] the tradition. [It was] in Barroquinha, the first Candomblé,⁹⁹ it is [a tradition] of women, it is matriarchal, Candomblé is matriarchal.¹⁰⁰ Christiam, a professional dancer and ritual practitioner, concurs: “Candomblé came as a matriarchy [from Africa]. Here in our nucleus, Bahia, it is cultivated principally by women who fought for its continuation, it is a religion of the mother.” (May 24 2018). Christiam’s commentary alludes to a continuity between Candomblé’s genesis, its perseverance as a persecuted religion and its present-day manifestation, linked by Black women’s lived struggles and a mother-centric theology. Celeste connects this ethos to the xirê, suggesting that by highlighting the female devotees and only allowing male initiates to enter onto the sanctuary floor once they have become embodied by their Orixá, Candomblés demonstrate female dominance and the privileging of women’s bodies for divine interpellation in a counterhegemonic move that reverses normative gender codes.

⁹⁹ Celeste specifically refers to Casa Branca, known as the first Candomblé in Salvador.

¹⁰⁰ “Por uma mulher, pra mulher. Não, foi mulher. Foi na barroquinha, foi o primeiro Candomblé, é de mulheres, é matriarcal, o candomblé é matriarcal.”

The performative dimension is key – Christiam and Celeste note that while in many orthodox houses men do not participate in the xirê, which involves the procession and embodiment of initiates in a public sphere of visibility, male-identified initiates still circle with/in their saints for the duration of the ceremony and until their divinities are dismissed by the reigning mãe or pai de santo. The xirê’s as a performance of female visibility concretizes a link between female embodiment and reproductive cycles as exemplified by the imagery of the roda as a womb. Maternal agency comes into focus through the performance of the xirê, but shortly after, just moments after the incorporation of female initiates, masculine subjects arrive and participate alongside their female counterparts. Thus while inverting the normative gender hierarchies, the orthodox xirês do not de-value male embodiment but rather position male-presenting bodies within a female and mother-centric universe of human resources.

Although Candomblé’s matri-focality is not new, I find these testimonies revealing because, when analyzed alongside the dances of the xirê, they illustrate the consonant operation of ceremonial choreographies and traditions of matrilineal succession, based on reproductive processes located in understandings of female, maternal agency. The circular pathways of the xirê’s invocations, viewed as figurations of the womb and performed only by the female initiates at Gantois, index the terreiro’s matrilineal leadership structure and historicize master narratives of Candomblé’s development in Bahia. These aesthetic and socio-political dimensions of the dominant practice come together to form what I call Candomblé’s feminist poesis.¹⁰¹ The feminist poesis is matrifocal and coalesces around the loci of fertility and motherhood, because its aesthetic elaboration is based on conceptions of gestation and birth. Yet, this valuation of

¹⁰¹ Barbara Browning identified the woman-centricity of Candomblé’s dances as well, drawing on Hélène Cixous to liken its ritual choreographies and spirit embodiments to a kind of “écriture féminine” or feminine writing (1995) based on Simone de Beauvoir’s (1949) idea of “writing women” as a form of valorizing women’s bodily and literary experience.

reproductivity escapes patriarchal logics, even though maternity is often exalted in patriarchal discourses too, with women's value often reduced to their status as "vessels" or reproductive machines. In Candomblé, mediums who do not present as female are structurally feminized in ritual performance. That is, in the performance of circling with their divinities, gender binaries effectively become fluid and transgress binary classification. This logic flows from Candomblé's constructions of the self, which posit that individuals are constituted by multiple differently gendered aspects so that, for example, one's primary Orixá may be female while the secondary is male. For mediums, that means that, regardless of their own gender identifications, they can also circle with their differently gendered spirit entities in different ritual contexts. For example, Celeste incorporates the divine mother Iemanjá at an Orixá ceremony in her terreiro, one month later she incorporates her macho cowboy Caboclo at a Caboclo session (fieldnotes May and June 2018). Male mediumship is not precluded in this formulation; instead male-identified mediums are feminized in the liminal space of ceremony.

Candomblé's feminist poesis emerges from a dual association with female reproductive agency as transcendent as well as immanent.¹⁰² This duality is evident in the Brazilian Portuguese idiom for a woman giving birth: "dar à luz," which means, literally, "give to the light," and/or "give to the world."¹⁰³ I draw on three different features of Candomblé ceremony to theorize this feminist corporeal episteme (Rosa 2015). First, as I have already begun to do, I

¹⁰² My Candomblé-based conception of feminine embodiment here intersects with but also differs from Marion Young's (1980) outline of female phenomenology as relegated to immanence because women's capacities for transcendence become thwarted by our social conditioning (and by the objectifying gaze) in a patriarchal world. These factors are still at play in Bahian society, while in Candomblé, women's bodies (and those of men who are feminized through performance of mediumship) are privileged for phenomenological transcendence.

¹⁰³ Interestingly, the idiom is also marked by a feminist poesis and may constitute a form of *écriture* feminine as a valorization of women's reproduction that transcends domestic, patriarchal connotations.

link the xirê to female reproductive anatomy. Then, I demonstrate how the progress of the xirê builds on and activates metaphors of birth and rebirth around which the primary initiation passage, *feitura* or “making the saint” is organized. The following discussion deepens my analysis of Candomblé’s circular aesthetics by elucidating how idioms of incorporation and trance dancing are similarity constructed around reproductive symbolism.

The Uterus and Umbilical Cord, Birth and Rebirth

Celeste explains that the roda “is gestation.”¹⁰⁴ In a figurative and active sense, the roda is an organism composed of unfertilized, enormously potent nuclei, rotating around the room together. In Candomblé, Orixá and other entities are nourished with offerings of food and libations. The logic of “feeding” the Orixá that informs material sacrifices is also at play in the xirê; Candomblé’s oral liturgy, comprising technically complex polyrhythmic percussion, song and gesture, produce a synthesis that supplicates the divinity and sustains her through the container of the roda, functioning as a placenta. The roda gestates the filhas and their santos, cultivating the intimacy between a human subject and deity that is institutionalized during initiation. These relations further build on parent-child obligations and physiology (see Johnson 2002, Rabelo 2014). The circularity of the roda builds energy until, when the drummers call down the invited entidades, the filhas stumble out of pace in syncopation. Celeste explains:

Why are we there, uniting what? Like an umbilical cord, one in the other, one in the other. You see that one takes the *barravento* [a wind that comes with the arrival of an entity, a wind that knocks you over], here comes the other, and another, and another and another, then when you see, everyone has arrived.

Celeste describes the moment of embodiment as yet another physiological transformation in a set of inceptions and births. In her view, when the deities arrive, they embody their filhas in a

¹⁰⁴ Interview May 18, 2018.

domino sequence that reproduces the surging of nutrients through an umbilical cord from a mother's placenta to a fetal child growing in the womb. The symbolic umbilical cord of the opening circle provides a channel by which entities are incubated, nurtured and, in the xirê's culmination, reborn in human material (*matéria*). The rebirth of divinities in human matter is an iterative phenomenon that re-performs the transformation effected in the *feitura*, when an initiate is reborn as the daughter of her primary Orixá linked to a specific house of worship.

Body parts that surround the uterus constitute significant sites in the geography of the Candomblé body and receive special attention in ceremony.¹⁰⁵ Spirit entities, those invoked as well as, possibly, non-invited others, can enter the body through the abdomen at the navel, the anatomical point of connection with the umbilical cord at birth (Oba, Costa interviews 2018). For this reason, according to Mãe Oba, the pelvic area must be protected with the *pano de costas*, thick cloth swaths that envelop the lower torso. *Equedes*, caretakers of the saints, remove and carefully retie these lengths of fabric after the invited entity's incarnation. Mãe Oba stresses that the lower abdomen, especially for reproductive filhas, must be covered in order to avoid attracting the envy of *Iyá Mim*, elder sorceresses who target fertile women. As the portal between the umbilical cord and internal reproductive organs cradled in the pelvic bowl, the navel is an especially susceptible opening whose wrapping assures that the initiate's body remains "closed," hermetically sealed (Johnson 2002) and ready to not only receive but actually bring into being the summoned presences.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Sherril Dodds, in *Dance Research Journal's* special issue on "Body Parts: Pelvis, Feet, Face, Hips, Leg, Toes and Teeth" (2014), helps explicate the relevance of examining how specific body parts, working choreographically in compliance or contradiction to the whole, composite dancing body, distinctively "engage frameworks of identity, specifically across lines of gender, sexuality, race, class, and nation" to engender meaning through dynamic choreographic relation to the rest of the body (1).

¹⁰⁶ In Candomblé terms a body walking the street is open and vulnerable (Johnson 2002) while that of an initiate is ritually sealed and sanctified. The closing of the body to unwanted spiritual and biological

A female initiate must take extra precautions to prepare and wrap her body because, according to Mãe Oba, “she menstruates. She has an open body.” Situating this tenet as a “taboo that comes from Africa,” Oba states “women cannot drum but can dance. Traditionally, women dance. Because women give birth ‘[dão à luz]’” (interview May 6 2018). Thus, Mãe Oba correlates women’s reproductive agency with mediumship, as mediums are those who dance for the saints, while she qualifies that stigmas around menstruation, also associated with an “open” and infectious body, prevent women from drumming for the same gods.¹⁰⁷ While women’s reproductivity can be associated with both the dangers of “openness” in terms of susceptibility to becoming embodied by undesirable agencies, the idiom of “giving to the light” as figurative for childbirth links our biologically reproductive capacity with the action of transmission, broadly conceived. For Celeste, Candomblé is not only orally transmitted but itself constitutes transmission through a mother figure, beginning with the “mother Africa:” (interview May 2018)

“Africa is the mother... when Candomblé came here, it came from a mother. It’s not that men can’t be Babalorixás or can’t be valuable, its not that at all! But the mother has the function of showing the other side, of passing along – because a man doesn’t have a child in the uterus, he doesn’t! So the mother comes to embrace and teach her children.

Transmission is not conceived as the passing on of a discrete set of knowledges, rather knowledge and knowledge transmission are reciprocally entwined. This relation traces an ideological linkage between the mother’s body (which can also be ritually performed by non-female-bodied devotees) as a site for divine mediation, and matri-lineal succession as fundamental to religious continuity, since Candomblé is actioned through “giving to the light/to the world” – or activated in transmission along matrilineal pathways.

agents, such as viruses, can also be achieved through ritual purifications, which I was routinely assigned to do in the houses where I conducted research.

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, dancing and giving birth or “giving to the light” are conceptually linked as procreative acts of transmission that bring to the world another being, spirit entity or child..

These justifications for Candomblé's matrilinearity articulate with anthropologist Andrew Apter's (2013) perspective on how Yoruban and pan-West African understandings of women's reproductive power and its transmission were resituated and negotiated within colonial plantations of the New World. Apter argues that "witchcraft power itself devolves matrilineally from mothers to daughters, an essence that can be allayed but never eliminated from female blood and its generational lines (79). This insight supports and echoes Celeste's assertion that the capacity for transmission is itself coded female (interview May 2018), and is exemplified by Maria Julia's standardization of female bloodline succession at Gantois.

Like the matrilineal transmission of power, the casting of priestly competency as senior, specifically post-menopausal, female is also deeply rooted in West African conceptions of gender-based agency. While the impregnable and fertile feminine body is idealized for embodying divinity through mediumship, its material byproduct, the infertile blood of menstruation, is highly stigmatized as a destructive force that can block social reproduction and capital flows. Apter's study on "The Blood of Mothers" in Yoruba-Atlantic perspective (2013) illuminates how, in Yoruban cultural logics, menstrual blood symbolizes failed conception and forms an oppositional tension with the procreative "good" blood of mothers. Remapped onto the New World's racialized relations of productivity, these "positive and negative valuations of womanhood ... resonated with similar contrastive sets deployed within hegemonic European discourses" of barbarity and desire (81). Taboos about the transformative abilities of "bad" menstrual blood conjoined with master class anxieties about the devolution of plantation society through low birth rates, signifying failure to adequately reproduce the enslaved workforce (87). Relatedly, the dynamics of the seigniorial household fuelled fears that Black female sexuality would rupture the social order, since a fertile Black woman could bifurcate the lines of

inheritance by bearing a master's child. Thus in the domestic contexts of plantation life, the "blood of enslaved mothers" symbolically gained a broad range of subversive potentials (89) by which enslaved women's witchcraft powers were channeled "outward" onto the broader divisions of the paternalistic colonial system.¹⁰⁸

This critical understanding of Yoruban constructions that contrastively pair fertility with witchcraft helps contextualize Candomblé's taboos on the participation of menstruating women in ceremony, as well as the entrenched preference for priestess positions to be held by older women. In the Yoruban terms analyzed by Apter, a senior female's "barren womb" is seen to "trap the menstrual blood that is polluted and powerful, turning [the women] into vessels of concentrated ase [axé, in Portuguese], the vital force of ritual potency and effective verbal command" (2013, 78).¹⁰⁹ Dona Cici testifies to the enduring grip of these frameworks, which are shared across many West African and Caribbean cultures: "A woman who menstruates cannot execute her ritual obligations; she makes a cake, the cake doesn't rise. Everything about her is negative, she spoils everything." (June 22 2018). Yet, interestingly, Cici is even more suspicious of male leadership than of a terreiro with a "young" woman in charge, since it would be possible to engage another priestess or schedule ceremonies around a fertile priestess' menstrual cycle. The ideal sacerdoté, confirms Cici, is an older woman whose blood no longer flows (ibid). I have dwelled on this discussion of blood idioms and the conceptions of women's agency that they inhere to illustrate how, despite some scholars' claims that Candomblé's female leadership represents a departure from West African cosmo-visions, founding Iyalorixás and their

¹⁰⁸ Historically, the appellation of "*macumbeira*," (applied to women, a male would be deemed a *macumbeiro*) derogatorily linked altar and embodiment practices, and pharmacopeiac healing with charges of witchcraft or black magic. For discussion of these classificatory schemas see Hayes 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Further research is necessary to elucidate how taboos around menstrual blood rooted in West African dualities of fertility/witchcraft both resonate with and complicate dominant misogynist scripts that exclude menstruating women from ritual functions.

successors in fact drew upon West African precepts of fertile and post-menopausal womanhood, preserving reifications as well as proscriptions on women's bodies for purposes of social and ritual reproduction.

In Bahia's Afro-religious economies of the body, these layered understandings of how fertility and witchcraft become inextricable from women's reproductive cycles, as categories that represent the productive presence and destructive absence of co-constitutive biological/creative capabilities located within the body. Consequently, taboos on menstruation and ritual performance occupy a pole along the continuum of reproductive analogies that structure not just the invocation circle and moment in which devotees become entranced as a spirit entity corporealizes in their bodies, wherein Candomblé's feminist poiesis is most evident, but also the various cyclical stages of initiation conceived as processes of gestation and rebirth.

During the major initiatory passage called making the saint or *feitura*, a novice (*iaô*) becomes secluded in the internal chambers of the terreiro, until her Orixá is born in a public ritual, the exit or coming out of the novice (*saida de iaô*). The stages of the *feitura* mirror the logics of gestation and birth that organize processes of invocation and circling with and in the saint. According to Dona Cici, the posture of the *iaô* who greeted us with a bowed head and downcast eyes evinced her gestative, pre-infant status and symbolizes her return to in utero: "the devotee comes out with a lowered head because she will be (re)born when the name of her Orixá is announced" (May 18 2019).¹¹⁰ With this passage, Cici refers to the ceremony in which the novice emerges from the isolation chambers, circles three times around the sanctuary, and, after three whispered confirmations in tones too low for the congregation to hear, finally

¹¹⁰ Even after the "birth" of her Orixá, an *iaô* must display a level of deference and submission in respect to the terreiro's hierarchical order, following sets of taboos that include sitting on the floor, remaining barefoot and eating with one's hands. Her low status approximates an infantile state that shifts after the first year's *obrigações* are complete.

announces the identity of her Orixá to the gallery (ceremony at Gilmar's, Cici, Johnson). The announcement of her Orixá's name precedes the first xirê in which the new initiate, now "made," will embody her Orixá. This formulation does not preclude the possibility of a devotee having already received her Orixá outside of the terreiro prior to initiation. But during the seclusion stage and *feitura* – the "making" of the saint - a divinity becomes individuated and indoctrinated into the ritual community. A dance teacher and practitioner, Nem Brito, explains that the first xirê in which the iaô dances after "coming out" implies yet another birth, because it is then that her Orixá learns when to "bow, kneel and stand, how to salute the doorways, and where to take her place with her 'barco,' or "boat," meaning the cohort members of her initiatory seclusion.¹¹¹

When, at Gantois's *cabeça do boi* offering, the filhas circle in the xirê, each devotee re-traces the pathways of her initial coming out as a "daughter" of her Orixá and of Candomblé. This idea is important because incorporation of a deity builds on the progressive relationship of an initiate and Orixá, which is formalized in the *feitura*, confirmed in the *saida de iaô* and activated over and over in ceremony through invocation. The *roda* gives continuity to multiple temporalities, multiple cycles of gestation and birth, making visible the internal creative force of each *filha*, in relation to the maternal anatomy of the xirê that interrelates the initiates together with their *entidades* as a collective with the broader community. Through the xirê and its apex, the arrival of the Orixás, the circular motion of multiple body-selves enacts reproductive activity and emerges as the engine of phenomenological change. As a womb of social and ritual reproduction that opens the offering at Gantois, the circular aesthetics of the *roda* signal and

¹¹¹ Johnson (2002) recognizes the *feitura* undergone by iaô as a renovation, in which the iaô's body is recast as a secret, closed and contained, ideal for manifesting and directing otherly forces. Although Johnson productively illuminates the *feitura* as a physical and phenomenological transformation, his analysis glosses over *feitura*'s explicit articulations with reproductive idioms. In her liminal state, between the internal chamber of the terreiro in which she has been secluded and her ritual "coming out," the iaô presents as fetal, about to be born.

support the ensuing transformations of subjectivity that occur, effecting a feminist poesis that, as part of an oral historical system, narrate Candomblé's matrifocal epistemologies.

While Mãe Oba, Celeste and Christiam concede that men may receive ritual knowledge and become excellent practitioners, my interlocutors maintain an intrinsic link between motherhood, female guardianship and Candomblé's genesis in Bahia. While this ligature is produced and performed through ceremony, it also contours divisions of labor – men are generally assigned to percussion and animal sacrifice while dancing remains a predominantly but not entirely female domain. In relation to Candomblé's matrilineal and matri-focal social organization, the xirê's circular forms narrate multiple birth processes across various temporalities and spaces, reproducing the mythography of Candomblé's origination as a birth from the womb of African mothers, as well as choreographing and giving impulse to the coming forth of the house's entidades into the present moment. The xirê instates the roda's circularity and cyclicity while re-performing Candomblé's birth story and interlacing ritual action with female agency and the mother's womb. As opposed to becoming symbolically infertile, in Candomblé's Yoruban-Atlantic corporealities, senior women obtain and represent the highest degree of ritual agency because much of their *axé* and, thus, transformative powers, are not lost monthly through shedding menstrual blood.

Rodar and Girar: Turn and Spin

I will now shift focus from the cyclical choreographies of invocation to Candomblé's circular idioms of incorporation, thinking about the culmination of the xirê at Gantois, when the summoned entidades embody human forms. Idioms of spirit embodiment in Candomblé trouble the notion of the body as fixed and index conceptions of gestation and birth as well as of becoming and being pregnant with, where the states of fertilization, pregnancy and being born

are also unfixed from one specific body and instead move between divine and human agencies. The xirê's spatial pathways and invocative gestures, beginning with the *avana* rhythm and shoulder rotations of the *gincar*, lead to a chain of phenomenological effects including the materialization of an Other that has been incubating in the body of the medium and the body of the *terreiro*, specifically in the womb figured by the *roda*.

The expression, “o santo pegou,” (the *santo* grabbed or grasped) implies that a *santo* or entity has literally caught a devotee and builds on the sexual connotation of “pegar” as colloquial slang for a range of interested actions from picking up someone, to kissing, to the consummate act of sexual intercourse, i.e. “pegging” (with a clear indication of active and passive roles). But while an entity may “grab” a devotee, that devotee is also said to “circle with” or “rodar com” her divine relative.¹¹² So initiates themselves, while referred to as “daughters and sons” of their *Orixás*, also gestate their relations in the womb of the xirê's circular invocations and are “pegged” by the *santo* in the sense of *pegar*, with its inferences of sexual union and sexual penetration. Then they dance together in cyclical, co-creative reciprocity¹¹³.

The circle is a shape but also a constant motion. This movement, asserts *pai de santo* and theorist Ricardo Aragão (2012, 7) is key to understanding the sensational, kinetic and sociological dimensions of *Candomblé* incorporation. In *Candomblé* vernacular, the initiate who

¹¹² I build on the terminology of “relations” set out by David Shorter (2015), who argues that the descriptors of “spirit” and “god” inappropriately reinscribe hierarchical Euro-colonial worldviews onto indigenous religions. However, I include the word choices of spirit and god to reflect the language used to my interlocutors who speak local dialects of Brazilian Portuguese.

¹¹³ A Yoruban dictum states that the child raises the parent and not vice versa. I find this reciprocal sense of raising and being raised apt for understanding the often-interchangeable relational terms used in *Candomblé*. While the entity is said to “peg” an initiate, the process is far from uni-directional, as I have endeavored to show. Rather an initiate undergoes extensive preparations to set the body as a stage or moving altar upon which the divinity can alight. Incorporation is thus mutually reciprocal because it realizes the spiritual obligations and social purposes of both parties.

becomes embodied by an entidade is called *rodante*, which translates to “one who circles” or “circler.” Aragão explains that the rodante ““circles with the saint”” or ““turns in the saint”” – “roda com o santo,” or “vira no santo” inside the ceremonial wheel. The rodante is one who circles or turns *with* but also *in* an entidade,” an Other being. “Rodar” or “virar,” as well as another commonly used verb, “girar” can translate to turn, spin or circle.¹¹⁴ The word “turns” confers several meanings that are especially relevant to the usage of rodar or virar. The Oxford English dictionary defines turn as 1) move in a circular direction wholly or partly around an axis or point. 2) move (something) so that it is in a different position in relation to its surroundings or its previous position. 3) change in nature, state, form, or color; become. The phrase “rodar no santo” (as well as its covalent terms, “virar” and “girar”) encompasses these meanings, so that turning or circling with/in the saint denotes a physical sense of spinning, a shift in relation to the external environment, and a physiological sense of change –ecstasis or metamorphic becoming.

A common description in dance scholarship of ritual dances involving Other beings, in Brazil and beyond, involves the notion of spirit possession (Johnson 2002; 2014). Yet, the appellation of “possessed,” which I rarely heard in Portuguese, invokes images of enraptured subjects flailing uncontrollably, or at least, seized by a force that comes from outside of the body. “Rodar com o santo,” “to turn” or “circle with the saint” infers an intersubjective, mutual joining together propelled and attenuated through movement; more specifically, locomotion of a body along a circular pathway. In this case, the idea of mutuality does not preclude that there exists a power differential between human and divinity, although they are co-constitutional and their divisions of labor effect each other’s co-construction. Meanwhile, “rodar *no* santo,” as

¹¹⁴ Matory’s (2005) translations are: “turn into the saint” (virar no santo)” and “turn around with [rodar com] the god or saint.” But Matory does not discuss the implications of these expressions or their emphasis on movement as a catalyst of change – his goal is to demonstrate that Angola and Ketu practitioners employ different idioms to talk about possession (213).

observed by Miram Rabelo (2014, 128), implies a moving inward and puts into question the “passivity” of the acolyte--since the ambiguous phrasing indeterminately defines whether the “rodante” is inside of the “santo” or whether the “santo” is in fact reciprocally radiated by the filha herself. “Rodar no santo” simultaneously encompasses circling with, circling inside of, being fundamentally moved by an external force so that proprioceptive and phenomenological change occurs, and turning into or becoming another nature, state or form.



Figure 3. An iaô circles with/in her Orixá at the terreiro Ilê Axé Opo Afonjá. Photo by Pierre Verger. © Pierre Verger Foundation. Permission to reproduce granted Feb. 2021.

In addition, *rodar* approximates the informal modern usage of the English verb “to roll,” as in to accompany or behave in a particular way, i.e. “we always roll together,” or, “that’s how she rolls.” These connotations attend to the enduring temporal dimension of “*rodar no santo*” as an extension of the relations formally consecrated during the intensive initiation period of the *feitura*, which involves behavioral modifications that reflect new responsibilities as an *iaô* or “wife” of the Orixá.¹¹⁵ The *iaô*’s new obligations include complying with an Orixá’s gustatory taboos as well as observing restrictions and regulations for keeping her consecrated body “closed.” A body that is ideal for circling with/in “the saint” is sealed against impurifying energies both hermetically through ritual technologies and practically through consumptive and sexual abstinences, as Paul Christopher Johnson (2002) has observed. So while a new acolyte will circle with/in her saint during ceremonial occasions, “*rodar no santo*” also addresses her new ontological condition of formalized togetherness with her Orixá. In an attempt to keep with the precise sensorial and choreographic senses by which *rodantes* experience and describe Candomblé’s embodiments, I will employ the terms “circle with” and “circle in” throughout the my dissertation. I later return to the question of circling with and in an Other to explore how these intersubjective movements are precipitated and organized by the *feitura*, the re-making of the body-self through which *iaôs* and *entidades* are (re)produced.

The inter-digitated meanings of *rodar*, to circle with/in the saint, and *roda* as a verb that describes the action of the *xirê* in which initiates circle the sanctuary floor, illustrate the generative power attributed to circling together in Candomblé. In both the sense of circling together and the sense of creating a protected circle for calling their *santos*, Candomblé’s circular choreographies build upon culturally-embedded understandings of fertility, conception, gestation

¹¹⁵ In Yoruba. Matory (2005) argues that “wife” in the context of an *iaô* denotes a relative gendering wherein the initiate is feminized in terms of her/his/their receptivity to the relatively masculinized deity.

and birth. Independently of their gender identifications, when initiates *rodar no santo* they structurally occupy a feminized subject position wherein their bodies are construed as concomitant and pregnant with the body of another being. In relation, according to dominant interpretations, the Orixá is masculinized, able to “grab” or “catch” his filha.¹¹⁶

In their explication of models of gendering in Candomblé, Paul Christopher Johnson (2002) and Jim Wafer (1991) point to the masculinization of an Orixá in relation to a feminized medium (and leader, in Johnson’s case), even if the Orixá is normatively identified as female and the medium male.¹¹⁷ It is worth considering whether the relevance of penetration metaphors to Candomblé’s processes of embodiment does really point to the masculinization, even relatively, of the divinity. In addition, neither of their models accounts for the destabilization of these roles during the state of trance, in which the human subject both contains and gives birth to, by way of giving physical form to, an entity, at the same time as she is contained and transformed by her santo, now feminized or occupying a maternal role to her or his “daughter” or “son.” Notably then, female as well as male and dually gendered entities simultaneously inhabit multiple axes of

¹¹⁶ These paradigmatic formulations bring forward a key contradiction, since there exist a plethora of reproductive "metaphors" in the ceremony, while, in certain cases, devotees receive prescriptions for the consecrated body to be celibate, thus denying the material possibility of birth/reproduction. Sexual abstinence can be assigned for short term durations, often for 3, 5, 7 days or more, or for the long durée, depending on the individuated quality of their Orixá. A transposition of sexuality and reproduction to the spiritual realm, this division between pure/impure bodily states, also correlated to the discourse of a “closed” body (ideal for spirit embodiment and maintained through refraining from sex as well as certain foods, crowds and other stimulating activities/environments versus an “open” body that is vulnerable to sickness and energetic contamination. These dichotomous understandings inform taboos around menstruation since a menstruating body cannot, in ontological terms, be closed.

¹¹⁷ Johnson bases his analysis on Yoruban-Atlantic codings of women as cool, reproductive and contained, while men represent sex and are “hot” (2002, 44). More specifically to the ways that Candomblé engenders power, Johnson positions mothers and fathers of the saints as, by definition, aged, respectable and controlled – metaphorically mother and midwife. In ceremony, the “male” Orixás “mount” and “possess” the feminized mediums; like straight men drummers and song leaders, Orixás bring male heat from outside into the terreiro where it is tempered and directed into processes of dual religious reproduction that bear axé and children (47). Johnson adds the caveat that, within Candomblé’s complex gender systems, every rule has a thousand exceptions and infinite possible interpretations (46).

relationality to their mediums (rodantes or those who circle with/in them) that are conceived through parental as well as sexual terms. In these cases, not only is gender relative but gendered family roles are also relative and unhinged from biological sex; thus the coding of a mother or wife position (taken on by the *iaô*, for example) is not unequivocally female.¹¹⁸ As such, Candomblé's female centric and matri-focal structures make room, at least theoretically, for male priests and mediums regardless of their gender identifications or sexual orientations.¹¹⁹ Yet as Candomblé develops in the New World and expands beyond the demographics of West and Central African adherents and their descendants, its ritualized relations become conflated with and sieved through hetero-patriarchal, Brazilian sexual categories. Despite or perhaps fuelled by this occurrence, many female, male, and trans practitioners deploy Candomblé's embodiments to reconceive non-normative sex and gender identities as sources of social and ritual power.

The closing of the *xirê* exemplifies what Heidegger describes as the threshold occasion or *ecstasis*, the pivotal moment of what I have defined as Candomblé's feminist poesis. At Gantois, after the *Orixás* swirl into and begin to circle with their *filhas*, the male-identified devotees who have become incorporated enter onto the sanctuary floor.¹²⁰ According to oral

¹¹⁸ Apter makes a similar argument in his (2013) article on polygamous structures in the Caribbean island of Carriacou ("[M.G. Smith on the Isle of Lesbos: Kinship and Sexuality in Carriacou.](#)") Possibly, considering that "mounting" is rarely used in Bahia in reference to *Orixá* embodiments, ethnographers of Afro-Bahian religions transposed the heteropatriarchal language of "mounting" and "possession" more commonly used in African Diasporic religions of Haiti (Hurston 1938, McCarthy Brown 1991) and Southern Brazil onto Bahian ceremony. Influential anthropologist Roger Bastide (1960), did not, apparently, achieve high-level mastery of Brazilian Portuguese, which could help explain why he may have resorted to terms popularized in other areas of Afro-Diaspora research. Or use of "mounted" may have decreased over time in relation to *Orixá* embodiments in Bahia, since the mid-late 20th century.

¹¹⁹ Male homosexuality in Candomblé has been the subject of much commentary and has become a trope of male participation as mediums in the religion.

¹²⁰ For Celeste, houses such as Gantois, in which only women enter in the *roda* of the *xirê*, allow men to enter only "after receiving their *santos*," in order to "demonstrate that in (that) house the women command" (interview May 2018).

history and ethnography from the mid-twentieth century, orthodox terreiros did not always allow male rodantes to dance in the roda. Nowadays, however male rodantes at Gantois do join their cohort sisters after becoming incarnated by their deities, at the end of the xirê. In this way, by allowing their male initiates to circle publically with their saints, the house harnesses the resources represented by male rodantes for the ultimate goal of the community of worship's social reproduction and maximization of its *axé*, a singularly potent energetic force or power to make things happen.¹²¹

Gantois' Matrilineal Succession :

| | | |
|-----------|---|------------|
| | Maria Julia de Conceição (Omoniké) and Francisco | |
| Pulquéria | Nazaré Damiana | Others |
| | Child | |
| | Escolástica (Mãe Menininha) Cleuza | Mãe Carmen |

4. Xangô's Axé Becoming Body

Xangô is one of Salvador's most eminent Orixá. Festas dedicated to him feature bonfires and light up the city throughout June and July. In addition, devotion to Xangô unites several major actors and sites of Candomblé's nineteenth century history. Gantois's first Iyalorixá, Maria Julia, was consecrated to Dadá, who is considered a quality of Xangô in Candomblé (Castillo, 2017),¹²² and his *assentamento*, or altar in his homage, was one of the first built at her terreiro. The sanctuary of the Casa Branca, the terreiro in which Maria Julia was "made," is dedicated to

¹²¹ As defined by Robert Farris Thompson (1983).

¹²² Castillo reports that while Maria Júlia was eventually consecrated to the Orixá Dadá, according to Mother Carmen, "it was Oxaguiã who caught her" (2017).

Xangô. It's founder, Iyá Nassô, as well as the second Iyalorixá of the house, Oba Tossi (Marcelina da Silva), were Xangô priestesses, as was another of Candomblé's major historical actors, Obitoke Bamboxê, who spread nagô Candomblé from Bahia to Southern Brazil and the Northeast state of Pernambuco through his nineteenth century travels.

At Gantois's Oxossi ceremonies, after the Orixás have settled in their human forms and carried the sacrificial parts of the bull's body balanced on their heads through the sanctuary, a tall, chiseled filho of commanding presence approaches Dona Cici. The filho has incarnated a quality of the Orixá Xangô, a masculine entidade who governs justice and commands lightning. Xangô was king of the Oyo Empire in Yorubaland, from where the egba peoples, among them Omoniké/Maria Julia, had been displaced in the early nineteenth century.¹²³ The embodied Xangô traces a universe of Orixá energy between himself and Dona Cici, swaying his two hands to the right then left in a circular motion, then he bows low. I am at the ready to secure Cici's cane every time she needs to access her mobility, when axé oils her veins she manages to kneel, to illustrate Orixá dances with her leg that won't bend. Xangô stands and, following the atabaque, spins with two palms upraised. As the rhythm shifts, he oscillates one leg back a time in a ball change while riding on his fire horse. He stops again before Cici, renewing the series of gestures. She returns the greetings. After Cici I'm next – trace the universe, bow, then follow the Orixá's timing to lift up my torso, open my arms under hers and receive a divine embrace (fieldnotes, May 18, 2018).

To think through the body politics of this part of the ceremony, in which the temple's Orixás are immanent, I consider how particular kinds of bodies are co-produced through the feitura and ceremonial dancing. I view these bodies as spectral and as part of an executive force that not only embodies but also multiplies axé and reflects it onto ceremonial participants. I call

¹²³ most sources claim Xangô the Orixá originated as a human king of Oyo (Cici 2018, Castillo 2010).

Candomblé's ritually prepared and socialized human forms *axé-becoming bodies* because they are specifically re-designed, through cyclical initiatory and ceremonial processes, to channel and bestow axé onto the individuals and families that pertain to the terreiro community, as part of a phalanx of other spectral bodies and entidades that distribute their agencies and bodily being in ceremonial performance. The *feitura*, or "making" of a devotee, creates bodies which are multi-faceted or spectral because they are made to concentrate and distribute multiple agencies who are themselves products of intricate syntheses that co-relate within a subject's human and other-than-human ancestral genealogies. Ceremonial invocation and embodiment necessarily relay and confirm these co-relations and situate an initiate and her primary Orixá within the constellation of a temple's familia-de-santo or spiritual family and its socialized guardian entities.

Interestingly, dance scholar Anurima Banerji (2018), in her account of Mahari Naach dancing in India's Jagannath temples, similarly describes how divine bodies, like the "transindividual" bodies of ritual dancers, "were not considered singular but plural and continually reproducible in the cycle of rebirth." Banerji positions the bodies of temple dancers, deities and the temple itself, conceived architecturally as a body, as "successive" and connected in a "dispersed, distributed corporeality" (151). Like Mahari Naach, Candomblé's "made" bodies relate successively, indexing each other, the entidades to which they are consecrated, and the terreiro's body, forging a trans-individual subjectivity activated in ceremonial dancing. Banerji's theories of Mahari Naach ritual corporeality and its effects are especially useful for my interrogation of Candomblé's extraordinary relations and the ways that they are fomented, reproduced and even challenged. By linking study of the *feitura* with an exploration of ceremonial dancing, I aim to help fill a gap in Candomblé literature that has focused largely on initiation and societal organization, leading to heavily structural analyses that preclude

understandings of Afro-Brazilian ritual *performance* as a dynamic and complex politically relevant sphere of action where initiates, priest/esses, entidades and visitors continuously re-define the terms of their collaboration.

Candomblé's spirit entities, in addition, group in various lineages that embody different social histories situated in specific historical, ecological and geographic frames. In Candomblé parlance, the term *lineagem* or lineage allows for discrepant interpretations amidst houses while enabling an understanding of the genealogical trajectories that connect families of entities in a conceptual and phenomenological field. Entities in their own lineages form narrative sets and constellations that splinter into myriad lines and novel organizational configurations that constitute the *enredo* or surrounding *co-presences* of an individual subject.¹²⁴ But even one entidade in a lineage constitutes a multiplicity. Thus, Orixás, Voduns, Caboclo and Exu/a form their own phalanxes (*falanges*) of beings at once distinct and united under the same moniker. These phalanxes are also “spectral” because they too operate like shades of light or color on a spectrum. Celeste's primary Orixá, for example, a maternal figure and ocean deity known as Iemanjá, comes as the two gendered Iemanjá Ogunté, a quality of Iemanjá joined with a quality of Ogum, whose volatility and skill at war and metalwork distinguishes his masculine personality, stance and movements. Iemanjá comes in countless other forms, too, known as “qualities,” which are both individuated and multiplied through the initiation process (Rabelo).

Rabelo argues that formal relations between human subject and divinity are neither “simply actualized nor simply created or constituted” by the *feitura*; instead, they are “instituted” (2014, 91). Rabelo's invocation of the concept of institution builds on Merleau-Ponty's (1968) insights (1968), quest to escape the duality of accepting history either as the realization of a pre-determined form or as the sole creation of human agents. For Rabelo, Merleau-Ponty's finding -

¹²⁴ See Alisha Bel-Jesus, 2015.

the idea of “simultaneity or crystallization” of past and future, wherein “if the past opens up the field of the future, it is the future that confirms the past, rethinking it and making it count” (92) – is crucial to grasping how initiation re-organizes a subject’s existence by foregrounding her relations to surrounding co-presences, her *enredo* or entourage. Furthermore, at the same time that the process of institution treats something that is already given, that already exists and acts – namely, relations between devotee and her divinity – institution is also the path that gives value to that which is already present, and transforms it into the focus of a sequence. The realization of *feitura*, concludes Rabelo, is not only to institute a re-encountered relation, “bringing to the surface something that was hidden, but actually to take a part of the history of this relation and activate it in the present. Making the saint (*fazer o santo*) is to make happen, one for the other, person and Orixá” (Ibid). History, in this context, is less the succession of acts by which individuals constitute a world of gods but rather the various activities by which gods and humans associate and negotiate the terms of their association. Priestesses and *filhas* do not create gods-- rather they take care of them, satisfy them, guaranteeing that their presences will be continuously renewed in the *terreiro*.

Redressing the overemphasis of twentieth century ethnographers, such as Márcio Goldman (1987) and Roger Sansi (1995), on human agency in the *feitura*, Rabelo points to the limits of Western Enlightenment frameworks that locate agency in individual (human) personhood and problematically link subjectivity with property possession, a secular capitalist logic that undergirds libertarian politics. Most relevant to the purpose of my discussion is that Rabelo addresses the *feitura* as a process driven as much by Orixá agency as by the desires of human persons, and indicates that the subjectivity of all parties transforms in ways that cannot be encapsulated by modern Western concepts of the rational, individual person.

Where Rabelo elucidates the distribution of agency in Candomblé's ritual re-making of human and divine personhoods, Banerji shows how bodies are distributed through a ritually produced "kinesthetic theory of the subject" that dialogues with Alfred Gell's conception of distributed personhood. Banerji's argument that religious imagery "*extends* rather than *substitutes* the entity in question" (2018, 147) provides a basis on which she constructs the principle she calls the *distributed body*, drawing from Gell's (1998) theory of the "distributed person." In the contexts of *mahari* performance in Jagannath temples, recounts Banerji, the "singular dancing body became porous and fractal, regarded as auspicious, infused with spiritual properties . . . part of a sacred lineage with complex religious and ideological attachments" (149). The distributed body that Banerji attributes to mahari dancing is constructed liminally in between single and plural states, offering a model that helps explode the idea of a ritual body as unitary. Building on the work of both Rabelo and Banerji, two practitioner-scholars engaged in the praxes they address, I suggest that Candomblé's performances of mediumship assembles axé-becoming bodies as agencies imbued with an array of differentiated, kaleidoscopic qualities of human and physical worlds. These axé-becoming bodies are authorized to effect transformation - through both the ceremonial dancing act, by which their subjectivities are continually distributed in the present, and the institutional process of *feitura*, by which they are de- and re-individuated in relation to the terreiro's ancestralidade.

The individuation of axé-becoming bodies informs performances of spirit embodiment and ongoing relations between practitioners within the same ritual community and across different allegiances. To give an example of how Orixás are individuated on the qualitative spectrum of one lineage, I draw again on the events at the *cabeça do boi* offering at Gantois. During the *xirê*, when the time came to salute and summon the paternal Orixá Oxalá, another

senior filha came over to escort Dona Cici over to where Mãe Carmen – the current Iyalorixá, daughter of Menininha and great great granddaughter of Maria Julia de Conceição – sat facing the sanctuary floor. These two elders are consecrated to different qualities of Oxalá; Mãe Carmen is a filha of Oxaguian, Oxala’s younger and more dynamic aspect, while Cici is dedicated to Oxalufã, who is hunchbacked with age and associated with patience and wisdom. Oxaguian wields a sword and shield; Oxalufã holds a staff crowned with a bird. In one of the most evocative ceremonial dances (to me), Xangô carries Oxalufã, his father, on his back. Aside from the categorical distinction between Oxalufã and Oxaguian, each of the elder’s Orixá would also have his own personal pronoun, a name revealed after the reclusion period of the new initiate, during which the individuated Orixá is also socialized into the terreiro.

In interviews, Dona Cici shared with me anecdotes that glimpse the executive force of an Orixá. Often, I found, these take the form of cautionary tales. For instance, Cici relates that she must abstain from sexual relations inside of her home because her Oxalufã “is dangerously jealous.” When I asked what could happen, Cici recounted the story of Mãe Sophia, an early twentieth century priestess of Exu:

Hers was an envious Exu who forbid Sophia to have a boyfriend in the house. Yet Sophia dared to fall in love with a man and began keeping him at home. One day she went to buy food in order to make a meal for her lover. She was struck down in the street and instantly died. (interview, Pierre Verger Foundation, June 2018)

Despite Sophia’s formidable standing as a Yoruba mother, her Orixá exercises executive power over her destiny and punishes her for transgressing sexual prohibitions. Cici’s reproofing account well illustrates 1) religious livelihood and the questions of penetrability upon which incorporation as the basis of the devotee-divinity relation is predicated are always dependent on contexts including the personalities and exigencies of specific divine agents, and cannot be

wholly reduced to gender and/or sexuality, and 2) the distribution of agency and body are disputed on an ongoing basis within dedicated ritual spaces as well as quotidian spheres.

On a less punitive note, Maria Carmo, a Caboclo specialist that I consulted in 2013, offered an illustrative account of her entidade's ability to intervene in the earthly dimension. Her Caboclo, a cowboy or Boiadeiro, tended to arrive without fanfare while she was "just sitting there" in her living room, she said. One day in the late 1980s her Boiadeiro descended and led her to the police station where, unbeknownst to Maria, her two sons were being held by the police for civil disobedience. Boiadeiro managed to negotiate the release of her sons without penalty (August 18). In this case, the success of Boiadeiro's intervention speaks to the resources that ritual embodiment can offer when a person's own agency is amplified in order to redress systemic (and interpersonal) imbalances of power and justice. Maria Carmo told me that, as a girl, her mother's friends perceived her susceptibility to incorporation and dragged her to a "traditional" Candomblé to see if her santo would come to circle with her. But, she said, he only liked a loose, lively samba and refused to enter the Orixá temple, finding it too buttoned up. In her testimony, Maria Carmo relates the enigmatic nature of her Caboclo while hitting on key tropes that distinguish Caboclo and Orixá; her Caboclo prefers non-institutional settings, takes on an anti-authoritarian stance in defiance of her elders' expectations, and neither she nor he have been formally "made" and thus socialized into a temple's hierarchical structures.

In the feitura, the bodies of *rodantes* – initiates who circle with their saints - are "made" for distribution with an Orixá whose own essence is "seated" or embodied in the arteries of the terreiro, in elaborately cared for altar houses and meticulously prepared ceramic vessels whose contents have been reciprocally embedded in the top a devotee's head. This intimacy engenders the intersubjective possibility of circling together, but feitura is not the only venue for

establishing intimacy with an Other. Caboclos circumvent the need for an intermediary agent or institutional process to formalize their intimacy and open the doorway for bodily distribution; the intimacy that they share with practitioners stems from their everyday affinities that include the overlapping realities of their socio-economic marginalization and their fluency in Bahian Portuguese. Whereas, in the Jagannath temple, ritual bodies were distributed across deity, dancer and temple architecture in a continual, institutionally valorized, “co-constituted triangle of corporeal power” (Banerji 2018, 48), Caboclos’ extra-institutional status complicates the cyclical processes formalized by orthodox priestesses and described by Rabelo, opening a field of contestation that potentially destabilizes the social hierarchies of the terreiro establishment. The distributed quality of axé becoming bodies, however, retains its potency across the spectrum of orthodox and heterodox practices of incorporation, since in ceremonial venues these various entities engage reciprocally with their mediums, each other, attendees, and the ceremonial spaces they animate – whether inside a temple sanctuary or outdoors.

Conclusions:

I have argued that the xirê produces feminine authority through its choreographic, symbolic and physiological use of circles in concert with performances of Candomblé’s origin story as one of black female ingenuity and strength. Drawing on testimonies from a range of practitioners, I endeavored to demonstrate how ritual embodiment and transmission are coded female in relation to both Candomblé’s genesis and the anatomy and function of the mother’s womb. I have looked at how the xirê’s circles and cycles figuratively produce a mother’s body to effectuate the social reproduction and transformation that ritual represents, creating a conceptual topography for understanding the work that circular aesthetics do in terms of invoking and intermediating divine relations. I suggested that these figurations shape the gendering of

Candomblé's social roles and these genderings are themselves situated in cyclical, non-linear and unstable patterns. This feminist poeisis, which links the circular aesthetics of the xirê to Candomblé's gender divisions and social structures, sketches a throughline across the broad range of Bahian houses and discourses of traditionalism.

For practitioners I spoke with, the circling of the initiates in the xirê further reflects a feminist politics in its kinetic re-cycling of female, more specifically, maternal, reproductive function as the container and motor of divine interrelation. The dense imagery of the roda as a womb and the file of initiates as an umbilical cord sheds light onto Candomblé's idealization of the mother's body for cultural transmission and for the reproduction of bio-social and ritual resources. The women-only performance of the xirê at Gantois, a prototypical model of orthodox Ketu Candomblé, shows that ritual permeability is coded female, at least in Candomblé's dominant scripts, helping explain why both terreiro leadership and mediumship privilege female participation. According to Dona Cici and Celeste, in other Ketu terreiros including Ilê Axé Opo Afonja and the Casa Branca, only women perform the xirê as well.

Idioms of spirit embodiment such as *rodar* and *girar no santo*, to “circle” and/or “turn in the saint,” illuminate the fundamentality of circling not only as an organizational and choreographic paradigm for invocation but also as the operative principle by which the joining of an entidade and a human subject is achieved. Candomblé's incorporations are understood in terms of an intersubjective moving together, not being-moved-by--a characteristic that has not received adequate treatment in Candomblé literature, especially in English. The rebirth of both human devotee and entidade engendered by the *feitura*, a remaking of the self that constitutes the first major initiatory passage, concentrates the possibility of moving together by repositioning divine and human subjects and their bodies in a new, consecrated and spectral relation, weaving

them jointly into the social fabric of the ritual community and its genealogies. Both the *feitura* and circling together are actions that construct Candomblé's body-selves as complex syntheses of multiple and distributed agencies and as sites at which various trajectories of space (orun and aiye) and time (mythical and ancestral pasts, present, futures made by possible by the instituted relations between devotee and divinity) intersect.

After sketching Candomblé's prototypical Orixá ceremonies and their Africanist aesthetics of cyclical and circular movement kinesis, in the next chapter I show how practices associated with non-traditionalism or heterodoxy differ from these canonic forms of Candomblé through the performance praxis that I call *dark horse kinetics*. I locate dark horse kinetics in Caboclo Candomblé practices that arise from as well as challenge understandings of tradition in Bahia's Afro-religious universe. My assertion is based on participant observation in rituals as well as historical evidence showing that, even as orthodox priestesses and priests articulated their Afro-centric platforms through the institutional frames of their terreiros, they embodied Caboclos, discretely, to contend with New World histories, narrate their lived experiences of post-colonial Bahian society and aggregate political power in relation to Brazil's formations of racism, hetero-patriarchy and homophobia.

CHAPTER THREE

***Barravento* (The Turning Wind): A Courtyard Ceremony at Ilê Axé Opô Aganju**

---September 8, 2018: After an hour or so the priest came to the festa, on “the legs of his santo,” (Cici). Then as the musicians played a samba de Caboclos, he stood shakily, trying to gain secure footing while swaying slightly side-to-side, resisting the *barravento* of his Caboclo. As he began retreating from the yard where we were gathered, the initiates of the house and drummers ran behind, playing louder and pushing the energy higher and higher, provoking the babalorixá’s *santo*, his “saint” or, in this case, Caboclo, to come down. Finally, he stumbled away, towards the temple sanctuary, and everyone wandered back to courtyard, with some Caboclos stopping at the *assentamentos*, where the Orixás are seated, to pay homage to the guardians of the house.

---“The Caboclo comes with more weight (*ele vem mais pesado*), he comes with the *barra vento*.” (Silvio)

Like circling with/in the saint, falling into the saint refuses fixed subject positions. This action features in the dark horse kinetic mobilized by Caboclos, as a quality of losing and regaining equilibrium that creates a fragmented yet resilient body politic. A double entendre with two interlocking meanings, the term “*barravento*” references a specific choreography and experience of spirit embodiment, one particularly linked to the arrival of Caboclos. The choreography of *barravento* involves a lunge backwards and ball-change weight shift to the front leg, and features as a principal move in samba de Caboclos. This *barravento* holds a sacred place in the repertoire of *dança afro*, one of Bahia’s unique, Candomblé-inspired theatrical dance genres,¹²⁵ and physically demonstrates the destabilizing, material effects of encounter with a spirit entity. On the other hand, *barravento*, defined as “the turning wind” or wind that “knocks you over,” (Magalhães 2020) also signifies the advance of an entidade and can take multiple forms in relation to the success or failure of the entidade to incarnate a devotee’s body. This

¹²⁵ By “theatrical,” I mean that *dança afro* is not derived from one historically regional form but rather functions as a shifting repository of movements codified by professional artists and rooted in Bahia’s Africanist aesthetics, for pedagogical purposes or for the stage.

second, more inchoate meaning of the term describes the phenomena that Pai Balbino, a Candomblé priest of “traditional” or nagô lineage, wishes to avoid.

In this chapter I apply a choreographic lens to events at a Caboclo festa held in the back courtyard of the terreiro Ilê Axé Opô Aganju on September 1st, 2018. Looking at invocative gestures, provocations that can “bring down” or dispel an entidade, and the barravento as choreographies that destabilize power structures, I suggest that the ceremony becomes a site for unsettling Candomblé orthodoxies as they interface with hegemonic Bahian and Brazilian constructions of race, nation, gender and sexuality. In contrast to a traditional Orixá service, the Caboclo festa foregrounds contestations of power between initiates and terreiro leadership and between devotees and their Caboclo. These contestations come into relief during transitional moments such as those in which devotees become embodied or, as in the case of the high priest, dis-embodied by their Caboclos. Analyzing idioms of incorporation, such as *cair no santo* (to fall or stumble into the saint) and *baixar o santo* (bring down the saint) help reveal under-theorized elements of Candomblé’s social process, since they synthesize the primary relations between entidades and their followers.

I conjoin choreographic and performance analysis with a critical theory of Caboclos’ potential to subvert hierarchies in order to develop my model of *dark horse kinetics* – a critical performance praxis that makes way for non-Western epistemologies (Rejouis 2014: 108). Dark horse kinetics builds on the aesthetic politics of *dark horse poetics*, which literary theorist Rose Rejouis’s (2014) identifies in Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1955) ethnography *Tristes tropiques*, based on his fieldwork among the Indigenous Tupinamba peoples of Brazil. In Candomblé’s Caboclo legions and their ceremonies, Tupinamba also features as a “feathered” Indian entity. Inspired by encounter with South American Indigenous ways of knowing, Lévi-Strauss’ work, suggests

Rejouis, proposes a critique of imperialist representational modes and recognizes the validity and integrity of non-Western ways of knowing (Rejouis 2014, 105). Rejouis develops dark horse poetics out of the concept of *bricolage* as a strategy of resistance and creative self-determination (103) with the purpose of exploring the call-and-response between Lévi-Strauss and Caribbean writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo. Benítez-Rojo's alternative episteme of "supersyncretic polytheism" in which "always/already syncretic deities" are re-imagined in the creation of new divine arrangements forges a New World paradigm of poetic territory whose parameters make room for Caboclos' hybrid pantheons as they resist the reach of the West's "authoritarian monotheism" (109 - 110).¹²⁶

Featuring in Caboclos' arrivals and dances, the barravento is a key element of dark horse kinetics. Looking through the lens of the barravento, the arrival and departure of Pai Balbino sheds light on Caboclos' proclivity for staging conflicts of agency in the ceremonial sphere. Present in the festive performances of Caboclo, dark horse kinetics overlap and intersect with the Orixá aesthetics present in Candomblé's "traditional" ceremonies.¹²⁷ Yet, dark horse kinetics also diverge from Orixá traditionalism, on the whole, in that they narratively contend with

¹²⁶ During fieldwork in Bahia's interior I found that Afro-syncretic religious symbolism includes Judaic and Islamic figures and numerologies. Several practitioners linked Kabbalistic mystic numerological influences together with Candomblé's Muslim factions. Yoruban Muslims made up significant parts of the Yoruban waves of forced immigration to Brazil as well as traders in the 19th century. Islamic mysticism's influence on West African divination likely began centuries earlier with the Muslim expansion of the 10th century. Kardecian Spiritism gained popularity in Brazil in the second half of the 19th century as a mediumship practice incorporating eclectic spiritual sources, identified with the writings of Frenchman Allan Kardec 1804-1869. Spiritism influenced other Afro-Brazilian religions including Umbanda, where many Candomblé devotees and leaders begin their spiritual journeys.

¹²⁷ In the mid 20th century, French sociologist Bastide located Brazil's Afro-descendent religions on a hierarchical spectrum from the most "African," "traditional" and "pure" Orixá moving down towards macumba, or sorcery, among which he placed Caboclo and the Brazilian Exu/a. Other influential researchers and religio-cultural leaders shared Bastide's perspective and helped establish a canon of legitimate (and unauthorized) practices that continues to this day.

Bahian and Brazilian histories of displacement, intercultural encounter, and national identity formations.

Additionally, dark horse kinetics encompasses and satirizes behaviors associated with South American and/or Latino-American social conditioning such as machismo and hypersexuality (as these tropes become affixed through dance partner roles, clothing and choreographic styling that is differentiates along binary gender lines), and offers a counter-discourse to Brazil's pervasive homo and trans-phobia, systemic racism and misogyny. As a political idiom used to reference an unexpected or unknown victor, the analogy of the dark horse brings forth Caboclos' identifications with historically disenfranchised Amerindian and Afro-Indigenous subjects and with geographical landscapes that are spatially peripheral to Bahia's socio-economic centers. Caboclos speak and sing in Brazilian Portuguese and their experiences of racial exclusion and exploitative and/or coercive labor conditions, exemplified by Brazil's contemporary service economy (and its underpinnings of plantation slavery) resonate with the quotidian challenges faced by many racialized practitioners.

Whereas devotees usually refer to Orixá embodiment as a process of "incorporation," Caboclo songs and expressions address human mediums as "horses" or *cavalos*, on which the Caboclo cowboys (*Boiadeiros*) and "Indians" (*Indios* or *Caboclos de pena*) arrive at a ceremonial festa. Even though scholars have employed the terminology of "horse" in relation to Orixá mediumship, practitioners rarely use the horse analogy in reference to Orixá practices in Bahia. In contrast, Caboclos characterize their mediums as horses and use wide-legged samba postures that indicate their mounted horseback positions.

Dark horse kinetics is a minoritarian performance strategy that appropriates, disrupts and redefines dominant identity scripts based on race, sex and gender normativities and phobias,

remaking the prevailing order in “locally indispensable” ways that endow racialized subjects with social agency (Munoz 1999, 6). This dynamic resonates with the “disidentificatory” strategies outlined by performance theorist Jose Muñoz (1999). Muñoz outlines heteronormativity, white supremacy and misogyny as pervading cultural mechanisms that undergird state power and govern the broader social spheres in which the queer artists of color that he engages produce radical anti-normative theatrical works. Disidentification crosses the thresholds between these arenas, working at once within and outside the dominant public sphere to create counterpublics that contest the hegemonies of the majoritarian public sphere by bringing processes of hybrid identity formation into view (5). Dark horse kinetics subsumes disidentificatory strategies while unfolding in relation to specific regional and local geo-political realities, circum-Atlantic and Brazilian gender and race constructions, colonial ideations of Indigenous South-American personhood and histories of interaction between Afro-descendent enslaved and ex-enslaved subjects and Indigenous inhabitants of Bahia.

When Caboclos brazenly appear, call each other down, and dance their sambas, they continually re-perform their roles as dark horses, signaling the arrival of “hybrid, racially predicated and deviantly gendered identities” (Munoz 1999, 6) at representation, within the specter of a ritual container that generates an alternative, oral historical archive. My application of dark horse kinetics in this chapter endeavors to situate the participatory dynamics of the Caboclo festa within the socio-political context of Candomblé orthodoxy as well as in dialogue with formations of modern state and national identity and dominant race and gender scripts that have become increasingly politicized under Brazil’s current populist nationalist regime. Against the background of president Jair Bolsonaro’s self-professed homophobia, criminalization of gay marriage, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism as well as racism denials, dark horse kinetics

valorizes non-normative gender and sex identifications, complicates monolithic narratives of racial democracy reinvigorated by the right-wing government and articulates oppositional claims to political enfranchisement for Afro-descendent and Amerindian subjects.

Although in Brazilian Portuguese, “Caboclo” typically refers to a person of indigenous or mixed indigenous and African ancestry, in Candomblé, Caboclos challenge the fixing of racial identity as they move between perceived categories. Historically speaking, the first Caboclo to emerge as popular icons and “encantados” (enchanted ones) of Afro-Bahian religiosity embodied Amerindian personae and symbolically represented indigeneity in the terreiros (Silva 1994; 19). However, Caboclos today, and likely for the last century or so, represent a range of New World settings. They play on imperialist tropes of the Noble Savage or Caboclo *de pena* (feathered Indian), as well as that of the rowdy cowboy, *Boiadeiro*, as allegorical anti-heroes of an early nineteenth century post-colonial Bahia. Still others are Portuguese sailors, *Marujos*, and mixed-race hunters, *Capangueros*. Caboclos reveal a typological unfixability and mobility in relation to hegemonic identity constructions, and their kinetic tactics continually confirm their sense of irreverence through their loose, broken and falling aesthetics that break down, on a bodily level, the formal boundaries drawn by Candomblé’s orthodox structures as well as the racializing and sexualizing discourses to which minoritarian actors have been subjected in Bahian and Brazilian society. While the exoticization and commercialization of Brazil’s Africanist practices, beginning in 1930s with then-president Getulio Vargas’ policies of cultural exportation, have contributed to the sexualization of Black women, men and trans-identified bodies in Brazil, the nation’s high levels of lesbo-, homo- and trans-phobic violence most frequently target Afro-descendent subjects (Smith 2016). Caboclo performances contend with these social realities as they appropriate and unfix or disidentify with hetero-patriarchal race and gender typologies.

Though Caboclos present as hyper-masculine, primarily Indigenous and mixed race personae, their proclivities for embodying female, male, and trans-identified subjects unbind normative ideals of masculinity from notions of biological gender and satirizes gender and sex binaries. Their Caboclos' behaviors, aesthetics of dress, song lyrics and samba dances index regional Bahian socio-histories and sexual discourses, as they engage foundational narratives of nationalism, cultural encounter and miscegenation. The Caboclo repertoire wrestles with complex narratives of racial and socio-economic oppression and eroticization, and lays claim to a collective identity that re-positions practitioner communities as protagonists of Brazil's historical past and precarious contemporary moment.

To understand why Pai Balbino evades his Caboclo's advances, this chapter engages two sets of taboos in Candomblé: first, the stigmatized Caboclo figure – associated with racial mixture, cultural corruption, social and geographic marginalization, and hyper-sexuality in contrast to the purity and moral-sexual righteousness of the majestic Orixá – and second, the male medium or *rodante*. As one who circles with and is penetrated by his divine relation, the male medium occupies a structurally female subject position in Bahia's Afro-religious universe. However, in the twentieth century as Western models of gender respectability influenced Brazilian social spheres, male mediumship became conflated with aberrant behavior, cross-dressing and the defiling of Black masculinity.

Scholars of Candomblé (i.e. Johnson 2002, Landes 1947) consistently identify women and presumed “passive” males as Candomblé's primary adherents, its human resources, due to the “symbolically loaded fact of their penetrability” (Matory 2005, 214). Other theorists (Browning 1995, Wafer 1991, Fry 1986) unpack Brazilian sexual idioms to show how and why Candomblé's relational gender forms cannot be understood through the lens of hetero-

patriarchal, twentieth century models. Though their analyses provide crucial insights, the available literature offers scant commentary on how practitioners in Bahia actually navigate ideological conflicts between relative conceptions of masculinity and femininity, on one hand, and binary, patriarchal-colonial gender categorizations, on the other. I contribute to debates on gender construction and performance in Candomblé, looking at the tactical ways that specialists who admit a high degree of fluidity in terms of masculine or feminine divinities embodying a “daughter” of the saint treat the controversial issue of male mediumship in their social practices.

Mediums are those who “circle with/in” the saint. To talk about the act of becoming incorporated in public, practitioners also commonly speak of “dancing” in the sacred circle. Normatively in Candomblé, women “dance” while men, initiated under the title of *ogã*, play drums and perform animal sacrifice. While the visibility of male-bodied homo and transgendered actors in Bahian Candomblé has inspired commentary (Wafer 1991, Allen 2012), ongoing proscriptions on male dancing have been effectively eclipsed. Andrea Allen (2012), for example, productively contrasts the acceptance of male homosexuality with the invisibilization of female-female intimate relationships and lesbian identity in Candomblé. Allen argues that, even if male homosexual behavior is deemed inappropriate by hegemonic Brazilian culture, the mounter/mountee religious relationship and the giver/receiver sexual relationship between an Orixá and medium replicate and legitimate the active/passive sexual dynamics legible to phallicentric Brazilian society (21).¹²⁸ My research adds nuance to the idea of Candomblé as a refuge

¹²⁸ Allen suggests that, in contrast to their treatment in broader Brazilian society, gay men in Candomblé are not emasculated and continue to assume conventional male gender roles in the division of ritual labor. Yet, as she explains, the theological reasoning that transposes mounting and bride possession metaphors onto gay men does not encompass female same-sex sexual behavior. Since phallic penetration is the “essential marker” of sex in Brazilian society, female same-gender sexuality is rendered incomprehensible. Black lesbian women are afforded a higher level of agency and power in Candomblé than in Brazilian society at large, but at the price of sublimating themselves as sexual beings (2012, 27).

for male homosexuals; I found that male mediumship and allegations of male homosexuality remain negatively entwined in popular and internal discourses of Candomblé, and that leaders of terreiros employ a complex array of tactics to negotiate with taboos of male gender presentation in their terreiros.

As prominent social figures, Candomblé's priestesses and male priests have become tensely bound together. While some theorists situate Candomblé's celebrated "Black Mother" (mãe preta) in opposition to the stigmatized and homosexualized *pai-de-santo* or male priest,¹²⁹ others focus on the activist roles priestesses have played in Black Bahian communities (Smith 2016, Harding 2000), and on historical collaborations between women and men in Candomblé's formative era (Castillo 2010). My research suggests that both priestesses and male priests share an ambiguous status as subjects who do not conform to hegemonic, racialized gender and sex binaries and bourgeois models of civic matrimony. Yet, facing the possibility of social derision, priestesses have acted as regulatory forces who mediate the gender performances of their male filhos who, alongside their spiritual sisters, come to represent the terreiro's moral and sexual respectability and human resources in public festas.¹³⁰

I begin with a choreographic analysis of the invocations at the festa organized by Ilê Axé Opo Aganju's filhas and filhos de santo, showing how the disruption of established cycles, through dissonant behaviors that shift the focus of ritual action, functions as a cornerstone of Caboclo ceremony. I locate these dissonant patterns within dark horse kinetics and address

¹²⁹ Matory (2005) argues that mães de santo have benefited from the conflation of their image with that of the colonial mammy and therefore achieved an officially legitimized status.

¹³⁰ I do not wish to disregard the ways Afro-Brazilian ritual practices and discourses contoured by interactions with European and/or Euro-American gender and sex paradigms. Rather I look at how emic approaches to the division of labor intersect, collude with *and* contest hegemonic categorizations. My aim is to create a composite picture that keeps Candomblé's paradigms of feminized mediumship in view while shining light onto the obscured, ongoing history of proscriptions on male-bodied performances – outside of the sanctioned spheres of drumming and animal sacrifice – in Bahian Candomblé.

Caboclos' provocative tactics for summoning their fellow entidades, by crowding them, dancing nearby, and even giving a surprise *cabeçada* – a capoeiristic blow executed with the top of the head. These provocations reveal how Caboclo choreographies of summoning diverge from formalized Orixá invocation and illustrate ways in which Caboclo festas create spaces of unpredictability for public or semi-public negotiations of agency (as in the case of the Caboclo ceremony at Ilê Axé Opô Aganju, which was not listed in the annual ritual calendar). Next, I contextualize the Caboclo within taxonomies of Afro-Brazilian religions, I suggest that while Caboclos provide an avenue for male practitioners to attain legitimacy as initiates who circle with their saints, Caboclo embodiment remains risky in various contexts, especially for public figures from orthodox lineages.

The high priest of Ilê Axé Opô Aganju, Pai Balbino is one of the most honored figures in Bahian Candomblé today. As the first male-bodied “son of the saint” initiated as a medium by the eminent priestess Mãe Senhora de Oxum (in 1959), of the traditional house Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, Pai Balbino's mediumship offers an opportunity to explore how Candomblé leaders choreograph gender in their own temples as they calibrate societal phobias around male sexuality with the need to reproduce their material and spiritual resources. Drawing on tactics from different temples, I demonstrate the extent to which ritual performances are co-choreographed by reigning priest/esses and the Orixás to whom they are reciprocally bound. In the final section, I analyze the nagô priest's flight in the face of his Caboclo's incoming presence, the “barravento,” as a choreography of disembodiment that speaks to the tensions encapsulated in Candomblé's processes of incorporation, by which devotees not only contain but also reflect and refracting axé onto ceremonial spaces and participants. I suggest that the incorporated or axé-becoming bodies

of devotees form a corporeal terrain for destabilizing the social hierarchies of a given terreiro, and distributing executive power.



Figure 4. Pai Balbino circles with/in Xangô Aganju. Ilê Axé Opo Afonjá, circa 1960s. Photographer Pierre Verger. © Pierre Verger Foundation. Reproduced with permission.

1. Invocations, Incorporations and Provocations

Founded by Pai Balbino in 1972, Ilê Axé Opô Aganju is an orthodox, Ketu terreiro linked to the motherhouse Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá. While Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá is located in the large mid-

city bairro of Cabula, Pai Balbino's house is located further from the city center in the suburban hub of Lauro de Freitas, near Salvador's international airport. Many city dwellers descend on the neighborhoods' lovely beaches during weekends, and affiliates to the temple hail from various parts of the city as well as from the neighborhood's own residential enclaves. Organized not by the house leadership but rather by the initiates of the house, this Caboclo festival offers a unique lens onto how ritual choreographies operate in unofficial arenas of Candomblé practice that occupy the interstitial fields between institutional orthodoxy and illegitimacy.

Upon arrival at the terreiro entrance on Saturday afternoon, September 8th 2018, we find the sanctuary closed. Wandering through the grounds, we discover a critical gathering behind the structures of the altar houses in an open, outdoor courtyard adjacent to the kitchen. Marcelinha and a couple of other senior filhas direct the preparations: scatter sacred leaves across the concrete floor, bring out fruits and beer, un-chilled, for the guests of honor, invited Caboclos, and offer plates of stewed chicken and beans to all. As I kneel beside her, Dona Cici explains in her low voice the reasons for her priest's absence, as stated earlier: "My father is *nagô*. This is Brazilian." However, adds Cici, Pai Balbino may yet arrive "if the santo grabs him and brings him here, involuntarily." Balbino's susceptibility to receiving and circling with a santo has been formalized, and he is as subject to embodiment by Candomblé's unpredictable, "Brazilian" entidades as the filhos and filhas of his house.

The ceremony begins with the xirê, the invocative circle initiated by the call of the drums. These *atabaque* drums, like those used at Orixá celebrations, have been ritually fed and elaborately prepared. However, whereas in Orixá ceremonies of the Ketu temple the ogãs use thin wooden sticks, they play with bare hands when drumming for the Caboclos. The rhythm, Cabila, stems from the Angolan percussion universe in which samba also emerges. The filhas

and filhos of the house proceed in a single file line, forming a circle that rotates counter-clockwise in the courtyard clearing. But the rhythms and step vary from those I see at the Orixá festas. In contrast to the pounding, two-step march of the *avanaia* at Gantois, the opening step of the xirê at the Caboclo session traces side-to-side patterns across the floor, two steps moving backwards in each direction, touch heel to the floor, bisecting the earth in zigzag segments.

While Orixá occupy a heavenly abode, known by the Yoruba term *orun*, Caboclos inhabit *aldeias*, indigenous villages often controlled by missionaries under colonial rule, and plantation ranches near and far from the city. These Bahian locales constitute what Brian Brazeal refers to as Caboclos' "mythic geography," the realms from which Caboclos journey to festas in order "to work, play and pray" (2013; 648). The steps of the Caboclo xirê lilt one way and then another, emphasizing the horizontal plane over the vertical one and calling the house's guardians from the inland regions, rather than down from the skies. This horizontal plane is the one traversed by Caboclos themselves as they travel, on horseback, from Bahia's rural interior landscapes to Salvador's coastal, cosmopolitan districts.

As they step diagonally towards one side and then another, the filhas and filhos de santo position their bodies in 45-degree angles to the line that would mark the circle's perimeter. Their directional shifts are initiated from the mid-upper back; the cervical spine and neck lag behind for a split second, created an accented swing and subtle head bounce coming from the reverberations of the step in the occiput joint that links the vertebral column to the skull, behind the jaw. The a rolling shoulder coordination explored in the previous chapter, which Linda Yudin calls a "defining feature of Afro-Brazilian corporal sensibility" (2017) – is still present, yet layered over a moving system whose masses relate in slightly looser, more syncopated designs, relative to the organization of the body in the Orixá invocation circle. This body posture differs

from the stance used in the xirê of the Orixás, described by Bahian dance scholar Suzana Martins (2008) as the “basic body attitude” for Candomblé, as it:

highlights a vertical alignment of the body... in an erect position, but with the torso lightly curved to the front. The arms are semi-flexed with pointed elbows. The body dislocates forward, alternating feet successively, propelling the whole body, as the semi-flexed arms balance in a movement of ‘going’ and ‘coming’ subtly accentuated by the elbows. Between one step and another, the feet move in *contratempo*, so that the body can advance through space. In this coordination of steps with the movement of the arms, the body slides in circular locomotion. (45-46)

In contrast to the successive marching steps of the Orixá evocation, the invocation choreographies of the Caboclo send the dancers rocking from one direction to another, with the weight shifting in relation to the stepping pattern of left, right, left, right (tap), as the body dislocates on a slanted forward/side trajectory away from the center of the circle, then the other way, stepping right, left, right, left (tap) towards the center. Moving sometimes in the same sideways direction and sometimes not, the *filhas* and *filhos* fall in and out of step with each other, even as the entire circle’s macro movement of counter-clockwise rotation never ceases.

The Caboclo festa’s invocative dances evince the quality of dissonance, as identified by Cristina Rosa (2011) in her analysis of *ginga* aesthetics, which grounds the expressive Africanist movement practices of both capoeira and samba. Rosa defines dissonance as:

dynamic harmony or unbalanced balance, coming in-and-out of sync-ness or falling out of rhythm and coming back again; sideways displacement or asymmetrical shifts; participatory discrepancies; swinging in and out of agreement with fixed cycles (144).

The spatial pathways of the Caboclo xirê choreograph sideways displacement within a circular structure, swinging out of and back into sync with the fixed cycle of the *roda*, the sacred circle whose cyclical structures and performance generate *axé*, metaphysical muscle or “the power to make things happen” (Thompson 1983). At the same time, the social configurations of the Caboclo festa also permit for discrepant and more fluid possibilities of participation, which I

draw out in connection to Rosa's ideation of "participatory discrepancies," as they are integrated in what I call an aesthetics of dissonance. While at Orixá ceremonies, as a rule, subjects who are not initiated at the host temple do not enter the invocation circle, the Caboclo xirê at Opô Aganju included people who are not initiated at the terreiro, or even initiated at all in Candomblé.

After a tall filho of impressive stature incorporated his Caboclo, an *índio* or Indigenous-identified figure known as Pena Verde (literally, Green Feather), the afternoon began to drizzle. To stay dry, I squeezed in amidst the other visitors under a small canopy overhanging the circle of participants and drummers, with whom we now stood shoulder to shoulder. Pena Verde sang a series of salutations, then called for another xirê and, rushing by, pulled all bystanders into the procession. Some of us, including several students of Candomblé dance, knew enough to follow the steps, more or less, as executed by the initiates. But Elias, a visitor from Uruguay, went completely freestyle. One of the governing filhas, in charge of the keeping ceremonial order, raised her eyebrows and exchanged glances with me, her expression reading a strong "ooooh boy." She took Elias aside to assess the nature of his state and decide whether his nascent santo would be allowed to stay for the festivities. Her assumption that Elias had incorporated a Caboclo after being pulled into the xirê fit with the participatory logic of the ceremony and the impulsive character of the entidades in whose honor the festa was held.

The boundaries drawn around the Caboclo festival at Opô Aganju are considerably more permeable than those of a traditional Orixá service, as Dona Cici was quick to point out. When Pena Verde continued to pull us into the action, Cici pronounced: "Isso nunca aconteceria, [In an Orixá ritual] that would never happen!"¹³¹ Generally, at an Orixá ceremony, only those entities already indoctrinated into the host terreiro's community are welcomed and nourished with

¹³¹ One filha lamented that her colleague had gone to worship at Gantois, but when his Orixá arrived, the entity was sent on its way (Carvalho interview May 2018) and would not be put out in the roda.

sacrificial foods, libations, and the prepared bodies of devotees in which to incorporate. However, Caboclos crave company and are not necessarily restricted by the same rigid hierarchies of seniority that contour and are re-inscribed during Orixá ceremonies. In the Caboclo xirê and ensuing arrivals, the conditions for an entidade to incarnate and circle with a devotee can hinge on an impulse and/or the particular social dynamics of the moment.

Another example of boundary-breaking behavior transpired a little later on. Once the Caboclos of the houses' filhas and filhos de santo had arrived, Pena Verde and several others began crowding participants with their own bodies. Dancing a forward moving samba, Pena Verde approached Lau, a professor of performance studies who accompanied me, another dance researcher and Elias, her student, to the ceremony, until the two stood face to face. Two incorporated Caboclos followed suit, surrounding the professor while singing in an attempt to provoke him to "fall into" his "santo." Lau's body swayed in the wind, stirred by the energetic forces before him; yet he held his ground. On the ride home, Lau revealed that Pena Verde had recognized a Caboclo's presence around him and endeavored to bring him forth, but that being outside of his own religious community, based at an Umbanda house in Southern Brazil, he did not want to become incorporated and thus resisted Pena Verde's advances.

The tactic of crowding another subject in order to bring down their entidade is unique to Caboclos' interactions. Whereas appropriate contexts for Orixá to manifest in festas generally correspond with the order of ceremony or specific events, for example the mãe de santo's incorporation of her divinity (see Rabelo 2014), Caboclos tend to gather around as-of-yet unincorporated devotees to create a pathway for a known or suspected colleague to present at the ceremony. As they approach participants, and samba and sing insistently to bring about their transformative states, Caboclos take charge of the invocative act, summoning friends and driving

the events of the ceremony. The choreography of Caboclo invocations is marked by spontaneity and differs in terms of movement, style and use of space from those of the Orixá as mandated through the institutional body of the terreiro and mediated by an established ritual order.

The participatory discrepancies evidenced in Caboclos' tactics for summoning members of their own cohort as well as in the participatory nature of the invocation circle, reflect, on a social level, the spatial sense of disorientation or juxtaposition created by the initiates' angular crosscutting of the xirê continuous pathways, in counterpoint to the roda's typically circular framework. Both socially and spatially, then, the Caboclo xirê swings "in and out of agreement" with the "fixed cycles," of the *roda de santo*, the sacred circle of Candomblé, as instated in public Orixá ceremony. Through the continuous renewal of kinetic energy produced in the xirê, the Caboclo festa participants overlay permanence and cyclicity with a sense of interruption, forging triangular geometries inside the circle and drawing newcomers into the flux.

Rather than signifying a break from the circular, cyclical aesthetics of orthodox Candomblé, however, Caboclos stage a dialectic between discontinuity and continuity in the same temporal frame. Barbara Browning notes that, "when the caboclo spirit comes down, he sambas. The roda is fixed" (1995, 26). I would like to complicate Browning's image of the fixed roda. At the Opô Aganju festa, Pena Verde calls the drummers to return to the rhythm of the xirê in between Caboclos' songs of arrival and sambas. Thus, the fixture of the roda stops *and* starts again, interspersed with its wheeling around. Similarly, the ritual action is driven by the filhas and filhos of the house and the Caboclos with whom they have some kind of established relationship, even if the Caboclos are not formally seated in the terreiro and socialized via the ritual passages undertaken for Orixá initiations. But the spiritual resources of outsiders, which

become evident as the afternoon unfolds – at least to those schooled in “seeing” the presence of an entidade – may be adamantly, if intermittently, summoned.

Caboclo Dark Horse Corporeality and Sociality

The dissonant aesthetics and provocative modes of being embodied by Caboclo unfix and reorganize Candomblé’s orthodox spatial and social structures while participating in an alternative process of identity construction that is continuously emergent in the present: unstable, non-linear and unique to the practitioner community. These qualities nest within dark horse kinetics, as a movement politics grounded and informed by circular Orixá choreographies and by Candomblé’s matri-focal social organization, which, despite coding mediumship as female, refutes binary categorizations of gender. However, dark horse kinetics expresses disjunction with orthodox Candomblé aesthetics and hierarchical arrangements as well. Articulated in the invocations, arrivals, ceremonial sambas and socialities of Bahian Candomblé’s Caboclos, dark horse kinetics is a worldmaking (Muñoz 1990) performance praxis through which practitioners deconstruct hegemonic identity scripts based on monolithic conceptions of both Africanness and Brazilianness, and on binary gender and sex categories, both within and outside of the traditional worlds of Candomblé. Drawing on Muñoz’s (1990) “disidentificatory” performances as worldmaking acts that create a “blueprint for minoritarian counterpublic spheres,” (5) dark horse kinetics is a survival strategy for those living within hegemonic structures who choose to negotiate mainstream codes, as opposed to rejecting them entirely or inventing completely new languages, which likely would not have the resonance or reach of dominant lexicon unless coopted. Dark horse kinetics intersects with disidentification as a set of behavioral and choreographic techniques that reorder the world from a subject position whose interpellation with patriarcho-colonial norms produces identificatory failures.

Caboclos' unique qualities of embodiment differentiate their arrivals from those of the Orixá and also informs their ceremonial dances. The Caboclo rides a human horse, but the "horse" or medium is authorized as a divine vehicle and "radiated" (*enradiado*) by the divine agent. Many Caboclos, especially those in the cowboy legion, the *Boiadeiros*, also ride equine horses as part of their profession and method of travel. At Opô Aganju's Caboclo session, when the Caboclos of the house arrived in their disruptive, energetic fashion, producing a domino effect of energy surging and ricocheting around the room, one devotee, Analisa stumbled forward with the weight of her Caboclo, a cowboy or *Boiadeiro*. She explains to me that her *Boiadeiro* arrives "from behind, riding on his horse, *montado seu cavalo*."¹³² His arrival sends her tumbling headfirst for a few steps before she regains balance (May 2018).

Analisa contrasts *Boiadeiro*'s entrance to the subtle arrival of her Orixá, Iemanjá, whose descent she "hardly feels at all" (interview May 2018). Like *rodar no santo*, the idiom *montado a cavalo* (riding a horse) is similarly intersubjective and unstable in terms of its gender categorizations. Reading the Caboclo as male, and the medium as feminized and penetrated, is tempting but insufficient because practitioners also, as I argue, mobilize and activate their Caboclos to assert their own masculine authority. "Montar" or mounting is also a cyclical choreography in that the "dominant" position of the rider does not remain constant and, rather, is continually brought into question. Instead of attributing agency to either the Caboclo, or *rodante*, then, the metaphor of the dark horse gives form to the distributed agency and body of the two actors together in the act of reproducing and generating *axé*.

Remember that *rodar no santo* suggests metaphors of pregnancy and birth where both the divinity and human are gestated and born through the container of the Other. Another

¹³² "Horse" is used much more rarely in the context of Orixá. Rableo (2014) qualifies that "horse" and "mounted" are usually used when person seek to relate Candomblé and African traditions.

choreography of arrival, *pegar*, literally to seize, riffs on the lusophone sexual slang of “picking up,” where the entidade performs the act of penetration, but is also used interchangeably with “baixar,” bring down, which positions the initiate, caller or another entidade as the determining agent in the possession act. Although Orixás can come down and radiate devotees, the popular usage of “montado a cavalo” (riding a horse) is reserved for Caboclos such as Analisa’s Boiadeiro, who comes galloping in from the arid backlands of Bahia’s sertão, a desert region that extends across much of Brazil’s Northeast, causing his filha to “almost” fall. Because Caboclos often arrive mounted on horseback, galloping in from the borderlands, their arrivals tend to push a devotee off-balance to an extreme degree. I attribute this quality of arrival to the elements of fall or destabilization and recovery, which is part of Caboclos’ overall circular flow of movement involving off-kilter stumbles followed by the restoration of balance and self-possession from a temporary state of lack of control.¹³³

I call Caboclos “dark horses” because of their marginalized status in Candomblé taxonomies of Afro-Brazilian entities and practices. Until recently, Candomblé’s Caboclos have been treated by scholars and many orthodox leaders as exogenous to the logic of Afro-Bahian religions. Ethnographer Ruth Landes, for example, framed Candomblé’s Caboclo as anathema to traditionalism and associated them with homosexual deviance.¹³⁴ Landes documented the iconic

¹³³ These corporeal schemas reflect in different idioms of incorporation; while I heard the phrase “becoming integrated” used to refer to initiates circling with Orixás, I never heard integrate in reference to a Caboclo union. Similarly, I often heard practitioners talk of devotees “falling” into their Caboclos.

¹³⁴ Landes explains the apparently rising visibility of male mediums, who she describes as passive homosexuals of the Bahian “underworld” (1947: 291), by the presence of the rule-bending Caboclo. Interestingly, Landes also associates Caboclo with pre-menopausal femininity located outside the matriarchal governance of a senior priestess, embodied by the profiteering seductress and provocateur, Sabrina, whose ritual practice has veered off the path forged by her own mãe de santo and maintained by the respectable Ketu priestesses: Landes’ informant describes Sabrina as a sorcerer, who transforms into a bird at night (179), reflecting Yoruban mythological descriptions of witches as shape shifters able to take the form of a night bird. In either case, Landes’ commentaries infer Caboclos close relations with non-senior mediums whose positions of authority have not been legitimized in established Candomblé institutions and whose sexualities fit neither within the constructs of the jeje-nagô model, in which an

priestess of the eminent terreiro Gantois, Mãe Menininha, dismissing Caboclo practitioners as “upstart” entrepreneurs, and another African-born, nagô informant, Martiniano, lamenting the “loss of our traditional ways,” due to these “caboclo nation temples” in Salvador (1947; 38). “My God,” continues Martiniano’s quote, “they’re destroying everything, they’re throwing our traditions to the wind” (ibid). Donald Pierson, similarly, quoted an orthodox practitioner denouncing the indigenous influences of certain “new” centres: “What a disgraceful mixture. To think that they give the name of ‘Candomblé’ to this nonsense (bobagem)!” Another of Pierson’s interlocutors accuses a male specialist from the sertão, Bahia’s rural backlands, of having the gall to open his own Candomblé after learning a “few things Indian” (1971, 305).

In conceptual opposition to the perceived purity of jeje-nagô Candomblé, Caboclos have also been associated with Afro-Catholic-Amerindian syncretism (Ramos 1940; Querino 1938), and with Congo-Angolan Candomblés permeated by Indigenous practices (Silva 2018, 23; Carneiro 1938). As has been noted, pioneer ethnographer of Afro-Brazilian religions Nina Rodrigues (1896) qualified the jeje-nagô Candomblé models as exemplaires of African purity while positioning the Angolan Candomblés as both inferior and culturally polluted. Marked by a eugenicist approach, Rodrigues’ perspectives inaugurated the nagô-centric bias that characterized Candomblé scholarship of the twentieth century (see Silva 2018; Dantas 1988). Rodrigues’ mentee, Arthur Ramos ([1932] 1951), transcribed a 1929 article from the journal *Diário da Bahia* about mediums possessed by the “spirit of a devilish caboclo”(123).¹³⁵ Thus, not only gender prejudices but also racist taxonomies related to the uneven valorization of African cultures, as well as valuations of racial purity and its imagined coeval of timelessness, over

adept passes through the stage of a novice, *iaô*, where s/he becomes a “wife” of the Orixá, nor the postcolonial ideals of hetero-masculinity or virginal maidenhood.

¹³⁵ Although Ramos considered the Caboclo entity as a relatively recent modality of religious syncretism, Caboclo practices were already widespread in Rio’s Afro-Brazilian religions by the time of his research.

hybridity and “novelty,” have affixed to Caboclo practices since at least the early 1900s.¹³⁶

The devaluation of Candomblé’s Caboclos contrasts with parallel movements of circum-Atlantic interculturalism produced in the Americas through syncretism of Caribbean, African, Native, and European influences. Specifically, Joseph Roach (1996) addresses the valorization of a novel interculturalism through the spectacular performances of New Orleans’s Mardi Gras Indians, African-American paraders who, similarly to the Caboclo, restage events of circum-Atlantic encounter “in which European experience remains only obliquely acknowledged, if at all” (14). Although Candomblés are considered sacred in contrast to Mardi Gras’ secular manifestations, both Candomblé and Mardi Gras practitioners belong to community groups (*terreiros* or the Mardi Gras “krewes,” respectively) and enact confrontational rituals of “resistant memory” (24) that express their allegiance to a certain constituency. Furthermore, as Roach demonstrates, the appearance and comportment of King Zulu, monarch of New Orleans’s African-American founded Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club (at the 1991 parade) serves as a multi-layered parody of white peoples’ “jury-rigged” constructions of race, thinly veiled by a mask of carnivalesque satire. Caboclos echo the parodic social commentary that Roach deems a “practice of disruptive humor” (21) because it “turns the tables” on the powerful through deconstructive irony. However, historically, as foils to the ideologies of African purity deployed by Candomblé leaders in the mid-twentieth century, partly in response to contrapunctual configurations of Bahian regional identity or *baianidade*, which emphasized African religio-cultural stability over the ideas of dynamic fusion flowing from Brazil’s industrialized South, Caboclo were delegitimized under the moniker of *macumba* and charged with ethnic heterogeneity, corruption,

¹³⁶These conceptual frameworks also articulate with socio-economic stigmas and rural/urban corollaries that have not been adequately addressed in the available literature.

capitalist value systems and uninitiated specialists.¹³⁷

Despite these pervasive associations with contamination and cultural impurity, Caboclo devotion persisted and flourished. Even the most orthodox houses continued to cultivate the hybrid, “Brazilian” Caboclo, usually in private contexts or surreptitious locations, while maintaining discourses of Africanist purity. Oral and written histories show that the *nagô* priestesses found creative ways to cultivate their Caboclos underground, even while discursively distancing themselves from the “improvised” or “inauthentic” practices that contradicted the politically salient attribution of Africanism to their specific national Ketu traditions.¹³⁸

In 1948, Bahian intellectual Edison Carneiro wrote that at the Gantois and Casa Branca, “I have seen [devotees] sing and dance for the Caboclo...Although rare, [the acts] are a deference from which these Candomblés cannot escape” (29). During the same period, the head priestess of another orthodox house, Alaketu, honored her Caboclo, Jundiara, in a private session every January, to avoid discrediting her temple (Teles dos Santos 1992, 86). Claude Lépine (1978) quotes a high-ranking priestess of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá stating that, if one of her filhas had a Caboclo, she would send her elsewhere to seat him (79). One of my interlocutors confirms that to this day the “traditional temples feed their Caboclos in the woods or other clandestine locations outside of terreiro grounds,” rather than staging public festivals in their honor

¹³⁷ Bastide (1960) positioned “macumba” at the bottom of a hierarchy that moved from what he saw as *nagô* Candomblé’s righteous African traditions, organized by initiated religious leaders to serve the greater good. See Stefania (2010) for analysis of Bastide’s taxonomies of Afro-Brazilian religion. The words *macumba* and *macumbeira* (sorcerer/witch) are being reclaimed by practitioners.

¹³⁸ According to Dantas (1988), the ascription of African authenticity to specific Candomblés responded to local political conditions rather than to qualifiable survivals of cultural forms. Dantas suggests that leaders and academics collaborated to forge a revised vision of Brazil’s African past that would empower select practitioners to speak for all Afro-Brazilians in religious and political affairs. See also Sansi on the frameworks that make Orixá culture objectifiable as “patrimony” vs. Caboclos’ “revelatory” ways (2016).

(interview Nilzete 2013).¹³⁹ And Jocelio Teles dos Santos shows that even as self-identified “candomblé de caboclo” communities declined in terms of demographic proportion to the total numbers of terreiros in Salvador, from 34.3 % in 1969 to 20.1 % en 1981, Caboclo practices in fact infiltrated temples of every other affiliation (89-90).

These literary views, as well as practitioners’ testimonies, demonstrate the extent to which Caboclo worship is both pervasive and abjured. Furthermore, in nagô-centric houses, Caboclo and devotion to them remain fundamental yet still, at times, repressed or, minimally, guarded from public view. But despite their iconoclasm, the entry of the Brazilian Caboclos into Candomblé’s ritual systems does not, in fact, signal the degradation of the “African” model, but is instead guided by a coherent religious logic (Teles dos Santos 1992, 147). Thus, despite their continued stigmatization, the Caboclos’ paradoxical status as, on one hand, charismatic rebels and, on the other, popular figures derided by Candomblé elites as well as scholars and segments of Brazilian intellectual classes, enables them to redress the exclusions of ritual orthodoxy and hegemonic social scripts from within Candomblé’s Afro-centric parameters.

Before seeing how these discourses and valuations of Bahia’s “lords of the land” (*donos da terra*) weigh on the events at Ilê Axé Opô Aganju, I want to discuss two scenarios that highlight the principle of *fall*, and the corollary principle of *recovery*, as aesthetic elements of dark horse kinetics in relation to the Caboclo’s resilient stance. Then, I move on to a discussion of how the Caboclos of the house make use of these aesthetic politics to construct an identity framework that fragments nationalized narratives while recovering their histories.

¹³⁹ Excluding Caboclos altogether could disadvantage a Candomblé house and its constituents, since Caboclos excel at “working” for the betterment of their everyday realities in professional and personal arenas (Eli, Oba, Carvalho 2018), and their cultivation is central to maintaining close ancestral ties with Brazil’s original peoples and territorial conscience (Iyá Alagsy, interview 2015).

I return now to the moment of the Caboclo *Pena Verde*'s arrival, at the culmination of the first invocation circle. Suzana Martins notes that the rodantes dancing in the xirê follow a repetitive structure, which is integrated with the rhythms and songs and “favors the moment of union between the divinity and the body of the filho(a)-de-santo, through the intensification of the beat that brings on ecstasy” (2008, 46). While the Caboclo xirê reproduces Candomblé's signature integration of cyclical movement and percussion, building in intensity until the invited entidades swirl in and embody their filhas and filhos, the sensations of Caboclo incorporation differ from those ecstatic expressions typical to Orixá ceremony. Experiences of Orixá and Caboclo incorporation range over time and vary from individual to individual. Yet, entidades maintain their own characteristic, physically felt cues. The Caboclo comes more “heavily” than an Orixá, arriving with the “barravento” – a turning wind, or wind that knocks you over (Silvio, interview Aug. 2018).

As the drummers picked up pace, Marcelinha's calls also intensified in tone and volume. *Pena Verde*'s *materia*, the human he will embody, stumbled out of the circular file of initiates, then caught himself with his hands on his knees. He stumbled again and once more posted each hand on a knee in an effort to regain composure. Moments later, he arched back from the lumbar spine and then righted himself, eyes now open wide. Two senior filhas came to his sides, removed a white cloth tied around his waist and re-tied the garment across his chest, knotted at the shoulder. His spine stiffened as he straightened up, seemingly even taller than before. Chin raised, a bow and arrow took shape in his arms. The “feathered Caboclo,” *Pena Verde*, has arrived. He strode to the front of the courtyard and back towards the drummers, slowly, several

times. As he began his song of arrival, the musicians changed to Congo, one of the rhythms used for Caboclos' salutations, through which they announce their identities.¹⁴⁰

The culmination of the xirê constitutes a situation to which schooled entidades and the mediums who circle with them learn to respond appropriately, by materializing or becoming incorporated, respectively. Attending to the phenomenology of incorporation, scholar-practitioner Miriam Rabelo suggests that spirit embodiment, although breaking with the “ordinary modes of bodily positioning in space (and time)” is experienced via a fundamental connection with the contextual situation (2014, 143). Pena Verde's arrival breaks from the circular-moving pathways of the initiates and the synchrony of their steps with the rhythm of Cabila, occurring contextually in the “right” moment as Marcelinha calls the Caboclos. As the ceremony unfolds, however, the Caboclos at Opô Aganju demonstrate a cunning approach to Candomblé's situational regulations for incorporation.¹⁴¹ Pena Verde, among others, deftly expands the range of contexts in which spirit embodiment is made possible and causes others to “fall into their saints” through creative measures. I have already discussed how Pena Verde attempted to coax Lau's Caboclo to the festa by crowding the professor and singing and dancing in close proximity to him. Through these instances, provoking participants to loosen their control over their own bodies and allow a Caboclo's subjectivity to materialize became focal points of the ceremony, quite unlike any Orixá ceremony I have witnessed (or read/heard about). Besides approximating other bodies to bring down their entidades, Pena Verde also employed a

¹⁴⁰ See Brazeal (2013, 644) for a categorization of Caboclo songs.

¹⁴¹ Rabelo (2014) notes that the arrival of an entity actively dialogues with the contextual situation. Frequently the arrival references a response, to the call of the drums and their rhythms, the sacrificial blood of an animal on an altar (assentamento), the arrival of the orixa of the head priestess and the cry of the newly initiated novice when announcing the name of her orixa for the first time, among others (129).

particularly “Brazilian” technique to effect the desired phenomenological shift, which is the filha’s entry into trance.

A few hours into the ceremony, after several Caboclos had sung their salutations and made a dent in the stash of beer set aside for their diversion, Pena Verde and the others circled close to a filha who had arrived late, an almost ambush. The drummers played a samba rhythm, and Pena Verde beckoned for her to samba with him in the center of the open space, now crowded by those who had come under cover when the rain didn’t stop. She refused, and Pena Verde performed a shuffle step, turning around, then tripped back before lunging low onto his knees and advancing further, motioning again with his hand for her to dance. The filha executed a few timid samba steps, then recused herself, stepping backwards out of the roda. Pena Verde stood, summoning her again. In the blink of an eye, he pushed his head into her stomach – delivering a *cabeçada*, a capoeiristic attack executed by butting the top of the head on an exposed part of the opponent’s body, often the abdomen. Without further delay, the filha’s body stiffened; she executed a barravento – a ball-change step to the back, as if the ground has been swept from one’s feet – then recovered her vertical composure and spun three times. This quick shift signaled a transmutation of the filha’s “matéria,” her body, into an extra-ordinary mode. She had “fallen” into her saint. Her body’s recovery to equilibrium signaled that her Caboclo’s presence had now incarnated in her form.

Like crowding around and singing in proximity to the bodies of participants with entidades in their midst, the *cabeçada* signifies an alternative mode of invocation by which Caboclos at the festa become protagonists in the ritual action of the day. They persistently take matters into their own hands (and voices), using improvisatory means to draw others from their cohort to the ritual space from disparate and dispersed locations, instead of relying exclusively

on situational contexts that incite an Orixá to incorporate in her devotee, and which are germane to an established ceremonial structure, such as the apex of a novice's naming ceremony or the arrival of the head priest/ess' divinity.¹⁴²

Learning when (and when not to) embody their filhas is part of the moral and technical training that both an Orixá and devotee receive through the regulated process of initiation at terreiro (feitura). As Rabelo relates, a prime focus of Candomblé's initiatory cycles is the conversion of lived experience between an uninitiated medium and her deity to the formalized links between the initiate and the Orixá to whom her head is consecrated (2014, 140-141).¹⁴³ In the passage towards seniority, the uninitiated medium's experience of "almost fusion" with an Other (an Orixá) becomes a "proper" relationship whose moral trajectory is guided by the mediation of the terreiro. For the novice, this passage is accompanied by ethical responsibilities, commitment and increased technical proficiency in terms of controlling the frequency and intensity with which the divine Other interrupts her sensory world (Rabelo 139-140). As she shapes this process, the mãe de santo is charged with guaranteeing that the Orixá becomes, effectively, an Other that can mobilize and act appropriately in the body of her filha (140). Thus, the Orixá herself is also disciplined into the role of guardian.

However, the Caboclos of the festa, though affiliated with the constituent filhos of the house, have not been socialized or "indoctrinated" into the terreiro hierarchy in the prescribed ways to which Orixá and their devotees are subject. Instead, Caboclos are cultivated privately and/or semi-privately by the houses' children and their association with the terreiro as a

¹⁴² Rabelo (2014) stipulates that Orixá break with ordinary modes of positioning the body in space and time in relation to the context at hand. Such contexts may arise outside of an ordered ritual space (143).

¹⁴³ This relation is regulated by stages of initiation pertaining to each of the one, three, seven, fourteen and twenty-first year *obrigações*, "obligations" or obligatory rites to the deity that include extensive offerings and, often, reclusion in the terreiro for a specified period.

regulating body is para-institutional; Caboclos appropriate the resources and authority of the terreiro at the same time as they forge their own new order.¹⁴⁴ Despite their unruliness and lack of respect for institutional and spatial boundaries (as illustrated by their penetration of participant's personal space), Caboclos and the Orixás sustain symbiotic relationships where, in some cases, Caboclos may guide an adept on their spiritual journey, from a domestic space and spontaneous visits from their spirit entities towards a sanctified link with a terreiro where the infrastructures of Orixá cultivation are already established.¹⁴⁵

Since their relations with their filhas are not mediated on an ongoing basis by the terreiro leadership, Caboclos remain largely free from the disciplinary constraints imposed on Orixás and the adepts in whose heads they are seated. Values of freedom and autonomy define Caboclos' ways of being (and feature in their origin stories). While some practitioners relate their "wild" nature to their identifications with Amerindian historicities (Nilzete 2015), their embodiments of an Indigenous sovereign also resonate with and disidentify from the emergent Brazilian state's own use of the image of the Indian to represent the casting off of Portuguese colonial control (Browning 1995, 25). While Caboclos' phenomenological operations – their interruptions of their filhas' "ordinary" sensory worlds and their reliance on the existential capacity of their mediums to circle with them – dovetail with those of the Orixás, their ethical obligations and expectations diverge from those of African-oriented divinities who are methodically installed

¹⁴⁴ Para-Institutions "appropriate the institution by using its own resources. They are simultaneously entirely part of the institution and of another order that may have only just begun to dawn" (Pannel 2018).

¹⁴⁵ Relations between Caboclos and Orixá vary among terreiros. As Rabelo and Aragão (2018) explain, if an initiate with Caboclo and Orixá aspects belonged to a terreiro that was less tolerant of Brazilian entities' presence, she would have to go to another temple to cultivate her Caboclos. But if her terreiro also housed Caboclos, she would learn to divide space and time into parts, in appropriate places, moments and practices to worship one and another entity. Additionally, Caboclo and Orixá differ in their modes of relation with devotees; ties that bind Caboclos to adepts do not pre-exist the events that constitute those bonds, while relations with the Orixá who rules one's head do precede an adept's feitura (91).

and schooled in the terreiro. This lack of moral constraint enables Caboclos to exercise a vast amount of flexibility in finding appropriate means to a context-specific end, in this case catching the filha unguarded enough to circumvent her reflexes and cause a brief loss of control, a moment which her Boiadeiro harnessed in order to embody her matéria.

Pena Verde's cabeçada, though brash and unfitting for an Orixá, confirms the *indio's* independent will and demonstrates his ability to personally instigate and effect transformative change; the result of the blow to the filha's stomach was that her Boiadeiro materialized in a flash. These para-institutional and unmediated tactics of summoning Others illustrate Caboclos' penchant for defining their own terms of interaction, deconstructing the established institutional apparatus by introducing novel techniques from the popular and/or martial genres, such as the cabeçada, into ritual vocabulary, and challenging the distribution of agency in a determined space by making social decisions usually left to the terreiro leadership, such as which and whose entidades may join the party, when and how. That Caboclos' extraordinary modes of being rest inside of Candomblé's overall schemas of embodiment speaks to their tendency for unfixing and loosening structural rigidities from within. The falls and recoveries performed by Caboclos in a serial fashion throughout the ceremony, in their arrivals as well as syncopated sambas with their polycentric and polyrhythmic coordinations of the hips, feet and shoulders, illustrates on an aesthetic-political register the unfixing and re-organizing of structure that Caboclos not only enjoy but necessarily enact as part of their socio-religious purpose.

2. "This is Brazilian"

The aptness of Pena Verde's choice of the cabeçada comes into relief when read alongside Dona Cici's unambiguous comment: "This is Brazilian." The cabeçada is a

quintessentially Brazilian tactic for soccer players as well as a fundament of capoeira, which is distinguished from other martial arts by, among other traits, its characteristic use of the head-butt as part of a vocabulary that also contains kicks and, to a lesser extent, attacks with the arms.

The cabeçada featured alongside other announcements of the Caboclos' Brazilianness, as the ceremony unfolded. The guest of honor, Pena Verde led the whole gallery in the lively call and response refrain: "Eu sou Brasileiro," or "I am Brazilian." When one of the percussionists picked up the role of caller, Pena Verde entered the roda to dance a lively samba. One foot replaced, or displaced, another as his hips oscillated over a wide-legged variation of the classic samba de roda step, a *miudinho* or small shuffle of the feet. Skipping backwards, Pena Verde looked over his shoulder and, spotting another Caboclo at the ready, kicked one leg out from under his own body weight, signaling an invitation for the next dancer to enter the circle. Pena Verde's anthem, a staple of Caboclo ceremony, is part of a repertoire of Caboclo music that grapples directly with complicated histories of place, race and class subjugation, and sexualization, in order to redefine and actively produce new meanings of Brazilian identity.

"Eu Sou Brasileiro" follows a call and response structure, the stanza and the verse repeat the same three-word declaration. At the same time as the performatic repetition of the lyrics attempts to stabilize their meaning, and unites the singers together as subjects within and co-producers of a nation-building imaginary, the song also evinces the "never complete, always in process" act of identity formation, which Stuart Hall argues must be viewed as a *production*, rather than an "already accomplished fact," (1990, 222). Recognizing that colonisation disfigures and destroys the pasts of colonised peoples, Hall calls for an acknowledgement of the ruptures, discontinuities, and fragmentation that (historically and contemporaneously) produce diasporic identities (225) as well as foreclose the kind of recuperation-of-the-past projects envisioned by

earlier Black activist thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and the Negritude poets. Instead, Hall proposes that [Caribbean] identity should be framed in dialogic relation or positioning between two vectors: similarity and continuity on one hand, and difference and rupture on the other. Caboclo performance stages this dialogism, through embodiments that symbolically and gesturally emphasize difference – construed through the índios and Boiadeiros different modes of dressing, moving, and speaking, which index particular timeframes and landscapes that themselves differ from the temporal present and space of the ceremony – juxtaposed to the homogenizing lyric of “I am Brazilian.” The embodiment of symbolic indigeneity in the form of a Caboclo entity makes Brazilian indigenous subjectivity present while bringing the absence of indigenous bodies into relief, affirming, as Hall states, that “the New World’s narrative of displacement *is* place” (237).

The narrative of displacement as place, which Hall attributes to New World identity production, is latent in Caboclos’ samba steps, while the lyric of the song performs what Hall refers to as the “suturing” of unstable points of identification together through memory and fantasy within the “discourses of history and culture” (1990, 226). Rather than being constituted in absolute terms, or “being eternally fixed in some essentialised past,” Hall argues that identity is continuously produced “through the inter-play of history, culture and power” (225), in the Foucauldian sense of power as a determinant of knowledge. In the context of Caboclo performance, I suggest, the interplay of circum-Atlantic history, Black Brazilian and Indigenous cultural encounter and Euro-colonial epistemic power is ongoing and embodied processually through various perspectives represented by Pena Verde, among others, whose songs as well as dances -- and even conversations they have with participants, in their characteristic *sotaques* or accents. Their rustic and broken Portuguese emulates how non-Lusophone Native peoples of

Brazil would or may have spoken in the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁶ Caboclos reposition subjectivities that have been marginalized in the creation of Brazil's national identity discourses (which have lauded Africanist and Indigenous cultural contributions while still excluding Afro-descendants and Indigenous bodies from the political field) by recasting the terms of their own representation in the national sphere, not externally to dominant forms of representation but in a kind of ironic mash up of romanticized, imperialist identity tropes that disidentifies from the structuring effects of hegemonic, essentializing modes of representation (as exemplified by Pena Verde's embodiment of the Noble Savage). These aesthetic politics, wielded by Caboclo and the practitioners with whom they circle, are re-produced through samba rhythm and dance provocation, as the following instance shows.

As the early afternoon gave way to evening one of the Boiadeiros began to sing a samba: "Criola, criola, criola pare mulato, criola" (Creole woman, creole woman, creole woman gives birth to a mulatto son, creole woman). When I asked Dona Cici about its significance, she related the song's double meaning. On one hand, the words chronicle Brazil's mythicized narrative of *mestiçagem* –miscegenation; the *criola*, a Brazilian-born, Afro-descendent woman, "seduced a white lover with her samba and bore a mulatto son." Northeastern regionalist Gilberto Freyre first developed the *mestiçagem* paradigm in his seminal 1933 *Casa Grande e Senzala* (published in English as *The Master and the Slaves*) to positively frame Brazil's racial diversity as a cultural asset and mode by which the best of African and (to a lesser degree) Indigenous traits were assimilated by the master class. Freyre's progressivist theories, though later critiqued for their

¹⁴⁶ Hall warns although Europe is constructed through exclusion, its power is not peripheral but constitutive of diasporic identity. Thus, the European presence in New World identity production is a site of refusal and recognition, a "profound doubling that inscribes the otherness of the self." Hall charges diasporic cultural producers to stage the European presence so that "we can place it . . . rather than being forever placed it" (1990, 233). Looking at Caboclo performance through this lens lends to a potentially fertile interpretation of embodying Otherness as a way of repositioning identity in response to the « doubling » created by the European presence that has historically spoken for the Black subject.

elision of historical and ongoing anti-Black violence, dramatically contrast dominant, pseudo-scientific determinist views that doomed Brazil because of its racially mixed population. Like Brazil's eroticized narratives of miscegenation, which many critics have deemed as a "fiction" or myth (Browning 1995, 15, Bishop-Sanchez 2015), "criola pare mulato" erases the experiences and traces of colonial violence that the nation's racial mixture results from. But sung at a festa, the chorus incites a participant, most likely a woman, to dance for the Caboclos. It is "a provocation to samba," concludes Cici.

In this song the sexualized *criola* and her reproductivity are figured, as Barbara Browning (1995) explains in her nuanced treatment of samba, as the "source or product of miscegenation," while racial difference and gendered violence are eclipsed in the erotic undertones of the song.¹⁴⁷ However, once again the seemingly simplistic message that the song inscribes, similarly to "Eu Sou Brasileiro," becomes overlaid with counter-discourses articulated through the body. As the gallery picks up the chorus, the Boiadeiro invites women at the festa to dance with and for him. His actions reproduce the gendered power geometry of the song's narrative, but as an embodiment of a mixed race cowboy from the interior, of Afro-descendent and Amerindian descent, the racialized role-play changes tone. The song appropriates the epistemological authority of the national discourse of *mestiçagem* and benign racial encounter (see Bishop-Sanchez 2015) in its sexualization of the *criola*; at the same time, the call rouses the dancers to

¹⁴⁷ Browning samba's origin stories: "in the early days of colonization, an escaped black slave encountered a cabocla, an Indian woman in the bush... sick and tired of life among the Portuguese, they set up house in the wild, and their children began a *mestiço* race. Unable to communicate in each other's language, their arguments took place in stomps, shakes, and shudders: the samba" (1995, 15-16). The eroticism of samba's birth story not only points to how racial difference has been romanticized in Brazil but also situates the encounter between indigenous Brazilian and Africans as a seminal and socially reproductive alliance, founded on non-verbal communication and dance dialogue (18). If the cabocla and "negro" spawn a new generation of Brazilian-born children and a novel communicative kinetic genre, Indigenous and Afro-descendent ancestry are positively entwined in descendants' genealogical matrix. Their historical collaboration is suffused with cultural significance as a mode of transmission and as a constitutive element of *ancestralidade*, Candomblé's discourse of inherited culture.

demonstrate their mastery over their own bodies,¹⁴⁸ since dancing in the roda necessitates becoming exposed and vulnerable to a Caboclo's *barravento*, and it carries the risk of "falling" into one's *santos*. While they dance on beat, the women who enter the roda demonstrate cunning in being able to evade a Caboclo's oncoming while expressing the samba's sensual or, as Browning (1995) asserts, "auto-sensual" qualities. This suggestive samba scene engages Brazil's eroticized ethos of racial blending, while the chorus set against the technically proficient and "auto-sensual" sambas performed by the dancers reveals what Joseph Roach calls counter-memories, or "the disparities between history as it discursively transmitted and memory as it is publically enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences" (2012, 26). Thus, via *criola pare mulato*, the Caboclos and their devotees of the house launch a performance of counter-memory that revels in the *criola*'s own sexual and political agency, employing their critical, disruptive choreographic and aesthetic techniques within the sacred sphere of the *terreiro*'s courtyard.

There is another subtext in the Caboclos' nationalist sentiments. In the Brazilian context, conceptions of modern national identity as constituted by the meeting and melding of ethno-cultural differences have circulated since before Freyre's watershed publication. Written by the early Brazilian modernist Oswald Andrade in 1928, as an anti-bourgeois effort at collective self-definition, the *Manifesto Anthropofago* proposed a discourse of national identity based on the metaphor of cultural cannibalism (*anthropopagia*). Originally written in English, the iconic line of Andrade's 1928 *Manifesto Anthropofago*, "Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question," simultaneously reified forms of ritual cannibalism allegedly practiced by Tupi native peoples (detailed in the 16th century writings of Frenchman Jean de Léry among others), and coined a literary metaphor for "eating" European influences, exemplified by the Shakespearean allusion.

¹⁴⁸ Browning's comments also elucidate connections between Caboclo, and sexual or bodily autonomy (1999, 25): "my Caboclo spirits have been identified at moments of my most energetic...dancing or at times when I evidenced a furious protectiveness of my own sexual independence."

Emphasizing Brazil's uniquely hybrid composition, the Cannibalist group positioned their ideas in response to influential, late 19th and early 20th ideologies of biological determinism, which spurred elites' hopes that Brazil would eventually become "white" through increased European immigration, racial mixing and the dilution of Afro-descendent and Amerindian bloodlines. The Cannibalist group construed Brazil's history of the European imperialist "consumption" of African and indigenous cultures as its strength of character. As an avant-garde movement, anthropopagia offered a channel through which Brazilian artists and intellectuals could assert a collective identity that opposed European postcolonial cultural domination.

Scholars of Brazilian history have explored anthropopagia's controversial legacies in the musical arena, primarily as an influence on anti-dictatorship *Tropicalia* artists in the late 1960s, such as renowned musicians Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa, and Caetano Veloso. However, cultural cannibalism takes on erotic hues when viewed in light of the Brazilian sex categories of "eating" and "giving." Though Western sexual identity categories have, to a degree permeated Brazilian models in the second half of the 1900s, many people, especially those whose "social education takes place outside of Western institutions" (Browning, 1995 53) – that is, the majority of Candomblé's Afro-descendent, working-class constituents – understand sexuality in local terms of "eating," and "giving" (see also Parker 1991, Fry 1986) rather than in terms of active, typically masculinized versus passive and typically effeminate roles. During the course of my research, one of my first interlocutors, Josimar, attempted to define for me the difference between the two actions, explaining that he would not acquiesce to "giving," as in performing, oral sex, because "eu como," "I eat," (personal communication, 2013). The position of "eating," correlates to the active position while "giving" denotes an ostensibly receptive lover (in the case of oral sex, the Brazilian construction equates the "giver" or performer with the receptive or

passive position). Josimar's structuring sexual paradigm distinguishes between contextual sexual roles, rather than relying on sexual object choice to create fixed identities around homo- or heterosexuality. In addition, his explanation reveals how *machismo* can operate in Bahian contexts in relation to sexual activity as a metaphor that extends sexual positionality to social power relations, in which the "giving" position is not necessarily female, although the active agent, or one who eats, occupies a masculine subject location.

As one who figurally "eats" other cultures, the cultural cannibal embodies an active, dominant sexual and social position. As a symbol of national subjecthood, cultural cannibalism imbued Brazil's legacy of race encounter with erotic registers even before the idea of *mestiçagem* took hold in the popular arena. The tropes of cultural cannibal and the culturally cannibalized, corollary to the active and receptive sexual roles when read through the paradigm of eating and giving, are unfixed from racial markers and re-embodied by Caboclo. At the same time, Caboclo and their aesthetic politics appropriate the modernist, primitivist interest in the Tupi figure as an emblem of the cannibalist impulse – an interest that built on Brazil's postcolonial use of the image of an *indio* as a representational strategy for the nascent state after emancipation from Portuguese rule in 1822 (1823 in Bahia). Reinterpreting and playing (in the sense of serious or efficacious play) on the erotic undercurrent of the cannibalist discourse, Caboclos' falls and recoveries and their sung verses destabilize the power operations of Brazil's sexualizing national identity discourses. Subsuming threads of cultural cannibalism and *mestiçagem* within their dark horse kinetics, Pena Verde and the other Caboclo guests of the afternoon authorize novel intercultural self-definitions and endow them with the epistemological authority of the nascent postcolonial nation.

3. *Homen não bota saia*, Men don't wear skirts: Taboos on Male Mediumship

After a couple more hours and several more rounds of descents, brought about as Caboclos strategically group around ceremonial revelers, singing and dancing samba until their santos come down, I notice Pai Balbino has joined the festivities. He greets Dona Cici and converses with Marcelinha and the equedes. A few moments later, the remaining incorporated filhos gather close to the priest. Pena Verde approaches his pai de santo while leading a samba; he dances within an arm's length of Balbino's standing body while two others remain poised near him, ready to prop him up if he should stumble or fall. Tension mounts as two of the drummers lift their atabaques and approach Balbino, who retreats out of the yard towards the sanctuary, into an expansive opening between structures. The drummers and filhas follow, led by Marcelinha, shouting now as energy swirls around Balbino – the *barravento*'s turning wind, attempting to seize him. I strain to see into the aggregate of people crowding Balbino, from my spot twenty meters or so away from the action. His body sways, skips back a few beats. Then, stumbling from the “heavy” weight of his Caboclo, Balbino escapes to an internal room adjacent to the sanctuary, walled off from the festa.

Why would a priest and medium flee the ceremony instead of staying to circle with his Caboclo? To answer, I would like to further contextualize Dona Cici's claim: “my father is nagô.” Pai Balbino is a priest of Xangô, a masculine warrior and judge linked to the kingdom and rule of the seventeenth to nineteenth century Oyo Empire (in present-day Benin and Western Nigeria). A monarchic and regal leader who embodies idealized masculinity in his rationality, commitment to justice and physical strength, Xangô features in the historiography and of Bahian Candomblé as the primary guardian of Casa Branca's founding priestesses. Dona Cici's admission demonstrates the workings of a cultural logic that promotes Yoruban or nagô

supremacy, and that reifies the Orixá while questioning the religious legitimacy of Caboclo. In this framework, Caboclo become transgressors who pollute and de-center lines of ritual (and, on subtextual levels, ethno-racial) purity, and may attend directly to their devotees without moving through the appropriate channels or disciplines of terreiro initiation and hierarchy.¹⁴⁹

However, another set of issues emerges in relation to Pai Balbino's gender presentation and the possibility of spirit embodiment indicated by the barravento. Where Caboclos, as I have argued, represent dark horses of Candomblé, male mediumship is marked by a similar paradox: ever present, yet simultaneously controversial and hidden or renounced. One of Bahia's popular journals recently described Pai Balbino as one of the "most prominent *male* authorities" (italics mine) on nagô traditions.¹⁵⁰ The writer's qualification of Pai Balbino's maleness seems to insinuate that his authority is both unique and unlikely, alluding to a history rife with apprehensions over gender respectability, transvestism, and fakery that afflicts questions of male mediumship and leadership in Bahian Candomblé to this day.¹⁵¹

Male mediums and priests have always been present in the Candomblés of Bahia, as evidenced by the foundational roles played by Africans such as Francisco Nazaré, husband of Gantois' first iyalorixá, Maria Julia de Conceição, and Bamboxé, who accompanied Casa Branca's founders to Bahia from Benin, during the formative nineteenth century. Yet since the second half of the 1800s, they have constituted a demographic minority (ref. *mapaeamento dos terreiros*, Reis, Harding) in relation to their female counterparts and to male specialists in

¹⁴⁹ Caboclo specialists often treat clients out of their home rather than the terreiro.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques, Dada. *Correio 24 horas*. May 2, 2020.

¹⁵¹ My use of the "male" marker, which implicitly constructs normative authorities as female while also upending gender associations, is based on the discourses of practitioners of diverse gender identifications and across the orthodox/heterodox divides of Bahian Candomblé.

Southern Brazil, where (arguably) Afro-Atlantic religions have not retained matriarchal trajectories in the same manner as Bahia. As Creole priestesses at the heads of houses founded by African “mothers” became the public faces of Afro-Bahian religiosity in the latter part of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, Candomblé’s logics of reproductivity and spiritual availability affixed more firmly to female bodies.¹⁵² As Browning (1995) notes, in Bahia, “it is widely accepted that women are significantly more receptive to the orixás than men. The exception to this rule is the homosexual man.” However, she adds: “Actually, this is a misstatement. The very term homosexual is one that needs to be opened up to reconfiguration in the context of the candomblé. For that matter, so are the very terms *woman* and *man*” (51).

Classifications of hetero-, homo- and bi-sexuality only entered the Brazilian sexual imaginary after the turn of the twentieth century (Fry 1986, Parker 1991). Influenced by European sexual theories, Brazilian intellectuals adapted medical-legal models that focused on sexual object choice to “folk” understandings, attaching heterosexuality to the active male persona – even though in Brazilian terms, a man who takes on the “active” position in homo-erotic activity would also be viewed as a “real man” (*homen*) – and homosexuality to “passive” or “effeminate” men seeking sex with men (Green 1999). These shifts in medical-legal approaches contributed to a mid-late twentieth century moral panic about sexual promiscuity and a supposed increase in homosexuality that endangered conservative family values.¹⁵³ Candomblé

¹⁵² Scholars cite pre-twentieth century statistical records from pre-twentieth century police and journal reports (see Matory 2005, Braga 2014) to show that male mediumship has not in fact been anomalous to Candomblé, even if demographically men’s participation decreased in the late 1800s. Although most likely male mediums never disappeared from Candomblé’s public arenas even during this period, many practitioners claim that men’s dancing in the *roda* constituted a rare event in the past (Celeste, Eli, Oba)

¹⁵³ As Cowan (2016) shows, Brazil’s military dictatorship of 1964-85 considered that gender disorder and sexual promiscuity among Brazil’s youth, especially the alleged increase in homosexuality, were eroding traditional Christian values, the family, and the state.

practitioners in Bahia from early twentieth century to the present have thus had to navigate multiple sexual-social systems (ritual constructions, Brazilian constructions and European-influenced notions) and their inconsistent value systems.

Even if, previously, mediumship had been demographically dominated by women, male mediumship could be understood through the emic terms of ritually-contingent gender fluidity. The feminization of the passive or penetrable male, via Brazilian dichotomies of eating and giving, resonated with Candomblé's internal cultural semantics, which already located mediums in a structurally feminine or giving/receiving position. However, I want to intervene in dominant views that attribute Candomblé's predominance of women mediums to their presumed sexual passivity and permeability, along the lines of Brazilian structuring sexual notions of passive/active, with the Orixá in the active position; closer analysis of devotees' own discourses of spirit embodiment and historical considerations of Pan-West African gender ideologies that informed Afro-Bahian religious development, complicates these associations.¹⁵⁴ Idioms of incorporation such as circling with/in the saint point to the mutually reciprocal ways that spirit embodiment is conceived, rather than affirming a passive/active mode of transmission, and the choreographic analyses that I elaborate in Chapter One suggest that the idea of mediumship as a feminized terrain emerges less in relation to women's sexual passivity and more to their reproductive capacities and procreative anatomy. Nevertheless, with the influence of medical-legal ideologies of homosexuality as a social and biological disease, Candomblé's performances – especially for male mediums incorporating female-presenting entities and using their ritual attire– could now be viewed, by foreign observers, Bahian intellectuals and religious leaders themselves, as nefarious occasions for the expression of abnormal homo-erotic behaviors.

¹⁵⁴ Though analysis Amerindian understandings of gender/sex is outside the scope of my study, further research in this area will help nuance discussions of the Candmblé complex gendering of ritual labor.

The social phenomena that led to heightened pathologization of men's acts of spirit embodiment, in particular due to charges of cross-dressing and transvestism have consequentially informed how Candomblé practitioners mediate their Orixás' desires to materialize in male subjects. Historian James Green's excavation of male homosexuality in Brazil (1999) is helpful in contextualizing these medico-legal trends. In twentieth century Brazil, Green writes, male streetwalkers increasingly dressed as women to work as prostitutes. Although archival evidence points to Brazilian men's inversions of gender roles during Carnival since the beginning of the century,¹⁵⁵ the emergence of a strong *travesti* (transvestite) street presence, coupled with the increasing popularity of drag shows in the mid 1900s, led to the convergence of homosexuality with cross-dressing, public performance, and immoral conduct in the popular imaginary.¹⁵⁶ These associations were also class-coded, so that in the press upper and middle-class men who "transgressed gender boundaries were ascribed an androgynous persona," while working-class men (more likely Afro-descendent) were "travestis" increasingly linked to marginality and prostitution (258).

In my conversations with practitioners, the expression of "wearing a skirt" surfaced in relation to taboos on male spirit embodiment in the public sphere, taking on variably derogatory or neutral overtones depending on the speaker's position. Over time, I came to appreciate that "wearing a skirt" stands in as a synecdoche not just for cross-dressing but for a sense of sacrilege attached to the idea that men could attend Candomblé expressly for the non-religious purpose of dressing and dancing as women. The drive to avoid such allegations informs the aesthetics of

¹⁵⁵ Green (2020). *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth Century Brazil*. Brown Library Center for Digital Scholarship.

¹⁵⁶ Green also discusses how *travesti* became a code word used by Brazilian press to refer to all working-class and poor homosexuals (1999, 21).

ritual display, as many terreiros where men are permitted to receive their feminine Orixá dress them in wide-legged harem pants covered by a shorter skirt than the one donned by female initiates embodied by the same Orixá (Cici, Oba interviews Oct. 2018).

Tactical Approaches to the Making of a Man

Mãe Cecilia, a Bahian Ketu-affiliated priestess asserts that, “in my pai-de-santo’s era, only women danced in the roda. In this day and age, there are more men than women [that circle with the saint]; *viados*”¹⁵⁷ (Cecilia 2019). The priestess’ stigmatization of the male initiate belies a complex and interwoven history of anxieties around male appearance and transvestism in Candomblé, and her use of a homophobic slur – “viados,” similar to “faggots” – betrays, in my view, a need to re-assert female authority in the face of an increasingly masculine presence among initiates as well as the priesthood. Her statement also conveys an ambivalent (at best) or, more strongly, intolerant view that is widespread across regional and economic sectors of Brazil, according to statistics gathered by gay rights groups and domestic journalists. At the time of writing, Brazil holds one of the world's highest rates of violence against sexual minorities, and the Bahian NGO, Grupo Gay, documented over 400 combined murders and suicides caused by “homotransphobia” in 2017 alone (NY Times July 5 2016, Brasil de fato Feb 11 2019). The same NGO reported that, in the late nineties, a gross majority of homotransphobic murders targeted homosexual men (Green 1999, 5).

Interestingly, the priestess equates male mediumship with a pathologized homosexual identity. At the same time, based on attending ceremonies at her temple, I do not read her statement that there are more male than female *rodantes*, nowadays as a factual quantification but, rather, a lamentation on the shifting conditions that, generally, endow male-identified

¹⁵⁷ A pejorative term, *viados* connotes a homosexual man who likely takes a “passive” sexual role.

practitioners with more opportunities to move through initiatory stages and attain specialist status because of their relatively greater economic mobility in Brazilian society.¹⁵⁸ Cecilia's view reveals a core contradiction within perceptions of gender respectability: On one hand she views male participation as an encroachment of male privilege, an extension of male privilege so prevalent in mainstream society, into the female-centric enclave of Candomblé, on the other hand Cecilia and other elders (Cici, Nilzete interviews Oct. 2018) relate that Orixás do not choose their disciples based on gender or sexuality (or race or ethnicity, for that matter)¹⁵⁹ so that the terreiro constitutes a protected space for devotees whose diverse identifications or desires are illegible to or irreconcilable with the normative thrust of dominant Brazilian society.

As she indicates, Mãe Cecilia was herself initiated by a male priest and diviner, Pai Vadinho. In light of this genealogy, Cecilia's discomfort stems not from the existence of male mediums in the ritual field but from their amplified prevalence and visibility, and the perceived threat to female empowerment through greater access to opportunities in the religious field. Similarly, despite her evident veneration for her pai de santo, Dona Cici is skeptical of priests on the whole, especially younger ones, because, as she stipulates, they are more likely to shortcut through Candomblé's initiatory levels by using financial means instead of properly paying their dues, so to speak (interview June 2018).¹⁶⁰ In Mãe Cecilia's case, her tough speech gives way to flexibility in practical terms. So, while Cecilia reproduces the current of homophobia in her discourse, in practice Mãe Cecilia has "made" numerous *filhos de santo*, and recognizes their

¹⁵⁸ Increasing males in priesthood has yet to be significantly analyzed. But taking into account the dramatic socio-economic crises of the 21st century, including reduction of the *bolsa familia* (family relief) that Lula maintained, women are shouldering more family costs and less able to take advantage of opportunities presented by global economy.

¹⁵⁹ Candomblé's conception of *ancestralidade*, or ancestry, crosses hereditary lines (Iyá Alagsy 2015).

¹⁶⁰ Cici does not allow that women could act opportunistically in these ways, either because they lack the means or because of behavioural norms and gender expectations.

import to the terreiro as well as the necessity of nourishing their Orixás by respecting the divine relation between each initiate and their primary guardian, regardless of gender identity. At her female-dominated house, male adepts destined to circle with their saints may be initiated to female or male Orixás, following the same principle that applies to filhas. During the xirê, male initiates dance along with their sisters.

This is not the case for all houses of orthodox lineage. At several of the mother houses, according to Dona Cici, “men did not dance in the era of Ruth Landes.”¹⁶¹ Here Cici refers to the late 1930s, when ethnographer Ruth Landes conducted research in Bahia’s nagô temple-compounds. However, Cici adds, “At Opo Afonjá, Xangô is the Orixá of the house. When they play for Xangô the initiated men of the house fell into the saint and danced for Xangô.” Upon scrutiny, Cici’s seemingly uniform claim that men “did not dance” for the Orixá, together with the timeline she details and her concluding statement, belies contradictions that I only began to apprehend after further fieldwork and analysis.

The usage of “dancing” has double meanings in this discussion since the phrase refers both to the role of rodante – one who circles with/in the saint, as opposed to an *ogã* (briefly, initiated drummer or male patron of a terreiro) or *equede* (one who cares for the saints) – in addition to the act of dancing publicly in the terreiro during festas. So, the comment that men did not dance at all in the terreiro implies either that no males were initiated as mediums or that those who could manifest a divinity would not be made visible on the sanctuary floor during public ceremonies but relegated to internal rooms. Yet, Cici and other sources confirm that Pai Balbino was the first *filho de santo* initiated by Mãe Senhora, in 1958 (Mariano 2009), the same priestess under whose tutelage Ruth Landes conducted research. Possibly, then, those “men who fell into

¹⁶¹ Landes in fact lived at Opô Afonjá nearing the end of her stay. The reigning iyalexás of the time harbored Landes and helped her escape persecution by then president Vargas, a Nazi-sympathizer.

the saint and danced for Xangô,”¹⁶² would have been male-identified adepts who, despite their proclivity for incorporating their divinity, were initiated as drummers to protect the terreiro’s reputation for ritual orthodoxy and, in correlative social values, moral decency and modesty.

Years later, as Dona Cici recounts, Mãe Stella, Iyalorixá of Opo Afonjá from the mid-seventies until she passed away in 2018, “put men out to dance with women, but she would not consecrate the head of a man to a feminine [Orixá]” (interview July 2019). Mãe Stella de Oxossi, one of the most famous Bahian specialists and also one of the most public lesbian figures in Candomblé, chose another tactic that, as I came to understand, many priestesses in the late 1900s replicated. Instead of relegating men to the role of ogã exclusively, Mãe Stella allowed men to be become initiated as mediums, but would only dedicate a male-identified devotee to a masculine Orixá. Similarly, relates another interlocutor:

“Nowadays... a boy is born. If his Orixá is feminine, they don’t put her [in the front], [they] put a male [Orixá], if he is required to make the saint. In the Casa Oxumaré, if a man of Oxum is born, he won’t be consecrated to her. A man who manifests a female saint is not from there, will not put on a skirt.”

If a male-identified acolyte of the Casa Oxumaré wishes to initiate and he has a feminine Orixá, i.e. the river goddess Oxum, *deusa* of fertility, or the mother archetype Iemanjá, the house leadership will substitute a masculine divinity in her place. The primary deity is said to occupy “the front” of the devotee’s head both because initiatory rites involve the seating of the primary deity physically in a person’s scalp and because idiomatically the divinity’s presence is before and beholding their protégé. The speaker’s testimony indicates that a man attending a ceremony at the Ilê Oxumaré could in fact manifest a female divinity. In that case, a witness could assume that the male is not from the host terreiro but a visitor whose saint has been made in another

¹⁶² Falling into the saint at the arrival of the main Orixá of the house or the Orixá of the head priest/ess is one regulatory principle to which iaô, devotees within their first seven years of initiation, jointly with their divinities, are contracted.

temple. He will likely be brought before a senior initiate to dispel his Orixá, instead of being dressed in the robes of his entidade and put out to dance by the terreiro's commanders-in-chief; for these reasons, he would not "wear a skirt."

A Candomblé devotee and dance teacher originally initiated as a drummer, Silvio, offers another glimpse into how priest/esses navigate the gender politics that put pressure on males to be initiated as drummers in order to avoid charges of transvestism.

When I was made, I followed the path of an ogã. During my feitura, my mãe de santo had spoken with my santo to leave me alone, without my knowing. The day my mãe de santo passed away, my Xangô came for the first time. My heart beat fast and I felt suffocated – characteristics of Xangô's arrival. The Iabas (female Orixás) have others – cold, shaky legs. The Caboclo comes with more weight (ele vem mais pesado), he comes with the *barravento*. (August 2018)

In this case Silvio's mãe de santo scripted the initial choreography of dispossession that Silvio refers to, when she spoke "to the santo to leave me alone." But Xangô remained accountable to this contract only so long as Silvio's mãe de santo held sway over the terreiro and as its living, governing priestess. Her death released Xangô from their agreement. On the day of his mãe de santo's death, her filho was subjected to the specific choreographies of Xango possession – accelerating heart beat, shortness of breath – signaling a dramatic phenomenological shift in his relation with the deity through codes that Silvio, already schooled in Candomblé's gestural semiotics, could interpret and comprehend. The contract that Silvio describes, between his mãe de santo and his primary Orixá, and its abrupt end, reveal the degree to which any hegemonic control over the human-entity relations of a terreiro is unstable, negotiable, and contingent on multiple factors, including mortality and divine will.

Silvio carries significant responsibilities in two different Candomblé houses. He explains how the approaches of his mãe de santo differs from that of his pai.

My mother's house did not have men with a female santo in the front. It is a house of Oxum, so Oxum comes and brings her daughters, she feels at home. The house of my pai-de-santo has three filhos de santo with Oxum, and one dedicated to Oia (Iansã) ... Today the house initiates men with female santos in the front, before – no, [the sacerdots] spoke with the Orixá, gave to her (appropriate offerings), but put the second (masculine) Orixá in the front. (September 25, 2018)

Silvio relates that, though the convention has been updated, his pai-de-santo would not consecrate the head of a male filho to a female Orixá. However, Silvio's testimony points again to the gap between Candomblé's cosmological operations and the social practice of the terreiro. Normally, a pai or mãe de santo determines the identity of an initiate's primary guardian in consultation with the divinities via cowrie shell readings. If a man at his mother's house had a female deity in the front, the priestess would supplicate and reason with her so that she would leave the head of the man to the charge of the next-in-command Orixá, a masculine one.

Silvio's statement that his mother's temple "is a house of Oxum," so therefore, "Oxum comes and brings her daughters, she feels at home" also shows the extent to which Orixá agency plays a causal role in the terreiro's social configurations. Because Oxum governs the terreiro, she attracts subjects with whom she shares an intimate connection into the ritual family. Yet Oxum in her multiple avatars will still depend on the priestess' discretion to be seated, praised and embodied in the house's ceremonies. Neither a priest/ess, nor an entidade nor a devotee can singularly or permanently determine the balance of power among one congregation's executive bodies, and while gender scripts are tactically written, they also rest on the author or priest/ess's ability to continually re-inscribe them.

Male-identified practitioners marginalized by oppressive gender scripts develop their own tactical responses to prohibitions on their dancing, sometimes finding para-institutional opportunities to cultivate their female divinities. This narrative came to me second-hand from an interlocutor, Adrianna, who described her colleague's experience in another Candomblé:

the men are not allowed to incorporate feminine entidades. In the past, some “gay” men wanted to incorporate female entidades... they wanted to do this performance as if it were a liberation effort, because as in everyday life they are repressed and cannot express this femininity, in Candomblé they could have this freedom. So the mãe de santo noticed that some of them were really not incorporating, it was ‘false,’ they were doing it because they wanted to be a woman. From that moment on she forbid it, to not disrespect her terreiro. He said that he receives Iemanjá in other terreiros, but not in the one to which he actually pertains. (Dias Sept 2018)

Unable to incorporate the maternal ocean goddess Iemanjá in his own house, the filho de santo in this narrative frequents other temples to receive his deity. Even though, as mentioned earlier, some orthodox Candomblés would not allow a visitor’s divinity to remain the course of a ceremony, other temples practice more open boundaries of participation. The filho de Iemanjá circumvents the regulatory and disciplinary control maintained by the priestess in question over the terreiro’s bodies, by changing his venue of practice.

Since, in the middle-class and intellectual Brazilian imaginaries, the most visible facet of male homosexuality was cross-dressing (Green 1999), men’s wearing a skirt implies, for some practitioners as well as commentators, a breach of private/public boundaries and a threat to the trope of virile, Afro-descendent hetero-masculinity embodied by the drummer. While practitioners associate taboos on women’s drumming with Candomblé’s West African precedents, the reification of the male drummer’s dominant, rather than collaborative, role in ceremony is fortified by foreign scholarship in the twentieth century. For example, Melville Herskovits, (1944) offers the following depiction:

At the drums his manner radiates confidence, in himself and in the power of his instruments. Relaxed, the drum between his legs, he allows the complex rhythms to flow from his sure, agile fingers. It is he who brings on possession through his manipulation of these rhythmic intricacies, yet he himself never becomes possessed... the movements of the dancers respond to the deep notes of the large drum, whose voice commands the gods themselves... without him, the god would not come and worship could not go on. (477)

Herskovitz's passage is rife with sexual imagery. While he compellingly argues for an appreciation of Afro-Brazilian musical sophistication, he projects a gendered hierarchy of power onto the ritual operations at hand, asserting male control of the gods and dancers, who are effectively feminized and placed in a receptive, responsive role.

Herskovitz's suggestion that the drummer "never becomes possessed" contrasts with the one put forth by Dona Cici, who historicizes the drummer's role in relation to West African and Cuban religions in which the drum is said to manifest a divinity that must be cultivated, just as those divinities who manifest in dancing bodies require feeding. For Cici, the drummer's role is a function of the social composition of terreiro life, since the ritual house is a multi-generational family compound: "Women of Candomblé may have a husband, have male children, there has to be [a role for] men, so we have ogãs." While Cici's perspective may seem dismissive, she offers a vital counter-discourse to Herskovitz's privileging of the drummer, coming from a grounded historical understanding of Bahian Candomblé's development around female-headed households where, for practical reasons, men's labor could be appreciated but not required on a daily basis.

The masculinization of the drummer highlights how Candomblé's orthodox divisions, as they relate to idealizations of femininity and masculinity and the typical embodiment of these ideals, become fixed into tiered valuations of gender appropriate behavior when read through a Western lens. In addition, these divisions become sexualized in consequential ways; the construction of the male drummer as the active agent that "brings on possession" and "makes the gods come" persists as a remodeled heteronormative standard against which male mediumship can be deemed passive and homosexualized. Even if many practitioners maintain Afro-Brazilianist sex/gender ideologies and practices, hetero-normative notions of sexual decency and

respectability had already cross-fertilized elitist Brazilian conceptions of civic hygiene since the Republic era (1890-year) and infiltrated the social worlds of Bahia's cosmopolitan centre.

In the above examples, Candomblé's relational gender ontologies become subjugated to apprehensions around (primarily Black) masculinity and sexuality, which are condensed in the image of a man wearing a skirt and/or dancing in the sacred circle. As Candomblé attracted national and international attention, and as ritual houses proliferated in the twentieth century, anxieties about male performance also became bound up in binary, biologically determinist framings of authenticity/African purity/reproductive body versus defamatory/mixed/non-reproductive body. Thus in the twentieth and twenty first century contexts described by Mãe Cecilia, Silvio and Adriana, female mediumship becomes an index not just of a female-centric *performance* principle but also a marker within a fixed identity politics of ritual and moral respectability. Yet the readings of a male medium as necessarily homosexual, especially if embodying a female entity, constitutes a reinterpretation of West African metaphors of spirit embodiment in light of Westernized gender categories. Social phobias around cross-dressing, layered over Candomblé's privileging of the female body for mediumship, and in concert with the sexualization of gender performances understood as contextual from a Black Atlantic perspective, coalesce in the stigmatization of male dancing.¹⁶³ Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, I contend, men's spirited dancing would have been framed by mediums' metaphorical feminization in order to align with the Candomblé worldview that links giving birth and "giving to the light" with ideations of the mother's body, transforming males into feminine actants.

These testimonies together illustrate the heterogeneity of responses to issues of male spirit embodiment among the orthodox houses, and the degree to which the incorporation of

¹⁶³ See also Matory, who discusses the homosexualization of the male priest at length (2005).

female Orixás by male initiates remains controversial. I endeavored to show how priest/esses script and delimit the physical forms an entidade may take within the economies of determined spaces and their governing norms, as well as how a divine agent can interrupt these scripts and shift the gender choreographies of the terreiro at hand. Many commentators have overlooked limits on male ritual dancing, partly because Candomblés are relatively accepting if compared to Bahian and Brazilian homo- and trans-phobic cultures on the whole. However, I found that while male homo- and/or trans-sexuality does remain taboo in many ritual spaces, male-male intimacy is still recognized, while lesbian desires are largely invisibilized by Brazilian phallo-centric conceptions of sex.¹⁶⁴ Yet, relations between women or even ritually feminized mediums and their female Orixás do also produce female intimacies, even if they are not defined as “lesbian” by contemporary queer parlance, especially given the sexualized connotations and interpretations of Candomblé’s spirit embodiments. Orthodox divisions between choreographing of men’s versus women’s performances of mediumship are being challenged at Ilê Axé Opo Aganju.

Although initiated in nagô Candomblé, Pai Balbino takes a different approach to choreographing male initiation and spirit embodiment in his terreiro, one that mirrors the heterodox practices that I address in later chapters. Adherents of Pai Balbino’s, regardless of gender identification, may be initiated to masculine or feminine Orixá and “put out to dance” in the invocative circle and ensuing festas held at the terreiro sanctuary.¹⁶⁵ This privileging of Candomblé’s gender flexibility in practice is a bold move, one that contravenes normative scripts that prohibit a male-identified adept from becoming initiated to and ritually embodying a female Orixá, as we have seen.

¹⁶⁴ This is changing since Allen wrote her article in 2012. More Brazilian women in Candomblés are claiming an out-lesbian identity (Yanuziello and Ramos personal communications 2019).

¹⁶⁵ When speaking about Ilê Axé Opô Aganju, Dona Cici emphasizes men initiated to feminine Orixás are dressed in wide-leg pants and never a skirt (July 10 2019).

I now turn to look at how and why Pai Balbino avoids the oncoming of his Caboclo, an “índio” known as Sultão das Matas (literally, Sultan of the Forest). My goal is to bring together questions of Caboclo kinetics with sexual and social choreographies of power in the festival space. I suggest that Pai Balbino’s own tenuous relation to the nagô orthodox establishment, as a male rodante, is mitigated by his identification with the moral rectitude, rationality, and exalted masculinity of Xangô, who, in the Yoruban liturgy, has multiple wives, including the feminine Orixás Oxum and Iansã. An announcement for a celebration of Pai Balbino’s 60 years of initiation in *Carta Capital*, a Bahian daily, illustrates the intimate links between the high priest and his divinity: the journalist writes, speaking of Balbino, that “Xangô [is] alive again in the eternal and noble body of a Nagô king” (May 14, 2018). Thus, the barravento and potential public embodiment of the priest by Sultão das Matas does not present a challenge to the legitimacy of his masculine authority, which is well established. What interests me about the situation, instead, is how within the context of the Caboclo festa’s non-standard social organization, ritual and socio-political power can be de-stabilized and transferred from the priest to his filhas and filhos and, in turn, to the Caboclos that they summon to the ceremony.

4. The Thwarted Arrival of Sultão das Matas

While falling into the saint is obligatory for novices, along a continuum of ceremonial processes, adepts gradually augment their resistance to spontaneous trance as they ascend through Candomblé’s levels of seniority. As an initiate passes through and fulfills her obligations over the long-term, she is increasingly able to control the phenomenological effects and contexts of her becoming incorporated, even while the fundamental impulse to “rodar” with her santo takes shape not as a transmitted skill but a prevailing existential condition (Rabelo 139). The

shifting relation of an adept with her divinity over time is characterized by the devotee's expanding capacity, despite her or his penetrability, to demonstrate agency *over*, as well as *with*, others. In the case of priesthood these others include not just spirit entities but also human persons, the filhas and filhos de santo. Public festas offer an opportunity, especially for senior initiates, to develop and establish one's ability to control or withhold their corporeal capital, rather than opting to distribute one's agency and body with an arriving entidade.¹⁶⁶ The barravento, or "turning wind," is an experience, phenomenon and choreography associated with this arrival. It is also a key component of dark horse kinetics because its deployment serves to destabilize the physical, standing body and the power relations associated with their stature.

The barravento thus constitutes a field of opportunity to achieve a distributed, axé-becoming body through transformative union with an Other, and to exert one's own singular agency in face of a deity's desire to manifest. Matory locates the barravento at "the conjunction of European and African discourses about sex and power," as the "first sign of oncoming possession" to which males who wish to preserve their reputation as "men" will quickly flee the sanctuary (214). Furthermore, the barravento embodies a contradiction because it implies:

these men's involuntary subjection to the penetration and will of an exogenous Other, which is both a precondition to eligibility for the possession priesthood and a great threat to those who regard masculinity as their only ticket to some semblance of authority.

Subjection to the penetration of an Other makes a man eligible for priesthood – a determinately authoritative position – while at the same time presenting a threat to masculine authority, for complex reasons, as discussed earlier. This passage deftly describes gendered dynamics of the barravento. However, in addition to the risk it represents, the possibility of encountering the barravento also fuels ritual proceedings; rather than avoiding the danger of spirit embodiment

¹⁶⁶ Elders who have completed their seven-year obligations are not necessarily required to enter trance when a festa is dedicated to the Orixá of a younger filho.

altogether, practitioners' ongoing engagement with the potentiality of incorporation is an engine for Candomblé's processual social relations. Within the roda, distributions of body and agency are enacted and disputed. These negotiations are building blocks of Caboclo ceremony.

Reading Balbino's escape from the ceremony against Matory's analysis, I propose that what is at stake here is not Balbino's social standing as an "upright" and therefore un-penetrable male but rather his paternal jurisdiction over the children of his house and the choreographies of spirit embodiment underway at the ceremony. Remember that the Caboclo festa at Ilê Axé Opo Aganju is organized by the initiates and not the leadership. Brought to the ceremony "on the legs of his santo," Balbino demonstrates vulnerability to trance and a willingness to meet the filhas on a terrain in which his social power could be compromised or subverted as he exposes himself to the risk of embodiment. At the same time, the priest exhibits mastery over the effects of the barravento, in his ability to resist the Caboclo's oncoming for a short while, corresponding to his senior status. This move demonstrates that subjection to the "will of an exogenous Other" is not always involuntarily; instead, within the contested space of the festa the barravento reveals the efficacy of the Caboclos' provocations and destabilizes existent bodily and social arrangements.

As priestesses advance in the terreiro hierarchy they accrue forms of power associated with masculinity (in Brazil's broader postcolonial social arena), enhancing their status as senior women, achieving a position of dominance over their spiritual kin that corresponds, to an extent, with Bahian constructions of paternalism. Thus as priestesses ascend the initiatory ladder, gain control over their own and their entity's choreographies of arrival and establish inviolable authority in their houses, they can retain their feminine agency over processes of transmission and social reproduction. According to Jim Wafer's (1991) description of Candomblé's spectrum of gender roles, "parents of the saint" (mães e pais de santo; there is no "gender neutral"

Portuguese term) are androgenized in relation to their feminized novices and masculinized ogãs – and for Wafer, the caretakers of the saints (equedes), while marked by female gender identity, are masculinized in relation to the “penetrable” mediums (146-147). While I find Wafer’s relational approach to gendering in Candomblé highly useful, based on my experience at terreiros led by both priestesses and priests, I do not agree with his theory of androgenization. Rather, within Candomblé’s matriarchal philosophies, post-menstrual womanhood accompanied by senior ranking becomes corollary to heightened social and ritual agency (see Chapter One).

As a prominent, senior figure in contemporary Bahian Candomblé and a high priest, Pai Balbino embodies a male authority in conjunction with his genealogical links to the motherhouses and the super-masculinity of the Orixá whose agency he represents, Xangô. Informed by these multi-layered choreographies of power, as well as, potentially, health-related concerns due to his prime age (Cici Aug. 2018), Pai Balbino ultimately withholds his own bodily material from being “seized” and exits the ceremonial space, thereby avoiding embodiment by his Caboclo, for now. Yet his flight may also imply the limits of human control over an entidade’s will to materialize – continued exposure to the summons of his spiritual children could lead to a different outcome. By not allowing his Caboclo to incorporate, the priest prioritizes the public image of orthodoxy that Dona Cici emphasizes, and confirms links to the authoritative senior females of the motherhouses, who only cultivated their Caboclos privately, while also honoring the masculine primacy of his Orixá, the King Xangô. Having followed Pai Balbino towards the sanctuary, the initiates and visitors wander back to the courtyard to conclude the ceremony.

There, a filha in her twenties arrived with an infant. When Pena Verde swept by her during one of the *xirês*, she stood quickly and swooned, falling into her santo as an equede took

the baby into her own arms. The equedes removed her earrings and shoes, inappropriate attire for a Caboclo. They tied a white cloth around her chest and waist, and fitted her head in a dark tan, faux leather cowboy hat with narrow rim. The filha's Boiadeiro kept his eyes downcast and danced fervently in the roda each time he was called, signaled by another dancer's extended foot or hand gesture. A Boiadeiro incorporated in the filha nicknamed Gordinha, entered the roda. In an instant, Gordinha's Boiadeiro grabbed the first in a firm headlock. He held the headlock for a long minute, then, as the filha's body softened, an equede came to lead her, now un-incorporated, to kneel beside Cici, who recounted later that the "girl's maternal responsibilities" necessitated her Boiadeiro's willful dis-embodiment so that she could attend to her babe (Sept 2018).

While Pai Balbino exerts agency over his body and his Caboclo, Sultão das Matas, his refusal from the physical and symbolic ritual space also suggests that, staying there, Sultão das Matas would have ultimately "seized" the priest. The wills of the filhas and filhos at the festa and their Caboclos, to summon their priest's entidade, in this case, remained unfulfilled. However, the conditions of embodiment differed for the young filha. In my interpretation, her desire to circle with her Caboclo could be respected within a temporal framework deemed reasonable by the senior filhas, after which her Boiadeiro was dispelled. My analysis of the various agencies involved in these two incidents of spirit embodiment and their outcomes intends to show that 1) Caboclo performances foreground the public negotiation of agency and 2) the outcomes of conflicts of agency is contingent not only on the identity of the players but on the conditions of the festa itself so that negotiations between entidades, mediums, senior initiates and the priest are not pre-determined but worked out in the arena of the Caboclo ceremony.

Although the ritual space is organized by Marcelinha and the other filhas, Balbino's retreat to the sanctuary challenges the stability of their control even while his disappearance from

the scene gestures to the efficacy of Caboclo in general and the Caboclos of the houses' initiates in particular. In this way, Balbino demonstrates an allegiance to his Orixá, by *not* becoming embodied at the festa, while his susceptibility to barravento and its impact in the context of the Caboclo ceremony transfers a part of his ultimate authority to his “children” since they are the designers and drivers of the events. In addition, Pai Balbino affirms a masculinized control of his own body, by refusing to be spiritually penetrated during a ceremony whose divinities are not indoctrinated to his dominance. Since the entidades of the festa are not “seated,” thereby socialized to the terreiro's hierarchies, submission to his Caboclo could present a threat to the priest's own corporeal agency as well as his own sovereignty over the terreiro's body.

By attending attending the festa resisting his Caboclo's barravento, the priest willingly jeopardizes his individual control over his own movements to destabilize one form of hegemony, the nagô hierarchy and paternal authority of the priest as its representative, through confrontation with the populist fervor constituted by the distributed, axé-becoming bodies of the temple's children, devotees of neighboring houses who joined the festa, and the invited Caboclos. At the same time, the disembodiment of the young filha's Boiadeiro brings another confrontation between the populace and individual to light; here another Caboclo takes on the moral authority of the collective to force a devotee back to her familial responsibilities, despite the shared desire – distributed across the agency of the filha and her Boiadeiro– to continue circling together.

Conclusions

The Boiadeiro's disembodiment by headlock speaks again to Caboclos' creativity in both summoning and dispelling others of their cast. In addition, I highlighted the headlock that sent Boiadeiro out of the filha's body to illustrate the dynamism and contingent character of Caboclo

performances. Caboclos' buoyant, dexterous, rowdy and resourceful qualities allow them to undermine official boundaries of ritual participation, test limits – with variable success – demand dances and drinks and reposition themselves and their devotees in relation to reductive national narratives and identity constructions. Caboclos come with a wind that knocks you down. Their arrivals are disruptive to the sensory world, and their presence can turn the course of events.

Divine whims are as determinant in shaping ritual process as the human heads of terreiros. Along these lines, this chapter explored how Candomblé's privileging of the female body for Orixá embodiment articulates with Brazilian constructions of gender and sex and Western-European influenced social phobias about male homosexuality to stigmatize male mediums and, in close relation, the Caboclo entities with which men became associated. I argued that the approaches of various mães de santo to the question of whether men should or should not be permitted to dance in the sacred circle evidences the continuous negotiation by which mediums and priest/esses engage tensions between a) Brazilian understandings of active and passive sex roles (relayed by the idioms of eating and giving) and their social implications for the actors involved, b) occidental, binary twentieth century sex and gender categories and c) Candomblé's relational paradigms.

Examining Ilê Axé Opô Aganju in particular, I suggested that although concerns about Pai Balbino's mediumship and his position as orthodox Candomblé leader have been assuaged by the priest's identification with the idealized masculinity of the Orixá Xangô, his flexible stance on the initiation of male mediums constitutes an activist approach that prioritizes Orixá agency over pressures to meet normative expectations of gender presentation. This flexible, progressivist and non-dogmatic approach is part of Pai Balbino's still unfolding legacy as a

moral leader who is, with the support of his guiding Orixás, determinately shaping Bahian Candomblé's present and future.¹⁶⁷

Caboclos are rebellious, but rebellion is not their end goal. Rather, their movements destabilize the tiered organization of a human or institutional body, and their songs recover the agency non-consentually “eaten” by the West’s imperialist representational regimes. As a body politic of Caboclos’ dark horse kinetics, the barravento contributes to an ongoing disruption of orthodox hierarchies and normative gender values. This kinetic means of continual intervention contrasts with the temporary type of dissolution of identity and social structure that anthropologist Victor Turner (1967, 1969) associated with the intermediary, “liminal” states brought on by ritual passages. Similarly to Turner’s idea of liminality as a suspension of existent social order, which is eventually re-established, Mikhael Baktin theorized carnival forms as generative but temporary inversions of official, bourgeois conventions. However, the cabeçada, headlock, auto-sensual sambas and barraventos effected by Caboclo constitute continually emergent forms of efficacious play that embed humor and irony into performative critiques. Although I focused my analysis on a particular festa, Caboclos’ relations with their devotees are not confined to the proscribed symbolic space of the terreiro grounds; rather they permeate into the daily lives of practitioners. But through the multifaceted kinetic tactics they employ in ceremony, Caboclos and devotees forge an ethos of continual disruption and recovery that remains available to practitioners for mediating social hierarchies that inform their daily lives.

¹⁶⁷ Recent events illustrating his spiritual and moral leadership are 1. Pai Balbino was charged with consulting the Orixá to determine Mãe Stella’s successor as Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá’s high priestess, and 2. In the face of President Bolsonaro’s disregard for COVID19 precautions and Salvador city council’s authorization of religious gatherings (July 2020), Balbino followed the successor that he helped name, Mãe Ana, in keeping his terreiro doors shut to protect constituents from viral spread (Folha de São Paulo).

CHAPTER FOUR

***Solto* (Loose) and *Quebradinha* (Broken): Aesthetics of Caboclos' Dress and Dance at Mãe Oba's Terreiro**

São Caetano, Salvador, Bahia. May 21, 2018: Facing the drummers, Tatiana's Caboclo, Tupi-Guerreiro,¹⁶⁸ pauses and pounds his chest to accelerate the beat, continuing until the drums catch up. Satisfied, he throws his loose arms up, side and down, decorating quick footwork by drawing squiggly lines in space, creating a V to channel energy into the earth. His steps trip back and front, left right left, right left right, resembling samba de roda's miudinho, a shuffle-like weight-shift from one foot to another. However, Tupi-Guerreiro's maintains a wider than typical stance. His torso rides above the pelvis and swings distally out with a syncopated thrust from the ribs, an unpredictable series of breaks or *quebras*. He stumbles and catches himself with a wave up the spine and a fall to the front. A final spin and he files out without turning his back on the center of the room.

Danced by the Caboclo Tupi-Guerreiro as he circles with Tatiana, this solo samba embodies the elements of *solto* and *quebradinha*, loose and broken.¹⁶⁹ A few days after receiving an invitation "open to anyone who wants to talk to the Caboclo," from Mãe Oba, I arrived with a friend and an offering of fruits for a *sessão de giro* – literally a "spin session – at her terreiro on a Saturday afternoon in May, the beginning of Bahia's rainy season, during my 2018 fieldwork. The session begins similarly to the festas, with an invocation circle that establishes the cyclical pathways, movements and rhythmic exchanges, the mechanics of which I discussed in Chapter One, and that culminate as the Caboclos of the house descend in their devotees, sending palpable

¹⁶⁸ The pre-fix marks this entity as an indigenous person from the Tupi language group. Guerreiro means warrior in Portuguese.

¹⁶⁹ *Quebradinha* could be translated as brokenish or kind of broken.

energy swirling around the room. Shortly after, as the drummers continue to play, the Caboclos leave to dress in their regalia. Tupi-Guerreiro lags behind the other Caboclos, dwelling in front of the *bateria* or percussion section. He announces his arrival with impeccable style, performing a samba full of accented breaks, torso isolations and swings. These signature aesthetics define samba de Caboclos in contrast to Rio's iconic *samba no pé*, (samba on the feet), a fast-paced style featured in Rio's Carnival parades and constituted by micro weight shifts and hip oscillations on a 2/4 time signature.

Known as "modern sambas," Rio's samba sounds first emerged in the residential *terreiro* of a Bahian migrant, Tia Ciata, in the early 1900s (refs), where predominantly Afro-descendent musicians and dancers influenced by novel rhythms such as the *maxixe* or "Brazilian tango," which incorporated European elements from the polka, gathered to improvise variations of the Bahian *samba de roda* or samba in the round (Lior encyclopedia of modernism, 2018; McCann 2004, 44). Even though musicians continued playing *samba de roda* throughout the year, in the 1930s the genre of *samba batucada*, featuring heavier percussion and large groups of players, developed and surged in visibility due to their presence in Rio's nascent, official Carnival parades (McCann 59). The *samba no pé* dance styles accompanied by the *batucadas* or samba schools during Rio's Carnival performances have shifted over time as Carnival has also grown to reach international audiences through tourism and mediatization (Rosa 2015). These styles have accordingly become increasingly presentational in their aesthetics, emphasizing arm and leg extensions, a poised upper body and vertical posture, and large head-dresses that impede the falling and breaking movements present in Bahian styles, as well as rapid-fire footwork¹⁷⁰. The Caboclo samba loosens and breaks up these aesthetic values.

¹⁷⁰ Accented breaks are still a principle element but they take on a different quality in that the head of the dancer must necessarily remain poised to keep the heavy headdress from slipping.

As an emblem of Rio's Carnival appropriated by cultural as well as corporate bodies, samba's popularity is bound up with state and corporate racialization and sexualization of women of colour, and the cooption of Afro-Brazilian forms into discourses of national identity.¹⁷¹ Iconic in regional and global imaginaries of Brazil, Rio Carnival's samba performances, while demonstrating remarkable virtuosity, also interlace colonial morality with *mestiçagem*, the eroticized narrative of race mixing at the core of Brazil's special claim to cultural modernism (Pravaz 2013, Freyre 1939, Vianna 2000). Yet these celebrated performances on Carnival's proscenium stages occlude recognition of the dance's multivalent meanings and forms of practice, often in areas spatially and socially marginalized from the political-economic center that Rio de Janeiro represents, including Mãe Oba's terreiro in a "peripheral"¹⁷² neighborhood of Salvador. Embodied by women and male-identified practitioners who nonetheless occupy a feminized subject position as mediums, Caboclos deploy samba as counterhegemonic choreographic praxis that dismantles and fragments dominant social narratives of gender, sex, and race identity. At the same time, Caboclos' aesthetics of dress also contribute to unfixing or loosening state discourses of patriotism and civic belonging by producing a break in normative operations to create popular meanings that resonate in spaces where the state is not present.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that practitioners specifically design their dances with the purpose of unmooring state domination, although this political intervention *is* part of the implication and effect of Caboclo performance. Rather, I am employing a method of overreading the subtexts displayed in dancing, as put forward by dance scholar Randy Martin (1995).

¹⁷¹ See Pravaz 2012, also Browning 1995, Rosa 2015.

¹⁷² *Periphèria* in Brazilian Portuguese refers to the spatial sense of distance from the center city as well as socio-economic sense of exclusion from the financial flows of gentrified neighborhoods.

Overreading, Martin explains, rests on the assumption that the meanings of given dance “account for more than that particular aesthetic activity,” pointing “instead to the very contours through which a given horizon for social activity is possible. Overreading involves reading through and “past the dance to the point where it meets its own exterior or context,” rather than relying on a stable demarcation between a piece’s interiority and its exteriority, and considering a “discussion of context as an interference with the veracity of the work” (1995, 184). Hence, overreading provides a valuable model for attending to the politically salient connotations of Candomblé performances as they meet and address the ritual and local contexts in which they are situated.

My (over)readings of Caboclo performances in this chapter highlight the dark horse kinetics of "loose" and "broken" as frameworks for apprehending how Caboclos’ aesthetics of dress act upon Brazil’s homogenizing nationalist narratives, and how Caboclos’ sambas revise dominant moral-sexual configurations to produce radical models of Afro-descendent female authority. Although I have indicated that these performances generate alternative models of women’s authority, they are not necessarily anchored to cis-gendered female identifications, since male-identified mediums also occupy a feminine subject position in relation to their ritual performances of penetrability and Candomblé’s non-binary, contextual constructions of the body. Whereas Chapter Two addressed Caboclos’ provocative qualities and their tendency to push against established conventions in order to destabilize dominant structures of power within Bahia’s Afro-religious hierarchies, this chapter examines how Candomblé’s Caboclos appropriate and re-signify representational tropes of the Tupi indigenous body that have been used as symbols in the construction of Brazilian national identity and sovereignty. I argue that these appropriations and re-deployments generate alternative worldviews to those enacted through hegemonic regimes of everyday social-political reality in Bahia and Brazil, even if those

regimes themselves retain their structuring power. Although this chapter concentrates more significantly on samba techniques and aesthetics, the ceremonies I engage are no less spiritually oriented than those featured in the other case studies. Additionally, this chapter more directly addresses national and colonial politics precisely because histories of Brazilian and Bahian Independence have formatively shaped the field of Caboclo dancing, just as Afro-Brazilians have mobilized Caboclo sambas to play public roles in defining traditions of civic celebration.

While Caboclos forge their own subversive narratives of corporeal and political autonomy through their clothing and use of ceremonial objects, their samba aesthetics, I argue, also interrupt the mediatized narratives of Brazil as a racial and sexual utopia with which the more visible and celebrated Rio Samba has become entwined. To demonstrate how Caboclo practitioners nest complex Black liberationist discourses and desires within nationalistic imagery, this chapter places historical accounts of Brazil's Independence Day celebrations and the alternative narratives of civility forged by Salvador's enslaved and free Afro-descendent citizens into dialogue with scholarship on Afro-Brazilian ritual, dance and music production. Drawing on historical analyses by Hendrik Kraay (1999) and Wlymarma Albuquerque (1999), I explore Caboclos as figures onto which various ideations of independence, freedom, belonging, statehood and modern nationalism have been projected by different segments of Brazilian society. I combine my ethnographic experiences in the terreiro with their historical accounts to suggest that Caboclos deconstruct nationalist narratives through varied tactics, including costuming and dance aesthetics.

Researchers of Candomblé have commented generatively on Caboclos' apparent connections to Bahian independence from Portuguese rule (Browning 1995, Prandi 1995, Teles dos Santos 1992). Caboclos festas typically take place near or on July second or *Dois de julho*,

the date commemorating Bahian victory over colonial forces and the expulsion of Iberian troops from Salvador in 1823, one year after the rest of Brazil gained independence in 1822. Yet despite attending to the correspondence between Caboclo festas and Independence Day in the calendar year, the available religious scholarship on Candomblé has largely ignored the counter-narratives of national identity produced in both Candomblé ceremonies and in Dois de julho celebrations.

Additionally, while music historians and ethnographers have explored samba's articulations with *mestiçagem*, Brazil's narratives of racial mixture, and *brasilidade*, a dominant national identity framework put forth during the 1930s (Dunn year, Vianna 2000, McCann year), scant attention has been given to how samba dancing both contributes to and complicates these intersections.¹⁷³ I expand on Natasha Pravaz's (2013) theorizations of Rio Carnival's samba performances and Cristina Rosa's (2015) examination of samba as knowledge transmission, rather than as a cultural commodity (Rosa, 18), in order to demonstrate how Caboclos' ritual dancing subverts (by virtue of shaking off and breaking down) Brazil's normative patriarcho-heterosexism and authorizes practitioners' own erotic expressions.¹⁷⁴ Along these lines, I am interested in how looking closely at bodies and their movements can allow us to see into how social and national structures interplay with human (and divine) agency in formative and fluid ways. How do Caboclos' sambas disrupt the production of a national body through their

¹⁷³ With the exception of Browning 1995, who addresses Caboclos and their sambas on 25 – 26). With its pelvic oscillations and rotations, samba explicitly engages erotic registers, being, as Browning observes, bound up with the eroticized narratives of inter-racial encounter (19) at the core of the nation's special claims to cultural modernism and racial democracy.

¹⁷⁴ Caboclos riff on, twist and trouble samba's sensual and sexual potentialities even as they selectively reproduce macho power dynamics. The *umbigada* or belly thrust, a traditional element of samba de roda involving the thrusting of two dancers' hips towards each other so that the belly-buttons "bump," is a key feature of samba's sexually-charged expressions as well as in European perceptions of samba as morally offensive because of its sexual nature. Filho (1999) explores the criminalization of samba in post-abolition Bahia as part of urban hygienic campaigns that primarily targeted poor Black women.

performances, and in doing so articulate their own moral ideologies by reconfiguring spatial and bodily relations?

Furthermore, drawing connections between economic operations and corporeal techniques in the present contexts of neo-liberal capitalism, I integrate discussions of Brazilian Funk – in which dancers put their hips above their shoulders in various positions, including bending over at the hips and down in a plank-like position with hands and feet on the ground – into my analysis, positing that funk dancing at a Caboclo festa upsets regimes of verticality regulated in the public sphere through capitalist labor relations and evident in conceptions of moral-sexual and physical “uprightness.” By extending the body into horizontal rather than vertical planes, funk postures break down postural norms that also inform many codified dance vocabularies, such as ballet and ballroom and even the invocation movements of the Caboclo and Orixá xirê, all of which maintain a generally vertical alignment of the shoulders over the hips. Urban developments privilege mono-planar, unarticulated movements of the bony masses of the pelvis and torso by encouraging subjects to locomote along linear pathways, even if persons may tactically choreograph their own movements along these lines.¹⁷⁵ The polycentric hip and torso movements of Caboclos’ sambas divide the body into multiple non-linear and non-vertically arranged units of mobility, while funk dances even more dramatically deconstruct, invert and re-order standard expectations of bodily composure since their signature choreographies are executed in low stances with the performers’ pelvis often just a couple of inches off the ground.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984.

¹⁷⁶ Cristina Rosa (2015) lists polycentrism as a feature of Afro-Brazilian aesthetics, based on Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s extensive formulation of Africanist dance principles (1996).

Throughout this chapter, I examine how Caboclos' loose and broken aesthetics, on the whole and specifically at Mãe Oba's heterodox house, operate in different arenas to disrupt normative configurations of race and national identity as well as gender, sex, age and erotic expression. I suggest that these re-workings produce alternative models that valorize feminine discourses of pleasure, desire and authority, such as, for example, erotic play between female-bodied mediums and other initiates of the temple. Although another set of festivals at Mãe Oba's terreiro similarly include performances of erotic play, those dedicated to the urban hustler and streetwalker figures known as Brazilian Exu and Exua, these are held without exception in the street outside the sanctuary doors, a space conceptually marked as appropriate for encounters that critically play on sexual metaphors.¹⁷⁷ In contrast, Caboclo engage pleasure and desire within Candomblé's sanctified spheres. In doing so, they carve out alternative sites that not only loosen and upset orthodoxies of gender and sex but actively reimagine these norms, by attributing ritual and social value to performances of desire and desirability. These dancing, axé-becoming bodies thus exemplify what Anurima Banerji defines as "paratopic performance," practices that exist alongside hegemonic arrangements, even as they take shape "against the mandates of the state and what is scripted in social law" (2018, 2).

I begin by outlining the contrastive aesthetic complexes of Rio samba and samba de Caboclo, the predominant dance form at Mãe Oba's two main yearly festas. Next, I situate Mãe Oba's terreiro in Salvador's periphery to demonstrate how tenuous relations between the municipality and the practitioner community resonate with Caboclos' own minoritarian yet sovereign status. Here I draw an analogy between the terreiro's geographic marginalization from the city capital flows and public services and the semi-autonomous yet politically fraught relation between Caboclos and the colonial plantation system.

¹⁷⁷ Similarly to the Orixá Exu, the Brazilian Exu and Exua govern the arenas of sex and money.

The next section looks at Caboclos' regalia to excavate complex interrelations between the symbolic persona of the "Indian," narratives of patriotism, and counter-discourses of racial liberation. Then, I address a solo samba, a ceremonial samba roda and an intimate duet between two Caboclos to demonstrate how the kinetic qualities of loose and broken work to unfix tropes of hyper-femininity, the macho male, and the noble savage. This chapter offers deployments of samba de Caboclos in ceremony as examples of how technique in dance can operate as a force of socio-political contestation, and how movement practices may be re-localized in the wake of their appropriation into nationalizing regimes.

1. Introducing Ilê Axé Oba Ina and Samba de Caboclos

Wielding scepters of bundled branches, the other Caboclos move to the perimeter of the room. A silhouette in the doorway leading outside, Sete Flexas dances a sinuous samba, bare feet marking time on the leaf-covered floor, exposed shoulders rolling up, back and down as ribcage adjusts to counterbalance oscillating hips. Then, with a serpentine spine and syncopated steps that turn on a polymetric beat, Sete Flexas rides out on the horse that is Mãe Oba's body. Soon after, he returns to consult each visitor one by one. During this consultation, Sete Flexas prescribes the cleansing ritual that would lead me back to Mãe Oba's terreiro and into a generative, layered engagement with the guardians and initiates of this community.

After the Caboclos had dressed and donned their instruments, the honored guest of the afternoon session makes his awe-striking appearance. A hush falls upon the sanctuary as Sete Flexas dances, chin up, in Mãe Oba's body, communicating a matriarchal command that embeds masculine authority at the same time. This duality of Mãe Oba's leadership is synthesized in one daughters' back tattoo, which reads: *Oba minha mãe, Sete Flexas meu pai* – Oba is my mother,

Sete Flexas my father. This section juxtaposes Mãe Oba's terreiro, in which Sete Flexas holds a privileged position as guardian and father of the house, as well as Oba's ritual kin, with characteristics of Caboclos' samba to show how their loose and broken aesthetics articulate with practitioners' lived experiences of Blackness as it intersects with social and spatial exclusion. These identifications create a field in which Caboclo cultivation activates the alternative politics of nationalism/civic belonging, cultural autonomy, race, gender, sexuality and erotic play that I will develop in the rest of the chapter.

Mãe Oba is a mother of six daughters and head of the mixed household that blends her biological family, including three granddaughters and two great granddaughters, with her ritually adopted children, several of whom are housed under her care as well. Oba's residence and her social standing exemplify the relations between ritual motherhood, extended maternal responsibilities and the multi-generational collaboration that often characterizes Bahian Candomblés; her daughter Tatiana acts as the *mãe pequena*, right-hand to the priestess, her son Luis is an *ogã* charged with playing at festas and sacrificing animals, and her great granddaughter, Ritinha, will inherit the mantle of priesthood.

The terreiro comprises an upstairs quarter that Mãe Oba shares with Ritinha, and a series of single rooms occupied by her daughters, female heads of household like herself, and their children. Oba had these built as extensions of the original sanctuary structure, of which she acquired sole ownership in the late 1980s. The Orixá are "seated"¹⁷⁸ and revered in the terreiro's internal chambers and in several smaller structures outside the main building. A poster hanging

¹⁷⁸ The Orixás of the house are those to whom initiated members of the terreiro are consecrated. The initiation process includes formal rituals in which objects such as seeds and stones are imbued with the essence of the Orixá and form part of an altar that is permanently situated within the temple. The Orixá is considered to be "seated" -- her enduring presence is now secured -- in this location. These altar seats become focal points of the economies of care in the terreiro.

on the kitchen doorway, adjacent to the sanctuary, illustrates the intimate relation between the house's governing Orixás--the lightning god of justice, Xangô and his wife, Iansã, goddess of thunder and transformation--and the guardian Caboclo of the house, *Sete Flexas* (Seven Arrows). Mãe Oba figures as a personified bull, a reference to the Orixá Iansã,¹⁷⁹ with a beer mug in hand (Sete Flexas' preferred libation) and smoking a large cigar. On the bull's head sits a cap of the type sported by several Caboclos of the house, and Xangô's double-headed axes hang suspended above the bull's head.



Figure 5. Poster of Sete Flexas with references to Xangô and Iansã at Ilê Axé Oba Ina. Graphic design by Luis S. Photograph by the author. Reproduced with permission.

¹⁷⁹ Iansa can transform into a bull as well as a butterfly. She is one of Oba's principal Orixás.

The Caboclos, who sing in Brazilian Portuguese and hail from the deserts and forests that are spatially marginalized from the urban core of the country, enjoy a special status in this household, as unique modes for addressing practitioners' immediate conditions. While these concerns include matters of employment, health, and romance, Caboclos also act as intermediaries through whom practitioner communities embody individual and collective imaginaries of political autonomy and social justice. Sete Flexas' origin story, told to me by Mãe Oba, emphasizes these values: A wild and willful "índio" when he first began appearing to and embodying Mãe Oba, Sete Flexas lived without family in the woods and was prone to acts of violence. Over time, Sete transformed into an "honorable guardian committed to right action and justice seeking while maintaining his willful character" (Oba, interview August 2018).

Caboclos' modes of representation, their rebellious and recalcitrant natures, and their fervent sambas articulate discourses of sovereignty and claim a freedom over their bodily movements and labors that refuses submission to the exploitative operations of economic hegemony in the contexts of New World colonialism, settler plantation society and Atlantic slavery. At the same time, the landscapes with which Caboclos are associated— including Bahian backlands for the cowboys, and Bahia's Atlantic forest regions for the Caboclos de pena —bisect the practitioners' own *habitus*, the prism through which power is culturally shaped in the interplay of agency and structure in a given human environment. *Habitus* encompasses the composite ways that the social world forms individual attitudes and cognitive patterns as well as postures and movement habits (Bourdieu 1977, Wacquant 2004). For practitioners in low-income neighborhoods such as Mãe Oba's, where, due to a lack of formal economic opportunities combined with race and class exclusions, residents necessarily engage in a constant "hustle," laboring while continuing to experience precarity in housing and employment. While

Orixá are recognized as aristocrats of Candomblé's divine realms, Caboclos' livelihoods, similar to those of many working class practitioners, are entangled in mercantile Atlantic configurations of class and labor relations in which they are endemically disadvantaged. Thus, the Caboclos' habituation to social inequities resonates with the experiences of their devotees while also reflecting the desire for and achievement of political freedoms and recognitions.

Spatially removed from the city center and thus from the largely central terreiros most implicated in the development of Candomblé's orthodox discourses and aesthetics,¹⁸⁰ Oba's terreiro sits on Travessa Augusta in São Caetano, one of Salvador's densely-populated Black neighborhoods, moving North from the tourist and commercial center. São Caetano borders the São Bartolomeu municipal park, a region historically occupied by Tupinamba peoples and in which the *quilombo* (maroon community) of Urubu thrived in the nineteenth century.¹⁸¹

Although Mãe Oba hails from a jeje-nagô lineage and identifies with Ketu Candomblé, her homenagens to the Exu/as, another hybrid and stigmatized set of divinities, and to the Caboclos, constitute the two grandest festas of her ritual calendar year. Though São Caetano is a highly populated area with multiple commercial centers, many residents refer to the area as a “favela,” inferring governmental neglect, unplanned development and, usually, a lack of security.¹⁸² The fact that the neighborhood does not receive regular municipal services and has a reputation for

¹⁸⁰ And also from the gaze of foreigners, intellectuals and elite Bahian participants, their perceptions and the influence of their perspectives, or ideas and fears about their outsider moral compasses, which are constitutive factors in adherence to orthodox codes.

¹⁸¹ Barbosa, Silvia Maria Silva. *O Poder de Zeferina No Quilombo Do Urubu: Uma reconstrução histórica politico-social* (2015).

¹⁸² A favela typically springs from residents' own initiatives and use of accessible building materials, rather than having been conceived by urban planners and constructed by developers. The term favela is controversial, connoting “slum” in popular global discourse, and often carrying injurious implications of high crime and drug use.

criminal activity are symptomatic of its favela ranking and the lack of formal economic opportunity available to many denizens. Taxi drivers, with the exception of those from the neighborhood (or adjacent bairros) themselves, repeatedly refused to take me all the way there.

Mãe Oba toured as a dancer and then seamstress for Bahia's *Balé Folclórico* (Folkloric Ballet), and several of her initiates dance professionally and teach for the company. In fact, I was first introduced by Mãe Oba by a colleague from Toronto's professional Brazilian arts scene, Adrianna, one of the first choreographers to bring samba to commercial and theatrical venues in the city. Adrianna had established long-term relationships with several of the terreiro's choreographers, with whom I was also familiar as a student in Salvador's Afro-Bahian dance and percussion classes. I thus entered the terreiro as a race and language outsider but a dance insider. Although increased white participation in Candomblés (especially in Southern Brazil) has been noted by some scholars (i.e. Amaral and Silva 1993; Oro 1998), at Mãe Oba's house I am usually one among very few, if any, other white-identified participants. As my commitment to this particular Candomblé house deepened, my out-of-placeness as a white-presenting¹⁸³ researcher-participant also became juxtaposed to my status as a mother and head of household, which intersects in layered ways with the lived experiences of many women at the terreiro. It was through participating in the samba dancing featured at Mãe Oba's primary festas, over time, that some of the social boundaries between myself and other women became broken enough for me to be able to glimpse the same sex intimacies forged by ritual kinship. Certainly, Oba and many practitioners at her house are also well versed in Orixá choreographies and rhythms, and even in the vernacular differences between Orixá movements adapted for the stage and the more roots versions typically performed in ceremony. However, the sambas at Oba's house, full of

¹⁸³ I use the term "white-presenting" because as a Jewish woman born in Palestine, I benefit from white privilege while having grown up in family and social group where we self-identified as ethnic and cultural others in relation to the dominant, white, Anglo-Saxon Canadian milieu.

inflections, articulate with the popular expressive styles of the favela and the lack of spatial and conceptual distance between audience and participants in street samba rodas and in the terreiro (interview Escola de dança, FUNCEB, 2018).

One practitioner, Eduardo, commented that samba engages the “fragmented daily experience of living on the margins, in the favela” (interview, June 25 2018). Via its Afro-Bahian origins and contemporary associations with the favela, samba is both racialized and coded working class. Yet in national discourses, the racial and class complexities indexed by samba’s interlacing with African identity are subsumed by problematic frameworks of cultural heritage and *mestiçagem*, by which the best qualities of African and European blend in mythic union and yield Brazil’s racial democracy.¹⁸⁴ When discussing the aesthetics of the form, Eduardo linked the elements of *quebradinha* and *solto* to the lack of separation between the space of the dance and quotidian life in the urban favelas of Rio and Bahia, where samba is cultivated and innovated, and that are populated by socio-economically marginalized Brazilians, most of whom are Afro-descendent (UFBA, May 28 2018). For him, these loose and broken ways of moving, embodied in a *Caboclos’* accented lunge and recovery, or the polycentric shake of the shoulders on top of the hips, effectively fragment the space of the body and the space between performers, while also creating intimacy in the form of a close and often playful confrontation.

Compared to the samba of Rio’s annual Carnaval, where dancers broadcast their movements to audiences on raised platforms along the sides of a massive stadium, *Caboclo* samba proposes a participatory mode in 360-degree spatiality and plays with the fragmentation of the body in the close, intimate space of the cypher, where distance is not possible. *Caboclos* dance their sambas in tight spaces, up close to the drummers and other festa participants; when

¹⁸⁴ Freyre 1939; see also Vianna 2000 and Bishop-Sanchez 2015.

mobilized as a provocation for another entidade to come down, a Caboclo may dance face to face with another, challenging a devotee to resist become entranced. Both Rio's samba and samba de Caboclo emerge from the *samba de roda*, or samba in the round, a dance and percussion genre developed by communities of enslaved Africans on Bahia's colonial plantations. While the sambas of Rio's Carnaval depart from the round format, samba de roda and samba de Caboclos share a basic circular structure. Dancers rotate in and out of the center, alternately becoming viewers and dancers. Performer and audience roles interchange in overlapping segments of time. Similar to the Orixá incantations, the verses of Caboclos' sambas follow a call and response form. However, whereas the liturgical chants of an Orixá ceremony proceed in a specified order and are initiated by a designated caller (or several), an entidade, a ceremonial participant or a musician may initiate a Caboclo samba verse. In dance, Caboclos make use of samba's call and response patterns, employing the call and response format as a provocation, to incite another Caboclo to the terreiro's festivities.¹⁸⁵ Relative to the vernacular styles of both samba de roda and Rio's samba no pé, where torso articulations are generally more understated, the Caboclo sambas make use of exaggerated, accented falls and breaks. These breaks infuse performances with a sense of discontinuity and surprise in relation to the dance action, and allow improvisors to experiment widely with personal style, timing, and expression.¹⁸⁶

Finally, pursuing this aesthetic comparison just a little longer, Rio's samba no pé performers, or *passistas*, typically use high-heeled sandals and extend their elbows to emphasize long, classical lines that frame the body even as the feet and hips oscillate at incredible speed. In the Caboclo samba, dancers maintain grounded, flexed hips, knees and elbows in order to

¹⁸⁵ Call and response is a principal element of Africanist and Afro-Brazilian dance aesthetics discussed by Rosa (2015) and Dixon-Gottschild (1997).

¹⁸⁶ Browning (1995) similarly links samba with fragmentation: "Samba is as much a fragmentation of a holy black body as it is a healing of spiritual and political wounds" (32).

quickly change direction, or to react to a musician or another dancer, while staying connected to the earthen floor beneath their feet.¹⁸⁷ In contrast, samba no pé dancers typically employ upright presentational postures. In a recent class, percussion and dance teacher Zé Ricardo, who also frequents Mãe Oba's terreiro, announced to a group of samba-trained dancers that: "Caboclos have no aesthetic." Then, lengthening his arms and legs in reference to the Rio passista style, he clarified: "What I mean is, they don't have *this* aesthetic" (Samba Congress, Toronto, June 2019). Ricardo's point was well understood by dancers trained to elongate their wrists, arms and legs to create "classical" lines. I suggest that Caboclos break these lines as they break with normative standards of social behavior and that Caboclo practices *do* operate in accordance with guiding aesthetic principles that overarch their costuming, oral traditions, and movements. The lack of classical aesthetic that Ricardo refers to, I suggest, nests within dark horse kinetics as a non-dominant and politically salient standard of beauty and elegance.

The songs and dances I observed and participated in over the course of my fieldwork, at Mãe Oba's terreiro as well as various other heterodox terreiros, exemplify Caboclos' resilient aesthetic and existential condition, which they share with many devotees and in which rupture and fragmentation operate as structuring principles of experience. One song in particular foregrounds the linkage between practitioners' social conditions, Caboclos' spatial and socio-economic marginalization and samba's broken and rebounding corporealities. Here, the Caboclo cowboy or Boiadeiro sings of how the Master's daughter beckoned him to attend to her inside of the Big house.

A menina do sobrado,¹⁸⁸ mandou me chamar por seu criado X2
Eu mandei dizer a ela, estou vacejando o seu gado,

¹⁸⁷ Practitioners and scholars of capoeira, which is, like samba, informed by the principal coordination of ginga, describe the ground as related to an inverted ancestral realm (Browning 1995; Capoeira 2002)

¹⁸⁸ "casa rico do senhor" rich house of the senhor (master).

Olo Boiadeiro, ele gosta do samba rasgado¹⁸⁹ X2,

The daughter of the big house sent her servant for me X2

I sent him to tell her, I am minding your cattle

Olo Boiadeiro, he likes a rough samba X2

The cowboy Boiadeiro, rejecting the class hierarchies that would obligate him to obey the commands from the daughter of the big house, prefers to stay out in the fields with his cows and dance a “samba rasgado.” A colloquialism not found in the dictionary, “rasgado” can infer rough or robust qualities; a fast and “cut” or staccato samba. Cristiam, a medium from a neighboring terreiro to Mãe Oba’s, adds the meanings “non-stop, fluent or fluid, fast and continuous” (Oct 23 2019). Another interlocutor, Sandro, defines “rasgado” as pertaining exclusively to the province of Boiadeiro’s samba, signifying a style that is “bonito, bem tocado, *bem* dançado – beautiful, well played, *well* danced” (Oct 24 2019).

In this stanza the samba rasgado, performed by Boiadeiro in the fields, stands in counterpoint to a visit to the Master house. Boiadeiro states his wish to stay amidst the cattle on the ranch rather than become involved in the affairs of the implicitly white daughter of the seignior. Furthermore, in the same breath, Boiadeiro’s calls for a samba rasgado in ceremonial time and space, imploring the musicians at the festa to play more intensely and quickly for him. The song collapses the space of the ranch with the ceremonial roda while aurally and corporeally linking the samba’s loose, broken movements and call and response dialogue with the marginal outback that he inhabits, outside the control of the Master’s daughter and the Master himself, an exemplar of bourgeois colonial masculinity. When he comes riding into the sanctuary, Boiadeiro

¹⁸⁹ Interpretations of “rasgado” include: “Rasgado is rasgado. In the sense that it is fast, but also truncated.” (Silva personal communication 2019). “Rasgado in some contexts can have the meaning of straightforward or blunt. I believe that samba rasgado has the context of pure samba, genuine samba, root samba. The cabrocha [mulata, country girl] brings rustic samba, without ornaments, from the hill to the city.” (D’Angelis personal communication 2019). “It has many meanings but overall, it is a Samba with non-stop. Fluently, fast, intense and continuous” (Fonseca 2019 personal communication).

comes mounted on his horse with all the rebellious fervor implied in the song, from one space distally related to the nexus of socio-economic order (represented by the big house), the outlying fields of the ranch, to another, São Caetano and the Candomblé of Mãe Oba.

I want to draw attention to the analogous relation between the Boiadeiro's position on the ranch in the samba performance and the terreiro populace's positioning in a dense but peripheral urban nucleus. Boiadeiro enjoys semi-autonomy from the domicile and its threat of unwanted inter-racial sex suggested by the Master's daughter; at the same time, his livelihood is still determined, or at the least determinately influenced, by the cowboy's ability to get along in the normative labor laws of the plantation system. Similarly, Mãe Oba's constituents generally occupy a space that is at once outside of the metropole, in terms of access to services, yet firmly situated inside of it geographically?; they depend on the city for basic needs like security, electricity, and transportation, to name a few. To illustrate my point, I offer an anecdote from the morning after the annual Caboclo festival in July 2019.

As I was helping sweep the premises of last night's refuse, I heard several filhas shout, "*lixo!*" (garbage!) and jump into high gear, shoveling disposable plastic cups, yesterday's offerings and the vestiges of the sacrificial meal quickly into heavy garbage bags. "The truck is here!" declared Barbara, a middle-aged equede, as she motioned for me to pass the dustpan. Not understanding the urgency, I asked "but when will it pass again?" "We never know!" she responded, "Whenever the sanitation workers feel like coming up." While the terreiro is not geographically located uphill from a main road, Barbara uses the term "subir" or "come up" to imply the physical separation of the compound, tucked into a cul de sac deep in the neighborhood, from the regulated routes of the municipality. This example illustrates the tenuous relationship between the temporal-spatial zone in which Mãe Oba and her filhas conduct their

ritual and domestic works, and the systems of power that govern the distribution of resources, including city services such as street cleaning and trash pick-up.

While the unpredictability of resource access has structuring effects on the lives of local Caboclo practitioners today, the mestiço cowboy enacted in the samba is able to undermine the power structure by choosing to remain in the field, where he is master of his own body and its movements, rather than submit to the hierarchical social order of the seignior's house. The cowboy here is situated in the historical context of the plantation system of the past. His implication within the New World economy and his subaltern location at the intersection of colonial race and class systems makes his identity and livelihood relatable to practitioners, while his loose and beautiful samba embodies the idealized qualities that free him from the constraints that the plantation power structure of the past seeks to impose on his body, spirit and psyche.

The samba *rasgado* – cut, beautiful and full of breaks – disputes the sexual-political subservience ascribed to the cowboy by the Master's daughter¹⁹⁰ (who as the bearer of racialized, patriarchal authority also represents a seat of power in the uneven system of white domination) while re-framing the field as a site for the assertion of radical self-possession. In this song, the samba *rasgado* establishes a terrain of corporeal autonomy in the field, in contrast to the call of the Master's daughter towards the homestead where the cowboy's Afro-indigenous body would be objectified through the legal relations of settler colonialism. In the above example, a space of defiant contestation opens up in the cowboy's dancing, in which the grip of the Master house and its power geometries on Boiadeiro's person is effectively loosened.

¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, white patriarchy is embodied in this passage by the master's daughter and not the master himself. This narrative twist could point to ways that racial power dynamics supercede gender hierarchies so that, marked by whiteness and owning class status, the daughter's efforts to subjugate the cowboy to her will operate as attempts to extend the reach of the plantation house's social hierarchies to the field.

Just as his samba dancing becomes a site for the cowboy's asserting agency over his body, manual labor and sexuality, Caboclos' bodily adornments also elaborate oppositional narratives, this time in relation to discourses of racial emancipation and national belonging subaltern agency.

2. Enmeshing Narratives of Nationhood and Racial Freedom

Caboclos decorate their bodies with feathered designs lifted from Amerindian symbolism, or leather costumes that evoke images of ranches and cattle herding. Caboclos incarnate Indigenous (Caboclos de Pena) and mixed Afro-descendent and Amerindian figures (cowboys or Boiadeiros) from Bahia's colonial and postcolonial histories. Their aesthetic representations in Candomblé are based on references gleaned from practitioners' lived experiences and knowledges orally transmitted by elders of their biological and/or ritual families, as well as popular and literary descriptions from the nineteenth century.¹⁹¹ Caboclos are described as "curandeiros," healers or shamans who "come to heal those from near and far" (interview Alagsy May 2015, Oba June 2018) by drawing on their extensive familiarity with local medicinal plants.

One of their typical procedures, the *sacudimento*, involves passing an assortment of freshly harvested leaves and branches known for their curative and pharmacopeaic abilities over ceremonial participants. They also diagnose ailments through talking to clients, and prescribe specific types of cleansing rites (*limpezas*), among other possible treatments. At Mãe Oba's Sunday session, each of the incorporated Caboclos offer the *sacudimento* to attendees that wish to partake, but only the guest Caboclo in whose honor the session has been called, Sete Flexas,

¹⁹¹ Found in sources such as letters exchanged between early Portuguese colonists depicting Tupi peoples' appearances in Brazil, and imperialist renderings of Indigenous appearances published by 19th century romantic writers.

conducts personal diagnostic assessments (notes May 2018). Both the *sacudimento* and diagnostic sessions take place after the *Caboclos*, having made their presences known in the bodies of practitioners, re-emerge from the *terreiro's* internal chambers in their finery.

After a pause in the ceremonial proceedings at the session, the *Caboclos* re-appear in full regalia. The *entidades* have traded in the classic whites of their *filhas* for colorful, animal print fabrics or fringed pants and skirts. A single *Caboclo de pena*, embodying Indigenous Bahian personhood, dons an ornate, feathered green and brown headdress and carries a bow and arrow in hand. Beaded necklaces and bracelets decorate their necks, wrists and ankles. The cowboy *Boiadeiros* wear leather vests, pants and cowboy hats in shades of tan. Only after dressing can they pick up their instruments, such as the medicinal branches they pass over participants, and their weapons and instruments such as the *Caboclo de pena's* bow and arrow (notes Jan. 2018).

The *Caboclos'* elaborately constructed regalia, the product of immeasurable amounts of labor investment in finding appropriate fabric, cutting, sewing and assembling a material culture montage, is not decorative but rather fundamental to *Caboclos'* healing techniques and ritual efficacy. Their costuming evinces Tupi Amerindian body decoration methods that make use of plant and animal materials such as seed necklaces and feathers, as tactics for displaying their mastery over the natural environment (see Kittiya Lee 2018). As they re-enter the sanctuary, the *índios* and *Boiadeiros* of the *Caboclo* lineage carry animal skin canteens and lassos associated with the cattle-herding cowboy of Brazil's plantation ranches, and tree branches that connect the practitioner community to the local environment, specifically from the nearby Atlantic forest of São Bartholemew park. While their feathered headdresses, cowboy hats and waterhorns in some ways reproduce colonial-era tropes of the wild, untamable *sertão* or arid Bahian backlands and its inhabitants, *Caboclos'* clothing and decorations also ironize imperial control over the

representation of non-Western Others for ritual purposes that sustain individual and collective well-being. These broken up and reassembled re-presentations feature in the session glimpsed above as well as in civic commemorations of Bahian Independence, gained with the 1823 expulsion of Portuguese troops.

When the Caboclos ride back into the ceremonial session on the backs of their human horses, they interlace black liberationist politics and histories of Afro-Bahian religio-cultural innovation into a fabric of representational forms that have been made available by state authorized expressions of Bahian patriotism, loosening or disentangling imperialist and nationalist tropes of indigenous and Afro-indigenous identity from their embedding in aesthetic regimes of the new Bahian state and nascent Brazilian nation formed in the nineteenth century. Beginning a few years after Bahia secured independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1823, Independence Day parades have featured Caboclo statues. Throughout the latter part of the 1800s and into the twentieth century, the parades served as a unique locale for Candomblé devotees, primarily Afro-descendent Bahians, to publicly develop their practices – specifically Caboclo cultivations – because drumming, dancing and spirit embodiments were, until the 1910s, authorized as part of the civic celebration (Albuquerque 1999). Today’s Caboclo ceremonies build on these historic precedents for Caboclo worship, which, I suggest, allowed practitioners to express their own counternationalist discourses and liberatory aspirations within the contexts of the parades. Thus, whereas Orixá music, choreography and apparel relate devotees to West African religions and histories, Caboclos’ aesthetics build on complex historical interrelations between Black liberationist politics and the figure of the “Indian” in Bahia’s civic, popular and elite imaginary. They enmesh these elements to rehistoricize the present as they tactically reconstruct discourses of indigeneity.

To shine light on these constructions and how they are activated through the embodied figure of the Caboclo, I first historicize the Caboclo as a principle element of Bahian Independence Day commemorations on July 2nd, *Dois de julho*. The festivities are marked by the procession of a carriage featuring statues of a Caboclo and Cabocla from the popular neighborhood of Lapinha to central Salvador, accompanied by samba and national flags. Figuring prominently in this patriotic display, the Caboclo, according to Browning, reads as an expression of Brazilian patriotism (1995, 31) related to romantic nineteenth century images of the noble savage.¹⁹² However, I suggest, a closer look at Dois de julho festivities begins to unfasten the Caboclo's ties to official narratives of patriotism. A historical analysis shows how, in fact, Bahia's Afro-descendent populations at large and Candomblé practitioners in particular mobilized around the Caboclo personage in order to unsettle the dominant production of nationalist imagery and carve out spaces in which to elaborate subversive performances of racial freedom and bodily expression.

The first Dois de julho commemoration took place in 1824, following the expulsion of the Portuguese troops on the 2nd of July 1823. Historian Hendrik Kraay (1999) recounts that, "an old mestiço," a man of mixed-race Indigenous inheritance, was placed on a "improvised" cart as a "living symbol" of the Brazilian nation." The cart was decorated with leaves from coffee, sugarcane and tobacco plants – represented the land's native fruits, transformed into a trophy and marched to the largest city square, following the route taken by the patriotic troops. Two years later a new cart was built which featured a statue of an "índio, *a caboclo*, dressed in feathers and carrying a bow and arrow"¹⁹³ (53). The Caboclo statue stood atop of a serpent, allegorically

¹⁹² Edison Carneiro (1948) and Reginaldo Prandi (2001) also attribute Caboclo aesthetics primarily to imagery from 19th century romantic literature.

¹⁹³ This translation is mine, as are all translations for quotations from interviews.

killing the colonial tyrant. The exalted position of the “old mestiço” in the original parade suggests a powerful symbolic association between Bahian independence from colonial rule and Indigenous identity, while his being replaced by a statue of “an Indian” as the celebrations took on official character speaks to the state’s own enduring attachment to self-representation through tropes of Indigenous personification on the civic stage.

In addition, historian Wlyamra Ribeiro de Albuquerque (1999), notes that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, slave owners distributed manumission cards to enslaved Afro-Bahians during Dois de julho parades. At the same time, public abolitionists increased their presence on the event’s civic stages (94). Although many of the manumission cards did not actually enable bearers to become free, their explicit symbolic value reflected the emancipatory aspirations of enslaved Afro-Bahians recruited to fight with Brazilian troops in the de-colonial battles of 1822 and 1823. Although they remained captive, concludes Albuquerque, enslaved peoples glimpsed the possibility of occupying a more privileged position on the political stage and sought to benefit from Bahian independence (93). Both the visibility of the abolitionist movement and the distribution of manumission cards infused the Caboclos’ civic procession with liberationist energy, and secured an association which continues to this day between the Caboclos of Lapinha and legal emancipation; the Caboclo statues recur as central elements of abolition day celebrations since Brazil officially ended slavery in 1888.

Another triangulated link between Dois de julho parades and counter-narratives of civic belonging merits addressing in order to situate Caboclos’ “excessive” behaviors of drinking, lasciviousness, and samba dancing that values the movements of the lower body in a historical context that correlates individual freedom (of oppressed members of society in particular) with

patriotic liberty (*liberdade da patria*) meaning liberty of the nation.¹⁹⁴ In an initiative that seems to have referenced the common practice of granting liberty to enslaved persons during the Dois de julho commemorations of the imperial era (1822-1889), the activist lawyer Cosme de Farias, who later became a city councilor and congressperson, advocated for the release of prisoners in celebration of Bahian Independence. The efforts of Cosme de Farias, himself a “mulato” of modest upbringing and education,¹⁹⁵ influenced then police chief Alvaro Cova, who freed all detainees caught for public disturbances deemed “obscene” or sexually “lewd,” from the detention facilities in 1914 (Albuquerque 2018, 74).¹⁹⁶

During this time, Bahian politicians continued to take cues about decorum from European authorities. Moved to uphold standards of patriotism as well as criterions of “civilized” behavior en vogue in European society, Salvador’s urban reformers became increasingly concerned about the appropriateness of samba’s role in civic demonstrations. Because of the valorization of pelvic and hip articulations in *rodas de samba*, members of the literary classes generally viewed the dances as inflammatory locations for the breaking of bourgeois social norms that linked movements lower body with low-class status and sexual misconduct.¹⁹⁷ These public discourses

¹⁹⁴ Freedom of the “motherland,” referring in this phrase to Brazil itself.

¹⁹⁵ Nassif 2011.

¹⁹⁶ Many freed prisoners had likely participated in samba activities, characterized by some early twentieth century journalists as “bothersome diversions” that led to excessive drinking, lewd sexual behavior and social tensions or violence. Some journalists documented complaints against the tendency of samba rodas on Dois de julho to involve persons of “dubious conduct” and devolve into fighting and the exchange of “obscenities” (Albuquerque 73-74). Select groups of Bahian elites – a somewhat heterogenous group including planters with broad patron-client networks that included their enslaved property and merchant factions linked to old noble families through marriage and hereditary lines -- also judged the street displays, such as batuques and sambas as “excessive” and out of line with civic ideals. Yet as Hendrik Kraay points out, Dois de julho’s popular, “carnavalesque” elements were integral events that critiqued the serious, monarchic, patriotic and official character of the commemoration (1999, 57).

¹⁹⁷ Bahia’s social norms were also influenced by the Christian Catholic Church, which continued to exert religious and moral authority. Gayle Rubin links Christianity with sex negativity, which “rests on the

precipitated and coincided with political efforts to remove the Caboclo statues from the Dois de julho parade in the 1910s.¹⁹⁸ However, despite the objections of cultural critics to individual liberties taken by members of popular classes, in terms of their robust dancing and/or consumption habits, Dois de julho neighborhood celebrations, in which revelers expressed their own alternative conceptions of patriotism and Brazilian identity, persisted.¹⁹⁹ Even further, the provocative qualities associated with popular dances and conduct at Dois de julho's neighborhood gatherings are evidenced in the contexts of Candomblé's Caboclo sessions and festas, where the Caboclos' loose and broken qualities and their foregrounded lower body movements similarly unfix and challenge normative standards of erotic display.

The Caboclos' integration into Candomblé's ritual cycles did not occur separately from the street festivals. Rather, the parades also offered a legitimate avenue for ritual expression, since other Afro-Bahian religious manifestations remained illegal and subject to police persecution until 1974.²⁰⁰ The parades' growth fostered the canonization of the Caboclo de pena as a popular *divinidade* in particularly in the neighborhoods through which the statue proceeded. However, concordant with the intensification of anti-Candomblé sentiment and persecution in

assumption that the genitalia are an intrinsically inferior part of the body, much lower and less holy than the mind, the "soul," the "heart," or even the upper part of the digestive system (Rubin 1984, 11).

¹⁹⁸ It is interesting to note that, in relation to the current, highly charged debates around monuments across the Americas, city politicians in the early 1900s successfully advocated for the erection of a Caboclo monument in Campo Grande, a central plaza located on the parade route. Officials tried to excise the Caboclos from the parades and divert the energy around the Caboclos of the street to the motionless monuments. Because attempts to remove the statues from the parades resulted in extremely low turn out that year, the Caboclo statues were re-instated to the civic festival in the next year.

¹⁹⁹ Albuquerque observes that these moral objections couched the ruling classes' discomfort with the autonomy exercised by working class celebrants in elaborating their own narratives of civility and pivoted around values related to the socio-racial hierarchies of the times (1999, 76).

²⁰⁰ Ferreiro Filho (1999) notes that, although state and police apparatus in the late 19th and early 20th centuries failed to eradicate Afro-Bahian cult practices, public Catholic institutions and news media effectively and efficiently stigmatized the free expression of these religious manifestations (251).

early twentieth century (95), intellectual factions of Bahian society, influenced by evolutionist ideologies that equated Indigenous personhood with “backwardness,” questioned the Caboclo’s role in the parades. During post-Independence years, Bahian elites rallied behind the índio symbol as an affirmation of the new state, even taking on indigenous last names as a patriotic exercise (100). But by the 1910s, politicians rallied to remove the Caboclo from Dois de julho festivities as an “anti-thesis” of modern civilized society (101). These various understandings of the Caboclo as a popular national symbol, a “local divinity” of the Bahian streets, an “enchanted entity” (1999, 94) in Candomblé and a “primitive” holdover from the imperial era, overlapped and fertilized the proliferations of their contradictory meanings.

The Caboclos’ representational tactics, in line with these historical ambivalences, thus dialogue with the state’s self-representation while producing popular meanings that resonate in spaces where the state is not present.²⁰¹ When the Caboclo de pena at Mãe Oba’s session puts on a feathered headdress and picks up his bow and arrow, he re-remembers/performs the protagonism of the both the “old mestiço,” and the “índio” of Dois de julho, annexing popular class expressions of cultural autonomy together with alternative narratives of Brazilian identity and civic pride within the trope of the Indian chief as a patriotic symbol of the new state.²⁰² Boiadeiros, bad-boys of the Bahian backlands, similarly embody the geography and rebellious spirit of an autonomous Bahia, while indexing the fundamental, subjugated roles of Afro-Bahians in the formation of the new Empire.

Dois de julho troubles the pairing of Caboclo with dominant expressions of Brazilian nationalism by demonstrating that aspirations for Black emancipation from legal slavery, and

²⁰¹ At least not explicitly in the sense of civic imagery or police surveillance.

²⁰² The Caboclo’s performance recalls Richard Schechner’s (1998) formulation of “twice-behaved” or “restored” behavior, which is never “for the first time” (35-88).

popular expressions of civic engagement have affixed to the Caboclo symbol since at least the beginning of the figure's association with Bahian independence and possibly before. In sessions and festas, Candomblé practitioners break up monolithic narratives of civic belonging through reference to the Caboclo's controversial protagonism in Independence Day celebrations, as a symbol of religio-cultural continuity. At the same time they also carry forward the challenges to moral-sexual hegemonies that became endemic to Dois de Julho celebrations in the imperial period and after. Caboclos deploy Bahian and Brazilian patriotic symbolism, specifically making use of the índio as an emblem of the nation, to appropriate the nascent state authority to Candomblé's dominantly Afro-descendent publics. This tactics reflects dark horse poetics as an aesthetic politics that enables recognition of the culture of the "weak." By this I mean that, through popular associations with Dois de julho's Caboclos, practitioners enjoyed freedom of cultural expression otherwise prohibited in everyday life. Caboclo devotees, marching with the statues through diverse parts of the city via the civic parade routes, also enhanced Candomblé's visibility and extended its sphere of influence.

I have argued that Caboclos' dark horse kinetics of loose and broken intervene in Bahia's hierarchical social configurations of nation and race. In addition, they juxtapose their techniques of incorporation with cowboy and Indian-inspired designs to make things happen and bring into relief a non-Western knowledge-making that, in a loop-like effort achieved through aesthetic and kinetic action, itself relies on imperialist tropes of representation for its activation.²⁰³,²⁰⁴,²⁰⁵

²⁰³ These "things" can include becoming employed, resolving matters of health and romance, the doling out of punishment and effecting financial gain (Agosto and Barbosa, interviews June 2018)

²⁰⁴ Practitioners that I interviewed confirmed this sequence is intrinsic and not arbitrary.

²⁰⁵ Caboclos depend on aesthetic forms (incantations, circular shapes, rhythms, invocatory dances) in order to appear; they travel the dark pathway between causality and aesthetics, one that arcs between

Looping discourses of primitivism and nationhood, Caboclos twist state-architected modes of representation to assure their own continuity. In doing so, they deploy a dark horse aesthetics that recasts symbolic elements of dominant culture in order to undermine its “foundational myths” and point to their fallibility, a loop-like effort. These aesthetic choices also point to “the contiguity of the primal and the modern within the same society” (Rejouis 2004, 107). In Mãe Oba’s “sessão de giro,” dark horse kinetics are activated as Caboclo tumble into materiality, and perform the works by which they are able to “twist” fate consequentially (Morton 2016, 6) through their executive bodies in action.

Caboclos’ bodily adornments of re-signified Amerindianness, and the cowboy apparel that situates them as Afro-Indigenous rebel spirits of Bahia’s outback, unsettle monolithic conceptions of Brazil’s identity as a “civilized” and white supremacist settler colony and insert the New World’s non-Western others into a retold history of hard-won autonomy from Portuguese colonial rule. Whereas their aesthetics of dress loosen, break, and reconfigure dominant narratives of nationhood and racial inferiority, Caboclos’ sambas make use of dark horse kinetics to trouble hegemonic discourses of sexuality as well as gender performance. In his analysis of Dois de julho in the 1800s, Hendrik Kraay concludes that both enslaved and free “Africans took advantage of the festivities to practice forbidden dances” and to drive their deities through the city as “saints of the streets,” following the examples set by Catholic saint processions in Salvador (1999; 63, 57). As many Africans and Afro-Bahians integrated the symbols of Dois de julho into the world of Candomblé, these different cultural manifestations, and the variety of political meanings ascribed to them, continue to inform performances and understandings of the Caboclos inside of the terreiro. The next sections look at how Caboclos’

doing and appearing. For eco-critic Morton, this is a pathway “that dominant Western philosophy has blocked and suppressed” (Morton 2016, 5).

samba choreographies at Ilê Axé Oba Ina expand upon the above historical narratives. I return to the solo samba that I described in the beginning of this chapter, proposing that the Caboclo warrior *Tupi-Guerreiro*, incorporated by Tatiana, employs masculinized dance stylizations to conjure a force of Black womanhood that transgresses gender boundaries and binaries.

3. Gender Transgressions of Tupi-Guerreiro's Solo Samba

Tupi-Guerreiro emblemizes Candomblé's Caboclos' sites of identification with symbolic indigeneity (see Silva 2019), political independence and willingness to fight for freedom. These traits resonate with the Caboclos of Dois de julho's Independence Day Parade, *indios* who represent anti-colonial victory, and whose statues are adorned with feather headdresses. The pre-fix Tupi signals this entity's ethno-historical and linguistic links to the Tupi indigenous groups that inhabited Bahia's Atlantic forest regions (among other areas of Brazil), while « Guerreiro » means warrior in Portuguese.

Incorporated in Tatianna's body at the afternoon session, Tupi-Guerreiro makes his iconoclastic presence felt by hanging back as the other Caboclos recede to the internal rooms of the terreiro to don their sacred attire. Alone before the drummers, he pounds his chest rhythmically, slapping his palms on his heart to accelerate and thus transform the musical beat. He can freeze with both palms on chest, and the drum suspends a moment, then begins again on cue. Tupi-Guerreiro implores the percussionists to keep up, using rhythmic gestures like tapping on his chest while ceasing the movement of his lower body, and threatening to stop altogether, thus interrupting the flow and production of axé, transformative energy or divine muscle, that propels the ritual. These punctuated movements erode the heteronormatively gendered boundaries between (typically straight) male drummer and (typically female) mediums.

When he lags behind the others to dance before the drummers, Tupi-Guerreiro's behavior and style fulfill masculine ideations of Bahian Candomblé and Brazilian samba.²⁰⁶ He uses the *quebras* to enter a call-and-response dialogue with the lead drummer that upsets the gendered power operations of Candomblé encapsulated by Paul Johnson in the following passage:

Straight men are drummers and song leaders . . . During the festas, the cycle of ritual parties that summon and celebrate the orixas' presence, the "female" mediums dress in their best . . . Then, when the drummers work and sweat to bring the dancers before them to a state of ecstasy . . . they musically possess them along with the orixás (2002, 45).

Johnson ascribes an active role, with sexual innuendo, to "[s]traight men" drummers who "work and sweat" to bring the feminized dancers into trance.²⁰⁷ However, Tupi-Guerreiro, in Tatiana's body, transgresses the frontiers between percussionist and dancer to take an active role in the musical production, projecting a male authority usually associated with the role of drummer.

In addition, Tupi-Guerreiro's dancing reflects elements associated with a male samba style, such as using a wider stance to keep the knees further apart than in a traditionally feminine mode, where the dancer's legs stay coquettishly close together. The galloping quality of Tupi-Guerreiro's side-to-side samba step alludes to his riding a horse and comprises part of the performance behavior that announces his arrival and identity – male, indigenous, brave, and wild, conforming to a construction of wildness that leans on as well as satirizes imperialist, romanticized tropes of the "Indian." Yet Tupi-Guerreiro's presence is made possible by an intersubjective process of embodiment through which his agency and subjectivity are distributed with a female devotee, Tatiana, as she circles with him. As a macho "índio" expressing his

²⁰⁶ Similarly to Candomblé, in Bahian samba de roda men typically play instruments while women dance.

²⁰⁷ I do find elements of Johnson's (2002) gender and sex analyses highly generative. For example, Johnson analyzes myths from Yoruban cosmogony that explore the polarity of male and female ("an ever-present theme in Candomblé" (43) to conclude that women are "cool, reproductive and contained" - both in body and in the terreiro (44), and that the drummers and entities bring the heat of the street to the cool house to fertilize the reproduction of children and axé." (45) I address the sexualization of Black male drummers in a similar passage written several decades earlier by Melville Herskovits, in Chapter Three.

agency through Tatiana's body, Tupi-Guerreiro's performance loosens the hold of gender binaries in samba expression. Furthermore, the solo samba performance unfixes gendered subjectivity from the sexed body, breaks with dominant gender expectations that govern the positions of dancer/drummer and receptive/active, and points at the constructedness of gender as an ideology in Brazilian culture (Parker 1991, Green 1999).

Interestingly, much later in the ceremony, Tupi-Guerreiro (still incorporated in Tatiana) retreated from the sanctuary and returned again, this time with a *cavaquinho*, a small Portuguese instrument in the guitar family, with four strings. He played a few rounds of samba verses, in collaboration with the percussionists. Since, as previously discussed, taboos on a woman playing music during ritual sessions maintain a stronghold in Bahia's Afro-religious spheres – even when a woman is embodied by a male entidade –Tupi's contribution to the aural arrangements of the ceremony constituted yet another radical form of crossing Candomblé's typically gendered social lines. In his samba and his singing and instrument-playing, Tupi-Guerreiro's tactics play on ideal masculinities from Candomblé's divisions of labor as well as New World machismo, that specifically Latin construct of aggressive masculine pride, while at the same time querying them by challenging the drummers' competency and control as well as acting from an embodied female subject position. Just as Tupi's solo dancing and musicianship propose a reformulation of normative models of gender, by loosening and shaking off the holds of fixed and binary categorizations on his expressive and kinetic behavior, the next example explores how an ensemble of dancing performers at a ceremonial festa works to fracture sex hierarchies that are race and class coded to legitimize historically stigmatized, non-heteronormative desires.

4. Erotic Discourses of a Ceremonial Samba Roda

Approaching my first Exu festival, held at the opening of Mãe Oba's ritual calendar year in April 2018, in honor of Sete Flexas, I can hear the music, a lively samba de viola set up in the outdoor courtyard beside the sanctuary, playing from the entrance to the alley on which the terreiro sits. The festa is well under way. Having descended and dressed, the Caboclos of the house fraternize with Brazilian *Exu* – urban, iconoclastic hustler types depicted as black and male and sprung from the trickster Orixá of the same name. In addition to the Exu present at the festa, several *Exua* – their female counterparts – have also incorporated in human mediums. In this case, the mediums embodying Exua are female-bodied. Like Caboclo, Exua tend to fit within several typological narratives. Pomba Gira is one lineage of Exua, described by Kelly Hayes (2011) as a “discourse at the intersection of magic, morality, sexuality and social marginalization” whose unique location in Afro-Brazilian religious practice evidences a conceptual universe that, rather than having been superseded by modernity and its correlative systems of knowledge and social control, serves as its illegitimate other (10). Pomba Giras give authoritative form to female desires, usually black and working class that have been systematically delegitimized by more hegemonic discourses (ibid). Hayes conducted fieldwork in Rio, but her definition resonates powerfully with the Pomba Giras as well as *Padilhas*, another quality of Exua, here among Bahia's primarily Afro-descendent Candomblé communities.

The Exuas – Pomba Giras and Padilhas – dress elegantly and sip champagne; they embody post-abolition era streetwalkers and cabaret owners of the urban underground. Whereas Caboclo incarnate rural landscapes, indigenous historicities and histories of plantation labor, Exu and Exua are born of the city; they characterize the extra-legal economic pursuits of entrepreneurial individuals and populations found at the interstices of Bahia's social fabric in the wake of slavery's official end. Caboclo and Exu/a interrelate under the aegis of their New World

identifications and preference for the Brazilian aesthetic complex of samba. Similarly to Orixá and Caboclo, Pomba Giras and Padilhas can embody female or male subjects, independently of their sexual orientations. Yet taboos around the performances of these divinities maintain a stronghold in Bahia, and men embodying Exu/a are not welcome even in many of Candomblé's heterodox spaces. Exu/as express moral-sexual discourses that are extremely illegible and threatening to Brazil's colonial Catholic-cum-right-wing Evangelical social values.

While the Exua at the festa employ their own uniquely stylized dance movements that differ from the wide stances, deeply bent knees and low postures of the Caboclo sambas, I have included their cypher in my discussion of loose and broken aesthetics for several reasons. First, because the physical organization of their circle foregrounds Sete Flexas' performance, which constitutes a loose and broken samba in the genre of Caboclo dancing that I am endeavoring to develop. Second, because the event of the roda, viewed discretely as a scenario within the broader context of the Candomblé ceremony, breaks with hetero-normative standards that exclude and pathologize racialized Bahian women, especially those who do not conform to models of civic marriage and monogamy, historically and to this day, and that are evidenced by commercial displays of Rio samba.

At Mãe Oba's festa, several Exuas made glamorous appearances. They formed a circle around Sete Flexas, Mãe Oba's guardian Caboclo, currently embodying her, this time on the street outside of the sanctuary. The Pomba Giras and Padilhas took turns dancing for Sete Flexas, as the musicians played samba *de viola*, a variant of samba de Caboclo that includes a lead guitar. Whereas Tupi-Guerreiro's samba lilted off his center axis, the Pomba Giras maintain a composed body posture. Their tight, fancy footwork and subtle upper body articulations embody a stereotypically feminine elegance and seductive charm. The Pomba Giras, incorporated in

women's bodies, compete for Sete Flecha's favor, taking turns dancing near him with movements that emphasize rapid oscillations of their hips and fannies. Sete Flecha's posture reads here as macho male, as multiple female subjects compete for the focus of his presumably heterosexual attention and desire.



Figure 6. Sete Flexas enchants Mãe Oba. Original Photographer unknown. Image reproduced with permission.

Eroticized and objectified by his dominating gaze as they vie for his interest, the Pomba Giras in some ways reproduces iconic, commercial, mediatized images of sexy, hip-shaking Brazilian “*mulatas*” (dark-skinned samba dancers) dancing in Rio’s Carnaval. These images,

such as those produced by Brazil's foremost national television station, Globo,²⁰⁸ bank on hegemonic constructions of hyper-femininity and black female sexual availability. However, the Pomba Giras' roda de samba seen here produces a different representational framework, as male desire (Sete Flecha's) is embodied by a senior female in a matriarchal position of elevated social respectability (Mãe Oba), lending homo-erotic and homo-social registers to Sete's danced interactions with women participants. This marked shift in the nature of male subjectivity present playfully (in the sense of efficacious play) produces a queer critique of global and in particular, dominant constructs of Brazilian, macho heterosexism that also plays on samba's socio-historical stigmatization and association with licentious eroticism.

A look at Bahia at the turn of the twentieth century, the historical moment in which Pomba Giras emerge, allows for better understanding of how their sambas twist the aspersions cast upon the "mulheres do povo," or (overwhelmingly Black) "women of the street" that they incarnate. In his discussion of Brazil's post-abolition era policies of social hygienization, Alberto Ferreiro Filho (1999) notes that political and seigniorial elites criminalized samba as immoral and incompatible with respectable, de-eroticized feminine models of the bourgeois family (248). Fueled by a concern with disciplining and "civilizing" the newly freed Black populace, the Republican government, from 1890 to 1937, prohibited Africanist batuques as well as samba, which, with its characteristic hip, belly and buttock isolations and proximity of opposite sex dance partners, scandalized colonial mores.

Samba dances, with their kinaesthetic emphases on what Mikhael Bakhtin calls the lower body stratum, including the pelvic basin and hip joints, would also have read through the lens of Christian understandings of bodily processes as vulgar and coded low-class (1968, 473). During

²⁰⁸ Pravaz (2012) historicizes the transformation of the samba dancing "mulata" within the political context of Brazil's gendered, sexualized and racialized discourses of African-inflected performance. Rosa (2015) explicates Globo's central role in mediatizing Carnival and samba dancing in particular.

the Republican era, these class connotations affixed to street women in particular, who, for Bahia's urban reformers, stood in the way of building a civilized city by not embracing the domestic values of civil marriage, virginity, and monogamy and by their roles as household heads (249).²⁰⁹ With their links to Bahia's post-abolition underground economies and street life, Pomba Giras and Padilhas sublimate these social stigmas into sources of anti-establishment pride, asserting a radical, Black feminist erotic and autoerotic sensuality. Their auto-erotic choreographic tactics articulate with a non-heterosexist principle that Timothy Morton calls the "Joy," and attributes to "erotic attunement," which, he proposes, is actually a discourse of female emancipation, a "dance that knows itself: unlike the patriarchal "Woman," [whose self-knowledge is subjected to the control of a dominant male] (2016, 157). As a symbol of female autonomy, Pomba Gira knows her status in history and draws energy from the ambiguous borderlands of society that she occupies.

As the Exuas dance with Sete Flexas, his double authority as the guardian of the house and right-hand man of the terreiro's matriarch legitimizes the self-determined models of Black femininity they provide for Candomblé's majority female-identified and Afro-descendent practitioners. In her treatment of the presence of *ginga*, the basic back-and-forth hip oscillation on which samba choreographies expand, Cristina Rosa (2015) notes that samba circles function as "territorialized black spaces" through which a community can "preserve a systematic yet non-hegemonic way of organizing bodies to move and make sense of their reality" as well as exorcise and liberate itself (2015, 85). Here at the Exu festa, the samba circle operates as a protective sphere for terreiro community members to cultivate self-knowledge, while also permitting

²⁰⁹ Rubin's (1984) comment that "Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity" is relevant here. With legal abolition in 1888, the late 19th century constituted a particularly tense moment for Brazilian elites anxious about the threat to social order presented by free Blacks.

women of the terreiro, who deal with the intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender in Brazil today, to define their own feminine discourses of eroticism in creative relation to each other and the temple leadership. As a performance of sexual agency and autonomy that interplays with Sete Flecha's approving gaze, the samba circle forms a counterpoint to the ongoing violence against Black, often working-class women who do not conform to standard patriarchal models of female behavior – such as entering monogamous civil unions or adhering to binary gender presentations. The roda of Exuas thus provides one example of how Candomblé's hybrid and marginalized entidades and the practitioners with whom their bodies and subjectivities are distributed mobilize dark horse kinetics to loosen and disrupt hegemonic race, gender and sex configurations that still shape public opinion and structure Bahian and Brazilian social life.

A samba duo performed by Sete Flexas and a younger male initiate embodied by his Boiadeiro provides another instance of Caboclos' transgressive erotics and how they upset hegemonic sexual mores; in so doing, they valorize women's illegitimized pleasures and desires, as well as the capacity of male-bodied, masculinized subjects to give and fulfill those desires. During the dances of the invocation circle, devotees maintain fairly vertical body composure, leaning to one side and another while slightly bent at the hips but keeping an overall sense of distance from the sanctuary floor. However after incorporating in their filhas and singing their songs of arrival, the Caboclos begin to lunge deeply, kneel on the ground, dip their torsos forward and arch backwards to near ninety-degree angles. These gestures dramatically shift the relationship of the dancer to the earth, which becomes more elastic as the performer's body moves constantly in and out of a vertical stance. In the duo between Sete and the young Boiadeiro, the cowboy kneels on the concrete floor before Sete Flexas, breaking with patterns of

upright verticality and using his torso and facial expression to draw attention to the lower body of the incorporated priestess. I suggest that by breaking down the linear standing posture of the body, germane to the Carnaval sambas and to the codified ballroom form, samba de gafieira,²¹⁰ their duet opens a space to refigure hetero-patriarchal norms around giving and receiving pleasure, in a ceremonial context that normalizes diverse forms of material and kinetic gift exchange.

5. Dancing in the “Outer Limits”: Sete and Boiadeiro’s Intimate Duet

The guests at Mãe Oba’s Caboclo festa in July 2019 demonstrated several of the kinds of behaviours that flustered social commentators of the Republican era, while also forging and confirming context-specific bonds between terreiro leadership and adepts in lateral as well as hierarchical terms. On the whole, the sambas at the festa point to how social dynamics between Caboclos and equedes or visiting community members already depart from hetero-normative expectations, by situating erotic play within the possibilities of homo-social friendship and ritual community building. In addition, the intimate dances that Caboclos share with each other and with women at the ceremony take place within a lively sphere that includes the exchange of drinks and smokes as well as playful gazes and movements. The festive atmosphere foregrounds acts of giving and receiving in the development and maintenance of mutually-beneficial social relations between, incorporated entidades, human mediums, and community members who may not circle with the saints, but nevertheless find meaningful opportunities to interact through offering libations as well as dances that sustain the entidades and keep them alive in the ceremonial present. These reciprocal exchanges establish and nurture alternative economies of

²¹⁰ A cabaret style begun in 1940s Rio clubs (gafieiras), samba de gafieira has evolved into a partner ballroom form.

care while suggestive moments of physical closeness between women, some of whom are embodied by macho male divinities, further loosen up and break from hetero-normative expectations for partner dancing.

Returning to Bahia and to São Caetano seven months after the end of my 2018 fieldwork, my reception at the terreiro feels different. Mãe Oba expects me to dance in the opening circle, and after that I follow the lead of the equedes to make sure I do not break one of the nuanced codes that I am still learning in the moment. During the pause, Claudia, one of the equedes, tells me to stay in the kitchen while the descended Caboclos march into the sanctuary. Peering into the barração from the kitchen doorway, I see that the Caboclos have all re-entered, and the sambas are beginning. Taína, one of her Oba's granddaughters, has incarnated her Boiadeiro. Last Sunday I had seen her as a young woman, nails painted, getting her hair done in the courtyard. This Saturday night she appears as a macho man in a woman's body, a bit hunched over, with clunky samba steps that narrate the Caboclo riding in on his horse, and eyes that dwell on the ladies' behinds. His attention moves to a middle-aged sambista enjoying the festa, who willingly turns around to show them the effect of her miudinho and oscillating hips on her bunda.

Barbara's Boiadeiro keeps his legs super wide, samba-ing in a straddle, digging alternate heels into the earth as his body tips sideways to counter balance the low slung weight shifts. The Caboclos come in and out of the sanctuary and the internal rooms of the terreiro, getting drinks (beer, courtesano, white wine in a glass for the Padilha) and cigars or cigarettes, which the equedes light for them. Zeulma's Caboclo is Sultão das Matas. He wears an impressive headdress of white feathers. When he lunges in the barravento, the feathers on his headpiece sling back. He turns around, points a foot or sometimes a shoulder (which nudges forward) or

even a sort of marked *umbigada*,²¹¹ a belly forward movement used in samba, in which the dancer, with arms open, extends her navel as an invitation for another Caboclo to come into the roda. In between refilling the Caboclos' drinks, Claudia nods for me to head back into the sanctuary and participate in the rest of the festival.

Visitors from other terreiros arrive. As they do, the Caboclos of the house gather around them and coax their entidades to join in. Observing the action, I watch the other women of the terreiro and neighborhood, in an attempt to ascertain how they may feel about being asked to go in the roda with an entidade. They enter after the first invitation, laughing²¹² and exuding a playfulness and familiarity that comes from years of friendship. A Caboclo, Boiadeiro, embodies Celeste, and extends a hand towards an elder equede, a gesture of invitation to samba. The equede accepts, Boiadeiro stays close behind him, and the two dance intimately.

Two Padilhas arrive – Monica's and another who descends in a filha from another house. Their sambas are more feminine, tight-legged, than those of the Caboclo. They rotate their hips down to the floor and back up. Sete Flexas, incorporated in Mãe Oba, appears on the periphery of the circle and passes his beer mug to an equede before entering the center of the roda. The Padilhas and Caboclos kneel to the floor in respect of his entrance. A young rodante, likely in his early twenties and encircled with his agile Boiadeiro, inches forward on his knees until his torso is positioned under Sete Flecha's groin. The Caboclos and drummers sing loudly, encouraged by the exhibitionist display. The young filho's face rests few inches away from Sete Flecha's moving pelvis. Sete opens and bends his legs as he inches forward in space, urging the filho into

²¹¹ From the Portuguese "umbigo" or navel, *umbigada* commonly features in dances with roots in the Congo-Angolan region, such as samba de coco and tambor de crioula.

²¹² In his examination of humor Bakhtin (1984) positions carnival laughter in contrast to bourgeois individualism, noting that carnival laughter is ambivalent and therefore includes rather than separates subjects from the "wholeness of the world," (12) and that humorous forms (for Bakhtin's purpose, those of the 16th century) constructed a second, alternative universe outside of the official bounds.

a deep limbo backwards until his neck reaches an angle almost parallel to the sanctuary floor, while his face and Sete's pelvis stay in close proximity. Sete's facial expression admits pleasure bordering on whimsy. While their physical postures suggest oral sexual activity, the feeling that charges their exchange is one of playful desire, such that the intimacy shared by the entities and by the executive bodies of their hosts supports the exploration and legitimization of fantasy fulfillment. Their performance of intimacy further confirms the complementary alliances of the terreiro's gods even while Sete in Mãe's body, within this scenario, is the recipient of sexual pleasure that clearly confirms his power position (shared with and co-produced by his *matéria*, the head priestess).

This performance locates Mãe Oba, embodied by Sete Flexas, in the active sexual position of "eating" while the young male initiate's Boiadeiro takes on the relatively submissive posture of "giving" the gift of pleasure (see Chapter Three). Evidencing these eroticized idioms of giving and receiving, the duet between Sete Flexas (in the body of a senior female) and Boiadeiro (in the body of a young male), conjoins the display of masculine sexual assertiveness with a markedly anti-patriarchal expression of female sexual pleasure. Furthermore, the event of the duo--with Mãe Oba circling with her Caboclo in the active and dominant position, while both actors perform their consensual enjoyment-positions desire fulfillment as itself propitious of the terreiro's social reproduction, particularly (but not exclusively) in relation to the attainment of pleasure for the house's matriarch together with her santo.

The sexual registers of Sete and Boiadeiro's performance of intimacy transgress the boundaries of erotic behavior condoned in normative sexual systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Brazilian elites in the Republican period were highly influenced by European ideological currents including medical-legal sexual models and conservative norms

(see Green 1999 and Cowan 2016). While Bahia's colonial society revolved around the nucleus of the patriarchal family, by the nineteenth century educated intellectuals and physicians became concerned with the ordination of public spaces and sought to "modernize" the "black city" of Salvador, along the lines of European cosmopolitan centers of the time (Filho 1999, 242). The turn of the nineteenth century in Brazil thus constituted a seminal moment for the consolidation of socio-erotic hierarchies similar to sexual taxonomies based on Victorian morality and Christian attitudes toward sex that coalesced in the United States. The foundations of these sexual systems are addressed by feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1984), who outlines what she terms the "charmed circle" of sex acts preserved through legislation, policing, medical practice and moral discourses, for purposes including control over women's reproductive rights and the criminalization of prostitution and pornography as social threats. Rubin details how various conditions of sexual conduct are deemed "good, normal, natural and blessed," namely, banal heterosexual procreative encounters between same-age married partners at home. On the other hand, the charmed circle consigns non-heterosexual, public, non-monogamous erotic acts involving consenting inter-generational partners or more than two people on the "outer limits" of acceptability. These acts are "bad, abnormal, unnatural" and, often, politically reprehensible.²¹³

While Rubin's work deals with explicitly sexual activities, I want to be clear that I am addressing performances that do not involve any actual physical contact. It is precisely the absence of physical contact that makes Caboclos' gestures resonate dually as ironic critique and as affirmations of pleasure as a productive mode or valuable resource in the generation of axé or ritual efficaciousness. At the same time, Rubin's analysis provides a useful rubric for understanding the socio-erotic hierarchies (which also embed class and race hierarchies by virtue

²¹³ Foucault (1978) broadly explores how patterns of sexual desire and behaviour are socially engineered, and how sexual moralities are both culturally relative and socially determined.

of privileging state-sanctioned marriages that would follow seigniorial models from the Republican era, elucidated in the previous section) that Caboclos' break down and reformulate to emphasize the giving and receiving of pleasures that fall beyond the limits of domestic, "vanilla," heterosexual acts.²¹⁴

Erotic behaviors demonstrated regularly in Caboclo festivals yet relegated to the outer limits of permissible sexuality, according to both Republican moral codes and Western legal values, include those that are cross-generational, exemplified by Mãe Oba and her young initiate as well as, later in the ceremony, interactions between her great grand-daughter Ritinha and Caboclos incorporated in adult bodies. These performances are non-procreative, executed in a group, outside of a domicile, under casual circumstances (in the sense that Sete and Boiadeiro are not in a committed relationship) and between unmarried partners. Their encounters are gender fluid and resist categorization as either hetero- or homo-sexual (in situations where homosexuality clearly falls outside of the charmed circle), since, although two bodies in question can be identified as female and male-sexed, the active status of their mediumship makes the ascription of binary gender impossible and renders the bodies illegible to dominant sexual ideologies. When read according to the bodies or *matéria* involved in the duo and the Brazilian categories of active and passive behavior, however, the performance inverts the normative gender roles of active masculinized figure and passive female, where, unlike Western understandings of sexual exchange, "giving" corresponds to the passive position while the value of receiving or "eating" is ascribed to the active position.

²¹⁴ Not only does the erotic hierarchy justify sexual oppression, the framework of the charmed circle, established in relation to Christian, sex negativity, which "rests on the assumption that the genitalia are an intrinsically inferior part of the body, much lower and less holy than the mind, the "soul," the "heart," or even the upper part of the digestive system, legitimizes the criminalization of subjects whose moral-sexual practices misalign with the institution of civil marriage regulated by the state (Rubin 1984, 11)

In addition to the “political reprehensibility” of the duo’s samba in terms of their visibility in the public sphere of the *roda*, the difference in age between the partners, their non-monogamous relationship of ritual kinship (which elides recognition by the state) and the potential homosexuality as well as homosociality of the scene, Sete and Boiadeiro's dance breaks with normative social and kinetic scripts through its use of space and bodily proximity. Boiadeiro’s low posture – as he kneels on the ground with his face just below the pelvis and groin belonging to Mãe Oba’s body – violates standards of respectability that pervade even today’s codes of permissible conduct on dedicated dance club floors in Brazil.²¹⁵

Sete Flexas and Boiadeiro, dancing their provocative duo, engage what is normatively perceived as “the profane” inside the sanctuary space; Sete accentuates the lower extremities as he gets down, while Boiadeiro’s bodily posture draws even more attention to Sete’s pelvis and hip rotations. In her discussion of Candomblé’s Caboclo, Barbara Browning notes that although “the term *samba* to designate the caboclo spirit’s dance seems to be a way of blurring the distinction between the divine and the profane,” the Caboclo himself is “intent on breaking down barriers, releasing strictures such as those between the sacred and the secular” (1995, 26). However, while Caboclos’ dancing appears transgressive according to social norms of comportment and the aristocratic standards of the Orixá, their movements actually nest within a vast range of acceptable styles for Caboclo *rodas*. The duo between Sete Flexas and Boiadeiro, furthermore, shakes up and breaks apart assumptions around the alleged asexuality of senior Afro-Bahian priestesses, which have affixed to Candomblé’s traditionalist frameworks of post-

²¹⁵ Bakhtin (1984) is relevant to this discussion too. The aesthetics of grotesque realism (18) that he attributes to medieval cultures of folk humor develop around a “material body principle” that engages the continual growth and renewal of the “people.” Differentiating his subject from bourgeois identifications, he argues that leading images of fertility and abundance belong to the “collective ancestral body” and not the biological individual or private ego of the “economic man” (19).

menopausal female leadership as they articulated in Brazil with tropes of maternal, politically passive Black “mammies” (see Matory 2005). In contrast, the young Boiadeiro’s impulse to fulfill the desires of Sete Flexas, as he circles with Mãe Oba, makes the terreiro’s matriach’s pleasures into a religious imperative.

6. Ritinha Dances Bahian Funk for the Caboclos

I have suggested that Caboclos’ ceremonial sambas re-appropriate aesthetic elements of the most visible samba forms from the runway stage of Rio’s Carnaval, such as the feathered headdress and rapid polyrhythmic coordinations of the hips and shoulders, while undoing the hegemonic constructions that link the image of Brazil with the racialized and sexualizing erotic discourses evidenced in the framing apparatus of the Carnaval’s mediatized presentations. I am not arguing that Caboclos’ sambas, danced by predominantly Afro-descendent practitioners from working and lower-middle classes and neighborhoods, elaborate exclusively as responses to Brazil’s systemic representations of nationalism, both in the icon of *indio* and the trope of the dancing and sexually-available *mulata*. Rather, the dance lexicons of Candomblé, including samba de Caboclos, participate in the territorialization of New World spaces of alterity whose value systems are not circumscribed to a polarity between resistance and conformity to a dominant culture. Yet, the homogenization of conceptions of regional and national belonging, the nationalization of samba and the global flows of consumption and circulation of Afro-Brazilian expressive cultures to which samba has been tethered and by which black Bahian social actors are further marginalized, do represent dominant discourses that are contested and restructured through Caboclos’ aesthetic and social movements.

While samba de Caboclos constitutes a well-established genre within Candomblé's composite ritual schemas--even if historically charges of foreign influence and impurity affixed to the form--I now turn my attention to an anomalous event, a seemingly out-of-place performance of Bahian funk on the terreiro's sanctuary floor. At the 2019 Caboclo festa, Mãe Oba's granddaughter Ritinha and a gaggle of four more children moved in and out of the sanctuary, according to the procedure of events and their respective obligations. As the night wore on, a while after the duo between Sete and Boiadeiro, the kids found seats on chairs and on the floor, near the Caboclos' roda, and began practicing their own Bahian funk moves to the rhythms of the samba percussion. Although funk stems from its own discrete socio-historical lineage of global/local configurations and race relations (Sansone 2003), its strongly accented isolations, emphasis on the pelvic oscillations and transgressive use of lower levels of space – in relation to other South American and/or Euro-inspired social and partner dance forms such as the samba de gafieira, tango, forro or a ballroom style like the waltz – locates the Brazilian funk within a schema of "loose" and "broken" (solto and quebradilha) aesthetics, and demonstrates a correspondence with Caboclo performance.

Although the term “funk” originally referred, in 1970s and 80s Brazil, to any imported electronically-based dance music from the US or Europe, by the late eighties the music became rapidly Brazilian-produced funk music sung in Portuguese, mostly in the baile funk parties of Rio, in “an emphatically working-class and juvenile Rio de Janeiro slang” (Sansone 117). Interestingly, sociologist and critical race theorist Livio Sansone notes that despite its popularity as a distinctly Brazilian style and its sonic divergence from American genres, “almost all music critics dismiss Brazilian funk as a poor lower-class urban version of US electronic black music

such as Hip Hop and R&B.”²¹⁶ In Bahia during my fieldwork in 2018 and 2019, the most popular dances for youth were called “funk” on the ground, but known as “Brazilian twerk” in North America and Europe, where they have been integrated into a modicum of fitness programs in studios and online. These funk choreographies in Bahia, which I saw performed with equal technical prowess by young people of all genders, involve furiously virtuosic contractions and extensions of the lumbar spine and hip joints at different levels, including body positions with hands and feet on the floor, upright with the torso plunged to a 90 degree angle with the legs, or deep knee-bended positions resembling the ballet move known as *grand plié*, with unequivocal focus on isolated and polycoordinated articulations of the “bunda.” Despite Brazilian funk’s embedding in the black subcultural musical scene of Rio de Janeiro – where in the mid 1990s, police campaigns against nightclubs charged organizers with noise pollution, instigating violence, and alleged complicity with drug barons of the lower-class neighborhoods where baile funks were held (Sansone 118) – kids in Salvador definitely told me that “funk is from Bahia” (Fundação June, 2018).

Coming back to the festa at the terreiro, featuring funk: When the Caboclos take notice of the young people’s shenanigans, looking over and beginning to migrate towards the group, Ritinha stands up and performs her “box” dance – popping the pelvis back on the sagittal plane (pelvic extension), flexing at one hip, popping forward (pelvic contraction) and then breaking at the other hip to create a square – and other moves that the children here practice in the street. The Caboclos become fascinated. This begins a trend; they keep asking Ritinha, through gesture, to demonstrate her moves, and eventually invite other youths to dance their funk styles too. One of the other youths is a *filha de santo* of around eight years old who incorporated Oxum at Olubaje

²¹⁶ see also Garcia 2019.

last year, the daughter of the magnificent equede. For me, the exchange appears scandalous at first, yet awe-striking. Questions swirl in my western-educated brain. Are the girls being sexualized? Are they being empowered through the reification and sanctification of their stigmatized funk moves in the roda de santo? I am not sure how to interpret the event, which transgresses an age boundary in a way I have never before witnessed at the festas. Reflecting on this scenario in the proceeding days and weeks, however, I come to view Ritinha's funk dancing in the roda de santo through a more complex lens.

By encouraging Ritinha and other younger members of the terreiro to contribute to the dance dimensions of the ceremony, the incorporated Caboclos and body of non-incorporated devotees successfully engaged a generational demographic often excluded, either by default and disinterest, institutional norms or esoteric requirements such as familiarity with socio-religious texts and codes, from ritual participation. Furthermore, the senior members' acknowledgement and approval of the childrens' funk choreographies signalled a subversion of Candomblé's programs of seniority/senior control over cultural transmission, aesthetic innovation and the definition and redefinition of the traditional as constituted by dance praxis. Distinct from the sambas around which this chapter pivots, with the exception of the samba duet involving a younger (though technically, adult) male-bodied adept, Ritinha's funk intervention and the affirmation of its legitimacy in the ritual space breaks with dominant logics that place adults in positions of authority over their juniors and which are often reinscribed in religious hierarchies and, more importantly, in familial and social relations at large. However, while the performances of funk at the festa constitute a novel adaptation of a popular youth culture into the Caboclo roda, the structuring of seniority by measure of a person's status in the terreiro's own hierarchy rather than age is actually germane to Candomblé, as Mãe Oba affirms (interview July 2019) – the

order of initiates in the invocation circle, for example, follows their stage of initiation, so that the newest initiates, regardless of age, come out after the « elder » adepts who have completed their seven year obligations.²¹⁷ Thus, the Caboclos' reverent attention to Ritinha's performance also reflects her status as the future high priestess of the terreiro.

Conclusions

The loose and broken aesthetic politics of Ilê Axé Oba Ina's Caboclos constitute key features of dark horse kinetics as a critical, heterodox Candomblé performance praxis. This chapter explored the qualities of *solto* and *quebradinha* in a variety of Caboclo dances including solo, duo and ensemble sambas and a unique iteration of resigified Brazilian funk. I showed how practitioners of a non-traditional, female-led community, in which social and capital resources are openly dedicated to Caboclo practices, generate alternative discourses of corporeal mobility, racial freedom, sexual morality and gender fluidity as they innovate on established ceremonial protocols and deconstruct generational hierarchies of power.

The social fabric of the Ilê Axé Oba Ina's terreiro community is woven with an integrity that supports the Caboclos' insurgent efforts at loosening and deconstructing Bahian and Brazilian identity discourses of civility and nationalism, accepted binaries for gender presentation, and sexual taxonomies that stigmatize Black women's desires and lifestyle choices. In the next and final chapter of my dissertation, I address a Candomblé temple on Itaparica Island, across the Bay of All Saints from the capital city. Located even further from the Salvador's central circulations of capital, foreigners and discourses of religious respectability, the terreiro Ilê Omin Guiam resists categorization in the ethnic scaffolding of Candomblé

²¹⁷ Mestre Valmir, a capoeira master at the International Foundation of Capoeira Angola), situates the rule of seniority as measured by length of time within a particular ritual or martial culture as a general principle of Afro-Diasporic practices in Brazil (class notes May 18 2018, FICA, Dois de julho, Bahia).

affiliations; the reigning priestess, Mãe Nilzete, classifies her practice as primarily Jeje, meaning that her ritual season is organized around the *Vodun* of Dahomean origins in present-day Benin. However, as she notes, divinities of diverse lineages including certain Orixás from the Ketu “nation” as well as *Inquice* from the Angolan Candomblé complexes, feature at her festas (interview 2015). Every year in August, Mãe Nilzete hosts a two-day festival that begins with an homage to the Inquice Tempo and closes with a Caboclo offering and celebration. At Ilê Omin Guiam, the Caboclos identify with indigenous historicities, modes of bodily decoration and loose, broken samba aesthetics similar in many ways to those discussed in this chapter. However, whereas at Mãe Oba’s, most of the Caboclos that populate her lively festivals are embodied by female devotees, at Mãe Nilzete’s Candomblé the majority of initiates who come prepared to circle with their Caboclos are men. I will examine the gendered interactions between Caboclos and their male-identified devotees, and community participants, usually female, within the political context and container of the house’s matrilineal, matriarchal leadership.

CHAPTER FIVE

As danças mais puxados: Caboclo Mediums’ “Driving” Dances on Itaparica Island

“O corpo é um portal que, simultaneamente, inscreve e interpreta, significa e é significado, sendo projetado como continente e conteúdo, local, ambiente e veículo da memória” (Leda Martins 2002, 89).

“The body is a portal that, simultaneously, inscribes and interprets, signifies and is signified, designed as continent and contained, a vehicle of place, environment and memory.” (Leda Martins 2002, 89).

-August 2018, Itaparica Island, Ponto de Areia, terreiro Ilê Omim Guian: Mãe Nilzete and her daughter, Rosinha Adesibi, a junior priestess, lead the calls as they circle in a close knit file with the *filhos de santo*, the initiated members of the house. Roberto pauses in place, creating a stark textural contrast to the continuous motion of the invocation steps being performed by the others. Pitched forward at the waist, he stumbles into the center, crossing one leg in front of the other, then stops again while the callers keep singing. Roberto arches his whole spine, face to the open sky. Iya Alagsy, still singing, approaches him and places a hand on his back. She removes the cap covering Roberto’s head as he straightens himself up. *Sultão das Matas* (Sultan of the Forest), the guest Caboclo of the night, has incorporated in his son’s body. He steps out of Roberto’s shoes and removes the wooden beads around Roberto’s neck.

With knees deeply flexed, the Sultan executes several grounded passages, crossing one foot behind the other, and bringing the elbows up to create ninety degree angles in the arms as the accent foot taps down on the concrete sanctuary floor. Synced with the drummers’ break, he accelerates into a powerful low-slung samba, a triplet requiring quick articulations of the hip joints above feet that replace each other as one at a time flies off the earth. In what feels like sudden succession, one and another and another devotee’s body leaps across the scene, jumps into the air, stumbles across the diameter of the opened up circle, bodies quiver and collide.

These bodies that have been ritually closed²¹⁸ before the ceremony are dancing at a crossroads. Directing the comings and goings of initiates, Caboclos, rhythms and calls at the ceremonial intersection of the festa, the priestess and her daughter maintain their composure as they attend to each of the entidades and direct the ceremonial proceedings.

I first met Caboclos at Iya Alagsy's 2013 August ceremony on Itaparica Island, an hour ferryboat ride away from the metropolis of Salvador da Bahia, at the start of my Masters' research. Iya Alagsy had publically announced the second day of her annual two-day festival, dedicated to the Nkissi or Congo-Angolan divinity Tempo, and the Caboclos of the house, in a now defunct state-sponsored monthly cultural guide, *Bahia Tursa*.²¹⁹ The first night had not been listed in the magazine, and in the following years I made efforts to attend the entire festival, held on August 10th, the date associated with Tempo's birthday, which coincides with my own. In this chapter I employ various points of entry to the annual ceremony as a whole, drawing out threads from several scenarios that I witnessed in my return visits over several years. These threads include the invocation and samba dances of Caboclos on the first evening of the festival, and the ways that the specific gender and sex configurations of Iya Alagsy's Caboclo ceremonies dialogue with historicities of ethnic and liturgical difference in Bahia. In relation, I contextualize and explore the cultivation and presence of the Nkissi Tempo from the Bantu-Angolan

Candomblé matrix, in a temple whose priestess discursively identifies with Dahomean and, to a

²¹⁸ Corpo fechado or "closed body" is a body philosophy and corporeal construction central to Candomblé that involves, among other elements, ritually "closing" the body through observing gustatory and sexual taboos, body-making initiation rites such as sealing a divinity inside the top of a devotee's head, and using a chalk powder mixed with herbs (*pemba*) to mark points of a medium's body with cosmographic symbols after a cleansing and before trance (see also Johnson 2002).

²¹⁹ *Bahia Tursa's* (no longer existent) listing of Candomblé ceremonies brings up sets of issues around which terreiros invite public access, the motivations and impacts of state efforts to promote some Afro-religious centers, and the juxtaposition of anti-Black state violence with the appropriation of Afro-Bahian practices into institutional heritage discourses. Historians including Romos (2010), Smith (2016), Pinho (2010), Scott (1999) and Hartikainen (2019) detail these issues in their institutional critiques.

lesser extent, Yoruban lineage affiliations, which dominate over Angolan houses in number and social cachet.

Separated by the Bay of All Saints and the historically divergent development of Itaparica Island's political and religious economies in relation to those of Bahia's metropolis, Iya Alagsy's terreiro attracts practitioners who face alienation from the worlds of orthodox Candomblé (and the potential social, political, economic and spiritual benefits that participation can confer) and from normative Bahian society because of their gender and sex identifications. Her temple thus offers a fertile locus point for examining how non-dominant, remotely located Candomblés create spaces that visibilize and support expressions of transgressive sexualities and socialities, through the platform of public ritual performance. Unlike the social makeup of the other ceremonies that I addressed in Chapters One, Two and Three, Iya Alagsy's homage to Tempo and the Caboclos is performed by predominantly male-identified practitioners. Though the other cases did also involve men, Iya Alagsy's August festivals differ in that very few, if any, women initiates offer their own bodies as vehicles for Caboclo incorporations, even though, in every year that I attended, some of Alagsy's female novices participated in the invocation cycles.

However, the high priestess, her daughter Rosinha and invited guests including several elder women family members occupy important, non-medium positions in this ceremony's order. When Iya Alagsy and Rosinha are not accompanying the invocation circle or guiding the incorporated Caboclos in prayer, they sit in designated chairs flanked by the drummers' dais on one side and visiting, guest family members on the other. Thus, their presences spatially anchor the ceremonial action constituted by the Caboclos and their male devotees, and appear to contain the seemingly transgressive performances within a traditionalist framework, since the governing priestesses that embody the orthodox image of female, Afro-descendent leadership.

Iya Alagsy's location on a hilltop in a semi-rural zone of Itaparica Island, across an Atlantic channel from Bahian Candomblé's orthodox sites, brings forth distinctive performances of gender and sex, as they interrelate with race and class in this out-of-the-way terreiro. Itaparica Island is, in fact, known as an important region in Candomblé geography, because of the Egun temples – discrete, male-dominated communities dedicated to Fon-derived ancestral practices – concentrated in that locality. Despite the diversity of Itaparica's religious landscape, ethnographic discourses have centered the Island's strong genealogical tradition of Egun temples, linked to Black fishing communities of Ponta de Areia, where Iya Alagsy's temple also sits, while other Candomblés have garnered little visibility and prestige. Thus, although Egun studies by Juana Elbein dos Santos in the 60s/70s and Julio Braga in the 90s have gained notoreity in the canon of Candomblé sociology, the religious resources offered by other terreiros on the Island have been overshadowed and undervalued.²²⁰

Although the Egun and Orixá/Vodun Candomblés maintained historically intense and ambiguous relations, an influx of tourism in the late twentieth century reconfigured the quartier's cartography by pushing Ponta de Areia's heterogeneous ritual mediators onto the public stage. Hence, despite the asymmetries mentioned above, as Tavares and Caroso (2015) point out, the coexistence of various forms of Candomblé on the Island of Itaparica, and their intra-cultural exchange during festival cycles has produced a ritual economy marked by competition and collaboration. Relevant to this chapter, researchers Tavares and Caroso construe the region's

²²⁰ See Santos 1988 and Braga 1995. Egun Candomblés are famously linked with secrecy, danger associated with cultivating the ancestors, and masculinity. Ritual performances mobilized in the cult of eguns confer a high degree of improvisation, competitiveness and surprise during the ceremonies (Drewal 1992).

ceremonial festas as events that bring to light a particularly dynamic circularity of symbolic goods, social legitimacies and visibilities.²²¹

Against the background of Ponto de Areia's dynamic circulation and intersection of ritual histories and mediators, the spatial, social and ontological relations of Iya Alagsy's joint ceremonies for Tempo and the Caboclos participate in the making of a corporeal economy that Tassio Ferreira (2019) calls the *crossroads body* or *corpo encruzilhado*. Although Ferreira invokes the crossroads body as a theatrical performance pedagogy based on Candomblé d'Angola praxis, I have adapted their formulation for analyzing ceremonial events because of its particular relevance to Angola Candomblé's aesthetics and their manifestations in the spheres of invocation, incorporation and dances of the embodied entities. However, Santana's model does not directly address dance within ceremonial or stage contexts, focusing instead on a philosophical underpinning for dramatic exploration. My reading of choreographies at Ilê Omin Guiam through the lens of the crossroads body thus contributes to this emergent theorizing of Angolan Candomblé's poetics.

The crossroads body indexes the meeting and overlapping of different temporal and cultural trajectories, and constitutes a privileged site for the processual management and production of complex, embodied personal and collective histories of place. Devotees forge a crossroads body individually and as an ensemble, through their use of driving, impulsive ceremonial dance movements that splice through and across the ceremonial circle. These gestures signal an aesthetic that Iya Alagsy describes as "puxado," which infers a quality of rigorous and toughness as well as an action of pulling, drawing, and stretching out. Iya Alagsy links the performance of "danças puxadas" to the Caboclos of her temple and specifically to their embodiment by male practitioners from different corners of the island, as well as some that hail

²²¹ Tavares and Caroso, 2015.

from the mainland of Salvador. Sitting within the schema of dark horse kinetics as an aesthetic politics that interrupts, through ceremonial performance, hegemonic understandings of ritual and social value in Bahia, these impulsive movements – lunges and leaps that splice into the center of the circle and that propel incorporated entities into contact with each other – recreate the temple as place of intersection or crossroads where ritual values can be reworked. My construction of the idea of place here relies on multiple vectors including Tempo’s “seat,” one of the physical manifestations of the deity, at a tree in the terreiro’s courtyard, and the multifaceted relations between Angola Candomblé, Bahia’s Caboclos and marginalized performances of Black masculinity and homo-sociality.

Looking at ceremonial animal sacrifices at the base of the Tempo tree through the lens of the crossroads body allows for the linkage of sequential ritual events including animal sacrifice, the transformation of the animal to nourishment for the terreiro’s multiple bodies (divinities, devotees, community participants, trees), and dancing at the crossroads. This expanded view links lines and shapes of blood from the animal sacrifice at Iya Alagsy’s with cosmographic patterns created by the ceremonial dance aesthetics of Caboclos sambas, through sets of coordinated bodily techniques that come into relief. To explore the construction and significance of devotees’ thrusting, “driven” movements and their crossroads making effect, in the first section I analyze the angular designs and pathways that are instantiated in the animal sacrifices and Caboclos’ performances at August ceremonies in 2013, 2015 and 2018.

In previous chapters, I theorized "dark horse kinetics" as an aesthetic politics grounded in the feminist poiesis – which spans across orthodox and outlying Candomblé practices – and generated by Caboclos’ heterodox ways of interacting, adorning their bodies, and dancing. Now I will argue that together with these destabilizing and fragmenting body techniques that work to

critique dominant hetero-patriarchal and systemically racist social orders, the dynamic incorporations and sambas of spirit entities at Iya Alagasy's annual August ceremonies create a moving field in which new socialities and frameworks of ritual agency are framed in a coherent narrative sequence (Nelson 2008). The second part of this chapter looks at how dark horse kinetics is deployed by male practitioners who are excluded from Candomblé's orthodox conventions of men's labor and from normative Bahian and Brazilian constructions of male identity, especially in relation to race and to social imaginaries of Amerindian identity and of Blackness. Dark horses of the Candomblé world, Caboclos are able to enact a pointed critique, through their dancing, of gender norms as they are constructed in Afro-religious spheres and in Bahian and Brazilian society. These critiques, I argue, work towards unfixing macho authority from male, heterosexual identity.

On a practical level, male mediums have experienced exclusion from orthodox ceremonial spaces, had their performances of spirit embodiment made contingent to the gender identities of the guardian entity (see Chapter Two), and/or been allowed to "dance" on the sanctuary at conscribed moments of public ceremony. Even today, the increased visibility of male and trans-identified initiates who circle with their saints continues to inspire suspicion due to Candomblé's preconceptions of what a reproductive body looks like and shifting social concerns over the performance of heteronormativity. While Western European influences have undoubtedly impacted twentieth century ideologies of ceremonial performance, they have also intersected with Candomblé's ontological female-centricity, which still generally assigns a reproductive body status to women as opposed to men, resulting in differing applications of ritual gender fluidity in relation to female versus male spirit embodiments.

In Bahian Candomblés, conversations about homosexuality and lesbianism are often, but certainly not always, relegated to the private sphere (see also Allen 2012), although “gay,” “lesbian,” “bi-” and “trans” are commonly used and understood categories of identification (interviews Johnny 2019, Liz 2018, Christiam 2018).²²² Overt discussion of sexual preferences is largely taboo, however, in many Candomblé settings, even though most practitioners do not conform hetero-patriarchal ideals of civil marriage in a monogamous domestic setting. Yet, gender non-conformity is valorized in ritual contexts, especially for women, whose embodiments of masculine and feminine spirit entities comprise standard religious expressions across the gambit of orthodox and heterodox temples. More controversial, though, are questions of men’s non-heteronormative presentations and their gender fluidity as mediums. During the twentieth century, as medical models that pathologized homosexuality gained currency in Brazil and fixated around male cross-dressing (see Green 1999), male spirit embodiment in general and of feminine divinities in particular became a concern for Candomblé’s public image. Consequently, in conjunction with other factors including, potentially, Candomblé’s pan-West and Central African sexual ideologies and scholarly (mis)readings of men’s performances (see Landes 1947; Matory 2008), male mediumship has occupied a marginal sphere and been conceptually stigmatized in relation to Caboclo and Angolan Candomblé practice.

Though Candomblé is monolithically attributed to African origins, practices linked to Bantu-Angolan ancestries have been racialized in distinct ways throughout the histories of colonial and post-colonial Bahian society as a continuously dynamic cultural, racial, magico-religious and economic contact zone.²²³ Influential twentieth century observers including Roger

²²² I never heard the terms “queer” or “pansexual” deployed in Bahia, by Candomblésistas or otherwise.

²²³ Commentators including Silva (2018) discuss the specific mechanisms by which Bantu peoples were racialized and devalued in Bahian social and religious arenas, not only by foreign observers of

Bastide (1960) considered the Bantu-Angolan Candomblés, with which Caboclo were also associated, as culturally degraded and inferior to the “authentic” (typically female led) nagô houses. Additionally, in the popular and academic imaginary, male mediumship and male leadership is much more common, “in the Angola and Caboclo nations than in the Nagô-jeje terreiros,” where leaders are “mothers,” (Johnson 2002, 192). However, this chapter intervenes in interpretations that place Angolan Candomblés outside of Bahia’s Afro-religious matriarchal traditions, positing that male mediums and women leaders can mutually support each other. Observing how male Caboclo “horses” circulate within a field that is bound, contained and legitimized through female leadership at Ilê Omin Guian, I suggest that male practitioners are able to claim and authenticate their authority as mediums by situating their performances within matri-focal Afro-centric spaces. They do so by convening within Iya Alagsy’s center, a terreiro with multiple ethnic affiliations that cultivates nagô-oriented Orixá, jeje Vodun, Angolan Nkissis and Brazilian Caboclo. By designing the August ceremonial cycles around the Caboclo and their male mediums, most of whom return on a yearly basis, the high priestess valorizes men’s participation and acknowledges the ritually procreative function of their performances. At the same time, since the Caboclo ceremony is conjoined with the temple’s homage to Tempo, an Angolan Nkissi, male spirit embodiment within the context of the August cycles meet normative expectations for demographically higher male presence in the Angolan Candomblé roda.

1. *O ‘Modo Bantu’ e o Corpo Encruzilhado: The “Bantu Style” and the Crossroads Body*

Candomblé (i.e. Bastide 1960) but also within stratified Black communities. Aragão adds that stereotypes against Bantu-speaking populations precede forced migration to Brazilian shores, suggesting that inhabitants of the Yoruba and Fon kingdoms viewed Kikongo and Angolan groups as aggressive and unrefined because of their reputation as invaders (class discussion 2018).

State and national agencies have unevenly recognized select Candomblé temples as bearers of Bahia's intangible cultural heritage sites and/or as recipients of governmental support. These institutional processes have included the conference of heritage status by The National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN),²²⁴ a federal body linked to the Ministry of Tourism, since the mid-twentieth century, and, in the early 2000s, the funded renovation of close to sixty Candomblé temples through Salvador's newly created municipal secretariat for Afro-Brazilian affairs, Municipal Secretariat of Reparation (SEMUR) (Hartikainen 2019).²²⁵ Though official recognition has conferred certain cachet to these houses, these state-sanctioned celebrations of Bahia's Afro-religious repositories are also part of a complex arrangement whereby, as researcher Piers Armstrong suggests, "material space and symbolic prestige are conceded to the black community in exchange for relative passivity" (1999).²²⁶ Thus, the ranking of Candomblé sites as cultural patrimony, and, in a parallel social development, the ascending visibility and popularity of Candomblé imagery outside of its primarily Afro-Bahian communities in the twentieth century, has not resulted in the increase of civic or political representation for Black Bahian subjects. This is not to deny the significance of IPHAN's efforts, however, for many practitioners and in other arenas, such as international tourism. Nevertheless, these federal legitimizations of Candomblé experts and their houses as sources of religious knowledge have often reinforced the privilege of Candomblé's better-known temples, including

²²⁴ In Portuguese: Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional.

²²⁵ In Portuguese: Secretaria Municipal da Reparação ([Hartikainen](#) 2019). See also Parés 2012; Romo 2010; Sansi 2007, 2016.

²²⁶ In Matory's words, the Bahian state "now publically endorses certain Afro-Brazilian religions and performing arts, while colluding in the racist exclusion of blacks from political and economic power" (2005, 46).

the orthodox nagô houses featured in Chapters One and Two (Ilê Axé Iyá Omin Iyamassê or Terreiro do Gantois, and Ilê Axé Opô Aganju) through patrimonialization.

In contrast, most Candomblé temples affiliated with Bantu-derived languages and practices from the West Central African regions of Congo and Angola have not benefited from the esteem afforded to these temples aligned with Yoruban ethno-national identity.²²⁷ Accordingly, Candomblés identified with Angolan heritage and the Bantu matrix of divinities known as Nkissi have, generally, struggled to legitimize themselves. A confluence of factors help account for these historical marginalizations, including racist hierarchies through which scholars, politicians, and some practitioners framed Angolan Candomblés as more “mixed,” syncretic and tied to the creolized, socially outcast Caboclos, relative to the construct of nagô purity (see Chapter One). The negative connotations of cultural mixing within discourses of Afro-Brazilian religions gestures to the paradoxical existence of antagonistic understandings of sexual/cultural interaction between races or miscegenation (*mestiçagem*) and their deployments in different spheres and by different sectors of Brazilian society. During the First Republic (1889-1930) ruling classes perceived miscegenation as a threat to social development and progress, provoking a national ‘identity crisis’ that found resolution in the re-packaging of miscegenation as a positive outcome of colonization that yielded Brazil’s “democracy of races,” during the New State regime of 1937-45 (Rosa 2015, 14-15). The racial democracy ideology, notes Cristina Rosa, not only allowed for the valorization of forms linked to mixed bodies and mixed cultures such as capoeira and samba, but also found in these forms the “necessary conditions for its representation and mass dissemination” (15). This formulation signals in positive terms a colorful cultural and racial history and a celebratory trope of difference

²²⁷ Notable exceptions include the Angola terreiro Tumba Junsara.

reconciled. At the same time, racial harmony as a national political ideology also authorizes white and elite participation in these culturally hybrid Brazilian practices.

However, in discourses of Afro-Brazilian religions, another set of historical considerations calls for attention. While a comprehensive discussion of the values of Black racial and cultural purity in Candomblé is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that Atlantic Africans – Afro-Bahian travelers and returnees to the West African coast, Western-educated literate Africans schooled by British missionaries in Lagos, and (Brazilian-born) priest/esses in Bahia – drove the creation of a novel collective pan-Yoruban ethnic identity that did not precede the dispersal of Africans from regions now associated with Yoruba-land. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Yoruba intellectuals, Candomblé practitioners, travelers, returnees and informants to foreign scholars advanced the idea of Yoruban religion’s superiority, dignity, nagô purity and “ancient pedigree” (Matory 2005, 63-64). Even if their ideologies of racial purity were influenced by colonialists’ and slave owners’ contempt for racially and culturally mixed subjects, the chief architects of “nagô-centrism and African purism in Brazil were African-Brazilian priests and travelers themselves” (60-61; see also Parés 2004). Nagô-centric African purism, on one hand, and discourses of *mestiçagem* and racial democracy, on the other, have thus produced their own diverging and contradictory criteria for qualifying cultural purity and mixture. These different axiological schemas also correspond to divisions in national and regional identity projects, since Brazil’s modern nationalism and image on the global stage are built on the premise of racial democracy while state and corporate constructions of Bahian culture revolve around the idea of authentically African roots.²²⁸ Thus in Bahian identity frameworks, mixed-race also negates the purity otherwise associated with Black (or white)

²²⁸ These different systems of evaluating Africanist and Afro-syncretic forms in Brazil account, at least partially, for why practices such as capoeira Angola, inextricably tethered to Bantu origins, are highly regarded nationally and internationally, in contrast to the historical undervaluing of Angolan Candomblé.

identifications in normative racial discourse, and becomes a trope of continuation and fusing of that which needs to be kept apart.

Yet another factor in the exclusion of Angolan Candomblé from the arena of African purity, for Priest and sociologist Ricardo Aragão, was the Angolan priest/esses and practitioners' disinterest in seeking political alliances with state officials and elites who could offer patronage and support to their terreiros in return for partisanship, in juxtaposition to the alliances between the Yoruban-affiliated "mothers" and municipal officials, such as the cultural icon Mãe Menininha and three-time governor of Bahia Antônio Carlos Magalhães. Furthermore, the Angolan mothers, preferred to keep their ritual matters private and did not welcome the attendance of visitors from the intellectual elite, thus avoiding the kinds of informant relationship that nagô practitioners forged with foreign scholars who reciprocally reproduced their discourses of Yoruban superiority (class discussion 2018 UFBA, see also Johnson 2002). Aragão challenges the dominant narrative of Angola Candomblé's having integrated the Caboclo personae through cultural cross-fertilization and Creolization with Bahia's indigenous populations. Instead, Aragão situates Caboclos as historically embedded "*donos da memória*" or "memory keepers" within the Bantu tradition (see also Teles dos Santos 1995 and Rabelo and Aragao 2018), while admitting that historical collaboration between Amerindian and African groups in the early colonial era still formatively shaped Candomblé's development. Aragão locates these tendencies within a broader epistemological orientation that he calls the "modo Bantu" or the "Bantu way" of being "open to external contexts" rather than insisting on a linear connection to the (reconstituted) past.

Called to the priesthood as an infant, Iya Alagsy's motherhouse, in which she was initiated in Cachoeira, a city in the renconcavo region surrounding Salvador, cultivated numerous Nkissis. Alagsy continued this legacy when she seated the Nkissi Tempo on her temple grounds.

Iya Alagsy's terreiro thus epitomizes these controversies and epistemological currents, as a Candomblé house that privileges the cultivation of Angolan Nkisis while falling outside of Bahia's ethno-national categories of Black Atlantic religions, since she continues to honor Orixás and Voduns that reign in the jejê-Fon and nagô-Yoruban traditions.²²⁹ Her terreiro, Ilê Omin Guiam, occupies a borderlands both in terms of its spatial dislocation from the metropole of Salvador, and in its amalgam of politically salient ethno-racial assemblages; in the same ritual cycle that honors the "Brazilian" Caboclos, Iya Alagsy venerates the Congo-Angolan Nkissi Tempo, one of the primary guardians of the house. Conceptually, Alagsy, like many other practitioners, associates the Caboclos with the "original land custodians" or Amerindian peoples in Bahia, primarily from the Tupi language group, while the Nkissi are racially linked to Congo-Angolan heritage even if they have been reterritorialized to Brazilian soil.

The name Tempo translates as Time, though multiple practitioners have shared with me an understanding of Tempo as encompassing both the temporal and spatial dimensions of reality (interviews Perreira May 2018, Adesibi Aug. 2015). Tempo is also a tree, as Iya Alagsy explains:

There is a tree called Akoko that we planted in the time of Tempo's seating (o "assentamento de Tempo"). But when I gave a grand offering to Tempo in the era of the confirmation of an Ogã, then came forth the tree called Loko – Iroko in Yoruba and Tempo in the Angolan tradition — who is very fundamental within the Religion. (personal correspondence Oct 20 2020)

Interestingly, Iya Alagsy describes the tree using the Fon language descriptor of Loko, a Vodum, even though she recognizes the entidade Tempo as belonging to the Angolan matrix. This linguistic discrepancy fittingly correlates to the interwovenness of Vodum, Orixá and other

²²⁹ Candomblés in Brazil have historically aligned with ethno-linguistic categories of jejê-Fon, from the present day region of Benin, nagô-Yoruba from Western Benin and Nigeria, and Bantu-Angola (also known as Congo-Angola) from West Central African regions. Called « nações » or nations, these groupings also correspond to waves of African forced migration to Brazil (see Chapter One). Scholars have noted that these divisions operate primarily as social boundaries rather than ethnic affiliations.

familial presences on the level of everyday practice in Bahian Candomblés including Iya

Alagsy's. The priestess further explains how Tempo became a primary deity of her house:

In my *familia de axé* (family of axé, ritual family), Nkissi have been worshipped for a long time. The *mãe pequena* (little mother or right hand to the head priestess) of the terreiro had been initiated in the Bantu nation and she made the seat of Tempo in my house. By the time my current Pai de Santo arrived to formalize my obligations, the Caboclo and Tempo seats already existed. He also worships Tempo in the tradition of his terreiro ... and in my biological family, on my mother's side, many people cultivate Nkisis. (personal correspondence Sept 2019)

This passage demonstrates how Iya Alagsy's ritual and biological family overlap and entwine, referencing each other and dually informing the ecology of her outlying Candomblé.

While some priestesses and their collaborators have been preoccupied with ethnic markers of ethnic "purity," Iya Alagsy describes the culturally hybrid and heterogenous composition of her terreiro with pride (interviews 2013 and 2018). Aragão, a pai de santo in the Angolan lineage, juxtaposes the "Bantu style" against the historically nagô fixation on purity, asserting that the Angolan way is one of "opening out to broader contexts," such as the conditions of Bahia's cosmopolitan society, in which persons of varied ethno-liturgical backgrounds intermixed in the terreiros, and the necessity of forging cross-cultural collaborations with Bahia's Amerindian populations, especially in quilombos or maroon enclaves, where runaway slaves joined native communities (class discussion Sept 2018). Detailing her family history, Iya Alagsy notes that her father grew up in a quilombo in the interior neighborhood of Cabula, in Salvador, as the son of mixed race Afro-descendent and Amerindian couple. Braiding together different ancestral and ethno-liturgical genealogies into the terreiro's religious calendar and architecture, Ilê Omin Guian exemplifies this "modo Bantu;" the various entidades that she cultivates are ritually seated in the internal rooms and outdoor quads of the temple.

Before the opening of the August ceremony cycle in 2018, Iya Alagsy had determined, by cowrie shell divination, that Tempo and the Caboclos desired a sacrificial offering of several birds. When I asked about the offering, Iya Alagsy informed me that an animal “of four feet” such as a goat or, even more extravagantly, a cow, would only be demanded by the entities in special circumstances. More commonly, she related, they prefer birds such as pigeons or doves. A few hours after I had arrived, the ceremony began with a sacrificial offering of four white doves and one pigeon, at the base of the Tempo tree in the back of a narrow courtyard behind the open-air sanctuary. Not wanting to cross any unspoken boundaries of participation for visitors, I hung back in the front of the house even as the drums began to roll and the initiates emerged from the kitchen where they had been cooking. Iya Alagsy returned and motioned for me to join. At the call of the drums, Iya Alagsy and Rosinha begin chanting over the birds. Then one by one, an ogã of the house artfully sprayed their blood into cosmographic patterns at the base of the tree.²³⁰ Accompanied by a low but constant chanting and percussion, the ogãs took turns offering the birds to Tempo and the Caboclos. They dripped the blood of the avian creatures in crossed lines across the base of two trees, then placed the feet along the lines of the X pattern, creating an intersection of angles. Iya Alagsy recounts how this sacrifice nourishes living beings that come together to create the ritual:

We make offering to the spirit, the body, the community, to sacrament our ‘assentimentos,’” [the seats of the house’s guardian entidades]. “The internal parts (blood, vital organs, visceral head) of animals we offer and the meat is to feed our bodies, it serves for the celebration, to eat, to concretize relations with the people, who live around here. The blood is axé.

²³⁰ Kongo-derived cosmogram symbols has been of interest to art historians including Robert Farris Thompson (1983), and capoeira scholars including Browning (1995) and Rosa (2016) have noted ways that these forms appear in capoeira gestures and aesthetic politics. Although the cosmogram symbol per se is not inscribed on the ground in Candomblé rituals, the shapes and pathways of the cosmogram feature in the sacrificial designs and invocation circle, as I will argue, and in gestural choreographies of greeting.

Iya Alagsy's testimony explains why the blood of the pigeons and dove is most vital for feeding Tempo and the Caboclos, strengthening the divinities with the energetic "capital" contained in bodily substances (Norton 2011) and fortifying their bonds with the temple community. Through the sacrificial process, the birds become bodies at the crossroads as the *axé*, metaphysical muscle, contained in their flesh is distributed among the tree, other spirits and humans seated in the sanctuary. The Tempo tree growing in the back yard of the terreiro is a body at the crossroads and a body that becomes marked with crossroads, when the *ogãs* and priestesses create intersecting lines and angled patterns on its trunk during the opening of the ceremony. The blood sprayed along the tree trunk, together with the birds' feet and heads, forms a spatial pattern of constellated, intersecting lines that repeats in the summons that follows, after Tempo incorporates in one of the male devotees present, and leads everyone inside.²³¹

Drumming begins again, signaling the start of another ceremonial phase, the invocation circle or *xirê*. Iya Alagsy links both the animal sacrifice and invocation circle with the *Nkisi Pambu Nzila*, a spirit entity who resonates with the trickster *Orixá Exu* and is similarly associated with crossroads, doorways, intermediation between the material and spiritual world, and the portals of life and death. In Kikongo, one of the Bantu languages that informs Candomblé d'Ángola's epistememes, *Pambu Nzila* signifies "master of the ways," and has historically been represented as a masculine figure, although *Nzila* also has feminine representations (Santana 2019, 32). In relation to the sacrifice, Iya Alagsy explains: "We begin, we prepare the space, through rituals, we attract lightness, and remove negativity, so that negativity doesn't hold back [the ritual process]." Thus, the sacrificial rituals that prepare the

²³¹ Although attending to the multi-faceted role that relations with sacrificial animals plays in Candomblé practice is outside the scope of this project, there is an emergent body of literature on food and Candomblé. Santeria scholar Elizabeth Perez's analysis of the processes of food preparation in Afro-Cuban religion in the US diaspora is notable for her attention to gender, the processual working out of trauma through cooking and the pedagogic function of sensory experience and affect in religious training.

space of the house to receive and interact with a range of spiritual forces represented by Nkissi, Vodum, Orixá and Caboclo, are themselves oriented around the idea of opening, attracting lightness and lifting the vibrations of the space, which can include removing constrictions caused by the residual presence of unwanted entities who, according to Iya Alagsy, can become affixed to certain persons or places for their own vested purposes, and need to be removed through energetic cleansings.

Subsequently, the invocation circle that follows the sacrifice similarly prepares the bodies of actors in the house to open, to become portals or to become “portalized,” – borrowing Ananya Chatterjea’s terminological formulation for how dance can organize bodies to align with and explore, and not appropriate, the experiences and perspectives of others (Oct 19 2020 lecture, DSA). The circle of initiates, in this case male-identified mediums who mostly hail from the Island, is interrupted by the lunges and jumps of Caboclos incorporating in human bodies. Their lively dances of arrival are exemplified by performances like Sultan of the Forest’s, described at the beginning of this chapter, where after the invocation circle around the sanctuary floor, the King Caboclo’s feet flew off the ground. The xirê seems to decompose into a chaotic juxtaposition of bodies at various stages of ritual process – continuing to circle, recovering from the impact of becoming incarnated, already settled and expressing their Caboclos’ physicality with angular movements of bent elbows and knees and impulsive flying leaps into the air or kicks off the ground.

Seen through the principle of Pambu Nzila as an entry point to ritual transformation, the busy intersection that the circle has dissolved into reads as a crossroads in which bodies have achieved portalization and actively re-organize as loci of multiple pathways, references, dislocations, and possibilities for transformational process through which devotees and their

entities signify their distributed, axé becoming bodies as ritually and socially reproductive. These processes reflect upon the present company so that attendees are implicated in a phenomenological shift that builds community bonds while confirming the terreiro's as an important node in the island's networks of care, since axé, good feeling and, later on, plates of slow-cooked food are circulating abundantly. In this transition the ambling, collective circling motions of invocation give way to another quality, full of angles and driven, directed, accented movements performed by one individual portal body or another. These possibilities are elaborated progressively through ceremonial dancing and interactions that are gestural as well as verbal, such as the exchange of hugs and whispered affirmations of mutual admiration between Caboclos, and partner sambas between incorporated entities and between Caboclos and ceremonial participants, over the next several hours.

Based on what they call an “epistemology of Afro-diasporic corporealities,” Brazilian theatre artist and Angola Candomblesista Tássio Ferreira conceives the crossroads body as a representation of Nkisi Pambu Nzila that can be applied in the development of a method of performance. Santana builds their model on the idea of a readily available body as portal, or as:

a multi-faceted body, which understands and accepts its own history, without having to hide it anymore. It is a body surrendered to its own possibilities, to its repertoire of life....this body concentrates and disseminates forces, and makes information circulate (2019, 35).²³²

My purpose here is to employ the concept of the crossroads body, which Santana theorizes as a corporeal construction of the human in the terreiro, to understand how the braided threads of tree body, animal body, devotee body and temple body are contiguously re-signified in the two-day August homages under discussion, dedicated to Tempo and the Caboclos, which I attended in

²³² My own translations from Ferreira's Portuguese text, “CORPO-PAMBU NZILA: Poéticas ancestrais,” CAD. GIPE CIT Salvador ano 23 n 42 p 25-39 2019.1.

2013, 2015 and 2018. Although this construction of human corporeality pertains to other Candomblé practices as well, it is especially relevant to the Congo-Angolan influenced August ceremonies at Iyá Alagsy's terreiro because of the unique zig-zagging, intersecting, crossroads patterns created in the bird sacrifice and in the sacred roda. By "ceremonies," I invoke not only the temporal duration of each ritual, from the animal sacrifice to the processual dispossession or dispelling of the Caboclos and other entidades, usually in the early morning, but also the daily, weekly, monthly and yearly *obrigações* – obligations such as offerings and cleansing – and acts such as altar maintenance that precede and proceed ritual passages.²³³ For Santana's purposes, the principle of Nzila as a guardian of the crossroads remains relevant before, during, and after transitional moments such as the animal sacrifice or the materialization of the Caboclos, because at every juncture the entity necessarily accompanies the medium's enchantment, giving permission for, and maintaining a navigable channel of, communications between corporeality and immaterial worlds.

As an organizing paradigm, the crossroads body positions the different bodies involved in ceremonial festivities at the meeting of two continuums represented by two lines that intersect. Scholars of dance have noted the prevalence of counter-clockwise movement in circular patterns among African Diasporic dance traditions such as Candomblé (Browning 1995, Daniel 2005) and the Ring Shout in the American South (Hazard-Donald 2011), which are connected by the through-line of their West and Central African precedents in practices of enslaved Africans in the

²³³ Terreiros have various strategies for organizing their ritual calendars. Many, but by no means all, inaugurate the beginning of their ritual cycles in April after lent and honor their Caboclos in July and/or August. Ritual events that mark crucial aspects of an initiate's or cohorts' journey, such as *obrigações* and the official exit of a novice from seclusion (*saida de iao*) also incorporate event-specific timing and sequences. Dates can also shift if the needed resources are not available at a designated time or if the terreiro enters a mourning period, as occurred in 2016 when Iyá Alagsy's public Caboclo festas were canceled while she observed a period of no drumming after the passing of her pai de santo.

New World. In addition, art historians have looked at the Kongo Cosmogram as a longstanding ideographic religious symbol and system within Bakongo art and culture, before and after European contact in 1482, with continued use across West-Central Africa and among African-derived practices of the New World (Farris Thompson 1983). The cosmogram intimates mirrored worlds between the material plane and ancestral plane, divided by a horizontal axis that represents a door or portal between the two worlds (Rosa 2019). Revisiting the Kongo Cosmogram in an experiential workshop at the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance (facilitated by Cristina Rosa, Duke University 2019), I realized, through actually moving along the cosmogram's quartered parts mapped as a circle on the floor and based on the closed cypher or roda of Capoeira, that the invocation circle follows the cosmogram's spatial aesthetic of counter-clockwise rotation. During fieldwork I investigated the question of counter-clockwise rotation and came up with two responses, one inconclusive and one reductive: a practitioner related that she herself is still seeking explanations for this parallel choreographic motif across Africanist cultures and their diasporas, and the other in the Lonely Planet Brazil, which claims that the circle goes against the hands of the clock because the devotees are going back into ancestral time (St. Louis 2013 [1989], 424).

Movement in the cosmogram is counter-clockwise around a circle divided by two lines that meet in the center. Relating back to the August festivals at Iya Alagsy's terreiro, this ideographic cosmo-vision describes the space of the invocation (constant circular motion) and incorporation, wherein the kinesthetic quality shifts from a more relaxed bodily posture to energetic and strong movements that, metaphysically, break through the door/wall between realms of living and dead/spirits. Aesthetically, the kinetic force of "breaking through" rests within the aesthetic of broken or brokenish (quebradinha) found in Caboclos sambas, which I

expanded upon in Chapter Three. Yet in the specific context of incorporation, breaking through describes the jutting motions of several devotees, in the process of becoming embodied by their Caboclos, who transverse the center of the circle and spring vertically off the earth into the air. While their lurches and lunges cross the dividing line between human/material and spirit/intangible, these leaps straight up from the ground travel an axis onto which Rosa maps the polarities of femininity (at the bottom or south end) and maleness (at the north peak). In Rosa's formation of Bakongo cosmogram, the feminine south pole links to "midnight" and the "peak of spiritual power" while at the north – noon – rest maleness and the "peak of physical power," (2019). Travel along and across this axis offers one way of understanding the ritual gender fluidity that Candomblé affords to mediums on a continuum of gender and sex identifications that rub up uncomfortably against Brazil's conservative norms. In the context of ceremonies at Ilê Omin Guian, I see mediums' departures from Candomblé's choreographic norms – their lunges and leaps into the center and buoyant ascents into the air, as analogous phenomenon, especially when considered in light of the cosmogram's spatial patterns. Following a cultural logic that is based on the cosmogram as a spatial order, devotees' movements along circular perimeter of the roda and linearly on the axes of two intersecting lines actually travel, whether in continuous or discontinuous fashion, from a realm of "spirit/femaleness" towards "physical/maleness."

To be clear, the lines of the cosmogram are not imprinted on the earthen floor of the temple sanctuary. However visual renderings of cosmographic patterns do feature in the sacrificial offering, as mentioned earlier, and in the designs of clasped hand gestures with which devotees greet each other. The cosmogram's spatial patterns maintain an unmarked presence in

the sanctuary.²³⁴ Because the sacred circle has been repeatedly sketched as the priestesses and male specialists revolve together, the projection of bodies across the horizontal and vertical spatial axes, as the summoned Caboclos arrive, stands out as a critical juncture. In this framework, the arena of performance also comprises a field for working out tensions between the public-facing conservatism of the Candomblé houses themselves – where sexual orientations are not usually discussed openly – and the generally non-conforming gender and sex practices of participants.

The case of Mãe Stella de Oxossi, the fifth iyalorixá of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, who passed away at age 93 at the end of 2018, and an “out” lesbian in a long-term same sex partnership, would seem to contradict this norm. But, Mãe Stella’s relationship and open sexual orientation stirred controversy among Candomblé communities. So while homosexual and/or lesbian identifications may still not be dominantly accepted, gender fluidity in ritual contexts is germane to the practice. As a daughter of Oxossi, Mãe Stella’s spirit embodiments of a masculine, hunter and warrior Orixá, aligns perfectly with her ritual responsibilities, and not just because becoming incorporated by a male deity fits within a hetero-normative male-female power dynamic (assuming a power relation associated with “possession” of a human devotee). Spirit embodiment of feminine Orixá by women mediums is equally expected and celebrated. Interestingly, Iya Alagsy suggests that though women dominate most of her yearly ceremonies, the Caboclo ceremonies concentrate male devotees because the Caboclos attract male practitioners to a greater degree than the Orixá, specifically because of the “rough” and “driving” dance qualities (personal communication Sept. 2018).

²³⁴ Farris Thompson addresses African ritual practices that do engage renderings of the cosmogram directly and discusses their resonances in diasporic religious practices (1984).

2. When Caboclos Embrace

In the temple's open-air sanctuary, two crossroads bodies intersect. They are two incorporated masculine entities whose meeting is marked by an uncommon public exchange of affection. David's Caboclo and another Boiadeiro, embodied by a taller, muscular Black man and decorated with a striped pattern African fabric in shades of blue, tied over the right shoulder, stand before the drummers. David's right arm extends to and rests on the other's bare left shoulder. They wear subtly jovial or playful expressions, radiating a lightness and gentle confidence in their bouncy stances and widely held chests. They exchange words, each nodding in complicity to acknowledge having comprehended the other's message. As the drums pick up their samba rhythm, the tallest man begins to hop slightly backwards. David's Caboclo lengthens his arms to full capacity and leans back in a gesture of open receptivity, and the other accepts the invitation, bowing slightly to meet David's embrace. The two men hold each other and orbit together for more than a couple of seconds, completing one full rotation and another half one before each recovers his own weight. But the duet continues as the Caboclos revolve again around the circle, this time drawing a larger circumference until they arrive at the far perimeter from the percussionists, still locked into the same step.

The human "horses" at Iya Alagasy's Caboclo festa form a male ensemble; their choreographic labors are punctuated with intimate gestures including hugs, glances of approval, and spoken praises of each other (sometimes in direct conversation, sometimes to a visitor such as myself). One Caboclo initiates an embrace, the other open-heartedly accepts. The Sultan of the Forest nods in admiration as they dance, commenting audibly on his love for the Caboclos in the center. These intimacies take various forms and nuances according to the characters involved

and the contexts of their exchange. Rather than following any typological or gendered codes, the actions do not follow a predetermined pattern of exchange; they are improvised.



Figure 7. Davi's Caboclo invites another Boiadeiro to embrace. Ilê Omin Guiam. August 11, 2018. Still from video.



Figure 8. Two Caboclo Boiadeiros circle in an embrace before continuing their samba duo. Ilê Omin Guiam. August 11, 2018. Still from video.

Iya Alagsy observes the supremacy of male mediums, many of whom hail from the neighboring areas of the island, in her Caboclo homages: “In the Orixá festas [at our terreiro], there are many women. The Caboclo festa attracts many men (Oct 3 2018, personal interview).” Furthermore, Iya Alagsy attributes men’s proportionally higher interest in the Caboclo festas to a socio-aesthetic confluence between presumably masculine ways of moving and the Caboclos’ dance style: “Like the Caboclo, a man is more sort of loose, more driving and fast... [the Caboclo] can dance how he wants to, he is more free.”²³⁵ Iya Alagsy’s characterization of the Caboclo as “more free,” in particular, sheds light on how circling with and in one’s Caboclo, affords an expanded range of socially acceptable behaviors and postures viewed as inherently masculine to male-identified subjects whose position as mediums means they are relatively feminized, in comparison to male-identified men in everyday life and to the heterosexualized drummers. There is no masculinized female correlative to the feminized male medium, however, at least in the ceremonies in and around Salvador, in my own experience and in that of practitioners that I spoke to, even though many women can and do play Candomblé rhythms outside of ceremonial situations.²³⁶ While Caboclo figures reaffirm rather than resist some normative gender scripts, allowing feminized male mediums to identify with recalcitrant and irreverent behaviors dominantly framed as masculine – such as imbibing excessive amounts of alcohol and tobacco, insisting that women dance for them and that drummers play faster or stop

²³⁵“...como Caboclo ele é mais assim solto, mais puxado . . . pode dançar como ele quer, é mais livre.” The slang term “puxado” in this context colloquially means tough, demanding, energetic, driving and quick. Even if ritual dance *practices* encourage gender non-conformity, Candomblé discourses still generally accepts and traffic in fairly normative ideas of gender binaries, as illustrated by Iya Alagsy’s emphasis on masculine movements being more “free” and physically intense.

²³⁶ I did see women drummers in the interior of Bahia, in Afro-Indigenous practices of Jarê. Some practitioners view Jarê as part of Candomblé with more Indigenous influence from the region, others situate Jarê as a separate Afro-Bahian or Afro-Indigenous Bahian religion and still others link Jarê to Umbanda, which comprises Afro-Brazilian religious practices that predominate in Southern Brazil.

altogether, and dancing freely with gusto, they also create and occupy a world that allows for radical expressions of male intimacy and solidarity that are disallowed as per everyday norms of macho composure.

Interestingly, Iya Alagsy situates the prevalence of men in both Caboclo and Tempo ceremonies, within the scope of her own temple's historic precedents, even as distinct from the general patterns of Candomblé involvement. Speaking of ritual mediumship in general, Iya Alagsy states that: "Here, men *have* participated, although in the great majority [of other temples] – only the women. People have thought it strange, but there are more and more men that dance in the roda, and that open their own terreiros" (Oct 2018). Thus, Iya Alagsy does not configure male participation and homo-sociality in the Caboclo and Tempo festivals as antithetical to rituals in which women dominate or monopolize the mediumship ranks. Instead, she regards the August cycles at her terreiro as special opportunities that privileges male-identified practitioners and supports the advancement of their ritual trajectories while fostering relations between the temple, the divinities associated with the place and land on which the temple is founded, and the constituent community.

The framework of male homosociality that I engage for the context of Caboclo ceremony borrows but also departs from the definition theorized by feminist scholar Eve Sedgwick (1985). Sedgwick employs the concept of male homosociality, defined earlier by Jean Lipman-Blumen as a preference for members of one's own sex – a social rather than a sexual preference (ref), to describe a dynamic of male bonding distinct from homosexuality. However, male homosociality configured within Caboclo Candomblé neither forecloses nor relies on the possibility of homosexual practice or preference (see also Wafer 1991). So, this homosociality can include homosexuality. However I employ the language of homosociality instead of

expanding an interpretation of homosexuality to involve unexpressed romantic desires, because historically male spirit performances have been negatively framed as deviant acts, in conservative, early to mid-twentieth century social discourses that pathologized homosexuality. In addition unexpressed or closeted male homosexuality has upper class associations in Brazil that do not fit with Candomblé's non-elite demographics (Green 1999).

Although researchers of Afro-Brazilian religion in the Southern states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo report that many practitioners publically identify as gay, lesbian or trans (Ramos personal communication Aug. 2019), in Bahian Candomblés, sexual orientations are more often, though certainly not always, articulated sub-textually through codes of dress, comportment and ritual position,²³⁷ while gender multiplicity and same-sex desires are also visibilized and lauded as propitious when scaffolded within ceremonial proceedings. Thus, male homosociality in the Caboclo circle includes friendship, romantic relationships, biological (and ritual) kinship, and is often formed along racial lines of solidarity among Black and mixed-race Black and Indigenous men and youth (who are often drummers).²³⁸ The context of the Caboclo circle is further differentiated in its power dynamics from the otherwise normative, everyday patriarchal conditions in which male sociality has been identified as a tactic for preserving male dominance, because both Iya Alagsy's temple and Candomblé writ large have been established as matriarchal spaces. Here, the men's performances of spirit embodiment multiply the axé of the

²³⁷ Iya Alagsy circumvents the question of Candomblé's reputed attraction of non-heterosexual leaning persons when she states that: "Its divined ; people are predestined to [become part of] Candomblé. Sexuality has no influence" (interview 2015).

²³⁸ This formulation is similar to Cindy Garcia's (2008) model of female homosociality in the salsa club, with a key difference being that while female salsa dancers necessarily configure homosociality in competition with Anglo women "who have become increasingly skilled at performing pan-Latina" techniques and personas (203), male homosociality in the Caboclo roda is not forged in competition with non-Black practitioners, who are not a visible part of the community. If Iyá Alagsy has white male clients, she most likely attends them at her residence in Campo Grande in central Salvador, and not on the Island.

host terreiro, confirming the ritual efficacy and potency of the temple's spiritual guides and leaders, and expanding and strengthening the terreiro's bonds with the resident community, while also providing resources – such as sacrificial animals, space and drummers – that support and deepen mediums' developing relations with their entidades. Instead, the sambas that male Caboclo practitioners perform together, or that serve as occasions for one masculine-identified Caboclo to praise another through gestural as well as verbal indications of approval, also produce economies of allyship and non-competition between male mediums, some of whom are in the process of establishing themselves as priests in nearby locales.

As a praxis largely dominated and led by women, Candomblé also fosters myriad kinds of female “lesbo-socialities,” so to speak, on the continuum with lesbian relations, that are similarly produced and affirmed through ritual choreographies including invocations, moments of incorporation and dances of the entities. Like non-normative men's sexualities, in Bahian Candomblés lesbianism or even bi-sexuality for women is not, typically, openly discussed in conversation,²³⁹ but women's intimacies are highly valued within ritual performances contexts.

Women initiates compose the cast of “equesdes” or “caretakers of the saints” (as opposed to initiates who “circle with the saints”) and their roles involve intimately supporting mediums' (female, male and trans-identified) transformational journeys by removing certain clothing and accessories, re-tying the swaths of fabric that make up their formal ceremonial attire, and wiping sweat off of incorporated subjects' faces. In addition, women mediums' relations with their own feminine divinities to whom they are consecrated, with their priestesses and with each other are instituted through ceremonial choreographies of circling together, side by side and in succession.

At Ilê Omin Guian's Caboclo and Tempo ceremonies, however, the emphasis is on male

²³⁹ In my experience (corroborated by Allen 2012), which is not exhaustive. I have heard of a terreiro in Salvador where community members openly identify as gay, lesbian and bi (Yanuziello 2019).

homosocial bonding, which accrues spiritual and social value as part of a continuum of ritual activity that re-signifies the space and bodies of the temple and transforms their relations. Having incorporated the Caboclos of the house, the mediums' actions and interactions transpire within a triangulated relation to the female governors of the terreiro, whose physical presence weaving across the sanctuary floor as they accompany the mediums, seated in their chairs near the percussionists, and leading seated prayers, contains the ceremonial process in a frame of Afro-Bahian matriarchal traditionalism.²⁴⁰ This dynamic shows how the scholarly focus on ascertaining the historical moment at which Candomblé's societies became dominated by women has obscured more multifaceted apprehensions of how male devotees work within the feminized ritual sphere and how women leaders and male "horses" productively and reciprocally authenticate each other's religious labors.²⁴¹

3. Caboclos Samba with Women of the House and Neighborhood

Hours into the night, after plates of food have been distributed and the guests have eaten, after the Caboclos have sat with the junior Priestess and sung and prayed and gotten back up to dance again, they begin inviting women in the gallery to dance with and for them on the sanctuary floor. A young woman from the Island willingly accepts, and enters the scene with a basic samba de roda step: with her feet more or less hip-width apart, she steps narrowly backward, placing her right foot behind the left on the first count of a four beat measure that

²⁴⁰ Sedgwick (1985) defines male homosociality as a form of "male bonding with a characteristic triangular structure. In this triangle, men have intense but nonsexual bonds with other men, and women serve as the conduits through which those bonds are expressed." This reading is relevant in sexist societies. However, in Candomblé, especially the Caboclo Candomblé context at hand, triangulation with female social actors takes on a different set of meanings because the women are the head priestesses.

²⁴¹ Jamie Andreson (2020) records similar findings. She argues that "While the Candomblé religion allows men to lead the houses as Fathers and receive the spirits as mediums, they must participate through and embody feminine modes" and that male-bodied priests authenticate their practices through affiliation with Afro-descendent, female-identified leaders (28).

feels more like a triplet. A quick weight transfer and the left foot shuffles forward, then the right leg comes in behind. After the held fourth beat, she repeats the samba step on the other side and continues alternating as the pelvis rocks to maintain the integrity of the hip axis. Her upper body rolls with micro-undulations and isolated accents of the ribcage and shoulders, which move off her centerline, making figure eight patterns. She locomotes in a semi-circle around the sanctuary floor, past the drummers and back towards the seating area. Two Caboclos – a “feathered Indian” who has tossed off his headdress earlier in the night, and David’s Boiadeiro, stop and bend forward, eyes fixed on her behind as her butt cheeks oscillate expertly. She brings her feet together as she turns around, without disrupting her samba step. While David’s Boiadeiro shifts attention to encouraging another woman, this time an elder member of the temple, to join him before the drums, the feathered Caboclo leans back in admiration of the first woman’s impressive technique, then lifts his right hand to frame her movements and call attention to her backside, without ever touching her body.

While the feathered Caboclo’s gestures seem to reinforce normative heterosexual patterns by objectifying the female dancer with his male gaze and, furthermore, calling the gallery’s attention to her fanny, at the same time his exaggeratedly macho actions satirize heteronormativity because the male medium’s act of performance reads as a transgression from behaviors coded as masculine and heterosexual in Candomblé’s divisions of labor. Because in the ritual context the male mediums are feminized and to a large extent viewed as homosexual, the potential threat implied by her sexualization is pacified and made into a comedic display. Samba often includes a range of facial expressions and that aspect of its virtuosity is important here. The dancer’s facial expressions, involving raised and lowering eyebrows, eye contact with her partners and viewers (and drummers) and curl of her lips appear to say, “show me what you

got,” and the Caboclos’ non-verbal dialogues indicate respectful admiration of her physicality. These friendly dynamics flow from the fact that many of the Caboclos, their mediums and community participants are well-known to each other, and their ritual interactions – often, but not always – build on a pre-established sense of trust.



Figure 9. Samba de roda with two Caboclos. Ilê Axé Omin Guiam. August 2018. Still from video. Video credit: Zendo Gedye. Reproduced with permission.

At Iya Alagsy’s as well as other Bahian Candomblé houses, Caboclos invite women from the community as well as visitors who have lasted until the later stages of the ceremony, to dance samba in the roda. Caboclos often circle around women as they dance, blatantly ogling their behinds and encouraging them to match their own loose, “free” and impulsive dance styles and accented breaks. Several practitioners who I spoke to explained these instances as a beneficial,

“very good” feature of ceremony stemming from Caboclos’ imperative to share their joy and delight with all persons in attendance (Eli Agosto interview Oct 2020, Terezinha Souza Nov 2020). At the same time, many ceremonial participants who frequent Candomblés, but are not necessarily initiates, observed that, by and large, Caboclos at Bahian Candomblé festas focus their attention on female-bodied attendees during this part of the ritual sequence (UFBA structured discussion 2018, Adrianna 2018). During my fieldwork I noticed how, across a range of locales, incorporated Caboclos beckon women, generally between the age range of young adult to senior community member, onto the dance floor and energetically demonstrate their interest in the women’s sambas, often letting their gazes linger on the lower parts of their bodies. These lingering looks effect a sense that women’s bodies are being ogled, while the duets also infer that the dancing of both women and masculine Caboclos is sexually and socially empowering. Importantly, Caboclos predicate their invitations on a high level of complicity from participants – calling in those attendees who are already familiar faces to the household.

While these performances at first appear heteronormative, especially when Caboclos are embodied by male-identified practitioners, they belie an ironic reversal of the homosexual male’s marginalization in Candomblé and Bahian society at large, and, in addition, push towards unhinging machismo and power stances associated with masculinity from male heterosexual affinity. Since Ruth Landes’ landmark monograph, *City of Women* (1947), the prevalence of homosexual-identified male mediums in Candomblé has been a subject of popular and scholarly debate.²⁴² Though Landes situated male homosexual priests as anathema to Candomblé’s matriarchal foundations, I suggest that male mediums are designated as “penetrable” because of their status as rodantes or initiates who circle with their saints, not because of their gender per se.

²⁴² I explore this body of literature and the topic of taboos on Black male sexual identity and gender performance in Chapter Three.

While women's bodies have been idealized for Orixá embodiment through discourses of nagô purity and African traditionalism that linked female procreativity and ritual reproduction (see Chapter Two), Caboclos' hyper-masculine identifications and their associations with cultural, political, corporeal autonomy (illustrated by Iya Alagsy's reference to their "free" movements) offer unique opportunities for male mediums to achieve the kind of visibility and legitimization that can be elusive in orthodox, Orixá-oriented circles.²⁴³

At many terreiros, Caboclos – unlike the African Orixás, Voduns and Nkissis – are cultivated in cloistered and/or offsite rituals rather than being officially "seated," meaning that their links to a specific temple are not officialized by the construction of an altar and material processes, including the placement of magico-pharmacopeiac substances into devotees' head, that bind entities to a consecrated space. Thus, Caboclos evade the stringent regulations that govern initiation procedures and dictate who may (or may not) incarnate such and such divinity, and at whose ritual house, and at what stage of their spiritual development. In the context of Caboclo festas, this relative informality helps further attenuate stigmas on male dancing; indeterminacy, unpredictability, improvisation and disregard for the rules are provinces of the Caboclo become positively affixed to maleness, both in terms of male-bodied performers, in the case of Iya Alagsy's temple and the August festivals, and masculine gender performance, as in the Caboclo festas I describe in the previous chapter, at Mãe Oba's terreiro where women mediums predominate.

²⁴³ Because Caboclos embody New World indigenous identities and histories of regional land use – particularly cattle herding and ranching – they circumvent the conceptual triangulation of Africanist-traditional-feminine (see Chapters One and Two) as an interpretive lens for assessing the authenticity of one's mediumship in Orixá traditions. Caboclo festas are admitted more flexibility within the gender divisions understood to support the continuity of nagô-jeje practices associated with West Africa. While Candomblé's gender logics do not exclude men from mediumship entirely, they still position spirit embodiment by male subjects as taboo, especially in public-facing situations. With Caboclo, however, male-identified practitioners find license to invoke and circle with/in their divine relations.

When male mediums who have incorporated their Caboclos invite women from outside the sacred circle to dance samba with them, they perform a multi-layered hyper-macho role that satirizes Brazilian hetero-normativity. Typically in Bahian samba circles, a man and a woman dance together in the center, using slightly modified versions of the basic polycentric samba coordination or ginga pattern (see Rosa 2015), where the woman's knees stay close together while in the male styling, the legs stance is wider. Aside from these subtle differentiations, the trope of the sensual and agile Black or mixed-race Brazilian woman is a fixture in local and global imaginaries of samba (see Pravaz 2013). The Caboclos' exaggerated interest in (primarily Black and mixed-race) women's bodies as they samba in the center of the ritual circle plays on these exoticized associations, as their gaze draws attention to the samba dancer's hips and bunda,²⁴⁴ but the act of male mediumship that makes their games possible is coded as non-heteronormative. In addition, the mediums' own identifications and practices land on a continuum between closeted and open homosexuality or bisexuality and, more rarely, transgender (Santos interview 2018). The overtness of the Caboclos' behaviours, such as staring at (some) women's behinds as they samba, is a performative act that critiques the hyperbolism of heteronormative behaviours that objectify and sexualize female colleagues, especially since these interactions take place after homo-social bonds have been established in much less parodic ways.

While I have based my case largely on observation and participation in Iya Alagsy's August festivals, my extensive fieldwork at various temples in Bahia, as well in archives and in conversations with practitioners, allowed me to develop and refine theorizations of Caboclos' gender critiques and transgressions. In my historical research, I came across the figure of João da Gomea, a male priest and Caboclo medium who surfaced multiple times as a reference in later

²⁴⁴ Browning (1999) discusses the cultural mechanisms by which samba dancers, even those who are not Black or mixed-race, embody the racially mixed « mulatta » in their dancing.

interviews. Born in 1914, João da Gomea moved to Salvador from the Sertão, the arid dry desert outside of the capital, from where many Caboclos hail. As a young male priest in a culture dominated by senior women leaders in the early twentieth century João da Gomea's open homosexuality caused controversy, even as he was lauded for his enchanting dancing and charm (Landes 1940). The first male initiate of the famed Mãe Menininha do Gantois (see Chapter One) to be allowed to publically dance with and for his Orixá, "Joãozinho" was a "trans figure" (Lima 2018),²⁴⁵ partially responsible for bridging Angolan Candomblé, Ketu practice, and Caboclo cultivation, and setting a precedent for open acts of male-bodied mediumship (Cici interview March 2018, Nascimento 2003).

Joãozinho's initiation by Mãe Menininha exemplifies how male priests who achieve seniority in Candomblé's ritual worlds have often done so by way of receiving permission from an established priestess who can grant legitimacy to their practice, beyond being either observers/patrons or drummers (roles traditionally assigned to men), in the public sphere. But although commentators such as Landes and others (i.e. Pierson 1940) viewed Caboclo embodiments as transgressive as well as novel, Caboclo already held a long history of practice in Salvador and the surrounding Bay of All Saints (Baia de todos os santos) regions when Joãozinho arrived in the city. Researchers of Salvador's annual Bahian Independence Day parades on July second have documented the presence of Caboclo as "enchanted entities" in the parades and in the neighborhoods through which the civic procession passed since at least the mid-nineteenth century (Kraay 1999, Albuquerque 1999).

I have dwelled on this historic figure to demonstrate that the interlacing of male-bodied Candomblé performance, acts of gender transgression and public Caboclo embodiment reaches into the formalization era of Bahian standards for Afro-religious expression. However, despite

²⁴⁵Discussion with Fabio Lima, sociologist and practitioner, Aug. 2018 UFBA.

the range of my inquiries and the references I encountered to Joao da Gomea as a historical model of male “cross-dressing” and/or transgender performance, I cannot claim to speak for the particular social dynamics of every Candomblé house.²⁴⁶ During one Caboclo festival at an Angolan temple in the peripheral quarter of Cajazeiras, for example, a colleague of mine from a University of Bahia research group noted that two Caboclos, incorporated in male-bodied mediums, had been commenting on the appearances of women attendees (lecture demonstration, UFBA June 19, 2019). I had not overheard their exchange; however, I do recognize that in some instances, Caboclos may be reproducing, rather than critiquing, qualities of Bahian and Brazilian machismo that authorize verbal and gestural objectifications of women’s bodies. In that case, Caboclos’ machistic performances can also be understood as practices that allow for the expression of standard masculine norms in a matrifocal ritual environment. A reading of the island’s Caboclos as sanctioned sites for feminized and homosexualized male mediums to take on macho postures that could effectively recover their masculine authority -- normatively associated with heterosexuality -- position Ilê Omin Guian as an outlying practice that brings into relief the limits of both dark horse kinetics and the feminist poesis that I have located as a cultural underpinning of Candomblé’s ritual choreographies.

Where is the indigenous female subjectivity and body in this formulation? Although Candomblé practitioners reported the appearance of *Cabocla*, Indigenous or mixed-race Black and Indigenous entidades of Candomblé, in occasional ceremonies, I rarely saw or heard mention

²⁴⁶ I use “male” and “male-bodied” to describe initiates who present as biologically male but may potentially identify as trans in private spheres (personal communication, Johnny W. Nov 2018). Trans- is a recognized category in Bahia but I have not heard of a recognized trans subject in Candomblé. But that does not mean that gender operates as a binary in Candomblé terms either. Some divinities (i.e. Iemanjá-Ogunté are recognized as two-gendered (Cici Oct. 2018) or as primarily of one gender but having facets of the self that are differently gendered (Oba 2019) or as andrógino and/or bisexual (i.e. Logun-Ede). These designations are also points of debate on which not all practitioners agree.

of her. Dona Cici, a Candomblé elder of the religion, explained to me that the Cabocla Jurema, whose polysemic name refers to the Mimosa tree that grows in Brazil's northeastern coastal regions, occasions some Afro-Bahian temples (interview April 2018). Jurema also connotes a pharmacopeiac, inebriating drink made from the sap of Mimosa tree. Whereas I encountered Jurema as an elixir in many Bahian Caboclo festas, I met the Cabocla once only (so far), on the evening of July second, Independence Day, at a temple that affiliates with the ethno-national category of Candomblé de Caboclo or Caboclo Candomblé, a distinct lineage from the jeje-nagô and Congo-Angolan Candomblé affiliations that I discuss in this dissertation (though many of these “nations” do also cultivate Caboclo).²⁴⁷ Although more research is necessary to fully analyze the differentiated meanings of Caboclo and Cabocla within Africanist Candomblés in relation to the self-avowed Caboclo Candomblés, or Candomblés in the “pure line” or “lineage” of Caboclos (Oba Nov 2020), my ethnographic experiences point to ideological and aesthetic entanglements between the hyper-masculine Caboclo and ideas of corporeal and political sovereignty affixed to embodiments of Indigenous and Afro-indigenous identity.

4. Caboclo as Sovereign: “Deixa Eu Cantar Mais Uma” (Let me sing one more)

The Caboclos de pena, Amerindian entities who dress in feathered adornments and occupy Bahian forests, and Boiadeiros, mixed-race Black and Indigenous cowboys, narrate symbolic as well as lived histories of collaboration between Indigenous Bahian peoples and

²⁴⁷ These are slippery distinctions. Caboclo Candomblés cite African heritage, Amerindian influences and Afro-Catholic syncretisms. In contrast, many nagô-jeje terreiros in Salvador have eschewed Afro-Catholic imagery in favor of decolonizing their altars and symbolic systems. Regardless of their “actual” differences, Caboclo Candomblé is a national title (nação) with variants such as “Keto Caboclo.” Since the 1980s numerous terreiros have changed their affiliation to Ketu even as they continue to honor their Caboclos, due to the value hierarchies of African/nagô purity (Teles dos Santos 2006, 17-18).

Afro-descendent in maroon communities.²⁴⁸ In addition, the aesthetics of Caboclos articulate in complex ways with patriotic discourses of Bahian statehood and with Brazilian modern nationalism. The trope of the “índio,” a male-bodied “Indian” figure, was deployed in Brazilian literature of the romantic era (Carneiros 1948, Prandi 2018, Brazeal 2013) and in civic discourses as a symbol of the newly Independent Bahian state (Kraay 1999) in the nineteenth century. The Caboclo in Candomblé indexes these histories of collaboration and cross-cultural influence, state regimes of self-representation and Amerindian-inflected ontologies of bodily decoration that overlap with state symbolism in that they present the Indigenous subject as a sovereign who wields mastery of the surrounding environment (see Kittery Lee 2018).

Late into the night of Ilê Omin Guian’s August 10th ceremony in 2015, a cowboy Caboclo performed a final act of defiant autonomy on which I would to close this chapter: David’s body moves with more weight now, as his cowboy Caboclo enters the roda. Hat in hand, he charges forward until right on top of the drummers, then looks around for another Caboclo to call in. Several shake their heads, not now. The scene drips with exhaustion. The drummers have been switching up more frequently, worn out by the Caboclos’ relentless exigency, and some visitors have fallen asleep on the sidelines. Other attendees begin gathering their things and telling the Caboclos to go home. But the cowboy calls in the next dancer with a thrust forward of his right shoulder, and Alison’s Boiadeiro enters with gusto. He skips one knee up towards his

²⁴⁸ Some scholars have described Caboclos as a symbolic representation of Amerindian identity (Prandi 2001, Teles dos Santos 1995) while others have complicated these claims by showing how Caboclos build on Africanist precepts even though they are considered “Brazilian” and therefore non-traditional to Afro-Bahian religiosity (Aragao and Rabelo 2018). My position takes account of these arguments while considering the correlation of Caboclo manifestations to Bahian Independence Day celebrations on July 2nd. While the embodiment of symbolic indigeneity brings up questions of appropriation along the lines of “imperialist nostalgia” – a romanticized longing on the part of a colonizing group for the culture they have destroyed (Rosaldo 1989) – the syncretic contexts of Candomblé and the alienated social status of many practitioners from the dominant economic flows, opportunities and racial privileges associated with ruling class status, characterize these performances and call for different kinds of analytical lens.

chest, then the other, alternating. He digs one heel into the ground, places the other a couple feet away to form a wide straddle, then jumps them together. The churning motion of his elbows makes his lower arms seem agitated as they jut sideways from and all around his stocky frame. A barravento trip step back and he recovers, still refusing to acquiesce to the crowd's calls for the ceremony's conclusion. Standing proud before the percussionists, cigar dangling from his lips, he declares, "deixa eu cantar mais uma," "let me sing one more" (field notes Aug 11 2013).

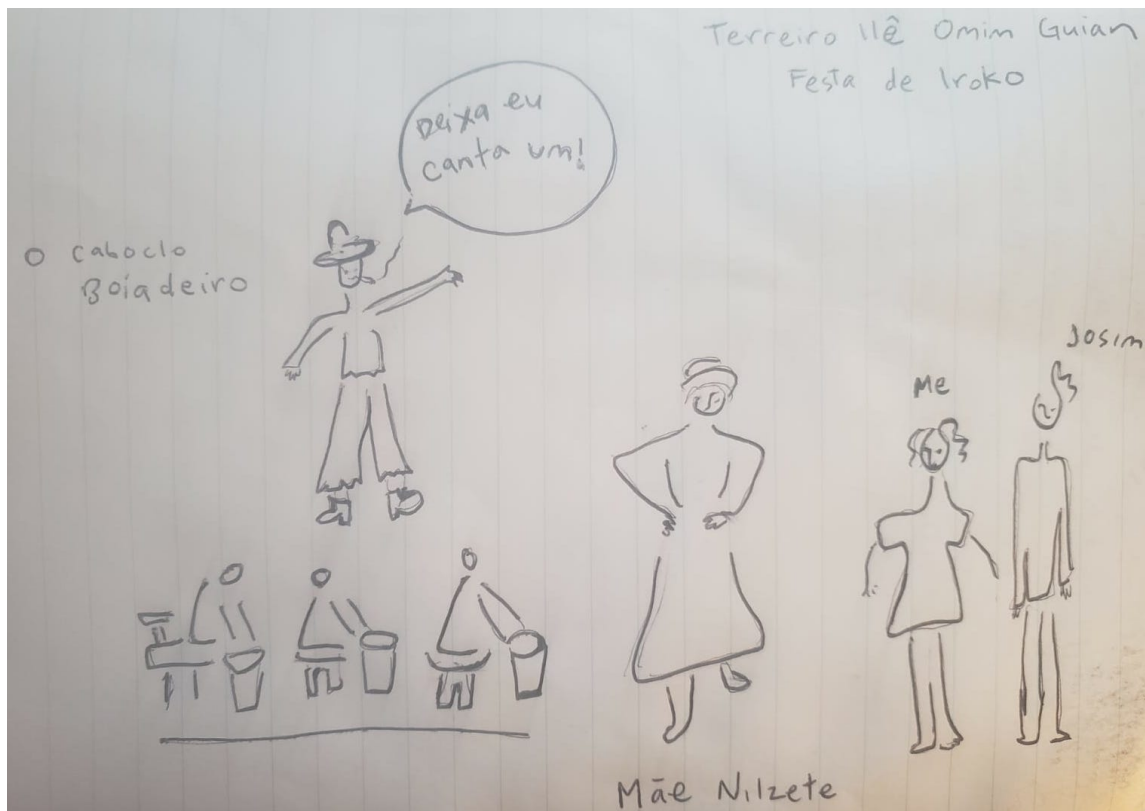


Figure 10. Boiadeiro before three drummers. Drawing by the author. August 10 2013.

Boiadeiro is a Caboclo of mixed-race Black and Indigenous identity. His recalcitrant attitude antagonizes the drummers from an authorial position, since they are obligated to keep playing as long as he wishes to continue singing and dancing. Despite the audience's calls for him to be dispelled, the Caboclo insists not only on staying put but remaining visible at the center of ritual action. While this performance punctuated the closing phases of the evening

ceremony, Boiadeiro's reluctance to leave the scene is an illustrative rather than out-of-character demonstration of Caboclos' typically, tactically rebellious nature. The entity defiantly demands to have the last word. This standing-in-place and holding ground takes on a political connotation when viewed in light of the politics of Bahia's racial democracy and African cultural heritage that I have touched on. Performance theorist Christen Smith notes that Bahia's iconic image as an "Afro-paradise," an exotic Black space and Brazil's capital of happiness (Smith 2016, 3) is a paradox of hypervisibilization: on one hand, Black culture's increasing visibility on Brazil's national stage serves to "assert the nation's status as an emerging world power," while on the other, this partial inclusion effectively hides the "economies of black suffering that sustain" Bahia's allure (4-6). Smith cites national studies and police statistics to expose Bahia's alarming realities of state violence and terror against Black bodies, showing how the tension between the nation's celebration of Blackness and routine killing of Black people transforms the Black body into a "ghost that sits in the shadows of the nation's popular imagination" (7). In a much different politics of exclusion, Indigenous peoples in Bahia and Brazil are largely silenced, especially under the current right-wing governments agricultural policies, which have led to the acceleration of clear-cutting Amazonian Indigenous territories for the expansion of mono-agriculture and the meat industry.

While I am not asserting that the sung choruses shared by Davi's Boiadeiro near the closing of the August festa translates on a policy level to a more full recognition of Indigenous and Black Bahian experience, I read the performance in relation to disciplining regimes of the Bahian state and Brazilian nation because of the multifold ways that Caboclos practices and practitioners do conscientiously engage with experiences and discourses of Indigenous and Black identity (interviews Nilzete 2015, Josimar 2015, Ferreira 2018). Boiadeiro's determination to

have the last word at the festa calls for recognition of his sovereign, commanding presence and the inexpendability of his participation to the ceremony – in the sense that without his agreeing to retreat, the ceremony really cannot end. The duration for which the Caboclo Boiadeiro maintains the intensity of his movements, the aesthetics of his performance and his willingness to antagonize the drummers and participants in order to assert his agency over the continuation of the festa, contributes to re-signifying the presence of the Caboclo figure, whose agency and body is distributed with that of Davi, into a discourse of political power.

At the same time that Caboclos distribute their bodies and agencies with those of their human mediums, they also draw other attendees into their relational worlds, as axé becoming bodies that interact verbally and gesturally with visitors. In another social tactic, distinct from calling us to dance on the sanctuary floor, Caboclos approach the gallery to exchange hugs, words, and sweat with ceremonial participants. When I attended these rituals with my young child in tow, Caboclos throughout the night approached us and wiped sweat from their own bodies onto our faces. These bodily acts of transfer constitute the transmission of their axé as an energetically potent force that travels across horizontal pathways of relation, binding witnesses, spirits, the animals and substances consumed, and the temple as an architectural body that nourishes and sustains the community, in a local network of transforming social relations – a crossroads body.

Conclusions

As well as activating counternarratives that, in a performance sphere, work towards “recorporealizing” Blackness (Smith 13) and, to some extent, Indigenous subjectivity, Caboclos’ dancing poses challenges to Brazil’s increasingly homo and lesbo-phobic conformist

hetero-normativity, especially now that Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right President who declared “I’m homophobic, with pride” and pledged to defend “the true meaning of matrimony as a union between a man and a woman” (*New York Times*, Dec 30, 2018) has been sworn in.

Although male-bodied mediums commonly incorporate Caboclos and other entities, their spirit performances exhibit ritual gender fluidity because mediumship is understood through the sieve of female gestation and reproduction.²⁴⁹ Thus, male-identified actors who “receive” their divine Others legitimize their practices in relation to Afro-descendent priestesses (see also Andreson chapter one 2020), and embody ritual permeability in a feminized role.

At the same, to meet Candomblé’s own normative scripts of masculinity as affixed to notions of sovereignty, defiance and bodily autonomy, male-bodied mediums necessarily occupy an interstitial location where they have to be more masculine than the women who perform men – they find that space in Caboclo incorporations where Caboclos’ behaviours and identities epitomize hyper-masculinity while unfixing the performance of machismo from dominant heterosexual presentation. These performances deem macho masculinity worthy of recuperating, even when unaffixed from normative heterosexual relations and linked to effectively homosexualized and feminized men’s bodies, rather than altogether rejecting binary gender standards, given the elevated place of women and femininity in ritual traditions of Candomblé. Instead, in the case of Ilê Omin Guian, male mediums who circle with Tempo and the Caboclos situate their axé becoming bodies as instruments of ritual and social reproductivity that reciprocally affirm the house’s stature under its matriarchal leaders, Iya Alagsy and Rosinha, who gain power in this model without that men having to give it up. By aggregating Ilê Omin Guian’s social resources including the participation of mediums and community members from

²⁴⁹ Women’s incorporations of masculine divinity, in contrast, are common to dominant Candomblé practices and discourses, and many of Bahia’s eminent houses are governed historically and presently by women dedicated to the male Orixás Oxossi and Xangô, among others.

around the Island, annual August ceremonies help establish and maintain the terreiro's social visibilities and symbolic capital amidst Itaparica's primarily Egun temples.

Homo-sexualized and marginalized in the writings of Landes (1947) and in Candomblé's dominant logics of female visibility, procreativity and suitability for mediumship, Afro-descendent male ritual specialists at Iya Alagsy's temple accrue prestige through identification with an Indigenous masculinity constructed as anti-colonial and autonomous, while also responding to and affirming the non-patriarchal social organization of the Candomblé that authorizes their embodiments. In contrast to the xirê at the Gantois, performed by exclusively women initiates, which I attend to in the first case study, the performances practices highlighted in this chapter elaborate outside of dominant lineages (ethno-culturally, liturgically and spatially). Still, they are lodged within Candomblé's matriarchal assemblages. Relevant to this chapter, the second case study historicized the intersecting stigmatization of Brazilian-identified Caboclos, as popular yet officially devalued figures linked Bahia's Indigenous histories, and the male-bodied mediumship, to analyze how Caboclos at a clandestine festa held at Ilê Axé Opô Aganju tactically destabilize ritual hierarchies. Ilê Omin Guiam presents an inverse constellation of power, in that, while Opô Aganju's is a nagô temple within Bahia's prominent orthodox lineages and led by a male priest, Ilê Omin Guiam is an outlying culturally hybrid space whose leadership still aligns with Candomblé's dominant logics of female seniority. Whereas I argued that Ilê Axé Opô Aganju's Caboclos employ the dark horse aesthetics of fall and recover to challenge and redress official distributions of power within Candomblé's Afro-religious universe, Caboclo choreographies at Iya Alagsy's heterodox house enact critiques of hegemonic race, gender and sex formations in Bahian and Brazilian societies at large. Similarly, my third case study looked at how devotees make use of Caboclos' loose and broken aesthetics to

radically authorize women's pleasures and desires through partner sambas deconstruct normative moral-sexual norms of respectability.

In this chapter I elaborated on how Caboclo mediums, this time constituted by male-identified practitioners, create a crossroads body through their techniques of weaving, layering, intersecting with each other, splicing the air and cutting into the center of the ceremonial circle. These bodies insert themselves within Candomblé's protected spheres through processually unfolding male intimacies that take shape in sambas performed side by side, hugs and whispered exchanges. When they invite women participants at the ceremony to dance, I contend, their exaggerated performances of Brazilian masculinity read as a parody of hetero-normative macho behavior. However, these partner sambas rub against the limits of my own theoretical models. While dark horse kinetics, informed by Candomblé's feminist poiesis, describes the counter-hegemonic falling, loose, broken, and crossroads choreographies of Caboclos, the spectral range of Bahia's ritual performances cannot be wholly encapsulated by the aesthetic frameworks that I have advanced. Some Caboclo instantiations may in fact reproduce rather than ironize hetero-patriarchal masculinities associated with Blackness, Indigeneity and the Brazilian nation.

CONCLUSION

Encerramentos: Closing Gestures

Oct 21 2018, Valéria, Bahia: At an Exua festival in the forests of Valéria, a vast and semi un-developed region further north and up the coast of Bahia de Todos os Santos (Bahia of All Saints) from São Caetano, I help an Exua, more specifically a *Padilha*, who has just embodied a collaborator, Sandro, to dress in her finery. The *Padilha*, whose name is *Lenço da Morte* (Sheet of Death), doesn't speak much, but gestures to the skirts she wants to use under her asymmetrical, knee-length, black, red and white patterned dress. She picks up the next items: wrist sleeves, bracelets, rings and finally her broad-brimmed hat. The *Padilha* of the house, to whom the festa has been dedicated, dressed exquisitely in magenta with a magnificent hair piece and a thick, several strand pearl necklace, points towards the opening of the dressing room and repeats: *Bemvidos amiga (Welcome friend). The umbrella is there.*

Holding the umbrella above *Lenço de Morte* so that her clothes aren't dampened, we return to the sanctuary. There, an Exu incorporated in a woman uses a wide stance for her samba; she approaches the drummers slowly, rocking her weight back and forth without emphasizing her hips. An Exua incorporated in a man comes beside her. He circles her hips as she bends her knees so that her pelvis lowers in an impressive descent, passing through close contact with her partner. Then the Exua of the house joins in, creating a triadic display of weaving in and around bodies, using a movement lexicon that differs substantially from both Orixá choreographies and Caboclo sambas. The Exu/as' dances extend a technical and rhythmic vocabulary based on samba but influenced the "favela funk" as well as *axé*, an Afro-Bahian music and dance style emphasizing hip articulations, arm and leg flexion, and deep pliés.

The Exua festa's performances of heterogeneous gender and sexual expression, at a terreiro cloistered in an Atlantic forest outside of Salvador metropolitan area, point to the rich array of choreographic displays at the outer edges of the geographic and social limits of my study. Compared to the rowdy Caboclos, the Exus sit even further along on the spectrum of extra-ordinary and non-normative gender performances spanned by Candomblé. Like Caboclo sessions and festivals, homages to the Exu and Exua offer unique sites for analyzing the layered meanings of performances that highlight gender play and marshal repressed sexualities as elements in the construction of minoritarian communities and historical agency.²⁵⁰ These expressions of gender non-conformity and of archetypal personas stigmatized for their non-monogamous, commercial sexual behaviours (“*Eu sou puta*,” “I’m a whore,” said one Exua to me, “So are you.”) construe performers as ritually and socially reproductive agents, and position participants as beneficiaries of distributed axé.

Candomblé's complex praxes cannot be reduced to or solely understood as political acts of resistance. However, as I have argued, cultivations of the « Brazilian » legions of spirit entities such as Exu/a and Caboclo directly grapple with practitioners' contemporaneous and ancestral lived experiences from the colonial era to the 21st century. As Brazil's right-wing federal government builds on historically prescient, conservative discourses of sexual morality disseminated by the 1964-1985 military dictatorship (see Cowan 2016), threatening, for example, to roll-back hard won gains of legal gay marriage and authorizing homophobic hate crimes, these ceremonial spaces become even more layered with oppositional meanings. At a time when, across the globe, nationalist populist projects threaten what many consider to be basic human

²⁵⁰ Many of the Exu and Exua present at the festa in Valéria embody enslaved African or Afro-descendent persons. Some of them speak of the senzala or slave barracks as their residence. Others such as Lenço da Morte incarnate free Black or mixed-race cabaret owners (as in her case), pimps, sex workers and performers of the urban underworld from Bahia's post-abolition period.

rights, this field provides abundant materials for scholars interested in how performers of ritual, social and political dramas instrumentalize their bodies to fortify the community bonds, authorize marginalized gender and sex identities and build alternative economies of care for persons often excluded from accessing social and economic resources.

I began by re-considering the ethnographic terms of “spirit possession” and setting out my schema of circling with and/or in “the saint,” (*rodar com/no santo*) as a relational, processual and movement-oriented technology of knowledge co-creation. Through this theorization of Candomblé’s transformative embodiments, I argue for a radical reinterpretation of Afro-Bahian ritual performance that attends closely to under-examined dance practices and intervenes in dominant popular and scholarly narratives about Candomblé’s matriarchal structures and ontologies of gender and sex as they intersect with formations of race, ethnicity, class and initiatory hierarchy.²⁵¹ If as Paul Christopher Johnson suggests, scholars of Afro-Atlantic religions have in fact constituted the category of “spirit possession” as part of the epistemic project of producing a racialized other that is capable of becoming possessed (and thereby assuming an object status), then the application of culturally specific, dance-based interpretations of ritual invocations and incorporations constructively illuminates dimensions of Candomblé’s aesthetic and political knowledge-making processes that have been previously eclipsed.

By foregrounding four different ritual centers in relation to that terreiro’s spatial and social location, leadership, ethno-liturgical genealogies and aesthetics of practice, this text establishes a framework for analyzing Candomblé’s ceremonial dances and demonstrates how, in each site, ritual choreographies merit attention for the things they *do* in the world. Movement

²⁵¹ I sketched my model against the contours of Paul Christopher Johnson’s (2014) definition of “spirit possession,” arguing that Candomblé’s choreographies of circling with/in one’s divinity are not coeval to the idea of possession, even if they subsume the experience of possession as one possible affect among a range of bodily experiences that involve the transformation or alteration of a person’s subjectivity.

aesthetics illustrate and instigate political valences. Each chapter explored these aesthetics: circling in Chapter One, falling and recovering in Chapter Two, loosening and breaking in Chapter Three, and finally, driving movements that transform the roda into a crossroads in Chapter Four. From an Orixá ceremony at one of Bahian Candomblé's motherhouses in a central district of Salvador, Bahia's capital, I moved progressively farther away from the temples that practitioners consider most traditional, attending to a terreiro in the lineage of Salvador's Ketu-nagô motherhouses but led by a male priest who takes an unorthodox approach to choreographing gender in his own temple, and then on two heterodox, outlying Candomblés whose geographic locales and Caboclo cultivations position them on the margins of Bahia's dominant narratives of Afro-religious authenticity.

Candomblé's gestures take forms as diverse as the identifications of their devotees. Their dances are ways of knowing in relationship that unfold inside of and not externally to Bahian and Brazilian social spheres. The interrelations that they embody are pathways engendered and instituted by circling with/in "the saint," a process of incorporation that troubles the boundaries and status of a bodily being. Practitioners of Candomblé refer to the human body itself as "materia," material, in contrast to "espírito" or spirit. Considering invocations, incorporations and the dances of spirit entities – with a wide-lens tuned to both culturally specific meanings and the geo-political conditions that impact devotees' lives – invites us to apprehend the human body as connection to the materiality of and in the world. The "grotesque bodies" of Caboclos, as Jim Wafer (1991) describes them, proffer a view of constant interrelation with the environment (socio-political and elemental or "natural") that is not reflexive but continually emergent through performance. Furthermore, in their use of locally harvested plant medicines, titles as "donos da terra," lords or custodians of the land, and rugged samba dancing, Caboclos assert their bodily

and political autonomy as discourses of historical and land-based authority, against the background of a federal regime that is actively invested in opening up Indigenous lands to the agro-industry, and that authorizes anti-Black racist state violence (see Smith 2016).

Though my dissertation focuses on the body politics of Bahian Candomblé as practiced in or around the capital metropole of Salvador, the materials and approaches I have outlined will provide, I hope, broad applications for scholars within and outside of Brazil who are interested in how practitioners of Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous performance activate claims of sovereignty through dance. By looking at ceremonial choreographies as theoretical lenses, variegated ways that practitioners (who may be disadvantaged in current geo-political constellations) mobilize diasporic and “occult” practices in order to re-map power relations across bodily and social spaces come into relief. These investigations require urgent attention, as rights to move, gather and make interpersonal contact under attack.

During the particular and peculiar moment that I write this, people in the Americas and indeed, across the globe confront new, more insidious forms of social choreography. As André Lepecki writes, the (in)actions of governments along the “necropolitical meridian” that links Trump’s United States with Bolsonaro’s Brazil in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic have reified and enforced “a certain hegemonic understanding of the relations between power and movement, subjectivity and movement, and agency and movement.” Since this development of “liberal kinetic logic,” Lepecki concludes, there is no limit for the potential “colonization and monetization of the kinetic,” the task at hand is to refuse the conditioning of movement by external i.e. governmental and corporate forces (Hemispheric Institute, *contactos* July 23 2020). The feminist poiesis and dark horse kinetics are two examples of immanent, improvisatory and non-conditioned individual and collective movements that contribute to understandings of how

locally embedded body techniques can inhere a politics of alterity that fosters live, fleshy and sensuous connectivity.

Taking seriously my proposal to reframe spirit possession in terms of the intersubjective, movement-oriented praxis of circling with/in the saints, this text is not punctuated by a stand alone description of actual or failed possession – the writing trope that Johnson describes as an “imprimature of authenticity” (159) for scholars of Afro-Atlantic religions writing in the “wake of the splintering of the ethnographic gaze” in the 1980s. Instead, I have endeavored to circulate my nascent ideas with and in the saints – the Orixás and Caboclos of my interlocutors – with whom I have gestated my ideas and with whose permission I have given them the present form.

Orixá ceremonies conclude with a circle of praise songs for Oxalá, the “universal father” of creation (Barbosa Jan 14 2021). Ceremonial festas for the Caboclo, at least some, do not really end; the sun rises and they are still there, reveling, their presences permeating into everyday (field notes Caboclo festa July 19 2019). I would like to conclude by giving the last word to a high priestess. When I shared with Mãe Oba my model for apprehending the aesthetic politics of Caboclos’ performances, she stated: “*é samba, é barravento, é tudo muito mixturado. Ai a gente vai se conversando aos poucos.* Its samba, its barravento, its all very mixed. And so, we keep on talking, a little at a time” (personal communication June 2020).

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