

Delicate Matters:

How Candomblé Food Habits reflect Identity Dynamics

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1. Introduction

1.1 Who is the man that cuts the meat on Sunday?

Food and all of the habits and customs associated with it, is intrinsically connected to culture and society. Whereas men and women eat separately in some places, it is the cornerstone of the family in others to eat jointly. In the Netherlands, my home country, enjoying a meal with the family is greatly valued. Children are taught not to start eating before everyone has been served and not to leave the table before everyone is finished. It is considered polite to finish the plate and not to ask for more, unless it is offered. A major indicator of our society is the old-fashioned saying: Who is the man that cuts the meat on Sunday? It is an expression that refers to the father of the family, who is often not at home while the children are awake. Traditionally, Sunday is his only day off and thus enables him to enjoy a meal together with his entire family. As he is the cost winner, and therefore the most important supplier of food, he is given a special location and task at the table. He will sit at the head side and cut and divide the meat. According to the saying, that is about as far as his role goes. He is not there to help the children eat or make conversation with them. The saying, in fact, implies that the children, even after having shared many meals with him on Sundays, still have no clue who he is and why he sits there sharing a meal with them. Implied in this saying is also the importance of meat. Because of its scarcity and cost it is considered a luxury. Only because of the father's earnings has the family been able to obtain it. The cutting of the meat by the father illustrates the importance of both the father and the meat.

The example above describes an outdated and stereotypical image of a father's role in a Dutch family. Above all it illustrates the importance of enjoying a meal with the family for the Dutch. At the same time it illustrates the importance of the father for supplying the meal. The mother's role in this matter, which must have been the preparation of the meal, is not mentioned. But mothers, undoubtedly, are as important for the entire process, as fathers. Their importance is marked by other expressions. Traditional food of high quality is often compared to the food a grandmother makes, 'Grandmother's stew' or 'Grandmother's pancakes'. This does not only indicate that grandmothers are good cooks, there are other things involved. First of all, it is not given that grandmothers are good cooks, but since they usually have a lifetime of experience with it, they are often better at it than younger women and definitely better than men, who are traditionally not active in Dutch family kitchens. Besides the lifetime of experience, grandmothers have another important asset that might improve their cooking: time. All of the dishes the Dutch associate with grandmothers require time-consuming preparations. It is the kind of dish young professionals or young parents are not able to prepare themselves, they only consume these dishes at a grandmother's house, because she is kind enough to invest her time into it. And there is another reason why she does so. Mothers, and

thus grandmothers, are charged with the task of feeding their children. Even if it is the father who supplies the food, it is the mother who cooks it, serves it, and in some cases actually feeds the child or at least sees to it that the child is fed with it. When a mother loses this daily task -because her children are growing up and moving out of the house- it is a relief in a way, but a loss in another way. It is the reason why children are allowed to eat candy at their grandmother's place, even if they are about to receive a meal, it is the reason why grandmothers often give candy as presents. It is the reason why a grandmother puts in the effort of making a meal the (grand)children love and are not capable of preparing themselves.

The description above could go on for many pages, but I do not want to describe Dutch cuisine and customs here. All I want, is to demonstrate the importance of food and how it reflects various cultural and social aspects. Naturally, there are many variants of the stereotype image I have described above. Around the world there are innumerable kinds of food and even more customs and habits associated with it. With the above example I hope to show that we all participate in the construction and legitimating of culture and identity through the use of food. It is a daily process, which we commonly take for granted, but upon close investigation, we will find that our food habits are intrinsically connected to our culture.

In this thesis I will investigate the food habits of an Afro-Brazilian religious community. As any other community, the members of the community take their food habits for granted, even if innumerable conscious choices need to be made and thorough thought and extensive care are put into it. Most of the food habits described here, are simply part of the community culture. They do not require introduction, or explanation for the members. The religious culture investigated here is connected to its food habits as any other culture is connected to its food habits.

Peter Farb and George Armelagos have described how the use of food, food products and all of the customs that surround it are indicators of the social and cultural values of the consumers (Farb & Armelagos, 1980). Even if those consumers are not at the table and never will be, they are important participants in the entire process. Women or children may never eat together with their husband or father in some cultures. They receive his leftovers and consume them in a different part of the house. Even though they are not present at the table, they are important participants in the eating process.

Family members are not the only consumers that may enjoy their meal separately. Deities, nature-gods, ancestors, and all other spiritual entities are probably the biggest group of consumers that enjoy their meal separately. As we have established a kind of reciprocity amongst ourselves, which includes the sharing of a meal, it is no more than logical that we also share a meal with our spiritual counterparts.

But not only the actual offering of food binds us with our spiritual counterparts. In various other ways people are able to define themselves as religious practitioners. Catholics, define their spiritual identity by not eating meat on Fridays, Jews by eating

merely kosher food products and by all means avoid pork, Buddhists who are strictly vegetarian. And what about all of the fastening practices? Catholics know a six week period of fastening before Easter, orthodox Buddhist monks basically fast all the time, since they live merely of what others are willing to give, Muslims have a strict eating pattern during the ninth month of their calendar, Ramadan. There are innumerable examples of eating or non-eating habits through which one can express (part of) one's religious identity.

Besides defining one's spiritual or religious identity, one can define various other parts of the identity through food. Delicacies, such as snails, oysters and caviar combined with expensive Champaign or aged wines and whisky are exclusive for wealthy people, especially in the West. French fries and pizzas have become symbols for lower class Americans. Different types of food are associated with different types of people, as we have seen in the examples mentioned above.

In this thesis I will present the results of a research on the use of food in the Candomblé community of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion, that finds its origins in north-east Brazil, particularly in the cities of Salvador and Cachoeira. The belief system is often described as a mixture between Catholicism and the Yorubá belief system. It has spread through the entire country of Brazil and even throughout the Americas and to Europe. Food takes up a central role in the Candomblé belief system. All of the deities are associated with specific types of food, that are offered to them on a regular basis and the sharing of food during a religious feast is an important part of the religious practices.

The scope of the research was too limited to investigate the actual practices of all temples on all occasions, but I have examined the practices through participant observation in various temples in the city of Salvador and in a smaller town in the surrounding area, Cachoeira. I have interviewed Candomblé clients, initiates and leaders from various ages and backgrounds.

Each society or community has its own eating habits and customs, which reflect their world view, shape their identity, mark their social structure and reveal many other things about their culture. In the Candomblé community, food plays an extremely important role, which is no less complex than that of food in other communities. I will demonstrate how food produces and shapes identity, reveals and negotiates social order, is structured around various categorizations that each imply a specific kind of use. In addition I will demonstrate how 'Africa' is reflected in the identities that are produced and negotiated through the use of food.

1.2 Candomblé

The estimated two million African slaves that were shipped over the Atlantic, mainly arrived in the port of Salvador, former capital of Brazil. Brazil became the main destination point for the largest population of Africans in the African Diaspora. These

enslaved Africans have become one of the oldest and biggest African diasporas in the world.

In the whole of Brazil, but in Bahia in particular, we find various survivals from the African heritage. Capoeira is probably the best-known Afro-Brazilian element in the world. The martial art, disguised as a dance, accompanied by the typical drums, cowbells, tambourines and *berimbaus* (one-snared instruments) is known as Brazilian in the first place, but linked to Africa through the slaves, who developed it. Some argue that the dance has its origins in the Angolan zebra-dance, but opinions differ. It is certain that the sport has evolved from a pastime for the African slaves to a popular exercise for Brazilians from all layers of society and many others throughout the world.

Not all African heritages have developed into worldwide phenomena. We may be familiar with the rhythms of samba and lambada, but it is still mainly produced and enjoyed in Brazil. Just like most of the Afro-Brazilian cuisine is still mainly cooked in Bahia. Candomblé finds its origins in Bahia, but has spread throughout the entire country. There are about three million Brazilians who have officially declared Candomblé as their religion, but up to seventy million who regularly or occasionally visit a temple (Renata Camargo, 2005; Reginaldo Prandi, 2004). The religion hardly exists outside Brazil, even though innumerable non-Brazilians are initiated and even some foreigners have worked their way up and have become Candomblé priests.

Candomblé, has manifested itself as a counter-religion. It counters society, in the sense, that official positions or diplomas have no value within the strict hierarchy of a Candomblé temple. Non-educated, elderly black women may be the leaders, professors and mums of young, white, academic professionals. Candomblé also counters the individualistic character of modern society. It also counters the Catholic liturgy with a strong opposition between wrong and right. Within Candomblé there is no standard for moral values, the wrong/right opposition is rather a continuum or scale, that needs careful attention to maintain its balance.

As a counter-religion Candomblé has manifested itself as an important political platform on various levels. First of all as a platform to raise black consciousness. This development is relatively recent, as Candomblé was oppressed and discriminated against in its early stages. During this period a form of syncretism was developed in which Candomblé deities and Catholic saints were worshipped together. This process has helped the Afro-descent community to become more Brazilian.

At the end of the nineteenth century a policy of de-Africanization was implemented by the Brazilian government. Afro-Brazilian elements- *capoeira* (an Afro-Brazilian martial art), samba, female vendors of Afro-Brazilian foods- were to be removed from the streets. Various expressions of Africanism were even prohibited at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as *capoeira* and the typical *Afoxé* drums. The turning point came when Vargas rose to power. Getúlio Vargas was president of Brazil from 1930 until 1945 and from 1951 until his suicide in 1954. Under the Vargas regime

Afro-Brazilians started to take pride in their (African) cultural expressions. Bahia now became the 'treasury of Afro-Brazilian culture' and Candomblé is one of the state's most prominent tourist attractions (Van de Port, 2007:246).

Obviously, the Candomblé community is not a homogenous group. In fact, all temples are autonomous institutions with their own authorities, characteristics and individual identities. For some temples this identity has been developing for many years and is full of traditions initiated by one of their leaders. Other temples, that have only recently been established, depend strongly on their first leader to initiate traditions and to develop an identity. Newly established leaders do not simply invent their own traditions, but they use the knowledge they have developed over the years at the temple, where they were initiated. They can also be inspired by other temples with which they feel somehow connected.

1.3 Candomblé history

Times have changed since Edison Carneiro wrote his book *Candomblés da Bahia*. The descriptions he gives of the Candomblé temples, no longer fit with reality. He describes how most temples are located in the rural regions at certain distance from the city. Often there is no electricity, or merely in a limited number of spaces. He describes how a small community lives at the area of the temple. They live a poor and sober lifestyle. Those living at the temple cook individually and sometimes consume only one meal a day. It is common to eat with the hands. The women, living at the temples, earn some money by washing clothes at a nearby river (1948).

In today's urban setting it is less common to live at a temple. One of the initiates, usually the leader or an older *equede* (female initiate, who never incorporates), might live in the surroundings of the temple, but the house will be located separately and considered a private area. Since the city has grown rapidly over the last decades and its area thus expanded vastly, most temples can now be found inside the city. All temples do need some form of open space for ritual purposes, which means that the temples commonly have a spacious backyard with, if possible, a water source or fountain. However, many temples can still be found on the outskirts of the city or even in remote areas. Naturally, most temples make use of the basic supplies everybody nowadays profits from, such as electricity and running water. Life at a temple is still simple and generally poor.

Despite the modern supplies, it is common to bathe at a nearby river or somewhere outside, during ritual celebrations. Also, it is common to provide for merely simple comfort at the temple, both for initiates, who still sleep on straw mats at the floor, whenever they are required to spend the night at the temple, and for visitors, who find themselves sitting on wooden or concrete benches for hours watching the ceremonial dancing, and still rarely receive cutlery to consume their food.

Most of Carneiro's description fit with Donald Pierson's descriptions in his book "Negroes in Brazil". It is striking to see Pierson's perception of Bahia in the 1950's.

He considers the “African culture” on the verge of disappearance, he even claims most of the inherited culture has already disappeared. The religious practices, he states, will be the last to disappear (1942:275). Now, almost seventy years later, we find that the Afro-Brazilian religious practices are popular as ever. The only influence that has virtually completely declined is that of the Malês, Islamic Africans.

Pierson describes various forms of African traditional worship, some of which had not been described in earlier works. He extensively discusses a case of a female individual from the lower class in Bahia, who relates various stories about black magic, *feitiçaria*. Besides the fact that her way of thinking proves to him that she has a completely different world view from the elite Europeans in Brazil, it also illustrates a problem that Candomblé leaders are facing in this period.

Many Candomblé leaders, who have never ‘suffered’ the entire initiation ritual, are rising to power. They are usually men who picked up their knowledge “here and there”. Through their magic practices they influence the world around them and the lives of individuals, like other Candomblé leaders. The difference between the initiated leaders and the self appointed ones is that the former seek to use their powers in a positive way, whereas the latter offer their practices as an expensive commodity, giving opportunity for individuals to directly harm others. Those leaders, who have undergone the initiation ritual, despise these practices and try to distance themselves from them.

A major problem that these self appointed leaders bring along, is that of mixture. Not so much the syncretism between Catholicism and Candomblé, but rather a mixture or syncretism of various *nações* (religious influences) and more importantly that of Candomblé with Indian ritual practices, especially the manifestations of *caboclos* (Indian entities). Thus, various Candomblé temples openly declare not to be involved in these harmful practices and leaders start dispersing their “pure” and “authentic” nature. This purity and authenticity, does not have to do with a liberation or purification of Candomblé from the Catholic influences, but with a purification of one African origin, instead of various African origins or even indigenous origins.

Pierson considers many social processes a threat to the proliferation of Candomblé, at least in its “pure” form. As described above, there is a threat from within, cult leaders who no longer respect the African traditions and mix their practices with influences from Indians and/ or perform black magic in order to gain wealth. Also, the younger negroes, Brazilian born individuals of African descent, “tend to forsake Candomblé and the body of ideas and sentiments identified with it and to look upon these customs and traditions as evidence of ‘ignorance’, ‘backwardness’ and ‘retarded mental growth’ ” (1942:313). However, according to Pierson, the greatest threat to the Candomblé religion is the contact of negroes with the white or European culture. As, especially men, begin to take part in the white/European culture, through education and labor, their interest in Candomblé starts to decline. Implicit here, is the

idea that Candomblé is not (merely) a religion, but that it represents African culture and therefore clashes with European/white culture.

The consequences of these threats manifest themselves in various ways. Candomblé temples (*seitas*) increasingly compete with each other as their allegiance is declining. Thus, temples use various ways to demonstrate their purity in order to manifest themselves as legitimate Candomblé cult houses and leaders present themselves as trustworthy. This search for authenticity or purity is connected to another phenomenon, also noted by Parés, is the fact that the prestige of older leaders and temples are romanticized and enhanced. Thus, these leaders and temples start to function as role models and become, in a sense, the prototype of Candomblé leaders and temples. Pierson even claims *babalaô* Martiniano, *mãe* Aninha and Maria Báda “represent the African tradition in its ‘purest’ form” (1942:317). Interestingly, none of these Candomblé initiates are African born negroes and all of them have learned African languages (*Nagô*, *Queito*) as a second language. In other words, specific persons become the epitome of ‘pure and authentic’ African tradition.

The search for purity and authenticity has been investigated by various scholars over the last decades. Luis Nicolau Parés is one of those scholars. He has investigated a specific phenomenon that is closely connected to the dynamics of the ‘purification’ of Candomblé (Parés, 2004). Two assumptions form the basis of his research. First, the derivation of a *nação* identity as a religious affiliation, which is acquired through initiation and not from kinship. Second, the search for authenticity, which is often not based on any type of historical knowledge or re-installment of actual Yorubá customs, but rather inspired by various forms of knowledge or imagination that may hardly have anything to do with reality (Parés, 2004; Capone, 2007). The bases for authentication may lie in a connection with a person or historical figure.

Parés argues that ‘disputes between experts in matters of ritual orthodoxy form one of the main arenas for establishing difference and identity’ (2004:196). The religious congregations base their practices on alignment with allied temples and differentiation with concurrent temples. Thus, temples seek for spiritual support not only directly from the deities and ancestors, which inspire the leaders and initiates, but also through some form of recruitment or fostering by a senior member of a prestigious temple. Temples try to establish a ‘pure’ or ‘authentic’ set of ritual practices that is derived from one particular origin. Those temples who claim to derive their practices from the same origin support each other and establish kinship-like relationships, in which the oldest members are the highly respected ones, that serve as role models. Through these processes temples seek to establish their ‘right to belong’.

One of the consequences of this dynamic, is the so called Nagoization of Candomblé. A process that has caused the Nago-influence to be dominant over other influences.

Half a decade after the end of slave traffic, Nina Rodrigues already noticed that all religious survivals, be it of Angolas, Haussas, Guruncis or Minas, are strongly influenced by the Nagôs. '[They] all have *terreiros* and *candomblés*, in which their particular deities and fetishes, also receive an external cult, more or less copied from the Nagô practices.' (1932:344) The only religious influence that has completely syncretized with the Nagô belief system is that of the Ewes, or *Gêgês*. "Their fusion is so intimate, that it is impossible to separate one from the other and in our earlier works, I didn't even notice they were different" (1932:393).

The Bantu (Angolan/Congolese) belief system must have had minimal influence in this period. The only thing Rodrigues' says about it is that he has invested a great deal of effort to search for survivals from these origins, but they were all in vain (1932).

The first to mention the Bantu or Angola religious belief system is Arthur Ramos. He admits, that the belief system in 1934 is highly influenced by the *Gêgê-Nagô* religious practices. At the same time he admits that the linguistical influence from the Angolans/Bantus is dominant over the linguistical influence of the Sudanese languages, such as Fon, Ewe, Yorubá, etc. (76). According to Ramos' findings the Bantu religions possess an "extremely poor mythology" (77). He minimally describes it as a "vague mythical sketch of a primitive pair that lived in a fruitful garden and from which humanity departed" (77).

Ramos' own study in Brazil presents some interesting findings. According to him the supreme being from the Angolans, *Zambi*, entered Brazilian religious practices significantly deeper than the Congolese variant, *Zambiapongo*. Most of Ramos' proof stems from linguistic evidence, except for two specific rituals. The first is a dance that is associated with the name *Zabiapungu* in the south of Bahia. The second is a "classic ritual to invoke spirits [of the dead]" (1956:83) common in Rio de Janeiro. It remains questionable to what extent the Congolese and Angolan religious beliefs or practices have actually influenced or survived in Bahian Candomblé, because these findings mostly show, what has been shown for the *Gêgê-Nagô* practices earlier, that they cultivate the same deities and use the same religious practices, only under different names.

Contrary to the Nagôs and *Gêgês*, the Bantus, according to Ramos, did not have any fetishist practices- with animal sacrifice and such. They were involved with death, ancestry, domestic gods, benignant or malignant entities, transmission of souls, totemism, etc. (Ramos, 1956:87). The Bantu liturgy is closely connected to totemic ceremonies, funeral rites and magic medicine. How much of these practices have survived in Brazil or influenced the Afro-Brazilian religions does not become apparent in Ramos' work.

One of the most tangible differences, that can still be noted, between *Gêgê-Nagô* ceremonies and Bantu ceremonies is the music. The *atabaques* (drums) are played with the hands in Bantu temples, contrary to the customs in *Gêgê/Nagô* temples,

where the *atabaques* are played with little sticks (*baguetas*). Another significant difference, that also manifests itself in the music is the language used for the songs. Though many Kimbundo and Kikongo songs can be heard at Bantu temples, it is common to hear Portuguese songs in a Bantu temple. In a Nagô temple, to the contrary, it is uncommon to hear Portuguese songs, virtually all songs are sung in Nagô (Yorubá).

Candomblé's popularity increased vastly after the abolition of slavery. Its cult houses and ceremonies suffered from police intervention and negative press, but nevertheless showed resistance and continued to exist. In this early stage it was a syncretism of the Gegê-Nagô mythology and liturgy that dominated the Bahian Afro-Brazilian cult houses. Later the influence of the Bantu (Angolan/Congolese) mythology and liturgy became more apparent. As more and more influences started to penetrate into the Candomblé belief system, the authenticity of the Candomblé leaders became a matter of interest. Older Candomblé leaders started to distance themselves from these mixed religions and sought to proof their purity and authenticity. Famous leaders evolved into reference points for other leaders and temples as the 'purest' or 'most original' leaders. If temples wanted to manifest their authenticity, they would establish kinship-like relations with well known temples.

Police no longer disturb Candomblé temples or their ceremonies. Nowadays, the Candomblé initiates and leaders are mainly confronted with negativity from the Protestant churches. Even though both the Catholic/Candomblé syncretism and the Afro-African syncretism are increasingly being disintegrated, the Candomblé community seems more united than ever and represents not only a religion in its own right, but a religion that has been described as a 'proper world' religion by various scholars. It is no longer a religion of African slaves or a sect for the outcasts of society, Candomblé is a religion of people from different color and descent and from all layers of society.

Candomblé is no longer considered a primitive or backward religion of people with inferior intellect, but still suffers from discrimination. The animal sacrifices and other rituals are often described as barbaric and despised by non-Candomblecistas. The sorcery practices as described by Pierson continue to give Candomblé a bad name and the struggle of 'authentic' leaders to dissociate themselves from the 'non-authentic' leaders continues.

1.4 Anti-syncretism, a break with tradition?

Candomblé leaders do not necessarily choose to maintain the traditions initiated by their peers or predecessors. In some cases, they consider it best to break with the (older) traditions. One of the most influential breaks with traditions was the choice of leader Stella to break with Catholic syncretism. This break was initiated by the Bahian anti-syncretism movement that wanted to free itself from external influences – the Catholic church- a necessary evil, which they no longer considered necessary. But it was also a movement that searched for purity and authenticity. In the south-

east of Brazil a comparable movement was initiated, but both movements had different ideas on where to find authenticity and how to define purity.

The Bahian anti-syncretism movement, led by Mother Stella from the prestigious *Opó Afonjá* temple, is focused on purifying the 'Africa' preserved in Brazil. Contrary to the re-Africanization movement from Southeast Brazil, Mother Stella does not search for authenticity on the African continent, but rather for the 'real' Africa that has only survived in Brazil and even on the African continent does not exist anymore. The Candomblé religion, according to the anti-syncretism movement simply needs to be freed from anything 'unreal'- the Catholic rituals imposed on Candomblé practitioners during slavery.

The re-Africanization movements from south-east Brazil do not search for an imaginary Africa, nor for role models within Brazil. The re-Africanization movements turn to Africa to find guidance. Yorubá language courses, for example, were taking place on a large scale in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Young students soon considered themselves carriers of the *fundamentos* (fundaments) of the Afro-Brazilian religion. Candomblecistas from the South of the country no longer found themselves forced to travel to Bahia in order to obtain ritual knowledge. A new source of religious legitimacy could be found closer to home (Capone, 2007).

According to Stefania Capone's argumentation, there are two things to be found in Bahia. Firstly, the role of certain temples or leaders as an authority within Afro-American religions as opposed to the authority of African religious institutions or leaders. Second, a search for an 'authentic Africa' within Brazil as opposed to an 'authentic Africa' in current Africa.

These two phenomena have also been examined by Luis Nicolau Parés, who has examined the development of Nagô/Ketu cult houses as role models for other Candomblé temples. He explains how Nagô/Ketu cult houses started to function as role models in the nineteenth century. He describes how this phenomenon is linked to the process, which he calls re-Africanization, but is in fact the same process, which Capone calls anti-syncretism. Besides the installment of *nações* (nations) as a theological institution and a search for authenticity and purity, the anti-syncretism process is strongly related with a relative and absolute increase in Nagô/Ketu cult houses. Due to various reasons, the anti-syncretism process has caused an explosive popularity for Nagô/Ketu cult houses. During the first period of the anti-syncretism movement, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Nagô/Ketu cult was considered more pure or authentic than other *nações* by various scholars and thus gained ground (Parés, 2004:191).

In this period specific leaders and their temples began to serve as role models for many other temples. Their actions, whether 'innovative or traditional' were imitated widely. Authenticity, then, no longer depended on the actual knowledge about the *nações'* geographical or theological origins, but rather on the resemblance with the practices of a more famous leader or temple.

As it is precisely this period during which an explosive growth of temples takes place, these phenomena -strong leaders, whose words and actions are copied widely and the idea that the Nagô/Ketu cult is the most authentic *nação*- become dominant and persist until today. They are even shared over Brazil's geographical boundaries. Capone illustrates the role of certain temples as described by Parés. An initiate from the Cuban variant Santería and adjunct professor at Florida University turns to Bahia for help in (re)learning specific rituals. He takes this knowledge with him to the US, where he performs the rituals for numerous initiates (Capone, 2007).

Parés argumentation sheds a new light on the re-Africanization process. He describes the importance of the *nações* to 'negotiate, construct, and legitimate ... ritual differences and collective identities.' (Parés, 2004: 185). He claims 'certain key ritual features are considered important as diacritical signs of a real or imagined continuity with a distinct African past and religious tradition' (2004:185). He exposes two interesting facts. First, the derivation of a *nação* identity as a religious affiliation, which is acquired through initiation and not from kinship. Second, the search for authenticity, which is often not based on any type of historical knowledge or re-installment of actual Yoruba customs, but rather inspired by various forms of knowledge or imagination that may hardly have anything to do with reality.

In fact, Parés does not describe a re-Africanization process, but rather a process of identity formation, consistent with the process which Selka and Capone describe as anti-syncretism (Parés, 2004; Selka, 2007; Capone, 2007). Candomblé temples do not search for their actual origins, but try to establish their temples as religious cult houses in their own right. They do so, not only by anti-syncretizing Candomblé from Catholicist influences, but also by constructing their own ritual practices and identities in line with or as opposed to those of other Candomblé temples.

Despite the fact that the *nação* identity is derived from religious affiliation and not from geographical origins, it shows remarkable resemblance with the discourse on ethnicity and autochthony as described by Geschiere (2009):

"In principle, ethnicity evokes the existence of a more or less clearly defined ethnic group with its own substance and a specific name and history. Precisely because of this specificity, ethnicity is open to debate and even to efforts towards deconstruction by alternative interpretations of history.

Notions of autochthony have a similar effect of creating an us-them opposition, but they are less specific. They are equally capable of arousing strong emotions regarding the defense of home and of ancestral lands, but since their substance is not named they are both more elusive and more easily subject to political manipulation"

The negotiation of a temple's identity is precisely what Geschiere describes as an us-them opposition. Through these negotiations temples create a feeling of belonging,

that is so typical for the notion of autochthony (Geschiere, 2009). But the main problem with these notions is how to define who belongs.

Geschiere repeatedly refers to the importance of the soil, those who are born within the area of the ancestral land belong, but those who are born in other areas do not (Geschiere, 2009:27). A parallel can be made here, with the Candomblé initiation rites. Those who are initiated in a certain temple, belong there. Those of which the place and form of initiation is uncertain or unknown do not belong. As described by Geschiere, these notions are not always obvious or easy to define (2009:27). Therefore, people are involved in defining these notions and they are creative with their conditions in order to 'prove' who does or does not belong.

1.5 Afro-African syncretism

There is another factor to be considered in the anti-syncretism movement, the Afro-African syncretism that is at the basis of the Candomblé belief system. The Nagô/Ketu belief system may have developed itself into a role model for other Candomblé temples, and its leaders may claim to be 'pure', but the creation of the *nação* was inevitably a mixture of various belief systems.

Capone emphasizes what Parés describes as the Nagôization of Candomblé: The fact that scholars for years have based their findings on research performed in no more than three temples, all belonging to the Nagô/Ketu *nação* and strongly related to each other. She argues that this limited ethnographic attention allowed for the construction of an ideal model of orthodoxy that was identified with the Nagô/Ketu *nação* (2007: 3). It is a contrast with one of the biggest complications of the purity discourse, the Afro-African syncretism.

In the diaspora, there is not only the matter of Afro/European religious syncretism, but also an even older and stronger Afro/African syncretism, which is based upon the idea of a shared African cultural ground (2007:4). It is a form of syncretism that is often considered positive, since it forms the 'core' of African culture and thus strengthens its resistance against exogenous influences. This line of thinking would imply that all those involved in African derived religious practices would support each other and, more importantly, learn from each other. However, Parés has shown that the search for authenticity and purity within Candomblé has caused an anti-syncretism movement against this form of syncretism (2004).

The explosive increase of Candomblé temples at the beginning of the nineteenth century, made it impossible for all temples to support each other. It was even impossible to know each other. It is therefore not surprising that some kind of authority or role model emerged. This role model may have caused a purification process against Afro-African syncretism in a certain way, it has never been able to fulfill this goal completely. Despite the efforts of Mother Stella and her predecessors it was a mission impossible to create any form of pure African derived religion, simply because the religion had already been modified by the Africans in Brazil as soon as

they arrived. Raul Lody explains how Africans after arrival in Brazil soon lost their ancestry worship, since this was based on the family structure, common in Africa, which was broken as soon as slaves were shipped over the ocean. Instead of worshipping the ancestors slaves started worshipping deities from a shared origin. Originally slaves with the same geographical background would share their worship practices. This process has developed into the creation of *nações*. The anti-syncretism movement against Afro/African syncretism, described above, was not so much a search to return to original African religious practices, but a search for clear guidelines for the religious practices, based on the *nação* practices.

Besides all of the religious and political aspects of the re-Africanization and anti-syncretism movement, there is a significant social component to it. Raul Lody has described syncretism, besides a necessity, as a need for Candomblé initiates to develop a more Brazilian identity. In other words, initiates were initially not so much involved in constructing an African identity, but rather with constructing a Brazilian identity. Their African identity, at that time, was evident. Being a practitioner of an African derived religion complicated the construction of the Brazilian identity, because it confirmed their 'Africanness'. Therefore, the practitioners searched for a way to overcome these complications through syncretism.

Later, when the re-Africanization process starts, the situation has reversed. Initiates are now using the religious identity to construct an African identity, because their Brazilian identity is already evident. Continuing this line of thought, we can state that the re-Africanization process is not merely the disappearance of a necessity for syncretism in order to create a 'Brazilianness', but also the emergence of a new necessity to create 'Africanness'.

It is no more than logical that there has emerged a different situation in the southeast of Brazil, where the population is mainly of European descent and Bahia, where the population is mainly of African descent. In cities, such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, African derived cultural and social elements are minimal. Those, which are still prominent, such as samba and bossa nova are completely incorporated in Brazilian society and are no longer considered 'African' nor are they connected to religion. If the *Paulistas* and *Cariocas* are going to turn to an authentic source for their religious support, why would they turn to Bahia? They no longer identify with the Bahian cultural elements, that are associated with Bahian Candomblé. It makes more sense to turn to a source from outside the country, one that is from the actual origins of the belief system, even if this source is no longer the original source from where the slaves brought their belief system.

For Bahians, on the other hand, the cultural elements, with which they identify, are intrinsically connected to Candomblé. It wouldn't make sense for them to go out and look for those elements elsewhere, if they can find those same things next door. The 'Africanness' has been kept alive in Bahia through various ways and it is an essential

part of their identity as Bahians . Why would Bahians betray this part of their identity and replace it for an external influence?

The above mentioned dynamics, that are consequences of the anti-syncretism movement, have caused for an increase in the importance of the mythological Africa, where the deities live. From an emic point of view, this is where leaders find their inspiration, either in the actual myths that relate various moments in the lives of the deities, or through divination during which diviners contact the mythological world and its inhabitants, the deities. How this mythological world is constructed, negotiated and consulted is, thus, a defining factor in the identity formation of a Candomblé leader. It is a matter of 'knowledge is power'. Those who are best informed about 'the correct' way of doing things, are the most powerful. This shows on a small scale within the temples. The leaders of the temples are the most powerful, because they possess the most knowledge or have the best access to knowledge (through divination). The hierarchy on the basis of seniority can also be explained in this respect. On a larger scale we find that specific temples or leaders have gained a position as role model for other temples or leaders on the basis of their knowledge.

1.6 'Africa', Africa and African

Afro, Africa, African are terms often and commonly used in Brazilian Portuguese. However, the use of the term 'Africa' and all terms related to it cannot be easily defined and is, in fact, subject to constant redefinition.

Stephan Palmié introduces two special editions of the Journal of Religion in Africa with an essay on epistemological questions involved in qualifying religious phenomena as 'African'. He starts by explaining how 'Africanity' carried negative connotations, it designated exactly that which 'properly universal religions' were not.

Later, the term is employed to refer to 'a past that needed to be known in order to more efficiently combat its hold on the future of modernizing nation-states' (Palmié, 2007:162). In this stage the 'authentically African survivals' in Cuba and Brazil start to take shape (Palmié, 2007:162). Even in this discussion we find a search for authenticity linked to some form of 'Africa(nity)'. The negative connotations of the terms transformed into positive ones. What was denominated as a racially determined inability of black people to conform to socially dominant white norms, became a prideful continuation of cultural heritage and exclusive *savoir* on the African continent and in the diaspora (Palmié, 2007:163). Racial exclusions turned into inclusion on the basis of a form of solidarity because of a common home land.

Then, Palmié enters a field that goes beyond the findings of the religious scholars above. As 'Africa' represents various entities, that are interactive, they react to the process of naming and, more importantly, such names turn into predications that can exert influence upon reality. In other terms, besides qualifying and representing reality, terms related to Africa, also influence reality.

Palmié argues that the complexity of terms, such as Africa or African, suffer from the 'scrutiny of the continents heteronymous history'(2007:161). Continuing this line of arguments, Palmié emphasizes the use of the 'Africa' topos, as opposed to any term more specific to define a descendant from the African continent, e.g. Igbo, Yoruba, Dahomean, etc. It seems the 'African' identity only becomes apparent with extra-African contact. This can be compared to what Capone describes as Afro-African syncretism, only on a broader level of society. It is also an argument that supports the idea of an imaginary Africa as the bases for a transnational identity. This imaginary Africa, which is focused on the future, may indeed be the basis for a transnational community to which the Afro-American religions appeal. A vast contrast with the real Africa, bound in history or geography, to which Afro-American religions would not appeal, because individuals no longer identify with it. Especially if it would emphasize the local origins, because individuals usually don't know their own geographical origins.

This view leads to new interpretations of the emphasis on *nação* origins in the Bahian Candomblé theological system as described by Capone and Parés. The collective identity created through the use of the imaginary Africa topos, is divided into smaller collective identities based on the *nações*. Interestingly, these *nações* do not refer to actual historical origins, but to an affiliation acquired through initiation. With this division religious leaders have created a translocal belief system, based on the idea that temples of the same *nação* are related and support each other. At the same time, this situation causes a separation between temples from different *nações*.

1.7 Dynamics of Candomblé

Candomblé has been involved in various dynamics since its legalization during the Vargas regime. An explosive growth in the number of temples has taken place, which coincided with the emergence of specific temples that started to function as role models.

More recently, one of the temples with a role model function has initiated an anti-syncretism movement. The anti-syncretism movement, that is intertwined with the search for purity and authenticity is the most influential dynamic of the last decades. These intertwined dynamics are connected to the notions of an imaginary, historical and current 'Africa'. Candomblé leaders have actively fought off 'the mask' of syncretism and have developed Candomblé as a religion in its own right. Candomblé has thus become more and more a symbol for the Afro-Brazilian community and a way for Brazilians to get in touch with the African elements kept alive by the religion, such as the Afro-Bahian cuisine, the drums, the songs, the dance, the social structure, etc.

Candomblé has manifested itself as a counter religion, it cultivates those aspects that are considered 'inferior' in Bahian society. Candomblé forms a political platform contra modernity, individuality, discrimination and racism. Initiates sometimes speak of the whitening 'embranqueamento' of the temples, referring to the influence of

modernity, such as the emphasis on written literature or the highly estimated respect for diplomas (Van de Port, 2007). They despise the lack of respect for the traditional hierarchy, the need for people to use pen and paper to learn the songs and myths, instead of the traditional oral transmission. Some of the older initiates regret the adjustments Candomblé is making in its (initiation) rituals to adapt to a modern lifestyle.

On various levels temples, their leaders and initiates have been involved in positioning themselves somewhere within these dynamics, because they are all part of the negotiating process of who belongs as described by Geschiere (2009). The use of colour (van de Port), religious affiliation (Parés), structure (Capone) and cultural elements (Selka) have been examined in this regard. But one of the most essential elements of the religion has not yet been investigated in this regard, food. Since the use of food, food products and all of the customs that surround it are indicators of the social and cultural values of the consumers, they must reveal important information on the way temples deal with these dynamics. Through examining the food habits of the heterogeneous Candomblé community I will expose how temples, leaders and initiates deal with the dynamics of the Afro-Brazilian religion. How do temples deal with these dynamics and how does food reflect the production of identity and the negotiation of belonging that is intimately linked to the notion of 'Africa'?

2. Fieldwork impression

São Salvador da Bahia de Todos os Santos, ex-capital of Brazil, is the biggest city in North-East Brazil and the third biggest city in the entire country, outsized only by Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The city houses almost three million inhabitants and almost four million including the surrounding area. The state capital is now commonly known as Salvador, but it has received various nicknames, such as *Bahia*, city of joy and black Rome.

With 26% of the *soteropolitanos* being classified as black and almost 55% as *pardo* (mixed) Salvador is considered the biggest black city outside of Africa in the world, followed by New York¹.

I arrived in Salvador on the 10th of July, 2009, after travelling for over twenty hours. While driving to my new home from the airport, I was first struck by the smell of the city. It was not necessarily good or bad, but strikingly different from the smell of Rotterdam, my home-town. The second thing that struck me, was the view on hills covered by slums, they seemed endless. I had been to Salvador before and remembered the impressive size and number of slum areas, but it still didn't leave me unaffected.

As we came closer to the centre of town the view changed. Instead of slums I now saw skyscrapers and shopping malls. I started to remember some things from the first time I was in Salvador, almost six years before. However, it all felt new and it was hard to imagine I was going to spend the upcoming six months in this city.

I arrived at the apartment, where I would eventually stay for almost five months. It was in the middle of the *Dois de Julho* district. One of the older districts of the city, close to the touristic and decadent *Pelourinho* district on the North side and to the south, a bit more distant, the *Barra* district with its famous beach *Porto da Barra*. The last month of my stay, I spent in a different apartment, no more than a block away from my first house.

As a blond European girl I stood out from the crowd in *Dois de Julho*. As soon as I stepped out the door I was confronted with comments of men varying from "hey Blonde" to "so, you must be the angel that fell from the sky. Be careful, because I will catch you". It was also a reason for many people to warn me: "don't go out late", "don't walk around alone", "aren't you afraid?" and the phrase I heard most often "you are a very brave girl". At the same time I was treated like everybody else. When doing groceries I was often approached with the typical Bahian words "my darling", "my daughter", "my love" by perfect strangers. Once, in a restaurant, the waiter called me and my (female) friend "princesses". As a real Dutch girl, I just couldn't believe

¹ Ancestralidade genômica e tipos de sobrenomes em Salvador-BA,

what I was hearing and asked my friend if I had understood his words correctly. She found my question hilarious. "Look at your face!" She yelled out, "get used to it, it's normal here." The question became a symbol for our cultural differences. Whenever I was visiting her and met new people, she would tell them this anecdote sooner or later. It was a sure success for laughter, because it answered to all of the stereotypes between the "European girl" and the "Bahian". The Brazilian stereotypical macho attitude according to which a woman must always be treated as a princess. The European girl, who is left confused. For her, calling a woman a princess in this setting is not just awkward, it's inappropriate.

The district I stayed in and the nearby centre of town are usually crowded with people and traffic. The streets are seldom empty. Working people, shoppers, tourists, innumerable street vendors and many people living on the streets make up the crowd. In the beginning I was shocked by the great number of people living on the streets, and I never really managed to get used to them. I tried to stay away from them at first, but soon learned that they hardly bother anyone. Sometimes they try to sell small things, such as pens or key chains or they beg for some change. The most intriguing group of people living on the streets are children. A little girl, she must have been about ten years old, once followed me a while. It was making me uncomfortable and I firmly held on to my bag. I ran into an acquaintance when she pinched my bottom. It startled me and as I turned around, she was just standing there, smiling at me with this audacious look in her eyes. On a different occasion, a child came begging for some of my ice-cream. I would have given it to him under any circumstances, but this child was enjoying an ice cream himself. No matter how fiercely I disputed with him, about the fact that I was not going to give ice cream to a child, that was already eating one, he never stopped bothering me until my ice cream was finished (and his still wasn't).

Whenever I could, I would walk to the beach for a quick swim and to enjoy the sun. I loved the calm sea of the bay and the warm sun in combination with the fresh winds. But a visit to the beach, was not merely about relaxing. The beach of Porto da Barra is located next to one of the better districts of the city. The danger of assault is fairly high. Obviously, a blond girl at the beach attracts attention, not only from the vendors and the many rent-a-chair stands, but also from male visitors. Whether I would go to the beach on my own, or accompanied, men always came to bother me. I soon learned a tactic that significantly reduced the chances of getting attention. I searched the beach for people from my own age group and introduced myself to them. I would ask permission to join them and mingle. It was a good way to feel safer at the beach and it was a functional strategy to get to know the Salvadorians.



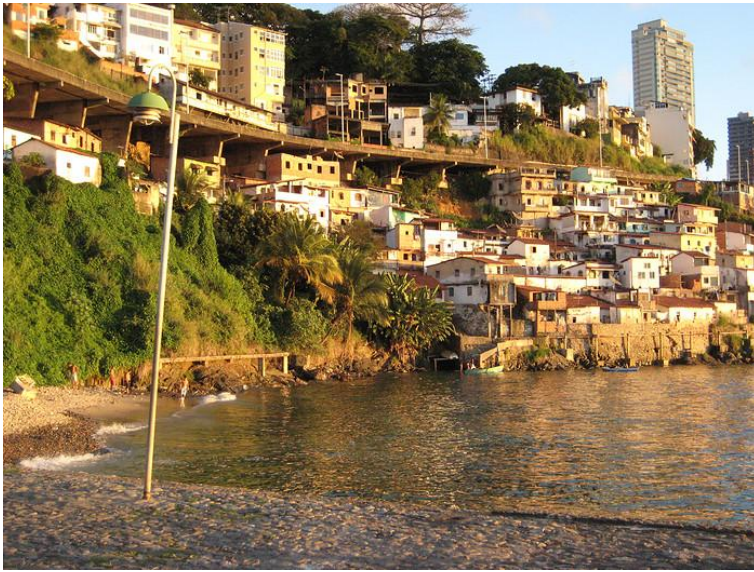
2.1 The beach of Porto da Barra in wintertime. (my picture)

The 'beach mates' often explained the dynamics of the short stroke of sand, where we were creating a tan. The beach is about five to six meters broad and up to 600 meters long. It is divided in strict invisible sections. The extreme left corner was occupied by the alternative crowd and gay sexuals. To me this piece felt a bit like Woodstock. There were always some people playing a guitar or other kind of musical instrument, some were playing soccer and many people smoked weed. A little further down the beach is the 'straight' section, where families group together and enjoy themselves. In between these two sections is even a small stroke where prostitutes enjoy their time off. Towards the right corner of the beach are more 'local' people. I am not sure why this term employed to refer to these people, because they are not the inhabitants of the Barra district. They are people from the margins of society living in slums nearby.

The division of the beach symbolizes the division of Salvador society. I don't mean to say that the society is completely segmented and that there is no contact between the various segments. I am trying to sketch an impression of the various social groups that exist in the city. Though there is some kind of segmentation, as elsewhere in the world, people sometimes belong to various social groups at the same time and they are very capable of maneuvering through the different social groups.

Maybe the groups that are absent from the beach are even more illustrative for the Salvador society. Big crowds of people are too poor to visit the beach, also because they live relatively far away from it. But even more striking is the absence of the rich people, who seem to have their own separate place in society. They often live in big spacious apartments in the city, where they find basically everything they need, such as a swimming pool, a fitness area and a playground for the children. Whenever they can they leave the city to spend some days at their beach house about one to two

hours from the city. These are the people that are completely absent from my image of the city.



2.2 The segmented population of Salvador. Under the road, the slums, next to the road common residences and at the back are the luxurious apartments of famous singers, writers and politicians. (my picture)

For most tourists, I suspect the Candomblé community remains invisible as well. Not because it is hard to find them, but because they are not directly recognizable in the streets and because they wouldn't necessarily start talking about life as a Candomblé initiate, without having a specific reason to do so. Up to about five years ago tourists would run into the various offers people make to the deities, that would be left along the roads, on doorsteps or at crossroads. However, these practices have been forbidden.

Those who go out looking for it, will find Candomblé in numerous places, museums, buildings, tourist shops, etc. By far the most recognizable element of Candomblé are the female street vendors, *Baianas de Acarajé*. Traditionally these are women that were summoned by their deity to go out in the streets to sell *Acarajé*. Though most of these street vendors are still initiates, it is becoming more and more common for non-Candomblecistas to get involved in such a business.



2.3 Baiana de acarajé. (source: <http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/shortorder/800px-Baiana-acaraj%C3%A9-Salvador.jpg>)

To most tourists these women may look different, because of their traditional dress, but they are probably not directly associated with Candomblé. Salvador is known as the city that has 365 Catholic churches, one to visit each day of the year. This number is no longer accurate, but the city is still dense with churches. Some of which are ancient and are still impressive. Few people know that the city is even more dense with Candomblé temples. There are about twelve hundred of them throughout the city. Still, they remain unseen, because they blend in perfectly with the environment or because they are located at places tourist would never visit.

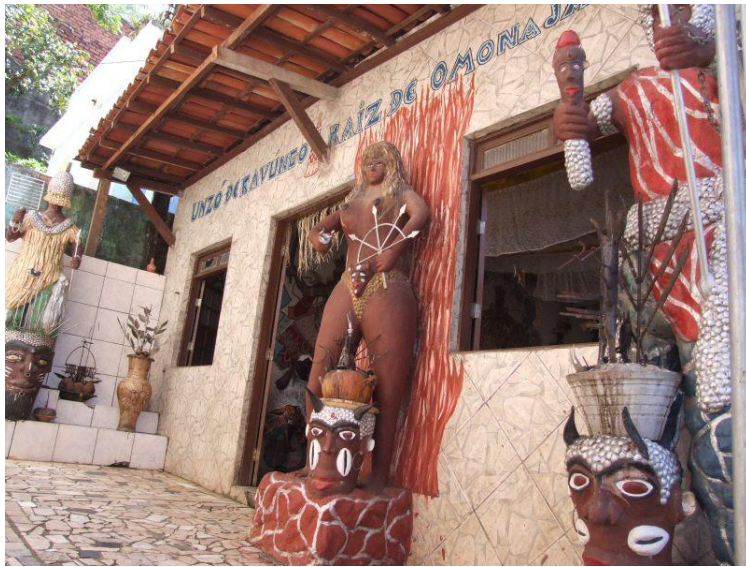


2.4 1165 Candomblé temples in the city of Salvador. (source: <http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/>)

Some temples are easily recognizable.



2.5 and 2.6 (source: <http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/>)



2.7 (source:

<http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/>)

Some temples are not so easy to recognize.



2.8 and 2.9 (source: <http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/>)



2.10 (source:

<http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/>)

In Cachoeira, a little town in the direct surrounding of Salvador (Recôncavo), it was easier to run into anything that involved Candomblé than to avoid it. The small town, just outside of Salvador, is known for its involvement with Candomblé. At the intersection near the entrance of town it is seldom empty with offers to Exú (the messenger between men and the deities). Even if these offers contain expensive bottles of rum, no one will take them, because everybody is well aware of the dangers of such a disturbance.

The dynamics of a town like Cachoeira, are very different from the dynamics of Salvador. In Salvador people hardly knew any temple, besides the ones they have a particular bond with. Even the most famous temples, such as Casa Branca or Opo Afonja, were not known by some of my friends and taxi drivers. In Cachoeira, on the other hand, even those who were not directly involved with Candomblé were familiar with most temples and their leaders. In Salvador I actively had to search for contacts who could help me with my research, but in Cachoeira, my presence was noted easily and help was offered whenever I walked around town. The politician I met one morning at the town hall, for example, was present at the Candomblé feast I attended the same evening. Indeed, many people in Cachoeira are involved with Candomblé and their most important yearly celebration is that of a Catholic sisterhood, the sisterhood of Good Death, which is made up of women who are initiated into Candomblé.



2.11 One of the sisters, from the sisterhood of the Lady of good death, with the typical Candomblé dress. The headscarf, the bead necklaces, the bracelets with cowry shells and the white cloth over her shoulder.



2.12 Another sister, with a different kind of headscarf, but with many necklaces, including one made of cowry shells. (picture by Pedro Archanjo, source: <http://www.orkut.com/Main#AlbumZoom?gwt=1&uid=16160216112194096964&aid=1214382302&pid=1214614010670>)

2.1 First encounter with Candomblé

It was the day after arrival when I first went to a Candomblé temple. It was a pure coincidence, that a friend of mine happened to be in Salvador at the time of my arrival. She should have been in Amsterdam, but one of her cats in Salvador had disappeared and she was so upset about it, that she decided to return home as soon as possible to look for the missing cat.

My friend was a frequent visitor of the temple of leader Zul and friends with some of its initiates, therefore she knew about the festivities. She was more than willing to go, because she would find comfort and advice at the temple about how to deal with the loss of her cat. We had been to the beach that day and returned rather late. When we were ready to leave it started to pour with rain. My friend arranged a taxi to and from the temple.

Even before leaving I found myself in the first confrontation with Candomblé. I knew that white clothing was common in the Candomblé community. I had, therefore, brought various white blouses and a pair of white pants. But I didn't know that skirts for women were much more appropriate than a pair of pants. My friend was kind enough to point that out to me. Unfortunately I hadn't brought a white skirt. We swiftly went through my wardrobe and found an appropriate skirt. It was not white, not even close, it was mainly purple. But it contained some earthly colors and according to my friend it would be appropriate for the occasion.

The problem with the outfit made me nervous. Arranging a taxi made me even more nervous, because most taxi drivers didn't want to head out to that part of the city at night, and particularly didn't want to return to take us back home. But my friend had convinced one of the taxi drivers to accept our offer and we were well on our way to the temple when we saw the body of a man lying in a pool of blood along the side of the road. My fieldwork adventure had officially begun.

I had no idea what to expect of the festivity. Surely, I had read various academic works on Candomblé some of which included extensive descriptions of the temples, the activities, the visitors and the participants. But even the most detailed description cannot transfer the feeling of actually being at the temple and assisting the feast. Luckily, my friend functioned as a guide.

We arrived late at the temple, but the festivities had not yet begun. The rain had stopped, but the ground was still wet. The temple we visited is located in Lauro de Freitas about twenty kilometers from Dois de Julho. The location seemed like a common residence in the middle of a street. We went through the gate and passed a little house when we entered an open space. From the open space I could see a path, but I couldn't make out where it led to. The trees at the end of the path blocked the light. I sensed the smell of animals, goats, probably. From the various doors in the low buildings on each side of the path were women going in and out. A small

group of young women was dressed alike in plain white tops and long, wide, white skirts. One of them was obviously European. German, I found out later.

The peace and beauty of the location grasped my attention. How was it possible that I sat here under a beautiful sky, surrounded by friendly people, after all of the madness I had experienced since my arrival? I started observing everything. I noticed that the German girl, my friend and I were the only light skinned girls. I also noticed I was the only woman not dressed in all-white.

I wondered what was behind all of the doors, where I saw the women going in and out. I wondered how much longer I would have to sit and wait for the festivity to start. A few children ran passed me, I followed them with my eyes and noticed that indeed there were at least two goats under a tree next to the path. Will they be slaughtering those later? I questioned myself.

All of my thinking was constantly interrupted by people introducing themselves and inquiring about me. What was I doing here, how did I know my friend, where was I staying, etc. 'Ah' my friend exclaimed all of a sudden, 'do you see that big woman over there? She is a famous samba singer.' The samba singer had just returned from a visit to the Netherlands, where she had performed in Amsterdam. I felt like I was in a world so far away from my own, hardly anyone had even heard about my country, I was often mistaken for an American, and here was a woman that had just recently returned from my home country.

I realized that the people sitting in the open area were the only ones that were visiting this festivity. I had expected a much bigger crowd, it seemed like there were very few people to celebrate the festivity. It came to me that this was the in-crowd of the temple. Everybody knew each other, people were chatting up as if they were in a bar. Except for the three women in the white skirts who were standing and nervously doing small chores, that apparently needed attention before the start of the festivities. My friend noticed my curiosity. 'They must be 'daughters' here. They are probably being prepared for initiation.'

What I didn't know at the time, was that this first encounter, so far, was rather representative of my other experiences with Candomblé festivities. The temples were often located somewhere on the outskirts of the city, or in areas which taxi-drivers preferred to avoid. They were usually quite peaceful on the inside. I often encountered open spaces where animals were kept and little rooms were to be found. The festivities usually started late and never ended before early in the morning. I was often one of the few white people at the ceremony, and they were hardly ever very crowded. Since I stood out from the crowd, with my European appearance, people often came to me to introduce themselves and make conversation. On various occasions I ran into famous Brazilians or prominent citizens at a temple.

This first encounter, I later realized, was also a good way to get introduced to the 'world' of Candomblé. While chatting with the visitors I was confused regularly by all of the emic terms. Especially, because they are often common Portuguese words, but they were given a new meaning. Angola, for example, was not a country on the African continent, but a religious affiliation. All kinship terms were used to indicate individuals with whom my interlocutors had spiritual connections. To make things more complicated, initiates were not only 'a child of' the spiritual leader, but also of the 'owner of their head', a deity with whom they have a special bond. Thus, whenever someone spoke of his/her father or mother, it could mean at least three people, their biological parent, their spiritual leader, 'their deity'. My friend, fulfilling the role of a guide, was kind enough to explain this confusing use of terms.

Finally we were summoned to proceed into the house at the end of the path, *barracão*. I was able to notice a big dog besides the two goats, locked up in a small cage. I also noticed a water well, a little garden like area with big trees and various other doors.

When entering the feast area I saw the elaborate decorations, the drums, some wooden chairs, leafs on the floor and the separation of men and women. My friend and I set ourselves down in the women's section close to the door. In front of us were big wooden chairs, with decorated backs, probably around eight of them. There was about twice as much space for women to sit as for men. A few older ladies were given a chair to sit on, because the concrete benches would be too uncomfortable for them.

Besides being exceptional for wearing a purple colored skirt and being blond, I started to notice that I was also an exception because of my age. My friend was already about ten years older than me and I estimated that most of the visitors were either around her age or over fifty.

There is another young woman going in and out of the temple. She grasps my attention, not solely because she appears to be of my age. She is helping a middle-aged lady with a remarkable appearance, similar to that of a Hollywood movie star. She's wearing a colored, middle eastern dress and enormous sunglasses. Her hair is painted in a dark shade, but she is light skinned. I was curious to know her nationality and her reasons for being here. While we were waiting for the festivity to begin I saw she was installing a camera. Apparently I was not the only one here for different purposes than religious or social ones. I later heard through the grapevine that she was from São Paulo and wanted to make a documentary about the temple.

It was exceptional to see someone film at a temple. In general any type of recording device, especially if it records visual images is prohibited at the temple. Under supervision of one of the elder initiates and with permission of the leader it is tolerated, but only for specific places, people, objects and moments. This woman was supposedly given a lot of liberty to make her documentary. The leader was said to have been very open about her visiting the temple and filming the daily life and

ceremonies there. On a different occasion, however, a ceremony was performed outside the temple at a nearby lake. During the ceremony the initiates explicitly requested her to turn her camera off at a certain moment. She refused to do so and argued that it was public territory and that everyone could film there. The initiates rested the case and the woman continued filming. As we returned to the temple to finish the ceremony, we received the news that the lady had lost her two cameras and her recordings in the bus. I never saw her since.

Now that I was done analyzing the visitors, I was ready for the festivity to begin. The *barracão* seemed like a theater, where everybody is doing his final things before the show can start. The drums were tested, seats were put in place, some last minute visitors were shown to their seats and there were hasty consultations between the participants.

2.2 The feast

With the beating of drums the beginning of the feast was marked. I witnessed the small ritual to chase Exú, something I had read about, and fireworks were set off. Then all of the initiates formed a long line with the leader in front followed by the *equedes*. There were only women participating in this feast. While they entered the room all visitors stood up. Once they are inside the room, the participants formed a circle. Different kinds of dancing were demonstrated, as indicated by the drums. Though everybody was basically doing the same kind of movements, the whole looked somewhat messy, since all participants followed their own rhythm.

After a while the leader sat down and the ritual of greeting began. Those who are 'owned' by a female divinity lie down on their right side and then turn to their left, those who are 'owned' by a male divinity lie down flat on their belly, face down. The leader, or whomever they are greeting, will touch the top of their back in the middle on the left shoulder and on the right. The initiate then sits up straight, or squats down, takes the hands of the one they are greeting and touches the middle of their chest, the left and the right, finishing the ritual with a little kiss on the hands.

The greeting takes place in a dedicated order. There is not only an order for whom you have to greet, but also for who gets to greet that person first. The participants greet the leader, the vice-leader (*mãe pequena*), the *equedes* and each other. Even those who are playing the drums are included in the greeting ritual. Due to the number of acts that make up the greeting ritual, lines are formed before certain individuals. Some visitors rapidly move to the end of the line just before it is finished. I notice that those who are being greeted sometimes mumble words or phrases to the one greeting them.

The party continues with various songs and dances. Every once in a while participants and visitors touch the ground and then touch their forehead. Visitors are still chatting and greeting each other, while the drumming, singing and dancing continues.

One of the participants starts to shiver, bends her upper body in various directions and yells out a cry. I hear my friend beside me: 'This must be the moment where they all start falling.' It took me a second before I understood her words. 'Falling' one of those common Portuguese words, that has gained new meaning at a Candomblé temple. She meant that the participants were 'falling into their saints', incorporating. And indeed, it was the moment when everybody started doing so, one after the other started to incorporate. The *equedes* took off the shoes, the head scarves, anything that may injure the individual such as glasses or jewelry. The pieces of textile that women wear around their waist were reorganized either underneath both armpits with a knot at the back, or under one armpit and a knot on top of the other shoulder.

A short chaos appeared in front of me. I hardly understood what was going, because so many things were happening at the same time. But before I realize what is going on exactly the women are already leaving the room and the party pauses for a while. From the literature I know that this is the moment where the women change their dress.

Meanwhile, all visitors return to their conversations from before the start of the festivity. Those who arrived late greet the other visitors. Some people leave the *barracão* to get a glass of water, to use the bathroom, or simply for some fresh air. The combination of this highly informal kind of social meeting at this religious place, which is actually in use for a ceremony is new to me. Though I would never consider myself a religious person, I realize that I have incorporated the Dutch Calvinistic Christian standards for behavior at a sacred place. As far as I know, it is appropriate to talk in a low voice at church and to speak little. If you want to chat, you wait for the ceremony to be over and go outside the church. But, here, I find a different standard. Socializing is apparently part of the feast.

I start to feel more comfortable in the laid back atmosphere at the temple. Many people have come up to me, to welcome me. The change of dress is taking a lot longer than I had expected, but finally the festivities continue. Everybody rises again as the incorporated initiates enter the room. Their dress and attributes are impressive. Each dress, including the attributes represents a deity. I try to distinguish them, with the knowledge I gathered from books, but it is harder than I expected. I notice that some people are starting to become emotional. As the 'deities' pass by us, spectators hold up their hands with their palms in front of them. 'It is to pick up the energy of the deities', my friend informs me.

After a round through the *barracao* there is again a greeting ceremony. Eventually the deities are all summoned by the drums to dance. This also happens in a specific order. At least three different songs are played for each deity. An *equede* will accompany the deity and dab the sweat with their white cloths. The deities, that are still waiting for their moment to dance, stand at the back making little movements. Sometimes they bow for the dancing deity or shiver as if at the beginning of their incorporation. The *equedes* lay their hands on the back of these deities to calm them

down. Some of the older incorporated women receive a small seat to sit down while they are waiting. I am fascinated by this state of trance, which does not seem like an actual trance to me. On the other hand, I wouldn't even know exactly what trance is, so I wonder how to interpret the behavior of these incorporated women.

After dancing the deities go around the *barracão* to hug all of the visitors. Sometimes they shake their bodies during the hug and yell out soft or loud cries. The ceremony continues like this for hours.

On my left side I witness how the German girl falls in and out of a trance. Every time she 'drifts of' her glasses and shoes are taken from her. When she returns to her normal self moments later, she looks for them and puts them back on. Her trance looks significantly different from the trance of the older women. The women, to me, seem calm despite their display of typical shivers and screams. The most obvious signs of their trance are their closed eyes and in some cases the faces are tense. The German girl, however, appears far from calm. She looks like someone who is using hallucinating drugs. She cramps her fingers and arms and her head rolls to the front and back. I am having difficulty understanding the entire trance process.

Another young girl, that my friend describes as one of the future initiates, also starts to fall into trance. Her trance, however, is of a different kind from that of the German girl. This girl 'falls into her saint' (*bolar no santo*). She doesn't simply go into trance, but seems to be taken over by her 'owner'. She falls down to the floor, where she starts shaking, cramping and rolling. Eventually she lies still, as if she were dead. A white sheet is put over her body and she is carried out of the room. Later, my friend explains that this is a sign from her 'owner' to say that she is ready to be initiated. The covering and carrying away of her body is her symbolic dead, she now needs to be reborn.

After the girl was taken away, the dancing continued. It was a complete surprise to me that the leader of the temple was now in the middle of the dance floor, not accompanying the other incorporated women, but actually participating as if she were incorporated herself. Was I mistaken or did she just incorporate? My friend was as surprised as I was, but for different reasons. I heard her thinking aloud: Why is she incorporating? She normally doesn't incorporate at this occasion. I turned my head towards her and she realized she was speaking aloud. "I just don't understand," she repeated, "she's not supposed to incorporate, what happened?". It was bothering her and she couldn't let go of her thoughts. She went over to inquire about it. "It is the month of Nanã, that's why she incorporated," was the answer. My friend nodded understandingly, but didn't accept the answer. "There is another reason, the feast for Nanã is not until later this month, something else must be going on." She stopped wondering about it and started realizing that we were witnesses of an exceptional occasion. "Wow, I have never seen the leader here incorporate. You are so lucky, this is really exceptional."

The feast continued for a few hours and ended around 3.00 am. Luckily our taxi driver showed up and brought us home. As I laid myself down to sleep, I wondered how representative this first experience was. From my friends reaction I had witnessed at least three exceptional things, the presence of a famous singer, the young girl that was taken over by her deity, and the leader, who incorporated.

2.3 Food at the ceremony

Before travelling off to the field, I had extensively read about Candomblé. Obviously, I was mainly interested in writings on food or anything that involved food. It is striking how little all of the academics say about the use of food, especially since various scholars mention the use of food, water, animal sacrifice and herbal conjunctions as essential to the ritual practices. Despite the various descriptions of the use of food, hardly any analysis is provided.

Nina Rodrigues explains the importance of offers. He describes the fact that during epidemics roads and crossroads are overloaded with plates of food offered to Omulu (deity of pests and diseases). He also mentions the offers 'our negroes' make to Exú (messenger between men and the deities), such as dog, rooster and goat. In Africa, Rodrigues explains, even human sacrifices are made to this deity (1945:362). Edison Carneiro describes the importance of water. He explains that water plays a minor role in the day-to-day lives of those living at the temple. In religious life, however, he notices that water enters in a significant percentage of the rituals (1948). It is used for ritual cleansings of the body, the head (as the seat of the deity) and various ornaments, such as the bead necklaces that represent one's protector deity. At the shrine for each deity a little cup must always be filled with water from a sacred source, which needs to be refreshed only at specific moments and accompanied by particular ceremonies (Carneiro, 1948). But it is not solely about offering food items, Arthur Ramos describes a custom from various peoples in Lunda, in which people share food. "They also use little metal crucifixes and even images and paper records, they call *Zambi* [supreme being]. They go around demanding salt, sugar and *jimbolas* (bread or cake) from the traders for their *Zambi*" (1956:80). Ramos mentions a comparable custom from Angola, where sorcerers wear little figures made of wood or ivory around their neck. "[They] don't do anything without resorting to these fetishes: if they drink, they sprinkle these *iteque*; if they eat, they give them chewed food; if they wash themselves, they wash the figures..." (1956:83). In short, the figurines are made part of everything the sorcerers do, which leads to them exhaling a "nauseating smell".

All of the academics mentioned above, thus, acknowledge the importance of food offers, animal sacrifice and the sharing of food. They give tables or descriptions of food products that 'belong' to specific deities or their 'sons/daughters'. Some even explain how the food reflects the various characteristics of the deities.

Besides the importance of the consumption of food, there is an important role for the non-consumption of food, fasting and taboos. Pierson noted the various taboos, that

are sometimes for life and sometimes temporarily: “The new *filha de santo*...must...rigorously observe certain food, drink and sex taboos...”(1942:287).

From the fragmented information of various scholar I was able to deduce that the use of food was of major importance and even essential. But it was difficult to understand the full dynamics of it, from the minimal descriptions they provided. I was eager to find out more about the subject.

During my first visit to a temple, I was impatiently waiting for the food to be served. Or at least to get a glimpse of it. My friend had even worsened my impatience by repeatedly emphasizing the good quality of the food at the temple. But, she had also warned me: “Usually the food is not served until the very end of the festivity, and it might take hours before we get anything.”

On this first occasion, I was lucky. The food was not served at the very end of the festivity, but during the change of dress. Since my friend and I were located near the entrance of the *barracão* we were one of the first to receive a plate of food. I was happy and grateful to receive a full plate. It looked like a color palette. There were little balls of different kinds of dishes neatly placed side by side. This was not just any kind of take-away food, nor was it inspired by the modern fusion cooking. This food looked like the typical traditional Bahian cuisine, as far as I could tell. I noticed that all other visitors were familiar with the dishes and assumed that indeed, these must be common dishes for them. I couldn't identify any of the dishes on the plate and even the meat did not seem familiar.

I started eating and noticed something peculiar. We were one of the first to receive the food, but it was only lukewarm. However, I enjoyed the food very much. I saw that most plates had similar dishes on them, but not all plates were the same. The food was served on plastic plates with plastic forks. This surprised me. It seemed contradictory to find such modern items in a place so often labeled as traditional. Later we also received a plastic cup with soft drink of our choice (a coke or the typical Brazilian guaraná). When all visitors had received a plate and a beverage, napkins were distributed and people passed around to make sure everybody had eaten to satisfaction.

My friend started to explain the various dishes on the plate, but realized that she didn't know everything about it. A middle-aged woman had come to join us. My friend and she knew each other well and were very enthusiastic to meet each other here. My friend used the woman almost as an oracle. She posed her every question she and I could come up with. The woman explained about the dishes and the kinds of meat that must have been used for this feast.

“This is caruru, have you ever eaten it? No? Oh, that’s a shame, caruru is delicious! Taste it! What do you think of it?”

Now, this here I don't eat. I just don't like it. Would you like some? Oh, my dear, you don't eat meat, right? Let's exchange our food, because this here I am not going to eat.

Well, what were you asking? O, that's right, about the food. Hmm, there must be goat, maybe chicken. I am not sure. It's delicious isn't it?

So, my friend, tell me, how are you?..." (notes on pc with A.)

The woman was a wonderful presence that made me feel very comfortable, but her information was incoherent and incomplete. When I came home and tried to make notes, I realized I had hardly understood or remembered anything she said.

In a way the food disappointed me, the way in which it was simply distributed on those plastic plates with plastic forks. People inquired whether I was still hungry as if we were enjoying a meal at their house. It seemed so plain and simple, it didn't feel like any kind of ceremony needed to be respected, let alone a religious one. There also seemed nothing special about it, no dishes prepared with blood, no extravagant ingredients, no extraordinary look to the plate or the way it was made up.

It just seemed so contrary to what the only actual research on the use of food described. Raul Lody has specifically investigated the use of food in Candomblé cults. His work is highly descriptive and hardly offers any analyses. However, it is full of all of the essential elements around which food evolves. It is about, the exchange of energies, about respecting the myths of the deities, about extensive knowledge and skill. Nothing like what this first experience had presented to me.

The most interesting part of Lody's work is Mother Stella's (leader of the famous Opo Afonjá temple) preface, in which she summarizes the use of food in various catchy one-liners. She ends her preface with the statement that "eating correctly equals being eternal." (Lody, 1998:17). Obviously this claim implies many things and illustrates the essence of the use of food.

One of the first things Lody points out is the fact that the many dishes that make up the Candomblé menu allow for recognition and knowledge on the peculiarities of the divinities. (1951:23) Food, according to him, is not only an important marker for culture, a civilization, but also "an historical moment, a social moment and an economical moment (1998:26)." Food in Candomblé gains a valuable dimension, it is intended as a way to feed the body and the spirit. At the same time it is a way to establish bonds and processes between men, gods, ancestors and nature (Lody, 1998).

With all of this information in mind I took a look around and observed this moment of everybody enjoying a plate of food. The exchange of energies, the establishment of bonds, I had seen it during the dancing the rituals, but this moment seemed nothing but a joyous, social gathering. The separate sections for men and women were no longer respected. Everybody mingled.

I remembered that besides the nutritional and spiritual value, the food also represents social and cultural values, which Lody recognizes and describes. He considers the public *festas* (feasts) at the temples, also called *ajeum*, the most signifying moments for socialization through food (1998:30), since they join together all initiates and visitors as they jointly share the same food.

I came to the conclusion that the interesting part might be the simplicity and plainness of the entire concept. I realized that the dishes were all typical Bahian food, often described as food of the African matrix (*matriz Africana*). It contained the two ingredients that were in all of the academic works I had read, palm oil and meat from the animal sacrifice. Lody considers palm oil the most immediate and effective marker of Africa in the Afro-Brazilian cuisine. It is like “bringing a piece of Africa into the intimacy of a plate, a ritual, a taste conditioned to civilizations and histories of African peoples” (1998:27).

Also, the variety of dishes on the plate and number of people receiving a plate indicated that it must have been a time consuming process to prepare all this food.

It came to me that the plastic plates and forks may have seemed too ‘modern’ in my eyes, but there were no pretences about the actual food. It was not in any way presented as if it were restaurant food. Each plate was made up carefully, that I could tell. But some plates had received more or less of one dish and sometimes one or two dishes were forgotten. I also noticed that certain dishes were given in relatively big quantities compared to other dishes.

The meat was an exception to the other dishes. None of the plates was served without it. Few plates came with two pieces of meat, but only to compensate their size. As far as I could tell all pieces of meat were served with the bone, which meant that all consumers had to get their hands dirty to enjoy their piece.

At the end of the feast, when the women who have incorporated join the visitors to eat and drink something, they had not yet returned to their usual selves, their *êrê* had come out. *Êrê* is the intermediary between an individual and its deity. It is the child, that everyone bears within. All visitors enjoyed themselves at the sight of these elder women behaving like young children, stealing each other’s candy, talking inappropriately, sometimes begging for money and jumping around.

These women, that are obviously ‘of the house’, do not receive their drinks in plastic cups. They each have their own cup. It is an old fashioned kind of mug made of agate, entirely white with a small blue line around the top. Since the mugs are all similar little strings of beads are used around the ear of the mug to be able to distinguish them.



2.2 Typical mug used in temples.

As I started to visit more and more temples on different kinds of occasions it came to me, that everything seemed so similar from one place to the other and from one occasion to the other, but it never really was. In fact, each and every time I visited the temple I found myself eating different food, in a different setting and location, on a different moment of the day and with different people.

I was served little snacks once during an event, because the ceremony would go on for hours and the temple decided to serve these in-between snacks as a gesture of hospitality. On another occasion, I was warned about the fact that the festivity was taking place on a Sunday. If I didn't accept the food straight away it wouldn't be offered to me anymore, because on Sundays people want to go home early. There was even an occasion where I was summoned to go into a tiny area behind the *barracão* to receive a plate of food while the deities were still dancing. I sat there, almost by myself, because I was the last person to receive a plate. There was no plate prepared for me, as usual, instead the leader of the temple asked me what kind of food I liked, how much I would like of it, etc. After I had eaten, the rest of the food was distributed amongst the people, that had been waiting outside the temple. I could describe many other differences, but it would be a wordy and boring description without any purpose. I prefer to look into some remarkable differences and their possible causes.

In the famous Opo Afonja temple of mãe Stella, one cannot visit a public ceremony and sit and wait humbly to receive a plate. The *barracão* (feast area) from this temple is exceptionally big and often very crowded. I estimate the average number of visitors around 150. As soon as the food starts to be served a line is formed in the middle of the *barracão*. Some of the visitors, with a special relationship to the temple or its leader may receive a plate directly from one of the *noviças*. However, most people have to stand in line to receive plate and it is not uncommon to see visitors share a plate. Quite a different situation from the one I encountered at most other temples.

Next to the *barracão* of the Opo Afonjá temple is a little food stand. The food they sell is definitely not part of the feast, they are snacks, such as pastries with salty codfish, pizza slices and cake. On all of the occasions I visited a public ceremony at the Opo Afonja temple the stand was crowded practically from before until after the ceremony. It is a striking contradiction with the first temple I visited where the leader and the initiates constantly saw to it that everyone had received a plate or whether they

wanted another one. It would have been a great insult to them if people would go for a snack at the nearby bakery after visiting their public feast.

At the same temple I visited a feast in the honour of Oxalá. It was during a period called 'waters of Oxalá'. It is a yearly event, that lasts for about three weeks and consists of various private ceremonies and three public feasts. The first two feasts represent Oxalá's mythical suffering and therefore do not include food. Only a handful of white corn is distributed, this time served from a big pan that is carried through the *barracão*. It is the one and only occasion I have visited a temple without receiving actual food. It must be one of the busiest days for the women from the food stand outside.

2.4 A peek into the kitchen

Candomblé kitchens are considered sacred places and are commonly closed for everyone besides the cooks. Therefore, I have been unable to witness the entire process of cooking for a feast. However, on a few occasions I was able to get an impression of what is going on there.

The first occasion was a feast at a temple run by a controversial Candomblé priest, mister M. In fact, the man called his place a temple, but he didn't actually run a temple. He was a leader, in the sense that he is an initiate for over twenty-one years, but he hasn't got any initiates of his own, nor does he respect all of the obligations that come with the leadership of a temple. Yet on this occasion he was celebrating a Candomblé feast and invited me to join the preparations in the kitchen.

When I arrived, around 10.00 am, the preparations had already started. There was a woman busily working in the kitchen and a young men accompanied her. Various others were helping out with little chores, such as cleaning pots and pans or cleaning and cutting vegetables. The woman was quiet and kept to herself. She was very serious and dedicated to her job. Every once in a while she would ask the leader his preferences for specific dishes, but more often the leader would ask her about various things. Whether she still needed ingredients, how much he would have to buy of certain items, how much time she still needed and if she needed any help. The young men, R., was just as dedicated and serious, but he never stopped talking. He explained to me everything he was doing, he commented on everyone's work and constantly asked the leader how he liked things.

At first I didn't feel at ease with this voyeuristic task of sitting in a chair and watching others work, but when the people started to make conversation I won their trust and I was allowed to participate in the process.

In this kitchen was a big cooking stove that worked on gas, not wood. There was a refrigerator and a blender, but no other modern cooking equipment. The cooks used one or two knives each, which they washed whenever they changed activities and

occasionally sharpened. There was a table with various bowls on it and some open cabinets with big pots and pans. The kitchen was simple, but spacious.

The older woman was a friend of the leader, she had been working for mister M. for years. He wouldn't let anyone cook besides her, she said, because she knew everything. Indeed, mister M. trusted her completely as he didn't bother to supervise her work at any moment. His leadership was only evident at the moments she or the young men asked him specifically about how he liked a certain dish.

The young men only came to help, because mister M. had heard he was a good cook. It was obvious that he knew what he was doing. R. prepared the food with the greatest ease and even skinned and cleaned a chicken while chatting and joking with others. He was well aware of his cooking skills and was constantly bragging about the different types of food he could cook and that he was always the best at whatever he made. Despite his arrogance about his cooking skills he respected the demands and wishes of his fellow cook and mister M.

The amounts of food being prepared were big, but the quality of the final product was never compromised. Both cooks constantly monitored their products. More shrimp for this, more dressing for that. 'What do you think, does this need anything else?' After evaluating all of the dishes the inspection was done all over again, until everybody was satisfied with the results.

The constant evaluations and improvements of the dishes were extremely time consuming. The cooking, thus, went on until late in the evening. After dinner, which I shared with all of the helpers, I went home to change my cloths. When I returned at the end of the evening I could see the cooks were still working in the kitchen. The start of the feast was delayed, because the preparations had not yet finished.

A very different occasion was when I went to a feast in the honor of *Tempo*, deity of the four seasons. It was definitely not a peek into the kitchen I had here, but I did accompany the entire process of skinning, cutting and roasting the sacrificial animal.

It was at a temple of the Angola *nação*. Most public feasts take place on a Saturday night, but this ceremony was on a Monday afternoon. When I arrived the sacrificial animal, a goat, had already been slaughtered. Various men walked around in white clothes that were stained with the blood of the goat. The animal lay on the ground in one piece, in plain sight for all of the visitors. Soon after my arrival the *ogãs* started to skin the animal. It was a task they fulfilled together.

Three *ogãs* prepared for the task, when they noticed that their fourth peer, was busy doing other things. They summoned him to join them, but he was intoxicated with the liquor that had been served and didn't obey their calls. They summoned him again, and eventually, clearly annoyed by his disobedience, went to get him.

The skinning was a ritual in itself. The head was taken off, followed by the hoofs. Bit by bit the animal was completely skinned. Then, the intestines were taken out and

separated from the rest of the meat, which was chopped into pieces. As one of the ladies started to roast the meat, another lady was busy with the intestines.

I couldn't see very well what she was doing, but I could see she was cutting the intestines into pieces and buried them in a corner of the garden like area that belonged to the temple. I heard her singing and clapping her hands while doing her work. Although she was located somewhat hidden away and with her back towards us, she occasionally interrupted our conversations to join them. But she hardly turned around and never interrupted her work to come and sit with us.

After the roasting of the meat was finished and the intestines were buried, various bowls of food were prepared, outside my view. The bowls were carried by initiates of the temple and under singing and dancing were taken around the temple and eventually offered to the deities.

2.5 Other impressions

Besides the actual food, after being cooked, I have obviously also encountered the food products under different circumstances and in other parts of the process. On various occasions I saw the skin of a goat drying in the sun, or the legs of chicken tied up to a pole or wall. As described above I have seen living animals waiting for their sacrifice on various occasions. But the most impressive encounter I had with it all, was when I visited R., a young leader in the small town of São Felix, which looks nothing like the metropolis of Salvador, but rather like a model town in which children play with their trains.



2.3 City of Sao Felix.



2.4 City of Sao Felix, close up.

This young man, twenty-one years of age, made a great impression on me. Mainly because he was so different from the people I had met so far. First of all because he was a young man, most people I had spoken to were elder women, some elder or middle-aged men. All of the younger women I had interviewed were either recently initiated or not yet initiated. This man was the leader of a temple. His own temple.

R.'s temple was inside his already tiny house, where he lived with various family members, including his three month old baby girl and her fifteen year old mother, his wife. He seemed to run the place like a dictator, at the snap of his fingers, I was served a cold fresh made juice. He showed me around the house, which included various shrines and a *barracão*. This might sound as if it were a spacious place, but it was nothing like that. It was a small garden divided into various parts, if I hadn't known I would never have noticed he had all kinds of shrines made up in it.

The first shrine he showed me was the shrine of Exú. Three big bowls with the legs of a goat arranged like a cross were placed neatly besides each other. The heads of the goat in the middle of the bowls were facing me. They are all white. I see many other things, my host rapidly explains: "All of this is a work for the slaves, the *Exús*, I did it yesterday for people from Rio de Janeiro and Recife. It took me from three in the afternoon until two in the morning to do all this. Each item you see here signifies one slave. I will not give you all the names, because it is too much. These things will stay here for three days. After three days I will take all of it put it in a big clay bowl and leave it at a crossroad. Somewhere away from the city, an open place with a big road. You cannot leave it inside the city. Nature will do its work and take care of it." We move to the next shrine. We don't need to move places, we just turn around to see a shrine of Tempo, of Oxalá and of Ogum, which he can't show me, because of 'the dangers'. Danger is one of the subjects, he will not stop referring to. I must absolutely not be afraid, according to him, because really there is nothing to fear.

Many people are afraid, he says, but there is no reason to. And he lights up another cigarette.

After the tour around the shrines in the garden, we continue our conversation in the *barracão*. As we are speaking I am more and more amazed by the situation I find myself in. All sorts of animals that would be considered pets by most Dutch children are surrounding me. A few turtles are underneath a little cage, I can see two rabbits locked up, a parakeet and chickens that are running around freely. In the left hand corner is a fountain, of lemanjá. To the right is a wall covered with all kinds of bead necklaces.

It was a strange feeling to be amidst these animals, knowing that they would be slaughtered and eaten any time soon.

He notices my fascination for all that I am seeing and follows my eyes constantly. Whenever I see something he informs me about it and why he owns it or what he may use it for. 'Yes', he confirms my thoughts, these animals are all awaiting their death. He doesn't keep them as pets.

I take a good look at the man in front of me, he is younger than me, and shorter, but he is built strong and big. His posture represents his character to me. He doesn't seem to have much history to tell, but he has strong opinions, without much nuance. I knew from the day I had spent in the kitchen of mister M. M. had explained that he didn't know how this 'boy' had become the leader of a temple. In fact, according to mister M., the 'boy' had no background in Candomblé. But mister M. had good faith in him, because his *iaba* was strong. The *iaba*, female divinity, of the young man was *Yansã*. *Yansã* has a typical greet (*saudação*) that goes *Epahei Oya!* Mister M. is almost blind and especially in the dark he doesn't see anything. When he had to make an offer at night time somewhere in the woods, the young man accompanied him, incorporated, it was the yell of his *Yansã* that had led the blind man through the dark without any incidents.

The young man in front of me, R., was fascinating. He considered himself the best in everything he did. He was able to cook any kind of food, he claimed, no matter where it originated from. He had gone through an extensive initiation ceremony. If others took about three months to do it, it had taken him three years. The stage of *êrê de grão*, which normally takes up one day or sometimes a few days, had lasted one entire year in his case. He had initiated people all over the country and even around the world. If I needed any kind of assistance, I could count on him.

As the conversation progressed one of R.'s initiates entered the room. She was preparing a ceremony. Her 'father', who must have been about forty years younger than she, was preparing everything while he continued talking to me. He treated them with the same attitude as he had treated the other women in his house, at the snap of his fingers they brought him whatever he demanded and if it wasn't good enough

he'd yell at them, as if they were children: 'Don't you know how to do this? Then let me show you!'

Later in the conversation R. indirectly touched upon an element of the food process. He described how he 'tests' visitors or clients when they incorporate. He is part of the Candomblé union (he showed me his membership card), which has prohibited certain practices, but he still 'has his ways of testing'. He described various ways of testing and leaves it obscure whether he does or does not makes use of these methods. One that mostly impressed me, was the test where an incorporated person should stick his/her hands and arms in a pot of hot palm oil. It is the kind of pot used for cooking. Not a modern frying pan of which we can control the heat, but a big open pot hanging over a wood fire. If the arms are taken out and the skin is burnt, the person was not in a 'real' trance, if the arms come out without any injure the person was indeed incorporated. The story particularly impressed me, because the one who is telling it has major burns on his right arm up to his shoulder.

The story describes a typical tool for preparing the Candomblé food. A big pot over a wood fire. Though practically all households in Brazil cook on gas, it is still uncommon to use gas in the Candomblé kitchen. Modern stainless steel frying pans are also uncommon. In fact, generally all modern cooking equipment is banned from a Candomblé kitchen. Wooden spoons, pots, and bowls are used together with pottery. To grind certain ingredients no blender or mixer is used but a grinding stone.

It is becoming more and more obvious to me that cooking in all its facets is more than a way to produce or provide nutrients. It is not just about the eating, but about everything else that is closely connected to it. As I am growing into my field and my research it is becoming obvious that all of the processes around food, such as cooking, eating and socializing, despite my earlier deception about the lack of ceremony around eating, are in one way or another connected to the spiritual world, sometimes in an indirect way, but more often in a very direct way, though it might not be so explicit for a first-time visitor.

3. Food habits and food products

In this chapter I will provide an analyses of various ways in which food is used in Candomblé, together with an analyses of the food products, the consumers, the cooks, and all other interesting elements that are part of the food process. How is food exactly used? What does it represent?

A distinction can be made between two different ways or purposes of using food at a temple, a spiritual use of food (*comida de santo/Axé*) and a social use of food (*comida do povo*). In some cases this distinction is clear and obvious, but more often this is not the case. Part of the spiritual food is prepared separately and offered to one or more entities. Nobody actually consumes this food. It is left at the shrine for several days and then moved to whatever place belongs to the entity in question. Food for *Oxossi* will be taken into the woods, food for *Oxum* and *Iemanjá* will be taken to deep waters, etc. The rest of the spiritual food will be distributed amongst the initiates and visitors of the temple. This food often serves both spiritual and social purposes. Some temples prepare a different kind of food, besides the spiritual food, often without the use of palm oil. This food is meant for those who cannot or prefer not to eat spiritual food. As the ceremonies sometimes last for hours some temples prepare little snacks that can be served before or during the ceremony. This is also a kind of social food. It is meant as a sign of hospitality.

The spiritual use of food is a complicated concept. It is not just an offer for the deities, but also a cultural and social event. It is important to bear in mind that the use of food and food products differs from temple to temple and from *nação* to *nação*. Still, many ideas on food and the use of food products are strikingly similar. A lot of money, time and effort are invested in the entire process of buying and preparing the food, but what does food actually mean and represent? What factors play a part in the entire preparation process of food?

3.1 Consuming energy

A visit to the *Opo Afonjá* temple on a Wednesday will usually be celebrated with a plate of *amalá* (a dish made of oxtail and okra). Any visitor will feel welcome at the temple when receiving this plate, it also keeps the visitor at the temple, while eating, giving opportunity for a conversation among the visitors or between the initiates and the visitors. But the food is not simply prepared for social reasons. *Amalá* is a typical dish for *Shangó*. *Shangó* is the 'owner' of the temple and Wednesday is his day. Serving *amalá* on Wednesday is a form of respect for him. Distributing this plate is also a form of distributing his energy, which enforces both the consumer of the food as the distributor, or temple. It is an exchange of Axé (life energy).

“The dynamics of eating and drinking in Candomblé transcend the biological action and are constituted in the most important way to renovate and establish axé.” (Maria Stella “Mãe Stella” de Azevedo, 2004:17)

Comparable to Peter Farb's description of cannibalism, where people attempt to acquire a person's spiritual or physical power through eating his flesh, Candomblécistas attempt to acquire a deity's force or energy (Farb & Armelagos, 1980). Not through the consumption of the body, or a symbolic representation of it, but through the consumption of the particular kinds of food that belong to a specific deity. The consumption of this food invokes the energies of the deity and thus its virtues are taken in.

Food is an essential part of virtually all Candomblé rituals and ceremonies. Food is not only offered to the deities, but also shared amongst the initiates and visitors of a temple. Whoever attends a public ceremony at a temple will receive a plate of food, or at least a hand of popcorn. The only exception is a feast in the honor of *Oxalá*, during a period called 'waters of Oxalá'. This period represents *Oxalá*'s mythical suffering in the dungeons of king *Shangó*. According to the myth *Oxalá* was mistaken for a thief by *Shangó*'s guards before he reached the castle. The guards arrested him and locked him away. For three weeks he suffered from hunger and thirst. That is why no food is served at the celebrations during this period, until the very last week, when his release is celebrated. The period is called 'waters of Oxalá' because the rains ceased to fall while *Oxalá* was unjustly locked away. Only when he was finally released and justice had been served did the rains fall again.

This exception illustrates that food is not simply a social and biological act. Food represents the deity it belongs to, or even a specific moment in the life of the deity. The food carries the deity's *Axé*. *Axé*, is a highly personal life energy that lives in everything and everywhere. Each deity has its own *Axé*, each temple has its own *Axé*, each priest has its own *Axé* even each initiate or visitor has its own *Axé*. But *Axé* is not an easy-to-grasp concept. It is not a stagnant energy or force given to you at birth. One's *Axé* is influenced constantly by various external and internal forces and energies. One can even influence one's own *Axé*. *Axé* is such a vital part of life that it is a common way to express gratitude. Comparable to the expression 'bless you' common in Christian communities. The word *Axé* has penetrated through into the world of *capoeiristas* (practitioners of the Brazilian martial art *capoeira*), where it is used to greet each other upon leaving.

Mãe Stella's statement implies that there are various ways to renovate or establish *Axé* of which food is the most important one. She explains:

"Without a doubt, in Candomblé everything starts in the kitchen and nothing compares to the energy that flows from the offers to the orixás. Shortly after the delivery ritual, the Axé expands through the room, to the barracão, to the houses, to the city. The kitchen, hence, is the sacred laboratory where the knowledge of doing, the faith, the respect and the beauty meet each other for the enchantment of the divinities." (Mãe Stella, 2004:17)

The concept of food as a way to exchange Axé was often confirmed by my informants. The general idea is that sharing the food with as many visitors as possible increases the Axé of the temple. As if the temple profits from the Axé of each consumer. At the same time each consumer profits from the Axé of the temple, the deities and all other consumers.

V: "I believe the food is essential. There are some offers that do not include food, such as flowers or leafs, but in general there is always some kind of food. I consider the food a symbol for strength. I see it this way. So, if you prepare some food, that food is characteristic for your orixá. Obviously, the orixá will not sit down and eat that food. Symbolically that which belongs to him, for example, quiabo, which is offered to Zazi and Bamburuse. Symbolically, you are strengthening them. If you strengthen them, in reality, you strengthen yourself. I see the food with this symbolism.

F: "Would you say that the people who attend the feast and eat this food also strengthen themselves with this food?"

V: "Absolutely. The sense of the food and the sharing of the food is exactly that. That you share that energy.

(...)

If you believe that everyone has an orixá... When you go to a feast, it is not just you who's going, your divinity goes along with you. So, if you are taking part in the feast, your divinity also takes part, strengthening that feast, strengthening that person, strengthening that obligation (obrigação) and making a stream [of energy] in this sense." (Interview with V, equede)

Another informant explains the idea of sharing Axé with all of the consumers and how this returns to the temple:

"No, it's not about the quantity [of food] that will define whether it is better. It's the form in which you give it. The 'house' that gives, will never stop having [food]. This is an important thing. Therefore, the house that succeeds in giving the visitors its food, the tendency is to prosper." (Interview with I)

The connection between food and Axé is so strong and intimate that food can even be referred to as Axé.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I attended a special ceremony for the Angolan deity *Tempo*. It was an exceptional ceremony, that did not take place at night, but on a Monday from noon till late. I had been there for hours. I was starting to feel tipsy, due to a combination of the heat and the home brew liquor that belongs to *Tempo*, that I had been drinking. I had witnessed the entire process of skinning the goat and cutting out the intestines. I even witnessed, and smelled, how the

flesh was roasted on the barbecue. But all this seemed ages ago and I had already given up hope for receiving any part of the goat's meat.

I made conversation with one of the visitors. No more than five visitors, who were not initiates of the temple, accompanied the entire ceremony. One of these visitors was an initiate from another temple with more than twenty-one years of 'being made'. As she was leaving the premises to run some errands, she couldn't resist the forces of her deity and incorporated. She was taken care of by the *equedes* and *ogans* and returned to herself after a short while. She came to sit down next to me and we made conversation. All of a sudden she asked me: "Has the *Axé* already come out?" I didn't understand what she was talking about and asked her to explain the question. "*Axé*, you know, the food", she replied. "Ah, ok", I said "yes, they have just gone around the *barracão* and offered the food in the shrine." But I obviously still hadn't understood. "No, not for the *orixá*, for us!"

Her words left me confused. Why did she call the food *Axé*? I was familiar with the concept of *Axé* as some form of life energy. But how was this concept connected to the food? I knew the food carried energies for the deities, but did her words mean that even we receive these energies through the food? I didn't get much time to think about it.

Before I knew it I received a full plate with various dishes on it and a piece of meat. I eagerly started eating. The same lady approached me. She told me: "Actually, it is good to eat this food while standing. Don't sit down while eating this. It's best to walk around a bit." I did as she asked me. I saw many people were walking around. "Why don't you come and sit down here", a friend of mine asked. I explained to him that the lady had warned me not to sit down while eating this food. "Yes, that's right, it doesn't combine with the energy of this food", he replied.

The conversation illustrates the exchange of the energies. The energy is not simply given to the body or spirit of the consumer. It is an active process in which the consumer, and his energies, play an important part. How the *Axé* affects the consumer depends partly on how the food is consumed.

Another informant explained it as follows:

"Each animal has its own Axé. We take from the animal the parts that compose the Axé. But this doesn't mean that... in a certain way this will help you, it will give you force. Because if you imagine, everything you imagine, it brings good results to you. But if you eat something, thinking it will do you harm, a negative imagination, it will do you harm. Thus, our thinking is very powerful. It can construct just as it can destruct."(Interview with I)

She continues, insisting that the food itself cannot do harm.

“When people say: It’s food with Axé. It is because we have taken the Axé, we have prepared it, with care, with thought. This was also meant for the other. Thus, of what we delivered to the orixás... because the orixás never eat alone. All of the orixás, they never eat alone. When we make an offer to the orixá, he always shares it with everyone ‘from the house’. That’s why, when there is an offer, people say: It’s Axé. Because, if the father, the orixá, shares it with you, it cannot be a bad thing.”
(Interview with I.)

Interestingly, the food is consumed, but the Axé within the food is not consumed. It is, in fact, first ‘created’ by the cooking process. The everyday food products are transformed in the Candomblé kitchen into ‘food with Axé’. Then, the consumers contribute to the Axé, the consumption of the food invokes or produces Axé. That is the very reason why the sharing is so important. Each consumer contributes, through his consumption, to the Axé that is being invoked. Eventually each consumer profits from the energy of all other consumers and vice versa. One could compare the contribution of each consumer, including the deities, with a drop of water. All of the energies combined are not a load of drops, they merge together and form a stream. This process illustrates the unique role of food. Without denying the individual identities of each consumer, the consumption of food and hence the production of the stream of energy contributes to the creation of a collective identity.

The role of food is unique for two reasons. First, because the exchange of energies is different from that of other offers. Although all offers are considered an exchange of energies in some way, the way in which this exchange of energies is conceived in food offers is distinctly different from the way it is conceived in other kinds of offers. Usually, the offers are made as a gesture towards the deity in exchange for a specific or general demand. It is not a direct pay-for-service situation, but it is a reciprocal relationship between an individual and a deity. Even if various people are involved in the offer it remains an individual process in the sense that these people each profit from it in their own way. They will always remain a group of individuals instead of transcending their individual identities to form a new collective one. This is only logical when you take into consideration that making an offer is merely giving something away, be it a material object or a song or ceremony, it is never an actual consumption of the offer, which is the case in the sharing of food.

Secondly, the role of food is unique because, without denying individuality, it assumes an equal status for all consumers. The strict hierarchy that exists at the temple, has no reflection in the distribution of food. Everyone at the temple will receive a plate of food as long it is available. All consumers receive the same kind of food. Surely, one may receive a different part of the animal as the other, one may receive more or less food than another, sometimes one receives different dishes than another, but all of these things are merely random choices. All consumers receive food from the same pots and pans. The only ones that receive special treatment in

this sense are the deities. Specific parts of the animal are prepared for them, according to the guidelines. They also receive their plates before all others.

The Axé is both shared and distributed at the same time. After the food is eaten and has fed the body, it is the Axé that has been established and renovated. This Axé leaves all consumers, including the *orixás*, strengthened. In the words of one informant:

“Whatever the mouth eats, the head also eats” (Interview with I.)

3.2 Preparations of the food

The Candomblé belief system does not provide a clear division between wrong and right or positive and negative. The Axé transmitted through food doesn't necessarily strengthen the consumer, it may also affect the consumer in an unexpected or even negative way. The difference between positive and negative energies, as we have seen above, may depend on one's own 'imagination'. However, many other factors play a part in the kind of energies transmitted through food or invoked by food. In a quote above, *mãe* Stella called the kitchen a 'laboratory'. This term implies the delicate matter of preparing the food. As in a laboratory, each minimal 'mistake', may cause an unwanted or unexpected outcome.

In a laboratory products are subjected to certain processes with the objective of transformation. The Candomblé kitchen is, in that sense, indeed a laboratory. The food products, commonly available products, are transformed from mundane ingredients into powerful, energy-rich food that belongs to a certain deity. Since the final product will be served to all visitors, initiates and, most importantly, to all deities it is essential that the results meet the highest standards. In order to achieve this goal, only the best ingredients, the best informed supervisor, and the best-skilled chef are good enough.

Before one enters a laboratory it is important to be sterile, clean, so that whatever process is being prepared, cannot be contaminated. In the Candomblé kitchen a similar situation occurs. Those responsible for the kitchen need to have a 'clean' body, that means without having intercourse and without influences from outside.

“If you would go and look. There is a ceremony, a concentration, a preparation for making the food with Axé for the orixá. It's like this. The religious space, it already has its place, in every shrine of every orixá, where these prayers, these rituals happen. That's where you prepare the food. It's not food that is distributed in a restaurant. It's food prepared, and before preparing there was a ritual. The slaughtering, that I spoke of. Because you take the animal still alive, then you pray, sing some songs. So, it's not just any food. Before the food come various other things, various preparations. You have to have a clean body. That is, without intercourse, without making love, without walking down the streets. Because, if you come back from the streets, you need to

take a banho-de-folha [(herbal cleansing)]. You're going into a sacred shrine for this kind of ritual." (interview with I.)

As described above, those who are cooking, need to have a 'clean' body. But, in fact, they also need to have a 'clean' mind. Many informants emphasized the importance of positive energies during the preparations of the food. Those responsible for the cooking cannot carry any form of negativity, such as sadness or anger, because this will be transmitted through the food.

"You cannot cook food locked up. Because, for us... I'm a gastronomist. Food very much has this, has many things, it transmits your energy. If you are not well, the food will not be good. So, if you want to cook food, you have to be well. You have to be well in order for the food to turn out good. So, if you are cooking for an orixá, you are going to make the food locked up? No, neither sick nor closed." (Interview with L.)

If we continue this line of thinking, it is no surprise that the ingredients also need to be of good quality. Especially the animal sacrifice needs to be in perfect health. For each feast an animal is chosen with the utmost care.

Each divinity has its own 'likes' and 'dislikes', usually these represent their characteristics or passages of their mythological life. *Oxum*, for example, a divinity that always wears yellow and gold, has a preference for yellow animals and honey. Honey is a taboo for an old lover of *Oxum*, *Oxossi*, because she deceived him by using honey.

Oxum, the lady of sweet waters, had fallen in love with *Oxossi*, the hunter. But *Oxossi* had no interest in a lady from the waters, he belonged in the woods. One day, *Oxum* smeared honey over her entire body and covered herself up with leaves. She went into the woods to seduce *Oxossi*, who didn't recognize her as the lady of the waters and he fell in love with her. Eventually, *Oxossi* and *Oxum* entered into the river, where the honey was washed off of *Oxum*'s body and *Oxossi* saw the deceit. (my summary of the myth)

Many books reveal the likes of the entities and even the recipes to prepare them. However, this information is never sufficient. Before making an offer to a divinity it is important to consult the divinity through divination. The divinity will reveal his/her specific demands for that particular offer, also through the game of cowry shells. Usually the divinity chooses an animal along the lines of its own characteristics. *Oxalá*, who belongs to the *funfun* (white) group, will demand a white animal. Male divinities usually demand offers of male animals and in their own age group. Female divinities demand female animals. Some divinities only accept animals 'on two legs', others only accept animals 'on four legs'.

Whenever there is a problem in fulfilling the demands of the divinity, it is necessary to consult the divinity again through divination. In some cases, *Oxalá* may accept a white animal with stains in his coat, because the initiates have been unable to find an

all-white example. But the initiates must 'ask his permission' first, because if he doesn't accept the animal, it is better not to make the offer. Sometimes initiates are unable to offer a animal on four legs. In that case they may replace it for four animals on two legs, but this decision can only be made after consulting the deities through divination.

One of the *ogans* of the temple is assigned with the task of slaughtering the animal. This task is of major importance and will therefore not be assigned lightly. Edison Carneiro describes the task is usually assigned to the "most constant and dedicated" *ogan* (1948:95). If the *Axogan* performs his task correctly, the blood will stream from the animal and the deity will accept the sacrifice. If, to the contrary, the blood is clotted, the deities do not accept the sacrifice.

Besides determining the wishes of the *orixá*, it is important to include the other *orixás* into the offer, because they may feel offended if they are not included into the offer. One determines which entities require an offer through divination. It might be the day of *Oxum*, but that doesn't mean that merely *Oxum* receives an offer. *Iemanjá* may feel disrespected and become jealous of *Oxum*. In that case it is important to include *Iemanjá* in the offer. In any case *Exú* must always receive an offer before any other divinity. *Exú* is the entity that opens the way between the world of people and the world of the entities. Thus, everything starts through him.

But it is not all about the animal sacrifice. It is also about the actual dishes. Most divinities have one or more specific dishes that are their favorites. Like the sacrificial animals, the preferred dishes usually represent the characteristics of the deity. *Shangó*, divinity of fire, likes spicy food that contains a lot of red palm oil. *Oxalá* likes white corn and white rice. Some divinities are more respected than others. Those who are highly respected receive special food products. *Oxalá* and *Iemanjá*, for example, may receive Champaign, while most divinities will never be offered any kind of alcohol.

Above all, it is necessary to respect the taboos, *quisilas*, in question. Logically, the *quisilas* of the temple may never be broken, but each feast is confronted with its own *quisilas*. During a celebration for *Oxalá* it is unthinkable that any item is used, which is his *quisila*. Even if it is demanded by any of the other entities. *Oxalá* is one of the most respected entities and needs to be shown the highest respect at all times. The *amalá* of *Shangó* served on Wednesdays in the *Opô Afonjá* temple does not contain palm oil, during the period of 'waters of *Oxalá*' out of respect for *Oxalá* for whom palm oil is one of his main *quisilas*. Depending on the *nação* and the rules of the temple a celebration for one entity may need to be free of the *quisilas* of other entities, because the mythology (*lendas*) tells us that they have an intimate or hostile relationship.

Even if one is well informed about the likes and dislikes of the *orixá*, it is important to seek assistance or supervision at a temple before making an offer. The leader there

will consult the *orixá* in divination to see whether he/she accepts the offer and whether he/she has any specific demands.

A friend of mine had recently started to visit a temple on a regular bases. She is a great cook and therefore learned rapidly about the likes and dislikes of the various *orixás*. She was scheduled to work during carnival and it seemed like a good idea to ask for the protection of *Exú*, deity of the roads. She prepared him his favorite dishes, *farinha* with palm oil, *farinha* with water and *farinha* with honey. She offered the food to him in the morning, as this was the best moment to do so.

Unfortunately, her carnival did not pass without disturbances. She saw a person being robbed in front of her eyes, she witnessed an accident and a drunken man came to bother her. As the police were taking the man in, he looked at her and said: "I really liked that food you gave me."

She was convinced the man was a representation of *Exú*, who was playing with her. (pc with G)

The way in which the characteristics and demands of the deities are taken into consideration in order to cook the 'correct' products is a way to construct the identities of the deities. Through both the specific demands and taboos one learns about various characteristics of the deity, such as sexe, age, status, color and preferences. One also learns about the mythical social context of these deities. How is their relationship with other deities? What is their job or function? Thus, the construction of identity that revolves around food is manifested in the mythology or oral literature. In this sense food plays a part in maintaining the oral literature. Dress, attributes, symbols are other material objects that represent (parts of) the oral literature.

Besides the demands and taboos of the deities and the temple, each consumer needs to respect his/her own taboos. When a consumer has a taboo for the consumption of a specific product it is not uncommon to ask for a plate without that product. The initiate may also give the product to someone else or simply leave it on the plate. When the consumer is dealing with a taboo on eating after a certain time or in a specific place, things may become more complicated, but the taboo needs to be respected. Many informants gave me fascinating anecdotes about the consequences of disrespecting a taboo:

"I had a taboo that I never knew about. I was at a party, there was a barbecue going on. I saw a strange kind of white meat on the grill, it smelt delicious! So, I asked for a piece. But it was just so tasty! I adored it! So, I asked for some more. Later, I inquired about the meat. They told me I had eaten snake.

The next they I woke up and felt my skin itching. I looked in the mirror and my skin was really dry and full of flakes. In the days after it only became worse. It seemed like I was turning into a snake myself. I was full of flakes!

So, my mother sent me off to find spiritual help. The mãe-de-santo played a game [of cowries] for me. I shouldn't have eaten that meat, it was my quisila...

The mãe-de-santo prepared something for me, some kind of herbal conjunction. It made me feel better and I slowly healed. Well, then I knew. Snake was my quisila. I will never eat it anymore. But it really was delicious!" (Interview with D.D.)

Taboos construct identity in a more tangible and specific way than the establishment of Axé. The Axé produced by a consumer is unique and individual, it depends upon the individual him/herself and on the individual 'owner(s) of the head'. The individual may influence the Axé by carrying either positive or negative energies, but the individual cannot choose whether or not to produce Axé. Respecting a taboo, on the other hand is a free choice, that needs to be made every time the individual is confronted with the taboo. It is also a process that can be observed clearly and immediately by other individuals, contrary to the production of Axé. Since the taboos also depend upon blood related and spiritual family, they may reveal various things about an individual.

"In my barco, I was initiated alone. If there had been more people in this barco, they could have affected my taboos. But for me, it was only my mother, the origins of the house and my own saint.

In fact, it is not the mãe-de-santo that gives the taboos. It is the orixá. Sometimes we are from the same orixá and you can eat something, that I cannot eat. And something else, everyone has taboos. There are things that makes one feel bad. There are things one cannot eat, drink or use. There are taboos on speaking as well. For example, for me it is terrible when someone interrupts me when I am speaking. " (Interview with P.)

Taboos can have a negative influence on people. They may prevent you from achieving your goals. An attentive observer would be able to register precisely those food products that are most harmful to an individual. Therefore, many individuals will not openly declare their taboos. They would rather use excuses, such as 'I don't like that kind of food' or 'it gives me cramps' instead of admitting to their taboo.

3.3 Quality of the food products

Since food is such a delicate matter, that is of high influence on various levels, it is important that the quality of the food is excellent. To achieve this, one needs to start with the best ingredients.

The food products are chosen with care. For the animal sacrifice it is important that the animal is in perfect health. For chickens, it is important that they are not caged chickens. To make sure the animals are of good quality some temples breed their own animals. If temples do not breed their own animals, they will buy their animals at a trusted dealer. In Salvador, there is a special market for products meant to use in

Candomblé ceremonies called 'Feira de São Joaquim'. The main reason for buying at this market is that the market offers a great variety and the products are cheaper at this market, especially if they are bought in big quantities, which is often the case for Candomblé festivities.

Usually the food is bought on the same day as it is prepared and offered. The products may be bought in advance, but it is highly uncommon to prepare food for upcoming days. The *equedes* who are in charge of the kitchen sometimes start cooking before dawn and keep on going until the festivity starts. No effort, what so ever, is made to spare time. In fact, from my observations in the kitchen it seems like the process is deliberately delayed. A dish, for example, may need honey. Instead of adding the needed amount of honey at once, the honey will be added in small quantities often with pauses in between. This is probably not about delaying the process, but about paying absolute and full attention to the food. Preparing it with haste or in any way that may seem hasty or time efficient goes against the idea of cooking with love and devotion. The cooking process of a Candomblé kitchen, forms a vast contrast with the modern cooking habits described by Jones, that have penetrated through into the lives of most Brazilians (Jones, 2007). There is no room for fast-food or microwaves in the Candomblé kitchen. When it comes to the quality of the food, no concessions will be made.

Because of the big quantities and excellent qualities needed for a festivity a lot of money is invested in the food products. Dried shrimp, for example, that are used as flavoring in many dishes, are an expensive ingredient, that is needed in big quantities. However, no concessions will be made to compromise on the costs.

"The food is part of the symbolism of the religion, like the clothes and dance. The food is much more expensive than the other symbols. For a festivity we spend eight to ten kilo's of dried shrimp, which costs about RS20 (E8) per kilo." (Interview with D.S.)

How do temples cover the costs for the public feasts? Whenever an initiate has an obligation to fulfill, such as his/her seven year anniversary or being initiated, it is this individual that will provide all of the necessities. As this may be an extravagant cost for an individual, it is possible for two or more individual to combine their obligations and thus share part of the costs.

Whenever a feast is organized for the celebration of one or two deities, the sons and daughters of these deities are expected to contribute to the feast. Outsiders can always contribute to the feasts by donating money. In some cases outsiders can also contribute food products, such as beans, corn, shrimp, fruits or onions. Donating food products is generally done by those, who have a close relationship with the leader of the temple or the initiates. In Cachoeira, the leader of a temple once donated a chicken to the befriended leader of another temple. The donator explained that the chicken was bought for her to use in one of the ceremonies, but it was never used. She didn't want to keep it, because she would have to take care of it and would get

attached to it. Hence, she preferred to donate it to her friend, who could use it at her temple. Under no circumstances are outsiders allowed to donate cooked food products.

Naturally, the food is prepared with the greatest care and attention. Some parts of the preparation are accompanied by specific rituals. These rituals may begin before the actual cooking process. It is important to 'ask permission', *pedir licença*, a kind of ritual that exists in many variants. The idea is that one needs be conscious about the products one is about to take from nature and use for one's own purposes. Without asking permission, taking a certain product may have negative consequences.

"This friend of mine. Her husband is biologist or something, he works with dirt. He asked my friend to take some dirt from Africa and bring it to him. So she went and took some from the street, the street! She took it and put it into jars to keep it. She became ill. She fell, lay there. When mother Stella, from here, from Opó Afonjá, came... she was lying there, unable to lift herself up. The jars were all there at the head of the bed.

When Stella went to talk to her, she asked: Girl, what did you do? And she asked about this thing at the head of the bed. My friend explained it to her. So Stella said: Get up, take that dirt and bring it back. When you take these things without asking... Here things have owners as well. You have to bring it back, because it is this what is making you feel bad. They are charging you, you are paying for it." (Interview with L.)

When it comes to picking leafs, either for cooking or for ritual cleansings, the ritual of *pedir licença* is not simply a ceremony, but it is also in the moment of picking the leafs. Candomblé leaders have excellent knowledge about the various leafs and know, for each kind of leaf, what is the best moment to pick it.

"Imagine that sir Orlando needs some leafs. I will go into the woods to pick them. But you can only take them at a specific time of day. We go, ascend a light, ask for permission. Ahh, what a good thing. When we take a cleansing with leafs it's so good. The body feels light." (Interview with R.)

Obviously, it is also necessary to *pedir licença* before taking an animal's life. The *matança*, slaughtering of the animal sacrifice, is thus accompanied by a special ceremony of singing and clapping, it is always performed in a specific way and only by the *ogan*, that is charged with the function of 'slaughter'. Even here we may find the influence of the deity's identity. Animals that are being sacrificed for *Nanã* are slaughtered with the use of a *tocum* (kind of wood) knife. *Nanã* is one of the oldest divinities and is believed to be from before the iron era, therefore the use of iron is *quisila* during the preparation of her food.

Not only the food products need to be of good quality. It is important that the food tastes delicious and carries positive energy. To ensure that the food is prepared in

accordance with all of the guidelines and that it will be of the best quality, the leader of the temple provides strict supervision during the entire process. The leader of the temple is like a chef cook or manager of the kitchen. He/she has all the information needed to prepare food the 'correct' way.

Although the supervision of the leader on the food preparation process is strict, the actual cooking is usually in the hands of the *equedes*. Often, one *equede* is the head of the kitchen, she has the *cargo* (task) of cooking. It is uncommon for *ogans* to be involved in the cooking process. The leader of the temple is like a manager of the kitchen. He/she has all the information needed to prepare food the 'correct' way. There is ambiguity about the exact function of the leader. Some believe the leader is determining for the cooking traditions of the temple and if the first leader dies, the next will continue with the traditions of the first.

"It's the mãe-de-santo that decides how the food is prepared. She has the supervision over the kitchen. If she dies, her tradition will continue. She continues the same way."
(Interview with Dona S.)

Others claim leaders usually do not reveal the information about preparing the spiritual food to anyone. This means that whenever a leader dies, much information is lost. It also means that a new leader will start his/her own tradition of cooking.

Naturally, any leader will have great knowledge about the food and the energies it transmits. In fact, it is a constant process of manipulating the energies. If one is capable of manipulating these energies for positive purposes, one is also capable of manipulating them for other purposes. Especially older informants would warn me about these kinds of manipulation. One of my closer friends, who is neither a Candomblé client, nor initiate, once told me this anecdote:

"One time, I was in a temple where everybody went into trance, including myself. The leader just waved his hand and poof... I felt it taking me over, I couldn't do anything. I don't remember what happened exactly. I think we all danced. Maybe the leader did something, that we were not supposed to see or maybe he wanted to demonstrate his force."

I know it was after the food had been served. I think there may have been some kind of leaf in it." (pc with OP)

Special forms of protection against these kinds of 'worked foods' (*comidas trabalhadas*) exist. But it is still necessary to remain conscious about the food one consumes. An informant explained to me the warnings of her *pai-de-santo*.

"You shouldn't eat everywhere you go. Who knows whether they are wishing you well? It's exactly because of this. Because the food may be the carrier of some kind of wish. There are even some herbs you can put into the food with an effect... nobody knows what it is." (interview with D. R.)

3.4 Social role of food

Besides the spiritual value of food, there is a great social value in the food. Many informants emphasized this role of food as important. Some consider the idea of sharing food as an African cultural influence. In fact, Peter Farb and George Armelagos explain that basically all societies are familiar with some kind of unifying event that includes food (Farb & Armelagos, 1980). The function of such a feast is to unify those who participate in it.

Basically all ceremonies in Candomblé, small or big, are accompanied by food. In accordance with Farb's and Amerlagos' description, a limited number of distinctive foods is eaten at these ceremonies, that are scarce, expensive and take time to prepare. Most food products at a Candomblé feast are not necessarily scarce or expensive, but the most essential part of the meal, the animal sacrifice, is both scarce and expensive. In public ceremonies everyone is welcome to join and all will receive a plate of food. In most cases the public will receive the same kind of food as the initiates, it is the food that is prepared for the deities, but separated at an early stage in the cooking process. In some cases temples prepare two kinds of food. One that is meant for initiates and one, without palm oil, for non-initiates.

"There are houses, where, besides the food with Axé, there is social food, such as bread rolls, coxinha [a fried delicacy], stroganoff, salads. Because there are people who do not eat palm oil at night.(..) In this place, where I once went, there was a room with all of this." (Interview with I.)

The exact reason for the distribution of this different kind of food is unclear. It is a kind of courtesy towards those who have a problem with the consumption of the food with Axé. It also seems like a form of wealth, that is being exposed. Ironically, it is both a way to make people feel comfortable and welcome and a way to separate non-initiates (*povo*) from initiates. The entire idea of everybody being equal is thus destroyed by the concept of this separate food for the people.

The guidelines for the preparation of food for the people are not as strict and complicated as those for the preparations of food for the deities. However, the quality and quantity of the food for the people are of major importance and since the two kinds of food are often prepared together, there is hardly any difference. Food for the people, even when it is prepared and served separately, must not contain any *quisila* and may never offend any entity. Since food is always offered cold or at luke-warm temperature to the deities, all other consumers also receive their food cold or luke-warm. There are two main guidelines for serving the food. The most important one is that there must always be plenty and the second one is that it must be consumed at the temple.

If a temple serves little food to the guests, who attend their festivities, this is considered a lack of hospitality and a form of disrespect. It is a very bad sign, because it seems the initiates are not committed enough to invest in the festivities.

Obviously, this is also a sign of disrespect towards the entities, for whom the festivity is organized. Either the initiates who have not incorporated, *equedes*, *ogans* or the leader of the temple will see to it, that nobody leaves without eating, unless they explicitly refuse the food. Often during a festivity, one is asked several times whether one has already eaten or whether one would like some more.

As explained by various informants, the food for the people, serves two main purposes, that may seem contradictory. The first purpose, which is often mentioned, is to send out a message of equality. It is the idea of everybody eating at the same table and sharing the same food that implies that all those who consume the food are equal. This equality is strengthened by the fact that there is no table setting or anything of that sort. All visitors and initiates receive a plate of food, but are free to consume it wherever they prefer, be it on a bench, amidst friends, or walking around. The traditional table setting, as described by Martin Jones, which may indicate the importance of an individual according to his place, is thus completely absent (Jones, 2007). In many cases the visitors do not merely share the food with the other visitors, initiates and leaders of the temple, but also with the entities. Even though the entities do not eat at the same place or at the same time as the people, they consume the (exact) same food.

The other purpose is to demonstrate wealth. While everybody is equal when sharing the food, there is also a message of wealth in providing the food for all present at the festivity. It is not a kind of wealth that is manifested in the 'material culture' with the use of expensive delicacies, exclusive china or silverware described by Jones, nor is it a competition in giving 'ever more lavish feasts' described by Farb and Armelagos (Jones, 2007:284; Farb & Armelagos, 1980). It is a way for leaders to prove their ability as a *mother/father-of-saint*. Since the leader of a temple is called mother or father it is expected of them to take care of their children, the initiates. All visitors of a public ceremony are in some way considered 'children', either of other leaders or of the deities. This gives the mother/father the obligation to provide for them.

One might easily overlook a third purpose of the food, which is especially important in the more rural setting of Cachoeira, a nutritional purpose. By organizing feasts on a regular basis all visitors are properly fed. Food is constantly being redistributed with the various feasts organized at numerous temples. In Cachoeira not only the visitors profit from these feasts, but also the villagers that spend the night waiting in the surrounding area of the temple, hoping to receive some food at the end of the feast. But even in the urban setting of Salvador no food is wasted. If any food is left over after a feast, it will be distributed amongst neighbors of the temple.

In a broader social context the quality of the food also plays a part. It is a way for a temple to demonstrate its identity, because it is par excellence a moment to receive visitors, which makes it a perfect occasion to display the temple's image. Obviously, many factors play a part in this process, but food is undoubtedly one of the most

important ones. It is very common to gossip about the quality and quantity of the food at a temple. Every other remarkable aspect of the food will also be noticed.

I once attended a temple, that didn't serve any food until five in the morning. Contrary to the customs at other temples, the food was not served to be consumed at the temple. It was wrapped in a plastic box for people to take away and consume it at any other time or place.

The next day a friend of mine, who had indicated this temple to me, inquired about the festivity and when I told her about this detail, she: "O, that crazy lady, she is a wonderful person, but she always keeps people waiting. She doesn't even serve the smallest bite out of courtesy. And also, the entities don't like it when food is served after two."

Since the food is not supposed to be distributed until the main entity of the festivity has danced, visitors sometimes wait for hours for the food to be served. As a courtesy some temples serve little snacks. These are especially for 'the people' and have nothing to do with the divinities. Still, they may never give reason to disrespect the divinities. In the example given above, food could have been served hours earlier, because *Ogum* (main entity at this festivity) had already danced. A lack of good organization was probably the reason for the delay in serving food. It is possible that the leader of the temple tried to make a statement by serving the food late. In a small town, such as Cachoeira, there is a lot of gossip. She may have wanted to show that she cannot be told what to do.

Serving the food in a plastic box, as if it were a box of take-away may have another very important reason. In Cachoeira is a lot of poverty. Each festivity at a temple would be accompanied by neighbors waiting on the doorstep or somewhere in the near environment of the temple. These people would never actually step into the temple to participate in the celebration. They would patiently wait for the food to be served and gratefully accept a plate. The social advantage here is obvious. Because of the late hours on which Candomblé festivities take place, it were mainly men sitting outside waiting for the food to be served. Serving the food in a box enabled them go home with the food and share it with their family.

Through the social and spiritual functions of food it is connected to African culture. The spiritual connection mainly comes from the construction and confirmation of the deities' identities. All deities are considered African and the myths are thought to take place in Africa. The connection to Africa, though often emphasized, is never explained as a direct link.

“The food that is prepared at a temple, you can call it African. But already with an interpretation from here. The food of the temples is food of the African matrix. Because it already had a life here with other elements.” (Interview with T.)

Besides these functions certain customs and product are directly derived from Africa or from the Africans in Brazil. Traditionally, food is eaten without the use of any cutlery. Nowadays the initiates of a temple still eat with their hands, but visitors often receive a fork or spoon. Some temples keep up the tradition of eating with the hands and never hand out cutlery or only give cutlery with specific dishes. Other temples may distribute cutlery for some dishes, but not for others.

Another extremely important influence from Africa is the use of palm oil. This ingredient was brought to Brazil by the slaves. Therefore it is considered the most important ingredient of food with Axé and various spiritual values are ascribed to it. Often leaders emphasized the role of palm oil as a symbol for an ‘Africa’ that has only survived in Brazil and does not even exist anymore on the African continent. They claim that palm oil nowadays is mainly used for other purposes than food in Africa.

“A long time ago, they managed to bring a very important product into Brazil, which is palm oil. Because Brazil, in fact, didn’t have palm oil. Palm oil is Africa.

But some things we will tell you. I tell you. So, this palm oil, that was brought here, what do we use it for? For food. Especially in the cultural field. Or, if it is the time, in the religious field. I’m talking about Candomblé. But not in Africa, they use it for illumination, for fuel, for other things. They even use it more for this than for food. In Africa they eat little palm oil.” (Interview with L.)

3.5 Beverages

When speaking of food beverages may not be forgotten. Beverages are part of the spiritual and social food, but play a relatively small role. A few traditional beverages are sometimes brewed at a temple, but this tradition is rapidly declining. Most beverages are starting to be replaced by industrialized products. The traditional beverages are both used as offers to the entities and are served to initiates and visitors. Some contain alcohol, but not all.

The most traditional drink used in Candomblé is *aluá*, which exists in many variants. Basically it is a mixture of water, sugar or *rapadura* (a product of sugar cane), ginger and corn. It can also be made with fruits or the peel of pineapple. The mixture will be fermented for days. The number of days of fermentation is often a kind of symbolic number such as three or seven (Lody:1998). Some variations of *aluá* contain alcohol, because they are prepared with a certain amount of brandy.

Alcohol plays an ambiguous role within Candomblé. On the one hand, it is associated with danger. Entering a temple under the influence of alcohol is very dangerous, because one is unprotected against any influence or energy. Some temples, therefore, do not allow visitors under influence to enter the temple. On the other hand, alcohol is used in every ritual or ceremony at a temple, because it is offered to *Exú*. *Exú*, the messenger between the world of people and the world of the entities, is often considered dangerous. If he is not properly treated he may cause all kinds of unwanted accidents. Therefore, he must always be offered his favorite drink, *cachaça*, rum made of sugarcane.

Lody also describes a kind of beverage made with the blood of the animal sacrifice. This drink will be served to those who participate in the *matança*. He describes it as an extremely important drink, because of the significance of the animal sacrifice. Lody describes it as a way to constitute a link between the deities and their supporters. According to him it is even offered at the shrines of the deities (Lody, 2004:57). I have not been able to find the use of such drinks at the temples. When I inquired about such practices, the use of blood in rituals was generally denied. Some explained that it used to be part of certain rituals, but that it has been abolished. Others claim that blood is used in rituals in small amounts, but that it is never consumed in any way.

At the end of a festivity when the food is being served, drinks are also served. It is highly uncommon to serve drinks before the food is served. Only when people explicitly ask for some water will it be given, but otherwise visitors simply have to wait.

Since food is only served at the end of a festivity it is safe to serve alcohol. The 'spiritual' part of the festivity is over and there is no longer a risk of allowing unwanted energy to enter the body. Beer is the most common drink to serve the visitors. Usually different kinds of soft drinks are also served. Only on special occasions, such as a festivity for *Oxalá* or *Iemanjá*, Champaign will be served.

Beverages take up a remarkable place in the use of food. Though their use is hardly constrained by any guidelines, contrary to the use of food, their role may not be overlooked. Alcohol plays a very specific role and is connected to danger. On the one hand, because it is *Exú* that likes alcohol and if he is not offered his favorite drink, *cachaça*, he may feel offended and cause danger to the temple. On the other hand, because entering a temple under the influence of alcohol may open one up spiritually in a way that negative energies can enter the body without any kind of opposition. Another alcoholic beverage, Champaign, also plays a salient role. It is only served on festivities for the more respected entities.

4. Context of Candomblé

Candomblé, as any other religion, has an image that is made up of various impressions that people have of the religion. The public image of Candomblé is ambiguous. On the one hand, it has a positive image as a mysterious and intriguing religion, which is used as a successful tourist attraction. Candomblé can be a political platform and proud symbol of the Afro-descent community of Bahia. On the other hand it is considered primitive, with its barbaric acts of animal sacrifice, the use of blood and body scarification. It is even considered devilish by the increasing Protestant population of Brazil. In the first part of this chapter I will investigate the public image of Candomblé in Bahian society.

Within the Candomblé community we find different Candomblé temples that each have their own cult. It is important for a temple to distinguish itself from other temples and at the same time to establish and maintain relationships with other temples. Obviously, the dispersion of the image of a temple depends greatly on its leader. On the other hand, the image of a temple may prove to be an important asset for its leader. In the second part of this chapter I will look into these dynamics and the identity formation of Candomblé temples and its leaders.

Finally, in the third part of this chapter, I will discuss the identity formation of Candomblé followers on a personal and individual level. I will demonstrate that the public image of Candomblé, the identity of a leader, of a temple and of the follower are all interconnected.

All of the identity and image formation processes are complex. They depend on various factors and are negotiated and legitimated through various ways. One of the ways to construct, negotiate and legitimate identity is through the use of food. Throughout this chapter I will briefly examine the role of food for these processes.

4.1 Public image

Citizens of Salvador have been confronted with the influence of Candomblé on their city, ever since the enormous amounts of slaves were shipped to their city and started practicing their religion in their new environment, around 1850. Even nowadays citizens can impossibly escape the influence of Candomblé on their city. The streets are filled with “Baianas de Acarajé”, female sellers of the typical beignets made of white beans, that find their origin in Candomblé. The names of the Candomblé divinities are used throughout the city for all sorts of establishments, such as shopping malls, hotels, restaurants, antique shops, residence buildings, etc. In various public places images or sculptures of the divinities can be found.

The public image of Candomblé has developed over the last century and a half. It was considered an African heritage at first, that was oppressed by law. Then, to disguise their practices Candomblé practitioners started syncretizing the Candomblé divinities with Catholic saints. This syncretism didn't simply function as a mask, it also

helped African Brazilians to integrate with society and become more 'Brazilian' (Lody, 1987). During the Vargas regime the African elements -Candomblé, capoeira, Afoxé drums- in the Bahian community were no longer oppressed and discriminated against, in fact, they were transformed into part of Bahians public face. This led to an ambiguous identity for Candomblé. On the one hand it is now appreciated by the Brazilian and European elite. Candomblé is even becoming a subject for academic research. Candomblé is no longer considered a set of primitive customs, nor as some kind of sect. It is now considered a religion in its own right.

"Because today Candomblé is a religion, we have our religion. Formerly it was a sect. But not now. Candomblé has evolved and it is a religion, now."

(Interview with D.S.)

Unfortunately the newly found interest is mainly focused on Candomblé's primitive character as illustrated by Mattijs van de Port in his article on 'Bahian white'. In this article, van de Port shows various kinds of illustrations that directly or indirectly represent the primitive character. One of the images shows a young girl with a shaved head. Her head is covered in blood of an animal sacrifice and sprinkled with feathers. A shocking image for those unfamiliar with the practices of Candomblé (Van de Port, 2007:253). Another example is the cd-cover of Carlinhos Brown. It shows us the artist with a pair of sunglasses on, holding a little white goat. The image is not very shocking at first sight, but with the title of the cd being *Candombles* it clearly hints to what will become of the little goat. These examples indicate what sort of images are used to construct Candomblé's public face. The images in one way or another hint at those customs often considered barbaric and primitive by the Bahian community, in particular the animal sacrifice.

Most Brazilians who are not involved in Candomblé try to distance themselves from the religion. They are either indifferent and know very little about the religion or they share a negative view on Candomblé which is mainly caused by the Candomblé offering practices. In general, people consider the *matança* (animal sacrifice) to be a barbaric act and a waste of animal life and since these practices make up such a big part of Candomblé's public face, the religion has gotten a negative image based upon these images. Also, many people are afraid of Candomblé. Either of the practices, such as the shaving of an initiates head, cutting the initiates skin or the use of animal blood, or of the spiritual power of Candomblé. I would often be warned about visiting a temple or interviewing any initiate. "Candomblé is dangerous, you know! Those people can control your life".

This negative image, that mainly exists of prejudices, is strengthened by Candomblé's secret character. Despite the various ways people have access to more information, Candomblé remains secretive and a big mystery to most. It seems the occasional television documentaries are the main source of information on the religion and its practices. Through these documentaries people are exposed to images of Candomblé festivities and rituals. Unfortunately media are not necessarily

concerned with informing its public, but rather with entertaining the public. This leads to an even bigger misunderstanding, which cannot be solved, because of the secrecy most festivities are involved with. The public is forced to believe what the media presents and often more than willing to do so.

Besides the television documentaries, media also pay attention to Candomblé whenever mysterious events occur. In the nineteen nineties a famous soap opera actress was murdered by two of her colleagues. Her body was left in an open field, surrounded by a circle of bones. She had been stabbed over fifteen times, with a prime like object. The stab wounds formed a circle around her heart. Media suggested that the offenders were involved with Candomblé and had made a sacrifice to one of the divinities on request of their leader. More recently, a three-year old was found with over thirty needles inside his body. His stepfather confessed that he fed the boy the needles as some sort of religious act. Naturally, these kinds of stories are major contributors to the public image of Candomblé as a barbaric and violent religion.

But Candomblé is also associated with positive influences. Two major Candomblé events take place every year in central places of Salvador. The first is the washing of the Bonfim's church stairs. This Catholic event, which takes place every year in January on a Sunday is preceded by a ritual washing of the stairs of the Bonfim church by Candomblé initiates. The washing ritual is performed by women dressed in traditional white dresses. They carry perfumed water on their heads which they use together with their brooms to wash the steps. During the event, which has grown to be more popular than the Catholic ceremony on Sunday, the city is overloaded with Candomblé initiates and clients and many national and international tourists.

On the 2nd of February people gather at places near the beach throughout the entire Salvador region. All kinds of presents are offered to the divinity that dominates the sea, *Iemanjá*. The presents, that are taken away by the current are accepted by the divinity. Whatever returns to shore, she did not accept. This event brings a new element to the view on Candomblé. Many of the presents offered to *Iemanjá* are non-biodegradable products, plastic plates, perfume bottles, jewelry. Recently discussions have been rising to stimulate people to offer only the biodegradable products, i.e. not to offer the plate of food entirely, but only the food upon it, or to offer merely the perfume itself and not the bottle.

Obviously, this is mainly an environmental problem, but it is also a direct problem for local fishermen. For them it becomes an economic problem, because the products may cause a setback to their catches. Ironically, they are the ones that participate in the offering, because they profit from the sea and want to keep on profiting. For that reason fishermen feel a necessity to show their gratitude to *Iemanjá*.

Not only on the 2nd of February do people offer presents to a divinity. Each temple maintains their own calendar and many occasions require the offering of food or presents. Within the city area it is prohibited to offer plates of food, because of the

vermin problem, especially cockroaches. However, outside the city area food offers along the sides of the roads are still very common. Most people are afraid of these offers, since they are well aware of their spiritual value. In particular those, which include feathers or animal parts. Anyone, Candomblé-follower or non-Candomblé follower, will be careful when passing these offers. One should avoid coming too close to these offers, not to look at them and never to disturb them.

Besides these main events and influences, citizens of Salvador are also confronted with the religion in more subtle ways. There are various clothing and jewelry shops that are specialized in Candomblé products. They sell the clothing and fabrics needed inside the temple, the bead collars or other kinds of jewelry associated with a specific divinity. Also, it is not uncommon to see small groups of people dressed in white on Fridays. These are recognized as Candomblé followers, because Friday belongs to *Oxalá*, one of the most respected divinities, that belongs to the *funfun* (white) group.

Despite all of these different manners for Salvador citizens to become familiar with Candomblé, most of them have little knowledge about the religion and its practices, or not own up to it.

The two yearly events described above are not simply religious festivities. They have become popular festivities that draw many national and international tourists and media to the city. Candomblé is thus developing into becoming part of Bahia's cultural identity. Even those, who claim to have nothing to do with Candomblé and not to know anything about it may have incorporated elements of it into their daily life. Whether it is the consumption of *acarajé*, the yearly *caruru* (a typical Candomblé dish made of okra) in September or watching so called 'Bahian folklore' shows in which Candomblé festivities are imitated.

Candomblé has become one of Bahia's biggest tourist attractions. Its public face has become known throughout Brazil and even outside the country. Mattijs van de Port investigated how a religion, that was long oppressed and considered inferior, became so important for Bahia's tourist industry and public image. In his article 'Bahian white' Van de Port explains the importance of the color white for the religious community itself and for its public face. From his text we can conclude that Candomblé has developed itself into a counter religion, it cultivates those aspects that are considered 'inferior' in Bahian society. Candomblé forms a political platform contra modernity, individuality, discrimination and racism. This doesn't mean that the religion is some kind of resistance movement operating in obscure places. Politicians, writers, singers and other prominent Bahians often demonstrate their interest in or ties with Candomblé. During my time in Salvador, for example, mother Stella, leader of the famous temple *Ile Axé Opo Afonjá*, celebrated her seventy-year anniversary as an initiate of Candomblé. Various activities were organized to congratulate mother Stella in prominent places of the city, in which numerous famous singers and authors participated.

On a commercial level Candomblé has proved to be a lucrative business. The tourist agencies disperse Candomblé imagery and attract many national and international tourists with it. Van de Port describes the transformation of Candomblé as a symbol for the primitive and barbaric practices of the numerous Afro-Brazilians living in Bahia into a symbol of exoticism and rich culture (van de Port, 2007). Until today Candomblé functions as this symbol in the tourist industry. Expensive resorts will organize so called folklore shows, in which a Candomblé celebration is imitated. The wealthy guests from other parts of Brazil or even from other parts of the world are curious to see the typical dress of the deities, the songs, the dancing. These imitations are obviously not performed by actual Candomblé initiates, they are merely cultural performances that might be inspired by Candomblé temples, but they have no religious value whatsoever.

In his article on 'Bahian white' Van de Port describes how the color white, and especially that which is absent from it, has had major importance for the dispersion of Candomblé imagery. Various anecdotes about scandalous reports or television documentaries are described in his text. It seems that the contradiction described above never ceased to exist. On the one hand we find the clean white clothes that have become intrinsically connected to Candomblé. On the other hand we find the absence of any form of impurity, which is precisely what makes the religion exotic and intriguing to the public. Van de Port calls this the 'politics and poetics of white' (2007:243).

A group that is particularly attracted to the 'poetics of white' is a group of non-followers, that I would like to call sympathizers. This is a group of people that shares mixed feelings towards Candomblé. Sympathizers are not ready to be initiated, because they fear the responsibilities that come along with initiation. This means that many of the cult's secrets are not exposed to them. However, they are very interested in the cult and will visit the temple whenever they can or want to. Sometimes sympathizers participate in the preparations of the temple's festivities or contribute to them in other ways. But the main objective for sympathizers to turn to Candomblé is help. Especially when they are suffering from difficulties in their personal life, they may seek for assistance at a Candomblé temple. Just as they might consult tarot cards, they may consult a Candomblé leader for divination. These individuals have a pay-for-service type of relationship with the leaders and may therefore choose where to seek for help any time they feel the need.

4.2 Competition with other religions

Recently the concept of 'absence of impurity' has been given a new dimension by the Protestant churches. Catholicism and African derived religions represent (Afro-)Brazilian identity and are still intertwined, even after the official break with syncretism. Protestantism, which has gained major importance over the last three decades, takes in a rather different position in Bahian society. Instead of referring to a specific part of the identity of Salvador citizens, the Protestant churches create new

identities for their clients (Selka, 2007:113). They do so, however, without denying the existence of other religions. To the contrary, Protestant churches take a stand against other beliefs. Especially African derived religions are subject to resistance in the protestant churches. Incorporation at Candomblé temples is considered possession by the devil. Also, Candomblé leaders are depicted as money eager magicians who cannot be trusted.

This last accusation is based on a problem within the Candomblé community. Since decades the community is being confronted with self-announced leaders, who charge extraordinarily high prices and are often not even initiated. These leaders sometimes perform extreme rituals, which were filmed and distributed by the media in the hands of Protestant churches.

“You will find many Candomblés out there that are doing horrific things. They use the name of Candomblé to perform black magic. To kill people. To make money. (...) Today people are crazy. You can do a divination by reading a book. You can do a bori [ritual] reading a book. Initiate people by reading a book. (...) People are so fascinated by the possibility of enriching themselves that they are not even interested in the secrets. They are only interested in doing some crazy things and making money. It’s with these little houses where the Universal [biggest protestant church of Brazil] goes and makes these films.” (Interview with I.)

These maleficent leaders are merely interested in money. Many Candomblé leaders are accused of trying to generate money by calculating extraordinary high prices or by simple scam. These accusations occur both outside and within Candomblé circles. It is a complicated matter, because many Candomblé leaders fulfill their function as a fulltime job and therefore charge their followers for specific kinds of consultation. Also, the followers and initiates of a temple are expected to contribute to their own divination rituals and to the temple’s festivities. Thus, it is not so easy to distinguish between genuine religious leaders who simply seek for compensation or income and non-genuine leaders, who are in fact only (or mainly) interested in generating money.

The way in which Protestant churches attack the Candomblé temples is sometimes vicious and aggressive. Cases are known of Candomblé initiates that were physically attacked by Protestants, or temples that were destroyed or violated. But some forms of attack are more sophisticated. During my time in Salvador I spoke to various people about the *Baianas de rua*, female street vendors. Traditionally these women are Candomblé initiates selling various types of traditional delicacies, such as *acarajé* (little balls of mashed white beans fried in palm oil) and homemade sweets, but it is becoming more and more common for non-Candomblécistas to get involved in such a business. Though most people are familiar with non-Candomblécistas selling their *acarajé*, it remains remarkable enough to specifically point it out, whenever the vendor is not a Candomblé initiate. Especially if the vendors are protestant women who sell their *acarajé* under the name of “Jesus balls” (*bola de Jesus*). In some cases these vendors would add garlic or other ingredients, traditionally not used in the

preparation of *acarajé*. Also, many protestant churches make use of Afro-Bahian cultural elements in their Mass, comparable to the inculturated Mass celebrated at Catholic churches. Thus, Protestants oppose to Candomblé in various ways in order to affirm their own identity. This opposition may sometimes be expressed in aggressive ways, where Protestants physically attack Candomblé temples or their initiates, but this opposition is also crafty, when it uses traditional Candomblé elements and transforms them into the church's own tradition.

The relationship of Candomble with Catholic churches is distinctly different from the one with Protestant churches. Stephen Selka has done extensive research in Cachoeira and Salvador, where he focused on cultural and religious resistance. He shows that nowadays Catholics seek to incorporate various Candomblé elements into their religious life. In order to illustrate the importance of Afro-Brazilian culture for the Afro-Brazilian Catholics in Salvador he investigated the inculturated Masses celebrated at the Rosário church. Inculturated Mass is a Catholic Mass accompanied by various influences from African derived religions, such as drums, dance and the distribution of bread. In his work he explains how Catholics incorporate various cultural elements of the Candomblé religion into their inculturated Mass in order to address a part of the identity of the people making up the church community. The inculturated Mass includes the use of African musical instruments and songs. Though this inculturation process is a recent development within the Catholic church, that only started to become mainstream around the late 1980s, Selka claims that even in the 1700s the Rosário confraternity integrated African songs and dance with Catholic feast days (Selka, 2007:54). From these findings we can conclude that African elements are important and have been important for centuries, even for those who have converted to Catholicism. Apparently the African drums and songs appeal to Afro-descent Brazilians not just for religious motives. African derived religions, which consist of African cultural elements also appeal to Afro-descendants for other motives than purely religious ones.

The inculturated Masses are highly popular, but still suffer from critique. Some Catholic priests are intolerant towards the joyous energy of the inculturated Mass as it is distinctly different from the stern and solemn liturgy of traditional Masses. Others feel inculturated Mass is a form of mixing politics and religion. They feel the church should not be a platform for the black conscious movement. Alberico, the head of the *irmandade da Nossa Senhora do Rosário*, states that raising black consciousness is indeed one of the functions of the brotherhood, but not necessarily in a political sense. "We fight against racism by raising self-esteem of blacks.", he explains (Selka, 2007:58). The criticism described by Selka indicates, that indeed the inculturated Mass plays a role on other levels than merely a religious level, which is precisely the reason for Catholic priests to be critical towards the inculturated Mass.

Candomblecistas also critique the inculturated Mass. In the 1980s Candomblecistas have initiated an anti-syncretism movement. Many people had started to consider the Catholic/Candomblé syncretism a necessary evil, that was no longer necessary. The

development of a phenomenon such as inculturated Mass seems like a step backwards to some Candomblecistas. Alberico, thus, insists that this is not the case. According to him there is no longer a mixing of the two religions, but rather a double religious belonging. Many visitors of the inculturated Mass also visit Candomblé temples on a regular bases or may even be Candomblé initiates. The relationship between the Catholic church and the Candomblé community is a complex relationship, because there is no consensus neither within the Catholic community, nor in the Candomblé community on how to deal with each other.

The public image of Candomblé is mainly constructed by influences outside the Candomblé community, such as the media, the tourist industry and the Catholic and Protestant churches. Even with the little knowledge most people have of Candomblé, food is of major importance for the negative public image, because of the animal sacrifice. At the same time food contributes to a positive image, with the popular Acarajé which has become a symbol for the Bahian kitchen and culture. However, Acarajé, as it is sold and eaten on the streets has lost a great deal of its connection with Candomblé, as even protestant women nowadays sell the delicacy.

The Candomblé community, however, also plays an important role in the construction of its public image. On the one hand, because of its manifestation as a counter religion, which has led to the dispersion of ambiguous images. On the other hand because various famous artists and politicians have admitted to their involvement with Candomblé and use various kinds of ways to express their involvement.

4.3 Temple and leader identity

The identity of a leader and its temple are constructed, negotiated and legitimated through various ways. The identity of a temple usually depends greatly on the current leader or its historical background. The identity of a leader, in return, depends partly on the identity of the temple. Finally the initiates may play a part in the identity formation process of a temple and its leader. In Salvador there are three famous temples that are very concerned with their image and identity.

The first of these three famous temples is Casa Branca do Engenho Velho, *Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká*. This temple is considered to be the oldest temple of Brazil and 'home' of the two other main temples in Salvador. The temple is highly respected by other members of Candomblé and even outside the world of Candomblé.

Founded by a 'daughter' of the 'Casa Branca' temple and probably the best-known temple of Salvador is *Ilê Axé Opó Afonja* currently led by mother Stella. This temple is known as an orthodox temple with its 'spiritual' roots in the Oyo kingdom. Mother Stella's predecessor mother Aninha has even re-installed the 'obas' (ministers) of *Shango* to prove the temple's pure 'nago' (yoruba) character (Parés:2004). Mother Stella is known to be an intellectually developed woman that is very concerned with society. She has started various projects to include society into Candomblé and its activities. Also, she encourages the temple's followers to participate in society.

Mother Stella and her predecessors have visited Africa and have established contacts in the 'motherland' of their temple.

Another temple founded by a 'daughter' of the Casa Branca temple is the temple of 'Gantois', officially called '*Ilê Iyá Omi Axé Yamassê*'. This temple is known for its different succession system. Contrary to other temples, it is not through divination that succession of the leader is decided. Successors are determined by (bloodrelated) kinship. The 'Gantois' temple can only be led by women.

Just like the other temples, mentioned above, the 'Gantois' temple is considered to be of great cultural value and is often visited by tourists. All three temples have developed from religious institutions into cultural establishments. They have reserved part of the temple to serve as memorial or museum. On the territory of *Ilê Axé Opó Afonjá* we can also find a library, a movie room, several residences and even an elementary school. Obviously, the three temples mentioned above are not the only famous temples. In a city that houses over twelve hundred temples (<http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/apresentacao>) many temples have become famous or at least known. However, most temples remain anonymous and humble. No one, besides the initiates of the temple and some close personal contacts of the leader and her/his initiates visit the temple. The temples are often hidden away in between houses, behind houses or on an outskirt of the city.

Smaller temples do not use the media to disperse their image. As for bigger temples, the first step in identifying a temple is its *nação*, nation. This term does not refer to a geographical African origin of the temple or its leader, but to a set of religious practices that is associated with descendants from a particular nation.

Since Candomblé is an Afro-African syncretism various influences can be identified. These influences are determining for numerous aspects of the temple, such as the language used in rituals/ceremonies and in the songs, the dress, the food, the decoration, the order of appearance of the divinities during the festivities, the drums, the house rules.

'Nagô' temples find their origin in Yoruba speaking countries. They are considered to be orthodox and conservative, leaders often speak the Yoruba-language or a form of it. The songs are sung in Yoruba and the drums are played with sticks. 'Nagô' has been considered the most pure *nação* by academics and Candomblé followers during many decades. Luis Nicolau Parés has demonstrated that it has been the most influential *nação* since the 1950's (Parés, 2004). Even today the most common terminology for divinities and the various Candomblé titles is that of the 'Nagô' *nação*.

'Angola' or 'Bantu' temples use the Kimbundu or Kikongo language. Most of their songs are in either one of these languages or in Portuguese. The drums are usually played with the hands. In 'Angola' temples the divinities are not called *Orishá*, but *Inquice*. They have their own terminology for the titles of its leaders and initiates. During many years the Angola temples were considered less pure, because they are

less conservative and were open to influences from the indigenous Brazilians, who cultivated *caboclos*, indigenous entities. The Nagô and Gegê temples considered the Angola *nação* a mixture, and thus less powerful.

Another major *nação* is Gegê, or Gêgê-Mahin. They use the Fon language as the main language in their temples and songs. Their word for Orishá is Vodun. The Gêgê *nação* is considered to be more conservative and more secretive than the other nations. For many years the Nagô and Gegê *nações* were hard to distinguish. Temples called themselves Gegê/Nagô as if it were one *nação*. The combination of these two *nações* still exists, but it has become more common to determine one's *nação* either as Nagô or as Gegê (-Mahin). A remarkable trait for the Gêgê (-Mahin) *nação* is their taboo on pork, which is probably inherited from the influence of Muslims.

Within the various *nações* we find many '*subnações*' or mixtures of *nações*. Certain temples are very strict about keeping to their own *nação* but others will welcome their visitors from another *nação* with a song 'of their own'. I have even come across temples where rituals from a different *nação* were performed or divinities of another *nação* were cultivated. The concept is used in various ways and very open for interpretation.

Within the *nações* and *subnações* the temples vary significantly in the way they do things. Identity is, thus, not defined by the *nação* of a temple, the *nação* is merely one of the factors that plays a role in the process of identity formation. Even within each *nação* every temple has its own cult. The differences in practicing the faith are sometimes obvious, such as the number of deities that are being worshipped, but sometimes the differences are minimal, of the kind that a layman would never notice. These differences may be of great value to the initiated. A young *ogã* once told me that he found it difficult to visit other temples, because he felt their way of playing the drums was wrong. He was never able to explain the difference in drumming to me, but it was obvious to him. Later he learned that it was not so much wrong, but really just different from the way he was used to play.

Other, more obvious differences can also play a part in the identity formation process. Most temples do not start any kind of festivity without the presence of the leader. Naturally, this is a form of respect, but there is another reason for it. The structure of a temple is very hierarchic. This means that the initiates depend upon their leader to explain to them how to go about things. Many leaders do not give away information, they simply guide their initiates during the festivity. In some temples this is fairly obvious. The 'mother' would constantly be bothered with questions from her initiates and festivities seemed to be like badly rehearsed theater shows. In one of the more famous temples, *Opó Afonjá*, I encountered quite a different situation on various occasions. Mother Stella was often not present, or only at the beginning of the festivities.

Another important factor for the identity formation of a temple is its background or, rather, its leader's background. People would often refer to temples using terminology such as 'that Bantu temple, that is led by a daughter of...' or 'that Gêgê temple that used to be led by mother...'. Even the leader of a temple or its initiates would identify their own temple by referring to other temples or to the background of the temple. In some cases leaders or initiates would distance themselves from other temples in order to establish their position.

'We are not like that immense temple of mother Stella. Here you find a small and humble temple, we all know each other.' (Interview with D.S.)

In Salvador leaders try to establish a name by explaining their background and their ideas. They will associate themselves with other temples or, to the contrary, distance themselves from other temples, consistent with the kinship-like relation Parés described. In Cachoeira, where the arena is significantly different, temples depend more upon the social network of the temple and especially its leader. Since it is such a small town, practically all leaders of temples know each other personally. If the personal contact between two leaders is good, they will support each other and each other's events. Whenever there is no personal contact or it has gone astray, leaders often ignore each other and speak badly about each other's temples.

Especially in Cachoeira people spoke of the 'power' of a particular temple or leader. During a public Candomblé festivity food is served. This food contains a temple's axé (energy). The Axé of the food is created during the cooking process. During this process, the food is transformed from regular food products into 'enriched' food, food that contains spiritual powers in the form of energy. By sharing the food the energy is shared, which is supposed to fortify the temple and all of the visitors and initiates. But a temple's axé is not necessarily positive. 'I never eat in somebody else's temple! You never know what their intentions are', said miss S. once. This opinion was shared by other leaders. 'I only go to the temples I trust, thus I can eat their food.' (interview with P.) This situation, in which people are suspicious of other temples and therefore reluctant to eat their food is a vice versa situation. When visitors do not accept the food at a particular temple they draw attention to themselves and people become suspicious of them.

Food is not only of spiritual value at the temple. Many informants confirmed the food's cultural character. Serving food to all visitors is considered a sign of hospitality. A lot of time and money is invested in the preparation of the food and often the leader of the temple or one of the elders will make sure that no one leaves the temple without eating. As the relationships between temples resemble kinship, one may expect to find the reciprocal nature of these relationships between the temples as well. Indeed, whenever there is a festivity at a particular temple, its leader will see to it that initiates of related and befriended temples are invited.

In a big city, such as Salvador, the arena in which temples manifest their identity is different from the arena of smaller towns, such as Cachoeira. In the urban setting of

Salvador it is not so easy for a temple to become known. Usually temples are recognized as related to more famous temples. In general related temples pay visits to each other. An *equede* or *ogan* will visit the temple of one of the spiritual sisters or brothers of their leader to represent their temple.

“Often I go [to another temple] to represent the presence of my temple there. We are, like I said, individual and collective at the same time. It is important to have this mutual relationship. It is important that there is always the memory that all belong to this same cultural group. In this sense one temple supports the other. And this support, in your point of view, is social and cultural.” (Interview with T.)

Sometimes ‘receivers’ come along. Even though it is quite common to see ‘receivers’ fall into trance during a ceremony at a ‘strange’ temple, it is not often seen as a good sign and people often try to prevent it from happening. That is why it is not uncommon to see someone fall into trance on their way out of the temple.

In the urban setting these visits are more complicated than in a small town, such as Cachoeira. In Cachoeira social contacts are easier to maintain. There is a relatively small number of temples and the leaders often know each other personally. They may be neighbors, family, friends or visitors of the same church. If a leader in Cachoeira cannot visit a temple on a certain occasion, he/she can visit the temple on another occasion. Her motives are easily verifiable, because of the high standard of social control in a small town. In Salvador leaders sometimes depend fully on their contact on the basis of their profession. Sometimes, the only opportunity leaders have to socialize with each other are the public feasts. With the large number of temples in Salvador, leaders have to choose constantly which temple to visit. This means that they regularly have to turn their colleagues down.

Food complicates the situation. There are two main reasons why a visitor must never leave a feast before the food is served. First of all, because not eating at a temple could be considered a sign of mistrust, as described above. If a visitor attends the feast in order to strengthen his/her relationship with the temple, it is mandatory that he/she stays until the end and consumes the food with the other visitors. Secondly, as described above, all visitors contribute to the energy of the feast by consuming the food. Thus, the visitor only contributes to the feast, if he/she actually consumes the food. This is a vice versa situation, the visitor only profits from the energy of the feast if he/she consumes the food. Visitors, thus, cannot visit various feasts in one night.

The urban arena, which consists of a large number of temples, also has its advantages. As some temples struggle to establish a name, others seek for anonymity. For many temples there seems to be consensus on their way of ‘doing things’. However, some leaders have their own interpretation of the belief system and prefer to do things their ‘own’ way. Various people told me about a ‘father’ who did not use animal sacrifice. One of my interviewees was extremely interested in this person, because she is a vegetarian and found him noble for not sacrificing animals.

She visited him on various occasions, but lost her confidence in him as a man with spiritual powers. She had come to the conclusion that so many of my interviewees had come to as soon as I told them about this man:

“A Candomblé leader, who does not use animal sacrifice cannot be taken seriously. He doesn’t understand the essence of blood and sacrifice.”

(Interview with P.)

In various ways the identity formation of a temple depends on the leader. But the identity formation of the leader also depends on the temple, its background and its initiates. More and more famous Brazilians turn to Candomblé. Singers, politicians, writers, academics are often spotted at a temple. Temples take pride in their famous visitors and their famous visitors may increase the interest for the temple by outsiders. Also, if the famous visitors are successful in their career and happy in their personal life, this is often considered the merit of the temple. Hence, it must be a powerful temple. Besides the famous visitors, foreign visitors may be important for the identity formation of a temple. Many leaders, especially in Cachoeira would take pride in having ‘white’ initiates. It would be a sign of their importance and influence. A European or North-American initiate is not just anybody. It is someone from a different world that was drawn to their temple all the way from the other side of the ocean. Thus, it must be a temple with special forces. Naturally, foreign visitors and famous visitors may also increase the income of the temple.

From an emic point of view temples are always ‘owned’ by a particular divinity. This may be the same ‘owner’ as that of the leader, but this is not necessarily the case. The ‘owner’ of a temple is revealed through divination before its foundation. The divinity that ‘owns’ the temple receives a special status. Its celebrations will be given extra attention, all initiates will have a special bond with it and usually a special shrine or altar is dedicated to the ‘owner’. Obviously this ‘owner’ takes in a central place in the identity formation of the temple.

4.4 Individual identity

The identity of an individual is obviously strongly shaped and influenced by the temple, where the individual is initiated. Since the identity of a temple and its leader are intrinsically connected, the leader is also a determining factor for the individual’s identity formation.

The choice of a temple is not at random. It is a careful search for the right temple, because the initiation process can never be undone. An initiate explains:

“Not everyone can ‘take your head by the hand’ (por a mão na sua cabeça). Whoever does it initially, can only be taken away after that persons has died. Otherwise, you are left disoriented, because [the head] is a place where you keep energy.” (interview with I.)

Some children are raised to be initiated at a specific temple. Their parents maybe initiates of the temple or have close relations to it. For adults the process of choosing a temple is more complicated. Often, the choice of a temple is based on mundane factors, one is related to an initiate, lives in the neighborhood, or was indicated the temple via a friend. Usually the individual will first visit the temple during a public feast or on a regular day. If one feels at home at the temple one may approach the leader for a more personal encounter and/or a consultation with divination. Those who are related to initiates of a specific temple, usually turn to the same temple or a related one. Clients tend to 'shop around' more. Eventually one feels the need for a more intense relation with the temple. The choice is usually based upon a feeling of comfort, connection and trust.

"I went to this house. I became so emotional at this house, where I am now initiated. It was the second Candomblé temple I visited. At this point I already knew my orixá. (...) I went to this house, to a festivity, which would be my future house. I went and became very emotional, had some memories and awkward nostalgia, without knowing for what. So I went and did a divination game. In another place. This person told me that I have a relationship with Candomblé. (...) In this house I did a bori ritual and regularly visited the place during two years. Later, I distanced myself from this place. I couldn't identify anymore with their rituals.

I asked for the supervision of Mãe Zul [a befriended Candomblé leader]. She asked where I would like to go. (...) I told her I liked this lady, of the place I visited the second time, where I became so emotional. She told me I needed to go there. I asked her: But how? I don't even know her! (...) She said: Go there and you will be received with open arms.

So I did and that was what happened." (Interview with V.)

Clients often visit one particular temple, where they may even actively participate in the preparations for the festivities. Clients may undergo various rituals at this temple, such as 'spiritual' cleansings, called *banho-de-folha*. Sometimes they receive bead necklaces after a divination, because it was revealed that such a necklace was needed. Also, they are often advised to offer an *ebó*, work. Usually the *ebó* is an offer of vegetarian food products, demanded by the deities. The client receives a list of demands from the leader and returns with all of the products to the temple, where he/she will prepare the food under strict supervision of an elder or the leader him/herself.

Not all clients are willing to get involved with a temple. Instead of seeking the assistance from a leader, they will turn to the internet and the guide books written by Candomblé leaders and perform the *ebó* at home. Other clients seek for assistance once, and repeat the *ebó* at home, whenever they feel a necessity.

Clients can thus stay quite anonymous and free of responsibility within the temple. To the outside world they do not have to own up to their interest in Candomblé and are therefore not confronted with any stigmas.

The identity formation of an individual within the temple is a complicated process, that depends on the temple, its leader, and many other factors. First of all, temples are structured by a highly hierarchical system, based on seniority. One enters the system as '*abyan*', this is the stage before initiation. After completing the initiation process one is named '*yawo*'. An initiate with more than seven years of initiation receives the title of '*ebamî*'. The system, thus, mainly depends on 'spiritual age', that is the years of initiation (*anos de santo*). Besides the age, particular functions play a part in the hierarchy. Obviously, the function of leader, *mãe/pai-de-santo*, is the most respected and powerful one, followed by the 'little mother/father', *mãe/pai pequena(o)*. The structure then becomes more complicated and differs from temple to temple and from one *nação* to the other.

A distinction can be made between two types of initiates, 'receivers' and 'non-receivers'. 'Receivers' (*rodantes*) are those who are capable of receiving an entity and incorporate. 'Non-receivers' are those who help the 'receivers' in every way possible. Male 'non-receivers' are called *ogã*, depending on their exact function they may be responsible for the slaughtering of the animal sacrifice, conducting the drums and songs, or any kind of assistance for these tasks. Each particular function has its own title and position in the hierarchy. *Ogãs* who execute the *matança* (animal sacrifice) are at the top of the hierarchy, followed by those who conduct the songs.

Female 'non-receivers' are called *equede*. They are responsible for the cooking, decorating the event area, serving the food and all assistance to the 'receivers' during an event. *Equedes* take care of the shoes and any kind of jewelry or accessory that may injure a 'receiver' while incorporating. They also carry white cloths to dab the sweat of the 'receivers' heads. *Equedes* responsible for the cooking are highly respected and receive a special position in the hierarchy. Only *equedes* that have a close relationship with the temple's leader receive this function. The leader needs to trust them completely and their cooking skills need to be excellent. In exceptional cases an *ogan* may be in charge of the kitchen, but *equedes* will never be in charge of the *matança* or the music.

Through divination can be determined whether an initiate is a 'receiver' or not. More often, a person either 'falls into his saint' (*bolar no santo*) during a feast, or is 'lifted to become an *equede/ogã*' (*ser suspense/o pra ser equede/ogã*). A person 'falls into his saint' when he incorporates without being initiated. The deity is invoked into the individual's body by the drums, that summon his/her 'owner' (main deity). The person may express the deity's presence through the specific way of dancing and yelling that belong to his/her 'owner'. Those who cannot receive, can be 'lifted to become an *equede/ogã*' by a deity, represented by an incorporated initiate. The initiate literally lifts up the individual and summons him/her for her task.

Sometimes divination is consulted for assigning other kinds of functions, but in general one's talents are the most decisive factor in assigning a function. Divination is also used to decide on the succession of leadership.

A highly important factor for the identity of initiates and non-initiates is the concept, known in emic terms as 'owner of the head'. The first step in the process of discovering one's 'spiritual identity' is the search for the 'owner of one's head'. Everyone's head is 'owned' by one of the divinities. If one's head is 'owned' by a particular divinity, one is called a 'son/daughter' of this divinity. Though it can only be confirmed by a game of cowry shells, 'owners' can often be exposed by various characteristics of its 'sons/daughters'. Besides the 'owner of the head' a strong presence of a 'second owner', *juntó*, is commonly present. This presence may also be exposed through the characteristics of its son/daughter. In rare cases a 'third owner' is present, which significantly influences things. The initiation process becomes more complicated and all of the obligations and responsibilities increase. In highly exceptional cases a fourth owner is present. In this case the initiation process becomes very complicated, in fact the leader can only guide such a person, but not actually initiate him/her.

In general being a 'son/daughter' of a specific divinity does not directly influence one's status, but it does bring along some kind of stigma or prejudice. Daughters of Oxum are believed to be vain and jealous, daughters of Iemanjá are talkative and sons of Oxalá are quiet. It is not uncommon for an individual to be known by his first name and the 'owner of the head'. Mother Stella of the *Opo Afonjá* temple, for example, is often referred to as 'Mother Stella of Oxossí'. Obviously, this is in the first place a way to avoid ambiguity and be specific about whom one refers to. Also, it is easier to know and remember a person's 'owner' than the person's last name, because the 'owner of the head' is often exposed through various ways and on various occasions, through jewelry, dress color, participation in specific ceremonies, incorporating, etc. But referring to someone by using the name of the 'owner' may also fulfill a different purpose. Jan Jansen describes the importance of last names in Mali in his work *'The revolving well'* (Jansen, 1995). He explains how the last names are determining for the kind of joking relationship one has to the other. He argues that this is a way for *griots* to be able to remember the complex oral literature that is part of this Malian culture. The concept of the 'owner' of the head partly fulfills a similar role. The characteristics that may indicate the 'owner of the head' are also ascribed to a person as soon as it is established that the person is a 'son/daughter' of such and such deity. Some individuals tend to display behavior that is in line with the characteristics of their 'owner'. Through the ascription of these characteristics and the constant commenting and emphasizing the oral literature is constantly referred to and thus remembered. It is a way of constructing and legitimating identity. Both of the deity and the individual.

An individual's identity is almost entirely reconstructed within Candomblé. A person's status, diploma or wealth are no longer important. One's position within the hierarchy, 'spiritual' age, 'owner', and function determine one's identity within the temple.

The connection between an individual's identity formation and food is versatile. The role of a 'receiver' and a 'non-receiver' within the temple differ significantly. As expected, their role in the food process also differs significantly. 'Non-receivers' fulfill a function in the preparation process. An *ogã*, as described above may be responsible for the slaughtering of the sacrificial animal. An *equede* may be responsible for the cooking process. Not all *ogãs* and *equedes* fulfill the same part in the food process, but they each contribute wherever they can. If the feast is organized in honor of an *ogã/equede*, they are responsible for providing the food products. 'Receivers' contribute to the food process by providing the products or the means to buy the products. As long as they are in the stage of *abyan* they are expected to help out, with all kinds of chores. In the upcoming chapter I will discuss how the consumption of food is connected to an individual's identity formation.

5. Processes to reveal one's individual identity

As we have seen above the 'spiritual' and social identity of an individual are mainly constructed during the initiation process. Various aspects of this identity are already known before initiation, but only after going through the entire process are all basic aspects of the complete identity established. This doesn't mean that the identity is a stagnant, self-determining concept, to the contrary, it is, just like any other identity constantly subject to redefinition and growth.

From an emic point of view the initiation process is not so much the construction of a new identity, but rather the revelation of an already existing identity, or at least various determining aspects of this identity. From this point of view, it is only logical that the individual's characteristics reveal information about these aspects even before they are revealed or confirmed through divination.

In this chapter I will discuss the complexity of the 'spiritual' and social identity of an individual within the community of his/her temple. The way in which such an identity is constructed and legitimated indicates the complex role of food and food products.

5.1 Initiation

During the initiation process a person is transformed from a regular into an initiate. Completing the initiation process alters the individual's status within the temple. This newfound status comes with responsibilities. These responsibilities differ from temple to temple and from person to person. Certainly the initiate can no longer ignore his/her taboos (*quisilas*) and needs to respect all the wishes of his/her 'owner'. With seniority the status of the initiate changes as do the responsibilities.

Food is transformed in a comparable manner. Regular food products are transformed in the Candomblé kitchen into delicacies containing life energy. As described above, the transformation process for initiands is an extremely delicate matter, just as the transformation process of the food.

An individual's spiritual identity is mainly construed upon his relationship with his/her 'owner'. From an emic point of view, this owner is an inhabitant of a mythical Africa. This mythical Africa depends on the identity formation process of the initiands, because they represent a specific version of the divinity, which is legitimated through the myths. In chapter three, I have described how food plays a crucial role in the construction of the mythical world of the deities. All dishes represent certain moments, events or characteristics of the divinities. In this chapter I will describe the intimate connection between the mythical African world of the deities, food and the construction and legitimating of individual identities within Candomblé.

Initiation is an expensive and time consuming process. It takes several months to prepare a person for the process and several weeks or months to undergo the process. It is a major step, because one can only be initiated once and will from then on carry the responsibility of all of the obligations towards the temple and to one's

own divinities. Sometimes a person is also responsible for the obligations of a family member's divinity.

The initiation process differs greatly from one temple to the other. The most orthodox kinds of initiation are almost extinct, because they are practically impossible to integrate into modern life. In line with Van Gennep's and Bowie's description of a rite of passage, the Candomblé initiation ritual consists of three stages (Van Gennep 1965; Bowie, 2000:149). The first stage, separation is, indeed, a physical separation of the initiand from the outside world. The initiand will stay internal at the temple. The duration of the internal stay at the temple is traditionally six months, but nowadays it is more common to stay three weeks or, in some cases, three months at the temple. Another part of this stage is the shaving of the initiand. At most temple's the initiate's head and body will be shaved completely and little cuts (*curas*) will be made at various places on the body that will be rubbed with medicinal herbs. Other temples do not entirely shave the initiand, but only those parts of the head, where cuts will be made (*catular*). To make sure the initiand is indeed free from outside influences, ritual cleansings will be performed.

During the second stage, the transition, the initiand is faced with various kinds of taboos. He or she may not talk to anyone about the initiation process, may not consume alcohol, may not enter a bar. An initiand may be faced with various kinds of food taboos and is therefore not allowed to buy food at any kind of bar or restaurant. This last rule is greatly affective, because it is very uncommon for Brazilians to take lunch to work. It is common to have a canteen or bar at the office or workers go out to have lunch. Also, during the entire process initiands need to stay abstinent from sex. These are all precautions in line with Bowie's descriptions of this stage, which is usually marked by a suspension or exaggeration of normal rules (2000:149). The sexual abstinence is common in kinship organized societies, as those of Candomblé temples.

Eventually the initiand is prepared to enter the world again, but not as the same he/she was before the ritual. A specific ritual is performed to cross over the threshold, as Bowie describes (2000: 155).

The development of an individual's 'spiritual' identity is a delicate and complicated matter. After determining one's 'owner' and 'second owner' many other steps follow in the construction and legitimating of identity. Each step is taken at its own time. Some followers have a necessity to be initiated in a short time span, but others may take years as non-initiated (*abyan*). The order in which to take the steps also depends upon the necessity of the individual or the will of the divinity.

5.2 Owner of the head

During the initiation process the initiates 'spiritual identity' is constructed. The formation of this identity is a highly complex process that starts even before initiation. As described above, one of the initial steps, when entering the world of Candomblé is

discovering the main deity of an individual, in emic terms known as the 'owner of the head'. This step is usually undertaken long before the initiation process.

The correct way of discovering the 'owner' of a head is through divination. It is a delicate matter. It takes an experienced Candomblé initiate to perform this kind of assignment and to understand the divination correctly, because other divinities might be trying to take the place of an 'owner'. Some interviewees explain that they have been confused about the owner of their head, because different diviners have told them different things.

"A long time ago, I think I was seven years old. A caboclo, a friend of my mothers, said I was [a daughter] of Ogum. Well, my mum respected it, because she also has a caboclo that was initiated. So, I always thought I was [a daughter] of Ogum. Over time, as I was growing up, I think I might have been around nineteen, my grandfather played [a divination] for me. Because during my childhood I suffered from various diseases, physical diseases. I suffered from the initial stages of paralasy. Thank god, I returned to being able to walk. I suffered from various problems. I burned myself, had some burns. (...)

So, it was a phase in my life where my mum very much needed advice, religious advice, spiritual. Later, when I grew up, I myself searched for this. So, I went to my grandfather. He played [a divination] for me and said that I was [a daughter] of Shangó. So, I asked him: Where is Ogum? Because you grow up thinking you're [a daughter] of Ogum. Because there are these difficult moments in one's life where an orixá steps forward to help one pass through that moment. He said that Ogum was in my life to protect me, because I had to go through these very difficult moments. And according to the mythology Shangó doesn't stay very much with his sons, when they are unhappy or sick. So he passed the responsibility to Ogum, because I am a goddaughter of Ogum. My godfather is a son of Ogum. When I went to be baptized in the Catholic church, my godfather went as a representative of the orixá. Because the orixás don't go to church. He said that from that day on I was a goddaughter of Ogum, that Ogum would protect me from anything, that would come to me, on my way. Until today, whenever there is anything [wrong], I am confident that Ogum comes, in dreams and all, that he is protecting me, that he cares for me. (Interview with I.)

Once the 'owner' of the head is established the follower will be called son/daughter of this divinity. Sons/daughters of particular divinities share various characteristics. A son of *Iemanjá*, for example, is very talkative, a son of *Oxossi* is a thinker and the sons of *Oxum* are known for their vanity. It is not uncommon for initiates or leaders to guess a person's 'owner' without consulting any kind of divination. This may be a reason for confusion. Sometimes followers have always heard that they are a

son/daughter of one particular divinity and later discover through divination, that their head is in fact 'owned' by another divinity.

These confusions do not occur at random. Three main reasons exist for the confusion about the discovery of the 'owner of the head'.

First of all, a competition between the 'owner' and the 'second owner', *juntó*, may be a reason for confusion. Often the 'second' owner presents himself quite strongly during the life of a person. As we have seen in the example above, this may occur when the individual is going through some difficulties that the 'second' owner helps to resolve. During these periods the second owner is in competition with the first owner and may be represented strongly in the individual through its characteristics or the second owner may disturb the reading of the cowry shells, when consulted for divination.

Also, particular divinities help out followers with specific problems. The interviewee quoted above had been faced with numerous health issues during her childhood. It was *Ogum* that had given her the strength to fight and overcome these issues. Thus, when her grandfather, a famous Candomblé leader, had once consulted divination for her, he told her she was a daughter of *Ogum*. This was the most present divinity in her life at that moment. Later on, in her adult life, the new leader of the temple consulted a new divination and discovered she was not a daughter of *Ogum*, but a daughter of *Shangó*.

Another situation that often causes confusion is a kind of heritage. Families may have a strong presence of one particular divinity. For example, one of my closer friends during the fieldwork, was a daughter of *Iemanjá*, her mother was a daughter of *Iemanjá* and her daughter was soon to be initiated as a daughter of *Iemanjá*. However, there had been discussion about whether her daughter actually was a daughter of *Iemanjá* or whether this *Iemanjá* was simply present because of the family situation. After all, she was seen as a child incorporating *Yansan*. The daughter was the first member of the family to be initiated into Candomblé and some thought that *Iemanjá* was trying to get what she deserved for her presence in the family during all these years, through her.

Determining the (rightful) 'owner' of one's head is of major importance. Those who are 'shaved' (initiated) for the 'wrong' owner tend to develop serious psychological problems, which may even lead to an untimely death. Once a person is 'shaved' the process cannot be undone or redone. Sometimes the problem of a 'wrongfully' shaved head may be kept under control by strict supervision of a leader.

Shaving the head and the rest of the body is an important part of the initiation process. Symbolically, it opens the way for the divinity to enter the body through the head. Some writers suggest that the shaving of the head and the rest of the body is a way to return to the stage of a new-born (Carneiro, 1948; Bastide, 1958). The process of shaving the head and initiating the person is called 'taking the head by the hand' in

emic terms, *por a mão na cabeça*. Once a leader 'has taken a head by the hand', the hand can only be removed after this leader's death. Thus, the general maxim Van Gennep has formulated, about the first time being more important than any subsequent time, is especially true in this case (Van Gennep, 1965).

After establishing the 'owners of the head', it is important to discover the exact qualities of the 'owners'. Each divinity exists in various qualities. Especially for 'receivers' it is important to understand the quality of one's owner, because it is expressed in the dress and attributes the owner carries and it is determining for the kind of dancing one performs when incorporated. Discovering the exact quality of the 'owner' can be done before the initiation process, but is often only done during the initiation process. Since 'non-receivers' are unable to incorporate, they lack this particular component. The 'owner of the head' is thus not exactly the same as the divinity one incorporates. All initiates, including 'non-receivers' have one or various 'owners of the head'. The divinity that one incorporates, however, is a more complex and individual concept. Even if two individuals incorporate the same quality of the same deity, each has its own individual characteristics. People tend to comment on the deities saying things, such as 'His *Shangó* is beautiful, really powerful!' or 'Her *Nanã* is so refined, really gorgeous'. But the comments aren't necessarily positive. I once overheard a visitor comment: 'Do you see that *Shangó*? How strange, right? He's almost like an *Ogum*.'

5.3 Bori

Before starting the initiation process one of the most important rituals for an individual needs to be performed. The ritual is called '*bori*', a Yoruba term that means so much as 'for the head'. In Portuguese the ritual is often called 'to give food to the head' (*dar comer à cabeça*). It is a process in which the 'true identity is revealed', as one of my interviewees put it (interview with T.). Through this process we become familiar with all of the determining aspects for the formation of this 'spiritual identity'.

Bori is a highly secretive ritual. None of my interviewees was willing to open up about it, but certain things, they were able to admit. Also, various Candomblé leaders have written guidebooks about their religion, in which the *bori* ritual is described. Lody makes a special reference to the *bori*-ritual, a ritual which is designed to nurture the head as the most sacred part of the body (Lody, 2004).

The main purpose of the ritual is to enforce 'the head'. It is about making the individual strong enough to deal with all of the difficulties in life and also to stand strong against the will of its 'owner' and 'second owner'. If an individual is not strong enough to deal with the forces of the owners, he/she might become a victim of a conflict between the two or they may cause psychological difficulties, because they may overtake the will of the individual. The ritual is thus not meant as any kind of sacrifice to a divinity, but is completely about the individual.

Different kinds of the *bori* ritual exist. The most complete kind lasts about a day and includes a ritual washing, the offering of various plates of food, and divination. For this ritual the individual usually spends one or more nights at the temple. A more simple form of the *bori* ritual is the so called 'water *bori*' (*bori de agua*). This also includes a ritual washing, the only offer is water and the individual does not need to spend the night at the temple. Since it is advised to undergo the *bori* ritual once a year, the 'water *bori*' is often more convenient. However, it is also less powerful. Those who need to strengthen the head in order to deal with specific circumstances, such as the initiation process, will need to undergo the more complete ritual. For both rituals it is necessary to stay celibate and sober at least a week before and after the ritual.

The complete *bori* ritual is all about the offering of food. It starts with the ritual washing for which a herbal conjunction may be used, usually in combination with different kinds of food products. It depends upon the request of the 'head' what kinds of food products will be used in the washing. To determine the head's request the deities are consulted through divination. It is the individual, that will undergo the ritual, who needs to supply and prepare the products, under the supervision of the leader and sometimes the elders at the temple. Food products that are used in the washing may not be consumed by the individual for a period of seven days or more.

Then, the actual offer to the head is determined. Sometimes the head may ask for food products against the will of the 'owner', this is a sign of its independent identity. The products are placed on a plate, that the leader will use to touch various parts of the body, including the top of the head. This part of the body represents all of the ancestors. If either one of the parents has already deceased the plate also passes the right big toe (for the father) and the left big toe (for the mother). If one's parents are still alive, there is no need for special attention.

There are other variations of the *bori* ritual, that are not meant for an individual, but for the musical instruments or other kinds of attributes followers may use. All drums, for example, are 'given food to' before they are taken into use and on an annual basis. Just like the 'owner of the head' of an individual, the drums are each dedicated to one particular deity. This deity is determining for the kind of food that is offered to the drum during the ritual of 'giving to eat'. Leader Ominarê explains that even in this case the guidelines are strict. If the drum belongs to a deity that does not like palm oil, it is strictly forbidden to ever use any kind of palm oil for this drum (do Lago Vialle, 2007:25).

Besides the drums, the bead necklaces followers use undergo a ritual washing to give them special powers. Part of this washing is a food offer. The powers a necklace obtains through this ritual are strictly individual and if the necklace would ever be passed on to another user, it will lose its powers. Rituals that are not meant for an individual will not be called *bori*, but the Portuguese term 'to give to eat to...' may be employed for all of the variations.

5.4 Barco

The initiation process, like an actual birth, is about being welcomed into a family. All of the initiates of one temple are considered brothers and sisters. They call their leader mother/father, and their leader's leader grandmother/grandfather. Each initiate gets to choose an elder brother/sister that will fulfill the function of 'little mother/father'. This person is not the same as the little father/mother of the temple, but is more like a mentor for the initiand. The function of a little mother/father may be compared with the function of a godmother/-father. Becoming part of the family, naturally comes with rights and responsibilities towards the family members.

From an emic point of view the initiation process always takes place in a metaphorical boat, *barco*. This boat is the group of people, which is initiated together. One may enter the boat alone, but a boat may also contain over six people. From an emic point of view entering in the same boat is the creation of a special bond. The boat members are from then on connected to each other in a more closely relation than with the other initiates at their temple. From an etic point of view this group is the *communitas* as described by Turner and Bowie (2000:153).

At the temple the use of kinship terms is often confusing or ambiguous. To clarify their words, interviewees would often emphasize whenever they spoke of their blood related relatives by using the word 'flesh', *carnal*. Without this adjective the words employed to speak about any family member were used to indicate their 'spiritual' relatives (*de santo*). Whenever a person spoke of a member of the same boat, this would often be emphasized as well: 'He is from the same boat as I am, we were initiated together' or 'they are from the same boat'.

The influence from the other boat members will carry on throughout the rest of one's life. They will share their most important moments of their 'spiritual lives, such as the 'coming out', completing seven years of initiation and completing twenty one years of initiation. But they also influence each other's 'spiritual identity'.

5.5 Quisila

One of the most apparent influences from the *barco* is that of shared taboos, *quisila*. The *quisilas* of one boat member influence the other boat members and vice versa. *Quisilas* are taboos that belong to anyone and anything within Candomblé. Temples have *quisilas*, which all of the initiates inherit. Candomblé leaders have *quisilas* which all of their sons and daughters inherit. Divinities have *quisilas* that all of their sons/daughters inherit. Most importantly, each individual has his/her *quisilas*.

Quisilas are taboos of all kinds. Sons/daughters of *Oxalá* inherit a taboo on using dark colors. Those who are owned by *Ogum* inherit a *quisila* for small spaces. Sometimes individuals have a *quisila* for looking at or using specific items, sometimes the use of certain words is *quisila*, but the main kind of *quisila* is that of food.

“Everyone has his/her own quisilas, even those who are not initiated in Candomblé and have never even heard of it. Even the pope.”(Interview with P.)

Many individuals do not know all of their *quisilas* and sometimes even their spiritual leader does not know all of their *quisilas*. Many initiates have told me fascinating anecdotes about when they unwillingly or unknowingly came into contact with one of their *quisilas*.

Individuals are thus, born with *quisilas* and receive more *quisilas* during their life, which are determined by their environment. Initiates receive the *quisilas* that belong to the specific qualities of their ‘owners’. During the initiation process individuals receive all of the temple *quisilas* and certain *quisilas* from their leader, they may have inherited *quisilas* from their ancestors or living relatives. Boat members always inherit one type of food *quisila* or another from their co-members. This means that they share a number of *quisilas* amongst them.

Naturally, the fact that initiates share a number of their *quisilas* and the fact that they have influenced each other on this aspect creates a special bond. The bond endures for the rest of their lives, because knowing a person’s *quisilas* is very powerful information. It is, in fact, a kind of poison to the body and/or spirit. The shared *quisilas* are, thus, more than a shared experience, it is also a shared secret and an indirect threat towards each other.

5.6 Êrê de grão

Part of the initiation process is the return to being an innocent child, *êrê de grão*. This stage is starting to become scarce, but many interviewees had gone through it. For the period of one day, several days or in rare cases up to a year, the initiate is taken into the woods, together with the other boat members. They are taken to a place where no people are around. The initiate is free to do whatever he/she wants. There is supervision from the leader, but only to prevent the initiate from doing something extreme, such as eating his fellow boat members. Interviewees sometimes described this stage as ‘being like a wild animal, you eat everything you encounter’. It is only after going through this stage that the *quisilas* are established.

After going through the stage of *êrê de grão* a period starts in which all *quisilas* need to be respected at all times. At the end of the initiation process, a special ritual is performed to prepare the initiate for his/her return to the common world. Since it is almost impossible for an initiate never to come in touch with one of his/her *quisilas* a protection against the *quisilas* is needed. This protection is called ‘breaking the *quisila*’ (*quebrar quisila*) and it is not only performed at the end of the initiation process, but at any important moment of the initiates spiritual life. *Quisilas*, like all taboos, are harmful to the initiate if not respected. Others, who might have malign intentions may cause harm to an initiate by exposing him/her to his/her *quisila*. To break this kind of harmful intentions, one doesn’t go about things at once, but ‘tries

things out' first. For example, in the confirmation process of an *equede*, she will be sat down in a specially dedicated chair. Instead of sitting down at once, she will make the movement of sitting down, without actually touching the seat and then stand up again, she repeats this movement and doesn't sit down until the third run.

5.7 Coming out

The very last step of the initiation process is the 'coming out' (*saida*). It is the final step of the process, described by Van Gennep as the reaggregation process. The initiand will dance three times at one night and his/her spiritual name will be announced. This name is personal and unique and reveals information about the initiand's family. The name needs to be approved by the initiand with a yell. Only after the approval is the initiation process complete.

Interestingly, an initiand is given a protective collar during the process, and various other ways of protection are inflicted on the initiand. These practices are in line with the rites of passage surrounding childbirth, that, according to Bowie, stress protection. The coming out, is indeed, comparable to a birth (Bowie, 2000).

The coming out marks the end of the first stage of the initiation ritual, but the initiand will only become a full member after seven years of initiation. Only when the initiate completes twenty-one years of initiation will he/she be considered an elder, wise enough to have his/her own cult.

6. Conclusions

Food habits reflect the social and religious structures of the Candomblé community, which is currently involved in various dynamics. It serves various purposes within the community and even outside it. It is a manner of producing, shaping and legitimating identities. On a social and spiritual level food connects people. It connects the visitors and the initiates with each other and the divinities. It also connects the neighbors of the temple with each other and the temple. Sharing the food is a sign of equality between the consumers, which is so important for the negotiating of a temple's position within the Candomblé community, because it creates a feeling belonging.

The idea of offering and sharing food as an exchange of energies even enforces these feelings, because it makes everyone involved in the food process responsible for the energy exchanged. At the same time everyone profits from this exchange of energies, the visitors, the initiates, the leader of the temple and even the divinities. Thus, through establishing one's own personal energy, which is an active and individual process, one contributes to the collective stream of energy.

The dynamics of the explosive growth in the beginning of the twentieth century and the subsequent emergence of temples with a role model function have caused a necessity for temples to bond. Temples have established kinship-like relationships in order to support each other and to prove their 'authenticity'. This idea of kinship-like relations between temples is negotiated and legitimated in various ways. It is a complex construction that starts already at the relations within each temple. My research has shown that food plays an important role in the construction and legitimating of these relationships.

Within the temple the social structure is not only negotiated through the use of food, but also, and even more so, through the knowledge of taboos. A bond is created between the initiates of one temple, because of their shared taboos. This bond is intensified whenever the initiates share more taboos. 'Boat members', for example, share various taboos and have even influenced each other's taboos, therefore their bonds are more intense. When initiates reach maturity, twenty-one years of initiation, they are capable of leading their own temple and become autonomous. However, they never break with their spiritual connections. They are a basis for mutual support.

Temples show their respect and support for each other by inviting each other to their public feast and visiting each other's feast. This is not merely a reciprocal relationship, eating at another temple is a sign of trust. Because of the exchange of energies invoked by the consumption of food, initiates are careful where and when to expose themselves to those energies. At the same time, food is a major indicator of a leader's knowledge, if the food at a temple is bad or not in accordance with the guidelines, a temple may gain a negative reputation and the leader will lose prestige. Since the food is a common subject to gossip about, leaders will be careful not to invite anyone that may cause negative rumors.

The bonding of temples is part of a more complex identity formation process, in which all temples partake. The most important indicators for this process are the *nação* and the 'owner' of the temple. Both of these characteristics are manifested in various ways. The *nação* is determining for forms of worship, number of deities to worship, the language used in songs and prayers and other forms of ritual orthodoxy. The 'owner of the temple' has a special shrine, and its celebrations are given extra attention. The 'owner' of the temple and its *nação* are determining for certain food habits and taboos at the temple.

But, as Parés has shown, Candomblé temples try to establish themselves as religious cult houses in their own right by constructing their own ritual practices and identities in line with or as opposed to those of other Candomblé temples (Parés, 2004). Positioning the temple in the arena of innumerable temples is, thus, just as important for the identity formation as the concepts of *nação* and the 'owner' of the temple.

In order to establish and maintain a respected position within the Candomblé community, temples try to establish a 'pure' or 'authentic' set of ritual practices that is derived from one particular origin. The dynamics of the anti-syncretism movement, in contrast with the re-Africanization movement in South East Brazil, have made the role of the imaginary Africa more prominent. Food habits construct and underline the connections of Bahian Candomblé with the imaginary Africa. First of all, because the Candomblé cuisine consists of dishes that were brought to Brazil by the African slaves. The Candomblé cuisine still coincides for the main part with the Afro-Bahian cuisine. Especially the palm oil, which is considered an essential ingredient for Candomblé food, represents a direct link to Africa. Second, because from an emic point of view it is the mythical 'Africa', habitat of the African deities, where leaders find inspiration for their cooking. Before any ritual or ceremony, the African deities are consulted through divination. From an etic point of view this 'inspiration' is a form of maintaining the oral literature and constructing the deities' identities.

But Candomblecistas do not only have to defend their position within the Candomblé community, but also within society as a whole. With its ambiguous reputation Candomblé has developed itself into a counter religion. Its characteristics as such become particularly apparent when we take the cooking process into account. In vast contrast with the modern fast-food consumption, the Candomblé kitchen forms the scene of a time consuming cooking process that is characterized by knowledge and devotion. There is no compromising in time, effort or expense when preparing the food with Axé. Not only in the cooking process can we find the contrast with modernity. Also in the consumption process we find a contrast with modernity. Individuals don't enjoy the freedom of choosing what to eat and when to eat it, as if they were in a restaurant. Consumers have to wait for the food to be served and have no choice but to consume what is put on their plate, with the exception of choosing not to eat what is provided.

Candomblé has also proven to play an important role in maintaining the Afro-Brazilian culture. Catholics have adopted various customs from the Candomblé ritual practices to address part of the identity of their followers. The Protestant churches have even found more crafty ways of incorporating Candomblé elements into their religious practices. This role, that was traditionally exclusive for the Afro-Brazilian is thus being copied by the universal religions. Because of this pressure from the other religions to compete with Candomblé, it is necessary for the autonomous cult houses to support each other and take a stand against the threats and attacks. The kinship like relationships described above are crucial in this struggle.

Since food plays such an essential role in establishing and maintaining relationships between Candomblé temples, it is an essential element in the way temples deal with the dynamics that Candomblé is involved with. Through the public feasts the social and spiritual identity of the temple is constructed as well as the mythical world of the deities on which the belief system is based. Food, thus, not only reflects the production of identity and the negotiation of belonging, but is one of the main determining elements in these processes, just as it is in defining the notion of 'Africa'.

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