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Português

Several Considerations

The word 'candomblé' is synonymous with african religion. It was always used in this sense, and still is today. This explains lots of things. Lets see. The Negro was uprooted from his land and sold as merchandise, enslaved. Here he arrived as slave, object; from his land he departed as a free man. During the journey, the slave traffic, he lost his personality, representativity, but his culture, his history, his landscape, his experiences, they came with him. These seeds, this knowledge, found a soil, an earth that resembled Africa, although strangely inhabited. Fear imposed itself, but the faith, the belief - what they knew - had an urge to express itself. There emerged the cults (onilé - later confused with the cult of 'Caboclo', one of the first versions of syncretism), there emerged the anger and the necessity of being free. The spells (ebós), the 'quilombos', appeared.

The 300-year history of Negro enslavement in Brazil shows, before all else, the resistance, the organization of the Negroes. The African culture survived, for them, through their belief, through their religion. What one believes, desires, is stronger than what one experiences whenever there is a limit situation. The religion, its organization in 'terreiros' (terrace or cleared land near a house, also a Candomblé temple or 'roças', small farms), was - as it was extensively written - the resistance of the Negroes. They resisted because there was organization. Organization with ones ownself. Every negro used to have, or knew that his grandfather had, a light, a guide, a protective Orisha.

Among the objects of the traffic (the slaves) there were rare jewels: 'Babalorixás' and Iyalorixás. These priests, wholehearted in their believes, created Africa in Brazil. This magic, this re-structurant organization, can only be understood if we think of what is **initiation**, the implications of its processes, what it establishes. The sugar-cane of the oner-patron, use to be planted by the 'Iaôs' just arrived from the 'roncós', the 'camarinhas'.

The force spread itself, the 'axé' grew and appeared in society under the form of the candomblé houses (candomblé - religion of the yoruba Negroes, as it is defined in the Aurélio Buarque Dictionaire). It was "a Negro thing", and as such, something furtive, ignorant, despised and quickly translated as a bad

thing, the devil's thing; good and bad, right and wrong, white and black. Those were the oppressing antagonisms, without any alternative possibility. The Negro, to be accepted, decided to behave as if he were a white. He used to say: "- Sir, we are dancing and playing to 'Senhor do Bomfim', your Saint, my Sir! It is not to 'Oshala', or rather, Oshala is the Father, he is the same as Senhor do Bomfim".

Syncretism was installed. It was a way of resistance that generated great onus, severe disfigurement and scars. The dynamic, the social process is implacable. Immobility does not maintain itself. The sons of the Africans here use to say they did not have confidence in Brazilian born Negroes (the 'sìgìdì', for example, an enchantment for invisibility, and creation of elemental, was not taught). Many things were lost, the African land was reduced to small portions, but Candomblé had effectiveness; the patron used to look for the old Negro woman to do a spell, to give him a bath of leaves, to give him an amulet. It began the proliferation of 'terreiros'. Alienation, massification, tourism, folklore.

But the great initiates, like the ones who created the African land in Brasil, still exist. Odé Kayodé - Mãe Stella de Oshossí, in 1983 said: "**Iansã is not Saint Barbara**", and explained. She showed that candomblé is not a sect, it is a religion independent from Catholicism. The earth trembled; some people began to complain: "- We always went to the mass, always the last blessing, after the initiation, was in the Church, we do the mass with the corpse present when someone dies, this can't change". It was the alienated tradition versus the coherent revolution, it was the breaking of the last chain. The dam was broken, and the water fertilized the almost sterile fields of survival. The Negro is free. He came from Africa, he has a history, a religion equal to any other, and what's more, it is not polytheist but monotheist: Olorum is above all the Orishas. Raimundo Nina Rodrigues told us that once he asked a Babalorixa why he didn't receive Olorum, as the last does exist, getting the following answer: "- Doctor, if I were to receive him, I would explode".

Now a new limit, new configuration installs itself. At this end of the century, with the deterioration of the traditional religious institutions, with the appearance of new religions, with the alternative esoteric doctrines, Candomblé, now taken as religion, is also seen as an efficient agency: it solves problems, cures diseases, calms the head. The whites want to be Negroes, we no longer hear of "the Negro with a white soul". Now the privilege is to be white with a Negro soul, to have ancestry, "to have a plot, a history with the Saint". The Iyalorixás and Babalorixás question themselves as never before. The traps, the "bounty hunters" are installed. They are the congresses, the television - the media - the books, the 'web' in a sense. We transform all this into tongs to separate wheat from chaff, that is the reason we are here. Saying what we are we give conditions to perceive what is posed and to understand the supposed, the opposed and the apposed. Differentiation is knowledge; Candomblé is a religion, it is not a sect.

The Iyalorixás organize the head. The process of organizing the ori is awo (secret). The candomblé is a religion that works with the secret, the silent side of the being, what belongs to Olorum. Candomblé organizes what is fragmented, opening channels of expression to the human being.

- Oni Kòwé -
Salvador, October of 1996



[**Ile Axé Opô Afonjá \(picture\) / Museum / "Iansã is not Saint Barbara" initiation / Sixteen Cowries / School / Sacred Leaves / Orisha's Food Iyalorixá / History of the Axé / Ile Ohun Lailai**](#)

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