

Julia Magalhães de Oliveira

student number: s1610465

## *A Lens to Candomblé*

Afro-Brazilian culture through the work of Pierre Verger

University of Leiden

Faculty of Humanities

Arts and Culture Research Master

May 21, 2015

Supervisor: C.J.M. Zijlmans

2<sup>nd</sup> reader: Wilfried van Damme

## Table of Contents

Preface .....	4
Introduction .....	5
<u>Structure of the Thesis</u> .....	6
<u>Candomblé</u> .....	7
1) Pierre Verger .....	9
<u>Verger in Salvador, Bahia</u> .....	9
<u>Barthes <i>Punctum</i> and Verger's Head Photo</u> .....	12
2) Pierre Verger's Discursive Lens .....	16
<u>An Introduction About <i>Orisha</i> and <i>Vodun</i> Cults in Brazilian and African Coasts</u> .....	16
<u>Slave Trade and Ethnicity</u> .....	19
3) Reginaldo Prandi and <i>Orisha</i> Mythology .....	25
<u>Mythological Sources</u> .....	25
<u>The <i>Orishas</i></u> .....	28
4) Roger Bastide and <i>Candomblé</i> Ritual .....	32
<u>Verger and Bastide</u> .....	32
<u><i>Le Candomblé de Bahia</i></u> .....	35
<u>The public ritual</u> .....	35
<u><i>Candomblé</i> and <i>Ori</i>: the head in the initiation rite</u> .....	44
5) Babatunde Lawal's Contribution to an Art Historical View on <i>Candomblé</i> .....	49
<u><i>Oshala</i>, Procreation, and the Metaphor of Artistic Creativity</u> .....	51
<u>The Meaning of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture</u> .....	52
Conclusion .....	55
Bibliographical References .....	57

## Acknowledgements

This research master thesis is the result of a cooperation between the University of Leiden and the Federal University of Santa Catarina, in which I have been granted a scholarship from the LexS Platinum Award Programme. I would like to thank Prof. dr. Maria Lucia de Barros Camargo from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, and Dr. Marianne Wiesebron from Leiden University, for enabling the realization of my studies in the Netherlands. This academic research has been accomplished with the orientation and supervision of Prof. dr. Kitty Zijlmans, for whom I feel special gratitude. I would also like to thank Prof. dr. Angela Lühning and Alex Baradel, from the Pierre Verger Foundation, and Prof. dr. Wilfried van Damme for the information shared. Special thanks goes to Petra de Kruijf for her help and support with practical life in the Netherlands, and André Scolari for his immense contribution to this research a few years ago in Salvador, Bahia.

## Preface

The deepest impression I received from Leiden University came from its library. Starting with the library's facilities, there an ideal environment is propitiated for academic production, with comfortable computers, printers, copy machines, and a team of librarians eager to help international students who are lost upon arrival, like myself. Another aspect that caught my attention was the good state of conservation of books, which indicate the library's concern for maintaining their material integrity. I imagine this comes from a culture of good relations with this kind of material knowledge. Unfortunately this is not noticeable in every university library.

I was also deeply impressed with the Special Collections kept by Leiden University Library, in which I found printed photographs that ended up giving direction to the development of my thesis. Moreover, from Leiden University Library I discovered the primary sources that I used in my research, which are books published in the late 1950s. It is important to state that these specific books cannot be easily found in Brazilian libraries. If original publications like the ones I worked with were to be found there, I highly doubt they would be available to be taken home, like they were here at Leiden University. Therefore, experiencing Leiden University Library has been crucial for the findings of my source material, and also, for the realization of a thesis concerned with cultural exchange. In this sense, I believe this academic exchange has reached a special goal, propitiating a unique academic experience.

This thesis presents some innovative characteristics. One of them is writing about my interest in the art of *Candomblé* in the English language. Works focused on this subject-matter are usually written in either Portuguese or French. Another new aspect is the connection I draw between history, myth, ritual and photography, to constitute a way of seeing *Candomblé*. I established these different framings (such as Pierre Verger's approach on *Candomblé*, Reginaldo Prandi's mythological work, Roger Bastide's ritualistic descriptions, and Babatunde Lawal's work on Yoruba sculpture and *orí*) in an attempt to understand processes of cultural exchange. This approach coincides with a new field of investigation known as World Art Studies, which considers art as a panhuman phenomenon. Within this framework, the concept of interculturalization fits the needs presented by the study on *Candomblé*, which is a culturally blended practice. The dynamic processes involved in this intercultural encounter suggest the investigation of its preconditions, nature, context, and other inter-relatable dimensions, which compose the essence of this thesis.

## Introduction

This Research Master Arts and Culture thesis deals with Afro-Brazilian culture, focusing on the work of Pierre Verger, a French photographer and ethnologist who executed extensive work on this topic. My field of research is photography and cultural exchange, or interculturality, specifically between Africa and Brazil in regards to *Candomblé* ritual. *Candomblé* is a cultural-religious practice that is the result of cross-cultural exchange. In *Flash of The Spirit* (1984), Robert Farris Thompson, who has devoted serious study to the art history of the Afro-Atlantic world, emphasized that African civilizations in transition to the West represent an important migration style to the world's history.<sup>1</sup> This author belongs to the state of the art in this field, representing much of what has been written about the art history of Afro-Brazilian topics in the English language. Another recent work worth mentioning written in English is *Ecstatic Encounters* (2011) by Mattijs van de Port from the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of the University of Amsterdam.<sup>2</sup> This author has concentrated on Bahian<sup>3</sup> *Candomblé*, which is my specific object of study. Even though a lot of research has been done on Bahian *Candomblé*, very little is available in English. In this thesis I wish to contribute opening up material for an English speaking audience; also, I aim to show how Pierre Verger, through the lens of his camera and his theoretical framing, is fundamental for the academic research of *Candomblé*. I am going to introduce Pierre Verger, and explain what *Candomblé* is composed of in an attempt to contribute a relevant study to the field, considering the context of Leiden University and the Netherlands at large, where little is known in regards to Afro-Brazilian culture despite the significant sources available. My approach will be based on how *Candomblé* has been framed by scholars such as Pierre Verger, who went after the African historical and cultural roots that compose Brazilian *Candomblé*. The corpus of this research is Pierre Verger's 1957 work, *Notes sur Le Culte des Orisha et Vodum, la Baie de Tous les Saints, au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique*, which is a rare title available at Leiden University Library. This book concerns, as the title suggest, an extensive compilation of notes and photographs regarding the cults of *orishas* and *vodun*, which in Brazil are venerated (not exclusively) in *Candomblé*. Therefore, my research question is concerned in analyzing how *Candomblé* was conveyed by Pierre Verger's lenses, both in visual and discursive ways. In the course of this thesis the Yoruba concept of *orí* appears as an

---

<sup>1</sup> Thompson, Robert Farris (1984). *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. Vintage Books: New York, p. xii.

<sup>2</sup> van de Port, Mattijs (2011). *Ecstatic Encounters: Bahian Candomblé and the Quest for the Really Real*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Bahian is an adjective referring to what comes from the north-eastern Brazilian state of Bahia.

important agent of cultural exchange because it brings two distinct worlds, Brazil and Africa, in a single cultural practice, which is the Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé*.

### Structure of the Thesis

In order to approach *Candomblé* through Pierre Verger's work, it is important to understand who he was and what was his background experience. Chapter 1 will briefly introduce the Pierre Verger Foundation, a private not-for-profit organization founded by him in 1988, situated in Salvador. The Foundation's website provides relevant information about his activities with photography, his cultural and artistic formation in Paris during the 1930s, as well as his engagement with ethnology and museums. The first chapter will also discuss his experience travelling the world in search of ethnological material, as well as the importance of his photography in ethnologic discourse.

Chapter 2 deals with how Pierre Verger shaped *Candomblé*. It focuses on Verger's 1957 publication entitled *Notes sur Le culte des orisa et vodun à Bahia, la Baie de Tous les Saints, au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique*. As mentioned, this book is an extensive collection of notes regarding cultural aspects that are common to Bahia and to the ancient Slave Coast. Verger provides a historical background regarding slave trade and ethnicity, which explains why Yoruba culture is the most influential in the *Candomblés* of Bahia. He goes back to the beginnings of African slavery, showing the intricacies present in the flow of Yoruba people to Cuba and Bahia. He also shows the strategies used by Portuguese colonizers attempting to retain possible revolts, which concentrated on the combination of different ethnic groups.

Chapter 3 introduces *Candomblé* and Yoruba culture through its mythology. The myths structure *Candomblé's* philosophy and religious rituals, keeping alive its memory and traditions. All symbolic representations and performances are based on these myths, which are essentially of oral origin. The chapter explains the difference between religious knowledge and its transcriptions into written texts. These transformations are explained by a social interest of lettered culture in relation to the subjects involving unlettered black culture and memory. As such, the academic field gradually gained a corpus of texts that tells us more about the philosophy that grounds *Candomblé*.

Chapter 4 will talk about *Candomblé's* ritual described by one of Pierre Verger's contemporaries, the French sociologist Roger Bastide. Both Verger and Bastide are fundamental writers when it comes to the academic research of *Candomblé*. Roger Bastide's *Le Candomblé de Bahia* was published in 1958,

one year after Pierre Verger's *Notes*.<sup>4</sup> The two authors keep a constant dialogue, citing one another and complementing each other's work. *Le Candomblé de Bahia*, though, seems to be better organized than Verger's *Notes*. It describes in detail the steps in the rituals, as well as the philosophical aspects of space and time that are inherent in *Candomblé*. I will only focus on the public ritual, and the initiation rite because these are aspects that can be identified in Verger's photographs published in 1957. Moreover, these elements of *Candomblé* are closely related to artistic practices, such as dancing and performing mythological moments during public ritual, or painting the initiated's head for spiritual connection.

Chapter 5 comes to put *Candomblé* side by side with the art historical framing taught by Babatunde Lawal. The Nigerian art historian discusses the myth of creation and the concept of *orí* in his articles *Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art* and *Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture*. He explains about the relation between human procreation and artistic creativity, as well as the head being the most prominent part of Yoruba sculptures because of its special meaning. The chapter will develop these ideas in relation to *Candomblé*. The purpose of this section is to draw a parallel between the treatment given to artistic pieces such as sculptures, and ritualistic practices, such as the initiation rite in *Candomblé* portrayed by Verger. The aim is to close the circle, putting Pierre Verger's pictures in artistic framing after having understood the interculturality inherent in *Candomblé* practices.

The Conclusion recapitulates my research question, signaling what is Verger's framing of *Candomblé*, and why this is relevant to the academic research on Afro-American topic. The conclusion aims at supporting Thompson's idea regarding the importance of African migrations to the West, giving as evidence the cultural style of *Candomblé*. The conclusion also demonstrates that the interrelated issues elaborated throughout this thesis helped to systematize and conceptualize on the art of *Candomblé*, bringing up dimensions involved with its historical precondition, agency and outcome.

### *Candomblé*

Attempting to define the object of *Candomblé* is a difficult task. The many definitions done over the years by anthropologists, ethnologists, artists, devotees, historians, etc., make me believe that for this introduction the best way to approach *Candomblé* is first by my personal perspective. I understand *Candomblé* as a culture that intermingles religion and art practices, and through the celebration of human and divine forces it provides spiritual support to its followers. It is intrinsically an African

---

<sup>4</sup> From now on I choose to abbreviate Verger's extensive title *Notes sur Le culte des orisa et vodun à Bahia, la Baie de Tous les Saints, au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique* to just *Notes*.

descendent tradition that has a strong artistic appeal in its religious celebrations, which are filled with visual decorations, performative dances, and a contagious musical rhythmic set up. The mysterious aspects of *Candomblé*, which are abundant, are not of my interest because I believe secrets have a purpose; nonetheless, the culture involving *Candomblé* implies its mysterious nature through the distance it establishes in comparison to our western way of thinking. One aspect of *Candomblé* that I find fascinating is its relationship with nature, location of the divine forces they worship. In this sense, oceans, thunderstorms, waterfalls, and trees become gods and goddesses. From this idea I can understand and admire the woman in prayer by a large tree in a *Candomblé*, shown in figure 1.



figure 1  
(Verger, P. 1957)<sup>5</sup>

Besides its devotion to nature, there are facts that always appear among the many definitions of *Candomblé*: it is of African descend and it was brought to Brazil during slavery. For the rest of this thesis exercise, I will show how complex this notion is, how much theory is involved, and some of what has already been studied about it. In other words, defining *Candomblé* is going to be what I will elaborate extensively through this whole thesis.

---

<sup>5</sup> I have not added more bibliographical information regarding the photographs from Pierre Verger's *Notes* because they are in a final section of the book that does not contain page numbers.



## 1 Pierre Verger

Pierre Edouard Leopold Verger (1902-1996) began photographing in 1932, starting a period of 14 years of exclusive dedication (1932-1946). During this period, he realized many trips around the world, photographing for European and North-American newspapers and magazines. Before settling himself in Brazil in 1946, he worked for a photography agency, Alliance Photo, and for the *Musée d’Etnographie du Trocadéro*, in Paris.<sup>6</sup> In the course of his life he became an ethnologist, anthropologist and a writer. Verger obtained a PhD title in African Studies through *Faculté des Letres et Sciences Humaines de l’Université de Paris* (1966), he also contributed to the *Musée National d’Histoire Naturelle* and the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, both in Paris. Because of his academic involvement with various universities, Pierre Verger managed to have his research published in articles and books. In 1946, when he decided to live in Salvador, Brazil, he dedicated his life to the research of Afro-Brazilian religion and culture. For his work on *orisha* and *vodun* cults he received a scholarship to study African rituals in 1948. In 1953 he was given the name Fatumbi, which means in Yoruba ‘the one reborn under *Ifá*’ (a deity that will be discussed later), becoming a divination priest. In 1974 he became a professor at the Federal University of Bahia, followed by his contribution for the creation of the Museu Afro-Brasileiro, in 1982.<sup>7</sup>

Much of Pierre Verger’s legacy can be found in the Pierre Verger Foundation<sup>8</sup>, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1988, situated where his home was for many years. The Foundation’s mission is to preserve and disseminate his work in order to establish a cultural and academic exchange between Africa and Brazil. The Foundation is also concerned in being socially active within the local community and adjacent areas providing integration activities. Aside from making publicly available Verger’s library, photo collection and personal archives, the Foundation also assists professionals and researchers who are interested in consulting his work.

### Pierre Verger in Salvador, Bahia

Pierre Verger arrived in Salvador in August 1946 through the All Saints Bay of Salvador, in the coast of Brazil.<sup>9</sup> Upon arrival Verger learned facts about the upper and lower sides of town, finding

---

<sup>6</sup> Today this museum is called *Musée de l’Homme*.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.colecaopirellimasp.art.br/autores/33>.

<sup>8</sup> [pierreverger.org](http://pierreverger.org).

<sup>9</sup> Hollanda, Luiz Buarque de. (Director). (1998). *Pierre Fatumbi Verger: um mensageiro entre dois mundos* [film]. Conspiração filmes/Gêge Produções/GNT Globosat.

vacancy in a hotel where he found the room of his dreams.<sup>10</sup> It faced the beautiful sea line of All Saints Bay, or *Baía de Todos os Santos*. This bay is a geographical location that received commercial goods, as well as African people destined to slavery in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and part of the nineteenth centuries. Nowadays the bay is, among other things, an important touristic site, especially for its unique blue tonality. The All Saints Bay hosts the capital Salvador, as well as the *Recôncavo*, which is the region encompassing the Bay's inner coast, sites of typical Bahian culture, including *Candomblé*. Figure 2 shows All Saints Bay with the capital Salvador indicated by the number one. Figure 3 shows a map of Brazil, with the state of Bahia colored in yellow.



figure 2

(<http://www.ama.africatoday.com/maps.htm>)



figure 3

(<http://www.luenticus.org/mapas/brasil/bahia.html>)

---

<sup>10</sup> Hollanda, 1998.

According to Verger, Salvador did not have running water in the 1940s, showing the simplicity of life; people would be back home from work by the end of the afternoon, they would gather with neighbors in front of their houses and eventually would improvise a small samba fraternization. In this context he became deeply interested in the people of Salvador, their living habits, not thinking about pointing his Rolley Flex towards anyone with more “anemic skin color”.<sup>11</sup> Salvador in the 1940s was still a nineteenth-century style city that had not yet “acquired” the twentieth century<sup>12</sup>. It received in the 1940s and 1950s foreign artistic personalities, including Lina Bo Bardi, Hans-Joachim Koellreutter, and Carybé. All of them were delighted with the Bahian popular life style, and engaged with representing and shaping this culture. For example, Lina Bo Bardi was an Italian architect who also arrived in Brazil in 1946, and became part of Brazilian Modernist movement. She moved to Salvador in 1950 to direct the project of the Museum of Modern Art of Bahia. Koellreutter, a German composer, arrived in Brazil in the late 1930’s, and went to Salvador in 1952 to open the School of Music of the Federal University of Bahia. Carybé is another artistic personality, a friend of Verger. The Argentinian visual artist arrived in Salvador in 1950, and dedicated much of his art to portray *Candomblé* religious culture in sculptures, watercolors, drawings, etc.

Being part of the Bahian life style included the participation in *Candomblé* public festivities. Pierre Verger and his friends attended the *Candomblé* called *Ilê Axé Opó Afonjá*, a contact that started informally but gradually turned into an intimate relationship. He established a very close bond with Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo, also known as Mãe Senhora, who was the leading priestess of *Ilê Axé Opó Afonjá*. It is said that the affective bond that united both of them was a result of divine forces because their ancestral gods were a perfect match.<sup>13</sup> However, it is too early to start getting into the peculiarities of *Candomblé*. For now what is of interest is that Pierre Verger, once aware of *Candomblé* and its relation with Africa, decided to begin a research work connecting these two worlds.

This is the moment when Pierre Verger began his transition from working mainly with photography to becoming an ethnologist. After his arrival in Salvador, in 1946, it took him five years until his first written publication came out in 1951, entitled *Orixás*.<sup>14</sup> This is a publication in Portuguese by a small Bahian publisher, where Verger worked with the already mentioned friend, the artist Carybé. We can notice through the bibliographical list given by Verger’s Foundation that after this 1951 publication, Pierre Verger began to write under the sponsorship of IFAN, Dakar. IFAN is the

---

<sup>11</sup> Holanda, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Verger, Pierre (1951). *Orixás*. Salvador: Coleção Recôncavo, vol. 10.

*Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire*, created in 1936 by the General Governor of AOF, *l’Afrique Occidentale Française*, Jules Brevié, for the research of social, human, and natural sciences in Dakar, Senegal.<sup>15</sup> Under the supervision of Theodore Monod, who wrote prefaces to Verger’s works, IFAN sponsored Verger’s publications throughout the 1950’s. Among them is the book I will discuss in the next chapter, which was published in 1957, his *Notes*. In the documentary movie *Pierre Fatumbi Verger: um mensageiro entre dois mundos*<sup>16</sup> (1998), it is said that the reason why Verger started to write was because Theodore Monod asked him to do so. In the same documentary, statements made by Yoruba peoples who received Verger in Africa affirm that he was able to participate, and even undergo rituals, because he could afford it. Verger institutional finances provided him with ethnological experiences, and demanded written documentation. The same documentary movie affirms that his true interest was in photography. He would not let go of his camera, and he would be prepared to photograph anything at any moment.

#### Barthes’s *Punctum* and Verger’s Head Photo

Pierre Verger’s photos can be found in different archives around the world, pictures from the former *Alliance Photo* ended up in different locations around Europe, making the investigation about the origin of certain images very challenging. While performing a bibliographical search in Leiden University Library I accidentally found four printed photographs taken by Pierre Verger in the Special Collections. The images measure 24 by 29 cm, and all have a stamp on the back side stating “A.B.C. Press Service (I. Rona), Amsterdam”. A.B.C. Press Service was a Dutch photo agency from Amsterdam that closed on July 31, 2003. Its archive with nearly half a million slides was acquired by Spaarnestad Photo, situated in Haarlem. Only the negatives made by Dutch photographers moved to the National Archives Photo in Rotterdam.<sup>17</sup> A.B.C. Press Service was created in 1932 by the journalist Imre Rona (1902-1974), and was for a long time the main press photo agency for foreign press and documentary photography in the Netherlands. Rona was interested in foreign photography, and the collection shows the world history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the eyes of major international press and documentary photographers at the time<sup>18</sup>, which include Pierre Verger.

The four photographs in Leiden University Library are from 1935-1936, according to the analysis of the Pierre Verger Foundation. Three of them were taken in Mali, but the one I am going to discuss

---

<sup>15</sup> <http://ifan.ucad.sn/>.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Fatumbi Verger: a messenger between two worlds.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.spaarnestadphoto.nl/>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

is from Upper-Volta. The image I find most striking is shown in Figure 4, depicting the face of a man, who is looking at the camera. The photograph was taken from an interesting angle, putting his face not entirely sideways, with a slight upward inclination. The man photographed has a half-smile on, he is not looking with eyes wide open, instead, his gaze seems relaxed and somehow playful.

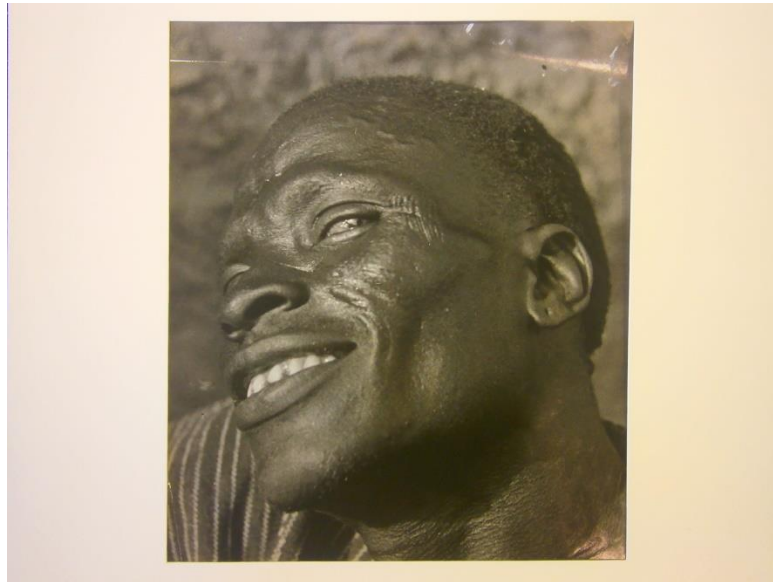


figure 4  
(Pierre Verger, Portray, Maon, Upper-Volta – 1936)<sup>19</sup>

The reason I find it so interesting is difficult to explain, it might be related to his facial expression, the gaze captured by Verger. It is a joyous picture. This image holds something that is discussed by Claudia Pôssa in a text she published on the Pierre Verger Foundation website. Pôssa did her PhD (2007) on Pierre Verger's photographic career, in which she worked on something called the "Pierre Verger's touch".<sup>20</sup> She talks about his particular way of approaching his object, of contemplating it and capturing an image according to their interaction. Verger's "touch", as indicated by Pôssa, can be studied in three ways: as documental impulse, as affection, or as punctum, a concept derived from Roland Barthes. According to Pôssa, the documental impulse would be the moment of shooting driven by a will of knowledge and appropriation, that is, a documental impulse that was pre-logic and intuitive. Another approach to Verger's style would be the affirmation of affection and

---

<sup>19</sup> This is a picture taken from the photograph at Leiden University Library's Special Collection. The information regarding the photographs was given by the Pierre Verger Foundation.

<sup>20</sup> pierreverger.org.

connection.<sup>21</sup> However, Roland Barthes' *punctum* seems to be more interesting here to understand Verger's unique way of equating a situation that is going to be photographed.

In *Camera Lucida*, published in 1980, Roland Barthes explores the temporality of photography, indicating that the essence of a photograph is "that-has-been" idea. Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest discuss Barthes's *punctum* at length in *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective: case studies from contemporary art* (2011). Van Gelder and Westgeest are both art history professors, the former in Leiden University, the latter in University of Leuven. Their book contributes to understanding the photographic medium through various case studies from contemporary art practices. In *Photography Theory*, they explain Barthes' "that-has-been" idea as the disquietude a photo can provoke.<sup>22</sup> This spontaneous reaction caused by a photo is what Barthes calls *punctum*, which is different from the given cultural meanings in photographs, which he calls *studium*.<sup>23</sup> According to Van Gelder and Westgeest, Barthes' *Camera Lucida* concerns analysis of viewers' responses to photographs, including his own. He initially thought of *punctum* as the striking detail present in a photo, but later he realized that *punctum* is more than the detail, it is an intensity and is related to time. A photograph deals both with "this will be", the moment in the past, and "this has been" the moment of observation of the photograph.<sup>24</sup> One of Barthes' critics, Geoffrey Batchen, as Van Gelder and Westgeest state, relates this tension to the title *Camera Lucida*, affirming that this is a drawing device prior to photography. The device, camera lucida, merges two sources of light, one coming from the scene, and the other from the paper placed beneath the instrument, into the observer's retina. This makes the act of seeing a private, individual experience.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, Pierre Verger's picture shown in figure 4, for me, is an example of his own private individual experience. I suggest that the gaze captured by Verger is his own, in the sense of "this will be" moment in the past; to me, the observer, the gaze is my own, in the sense of "this has been" moment of observation, now, in Leiden's Library Special Collections.

Apart from the impressions conveyed by this particular photograph, we can start to think of key aspects related to how Pierre Verger built his ethnological experiences through the images he captured. We already know that from 1946 onwards his lens was pointing exclusively at African and

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://pierreverger.org/en/pierre-fatumbi-verger-en/texts-and-interviews-online/research-on-verger/o-toque-vergeren.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Van Gelder, Hilde; Westgeest, Helen (2011). *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective: case studies from contemporary art*. Chichester etc: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Van Gelder; Westgeest. 2011: p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> Van Gelder; Westgeest. 2011: p. 67.

Afro-Brazilian people and culture. My research question refers to how Verger conveyed *Candomblé* both in visual and discursive ways. So far, the photographed person indicated in figure 4 cannot be explicitly related to *Candomblé*, to Africa, or to Afro-Brazilian elements; indeed, it holds a joyous impression, something difficult to express verbally but that contains a playful aura, a gaze that interacts and identifies with the observer. Next, we are going to find out how Pierre Verger talks about these elements.

## 2 Pierre Verger's discursive lens

This chapter will deal with Pierre Verger's discursive lens, depicting the beginnings of his research involving the transatlantic flow of Yoruba culture. I am going to discuss his 1957 publication *Notes*, which portrays his early discourse about Afro-Brazilian history and culture. The title points out what the book is about: it gives an extensive collection of notes regarding the philosophy of Yoruba religious culture, and presents the coherences Verger found between the Brazilian *Candomblé* and Yoruba cults. One important fact to be clarified is that *Candomblé* is not exclusively a Bahian element, neither it is exclusively a Yoruba descendant. Many pictures presented in *Notes* were taken in Recife, a city neighbor to Salvador, where similar Afro-Brazilian cults also happen. Moreover, *Candomblé* is the result of a cultural blend that hosts different African cultures, not only the Yoruba. This seems to be confusing, and indeed, it is. We are talking about a cultural practice that grew from unlettered tradition, and served as means to maintain living traditions that were forbidden under colonialist rules. Pierre Verger is a researcher who attempted to investigate and organize these roots, trying to learn with more precision where *Candomblé* comes from.

### An Introduction About *Orisha* and *Vodun* Cults in Brazilian and African Coasts

As previously mentioned, Theodore Monod, the director of IFAN, Pierre Verger's sponsor during the 1950s, wrote the preface of *Notes*. Monod affirms that an attentive look at African cultural survivals on Brazilian soil requires effective knowledge about both parts of the diptych Brazil and Africa. For this reason, he points at Pierre Verger as the person who worked in this regard under exceptionally favorable conditions, gaining the trust of both Brazilian and African people. According to Theodore Monod, Verger was endowed with the gift of sympathy, which consecrated him a divination priest, building an ethnologically solid ground to face such enterprise.<sup>26</sup> It is important not to forget the fact that not only sympathy brought him to become a divination priest, but also financial possibilities for coping with the expenses involved in ritualistic preparations. Thus, Verger became a specialist on Afro-Brazilian religion and culture. In the *Notes* he created a dossier of religious practices concerning the Black people of Bahia.

---

<sup>26</sup> Verger, Pierre (1957). *Notes sur le Culte des Orisa et Vodun à Bahia, la Baie de tous les Saints, au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique*. Dakar: IFAN, pp. 7.



Theodore Monod presents the above-mentioned notes as regarding ritualistic manifestations of certain African gods brought to America during the period of the slave trade. He indicates Salvador as the starting point, precisely at All Saints Bay (*Bahia de Todos os Santos*), where the slaves arrived and were distributed. Certain Afro-descendants remained faithful to their beliefs, their ancestry, and continued celebrating their rites through impressive ceremonies. Monod considers the important cultural influence left by the Yoruba, and to a lesser extent, by their neighbors, the *Dje Dje*. He opens his Preface with the following statement:

*On savait depuis longtemps que les Noirs de Bahia, au Brésil, avaient conservé des croyances, un rituel, dans une certaine mesure un vocabulaire d'origine africaine, et provenant, plus précisément, de Nigéria (pays yoruba) et du Dahomey (group djédjé).<sup>27</sup>*

This guided Verger's research towards the religions belonging to these African ethnic groups. To complement his studies on African soil, Verger focused on Yoruba and Dahomey lands, which are African kingdoms situated in the regions of Nigeria and Benin, respectively. Verger's familiarity with Brazilian religious practices in *Nago* and *Dje dje* cults granted his studies points of departure and references relatively accurate. In Africa, Verger showed images of Brazilian ritualistic practices, he also learned lyrics, chants and certain praise poems (*orikis*), enabling him to establish an immediate link with the Africans.<sup>28</sup>

Verger's *Notes* come as the result of one year of research in Dahomey and Nigeria, which lead to the collection of extensive documentation about *orisha* and *vodun* in conjunction with historical traditions of their migrations. When returning to Brazil with information and pictures about liturgical objects from Africa, Pierre Verger was seen with different eyes. Other trips were made between Africa and Brazil while Verger classified and ordered some of the cults in Bahia regarding *Dje dje* and *Nago* ethnicities. In the *Notes'* introduction we find that Pierre Verger admitted this is a complex study because the elements involved are unstable, and the deities researched are found in various locations, having certain aspects changed from place to place. The regions visited in Africa faced a number of internal wars and invasions. These events resulted in the migration of cultural elements from one place to another. Gods that originally belonged to certain locations were taken to other places. Some of these gods remained alive in the collective memory, while others disappeared; sometimes these gods,

---

<sup>27</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.7.

<sup>28</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.9.

when compared, had very different characteristics, other times they seemed very much alike and mutually influenced. It is difficult to say whether or not there is an older and coherent cosmogony shared by these populations, or if this system has been recovered by local traditions. What Verger noticed was a tendency of ruling families to identify their ancestors and divinizing them as gods, thus substituting their distant history by a sacred myth. The coverage is so deep that it is hardly possible to identify this ancestry today if not by rituals, reinterpreted by local influences. The common points and differences of these diverse rituals are to be found by comparing studies of these same ceremonies celebrated on different locations.<sup>29</sup> Pierre Verger's work does not aim at such a goal. A general overview of this collection does not organize the mythology in a harmonic, hierarchical pantheon. The collected notes show that these religions are exclusively the cult of divinized heroes. Verger concludes that the cult of *orishas* addresses, in principle, the forces of nature through divinized ancestry, forming a vast system that unifies the dead and the living within a continuous familyish solidarity. The mystic connection with divinized ancestors is constant and active, nothing is done without consulting and assuring their protection. Verger indicates that these people live in prosperity if their ancestry is satisfied, as opposed to catastrophes and calamities that can be seen as a result of gods that feel offended or dissatisfied.<sup>30</sup> The gods can be terrible and terrific. If conveniently treated and adored, they provide help and protection to their worshippers. In order to approach these religions one must disregard certain assumptions: good, evil, original sin, divine providence, things that are earned under efficiency, strength and struggle. There is the notion that forces of nature can be settled down through associations, connections, and affinities of certain elements that are unfamiliar to us or do not seem to follow any logic. These traditions are transmitted orally.<sup>31</sup>

The information introduced by Verger is quite relevant because it is important to have a better understanding of Africa in order to approach its cultural presence in Brazil. In fact, it is interesting to learn that the cultural blend that occurred in Brazilian lands actually began in African soil, through the internal wars and invasions that had already mixed together different gods and different ancestry. Therefore, an attempt to learn the precise structure or origin of the *orisha* pantheon seems to be an impossible task. In my opinion the most relevant information given by the first pages of Verger's *Notes* is the idea that family history is associated with divine ancestry, and this divine ancestry is directed to the forces of nature. From this I understand that Yoruba societies link humans and nature with mythology, adding characters and characteristics that are mythological to their routines. Moreover, the

---

<sup>29</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.10.

<sup>30</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.12.

literary events that are present in the mythology give life to the stories of *orishas*, and I will dedicate the next chapter to the discussion of mythological sources.

### Slave Trade and Ethnicity

The first step to understand the interculturalization that resulted from the encounter of African civilizations in American colonies needs an assessment of historical facts regarding slave trade and ethnicity. This is precisely the major concern Pierre Verger points at in the opening pages of his *Notes*. Despite the fact that little is known (or taught) about the specificities of slavery history, this subject is crucial to understanding Afro-Brazilian cultural “end result”.

The first section of Verger’s *Notes* tells us that slavery was a practice brought to Spain by the Moors, and was introduced to the “new world” in 1502. A royal treaty established between Seville and the northern and western African coasts allowed the transport of black slaves from Spain to Hispaniola, the territory that later became Santo Domingo and Haiti. In the “new world”, the Spanish *conquistadores* and the Portuguese *bandeirantes* were later joined by the English, French and Dutch settlers. They Christianized the native populations for the “salvation” of their souls, and tried to make them work in plantations and mines. The only native South American communities familiar with agriculture belonged to the modern territories of Mexico and Peru; for this reason these populations managed to handle the regime imposed by European conquerors. All other native communities were semi-nomads who grouped together and lived of hunting and fishing. These people were not prepared to become sedentary or to engage in agricultural work, as it was demanded of them. The abrupt shift in life styles resulted in their emigration towards the interior land, as far as possible from progression and cultivation. Some native populations simply disappeared - they preferred death over slavery.<sup>32</sup>

Verger then discusses the strategies used by European colonizers to deal with their human labor products. A treaty that established African labor as substitute for the insufficient and counterproductive indigenous labor officially lasted for three centuries (and in undercover for another half a century). It is hard to precisely evaluate the amount of slaves transported in the “philanthropic” initiative of Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Spanish Dominican friar who advocated in favor of native populations, proposing the use of African slaves instead.<sup>33</sup> The estimates vary enormously, says Verger. He refers to the Catholic Encyclopedia which talks about twelve million people, while others<sup>34</sup> speak of fifty million

---

<sup>32</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Source: <http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/history/spanish/lascasas.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Verger here cites the article *Coup d’oeil sur les peuples africaines et afro-américaines* written in 1953 by J. Comhaire.

people. The treaty allowed “getting” African people from all origins and all “nations”. The main locations included the Gold and the Slave Coasts (located at the Atlantic shores of modern Ghana and Benin), which provided Sudanese people, and the coast of Angola, providing Bantu people. The peoples were separated from the very beginning of their forced journey to the Americas. People from cultural groupings that were opposed to one another were forced to live together, side by side, at the same plantations. As a result, Verger explains that they shared the misfortunes of slavery and exile, culminating in the implementation of similar living habits. This new way of life created among Africans a feeling of solidarity, of fellowship, unifying them against the ones responsible for their captivity. This unity put at risk their keepers. Slave owners deeply feared uprisings and revolts once they were largely outnumbered by the Africans in American territory. The slaves were separated by ethnicity, and carefully put together with their adversaries, configuring ways to stimulate hatred among enemy groups.<sup>35</sup>

Verger’s discursive lens focused on the ingenious ways slave owners used to generate hatred among African groups. He tells us that the Brazilian Government believed it would be helpful to encourage the *batuque*, or drumming, a rhythmic entertainment organized by the slaves in their days off. To the Government eyes the *batuques*<sup>36</sup> would have slaves gather together and scorn one another through feelings of pride for their individual “nations”. The Government considered the institution of *batuque* as something that stimulated black people, in an insensible and mechanical way, to remember the feelings of mutual aversion. This feeling of aversion was considered as the best guaranty to maintain security in Brazilian largest cities. If different African “nations” completely forgot the natural rage that kept them apart, an immense and inevitable danger would take over. As such, Verger concludes that the strategy adopted by the government was not so wise; the intended encouragement for disagreement became what set unity among black enslaved Africans.

The research done by Verger is interesting because it tracks down what were the ethnicities involved in Brazilian slave traffic, and how their transportation was planned and directed. In fact, the regrouping of these African “nations” was done according to commercial exchange. There were slave providers in the Atlantic African coast, and slave buyers dispersed throughout certain points in America.

---

<sup>35</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.16.

<sup>36</sup> Here Verger refers to a text from the beginning of the nineteenth century, written by Nina Rodrigues, an author that will be discussed in the next chapter. Nina Rodrigues says that the institution of *batuques* was seen by particular individuals from Bahia as something completely different. To slave owners of Bahia the *batuques* were prejudicial to dominical events: to some because they used their slaves to do useful work even on Sundays, to others because they wanted to exhibit their slaves in front of their properties in order to show-off their wealthy social position. (Verger, P. 1957: p. 16).

The trade between Bahia and Whydah<sup>37</sup>, at the boundaries of the modern nation of Benin, was particularly intense. This African territory was taken over by the king of Dahomey, who kept human commerce with European nations. Ships travelled directly from one port to another, exchanging tobacco and *cachaça*<sup>38</sup> for slaves. In this market exchange a good amount of war prisoners from Yoruba ethnicity (especially Mahi and Nago) was taken to Bahia. The king of Dahomey even sent two ambassadors to Bahia in 1795, proposing exclusivity in slave trade to Portuguese traders. Verger tells us that the offer was denied because it would result in the gathering of too many slaves from the same ethnicity, which could have harmful consequences.<sup>39</sup>

The reason why Verger focuses on this aspect is because Bahia hosted numerous insurrections. One was led by the Haoussas in 1807-1813, followed by another led by the Nago Male in 1826-1835. These ethnic groups were Muslim, and extremely well-educated. However, the outcome of these revolts was limited because other black “nations” chose not to participate. Later there was a religious war set against white slave owners and against black individuals who had converted to Catholicism. This time African Muslims who were free participated in the war. These citizens were later expelled from the country, returning to the old Slave Coast. They carried with them living habits, agricultural methods, and architectural knowledge they learned in Brazil; this explains why European influences can be noticed in these regions of West Africa, as noticed by Pierre Verger. Equally, many other freed slaves, non Muslims as well, returned to Africa in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They engaged in the commerce of palm oil and other African products that were required by Afro-Brazilians in their ritualistic cults. Commercial and cultural exchanges between the Slave Coast and Bahia eventually declined, and at a certain a point they were completely interrupted.

*Notes* also mentions an interesting participation of the Dutch in the Brazilian slave trade. In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese fort of *São Jorge da Mina* controlled the whole trade between the Gold Coast and the Slave Coast. The Dutch took over this fort, and forced Portuguese and Brazilian ships to hand in ten percent of their tobacco load destined to slave trade. The king of Portugal, feeling humiliated, set up a law in 1730 forbidding ships from passing that region. Then, the traders were forced by law to pass by Cape Verde, which is situated further south, closer to the coast of Angola. Citizens of Bahia became extremely dissatisfied because slave business was good the way it was. The general governor of Brazil adhered to the orders established by the Portuguese. However, he warned

---

<sup>37</sup> This location is historically addressed as the Slave Coast. There the Portuguese built a fort called *São João Baptista de Ajudá* in order to protect their slavery interests.

<sup>38</sup> *Cachaça* is a typical Brazilian rum made of sugar cane.

<sup>39</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.17.

the Portuguese crown of the bad consequences this act could result in. Unhappy about the “quality” of the black people that arrived under these new circumstances, traders from Bahia shook up the Portuguese economic tutelage and invested in the construction of stronger, armed ships, organizing the trade for their own risk.<sup>40</sup>

One way to understand why, for example, slave trade history is neglected in Brazilian education, comes from the attitude the country adopted in relation to the end of slavery. Brazil was one of the last countries to truly end the use of human slave labor. Pierre Verger tells us some details, stating that in 1815 Portugal adhered to the Vienna Convention, which ended the slave trade north of the equator. Nonetheless Bahia, which was officially included in the treaty, continued the trade unofficially with Whydah and Lagos. In 1846, just one hundred years before Verger’s arrival in Salvador, new laws of free trade made British sugar invade Brazilian and Cuban markets. Sugar is an ideal product for slave labor, so as consequence, unofficial slave traffic during this period received great stimulus. This economic movement in Brazil and in Cuba maintained slave business with the Slave Coast, where the captives were mainly Yoruba. This situation happened during a time of insistent war conflicts inflicted by the king of Dahomey against his neighbor, the king of Yoruba land. The latter had his power weakened by Fulani invasions.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, at this time Brazil and Cuba were the only countries receiving war prisoners to slavery, which had been abolished altogether in South America, except in Brazil. Slavery had also been abolished in the Antilles, except in Cuba and Porto Rico. Pierre Verger found contracts of purchase and sale of slaves still between 1838 and 1860, in municipal archives of Salvador, which indicated that the last Africans taken to Bahia were in majority Yoruba.<sup>42</sup> For this reason the Yorubas, also known as Nago, exercised a stronger cultural influence in comparison to other African “nations”, as Pierre Verger insistently conveys.

In this chapter I worked with the preface and the introduction of Pierre Verger’s *Notes* to pursue an idea of the framing he gives to *Candomblé* through his discourse. First I looked carefully at how Theodore Monod presented Verger’s research, discussing the essence of his work in terms of relating

---

<sup>40</sup> Verger, P. 1957: p.18.

<sup>41</sup> The Fulani is a Muslim ethnicity from West Africa that invaded and conquered the Yoruba territory of Oyo in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Yorubas were then pushed towards southern territories, in which the cities of Ibadan and Abeokuta were founded by the 1880s. (Source: <http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/Yoruba>).

<sup>42</sup> The documents show a distribution of men by “nation”, providing statistics such as: a total of 3060 people from Sudanese origin, which included 2049 Nago, 286 Djèdjè, 117 Mina, 39 Calabar, 27 Benin and 1 Cachen; a total of 460 people from Bantu origin, which included 267 Angola, 65 Cabinda, 48 Congo, 29 Benguela, 5 Gabon, 4 Cassanje. (Verger, P. 1957: p.18).

Afro-Brazilian *orisha* cults and African religious practices. Monod was interested in making an image of Verger as someone “endowed with the gift of sympathy”, which I believe he really was. Verger was very close to the people involved in his work. The picture shown by figure 5 suggests this close and friendly relationship, in which we can see Verger in a ceremony in Ifahin in the 1950s. He and the people he is accompanying seem very relaxed, including the laughing the man playing with what seems to be a camera, and the funny/curious look from the lady next to him.



figure 5  
(Lühning, A. 2012: p. 131)

My tendency is to say that Verger’s interest in researching the roots of Bahian people came as a consequence because *first* Bahia established an affective bond with him. Bahians are also endowed with the gift of sympathy, not to mention the natural beauty Salvador offers to the lenses of any photographer. Nonetheless, it is important to think critically in terms of Verger’s financial conditions, which is what enabled the realization of his research trips. Moreover, Verger’s historical concern looked carefully at the events of slave trade. Facts mentioned in his introduction are extremely relevant to the study of *Candomblé* and its roots, such as the complexity involved in the origin of *orisha* cosmogony.

The process of cultural blend that took place in Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé* is not something new. Verger tells us that due to African internal migrations, divine characters were continually shaped and reshaped.



### 3 Reginaldo Prandi and *Orisha* Mythology

So far I have talked about Pierre Verger's professional background in photography and his early development in ethnological research. I also included some historical facts that contextualize Verger's presence in Bahia, as well as his studies about *Candomblé* and its Yoruba roots. We know about the financial means he used to realize his trips between Africa and Brazil, and also his personal affective bonds with the mystic environments of both locations. I looked at the preface and the introduction of his early publication, *Notes sur le Culte des Orisa et Vodun*, which introduces his specific interest for African and Afro-Brazilian culture, and which gives a historical background regarding slave trade. His *Notes* are followed by an extensive collection of ethnological material, including myths, praise poems, and ritual photographs. Verger's notes regard the mythology that structures both *Candomblé* and Yoruba religion, which will be the main concern of this chapter. These myths, which originally belong to an oral tradition, travelled in the memories of the peoples who were caught and sold in the slave trade. In the previous chapter, I referred to Verger's inability to organize this mythology in a harmonic, hierarchical pantheon. The reason concerns the variety of deities that come from different backgrounds, and which succeeded or disappeared upon contact with one another. We learned from Pierre Verger's *Notes* that it is difficult to identify a single, unified and coherent cosmogony that belongs to Yoruba ethnicity, and that there was a tendency for ruling families to identify their ancestors with divinized deities. This is a crucial point because the substitution of family ancestors by divinized deities is so deep and intense that it is difficult to dissociate the sacred myth from the historical background. Family memory is celebrated by rituals, which are interpreted under local mythological influences. These gods, deities, mythological protagonists, are called *orishas*. The *orishas* are cultuated both in Yoruba religion and Bahian *Candomblé*. As stated in the previous chapters, the *orishas* address the forces of nature, and the link between family and mystic ancestry sets a unity between the dead and the living. What is going to be discussed here is this mythological content, but instead of relying on the disorganized *Notes* of Pierre Verger, I will refer to a more contemporary work, to understand *Candomblé* mythology and the shift it underwent, from oral to written sources.

#### Mythological Sources

The work I am referring to dates from 2001, it is entitled *Mitologia dos Orixás*, and it is the result of an extensive research done by Reginaldo Prandi, a retired Sociology professor from the University of São Paulo. For decades Prandi collected myths while developing research on other aspects of *orisha*

religions. In 1996 he decided to give a more systematic and annotated exposé of the research on these myths, coordinating a team of researchers who compiled the corpus of myths that is put together in *Mitologia dos Orixás*.

Prandi indicates that it is difficult to find books or articles about *orisha* religions that make no reference to myths. This is because ritual values rest on this mythological knowledge. He makes an overall list of the most important authors and works that talk about these myths, so I will list some of the sources mentioned by Prandi that I find relevant for my research. Prandi mentions that the very first written myths appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first Brazilian scholar to publish on African mythology was Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906), who was a young, white, male *bahian* doctor who unfortunately believed in the inferiority of afro-Brazilians.<sup>43</sup> Other texts that discussed African and Afro-American cultures never ceased to grow. Publications from authors such as Leo Frobenius<sup>44</sup> (1873-1938), Wande Abimbola<sup>45</sup> (1932-), and Ulli Beier<sup>46</sup> (1922-2011) are mentioned by Prandi as important scholars. According to Prandi, Ulli Beier is one of the most important contemporary names researching *orisha* mythology. He was a contemporary of Pierre Verger in Africa, from whom he learned numerous myths, including some collected in Brazil. In regards to Pierre Verger, Prandi mentions him as a tireless enthusiast and discloser of *orisha* religion, who adopted *Candomblé* as religion and Brazil as homeland.<sup>47</sup> Verger was initiated as a divination priest, or *babalawo*, in Africa, adopting the name Pierre Fatumbi Verger. Fatumbi signifies in Yoruba language ‘the one who is reborn under *Ifá*’ (deity who owns oracle wisdom).<sup>48</sup> Prandi says that Verger’s 1954 *Diex d’Afrique*<sup>49</sup> presented a first compilation of myths, which he expanded in 1957 with *Notes*, continuing to work on this project throughout many publications during the 1980s. Roger Bastide is another important author mentioned by Prandi in *Mitologia dos Orixás*. I will discuss Bastide’s work in the next chapter. Prandi uses a translation of Bastide’s French publication from 1958, *Le Candomblé de Bahia: rite nago*, which is also available in the Leiden University’s Library, and will be my source.

However, the richest Afro-Brazilian mythological source cited by Prandi is a notebook written by Agenor Miranda Rocha in 1928. Rocha is well-known among the *Candomblé* community, and his

---

<sup>43</sup> Rodrigues, Nina (1935). *O animismo fetichista dos negros bahianos*. 2<sup>a</sup> ed. [1<sup>a</sup> ed.: 1896]. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira.

<sup>44</sup> Frobenius, Leo (1949). *Mythologie de l’Atlantide*. Paris, Payot.

<sup>45</sup> Abimbola, Wande (1975). *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá*. Lagos, Unesco.

Abimbola, Wande (1976). *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*. Ibadan e Londres, Oxford University Press.

<sup>46</sup> Beier, Ulli (1980). *Yoruba Myths*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>47</sup> Prandi, Reginaldo. *Mitologia dos Orixás*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001, p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Verger, Pierre (1954). *Dieux d’Afrique*. Paris, Paul Hartmann Éditeur.

notebook registers *odus*, or oracular chapters from the divination game, containing myths, interpretations and offerings. This notebook was copied and recopied many times, making the text circulate under unknown authorship for a long time among *Candomblé* priests and researchers. Prandi affirms that in the 1950s Mãe Senhora<sup>50</sup> lent a copy of this notebook to Pierre Verger, who made broad use of it in his *Notes*. The myths written in this notebook were disseminated broadly through the works of Pierre Verger and other authors.<sup>51</sup> Finally in 1998 Agenor Miranda Rocha had his notebook published under his authorship in an edition entitled *Caminhos de Odu*<sup>52</sup> (Walkways of Odu), which according to him, contains knowledge passed on by the priestess Mãe Aninha Obá Bií, who orally delivered the stories to Agenor back in 1928.

Reginaldo Prandi also develops the idea that *orisha* religions constituted in America received a significant revival during the 1960s. He assures this can be noticed in the expansion of *Candomblé* cults throughout Brazilian territory, and the Cuban Santería practice in the United States, especially by Hispano-American immigrants. The result is an increased number of publications regarding *orisha* religions. Researchers and priests have published texts, mythological collections, and ritualistic formulas collected in Africa, Cuba and Brazil, generally in a fragmented and non-systematized way. The recent expansion of Brazilian *Candomblé* involved a strong affiliation of social segments that are distinct from the people who originated the *orisha* religion in Brazil. Prandi states that now *Candomblé* includes followers who are not necessarily Afro-descendants, and may belong to social groups who come from a school-centered education, used to the idea of printed knowledge in books. This new segment, which generally associates religious culture with the written word, found meaning in *Candomblé* practices and conceptions. They discovered mythological presence in ritualistic objects, chants, secret initiation rites, colors, decorative adornments, liturgical vestments, dances, temple architecture, and notably in the archetype or behavior of the son-of-saint (a devotee, in Portuguese *filho-de-santo*). The people-of-saint (devotees, in Portuguese *povo-de-santo*), as posed by Prandi, recall in a daily routine the characteristics and mythic ventures of the *orisha* who is believed to be his or her patron. This stimulated the editorial market about *orishas* in such way that the oral transmission of religious knowledge characterized in *Candomblé* gradually incorporated the use of written text. Today the number of publications regarding *orishas* is large, affirms Prandi. There are titles specialized in myths, and a great number of publications

---

<sup>50</sup> I have already spoken about Mãe Senhora in chapter one, when talking about Pierre Verger's affective bond with the leading priestess of *Ilê Axé Opó Afonjá*, the *Candomblé* cult he attended in Salvador. Mãe Senhora is a religious name that could be literally translated into Mother Lady, but her official name is Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo.

<sup>51</sup> Prandi, Reginaldo (2001). *Mitologia dos Orixás*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Rocha, Agenor Miranda (1928). *Caminhos de odus*, org. Reginaldo Prandi. Rio de Janeiro, Pallas.

about the religion and culture that also reproduce collected myths from different researches, different times, regions, and countries.

### The Orishas

From this point I am going to present the *orishas* through the myths appointed by *Mitologia dos Orixás*, which refers to Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé*. The mythology says that one day in African Yoruba lands a messenger called *Eshu* went searching for solutions to the terrible problems that afflicted the lives of everyone. The myth tells us that *Eshu* was advised to hear what were the difficulties lived by humans, deities, animals, and all living beings sharing life on Earth. They were narratives that talked about ventures, sufferings, victories, defeats, achievements, failures, health and death. Everything related to every-day life needed to be told to *Eshu*, even if some facts seemed unimportant. *Eshu* was to pay close attention to the details about the offerings given to the *orishas*. These preparations invoke the help of deities to overcome the challenges imposed by life. *Eshu* compiled 301 myths, representing to the ancient Yoruba philosophy an uncountable number of stories. *Eshu* ended up having all the knowledge needed to unveil the mysteries about the origin and the government of the world. He knew about mankind's destiny, and the journey each individual needs to face, including misfortunes such as poverty, the loss of social positions, enemies, infertility, disease and death.<sup>53</sup>

This knowledge was given to a foreteller named *Orunmilá*, who is also known as *Ifá*. This god shares his oracle wisdom with priests called *babalawos*, who are seen as the fathers of the secret.<sup>54</sup> The *babalawos* have to go through an initiation rite in order to exercise oracular reading, so they learn the primordial stories that relate facts from the past that repeat themselves every day in the lives of men and women. Nothing is new to the eyes of ancient Yoruba thinking. The key of oracular reading is finding the reoccurring events in the mythical past. The myths of this oral tradition are organized in sixteen chapters, each subdivided in sixteen parts, all of which have to be meticulously memorized.<sup>55</sup> *Odu* is the name given to the narrative segment of a determined mythical chapter that holds the solution to a problem that is brought up. The *odu* has the magical medicine, which often involves the preparation of some kind of votive sacrifice to the *orishas*. The divination priest, or *babalawo*, needs to know precisely which chapter holds the solution for the problems brought by patients. Believing that a specific solution for a problem is in a certain chapter, the *babalawo* then tosses a game of sixteen cowrie shells, a divination tool that indicates in which myth and which *odu* the solutions are to be found.

---

<sup>53</sup> Prandi, R. 2001: p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Prandi, R. 2001: p. 18.

*Eshu* is believed to be the messenger responsible for the communication between the divination priest and *Ifá*, the oracle god.<sup>56</sup>

*Mitologia dos Orixas* tells us that this divination practice survives in Africa among the Yoruba that follow the *orisha* religion, and also in America, among the participants of *Candomblé* in Brazil, and *Santería* in Cuba. Both in Africa and in Cuba the oracle is prerogative of *babalawos*, but in Brazil the task is held by the priests and priestess.<sup>57</sup> However, priest and priestess are not ideal vocabulary words. These persons are referred to as fathers and mothers-of-saint, or in Portuguese *pais e mães-de-santo*. In Brazil the divination practice was gradually simplified, and the body of myths detached from it; however the names of *odus*, the preparations, and the *orishas* who protagonize the stories have been kept. *Ifá* itself is randomly remembered, being *Eshu* the one who occupies the central role in the oracular game. The myths, nonetheless, remained present in the explanations about the creation of the world, the composition of *orishas*, and the religious justification of taboos, which are all lively present in the routine of *Candomblé* and its ritualistic dances and performances.<sup>58</sup>

The *orishas* are gods that received from *Olodumare*<sup>59</sup>, the Supreme Being, the task of creating and governing the world. Each *orisha* is responsible for an aspect of nature and certain dimensions of human condition. *Eshu*<sup>60</sup> is the only *orisha* that is always present in all cults. He is the messenger, the deity responsible for human and divine communication. Movement, biological reproduction, market exchange, are dynamics that belong to *Eshu's* domain. Unfortunately during the first contact between European Christian missionaries and the Yorubas, *Eshu* was perversely misinterpreted in the figure of the devil, a burden carried on until today.<sup>61</sup> The visual representation of *Eshu* sometimes contains horns and a trident, characteristics that reveal his penetrative power, not a demoniac aspect.

*Ogum* governs iron, technology, and war. He is the *orisha* who opens up new paths and provides opportunities and personal realization. In a more archaic time *Ogum* was also associated with agriculture, hunting, and fishing, activities that were essential to the lives of more ancient African people. In this sense, he is closely associated with other deities also related to hunting, such as *Oshossi* or *Otim*, who are the owners of earth's fauna and flora. In Brazil *Ogum* is not so much associated with agriculture or the fauna/flora, instead, this *orisha* is conceived as the great warrior.

---

<sup>56</sup> Prandi, R. 2001: p. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Prandi, R. 2001: p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Olodumare* is also called *Olorum*, and in Cuba it is known as *Olofim*.

<sup>60</sup> *Eshu* is also called *Legba*, *Bará* or *Eleguá*.

<sup>61</sup> Prandi, R. 2001: p. 20.

*Nanã*<sup>62</sup> is a female *orisha*, the guardian of ancestral wisdom whose natural domain is the mud that sits at the bottom of rivers and lakes. She is the lady who owns the planet we live. It was *Nanã's* mud that modeled the first human being. She is considered to be the oldest *orisha*, and *Oshumare* and *Omulu* compose part of her family. *Oshumare* is the rainbow *orisha*, the serpent god who controls the rain and the fertility of the soil, while *Omulu* is the master of diseases and the secrets of their cure. *Ifa* is the *orisha* who knows men's destiny, who owns oracle wisdom, and teaches men how to solve all kinds of problems and afflictions. *Ossaim* is another *orisha* who masters the healing power of plants.

*Shango* is the god of thunder and governor of justice. He is said to be one of the first kings of *Oyo*, the city that dominated for a long time most Yoruba territories. This is probably the reason why *Shango* is widely adored in Africa. In Brazil *Shango* is also one of the most important patrons of *orisha* religions, and his cult is associated to his three wives: *Oya*, *Oba* and *Oshum*. These goddesses are originally associated with three African rivers named after them. For obvious reasons these female *orishas* lost their geographical association in Brazil, but other attributes became more important. *Oya* holds the power of winds, thunderstorms, and female sensuality. She is the queen of lightning, also responsible for taking care of dead spirits. *Oba* drives the flow of rivers and domestic life of women. *Oshum* chairs love and fertility, she is also the owner of gold, lakes and waterfalls.

The cult of female *orishas* could not be complete without *Yemanjá*, the mother of all gods, men, fish, the one who rules emotional balance. *Yemanjá* is probably the most famous *orisha* in Brazil, commonly seen as the mother of the oceans. Other deities associated with motherhood include *Ibeji*, who are widely celebrated twin *orishas*. These deities are infantile gods who rule childhood, fraternity, duplicity, and the childish aspect of adults.

Last but not least comes *Oshala*<sup>63</sup>, the head of creation pantheon. *Oshala*, is the creator of Men, the lord of life's principle, the great *orisha*. Very respected in all *orisha* religions, *Oshala* is the father of all *orishas*, and the god of creativity and art. We should be giving *Oshala* special attention when discussing artistic matters in the next chapters; this *orisha* is an important element in the initiation process, and his presence is expressed through artistic paintings performed over the devotee's body and head. *Oshaguan*, his older version, is the creator of material culture, the inventor of the pounder that prepares food, and the one who commands conflicts between peoples. In Brazil this *orisha* is evoked in his younger version, which is *Oshala*, a young warrior. In Africa there is a large dispute between *Oshala* and *Odudua*, who is earth's creator. However, in Brazil *Odudua* basically vanished, often being

---

<sup>62</sup> *Nanã* is also called *Onilé*, literally representing mother earth.

<sup>63</sup> *Oshala* is also known as *Obatalá*.

identified as one of *Oshala's* aspects. There are other *orishas* who belong to this group, but are seldom remembered. *Ajala* is one of them, an *orisha* responsible for fabricating the heads of men and women. *Ajala* is, therefore, held responsible for good and bad destinies because *Ori*, the head, is also a deity that each individual human being has. *Ori* is the *orisha* who sustains the person's individuality, it is an element that will be discussed more in depth in the last chapter together with the artistic functions and attributions of *Oshala* and *Ajala*.

The Yorubas believe that men and women come from the *orishas*, implying that there is not one single origin. Each person inherits marks and characteristics from the *orisha* he or she descends from. These deities are in constant fight against each other, they defend their governments and aim to enlarge their domains, making use of varied maneuvers, from love games, to open declared war and secret conspiracies. *Orishas* get happy, suffer, win, lose, love, and hate; in fact, human beings are lighter versions of them.<sup>64</sup>

In this chapter, I have introduced *Candomblé* mythology, the sources involving the *orisha* pantheon, and the transition this mythology made from oral to written sources. The *orishas* are artistically developed in many different ways, from visual arts to literature and music. Before discussing the art involved with *orisha* culture, I will first elaborate on the ritual of *Candomblé*, the topic of next chapter.

---

<sup>64</sup> Prandi, R. 2001: p. 24.

## 4 Roger Bastide and the *Candomblé* Ritual

This chapter regards the public ritual and initiation rite of *Candomblé* through the works of Pierre Verger and Roger Bastide, who was a sociologist closely related to Verger, with whom he wrote many texts. The source from which I collected the images that will be presented in this chapter is Verger's *Notes*, while the text I am about to discuss was written by Roger Bastide. I am going to concentrate on his 1958 publication entitled *Le Candomblé de Bahia: rite nago*<sup>65</sup>, for its descriptions and presentation of *Candomblé* as an object of study. I rely a lot on Bastide's recount of *Candomblé* because of his large contribution to the field, understanding *Candomblé* as an autonomous Brazilian reality. Interestingly I am establishing a dialog between him and Verger because the latter discussed *Candomblé* in a comparative relation with its African origins. In the course of this chapter I will work out dialogs between Verger's pictures and Bastide's interpretations because I understand that the photographs perform an interesting function when combined with the text: they provide a visual lens to the discursive frame establishing a double bond relation. Pierre Verger's *Notes* compares images of Brazilian and African cults. I have deliberately selected only the photographs of Brazilian cults, taking them out of their original comparison context, placing them in a different context of textual comparison with Roger Bastide. I understand that the explanation provided by Bastide and the images given by Verger strengthen each other.

### Verger and Bastide

Angela Lühning, an Ethnomusicology Professor at the Federal University of Bahia and director of the Pierre Verger Foundation, published an article discussing the interrelated trajectories of Roger Bastide, Pierre Verger and Alfred Métraux.<sup>66</sup> According to her, these authors made important contributions to the anthropology, sociology and history of the twentieth century; however, little is known about their common interests, professional convergences and profound friendships. Lühning's article is based on the analysis of letters exchanged by Verger, Bastide and Métraux, where they dialogued over professional matters, discussed questions, and shared personal experiences.<sup>67</sup> My focus will be on the bond between Bastide and Verger because of their shared interest for Afro-Brazilian culture.

---

<sup>65</sup> Bastide, Roger (1958). *Le Candomblé de Bahia: rite nago*. Paris: Mouton & Co.

<sup>66</sup> Lühning, Angela (2012). *Verger, Bastide e Métraux: três trajetórias entrelaçadas*. **Revista USP**, São Paulo, N. 95, p. 128-141, Set/Out/Nov 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Lühning, A. 2012: p. 130.



The article states that Roger Bastide was born in southern France in 1898, and was of Protestant origin. He became a sociologist with a solid academic career, having taught for sixteen years at the University of São Paulo, from 1938 to 1954. His stay in São Paulo turned him into an important figure for the academic education of Brazilian sociologists and anthropologists.<sup>68</sup> Roger Bastide substituted Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was hired for the University of São Paulo's opening in 1934. He died in France in 1974 shortly after his last trip to Brazil. Lühning tells us that Pierre Verger exchanged 227 letters with Roger Bastide in the course of twenty-seven years, from 1947 until 1974.<sup>69</sup> In 1944, two years before Verger's arrival in Brazil, Roger Bastide had already done his first field work in north-eastern Brazil, resulting in a publication entitled *Imagens do Nordeste Místico*.<sup>70</sup> The impressions Bastide had from this trip made him strongly advise Verger in going to Bahia in 1946. It was through Verger's observations about *Imagens do Nordeste Místico* that both of them began exchanging letters and ideas.<sup>71</sup> In 1951 Bastide visited Verger in Salvador during field work, and in 1958 they traveled together to Africa, as shown by figures 6 and 7. Figure 6 shows them among friends at the airport of Cotonou; figure 7 shows Bastide in Ilesa, Nigeria. I find interesting the fact that the image in figure 6 is clearly a posed photograph, probably taken by a non-professional photographer, which indeed captures an interesting alignment between the bodies and the palm trees in the back. However, figure 7 is more interesting because it captures a moment of observation, where Bastide's eyes are curiously looking at the man and the woman next to him.

---

<sup>68</sup> Lühning, A. 2012: p. 130.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Bastide, Roger(1945). *Imagens do Nordeste místico em branco e preto*. in: **O Cruzeiro**, Rio de Janeiro. The title in English literally translates into *Images of the Mystic Northeast*.

<sup>71</sup> Lühning, A. 2012: p. 130.



figure 6  
(Lühning, A. 2012: p. 132)



figure 7  
(Lühning, A. 2012: p. 136)

The images portraying Bastide's only trip to Africa happened soon after the defense of his *these d'état* from the University of Paris, which was composed of two parts: *Les Religions Africaines au Brésil* and *Le Candomblé de Bahia*. Bastide's work is dedicated to the transformations, interpenetrations and metamorphoses of African and Brazilian civilizations in contact. However, even if African cultural traits sustained changes in Brazil, Bastide was certain about the idea that *Candomblé* has a structure, and that this structure deserved careful and special study.<sup>72</sup> In his own words, Roger Bastide said that he was neither seeking for African or non-African traits in *Candomblé*, nor was he concerned with its syncretism with Luso-Brazilian civilization. He studied *Candomblé* as an autonomous reality, without reference to history or to the transplantation of cultures from one part of the world to another. He focused on describing a system of concepts borrowed from ethnography and cultural anthropology, aiming at opening new path for research.<sup>73</sup>

### Le Candomblé de Bahia

It is Roger Bastide's contention that *Candomblé's* private rituals are far more important than the public ones, even though the latter may be considered by researchers as the most important and dramatic moment. He states that people engaged with *Candomblé* belong to a different state of mind, which is a distinct world of collective representation. This religion would not have been able to survive without a fraternal cooperation of people who are literally called people-of-saint (which are sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers-of-saint). One of their functions is to reincarnate the *orisha* of their ancestors during ritual course.<sup>74</sup>

### The Public Ritual

Roger Bastide understands that each *Candomblé's* ceremony is dedicated to one *orisha* in special, even though all of them may manifest themselves.<sup>75</sup> He describes the ceremony's development through the following steps: the sacrifice, the offering, *Eshu's padê*, the musical appeal, the preliminary dances, the gods' dance, and the rites of exit and communion. I am going to present each step, as stated by Bastide in *Le Candomblé de Bahia*, with some photographs chosen from Pierre Verger's *Notes*.

---

<sup>72</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

**The sacrifice.** This part of the ritual is reserved only for those already experienced in the cult. It is the most secret aspect of the ritual, and it is done by a small number of participants.<sup>76</sup> There are photographs taken by Verger regarding the sacrifice, however I choose not to include one here because of the strong (maybe unpleasant) effect it may cause on the viewer. Moreover, the sacrifice is kept secret because *Candomblé* members are aware of the stereotypes associated to this “superstitious” aspect of African religions.<sup>77</sup> The object of sacrifice is usually an animal, which varies according to the *orisha* for which it is being offered. It can be an animal with either two or four feet, like a hen, or a goat, for example. The animal’s sex has to be the same as the *orisha* who will “receive” its blood, and the procedures must be done with specific instruments.<sup>78</sup> In fact, Bastide talks about two sacrifices, because *Eshu*, the messenger *orisha*, must always be served in advance, as the step regarding *Eshu’s Padê* will cover.

**The offering.** The sacrificed animal then goes to the hands of the cook who will prepare the food for the *orisha*.<sup>79</sup> Specific parts of the animal are destined to the *orisha*, while the remaining parts are cooked and served to worshipers or to visitors who participate in the communion repast at the end of the celebration. There is no waste of food, says Bastide. The way in which the offering is prepared is as meticulous as the sacrifice ritual. This is how Afro-descendants maintained living religious culinary traditions. Some of these traditions have crossed the sanctuary border to enter profane cuisine, being incorporated as part of Bahia’s culture.<sup>80</sup>

***Eshu’s Padê.*** Bastide explains that the sacrifice is made in the morning; the culinary preparations and divine offerings happen at around midday; the public ceremony begins by sunset and goes through the night. It begins with *Eshu’s padê*. The word *padê* is associated with the Portuguese word *despacho*, which refers to something that is being sent or shipped somewhere.<sup>81</sup> Because *Eshu* is misinterpreted as the devil, so Bastide explains, some people believe he is a trickster. In this case, when the police persecution attempted to interrupt a ritual and arrest its participants, some believed it was because *Eshu* was not properly served. The truth is, states Bastide, that *Eshu* is the African Mercury, the intermediary needed to establish connection between men and the supernatural world. This is the fundamental reason for making an initial offering to *Eshu*, otherwise, there would be no ceremony. The

---

<sup>76</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 15.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 17.

moment of *Eshu's Padê* also includes a mandatory prayer for the dead and the ancestors of *Candomblé*.<sup>82</sup>

**The musical appeal.** *Eshu*, nonetheless, is not the only intermediary between humans and gods. *Candomblé* ceremony counts with three main drums: the largest drum called *rum*; the middle-sized drum called *rumpi*; and the smallest drum, called *lé*.<sup>83</sup> These are not ordinary drums. The instruments undergo a process of baptism, with the presence of godparents and sprinkled holy water, says Bastide. The drums are taken to the Church, they receive a name, and a candle is lit in front of them and consumed until its end. Each year the drums also “eat” a specific offering. A sacrificial dish is offered before the drums, where it stays a whole day in order for the instrument to have enough time to “eat” it.<sup>84</sup> It is believed that through this ritual the drums acquire divine attributions, and therefore cannot be sold or lent. The main point here is that this ritual enables the musical drums to play to the *orishas*, accompanying chants and dances that call them to come from Africa to Brazil.<sup>85</sup> The ritualistic drums have been photographed by Verger. Figure 8 shows the drums *rum*, *rumpi* and *lé* in Brazilian *Candomblé*. In the photograph we see three young boys playing the drums, showing that the involvement with the cult may happen at an early age.

---

<sup>82</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 18.



figure 8  
(Verger, P. 1957)

**Preliminary Dances.** The *orishas* are evoked according to a sequential order which varies from *candomblé* to *candomblé*, but this order remains the same within a particular sanctuary.<sup>86</sup> This moment is called *xirê*: the first *orisha* to be evoked through preliminary dances is *Eshu* and the last is *Oshala*, who is the father of the sky and the most elevated *orisha*. There is a great variety of sequences in between these two deities. The order can run from the youngest *orishas* to the oldest one, or from the most aggressive towards the most pacific one. A minimum of three chants are destined to each *orisha*.<sup>87</sup> Bastide explains that in *Candomblés* of Bantou origin the chants are sung in Portuguese, in Yoruba *Candomblés* they are sung in the original African language, which depends on the ethnical origin of that “nation”. The songs are accompanied by the rhythm of drums, intending to make the *orisha* come to earth. There is also dancing, and these dances are choreographed according to certain episodes

---

<sup>86</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

involving the history of the *orisha*.<sup>88</sup> Through figures 9 and 10 it is possible to see moments of preliminary dancing, in which the devotees all together dance to their *orishas*. In these pictures we see groups of women dressed with special clothes, wearing white head scarves, beaded necklaces and bracelets. All of them have an inclined posture in which the top of their heads tend to face forward.



figure 9  
Preliminary dances  
(Verger, P. 1957)



figure 10  
Preliminary dances  
(Verger, P. 1957)

The choreography represents fragments of myths, and call all of its evocative power. Another moment of evocation can be seen by figure 11, in which a devotee is concentrating for the arrival of an *orisha*. By the look on her face I believe this devotee is in a moment of deep mental concentration, and the palms of her hands are facing forward. This positioning of the hands is a sign of respect and openness to the *orisha's* energy<sup>89</sup>.

---

<sup>88</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> In *Candomblé*, as well as in Yoruba religion, there is a specific concept that refers to this “energy”. It is the concept of *ashe*. *Ashe*, according to Babatunde Lawal, is the power that sustains all existence. I chose not to develop the concept of *ashe* in this thesis because of its deep complexity. However, *ashe* is an essential idea present in *Candomblé*, and hopefully I will be able to develop it further in another opportunity. Rowland Abiodun explains *ashe* as an “enigmatic affective phenomenon in Yoruba art and culture”; to understand it better, see his article *Àse: Verbalizing and Visualizing Creative Power Through Art*, (1994).



figure 11  
(Verger, P. 1957)

The gestures are adjusted to the words that are uttered under this mimetic imitative force, so it does not take much time for the *orishas* to get on their “horses”. Bastide says that this is the expression used to refer to the moment of possession: the person who embodies the *orisha* is referred as the *orisha’s* “horse”.<sup>90</sup> The *ekédi* are assistants, important participants responsible for watching over the people under the possession of an *orisha*.<sup>91</sup> Figure 12 shows an example. In the picture we can see an *orisha* fully embodied on its “horse”, which is the person dressed up with a covered face standing sideways with both arms behind his/her back. There is another person laying down by the *orisha’s* feet, and the *ekédi* is the woman trying to bring this person back to her senses.

---

<sup>90</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 20.





figure 12  
(Verger, P. 1957)

The violence in the possession crisis varies according to the circumstances, the personality of the possessed one, or the nature of the *orisha* who “owns” that particular person.<sup>92</sup> In the case of someone who commits many faults in life the possession crisis is believed to become a kind of penitence, Bastide explains. The assistant *ekédi* helps the individual out of the dancing hall into a separate room. There the “horses” are dressed with liturgical vestments, carrying in their hands symbolic objects assuring their divine personality.<sup>93</sup> Many of these objects have a Yoruba name, and some are not easily identified with an equivalent object from western society. Figures 13 and 14 portray two distinct *orishas*: *Shango* and *Yemanjá* respectively.

---

<sup>92</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 21.



figure 13  
*Shango*  
(Verger, P. 1957)

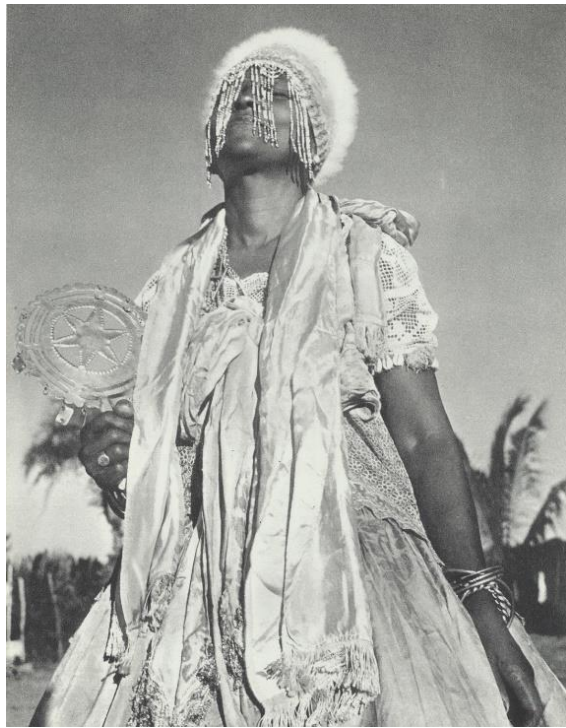


figure 14  
*Yemanja*  
(Verger, P. 1957)

The incorporated *Shango* portrayed in figure 13 is carrying a double-axe, which is a symbol that can be seen in many artistic representations. I believe this person is a man, even though he is dressed in a womanly fashion; he is wearing arm adornments but not actual bracelets. His beaded necklaces are worn underneath the upper part of his vestment, he is also wearing a head piece but his face is uncovered. This person seems to be undergoing a peaceful trance. The *Yemanjá* shown in figure 14 has a more elaborate outfit. I believe this person is a woman even though her head piece covers her face. She is wearing bracelets and is carrying a symbol with a star on the center. Her face is pointing upwards which gives her posture an assertive attitude.

**The gods' dance.** The dancing hall receives all sons and daughters-of-saint, but at this time, they are not human worshipers anymore. They become the incorporated *orisha*, which means, they are the *orishas* themselves. These *orishas* enter the hall to blend in with the rest of the Brazilians.<sup>94</sup> The ritual pace does not change; the gestures, however, acquire beauty, the dancing steps reach an exquisite poetic expression, Bastide says that the people dancing are not the cooks or the cleaning ladies anymore. Their faces metamorphose into masks, they are not wrinkled from hard work, and the stigma of their harsh routine disappears. Here Bastide sees for a moment Africa and Brazil becoming one, the ocean vanishing, slavery is rubbed away. The *orishas* are present to salute the drums and the supreme priests, they dance, and sometimes talk to others to give advice. This moment trespasses the boundaries between natural and supernatural, the ecstasy reaches the desired communion.<sup>95</sup>

**The rites of exit and communion.** The ecstasy only comes to an end when the chants *unló* are sung. These are responsible for sending the *orishas* away. They are sung in the reverse order of invocation, starting with the deities that were called last, and ending with the deities that were first evoked.<sup>96</sup> The last chant, called *peji*, serves to express the wish that the mystic forces return to the culinary offerings that were made. This is a moment when the boundaries between natural and supernatural are broken, affirms Bastide. A last repast is made to unite deities, members of *Candomblé*, and those spectators who are still present by the end of the long ceremony.<sup>97</sup> The daughters-of-saint bring dishes that are in the corresponding color of their *orisha*, carrying a small amount of food. White is for *Oshala*, blue for *Yemanjá*, purple for *Nanã*, etc. They all sit around a white cloth served on the floor, over which they place the sacred food; solidarity and sharing is celebrated among the group. The various foods of different *orishas* are fraternally mixed on a tray, and it is mandatory to eat with bare

---

<sup>94</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 22.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 23.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

hands. One must not confuse this repast, which is communion, with the snacks that are sometimes served during the ritual, between the preliminary dances and the gods' dances. This moment is very different, it is a moment of a triple sharing before the complete regress to profane reality: the sharing happens first among the *orishas* and their human "horses", then among the members that belong to different *orishas*; finally, among the *Candomblé* fraternity and the non-initiated visitors. In this sense, Bastide concludes that some of Africa that was lost and then evoked is able to penetrate, to a certain extent, the lives of everyone.<sup>98</sup>

### *Candomblé* and *Orí*: the head in the initiation rite

Roger Bastide explains that the initiation rite involves a series of performances that seek the establishment of a spiritual connection between the person and his/her individual *orisha*. This connection is quite strong, and the person who undergoes initiation acquires a new personality because the rite works as a rebirth. This happens because the *orisha* enters the person's head, or to more precise, the person's *orí*. This concept is extremely relevant here because it unifies human body, spirit, and destiny. To the Yoruba *orí* is a location for divine presence in the human body. It is through *orí* that human beings are able to make connection with the supernatural world, which is the world of the deceased ones and the world of *orishas*. In this manner, the initiation rite aims at the connection between the head or *orí* and the *orisha*. Procedures such as herbal infusions or paintings function as mediators, in which a shared materiality is manipulated by both natural and supernatural worlds.

Roger Bastide teaches us that each member of *Candomblé* owns a private necklace whose beads have the same color that represents the person's *orisha*.<sup>99</sup> However, this necklace by itself has no true value unless it undergoes a preparation because it has to be "cleaned". The ones who wish to become part of *Candomblé* should start by consulting *Ifa*'s divination power. It is important to remember that *Ifa* is the *orisha* who owns oracle wisdom and knows men's destiny. *Ifa*, then, is the one who informs the *orisha* predestined to each individual *orí*. Not everyone can consult *Ifa*. This task is in the hands of a sacerdotal member, called *babalawo*, who is experienced in the cult and knows how to access the supernatural world of *orishas* and ancestors. This *babalawo* then "reads" *Ifa*'s message, distinguishing which *orisha* belongs to the individual's head or *orí*. Then a necklace is made in correspondence of this *orisha*. The "cleaning" ritual performed on the necklace includes immersion in water, infusion in ground herbs, among other sacred procedures. Each venerated *orisha* has a sacred stone that stays in his

---

<sup>98</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 24.

sanctuary. The necklace is to stay overnight by its *orisha's* stone, together with a sacrificed offering and the appropriate herbs used to wash both stone and necklace. This ritual is to make a sacred connection between these two objects (necklace and stone), and the person's *ori*. The person's head is to be washed with the same water involved in the cleaning of the necklace and the *orisha's* sacred stone. All elements of this trinomial, divine, man, and necklace, come in close contact, enabling a mystic flow between them – every time the necklace is worn and functions as mediator.<sup>100</sup>

Besides this apparently simple ritual, there are also procedures performed on the initiated's head as to keep the person strong and free of vicissitudes or sickness. Bastide informs that the person's *ori* may become weak over time, so in *Candomblé* it is important to “feed” the head. The sacrifice and offering destined to “feeding” the head may have a prophylactic or healing character.<sup>101</sup> This process is called *bori*, and it has an intermediary position that interlaces men and *orishas*. It works to strengthen the person's spirit, but at the same time, it serves as a social way to inscribe the person in the mystical life.<sup>102</sup>

The initiation process of fixing an *orisha* into someone's head or *ori* is slow and runs through various stages. The progressive character of these stages are manifested by a series of symbolic actions. First the person's hair is cut short with a pair of scissors, and then shaved. Then the person's skull is washed with the blood of a sacrificed animal. During these stages the devotee has to live in a small room with limited social contact with others.<sup>103</sup> Months separate the first and the last part of this fixation process. During this period the devotee, who is also called the *orisha's* spouse, learns the chants and dances of that particular *orisha*. In fact, most candidates for initiation in *Candomblé* participate in cults and ceremonies since their childhood, so they already have knowledge about these symbolic representations.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, the initiation process serves to improve and deepen this specific knowledge, after all, that person will become a kind of specialist about that *orisha*. The learning process never ends, and in order to achieve the highest positions in the hierarchy of *Candomblé* a lot of dedication is needed, says Bastide.

All stages of initiation are put under the sign of *Oshala*. It is about the myth of creation in which a new personality is about to be born.<sup>105</sup> *Oshala* is the god of creation, patron of artists, and the father of all *orishas*. This god is symbolized through the white color, which explains the predominance of white

---

<sup>100</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 24.

<sup>101</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 26.

<sup>102</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 27.

<sup>103</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 33.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 34.

liturgical vestments, and the paintings done over the initiated's body and head. Figures 15, 16 and 17 show devotees during *Candomblé's* initiation rite, where we can see people with white head paintings.



figure 15  
(Verger, P. 1957)



figure 16  
(Verger, P. 1957)



figure 17  
(Verger, P. 1957)

Figures 15 and 17 show women with a helmet-like white painting on their heads, and white stripes painted on their faces. Their outfits are white, but one has short-sleeves and the other is wearing a strapless outfit. The woman in figure 15 is laying down, and attention is given to her through what seems to be clapping of hands (common in *Candomblé*). The woman in figure 17 seems to be choreographing a dance to her *orisha* by the way her hands and arms are positioned. The woman shown in figure 16 is different from the other two because she has a homogeneous white-dot painting all over her body and head. She is not standing, sitting, or laying down, but her body position is on the floor with her elbows sustaining her upper body.

I have talked about the preparation of the candidate's head through the complete removal of hair. In some *Candomblés* the shaving extends to the person's arm pits, pubic area, and all remaining parts of the body. It is believed that this allows the penetration of the *orisha* through all pores.<sup>106</sup> Bastide tells us that during this stage of initiation the person enters a state of childhood, ready for rebirth into a new life, under the sign of his/her *orisha*. With a white powder diluted in water (this mix is called *efum*) drawings are made on the person's shaved head.<sup>107</sup> These drawings have symbolic meanings according to the deity involved. Roger Bastide cites a description written by Nina Rodrigues, in which he states this painting represents a helmet.<sup>108</sup> From the top part of the person's head a small central circle is drawn. From there divergent lines run towards the skull's outermost parts. Other concentric circles of increasing diameters are also drawn, as we can see in figure 15. In fact, this is just one description, because we know that each *orí* receives its individual treatment, and therefore, the drawings vary. The small circle drawn on the top of the head signals the place through which the deity will pass to finally possess its "horse".<sup>109</sup>

For the development of this chapter I began introducing Roger Bastide and his professional relationship with Pierre Verger. I am interested in Bastide because his written description of *Candomblé* considers it an autonomous cultural object, and his work and Verger's complement one another in a very interesting manner. As mentioned before, both of them kept in a constant dialog, exchanging knowledge and mutual interests. I found interesting using Bastide's descriptions and Verger's photographs because the two publications were done almost simultaneously, indicating a certain connection between the two scholars. My intention regarding the descriptions and photographs

---

<sup>106</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 35.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Bastide, R. 1958: p. 36.

discussed in this chapter was to introduce an artistic characteristic I find inherent in *Candomblé*, which can be noticed in figures 15, 16 and 17. In my opinion these three ladies look like living art works. When looking at these images while understanding the symbolic meaning of this initiation ritual, it becomes easier to associate art and *Candomblé* because initiation is seen as a rebirth. In the next chapter I will show that the event of birth is closely related to art through the attributions of *Oshala*, which is the *orisha* represented by the white color, the patron of all artists, and the one responsible for human creation. I will develop these ideas in the next chapter with an art historical framework on *Candomblé*.



## 5 Babatunde Lawal's Contribution to an Art Historical View on *Candomblé*

To further comprehend the meaning of Pierre Verger's photographic and written discourses on Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé* I would like use Babatunde Lawal's ideas of *orí* and metaphysical meaning of Yoruba art. In order to do so I am going to use two of his articles, *Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture* and *Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art*. Babatunde Lawal's perspective is important because he provides an art historical view related to Yoruba culture that can be associated to *Candomblé*. The viewpoints encountered so far regarded the historical background and matters of ethnicity developed by Pierre Verger in his *Notes*, the mythology regarding the *orishas* researched by Reginaldo Prandi in *Mitologia dos Orixás*, and the ritualistic descriptions given by Roger Bastide in *Le Candomblé de Bahia*. Now that we have come to the point where *Candomblé* meets art, I am going to discuss Babatunde Lawal's definitions of *orí* and the myth of creation in an attempt to better understand the ritualized *orí* discussed and seen in the previous chapter.

Babatunde Lawal presents himself as a historical return for his first name, Babatunde, literally means "the one who returns". Lawal was born in Nigeria, graduated from Fine Arts at the University of Nsukka, in Nigeria, and today teaches Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University, USA. He has published texts on art in Africa and the African Diaspora. His aesthetics research on the significance of traditional art and festivals contributes significantly to the field and serves as inspiration for contemporary artists. I had the opportunity of attending a short-term course given by Babatunde Lawal at the State University of Bahia (UNEB) in Salvador, in 2011. The course was promoted by the NGEALC (*Núcleo de Estudos Africanos e Afro-Brasileiros em Línguas e Culturas*) a research group focused on African and Afro-Brazilian languages and culture, and it aimed to communicate with local Afro-Brazilian religious community. The academic community was also welcomed. The course focused on *orisha* iconography, color symbolism, mediumship and masks, and it wished to broaden the religious community on knowledge about Yoruba culture. This was a wonderful opportunity to learn iconographical aspects of the *orishas* through the lens of Yoruba religiosity and culture.

In the referred course, Lawal explained that female power is the source of life to Yoruba culture, and feminine elements tend to be predominant in their art. As example we can look at figure 18.



figure 18  
(Lawal 2001: p. 500)

According to Babatunde Lawal, figure 18 shows a seated female figure representing *Onilé*, the Earth goddess<sup>110</sup>, in Brazil known as *Naná*. We can see that the figure's head is prominent, while its arms, legs, hands and feet are not. I can also notice breasts, which are to nurture the small children the figure seems to be holding. Lawal explained that female images tend to be larger than male figures because women have more internal space, a space that is attributed to the uterus' capacity to grow. He also

---

<sup>110</sup> Lawal 2001: p. 500.

stated that the person who incorporates *orisha* functions as a vehicle to intermediate power, and the female body is the most adequate for this power-mediation. When men attempt to incorporate an *orisha* they often need to make their body stronger by wearing womanly outfits such as skirts, dresses or even applying fake breasts to their clothes. Even though in *Candomblé* I have never read or heard anything about the application of fake breasts on liturgical vestments, we were able to see in figures 12 and 13 from chapter four men dressing strapless tops and long skirts.

### *Oshala, Procreation, and the Metaphor of Artistic Creativity*

Another association made by Lawal regarding *orisha*-power and women has to do with pregnancy. In his article *Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art*, Lawal focuses not only on the interconnectedness of Yoruba art and language, but also on how Yoruba cosmogony deals with procreation and draws metaphors of artistic creativity.<sup>111</sup> He explains the Yoruba myth of creation in which *Oshala*, the *orisha* of creativity, molds the archetypal human sculpture from divine clay. The molded figure proceeds to the hands of *Ogun*, the *orisha* of iron tools, who applies the finishing marks onto the clay sculpture, delineating its features, especially the face. Then the image turns into a living human being by receiving a divine breath, or soul, from *Olodumare*, the Supreme Being. Then the human being is placed inside the womb of a woman to develop from an embryonic form into a baby.<sup>112</sup> This explains why expectant mothers pray for *Oshala*, saying “*Kí Òrìsà yá onà ire ko nì*”, which translates into “may the *orisha* fashion for us a good work of art”.<sup>113</sup> These ideas imply that procreation has both a biological aspect and an artistic dimension. Lawal elucidates this prayer by showing that the process of artistic creation is called *onà'yíyá*, which literally combines the words ‘art’ (*onà*) and ‘creating’ (*yíyá*). So the idea that the female body mediates *Oshala*’s creation makes some people understand the Yoruba word for mother, *iyá*, as “someone from whom another life is fashioned” or “the body from which we are created”.<sup>114</sup> The association of *Oshala* with human creation and women’s pregnancy can be added to the understanding of the white-color paintings that are performed on the heads and bodies of people undergoing initiation in *Candomblé*. Roger Bastide explains, as I mentioned in the last chapter, that the person undergoing initiation establishes a strong spiritual connection with his or her *orisha*, acquiring a new personality because the rite works as a rebirth. The

---

<sup>111</sup> Lawal, Babatunde (2001). *Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art*. In: *The Art Bulletin*, v. 83, n. 3, (Sept. 2001), pp. 498

<sup>112</sup> Lawal, 2001: p. 499.

<sup>113</sup> Lawal, 2001: p. 500.

<sup>114</sup> Lawal, 2001: p. 500.

agency implied in these procedures is a case of cultural sharing, or interculturalization, in which *Candomblé* displays aspects of African faith and belief as its own (Afro-Brazilian) tradition.

### The Meaning of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture

Lawal's *Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture* discusses why the head is a pronounced element of Yoruba sculpture. He states that western Nigerian Yorubas consider the human head, or *orí*, as the most vital part of a person.<sup>115</sup> This is the reason why sculpture figures have the head as their most elaborated and finished part. Lawal elaborates this idea on a physical and metaphysical level:

At the physical level, it [*orí*] is an index of individual identification and the locus of important organs such as the brain (*opoló*), the seat of wisdom and reason; the eyes (*ojú*), the lamps that guide a person through the dark jungle of life, the nose (*imú*), the source of ventilation for the soul; the mouth (*enu*), the source of nourishment for the body; and the ears (*etí*) the sound detectors. Needless to say life cannot be sustained without these organs, and no matter how seriously a person may be injured, hope is not lost as long as the head remains intact.<sup>116</sup> (...)

It must be noted, however, that while the Yoruba recognize the physiological importance of the head, they place a higher premium on its metaphysical significance as the source of life and the essence of human personality (Abimbola 1971: 73-89<sup>117</sup>; Idowu 1970: 170-75<sup>118</sup>). The physical head is thought of as no more than an outer shell, *orí òde* (lit. "outer head"), concealing the *orí inú*, the "inner head." The latter determines the existence and fate of the individual on the earth.<sup>119</sup>

Yoruba ontology talks about an interesting relationship that unites the human head, its destiny, the Supreme Being, and a divine potter's workshop. It states that when *Oshala* finishes making the human figure from divine clay and *Olodumare* breathes life into it, the person is then directed to the workshop of a heavenly potter, the *orisha* called *Ajala Alamo*, whose responsibility is to fabricate inner heads. In his workshop, *Ajala Alamo* has many completed inner heads, so the person simply has to choose one of them.<sup>120</sup> Though these inner heads look similar, they are intrinsically different from one

---

<sup>115</sup> In a note Lawal indicates that this article is a revised version of a paper first presented at a *Religion and Art* seminar, organized by the Center for the Study of World Religions of Harvard University, on April 1975.

<sup>116</sup> Lawal, B. 1985: p. 91.

<sup>117</sup> Abimbola, W. (1971). *The Yoruba Concept of Human Personality*. in: **La notion de personne en Afrique noire**. Paris: Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, n. 544, pp. 73-89.

<sup>118</sup> Idowu, E.B. (1970). *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longmans.

<sup>119</sup> Lawal, B. 1985: p. 91.

<sup>120</sup> Lawal, B. 1985: p. 91.

another, therefore, the person's choice determines his or her fate on earth.<sup>121</sup> The ones who choose a good *orí* are lucky and prosperous in life, while the ones who are frequently unlucky are assumed to have chosen a bad *orí*. Lawal also says that the adverse effects of a bad *orí* can be minimized through rituals, and that a good *orí* does not automatically imply success in life – one must work hard to achieve it.<sup>122</sup> From this idea we can understand that *orí* is much more than an aspect of destiny, as Lawal tells us. There is a popular Yoruba saying indicating that a person's *orí* is his or her own creation, constituting an individual, personal life-source.<sup>123</sup> The *orí*, then, is considered to be the most powerful deity, and “may very well symbolize the godhead in the individual”. This means that the *orishas* can assist a person “within one's innate endowments”, that is, within the person's own destiny.<sup>124</sup>

In the previous chapter it was mentioned that *Candomblé* realizes procedures on the heads of its initiated devotees to keep them strong and free of vicissitudes or sickness. We saw that the person's *orí* may become weak, and for this reason rituals are performed for prophylactic or healing purposes. In *Candomblé* this process, the ceremony referred to as *bori*, serves to strengthen the person's spirit, intermediating men and deities. Comparatively speaking, in Yoruba artistic representations, there is an abstract mode for the head found in the *ìborí*, which is the shrine for worshipping the *orí*. *ìborí* is a contraction of the words *ìbo orí*, meaning the “altar (of the) head”.<sup>125</sup> According to Lawal, the abstract form of *ìborí* refers to the concealed aspect of one's life and destiny. The decorations of *ìborí* underline a function of propitiating well-being and prosperity, a clear point of convergence between *Candomblé* and Yoruba artistic practice. This is also an example of interculturalization in which we can observe the African influence in the interconnectedness of materials, procedures and functions of head and destiny.

According to the mystic logic of the preparation of the head in rituals, the *orishas* feel attracted by art. A series of procedures is done in order to attract them towards human incorporation; these include herbal infusions and prayers, but also dancing, playing music, and painting the head. The initiated person uses head painting to prepare this locus for receiving his or her *orisha*, therefore, the *orishas* are assumed to identify with this painting. If we consider that in *Candomblé* these rituals are performed to evoke African *orishas*, then *orí* becomes an agent for artistic and religious exchange between Africa and Brazil. Here I am specifically referring to the head paintings, which religiously mean preparing the person's *orí*, or individual destiny, to receive African blessings. *Orí*, then, becomes the

---

<sup>121</sup> Abimbola, W. 1971: p. 80.

<sup>122</sup> Lawal, B. 1985: p. 92.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Lawal, B. 1985: p. 93

<sup>125</sup> Lawal, 1985: p. 98.

most important vehicle of religious, artistic, and historical flow. If traditions have travelled across the Atlantic, they did in the minds and memories of peoples; *orí* was the “storage” of such cultural content.

Throughout this chapter I discussed female power and *orisha* incorporation, the relation of *Oshala* with art and creativity, and the concept of *orí* and its reference to both the human body and destiny according to Yoruba thinking. I used Lawal’s art historical insight developed through Yoruba sculpture to address to its physical and metaphysical significances. This enabled us to have a better understanding of the treatment given to the head in Yoruba-related cultures, and also enlighten the comprehension about Pierre Verger’s photographs of *Candomblé* rites. His lens conveyed devotees with paintings performed on their heads and bodies. Verger’s discursive lens had also conveyed a historical relationship between bahian *Candomblé* and Yoruba culture, leaving me with an interesting way for interpreting the images of head paintings in association with the art history of Yoruba sculpture. I understood that *orí* is an agent of cultural exchange. Therefore, when I look at Pierre Verger’s images of ritualized *orí* while understanding *Candomblé* as the outcome of a massive human displacement, the painting of the head and its strong symbolism in the color white become points of convergence both in religious and artistic manners. The reason is because one of *Candomblé*’s purpose is to evoke African gods for incorporation, and the procedure for this incorporation include artistic preparations of the head, which is the locus of *orisha* penetration into the human body. Moreover, *orí* is an agent of cultural exchange because as a human mind, it carried the cultural content that was brought from Africa to Brazil during the trade of African enslaved peoples.

## Conclusion

When reflecting upon the World Art Studies interculturalization process, I came to the conclusion that *orí* can be seen as an agent responsible for the transmission and transformation of artistic and cultural practices present in Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé*. Even though *Candomblé* itself does not need or rely on the academic research that has been executed over the past decades, one of the ways to have access to it is through texts and research, acknowledging that these are framed and limited. The objective of this thesis was to perceive *Candomblé* through the framings of Pierre Verger. In order to understand how Verger conveyed *Candomblé* through his visual and discursive lens, I too established a framing of his work, trying to keep the focus on the Afro-Brazilian object.

From chapter one I came to the conclusion that Pierre Verger, born French, by the time he passed away, had become French-Brazilian, as he is described in an exhibition dedicated to his work.<sup>126</sup> The fact that he was so close to the people he wrote about was not well-seen by his anthropology contemporaries, but from my lens it explains why he was so careful when writing about African and Afro-Brazilian culture. The development of chapter two made me realize that Africans have a profound responsibility for building societies in the Americas, but their way of thinking is still silenced in the process of knowledge construction in modern universities. The study Pierre Verger did on the history of slave trade is extremely relevant and should be looked at more frequently. Unfortunately for the purpose of this thesis I was not able to access all the research he dedicated on slave trade and ethnicity, therefore I understand that this aspect of the thesis deserves further development.

The third chapter concerns one of my favorite aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture, which are the myths on *orishas*. I conclude that these myths are the offspring of the manifestations involved with them, such as religious procedures, choreographed dances, visual arts, music, etc. It is possible to make associations between the figure of *Eshu* and Pierre Verger. In chapter four, on the basis of Bastide's study, I discussed the function of *Eshu* in ritualistic ceremonies as being the messenger between the natural and the supernatural worlds. We also saw that Pierre Verger exercised a similar function, being a messenger between two worlds: Africa and Brazil.

The final chapter of this thesis points at a special concern in terms of art history and ethnology because it regards events that are difficult to be denominated either as art or as religion. The chapter left questions unanswered, such as why some of the people photographed had the whole body painted,

---

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.sp-arte.com/noticias/fotografo-pierre-verger-ganha-retrospectiva-na-galeria-marcelo-guarnieri/>

while others only the head. I believe aspects like this can be answered through a careful look over the mythology, which is rich, vast, and is available for research.

If I think about sight capability, one uses lenses to be able to see things that cannot be seen without them. For example, I wear glasses because I am farsighted, while someone else uses microscope lenses to study cellular division. In this sense, these lenses propitiate a better understanding of the object that is being looked at. On the other hand, the lenses are a physical barrier (glass) placed between the eyes and this same object. The lenses that enable seeing things are limited because they mandatorily impose framing. What you see through the lenses is only a part of what happens on the whole. Verger's discursive lens is fundamental to understand *Candomblé* because he focuses on a part of history that was not looked at, even though some contemporary critics say that one consequence of his work was the de-historization and de-politization of African religions.<sup>127</sup> In my opinion, this topic needed a microscopic lens for understanding, even if partially, its internal dynamics. To conclude, Verger's discourse regarding *Candomblé* is concerned with the history that ties Brazil to Africa, which clearly shows processes of interculturalization. Understanding this interculturalization, in a sense, enables all Brazilians to have a good notion of self-awareness once we are all somewhat black, white, and indigenous.

---

<sup>127</sup> Brivio, Alessandra (2013). *Notes sur le Culte des Orisas et Vodun: Pierre Fatumbi Verger and the study of "African Traditional Religion"* in: **History in Africa**, vol. 40, issue 01, Oct. 2013, pp. 275-294.



## Bibliographical References

- Abimbola, W. (1971). *The Yoruba Concept of Human Personality*. in: **La notion de personne en Afrique noire**. Paris: Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, n. 544, pp. 73-89.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1975). *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá*. Lagos: Unesco.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1976). *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*. Ibadan e Londres, Oxford University Press.
- Abiodun, Rowland (1994). *Àse: Verbalizing and Visualizing Creative Power Through Art*. in: **Journal of Religion in Africa**, vol. 24, fasc. 4 (Nov., 1994) pp. 309-322.
- Ajanaku, F. (1972). *Ori, Ipin ati Kadara, Apa Keji*. Olokun 10: 11-13.
- Bastide, Roger (1958). *Le Candomblé de Bahia: rite nago*. Paris, Mouton & Co.
- Beier, Ulli (1980). *Yoruba Myths*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Brivio, Alessandra (2013). *Notes sur le Culte des Orisas et Vodun: Pierre Fatumbi Verger and the study of "African Traditional Religion"* in: **History in Africa**, vol. 40, issue 01, Oct. 2013, pp. 275-294.
- Frobenius, Leo (1949). *Mythologie de l'Atlantide*. Paris, Payot.
- Hollanda, Luiz Buarque de. (Director). (1998). *Pierre Fatumbi Verger: um mensageiro entre dois mundos* [film]. Conspiração filmes/Gêge Produções/GNT Globosat.
- Idowu, E.B. (1970). *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*. London, Longmans.
- Lawal, Babatunde (1985). *Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture*. in: **Journal of Anthropological Research**, vol. 41, n. 1 (Spring, 1985), pp. 91-103.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2001). *Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art*. in: **The Art Bulletin**, v. 83, n. 3, (Sept. 2001), pp. 498-526.
- Lühning, Angela (2012). *Verger, Bastide e Métraux: três trajetórias entrelaçadas*. **Revista USP**, São Paulo, N. 95, p. 128-141, Set/Out/Nov.
- Prandi, Reginaldo (2001). *Mitologia dos Orixás*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras.
- Rocha, Agenor Miranda (1928). *Caminhos de odus*, org. Reginaldo Prandi. Rio de Janeiro, Pallas.
- Rodrigues, Nina (1935). *O animismo fetichista dos negros bahianos*. 2ª ed. [1ª ed.: 1896]. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira.
- Thompson, Robert Farris (1984). *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York, Vintage Books.
- van de Port, Mattijs (2011). *Ecstatic Encounters: Bahian Candomblé and the Quest for the Really Real*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press.

van Gelder, Hilde; Westgeest, Helen (2011). *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective: case studies from contemporary art*. Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell.

Verger, Pierre (1957). *Notes sur le Culte des Orisa et Vodun à Bahia, la Baie de tous les Saints, au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves em Afrique*. Dakar, IFAN.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1954). *Dieux d'Afrique*. Paris, Paul Hartmann Éditeur.