Circling With/In
Sharing Dancing in Candomblé and Intercultural Research[1]

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Tacka dacka dak tacka dakka dakka dak. The dancers' feet march in counterclockwise direction as their shoulders rotate up and to the back of the body, scapulae sliding down as heels hit the ground, following the down accent of the drums. Here in the ritual house of Mãe Oba, located in a peripheral zone of Salvador da Bahia in Northeastern Brazil – the dancers, daughters and sons (*filhas* and *filhos*) of the saint – trace circular pathways around the perimeter of the room. Their shoulder rotations draw energy from all directions and churn inwards, activating through texture and effort a spherical space in which propitious forces may come from any side. Torsos, pelvises, and supple spines echo the undulations of gathered energy initiated by this shoulder movement, the *gincar*, creating dynamic polycentric systems (Rosa 2012). Their collective perambulations pause for a moment as the dancers spin unto themselves so that the circle becomes a wheel of semi-independent cogs rotating on the spot. Then, colluding with the roll of the drums, the daughters and sons of the saint continue moving on their circular trajectory.

This dance opens and establishes the sacred circle, or *roda*, that features prominently in African Brazilian choreographies. In ritual contexts, the term *rodar* describes both the dancers' circling of the sanctuary floor and the action of circling with or in the "saint"[2] – becoming entranced by a di-

1 I gratefully acknowledge the Ruth Landes Memorial Fund, a program of the Reed Foundation, Inc., the American Association of University Women and the U.S. State Department of Education for supporting the research fieldwork that anchors this essay.

2 Candomblés position devotees in relation to their "saint" (santo) so that devotees are people of the saint or *povo de santo*. While some practitioners in Southern Brazil have asserted preference for the usage of *povo de axé* instead of povo de santo, building on the Yoruba-

vinity. A medium is a *rodante*, one who circles. These interwoven meanings illustrate the generative power attributed to circling together in Candomblé, an Afro-Atlantic religious complex practiced primarily in Brazil.

Cultivated by African-descended actors brought to Bahia, Brazil's colonial capital, through the transatlantic slave trade between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, Candomblé encompasses West and Central African, Amerindian, popular Catholic, Spiritist and Semitic influences.[3] To address the diverse needs of enslaved, free and freed constituents who co-mingled in cosmopolitan Bahia, ritual specialists and community leaders necessarily adapted their religious models and, in the mid-1800s, established the unique social structures that give shape to contemporary Candomblé.[4] Candomblé's progenitors brought a plurality of local, regional and trans-oceanic divinities together under one roof. At the same time, they also instituted ritual codes that emphasized the close embrace between devotee and divinity, an intimacy formalized in the initiation process and instated through ceremonial dancing.

Today, across a range of traditionalist and marginalized Candomblé houses (terreiros) of Bahia, practitioners mobilize ritual dancing to invoke, embody and interrelate with the "santos" – African Diasporic deities, the *Orixá*, and a spectrum of syncretic entities with diverse ethnic and socio-historical identifications. When an initiate circles with her saint, both she and her deity share their bodies and subjectivities across colliding physical, temporal and social worlds. As a key feature of ceremonial efficacy, circling with/in the saint constitutes a culturally specific ontology of spirit embodiment and a relational, choreographic and worldmaking practice of *sharing dancing*.

Apprehending Candomblé's spirited embodiments as acts of sharing dancing, defined by the local idiom of "circling with/in the saint," serves a

Atlantic concept of ase, *àṣẹ* in Brazil – defined by Thompson (1983: xv) as the "power-to-make-things-happen" – in place of the Lusophonicized povo de *santo*, I elect to embrace the "saints" because they feature most commonly in emic discourses and most accurately reflects the language of my interlocutors' descriptions across regional and ethnic affiliations in Bahia.

3 Popularized in late nineteenth century Brazil, Spiritism follows the doctrine of Frenchman Allen Kardec. This is a non-exhaustive listing of Candomblé's most cited influences.

4 The Casa Branca do Engenho Velho and the Terreiro do Gantois, Candomblé's widely recognized motherhouses, were established in 1830 and 1849, respectively (Castillo 2017). In the 1900s, these houses harbored fugitive slaves and women and their children, while men typically lived outside the compound (Cici 2018). In mid-late 1800s, people regularly gathered in domestic homes and attended terreiros for festivals. Only after abolition did terreiros become places of residence for entire communities (Butler 2010).

dual purpose: First, I propose that foregrounding Candomblé's ritual movements as mutually reciprocal acts of sharing dancing intervenes in the colonial and postcolonial representation of Afro-Atlantic religions, which have been dominantly viewed and even evaluated through the trope of "possession". Within the framework of posession, the agencies of racially-marked devotees are expelled as their bodies become "possessed" by divine agents (Lambek 2014; Léry 1990 [1578]; Rodrigues 2008 [1932]). Second, I explore how circling with/in could offer a methodological as well as analytical model for intercultural research, recognizing that the uneven power relations of academic production often correspond to global inequalities and that the theory of possession has informed the ways that accounts of African Diaspora ritual performances are written. Alongside these lines, I reflect on the development of a dance storytelling film that emerged from the willingness of participants that I encountered in the field, including practitioners, specialists and their sentient guardian entities, to share their dancing with me, inviting me to circle with/in the relations and sites in which we interacted as part of a collaborative oral history project about the Orixá Ogum.

I. Circling With/In as a Relational Aesthetic and Movement Philosophy

During the invocation sequences of Candomblé ceremonies, devotees circle around the sanctuary floor and, at the drum's breaks, pivot around in their own places. Circular pathways and patterns repeat over and over as each of the invited divinities is summoned, creating cyclical spatial structures that continuously elaborate throughout the evening as the spirits arrive and perform in their signature styles. While each deity communicates in her own gestural vernacular, circular principles of bodily movement and locomotion through space are germane to invocation choreographies and the dances of the divinities, as illustrated by the movement of the shoulders in the *gincar*, the circular rotation of the shoulders described above, and the round motions of the elbows, hips and feet in the dances of the Orixá.

Elder Candomblé initiate Celeste Ferreira relates these circular pathways and spatial formations to the figuration of a mother's procreative anatomy, a womb, and, in extension, to the historically matriarchal organization of Afro-Bahian religion (Landes 1945; Butler 2001; Sterling 2010). Celeste explains

that Candomblé ceremonies take the shape of a circle because: "The woman is a cycle, you see? We circle because the uterus is round. When born here [in Bahia], Candomblé came from a mother. [The *roda*] is belly. It is birth" (Lior – interview with Celeste Ferreira on May 18, 2018). Celeste's admission that Candomblé itself was "born from the body of an African mother" (May 18, 2018) alludes to oral and written histories of Candomblé's Bahian genesis as a primarily female-led tradition, based at least in part on Yoruba-Atlantic understandings of gendered power and women's reproductive agency (Apter 2013; Lior 2021).

For Celeste and other practitioners, a contiguous reproductive logic informs the circular spatial patterns forged by dancers, the ideation of the circle as a womb, and the prominence of women in governing positions.[5] Circling in/the saint concentrates this feminist and mother-centric principle, just as Candomblé's female-centricity pervades popular discourses. At the same time, circling with/in suggests an ethos of gender fluidity and multiplicity because mediumship roles are determined by devotees' relations with a cast of divine guardians, rather than biological sex or essentialist ideologies.

Ritual leaders of many heterodox terreiros organize their social structures and performance aesthetics to foreground the inclusivity of their communities as places where women, men and non-binary gendered mediums circle with/in saints whose gender and sexual expressions may concord or diverge from their own identifications.[6] The expression of circling "with" or "in" foments this broad range of mutable relational possibilities. In contrast, the trope of possession deployed by influential Candomblé scholars,

5 Interviews with Cristiam Fonseca May 5, 2018; Mãe Oba May 6 and Sept. 18, 2018; Ely Agosto Oct 20, 2018, Nancy de Souza e Silva August 22, 2018, Bahia, Brazil.

6 For example, at Celeste's heterodox terreiro, men may be consecrated as mediums to female or male Orixás, following the same principle that applies to their sisters-of-the-saint. And, in contrast to some houses of orthodox lineage where male-bodied mediums only go out onto the sanctuary floor after becoming embodied by their Orixá, men dance along with their sisters in the invocation circle (see Lior 2021 for a detailed exploration of how practitioners embed constructions of mediumship as a site of gender flexibility creatively within narratives of Candomblé's female domination and the complex gendering and ungendering of acts of transmission and social reproduction).

including Brazilian anthropologist Nina Rodrigues (2008 [1932]),[7] American feminist Ruth Landes (1942), and French sociologist Roger Bastide (1960), but rarely, if ever, used by people in Bahia, has been conceptually and historically linked to modern Western gender normative assumptions about women's sexual permeability and penetrability. However, recent works by scholars attending to subaltern constructions of ritual bodies, through feminist, queer and critical dance studies lenses, have advanced nuanced understandings of spirit embodiment in relation to gender, sexuality, race, other nodes of identity including initiatory status, and specific choreographic tactics employed by practitioners of a given form in place and time.[8]

To consider circling with/in the saint as an intersubjective and intersectional movement practice of sharing dancing, I am thinking alongside theorists of embodied ritual performance including Yvonne Daniel, Aisha Beliso-de Jesús, and Anurima Banerji. Commenting on the pervasive reference to "spirit possession" in literature on Caribbean and Black Atlantic religions, Daniel notes that, "these words are too closely aligned with pejorative descriptions and shallow understandings of African-descendant cultures" (Zutshti 2017 – interview with Yvonne Daniel [online]).[9] Instead of a body that is possessed, Daniel deems the "human body that has been transformed by a spiritual incorporation" as one that is "supra-human" (2011: 16). Offering another perspective on religious phenomena that center the sharing of one's body, Beliso-de Jesús in her study of Cuban Santeria (2015: 9) coins the term "copresences" to describe spiritual agents, including deities, priests, video technologies and religious travelers, as transnational Santeria ontologies in

7 A medical examiner and criminologist, Nina Rodrigues praised the Candomblé of *Casa Branca*, Bahia's renowned motherhouse of Afro-Brazilian religion (1898), but upheld biological determinism and eugenics in his works including *Os Africanos no Brasil* (1932).

8 For example, while anthropologist Andrew Apter (2013) explores how Yoruba-Atlantic idioms of fertility and destruction inform constructions of senior women as ideal for ritual mediumship and leadership because their post-menstrual bodies no longer experiencing a "loss" of procreative force, Caribbean religions scholar Roberto Strongman employs a queer studies lens to argue that devotees achieve a ritual re-gendering of their bodies through dancing with their deities (2019).

9 Apter notes that in a Yoruba cosmovision, spirit embodiment means a devotee ceases to be "owner" of themself, just as the day of and the areas overtaken by public Orisha festivals "no longer belong to themselves" (personal communication, March 2021). These perspectives, I suggest, do not contradict. By circling with/in one's saint, actors do give up sole proprietorship of their own bodies, since that ownership or agency becomes shared.

which a multiplicity of beings are felt and social figures of a past are made present. Emerging within a complex racial-historical matrix, through which colonized racial subjects were and are denied corporeal autonomy (2015: 29-30), the idea of copresence intersects and interconnects multiple assemblages of power, challenging hierarchies of animacy and configurations of space-time. While Candomblé's spirited performances involve the copresence of multiple subjectivities, circling with/in instantiates movement-oriented understandings of spirit embodiment relevant to Candomblé in Bahia.

Anurima Banerji advances a nuanced, non-linear and culturally specific theory of spirited dancing in her work on *mahari* performances by female ritual specialists in India's Jagannath temples. Mahari dancers, Banerji demonstrates, linked religious icons and the material space of the temple to create "corporeal geographies" through which their bodies would become "distributed," (Banerji 2018: 35; Gell 1988). Adopting Banerji's pluralistic view of the interrelations between divinities, ritual specialists, and material spaces, I propose that Candomblé's choreographic praxes – woven together across myriad regional and aesthetic variations by the connective thread of circling/within the saint – feature the distribution, rather than displacement, of personhood and bodily presence.

Whereas Banerji addresses South Indian precedents of Odissi dancing and both Daniel and Beliso de Jesus examine Caribbean forms, I focus on regional idioms in and around the capital city of Bahia, Northeastern Brazil, in order to grasp circling with/in as an indigenous discourse as well as an umbrella for the decolonial dance aesthetics marshalled in Candomblé (Lior 2021). Looking reflexively at my own fieldwork and writing methods I ask, how can circling with/in also concentrate a decolonial research technique, a movement of radical reciprocity and connection? And, in extension, could circling with/in subtend a practice of problematizing rather than obfuscating a researcher's own movements in the field of ethnographic co-creation?

II. Thinking Sharing/Dancing in Candomblé

During my first trip to Bahia in 2014, my teachers from dance and martial arts classes referred often to Candomblé as an originating source for samba and capoeira's participatory circular forms, aesthetic principles and cultural histories. Wanting to deepen and contextualize my movement practice, I

began training in the symbologies of the Orixá, Yoruba-oriented Afro-Brazilian divinities, and visiting Candomblés ceremonies when invited by colleagues. Over extended visits in 2010, 2013, 2015, 2018 and 2019, I developed deeper, long-term relationships with devotees of various lineages and with two priestesses, in particular, whose temples lie outside of the capital city's central districts and capital flows. Because of my participation in invocation circles and spirited dancing at their outlying temples, some of the social boundaries between myself and other practitioners became porous enough for me to cultivate research collaborations and ritual kinships.

As I attuned to Bahian vernaculars of speech and became more familiar with ceremonial expressions and with literature written in Brazilian Portuguese, I noticed a stark discrepancy between the ways that people talked about spirit embodiment on the ground and the language used by foreign scholars (i.e. Johnson 2002; Landes 1947; Matory 2005) to talk about Candomblé and other Afro-Atlantic religions that share its body-centered epistemologies. Whereas many academicians employ the term "possession," people in Bahia most commonly and consistently use different terms to describe ritual experience: the more technical verb *incorporar,* to "incorporate" or embody one's guardian entity, and the colloquial expressions of *rodar com* or *no santo*, "circling with" or "in" the saint.

According to religions scholar Paul Christopher Johnson, spirit possession "remains the standard anthropological classification for ritual events in which a nonhuman entity is understood to *displace* the human person in a given body" (2014: 4, italics mine). Circling with and in the saint, in contrast, involve the *sharing* of a devotee's body in a process that refracts and multiplies *axé* – sacred action or metaphysical muscle – among social actors and spaces. From dancing alongside and under the tutelage of ritual specialists, I started to appreciate that "circling with/in one's saint" is not just a metaphor but rather a local, movement-oriented and mutually reciprocal process by which devotees move *with* their guardian entities, creating mobile sites across which metaphysical power and agency are generated and distributed.[10]

10 "Rodar *no* santo," observes Miram Rabelo (2014: 128), implies a moving inward and puts into question the "passivity" of the acolyte – since the ambiguous phrasing indeterminately defines whether the "rodante" is inside of the "santo" or whether the "santo" is in fact reciprocally radiated by the filha herself. In this case, mutuality does not preclude a power differential between human and divinity, although they are co-constitutional and their divisions of labor effect each other's co-construction.

As a practice of sharing dancing, circling with/in the saint challenges the fixity of the body itself and unfixes a person from any stable position since a devotee is seen by ritual participants as both becoming embodied by, and circling inside of, a spirit entity. The anthropological trope of possession implying "control over, or physical occupation of" a devotee (Johnson 2014: 2), inaccurately reduces Candomblé's processes of transmission to unidirectional movements applicable only to novice experiences of incorporation.[11] Failing to grasp the complexity and relationality of spirit embodiment acts and instead fixing practitioners of Africana religions as objects capable of being possessed or becoming possessions, this model functions as a potentially dangerous epistemological justification for the oppression of Brazil's Black communities, who make up the vast majority of Candomblé practitioners (*Mapeamento dos terreiros* 2014). This is not to discount the usefulness of spirit possession as an analytic, but to bring into relief how scholarly emphases on Candomblé's embodiments as possession practices have served to promote and maintain an ideological contraposition between Afro-Bahia's magico-religious cultural production and "European individualism and rationalism" (Johnson 2016: 154).[12]

What is at stake and what can be gained by reframing processes of spirit embodiment through the lens of sharing dancing? In addition to becoming a leitmotif in accounts of Africana religions (i.e. Bastide 1960; Brown 1991; Dunham 1969), possession has been imagined as itself a measure of authenticity or gauge of success for a given, usually public, ceremonial event. Take, for example, religious scholar Paul Christopher Johnson's (2002: 46) declaration: "There is nothing more agonizing in the terreiro than a ritual failure, the drums uselessly pounding while a medium turns and turns but simply cannot achieve the required shift in consciousness." Certainly, the arrival of divinities to a ceremony or *festa*, in order "to work, play and pray" (Brazeal

11 Ricardo Aragão explains that, over the long-term as the relationship between person and Orixá progresses, "possession becomes a more and more rare event" (Aragão [2012] in Rabelo 2014: 133-135).

12 Along these lines, Johnson (2016: 174) adds that "spirit possession both resisted modernity and constituted it from within, as exception. As possession was purified and outlawed in Europe, though, it was quickly 'found' abroad, above all in Africa. In the new global system, those who were possessed by spirits would be studied by those who possess things, Europeans and then Euro-Americans who presented themselves as rational and autonomous agents."

2013: 648) is most clearly evidenced when the summoned guests traverse the material-immaterial divide and enter the bodies of their initiates. But by shifting from an evaluative gaze, illustrated above in Johnson's appraisal of "ritual failure," to curiosity predicated on a complex understanding of Candomblé's logics of sharing dancing, we can pivot towards a more critical, respectful engagement with this world and its actors.

A broad view of ritual embodiment as a process of sharing allows for the agency of dancing mediums, as well as the drummers whose pounding intends to buoy a requisite "shift in consciousness," to come into relief. In addition, understanding Candomblé's spirited performances as living assemblages in which consequential relationships between human subjects and guardian entities are determined and directed engenders an inquisitive rather than scrutinizing query of why a divinity, despite being ever-present, would choose not to share their body and unique phenomenological perspective in a particular ceremonial context.[13]

III. Oia-Iansã Abstains from Sharing Her Dancing

How can an act of not sharing enacted during a public festa productively instill and restore Candomblé's ethics of care and reciprocity? This section explores the refusal of an invited entity, a quality of the warrior Orixá, Iansã, to share her dancing at a festival held in her honour. I contend that, rather than precluding the success of a ritual act, the divinity's refusal to share her form and movements signals a teaching moment; through her non-consent to the intimate gesture of embodiment, Iansã offers the devotional community a chance to recognize and correct an imbalance in the terreiro's moral-political economy.

During my 2018 fieldwork tenure in Bahia, a ceremony in the aforementioned house of priestess Mãe Oba incited me to interrogate Johnson's notion

13 Vivieros de Castro mines Amerindian ontological categories to propose "perspectivism," referring to how human and non-human persons see themselves, each other and the world from distinct phenomenological points of view. In perspectivism the point of view creates the subject, and both earthly and "immaterial" beings, such as spirits and the dead, exhibit corporeal diversity and share a "spiritual unity" (1998: 476).

of "ritual failure."[14] I arrived to the festa with a girlfriend who would dance in the *xirê*, the invocation circle, for the first time that night. Her coral-peach colored skirt was stitched from the same fabric that wrapped around the three ready drums and hung on the sanctuary walls of the terreiro, Ilê Axé Oba Ina, tucked into an alley in São Caetano's densely populated core. The whole house gleamed with decorations for the guest Orixá of the night, Oia-Iansã, goddess of the household and the priestess' own head, the "queen of lightning,"[15] whose dominion includes winds, storms and the cemetery entrance.

When the caller and drummers summoned Iansã, several of Mãe Oba's "children" stumbled and rocked off-balance; signs of their Orixás becoming manifested. Yet the priestess herself remained poised; having performed a brief sequence of invocation steps, she took her seat in the kitchen hallway where each incorporated divinity would kneel to receive her blessing. Later, after they dressed, three qualities of Iansã came charging out of the internal rooms. Embodied by three senior daughters of the house, they veiled their faces with strands of red beads and churned the thick air with elbows and wrists extending in weighted opposition to Iansã's percussive footsteps and heavy pelvis.[16] One by one they zigzagged across the sanctuary, whirling and advancing towards the drummers. The conspicuous absence of Mãe Oba's own Orixá punctured the brilliant, moving, provocative presence of the three other Iansãs: Why didn't the empress of the temple, the high priestess' divinity to whom the festa was dedicated, present herself in the body of Mãe Oba?

14 My intention is not to diminish the value of Johnson's contributions but rather to productively push against the limits of this passage in order to expand its interpretative possibilities.

15 Lyric of "Iansã," a song written by Maria Bethania.

16 Browning (1995: 66-67) further describes Iansã's characteristic choreographies: Her dance "is air and it is matter at once: the commotion of pure directionality as it encounters the corporeal. Above all, her impossibly volatile hips seem to proclaim that women's sexuality and reproductive rights belong to them […] The motion of Iansã's dance, as I said, might be read in reference to her association with windstorms. And yet it is through the dancer's physicality, her body in all its materiality, with the full weight of her hips, her flesh and blood that she creates a stir."

"My Iansã did not want to incorporate," Mãe Oba relayed to me the next day, "para castigar os filhos – to punish her [spiritual] children. They don't pay attention to her" (Lior – interview with Mãe Oba on August 20, 2018). If these words sound harsh, consider that ritual "obligations" (*obrigações*) are fundamental to a Candomblé's health and sustainability. Initiation is the beginning of a binding contract between devotee, deity, and the collective body of the house. A divinity only "works" for her initiate when she is properly cultivated – seated, cared for and ritually fed. To undertake initiation in Mãe Oba's terreiro, then, means taking on custody not just of one's saint but also of the guardians of Oba's Candomblé house. Orixás speak in action; ceremonies are primary sites for transmitting and enforcing the terreiro's dynamic processes of socialization, for re-calibrating the flows of power and devotional labour so that *axé* can circulate unrestricted.

Iya Alagsy, another priestess of Bahian Candomblé whose festas I attended regularly during my fieldwork and with whom I spoke recently, further expounds on the subject. Iya Alagsy first describes a customary appearance of and human embodiment by a divinity:

> The Orixá arrives and manifests herself, but the Orixá manifests itself through the person, [whether that is] an Iyalorixá (high priestess, mother of the Orixá) or a novice; the Orixá arrived, arrived and manifested herself (Lior – interview with Iya Alagsy on January 13, 2022)

Continuing, Iya Alagsy distinguishes between events in which an Orixá "manifests itself" and other types of appearances in which a divinity may not become physically manifest. She cites the ritual of cowrie shell divination to illustrate that presence are vital and significant to Candomblé's modes of communication:

> There exists a nuance; an Orixá can also arrive, be present there, through the throwing of the obi or the cowrie shells,[17] for example, we see that the Orixá is there but she hasn't incorporated (Lior – interview with Iya Alagsy on January 13, 2022).

17 Kola nut and cowrie shell divination, two prominent forms of communication with the Orixá in Candomblé.

Coming back to the ceremony dedicated to Iansã in August 2018, Iya Alagsy states that,

> Under these conditions [of the Iansã's declining to circle with the high priestess], because of the behaviour of the children of the house, or some of them, the Orixá wasn't incorporated, wasn't seen to be present, but *she was there, participating, just not embodied in the person.* This happens too – it is not because the Orixá didn't incorporate that she wasn't there. It really depends on the reasons, and one of these can be […] the matter of the discipline of the children of the house. (Lior – interview with Iya Alagsy on January 13, 2022, italics mine)

With her differentiation between an Orixá's embodied and non-embodied presence, Iya Alagsy effectively supplants the production of meaning from the question of whether or not a trance possession has occurred to the imperative of deducing why a divinity would decide to manifest herself in a viscerally unequivocal form. If the Orixá is there, participating, but just "not embodied in the person," then the ritual has not "failed," in so far as the purpose of inter-relating with, and receiving instruction from, the spiritual realm is activated.

Interestingly, both Mãe Oba and Iya Alagsy's perspectives situate the August Iansã ceremony within a wider temporal context. For them, Iansã's reluctance to circle with/in Mãe Oba signifies not a ritual failure but an appropriate response to the negligence of the filhos de santo in the months leading up to the event. Looking through the lens of possession, in this case, offers too narrow a focus on public festas wherein the dancing bodies shared between divinities and their mediums are typically on display. As a dominant mode of representation, the analytic framework of possession obscures the bigger picture of relational dynamics at play over time and the investments of different social actors from the congregational corpus, including a particular medium and her guardian entity.

Acknowledging Iansã's agency in deciding to share or withhold her body and thus her dancing helps locate spirit embodiment on a relational continuum within a complex intersubjective choreography of social entanglements. We can then see how, by refusing to share her dancing at the ceremonial festa, the reigning Iansã enacted a disciplinary tactics of non-consent that, in addition to "punishing" her devotees, in Mãe Oba's terms, also in-

structs them in the necessary process of repair: more attention to the needs and domains of this particular regent at this time in the everyday life of the terreiro. Both Mãe Oba's and Iya Alagsy's interpretations reflect a nuanced understanding of sharing dancing as an ongoing negotiation in which a deity's non-consent to incorporation constitutes a meaningful communication. Reframing the categorical opposition between ritual success and failure in Afro-Atlantic religious activity, their testimonies effectively shift the discursive emphasis off of a singular spectacular rite of possession and bring a much vaster and subtler range of embodied knowledge transmissions into view.

IV. Thinking Sharing/Dancing as an Intercultural Research Method

As a theoretic for investigating Candomblé's aesthetic politics of embodiment, sharing dancing brings the dynamic interplay of multiple agencies to the fore. Simultaneously, the capaciousness of sharing dancing forges a hermeneutic space in which the idea of presence can be productively complicated, and acts of non-sharing can be grasped for their pedagogical implications. I have suggested that sharing dancing, with its potential connotations of connection and shared bodily experience, on one hand, and separation and division, on the other, interrupts in the dominant regime of representation of Afro-Atlantic religions. Instead of reproducing the uni-directionality of possession, circling with/in opens a field of relations in which neither divinity nor devotee possess sole control over the Other and, instead of becoming fixed as objects or possessions, persons participate in the ongoing negotiation and redistribution of agency to capitalize the production of axé. How can sharing dancing also connote a methodological move, specifically for inquiry into the socio-political valences of choreographies from Candomblé and related Northeastern Brazilian ritual matrixes? Grappling with dance research's tenuous position in the fraught field of global power inequities and the colonialist foundations of ethnography as a discipline, I wonder what modes of investigation are actioned by circling with/in as a

critical methodology, what kinds of production, including but not limited to written outputs, could be actualized?[18]

The dance storytelling film, *Ogum's Story* (2020), emerged as my attempt to circle with/in the epistemologies, forms and material spaces of the Bahian Candomblé universe, coupled with the directorial instincts of a long-time interlocutor, Candomblé elder and public intellectual Dona Cici (Nancy de Sousa e Silva). Late in 2018, Dona Cici asked me to animate a story about the trials of the Orixá Ogum, a macho, forest-dwelling warrior, and how he learns to quell his fiery temper. Cici wanted to produce an audiovisual documentation of Ogum's story in which I would depict his movements in the genre she calls "Afro-contemporary," as distinct from traditional renderings of Orixá symbolism performed in the terreiros of Salvador. She also wished to honour the legacy of Pierre Verger, a French photographer who popularized images of Candomblé in the 1960s, eventually becoming a priest of African divination and a mentor to Dona Cici and father of the saint, Pai Balbino.

To prepare for filming, Dona Cici instructed me on Ogum's hyper-masculine posture and expression and corrected my execution of his steps. These rehearsals gave me an opportunity to circle with/in Cici's repertoire of Candomblé's Yoruba-based mythography and the world of Orixá aesthetics, glimpsed through my lens as a researcher, race and culture outsider and dance insider in Salvador, Bahia.

Furthermore, the project of interpreting Ogum's Story offered a channel for mutually reciprocal exchange as, together with another collaborator, filmmaker Angel Robin Fox, we co-created an accessible piece through which Cici re-represented the space of the Pierre Verger Cultural Centre where she works for the staff and young people that attend the centre's programs and local audiences, with whom she shared the film.

While recounting Ogum's penchant for violence and his personal quest for wisdom, within the Cultural Center on the site of Verger's former home, Dona Cici wove a tale that linked the center and the people who inhabit its quarters to an epic journey and rich cultural inheritance. Allegorically, the film's narrative setting paid homage to the Cultural Centre as a headquar-

18 My methods are also informed by imaginative ethnography (Kazubowski-Houston 2010), performance ethnography (Madison 2005) and ethnography of the particular (Abu-Lughod 1991).

ters of Candomblé inquiry, repository of visual and literary texts and refuge for children and youth who are criminalized at egregiously disproportionate rates. Learning Ogum's songs and gestural sequences from Cici allowed me to circle with/in her movements, to move alongside her saints, to distribute responsibility for an artistic output and share a body of work. This process also engendered a kind of reflexive engagement with my position as an intercultural dance scholar, since I performed the role of a researcher who comes to the Centre seeking Cici's tutelage.

Figure 1: Dona Cici recounts Ogum's Story *(2020) at the Pierre Verger Cultural Centre (Still from the film)*

Through making *Ogum's Story*, I attempted to move circling with/in towards an intersubjective, movement-centered methodology as well as theorizing praxis. I endeavored neither to elide my own participation nor to reify my self-conscious realizations in the field, veering from the path of scholars that feature their becoming possessed as a kind of "imprimatur of authenticity" (Johnson 2016: 159). Instead, I co-created from a moving vantage point, circling with/in the space of the cultural center and Ogum's re-contextualized rhythms, sharing dancing that both embraces and problematizes the performance of research.

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