Gustavus Adolphus College

Syncretism, Slavery, and Identity: The influence of hybrid slave identities on the syncretic formation of Brazilian Candomble

Senior Religion Thesis

Department of Religion

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November 28, 2005

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Introduction

The broad topic of this thesis is the concept and process of religious syncretism. Specifically, I wish to examine the syncretic process that produced the South American, African-derived spirit-possession cults known as Candomble. Originating during the slave period and centrally located in Bahia, Brazil, Candomble is a religion that has syncretically integrated elements from various African tribes, Amerindian tribes, and popular Catholicism. Broadly, it utilizes trance dances to induce spirit possession in order to manifest African and Amerindian spirits.[1]

While my focus does involve both syncretism as a concept and the syncretic process itself, I argue specifically that the syncretic process that produced Brazilian Candomble was influenced heavily by hybrid social identities created by slaves during Brazil's colonial period. I do not cite these identities as the sole origin of Candomble's syncretic qualities, but I do believe they were foundational to the syncretic process.

In my first chapter I discuss the concept of syncretism itself; its conceptual problems, distinctions, and my own definition which I will use here. Chapters 2-5 examine the field of Brazilian Candomble, the history of specific African societies up to enslavement, slave life, and finally the formation of the new hybrid social identities.

There are a few areas that require further study and research. Multiple sources that would have been infinitely valuable were unavailable to me. Such was the case either because many are not published in English, or simply could not be found. As such, sections in my chapters on syncretism and the history of the African tribes are lacking. Due to constraints on time and space, multiple other areas of this topic are not covered.

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[1] Mikelle S. Omari, *Bahian Candomble* (California: Museum of Cultural History, 1984), 16-17.

The urbanization of Brazil and subsequent emigration to the cities is not discussed, nor are many other syncretic and non-syncretic elements of the Candombles. Despite these omissions, I still feel that a solid connection can be made between hybrid slave identities and the syncretic exchange which produced Brazlian Candomble.

CHAPTER 1

Syncretism: A conceptual look

A discussion of syncretism in almost any forum will have its champions and its opponents. Syncretism is often defined as any mixture of symbols, ideas, principles, or practices from two or more religions.[2] Syncretism is at times largely rejected as a convoluted and highly ambiguous term, and often carrying with it such negative connotations of "impurity" and "deviance" that it is not recognized by some scholars. The use of the word through history is varied, and the instances in which it should be used are not always clear. As Robert Baird put it, "historically speaking, to say that Christianity, mystery religions or Hinduism are syncretic is not to say anything that distinguishes them from anything else."[3]

These issues lead us to ask: what is to separate syncretism from other developments and processes of religious change? How can we conceptualize syncretism as a phenomenological descriptor without the connotations of an inferior mixing of religions?

A brief history

The etymological origin of "syncretism" is unclear: some think it can be traced back to two Greek words, *syn*, meaning "with," and *krasis*, which translates into "mixture."[4] Thus, from this combination a few possible compounds arise, namely *syngkrasis* "to mix together" and also *idiosyngkrasia*, a forerunner of the English word

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[2] Helmer Ringgren. "The Problems of Syncretism." *Syncretism* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969), 7.
[3] Siv Ellen Kraft. "To mix or not to mix." *Numen*: *International Review for the History of Religions* 49, no.2 (2002): 144.
[3] Rosalind Shaw, Charles Stewart, ed. *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

idiosyncrasy. Syncretism's first use, however, came in the late 1st century from Plutarch in his *Moralia*. In his chapter on brotherly love, Plutarch explains that it is profitable to befriend your brother's friends, and beware your brother's enemies.[5]

The term is seen again in the Renaissance with the revival of many classical Greek philosophical works. Erasmus and other philologists of the time were intrigued by its potential applications. They were quick to adopt a new perspective of Christianity, a syncretic view that took into account classical Greek and Roman influences.[6] Positive perspectives were soon to end, however. A Protestant theological movement of late 16th and early 17th centuries tried to consolidate diverse Protestant denominational doctrines by combining ritual communion and baptism. A fierce opposition to this movement arose and advocates of the consolidation, such as George Calixtus, were accused of unnaturally mixing religions into a confused and impure amalgamation.[7] This new meaning of the syncretic process was carried over into the late 19th century where syncretism first began acquiring a presence in the academic sphere.

Religious scholars during this time began to use syncretism to describe Greek and Roman religious life as a confused and disorderly mélange of beliefs, lacking in coherence.[8] In 1898, Hermann Usener described syncretism as "the unprincipled abandonment of the faith of the Fathers." And while conferences were being held during the 1960's and 70's to debate the theoretical implications and applications of syncretism, Robert Baird stated in his *Category Formation and the History of Religion* that the word

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 4.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid

syncretism should be banned from the field of historical religious research.[9] As evidenced by the conferences held earlier, there are efforts to redefine syncretism in order that it may be applicable once again.

Conceptual Distinctions

In order to arrive at a practical definition of syncretism we must first distinguish it from similar yet distinct processes that also occur in religious history. Multiple concepts exist already in religio-historical discourses that are similar to syncretism in many ways, but clarifications must be made as to the differences between them. A proto-typical syncretic religion is elusive, in part due to the ambiguous nature of the current definitions of syncretism, and also as a result of the diverse circumstances that surround historical events. Due to its amorphous nature, syncretism may be confused with alternative processes of religious change. These overlapping categories were identified by Carsten Colpe in his article in the *Encyclopedia of Religions* where he attempts to define syncretic instances and religions.[10] The first is "synthesis," defined by Colpe as "a reconciliation of cultures or an integration of cultures into a higher unity."[11] This definition seems to imply a complete melding of ideological systems, forming a new unique amalgamation. Instead of a borrowing of symbols and practices, where two systems could be viewed as sharing principles while remaining distinct and separate, such as syncretism, synthesis implies an actual consolidation into a single entity.

Another perspective on this distinction is given by Michael Pye, another proponent of a revamped definition of syncretism. Pye emphasizes the difference

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid, 144.
[11] Ibid.

between synthesis and syncretism by indicating the first as being "the conclusion to a process which is thereby completed," whereas syncretism is "the temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern."[12] Despite its redundancy, Pye's statement on synthesis points toward a completion, a finality which brings to a close a process of change and produces a new unique system. Whereas synthesis forms a new system by a process that breaks down and removes the distinctions that existed between its former components, syncretism presents a common space where multiple symbols, practices, and ideological forms coexist, as Pye said, and as of yet it would seem have not formed a solid, unified system. Taking these two explanations a step further, we could say that a major distinction between a religion that has been synthesized and a syncretic one is that the former now stands as an entity moderately resistant to outside influence, whereas the latter, being that its conceptual boundaries have yet to solidify, is highly susceptible to change.

Colpe's second overlapping concept is "evolution," a "process, internal to a system, that produces new elements and that is irreversible."[13] Here the contrast with syncretism is more obvious. Syncretism by its most common definition is specifically concerned with the interaction and exchange between multiple ideological systems. It must be admitted that even evolution itself within a given system is bound to have outside influences; the main focus here is a natural process *internal* to that system. Evolution often implies a progression traceable from a given source, such that evolutions of symbols, ideas, or practices have recognizable predecessors and may be extensions or improvements. Expanding on both concepts, syncretism creates a common space for

[12] Ibid, 145.
[13] Ibid, 144.

multiple elements to coexist as they are, being taken from preexisting belief systems, whereas evolution creates *new* elements from old ones. In evolution, the focus now becomes a linear progression of ideas or practices within a specific, contained, preexisting paradigm, in contrast to exchange that takes place at a specific point in time.

In a final conceptual discussion, Colpe accounts for religious diversity in distinguishing "harmonization," "in which harmony is established among different religions by the claim that they are seeking the same goal."[14] Here no exchange is implied or even seems necessary. Harmonization seems to account for the coexistence of religions together, emphasizing cooperation and/or tolerance, but not necessarily syncretic borrowing. Common ground is established perhaps through the recognition of compatible doctrines or cosmological ideas, however any mixing understood as the basis for syncretic consideration does not seem to be the focus.

It is important to keep these categories separate from each other in theory if a practical definition of syncretism is to be used in religious studies: in practice, however, it must be remembered that complexity is the rule, not the exception. Multiple processes may be present and active at one time, or one may be the agent or predecessor of another. Early Christianity syncretically absorbed select classical pagan beliefs,[15] synthesized those elements, and through time evolved into what is now considered widely as a "pure" tradition. However, critically analyzing instances of religious change is paramount to discerning exactly the manner and mode of that change, and cautious identification of syncretism, synthesis, harmonization, and evolution are key in maintaining the credibility and stability of syncretism as a concept.

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Rosalind Shaw, Charles Stewart, ed. *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, 4.

Although these terms do not exhaustively describe the varied phenomena occurring in religions throughout history, I do believe they are useful in covering *prevailing* processes of change. Each of these processes involves the introduction of new elements into a religious system and as such may be confused with or mislabeled as syncretism, and vice versa, thus the importance in distinguishing them.

Conceptual Problems

As noted above, some argue that "syncretism" is ambiguous and thus undeserving of its own conceptual category. To apply the term syncretism to any religion is in reality neither to say anything unique, nor to identify any sort of process that can be compared to its antithesis. The problem lies not in the concept of syncretism itself, but in such broad and ineffectual uses as applying it to all religions in all points in time. We could say that symbols change, or religions evolve, and these statements would also stand as useless as the previous one regarding syncretism. Concepts do not become ineffectual because they are widespread or universal, and our concern should not be generalized descriptions but specific instances of syncretic phenomena. Just as religious evolution occurs at different times and is affected by multiple factors, so syncretic processes are set within specific historical points and fueled by various forces.

Likely one of the most glaring problems associated with syncretism is the pejorative meanings it has been ascribed through mostly the last century and a half.[16] Oddly enough, many religious historians and phenomenologists have long accepted that cross-religious mixing and syncretism is a feature of almost every religion. Often within the field of religious study, religions themselves are accepted as given entities. This

[16] Ibid, 2.

immediately supposes any sort of syncretic instance as abnormal or impure.[17] The problem then lies in notions of long established "traditions" as having claim to purity or authenticity. At one point in syncretism's history it was incorporated into a framework or religious evolution, being placed at a less developed stage prior to the acceptance of Christianity and monotheism.[18]

So the true conflict is the stratification of religions based on their claim to authenticity and purity. Established traditions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and so forth, are considered to have a strong traditional and doctrinal base from which to proclaim the truth. Any deviations from claims to orthodoxy are decried as dilutions of the original teachings or deviant practices. This is observable even in the Brazilian Candombles examined here. Particular "elite" houses of worship hold prestige among Candomble worship groups according to their replication of "authentic" African rites.[19]

Truly it is understandable that any adherent to a particular faith accepts at least on a basic level the worldview presented by it. Yet when engaging in religious study, particularly religio-historical inquiry, it becomes necessary to examine common characteristics of human social institutions. Most importantly that includes change. Religions are not static from the beginning of history. Hardly anyone would argue that Christianity existed before the ministry of Christ, nor did Islam precede Muhammad. Religion is constantly in a dialectical relationship with humanity, and when change occurs, nothing solidifies it better than time. Trends become traditions through the

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[17] Ibid, 5.
[18] Ibid, 4.
[19] Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 51.

passing of time, theories become accepted facts, and cults become institutions. Yet this is the nature of belief systems.

Perception dictates the validity of the truth presented to us. Traditions are belief systems that have been supported widely for a certain period of time, so much so, that their ideological frameworks become almost inseparable from reality. In short, syncretism must be understood as a part of religious history, an agent in the change that is inevitable in all human endeavors. As such, it must be considered within its historical context, whereas it may, at a given point, consolidate elements of multiple religions into a syncretic mixture. Over the passing of time syncretism gives way to synthesis, evolution, and produces through history a respected and "authentic" tradition.

The Syncretic Process

Many theories of syncretism contain another essential problem, and that is they lack any explanation or analysis of the process of syncretism itself. F. Niyi Akinnaso, an anthropologist, pinpoints the problem with many theories regarding syncretism:

> Syncretism takes as its starting point the clash or interplay between two or more distinct forms of religious symbolism without explaining the dynamics of the interaction, thus excluding the importance of human agency in the creation of religious knowledge. Like the structural-functionalist model within which it was embedded, syncretism recognised [*sic*] change without being able to explain it.[20]

Although a large amount of factors may contribute to any sort of social or religious change, there are a few parameters that can be identified in the syncretic process; equivalence, human agency, and the "unanswered question."

[20] Siv Ellen Kraft, "To mix or not to mix", 146.

Let us examine the last concept first, as in many instances it could be reasoned to be the initial stage of the syncretic process. The circumstances causing culture contact and possible clash are varied, whether they are migration, population increase, conquest, or simply a coexistence resulting in exchange. Whatever the case may be, the "unanswered question" represents the negative space that appears when change occurs from the contact between two cultures. Specifically, an issue arises that can no longer be answered by the current religious paradigm, or cannot be answered satisfactorily.[21] In reaction, new solutions are sought and often another religion offers a solution acceptable within the framework of the current religion.[22]

If we may look at the nature of symbols as Paul Tillich did, at times the symbols understood by and active upon a peoples become insufficient, and new ones cannot be made, but must be discovered and reinterpreted as viable.[23] Ringgren offers a good example in his illustration of the ancient people of Israel: upon entering Canaan, the Israelites encountered a population whose subsistence revolved around agriculture, and the religion reflected this. Largely influenced by their nomadic and pastoralist lifestyle, the Israelite religion adopted some of the attributes of the fertility cults present in Canaan.[24] The focus is a perceived change in the way people of that culture live. Often the change is negative; resulting in a need for new explanations and new religious ideas, sometimes in the form of external religious forms being adopted, or even a return to a quasi-indigenous religious form.[25]

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[21] Helmer Ringgren, "The Problems of Syncretism", 10.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 43.
[24] Helmer Ringgren, "The Problems of Syncretism", 10 .
[25] Ibid, 11.

The syncretic exchange that can occur as a result of unanswered issues requires an ideological conduit between the two religious forms in question. Clerically authorized assumptions regarding the nature of syncretism have implied that arbitrary "borrowing" occurs with no structure or pattern; that an unorganized mishmash of beliefs takes place. But similar points of contact within the respective religious systems must exist for any exchange to take place.[26] These points of contact, overlapping structures, or equivalences are in effect common, at times parallel ideological frameworks in which multiple ideas and symbols may flow between the two depending on their need and perceived validity.[27] Intimately tied to these overlapping contact points is the concept of perception.[28]

Religious institutions and belief systems are not autonomous entities, but are constantly reshaped and reinvented by their adherents. As such, human agency is a key factor in the syncretic process. Similar points of contact only exist as long as they are *perceived* and understood to be similar by those involved. Equivalences such as these must be given a symbolic significance, designating them as complimentary forms, thus allowing the exchange of acceptable symbols and ideas from one religious system to another.[29] Symbols are only effective as long as they are accepted and understood by the religious community that employs them.[30] An arbitrary snatching of diverse symbols from multiple frameworks would be ineffectual, precisely because of this need for equivalence. Exchanged forms, ideas, and symbols must be understood in the context of the established paradigm.

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[26] Ibid, 9.
[27] Rosalind Shaw, Charles Stewart. *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, 16.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 43.

Conclusion

Syncretism as a concept has had an extensive history of pejorative meanings and generalized applications, although there are researchers and scholars who wish to reestablish it as a valid religio-historical category. To effectively apply it as a term for use in the study of religion, it must be taken within its historical context and understood as a process affecting religious development just as evolution, synthesis, and harmonization do. It involves a dynamic relationship between the actions and efforts of ordinary people, as well as the effectiveness of ideas and symbols within given instances and systems. Without a clear definition of syncretism and its conceptual boundaries, there is nothing to distinguish it as an applicable concept in the religious field, and it becomes useless.

It is not my intention, for the purpose of this work, to repudiate the emerging discussions of syncretism from Colpe, Stewart, Ringgren, etc. Instead, I mean to consolidate what I feel to be their strengths. Namely, I define syncretism as an historical process of change that merges elements from distinct belief systems. It utilizes mutually compatible ideological structures to accomplish this, but also includes the conscious participation of the constituents of those systems. Syncretism is *not*, however, mutually exclusive from synthesis, evolution, or harmonization. It is a *process* of change, emerging and reemerging throughout the course of a religion's history and may be present in conjunction with other processes. In studying syncretism, focus should be directed to the historically specific occurrence of syncretic change, its causes, products, and agents.

CHAPTER 2

Brazilian "Candomble"

In this chapter I now turn my focus to the African-derived spirit possession cults which arose out of Brazil's massive importation of slaves. Before I can examine the factors behind Candomble's syncretic origin, I must first establish the syncretic elements of Candomble itself. Due to the enormous amount of African slaves brought into Brazil, more than three and a half million, a wide array of ethnic groups were present throughout the duration of Brazilian slavery.[31] Roughly thirty distinct tribal groups are identified as being represented in Brazil.[32] So what exactly are the origins of Candomble? How do we examine syncretic components of a religion that potentially has thirty preceding belief systems, all intermingling over the course of two to three hundred years?

Prototypes and variants

Patric Giesler explores exactly this issue in his dissertation on Candomble as a syncretic field of variants.[33] According to his own research, as well as that of previous literature reviewed in his dissertation, Giesler proposes that the term "Candomble" does not describe a set of qualifying characteristics which categorizes a specific religion, while excluding other Candomble-like variants. It does not define a distinctive belief system that is relatively homogenous throughout Brazil, but instead must be thought of as a field

[31] Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit,* 45.
[32] Patric Giesler, "Conceptualizing Religion in Highly Syncretistic Fields: An Analog Ethnography of the Candombles of Bahia, Brazil" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1998), 111.
[33] Ibid, 3.

of variants.[34] In this conceptualization, Giesler goes on to compromise two methods of categorization, namely the digital view and the analog view.[35] The former is a simple binary description, namely, something either falls into a category, or it does not.[36] Categories are mutually exclusive, and variability amongst objects is ignored or split into dualistic categories.[37] The analog view allows for a larger range of variability, placing objects along a continuum without requiring characteristics essential for inclusion. Rather than dividing objects into column A or B, variations are placed according to the degree by which they resemble each other.[38] Of course, any sort of comparison of this type requires a reference point to determine by what degree something varies. Here, Giesler is informed by Wittgenstein's prototype theory.[39] The field of Brazilian Candomble is set along a continuum, with variations either closer to or farther away from the prototypical example. That example, according to Giesler and earlier researchers, is identified as the most African Candombles.[40] More specifically, the Yoruba-derived model of Candomble.[41]

So to imagine Giesler's compromised model of the two, which I will use here as well, we are presented with a prototype embodied in the Yoruba-derived model, and a continuum of variants following. In addition, within this continuum, three analytical clusters exist, each with their own variant filled fields.[42] Each type, however, is still not exclusive; each shares borders and qualities with the others, creating overlapping

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[34] Ibid, 143.
[35] Ibid, 141-142.
[36] Ibid, 18.
[37] Ibid, 21-22.
[38] Ibid, 25.
[39] Ibid, 26.
[40] Ibid, 29.
[41] Ibid, 128.
[42] Ibid, 144.

characteristics that makes any absolute classification difficult, if not impossible.[43] My analysis here is based on this model, namely because it recognizes the wide array of variants within "Candomble" and emphasizes the highly syncretic quality therein, while providing a focus in the form of the analytical clusters.

Historical Origins of Type Distinctions

The labels for each of the three types have their roots in various interactions between the Portuguese, the slaves, and the differing tribes with each other.[44] Colonial distinctions were based on observed religious practice and common language. Overall, most ethnic groups fell into two language categories, "Sudanese" and "Banto."[45] "Sudanese" speakers primarily came from what is now Benin and Nigeria, while "Banto" peoples were brought from coasts south of the equator, most notably Angola and the Congo.[46] As each tribe intermingled and various religions arose, which would later be known as Candombles, they began to be designated as separate "nations."[47] These "nations", or *naçāo*, were labeled as such to designate from which tribal group the religions derived. I will be using these established *naçāo* designations, as Giesler does, to maintain continuity between historical accounts and also for purposes of maintaining a vocabulary shared by adherents to the various forms of Candomble.

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[43] Ibid, 145.
[44] Ibid, 112.
[45] Ibid, 117.
[46] Ibid, 118.
[47] Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 65.

Jêjê-Nagô Candombles

The term "Jêjê-Nagô" is in fact a combination of two *naçāo* designations given to the Fon and Yoruba, respectively.[48] Oddly enough, each of these designations is reported to have come from the opposing tribe. The Yoruba took to calling the Fon "Jêjê", and inversely the Fon labeled the Yoruba "Nagô," both of which were adopted by the Portuguese.[49] Both these terms etymologically carried derogatory tones, but became incorporated into the vocabulary of Candomble. Thus these labels are applied to Candombles derived from the particular group. Accordingly we arrive at both "Nagô Candombles" and "Jêjê Candombles" as types of variants in the field.[50] Commonly, because their ritual and ideological structures are so similar and mutually influence one another, they are referred to under the previously mentioned designation, "Jêjê-Nagô Candombles."[51]

As was previously mentioned, if we consider Brazilian "Candomble" as a field of variants gradationally departing from the prototypical type, then the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles are placed nearest to that cluster. Consequently, the amount of syncretic elements within this set both inter-African and non-African, is the lowest within the field of variants.[52] Jêjê-Nagô Candombles are the closest in resemblance to the prototypical "Nagô" model, and as such rely heavily on elements from the Yoruba tradition.[53] The pantheon of deities is almost exclusively of Yoruba origin, the *orixas* of Africa, and the

[48] Patric Giesler,"Conceptualizing Religion in Highly Syncretistic Fields", 121.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid, 152.
[52] Ibid, 200.
[53] Ibid, 151.

liturgical language used in chants and songs is claimed as being pure "Nagô."[54] Syncretic elements are still present and distinguishable, however small they may be. Some members of the Nagô pantheon actually derive from the Jêjê tradition. Instances have been observed where Nagô drum beats and ritual chants were employed to summon the *orixas* of the Yoruba, but then change to language specific to the Jêjê *naçāo* when Jêjê deities are called upon.[55] Such instances suggest a conscious incorporation of deities from differing origins, despite the assertion that all belong to the Nagô pantheon.

Because Jêjê-Nagô Candombles are the least syncretic of the three Candomble clusters discussed here, the incorporation of Brazilian elements, such as Indian and Catholic, are minimal in some and non-existent in others. When they do appear, however, it is predominately the Indian cultural heroes that are recognized.[56] These Indian spirits, or *caboclos,* receive the least amount of attention and veneration in the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles. Often they are given ritual observances as a group, or may be recognized as having importance to a single initiate, but may not be welcome within particular worship groups.[57] Due to this cluster's close resemblance to the "Nagô" model mentioned previously, instances of syncretic mixing are low and infrequent, although the degree varies across specific Candombles.

Angola-Congo Candombles

Traveling down the syncretic continuum in which we conceptualize the varying Candombles, the next cluster identified is the Angola-Congo Candombles. This cluster

[54] Ibid, 184.
[55] Ibid, 151.
[56] Ibid, 486.
[57] Ibid.

was originally identified as the mixing of customs and languages of the Bakongo and Ambundo tribes, as well as others.[58] In contrast to the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles, the Angola-Congo Candombles implement the "Nagô" model to a lesser degree. Elements from the Bakongo and Ambundo tribes are integrated to a larger extent, and other elements are present as well.[59]

While the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles rarely recognize *caboclo* spirits or give them a place in their belief systems, the Angola-Congo Candombles employ these spirits noticeably more. The former, for the most part, maintains a pantheon exclusively made up of Yoruba-derived gods, and their descriptions are heavily informed by the Yoruba mythology.[60] In contrast, the *caboclos* of the latter often occupy space in the pantheon along with the Nagô *orixas*, and are given a much more active role in the spirit possession rituals of the Candomble.[61] Unlike the *orixas*, who only possess their mediums and then ritually dance, the *caboclos* enter their mediums and interact directly with the devotees of that Candomble. They talk, joke, tell stories about their lives, and give advice to those in need.[62]

In addition to the *caboclo* spirits, the Angola-Congo Candombles also syncretize elements from Christianity, although still not as heavily as the third cluster. A common example is the case of Exu, the messenger *orixa* in traditional Yoruba mythology.[63] In the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles, Exu is vital to the cult of the *orixas*. He is the messenger and intermediary between the *orixas* and the priests and priestesses.[64] Although he is

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[58] Ibid, 159.
[59] Ibid, 160.
[60] Ibid, 160-161.
[61] Ibid, 161.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Geoffrey Parrinder. *West African Religion*. (London: Epworth Press, 1969), 56.
[64] Ibid.

attributed with a trickster aspect, his role is a positive one in the Jêjê-Nagô cluster.[65] But the farther Candombles are from the prototype, the "Nagô" model, the more Exu becomes demonized. Already present in the Angola-Congo Candombles is the syncretic merger of Exu with elements of the Christian devil.[66] Emphasis becomes placed more and more on the evil tendencies inherent in Exu's nature, the farther away from the prototype one gets. This tendency follows the greater degree of syncretism between African elements and Christianity that is seen as we move further down the continuum.[67]

Candomble de Caboclo

The third syncretic cluster of Candomble is especially interesting because it does not derive from any particular *naçāo*, but instead is a highly syncretized form coming out of the Angola-Congo Candombles and syncretizing with rural folklore and Amerindian beliefs.[68] Accordingly, Candomble de Caboclos represent a contrasting end of the spectrum from the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles. Most of the components present in the Nagô model are simplified or removed. Initiation ceremonies are shorter, clientilistic divination and sorcery are more common, and the liturgical language now becomes Portuguese with a few Banto and Amerindian phrases mixed in.[69]

As we have seen, the latter's emphasis is on African beliefs and gods, whereas the former incorporates to a much greater degree the Indian spirits and Bahian folklore heroes.[70] It is not only this incorporation, but in fact an elevation of the *caboclo* spirits

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[65] Patric Giesler. "Conceptualizing Religion in Highly Syncretistic Fields", 161.
[66] Ibid, 206.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid, 165.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

that sets these clusters of Candomble apart. The nature and characters of the *orixas* are reduced to a few general traits, and subordinated to the Brazilian elements.[71] African concepts and deities are present that have no real basis in African religion, but are instead Brazilian informed constructs of what is "African". The result is a host of invented African gods who now speak and interact with their devotees, a major departure from the behavior of the *orixas* of the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles.[72] This data on the reduction of African gods may support the contention that syncretism merely dilutes a religion and makes it weaker, but, what the African gods lack in this cluster is made up for in the Brazilian elements.

In addition to Amerindian spirits and Brazilian folklore heroes, the Candomble de Caboclos also incorporate Catholic elements into their beliefs and rituals.[73] Catholic saints are often correlated on a one to one basis with African *orixas*, with parallel traits or functions determining the correspondence.[74] Christian beliefs are also applied to Exu as they are in the Angola-Congo Candombles, however, in the Candomble de Caboclo Exu now is personified by the downtrodden and marginalized peoples of Brazil. Exu will posses initiates, another contrast to the Nagô model, and will take on the persona of drunkards, prostitutes, and beggars, and the Christian devil himself.[75] So while the African elements may be diluted and simplified, the Brazilian influence just becomes more complex and involved.

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[71] Ibid, 166.
[72] Ibid.
[73] 192.
[74] Sidney M. Greenfield. "The reinterpretation of Africa: Convergence and syncretism in Brazilian Candomblé", 122.
[75] Patric Giesler, "Conceptualizing Religion in Highly Syncretistic Fields", 192.

The Syncretic Process at Work

But how was syncretism to take place? What ideological conduits were present to facilitate a syncretic exchange? A few commonalities existed between African tribes as well as African tribes and Amerindian culture. Ancestor worship was a major equivalence, especially between Amerindian religion and the Bantu peoples.[76] Although the Yoruba and Fon people's worshiped and invoked deities more so than ancestors, there was still the common practice of trance which was shared between these two tribes and the Amerindians. The dead possessed Amerindian women during trance dances just as the *orixas* and *vodouns* possessed their devotees.[77]

Common ground existed between popular Catholicism and the African tribes as well, despite the Catholic forbiddance of ecstatic rituals. But, the saints themselves fit into the framework of African religions. For the Yoruba, Fon, and Bantu peoples, the saints corresponded with their own deities. Just as the *orixas* and *vodouns* and ancestors act as guardians and intermediaries, so too, do the saints.[78]

Thus we see the corresponding identification of one with the other, or the outright integration of the two.[79] But to have this correspondence, saints had to be interpreted as being equivalent to African deities. For instance, Christ is at times identified with the *orixa* Oxalá, and at other times Shango.[80] There isn't a random assignment nor exchange, but rather a conscious interpretation of the Catholic saints and their qualities.

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[76] Ibid, 60.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Sidney M. Greenfield. "The reinterpretation of Africa: Convergence and syncretism in Brazilian Candomblé", 122.
[80] Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 275-276.

Thus we can see specifically the qualities of new problems requiring new solutions, equivalences across which elements are exchanged, and human agency in the syncretic process. Yet as I have said, this is a restricted definition applied within a specific case. It does not and cannot cover all possible cases of syncretic exchange.

Conclusion

As I stated earlier, these clusters are only categorical markers to pinpoint differences along the spectrum. They are not, however, the definitive descriptions of every type of Candomble. They lie along the syncretic continuum pulling away from the Nagô model which stands as an ideal type. Each of these clusters also contains its own syncretic continuum, with elements being added and removed across examples. The boundaries overlap, and the distinctions between each are not always clear, thus, the use of these three clusters. As I will show later, these three clusters correspond to social identities formed by African slaves and their descendants during the colonial period of Brazil. Each cluster contains its own elements and each has its own emphasis, whether it be Brazilian, African, or somewhere in between. The ways in which slaves were re-socialized and how both they and their descendants identified with their African roots or the white slave owners contributed largely to their social identity. These new hybrid identities can then been seen as reflected in the variants of Candomble and the emphases therein.

CHAPTER 3

History and Culture in Africa

In order to sufficiently examine the circumstances of and causes for the syncretic nature of Brazilian "Candomble", a discussion must be presented as to the original social, religious, and political context in which they lived. Most importantly, an examination of the structure and super-structure of their societies as they pertain to the interpenetration of religion into politics and vice versa is vital to understanding why the various worship paradigms of each of these societies were later to be syncretized and the pantheons consolidated in varying degrees through the course of their enslavement in South America. Although there were a large number of tribes involved in the formation of the Afro-Brazilian religions, the most influential ones to be focused on here are the Yoruba and the Fon.[81]

The Yoruba

A sizeable number of the slaves brought to South America during the transatlantic slave trade were taken from West Africa, in particular the south-west region of what is present day Nigeria.[82] Yorubaland, or *ile Yoruba*, is roughly the size of England, and contains some of the oldest urban centers in Africa.[83] The most important of these

[81] The Angolese/Congolese grouping is omitted in this section due to a lack of sources, and due to the generalization the name "Angolese/Congolese" represents. In reality the term covers multiple distinct African tribes, many of which were difficult to find. Also, a large number of resources on this subject are exclusively in Portuguese or French, and as such were not available to me. However, I feel their exclusion may be justified in part by the dominance of the Yoruba and Fon religious structures in Brazilian Candomble.
[82] William W. Megenney. "West Africa in Brazil : The case of Ewe-Yoruba syncretism." *Anthropos* 87, no.4-6 (1992), 459.
[83] Robert S. Smith. *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 6-7.
[83] Ibid, 13.

centers, however, is the area of Ile Ife.[84] Robert S. Smith describes the cultural and religious significance of Ife:

> The traditions of the creation of the world and of the origins of the peoples and their states centre on Ife, the source whence all the major rulers derive the sanctions of their kingship and which, burdened with gods and their shrines and festivals, is the centre of religion.[85]

This spiritual centrality of Ile Ife is common among most of the sub-groups present within the larger grouping of the Yoruba. The spiritual head ruling Ife is known as the *Oni*, a sort of religious figurehead having dominion over the region of Ife, although whether his authority carried beyond Ife is still being debated.[86] Although the entirety of *ile Yoruba* was divided into smaller, rival kingdoms, this spiritual focus on Ile Ife was imitated on a micro-level, with the established urban centers and surrounding farmlands constituting the components of this dynamic.

A driving force behind the prosperity and importance of large urban centers populated by local farmers is the intrinsic connection and interdependence of the political system and religious beliefs amongst the Yoruba people. Much of the population of these towns owned and worked farms many miles away, however, the town itself still remained the social focus of their lives.[87] The reason for this was the existence of the *oba*, roughly translated, the king.[88]

One of the cultural achievements of the Yoruba people that has impressed scholars is the development of a loose political system maintained through much of their history. Each major urban center was led by an *oba* and his council of chieftains, and

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid, 13.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid, 87.
[88] Ibid.

groups of towns were subsequently set under a "crowned town" or *ilu alade,* which contained the head *oba,* wearing the beaded crown bestowed upon him by the presiding Oni of Ile Ife.[89] Towns were then ranked and named according to their established size and the presence of an *oba* or lack thereof.[90] Competing communities, or *ilus*, vying for superiority incorporated "conquered" kingdoms under their rule and demoted established *obas* to what became known as *baales*.[91] In order for prospering chiefs to gain independence or *baales* to regain their autonomy, a legitimizing link of hereditary descent had to be drawn to Ife and the creation myth common among the Yoruba.[92] According to the Yoruba, the beginning of the world was caused by the son of Olodumare, Oduduwa, placing a handful of earth on an endless expanse of water and setting a rooster upon the earth. The scratching of the rooster spread out the different lands of the world, and the point of descent by Oduduwa is claimed to be Ile Ife.[93]

The position of the *oba* and his importance to the people he governed was inseparably tied to Yoruba myth and the kinship systems derived from them. Much like the ancient pharaohs of Egypt or the emperor of Japan, the *oba* was believed to be the divine protector of his people, as well as their link to Ile Ife and the very origins of their people's existence and creation.[94] In addition to tracing descent from Ife, each influential

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[89] Ibid, 90.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Sidney M. Greenfield. "The reinterpretation of Africa: Convergence and syncretism in Brazilian Candomblé." (In . Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 117.
[91] Ibid, 118
[92] Ibid.
[92] Robert S. Smith. *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 91.
[92] Ibid, 97.
[92] William Bascom. *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*. (California: University of California, Berkeley, 1969), 11.
[92] George Brandon. *Santeria from Africa to the New World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 14.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Robert S. Smith. *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 91.

oba, baale, and chieftain also laid claim to a particular ancestral spirit, or *orixa*.[95] These *orixas*, or *orishas*, are regarded as superhuman beings, some of which are considered to have been present before the conception of human beings, such as the emanations or sons of Olodumare.[96] Others are said to have been remarkable people who died legendary deaths and have now become the watchers and guides of human destiny.[97] William Bascom asked two high priests to describe the *orixa*:

> . . .an orisha is a person who lived on earth when it was first created, and from whom present-day folk are descended. When these orishas disappeared or "turned to stone," their children began to sacrifice to them and to continue whatever ceremonies they themselves had performed when they were on earth. This worship was passed on from one generation to the next, and today an individual considers the orisha who he worships to be an ancestor from whom he is descended.[98]

Individual *orixas* themselves are not static by any means, despite their apparent mortal origin. Three characteristics can be defined along a descriptive continuum, with each *orixa* falling in varying degrees along the scale according to the amount of each characteristic present.[99] Depending on the region, worshiping cult and mythology associated with the *orixa*, the aspect of the nature spirit, cultural hero, or venerated ancestor can be applied to the perceived personality in varying degrees.[100]

The relationship between humans and the *orixas* is focused on the mediatory function which the *orixas* serve. They act on behalf of humans in dealings with the

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[95] Ibid, 97.
[96] William Bascom. *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, 11.
[97] George Brandon. *Santeria from Africa to the New World.* 14.
[98] Ibid, 14.
[98] Andrew Apter. *Black Critics & Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 152.
[98] Ibid.
[98] George Brandon. *Santeria from Africa to the New World*, 14-15.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Andrew Apter. *Black Critics & Kings*, 152.
[100] Ibid.

elusive and removed Olodumare, most often being petitioned for aid, luck, wealth, health, or advice.[101] There are a fair amount of *orixas* who receive veneration across many different sections of the Yoruba region, however, many of them are geographically specific, being tied to specific clan lineages and employed for authoritative legitimacy.[102] In short, the pantheon of *orixas* was not necessarily a universally recognized collection among the entirety of the Yoruba people. As political and territorial rivalries constantly shaped and redefined the myths of descent according to the various kingdoms' political successes and failures, individual *orixa* veneration was not the exception, but the rule. Large-scale and prolonged political successes often promulgated the popularity and multi-regional worship of once *ilu*–specific *orixas*.

Within each kingdom itself, three types of *orixa* worship groups can be identified, segmented in descending size from the royal lineage representing the entirety of the kingdom, to the chieftains of each *ilu*, down to the individual lineage houses. On the largest scale, the royal clan lays claim to its *orixa* by descent as is traditionally appropriate.[103] In addition to being perceived as an ancestral spirit of the royal house, which is indeed necessary for the validation of their rule, the *orixa* of the royal lineage also takes on the aspects of both the cultural hero, the standard-bearer of the kingdom, and also that of the nature spirit, the raw power of the bush.[104] As the *orixa* of the royal lineage, the deity not only acts as the mediator between the royal lineage and the higher powers, but also becomes the steward of the entire kingdom's destiny.[105]

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[101] George Brandon. *Santeria from Africa to the New World*, 14-15.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Andrew Apter. *Black Critics and Kings*, 153
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

With each ruling *oba* exists a council of chieftains underneath him, and each chieftain himself is responsible for a quarter or section of that particular *ilu*.[106] Just as each crowned *oba* lays claim to a particular *orixa*, so too does each chieftain and *oba* underneath him claim an *orixa*. The nature of each quarter *orixa* differs from other worship groups' *orixa* by the nature of the group the deity represents.[107] As a result of an *ilu* quarter containing more than one lineage household, quarter cults cross-cut clan distinctions.[108] Subsequently, the nature of the *orixa* changes taking on more aspects of the cultural hero and also greatly diminishing the characteristics of an ancestor spirit.[109] The connection to an ancestral spirit is lessened because of the consolidation of multiple clans into a single worship group, and more emphasis is placed on the power that transcends the social order, the power that comes from and was used by cultural heroes.[110]

The smallest worship cult existent in Yoruba society is the individual lineage cults, normally confined to a single house compound.[111] The eldest male member of the lineage stands as the "oba" of the house, and within that household now becomes the spiritual figurehead of what is distinctly ancestor worship.[112] These individual household cults encompass one specific lineage, which can reliably trace a particular *orixa* as a common ancestor.[113]

The pervasive tendency in the Yoruba society to rank and organize within politics and the social order is intimately tied into their religious organization. A person's place

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[106] Ibid, 21.
[107] Ibid, 152.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 152.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

in the social order, their relation to others, and indeed their place in the universe, was constantly reinforced through each institution of kinship, politics, regional location, and religious affiliation. In addition, religion itself relied heavily on the ebbs and flows of each of these institutions. Political power struggles were constantly reshaping the mythology as well as the popularity and veneration of particular *orixas*.

Most importantly, each person found their religious affiliation and perspective based on the social order surrounding them. To a large extent, *orixas* were not chosen. An *orixa* might be approached and petitioned for help in specific situations, but because many *orixas* were considered to be ancestors, kinship defined a person's affiliation. In addition, as we have seen, the importance of the *oba* system also shaped a person's religious focus depending on which *ilu* they belonged to, and which kingdom they resided in. I would argue that the Yoruba religion was inherently subordinate to the political and social structure present, and as such could not exist the way it did without those structures to support it.

The Fon

The Fon of Dahomey and their religion are quite similar to the Yoruba.[114] Many of the histories detailing the origin of the royal family allude to a possible link to the Yoruba kingdoms.[115] Two myths can be found on the origin of the Fon royal family. The first details the story of a daughter of the king of Adja-Tado. In this myth, the daughter of the king is impregnated by a leopard, a common spiritual figure in West Africa. The princess then gives birth to a son, Agasu, who will become the indirect

[114] W. J. Argyle. *The Fon of Dahomey*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 5.
[115] Ibid.

founder of the royal family of the Fon.[116] The descendants of Agasu eventually attempt to overthrow the king of Adja-Tado, fail to establish reign, and flee to form their own kingdom. Another story alters the origin of Agasu, although includes the persona of the leopard. In this second version, a daughter of a vassal of the king is impregnate by a "stranger from the east", who was skilled in hunting and magic.[117] To the east of the Fon lies the kingdoms of the Yoruba and this may be an allusion to a possible connection to that culture. Either way, like the Yoruba, the Fon royal family sought to legitimate their rule through a claim of supernatural or powerful descent.

Before the coming of the royal family and its establishment at the city of Abomey, the region of Dahomey was inhabited by various autonomous clans, each with its own social organization and ancestor cults.[118] After the establishment of the royal lineage, a somewhat haphazard consolidation of each of these belief systems occurred, although many of them are distinguishable from one another.[119] Very similar to the Yoruba, the Fon base their religious affiliations on their lineages, which are then subsequently grouped into clans. There exists two types of clans, and they are distinguished by the way in which they trace line back to the beginning of history.

The first type of clan claims descent from an ancestral spirit, or *vodoun*, much the same as the Yoruba claim descent from the *orixas*.[120] These ancestral spirits, the ancestors of maybe four or five clans among the Fon people, were reported to be the first people and had originally come down from the sky or crawled out from holes in the

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[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid, 55.
[119] Ibid, 175.
[120] Ibid,

ground.[121] The second clan type has instead of an ancestral *vodoun*, a worldly ancestor, often a plant or animal. Myths detailing the origins of these clans often involve the impregnation of a woman by the respective ancestor, and thus creating a new lineage. The clans replace an ancestral *vodoun* with the *tohwiyo*. This distinction, however, does not exclude members from one type of clan participating in the worship of the other.

The main social unit in connection with these ancestor worship cults is the patrilineal relationships groups.[122] Each lineage group has a chief, known as the *xenuga*, the eldest living male of the lineage. It is through this chief that a connection is maintained between the living members of the lineage group and the dead ancestors. Although the *xenuga* has jurisdiction over the entirety of his lineage group, it is ultimately the *tohwiyo* that governs the destinies of all members of the clan, whether they are alive or dead.[123]

Through the veneration of the ancestors and the observance of all critical ceremonies in regard to the lineage group, the perpetuation of the clan itself may be ensured. It is because of this emphasis in Fon society on the maintenance of the clan and its ancestors that the patrilineal descent groups were most certainly the focal point of the social organization.[124] In addition, the religion itself relied on the perpetuation of this system.[125] Without the continued cohesion of these kinship groups the structure of the ancestor cults disintegrates. Likewise, any laxity in veneration and ritual observance

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[121] Melville J. Herskovits. *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom.* Vol. 1.(New York: J. J. Augustin, 1938), 159.
[122] Ibid, 194.
[123] Ibid, 156.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid, 194.

would cause a breakdown in the organization and cohesion of the kinship group. As they stood, each was absolutely dependant on the other.[126]

Conclusion

As we will see, the conditions imposed upon African slaves in Brazil uniquely countered the binding social structures that comprised their society in Africa. The interaction between the established social models of the African slaves and the parameters of Brazilian slavery produced a uniquely integrated African religion, which was then shaped by newly forming social identities.

[126] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

Slave Life in Brazil

The idea of syncretism takes as its starting point the interaction between multiple cultures. But if we are to regard syncretism as an historical process of change, then it is necessary to identify and examine the circumstances of that interaction. Contact alone does not solely determine the product of the syncretic process. Specifically, I maintain that the nature and forms of Brazilian Candombles would not have been the same without the institution of slavery. The enslavement of the varied African peoples engendered certain changes in social and ethnic identity which were integral in formulating the variants of Candomble identified earlier. These changes will be discussed later; this chapter focuses on the differing social relationships slaves found themselves in, relationships that would later shape their perception of themselves and their place in the context of Brazilian society.

The Slave Trade

Although the bulk of slaves comprising Brazil's economy between the 17th and 19th centuries, initially the Portuguese had enslaved the indigenous Indian population.[127] Indian slavery was eventually abandoned because of its varying difficulties. Amerindians, unlike African slaves, had the advantage of being enslaved in their own element. Brazil was their home, and they knew the backcountry far better than their oppressors.[128] In addition, European invaders had brought with them diseases previously unknown to the Indian population. Epidemics swept through slave populations,

[127] Boris Fausto. *A Concise History of Brazil* (New York: Cambrigde Univerisity Press, 1999), 17.
[128] Ibid.

specifically during 1562 and 1563.[129] A few years later, the push for African slaves began. The number of slaves imported from Africa depended largely on the economy, so fluctuations occur between the 16th and 19th centuries.[130] Early on in the slave trade, the Mina coast was the main source of slaves, and later efforts were expanded south to Angola and the Congo.[131] During the 18th century Angolans became the majority of slaves brought into Brazil, numbering around 70 percent of all slaves during that century.[132] A little later, during the 18th and 19th centuries, both the Fon and Yoruba peoples were brought to Brazil in large quantities.[133] Overall, it is said that roughly 4 million African slaves were brought into Brazil between the 16th and 19th centuries.[134]

Intra-Slave Relationships

The process of enslavement was a shocking and demoralizing ordeal. It was not uncommon for villages to be raided for slavers unable to meet their quotas, but often slaves were sold by their own communities.[135] Common criminals, village troublemakers, or those in debt would be sold into slavery.[136] A system of slavery was already established in Africa long before the arrival of European adventurers; its nature and size were different than European notions of slavery.[137] African slaves were more or less servants of their masters, retaining their individual identities and remaining human

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[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid, 18.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Patric Giesler, "Conceptualizing Religion in Highly Syncretistic Fields", 119-120.
[134] Boris Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 18.
[135] Katie M. de Queirós Mattoso. *To Be a Slave in Brazil: 1550-1888* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 19.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid, 15.

beings instead of property only.[138] Often times slaves were incorporated into the family as an equal, and children born to slaves were born free.[139] In contrast to the European application, slavery was not a major economic enterprise in Africa. Only after contact with European slave traders did African kingdoms begin to actively pursue the venture of acquiring "captives" for the specific purpose of selling them into slavery.[140]

Thus, what had before been merely a change in social status and possible relocation to another village now became a traumatizing trip to an unknown country. Slaves often had to be marched to ports along the coast, and then were forced to await the arrival of ships, sometimes for months at a time. The arrival of the ships meant only that the slaves now faced a grueling journey across the Atlantic. Upon their disembarkation, they were immediately glossed over in an attempt to best present them as suitable products.[141] All in all, the process was scarring to say the least, and slaves arriving in an unknown country organized under a completely foreign model must have been desperately searching for an anchor.

In order to survive in this new world, a slave had to be socialized into his new role.[142] Whether or not he accepted that role determined his ultimate fate, and there are numerous examples both of slaves resisting in many ways, and also assimilating. This socialization came from two sources: the slave owner, and the slave community itself. The former will be discussed later, but let us first deal with the slave community. It was a common practice, in fact a prudent one, for slave owners to mix slaves from different

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid, 29.
[142] Ibid, 90.

ethnic groups in order to discourage rebellion.[143] Logic of the time dictated that slaves, unable to communicate or socialize with their fellow slaves, would be much less likely to resist or organize. In fact, further mechanisms were implemented to exacerbate tribal rivalries. Often, overseers would assign easier work to members of a certain tribe and assign harder work to another tribe, playing each side off the other.[144]

Ultimately though, new slaves were confronted with a heterogeneous group, and relationships were often barred by linguistic or religious barriers.[145] As we have seen among the Fon and Yoruba, kinship ties were essential to an individual's identity within the larger society, and this was true throughout much of Africa.[146] But slaves, thrust into a diverse group consisting mostly of other men, had no family ties to fall back on and anchor themselves in this new environment. Creating new families was also a difficult endeavor. Marriage was looked down upon by most slave owners.[147] Plantations also encountered problems with sexual promiscuity.[148] In most cases, women were outnumbered by men, and would maintain multiple relationships.[149] Often times when owners sought to arrange marriages to deter promiscuity, slave women would poison their new husbands with medicinal herbs obtained from their local "witch doctor."[150]

Promiscuity also meant that new kinship ties could often not be established. Many African societies' kinship structures, such as the Yoruba and Fon tribes, are patrilineal; when a father could not be identified, claim to a descent group was

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid, 91.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Gilberto Freyre. *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (New York: Borzoi Books, 1966), 456.
[148] Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 61.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

interrupted or lost.[151] In general, slave families were discouraged by slave owners.[152] Adult male Africans were cheaper to buy and easier to put to work than children.[153] In addition, slaves themselves may have been reluctant to create families. It wasn't until the late 19th century that legislation was passed to prohibit the separation of slave families. Before that time, owners could split up families as they saw fit.[154]

In addition, religious differences were a serious problem. Religion was an agent of social organization in many African societies. It determined one's place not only in the society, but the universe, and affected almost all aspects of daily life.[155] These differences often led to ethnic exclusivity amongst slaves, and certain African confraternities only included members of one ethnic group or another until the 19th century.[156] Slave communities did achieve levels of solidarity in many instances, and perpetuated their African social structures and customs.

Yet, in many cases, slave communities only constituted one part of a slave's new identity. If a slave proved himself to be loyal and skilled, he would be placed as an overseer over other workers, often in the field.[157] Such a promotion had its advantages, as well as its drawbacks. Affiliating oneself with either the slave community or the master had its repercussions with both.

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and Slaves,* 456.
[153] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil,* 110.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid, 17.
[156] Ibid, 128-129.
[157] Ibid, 89.

Slave-Master Relationships

The relationship that a slave maintained with his master depended on numerous factors. Loyalty and obedience were important, but location and the work a slave was assigned to also factored into that relationship. Rural slave owners, depending on the size of their farms, generally had more contact with their slaves than urban slave owners.[158] Slaves rarely left the sugar and coffee plantations, except perhaps to deliver messages for their masters or to sell what extra produce they could grow themselves.[159] They were generally isolated from the greater population of slaves, confined to the slave community of the farm. They may have encountered other slaves of the same ethnicity or language group, but such was not always the case, due to the heterogeneous composition created by the slave owner.[160] As such, they may have had less solidarity with their fellow slaves than urban slaves.

On smaller farms, African slaves may have come to know their owners well and enjoy moderate incorporation into the family.[161] Smaller farms also meant a smaller number of slaves, which reduced the reinforcement of African customs and values.[162] This was the case to a greater degree with those slaves that worked close to the house or in the family home itself. Wet nurses were often chosen from among a family's slaves to tend to a newborn child, engendering a stronger bond between owner and slave.[163]

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[158] Ibid, 108.
[159] Ibid, 121.
[160] Ibid, 90.
[161] Ibid, 118.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Mieko Nishida. *Slavery and Identity: Ethnicity, Gender, and Race in Salvador, Brazil, 1808-1888* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 19.

In contrast to rural slaves, those that lived in the urban areas and port cities enjoyed a greater autonomy from their owners.[164] Many slaves were hired out to earn income for their masters rather than perform household chores.[165] Skilled artisans who had been trained in Africa could ply their trade amongst the markets of Bahia or Recife. Many were only required to provide a set amount per day to their master, and so had the opportunity to save money in the hopes that one day they could buy back their freedom.[166] This meant that slaves had the ability to move with more freedom around the city, and regain some sense of dignity. It also allowed the contact of Africans slaves with members of their own ethnicity.[167] Travelers remarked on the "politeness of blacks", referring to members of the same ethnicity gesturing to and greeting each other as they passed in the streets.[168] Major port cities were also constantly receiving shipments of slaves from Africa, and so in a sense these urban slaves had constantly reinforced contact with their homelands.[169]

Slaves were also used in the mining of gold and diamonds in the back country of Brazil.[170] These too had a chance at buying back their freedom, and at times shared a closer relationship with their masters.[171] In fact it was considerably in the master's self-interest to maintain good relationships with his slaves. Most gold and diamond miners were only interested in procuring a quick profit and retiring, and so were less strict with their slaves.[172] Many miners attempted to increase their profits by evading the

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[164] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil*, 96.
[165] Boris Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 27.
[166] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil*, 96.
[167] Mieko Nishida, *Slavery and Identity*, 52.
[168] Ibid, 36.
[169] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil*, 128.
[170] Ibid, 94
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid, 119.

government's tax collectors. In so doing, slaves were often taken in as partners in these schemes, and could potentially report their master to later be set free for their service to the government.[173] As with urban slaves rented out for profit, slaves working in the mines were often required to produce only a set amount per day, and could acquire their own savings beyond that.[174]

Whether slaves were set to work on plantations, mines, or various skilled occupations in the cities, they were always faced with the balance of relationships. Gaining the slave owner's favor meant sacrificing the respect and acceptance of other slaves, while resisting could mean a harder life for the slave. It was a delicate balance, requiring tact and sometimes deception. Yet, in most cases the slave had no choice. His role was now dictated by a society that was alien to him. His only chance for mobility and possible manumission, besides escape or suicide, was to learn, obey, and maneuver within the confines of the parameters set down by his masters.

African-born Slaves and Creoles

There was a moderately constant flow of African slaves pouring into Brazil between the 16th and 19th centuries, and although slave families were discouraged, children were an inevitable outcome. Whether it was the illegitimate children of slave women by the slave owner himself, or the children of slave couples, *creoles* represented a unique compilation of European expectations and African values and upbringing. Whereas African born slaves could conceive of freedom and what life had been like in Africa before their enslavement, *creole* children only knew the plantation or port city

[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid, 94

they had been born into. If the African slave felt his identity challenged and his allegiances torn, it must have been even greater for the *creole*. Relations between Africans and *creole*s were often tense, and such was the lot of the *creole,* for he was a child of both cultures, and yet was a member of neither.T[175]

For the most part, *creole* children were parented by the plantation community as a whole.[176] Many were illegitimate, either owing parentage to an unknown slave or an ashamed slave owner. Without a father, many *creole* children adopted the white slave owner as their patriarchal model, while their own slave mother raised them for the most part.[177] *Creole* slave children were usually not put to work until roughly age eight, and so in their early years roamed the plantation, often playing with the children of the slave owner.[178] By day they played amongst the fields and received affectionate touches from the ladies of the house. But at night they returned to the slave quarters to participate in the customs and rituals still celebrated by many slave communities.[179] Being raised amongst a heterogeneous group of Africans and Portuguese, *creole* children also gained a superior grasp of Portuguese while at the same time losing touch with their African roots, and at times had to decide whether or not to maintain the ties to those roots.[180]

*Creole*s were not completely privileged though. *Creole* children were expected to learn faster and better than African born slaves.[181] Considered largely to be completely barbaric and primitive, African slaves were seen as needing education in almost all areas of life. In contrast, the *creole*, having white blood, was expected to learn in their

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[175] Ibid, 92
[176] Ibid, 111.
[177] Ibid, 112.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid, 98.
[181] Ibid, 92.

childhood what African slaves needed a lifetime to learn.[182] And although *creole* children began life identifying with the European lifestyle personified by the white slave owner, they were still slaves. Once they were old enough to work, they were placed either in an apprenticeship with an older slave to learn a specific trade, or were placed in the fields.[183]

It would be almost impossible to generalize the reactions of children in this situation, but we may say that whether or not they maintained their allegiance to the master or found solidarity with their fellow slaves depended on their level of attachment to their owner and also the job they were assigned to. Slaves moved into the house to serve the owner's family personally could well be seen as maintaining their identification with the slave owner. While slaves moved into the field may have been more inclined to resist, escape, or establish their African identity to a greater degree.

In addition to these circumstances and conditions, other factors must be taken into account. Slaves may have been treated as the lowest position in life, mere property to their owners, but such was not the case in Africa. A slave could conceivably come from any status, and so within ethnic groups there were factors determining relationships and the reinforcement of social ties. Slaves may have encountered only other slaves of the same social status as they were in Africa, but there were also African chiefs and kings, respected leaders of communities.[184] The famous story of Chico-Rei, an African king who was enslaved with members of his family and freed every member of his tribe, is a striking example of the power of a former leader in slave communities.[185]

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[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid, 112-113.
[184] Ibid, 19.
[185] Ibid, 87.

Conclusion

Whites were not the only slave owners. Any race could own slaves: white, mixed-blood, or remarkably even slaves themselves.[186] It would seem this fact would have blurred the class distinctions between Africans and Portuguese, and settled slavery as a universal institution that anyone could participate in; this was not the case. Slave owners were almost always associated with the white class, and "whiteness" became identified more with power and superiority than skin color.[187]

Historically speaking, the events that occurred during the course of Brazil's use of slavery are varied and cover much more than just slave relations. Yet, African tribes were brought to Brazil for that express purpose: slavery. It is the origin of their existence in Brazil, and as such informs their experiences and the experiences of their descendants. As we will see, the relationships they formed were integral in shaping a range of novel collective identities. These identities were then reflected in the varied syncretic forms of Brazilian Candomble.

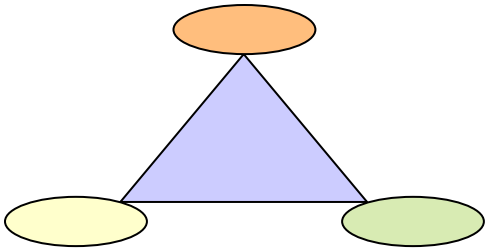
[186] Ibid, 115.
[187] Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

Slave social identities reflected in the Candombles

We have seen that the African slaves brought to Brazil experienced a wide array of social settings and relationships. Because there were so many possible influences on the slaves and their descendents, making any exhaustive categorization of their responses is a much larger task than can be covered here. But a broader analysis can be made of prominent social identities that arose out of their experiences. Slaves had three major sources of influence from which these new identities drew their ideas, principles, and structures: their own African heritage, the cultures of fellow African slaves, and the new cultural forms encountered in Brazil. Many of the same factors that determined the various relationships a slave entered into also determined the degree to which he/she formed one of these new identities.

As was previously mentioned, the complexity of experience bars any definitive representation of identities and responses. For my purpose here, however, I believe it is helpful to conceptualize these identities in much the same way that Patric Giesler presents the variants of Candomble; namely, as a continuum with gradationally varied instances.[188] The difference here is that the Candomble variant model is a descending scale with fuzzy sets identified along the scale, while my model can be thought of as a triangle. The three points represent the Amerindian, Portuguese-Brazilian, and African influences.



[188] Patric Giesler, "Conceptualizing Religion in Highly Syncretic Fields, 143.

Because of colonization, the Amerindian influence is greatly decreased, though still present, and as such must be taken into account; however, much of my discussion will focus on the African/Brazilian exchange. This allows for the recognition of diversity in the experiences of the slaves and their descendants as well as their reactions, as I do not presume to provide an analysis that contains all possible identities. It must also be remembered that my focus here is only one section of that triangle; the changing identities of the African slaves and their descendants and their reflection in the variants of Candomble.

I divide the subsequent two sections into emerging African identities, and the identities resulting from African/Brazilian interaction and assimilation. The first outlines the breakdown of identity for African-born slaves and the reshaped African identities that resulted from it. The second discusses the varying degrees to which both African-born slaves and their descendants integrated their African heritages into the framework of the culture they found themselves in.

African Identity

As we have seen, a majority of African religions were thoroughly interwoven into their particular social structures, tying together politics, kinship, and social norms.[189] So, as a result of the fragmentation of many ethnic groups and families, religion could not stand unchanged in Brazil. Slaves arrived in Brazil without their families, without their social organizations, and so to a certain extent lost their identity within the masses. This was true especially as far as Brazilian society was concerned. The slave was an item, a

[189] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil,* 17.

piece of property, or if he should be in transit, simply cargo.[190] Internally, he had lost all points of reference for identity. Ripped from his family, his village, his continent even, the slave was also treated externally as cattle.[191] But even at the very first stages of enslavement, particularly the trip across the Atlantic, new social ties were being made. Slaves had a term for fellow slaves of the same ship, a sign of mutual hardships endured and friendships formed; *malembo*.[192] It was the first sign of solidarity amongst slaves, and should two shipmates be lucky enough to end up in the same location, bonds became stronger.[193] Unfortunately, many slaves were sold off separately; at times separating them from the intermediary friends they had made during the trip.

But however alien this new society may have been to the African slave, he was not alone. However different his fellow slaves may have been, the new slave had few avenues of support, and was forced to make a choice. The new "African identity" that arose from slave solidarity has two primary examples: slaves in port cities and those slaves sold onto plantations. Each situation presented distinct difficulties, and solidarity formed in different ways, but the resulting collective identities are similar in form.

The slave sold to the coffee or sugar plantation faced new problems of socialization. We have seen how the composition of the slave community was at times a barrier to group solidarity. Not only did the slave face different languages, customs, and religions, but had become isolated from his own. Cut off from his clan, tribe, and places of worship, the slave had no anchor on which to rest his beliefs or his place in the world. He was forced to choose assimilation or refusal, revolt, suicide, or escape. Assimilation

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[190] Ibid, 87.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid, 86.
[193] Ibid.

did not necessarily imply assimilation into the white Portuguese society, although it was an option. There also existed assimilation into the new amalgamation of African customs and religions that had formed in the slave community. But this new collective African identity had to take on a new form; religion had to transform.

The most influential African religions had two main foundations: ancestor worship, and nature spirit worship, deities tied to specific geographic locations.[194] Obviously, slavery barred access to both by removing ethnic groups from their homelands, and by separating kinship groups. A slave may still be a son or daughter of their particular *orixa* or *vodoun*, but unless they were a priest or priestess of that cult, formal worship was lost to them.[195] For Bantu slaves, the Angola/Congo *naçāo* specifically, ancestor worship was a component as well, but in addition, Bantu slaves could no longer worship their nature deities. Removed from their homeland, they were as well removed from these spirits, and as such broke down to a greater degree allowing more syncretic elements to enter and mix, such as the *caboclo* spirits.[196]

With neither homeland nor kinship groups to unite them, slave communities were forced to compromise, consolidate, and ultimately identify with the new group they made for themselves. This is an especially interesting point, as much focus has been given to Catholic/African syncretism in regard to Brazilian Candomble. Some scholars discredit the syncretic description of Candomble, citing that Catholicism and Candomble are separate belief systems, coexisting but not mixing.[197] But just as important was the intra-African syncretism that had to occur in order to solidify these slave communities, and not

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[194] Ibid, 126. Specifically, this refers to the three major groupings examined as sources of the Candombles: the Yoruba, Fon, and Angola/Congo *naçãos.*
[195] Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil,* 62.
[196] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil*, 126.
[197] Ibid.

only amongst differing tribes, but even the consolidation that occurred amongst the pantheons of the Yoruba and Fon specifically.[198] We have seen how the Yoruba *orixas* and Fon *vodouns* and *tohwiyo* were specific to kinship groups, and official pantheons were non-existent.[199] But as foundational structures were destroyed due to enslavement and tribal numbers could not be gathered in sizes necessary for the specialization originally found in Africa, consolidation was unavoidable.[200] Thus, the solidarity of the group required a consolidation of customs and religious beliefs, and identification was, in many cases, shifted from a slave's kinship group or clan to the slave community itself; identity was no longer tribal, but African.

Slaves living in the major cities of Brazil underwent a slightly different process of re-socialization. Due to their increased contact with their own ethnic groups, greater homogeneity could be maintained within customs and religious forms. But the same shift in identity occurred. It is true that many slave associations formed that were exclusive according to ethnicity, however, restrictions had begun slackening by the 18th century, and by the early 19th century most ethnic distinctions had lost all meaning.[201] The same intra-African consolidations were also occurring, de-constructing specialized cults and joining all deities under one roof.[202] Slaves in urban areas had the advantage of receiving an influx of slaves from Africa, hence constantly reestablishing ties to their heritage. But this did not negate the process of re-identification.

In both instances, there was a shift in identification, from an individual's tribe or ethnicity, to a larger collective identity encompassing the diversity of African people's

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[198] Ibid, 127.
[199] George Brandon. *Santeria from Africa to the New World*, 14-15.
[200] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil,* 126.
[201] Ibid, 129.
[202] Ibid, 127.

enslaved in Brazil. It cannot be said that this was always the case, as there were black associations that retained their ethnic homogeneity.[203] But as was mentioned, those ethnic distinctions dissolved over time. If we look to the more purely African Candombles, specifically the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles, we can see that indeed their syncretic elements do not derive from a single ethnic group. Moreover, I argue that elements and ideas within these less syncretic forms of Candomble reflect this consolidated African identity that arose during slavery. This collective African identity manifests itself in two ways; the individual, internal identification of the initiates, and the external, collective identification of the Candomble as a community.

One of the central elements of the Jêjê-Nagô Candombles variants is the identification of one's personal *orixa*.[204] Each person is said to have a latent relationship with a particular deity, in this instance, a Yoruba-derived *orixa*. The "head" of the person must be united with his or her own personal *orixa* in order to reach their full potential in life, achieve their destiny, and so forth.[205] It is, in a sense, a discovery of one's true nature, and I argue, reclamation of one's lost African identity. An initiate who has identified their *orixa* with the help of a diviner becomes a "child" of that *orixa*.[206] Whereas original *orixa* and *vodoun* worship in Africa was determined by patrilineal descent, it is reconstituted here as a spiritual kinship. *Orixas* are discovered within a person's natural personality, and in this sense it is almost as if initiates were separated from Africa and its gods and have been found again. This is the internal identification with the African collective identity.

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[203] Ibid, 129.
[204] Patric Giesler, "Conceptualizing Religion in Highly Syncretic Fields", 408-409.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid, 421.

In addition to the individual connection and acceptance of the African identity, there is also the establishment of the collective African identity. One of the central examples of this is the *entoto*, along with "staff of Oranmiyan" which rests atop it.[207] The staff, which is usually represented by a central column in the *terreiro*, or central building, is a reference to the mythological pole which rests at the center of the world in Africa. The *entoto* resting beneath is the concentrated spiritual energy of the entire Candomble community.[208] It is considered to be both a link to the earth itself and to Africa.[209] In this way then, the community as a whole has both a physical and symbolic connection to Africa. They call the gods from Africa, and in a sense are recreating Africa in their Candomble community. As Roger Bastide said, "The *candomble* is more than a mystic sect; it is a genuine bit of Africa transplanted."[210]

As heterogeneous groups of slaves mixed and solidified, they naturally formed a shared collective identity. Accordingly, because many of them were African-born and still retained much of their individual cultures, a new collective conscious needed to take these into account, with some influencing to a greater degree, such as the Yoruba and Fon. But because of the deconstruction of various social structures as a result of enslavement, the religious forms were reshaped to accommodate this new identification with the slave community. Yet not all slaves chose to retain their African identity in the face of assimilation into the larger Brazilian colonial society. *Creole*s were in a unique position, belonging to neither African nor Portuguese society, and so had to forge their own identity as well.

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[207] Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 68.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid, 69.
[210] Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 224.

Variable Creole Identities

Emerging *creole* identities varied to a greater degree than the consolidated African identity. This was due to the ambiguity of the *creole* slave's formative experiences, as well as the diametrically opposed cultures that informed his spiritual and psychological growth. Once again, we turn to the situations surrounding urban and rural *creole* slaves. Both encountered different types of socialization, yet both also found many of the same expectations from white owners, and tensions with African-born slaves.

Creole slaves lacked one important trait that helped to create greater solidarity amongst African-born slaves; a memory of freedom. *Creoles* slaves knew only life as a *creole* in Brazil, and as such, drew upon two forms of socialization: African and Brazilian.[211] *Creoles* often did not have stable parentage. Of 679 Brazilian-born slaves registered in Santo Antônio parish between 1808 and 1869, only 18 were registered as legitimate children. Fathers often could not be identified, or were the slave owner himself, and mothers had contact with their children to nurse and most substantially at night after the day's work was done.[212]

So what constituted the *creole* child's family? If we understand the solidarity of the slave community as a reconstitution of identity from tribal to African, then in turn we can see that the *creole* was presented with an amalgamating entity, the focus of which was communal life rather than family.[213] The slave community comprised one side of

[211] Ibid, 71.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil*, 111.

the *creole's* identity and family, while the other half was filled by the white slave owner or the chaplain.[214]

It was indeed in the slave owner's interest to win the *creole* child's affections and loyalties as early as possible. Since most were free from work until the age of eight, the *creole* child would play alongside the slave owner's white children, and if they owed parentage to the slave owner, could also receive special attention.[215] And so, the *creole* slave at times came to identify with his or her white owner as their missing father figure. Their formative years were spent balancing the influences of the white ruling class with the heterogeneous community of African slaves, who quite possibly were just as foreign to the *creole* as the Portuguese were to the African slaves. At age eight, when the child was to be put to work, they either were sent into the fields, taught a trade skill, or put to work as a domestic servant.[216] Slaves working in closer proximity to the owner and his family had a chance of assimilating to a greater degree than unskilled manual laborers. No matter what task they were assigned to, the *creole* had to make a choice, either to accept the hierarchy and social model of the white ruling class, to embrace the African slave community, or to bring the two together in the formation of a new identity.

The conditions of urban slaves obviously allowed for a greater retention of their African identity. Yet I maintain that a certain degree of assimilation was necessary and inevitable for both rural and urban slaves. True, urban slaves often had the advantage of establishing connections with their own ethnic groups, but as we have seen, their numbers were not large enough to reconstitute a self-contained and self-sustaining

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[214] Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 71.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To be a Slave in Brazil*, 112.

community.[217] The fact remains that these groups were slaves forced to work and live in a society completely foreign to them. If they did ardently maintain their African customs, they still had to adapt to the new society around them, and learn how to successfully exist within its boundaries. But for *creoles*, the task of assimilation, or partial assimilation was even easier.[218] How many generations would it take for the *creole* to find his African heritage more alien than the Brazilian society that constituted his reality? Miscegenation, not only psychological but physical as well, was a consistent phenomenon in Brazil during the colonial period.[219] There can be no doubt that the two cultures were integrating.

Slaves may not have earnestly accepted Brazilian culture, but there were advantages to partial or surface assimilation. As was mentioned, slaves were still *slaves*, and to advance in their situation they had to do so according to the parameters of the ruling society. This did not necessitate the complete abandonment of African culture, but instead the adoption of prevailing cultural forms. Acculturation was a means of attaining a better social status, more so for freed blacks, but for the slave as well.[220] And while the adoption of Catholicism and white models of behavior may not have immediately transformed the African-born slave, it was the first step.

Creoles were born into a strange mixture of consolidated African beliefs which they did not always understand, as well as European values and religions. The result is a range of *creole* identities that vary across individuals and generations, that both reflects the unique experiences and degrees of acculturation, and is reflected in the more syncretic

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[217] Ibid, 126.
[218] Ibid, 98.
[219] José Honório Rodrigues, *Brazil and Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 53.
[220] Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 68.

variants of Candomble. These identities, then, are products of historical variability as well as individual experience. Rather than a collective identity of African identification, the *creole* identities are greatly varied, and the increasingly more syncretic variants of Candomble reflect this in their differing integrations of various Amerindian spirits and Brazilian folklore. The further along the syncretic continuum we go, the more emphasis can be seen on Brazilian elements as opposed to African. It is not, as I have said, a dilution of exclusively African elements, but rather a de-emphasis. In exchange, Catholic, Amerindian, and Brazilian elements are introduced in reflection of the degree to which African identity has been integrated with or replaced by these influences.

Conclusion

A few limitations and restrictions need to be considered in conjunction with my argument. I do not contend that these unique social identities were the *sole* cause for the syncretic process that produced the Candomble variants. I do contend that they were a significant result of the conditions of Brazilian slavery and that they are a significant component in the Candombles' syncretic creation. I am *not* arguing that these unique identities *directly* and *immediately* formed the variants of Candomble that can be seen today. Instead, they were a significant agent in the syncretic process, but not the only one.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

While I have examined a portion of this subject, a majority of the material was left untouched. The social identities that Brazilian slaves formed are only a part in the larger puzzle that formed the Candomble communities. Other factors, such as urbanization, emigration, and the need for status enhancement also contributed to the Candombles we see today. Yet, it is an important part. Identity is important for any person or people, but the interplay between identity and syncretism is particularly interesting to us here. The process of re-socialization and re-identification that African slaves and *creoles* underwent was intimately tied to the syncretic process that produced the Candombles. As such, it is an excellent case for the study of syncretism as well.

Syncretism is, as I have said, an historical process of change that merges elements from distinct belief systems. It utilizes both human agency and equivalences across belief systems; it is often in response to an unanswered question, or an unsatisfactory solution to a new problem. This definition is not complete, nor is it perfect. The syncretic process is a complex process of reinterpretation and exchange, driven by many factors and producing at times unexpected results. This is precisely why instances of syncretic change must be examined within the context of their historical events. I believe this restricted definition is useful here, as it integrates patterns identified from various other source and can also be seen in this particular case.

We have seen the many different situations that both African-born slaves and *creoles* faced in Brazil. Torn from the institutions and structures that informed and shaped their identities, African-born slaves faced a new society and new life completely

alien to them. *Creoles*, on the other hand, were born between two worlds, and were unfamiliar with both Brazilian society and the remnants of Africa perpetuated by the slave communities. For the former, whose family ties were broken and whose homeland was far away, a new solution was needed. The *creoles* as well, were caught in a class all their own, neither African nor Brazilian, and so required their own culture, their own identity.

Just as my definition of syncretism is, to an extent, specific to this particular case, so too were the conditions which resulted in the syncretic process. The combination of all the factors discussed here produced unique situations resulting in the syncretic process. The breakdown of the African social institutions foundational to their religions, the two-fold socialization of *creoles*, and various degrees of cultural integration all contributed to the formation of new social identities for slaves. Yet this too, is just a part of the larger process that produced Brazilian Candomble. It must be remembered that these identities were foundational to the syncretic exchange of elements between these religions, *but* other factors led to the solidification of this new syncretic belief system into the modern Candomble communities.

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