

Training through experience: the case of the first ialorixá of the Terreiro da Nação Xambá (PE)¹

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Resumo

Este artigo é fruto da análise da trajetória formativa de Maria das Dores da Silva (1900-1939), fundadora e primeira ialorixá do Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Nação Xambá, terreiro de Candomblé localizado em Pernambuco. A pesquisa teve como objetivo analisar como o estudo sobre a formação dessa ialorixá contribui para o campo da História da Educação. Valendo-se metodologicamente da pesquisa bibliográfica, da pesquisa documental, da metodologia da História Oral e teoricamente da noção de educação não formal a partir de Gohn (2006), a pesquisa desvelou os processos formativos que compuseram a liderança religiosa de Maria Oyá, como ficou conhecida Maria das Dores da Silva, assim como revelou problemas de ser mulher, negra e praticante de religião de matriz afro-brasileira no período do Estado Novo (1937-1945), governado pelo então presidente Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954), que impediu as práticas religiosas que veneravam os orixás.

Palavras-chave

História da Educação; História da Educação no Brasil; educação não formal.

A formação pela experiência: o caso da primeira ialorixá do Terreiro da Nação Xambá (PE)

Abstract

This article is the result of an analysis of the formative trajectory of Maria das Dores da Silva (1900-1939), the founder and first Yalorixá of the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Nação Xambá, a Candomblé terreiro located in Pernambuco. Using bibliographical research, documentary research, oral history methodology and the notion of non-formal education based on Gohn (2006), the research uncovered the formative processes that made up Maria Oyá's religious leadership, as Maria das Dores da Silva came to be known, as well as revealing the problems of being a woman, black and practicing an Afro-Brazilian religion during the Estado Novo period (1937-1945), ruled by then president Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954), which prevented religious practices that venerated the orixás.

Keywords

History of Education; History of Education in Brazil; non-formal education.

¹ Text corrected with Proap Capes resource through UFPE Propg Notice 06/2022 - Institutional Notice to Support Research in Human and Social Sciences in the context of the project "The relationship between women-education and the authoritarian political regime in the Northeast of Brazil (1964-1978)". CNPq/MCTI/FNDCT Notice No.18/202.

La formación a través de la experiencia: el caso de la primera yalorixá del Terreiro da Nação Xambá (PE)

Resumen

Este artículo es el resultado del análisis de la trayectoria formativa de Maria das Dores da Silva (1930-1939), fundadora y primera yalorixá del Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Nação Xambá, terreiro de Candomblé localizado en Pernambuco. Metodológicamente utilizando la investigación bibliográfica, la investigación documental, la metodología de la historia oral y teóricamente utilizando la noción de educación no formal de Gohn (2006), la investigación develó los procesos formativos que conformaron el liderazgo religioso de Maria Oyá, como se conoció a Maria das Dores da Silva, además de revelar los problemas de ser mujer, negra y practicante de una religión afrobrasileña durante el período del Estado Novo (1937-1945), gobernado por el entonces presidente Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954), que impedía las prácticas religiosas que veneraban a los orixás.

Palabras clave

Historia de la Educación; Historia de la Educación en Brasil; educación no formal.

1 Introduction

The history of Candomblé² of the Xambá Nation, in Pernambuco-Brazil³ is intrinsically linked to the life trajectory of its first ialorixá⁴, named Maria das Dores da Silva (1900-1939), better known as Maria Oyá. This black woman played a fundamental role as a religious leader and transmitter of traditional knowledge in one of the most prominent Afro-Brazilian terreiros⁵ in the history of the state, Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Nação Xambá, also called *Ilê Axé Oyá Meguê*, located in the city of Olinda, in the state of Pernambuco. According to Campos (2013), the invocation of Santa Bárbara can be related to the religious syncretism that marks many Afro-Brazilian houses of worship, a syncretism that, according to the authors, began as an initiative to disguise cults of African origin, in order to protect and maintain religious beliefs and traditional knowledge on the part of the enslaved, but which still today exerts a strong influence on part of Afro-Brazilian religions.

It is also worth pointing out that, in this study, we understand by traditional knowledge “[...] the set of knowledge and skills related to the natural and supernatural

² According to Lima (2003, p. 17), are “[...] religious groups characterized by a system of beliefs in deities called saints or orixás and associated with the phenomenon of possession or mystical trance”.

³ Pernambuco is a state located in the Northeast region of Brazil. Its capital is the city of Recife.

⁴ Term used to name priestesses in Candomblé. Its male equivalent is “babalorixá”.

⁵ Symbolic practices, religious ceremonies and the sharing of experiences with the sacred in Candomblé have a place in what adherents usually call “terreiro” (Casali, 2016).

world, transmitted orally from generation to generation” and where “[...] there is an organic interconnection between the natural world, the supernatural and the social organization”, which implies that the “natural” and the “social” are not rigidly separated, but rather in a conceptual continuity for these communities (Diegues; Arruda, 2001, p. 50).

It should be noted that the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Xambá Nation is characterized as one of those spaces in which the natural world, the supernatural and the forms of social organization are intrinsically interrelated, being, therefore, a place where traditional knowledge transmitted orally circulates, in a movement in which we can call “non-formal education”, in which “[...] the great educator is the ‘other’, the one with whom we interact or integrate” (Gohn, 2006, p. 29). Although religious spaces are sometimes understood as places where “informal education” occurs (Gohn, 2006), we understand that in non-formal education there is intentionality, which differentiates it from informal education. In the space of the Candomblé terreiro, there is a purposeful circulation of knowledge, in which the elders initiated in religion teach the youngest. According to Gohn (2006, p. 29), learning:

[...] follow the life trajectories of groups and individuals, outside schools, in informal places, places where there are intentional interactive processes. [...] There is in non-formal education [sic] an intentionality in action, in the act of participating, learning and transmitting or exchanging knowledge.

Non-formal education aims to expand knowledge about the world in which individuals are inserted in their social relations. Its objectives are not pre-established, but are built in the interactive process, resulting in an education directed by the interests and needs of those involved. Recognizing these daily practices as eminently formative is part of a clear movement of questioning scientific rationality as the only legitimate one, which allowed and still allows bringing to light new fields of production of unexplored knowledge or that were not understood as knowledge or educational knowledge (Gohn, 2009). As Gohn points out (2009, p. 30, emphasis added):

Other dimensions of social reality, equally productive of knowledge, came to light, such as those that come from the world of the arts, from the *‘feminine world’* of women, from people's bodies, *of religions and sects*, from popular culture, from everyday learning, via non-formal education.

It was precisely in the universe of religious women of Candomblé that Maria Oyá's training opportunities were given. Even in contexts in which religious freedom was constantly threatened, as we will see, this ialorixá acted to preserve the knowledge of her religiosity and, not without reason, the formation of this woman was listed here as the object of study precisely because she was the founder of the aforementioned terreiro and brought together in her trajectory elements that bring together knowledge from a non-formal educational process. This woman established the terreiro, formed and intentionally formed several religious during an authoritarian and religiously intolerant political regime, known in Brazilian history as Estado Novo (1937-1945), characterized by censorship, a singular idea of nationalism and the centralization of power in the hands of then President Getúlio Vargas.

It is also necessary to emphasize that this research is based on a perspective of History that, in recent decades, has been considering different groups and individuals, hitherto excluded, which is reflected in studies on the trajectories of women. And as Costa, Mota and Santana (2022, p. 6) point out, “[...] the experiences and actions of these social subjects, lived and transmitted in different contexts and varied environments, foster the History of Education”. Thus, through the formative trajectory of Maria Oyá as a local religious leader, we put into perspective not only the history of the terreiro, but also the political circumstances in which this woman was inserted.

To this end, we seek to answer in this article the following problem: which elements of Maria Oyá's education can be listed through her experiences with the terreiro? The objective that guided this historical investigation was to analyze how the study on the formation of this ialorixá contributes to the field of History of Education. The problem and objective that guide this research were governed by the need to go beyond formal education institutions and to broaden the interpretative range of training spaces, especially those occupied by historically marginalized groups in Brazil, such as the group of women practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, the main responsible for keeping alive the terreiros traditions, long persecuted – and still stigmatized nowadays.

2 Methodology

Regarding the methodology, we use the methods of historical research based on the use of bibliographic research and documentary research – carried out with journals from the Digital Hemeroteca of the Brazilian National Library, with documentation contained in the collection of the terreiro itself and in the Jordão Emerenciano Public Archive, located in the city of Recife. We also use the methodology of Oral History from Alberti (2005), for whom it is configured as a research method – used in historical, anthropological and sociological studies, above all – that uses several techniques for the collection and analysis of data, focusing on apprehending and interpreting historical events from the memories and narratives of those who experienced or lived with them. With it, it is possible to perceive the ways in which the subjects participating in the research interpret the lived experience and the contexts in which they were inserted (Alberti, 2005).

Oral History is also a producer of sources, and it is possible, through the sources produced by it (interviews, for example), to investigate institutions, social movements, life trajectories and developments of certain historical facts based on the narratives of individuals, and it is also possible to cross the sources produced by the historian with documentary and bibliographic sources. Although the use of Oral History as a methodology is still the subject of intense debates in the Humanities, especially with regard to the “veracity” of oral reports, Alberti (2005, p. 19) has already pointed out that we should not consider this issue as a negative factor:

[...] the fact that the deponent distorts reality, has memory flaws or errs in his report: what matters now is to include such occurrences in a broader reflection, asking why the interviewee conceives the past in one way and not another and why and to what extent his conception differs (or not) from those of other deponents.

By agreeing with this perspective, the premise was to use the semi-structured interview technique, since it is configured as one of the main instruments of approximation between the researcher and oral reports, because, according to the proposition of Fraser and Gondin (2004, p. 139), this type of interview constitutes a “[...] form of social interaction that values the use of the privileged word, symbol and sign of human relations, through which social actors build and seek to make sense of the reality

that surrounds them”. Although following a previous script of questions, the semi-structured interview has a certain flexibility and, therefore, can promote collective interactions, in which the subjectivities of the interlocutors and their voices are heard and interpreted according to the data analysis employed by the researcher, in order to promote the sharing of memories, knowledge and experiences.

As for the choice of narrators for the research⁶, the interviews were conducted with frequent members of the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Nação Xambá and relatives of Maria Oyá, Mãe Biu and Madrinha Tila. The sample comprised a total of three participants, namely: Maria do Carmo de Oliveira, the Cacau da Xambá, current yaba of the terreiro; Hildo Leal da Rosa, historian and curator of the Severina Paraíso da Silva memorial, initiated in Candomblé; and Juvenal Ramos, nephew of Maria Oyá and frequenter of the house. In the provision of this article, we first list the formative elements that allowed the composition of Maria Oyá's religious leadership to then make contributions of this study to the History of Women's Education in Brazil.

3 Formative elements of Maria Oyá's trajectory

The history of Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Xambá Nation originates in the 1920s, when babalorixá Artur Rosendo Pereira (? – 1950) left Maceió (state of Alagoas, Brazil) due to police repression against Afro-Brazilian cults in that state with the so-called “Operation Xangô”, characterized by the invasion of terreiros, aggression against Afro-religious people and confiscation of sacred goods (Rafael, 2012). This repression of the terreiros resulted in the migration of Afro-Brazilian religious leaders to other states, such as Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco, the latter being the destination taken by Rosendo to reopen his house of worship. Guerra (2010) points out that, although it is not possible to confirm the veracity due to the scarcity of sources, the lineage of cult to the orixás of which Artur Rosendo took part is related to his stay on the Coast of Africa, where, according to the author, he learned for four years the rites that would later compose the nation⁷ Xambá in Pernambuco lands. Rosendo started many sons of saints

⁶ This research was submitted, via Plataforma Brasil, to the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE) and approved on July 12, 2022.

⁷ According to Silva (2005), the “nations” designate the cult lines in Candomblé and are commonly associated with African ethnic groups.

and, in the following decades, many of these sons became priests and priestesses in Candomblé, like Maria das Dores da Silva.

Maria das Dores da Silva, who became better known as Maria Oyá, was born in 1900, in the municipality of São Lourenço da Mata. She went to Recife at a young age, living in the neighborhood of Campo Grande, North Zone, at the time an impoverished region, far from the city center and populated by small mud huts, where she also founded her terreiro. Her experiences were important to her formation as a religious leader and can thus be summarized: the jobs she took to keep her terreiro running – notably those of midwife and washerwoman –, the period in which she began in Candomblé, as well as her political performance with the doctors and intellectuals of the time.

According to the reports contained in the interview held on August 3, 2022 with Hildo Leal da Rosa, historian and member of the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Nação Xambá, the future ialorixá worked as washerwoman as the main means of support of her house, as well as sometimes as a midwife in the face of the need for some woman at the time of midwifery. According to Hildo Leal da Rosa (2022): “[...] *from the point of view of source of income, to live, we know that she was a midwife, but I believe that she did not live from it, and she was a washerwoman. She lived on the clothes she washed*”. The trade of a washerwoman, which consists of the practice of washing clothes from other houses, in addition to your own, usually using public laundries or riverbanks. According to Monteleone (2019), payment in exchange for certain tasks, such as washing clothes, became professional throughout the nineteenth century and extended throughout the twentieth century, even though payments were scarce. Considered a female job, learned among women through observation, many accumulated functions of cleaning and sewing clothes, thus occupying many days of the week (Monteleone, 2019). Between washing clothes, putting them to dry and making the necessary sewing repairs, many took care of their own homes and, in the case of Maria Oyá, also their terreiro, which made household chores become for her the main means of subsistence.

As a midwife, the oral reports of Maria do Carmo de Oliveira (2022), an iabá from the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Xambá Nation, indicate that Maria Oyá learned to assist other women in the arts of midwifery, by observing those who exercised the same profession, a common practice in the early twentieth century, due to the small number of doctors available to the poorest women in Recife. Although she was not a

consanguineous mother or even married, the future ialorixá assumed the support of herself, her sister, Maria do Carmo Paraíso, and her children, performing such tasks.

According to Maria das Dores' nephew, Juvenal Ramos (2022), she was also considered a welcoming but determined woman who, when necessary, supported the people in her house by prescribing herbal baths to cure the ills of the soul and body, helping women with their offspring and giving them advice, thus bringing them comfort, practices that were apprehended by experience, but guided by their ancestry, which, as stated by Oliveira (2012, p. 42), is amalgamated with the African worldview and constitutes an epistemology that:

[...] because it is absolutely unique and absolutely contemporary, it shares its sign regimes with the whole world, biasing totalitarian systems, contorting linear schemes, disturbing imaginings of purity, affirming multiplicity within identity. The ancestry re-signifies the time of yesterday. Experience of the past it actualizes the present and disdains the future, for there is no future in the world of experience.

The practice of assisting other women in childbirth is one of the elements of Maria das Dores' formative trajectory that deserves conjunctural analysis, because the future ialorixá was recognized as a midwife in her community, offering her help where the government could not reach. His nephew, Juvenal Ramos (2022), also told us that, at the time of his birth, Maria das Dores – who, at the time, had already assumed the post of ialorixá – prescribed baths with herbs to be given in the shoot and threw the cowrie shells⁸ to know which orixá would rule his life.

Thus, we also noticed the recurrence of recommendations from folk medicine, since Maria das Dores, in addition to childbirth, also recommended herbal baths, observation of the designs of the orixás for the health of the newborn and other actions to care for the sprout that had just been born. In view of this, it is necessary to list that the formation of Maria Oyá is inseparable from her relationship with Candomblé, since, even in the office of midwife, the ialorixá demonstrated rigorous observation of the will of the orixá. We reinforce, therefore, that this woman needed a posture of participant and constant observation, attentive listening to the ways of being and doing within the terreiro, and skills to repeat the teachings that were intended for them by other men and women, which necessarily falls on the formative dimension of their experiences.

⁸ The cowrie shell casting is a divinatory art present in the religions of African origin and in the religions of the african diaspora, including in the Americas.

Her contact with the Candomblé of the Xambá Nation, in turn, took place in the mid-1920s, with the terreiro of Artur Rosendo, coming to the lands of Pernambuco, as already pointed out, due to the persecutions undertaken by the police against the terreiros of Alagoas. As Hildo Leal da Rosa (2022) reported to us:

Look, we know that she had contact with the Xambá in the mid-1920s, in the terreiro of Artur Rosendo [...]. About a decade later, he was already established with the terreiro here in Pernambuco [...]. I think it was [19]27 or [19]28 when she made her initiation. During this period, we know that Artur Rosendo's house was being closed by the police, that is, he was kind of on the run [quotes with his hand].

With Artur Rosendo's terreiro closed, on the grounds that he was exploring popular belief – an accusation that often fell on Afro-religious people -, Maria Oyá's initiation occurred in a discreet and disguised way, unlike what was commonly done. This initiation occurred secretly from the eyes of the police, in February 1927, in the terreiro of Artur Rosendo, located in Água Fria, a region close to the neighborhood in which Maria Oyá resided. It is not known for sure how the rapprochement between Maria Oyá and the Rosendo terreiro took place, in addition to the ialorixá residing in a nearby neighborhood –, given that, by itself, it does not explain her frequency to the house of worship of the Rosendo orixás, since there were terreiros closer to her house, in Campo Grande. However, the fact is that, already in the 1920s, Maria Oyá had been initiated into the Candomblé rites, with Artur Rosendo as babalorixá, her spiritual leader.

According to Machado (2012), the process of initiation into Candomblé can be considered as a rite of passage that aims to establish a link between the subject and their orixá and the terreiro of which they will become a member. To do so, the person must go through a time of recollection that may vary according to the terreiro, in order to establish a connection with the deities. In this process of recollection, food begins to be regulated, the individual sleeps and sits only on a straw mat, as well as dresses in white every day and quickly interacts with other children of the saint who have already undergone initiation and with other individuals who may also be going through the period of recollection, in order to keep the individual to be initiated focused on their spiritual endeavor. After the collection period and the internal ceremonies in the terreiro, a public festival is held to celebrate the birth of a new orixá child. At this party, called by the members of the Xambá Nation as “leaving iaô”, the orixá presents himself to the

community, dances and reveals his name before those present, in a ceremony that makes public the devotion of the new member from the terreiro (Machado, 2012).

However, Maria Oyá's compliance with the protection of a little more than a month was not fulfilled in the terreiro of her religious leader, as was necessary. On the contrary, Maria Oyá spent the time of recollection in her own house, in Campo Grande, having to make her own regulated food, staying away from worldly life and interacting minimally with the world outside the walls of her house, which proves to be a tactic triggered by her to continue worshipping the orixás. Thus, it can be said that the strength of axé⁹ circulated secretly and with it the first steps of Maria das Dores towards the leadership of her orixás house of worship were taken.

In a letter contained in the collection of the terreiro – whose authorship and dating are inaccurate –, it is said that, for having fulfilled her recollection far from the terreiro of her babalorixá, Maria das Dores received all the instructions of what should be done in her seclusion through the incorporation of her ruling orixá, Oyá¹⁰. According to Hildo Leal da Rosa (2022), a woman, Donatila Paraíso do Nascimento, who would later assume the position of Godmother¹¹ of Maria Oyá's terreiro, played an important role in assisting Maria Oyá during her safekeeping period. When Maria Oyá was incorporated, Donatila listened to the instructions of the orixá and transmitted them to Maria das Dores, who could not remember what had been said to her, due to the ritualistic trance. After this period of imprisonment, the traditional "saída de iaô" took place in 1927 and in secret, playing and singing quietly in order to do not alert the police, as Hildo Leal da Rosa, who had heard through oral tradition (2022), told us.

Maria Oyá, as she began to be recognized after her first steps in Candomblé, continued to worship the orixás at another address, at Rua da Mangueira, number 137, also in Campo Grande, in her own terreiro, in June 1930. According to Hildo Leal da Rosa (2022):

⁹ The word "axé" or "asé" has its origin in the Yoruba language and has the meaning "strength", "achievement" "power" and "desire for happiness".

¹⁰ Oyá, Iansã or Inhançã is a female orixá associated with winds and lightning, commander of storms and also of the spirits of the dead.

¹¹ In the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Nação Xambá, the hierarchy of the house is structured as follows: babalorixá and ialorixá, godmother and godfather. As pointed out, the babalorixá and the ialorixá are the religious leaders of the terreiro and responsible for the house rituals. The godmother and godfather are the second in the house hierarchy, assisting and advising the babalorixá and the ialorixá in the religious exercise. The other initiated members are classified into iabás, as far as women are concerned, and "ogãs", as far as men are concerned

This speed with which she is initiated and opens the terreiro – it is my opinion – I think it is something she was destined to be, because, if she were to meet certain deadlines, the normal thing, the common thing is that people open the terreiro seven years after they were initiated. She opened it, she was, I don't know, three, four years old, I don't know... three to four years old... it's because she was destined to be an ialorixá and to have her own house.

From the above report, it is possible to understand that Maria Oyá had a different learning period, made more flexible, due to the circumstances that surrounded her, that is, the impossibility of following, in the necessary time, with all the rites of Candomblé, caused Maria das Dores da Silva's initiatory paths to be shortened as a result of the persecution suffered by her babalorixá. However, the fact is that she had to learn more quickly through experience and constant observation and participation in the rites of Candomblé, as well as raising financial resources by washing clothes and giving birth to open her own house of worship, even in a context in which police repression was present. With her own open house of worship, the authorization of her religious leader, Artur Rosendo, was still necessary for Maria Oyá to assume the tasks of ialorixá of the house. Thus, Maria Oyá was presented as a priestess to the terreiro community of the city on December 13, 1932, through a ceremony of receiving the leaves, knife and sword of Oyá, her regent orixá, as well as the coronation of said orixá on the throne¹².

Although, in the 1920s, Artur Rosendo experienced police repression and was accused of exploiting popular belief, the 1930s reserved better days for them, which allowed him to hold the celebration that presented Maria Oyá as the leader of his own Candomblé house. Freed from the accusations, Rosendo was able to carry out the so-called “coronation of Oyá on the throne” – a ceremony that marked the ascension of the new ialorixá to the position of leadership of the house, according to the precepts taught by Artur Rosendo – before the curious eyes of the population of the neighborhood and with all the pomp that the moment demanded – and still demands today.

Although the oral reports did not show further details of Maria Oyá's ascension to the position of ialorixá of the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara – Xambá Nation, the periodical *O Cruzeiro* (1949) offers us some elements of the ceremony. The matter in question deals with the coronation of a consanguineous daughter of Rosendo, named Iracema. As

¹² The ceremony was conducted by Artur Rosendo whenever he granted the authority of ialorixá to an initiate. The coronation ceremony of Oyá on the throne is repeated annually in the Terreiro de Santa Bárbara da Nação – Xambá. For more on this, see Costa (2011).

happened with Iracema in the 1940s, Maria das Dores, in the 1930s, was also one of those women who received the authorization to manage her own terreiro on the dirt floor in a common house in Recife, according to the rites of her nation of Candomblé. According to the aforementioned matter, the ceremony was performed as follows:

They receive from his father the Tubemba, a small sieve. A pair of scissors, a cowrie shell bracelet, a knife, two abebé of Oxum, perfume, and a razor and a red comb are placed on this one. And to do the olôdô, the ritual initiation of the many children you will have. To cut their hair, prepare the amassi and with it wash their heads, immolate the propitiatory animals, shave their heads, give them the three butchers of the forehead, hands, chest and neck as required in the oberé. Rosendo's hands betting on your head give you 'the upper strength' – it's the duri. The sails crossed in front of him defend his heart. The sword crossed over his chest guards his ialorixá strength. The perfume drops that the old babalorixá sprinkles on him, it stills bring him more 'upper strength'. The crosses made in the palm of his hand allow to walk fast in the lesson of the game – hitting the dôlôgum. The cigarette smoke blown on her face will protect her against the arts of the pipe people, the sorcerers of the caboclo centers. It is necessary to tell everyone that she was the orixás chosen one and the small speech interspersed with strange words says it in a claudicating Portuguese. Rosendo asks everyone to be loyal to her and to obey her. There is a lot of emotion and lansã's daughter cries quietly there on the throne (*O Cruzeiro*, 1949, p. 52).

By sitting on the throne and receiving the vestments described by René Ribeiro in his article, the ialorixá are granted the tasks of initiating the “many children they will have”, immolating the animals suitable for the ceremonies and caring for their orixás. In the ceremony, her heart is defended by the candles and her strength is guarded by the sword crossed over her chest, in the same way that the perfume that Rosendo puts on her brings her the strength of those above her and the cigarette that defends her against sorcerers. There is a symbolic rite that presents to the religious community the new priestess as the one to whom the faithful owe obedience, whom their holy children must observe in their wisdom granted by the higher forces.

However, the legitimacy of the position was not only granted through the initiation and, subsequently, the coronation ceremony. This data brings us to another element of her formation, since the legitimation of her post of ialorixá was achieved, above all, through the performance of Maria Oyá before her holy children. By going through the ceremony that presented her as leader of her religious community and in the brief period that she remained in the highest hierarchical position in Candomblé religiosity – about nine years –, Maria Oyá initiated a total of 18 people in the rites of the Xambá Nation, among which can be mentioned Mãe Biu and Madrinha Tila, her

future successors, according to Hildo Leal da Rosa in an interview (2022). A small number compared to the initiations of the period after Maria Oyá, but that was enough for the ialorixá to regiment a religious community that, as we will see, guaranteed her prestige not only among her religious family, but before the intellectuals of the period.

Due to the context of constant police surveillance of the terreiros and the growing accusations that the Afro-religious would be exploiters of popular belief, as had occurred with Artur Rosendo, Maria Oyá had to deal with the legal apparatus of the state of Pernambuco to make her terreiro work and, more than that, make her terreiro one of the few Candomblé houses to be protected by the so-called “Mental Hygiene Service” (SHM)¹³. The relationship between SHM and terreiros was initially due to the interest of psychiatrists in understanding the mediumistic trance and considering such religious practices as centers that produce collective hysteria and mental disorder (Silva, 2018). In the eyes of the technicians, the adherents of Afro-Brazilian religiosities, generically called “low spiritualism” at the time, seemed to be more likely to develop mental degenerations precisely because they were adherents of these “laboratories of collective hysteria”, as the technicians called it.

There is also a concern to determine the profile of this population, described as mestizo and incautious, as well as to emphasize the agency of the SHM in restricting and inspecting houses of worship. It was in the meantime that, in agreement with the Secretariat of Public Security (SSP) of Pernambuco, the SHM began to subordinate the operation of the terreiros, seeking to regulate the practice of “spiritism”. It is necessary to emphasize that this scenario is closely related to the development of modern science, which, especially between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, created “[...] policies that justified the erasure of the black body to the extent that this same body can be read under the shadows of its history, under the darkness of policies that made it invisible” (Santos; Dantas Junior; Zoboli 2020, p. 14). Through biology, under the assumptions of eminently eugenic policies, the black body, considered inferior, even though “invisible” was, at the same time, stigmatized and exoticified. It can also be seen that not only his body, but the elements that crossed and still cross the black subject – and here we emphasize Afro-Brazilian

¹³ Regarding SHM, it was created in 1932 by psychiatrist Ulysses Pernambucano de Mello (1892- 1943). One of the functions of this body was to regulate the activities of Afro-Brazilian cults in Pernambuco.

religiosity, such as Candomblé – were also persecuted, as well as suffered from policies that aimed to silence and erase them. Regarding the terreiros, in particular, with the intention of better developing the practices of knowledge and control of these houses of worship, Ulysses Pernambucano, psychiatrist and creator of the SHM, among other scholars of the aforementioned body, proposed a conciliatory solution to the rulers of Pernambuco: Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners should undergo mental examinations. The police, on the other hand, would be committed to allowing the operation of the registered terreiros, upon prior approval and scheduling of their activities (Miranda, 2006). Prior to the SHM's actions, all terreiros and their leaders, as happened with Rosendo in the 1920s, could be subjected to police raids, the closing of their doors and the criminalization of their patrons due to the belief that they would be exploiting naïve and bona fide people, practicing witchcraft and disturbing public order.

The SHM changed this scenario to the extent that, by studying and demystifying the phenomenon of mediumistic trance, it enabled the functioning and fostered the prestige of certain Candomblé houses in Pernambuco, as well as acting as a state agency responsible for entering the daily life of the terreiros to get to know and control them (Silva, 2018). Maria Oyá's terreiro was one of the houses that began to operate with the approval of the SHM. To this end, Maria Oyá made a petition, asking for permission to make her house of worship work with the SHM scholars. In the oral reports and with the documentary research, it was not possible to obtain information about the possible mental examinations that Maria Oyá went through, however, as we pointed out earlier, it was the practice of the SHM to carry out clinical examinations on the religious leaders, so that, then, the ordinances could be issued releasing the operation of the spiritist center or the terreiro, which denotes the possibility that the ialorixá had to undergo these examinations.

The exams involved psychiatric analyses of the babalorixás and ialorixás, a test to determine mental age and intelligence quotient (IQ), for example. In addition, the statutes and regulations of the so-called "African sects" and the list of days of operation were to be delivered, as well as the commitment not to practice medicine illegally and to allow the visit of SHM auxiliaries on the premises of the terreiros (Masiero, 2002; Silva, 2018). Psychiatric examinations, in particular, aimed to reveal "[...] the possible

tendencies to mental illness of the leader, babalorixá or medium, since they are almost always mestizo or black" (Masiero, 2002), which slips into the eugenicist character of many active in the SHM (Masiero, 2002).

According to Menezes (2005), this intricate alliance between the SHM technicians and the Afro-Brazilian religious leaders in Recife reduced the persecution suffered by the registered terreiros, thus allowing the daily life of these orixás houses of worship to continue with relative tranquility, even though the oppression forms already mentioned in this article remained on the agenda. It is also important to highlight the complex relationship of exchange of benefits between members of the SHM and leaders of the terreiros, since, on the one hand, the houses of worship could operate with open doors and without the violent interference of the police, while the members of the SHM could enter and interfere in the daily life of the terreiro. carrying out his studies on mediumistic trance and the supposed propensity of Afro-religious people to collective hysteria and mental disorders.

In addition to the formative elements that permeate the entire experience of the initiation period, such as learning the food that should be ingested, the clothes that should be used, the public festivities that one may or may not attend, the treatment with the orixás, the songs, the dances, the offerings and the orixás invocations, as well as the moral and ethical values of Candomblé – such as respect for the elderly, solidarity and care for the religious community – the receipt of authorization from the orixás and legitimacy on the part of her babalorixá, the physical maintenance of her house of worship and the guarantee of the resources that would allow the permanence of its operation, it was necessary for Maria Oyá to form a complex and intricate network with the SHM technicians. Submitting to mental examinations and petitioning for her terreiro axé to remain circulating with open doors, which required knowledge of financial organization and the functioning of part of the state machine and tactics activation arranged in the midst of daily dealing with bureaucracy, racism and religious prejudice that plagued her experience as a black woman and religious leader of Candomblé.

4 The doors of the Estado Novo are opened, the doors of the Terreiro de Maria Oyá are closed

The repression of Afro-Brazilian cults did not begin with the Estado Novo, since, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it could already be seen that Afro-religious people were considered sometimes as incautious, sometimes as exploiters of public credulity, and, with this, the terreiros were subjected to all kinds of repressive actions, ranging from the restriction of their religious activities to the closing of their doors. With the arrival of then-President Getúlio Vargas to power in 1930, however, these practices of repression intensified, since a project to build the National State was more strongly outlined, which had as one of its premises the modernization of Brazil. Seen as spaces that went back to the backwardness of the country and that greatly hindered the nation's advance towards modernity, the terreiros and their frequenters began to have the attentive eyes of the state apparatus, which, in turn, began to regulate their activities more systematically. In Pernambuco, the relationship between the aforementioned SHM and Afro-religious leaders can be considered one of the greatest expressions of this scenario.

Under the action of the promoter of law and Brazilian politician Agamenon Magalhães (1893-1952), appointed as intervenor in Pernambuco by Getúlio Vargas in 1937, a campaign was started that drew the supporters of the terreiros as opponents of the order and progress that was wanted for the nation. Inspired by these ideals and based on the Brazilian Penal Code of 1890 and, later, on the Penal Code of 1940, Etelvino Lins (1908-1980), then secretary of public security of Agamenon Magalhães – and fervent adherent of Catholicism –, between 1937 and 1945, issued Ordinance No. 193, on January 22, 1938, which prohibited the operation of terreiros, also based on the 1937 Constitution, granted by Vargas, which advocated freedom of expression for all Brazilians, but which repressed the “vicious practices” that could corrupt and degrade people.

The secretary, together with the police body of the city of Recife, built a scenario of terror and persecution that greatly affected the terreiros and their supporters. As can be seen in the text of the ordinance, even if freedom and justice were present in

constitutional acts, religious exercise was subordinated to the requirements of "public order" and "good customs".

It resolves, in the interest of the public good, to prohibit [*sic*] the operation throughout the territory of the State, the African sects and the offices of hermetic sciences [*sic*], of any kind, and the licenses issued are revoked. The Investigation and Capture Police Station and the Censorship Commission of Public Amusement Houses ensure that this prohibition is strictly observed, otherwise seizing all the objects of these practices, which should be destined to the Museum of the [*sic*] Hygiene [*sic*] Mental Directorate of the Psychopaths Assistance Service [*sic*] (Pernambuco, 1938).

Once the practices considered vicious were identified, namely the speculation of public credulity and the incitement of psychic powers, the appropriate authorities were assigned the duty to combat them. Thus, the exploiters of public credulity – long identified as Afro-religious – should be repressed on the grounds that they were committing crimes against public health and morals. Thus, the so-called African sects were included in this list of activities, so the licenses issued by the SHM were revoked and the terreiros were prohibited from operating, under penalty of having their doors forcibly closed by the authorities and their religious objects seized. Lima (2017) also argues that, even in the absence of flagrant acts, systematic searches were carried out by the police at the house of the accused/ investigated, in order to find materials that could incriminate him before the authorities. Thus, the adherents lived under a climate of denunciation, police investigations, apprehensions and arrests; as if the persecutions suffered were not enough, they were still exposed in the pages of the newspapers. The so-called "Pernambuco xangô"¹⁴, according to Lima (2017, p. 63):

[...] It was already famous throughout Brazil as one of the most original forms of African religion and witness to the 'roots of Brazilianness', under the intervention of Agamenon, should now exist only in folklore books or museum pieces, it should remain in the past.

It can be pointed out that all the action of Afro-religious leaders throughout the 1930s, like Maria Oyá, to legitimize their religious activities and regularize their terreiros was swept away during the government of Agamenon Magalhães. However, even in the face of the state ordinance issued by Etelvino Lins and the fact that the context of

¹⁴ The term "xangô" is a generic nomenclature referring to the space where the religious ceremonies of Candomblé take place, in territories such as Alagoas and Pernambuco. It is also the orixá of thunder and lightning.

repression described here was already present, some terreiros sought ways to resist. Some houses tried to be more discreet, decreeing the absence of music and singing so as not to draw the attention of the police. Other houses, however, whether by faith in the orixás or because they believed that this scenario of terror would not reach them, remained in operation as usual. In his report on the closure of Maria Oyá's house, Hildo Leal da Rosa (2022) pointed out that the terreiro da ialorixá was one of those houses that remained open as a sign of resistance for their faith:

The moment she went through the closing of the house, she did not get exasperated, she did not run away, she did not hide, she did not hide any objects, because it was known that the police were coming, sooner or later. Campo Grande had many terreiros and the news was already known: 'They shut down so-and-so's house; they took everything. They closed the house of what's-his-name; they took everything'. It is so much that the husband who will later marry Mãe Tila, her initiate of the saint too, came to her and said: 'Dona Maria, let's hide things because the police will take everything', and she replied: 'I owe nothing to the police. I won't hide anything'.

Maria Oyá was known for her strength and determination in favor of her religion. The reports of the closure of other houses in Candomblé reached the ears of the religious leader, who, believing she had no accounts to settle with the police, decided not to hide the religious apparatuses that could be seized in police searches and, consequently, to incriminate her as provided for in the aforementioned state ordinance. However, as their initiates intuited, the police arrived at the terreiro in May 1938, a few months after Etelvino Lins' ordinance. In the police diligence, several materials that made up the religiosity of Maria Oyá's house were taken. The ialorixá was also taken in the police car to the nearest police station, located in the Espinheiro neighborhood, also in the city of Recife, on the grounds that it was not complying with the provisions of the ordinance that prohibited the operation of the so-called African sects. At the police station, Maria Oyá was subjected to interrogations and then released.

Maria Oyá, either for fear of being detained again or for having been dismayed by her "arrest", decided to permanently interrupt the activities of her house. As her nephew Juvenal Ramos (2022) maintains in his account, the detention "[...] caused her tremendous disgust, because she believed so much in the orixás and they did not defend her from this obstacle and took her prisoner". The ialorixá believed that her orixá, Oyá, would defend her from the police force and protect her house from pillage and closure. Seeing herself in a situation that publicly embarrassed her, it can be inferred that Maria

Oyá shivered her relationship with the sacred, being led to a state that is currently interpreted by the members of the Terreiro da Nação Xambá as depressive and that subsequently led to her death in 1939. With her house closed and her subsequent death, both the consanguineous family and the religious family of Maria Oyá dispersed around the city, according to the iabá Maria do Carmo de Oliveira (2022).

It can be seen, therefore, that the ialorixá was the symbolic agent that maintained the family unit, whether it was of blood or religious. With the intervention of the police in the activities of the terreiro, what happened was a rupture of this link that found its main foundation in the sacred. The family, who had their place of residence in the Campo Grande neighborhood, dispersed through the city of Recife and only met again with the agency of their successors, Mãe Biu and Madrinha Tila, for the reopening of the terreiro, in the 1950s. Maria Oyá saw her relationship with the sacred being deeply interrupted by the repression of Afro-religious people. By closing the doors of their houses of worship, the State perpetuated the history of violence against the terreiro peoples, at the same time that it brought down all the movement of work and struggle that characters like Maria Oyá undertook in favor of their religion.

However, here is the example of an ialorixá, who forged in the rites of Candomblé and trained in the arts of resistance, acted motivated by her faith in the orixás. When possible, he woven alliances with agents of the state instrument, subverted roles socially attributed to women and assumed leadership positions in a world that sometimes criminalized its existence. When investigating the formation of Maria Oyá as religious leadership, we take this character “[...] as access routes for the apprehension of broader issues and/or contexts” (Avelar, 2007, p. 52). That is, through its trajectory, we can understand elements of the history of the time in which it lived, intimately articulating the life of the ialorixá with its social context, as pointed out by Avelar (2007, p. 52) and, as the author pointed out, take individual paths as “[...] representative of structuring trends of an era that introduces the issue of the representativeness of the individual in the explanation of certain historical relations and processes”. In this sense, Maria Oyá can be understood not only as a representative of the religious family she built, but of an entire collective of black women from Terreiro who triggered different tactics to keep their knowledge and faith alive.

5 Conclusion

In her constitution as a religious leader, Maria Oyá had to learn, through experience, different trades – such as that of midwife and washerwoman – to support herself and her house of worship. In the initiation to Candomblé, she built a deep knowledge about the different orixá, contemplating what pleases them and their forms of worship, which involves knowing which rituals and offerings are appropriate and required for each orixá. From a very young age, by observation and above all by experience, she learned to communicate with the sacred, to teach the various rites that make up the religious system of the Xambá Nation to its initiates, as well as to develop skills as a leader and conductor of ceremonies and rituals within her terreiro. His position as ialorixá also demanded the improvement of his communication and orientation skills of the faithful who sought advice in times of spiritual distress, using different divinatory methods, such as playing the cowrie shells. He also had to build an influential role with SHM technicians and file a political petition with doctors and scholars of his time.

Without losing sight of the picture of oppression perpetuated against the religious of Candomblé, especially during the period of Getúlio Vargas' government, we consider that Maria Oyá's formative trajectory was the result of a concrete historical practice and the social relations that took place in her daily life, which leads us to understand that the formative paths followed by her provide us with important contributions to the field of the Women's Education History in Brazil. The study that resulted in this article shows that personal life and religious life are coexistent in the case of ialorixás, since, in religions of African origin, religious life is inseparable from practical life. The natural world, the supernatural and the social organization are closely related in the terreiro, so we point out that it is in the space of the house of worship that the ialorixá eats, drinks, worships, experiences and lives, in short, it is constituted. Thus, it is clear that the decision on the transcendental plane is not related to academic/ formal training as in other religions, since, to be an ialorixá, it was not necessary to be educated or attend formal educational institutions, as occurs in other religions. On the contrary, Maria Oyá's trajectory demonstrates that the will arising from the sacred transcends the decision of men and it was precisely to the visible practices of how this woman was formed based on this ancestral designation that we dedicate ourselves in this study.

Thus, we can affirm that this woman was provoked to have administrative skills, that she managed financial and human resources in favor of the objective of maintaining the house and its axé, skills that were only developed with the daily treatment with the terreiro and that show her tactical ability to occupy the spaces and the gaps that opened up in her religious exercise. Through social interactions with other individuals, directly or indirectly involved with their religious universe, Maria Oyá's formative trajectory allows us to point out paths that demonstrate the intentional circulation of knowledge within the terreiro, an intentionality that constitutes it as a non-formal educational space, considering that the construction of knowledge by the individuals who are in it occurs from different sources, including the experiences they have lived.

We reinforce, with this, that Maria Oyá needed a posture of participant and constant observation, attentive listening to the ways of being and doing within the terreiro and skills to repeat the teachings that were destined for her, which necessarily falls on the formative dimension of her experience. In this sense, the History of Education that we deal with here is not established by legal frameworks and formal education, but approaches the experiences, the practices of these so-called "ordinary" women, the contexts in which they were inserted, the entanglements that gave an original shape to their lives (Dominicé, 2014). We show, therefore, that the History of Education can also be different from the History of Schooling. Therefore, we reinforce the importance of the research, which sought to contribute to studies on the History of Education, as we also deal with the formation of Candomblé religious leaders, the limitations imposed on them in their performance as leaders, as well as the barriers overcome by these female subjects and which necessarily fall within the notion of being a black woman who adheres to Candomblé contemporaneously.

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Responsible publisher: Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho

Ad hoc reviewers: Ilka Miglio de Mesquita, Simone Varela and Angelita Leite

Translator: Stéfane Rodrigues Colman da Silva

How to cite this article (ABNT):

SILVA, Tayanne Adrian Santana Morais da; BARRETO, Raylane Andreza Dias Navarro.

Training through experience: the case of the first ialorixá

of the Terreiro da Nação Xambá (PE). *Educ. Form.*, Fortaleza, v. 8, e11423, 2023.

Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/e11423>



Received on July 13, 2023.

Accepted on October 17, 2023.

Published on November 25, 2023.