

Candomblé and the Academic's Tools: Religious Expertise and the Binds of Recognition in Brazil

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ABSTRACT Latin American state efforts to recognize ethnically and racially marked populations have focused on knowledge and expertise. This article argues that this form of state recognition does not only call on subaltern groups to present themselves in a frame of expertise. It also pushes such groups to position themselves and their social and political struggles in a matrix based on expertise and knowledge. In the context of early 2000s Brazil, the drive to recognition led activists from the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé to reimagine the religion's practitioners' long-term engagements with scholars and scholarly depictions of the religion as a form of epistemological exploitation that had resulted in public misrecognition of the true source of knowledge on the religion: Candomblé practitioners. To remedy this situation, the activists called on Candomblé practitioners to appropriate the "academic's tools," the modes of representation by which scholarly expertise and knowledge were performed and recognized by the general public and state officials. This strategy transformed religious structures of expertise and knowledge in ways that established a new, politically efficacious epistemological grounding for Candomblé practitioners' calls for recognition. But it also further marginalized temples with limited connections or access to scholars and higher education. [*politics of recognition, politics of expertise, state recognition, Candomblé religion, Brazil*]

RESUMEN Esfuerzos estatales Latinoamericanos para reconocer poblaciones marcadas étnica y racialmente se han enfocado en conocimiento y pericia. Este ensayo argumenta que esta forma de reconocimiento del estado no sólo llama a grupos subalternos a presentarse así mismos en un marco de pericia, sino también presiona a tales grupos a posicionarse así mismos y sus luchas sociales y políticas en una matriz basada en pericia y conocimiento. En el contexto de Brasil de principios de los 2000s, el impulso al reconocimiento llevó a los activistas de la religión Afrobrasileña Candomblé a reimaginar los compromisos de largo plazo de los practicantes de la religión con investigadores y representaciones académicas de la religión como una forma de explotación epistemológica que había resultado en desreconocimiento público de la verdadera fuente de conocimiento de la religión: los practicantes de Candomblé. Para remediar esta situación, los activistas llamaron a los practicantes de Candomblé a apropiarse de las "herramientas académicas," los modos de representación por los cuales la pericia y el conocimiento investigativo se llevaron a cabo y fueron reconocidos por el público en general y los funcionarios del estado. Esta estrategia transformó las estructuras religiosas de pericia y conocimiento en formas que establecieron una nueva base epistemológica eficaz políticamente para los llamamientos por reconocimiento de los practicantes de

Candomblé. Pero también marginó los templos con limitadas conexiones o acceso a investigadores y a educación superior. [*política de reconocimiento, política de pericia, reconocimiento estatal, religión Candomblé, Brasil*]

RESUMO Os esforços estatais na América Latina para reconhecer populações marcadas étnica e racialmente têm-se concentrado em conhecimento e expertise. Este ensaio argumenta que essa forma de reconhecimento estatal não apenas exige que grupos subalternos se apresentem em um arcabouço de expertise, como também pressiona tais grupos a se posicionarem a si mesmos e a suas lutas sociais e políticas numa matriz baseada em expertise e conhecimento. No contexto do início dos anos 2000, a busca do reconhecimento levou ativistas do candomblé, uma religião afro-brasileira, a reimaginar os antigos envolvimento dos praticantes religiosos com acadêmicos e descrições acadêmicos da religião como uma forma de exploração epistemológica que resultou no reconhecimento equivocado da verdadeira fonte de conhecimento na religião, a saber, os praticantes do candomblé. Para remediar essa situação, ativistas convocaram praticantes do candomblé a se apropriar das “ferramentas dos acadêmicos,” os modos de representação por meio dos quais o conhecimento e a expertise acadêmicos eram desempenhados e reconhecidos pelo grande público e por agentes estatais. Essa estratégia transformou estruturas religiosas de expertise e conhecimento de maneiras que estabeleceram uma nova base epistemológica politicamente eficaz para as demandas de praticantes do candomblé por reconhecimento. Porém, também contribuíram para marginalizar ainda mais terreiros com limitados conexões ou acessos a acadêmicos e ao ensino superior. [*políticas de reconhecimento, políticas de expertise, reconhecimento estatal, Candomblé, Brasil*]

State recognition comes in various forms. Across Latin America, state efforts to expand the social and political inclusion of historically marginalized ethnically and racially marked populations have taken the revalorization of subaltern knowledge and expertise as a central concern. In most Latin American contexts, such efforts have focused on Indigenous populations, but in Brazil they have been championed as a remedy to Afro-Brazilian marginalization. This was particularly the case in the first decade of the 2000s, when the Brazilian federal government’s efforts to counter the legacy of racial democracy—a nationally hegemonic ideology that celebrated cultural and racial miscegenation yet obscured deep racial inequalities and discrimination—were focused on repositioning Afro-Brazilian populations and cultural traditions in established frameworks of knowledge and expertise. From the recognition of the knowledge of Capoeira *mestres* (masters of the Afro-Brazilian martial art Capoeira) and *baianas de acarajé* (street vendors of the Afro-Brazilian *acarajé* bean fritter) as immaterial cultural patrimony to the mandating of the teaching of Afro-Brazilian culture and history in the nation’s public schools, the federal government’s efforts to revalorize Afro-Brazilian cultural contributions have had a distinctly epistemological bent.

This turn to recognizing subaltern knowledge and expertise in Latin America was the result of several developments, including the adoption of multicultural constitutions across the continent in the 1990s, many of them developed in dialogue with Indigenous and Afro-descendent movements (Van Cott 2000; Yashar 2005); a push by transnational and multilateral organizations like the World Bank and the

International Development Bank toward the development of policies for racial and ethnic inclusion (Hale 2005; Walsh 2012); and the incorporation of Afro-descendent and Indigenous activists and agendas into governing structures (Escobar 2010; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Walsh 2012). The enthusiasm for these efforts at knowledge-based recognition has been wide-ranging. Scholars, activists, government officials, and representatives of transnational and multilateral organizations have extolled knowledge-based recognition’s potential to mitigate the effects of neoliberal policies on Indigenous and Afro-descendent populations, opening new avenues for these groups to claim and benefit from state recognition and decolonizing dominant epistemological and political structures (see Capone and Morais 2015; Escobar 2010; Walsh 2012). On closer examination, however, these new avenues for recognition have been riddled with similar problems as other forms of state recognition. They have resulted in the incorporation and co-optation of subaltern political projects into neoliberal governing agendas, the forced accommodation of subaltern structures of knowledge and expertise to dominant frames, and the further exclusion of groups and cultural expressions that for one reason or other cannot fit within the new parameters of state recognition (Escobar 2010; Gustafson 2009; Walsh 2012).

The problematic character of these new forms of state recognition shows that neither the focus on expertise and knowledge nor the effort to include Indigenous and Afro-descendent activists in their construction has resolved the double binds that are produced by state recognition. The

anthropological scholarship on state recognition of subaltern groups has variously demonstrated that such projects produce irresolvable double binds, in Gregory Bateson's (1972) sense (Cattellino 2010; Povinelli 2002). On one level, the very effort to make difference recognizable to dominant state frameworks poses an irresolvable dilemma as it requires subaltern groups to present themselves as both radically different from dominant society and compatible with the frames of difference set by it (Povinelli 2002). On another level, the concern with inclusion, rather than with the transformation of dominant societal frameworks that undergird state recognition, stands in conflict with and directly inhibits efforts to develop a politics of redistribution or identity that emerge from a standpoint of radical difference (Escobar 2010; Hale 2004; Postero 2017). The turn to recognizing subaltern expertise and knowledge does not unravel these double binds. Instead, it anchors them in a new frame.

This form of multiculturalism poses demands on subaltern groups that differ distinctly from those posed by multiculturalism focused on culture. Most obviously, it shifts the emphasis of recognition from cultural performance to conceptual structures that tend to be understood as distinct from and prior to the performance of culture. In parallel, it privileges a different kind of subject as the target of recognition. Instead of members of cultural groups or carriers and guardians of culture, it focuses on cultural experts. On a broader level, this frame of recognition positions the targets of recognition in a different structure of reference: that of expertise. This structure of reference, in turn, brings along a different set of comparisons and expectations both for the formulation of cultural knowledge and its presentation. In this configuration, it is other forms of expertise already recognized by state institutions and representatives that come to be positioned as the benchmark against which those forms vying for recognition are assessed. The state concern with recognizing subaltern forms of expertise and knowledge thus presents these populations with a particular set of representational challenges. It requires them to adapt their self-representations to a frame of expertise and to bring these efforts into comparative alignment with other forms of expertise recognized by state institutions in their particular context. These frames, however, rarely correspond to those of the forms aiming for recognition. Herein lies the double bind of this form of state recognition: the demand for performing subaltern expertise and knowledge in a frame that at once calls on subaltern groups to foreground their difference and expects them to fit this difference within extant models of the character, focus, and scope of such expertise.

This article examines how the concern with recognizing Afro-Brazilian expertise and knowledge in Brazilian state multiculturalism informed and conditioned Afro-Brazilian religious activists' efforts at recognition in the early 2000s. Specifically, it traces how such activists' efforts to resolve the double binds posed by the turn to knowledge-based recognition reconfigured and rearticulated extant structures and

conceptions of religious expertise and knowledge as well as the religion's and its practitioners' place in a broader Brazilian economy of expertise and knowledge. As the anthropological scholarship on state recognition has demonstrated, the political and social effects of such projects are not limited to failure at recognition, state co-optation of subaltern agendas, and the further entrenchment of extant exclusions. Instead, subaltern efforts to respond to the impossible demands of state recognition have produced new forms of social and political life. Typically, these new forms have involved adaptations of subaltern politics and culture to dominant models (Gustafson 2009; McNeal 2011; Sansi 2007). However, they have also produced new and unexpected articulations of community identity and political engagement (French 2009; Hankins 2014). On occasion, they have helped pave the way for more radical politics (Gustafson 2009; Postero 2007).

Drawing on an analysis of efforts by practitioner-activists from the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé to render their religious expertise and knowledge legible to state frames of recognition in Salvador, Brazil, in the early 2000s, I argue that state recognition focused on expertise and knowledge does not only call on subaltern groups to present themselves in a frame of expertise.¹ It also pushes such groups to position themselves and their social and political struggles in a matrix of expertise and knowledge. The effects of this can be profound. In Brazil in the early 2000s, the drive to recognition led Candomblé activists to reimagine the religion's practitioners' long-term engagements with scholars and scholarly depictions of the religion in a framework of epistemological exploitation and public misrecognition of the true source of knowledge on the religion: Candomblé practitioners. The continuing societal marginalization of Candomblé practitioners, they argued, was a product of the general public's and the state's inability and unwillingness to recognize the religion's practitioners' expertise and knowledge. To remedy this situation, the activists called on Candomblé practitioners to appropriate the "academic's tools," the modes of representation by which scholarly expertise and knowledge were performed and recognized by the general public and state officials. As I demonstrate, this strategy fundamentally transformed religious structures of expertise and knowledge in ways that simultaneously reproduced the logics of epistemological exclusion that activists had identified for prior modes of state recognition and established a new, politically efficacious epistemological grounding for Candomblé practitioners' calls for recognition. The cumulative effect of these transformations was not so much a critique of the impossibility of state recognition but a further, albeit critical, solidification of these activists' analyses of the societal import of knowledge-based recognition.

Candomblé, especially as it is practiced in Salvador, has been the focus of state celebrations of Brazil's African cultural heritage since the 1930s (Johnson 2002; Morais 2014; Romo 2010; Sansi 2007, 2016; Santos 2005).² This state

attention on Candomblé has, however, not resulted in robust recognition. Although a few of Salvador's most famous Candomblé temples have received designations as national and state patrimony since the 1980s, and several others have been included in efforts to fund the renovation of temple structures and the organization of social programs through them, the majority of the city's more than 1,400 temple communities have benefited from only limited state support or recognition (Parés 2012). Indeed, most of these temples continue to find themselves in precarious legal and financial conditions, with little recourse to state aid or benefits. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, increasing numbers of the city's Candomblé practitioners began to call for a change to this situation. Motivated partly by concerns over an explosion in evangelical Christian intolerance toward Candomblé and partly by the emergence of new state institutions that appeared to promise new avenues of recognition, the city became a hub of Candomblé activist mobilization for expanded state recognition. The state focus on recognizing expertise and knowledge resonated well with these religious-activist efforts. In addition to intersecting directly with religious notions of Candomblé practice as a path toward religious expertise, it presented a new and politically productive analysis of Candomblé practitioners' long-term relationships with scholars and scholarly expertise.

CANDOMBLÉ AND AFRO-BRAZILIAN KNOWLEDGE IN MULTICULTURAL BRAZIL

Brazil's democratization in the mid-1980s brought forth a radical transformation in state and public discussions on and approaches to race and racial inequalities. In contrast to the military dictatorship's promotion of an ideology of racial democracy—which claimed that racial prejudice and inequalities did not exist in Brazil due to the racially mixed character of its population—the newly democratic state adopted a multicultural constitution and recognized racial inequalities as a prevalent and urgent problem (Htun 2004; Telles 2004). The following decades saw the development of many government initiatives aimed at mitigating these inequalities, from the creation of a plethora of government institutions tasked with recognizing and supporting Afro-Brazilian culture and populations to the creation of race- and ethnicity-based quota systems in the public sector (Capone and Morais 2015; Htun 2004; Morais 2014; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Santos 2005; Telles 2004). In the first decade of the 2000s, these initiatives were complemented by economic programs developed by the administrations of presidents Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva and Dilma Rousseff that significantly reduced poverty in Brazil, especially among Afro-Brazilian populations. As a result, the opportunities available to at least some Afro-Brazilians for social mobility and citizenship expanded significantly.

One of the key areas in which government efforts to remedy racial inequalities focused in the early 2000s was knowledge. In addition to implementing a form of race- and income-based affirmative action in all of the nation's

public universities and providing funding for low-income Afro-Brazilian students pursuing degrees at private universities, Brazil's federal government mandated the teaching of Afro-Brazilian culture and history in primary and secondary schools in 2003 (Law 10.639/03). The impact of these efforts on the politics of knowledge and expertise in Brazil was further supplemented by government programs concerned with recognizing Afro-Brazilian cultural practices and traditions as forms of knowledge. Ranging from the designation of the knowledge of Afro-Brazilian cultural experts as immaterial cultural patrimony to the provision of grants to community and activist groups invested in teaching and preserving Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, these programs contributed to the construction of particular kinds of impoverished Afro-Brazilians as valued reservoirs of and experts in cultural knowledge.³ The frames of expertise applied to different groups of Afro-Brazilians varied. For example, the recognition of Capoeira *mestres* as experts effectively relied on a model grounded in Asian martial arts, while the recognition of *baianas de acarajé* depended on comparisons to other kinds of culinary experts.

These initiatives were primarily developed and managed by secretariats and foundations that were founded in the 1990s and 2000s at federal, state, and municipal levels of government to realize the multicultural mandate of Brazil's 1988 constitution in respect to Afro-Brazilian culture and populations.⁴ As the primary government institutions responsible for putting Brazil's multicultural state agenda of expanding Afro-Brazilian inclusion in the nation into practice, they constituted key sites for the “postlegislative negotiation” (French 2009) of its direction and character. In this task, they were strongly influenced by black-movement understandings of Brazil's racial inequalities.⁵ As part of a broader black-movement “capture of the state,” many of the people appointed to head these new government institutions were black-movement activists (Htun 2004; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Parés 2012; Telles 2004). In consequence, the form of multiculturalism that emerged from the programs and policies developed and managed by these institutions reflected concerns over recognizing the cultural and racial distinctness of Afro-Brazilian culture, on one hand, and fostering a publicly visible and racially conscious mode of Afro-Brazilian political and societal engagement, on the other hand.

The frames of recognition that these multicultural efforts at expanding Afro-Brazilian inclusion have relied on have, however, been highly restricted. As a result, as Christen Smith (2016) and John Collins (2015) have shown for Salvador, the efforts have tended to exacerbate the societal exclusion of Afro-Brazilians rather than expand recognition and inclusion. For example, Collins (2015) describes how the transformation of the city's historical center into a UNESCO cultural heritage site was predicated on the eviction of all neighborhood residents except those able to accommodate themselves to a highly constrained frame of black culture. Smith (2016), in turn, argues that the turn

to state multiculturalism in Brazil was predicated on the violent policing and marginalization of those who did not fit the image of Afro-Brazilianness celebrated in this new imaginary, a predicament arguably of the majority of the nation's Afro-Brazilian population.

One of the few population groups that have appeared to fit within the confines of Afro-Brazilianness valorized by these multicultural efforts is Salvador's Candomblé practitioners. For example, in the early 2000s one of the larger projects presented by Salvador's newly created municipal secretariat for Afro-Brazilian affairs, SEMUR, aimed to fund the renovation of close to sixty Candomblé temples. In addition, various government agencies have invested in efforts to recognize the religion's best-known temples as cultural heritage sites (Morais 2014; Parés 2012; Sansi 2007, 2016). It is also telling that Candomblé mythology and practices have been afforded a central place in pedagogical materials that seek to respond to the demands of the law that requires the teaching of Afro-Brazilian culture and history in Brazilian schools. However, upon closer examination, and quite ironically, these government efforts to recognize Candomblé have tended to reproduce racial-democratic conceptualizations of the religion's value to Brazilian society as the religion and its practitioners have continued to be celebrated in them primarily for their ability to preserve a traditional form of African religiosity across generations (Morais 2014; see also Parés 2012; Sansi 2007).⁶ Tellingly, the temples that have benefited the most from these new forms of recognition have tended to be the ones that were already celebrated in the racial-democratic frame.

For the Candomblé activists I came to know during my fieldwork in Salvador in the early 2000s, such government efforts to recognize their religion presented a challenge. On one hand, the activists acknowledged the ways these efforts mediated their access to resources like funding for temple renovations and exemptions on property taxes as well as broader societal appreciation and inclusion. On the other hand, they were highly critical of the frames of recognition such efforts involved. In this context, the growing government investment in recognizing Afro-Brazilian expertise and knowledge appeared as a potential solution. It suggested a means to shift the frame by which Candomblé practitioners were recognized by government officials from that of passive guardians of cultural heritage to that of more active and self-sufficient experts on the religion. For this to happen, however, Candomblé practitioners had to reframe their knowledge of the religion as a form of Afro-Brazilian expertise that fit within the frames of recognition deployed by government institutions and programs. Accomplishing this required that they establish themselves as experts in the religion in ways that were recognizable to these institutions and programs, and demonstrate that this expertise was exemplary of the kinds of Afro-Brazilian expertise that had been marginalized by dominant societal structures.

CANDOMBLÉ AND THE PROBLEM OF SCHOLARLY MEDIATION

A framework of expertise was by no means foreign to Candomblé practitioners in Salvador in the early 2000s. The religion has been a central focus of social scientific research on and representation of Afro-Brazilian religion and culture since the late nineteenth century (Capone 1999; Castillo 2008; Dantas 1988; Matory 2005; Silva 2000). As a result, Candomblé practitioners have been both intimately familiar with and variously involved in the construction of scholarly depictions of the religion for well over a century. They have acted as informants and interviewees as well as interlocutors, consultants, spiritual guides, and mentors to scholars. They have also taken more active roles in the production of this scholarship. In addition to recruiting scholars to study their temples, practitioners have participated in conferences organized by academics, organized conferences of their own, founded research centers on Afro-Brazilian culture and religion, and authored numerous monographs and essay collections (Capone 1999; Castillo 2008; V. Lima [1997] 2003; Silva 1995).⁷ This web of scholar-practitioner engagements has built a particular structure of expertise in which scholars and scholarly expertise have variously mediated practitioners' access to government recognition. The temples that have been the most studied by scholars have also been the most successful at obtaining government funding and titling as sites of cultural heritage (Parés 2012; Sansi 2016).

Candomblé practitioners have generally viewed this dynamic in positive terms (Castillo 2008; Silva 2000). They have seen great value in the ways that scholars have contributed to improving Candomblé's public image and individual temples' access to government recognition and resources, so they have actively encouraged scholarly attention and involvement in their temple communities. They have invited scholars to attend ceremonies and on occasion to join temple communities in positions of public support and benefaction (Capone 1999; Castillo 2008; Silva 2000). At the best-known and most-studied temples, these strategies are reflected by the significant presence of scholars at ceremonies and in the temples' ritual hierarchies.

At the same time, criticism of the unequal distribution of the benefits of scholarly attention among Candomblé temples has been widespread among practitioners. The scholarly focus on a few famous temples, many practitioners have argued, has disproportionately privileged individual temples and their religious practices and effectively established these temples as paragons of authentically African Candomblé in ways that have discredited the religious practices of other temples (Capone 1999). These criticisms have frequently intersected with religiously grounded critiques of scholars' unauthorized and inappropriate exposition and circulation of religious knowledge (Braga 1998; Castillo 2008; Silva 2000). As practitioners have argued, the religion's practice is grounded in and reflects a set of foundational secrets, *fundamentos*. These secrets are to be shared only with

practitioners of sufficient rank in the religion's hierarchical order and via extended participation in temple practice. Scholarly accounts, by their very character, violate these epistemological maxims: they are authored by researchers who lack the ritual status required to speak about religious secrets, they are shared indiscriminately with all audiences, and they are text- rather than experience-based.

In the early 2000s, however, such practitioner analyses of scholarship were increasingly eclipsed by a new activist critique of scholars that emphasized the negative effects of scholarly representation and mediation for Candomblé practitioners as a whole. When conducting fieldwork in Salvador at the time, I repeatedly heard Candomblé activists argue that scholarly mediation was a primary cause for Candomblé practitioners' continued marginalization from the public and political spheres. Some activists, like Nil, a practitioner in his early twenties and a student in sociology at the Catholic University of Salvador, whom I first met at a Candomblé activist event in October 2009, charged that scholarly accounts of Candomblé had constituted the religion's practitioners as objects of study in need of outside representation instead of subjects capable of speaking for themselves. Others, like Makota Valdina, a well-known and highly respected practitioner-activist, whom I heard speak on the topic of scholars at a Candomblé activist conference organized in May 2009, lambasted scholars for the ways their accounts of Candomblé appropriated Candomblé practitioners' religious expertise: "[Academics] come, they drink from the source. And so, the source is good. They drink it all. Then they create a concept, they create a theory. And so, what we say no longer matters. Each one of them has their doctoral dissertations . . . their positions in society, and we are always left to our own devices."⁸

At their core, these critical views on scholarship were grounded in a reframing of the relationship between Candomblé practitioners and scholars as one of competing regimes of expertise. Candomblé practitioners, as critics like Makota Valdina and Nil argued, were experts in their own right. Thus, when scholars claimed the mantle of experts on the religion, they not only marginalized the contributions of Candomblé practitioners to the research but also, and even more seriously, discredited practitioners' expertise. This, in turn, contributed to a marginalization of Candomblé practitioners from both social prestige and conversations with government officials responsible for the distribution of resources. From this perspective, the continuing social marginalization of Candomblé practitioners was inherently linked to a societal misrecognition of the location of expertise on the religion. The prestige and social positions that scholars of Candomblé enjoyed were misplaced. The rightful recipients were the religion's practitioners.

It was no coincidence that these activists' analyses of the politics of expertise on Candomblé reflected the black-movement-informed analyses of Brazilian social and racial inequalities that undergirded government efforts to recognize Afro-Brazilian expertise and knowledge in the early 2000s.

Discussions on the various government efforts to expand Afro-Brazilian access to higher education were widespread in Salvador and, as such, were common knowledge among Candomblé practitioners. Moreover, many of the practitioners who were involved in Candomblé activism held close ties to black-movement activists who worked for or with government agencies concerned with Afro-Brazilian recognition. Many of them had also participated in black-movement groups for decades, and some had worked directly with government agencies responsible for the development and realization of programs aimed at better recognizing and including the nation's Afro-Brazilian populations.⁹

However, if these activists' critiques of scholarship on Candomblé intersected with black-movement-informed government identifications of the politics of expertise as a site where social and racial inequalities were produced and reproduced, their vision of how it could be transformed emerged from the religion's practitioners' long history of close engagement with scholars and scholarly modes of representation. For them, the solution, as Makota Valdina provocatively put it at the activist conference held in May 2009, was for Candomblé practitioners to "appropriate the tools of the academic." This was not a new idea. Indeed, the earliest example of a Candomblé practitioner's characterization in the public sphere as an expert was the result of the participation of the acclaimed Candomblé priestess Mãe Aninha, leader of the prestigious Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, in the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress that was organized in Salvador in 1937. However, the government interest in reconfiguring the politics of Afro-Brazilian expertise and knowledge positioned such engagements with scholarly modes of representation in new ways. In this context, these engagements came to appear as a means to achieve not only public acclaim but also government recognition and resources.

CANDOMBLÉ CONFERENCES AS POLITICAL STRATEGY

The Candomblé activist conference where Makota Valdina spoke, and in which she approvingly participated, exemplified what she termed "the appropriation of the tools of the academic." The event, which was organized by the Terreiro do Cobre, not only sought to provide Candomblé practitioners with a forum for discussing strategies for productively engaging different kinds of media but also was designed to showcase the religion's practitioners' ability to speak from expert locations more commonly occupied by scholars.¹⁰ The event itself was structured as a conference in ways that closely paralleled academic conferences. The first half of the event was composed of a panel (*mesa*) of three invited speakers, Ebomi Cidália, Mãe Valnizia, and Mãe Jaciara, all well-known and high-ranking Candomblé practitioners, who spoke on their experiences with different media forms from behind a panel table (Figure 1). The second half of the event was dedicated to a Q&A in which the event's audience of practitioners, black-movement activists, and journalists could engage the panelists in conversation. The Q&A also



FIGURE 1. *Terreiro do Cobre conference, May 2009. (Photograph by author). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]*

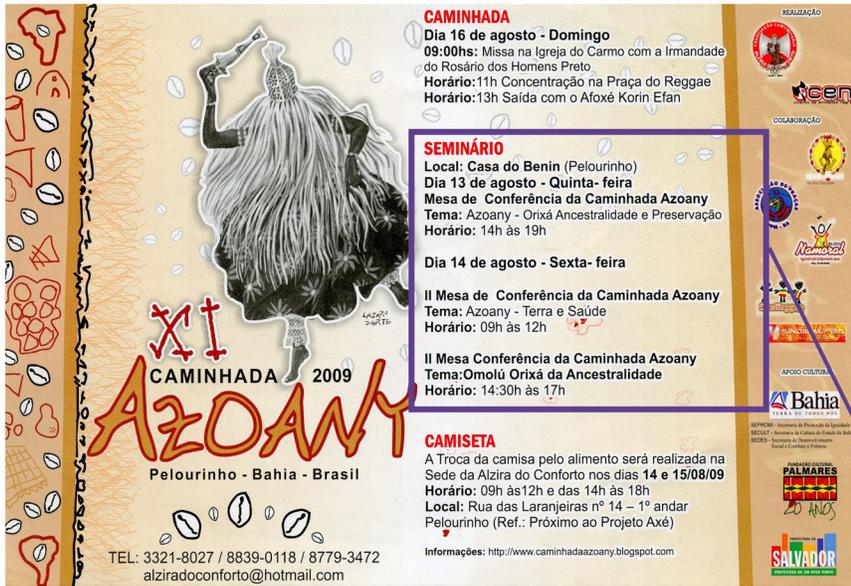
provided participants like Makota Valdina, who was not one of the invited panelists, with opportunities to claim positions of expertise. In addition, the event doubled as the public launch (*lançamento*) of a book authored by the organizing temple's leader, Mãe Valnázia de Ayrá. As Mãe Valnázia, who also was one of the event's three panelists, argued during her presentation, the book was her effort to bring a Candomblé perspective to a field more commonly occupied by scholars. Her aim was to show that Candomblé practitioners too could write books. They did not need scholars to do this for them.

This conference was not a singular event in Salvador in the early 2000s. Rather, Candomblé conferences exploded into the city's public realm at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Such events, typically called *seminários*, were organized by a broad range of practitioners with varying aims.¹¹ The largest of these conferences were associated with marches that aimed to raise public awareness about the widespread evangelical Christian attacks against Candomblé. Others were stand-alone events concerned with enabling practitioners to discuss such religiously salient themes as best strategies for engaging dominant and alternative media forms, and the import of ancestry and feminine forces in Candomblé. In addition, Candomblé conferences complemented occasions like temple anniversaries and the launches of books authored by practitioners. One conference I attended in 2009, an event organized by the activist collective *Coletivo de Entidades Negras* (CEN), boasted more than three hundred participants.¹² Most conferences, however, had between thirty and one hundred participants. The length of the events also varied. Some, like the conference organized by the *Terreiro do Cobre*, consisted of one panel only,

while others involved multiple panels and stretched over two days.

The groundwork for these events had been laid by Candomblé practitioners' long history of participation in and organization of conferences on Afro-Brazilian culture and religions, a history that stretches back to the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress, held in Salvador in 1937.¹³ As a result of this history of conference organizing, Candomblé practitioners in the early 2000s had an acute sense of the conference form's potential for reconfiguring the politics of expertise on the religion. Indeed, one of the aims of the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress had been to present Candomblé practitioners' as religious experts alongside scholars (Romo 2010). However, it was not until the end of the first decade of the 2000s that the organization of these events came to be adopted more overtly as a strategy for state recognition.

At their core, the Candomblé conferences of the early 2000s sought to position Candomblé practitioners' conversations with each other and with government representatives within a framework of expertise. The conference organized by the *Terreiro do Cobre*, with its explicit focus on practitioners' efforts to speak in the public sphere, provided an especially clear example of this. At others, this agenda was more overtly emphasized at the events themselves by organizers' descriptions of their intended purpose. A seminar organized in August 2009 in connection with an annual march dedicated to the Candomblé *orixá* deity Azoany (also known as Omolu) provides an example. In fliers for the event (Figure 2), the seminar was presented as a forum for discussing the topics of ancestry, earth, and health, all qualities associated with Azoany. However, at the event



Conference Program:

August 13th - Thursday
 Panel: Azoany - Orixá, Ancestrality and Preservation

August 14th - Friday
 Panel I: Azoany - Earth and Health
 Panel II: Omolú, Orixá of Ancestrality

FIGURE 2. Program for Azoany conference, August 2009. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

itself, Albino Apolinário, the event’s main organizer and coordinator, emphasized that the overall motivation for the seminar and the panel discussions that took place was to provide practitioners with a space to come together in discussion with each other and with government representatives. To facilitate these dialogues, the seminar included an “institutional panel” that featured federal senator Luiz Alberto and state senator Bira Corôa as speakers. Both of these politicians had begun their political careers as black-movement activists and were known to be sympathetic to Candomblé practitioners’ concerns. Furthermore, the event’s program included the signing of an agreement of cooperation between its organizing association, the Associação Alzira do Conforto, and the federal government’s office for Afro-Brazilian culture, the Fundação Cultural Palmares.

The widespread adoption of the conference form was not without problems, however. If the turn to a framework of expertise by Candomblé practitioners spoke directly to government interests in expanding the recognition of Afro-Brazilian expertise and knowledge, it also positioned them in a particular double bind: the recognition of Candomblé practitioners’ expertise depended not only on its fit with

established forms of expertise but also on its demonstrated difference from them. This double bind was reiterated in Candomblé activists’ own criticism of scholars and scholarly expertise.

PERFORMING RELIGIOUS EXPERTISE AT CANDOMBLÉ CONFERENCES

How Candomblé conferences differed from academic ones was of key concern to their organizers. Although the events were designed to showcase Candomblé practitioners’ expertise in a scholarly medium, the events did not aim to equate religious and academic expertise. Instead, their success depended on organizers’ and participants’ ability to distinguish between the two. Much of this was accomplished through conference organizers’ metapragmatic characterizations of the events. The conferences, as their activist organizers would emphasize, were Candomblé events. They were organized by practitioners and for practitioners. Their aim was to provide Candomblé practitioners with a forum to discuss issues of concern to them. Most importantly, they were events where religious rather than scholarly expertise commanded the greatest respect. In contrast to scholarly

conferences, the authority to speak and the manner in which participants could do so at these events was determined by Candomblé's religious hierarchy of expertise.

In Candomblé temples, authority and expertise are grounded in a rigid multitiered ritual hierarchy (V. Lima [1997] 2003). This hierarchy organizes all social interactions between Candomblé practitioners in temple contexts. It orders how practitioners prepare for and participate in rituals, how they speak to and interact with each other, and how they may occupy and move about the temple structure. In so doing, it also organizes the distribution of religious knowledge among practitioners (Braga 1998; Castillo 2008; Johnson 2002). While all practitioners of a temple may participate in its public ceremonies, access to other rituals is graded by ritual rank such that the deeper the *fundamentos* engaged in the ritual, the higher a practitioner's rank must be to take part in it. The discussion of the religion is similarly graded. Thus, matters of public knowledge can be discussed among and within earshot of junior practitioners, but talk about the *fundamentos* must be reserved for conversations with those with sufficient rank to engage them. The end result of these restrictions on speech about the *fundamentos* is a hierarchically organized economy of discourse in which the authority to speak corresponds to religious rank and speech itself is taken as a claim to rank (Hartikainen 2013).

At the conferences organized by Candomblé activists that I attended in the early 2000s, great care was paid to following this religious organization of speech. Thus, invited speakers were almost without exception recruited from among temple leaders and distinguished mid-ranking adherents, and speech turns were closely monitored by event moderators in order to ensure compliance with the religious hierarchy. Correspondingly, the opportunities for junior practitioners to speak at these events were limited to asking questions during the panel Q&A session. It was rare for a junior practitioner to venture a question at all, but on the few occasions that they did, they were responded to, without exception, by a high-ranking practitioner who framed the interaction as a pedagogical encounter.

The creation of a religious organization of discourse at the conferences could not, however, be accomplished through such organization of speaker roles only. Instead, it also depended on the speakers establishing a religious conversational grounding for their utterances. To accomplish this, conference speakers had several discursive means at their disposal. They could explicitly discuss their investment in speaking from the position of a religious practitioner. They could employ words and phrases from the different African-language-based ritual-speech registers that are employed in Candomblé temples. They could ground their arguments in references to and myths about Candomblé's *orixá* deities. They could open their statements with invocations to the *orixás* and requests for and offerings of blessings directed to the events' other practitioner-participants. The conferences' practitioner-speakers would frequently use several of these strategies in combination. For example, Ebomi

Cidália's contribution as a panelist at the conference held at the Terreiro do Cobre included a discussion of how she could not request blessings from anyone at the event because she had no religious seniors there; an offering of a blessing to Mãe Valnizia, who was not only her co-panelist but also the leader of the temple that had organized the event; and a sung invocation to Xangô, Mãe Valnizia's tutelary *orixá*.

Not all practitioners were equally able to occupy these expert positions, though. Indeed, while these practices effectively created a discursive and interactional authority structure for the conferences that reflected Candomblé's religious authority structures, this did not mean that religious rank was the only organizing criterion for speech at them. Instead, upon closer examination, the invited panelists at these events tended to be practitioners who were affiliated with the city's most famous and prestigious temples. In addition, most of them had already gained acclaim as experts on Candomblé in the city's public sphere. Some had authored books that drew on their experiences as Candomblé practitioners, while others had shared their expertise on the religion through the public recounting of Candomblé myths or the performance of Candomblé's religious rhythms and incantations. Moreover, many had distinguished themselves as Candomblé activists. Particularly telling was the composition of the Azoany seminar's panel on ancestry. Despite the panel's weighty topic, its invited panelists were not the highest-ranking practitioners present at the event. There were several elderly temple leaders in the event's audience whose religious rank surpassed that of the speakers. However, in contrast to these audience members, the panelists were publicly acclaimed experts on the religion. For instance, Iray Galvão, who was an *ekede* (female officiant) from the Obá Na temple, was also an award-winning author of children's books that drew on Candomblé mythology to forward a message of racial equality and inclusion. Esmeraldo Emetério, in turn, an *ogã* (male officiant) from the Tumba Junçara temple, was widely known as an expert on Candomblé rhythms and an outspoken critic of religious intolerance against Candomblé.

That such practitioners would be privileged as panelists by conference organizers was no great surprise. Both they and their views on the themes to be discussed at individual events tended to be well known to the organizers. As such, the organizers could generally anticipate how they would contribute to conference conversations. However, the privileging of such panelists was not just the product of personal ties and public acclaim. Their approving presence and participation were also instrumental to the validation of the conferences' religious-expert footing. This was especially the case for conferences that were organized by practitioners who had not relied on the event form before. For them, finding the right balance between reliance on the academic event form and its strategic use to forward religious conversations could be especially challenging. In the eyes of government representatives, the approving participation of practitioners whose authority and expertise they already

recognized could mean the difference between the recognition or nonrecognition of a conference and its participants. In the eyes of other practitioners, in turn, the endorsement of widely respected panelists could validate a conference as a religiously appropriate and acceptable kind of engagement with scholarly media.

Ultimately, then, despite conference organizers' claims that the authority to speak at Candomblé conferences was ordered by Candomblé's temple-based hierarchies of expertise, the events did not so much reproduce a pre-existing hierarchy of religious expertise but rather brought forth a new one that was particular to the conferences. In this structure of expertise, expert status depended integrally on the successful performance of Candomblé-specific discursive and interactional status rituals. But it also depended on the approving validation of those who had already gained recognition for similar engagements with the conference form.

The constraints of this structure were acutely brought to my attention when I discussed the conferences with a group of practitioner friends in August 2009. These practitioners had invited me to join them at a seminar on immaterial cultural heritage that had been organized by the Catholic lay brotherhood of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos. Because this seminar took place on the same day and in the same neighborhood as the Azoany seminar, I suggested that my friends join me at the latter event. They, however, were reticent to do so and eventually explained to me that they felt uncomfortable attending an event where they did not know and were not known by the organizers. Most importantly, they feared that their ritual rank and expertise would not be recognized and respected at such events. But they were also concerned about being misperceived as ignorant of religious strictures on secrecy due to their lack of awareness of the event's implicit norms for discussing the religion.

A PUBLIC DOMAIN OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

If the Candomblé conferences were successful at grounding their practitioner-participants' engagements with the scholarly event form in a religious hierarchy of expertise, the efforts to discuss religious matters via the conference form also posed a double bind. In contrast to Candomblé practitioners' commitment to an understanding of their religion's *fundamentos* as secret knowledge that should be discussed only with practitioners of specific rank, the state efforts to recognize Afro-Brazilian forms of knowledge and expertise were predicated on a model of public knowledge. They both assumed that the Afro-Brazilian knowledges they sought to recognize could be discussed in public and required such public discussion for recognition. The public character of conversations at the Candomblé conferences and the ways in which they required speakers to address their words to hierarchically heterogeneous and oftentimes partly unknown audiences made this double bind explicit.

From the perspective of Candomblé norms of secrecy, the publicness of the conferences posed significant con-

straints on the discussion of religious knowledge. Candomblé practitioners consider the *fundamentos* to be knowledge that should be kept secret (Braga 1998; Castillo 2008; Johnson 2002). Typically, the secrecy of the *fundamentos* is justified by arguments about their religious power. Improper engagement with them could have dangerous effects. It could provoke the anger of the gods or lead them to act on the world in unintended ways. However, secrecy also stands at the core of the construction of social power in Candomblé. It undergirds the organization of the hierarchies of expertise that order individual temple communities as junior practitioners' access to the *fundamentos* is variously limited. In addition, secrecy structures relationships between temples. Indeed, a temple's ability to attract clients and practitioners, a necessity for success, depends on the reputation of its *fundamentos*. The more authentically African and religiously efficacious they are known to be, the greater the temple's reputation and success. In this context, the public disclosure of the *fundamentos* poses a two-fold threat. On one level, it depletes the disclosing temple's religious capital and reputation. A revealed secret is no longer a secret. On another level, such disclosure suggests a fundamental disregard for and ignorance of the character of the *fundamentos*, a suggestion that also strongly undermines the disclosing temple's reputation.

Not surprisingly, then, the conferences raised difficult questions about how the religion could be discussed and expertise in it communicated in public. At most events I attended, these questions were not discussed overtly. Instead, they were engaged indirectly through critical discussions about what event participants considered to be examples of the inappropriate disclosure of foundational religious knowledge in the public realm. The targets of these criticisms were not only scholars but also media professionals and practitioners who had allowed the filming of secret rituals and posted videos of them on social media. These criticisms effectively reinforced the religious emphasis on secrecy and drew conference participants' attention to the challenges of performing Candomblé expertise in public. But they did not resolve the question of how Candomblé could be discussed at these venues.

The ways in which the events steered participants toward particular kinds of discussions on Candomblé and the ways in which panelists responded to this task did, however, articulate a model for how practitioners could discuss the religion in public. The conversations that took place at the Azoany event in August 2009 were telling. Albino Apolinário's description of the event's political motivations highlighted how the event was not designed to act as a forum for discussing the religious foundations of such concepts as ancestry, earth, and health. Instead, it sought to showcase how these religiously central notions intersected with and guided practitioners' broader societal and political engagements. The event's invited practitioner-panelists furthered this goal well through their presentations. Thus, Iray Galvão recounted several myths about Azoany/Omolu that stressed

the centrality of societal inclusion and acceptance as values in Candomblé. Esmeraldo Emetério Filho, in turn, argued that Candomblé practitioners needed to take on greater roles as guardians of Brazil's Afro-Brazilian ancestry. According to him, they were especially well positioned to do so due to the centrality of such protection of ancestry to Candomblé. In aggregate, these practitioners' contributions served to demonstrate that discussions about Candomblé did not have to focus on the secret *fundamentos*. The religion also encompassed values that provided particular perspectives on and guidelines for addressing such key societal and political concerns as discrimination and the limited recognition of Brazil's Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage and history.

The presentations made at the conference held at the Terreiro do Cobre forwarded a parallel argument. In accordance with the event's theme, the invited panelists had been asked to reflect on their experiences of engaging different public media. Ebomi Cidália, the most senior ranking of the panelists, responded to this task by focusing her discussion on the character of leadership and authority in Candomblé, a topic that did not directly touch on the sphere of ritual practice. Mãe Val, in turn, described how, in writing her book, she had wanted to provide an account of life in the neighborhood of Engenho Velho da Federação, where her temple was located. Finally, Mãe Jaciara discussed her confrontations with evangelical Christian media and argued that Candomblé practitioners needed to counter negative portrayals of Afro-Brazilian religions with their own media productions. These accounts all drew the conference participants' attention to the ways in which Candomblé practitioners' knowledge and expertise extended beyond the *fundamentos*. As the three women variously emphasized, Candomblé practitioners' knowledge was also composed of particular kinds of social values, perspectives on the social and the political, and experiences with discrimination. This was a form of Candomblé knowledge and expertise, they suggested, that did not need protection but that instead should be discussed in public.

During the event's Q&A session, Makota Valdina extended this line of argument in ways that made it clear that it did not only respond to the challenge of public discussion of Candomblé knowledge. It also worked to present Candomblé practitioners as privileged experts on Afro-Brazilian experiences with racialized discrimination and marginalization. Following her call for Candomblé practitioners to appropriate the tools of academics, Makota Valdina argued to the event's participants that this strategy was to be employed not for the public discussion of ritual practice and the secrets it involved but instead to draw attention to practitioners' experiences of religious and racial discrimination as adherents of an Afro-Brazilian religion. This, she charged, was a form of religious knowledge that demanded public discussion. The approving nods her words received from the event's organizers suggested that she had captured their intentions for the event particularly well.

Despite their different emphases, the presentations offered by practitioners at these events forwarded a model of Candomblé knowledge that not only differed from conventional understandings but also articulated a racialized religious politics that intersected particularly well with state efforts to combat racial inequalities and discrimination through the recognition of Afro-Brazilian expertise and knowledge. While the panelists acknowledged the epistemological centrality of the *fundamentos*, they also argued that Candomblé practitioners' knowledge extended beyond such secrets. As their presentations proposed, Candomblé practitioners' knowledge also consisted of knowledge gained through practitioners' everyday experiences as adherents of an Afro-Brazilian religion in a fundamentally unequal and racist society, and religiously motivated values and perspectives that could help in addressing these injustices. If the model of Candomblé knowledge that emerged from these articulations resolved the religious challenges of public speaking, it also presented an especially powerful argument for the value of recognizing Candomblé expertise to state institutions concerned with combating racial inequalities through such forms of recognition.

RECOGNITION, BUT AT WHAT COST?

The Candomblé conferences that I have examined here were particularly successful in articulating and promoting a depiction of Candomblé expertise and knowledge that fit within the frames of recognition promoted by Brazilian state institutions in the early 2000s. At the Azoany seminar, this was apparent in the supportive participation of federal senator Luiz Alberto and state senator Bira Corôa on the event's institutional panel and the cooperation agreement that was signed between its organizers and the Fundação Cultural Palmares. At the Terreiro do Cobre conference, in turn, it was reflected in the event's enthusiastic reception by the many black-movement activists and government officials present in the audience. But the success of this activist strategy was not limited to these two events. As the first decade of the 2000s came to a close, most Candomblé conferences organized in Salvador were supported by government funding from agencies focused on Afro-Brazilian cultural affairs and/or racial reparations. Furthermore, the events were frequently attended by appointed officials from these agencies who spoke enthusiastically about their appreciation for Candomblé practitioners' political efforts.

At the same time, these efforts at rearticulation produced new configurations of expertise and knowledge on Candomblé. On one level, the conferences brought forth a new kind of expert, the practitioner with scholarly credentials, a figure that refused the rigid binary between the practitioner and scholar. This was an expert who simultaneously conformed to and differed from dominant frames of expertise on the religion and creatively transcended the conflict between the two oppositional expectations by articulating a different form of expertise altogether. On another level, the efforts to perform religious expertise via the conference

form generated a reimagining of Candomblé knowledge in ways that both refused and transcended the conflict between multicultural demands for the concurrent performance of epistemological difference and societal relevance. The new domain of publicly circulable Candomblé knowledge that these practitioners articulated was at once epistemologically distinct in its grounding in the particularities of practitioners' experiences with racialized discrimination and epistemologically compatible with the ways in which Brazil's vast racial inequalities are conceived of and envisioned to be resolved in this form of multicultural recognition.

But how successful were the events in achieving the goal of *expanding* Candomblé's state recognition? To what extent did their rearticulations of Candomblé expertise and knowledge transform earlier dynamics of the religion's state recognition? As my practitioner friends' reticence to join me at the Azoany event in August 2009 reveals, the frames of expertise promoted by the seminars were not equally accessible to all Candomblé practitioners. Instead, individual practitioners' ability to successfully present themselves as experts at these events depended on a combination of factors. In addition to religious status, their recognition as experts at these events was predicated on a reputation of religious knowledgeableability, acquaintance with scholarly modes of representation, and knowledge of activist reformulations of the scope of Candomblé knowledge. These expectations posed significant constraints on who could participate in and benefit from this activist strategy.

Ironically, these constraints were the greatest for practitioners from temples that had been marginalized in the scholarly mediated configurations of state recognition that the seminars aimed to replace. Historically, the temples that have been the least likely to benefit from state support and recognition have been those with no connections to scholars and no representation in scholarly accounts. Indeed, whereas scholarly attention has contributed to the establishment and solidification of particular temples as paradigmatic examples of state-supported "authentically" African religiosity, the lack thereof has had the opposite effect. Temples that have not been studied by scholars have tended to either remain unknown to state institutions or be considered inauthentic and, as such, less worthy of state attention than those privileged by scholars. If one consequence of this dynamic has been that practitioners from such temples are less likely to be familiar with the scholarly frames of expertise on Candomblé that the Candomblé seminars adapted and aimed to transform, another consequence has been their lesser likelihood of being included in state efforts at supporting Candomblé temples in general (Matory 2005; Parés 2012).

The marginalizing effects of this activist strategy for such temples were further compounded by the ways in which Candomblé activism has tended to concentrate in and around temples with close connections to scholars. Although the range of temples with which Candomblé activists are affiliated extends beyond those celebrated by scholars, the latter have long acted as central hubs of Candomblé ac-

tivism. The Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple is the most noteworthy example of this. But most of the other temples involved in these efforts have also been either the focus of extensive scholarly investigation or are closely related through ritual and social ties to one of Salvador's three most-studied famous temples. Some, like the Terreiro do Cobre, fit both of these categories. The few temples that do not fall into the category tend to be temples that have either managed to attract university-educated black-movement activists into their fold or produced their own scholars of Afro-Brazilian culture and religion (see F. Lima 2005; Parés 2012). As a result, practitioners from lesser-studied temples are less likely to hold the scholarly credentials or possess the knowledge of the new configurations of religious knowledge and expertise necessary for the construction of authoritative speech at Candomblé conferences. Moreover, their connections to Candomblé activist circles tend to be weaker.

Ultimately, then, the success of the Candomblé seminars has come at a cost. The very ways in which they have creatively reworked the frames by which Candomblé practitioners' expertise and knowledge is recognized by the state have also resulted in further marginalization of practitioners from temples with limited or no scholarly connections.

CONCLUSION

In an analysis of Seminole efforts to transcend conflicting expectations of Indigenous sovereignty in the United States, Jessica Cattellino (2010) argues that the demands that constitute the double bind cannot by definition be reconciled. Instead, the double bind must be refused and "the cultural expectations on which it rests must be reorganized" (252). Candomblé practitioners' efforts to gain recognition for their religious expertise via the scholarly genre of conferencing can be seen as an effort at such refusal and rearticulation. The conferences organized by practitioner-activists do not so much fit Candomblé expertise and knowledge within the frames of expertise and knowledge that undergird multicultural state attempts at Afro-Brazilian recognition in Brazil as they work to transcend and creatively reorder these frames. The resulting new forms of expertise and knowledge not only reposition Candomblé practitioners in the structures of publicly recognized expertise on their religion but also reconfigure these structures. But how far does this refusal of the terms of state recognition extend?

Refusal, as Cattellino (2010) observes, is risky. While it may lead to the unraveling of a double bind, it does not always do so. Instead, it may also end up reinforcing the order of things. Indeed, the broader-scale effects of the new forms of expertise and knowledge that have emerged from the activist conferences are by no means obvious. While the conferences have arguably succeeded in bringing public and government recognition to Candomblé practitioners' expertise and knowledge, the rearticulations that these events rely on also further marginalize temples that were most marginalized by earlier configurations of state recognition.

This irony has not gone unnoticed among Candomblé activists. Yet their critical analyses of the situation have not resulted in a broader critique or refusal of the shift to a knowledge-based frame in the state recognition of Afro-Brazilian populations. Rather, they have been characterized by an effort to trace the conferences' marginalizing effects to the ill fit between scholarly and religious-expert hierarchies and modes of representation. From this perspective, Candomblé activists have come to view the solution to the exclusionary logics of this paradigm of recognition to lie not in its refusal but instead its deeper and better-directed embrace.

The widespread conversations that a Facebook post published in November 2016 inspired among Candomblé practitioners illustrate this analysis well. The post titled "Eu sou de KONDOMBRE" (I am of KONDOMBRE) was authored by Luciane Reis, an *ekede* from the Terreiro de Oxumaré, which has long acted as a center for Candomblé activism in Salvador. In the post, Reis argued that she was a practitioner of "Kondombre," a religion of semiliterate black women who learned to cultivate the *orixás* through their participation in the everyday activities of temples, *not* of a "Candomblé" that looked down upon those whose speech revealed their lack of formal education. The original post, as Reis argued on its comment stream, was motivated by her outrage at another Facebook post that had ridiculed people who called Candomblé "Kondombre." However, the post resonated strongly with a broader sense of unease among Candomblé practitioners with the ways in which activist efforts to gain recognition for the religion in the frame of expertise had contributed to a further marginalization of practitioners whose access to formal education, and, as such, the conventions of "educated" speech had been limited. As the extensive reposting of the original post by Candomblé practitioners across Brazil in 2017 and the commentaries that these reposts produced revealed, large numbers of practitioners were concerned about the ways in which Candomblé and scholarly modes of expertise and knowledge had come to be entwined in these efforts. For many of them, the efforts to gain recognition for Candomblé expertise and knowledge in the political public sphere had led to a dismissal of the true character of this expertise and knowledge. The solution they proposed was for this expertise and knowledge to be recognized on its own terms.

It is here, in these practitioners' calls for greater and religiously more sensitive recognition, that we can see the double binds of knowledge-based state recognition and their productivity at full force. On one hand, the Kondombre post and the discussions it inspired highlight the contradictions and impossibilities of knowledge-based state recognition. The effort to establish Candomblé as a source and site of public authority may have expanded the recognition of practitioners' expertise and knowledge but only at the cost of further excluding the religion's "true" experts. On the other hand, the post's and its proponents' calls for better-directed recognition of the religion's structures of

expertise and knowledge, rather than an altogether refusal of this paradigm of recognition, foreground the ways in which any engagement with the double binds of recognition demands an at least partial embrace of the social and political logics that motivate them. Indeed, ultimately, the very ability of Candomblé practitioners to creatively engage and transcend the double binds posed by knowledge-based state recognition depends on their willingness to position themselves and their social and political struggles in the matrix of expertise and knowledge it projects.

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NOTES

Acknowledgments. Research for this article was supported by the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. Previous versions of this article were presented at the Semiotics: Culture in Context workshop at the University of Chicago, and the Carter G. Woodson Fellows Seminar and the Linguistic Anthropology Seminar at the University of Virginia. I am thankful to the participants of these events for their thoughtful engagement with the article. In addition, I wish to thank Andy Graan, Alireza Doostdar, Jan H. French, Sue Gal, Angie Heo, Karl Swinehart, Sarah Vaughn, Costas Nakassis, Michael Silverstein, Jalane Schmidt, and Sarah Fredericks for their invaluable feedback and commentary at various stages of writing this article. This article also benefited enormously from comments and suggestions offered by Deborah Thomas, Michael Chibnik, and four anonymous reviewers, for which I am grateful. Furthermore, I must thank João Gonçalves and Léo Custódio for their help in translating the article abstract to Portuguese. Finally, I am deeply indebted to the many Candomblé practitioners who have welcomed me to their temples and political activities in Salvador.

1. In the early 2000s, Candomblé activism in Salvador spanned several organizations and temples. However, a small number of them were especially prominent. These included the Terreiro do Cobre temple and the Associação de Alzira do Conforto activist organization, whose activities are at the center of my analysis.

Methodologically, this article is based on ethnographic fieldwork on Candomblé activism that was conducted in Salvador, Brazil between 2008 and 2011. During this time, I participated in events organized by several activist organizations and temples, including the Terreiro do Cobre, the Associação de Alzira do Conforto, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, and Coletivo de Entidades Negras. In addition, I interviewed activists, government officials, and non-activist practitioners, and I participated in the ritual activities of several Candomblé temples in Salvador. My participation in one temple, Ilê Axé Ninfá Omin, was particularly extensive as I was chosen ("suspended") by one

of the temple's *orixá* deities to the mid-ranking ritual role of *ekede*.

N.B. In this article, I use real names for all Candomblé temples, associations, and practitioners. This choice is motivated both by the fact that the majority of them are publicly known and by practitioners' uniform requests to be identified by their real names in my scholarship.

2. Candomblé is an initiatory, spirit possession religion based on religious beliefs and practices brought to Brazil by enslaved and free Africans. The religion has also been influenced by Catholicism and Indigenous religions. Candomblé emerged in Salvador and surrounding areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the twentieth century, it spread to other regions in Brazil and beyond. Currently, there are over 1,400 Candomblé temples in Salvador (Santos 2008). In Salvador, the majority of Candomblé practitioners are lower-class Afro-Brazilians with fairly low levels of formal education (Santos 2008; see also Santos and Santos 2013). In southern Brazil, the religion has also attracted large numbers of white middle-class practitioners with relatively high levels of formal education (see Amaral and Silva 1993; Oro 1998).
3. On the patrimonialization of Afro-Brazilian culture before and after Brazil's democratization, see Capone and Morais (2015). On the patrimonialization of Candomblé, see Morais (2014); Sansi (2016).
4. The dismantling of this model of multiculturalism began on the federal level in 2016 when Michel Temer's conservative government took power. As one of its first acts in power, it stripped power from SEPPPIR, the federal secretariat for policies for the promotion of racial equality of ministerial status, and made it subordinate to the Ministry of Human Rights.
5. The "black movement" in Brazil is not a singular, unified movement. Instead it is composed of hundreds of antiracist groups and collectives variously concerned with combating racial inequality and discrimination, raising black consciousness and mobilizing Brazilians of African descent politically, and valorizing "blackness" as a cultural and social form. What brings these groups together as a "movement" is their shared concern with increasing the societal recognition and inclusion of Afro-Brazilians as a racially and culturally distinct group.
6. On Candomblé's celebration as a privileged emblem of Brazil's African cultural heritage under the ideology of racial democracy, see Johnson (2002); Morais (2014); Parés (2012); Romo (2010); Santos (2005); Sansi (2007).
7. This is especially the case for the famed Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, which has been at the center of scholarly production on Candomblé since the early twentieth century (Capone 1999; Castillo 2008).
8. All translations from Portuguese to English by author.
9. On the relationship between black-movement activism and Candomblé in Salvador, see Parés (2012); Santos (2005); Selka (2007).
10. The Terreiro do Cobre is considered to be one of Salvador's oldest and most prestigious Candomblé temples. Since the 1990s, it has become a key node in Salvador's Candomblé activist networks (Agier 1998).

11. Between 2008 and 2010, I attended seven Candomblé conferences in Salvador.
12. CEN is a black-movement activist collective that has taken Afro-Brazilian religions as a primary focus.
13. In the 1980s and 1990s, Candomblé practitioners participated in several international Conferences of the Tradition of Orisha Culture (COMTOC) (Capone 1999, 2005; Matory 2005; Silva 2000). Another series of landmark events was the annual *Alaiandê Xirê* music festival organized by practitioners from Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá.

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