

# Small Leaves: Children in the Temples of Candomblé in the Backwoods of Brazil

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**Abstract**— *This study is a reflection of the realities experienced by three children and one adolescent from three Temples of Candomblé in the cities of Juazeiro / BA, Petrolina / PE and Paulo Afonso / BA (Sertão Nordestino Brasileiro), whose main objective was to describe, under their own perceptions, how their relationships are established in the process of participation (initiation, teaching and learning of knowledge) in these spaces of Afro-Brazilian religious cults. Two children were interviewed by ethnographic research in Terreiro Bandalecôngo de Mãe Maria de Tempo, in Juazeiro / BA; a child in the Terreiro Ilé Dará Axé Omo Logum Edé of Pai Adilson, in Petrolina / PE and; a teenager in the Abassá of the Goddess Oxum de Idjemim, in Paulo Afonso / BA. The method used was that of Content Analysis, according to Bardin (2016). It was concluded that the relationships involving children, childhood, religion, family and community are fundamental for the construction and (re) elaboration of knowledge and to know in the process of teaching and learning inside and outside the temples.*

**Keywords**— *Children and adolescents. Temples of Candomblé. Participation and initiation. To know. Backwoods of Brazil.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Corsaro (2011) concluded that, through the traditional theoretical conception, in which much of the sociological thinking about children and infants derives from the theoretical work on socialization, a process by which children adapt and internalize society, the child is seen as society, which must be shaped and guided by external forces in order to become a fully functional member. He tells us that in the deterministic model the

child plays primarily a passive role, in which he is both a "beginner" with potential to contribute to the maintenance of society and an "untamed threat", which must be controlled through careful training. Still for this author, in the constructivist model, the child is seen as an active agent and an avid apprentice, perspective in which the child actively builds his social world and his place in it.

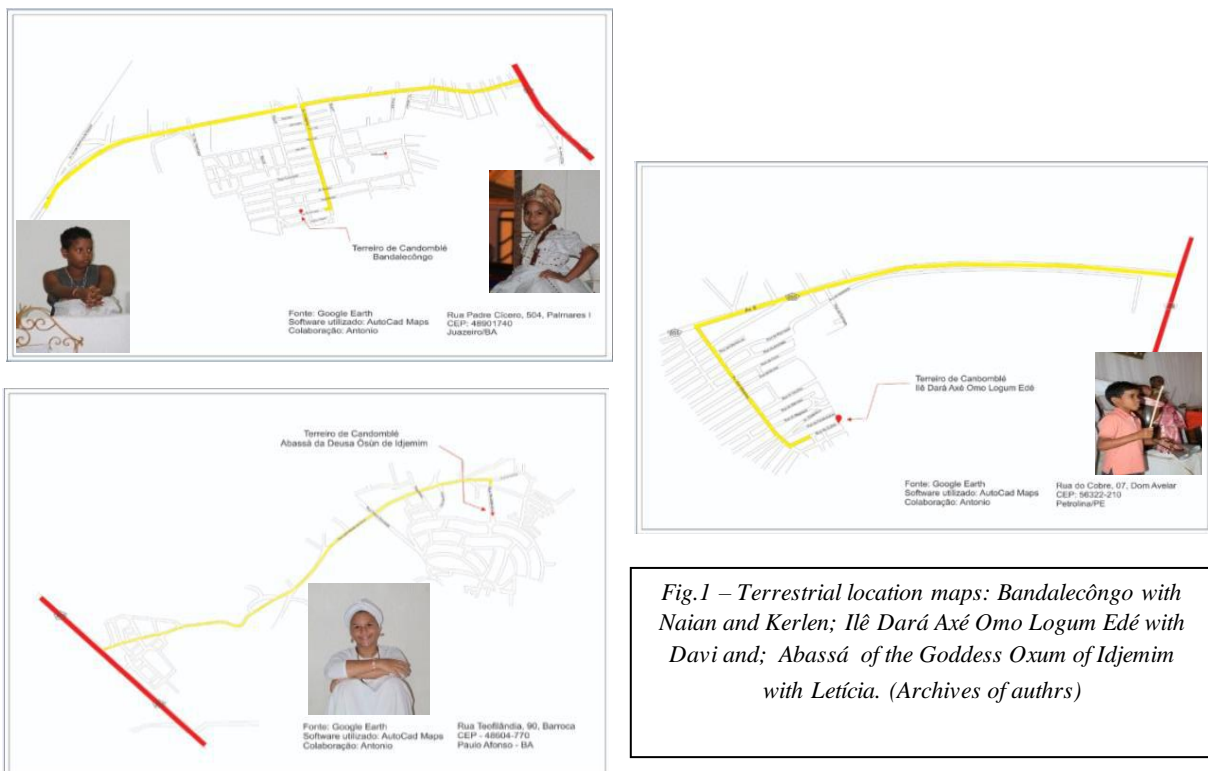
Caputo (2012) reports that, as a researcher, she tries to "frame" aspects of reality and to cut down from

the observed immensity a smaller immensity, on which one can look more closely and that the temple offered her the infinite, but focused on her attention on talking, interviewing and photographing especially the children, relating them to the community of the temple as a whole.

Taking these conceptions as a guide to arrive at a possible description / understanding of the processes that involve children in learning and in the socialization of the knowledge and knowledge of the religions of African matrices, more specifically Candomblé in the Brazilian semiarid region, semi-structured interviews with

three children and one adolescent from three Candomblé temples in three Brazilian cities.

From Bandalecôngo temple (Juazeiro / BA), the children interviewed were Kerlen, eight years old, initiated in candomblé at age seven, and Naian ten years old, started in religion when she was six years old; From the Temple Ilê Dará Axé Omo Logum Edé (Petrolina / PE), the seven-year-old David, who started at the age of four, ; From the Abassá of the Goddess Oxum de Idjemim (Paulo Afonso / BA), the content analyzed was that of Leticia, thirteen years old, initiated at the age of ten.



*Fig.1 – Terrestrial location maps: Bandalecôngo with Naian and Kerlen; Ilê Dará Axé Omo Logum Edé with Davi and; Abassá of the Goddess Oxum of Idjemim with Leticia. (Archives of authrs)*

**II. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

Based on the identification of the scenario, the research adopted as a strategy data collection as a case study, considered by Oliveira (2008) as an initial study of few known problems or when there are few or a single case available to study ", or by the understanding of GIL (2010) that is based on a strategy for very numerous data and obtained in different ways.

According to an ethnographic study, the research coincides with the idea of Macedo (2015) evidencing that the experience of the other is placed in the research with the status of a different way of creation and apprehension of knowledge and that this experience happens in between us, in the between-two, provided by interactions in the same research process. For the author, the researcher and the social actors involved, via generative encounters, produce the heuristic of research,

the cognitive modes, very intuitively, to arrive at the discoveries.

The data collected by semi-structured interviews were grouped, systematized and categorized in thematic axes, then in analytical topics and finally in this scientific production (article). The analysis of the data collected in the field was based on the Content Analysis - French Line AC, based on the studies of Bardin (2016), which proposes the categorization of discourse content as one of the possible methods of analysis.

**III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**  
**Childhood in Human Ecology of Candomblé temples in the semiarid of brazil**

Kileuy and Oxaguia (2011) argue that the word "candomblé" seems to have originated from a term of the Bantu nation, candombe, and translated as dance and batuque, referring to jokes, parties, meetings, slaves

feasts, in the slave quarters, in their spare moments. Also, it is a religion that was created in Brazil through the cultural, religious and philosophical heritage brought by Africans, adapted to the environmental conditions and with the primary function of worship the divinities - iniquices, orixás or vuduns -, beings that are the strength and power of nature.

Regarding his activities in the temple, Kerlen, a child from Bandalecôngo's temple, says that he helps Yalorixá by separating food and things from cleanings to get through the body when cleaning or initiating, and that her temple is candomblé. Her imagery seems surprising when she elaborates her Human Ecology by linking Africa to the Northeastern Semiarid by describing that she likes zebras, which has two dogs and her palate is attracted by the sweet taste of grape fruit.

Naian, also a child of Bandalecôngo, says that inside the temple, he does many things: "I play, when there is a party, help my mother in at the ebó ritual, move the ebó from a place to another" And that he himself defines himself, functions, such as a "Keligebo"<sup>2</sup>. The small candomblecist claims to be also Ogã.

Naian still claims to be from Candomblé, inferring distinction between candomblé<sup>3</sup> and Umbanda: "It's that he sings some songs that are already very different in Umbanda." He also says that he likes and cares about nature and plants and that between dealing with "bugs" and with people, it's easier with the bugs, because the people from outside, keep saying things about us. Criticizing".

Davi, child of Ilê Axé Dará Omo Logum Edé, affirms to be Ogã<sup>4</sup>, who likes to play drums and that deal

with animals in a natural way. He also assumes that he is from Candomblé, verbalizing his conceptual defense of what differentiates Candomblé from Umbanda: "Umbanda plays drums and Candomblé plays atabaque". He also describes how he takes care of the plants: "I drink water and leave it in the sun." And why I like snakes and not fear them: "because I snake's", alluding to his head Orixá, Oxumaré.

The child sketches naturality when he speaks about his father and his uncles (who are also ogans) in the rituals and already carries out the immolations to offer to the deities. In the position of Alabê, Davi helps his father and uncles in specific jobs of Ogã Axogum.

In this respect Caputo (2012) tells us that:

There are innumerable children and adolescents in the afro-Brazilian cults community. They are either from the family of the father or mother of a saint or are attached to the sons and daughters of the saint of the temples. Like adults, these children are initiated into candomblé, perform specific functions, receive positions in the hierarchy of the temples and manifest pride in their religion (CAPUTO, 2012).

The adolescent abbess of the Abassá of the Goddess Oxum de Edjemim, Leticia Maria, when asked about what she does in the temple, she was a little shy and / or tense enough to answer "I am Abián in the temple." She says she never went to a Umbanda temple, but with aplomb She assumes that She is from Candomblé and goes on to argue:

For me candomblé is a religion that is equal to the Catholic. But in the Catholic the names of the saints are others. Our Lady of Aparecida is Iemanjá, Our Lady of the Conception is Oxum. It's different, but it's the same. And the language is different, but it is based on the Catholic Church. It is a ritual of faith (LETÍCIA, 08/08/17).

She makes an association in the relationship of religion with nature and warns about the ecological behavior of man on the elements:

It is very much the same because the snake, for example, has a god who dominates it, which is Oxumaré. There is the forest that manages the Oxossi and Ossaim leaves. There is mud that is the Nanã, there is the freshwater river that is the Oxum. There is salt water that is Iemanjá. Everything is all about the reality of Candomblé. I think candomblé is more the reality of nature than the Catholic church.

<sup>1</sup>For Kiley and Oxaguã (2011) the sense of "doing ebó" is based on rituals that allow the strengthening of the spiritual life, but also part of the rituals that help to remove the negative forces that bring instability. They are elements that can be offered to Exu, eguns and Edus and also to the orixás and other deities.

<sup>2</sup>From the speech of Naian the sense apprehended is the one who deals with ebó, although according to his mother kota he doesn't detain the position of kelegebo.

<sup>3</sup>For Prandi (2003), Umbanda is an Afro-Brazilian branch and was formed in the 20th century in the Southeast, and represents a synthesis of the ancient Candomblé of Bahia, transplanted to Rio de Janeiro in the passage from the 19th to the 20th centuries, the Kardecist spiritualism, which came from France at the end of the nineteenth century (MARQUES and NOVAES, 2015, p.33).

<sup>4</sup>Male authorities, hierarchical rank below the priest / priestess, and their direct auxiliaries, so called by the Yoruba people. In the fon nation they are called runtó / huntó and in the bantu nation they are called xicaringome / xincarangoma. These men, like the equedes, do not enter into a trance (Kiley and Oxaguã, 2011, 60).

But man has to be aware of what he is doing. Example: Is there a god that will tell you what you have to do? No! It has to come from you, not from others. Because more and more people find a cleared forest. The people always ask why it does not rain or why it rained there and it did not rain here. Maybe where it did not rain was where everything was cleared and where it rained is because they preserved it (LITICIA, 13/08/17).

Corsaro (2011) describes us that interpretive reproduction views the integration of children into their cultures as reproductive rather than linear. For him, from this reproductive perspective, children do not simply imitate or internalize the world around them. According to the author, they (children) strive to interpret or give meaning to their culture and to participate in it. In this attempt to make sense of the adult world, children collectively produce their own worlds and cultures of peers.

According to Tomaz (2014), the symbolic relationship established between traditional peoples and communities and nature, constitutes an ethnoecology of preservation and care and that the vulnerability to which they are subjected can be understood by the historical construction in which these differentiated groups had to submit, from Brazil colony to contemporaneity.

Higino (2011) concludes that the social space of the temple, is a religious space and also an educational one, since it is in the coexistence that the exchange of knowledge is established, since the religious heritage brings with it, throughout the history, a context of resistances and social oppressions that lead the Negro to exercise his citizenship and define his identity and conscience. For the author in the education of Candomblé there are values transmitted because they are linked to spirituality and the basis of their existence is the transmission of fundamentals and doctrines, orally, by the elders.

Thus, in the children's and adolescent's speech, we can see an interaction that directly relates religion, nature (environment), society / community, cultural symbols in their own conditions as a child in an interpretative perspective, following Corsário (2011), because of adult cultural reality participate, but also re-elaborate and re-signify their interaction, describing this relationship as the driving force that binds them, in rituals, also to the deities, but mainly fun, as ecological connection in the representation of Orixás that have as main characteristic care and / or symbolism with the elements of nature, for example, Oxumarê (whose representation is the snake) and / or Oxossi (guardian of

the woods), among others, in a connection between the human and the sacred.

### **Initiation in Candomblé: Perceptions of Children from Brazilian semi-arid temple**

Leonardo Boff, in dealing with the ethical principles of unlimited responsibility and respect, tells us that "responsibility, fundamentally, has to do with the conscience of the human being, of him realizing the consequences of his acts" and that respect is "the attitude towards the other: when we respect, we guarantee the right that things exist" (BOFF, s / d).<sup>5</sup>

In "The Voice of Time: the Winds of the Bandalecôngo temple"<sup>6</sup> the Yalorixá Mother Mary of Time tells us that Initiation is the birth to a new life and that in the houses of nation Keto, there is the tradition of shaving the head of the iaô, during the process of making the saint, while the person is collected (period ranging from 14, 21 and 30 days) depending on the particularities of the initiate's personal life. For her, the scraping of the head means that that person is leaving everything to start again to live with a clean and pure head to receive the teachings that will be governed by the Orixá of his Ori.<sup>7</sup> (MARQUES, ALVES and MARQUES, 2017).

As the children and adolescents of the semi-arid Brazilian temples perceive themselves as part of a religion with many marks of resistance due to prejudice and discrimination that are still violently stuck in the memories, bodies and established human relationships, including (schools), and how they describe their experiences is what the interviewees of this research reveal.

According to Kerlen, at school the students know she is a candomblecist and that, "they question her like this: Kerlen, how do you dance? Then I'm kind of lost. Then I will soon do my activity." In this respect, it is pertinent that the Yalorixá Mother Mary of Time, who is Mother of Saint and biological grandmother of Kerlen bear his testimony at the stage in which Kerlen made himself "in the Holy:

<sup>5</sup>This is a documentary available on networks and social platforms, which was accessed on 09-02-2018 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YFTh2yEPIk>), but does not have the date of its production.

<sup>6</sup>Book organized by Juracy Marques, Maria Rosa de Almeida Alves and Robson Marques.

<sup>7</sup>It is the name of our physical head for the Yoruba; camutuê or mutuê for the bantus; and is for the Fon nation. The ori is a divinity that serves only his son, since it is individual and unitary (KILEUY and OXAGUIÁ, 2011).

Kerlen shaved her head, went to school, she had a cap. We made a nice little white cap, put it on and it was like a toupee, and they always asked why she did not take off her cap. So she said, "No, no problem, you want to see?" Then she took it off. She talks too much. She also said, "Listen, there's nothing much. Look! That's hair, hair grows out fast. It's going to be all over again, my curls will come back all over again." She is like that (MOTHER MARIA DE TEMPO, 07/17/17).

It is important to point out that one of the hallmarks of the initiation process in Candomblé, also in the Brazilian semi-arid, is the rite of shaving the head and the recollection in a room (Honkó, camarinha) for learning fundamentals such as greetings, songs, dances, what to eat or stop eating to be in harmony with the Orixá that will govern the life of the initiate from the making. This process is followed and directed directly and constantly throughout the period of recollection by a person of great doctrinal knowledge within the temple called Makota or Mother Cota. And, because it characterizes, especially in long-haired women, a radical change of vision has been described as the most common form of prejudice, discrimination and intolerance that people in candomblé experience.

From his process of initiation into religion what Kerlen describes from his memoirs is that he began at the age of seven, who attended a party in the hall of the temple, which had many people and who did not wonder about the shaved head because "the hair grew out and at school no one said anything." As for his head guides, he reveals that they are Iansan and Oxossi.

Naian relates a situation at school with her colleague when she was asked if she had any problem with being a candomblecist:

If so ...? It was just once that I told my classmate. But I asked him not to tell anyone. Then he said he did not like my religion, that he was my best friend at school. Then he said that I was a sorcerer, that I was going to cast a spell on him. Then I did not like it. Then I ended friendship with him. Then he threw a stone at me. Then I did not talk to him anymore (NAIAN, 07/23/17).

And when asked if his teachers and other colleagues at school know that he is a candomblecist, he says: "Only my cousin." She also says she does not tell her colleagues and teachers, only the principal, because she does not have the courage to tell them. "Because they keep calling me a sorcerer and I do not like it. And I do not like messing around."

But it is when Naian tries to describe what he feels when he is called sorcerer that we perceive a possible disorder in his attempt of conceptual (re)elaboration and of religious meaning: "spell maker is ... is not ... it is the same thing of Candomblecist .. I do not know how to explain well."

Asked about his inspiration to be from candomblé he says: "it is because I saw my mother there then I encouraged myself a lot. Then I wanted to join them." "For me ... I do not remember, but I think I just chose it." And he reveals that his front guides are: "Oxossi and Oxalá, Iemanjá and Oxum come later."

It is inferred from the content of Naian's statements that his religious reality is in constant conflict with the glances of his religion in the daily life at school by the relation reported with his colleague but that it is sustained by the conviction of the experiences with his biological mother and also a saint.

David told only that he has a colleague who is from another temple, and at school nobody did not notice anything different with him. He, with unusual responses of his age, says that it was from his Uncle Mida that he learned to play. And when asked what methods his uncle used to teach him, true and childish, he answers: "Teaching! I looked and learned." This speech translates one of the ways in which education in the temples occurs: still strongly based on oral tradition, children just observe, listen and learn.

Leticia reveals to us that for making part of Candomblé temple has already been discriminated against, has already gone through some prejudiced situation:

There's a classmate of mine, from school, that's a Christian. She does not believe in this and such. If I wear a necklace like that I'm already a macumba maker, I'm already the one who casts spell on people and such. Then when I got there she would start saying things, start laughing at me. Then, at religion class, the teacher started talking about Candomblé and asked who was from Candomblé. I said I was and there was another classmate who was too. Then the Christian girl started talking and all. Then I said: the same way I respect your religion, you should respect mine. I make my choice, you make yours. I told her that and nothing more. And today she is ok about my religion. She never said anything again. I wear the necklace and such, I no longer said anything again (LETÍCIA, 08/08/17).

For Leticia, a situation of discrimination faced in the school, did not make her feel victimized, on the



contrary, she used the situation in the classroom to declare herself a candomblé member and have the other students respect her as such. By her statement Leticia seems to be steadfast about his religious choice and to give us a good lesson: do not shut up before the oppressor and be proud of what you do with love and devotion.

#### IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This work is concluded considering that, by the categorization that directed the speeches for the analyzes and according to semantic values in common, in the topic of Childhood of the Human Ecologies of the candomblé temples in semiarid, it is established that the children and the adolescent, with their interpretations and (re) elaborations of reality describe their activities in the temple while maintaining the ingenuity and purity peculiar to their ages, establishing their childhoods in the context of religiosity and also as active and creative beings.

Kerlen and David saved the verbalization of the answers, but they were very attentive and charming by the detachment in the reelaboration of their realities. The content of David's speech, especially when he reports that "Umbanda plays drums and Candomblé plays Atabaque," seems to evidence a departure from the adult argument that entities, rites, touches, songs, offerings and, more generally, the rite of shaving or not shaving the head that represents this differential (distinction between candomblé and umbanda), ratifying its authentic interpretation.

Naian also involves the musicality when it is arranged to distinguish Candomblé of Umbanda, which is very pertinent, considering its condition also of Ogan. And that most likely discrimination from people externs their religion, which makes him understand better the beings who do not judge him: non-human animals, "the bugs."

It is also necessary to consider that Leticia defines Candomblé as a ritual of faith syncretized in Catholicism (Christian religion). Associating the elements of nature with the orixás, in her discourse, she compares her religion with the Catholic Church, enphasysing that candomblé experiences more the environmental reality and also relativizes the responsibilities signaling that, in the hierarchy of care, much is missing from the part of humans.

Regarding the feelings of their learning and initiation processes, the children and adolescents of the Brazilian semiarid temples describe how much play, beauty, knowledge and knowledge there is in playing drums, singing, dancing, assisting in ritualistic preparation, as well as to connect in different planes (the

terrain and carnal with the ancestral and divine) reelaborating and redefining, within its infantile perspectives, the cultural and religious realities of candomblé shared with the adults.

It can be inferred from Kerlen's speech that on the part of his colleagues there is more curiosity than discrimination when asked to see her dancing, but neither the questions nor the answers account for arguments capable of a conclusive conclusion. From Naian, it is inferred how violent it is for him to be labeled sorcerer to the point of not having the courage to tell his colleagues and teachers that he is from Candomblé, fearing more retaliation what may be putting him, like many, a position of religious invisibility.

And Leticia's sense of belonging is ratified by her entire history of dedication and reciprocity when her skills are properly cared for within the rites of her religion. Children in the temples, for Leticia, gain a sense of a reality with freedom and spontaneity in these spaces by the behaviors naturally experienced, which makes her speech special like a pearl due to the autonomy and authenticity of its descriptions.

Finally, we highlight how important it was to listen to the children themselves and the teenager about their lives, their choices and their participation in candomblé. Their speeches are strong winds against the whole mountain of prejudices, discriminations and structured intolerances against candomblé and, particularly, about the initiation of children in Afro-Brazilian religions. The constructions, interpretations and (re) elaborations of children, characteristic of the historical context of the black people confirm that the children of Candomblé of the Brazilian semiarid are Small Leaves that teach us great lessons.

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