

Ìyá Agbára

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THE CRACK BEGINS WITHIN

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“Candomblé is a feminine religion, created by women. The strength of Candomblé is feminine. Why by women? Because it is the woman who generates. It is only the woman who gives birth. It’s only the woman who has a uterus. Candomblé religiosity is comprehensive, it embraces everyone. Who embraces a big family? It is always the mother”.

Babalorixá Muralesimbe (Murah Soares)
Spiritual leader of *Ilê Obá Sileké*



**1 Claudia
Sampaio
Silva**

My name is Claudia Sampaio Silva, I was born in Bahia, in the Chapada region, close to Andaraí in a very small town called Colônia de Itaitê. I went to Salvador at the age of five with my family. I arrived in Germany for the first time in 1988 when I came to visit an aunt who had two small children and was overwhelmed with them. I came to help her and took the opportunity to leave Brazil. That was in the 1980s at the end of the Military Coup of 1964, and the beginning of the so-called Democracy. That was a very conflicted time! I took a leave of absence from college and stayed in Berlin for a year, from 1988 to 1989, and, during this time, I met my ex-husband. I returned to Salvador in 1989 and concluded my BA in Communication. I am a journalist. In 1991, when I finished college, I came back to live here in Berlin, then I got married and have been living here until today, and I do not intend to leave Berlin ever again.

The Candomblé house in Berlin was one of the most surprising things I have ever experienced in my life because one day, out of nowhere – I had never entered a Candomblé house in Bahia –, I received an invitation from a friend to visit this place, a small temple that *Babá Muralesimbe*¹ created in Berlin, in a very tiny apartment. It was a festive day for the *Yabás*, for the Candomblé women. The house of worship was small,

¹ Babá is the shortening for babalorixá and means the priest of the worship house but is also called Pai-de-Santo. The priestess is called Mãe-de-Santo or ialorixá.

crowded, and had such a good vibe! That is when I fell in love with the idea of being part of Candomblé, I fell in love with the charm of people, that energy fulfilled me, and because of that, I joined the *Ilê Obá Sileké*.

In 2007, we moved to the Kreuzberg neighbourhood, where we live today. Some people say coincidences do not exist, and it was very odd what I experienced when I first entered Ilê. An *Oxalá's* boy opened the door for me, a person I had never seen before, and he said 'one *Oxalá* is leaving and another is coming,' and I am from *Oxalá*. That was a moment very meaningful. As I said, I never had any relationship with Candomblé in Bahia. I attended a spiritualism course, visited some Umbanda Branca gatherings, but I never had a connection with any of them. Suddenly, I was in this community having breakfast, learning to pray, to make prayers and offerings; this collective experience was so fascinating to me. The Candomblé house has expanded here in Kreuzberg, now we have this wonderful space! With the expansion, we have gained knowledge and confidence, but many responsibilities have also come along.

Those who have no idea about Candomblé try to understand it through comparison. The interesting thing is that ***Babá Muralesimbe, to avoid frustrating expectations, always clarifies about the adaptations that need to be made in Germany to live and worship***

the Orixás; adaptations that seek to be as faithful as possible. That is a very important learning experience Babá offers. **Most people seek religion as a pillar to solve life's problems, but religion is nothing like that, right?** We know that religions are to strengthen people regardless of their belief, for they help us to deal with reality more serenely. I am a very critical person concerning the concept of religion when it is put as an essential thing in people's life. Because, for me, what matters is spirituality, not a religion, that is why I am surprised with myself for staying in Candomblé for so long.

I have some restrictions about religion, but I know that it is when we reach our limit that the great learning comes. Learning to tolerate what irritates me, learning to live with different opinions and attitudes, often completely opposite to mine, is the great challenge that spirituality has placed on me.

Sometimes I come walking, walking without much desire to get here, but suddenly, when I walk through that door, I realize the meaning of everything, and this feeling keeps me in the Ilê. The desire to worship the *Orixás* and to consciously feel this energy to flow in my life is invigorating. This energy has always flowed, even not being initiated yet, it flows. That is something I consider important, and that the Candomblé community has to understand.

I received a very important task in Candomblé, which is to work in the kitchen. Whoever has this responsibility is called *Iyabassé*, who is the woman who cooks for the Orixás, for the Goddesses and Gods, she is the one responsible for preparing sacred foods in Candomblé. I had the honour of being taught directly by *Babá Muralesimbe*, but always with the caveat that the kitchen, the cuisine, the Candomblé menu varies from house to house. Of course, some foods are sacred anywhere in the world and refer to each *Orixá*, but the recipes vary as in our home. For example, we all know potato soup, right? You make potato soup in a way, but the potato soup someone else makes will be in another different way. Anyway, what I mean is that *Babá* had the resolve and the patience to teach me his recipes, and I learned a lot, I learned many things as an uninitiated Candomblecist woman. In the Candomblé structure, I read this recently, the *Iyabassés* must have to be someone already initiated in the religion, and it must be a woman.

It really is a great honour to cook for Candomblé. Although I am not initiated, I have always been attentive to the seriousness of this position because the energy that an *Iyabassé* manipulates is very powerful.

As an *Iyabassé*, when I arrive in the kitchen with the task of making an offering to someone, I always bother to know that person's name because during all the time preparing the offering I will think about this

person, I will metalize good things for this person all the time. Cooking is a form of prayer, so I am not in the kitchen to talk, to make jokes or fool around, I am in the kitchen praying. But, of course, there are times when this happens, it is normal, it is human, and it is healthy to laugh. We are happy in the community. We spend the whole day in the community, we want to relive moments, share stories, but when I am in the kitchen, I am focused, I am in connection with the person making the offering, the offering preparation, and the *Orixás*.

But, anyway, we have to learn to moderate the ego, that is my biggest challenge in this house, to be true to what I learned, faithful to the wisdom of the *Orixás*. And, in this fidelity pact, I work the patience, even with myself, that is crucial. We strive to be patient with life and forget about ourselves. As long as my restriction of not wanting to initiate is respected, I will always be here with an open heart, and waiting for a new generation of people to be interested in working in the kitchen. A generation that will be willing to keep and take forward, as we are getting older, the knowledge of preparing the sacred food. We need people that are willing to get into the Axé² aware that Axé is sacrifice and exchange, the exchange that *Babá* always

² To enter into the Axé means to connect to the spirit of Candomblé. Axé is the force that inaugurates life as its vitality of the physical experience.

talks about. We, women, know that the kitchen is a thankless job.

This experience here at Candomblé is fundamental for me; it was my biggest gain so far at the age of fifty-three. Accepting the *Orixás*, accepting my limitations, tolerating differences, is a daily challenge, and it is an interiority challenge of those who cultivate spirituality.

And what is spirituality? What is it? It is a state of connection with your inner force. I pray the psalms every morning; I study the Gospel by myself at home on Sundays; when I arrive in Salvador, Bahia, I go to mass with my mother. And she asks me ‘my daughter, what is your religion? In Berlin, you go to Candomblé, here in Brazil you take spiritual healing, you go to mass?’ I say ‘mother, there are many ways that lead to God. I do not have to choose a single path! I have to feel close to God. I have to feel God inside me.’ That is spirituality!

Another important thing to experience in the sacred cuisine of Candomblé, here in Berlin, is how to deal with the lack of some ingredients. I remember when I arrived here, in 1988, I brought palm oil, coconut milk, and other ingredients from Brazil. **With globalization, many ingredients arrive here, which made the Iyabassés’ lives much easier and nowadays, we find 99% of dry foods. The palm oil and the coconut milk that are the basis of Axé’s cuisine; the banana**

leaf - without açaçá, there is no Candomblé -, we have already found here in the Asian and African shops. Of course, there are some herbs needed, and we try to bring them from Brazil, but even that we are overcoming. Do you know why? **Because the need to move forward makes us develop other learnings.**

Today we realize that many plants in Germany we can adapt to the needs of Candomblé and serve the healing process, and twenty years ago, we did not know it. It is very positive because it encourages and strengthens people who seek this kind of natural healing.

Nowadays, we can do in Berlin many healing rites that in the old days could only be done in Brazil.

Things developed well for everybody who wanted to worship and seek healing in the Candomblé in Berlin. We have a large flow of people who seek to take care of themselves through herbal healing and offering rituals to the Orixás. **This house has a lot of Axé!!! And, I say more, the adaptations that we had to go through is what most symbolizes the force of Candomblé.**

2 Diana Schreyer

Ich bin Diana, 50 Jahre alt, ich wohne seit 6 Jahren in Berlin und gehöre seit 3 Jahren zum Candomblehaus in Berlin. Eigentlich komme ich aus einer kleinen katholische Stadt an der tschechischen Grenze. Dort gibt es ganz viele Wälder, Wiesen, Felder, Bauernhöfe, Kirchen, Klöster, Grotten mit Marienerscheinungen, Marterln und den Wallfahrtsort Therese von Konnersreuth.

Im Alter von 20 Jahren kam ich dann in Bayreuth mit dem Afrika Haus in Kontakt. Ulli Beyer, der damalige Leiter, war der Mann der Oshun Priesterin Susanne Wenger. Sie hat viele Jahre mit ihrem Mann in Nigeria gelebt. Sie war Künstlerin und wurde inisiert und hat sich um die Schreine von Oshun gekümmert. Rückblickend finde ich es spannend, dass ich eigentlich damals schon mit diesem Thema zu tun hatte ohne zu wissen, dass es 20 Jahre später nochmal in mein Leben tritt. Im Afrikahaus gab es Vorträge, Konzerte, es gab Veranstaltungen der Ethnologie und Islamwissenschaft. Unter anderem gab es einen Film über Mami Wata. Und eine Dozentin reiste damals sogar eigens aus Berlin an, um über Zauberei & Hexerei in Afrika zu sprechen. Ich war fasziniert. Menschen durchquerten mit den Tuareg die Wüste. Die Wüste übte ihre Faszination auf mich aus. Ich lernte aber alles nur in Filmen & Seminaren kennen.

Mit einer Freundin wollte ich damals nach Marokko

gehen und reiten. Reiten habe ich gelernt in der Zwischenzeit, in Marokko war ich bis heute noch nicht. Aber ich habe damals ein halbes Jahr im Nahen Osten gelebt.

Es war Jordanien. Hätte ich es mir aussuchen können, wäre ich damals vermutlich viel durch Afrika gereist um alles selber zu erleben und den Einfluss von Sprachen aufeinander zu untersuchen. Arabisch, Swahili, Spanisch, Französisch waren damals mein Ding. Ich habe alles aufgesaugt. Aber wie so oft kommt es dann anders im Leben, als man denkt

Im Alter von 33 Jahren zog ich dann ins Saarland. Ich zog dort meine Tochter groß. Ich habe in der Nähe des Staatstheaters gewohnt und viel Zeit im Theater verbracht. Damit tat sich wieder eine neue Welt auf, die Welt des Theaters. Es gab das Le Carreau in Forbach, Festival Perspectives und das Max Ophüls Filmfestival in Saarbrücken. Es gab öffentliche Ballettproben und Tanzworkshops für Amateurtänzer mit den Balletttänzern des Staatstheaters, französische Literaturtage, Einführungsmatinées und -soirées für Opern & Ballettstücke. Nach und nach erschloss sich mir, wie Bühnenbild, Musik, Tanz, Kostüm, Maske usw. ein Ganzes ergeben. Es war wieder eine spannende Zeit und ich mittendrin.

2009 lebte ich noch in Saarbrücken. Und da gab es ein

Tanzwochenende Afro Dance in Saarbrücken, vielleicht ahnst du, wer ihn gegeben hat? Bezeichnenderweise gab es dazu noch ein Ritual für Obaluaie. Weder sagte mir Candomblé zu diesem Zeitpunkt etwas, noch hatte ich mit Portugiesisch etwas auf dem Hut. Es folgten weitere Tanzworkshops in Saarbrücken und Berlin, die Teilnahme am Karneval der Kulturen mit Afoxe Loni 2011 in Berlin und bald die ersten öffentlichen Rituale im Candomblé Haus. Als meine Tochter dann auf eigenen Beinen stand, habe ich 2014 meine Koffer gepackt und bin hierhergezogen. Nachdem ich *Babá* in Saarbrücken kennengelernt habe als Tanzlehrer, kam ich immer öfters zu Tanzworkshops nach Berlin. Und irgendwann geht man dann auch zu öffentlichen Ritualen. Und so hat es seinen Lauf genommen. Ich habe dann eigentlich nur spaßeshalber angefangen mich zu bewerben, ich dachte, das klappt eh nie. Im Saarland war der Arbeitsmarkt sehr schlecht. Aber ich war dann sehr erstaunt, dass ich immer öfters zu Vorstellungsgesprächen eingeladen wurde in Berlin. Und so nach 1.5 Jahren war ich dann hier. Es ging dann ganz schnell innerhalb von 4 Wochen. Wohnung in Saarbrücken gekündigt, Arbeit gekündigt, Freitag losgefahren und Montag fing das neue Leben an hier. Ich kannte nur Leute aus dem Candomblehaus bzw. aus dem Forum Brasil.

Ich arbeite jetzt seit ca. 15 Jahren in verschiedenen Universitätsverwaltungen, von Sekretariat über

Finanzverwaltung, jetzt akademisches Auslandsamt. Also immer klaren Regeln folgen. Ich glaube, das kann ich gut, deshalb passe ich wahrscheinlich auch gut als *Eke*.

Im Allgemeinen würde ich über Spiritualität sagen, dass man Dinge erlebt, die man nicht erklären kann zwischen Himmel und Erde. Aber man akzeptiert sie einfach und man erkennt, dass man nur eine kleine Nummer ist im großen Getriebe. Und man hält dann den Ball flach.

Ich finde, dass Candomblé Impulse anbietet. Man kann sie ignorieren oder annehmen. Das entscheidet man dann für sich selbst. Den Weg geht man auf jeden Fall selber. Man wird immer wieder in Frage gestellt, es hört nie auf und man kann nicht mal für sich selbst die Hand ins Feuer legen. Heute scheint alles ganz klar zu sein, morgen ist es vielleicht anders. Niemand weiß es. Damit muss man leben können. Es ist kein einfacher Weg. Man konsumiert nicht als Sohn oder Tochter des Hauses, sondern man wird in die Pflicht genommen.

An manchen Tagen frage ich mich, warum tu ich mir das an? Vor allem die öffentlichen Rituale sind sehr anstrengend für die Töchter & Söhne des Hauses. Gegen Geld könnte man sich alles Mögliche kaufen in der Esoterikwelt. Aber letztlich ist es so, dass man sich

hingezogen fühlt so wie eine Art Berufung, so dass man immer wieder kommt, auch wenn man manchmal vor Erschöpfung den Kopf unter dem Arm trägt.

Es hat sich vor einem Jahr herausgestellt, dass ich *Eke* sein werde. Ich bin zum ersten Mal nach Brasilien gereist. Ich habe dort eine ältere Dame besucht, die schon seit vielen Jahren *Eke* ist und die sagte mir ins Gesicht, ich bin *Eke* und mein *Orixá* hat mich nach Santo Amaro gebracht. Und dann bin ich zurück nach Berlin und dann wurde das Jogo de Búzios befragt und tatsächlich, die Rolle einer *Eke* ist mir vorbestimmt. Und ich werde jetzt so *peu a peu* herangeführt. Es ist noch sehr vieles neu und ich habe noch viel zu lernen. Aber ich fühle mich wohl. Ich denke, es wird langfristig zu mir passen. Im Sommer ist geplant, dass ich meine *obrigação* mache. Zu Olubaje.

Es fing damit an, dass ich mich um ganz einfache Dinge gekümmert habe wie die Wäsche im Allgemeinen. Dann bereitet man die Rituale mit vor. Man versucht voranzuplanen, was braucht man wann. Was kann ich machen? Was ist mein Anteil? Aber letztendlich soll ich bei Initiationen helfen. Aber was dann auf mich zukommt, weiß ich erst, wenn ich selber initiiert bin. So zeitintensiv wie Candomblé ist, wird es mein Leben sehr bestimmen. Ich verbringe eigentlich jetzt schon drei Tage hier im Candomblehaus. Also einmal um Portugiesisch zu lernen, einmal um die

Opfergaben mit zu überreichen am Mittwoch. Und samstags ist ein allgemeines Treffen. Entweder singen wir, oder wir bereiten wieder Opfergaben vor für die *Orixás*. Je nachdem, was gerade angesagt ist.

Obaluaiê ist mein *Orixá*. Über ihn hört man und liest man immer nur Krankheit und Heilung. Aber er ist auch Herr der Erde und Herr der Sonne. Das gefällt mir sehr gut. Und ganz am Anfang sagte man mir, ich solle mir vorstellen, dass ich mit meinen Füßen am Boden bleibe und immer mit dem Kopf in der Sonne. Dies ist für mich einfach eine schöne Sichtweise auf das Leben.

Wir sind alle hier im *Ilê* sehr unterschiedlich. Jeder ist anders, kann man sagen. Jeder hat ein anderes Talent und jeder kann es hier einbringen gemäß seiner Veranlagung. Jeder bekommt auch eine Aufgabe von *Babá*. Und jeder ist dann auf seine Weise Teil des Ganzen.

Es ist natürlich alles sehr fremd, ich verstehe auch nicht immer alles. Manchmal ist es so eine Art hop on und hop off. Und dann aus heiterem Himmel ist mir alles klar. Und dann verstehe ich auch was Brasilianer sagen entweder wortwörtlich oder intuitiv. Irgendwas kommt einem bekannt vor. Und man kann etwas rückschließen.

Ich habe halt immer das Gefühl, dass alle Sender in mir auf Empfang sind, ohne es aber mit dem Kopf verstehen zu wollen. Manchmal habe ich den Eindruck, ich verstehe etwas intuitiv, aber ich könnte das dann nicht mal auf Deutsch jemandem erklären, quasi was ich jetzt wahrnehme. Also ich komme zurecht irgendwie, ich schwimme hier mit, aber es ist halt nichts Analytisches, oder so. Es passt, egal, was passiert. Also, ich habe jetzt keinen Anspruch an mich. Ich habe jetzt kein Muster, in dem ich jetzt alles, was ich erlebe, irgendwie reinpacken kann. Ich habe keine Erwartungshaltung. Ich nehme es einfach nur wahr. Das ist jetzt *Yorubá*, Brasilianisch, Deutsch, mittlerweile höre ich auch wieder Hebräisch. Also, ich mache mir einfach keinen Kopf.

Candomblé in meinem Leben bedeutet auf jeden Fall immer mehr. Man bekommt Regeln als Tochter des Hauses, quasi wann man sich wie kleidet, wann man was machen muss. Es klingt erstmal sehr reglementiert, aber es gibt auch Freiheit, finde ich. Es ist ein Widerspruch an sich, aber ich habe irgendwo mal gelesen, wenn man sich festlegt, also sich verbindlich zeigt, sich verpflichtet, es gibt einem sehr viel Freiheit. Und das spüre ich in mir selber. Weil einfach viele andere Möglichkeiten wegbrechen. Die sonst vielleicht meine Zeit oder Energie kosten

würden. Vielleicht mit Dingen Zeit verbringen würde, die auch interessant wären, aber die jetzt einfach nicht mehr passen. Also Candomble bestimmt definitiv das Leben. Ja. Mehr und mehr, ohne dass ich jetzt weiß, was dann nächstes Jahr sein wird, wenn ich initiiert bin. Ich lasse es einfach kommen



3 Virginia Borges

My mother is my ground, my foundation, she is a woman of Xangô. My daughter, my great life partner, is a woman of Xangô, and now I am gestating a boy, a little Xangô! (Said Erê) Ilê Obá Sileké's cumieira is of Xangô!¹

I am Virginia Borges, Brazilian; I was born in São Paulo capital, but I grew up in the countryside. My parents are agronomists, militants in the fight against pesticides since the 1980s, when I was born. They met at college and had me when they were very young. My grandmother raised me until I was seven years old. My maternal grandfather was a farmer and held a position of trust on a farm in the countryside of São Paulo. My maternal grandmother was Spanish, she came from a very simple family of immigrant peasants, but our life was always wantless on the farm. I was raised drinking eggnog my grandmother used to make with buffalo milk and free-range chicken eggs.

My mother left me a great legacy not only intellectually, but mainly in breaking the role predestined for a woman of her generation. She was eight years old when she decided to leave the countryside and go to the city to live in an aunt's house to study. She got an undergraduate degree, a master, a doctorate, a post-doctorate, and built an international career in the field of agroecology.

1 Cumieira, or cumeeira, is the central point of energy, the base, the structure, and the heart of a Candomblé house.

I have a degree in Fashion Design, and I spent ten years working as a fashion designer in the creative department of various textile companies in São Paulo, but I ended up finding more sense in my career working with public policies for ethical and sustainable fashion in Brazil's Ministry of Agrarian Development. **From 2008 to 2014, I worked travelling through many corners of Brazil, producing collections with groups of family farmer women in different rural contexts in the country.** During this period, I went to the states of Pará, Mato Grosso do Sul, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Bahia, Minas Gerais, and Maranhão. **These groups acted as co-authors of the collections; it was a creative experience that deeply transformed me.** I plunged into a context that was in opposition to that of the industrial manufacturing system that saw the employee only as labour. Being in connection with these women and their ancestral Afro-indigenous knowledge was so inspiring! In the research for my master's degree, I reflected on this experience. **I received a grant to develop part of the research in France, and that is how I arrived in Europe in July 2017. That was shortly after the coup against President Dilma Roussef, which marked me a lot because when Michel Temer took over, the Ministry of Education cut the funding that had just made it possible for me to leave the country;** I was part of the last batch of researchers funded through that scholarship. My husband, at the time my boyfriend,

had a research grant linked to Berlin, and, when my research ended in France, we decided to settle in Germany. My adaptation process in Germany was complicated because I was finishing writing the dissertation in Portuguese, working in French with my professor and with the conservator of the Paris Ethnographic Museum, and solving my life in Germany in English. That means I went through a period of deterritorialisation, feeling very socially vulnerable until I understood myself and started to reinvent myself in the German context. The *Ilê Obá Sileké* was very important for my adaptation process in Berlin. I realise that my relationship with the house was tightening my relationship with Berlin. Today, my bond with Berlin is largely due to my bond with the *Ilê*.

Candomblé

My experience with Candomblé began in Brazil; from 2015 to 2017, I was *abian* in the *terreiro* Candomblé of Babá Tonykã in Barão Geraldo, Campinas.² It was in an offering to Yemanjá that I first felt the presence of my *Orixá*: it possessed me, that is, I went into a trance, and instead of retreating, the Babalorixá suspended my *Orixá*. That means that my *Orixá* chose me and that the Pai-de-Santo (spiritual leader) of

² *Abian* is anyone who joins Candomblé, also called Filho-de-Santo, after having gone through the ritual of Fio de Contas beads and Ebori. *Terreiro* is the name for the worship houses of Afro-Brazilian religions.

that *terreiro* recognised that I belonged to Candomblé. It also meant that I would have, at some point, to fulfil my obligations, that is, I should be initiated into the religion there or in another house. I wanted my initiation, but I had doubts if that was my home of worship, because it happened just before I came to Europe. In Berlin, I heard about the *Ilê Obá Sileké* on the internet. At first, I thought it was just a cultural space that offered capoeira and Portuguese courses, I did not understand that that cultural space could also be a *terreiro*.

As time passed, I continued to feel the presence of my *Orixá*. In my mind, I was asking *Yemanjá* to find a home of worship so that I could continue my spiritual work in Europe. Almost a year passed by when my daughter (of *Xangô*) became friends with Uriara (of *Iansã*), an actress, feminist and activist, friend of Babá Murah, spiritual leader of *Ilê Obá Sileké*. My daughter arranged to go to the *terreiro* the following week after she met Uriara and took me with her. That same day we first went to that *terreiro*, I sat on the Candomblé mat, called *enin* in Yoruba, and it means both that I felt at home and was accepted as an *abian*, that is, as a *Filha-de-Santo* not yet initiated in the religion. Today, as a *yawo*, that is, as a *Filha-de-Santo* already initiated, I realise that we can understand the *enin* in Candomblé as the skin through which we connect to a larger body as part of it: the “ethereal” body of our

Orixá.

In Berlin, I entered in a trance stage in the first *Olubajé* that I went to at the *Ilê*. *Olubajé* is a very peculiar ritual in Candomblé, it is the ritual where a banquet is offered to King *Obaluaê*. After that, I stayed only six months as an abian, and Babá Murah and I tossed and read the cowrie-shells, and the oracle said I already had to prepare for initiation; it was all very fast.

At that moment, before I decided to initiate, I was finishing my fieldwork on the north coast of Bahia and thinking about how to apply that learning here. As I was near Salvador, I went to see Babá Obaràyí so he could toss the cowrie for me, he is the Pai-de-Santo of Yá Omindarewá, Mãe-de-Santo of Babá Tonykã. I tried to follow the lineage of the worship house that I had my first contact with my *Orixá* in Brazil. The *Ilê Axé Opô Aganjú* is a *Xangô* house of the Ketu nation. It was a very important thing for me. He said that I needed to fulfil my obligations as soon as possible.

Obligations are the rites that mark the trajectory and relationship between the Filha-de-Santo, her *Orixá*, and the community that receives her. At that time, I had hyperthyroidism, and, coincidence or not, my treatment was with iodine. The healing power of iodine in Candomblé is in the sea waters, and my *Orixá* is *Iemanjá*, the mother of the salty waters of the sea. I was then invited to do my initiation in Bahia, and I

was flattered but I did not want to be a Filha-de-Santo at a distance. In this whole process, I understood that I wanted to be initiated in Germany, and that is how I became *yawo* of the *Ilê Obá Sileké*.

As a historian of non-European art, applying for a PhD at the Free University of Berlin, I am proposing to develop research that deals with the question of the reinvention of Candomblé in Germany. When I came to the *Ilê*, the double identity of the house caught my attention – a space that is both a cultural centre and a *terreiro* of Candomblé. At first, the cultural centre stood out for me, then, I realised it was also a religious space, in which Candomblé really took place. I find it interesting how this operation takes place in practice – Candomblé read through the cultural aspect.

The Candomblé history brings together a legacy of preserving an Afro-Brazilian material and immaterial cultural heritage, of persecution, struggle, resistance, and reinvention. African reminiscences, their rituals, cults, and deities, despite African ethnic differences, were recreated in the Afro-Brazilian context. The dynamics of maintaining and, at the same time, recreating traditions is something that I intend to focus on in my research. Reinvention is focused not only on the preservation of cultural heritage but also on enabling its continuity in the present and, in this sense, it also creates a future.

My approach is the History of Objects. In continuity with my master's research at the Quai Branly Museum, I will work with the enin in the context of the worship house and with one object from 16th century in the context of the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin. In spite of their very different temporal contexts, both are made from the same plants (the fibre inside the stem of the Piassava palm and the fibre extracted from the Ouricuri palm leaf), and, like me, came from Brazil to Germany. Plants remind me of my parents' ancestry who, as I said, dedicated their lives to building a social and ecological militancy. In my mom's case, in the construction of an academic trajectory in agroecology.

Now, here in Berlin, at the *Ilê Obá Sileke*, I was appointed to the position that has the responsibility and the power to care for plants in a daily and liturgical context. In this sense, the elements of my research and life trajectory intertwine in many ways to tell a story in which, to some extent, I am also a participant.

Iyá Agbára

It was my *Irmã-de-Santo*, Dofonitinha d'Oxóssi, that put me in touch with Virginia de Medeiros. At first, it was just to do a translation job, but our encounter was conducted by very supportive energy that brought an *Axé* of multiplication. Virginia, my namesake, together with Dofonitinha, also my namesake, and

I, we share the co-authorship of *Iyà Agbára*. All the people involved in the project are Filhos-de-Santo of the *Ilê*. The artist's sensibility in conducting her creative process led everyone to get involved in the project doing what they enjoy most: singing, playing, or telling their stories. The greatest example is the film portraits: the images were suggested within a collective process of creation, which includes the artist, Virginia, my namesake, who, as na abian of the house, was portrayed just like us. It is very special to me that the technical and artistic process of choosing the image was an analogy to spirituality. A portrait in the film will literally and poetically be revealed. Gustavo D'Logunedé, who filmed us, is also our Irmão-de-Santo. We worked with multiple exposures, rewinding the film inside a black box to expose the same frame to what was portrayed. We had no control over the image we were creating, we were immersed in the process and what it would literally and poetically reveal to us. That work also talks about being open to living an experience you have no control over, just like the yawo's mind is at the moment of trance. The project was divided into two phases, the Artistic Installation and the Roundtable at the *Ilê Obá Sileké*.

The way Virginia de Medeiros built the artistic experience here in Germany was very close to what I built with the group of women farmers in Bahia - creative work from a co-authoring perspective. Only

that now, instead of being the proponent, I was part of the community approached by Virginia with a proposal of co-authorship. That perspective inversion was so fascinating!

In the art world, I realise that co-authorship is still a space for social and political engagement surrounded by taboos. The logic of the art market depends on the notions of copyright, intellectual property, and, thus, on a notion of authorship that tends to be limiting; therefore, this project's form opens several debates within contemporary art. As a yawo and as an art historian working with art from non-European tradition, seeing Babá Murah, taking part with the Ilê community in the 'Ritual of Cure' in the Gropius Bau's lobby, and, in the same year, participating in the 11th Berlin Biennial highlighting Candomblé's matriarchal force is, for me, specially instigating and rewarding. There is an asymmetry of power in the dispute over the art territories - art or craft, popular or erudite culture, performance or ritual, highbrow or lowbrow art. And, at this moment in which debates on colonialisms past and present are under revision, I believe that the parameters and values that govern the art systems must continue to be questioned.

Iyá Agbára cannot be translated literally without at least a few mediations. In my opinion, it is closer to „motherly power“ than to „the power of mothers“.

During the process of our work, we are constantly debating its meaning. To us, this, too, is part of our creative process. We intentionally left the term untranslated, as a kind of refusal to force it into a semantic system it is foreign to.

4 Virginia de Medeiros

My name is Virginia de Medeiros, I am a visual artist, and I was born in Bahia's countryside, in Feira de Santana. My parents are from the hinterland of Paraíba, my mother is from Sousa, and my father, from Patos. I lived in the countryside until I was eighteen years old, and I think that was when I had my first contact with art and spirituality, like, living in nature.

I came to Berlin as a guest artist at the 11th Berlin Biennial to produce new work in the three months of residency. This edition is very interesting, all curators are foreigners and see the Biennial as a series of experiences lived in real-time, opening the process to the public. The duration of the residency is terribly short for my creative process, but the curatorial project made me accept the challenge. I arrived on 30 November 2019 and will be back on 8 February 2020.

At the same time that I accepted the invitation, I was very insecure. I talked about it to Amanda Melo, an artist friend, constellation therapist and promoter of creative processes. And she said that everything has a *raison d'être*, that we could open the residence in a systemic field to constellate my issues and to energize and stabilize the vibrational field of the residence, and I accepted it on the spot. In the constellation, we move through physical sensations that help to visualize the hidden dynamics. **As a result, the constellation**

indicated that the purpose of the residency pointed to spirituality and announced three words: Africa, territories, and healing. The manifestations are all corporeal, my body made movements never done before and performed something of the liturgy of the offerings. Two months later, these movements were repeated here at Ilê. How can a body have a memory of the future? I read that Exu is the boy who hit the bird yesterday with the stone he throws today.

I was born on February 2nd, *Yemanjá's* day. I am the daughter of *Yemanjá* and *Exu*, as well as the Blessed Mother of *Yemanjá*, *Yalorixá* who laid the foundation stone for the creation and consecration of Ilê here in Germany. In Brazil, *Yemanjá* is also called *Janaína*. My name was going to be *Janaína*, in her homage but in the end, they decided to honour my paternal grandfather, grandpa Virginio. My mother was so afraid that the waters would take me away that, when I was little, she never left me alone at sea. *Yemanjá* is the queen of the waters of the world; she rules my head and guides my destiny. In the years I lived in Salvador, I celebrated my birthdays at Praia do Rio Vermelho, at the Festa de *Yemanjá*, Candomblé's largest public religious event in Brazil.

It was here, in Berlin, that I learned that my second saint is *Exu*, *Babá* read it in the cowrie-shell divination. I am from *Exu Alaketu*, the *Exu* of this House so I felt

protected and understood that I was in the right place. In the last two months, I lived with Silvana Olivieri, a Bahian who was living in São Paulo, daughter of *Exu*, and when we are together, the world is a spell. Silvana is also part of this experience here in Berlin. **I am reading Simas and Rufino; one is a historian and the other, a Brazilian educator. They perceive the field of culture as the territory of *Exu*: the powerful cultural act is the availability of *Exu*, who ingests what arrives as an offering to return the offering, transformed, as *Axé*.**

The only thing I was sure of in this residence was that I did not want to do an authorial work, I needed to find people to think and act together. The constellation showed me that there were people already waiting for me in Berlin; yet, I did not know who they were, but I believed that when I found them, I would feel it. Lisette Lagnado, the Biennial curator, presented me with an article by Daniela Labra about the Berlin-based Latin American artistic creation and activist network, and perhaps there would be the people I would like to work with. I met Dani to talk about the article, and, in the end, we talked more about life than anything else, about the uncertainties that move and throw us at the other margin of the river, so we are not at the margin of ourselves. It is precious to trust and jump. We had a lot of fun, Dani spoke of Murah Soares, who was not in the article, but she would like him to be. She told

me that Murah is an activist on Afro-Brazilian issues in Berlin and the religious leader of Germany's first Candomblé ground.

I arrived in Berlin on the week of the Black Awareness Day. I went to an event at the Ilê and I wanted to meet Murah, but it was a hastened performance, and he told me to come back next Wednesday. Murah's humour and joy invaded me; I hugged him as if I was hugging Bahia. On this day, I also met Gil, who was doing the simultaneous translation of the event. Gil impressed me in a way I could not explain, I was captivated by the force and the smile of this daughter of Oxóssi. We smoked a cigarette in the breath of a spell that only those who are invisible can explain. I invited Gil to simultaneously translate my speech on ExRotaprint, for I felt, at that moment, Gil was one of the people who were in my vibrational field that the constellation of the residency had shown when I did it in Brazil. Gil is co-author of *Ìyá Agbára* and named the work, which means "Mothers' Force" in Yoruba. After a while, Gil realized that *Agbára* is also one of the names of *Exu*. What we do not see can still be present: *Exu* is in charge!

At the end of the event, I met Verinha, daughter of *Oxum*, a waterfall of love, and she showed me the sacred settlements in the house - the stones where the *Orixás* live. Vera is the *Yabassé*, who is responsible

for the preparation of the sacred food in Candomblé. I could never imagine that a week later, I would be her assistant, received by *Babalorixá Murah* as an abian, daughter of the house.

The week before the event at Ilê, I found three stones in the apartment I am living in Berlin; small and delicate stones streaked with lines that remind me of the palms of hands. I felt they wanted to tell me something, I put them on my altar. I visited the exhibition at Hreinn Fridfinnsson at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, among so many works, one caught my attention: the photo of a large stone that was inhabited by a spirit. The stones are talking to me, I thought.

I told *Babá* about my dream. It was a river of black, warm waters that tossed gently; it was fat and full river, a high river! The darkness embraced the landscape with a transparent veil that dyed everything grey, except the bottom of the river and the neon green of a luminous grass that snaked at my feet. At the height of my eyes on the high seas, a black man danced over the waves. His naked body reflected in sparkling silver, a reflection of the mirror he carried in his left hand brightened the divine in me. His erotic dance was beautiful; he masturbated while floating in the sea. I went out towards the beach, passed a black and soft mud, my feet sank with tranquillity. Eunice, who does reiki on me, told me that from the waist down,

I am a grown-up man, I thought, ‘is it because of the testosterone implants?’

I went to the *Ilê Obá Sileké*'s website to learn about the history of the House and I saw that a Sacred Dance Workshop was going to happen on Sunday, I signed up. It was the Sunday before I met *Babá*. It was amazing, we danced so much, and, on that day, I met Esteban Guevara, and, since then, there have been many exchanges. Esteban took me to Sérgio Costa' book launch - *Entre el Atlántico y el Pacífico Negro: Afrodescendencia y regímenes de desigualdad e Sudamérica* -, at FU Berlin where he studies.

The whole city seemed to come alive in my body in continuous formation; it was like this from the beginning to the end of this cycle of the project. There is Laura Carvalho, too! Laura encouraged me so much when everything was still enigmatic, she was there, she helped me to find answers without even knowing what the question was.

On the same day that I met Esteban, I also met Virginia of *Yemanjá*, my namesake. Gil put me in touch with her to translate my talk on ExRotaprint, for Gil had given up doing it because it would have to be from Portuguese to English and not German. Virginia and I arranged to have lunch together to talk about the translation and for me to pick up a white outfit that she

would lend me because I needed white clothes to go to Ilê. I enjoyed wearing white so much; the body vibrates differently!

Virgínia D'Yemanjá had separated a roupa de razão, which is the traditional clothing of the Filhas-de-Santo. The outfit had her name written on it, my name Virginia D'Yemanjá, on the sewing bar in blue ink. I asked if she could lend me her clothes, and she told me maybe not, but she sensed that she could. Virginia teaching Virginia how to dress. We were facing each other; I was mirroring her movements. Wrap the fabric around the body, twist it without knotting. 'You can't knot it. You have to tie it in a fold,' Virginia explained to me, and that sounded so poetic. To tie without a knot, without a fixed point, the ends of the fabric free in a fold. It was a beautiful moment, the vibe changed and turned into a promise: Virgínia D'Yemanjá had an important role in this project, she was a co-author, but I did not know that yet.

On that same day, in addition to the roupa de razão, she gave me wagi, a blue powder that I wanted so badly to purify and clean the energies of the space reserved for me on ExRotaprint. Amanda had taught me how to use it in Brazil, but I had forgotten my wagi there. The Virgínias D'Yemanjá duplicated themselves in the Ilê, creating confusion when it came to calling us by the name, so, Babá decided to call me, by my juntó,

Virgínia D'Exu. It was funny. There is still a lot of taboo around this *Orixá* because, in Brazil, *Exu* is associated with the devil by Catholic influence, even today.

On Wednesday, I went back to the *Ilê* for a chat with *Babá*, and I said what I felt without being very clear, that I did not have a project, but I thought *Ilê* was my place of work. *Babá* replied that it was the *Orixás* who took me to *Ilê*, and also that I should live the day-by-day there that things would unveil. And so, I did, and so it was. In this process of conviviality inside and outside the ground, one day, *Babá* took my face with both hands, looked into my eyes, and said, 'daughter, Candomblé is matriarchal. It is a female religion created by women. The force of Candomblé is feminine. Why women? For it is the woman who generates life; only women can give birth; only women have a uterus. Candomblé's religiosity is comprehensive; it embraces the whole world. And who embraces a large family without making distinctions? It is always the mother.' The project is about that, I realized on the spot.

ExRotaprint

I have been thinking of the artistic gesture as a way of inhabiting the world, as a movement of self-construction, always unfinished, always averse to any identity. In this sense, I was replicating the lived

experience, in ExRotaprint, as an artistic gesture.

Amanda has been helping me to take care of everything to keep my energies balanced. From the Radiesthesia, based on the exhibition room's floor plan, Amanda captured the vibrations and identified the energetically harmonic place for me to receive people and concentrate the work.

Ìyá Agbára was a collective exercise that, in addition to the *Ilê* community, connected and involved many people. It is so special to meet you at *Ilê* and work with you, Gustavo! I was fascinated by your tenderness, sensibility, and skills with the film, with the camera, with lighting, and especially with people and with Time! I have never felt such an affinity with Time, and much of that has come from you.

I feel this work will have many consequences. In fact, all the work I do is unfinished, so retaking, and putting them back in the flow of life is part of their condition. Whenever this happens, they come into existence in another way. There is no end, only process. The work is a portal to an inner journey, a continuous state of self-knowledge and transformation. It is purely spiritual and living the *Candomblé in Berlin was surprising!* I am from Bahia, and *Candomblé* has always been part of my culture, but I have never immersed myself in religiosity, it was all very intense, strong, and transforming.

5 Lucrecia Boebes- Ruin

I am Lucrecia Boebes-Ruin, I was born in Brazil, in the state of Maranhão, in Coroatá, with the surname of Patrício. Ruin and Boebes are surnames of my two German weddings.

Germany in my life.

On January 20, 1998, I landed at Kassel Airport intending to study German and take a course at a university. At the time, I was 21 years old. The day of January 20 deserves to be highlighted because, on this day, the life of the Saint São Sebastião is celebrated. This Saint is syncretized in some places in Brazil, mainly in Maranhão, as being an avatar of *Vodun Xapanã*, which in Candomblé, corresponds to *Obaluaiê*, the healing *Orixá*.

Time has passed.

I learned to speak German, and my first child, Caetano, was born on the 2nd of June, in 2000. After Caetano was born, I returned to Brazil to do my initiation in the Tambor de Mina for *Vodun Naveorualim*, which corresponds to *Oxum* in Candomblé.

Time has passed.

I lived in Portugal for a while, then, I went back to Germany, and there I had my second son, Cláudio. I

broke up with my ex-husband in the same year that Tara, my daughter, was born. It was a decisive year in my life, for I also lost my Pai-de-Santo in Brazil. Since my Pai-de-Santo had passed away, I did not know how to take care of my spirituality, it was a moment of waiting because I had found no alternative in Germany.

Time has passed.

I tried to fill the spiritual void with other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, which are splendid philosophies of life! But they could not fill the void that remained within me - the lack the beating of the drums, the cult of *Voduns* and *Orixás* have left. I missed praising the Saints in the way that I had learned from birth, since my childhood, with my traditions in Maranhão.

Time went by.

I gave up all the spiritual pursuits that I had started: meditations, tantra, Buddhism. They were interesting experiences, but I left everything behind because I felt they were not the spiritual path I wanted to take. During this period, I met my current husband, we got married, and I had one more child, my son, Lázaro, who was born on the 19th of December 2015, the day I completed *Odun*. My son was born when I was celebrating fourteen years of *Vodun*! He was planned

to be born four weeks later, but Lázaro wanted to come into the world, exactly, on that day!

Lázaro was born in October, and in November, I wanted to do a workshop with *Babá Murah*. I told my husband I wanted to dance a little, although I had just given birth, I really wanted to dance for the *Orixás*. I went there with my baby; Lázaro was not even a month old.

I told Ina, the person in charge of the workshop ‘Ina, please tell Murah that when my baby cries, I will take a break to breastfeed him.’ She said I could say that myself to him, that he would understand it, and that it was not a problem at all, so, my first contact with *Babá* was through dancing. The workshop lasted three hours; we dance for *Ogun*, *Oxóssi*, and *Babá* was observing my movements with my babe. He thought it was amazing to see a woman coming for the first time to the house with the attitude of like, go and dance, dance, dance and then stop to breastfeed, change the boy’s diaper, check if the boy was okay. Then back to dancing, dancing, dancing, then, putting the baby to sleep and then dancing again! That was for an entire afternoon, and, at night, there was a party, and *Babá* performed for *Xangô*. I was so delighted, and I said to him like this ‘I would like to know your house, the *Ilê*.’ He gave me the address and said, ‘Go!’ I wanted so badly to go to the next party, the *Festa de Oyá* but I was

too much involved in the housework, taking care of the children. I ended up not being able to go.

Time goes by.

The month of the Berlin Culture Carnival came and Danilo, a friend from Banda Peludum, called me two weeks before asking me to go there with him and said ‘Hi Lu! We are going to Berlin; don’t you want to come with us? You and Caetano?’ I said, ‘I will think about that.’ Someone offered a ride and a place to stay in Berlin, so I went. I met *Babá Murah* for the second time, he was with Barraca do Acarajé,¹ and I tasted Murah’s delicious Acarajé and he invited me to go to Ilê during the week.

That same week, I went to see *Babá Murah*, and he tossed the cowries for me. It was an incredible experience! When he threw the shells, some of them flew from the table and landed on my leg. *Babá* looked at me and said ‘your *Orixá* is asking for your obligation.’ I was so amazed because I was already feeling the *Orixá*’s demands!

I am a somewhat peculiar but not rare case of Filha-de-Santo in the Candomblé liturgy. I have what is called *Orí Mejí*’s Candomblé. In *Yoruba*, *Orí* means the head, *Mejí* means half, and their combination means

¹ It means a food stall that sells acarajé. Acarajé is a traditional Bahian dish.

a double head. Two Saints rule my head at the same time, that is, two *Orixás*. In Candomblé, we usually have one *Orixá* in the front, a father or mother commanding the head, and a second *Orixá*, which is the *Juntó*. When you become unbalanced in the quality of your head's *Orixá*, you will be supported by the qualities of your *Orixá Juntó*. In Brazil, I had the initiation for only one of the Saints, the *Orixá Oxum*, so there was a very strong demand from the other, in this case, *Yemomja*. It was so strong that Iemanjá was not letting *Oxum* speak in the cowries. Soon, we set up an *Obori*, a traditional Candomblé ritual of energetic harmonization, to calm Iemanjá down. My *Obori* happened at the end of May, and we had already scheduled my offering to *Yemomja*. My first initiation was seventeen years ago; so, it was a long-time owing obligation. When we initiate in Candomblé, we have obligations to fulfil, which are ceremonies for our *Orixás*. We have these ceremonies after three years of the initiation, then again in five, seven, and fourteen years. And, I had already passed the time to make that offering.

We scheduled the offerings, I made the obligations, and from there, I started to participate in the events of *Ilê Obá Sileké*. But, as I do not live in Berlin, I am not able to have intense participation like my brothers in the house. I always come by train, and it takes me four hours from where I live, Bochum, till here. I come over mostly on special occasions when there are

parties or initiations. When my kids are on holidays, I can come more often but, even not being here daily, I take some responsibilities in the house, with my Família-de-Santo so when I am here, I participate intensively. In Brazil, the Família-de-Santo is more homogeneous; I interacted only with Brazilians. Here, I live among people from different parts of the world: from Israel, Sweden, Portugal. I live with different cultures and ideologies that eat, pray, sing, and dance together for the *Orixás*! It is a new experience with many challenges, but, if I take stock of how my life developed after Candomblé, I would say it is very positive.

Candomblé

To begin with, I was not initiated in Candomblé Ketu, the line this house follows. My initiation was in the Tambor de Mina *Jeje Nago*, Afro-Brazilian religion that has its roots in the Kingdom of the Old Dahomey, where the current location of Benin is. In Brazil, the main centre of Tambor de Mina is the city of São Luiz do Maranhão. There are many houses in Maranhão, such as Casa das Minas, which is the oldest ground. It was founded in the mid-19th century by Maria Jesuína who was, in fact, Queen Nã Agotimé, of the royal family of Abomey, mother of the King Guezô of Dahomey, brought as a slave to Brazil. We also have the Terreiro de *Iemanjá* and other extinct grounds that

were very important for the existence of the Tambor de Mina.

Tambor de Mina worships *Voduns*, *Orixás*, and enchanted entities (gentiles or caboclos, who are spirits of kings, nobles, Indians, Turks, etc.). In the south of Maranhão, there is the Terecô, which also integrates the Tambor de Mina. That religion has many elements of Candomblé, but it is more focused on the forces of *Exu* than of the other *Orixás*. The head of this spiritual phalanx is *Léguas Boji da Açucena Trindade*.

When I switched to Candomblé Ketu, I stopped worshipping *Voduns* and started to worship *Orixás*, and for this change of worship, we say: 'I changed the waters.'

In the Cult of the Tambor de Mina, the liturgical language is Jeje or Fon. Fon was the official language of the ancient Kingdom of Dahomey. *Vodun* means ancestry. In Candomblé Ketu, the liturgical language is Yoruba, so I had to learn a new language from scratch! The knowledge I have about the Tambor de Mina, I keep for me as a legacy for life.

Back to *Ilê Obá Sileke*

After my initiation for my *Orixá*, *Yemomja*, I did all my obligations that she was demanding, and, at this time,

Oxum, my first *Orixá*, also demanded I fulfilled my obligations with her. Along with my two head *Orixás*, I have my *Juntó*, which is my second saint, the *Orixá Obaluaiê*, which is an Ancestral *Orixá*. An Ancestral *Orixá* is when it was an *Orixá* from an ancestor that needs to be taken care of. I will fulfil my obligations to *Obaluaiê*, probably, next year. I am seeking to balance all the energies that follow me, and, with time, I will understand how I sit in this house, whether I'll have a function in the future or not. I still do not know it, but I think I will have.

About the German immigration process

As I said, I arrived here on 20 January, the day of my *Vodun Xanapã*, which corresponds in Candomblé to *Obaluaiê*, my *Juntó*. I came to Germany to study the language and to take a university course. After a year, I learned a basic German that allowed me to interact well and be independent. At university, I undertook a course that would validate my Brazilian high-school diploma but, around this time, I got pregnant with my first son and was not able to finish the course.

At home, with my ex-husband, we only spoke German, and it was vital for my adaptation phase because I understood that the more I got involved with the language and the Germans, the more I would understand how to speak and more about this culture.

Language has a lot to do with the way people think, with their culture; if we avoid the social integration process, it becomes much more difficult to understand the differences between languages. Learning how the German people think was very important to understand the language, and I put a great effort into understanding it. Today, I can say that I have a great understanding of the thinking structure of these people. With my children, I used to speak Portuguese, but I realized that at school, they mixed the two languages, then, I started to speak only German with my children.

Not long ago, I decided to study German again and I started attending a school for adults to get a certificate that allows me to do a university course. I dared to take German as the main subject, I read and interpreted several German authors like Goethe, I did well in the subject, and, last year, in December, I took the final exam and got my certificate. I decided to study at RUB, Ruhr Universitat Bochum and enrolled in two courses: the science of Romanesque religion with a focus on Spanish. In one of them, I will study religions, and the focus of my research will be on African religions in the United States and especially in Latin America. I want to understand the cult of the *Orixás* and *Voduns* of the enslaved black people in the United States, the Cuban Santeria that have their roots in the *Yoruba* religion, the Haitian *voodoo*, and the black resistance in Haiti

in addition to all the richness of the developments of the African religions in Brazil. I know my work will be innovative because there are not many studies on African religions in Germany. My research focus has to do with my spiritual life – since when I was younger in Brazil, with Tambor de Mina, until my experiences with Candomblé here in this house Berlin. I am very interested in developing the research on the worships from Benin, on the *Voduns* more than the cults in Nigeria. We know, in Brazil, that there are many connections among African religions, for instance, many *Voduns* from Dahomey are worshipped in Candomblé Kentu. In the Jeje Nation, *Obaluaiê*, *Nanã*, and *Oxumaré* correspond to *Vodun Dan*.

Ilê helps me to understand Germany from a religious perspective. Here, we have more tranquillity than in Brazil to keep this Candomblé house alive because Germany gives us the same right to worship as they give to any other religion. When we look at Brazil, we see what

happens to religions of African origin, they are targets of intolerance, and discrimination, persecution, and violence against supporters only increase.

Around where I live, Bochum, in the city of Essen, there is the Vodun Museum. It has a huge collection of artefacts that are exhibited around Germany. The

person in charge of the museum has already been in various countries like Benin, Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil. Last time we met, he told me that a German supermarket chain was so impressed with his collection that they offered him a bigger space to set up the museum. He and the museum count on the support of people and the community; that is, of Germany. He also told me that on his last trip to Brazil, he met families that had to abandon the worship of their ancestors and had to get rid of their religious artefacts. He brought some of these artefacts along with him to be part of the Museums' collection, human-size images of Exu and Pomba-Gira that would probably disappear. He divided the museum into different cults: there is a part for Benin, another for the *Egunguns*, one for the Haitian cult, there is also a space for the Cuban Santeria, and, now, there is a space for the Brazilian worships. The museum not only exhibits the artefacts but also offers lectures and talks about the subject. In this sense, I think the German State cooperates and provides the opportunity for other cultures to exist and survive.

My first contact with spirituality - that carries me and that I carry it.

It all started in São Luiz do Maranhão. In Maranhão, I went to several Tambor de Mina houses; one of them was the Terreiro de Dona Lurdes. I used to participate

in the sessions and the beatings of the drums that she held, and I also had a neighbour who was very important in my spiritual life, she was a Mãe-de-Santos. Yet, she did not want to be one, she knew everything she had to do, but she did not do it. She is of *Obaluaiê*, just like me. My neighbour started to get sick, and it had to do with her rejection of her spiritual mission, which is normal in our religion. When we have such energy, and we do not take care of it, there is a physical imbalance. She could have tried to balance her energy without having to take any position within the religion. Anyway, it was with her that I learned a lot about Vodun cults and spirituality. In the city we lived in, there was an old fellow who played the drums now and then; we could hear it from my home, it was so cool! My mother did not allow us to go there, but our childhood had the rhythm of the drums, we loved to listen to that loud sound! I thought it was great! I know how to sing for all the enchanted entities and Saints because it is part of my childhood. The connection I have with my spirituality is from the cradle. As a child, I used to go to the healing sessions at the nearby grounds, I received the spiritual healing, and we sang to all the entities and deities, 'the black water mother of the river is coming. **The black water mother of the river is coming. But she will take charge of someone; I do not know whose it is. But she will take charge of someone; I do not know whose it is.**' This song is sung for enchanted fresh water. When I sang it, it sounded

like a call; I felt like she, the entity, was speaking directly to me, and I knew I was of the water since I was a child. The whole time the cycle renews itself, and my spirituality will always be present no matter where I am in the world. I will carry my *Voduns* and my *Orixás*, and they will show up to me! I never feel alone!



6 Vera Regina Menezes

When we feel good only at looking at someone and because of this person's way of being, the hug will be an exchange, and, then, there is no way it will not be good. I love hugging people I like. The hug is one of the good emotions I put out.

I introduce myself as Vera Regina Menezes, married name Schneeberg. I was born in Rio de Janeiro, in Niterói, Brazil, I am sixty-nine years old, I have a wonderful family that lives in Brazil, and I miss them a lot. We Brazilians have this family affinity, we are family people. I have many siblings, twelve, and they are all wonderful people!

I have been in Germany since 1983, and I came here because my sister, in 1979 - at the time she was forty years old -, met a German man in Rio and they fell in love. He is a wonderful man; he was seventy years old at the time. Five years later, my sister invited me to come over and live here. After I arrived in Europe, I went to Italy, France, England, Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland and, then, I returned to Berlin and stayed here until today. I got married, I have a daughter, who is thirty years old, and I have a grandson! I got a grandson, who will be three years old, he is cute!

I left Brazil for several reasons, but in particular, because Brazil is an ungrateful country, it does not give opportunities to its children. We have life purposes,

we want to achieve our dreams, but we cannot do it in Brazil at all, it saddens me, and it saddens me a lot. When I worked in Brazil, I had no chance to evolve in my career, because the Brazilian government is always taking what is ours by right, so, unfortunately, I came to seek this right in another country. Here, we have a structure that looks at us differently, there is collaboration, there is support for people to move forward. I ended up falling in love with Germany and never went back to Brazil. Our country has so many riches, but it loses its children for ingratitude; moreover, people are affectionate, but honesty is lacking, the character is lacking! That is what I think of our beautiful, wealthy, and wonderful Brazil.

I am a grasshopper, the sun does not even need to shine, and I am singing! I always liked to sing. In 1970, I sang on the Chacrinha TV show, I was a contestant on this show, and I had to hide it from my father because he was so severe, he would not support me in that, yet, I went there hidden and ended up winning an award. But I always sang in choirs; I was never the lead singer. When I arrived in Berlin, a friend of mine who worked with me in a French canteen said that I sang very well – I was always humming in the kitchen –, and he invited me to start a band. I said, ‘let’s start a band, let’s do it!’ Maybe you know João, I forgot his last name, he is a Brazilian writer who lived here but returned to Brazil, he writes short stories for children.

‘João Guimarães, Vera, he is my friend.’ Yes, I am the singer of the João Guimarães Band, we recorded an album of experimental music, it was this album that I gave to Gustavo and you, Virginia. Experimental music is not my favourite kind of music, but the album was very good, and we performed in several places here in Germany. I have also performed a lot of plays in Brazil; I have performed some plays here in Germany too. I love this artist’s life!

Ilê Obá Sileké

Candomblé is an ancestral religion, one of the oldest religions in human history, and it is not restricted to black people, it is not a black man’s religion. Candomblé has no race, gender, or class; none of these matters in this religion. Candomblé has its doors open to everyone. Nobody taught us how to receive people inside this house, we only feel the force that guides us, and that force translates into giving love. We give love because love begets love wherever you go or with whomever you go.

I am an *Iyabassé* in Candomblé, the person responsible for preparing sacred foods. I became an *Iyabassé* because I am one of the oldest daughters in the house. Besides, I am retired and, therefore, I have more spare time than younger people. I also like to cook a lot, but this position came by chance from fate. We are a

small group here, most people work and do not have so much spare time, and that counts a lot when we have to organize tasks. The kitchen, to me, is a sacred place, especially when I am cooking for the *Orixás* or for the people who come here to make the offering to the *Orixá*. When people come to play the shells with the *Pai-de-Santo*, and there is an obligation to do, I cook for them. *Iyabassés* have a list of the preparations of sacred foods, when an *Iyabassé* is cooking, something good comes from inside us and goes to the food we are preparing. We pray, and I ask the *Orixá* to protect the person who is doing the obligation, we ask that the person's request goes to a good place. It is not a mandatory practice, but it is something that does us good! For me, as an *Iyabassé*, this is very important, and I do it with great affection.

The *Ilê*, here in Germany, is our home, here is our place! This is where we find Candomblé together with our *Pai Murah*. Before opening this house, *Murah* and I were friends of, like, going out together, singing, drinking beer, and, then, *Murah* took the responsibility of a spiritual leader and opened *Ilê Obá Sileké*. The *Ilê* started in a tiny house, and, at that time, I had doubts if this was really my spiritual path because, before I was a Candomblecist, for about nine years, I was a Buddhist. During this time, I was in search of a religion, I wanted to stay in one religion. My family comes from the Christian tradition, my father was

a Protestant, but we did not go to church, and **my mother was a rezadeira, she sensed her ancestral spirituality.**¹ She used to put a leaf with a sprig of herbs behind her ear – I do not remember the name of it – and prayed for the children of the community. **The rezadeiras are fated to heal by faith, but my father never let her participate fully in this activity.** My mother had her images of faith – back in the days, almost every Brazilian had one near the front door of the house – but my father did not want those images, he did not accept images of Candomblé saints at home. We were unable to attend any other religion because my father forbade it.

Here in Germany, when I met Murah, I came to realize how my spirituality in Candomblé is something that comes from within, it is neither a choice nor an obligation, it is something from the heart. Candomblé is a feeling in my life. You feel Candomblé, you feel the need for the other., you want to know how the other is doing, **you want to welcome, help, and to be together.** **And what is spirituality? It is water, the wind, the leaf, all that is natural; everything that affects Nature is spiritual. In the sand, inside, we find strength – this is spiritual for me. I found here in this house, Ilê, Nature,** and we are fine, thank God. We try to welcome people into this house in the way that spirituality makes us feel – which is an infinite loving force, it is

1 Rezadeira is a lady who prays for the healing of the people.

this force that we seek to show at *Ilê*, it is this force that Candomblé shows us and exerts on us so that we can welcome people, have affection for people.

What we want to show is that this force does not have to disappear, that it cannot stop. In Brazil, where it all started, they are trying to undermine that force. Destroying, closing down, persecuting by ignorance Candomblé's houses, for not understanding what this religion is. *Ilê*'s people want this force to live, to move forward, and that other people get to know it. We have the opportunity to be in Germany and to be able to talk about Candomblé without taboo, and that is why we are here to simply say: we are from Candomblé! Candomblé has to live.

We need to show this house so that the public knows about *Ilê*, the only Candomblé house in Europe. **We believe in this spirituality, and we want it to continue for generations and generations! This spirituality is our root, our ancestry that is being cut from the inside, from its cradle, Brazil. This Afro-Brazilian spirituality was born from the scarcity and wisdom of the African people, and it is not linked to capital but Nature - at a time like this, when people need it most -, Candomblé is being undermined in Brazil, that is so sad.**

So, since we are here in Germany - where the State

maintains a neutral and tolerant position towards all religions - we have the opportunity and the guarantee to practise Candomblé freely. The religions here live together peacefully, so let's enjoy being here and expand. We needed to show the beauty of this house, and suddenly, with the wind, you came, Virginia, so, hey! That is what we needed, for God's sake! So, we are very happy to participate in this project and also have Gustavo, this artist from *Ilê*, who is always behind the cameras. We always watch his movies, and now he is here working with us! This is wonderful! At least, for me, this experience is formidable! You see, when we enter this house, we do not have time for anything else, it is a lot of work, we do not have time to look at each other, to go out and have a chat because we leave here very tired, and, suddenly, you appear with the wind and give us that time. That is awesome! Congratulations!

7 Nitzan

My name is Nitzan, I am 29 years old, I have been living here in Berlin for a year and a half, and I was born in Israel. My grandparents survived the holocaust. I moved to Berlin because of Candomblé, I came because of this house, Ilê, which has invited me to be part of the spiritual process that is happening here in Germany.

I got to know Candomblé through Capoeira Angola and got to know Capoeira Angola through Samba de Roda. There is a group of Capoeira Angola in Haifa; a friend of mine was part of it, and one day, he called me to a party, and, at that party, I fell in love with Samba de Roda. I started training Capoeira Angola right after, and after ten months, I went to Brazil, where I spent one year. I had already had contact with Brazil because my grandmother lived fourteen years living in São Paulo after the family fled from Europe. My mother was born in São Paulo, but my family left the city when she was three years old. So, Brazilian culture and Portuguese language were not present in my family, but the connection exists, for example, I have Brazilian documents. Brazil is not part of my family's culture, but it is part of its history.

I went on a trip for a year, which is very common in Israeli culture, and my idea was to travel to several countries in South America, but I arrived in Brazil and stayed there. In Brazil, I travelled because of

Capoeira. The families of Capoeiristas friends hosted me, and I also stayed at the house of some Masters of Capoeira, of Sambistas, who welcomed me into their lives. **Dona Nicinha do Samba is a lady with a big heart who hosted me at her house in Recôncavo Baiano. She is like a mother; she is my mother! And she is also from Candomblé.** I was travelling through Bahia with Master Limãozinho, from São Paulo, meeting the most important people of the Samba de Roda Culture in Recôncavo. He was the one who put me in touch with Dona Nicinha; she has a Samba de Roda Group in Santo Amaro da Purificação. After this trip through the Recôncavo, I continued travelling **but I was so amazed at the community of Recôncavo Baiano, there is something there that we lack in the modern world - the simplicity of living. Simply being with each other, helping each other, waking up in the morning, making coffee and calling the neighbour over for a coffee, sitting on the porch and watching people going to and fro. It was the greatness of these little things that touched me most in Brazil.** My brother, Amir, arrived to travel with me for two months, and I returned with him to Recôncavo, and Dona Nicinha received us at her home. It was from that moment onwards that our relationship became very strong; she is a huge source of Axé, affection, and guidance.

In Capoeira, many people are part of Candomblé, the Povo-de-Santo. I practically did not participate in

any ritual in Brazil, but I lived a lot with people who were part of that culture and religion. **When I arrived in Brazil, I was an atheist but when I left Brazil, after one year, I already knew that I would initiate in Candomblé. It was a very slow and deep process, I thought, 'I am going to go back to Israel, organize my life, and move to Bahia.** I will find a house, a Pai-de-Santo, a *Babalorixá*, and I will enter a Candomblé community in Brazil.' I went back to Israel, and then I went to Brazil two more times. I visited Dona Nicinha do Samba, met Nina, who is Brazilian and a Filha-de-Santo here in *Ilê*, and it was Nina who invited me to come and check this house, *Ilê Obá Sileké*.

I came to this house as a visitor and left it knowing that the house was calling me. It was a very slow process of accepting that I would no longer move to Brazil but Europe - mostly because of the history of Germany against my people.

Now, I am here, studying and building a life in Berlin. The reason for moving to Germany was the *Ilê*; I would have never moved to Europe if it were not for this community. The day I first came to this house, I felt that the doors were open for me to arrive as part of the family and not as a mere visit. It took me three months to understand that I wanted to be a part of this house, to be part of this family, and it took two years before I moved to Berlin.

I did not choose Germany; it was the house that chose me, it was my *Orixá* who chose this house. I felt it was something I needed to accept, as it really was not my choice. I came following my *Orixá*; I chose Candomblé and *Oxum* chose this house.

Here at the house, I am an yawo. I initiated one year ago; it means that I am right at the beginning of the spiritual path. I am in this house to serve and help with whatever is needed, but I still do not have a specific position in the house, I only have small responsibilities like tidying up the pantry, cleaning, washing dishes, and helping the *Iyabassés* with whatever they need. In fact, I am here as a helper for the elders, to accompany their work and learn more and more. I think this is what it is: to follow the daily routine and slowly learn more and more and get stronger and help other people. These things are part of the community, right? Because nobody can do things alone.

My family is Jewish, but in Israel, it is quite common to have a Jewish identity without being religious, and it is a very difficult thing to explain when you live outside Israel. We celebrate religious holidays but in a non-religious way. It comes down to gathering the family and making dinner, but following the religious rules, that is not it, it was never part of my upbringing. My mother is very spiritual, but she does not have a strict

religious path, she, like, learns a little from one path then goes on to another one and learns a bit more, but my dad is not interested at all in spirituality. Me too, I was never interested in the spiritual aspect of life until I went to Brazil and until I understood how deep the spiritual dimension is in Capoeira Angola. And it was in Brazil that I could understand the connection between Capoeira Angola and Candomblé! That was my spiritual revelation.

Today, *Ilê* is my centre. I left my whole life behind to be part of this family; if I had not felt the force that exists in this community, I would never do that. That is a very important thing in my life. Moving to another country can be a very tough process, it can lead you to a deep feeling of loneliness, but I did not move alone, I moved to a community. The difficulties until we establish a life outside our country still exist, but I knew that if I had any problems, I could count on *Ilê*'s family. I know that there will always be someone to be with me, and that person will help me carry the weight of any difficulties that I may face. A weight that, in this model of an individualistic society, we usually have to bear alone.

Me and Or, my brother, have a very strong connection on a daily basis and before moving to Berlin, we lived together. He has always been very spiritual. When I started the Candomblé path, he was very interested

too, and I felt that this place, Ilê, could do him good. Or arrived for a visit and, the first time he entered the house, the house also opened itself for him. He ended up being part of the community, but he still lives in Israel, for we have different immigration processes. Yet, he is part of my blood and spiritual family.

My grandmother had no contact with Candomblé, but in her house, there were drawings that, after knowing Candomblé, I realized that they had a connection, like the representation of an offering to *Iemanjá*, and, at that time, I had no idea what it was. **My grandmother is a very important person in our life, and she is also very fond of Brazil and Brazilian culture. She was one of the people who most supported me moving here, and she came to visit me three or four times, participated in the rituals, and prayed in Yoruba with us. I think her history of surviving the holocaust has made her a very strong woman,** for she had to make a series of changes like moving to Argentina, then to Brazil, returning to Europe, and then moving to Israel. **That is a very typical story of the Jewish people, they always had to move from place to place, and always needed to protect and defend themselves. For me, this story also has a connection with the black resistance that is the foundation of the Candomblé religion.**

8 Nina Graeff

My name is Nina Graeff. My surname comes from my father's family; my grandparents are German descendants. I am from Porto Alegre, South Brazil.

I am a musician working mainly as a researcher of music anthropology. I came to Germany to study piano when I was twenty-two years old. My boyfriend at the time was also a pianist. We went to Weimar together. One year later, I passed the entrance exam at the Strasbourg Conservatory and moved there to study for two years. Because I already had another boyfriend in Weimar, once I finished my studies in Strasbourg, I went back. I preferred to live in France, but I went back because of my boyfriend.

In Weimar, I did a master's in Music Anthropology, Ethnomusicology, and started working with research. That's when I met Tiago de Oliveira Pinto, who is the holder of the UNESCO Chair for Transcultural Music Studies at the University of Weimar. He was the one who took me away from Bach, Beethoven - from the German composers I came to study - to start studying Brazilian Music. This happened because he took me to Bahia. It was in 2010. He took me to Recôncavo Baiano, and I was very moved by people's energy there. Their generosity made me want to dedicate my studies and research to that culture. That's when my research on Samba de Roda began and I had my first contact with Candomblé. I had never identified myself with Brazilian culture when I left Brazil.

In Recôncavo Baiano I met Nicinha do Samba, who is of Iansã. Nicinha is a woman that I admire a lot! A very strong woman; the great Matriarch of Santo Amaro da Purificação. I always admired *Iansã* for being such a strong woman! A woman who goes with the wind, fiery. It was something I wanted to be, but I wasn't yet. Now, I have become a bit more like *Iansã*. In Bahia, I had a great admiration for Candomblé, but I was also afraid. I think it's very common for people to be afraid, not wanting to play with an energy they don't know.

I returned to Germany with the desire to do another fieldwork trip to Recôncavo Baiano for my master's. But I was afraid to go there alone. So much that during this time, I had my first dream about *Iansã*. It was a dream with an important message, but also full of fear.

After I finished the master's, I still worked on some projects in Weimar. But I never liked Weimar. I never wanted to go there in the first place, and I was already kind of depressed. That's when I decided to move to Berlin. I had nothing waiting for me in Berlin, but I wanted to do a doctorate here. I started to write a research project on Samba, Candomblé, and Capoeira in Berlin and Bahia. I already knew about the Ilê Obá Sileké, I had seen it on the internet. I thought it would be a good idea to do fieldwork there.

I have always been very emotionally dependent on my

love relationships. I kept changing boyfriends; I was never alone. When I came to Berlin, my relationship was not well, and we ended up breaking up. I found myself in Berlin, almost 30 years old and, for the first time, alone. I spent a long time learning how to deal with this loneliness - that of not having someone to take care of me. **This was a moment of great change in my understanding of my condition as a woman.**

While preparing the research project, I went to an Ilê ritual. Everyone thought I was German, they spoke to me in German, because I am white with green eyes. That day was the first time that I saw Babá Murah, who reminded me so much of Nicinha! Both are of Iansã! At that moment, I missed Nicinha, I hadn't seen her in a long time and, immediately, I identified with Murah and the *Ilê* house. Both Murah and Nicinha are very affective and, besides that, they are like the wind! They are children of Iansã: creative, fiery people who do things their way!

I went again to Ilê to do a dance workshop and attend a lecture by Babá Murah. Babá talked about his life story in Berlin, about the *Ilê Obá Sileké*, Germany's first Candomblé house that also hosts, in the same place, the Forum Brasil Intercultural Center. He told us he was the founder of the Berlin Carnival of Cultures and of the *Afoxé Loni* Group formed by the Ilê community. That day, I admired him even more, him and his

husband Martin Titzck. On that very same day, I saw online that there was an internship at the Forum Brasil, and I applied.

I talked to Martin with an anthropologist mind: ‘will I get access to Candomblé? It’s so hard. It’s all so closed in itself.’ At the meeting, Martin asked me if I saw myself more as a cultural manager at Forum Brasil or as an assistant of the Pai de Santo *Babá Murah*. I was a bit confused; I didn’t even know how to respond at the time. ‘What do you mean by Pai-de-Santo’s assistant?’ As a result, I became *Babá’s* assistant, and, as an assistant, I was able to participate in all internal rituals. This happened a week before I got my Ph.D. scholarship. I was still working in Weimar. Shortly before that, I had decided to resign and leave my past in Weimar behind. A past tainted by love and professional betrayal. Once I let go of this past, a new path opened up: I was accepted immediately to work at Ilê. I also volunteered to work at Forum Brasil, and I was awarded a three-year doctorate scholarship. All of a sudden.

At the beginning of my doctorate, I came to the Forum Brasil every week. The idea was to stay there for six months and then research Capoeira. The six months passed, and I kept coming here. I missed *Babá*, I couldn’t stop coming. I couldn’t leave Ilê but I also didn’t want to give myself to religion. Then, I went to

Brazil to do my research in Santo Amaro da Purificação. When I returned to Germany, I started having very revealing dreams. I started to have a more intimate contact to my *Orixá*, *Oxum*, and it was, then, that I decided to do the initiation. I haven't initiated yet, but the promise has already been made to my *Orixá*. It will be when she wants. That's when I really got into Candomblé. That was in 2016 when I was writing up the thesis.

My research process, and later, my ethnographic writing, allowed me to learn, through the body, the subject of my thesis. Candomblé invaded my body. As I wrote the thesis, I was transformed. I became more and more open and cheerful! I learned to smile! I learned to hug people! I learned to be much more sociable. I realized I was a very individualistic pianist and a very repressed woman.

My sensitivity started to flourish. I started to have more self-confidence, self-love and I became a feminist woman. I started writing poems. I always wrote one here and there but suddenly it was a waterfall of poems. I wrote three hundred poems in a few months. And it wasn't long before I started to accomplish my biggest dream: composing music. It happened in a very natural way. I realized how my family context was repressed and repressive. Candomblé, under the light of the *Orixás*, took me out

of this shadow. I didn't become an Iansã, an Orixá that I admire so much. But that's okay, I am not the daughter of Iansã. Candomblé showed me that **I can exist within my shyness but with self-confidence; knowing that being shy has several qualities. The qualities of the Orixás complement each other, both in the material and in the spiritual world.** I learned this at Candomblé by seeing people from different Orixás living with their differences. Seeing that each one has its place, its role, and its capacity.

Candomblé made possible a whole personal transformation that also became a professional one, thanks to the Orixás. And you have to live it to believe. My thesis talks a bit about the experience within Candomblé. Only those who go through an experience like this can understand the force it has. **When reading or listening to spiritual experiences, many things may sound exaggerated. It is necessary to feel in the body, to live the day-by-day, and to feel this force blooming inside us. This is the force of nature that in Candomblé we call Orixás. And, every time we cultivate it, it gets stronger. This power brought me back into the world as a woman and made me realize the repression I suffered, which came a lot from my family. This force emancipated the feminine in me.**

Ilê Obá Silké is not just a home for Brazilian immigrants seeking a place of identification. Ilê's

extension is much greater - there are people from Africa, the United States, Cuba, Colombia, Israel. I realize that spiritual force is far greater than any cultural aspect. The force of *Axé* in Candomblé, Capoeira, Samba de Roda is very inclusive. It manages to integrate and to adapt itself to different cultures.

This force, known as Ubuntu, says: I am only well if you are well. Well-being is a collective feeling, not an individual one. This force is constitutive of both nature and the human being, but our model of individualistic and competitive society annihilates it. Candomblé people call Force of the *Orixás* what the African philosophy also calls *Ubuntu*. A society supported by the pillars of respect and solidarity is part of the essence of Ubuntu, which deals with the circulation of forces among all the world dimensions; the natural, the human and the spiritual. This circulation empowers those who contribute to it.

Ilê Obá Sileké works together with the Forum Brasil Cultural Center. There are two paths to take to be part of the house: the spiritual and the cultural. The Forum Brasil is the interface that mediates cultures; it is the door that leads to Afro-Brazilian culture, to the *Orixás* and their religious rites. This does not mean that Forum Brasil exists as a strategy to bring people to Candomblé; it is not like this. It has nothing to do with proselytism. This combination is an Afro-

Brazilian tactic of territorialization, of surviving and conquering space within society. It is a way of resisting all sorts of persecution that Afro-Brazilian culture has suffered. Today, Samba is a Brazilian national symbol. Candomblé is still discriminated against and suffers persecution in Brazil.

For Afro-Brazilian culture, it seems there is no separation between religious and cultural institutions. Spirituality is present at the Roda de Samba, Capoeira, or even at a birthday party. But, in Western society, it is different, culture and religion are separate. And there is a lot of religious prejudice. In such a case, cultural manifestations become an interface for mediation. Babá Murah knows this very well. Murah graduated in dance, is a choreographer by profession. Doing dance workshops, performances about the Orixás, or washing the steps of a Cathedral in Berlin, are ways of giving visibility to his culture through artistic language, and of opening space for Candomblé in Germany.

I am not an activist, but through my work, I try to do something that has a positive social impact on Afro-Brazilian culture. Since my first publication, I have tried to give visibility to Candomblé. I had the opportunity to publish a paper about the transmission of cultural heritage and Candomblé on the website of the German UNESCO. I disseminate Candomblé

in Berlin as a model of social organization based on the acceptance of differences, social integration, solidarity, openness to otherness, and learning through alterity. In October, I was invited to speak about Candomblé at Haus der Kulturen der Welt. I took the opportunity to show what we are doing here at Forum Brasil. It is very beautiful what happens here in this house. The power of the Orixás is contagious, brings well-being regardless of being a Candomblé practitioner. We live in a sick society. Candomblé's force is healing and that is very positive. I consider myself a mediator who translates, paves the way, and multiplies the good that the power of the Axé brings to people.

9 Mirah Laline

My name is Mirah and I am from Belém do Pará, north of Brazil, from the Amazon rainforest.

Before coming to Berlin, I lived for eight years in Porto Alegre, south of Brazil, where I graduated in dramaturgy at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, worked as an actress and built a very successful career in the field. I was the co-founder of the collectives Ato cia.cênica, Grupo Cerco, and Bloco da Laje, which are still running in the city. As a director, I staged many German authors with good public feedback and because of that, I was awarded the DAAD scholarship to study for one year in Berlin at the Ernest Busch University of Dramatic Arts. That is a well-recognized scholarship. I used this time to rethink my life, my career, for in Brazil, those who work with art experience a great deal of stress to make ends meet. I was already feeling a bit lost hopping from one rehearsal to another without knowing what I wanted. With the scholarship, I came to Berlin to take time off, but my life took an unexpected turn.

In my second month in Berlin, I met my husband, he is a Kurdish refugee from Syria, a rapper and an actor too. We met at the Gorki Theatre; it was a very crazy encounter! After we met, I immersed myself in his universe. For one year, everything I did in Germany was related to refugee issues, I got into another culture, another world. We know very little about the Syrian War in Brazil and everything outside the axis

EUA-Europe. And before completing my scholarship, I found out I was pregnant.

The pregnancy was a shock to our plans, but it was also surprising, and I will tell you why. A month before I found out I was pregnant, I had surgery here in Berlin. I had a fibroid in the womb removed, it was a tense and emotional period. I met a lot of people here because I got involved in several projects and worked like crazy, but when I was in the hospital, hardly anyone came to visit me, people were too concerned with their essays and projects, and I found out that I had almost no one. That was my first shock concerning affection, care, and friendship in Berlin. At the hospital, it was so difficult! I had to sign a surgical consent form because if something went wrong with the surgery, I ran the risk of not being able to get pregnant anymore.

I was twenty-seven years old at the time, and I think I put so much life energy in my womb, in my body, you know? It was all so intense! A month later, I found out I was pregnant, the possibility of this happening was very small.

I found out I was pregnant on July 21st, my birthday. I was in Porto Alegre beginning to work on a big project with Ato cia-cênica in a co-production with a public theatre. We both were happy, but it was an emotionally dramatic period. Lian is very young; he was twenty-

two at the time, and he was a father at the age of twenty-three - I only found out his age just before our son was born. Two months before completing my scholarship, I returned to Berlin, for we understood we could not live in Brazil. Lian does not speak Portuguese, and my pregnancy was in Brazil during Dilma's impeachment. I thought 'I cannot have my son in Brazil; the country I left a year ago is no longer the same.' So, we chose to build our lives here in Germany, but we faced a huge bureaucracy to get married as quickly as possible so that I could be allowed to stay in Berlin. When I finished my student visa, I stayed a long time on a provisional one, but I had no social rights; I could neither work nor study. The only thing the visa granted me was to live in Germany because I was pregnant and married to an Anerkannter Flüchtling, a recognized refugee. Lian was politically persecuted in Syria; he lost his passport, and, in Berlin, he cannot visit the Syrian embassy because he risks being sent back.

Everything I experienced was an emotional substance for me to find the *Ilê*.

During my pregnancy, I had only two Brazilian friends who lived with me, and just before giving birth, they moved out. After Adel was born, I became very lonely.

I had built a career in Belém, moved to Porto Alegre, built a career there, and now, I have to do it again

here. To start over in Berlin as an immigrant and with a kid is hard and we strongly feel a colonized complex. I always think I am not as good as others because I am a woman, I am an immigrant, and I do not speak the language. We have to face many barriers.

We still have cultural differences at home: Lian is Kurdish, I am Brazilian, and we still have to understand each other within the German culture, a culture that overwhelmed us with bureaucracy and demands.

After Adel was born, I had postpartum depression; I did therapy. Depression was linked to the issue of belonging as I felt that I did not belong here, I missed Brazil and my family, and I did not know how to deal with homesickness. I have always been a very spiritual person; when I was a kid, I used to go to an Umbanda house with my mother as well as to a spiritism ground to get spiritual healing. **Religious syncretism has always been very strong in my family; I grew up with that spiritual connection. For instance, I know that my dreams are premonitory, and I also play tarot cards. So, I have always lived that spiritual energy. In Porto Alegre, at the Bloco da Lage, a carnival street band which has many Umbandists people, we used to sing for Xangô, Iemanjá.**

Some friends from Brazil came to visit me, they are

from Umbanda in Porto Alegre, and they told me that I needed to take care of my spirituality. I always knew that I had a *Pomba Gira*, a spiritual entity that accompanies and guides me. We have had a good relationship since I was a kid! She was the first entity I spoke to; I was very small.

I had a Skype conversation with *Exu Destranca*, which was very intense indeed!¹ I confirmed with the entity that if I did not work on my spirituality here in Germany, I would go down even further.

In Porto Alegre, I did not go to any spiritual place, but I was actively living my spirituality. I brought people together, created groups, and I was always about bringing people together. I had a spiritual commitment through my art, it is my spiritual vehicle.

Here in Germany, I got spiritually emptied, and I lost my shine. Being a woman, daughter of *Oxum*, and having the *Pomba Gira* by my side, I was always taking good care of myself, I was always shining. Here, I got into the role of a mother, into a daily life where I had not time to take care of myself, like, I was dishevelled, careless, and thinking ‘who am I?’

That is when I decided to work on my spirituality, but

¹ Exu Destranca is an entity in Candomblé that unblocks the difficult moments in life.

I did not know anyone who frequented an Umbanda or Candomblé house in Berlin. Until one day, I met an artist friend, and we ended up talking about it, and she said that there were some Candomblé houses here and that she would take me there, but in the end, she gave me no name or address. Around this time, I received the invitation to the Party of *Cosme* and *Damião* here in the *Ilê*. I did not know it was a Candomblé house, I thought it was just an institute of Brazilian culture. Coincidentally, I met that artist friend again and she told me it was the *Ilê* the house that she wanted to take me to when we spoke that time. I went there with my son, and his meeting with *Babá Murah* was an event! He wanted to play only with *Babá*, and I had the feeling of the cosines of a home. Through my son, it became even more evident that *Ilê* was the place I was looking for. That first day was so special, my son was totally integrated into the house, and it restored my sense of belonging as it was very intense for me. The second time I came back to *Ilê*, I talked to *Babá* about it. That is how I got to this house. For me, everything is still very new; I am completing my third month here.

I knew that my entry into this house was associated with many things, and I knew that the moment I worked on my spirituality, I would prosper professionally. And it was very curious because when I made an appointment to come here, on a Wednesday,

to talk to the caboclo² to find out whether I was going to be the daughter of this house or not, the day after, on a Thursday, I got a call about a very good job offer that would save me financially for the rest of the year. From that moment on, I turned my radar on because life sends signals.

Candomblé's materiality is so new to me: the clothes, the objects, the ceremonies. In fact, I know almost nothing about Candomblé. Because my childhood experience comes from Umbanda.

What assured me that this was my spiritual house happened on the second day I came here to do the obligation for *Obi* like I was advised to do. On this day, I locked myself in the room and sang, sang, sang, sang, it was overwhelming. I never forgot the Umbanda prayers I learned as a child, and I said to myself 'this is it. I will get into Candomblé!' My mother is a very spiritual woman, and today she follows another spiritual line, no longer Umbanda nor Candomblé. She advised me 'it is what you need right now, daughter. It is what you need. It is your spiritual development.' **My mother supported me a lot, her attitude was so special.**

It was also special to know that I am entering the *Ilê* at the moment when the house needs someone to work

² Caboclo is an Amerindian spiritual entity.

on its production through an artistic perspective, for, in addition to the religious community, *Ilê* also has an artistic dimension. *Babá Murah* is also a dancer and choreographer. Showing the richness of Afro-Brazilian culture, the African tradition, and its religious symbols through artistic language is critical, legitimate, and political. I met with *Babá* and *Martin* to start thinking about how we are going to produce all the artistic knowledge that *Babá* has, like the *Orikis*, which are the poetic texts that tell the story of the *Orixás*. We presented an *Oriki* in *Gropius-Bau*, it was very special to be part of this performance. It seems that everything fell into place, I came at the right time. I know I can take this post as *Ilê's* cultural producer; art is my spiritual vehicle. I know I can bring out all the artistic beauty of the *Ilê* house.



10 Luanny Tiago

Good morning, my name is Luane Thiago da Conceição, I am 28 years old, I was born in Rio de Janeiro, in São Gonçalo, and I came to Germany when I was four years old. My family has always participated in Candomblé in Brazil. In the garden of my grandparents' house, there was even a shed where we especially met for that. **There is something very fascinating in my family; we were brought up to pretend that we are not part of this religion. Since I was little, this was very clear to me, we should not show the world that we practise Candomblé, and we should not reveal to anyone who your Saint is.**

I always went with my mother to the toque at my grandparents' house. Toque means a Candomblé public ceremony and a public party in Brazil. It was so good! I always fell asleep peacefully near the drums; they rocked me, it was like I was listening to Beethoven, it is funny, is it not?

When we came to Germany in 1997, we brought the Candomblé culture with us. **Every culture is like that, we carry it in the body, and I believe that we do not need a house to worship a religion for the body is such a house.** We can create an environment and practice religion anywhere. Of course, it is always better when we have guidance, but in my case, as it comes from the cradle, I take it with me. It is hard to escape Candomblé, and even when you want to stop

worshipping the religion, it will always be a part of you because Candomblé tells our story, it is our origin.

When my mother met *Babá* here in Berlin, I was four years old. To me, he is like an uncle; *Babá* is my uncle. My mother and *Babá* came to know, long afterwards, that they already knew each other from Rio de Janeiro, that Mãe Beata of Iemanjá is *Babá's* *Ialorixá* and was also my godparents' and my mother's *Ialorixá*. It was a great reunion when they recognized each other through Mãe Beata.

Since I arrived in Germany, I have been part of the house of *Ilê Obá Sileké*, and I also participated in *Afoxé Loni*, which lasted ten years and was part of the Culture Carnival. We were the opening act of the Culture Carnival in Berlin. It was a big mob; you have no idea! The Forum had more than one hundred people scattered around the house. *Babá's* Candomblé house received guests, and everyone else who could host someone also did so; it was a gigantic support network, but it was very tiring. Having such a big party for so many people is hard work until the day that *Babá* said 'enough. It is over. We will not do it anymore.'

When *Babá* opened the house here, in Kreuzberg, my mother helped him. There is a picture of the first Toque the house had, my mom with *ekedi*, along with *Babá*, helping to organize everything for the ceremony. My

mother lives in Hamburg, and I also lived there too. We came from Hamburg to Berlin to participate in the ceremonies as well as to enjoy Berlin, of course! My stepfather knows that we practise Candomblé, but he will explain to a German that we see spirits instead. It is very hard to talk about these things! Out of five children my mother had, I am the only one who is part of Candomblé, she did not want to involve my siblings. Now, I usually come to *Ilê* alone and my mom comes when she has the chance to.

You have to see my bedroom; it is very funny because you can see that I am from the countryside! My bedroom is full of wooden things, plants, flower prints, there are flowers on the wallpaper and everywhere! Those who know me, recognize it is my bedroom. **I love nature. And the basis of Candomblé is nature. Without nature, there is no Candomblé. You need water, you need the leaves, as well as the sun, the wind, and all the forces of nature. All of nature's energy is part of the Axé. The water we drink, the leaves we use for the baths, and the blessings, they are all part of nature. That is Axé. It is very important to take care of nature, for without it, we are nothing.**

Here in Berlin, we do not always find the leaves we have in Brazil so it is not possible to worship the way it should be done. Here, we have an adapted Candomblé, for instance, in Germany, it is forbidden to sacrifice

animals. Recently, a new idea emerged in Brazil, which is to do a vegan Candomblé without sacrificing animals. I read there is already a ground doing the ceremonies only with leaves, and the natural richness we have in Brazil allows us to practise Candomblé like that. I, for one, think the issue of adaptation is very important because it is a new way of embracing the Axé, we have to reinvent ourselves, time changes and people's needs change too. When Candomblé arrived in Brazil, it was a completely different situation than we have today and, to survive - I do not think only Candomblé, but all religions, and I would say, all cultures - it had to reinvent itself and adapt to the needs of its time. The Catholic Church also needed to reinvent itself so as not to lose its followers; it did not standstill. To practise religion like Candomblé in the German cold, we have to be very creative! How do we do an initiation in the sea when it is minus ten degrees outside? You have to find a new way to do the ceremony. First, you have to adapt to the seasons, which, here, are totally different from Brazil. Finding the required leaves is not always an easy job, and sometimes, we do not find them. Fruits, for example, sometimes we do not find them too, and things like musical instruments, clothes, garment, fabric, and other things become a challenge. The only thing we have left is to pray and apologize for Agó, for the *Orixás* like 'I am sorry, I am doing the best I can, but, I am not sure this is the right leave that we should use because

the one we need does not exist here.’ And, we go on like this with respect, trust, and love.

However, I believe that the biggest difference between Candomblé in Brazil and Europe is the issue of the Candomblecist hierarchy. In the Brazilian Candomblé houses, the positions and functions are very clear and rigid. Additionally, if you receive a task, you will fulfil it without questioning it. In Candomblé, you first experience it and then understand it. In Europe, people are not used to taking orders. The system here defends freedom and the questioning of authority, that is the European spirit. A European needs to understand before doing: ‘Why am I going to do this? Why does it have to be on this very day?’

In Brazil, no one questions a *Babalorixá*, you trust and obey. Observing and knowing how to listen are the best ways to learn in Candomblé, questions are not part of learning. It is not always easy to bow your head and do what has to be done, and sometimes the person goes home with grief, but this is also part of learning. That is one of the reasons for many Europeans to abandon Candomblé; they are unable to deal with the hierarchy, take orders, and accept scolding. It is hard to adapt to a new system if you are not open. Another hard thing to explain to the people of this continent is that they need to kneel, lower their heads, and ask the elder children of the house for a blessing. And often, it

is a person you do not like, but you have to say hello.

I never forgot when I had to go out with my grandmother in Brazil. I had to kiss the hand of older people, and sometimes, it was stinking. I do not know; we never know where the people put their hands. These are commonplace questions, but they also arise here inside Ilê. We are the only Candomblé house in Europe; we have people that come from Israel to participate.

To grow up in Germany as a Brazilian woman was not always easy, more so if you are a black woman. For, here, there are countless clichés about Brazilian women, you have to know how to dance the Samba, to wear a bikini, and to know how to make Caipirinha. These are absurd clichés that represent Brazil abroad.

Both my school and family educations were very strict, my mom is an old school person in this sense. I could only go outside to play when I had finished my homework, and I couldn't go out at night, it was a pain in the ass. My friends were all partying, and I was at home just listening to their stories like 'look, it is great here!' 'What a shame you cannot come!' Everyone had a little something to tell about a party or so, it was only me who did not, but, at the same time, my mom was very nice, in the sense that she never forbade me to go to the parties as long as she could go too. We used to go out very often, and not everybody understood it, but I really enjoyed going out with her. At first, she stayed

sober to take care of me; today, the tables have turned, and I am the one that stays sober to take care of her, it is very funny!

At home, my mom does not talk much about Candomblé, you know? It is just the two of us who practise it. She does her own thing and asks me if I have done this or that and, from time to time, she explains to me how to do certain things or asks me if I went to my uncle's house, here at Ilê. Yet, to speak openly about it, she does not do much, though, she has certain habits such as not leaving her purse on the floor, never drinking straight from the bottle, and, from time to time, we used to take baths of sea salt. When I am angry, and she sees me working in the kitchen with the knife, she comes along and says 'do not do this now, put the knife down and calm down. Your energy is not good enough to handle a knife.' She always said that.

What else can I give as an example? Food. Certain foods are not made at home. There is also the issue concerning clothes; she never let me go to *Ilê* with a short skirt, a low-cut blouse, or black clothes. These were things I learned without getting an explanation, and, with time, they became natural in my life, and we understand them.

I am also one of these people that only observe things

but do not mention them because, when there are many people together, there is gossip.

Here, it is like living in a big house with many brothers, and it is tricky because everyone has a different personality. We know that the *Ogun* people are the angriest, the *Iansãs* are the most annoyed of all and do not have patience with people that are a bit too slow. When a daughter of *Iansã* is in the kitchen, she is in charge of the fire, takes care of the peppers; each one has a different way of being. These are small things but help us to understand the different behaviours.

In our house, my mom and I, we have a garden where we cultivate and worship plants. The medicinal herbs are very important for my mother, for instance, we always had Boldo as it helps treat many things, and we also have Saint George's sword, which is potent against negative energies. These small things are so vital to our well-being and are in nature, but people do not pay attention to them.

To say that we are part of Candomblé to strangers, never.

Whoever belongs to it, already knows it, and you recognize it. Sometimes, even by the dance movements, you can already notice that a person has a notion of Candomblé, but to speak openly about these

things, we prefer not to. When I told my mom I was going to do this interview, she asked ‘why? Why do you have to expose yourself like this?’ But I accepted the invitation because I am concerned about the growing persecution and violence against Candomblé houses in Brazil, and I believe that these persecutions happen, often, because people do not know Candomblé. So, yes, it is imperative to talk about it. Speaking is a political act. But, on the other hand, I understand my mother and her generation, they suffered a lot and were persecuted whenever they expressed themselves freely about Candomblé. Silence is protection. So, I find it very difficult to demand people of that generation to have a different attitude, like, saying to them ‘yes, you must talk about Candomblé.’

For, the fear remains, and the persecution still exists.

To be honest, everyone has some beliefs that have nothing to do with Christian tradition. For example, placing corn behind the door, taking a leaf bath, taking a healing plant, or wearing an amulet.

Many people, when they have a problem, look for a *Babalorixá*. I find it curious because they say they do not want to know about witches and wizards, but when life is not going well, they know how to look for a healer. Conversations always start like this ‘ah! Are you not part of Candomblé? So, I have a problem,

I really want to talk to a *Babalorixá*. How do I do it?’
This happened to me once at a Pagode party. We had paid homage to *Iemanjá*, on February 2nd, and, when I was in the bathroom, a girl approached me and said ‘I saw that you are part of Candomblé. I am in trouble. In Brazil, it was my mother who solved it. Now, I am looking for someone to solve it here in Berlin.’

My question is ‘why do people not look for Candomblé when they are well? Why do you not look for it when you have something to add?’ Add energy, happiness, love or whatever! But they always show up when they have financial problems, love problems or when they are in extreme trouble, almost dying and have no hope. It is hard, it is really hard. There are some people who you really cannot take seriously, because they show up and do what has to be done and, then, they forget and do not reciprocate in any way.

Candomblé is like this when I do something good, I do not expect to receive retribution at the same time I do the deed. If today, I do something good for you, and you cannot reciprocate it, that is fine because I know that you or someone else upfront will do something good for me. I have always acted like this, and I have always done very well. Candomblé teaches us to be calm.

I am an extravagant person! When I like someone, I give them a little gift. I say 'look here, I made this jam for you! Take it home. I made this food for you!' I like to give gifts, but here in Europe people are not used to receiving them. When you give something to people here, they always think 'now I also have to give something in return.' 'Look! You do not have to give me anything in return, no! I gave it to you because I remembered you. I thought this shirt would fit you well! That is why I bought it, and I am giving it to you.' But what happens is that they do not want a gift, because it is the burden of the commitment to have to give you a present too. What is that?! No, the world is not like that.

If you are a good person, kind, and contribute to the world, the world contributes back to you. The energy we move, move us. That is what I think, and Candomblé is like that. You give what you can even if it is just a fruit, a piece of cake or a bottle of oil. The Orixá sees that you give what you can in every context. And it is all right, and the Orixá will help you. I always think so.

Mãe Beata is an iconic feminist Ialorixá who fought racism and homophobia in Brazil, a tireless woman, a social activist, and she opened many doors for the establishment of Candomblé. I, personally, did not get to spend much time with her, but my godfather, who

is also *Babalorixá*, was her Filho-de-Santo. She was a great teacher for my mother and many Brazilians. When she came to Berlin to open *Ilê Obá Sileké*, she came first to Hamburg, in the Quilombo do Romão, and, at that time, I lived there, I only moved to Berlin recently. Mãe Beata was a person who, when she entered a room, she was already present in it; she was a person who arrives and is! I do not know how to explain it, but it is like I could see only her and no one else. A very funny thing happened when Mãe Beata went to Hamburg. We paid homage to her in a church - a mass with the pastor and all -, then, we went to a river to offer flowers to *Iemanjá*, who is her *Orixá*. Hamburg has no sea, but it does have a river with a small beach - maybe calling it a beach is an exaggeration, but there are sand and water, and that is fine! At the edge of the water, one of her Filhos-de-Santo asked 'my mother, I do not think it is good to throw flowers in the sea. In Germany, we are not allowed to throw anything into the sea. You can even be arrested for this.' Thus, we gave up making the offering, the *Orixá* understands, we lit a candle, clapped our hands instead, and that was it. These are cultural differences that we have to respect and adapt to.

Mãe Beata had a very strong character, very present, very welcoming, very affectionate, and very strict. She only needed to look at us, like mothers do, to

make us understand that we did something wrong. We immediately understood, learned, and did not repeat that mistake. She called everyone ‘my son.’ I sang for her, I still do. My gift is singing. Once we were in the kitchen, I sang to her, and she cried. It was summer, the window was open, and all the neighbours applauded. I sang an opera tune, *Memory*, from *Cats*. It was such a pleasant night indeed. Her *Axé* was like a wave, you know? It comes and breaks, and you get all that *Axé*! And, then, I was swimming in this good energy! She never forgot about me. When she returned to Brazil, she always asked ‘where is that girl who sings? Is she ok?’ ‘Yes, mom, she is ok!’

I always wanted to study singing, but when you really like something and start working with it, you lose the desire to do it. For example, I love cooking, but I would never like to work as a chef because the routine of the work stresses you, it spoils the love you have for it. When you do something because you want and not because you have to do it, it generates a sense of greatness in the gesture. I sing from time to time at weddings and private parties, and I have also sung at small festivals with bands. I started singing and dancing with my mom. My grandfather also danced *Forró Pé de Serra*,¹ he was from João Pessoa. When I was little, I danced on his feet, he had a huge belly, so I had to find a way to hold his hand and balance myself

1 Forró Pé de Serra is a musical subgenre that originates from Forró.

as I was always so thin with very long arms, but it worked. I loved dancing with grandpa! And I always loved dancing and singing with my mom! We liked to play a game that was like this: one said a word, and the other had to sing a song with that word.

I am an old soul in a young body, for I love old songs, I just love them! I was brought up listening to MPB, Brazilian classical music, and Samba. My mom is from Rio de Janeiro and loves Pagode, Samba, then, there is dad's kind of music, which is rock & roll from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. I also like tacky German music, and I know them by heart! I have the greatest pleasure in singing classical German music from the 1920s. It is so funny: Can you imagine a young black woman singing on stage German music from the 1920s? I already made money out of it.

I studied linguistics and anthropology, and today, I do intercultural work, I consider myself a translator of cultures. When I worked with Brazilians and Germans, my challenge was to translate the differences between these two cultures. The projects here are more structured; in Brazil, work is always done through the famous *jeitinho*.² To translate cultures is very hard work, but I love doing it, and I love working at festivals!

² *Jeitinho* is also known as the Brazilian way. It means finding a way to do things by circumventing norms or social conventions.

As I grew up here in Germany, I was always very interested in doing projects with Brazilian culture. I was part of the group of Baianas in Hamburg, we danced with the conventional costume of Baianas, which are also the traditional garments used in Candomblé houses. But dancing samba in a bikini was never my thing. The progressive funk carioca of the 1990s, like Claudinho and Buchecha, I love it, but those funks that are more vulgar, I do not like. I can even enjoy it from time to time, but I prefer Forró, Pagode, I am a huge fan of Pagode. In concerts, I am always at the front of the stage singing all the lyrics!

My mother has always been a very important figure in my life. She has a super strong personality and she is one of those people who arrive at a place and everybody notices! She is awesome! On a stage, her presence would be enough to fill it all. It was always difficult to live with such a strong personality, so I had to become someone strong to survive with her, but that is not a criticism. When I started singing, I found my strength, because before I was Selminha's daughter; after I started doing my things and stopped hiding behind my mother's skirt, I became Luanny or Lua, Lua Cantada.

My mom is a friend and mentor, and when I have a problem, the first thing I do is call her, for example, 'Mom, I want to make this recipe, how do I do it?' or

‘Mom, I have a sore throat, what do I have to take?’ She knows everything and gives me a list of what I need. Regarding health, I always consult my mother first and then a doctor, for she raised many children and has great wisdom. It is not just for everyday things that I ask her help. Moving to Berlin was a very important decision in my life, and I am very close to my brothers and my family. My desire has always been to be closer to them, I did not want to leave them. I asked my mom ‘mom, do you think it is a good idea for me to go to Berlin?’ I thought she would answer ‘daughter, what are you going to do there?’ But she replied ‘I think it is a good idea, you are not happy here. Go after your happiness.’ I do not doubt that this was the best decision I made. The distance helps me to know who I am and who I want to be, besides, here, I am closer to *Ilê* too.

From Berlin to Hamburg it takes two to three hours, depending on the transport. Now, I feel that I am more present to my family than I was before because when I am there, I know I will be back, so I enjoy more the time I spend with them. I love to cook for them! Doing things for others has always pleased me, it is pleasant to see people’s satisfaction.

I am from a big family, I am the oldest, and my mother always says to me ‘you are not the mother of your siblings, you are their sister. Please behave as such.’ I

am kind of a dominant person, I confess, but I never shouted at my brothers. They know that when I shut up, that is when things went wrong. When there is a problem, I am the first person they look for because there are problems that the children do not want to involve the parents, so my brothers call me. When my mom has trouble with one of them, she sometimes asks me to intervene. I have the patience to talk to my brothers, and I always try to keep us all together.

Singing is super important for Candomblé; the force of singing is what supports the Axé. Singing is one of the foundations of Candomblé, it is essential to praise the Orixás, and it is also good for your health! The Candomblé ceremonies would be nothing without the singing. We have drums, singing, and dances, a valuable mixture to transport the Axé energy, our vital force.

Through singing, we evoke, ask, and pray for the Orixás. There is a force that rules the singing, and you do not have to be from Candomblé to feel it if you have passion, happiness, and an open heart for singing, you are already with the Axé energy. No matter how you sing, the important thing is that you sing! Every Candomblé ceremony has songs, and some we know and sing and let ourselves go. There are also those lyrics that we do not remember or do not know then the *Babalorixá* says ‘sing, my people! Open the mouth!’

It is so funny! Sometimes, you are in the middle of the circle and do not hear what *Ogan* is singing, and you move your mouth to pretend to be singing.³

Singing is a kind of prayer, it is a link between this world and the world of the *Orixás*, the spiritual world. For me, singing has always been a form of communication, and I am one of those that when something good or bad happens in my life, I sing! When my grandmother passed away, I sang, and my German father did not understand why I was singing. I explained to him that it was a way to express my feelings, to connect with my grandmother.

We all have our favourite music that we listen to in the living room, in the kitchen, or the shower. Listening to music releases emotions and relaxes the body, music lowers stress. Singing is super healthy! ‘Sing people, sing! Sing because it is good for your physical and spiritual health. Singing is like cleansing the soul! Sing people, sing!’

³ *Ogan* usually is a male priest chosen by the *Orixás* to stay out of the spiritual trance during the rituals.

11 **Gilmara** **Guimarães**

I am Gil, Gilmara, Dofonitinha de Oxossi, Dofona. I have several names besides these, but there are some that I am not allowed to speak in public, and on this occasion, I am Gil, preferably. I am from Minas Gerais, I was born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and I have been living in Germany for exactly six years.

In Minas Gerais, I worked as a Portuguese teacher and I graduated from the Faculty of Languages and Literature at UFMG. In my spare, time I used to do afro dance in a dance company for black people and attend to Candomblé Angola. In Candomblé Angola, I started my journey in the Afro-Brazilian religion; that was in 2007. My path in Candomblé did not begin as a personal search; I did not get into Candomblé because of me, but because of my father, I wanted a cure for my father. I wanted to find an answer to cure my father of alcoholism, which had brought a lot of violence and sadness to our house.

I come from a traditionally Catholic family. My grandmother was the Eucharistic Minister, a very active woman in her community who even helped found a church in the neighbourhood where I come from it is called the Sagrada Familia. I found neither answer nor solution in Catholicism for my father's alcoholism then I went to Macumba to help him. It was at that moment that I met my Mãe-de-Santo, and she took care of me for nine years. The story of my journey in Candomblé is very fascinating and painful too.

My Mãe-de-Santo, at that time, was Mameto Sambugikan, and, throughout my journey, she instructed me a lot. She brought up several important issues to think about and rethink Candomblé. Brazil was, without a doubt, the place where I could recognize myself as a Candomblecist even though I did not understand it, for, what I see, when I look back, is that Candomblé is a very complex religion. Because of such complexity, it needs time to be understood, **and our time, the time of contemporary life is not the time of Candomblé. I needed to slow down; I needed time to mature before the time of understanding. The first task was to review my ethical and moral issues; the second was to learn to take care of me.** I learned to see my body as a temple. This condition of inner maturity prolonged my time as an abian, an uninitiated Filha-de-Santo (spiritual daughter), a position I stayed for at least nine years, from 2007 to 2016. In 2016, I initiated in Candomblé. The most curious thing is that I believe that my coming to Germany has to do with my journey in the Candomblé.

I met a German man in Brazil, and we fell madly in love. He's an artist. We met in militancy the during a protest organised by the occupation of the City Council in 2013. That year, there were several mass protests in Brazil known as the June Days, and I went to all of them. During these protests, I moved from my house to the occupation that took place at Belo Horizonte's

City Council. He played the piano at the City Council occupation, and it was in this context that I met him. But it was on the day we left the occupation that we got to know each other better. It was such a meaningful day because I was protesting on the street completely naked, and my black body was painted with white paint – and it was on this day that we fell in love. This love brought me to Germany. I left everything behind: work, family, and friends. For four years, I lived in two other cities before coming to Berlin, and everything was all so exciting. I always say that this love was a kind of trigger to bring me here, where I am today. We are no longer together. We lived a phenomenal story in Brazil; however, living together did not work because the cultural differences were very tough to deal with for both.

Ilê Obá Sileké

I already knew the house *Ilê Obá Silêke*; I knew *Babá* on the internet. I always wanted to contact *Babá Murah* so he could guide me regarding the cultivation of medicinal plants here in Germany. There was one thing that was killing me, though: the fact that I did not know which Brazilian plants would thrive in Germany's soil, but I was never able to talk to him about this. In 2015, I went through a series of health problems. For a year and a half, every month boils appeared on my body, which made me feel very

depressed, sad, and I couldn't find the reason for the boils.

On December 31, 2015, I bowed to God in reverence and asked 'my father, if you, Lord, want me to initiate in Candomblé, I am ready, I am more than ready, but I cannot initiate Candomblé without a job, and I cannot do the ritual with poor health.' And it was hilarious because I found out what it was after a thousand exams, for doctor even suspected that I had AIDS and required me to do many of them to find out whether I had HIV or not, but they were all negative. In the end, it was only a lack of zinc. I took some vitamins, and the boils never came back again. Then, I had the intuition, I should not eat pork anymore, so I stopped eating pork and took some vitamins, and the boils never came back. It was amazing! Seven days after New Year's Eve, I got a job in a very unusual way. I started working as a caregiver for teenage refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, but what was curious was the following: even though I was not a social worker, which was a prerequisite for getting the job, I was selected. In the interview, the owner of the company simply did not let me speak. He was delighted with my resume and my presence, and not having to speak, gave me great peace of mind because my German at that time was very weak. That is how I got my job. In the following month, I already had my own money, and I no longer depended on my ex-husband to visit *Ilê Oba Sileké*. I went to

Iemanjá's Festival, and when I heard the music for *Oxóssi*, I got into a trance. It was on this day, February 2, 2016, that I met *Babá*. He was impressed because, in my first visit to the temple, I entered into a trance state, and he understood right away that I belonged to Candomblé. They dressed me like a Baiana with beads and counterregun. The first thing *Babá* asked me was if I was going to initiate. I said yes and swore 2017 as the year of my initiation; I also said I would do it in Brazil.

In April, I returned to *Ilê* for *Oxóssi's* party, who is my deity, and I again got into a trance. I was scared. I knew there was a psychological factor to it because the only thing I missed about Brazil was Candomblé. I do not miss relatives and friends; I know that these affections are built over time in the involvement with the place you live. I am not a person that holds on to things and people, but I always said that if I needed to return to Brazil, the only reason would be Candomblé. In short, that is how I got to know my house, my *Ilê Obá Sileké!*

I am the first daughter made for *Oxóssi* and the third from that house, and I say this with great pride as it was a gift I really did not expect. Now, I understand why I came to Germany; I came to recognize myself, to rebuild myself, and to find my house, the place I needed to be.

There is a great lack of information regarding Candomblé. Many people seek Candomblé to solve

financial problems or love failures but Candomblé is not limited to make offerings to get what you need. That kind of attitude bothers me a lot. **Candomblé is a space for healing, daily coexistence with the forces of nature. Candomblé is a place of self-reflection, self-knowledge, and spiritual growth; this individual search expands to the Candomblé community itself, to the *egbé* itself. *Egbé* means community, brotherhood, so you are in touch with yourself and with others, changing and improving yourself through living with differences because you can only better yourself daily.** What I want to say is that I do not want to be better than the others but every day better than myself. It was one of the greatest lessons I had in life: I came to recognize myself, to accept myself with all the problems and issues I have, and also that I was accepted in the diversity of the community. That is why I came to Germany and today, that is very clear to me. I needed to lay my foundation here in this place and live for the sacred as far as my physical body needs to go.

We, diasporic individuals, need a place to heal our pain, we need a place to have a bit of comfort, welcome, care, and security. *Ilê Obá Sileké* here in Berlin is that place. And do you know what my first responsibility at *Ilê* was? I was responsible for taking care of the plants. *Babá* put this task in my hands, and it was very, very beautiful! I thank Lord forever for that! I had a garden in Leipzig; I lived in

a very nice house, and through this garden, I got to know the German soil and the things this soil can cultivate. But how to bring the species of Brazilian flora here? At the same time that I was in this search, researching it, I got to know the Brazilian plants that exist in Germany. Candomblé is very rich and diverse; for example, the leaves Candomblé Angola uses are different from those Candomblé Kentu uses in its rites. That discovery motivated me to research the origin of medicinal plants and the similarities among species. I found out that there is an analogous basis in all plant species, I also discovered that when looking at our environment, we find the answers. Researching plants, recognizing species helped me to improve my German and it was a lot of work, a lot. As I had no money to pay for a German course, I had always studied alone. So, researching plants was my school, and as I am a teacher, this exercise was familiar to me. It is the role of a teacher: knowing how to teach as well as knowing how to learn.

My role at *Ilê Obá Sileké*, I like to joke, is to be a multipurpose *yawo*. *Yawo* is a *Filha-de-Santo* already initiated but who did not complete the seven years initiation period. Only after seven years, the *yawo* becomes an *egbomi*, an older sister, but even though I am not an older sister, I do have an appointed position. What does it mean to have an appointed position? It means that in a few years – I began the initiation three

and a half years ago, I am in the middle of it – in three years and a half I will complete the seven years and I will be the *Iyakekêre* of the house, the Mãe Pequena, the second priestess of the community.

That is a mind-blowing contradiction; there is a gale blowing inside me. The *yawo* time is the time of learning. But, then, the *Orixá* comes along in our destiny, because everything is predestined, and it played a trick on me. I have always loved Candomblé, but as a good *Oxóssi*' daughter, I like to take a distance sometimes; I like to be there at the house, but I also like to be alone. I like to be anti-social and on my own without seeing people for a while, and without meeting people, so I can meet them again later. That is a characteristic of my personality.

When I lived in Leipzig, I used to come to Ilê three times a month to do regular tasks in the temple; we met every Wednesday. During this time, I used to plan my vacations to stay in the *Ilê*, but it has been two years since the *Orixá* sent me to Berlin. It was all so surreal! The result: I am living ten minutes away from the *Ilê*, and I am here almost every day. I only take a break when I feel I need it, for, it is also important to take a rest sometimes. In these two years, I have been learning many things, like a little bit of each function to help the others that are beginning. Because being one of the oldest *Filhas-de-Santo* in the house

- I am a person who is always present as part of all the offerings' preparations and obligations - one of my functions is to instruct the others, to teach the activities of the house, and also to delegate the tasks and things Pai-de-Santo instructs. I try to take care of the children in this house. When they retreat for the initiation process, I also retreat, I take care of meals like breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I check if they need clothes, if they have tea to drink, and I also communicate with family members of those in the resting period. Some initiation processes last a long time, and the person undertaking it may be out of touch for twenty-one days, and I stay with them as long as necessary to give them full assistance. I also work along the temple's organization to make sure the festivals take place, the *Orixás'* Festivals. I check if the ritualistic musical instruments are in order; I am even responsible for checking small things like what cleaning supplies are missing. The house here is relatively new, fifteen years old is nothing, but, at the same time, it is a lot. We still do not have an *egbon* in the house - *Egbon* is a yawo that has already completed the seven years of initiation. I see that in a few years, we will be even more established, with people understanding their roles, and understanding the dynamics. Seven years from now, this Candomblé will be something else!!!

The children of the house will have greater awareness

through their experience, for Candomblé is experience. Learning is in everyday life, in the most mundane tasks, such as washing a bathroom. When we clean something, we are also cleaning ourselves, it is a state of meditation. You go on cleaning and getting deeper within yourself, and in this process, you understand your role. This level of awareness, each member aware of their role and value, will lead the Ilê hive to operate more lightly and fluidly. People do not value themselves as much as they should because they neither know themselves internally nor understand the value of what they do.

I would like to bring up a personal reflection now: why am I in the Candomblé? First: because I am black; second: because my father is black; third: because my grandmother is black; fourth: because my great-grandmother is black and was a slave. My grandmother was already born free. My dad, he could only study until the fourth grade, but my grandmother said to my father ‘you did not make it, but your daughter will.’

I was the first generation of my family that graduated in a university, but I always lacked a place of belonging, of origin, and, somehow, I knew that the academy was not the place for a black woman. As a feminist, I found black feminism in the “Bloco das Pretas,” but at the same time, I realized that that was

not my place of militancy. I lacked finding my roots and Candomblé filled this void. **My place in Candomblé is linked to my ancestry as a black woman: I bring, perpetuate and immortalize my black lineage here. That ancestry allows my roots to sprout and flourish; I flourish working here. For me, Candomblé is a militancy space, and it was this place that I chose to keep having a voice.** I say this because the Candomblé, in its history of survival, opens, expands, and reinvents itself. Candomblé was born within a family nucleus. Even today, it is common to see, for example, the biological children of Pais and Mães-de-Santo taking on roles in the Candomblé hierarchy. I feel like my Catholic grandmother cut our ancestral lineage. My father is Catholic, and my mother was terrified of Candomblé. **My mother is a white woman who took a long time to accept me as a Candomblecist woman, and I know that I need to recover my ancestral lineage because it was lost. The history of the black folk was completely neglected, and, at the same time, the history of black people becomes very clear in Candomblé. I recover my past inside the Ilê; here, I had contact with my ancestry and my ancestors, it is here that ancestry speaks and shows me what it is and who I am. Here, I recognize myself;** I see that, despite everything that has happened to black Brazilians, historically speaking, I can still find the line that ties me with my lost ancestry, and this line is in Candomblé! I am a militant within Candomblé.

Now, maybe you understand better why I want so badly to be here, for, I nourish myself with everything in here. Because, here, my roots are strengthened, my ancestry is being strengthened, and I hope that in this way, the black ancestry is using me so that I can continue perpetuating what was established in Brazil as an Afro-descendant religion. I am really religious, and **I see this religion, Candomblé, as a political space, a space for fighting racism. In Brazil, Candomblé is persecuted, defamed, and discriminated against; attacks on temples and physical aggression are part of the reality of Candomblé in Brazil as it is the only religion that is not accepted. Attempts to silence it are innumerable. We do not see such violent demonstrations against other religions in Brazil as we do against Candomblé.** In Berlin, there is, apparently, religious tolerance, but it is very difficult to find people with an open heart to understand what Candomblé is.

What we see most is Candomblé being placed in a “box” as an uncivilized rite as if orality were something less than writing, as if keeping traditions was out of fashion. There is a certain prejudice in all of this as everything ends in exoticism; it fills me with rage. Candomblé is an animistic religion - the way of seeing animals and plants and stones occurs in a different range of meanings, with different senses from Western Judeo-Christian culture. It is another world view that exists, but that we have to earn the

right to exist. It exists, but it is not accepted, thus, it is a space for fighting for the right to exist.

Ilê Obá Sileké has a fundamental role due to its geographical location - Ilê is in Germany, in the heart of Europe in a place where the logic of capitalism reigns brutally, where Judeo-Christian religions have a lot of strength just as atheism dominates minds. These world views are very strong, as they determine a way of thinking and living capitalistically. Time is money: that is the motto here. Candomblé opposes this motto, it has another perspective about time and the world, and it has another way to relate to money. But there also are people who are open here in Germany who can understand these issues, people who can perceive and feel the cosmic energy that permeates us, the energy that is here and there at this moment. People who understand the cult of the forces of nature, like wind and water, personified in the form of the *Orixás*; who realize that this energy works for our spiritual and personal growth and that things are not apart from the others. Some open people feel like this that is why we have many children in the house who are German.

People here become adult technocrats; they seek technical and rational solutions to problems without considering human aspects - there is servitude to work based on individualism. The Germans do not enjoy

the collectivity, they are not beings of the collective. Candomblé is a religion that operates in the collective, without community, there are no individuals, and without singular beings, there is no community. Think about the loneliness of this country, people isolate themselves, and many die alone in their apartments and are found dead only later by the smell of the corpse. People do not enjoy interacting with each other over here. The Candomblé community attracts people who no longer want to live in isolation.

Candomblé has a matriarchal structure, its origin is matriarchal: women created Candomblé. The “street vendor slaves,” in the context of colonial Brazil, were slaves who sought paid occupation in the streets. Many set up trays to sell goods on the streets while breastfeeding their children and sold their delicacies there like acarajé, abará, cocada, as well as utensils, clothes. They could make money with the trade, and some manage to buy their freedom. They could as well spare a little money to play the drums and reverence the *Orixás*. Therein lies the root of Candomblé in these women; they were the veins that transported *Axé* throughout all the temples. *Ilê Obá Sileké* is predominantly female.

