

# Regeneration, Restoration and Return of Forces and Materials in Candomblé

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## Abstract

In this paper I explore how a principle of regeneration, restoration and return sustains Candomblé's worlding, mode of existence, ritual practices and ways of coping with crises. Candomblé's ontology relies on a common origin and unity of substance and essence among all beings, from which existence descends, an all-encompassing power, called *àşę*, whose movement, transition and circulation make life possible. The *àşę* can flow and be transmitted and accumulated, but it is also subject to a process of degradation. Thus, rituals aim to restore the *àşę* in people, objects and places, and produce flows of *àşę* in the Cosmos and in society in order to ensure states of (always precarious) equilibrium. Some natural elements and foods especially bring about the life force of transformation and regeneration, and can renew the relationships of humans with the ancestors and the *òrìşà*.

Different *òrìşà* and spiritual beings bring the life force, express themselves in their symbols and mythical deeds, and hold sway on activities implying a regenerative and transformative principle.

Celebrations in the liturgical calendar, especially the Waters of *Òşálá*, which opens the annual celebrations with the purification force of water, and the *Olugbaje*, a great healing banquet devoted to *Ọbalúaié*, constitute re-enactments and actualizations of myths and acts of purification, life regeneration and restoration of energies.

**Keywords:** Regeneration; Life cycle; Candomblé; African-Derived Religions.

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## Introduction

«The earth is undergoing a cleansing and we need to review our postures, values and the consumption of material goods» (Mãe Wanda de Omolu cit. in Fortuna 2020). With this sentence Mãe Wanda de Omolu, a mother-of-the-saint<sup>1</sup> of Candomblé, commented on the Covid-19 pandemic, expressing the shared assumption among Candomblé practitioners that the pandemic arose as an abrupt reaction of the Earth to the environmental crisis (Calvo 2021). The Earth's regenerative potency was threatened by years of humans' predatory action on nature, pollution and destruction of forests and ecosystems.

As often happens, in times of crisis, when principles that rule social and natural processes are put at risk, they become explicit. The principles of regeneration, restoration and return of materials and forces – which allow the continuity of the life cycle and direct ritual and daily behaviours – were even more explicit when confronted with the possibility of being unable to continue to bury one's dead in the ground, because of the risk of a shortage of cemeteries during the most severe phase of

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<sup>1</sup> Religious leader of a Candomblé *terreiro* (shrine).

the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>, or the unilateral deliberation of a cemetery's administration<sup>3</sup>. The main issue in these discussions was the need to return, after death, the material with which human beings are formed, in order to let new life surge, together with the respect of the traditional practice, and concern with the destiny of the spirit of the dead (Calvo 2021, Oliveira 1999, De Aquino 1998).

In fact, the Candomblé ontology<sup>4</sup>, which can be defined as hybrid (Calvo 2022), implies that all more-than-human beings are individualised and conscious beings as well as part of a meshwork of relationships and forces, descending from a gradual process of subdivision of a divine principle, a sacred force called *àṣẹ* (Goldman 2005, Calvo 2022). The dynamic balance of *àṣẹ* in the Cosmos ensures the continuity of life, and most efforts, in Candomblé rituals (especially healing rituals, sacrifice and rites of passage, such as initiation and death) and daily life, aim to avoid the spoiling of, and to manipulate, to concentrate and to exchange *àṣẹ* – among humans and between humans and other more-than-human beings (the environment, the earth, natural elements, divinities, the ancestors and other spiritual beings).

The principles of restoration, regeneration and return encompass these practices, the concept of the person, the relationship with ancestry, kinship (spiritual and blood), and powers and deeds of spiritual beings, and offer possibilities for giving meaning to and coping with individual and collective crises (such as illness, conflict, epidemics, floods, fires and earthquakes).

The concept of regeneration has been variously interpreted and explored in Anthropology, especially with regard to forms of conceiving, living and planning biosocial processes and religious experience. Focusing on the interdependence of more-than-humans existence, regeneration has been analysed in relation to the connection between gender, vegetative processes, agriculture and burials (Strathern 2021); as a form of conceiving the cycle of composition and decomposition of plants, soil, air, water and light and an ethical and responsible model for living with other more-than-human-beings (Ingold 2010); as a possibility to conceive humans' fragility and interconnectedness with the earth, through the concept of "compost" (Haraway 2016, Calvo 2022); as a form of understanding "biosocial becomings" (Ingold, Palsson 2013); as a driving force for the existence of multispecies interactions (Tsing 2015); as an alternative model to sustainability for conceiving and planning human action on the environment (Reed 2007); as a form of agro-activism (Meneley 2021); as a principle sustaining the moulding of society on the basis of the idea of the cyclical recurrence of natural and social crises (Megerssa, Kassam 2020); through the significance of symbols of fertility and reproduction in funeral rituals (Bloch, Parry 1982); and as a feminist and postcolonial alternative to reproduction, especially in relation to motherhood (Haraway 2004).

Candomblé is one of the many African-derived religions in Brazil that emerged in a process of reterritorialization of human beings, divinities and traditions, after forced deterritorialization and the destruction of their social structures with the slavery trade. Despite the variability among the different traditions and lineages, Candomblé can be defined through the following distinctive features: the worship of ancestry, the ritual embodiment of divinized ancestors<sup>5</sup> (who hold sway over the elements of nature and social and cultural domains, such as war, metallurgy, hunting, justice and

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<sup>2</sup> See Hortélio (2020) and Silva (2020).

<sup>3</sup> See Ribeiro (2022).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term "ontology" as a "way of worlding", according to Mario Blaser (2012: 5).

<sup>5</sup> *Ọ̀rìṣà* in *ketu nation*, *vouduns* in *jeje* and *efon* ones, or *iniquices* in the *angola* one. The generic term saint is also used. Each *nation* refers to different traditions of the African continent (*ketu nation* to Yorubaland in West Africa, *jeje* and *efon* to the ancient kingdom of Dahomey, in Benin Republic, *angola* to the Bantu peoples of Central Africa) and distinguishes itself from the others through ritual language, drum rhythms, the ancestors worshipped and some ritual elements. In this paper I employ the terms of the *ketu nation* and the Yoruba spelling (see, for instance, Beniste 2021), but in citations I keep the original typewriting, that often follow a Yoruba version used in Brazil, where "ş" is substituted with "x" and accents may be missing or different.

medicine); a complex initiation procedure; animal sacrifice; oral transmission of knowledge, marked by secrecy; oracular consultation and social organisation in so-called *terreiros*.

The data that will be discussed in this paper are the fruit of intensive ethnographic research over more than seven years among Candomblé practitioners in Rio de Janeiro and among traditional African and Afrodiasporic religions in Italy over the last two years, especially in the *Aṣe Idasiḷe Ode*, a Candomblé *terreiro* of the *ketu nation*, directed by Bábá Marcelo dos Santos Monteiro Odearofa Ifamakanjuḷa Alabi Adedosu, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), where Candomblé interweaves with the Ifá system<sup>6</sup> and Yoruba *òriṣà* worship; and the *Òriṣà* and Ifá Temple *Ijo Adinula Ajé Ifá*, of Bábá Ifàlòba Iuoínsànyà Ifálóseyí Gennaro Timeo and Ìyá Fáwèímímó Òsúnṣéwà Fániyí Lucia Santoro, based in Bari (Italy) and Salvador (Brazil), where traditional Yoruba religion (*esin ibilè*) from Oyó (Nigeria) is practised and also where people from Candomblé and Cuban *Regla de Ocha* receive assistance in their ritual practices.

The paper is organised into four sections. In the first section, I explore regeneration, restoration and return as principles that sustain the dynamic balance of forces in the universe and life cycle, connecting life and death, and humans with ancestry, natural elements and the earth. In the second section, I analyse the centrality of symbols, actions, powers, natural forces and transformations involving regeneration in *òriṣà* mythology and representation. In the third section, I examine two feasts of the religious calendar, which have a regeneration and purification function for the Earth, humans and their relationships with spiritual beings: Waters of Oṣálá, and *Olugbajẹ*. In the fourth section, I present healing rituals and the repositioning and exchanges of life forces, focusing on foods and natural elements, especially those bringing a regenerative and transformative life force.

## Regeneration, restoration and return in the life cycle

Candomblé's hybrid ontology is based on multiplicities, continuities and creativity, not-excluding possibilities and transitions, where all more-than-human beings are part of a meshwork of relationships, forces and flows, as well as individualised and conscious beings, linked by incompleteness, translation and affect (Calvo 2022). For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the first aspect, that Marcio Goldman (2005) has defined as "ontological monism", according to which all more-than-human beings descend from a common divine origin, in a gradual process of subdivision and diversification of the *àṣẹ* flowing from the Supreme Being, referred to as Olorun (Lord of the *òrun*<sup>7</sup>) and Olódùmarè ("Lord of creation"). This aspect is explicit in cosmogonic myths:

The myth describing the formation of the universe and of all beings which populate the *aiyé* (the material world) shows an original state of undifferentiation between the divine principle and all beings, as well as the process of individualization of all beings, which continue to be interconnected and form a meshwork of lifelines (Calvo 2022: 128).

The *àṣẹ*, analogous to other principles like *mana* and *orenda*, constitutes life in all of its manifestations and forms, enables the life process, and ensures the dynamic existence and the process of happening and becoming (Santos 2008). According to Goldman (2009), «the unity of this force guarantees that everything participates in everything, but its modulations imply that there are degrees of participation» (Goldman 2009: 123) and «everything exists in perpetual interaction» (Goldman 2009: 133). *Àṣẹ*'s circulation and exchange enable the continuity of life, in successive states of bal-

<sup>6</sup> Ifá denotes the oracle given to humanity by a divinity called Òrúnmilá, as well as a complex system of knowledge encompassing religion, history, medicine, botany and ethics (Bascom 1969).

<sup>7</sup> The spiritual world, which constitutes another dimension with respect to the *aiyé*, the material world, in a relation of mirroring and interconnection (see, for instance, Santos 2008).

ance and unbalance. *Àṣẹ* can flow inside and outside the bodies, produce affects and “participations”<sup>8</sup> among more-than-human beings and be accumulated, concentrated and distributed, but is also subject to a natural process of spoiling. In Candomblé, in fact, ritual activity, daily actions and care are aimed at preserving and accumulating *àṣẹ*, and transferring specific qualities of *àṣẹ* from natural elements to objects, places and people, after its “awakening” through ritual gestures, rhythms, chants, invocations and enchantments<sup>9</sup>.

In fact, the concept of *àṣẹ* coincides with health, prosperity and potency of realisation, while the lack and unbalance of *àṣẹ* manifest in disease, conflicts and difficulties in attaining prosperity and happiness. Roger Bastide (1973) detected, in Candomblé, the presence of intermediate states between “Being” and “Not being”, a scale of existence developed along the initiation process and subject to constant care, since life inhabits all forms of existence, but to a lower or higher extent.

Lucas Marques (2018), exploring the ritual fabrication of sacred objects in Candomblé, invites us to follow the formative process of materials – which are not separate from the forces that constitute them – and observes that:

However, along this process, things (persons, objects, gods) undergo a series of transformations: they become more or less “done”, can have more or less *axé*, cross different modes of existence. This variation can (and, in general, must) be ritually manipulated. So, in order to continue to be “alive” (i.e., with *axé*), things need a constant and uninterrupted work of doing, involving foods, words, songs, gestures, cleanings, libations of oil, honey, blood etc. (Marques 2018: 133).

Rituals aim at making people participate in specific modulations of *àṣẹ* and establishing or renewing alliances and connections with the *òriṣà* and the ancestors. In particular, initiation establishes a connection between the person, the *òriṣà* and his or her personal *assentamento*<sup>10</sup> (which is made during this process) and represents a death and rebirth, when the person has the possibility of remaking his or her destiny and balancing and strengthening his or her *àṣẹ*<sup>11</sup>.

In Candomblé, life is strictly connected with death, and birth with death, in life circularity, and are part of a unique regenerative process (Oliveira 1999, De Aquino 1998). Human beings are the result of a composition of forces and materials, having spiritual and material components, among which complex relationships, affects and influences are maintained. Santos and Santos (1971) observe that the elements comprising a human being have a double existence: one part remains invisible in the *òrun*, and the other is visible in the individual, in his or her body, or in intimate contact with it.

According to the myths, human beings’ formation begins with the moulding of the body, *ará ènia*, by *Òṣàlá*<sup>12</sup>, from primordial mud, *amò*, a junction of water and earth (feminine elements related to generation, regeneration and fertility), that comes to life thanks to the infusion of *Olódumare*’s

<sup>8</sup> I employ here the concept of “participation”, as developed by Roger Bastide (1953), who recovered Levy-Bruhl’s concept in order to denote a “category of action” based on a “wish to link” instead than “a category of thought”, since, in Candomblé, most ritual actions are directed to operations on “forces”, deriving from «a dynamic and vitalist philosophy, a theory of Forces» (Bastide 1953: 32).

<sup>9</sup> On the use of plants in Candomblé, their preparation for ritual use and the importation and substitution of African plants in Brazil, see, for instance, Barros and Napoleão (2007) and Voeks (1990).

<sup>10</sup> The *assentamentos* are material constructs properly prepared and nourished with offerings, songs, prayers, invocations and rhythm. They are, at the same time, the place where the *òriṣà*’s energy is concentrated, where they live and are worshipped, where the relationships between the person and the *òriṣà* take place, and the *òriṣà* itself. Their nature is essentially relational, acting as “effective mediating objects” (De Aquino 1998: 101). There are collective *assentamentos* (also called *ojúbô*), which link a *terreiro*’s community to a specific *òriṣà*, and personal *assentamentos*, usually constructed during initiation, which link the initiated to his or her *òriṣà*.

<sup>11</sup> For more details on the initiation process, see, for instance, Oliveira (1998) and Faldini (2009).

<sup>12</sup> *Òriṣà* in charge of creating the human body, who also appears in charge of creating the *aiyé* in many myths (see, for instance, Prandi 2001: 502-503).

breath in them, which manifests itself in respiration<sup>13</sup>. After that, the body goes to Àjàlà (the divine potter)’s house, where it chooses its *orí*, the head, which constitutes the most important and sacred part of a human being, concentrating his or her force and personality and constituting the basis for his or her destiny. So formed, human beings cross the border between the *òrun* and the *aiyé*, where they are born emitting the first breath. After death, the spirit returns to the *òrun* and is worshipped as an ancestor, continuing to influence the life of his or her descendants, communicating with them (through dreams, intuition, the oracle and exceptional events in daily life) and receiving offerings and prayers.

In a human’s body and *orí*’s formation death intervenes, directly or through ancestry. In fact, according to a myth<sup>14</sup>, when Òsálá was looking for the suitable material to form human beings, it was Ìkú – death, a spiritual being which appears in myths and folktales as a young warrior or a haggard old man carrying a heavy club with which he kills his victims with a touch – who provided him the *amò*, and was consequently charged by Olódùmarè with the duty of devolving the material to the earth, after a period, in order to fill the gap that was formed, and have material available for the birth of other human beings. In fact, death implies the restitution of human components to the primal generic matter: «the mud, constitutive of all human beings, but also water, fire, iron, plants...» (De Aquino 1998: 83). Therefore, Ìkú mediates the reciprocity between the living and the dead (De Aquino 1998) and is responsible for both life and death, which appear as the condition for one another, «in an eternal circle, where there is no beginning or end, which is always starting again» (Oliveira 1999: iii-iv).

This conception is at the basis of Candomblé’s insistence on the importance of burial in the ground – besides the conviction that it favours the spirit’s journey back to the *òrun*, which is claimed as part of a constitutional right and became the subject of discussion, worry and fight when denied by the cemetery’s administration<sup>15</sup> or was at stake during the Covid-19 pandemic (Hortélio 2020, Silva 2020, Calvo 2021). In these discourses, Candomblé’s practitioners reclaimed the importance of devolving to the Earth the material the human body was formed with at birth and nourished with during life. The conception of humans as “compost”<sup>16</sup> is manifest, expressing «the interconnection between all the beings that inhabit the planet, which can blend, compose and decompose with each other, be part of the terrestrial composting, the humus, a symbiotic tangle, in the ecological development that sustains the continuation of life» (Calvo 2022: 137) and the circularity of life.

Concerning the *orí*’s composition, the four *osa*<sup>17</sup>, the 16 *odù*<sup>18</sup> and ancestors (*Èṣù*, *Ìyámí* and *egúngún*<sup>19</sup>) participate in the formation of its spiritual component, called *orí inú*<sup>20</sup>. These materials are called *òkè Ìpòrì*, defined<sup>21</sup> as the place where the river (*Ìpòrì Odò*) begins its journey: the river’s offspring. *Bàbá César Ifalola Èbí Offe Orùnmilà – babaláwo*<sup>22</sup> with a religious office in the *Àṣe Idasile Ode* – explained that «*Ìpòrì* is the elision of *Ìpo-n-Orí*. And is a reference to the link between

<sup>13</sup> After death, the breath (*èmi*) joins the air mass (*ofurufu*), where it comes from.

<sup>14</sup> See Beniste (2000).

<sup>15</sup> See Ribeiro (2022). On this occasion, when the funeral of a Candomblé priestess was celebrated, the cemetery’s administration denied the request of her religious community to bury her corpse in a grave and instead put it in a drawer, giving rise to arguments on location and a big debate on religious intolerance in journals and social media.

<sup>16</sup> A concept developed by Donna Haraway (2016).

<sup>17</sup> The basic elements of nature (earth, water, air and fire).

<sup>18</sup> Ifá signs, corresponding to its main *odù*, called *odù meji*, who are also divinities, sons of *Òrùnmilà*. The *odù* intervene in oracular consultations and determine a person’s destiny, which is chosen before birth.

<sup>19</sup> *Èṣù* is the principle of generic and individual existence, the first being to be generated and from which the first human beings descend directly; *Ìyámí* (the Ancestral Mothers) represent the feminine principle of life and generation, and *egúngún* are the family ancestors.

<sup>20</sup> *Orí inú* – which continues to be strictly linked with its material correspondent, *orí òde* – receives offerings and prayers, and determines a person’s personality and destiny (see, for instance, Santos, Santos 1971, Jagun 2015).

<sup>21</sup> This definition appears in the myths related to one of the 16 *odù*, *Èjiogbè*.

<sup>22</sup> *Lit.* “father of the secret”, priest of Ifá.

the conscience and feet's toes. The big toe<sup>23</sup> connects conscience with our ancestors. We can say that the big toe connects us with our ancestors» (Bàbá César, personal communication). And Márcio de Jagun (2015) notes that the concept of immortality derives from the idea that *orí inú* is composed of the material accumulated by a person through embodiments and his or her ancestors' inheritance, and, so, there is a direct link between a person and his or her ancestors. Bàbá Marcelo also observed the relation between humans and Olódùmarè, though the *Ìpòrí* transmitted to them by the first human beings along the *Ìpòrí Odò*, through the connection between a person and his or her ancestry, going back to the creation of human beings and the divine origin of existence.

As observed by Patricia De Aquino (1998), in her study of the *aşésé* (funeral rituals in Candomblé), death does not derive from life, or life from death, but «death, as the story of *axexé*'s foundation shows, needs life in order to be thought» (De Aquino 1998: 103), since «Even if it is a death ritual, the *axexé* is also, in a certain way, a life ritual. The word *axexé* means beginning, origin» (Rocha 1994: 120).

## Regeneration in *òrìşà*'s and spiritual beings' powers, symbols and deeds

All *òrìşà* and spiritual beings carry regeneration in people's lives and forces, as observed by Ìyá Fáwẹ̀mímó, but some of them directly express this principle in their powers, deeds, transformations and natural domains, as do other spiritual beings.

Foremost are Onílẹ̀ (the Lord of the Earth) and Ìyámí (the Ancestral Mothers), spiritual beings related to the Earth and its generative and regenerative potency and to the cycle of life and death.

Onílẹ̀ is a primordial divinity, that is worshipped in most traditional Candomblé *terreiros* and became more popular in Brazil after the intensification of exchanges with Nigeria and the spread of the Ifá system and *esin ibilé*<sup>24</sup>. In Nigeria, Onílẹ̀ is considered a feminine divinity in some regions and a masculine one in others, whereas it is possible that s/he has no gender definition, as a result of his or her primordial nature, prior to the formation of living beings in the *aiyé* (the material world) and the separation between male and female. Onílẹ̀ represents and reigns over the earth and the planet, as well as all its products (plants, animals, minerals) and stands for human habitat. The earth is the place inhabited by ancestors and the location where the primordial matter with which humans are formed is retired, representing the beginning and the end of the life cycle, as well as the transformation of matter from which new life can surge. Onílẹ̀ receives offerings in many occasions, in order to preserve human life, especially in so-called “substitution offerings”, in which a goat (the animal considered most similar to humans) is buried in the ground in substitution of a person at risk of death. Many offerings to him or her are made «so that he or she allows us to continue stepping on earth and doesn't take us away» (Doné Malu Paixão, personal communication).

Ìyámí, also called *Eleye*, Ladies of the Birds<sup>25</sup> – who represent numerous offspring with their feathers and eggs – are among the spiritual beings charged with creating the *aiyé* and represent the feminine power of reproduction and transformation (as in the process of gestation in the mother's womb), and the fertility of soil, plants, animals and humans. But they also have destructive powers and can spoil human life, as they are responsible for the creation of and rule over the Ajojun<sup>26</sup>, spiritual beings representing all harms, including Ìkú (death). Ìyámí rule over earth and water, feminine elements linked to reproduction and fertility, and to menstrual blood, which represents women's ability to generate children.

<sup>23</sup> Ancestry is connected to big toes, that are in contact with the earth, and there receive offerings on some occasions, such as the ritual of *borí*, when the *orí*'s energies are strengthened and balanced.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Capone (2016).

<sup>25</sup> In fact, their symbol is a bird, their action is related to various birds and they can take the form of a bird, such as *oşòròngà*, an African bird that goes out at night. For more details on Ìyámí, see Oyẹ̀wùmí (2015).

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed description of Ajojun, see Calvo (in press).

Èṣù, *òrìṣà* of communication and movement, which ensures the dynamic process of transformation and becoming, constitutes the principle of generic and individualised existence, from which all human beings descend (Calvo 2022), the interconnection and unity of existence, and masculine generating and multiplying potency, expressed in his phallic representation. In the introduction to the book *Caroço de dendê: a sabedoria dos terreiros*, by Mãe Beata, Vânia Cardoso describes Èṣù's transforming potency, as «the hungry mouth that eats anything that exists, but he also regurgitates, regenerates and creates» (Beata de Yemonjá 2008: 15)<sup>27</sup>.

Èṣù is «the *arché*, the original principle, unity that generates multiplicity» (Correia 2020: 41) and «the *ápeiron*, the infinite or unlimited» (Ibidem) and «anything that multiplies, separates, transforms itself, [...] life, with all its contradictions and syntheses» (Augras 1983: 104).

Èṣù is often represented with the geometrical forms of a sphere and a spiral. The sphere, with no beginning, no half and no end, represents cycles' renovation, cyclical time and the possibility of creating the points of a space-time singularity (Sodré 2017). The spiral (in Èṣù's connection with *okoto*, a snail), expresses life potency, infinite evolution and the process of life and death:

An analysis of *okoto*'s image, with which Exu is associated, is essential. The *okoto* is a variety of snail with a conic shell with an open top. *Okoto* is the denomination of the upper part, that, settled at the cone point (a leg, a unique contact point) evolves into a spiral, opening up at any rotation till it becomes a circumference that expands to infinity (void top). *Okoto* shows that Exu, despite being multifarious, possesses a unique origin and nature, and also explains his dynamic principle and his mode of auto-expansion and multiplication. Exu is one and infinitely self-multiplying" (Santos, Santos 2014: 27).

«Èṣù appears in many myths as a trickster, transgressing, transforming, disguising and subverting limitations and rules» (Calvo 2022: 133), expressing the creative potency of chaos, from where a new (cosmic, social or individual) order can appear.

All female *òrìṣà* (Ọṣun, Yemojá, Oya, Yewá, Ọbá and Nāná), due to their connection with water in its different forms, manifestations and states (river, sea, lake, waterfall, rain, swamp and steam), maternity and fertility, represent the generating, regenerating, multiplying and transforming principles of life, and are worshipped in rivers, waterfalls, swamps, lakes and the sea. Here I present those that mostly carry symbols and potencies of regeneration, transformation and birth.

Ọṣun, *òrìṣà* of sweet waters, such as rivers and waterfalls, holds sway over human procreation and the foetus's transformation in the maternal womb, as well as over soil fertility, and directs the Ìyámí society. Ọṣun is an *òrìṣà* expert in cooking and witchcraft, in their multiple transformative potency. The main food that is offered to her, *omolokun*<sup>28</sup>, usually contains eggs, which represent fertility, multiplication and generation. Yellow, Ọṣun's colour, that is a declination of red in Yoruba chromatic classification, and her link with the bird *ikódidẹ* (*Pittacus Erithacus*), whose red feathers are used in the initiation process, represent her connection with menstrual blood and fertility.

Yemojá, whose name is the contraction of Yèyè-Ọmọ-Ejá, “mother whose children are fishes”, is the essence of maternity and nutrition, represented by her large breasts. In Nigeria she is worshipped in a river, Odò Ọgùn, and in the African Diaspora in the Americas, her domain became the sea, whose waves express perpetual return and life cycle. But she is also connected with death, ancestors and Mother Africa<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> This conception is linked to a myth, in which Èṣù eats everything he can reach (Prandi 2001: 73).

<sup>28</sup> A yellow paste prepared with cowpeas and palm oil, among other ingredients.

<sup>29</sup> The association of the sea with death is due to *Bantu* influence (Slenes 1991-92), slavery traffic through the Atlantic and deaths and suicides along these trips. In fact, the ocean is also denoted as “the great *calunga*”, where *calunga* is a *Bantu* word denoting the sea, the location where the spirits go after death and, in Brazil, also the cemetery.

Ọya, also known as Yánsàn, a warrior *òriṣà*, who reigns over wind, rain, storms, lightning and wind-storms. She has the power to transit between the life and death realms and can control the *egúngún* (spirits of the dead) and favour the passage of the dead's spirit to the *òrun* (the spiritual world). Consequently, she embodies in funeral rituals and brings the *carrego de egun* (containing the dead's belongings to be devolved to the dead) to a natural place determined by the oracle.

In the form of wind, Ọya transports water drops from the earth to clouds, where they fall in the form of rain, fertilising the soil and allowing plants and animals' lives to continue.

Ọya represents also the power of transformation, since she can turn into other forms: some myths portray her as disguised in a buffalo skin and transformed into a buffalo and back, or as transformed into a butterfly (representing rebirth and life evolution and regeneration) by Èṣù, keeping the ability to turn into this animal.

Yewá has the domain of twilight, mist, springs and the atmosphere vacuity that contains planets and stars and is mirrored in lakes (her natural domain), and she reigns over the dead realm. Henceforth, she rules cosmic processes and movements, as represented by her dance, when she makes a sphere rotate in her hands, besides guarding the magic secrets of healing and animals' and plants' transformation.

Nàná synthesises within herself birth, life, death, fecundity, wealth, human trajectory in the Earth and a link with the ancestors. She is the *òriṣà* of still waters, lakes, swamps and mangroves, and mud that fertilises the earth and offers the primordial matter with which humans are formed. According to a myth, she collaborates with Oṣálá to shape human beings from the *amò*, the primordial mud, and rules death, when humans devolve to the earth the material they were made of.

Nàná is the mother of Oṃọlu/Obalúaié (“the son of the Lord”/“the Lord of the earth”), who controls earth interior and fire (especially the fire contained in the earth's depths that manifests in volcanic eruptions, and the sun). Obalúaié controls epidemics, skin and contagious diseases, the cycle of life and death, and has the power to spread diseases and kill, but also to heal.

His favourite food is *doburu* (popcorn), which represents the transformation of his wounds, due to smallpox, into flowers (analogous to the process of corn seed when heated), which has the power to purify from all diseases. The *Olugbaje*, an annual celebration devoted to Obalúaié that will be described in the next section, is a great ritual of healing, purification and renovation of humans and nature.

Ọṣùmàrè, another son of Nàná, is the *òriṣà* that ensures movement, regeneration, renovation and the continuity of the life cycle, in the form of a rainbow and a snake. The rainbow reveals a continuous water cycle circulating between the earth and the sky: water, through evaporation, reaches the sky where it turns into rain that falls on the earth and fertilises nature. In the form of Dan, the snake, Ọṣùmàrè is represented as the Ouroboros, the primordial snake that bites its tail and wraps the Earth – forming a circle, a designation that has no beginning and no end, that regenerates and transforms itself – so it ensures the planet's integrity, infinite time reproduction, perpetuation, movement, and life cycle. The snake's shedding of its skin is another symbol of transformation and regeneration.

Ọgún is a brave warrior and metalworker, ruling over technological progress. According to a myth, Ọgún consulted Ọrúnmílà, who inspired him to melt some earth that he had in his house. So, he discovered iron that, with the transformative power of fire and human activity, allowed him to produce swords and other utensils. Ọgún was also one of the *òriṣà* who participated in the creation of the *aiyé*, opening the path with his sword.

Oṣálá, also known as Oḃátálá (“king of the white robe”), represents the synthesis of masculine procreation potency. He is an *òriṣà funfun*, associated with the colour white, representing the colour of creation, which concentrates and can generate all the other colours. Oṣálá is the protagonist of many myths related to the creation of the *aiyé* and is in charge of forming human bodies from the *amò*, the primordial mud.

In Candomblé, a distinction of Oṣálá is made between two periods of his existence, so he is called



Oṣaguyan – a young warrior who likes to eat pounded yam – and Oṣàlùfòn or Oḅalùfòn, the elder, but in some myths Oṣaguyan appears as the son of Oṣàlùfòn.

The main offering to Òṣàlá is the ìgbín, an African snail, whose shell represents the expansive quality of evolution. His ritual tool is the *òpáosorò*, a metal sceptre with three disks and a bird on top, representing the act of creation and the relationship with ancestry. A feast devoted to him, the Waters of Òṣàlá that will be described in the next section, is a purification and regeneration ritual.

Òsányìn reigns over pristine forests and medicinal leaves, which have a central role in Candomblé rituals, especially for the production of baths which can purify and regenerate the *àṣe* of persons, objects and places. In fact, a common saying in Candomblé is “*Kósi Ewé, Kósi Òrìṣà*” (“No leaves, no *òrìṣà*”). Òsányìn guards the secrets of the leaves that heal and kill, the incantations (*ofô*) that awake their potency and their use. Òsányìn’s power and presence are invoked in a ritual called *Àsà Òsányìn*, *Sasányìn* or *Sasanha*, in which leaves are “chanted” in order to “awake” their force and invoke Òsányìn’s assistance before being employed in rituals.

Ìròkò is an *òrìṣà* represented by a sacred tree identified with *Milicia Excelsa* in Nigeria and substituted by *Ficus Gamelleira* in Brazil, considered to be the first plant to grow in the Earth, making the connection between the òrun and the *aiyé* and allowing the *òrìṣà* to descend for creating the *aiyé*. It represents the “cosmic tree”, the axis mundi, the foundation and beginning of all things, the connection with ancestry and history. Ìròkò rules time and weather in all their manifestations, perpetual cosmic renovation and regeneration, immortality, the liminal territory between life and death and between death and life.

## Ceremonies of purification and regeneration

Analogously to human beings, sacred spaces and objects also need continuous care, since «the *terreiro* participates in the flux of life, materials and forces: a finished and stable form is never reached» (Calvo 2019: 259), and forces and materials are subjected to a natural process of wearing. The *àṣe* needs to be continuously renovated through prayers, chants, invocations, herbal baths and offerings of foods and other elements. For example, the *quartinha*, a clay or pottery vase next to the *òrìṣà*’s *assentamentos* should always contain fresh water and never get dry.

Constant care and annual ceremonies aim at renewing the connection and alliance between humans and the *òrìṣà* and the ancestors, to regenerate the *àṣe* contained in their *assentamentos*, to create fluxes of *àṣe* between the *òrun* and the *aiyé* and to strengthen forces and relationships in the community. Once a year, in a ceremony devoted to an *òrìṣà* singularly or gathered according to their family relationships or alliances, the *òrìṣà*’s *assentamentos* receive special care. The materials deposited on the *assentamentos* over the course of the year – which concentrate the *àṣe* of the *òrìṣà* and of offerings, prayers, invocations and breath – are withdrawn, then burnt and reduced to a powder, called *àṣe*, which can be later used for transmitting the *òrìṣà*’s force. Then, the *assentamentos* are washed with a bath prepared especially with leaves and other elements, before receiving the offerings of the *òrìṣà*’s favourite foods, the blood of sacrificed animals and other elements, prayers, invocations and chants. After a public feast takes place, when the *òrìṣà* are called to embody in especially prepared adepts with drums and chants, they share their *àṣe* with the community and communicate with them through dance and gestures.

Two celebrations in particular, the Waters of Òṣàlá, held in January and opening the liturgical calendar, and the *Olugbajé*, in August, are collective rituals of purification and regeneration of humans and nature, actualizing mythical events.

A well-known myth among Candomblé practitioners is at the basis of the Waters of Òṣàlá, explain-

ing also different *èèwò*<sup>30</sup> of people initiated into this *òriṣà* and care required with regard to Òṣàlá's worship and offerings, the best known being avoiding the use of palm oil.

According to the myth, Oṣàlùfòn, who was living with his son Oṣaguyan, once wished to visit his other son Ṣàngó<sup>31</sup>, so he consulted a *babaláwo* in order to get advice about the trip. After the *babaláwo* failed to discourage him to postpone the trip because the conditions were not favourable, he recommended Oṣàlùfòn to bring three robes and soap, to do all what he was asked during the travel, to avoid complaining and to make *ẹbò*<sup>32</sup> for Èṣù. But Oṣàlùfòn, who is known for being arrogant and not following the oracle's advice, began his trip without carrying out the recommended *ẹbò*. Along the path, he met Èṣù three times and was asked to help him to put his burden on his head (respectively, palm oil, glue and carbon) and, remembering the *babaláwo*'s advice, he could not deny his help, but got dirty every time and had to change his robe.

When Oṣàlùfòn entered Oyó kingdom, he saw a white horse that he had given to Ṣàngó as a present and decided to take it and return it to his son. The horse recognized him, and, together, they were walking in the direction of Ṣàngó's palace and met the soldiers, who were looking for the horse. They thought he was a thief, beat him and put him into prison, where he remained for seven years. In this period, Oyó kingdom was affected by long drought, epidemics, cattle death, failed crops and barrenness among women, so Ṣàngó consulted his *babaláwo*, who revealed to him that these plagues were the consequence of an innocent's imprisonment. When Ṣàngó ordered his soldiers to bring him the prisoners in order to discover who this innocent was, he recognized his father, so he ordered some women to go to the river, in silence and dressed in white, as a sign of sadness and respect, and to get fresh water in order to wash Oṣàlùfòn, and to bring a white robe. Then Ṣàngó carried his father in his back, as a sign of humility, and brought him back home, where Oṣaguyan welcomed them with a rich banquet. After Oṣàlùfòn got free, the plagues that affected Oyó kingdom stopped.

The ceremonies of Waters of Òṣàlá<sup>33</sup> open the Candomblé liturgical calendar and usually take place in January or at the beginning of spring, marking the beginning of the new year with the purification of the *terreiro* and its members, and the regeneration of its *àṣẹ*, the relationships with the ancestry, the group cohesion and collective memory.

The *terreiro* is cleaned and decorated with white textiles and flowers, everybody purifies with an herbal bath at the entrance, wears white robes, covers his or her head with a white cloth and respects silence and food interdictions, avoiding especially Òṣàlá's *èèwò* (first of all, palm oil).

The ritual is divided into three parts: the Waters of Òṣàlá, the Procession of Oṣàlùfòn and the Pylon of Oṣaguyan, which take place over three weeks. In most *terreiros*, the ceremonies begin in the early hours of Friday (the day of the week devoted to Òṣàlá) with the building of a small hut, with braided palms, and covered with a white cloth, located in the external area of the *terreiro*. Under the hut, the *assentamentos* of Òṣàlá are settled – where they will stay until the second Sunday of the ceremonies, when Oṣàlùfòn's return to his lands is performed – symbolising Oṣàlùfòn's journey to Oyó and stay in prison.

The second phase begins with the procession to a river or fountain to get fresh water and back, in silence, where all the members of the *terreiro* carry a pot on their head, and, back in the *terreiro*, give it in turn to the *iyálórìṣà* or *bàbálórìṣà*<sup>34</sup> who uses it to wash his or her head and afterwards puts an

<sup>30</sup> Interdictions, usually related to daily activities, which are considered prejudicial to a person's health, spiritual balance or other aspects of life and are determined through oracle consultations. They concern food, dresses, places, work, objects and daily behaviours.

<sup>31</sup> *Òriṣà* of justice, ruling over fire and thunderbolt. According to Yoruba tradition, he was the third king of Òyó city.

<sup>32</sup> Offering.

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed description of this ceremony, see Beniste (2009).

<sup>34</sup> Also called, respectively, *mãe de santo* ("mother-of-the-saint", if a woman) or *pai de santo* ("father-of-the-saint", if a man), this is the main priest of a *terreiro*.

*obi*<sup>35</sup> in his or her *ori*. They then return to the river or fountain to collect the water with which the hut and Òṣálá's *assentamentos* are washed three times. The pots are then arranged around the Òṣálá's *assentamentos*, silence is broken and a ceremony is celebrated with the rhythm of *atabaques*<sup>36</sup>, chants and the visit of the *òriṣà* through the bodies of the specially prepared initiated.

The last ceremony, the Pylon of Oṣaguyan, corresponds to Oṣàlùfòn's return home and the banquet offered by Oṣaguyan: in procession, the Òṣálá's *assentamentos* are taken back to his *peji*<sup>37</sup> and the distribution of food then takes place. A stool and the pylon wrapped in white fabric, with a white fabric raised over them, are brought in procession, passing through the main points of the *terreiro* (door, centre of the *barracão*<sup>38</sup> and *atabaques*), and are then settled in a place in the *barracão*. The *iyálòriṣà* or *bàbàlòriṣà* sings chants devoted to Oṣaguyan, who embodies in an initiated, dances in front of the pylon, celebrating Oṣàlùfòn's return home, and distributes the yams (Òṣálá's favourite food) to those present who, by eating them, express their wishes to the *òriṣà*. A ritual of symbolic flogging follows: Candomblé's important members hit the shoulders of the others with small sticks of *atori* (*Glypheataterifolia*), called *isán*, recalling a war that took place in Ejigbò and is told in another myth<sup>39</sup>. Then, other *òriṣà* may embody and dance.

In the period that follows the set of activities of the Waters of Òṣálá, the ancestors of the *terreiro* are remembered and revered.

The waters of Òṣálá can be considered a "rite of passage", the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one, through purification and renewal with water, the primordial source of life. According to José Beniste (2009), this ritual also revives agrarian feasts of yam harvesting and propitiation of rain and fertility in West Africa.

Another effect of the Waters of Òṣálá is to renew and strengthen relations in the religious community and the sense of belonging to the group, through communion of sacred food and its *àṣẹ* among its members and with the *òriṣà*.

The Waters of Òṣálá celebrated in the *terreiros* have a public version in *A Lavagem de Bonfim* ("The Washing of Bonfim"), held in January in the Church of the Lord of Bonfim in Salvador de Bahia – devoted to Jesus Christ, associated with Òṣálá in Afro-Catholic syncretism – when the steps and the churchyard are washed with scented water brought in pots by women dressed in white, to the sound of handclaps, *atabaques* and chants.

The *Olugbajẹ*<sup>40</sup> re-enacts a myth, according to which Šàngó was receiving a visit from dignitaries from the different kingdoms and Ọbalúaié, who came from afar, was ridiculed for the dance he performed. He went away and sent epidemics and drought to those people. So, they consulted a *babaláwo*, who revealed to them that these plagues were sent by Ọbalúaié and recommended that they prepared a banquet for him, in order to appease his rage. Each *òriṣà* prepared his or her favourite food to offer to Ọbalúaié, constituting the mythical antecedent of the *Olugbajẹ*. After the banquet, epidemics stopped threatening the people, rain began to fall again, the fields to give fruits and women to give birth, representing a renovated alliance and a re-established balance in nature, social relationships and individuals' bodies.

The *Olugbajẹ* is considered a "big collective *ebọ*", a great banquet devoted to Ọbalúaié, the *òriṣà* of smallpox and contagious diseases, where foods of all the *òriṣà* – after having rested next to Ọbalúaié's *assentamento* in order to be consecrated and absorb his healing force – are offered to the guests in

<sup>35</sup> Kola nut, the main offering to all *òriṣà* (except Šàngó), ancestors and other spiritual beings, and *ori*.

<sup>36</sup> Drums used in Candomblé.

<sup>37</sup> Room where the *òriṣà*'s *assentamentos* are guarded.

<sup>38</sup> The main hall, where public ceremonies for the *òriṣà* take place.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Beniste (2009).

<sup>40</sup> Which is the composition of *Olu* ("Lord") – *gba* ("festival") – *je* ("food"). For a detailed description of the celebration, see Barros (2005).

castor leaves and should be eaten with hands. The leaf is then folded around the food remains and is passed over the body, pausing where the person has pain or some health problem, in order to get purified of diseases and harm. The leaves and food remains are then collected in a basin, which is brought next to Ọbalúaié's *assentamento*, from where it will be taken to the place indicated by the oracle.

*Doburu*, the popcorn<sup>41</sup>, representing Ọbalúaié's smallpox wounds, is thrown, falling like rain on all participants in order to purify them of all diseases. A handful of popcorn is also offered to each person, who rubs it into his or her body.

The Waters of Ọṣálá and *Olugbajẹ* represent rituals of purification and regeneration of humans, as individuals and as a community, a renewal of the *àṣẹ* and of the alliances with the *òrìṣà*, through elements (water and popcorn), which carry the life force of purification, transformation, healing and regeneration of nature and humanity.

The myths re-enacted in these two ceremonies present a moment of crisis, represented by epidemics, drought, crop failures and women's barrenness, as the consequence of a broken balance or alliance, that was solved by discovering the offended divinity and performing reparatory acts in the form of offerings. Analogously, the crisis brought by the Covid-19 pandemic was interpreted through the same lenses, i.e., as a broken balance of humans' relationship with nature (Calvo 2021), and Candomblé practitioners recurred especially to Ọbalúaié and Ọṣálá. In fact, during the pandemic, they intensified invocations, prayers and offerings to Ọbalúaié and organised processions in his honour in order to ask for his protection from contagion and disease and for the Earth's purification from disease and death (Calvo 2021). When terreiros reopened and recovered public celebrations after a self-imposed closure, some of them began with the Waters of Ọṣálá, propitiating purification and regeneration of the community and nature, and the continuity of life (Natividade, Soares 2022).

## Rituals and elements aimed at regenerating and balancing forces and healing

Rituals aimed at achieving physical, psychological, material, social and spiritual well-being, restoring and balancing energies are, usually, a combination of "medicine" (*borí*<sup>42</sup>, baths<sup>43</sup> or *gberi*<sup>44</sup>) and "offering" (*ẹbọ*), aimed at transmitting *àṣẹ*, making the person "participate" in specific modulations of *àṣẹ*, and establishing flows and movements of *àṣẹ* in the Cosmos.

There is a similarity (both metaphorical and metonymic) between the leaves and other elements used and the *àṣẹ* that is transferred and concentrated into the person through the ritual of *borí*, baths or *gberi*, or the material transformation that is intended to obtain with the *ẹbọ*. As Bábá Marcelo maintained, «The *ẹbọ* is a coded letter that brings our desires to Olódùmarè through Èṣù» (Bábá Marcelo, personal communication). The combination of elements, established by the oracle, aims to produce a synergy that renews and reinforces the person's *àṣẹ* and creates energy flows and exchanges of *àṣẹ*, «aimed at maintaining balance of existence in the Universe among humans, animals, vegetables and minerals» (Bábá Marcelo, personal communication).

Among the natural elements and foods employed in *ẹbọ*, *borí* and baths, some of them specifically carry the life-force of renewal and regeneration<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Traditionally prepared with sand, but today, more often in a popcorn popper, without oil or salt.

<sup>42</sup> *Lit.* "offering to the *orí*". With the *borí*, a person's energy is regenerated and balanced, through the *àṣẹ* of elements of the mineral, vegetal and eventually animal realms.

<sup>43</sup> Prepared with leaves and other elements such as salt, palm oil, powders containing the *àṣẹ* of some *òrìṣà*, the blood of sacrificed animals and vegetal powders, according to the oracle's orientation. Baths can have a purifying, balancing and regenerating potency, according to the person's need.

<sup>44</sup> Incisions where a powder containing the *àṣẹ* of some *òrìṣà* or natural elements is put.

<sup>45</sup> I refer here to the elements used in the *Àṣẹ Idasilẹ Ọdẹ* and the data collected during my fieldwork.

First of all, water, *omi*, a feminine element, is the primaeval nourishment for plants, animals and humans, which refreshes and fertilises the earth; in the form of amniotic fluid, shelters, nourishes and sustains the development of the child in the mother's womb; and, mixed with earth, provides the primordial mud with which human beings are formed. Water is a means of communication with the ancestors, the *òrìṣà* and the other spiritual beings, and is present in all rituals – since “*Kó sí omi, Kó sí Òrìṣà*” (“No water, no *òrìṣà*”) – bringing purification, renewal and regeneration of *àṣẹ* and life. Sàlàmi and Ribeiro (2015) note that:

Water, a feminine and passive element, with its life-maintaining property, circulates throughout nature, in the form of rain, sap, milk or blood. It has the power to make sacred what it touches and to establish harmony. As every living being comes from waters, the baths favour, by analogy, the occurrence of ritual rebirths and promote the circulation of new forces, which update the life potential of individuals (Sàlàmi, Ribeiro 2015: 197).

Other liquids with a regenerative and transformative force are:

- *Otí*, a fermented drink (usually gin), has the generative force of male semen, brings joy and awakens the person's life force. It represents the transformation of the original matter, because «it is the result of distillation, of the death of a vegetable that was transformed to be reborn with another flavour, another force, another life» (Bàbá Marcelo, personal communication).
- *Epo*, palm oil, is a red vegetable blood, which cools and soothes. It represents female menstrual blood, fertility, Ìyámí's gestation and fertility potency, the dynamic strength of descent and life cycle.
- *Òyìn*, honey, is the blood of flowers collected by bees, passed through a process of transformation from the original matter, and brings richness, beauty and sweetness.

Among the leaves, those that bring the *àṣẹ* of regeneration, transformation and multiplication are, above all, those that grow in the most diverse environmental and climatic conditions and from which new plants sprout when they are cut; those that establish a connection with ancestry or between the *òrun* and the *aiyé*; and those belonging to Oṣàlá and, therefore, linked to creation, such as: *Òdúndún* (*Kalanchoe Crenata*); *Màrìwò*, the young leaf of *Elaeis guineenses*; *Pèrègún* (*Dracena Fragans*); and *Akòko* (*Newbouldia Laevis*). Other leaves – such as *Bujé* (*Genipa Americana*), used to ward off death, and *Tètèrègún* (*Costus Spicadus*), employed in initiation rituals – represent rebirth after symbolic death.

The seeds, representing the embryo from which a new plant will be born after being buried and going through a process of death and rebirth, bring the force of fecundity, multiplication and regeneration, and favour the relationship with ancestry. The most used seeds in Candomblé are *obi àbàtà* (*Cola acuminata*), kola nut; *òrógbó* (*Garcinia kola*), bitter kola nut; and *ataare* (*Aframomum melegueta*), Guinea pepper.

Among the powders of plant origin used in the rituals, *osùn bíkẹ* – red powder extracted from *Dracaena Mannii Agavaceae* through the natural action of termites or sawdust – is a vegetal red blood, representing menstrual blood. Therefore, it brings women's generating and multiplying potency, fertility, fecundity and offspring.

Among the animals, those that most concentrate the force of transformation, generation and regeneration are:

- *adiẹ*, the chicken, which multiplies through its eggs and has the patience to hatch them, so it can bring patience and fertility. The chicken's eggs, representing life transformation and generation, are offered to *Ọṣun* and *Ìyámí*;
- *etù*, the guineafowl, which brings strength and resistance, and drives away death, is consid-

ered the first being to be initiated (as reported in a myth), and is a focal symbol of initiation rites<sup>46</sup>;

- *abo*, goose, is used in case of internal diseases (such as cancer or kidney stones), «because it ingests stones and expels liquid faeces, [so] it has the potency to transform everything that is inside the body» (Bàbá Marcelo, personal communication);
- *ìgbín*, an African snail, represents the white blood of the animal realm and is offered to Ọbàtálá, expressing the creative force that organises chaos. Bàbá Marcelo stressed that the *ìgbín* brings patience and the ability to wait for the favourable moment to act, since, when the season is dry, it closes itself into its shell and restarts activities when the rain resumes. The spiral shape of its shell represents the expansive quality of evolution;
- the African catfish is a very resistant fish that can live in the most varied environmental and climatic conditions, even in the mud in case of drought, where it is confused with the soil and seems to be born with rain. It therefore brings the potential to resist the most diverse conditions, and the potency of transformation and regeneration.

Foods that bring regenerative and transformative forces are:

- *canjica*, boiled white corn, a food of Ọbàtálá, bringing the *àṣẹ* of creation, peace and balance;
- *doburu*, popcorn, the main food of Ọbalúaié, a symbol of healing, which purifies and regenerates the body, and wards off diseases;
- *ẹko* or *àkàsà*, a white paste made from corn flour or white corn, is the element contained in one of the two gourds of existence from which Èṣù and all human beings were formed, representing the principle of individualization from the protomatter, generation, the human body and life itself (Calvo 2022, Reis 2022).

## Final considerations

In this paper, I explored the different forms in which the concept of regeneration, and some of its declinations – restoration, return, cyclicality, circularity – sustain Candomblé’s modes of conceiving and living individual, social and more-than-human processes. Natural phenomena (such as a plant growing from a seed, rain, cyclical alternation of seasons); human experiences (such as birth, death, epidemics and illness); human activities (such as agriculture, metallurgy, medicine); social organisation (especially family ties, elders’ importance and relationships with lineage and ancestry); forms of conceiving and interacting with cosmic forces; rituals marking social and individual life and daily care are all linked to one another through correspondences, interconnections and entanglements and appear with porous borders<sup>47</sup>. Following Maria Cristina Rangel and Estélio Gomberg (2016), we can observe that:

the orixás are expressions of how human beings relate with nature, not only as exteriority, but also through what is continuously fuelled between inside and outside, between natural phenomena and their permanent reprocessing by human being, who turns them divine (Rangel, Gomberg 2016: 43).

Candomblé’s “relational” conception of life (Bastide 1993), based on forces and flows, and form of worlding can be interpreted through Tim Ingold’s ecosystemic perspective, considering organisms as subjects-in-the-world – where boundaries between human and non-human, organism and environment become porous – a locus of growing and developing in a continuous field of relationships (Ingold 2011, Ingold, Pálsson 2013), along life lines, in the process of dwelling and living. Natural,

<sup>46</sup> See Vogel *et al.* (1988).

<sup>47</sup> The interconnection and interdependence among natural, human and spiritual domains in African philosophy (Kelbessa 2018) are analogous as those lived in Candomblé.

human and spiritual processes are interdependent, intertwined and crossed by different correspondences and plays of mirrors. The continuity of human life is strictly linked to other more-than-human beings' (other human, natural and spiritual beings) existence, and on the possibility of perpetuating the cyclicity of existence and the dynamic balance of forces and materials in the Cosmos, through a process that includes states of equilibrium and disequilibrium, order and chaos, individualization and undifferentiation, life and death. Candomblé practitioners recognize, therefore, the importance of not interfering into the nature's cycle and the consequences of aggressive human action on nature, that can interrupt its processes and eventually attack its regenerative ability, as Mãe Wanda de Omolu (cit. in Fortuna 2020) pointed out when offering an interpretation of Covid-19 pandemic. Recognizing human finitude and incompleteness, Candomblé practitioners stand for a sympoietic and response-able<sup>48</sup> relationship with more-than-human beings in contrast with the colonial and capitalist androcentric and anthropocentric conception of nature<sup>49</sup>, and recognize human responsibilities for current ecological, climatic and pandemic crises; and the need for humans to change their form of conceiving and living in relationship with the environment and all more-than-human beings. Actualising myths and ancestral knowledge to the new situations – according to which crises are always a manifestation of unbalance in forces and relationships, and need understanding and correcting behaviours, as well as performing acts of repair, renovation of alliances and rituals of regeneration and purification – Candomblé's practitioners interpret current ecological, climatic and pandemic crises as the consequence of an unbalanced relationship among humans and between humans and nature, calling for reflection and change. Therefore, the principles of regeneration, restoration and return are manifest in ritual practice (especially in the link between life and death in initiation and funerals) and daily care; sustain the forms of interpreting natural phenomena, vegetative processes, the interdependence of and the cycle of composition and decompositions of humans, animals, plants, soil, air and forces; constitute the basis for the moulding of society and the relationships with the elders, ancestry and women (as spiritual symbol of life reproduction<sup>50</sup>), and support an ethical and response-able mode of relating with other more-than-human beings and social and political actions in defence of African-derived traditional mode of existence, forms of food production, consumption and distribution, and the respect for nature, as well as offer an alternative model to colonial and capitalist systems.

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<sup>48</sup> I intend response-ability according to Haraway (2016: 30).

<sup>49</sup> See also Santos (2016) and Calvo (2022).

<sup>50</sup> On the meaning of *iyá*, "mother" in traditional Yoruba societies, see Oyěwùní (2015).

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