CHAPTER ONE

Cops and Candomblé in Domingos Sodré's Day

Candomblé between Tolerance and Repression

The day before Christmas Eve, 1858, a group of African freedpersons (i.e., ex-slaves) gathered for a *batuque*, the general expression then used for an African drumming session, in the Cruz do Cosme neighborhood on the outskirts of Salvador. Suddenly, the police surrounded and invaded the house, arresting people and seizing objects pertaining to Candomblé ceremonies. This raid caused a rift between the local subdelegado, or deputy chief constable, and the chief of police. In an official letter to his superior, subdelegado Manoel Nunes de Faria complained that he had not been informed of that police action. He later found out that the group of Africans had been arrested "for being found drumming." He questioned that charge, and protested:

> First, for your information, there was no such batuque, of which I am very well aware, and the Africans were at work, and this is nothing more than harassment, and if you perchance should pass by one afternoon and see the work of these Africans you would be amazed, and would even want to ensure that they stay in this parish, therefore it is precisely in light of this persecution that you should have them released and if you do so you will be doing them a great justice.[1]

He went on to state that the lieutenant commander of the urban police had acted "as if there were no subdelegado in the parish, which is highly

[1] Manoel Nunes de Faria to the chief of police, December 23, 1858, APEB, *Polícia. Subdelegados*, maço 6232.

astonishing"; and described the raid as typical "absolutism," indicating a lack of confidence in his authority. If the chief of police did not trust the subdelegado, "it would only be just to fire him," the aggrieved officer concluded.[2]

To provide a better understanding of this controversial issue and others that would arise later, I should say something about the structure of the police service in Bahia at the time. The provincial police chief, whom the emperor appointed directly, was at the top of the chain of command, and beneath him were *delegados* (chief constables), subdelegados, and the armed police force, which had its own hierarchy. The posts of delegado and subdelegado were created by the 1841 police reform act, and the president of the province chose their occupants from a police chief's list of three candidates. They replaced most of the police functions previously held by the justices of the peace, elected officials who held a post created in the late 1820s.[3] Salvador had two delegados, one for the urban parishes, the other for suburban and rural parishes. But the police chief interacted directly with the subdelegados, who were in charge of the day-to-day policing of each parish – or one of two districts in larger parishes – with the help of a clerk, constables, and, when necessary, bailiffs and urban guard officers. The urban guard patrolled the city day and night, on the lookout for lawbreakers. The post of subdelegado was unpaid but reflected and added to the power, respectability, and prestige of the men who held that office. It was precisely in an effort to defend those attributes of his post that the subdelegado of Cruz do Cosme complained to the police chief about the raid on the Africans' home.[4]

The Cruz do Cosme district was typical of what was then the rural outskirts of Salvador. Located in the second district of the rather large Santo Antônio Além do Carmo parish, it was home to a sizable number of African freedpersons who lived and farmed there, selling their produce for a living, as its subdelegado accurately stated in his letter to

[2] Ibid.

[3] For justices of the peace, see Thomas Flory, *Judge and Jury in Imperial Brazil, 1808–1871: Social Control and Political Stability in the New State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

[4] The rules governing police ranks and titles can be found in Araujo Filgueiras Junior, *Codigo do Processo do Imperio do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Eduardo e Henrique Laemmert, 1874), particularly chaps. 2 and 3; and the "Regulamento" (Regulations) for the Urban Guard of May 18, 1857, Art. 6, followed by the "Instruções" (Instructions) of July 25, 1857, APEB, *Polícia*, maço 2946.

the chief of police. Following the food traditions of their homelands, these freedpersons, sometimes with the assistance of slaves, mainly planted yams for both their own consumption and the city's food supply.[5] This rural district was typical of the "black countryside" to which historian Flávio Gomes refers in his study of Rio de Janeiro, in which solidarity and negotiation, as well as competition and conflict, marked the daily lives of the communities that formed around small farms and businesses.[6]

Cruz do Cosme was frequently mentioned in police reports. In September 1859, subdelegado João de Azevedo Piapitinga (remember his name) reported that he had received frequent complaints from farm workers regarding "constantly occurring thefts." Three Africans were arrested for stealing yams from other Africans.[7] But produce theft was not the only problem. According to the subdelegado, there was a great deal of "disorder" in that area, particularly on weekends, when a large

[5] The Yoruba people were the most numerous group among the Africans who arrived during that period in Bahia, where they were called nagôs, and yams always came first in descriptions of Yoruba agriculture. See, for example, Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966 [orig. 1897]), 109–110; Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 174. Yam farming was widespread in the African forest zone while millet predominated in the savannah area, according to Robert July, *A History of the African People*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 131–132. The tuber played an important role in the diet of slave ships, according to Robert Hall, "Savoring Africa in the New World," in *Seeds of Change*, ed. Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institute, 1991), 163–165; and Markus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007), 237, which indicates that yams were eaten aboard by slaves imported specifically from the bights of Benin (from where most slaves embarked for Bahia) and Biafra. Yams were served at the meal the Malês ate before the 1835 revolt, according to "Devassa do levante de escravos ocorrido em Salvador em 1835," *Anais do Arquivo do Estado da Bahia*, no. 38 (1968): 63. In other slaveholding cities such as São Paulo, freed Africans also settled in rural districts like Cruz do Cosme. See, for example, Maria Cristina Wissenbach, *Sonhos africanos, vivências ladinas: escravos e forros em São Paulo (1850–1880)* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1998), esp. chap. 4.

[6] Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Histórias de quilombolas: mocambos e comunidades de senzalas no Rio de Janeiro, século XIX* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006).

[7] João de Azevedo Piapitinga to the chief of police, September 29, 1859, APEB, *Polícia*, maço 6232.

number of city residents passed through there.[8] In 1860, Piapitinga had requested police reinforcements to combat the "murderers, deserters, fugitive slaves, escaped convicts and gamblers" in his district.[9] Many of those people frequented the Candomblé sites established there, which many officials also considered part of the "disorder" in the outskirts of the city. This is where the Christmas 1858 raid on the African drumming session comes in.

In his account of this episode to the president of the province, the police chief reported that on December 23, among other measures, they arrested one man and twelve women – all African freedpersons – found "in dances and batuques, having seized several objects and garments used in those dances." He did not give any details about the confiscated objects and garments, but listed the names of the individuals arrested.[10] Also according to the chief of police, this time in response to subdelegado Faria's protest, the raid was due to "repeated complaints from neighbors regarding the rumpus that many blacks frequent[ly] made at the Candomblé in the house that was raided." And he went on to accuse the subdelegado of dereliction of duty, because that measure would have been unnecessary if "the police had been so vigilant and active" in that district that he, the police chief himself, would not have been obliged to take steps against those Africans. Finally, he said he was surprised at the "immoderate tone" of his subordinate's letter and concluded by threatening to remove him from office because he lacked the "serenity which is indispensable to anyone in any small position of authority."[11]

[8] João de Azevedo Piapitinga to the chief of police, June 5, 1858, APEB, *Polícia*, maço 6232.

[9] João de Azevedo Piapitinga to the chief of police, September 12, 1860, APEB, *Polícia*, maço 6233.

[10] A. M. de Aragão e Mello to the president of the province, December 23, 1858, APEB, *Polícia. Correspondência*, vol. 5730, fl. 58. The majority of this group was made up of women, which fits with what we know about the gender of the people arrested at nineteenth-century candomblés in Bahia. See João José Reis, "Sacerdotes, seguidores e clientes no candomblé da Bahia oitocentista," in *Orixás e espíritos: o debate interdisciplinar na pesquisa contemporânea*, ed. Artur César Isaia (Uberlândia: Editora da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, 2006), 57–98.

[11] A. M. de Aragão e Mello to the subdelegado of the second district of Santo Antônio, December 24, 1958, APEB, *Polícia. Correspondência*, vol. 5732, fls. 9v–10v.

The subdelegado's response, dated December 27, was humble and conciliatory. He wrote that his first letter was an outburst in response to a raid that had undermined his authority, as it was carried out without his knowledge in his own district. Now that he knew that the order had come directly from the chief of police, he understood and accepted it. He concluded by promising to be "always ready to serve the public," leaving out of his thoughts the Africans whom he had previously defended as unjustly treated.[12]

But the Africans themselves, better yet, the women in the group, headed by Aniceta Rita Junqueira, put up a capable defense. The day after their arrest, they sent a petition to the police chief explaining that they were nothing more than honest washerwomen who went to the house the police raided to get some food and rest after a hard day's work. After that, they would go to the city, where they claimed to live, but "the house where they used to stay was surrounded by a police detachment, and then they were arrested and imprisoned in the Aljube," a religious jail dating from colonial times that was now used to house individuals, particularly slaves, accused of petty crimes. The African freedwomen claimed that "they were not in that house for illicit purposes," and asked to be set free. The chief of police released them that same day. They were in luck, because he did so before the dispute with the subdelegado began. Otherwise, he might have kept the African women in jail to avoid giving the impression that an insubordinate underling had pressured him to let them go.[13]

This episode is typical of what went on behind the scenes of the police repression of nineteenth-century Candomblé in Bahia. Police officials frequently disagreed about how to handle it. Referring to the colonial period, Nina Rodrigues observed that "the suppression or maintenance of the drumming sessions was an apple of heated discord."[14] Generally

[12] Manoel Nunes de Faria, December 27, 1858, APEB, *Polícia. Subdelegados*, maço 6234.

[13] Petition from Aniceta Rita Junqueira et al. to the chief of police, December 23, 1853, APEB, *Polícia*, maço 6322. Aniceta owned at least one slave, a woman named Esperança. APEB, *Índice de alforrias, 1861–1861*, maço 2882.

[14] Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil*, 4th ed. (São Paulo: Editora Companhia Nacional, 1976), 155–156. Nina refers to the different repression policies of Count da Ponte and Count dos Arcos. For details, see João José Reis, *Rebelião escrava no Brasil: a história do levante dos malês em 1835* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003), chap. 3; João José Reis and Renato da Silveira, "Violência repressiva e engenho político na Bahia do tempo dos escravos," *Comunicações do ISER*, 5, no 21 (1986): 61–66. Renato da Silveira has

speaking, the same can be said of the policy of repressing Candomblé in Domingos Sodré's time. During this period, police chiefs generally exerted stricter control of African cultural expressions, while many subdelegados – who had to deal with the problem firsthand on a daily basis – often opted for a policy of tolerance and negotiation, as the numerous complaints about candomblés and other drumming sessions that resounded from several parts of the city suggest. As historian Dale Graden has noted, some police officials "recognized the benefits to be gained from quiet diplomacy."[15] The press repeatedly accused the police and other authorities of colluding with the candomblés and African drumming sessions. In 1864, for example, the *O Patriota* newspaper published a satirical poem criticizing a judge for suspending a robbery investigation to protect the Candomblé community. A passage of the poem said, "the judge makes no justice/When there is a whiff of Candomblé."[16]

But no newspaper was as insistent as *O Alabama* in accusing police officers of protecting Africans, permitting them to engage in their practices and even taking part in Candomblé ceremonies. I have even found in the pages of this paper a complaint about a subdelegado who was said to be possessed by an African divinity. Self-styled by its mulatto editor as a "critical and jocular" publication – a common motto of such publications in nineteenth-century Brazil – the newspaper preached that these officers were holding back the march of progress and civilization – European civilization, that is – in that province, which was its main concern.[17]

conducted an extensive study of the dynamics of repression/tolerance by church and state, in which doctrine and political strategy converge. See Silveira, *O candomblé da Barroquinha: processo de constituição do primeiro terreiro baiano de Keto* (Salvador: Maianga, 2006), esp. chaps. 1–3.

[15] Dale Graden, *From Slavery to Freedom in Brazil: Bahia, 1835–1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 118.

[16] *O Patriota*, vol. 5, no 3, June 6, 1864, p. 4.

[17] Regarding *O Alabama*'s coverage of Candomblé, see Dale Graden, "'So Much Superstition among These People!': Candomblé and the Dilemmas of Afro-Bahian Intellectuals," in *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics: Bahia, 1790s to 1990s*, ed. Hendrik Kraay (Armonk, NY/London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 57–73. See also Reis, "Sacerdotes, seguidores e clientes," 57–94; Nicolau Parés, *A formação do candomblé: história e ritual da nação jeje na Bahia* (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2006), 141. At the end of the century, the press attacked black carnival groups and continued harassing Candomblé. See Rodrigues, *Os africanos*, 238–253; Peter Fry, Sérgio Carrara, and Ana Luiza Martins-Costa, "Negros e brancos no Carnaval da Velha República," in *Escravidão e*

The police were not the only authorities who were ambiguous about Candomblé practices. The courts and even politicians disagreed on how to deal with Candomblé and its followers and clients. Some members of the public complained about African healers and diviners, while others consulted, protected, or at least tolerated them – sometimes out of fear, as they had a reputation for wielding extraordinary powers, such as the ability to disseminate witchcraft. When Domingos Sodré was arrested, both Candomblé temples, or *terreiros*, and individual practices – such as divination – that were not based on an organized religious community could already be found throughout the city, although the temples were more often located on the outskirts of the city, places like Cruz do Cosme, far removed from the sensitive ears of city dwellers and the vigilance of the powers that be.[18] Nevertheless, I must stress that their success was due to patient negotiations of tolerance with society, because Candomblé was always on a knife edge, pressured by complaints from the great and the small, particularly the press, which more often than not led to police repression.

A Chief with a Style of His Own

In 1862, the year when the raid on Domingos Sodré's house took place, the head of the police in Bahia was forty-year-old Chief João Antônio de Araújo Freitas Henriques (Figure 2), who would play a leading role in even more heated disagreements on the same subject with his subdelegados than his predecessor's dispute with the subdelegado of Cruz do Cosme. João Henriques had enjoyed a brilliant career in the judiciary and served on high courts of the imperial government. He occupied

invenção da liberdade: estudos sobre o negro no Brasil, ed. João José Reis (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988), 232–263; and Wlamyra R. de Albuquerque, *O jogo da dissimulação: abolição e cidadania negra no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2009), chap. 5. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the press continued its campaign and accused the police of complicity with Candomblé. See Angela Lühning, "'Acabe com este santo, Pedrito vem aí'. . .," *Revista USP*, 28 (1995–1996): 194–220.

[18] See, for example, Rachael E. Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Nicolau Parés, *A formação do Candomblé*, 138–142, for instance; Silveira, *O candomblé da Barroquinha*, esp. chap. 8; and particularly Jocélio Teles dos Santos, "Candomblés e espaço urbano na Bahia do século XIX," *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, 27, no. 1–3 (2005): 205–226.

Figure 2. João Antônio de Araújo Freitas Henriques (1822–1903), the police chief who ordered Domingos Sodré's arrest.

the position of chief of police in several provinces (Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Bahia) and that of president of Ceará (1869–1870) and Bahia (1871–1872), among various public offices.[19] The son of a colonel in the National Guard, he had held conservative ideas since his youth. At one point, he published a subterfuge-filled defense of large rural landholdings, claiming that they were ideal for furthering economic progress. He praised Britain for the "maintenance of large farms," which "preserved an aristocracy of great repute that is strongly committed to national prosperity."[20] Apparently, for him, what

[19] Arnold Wildberger, *Os presidentes da província da Bahia, efectivos e interinos, 1824–1899* (Salvador: Typographia Beneditina, 1949), 591–598.

[20] J. A. de Freitas Henriques, "Se a Terra deve ser dividida em grandes ou pequenas propriedades e quaes são os seus resultados econômicos e políticos," *O Musaico*, 15 or 16 (?) (Sept.? or Oct.? 1846): 230, 246.

was good for Britain – if indeed it was – was good for Brazil. Henriques wrote that article when he was twenty-four. Now, sixteen years later, he was committed to his role of protecting Bahian aristocrats and commoners alike from the propagation of vibrant African cultural expressions that abounded in the province.

Since he had taken office in late November 1861, João Henriques had worked hard to eradicate candomblés, and more. Although I would like to focus on his crusade against that religion, I should at least mention his antipathy toward other African and creole customs – folk customs in general, in fact – that were widely popular in the province. For example, he prohibited Catholic devotees from collecting alms for the saints, a common activity among the members of black confraternities, which raised funds that way to take care of their altars and churches, organize their lavish and entertaining devotional feasts, and care for their poor brethren in life and death. According to Henriques' law, alms gatherers could only operate in the city with the official authorization of the archbishop. The "intent is to punish those who use the cloak of religion to profiteer, taking advantage of the public's credulity," the police chief explained in a bulletin to his subdelegados.[21] As we will soon see, he used similar terms against followers of Candomblé, and added even harsher words.

Outside the religious sphere, Henriques sought to repress lesser infractions and offenses by enslaved, freed, and free blacks, such as bouts of capoeira street fighting, the African-derived martial art. On June 18, 1862, he sent a circular letter to his subordinates ordering them to clamp down on capoeiras – in this case the practitioners of the martial art – in all parishes of the city. This is an interesting document for various reasons, and worth quoting in full:

> Seeing that on previous Sunday afternoons a large number of scamps have gathered in Barbalho Field, who in organized gangs and from various places will go there to make it their stopping place, where, according to the press, on the afternoon of Sunday last there was a great outcry and noise, and some were wounded, I demand that you pay attention to this. As I have issued orders for them to be taken by surprise in that area, it is likely that they will seek another position to practice the fight and game of capoeira, a

[21] Circular letter from the police chief to the subdelegados of Salvador, May 31, 1862, APEB, *Polícia. Correspondência*, vol. 5754, fls. 146–146v.

> business that should not be overlooked, in view of what goes on in the Court [of Rio de Janeiro], whose police, although surrounded by other means, have not been able to put an end to those turbulent "capoeiras."
>
> In fact, based on the foregoing, I recommend that you be fully vigilant in your district, to prevent gatherings of such people, and I hope that you will take action in this regard with full energy and zeal.[22]

The following day, Cosme Firmino dos Santos, a creole (Brazilian-born black) freedman who worked as a tailor, was arrested "for capoeira" in Santana parish and sent to prison.[23]

This order to crack down on capoeira eloquently speaks for itself and is the first document to establish a clear relationship between capoeira as a martial art and a game. But the duality of being both a game and a fight was not the heart and soul of capoeira alone, and João Henriques did not seem to realize this when he proposed to eradicate cultural practices with African roots and hues in Bahia. But he was not alone. The press had issued constant warnings about the operations of candomblés since at least the beginning of February 1862, two months after Henriques became the highest police official in the province. At the time, the *Diário da Bahia* newspaper reported the presence of a "major batuque, and in due form, to which a few dozen Africans abandoned themselves in a backyard in Agony alley," not far from where Domingos Sodré lived. It was a celebration in honor of a recently deceased Candomblé dignitary, "solemn obsequies" as the paper ironically described it, although it was a perfectly accurate description: the candomblés marked the passing of the most important members of the African community with a solemn ceremony and even a feast, accompanied by the consumption of food and drink. However, the editors of the *Diário* were only interested in spreading the news that the celebration was accompanied by the "hubbub of shouting, the hellish din of instruments," and plenty of hard liquor. They concluded by appealing to the police

[22] Circular letter from the police chief to the subdelegados of Salvador, June 18, 1862, APEB, *Polícia. Correspondência*, vol. 5754, fl. 171v.

[23] Chart of the prisoners in the penitentiary, June 19, 1862, APEB, *Prisão. Relação de presos*, maço 6272. For capoeira in nineteenth-century Bahia, see Frederico José de Abreu, *Capoeiras: Bahia, século XIX* (Salvador: Instituto Jair Moura, 2005).