



 Sisnando Souza Pacheco¹

 Débora Previatti²

 Vilson Caetano de Sousa Júnior³

¹ Universidade Federal da Bahia , Escola de Nutrição, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Alimentos, Nutrição e Saúde. Salvador, BA, Brasil.

² Universidade Federal da Bahia , Escola de Nutrição, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Sociais e Programa de Pós-Graduação em Alimentos, Nutrição e Saúde. Salvador, BA, Brasil.


³ Universidade Federal da Bahia , Escola de Nutrição, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia e Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Étnicos e Africanos. Salvador, BA, Brasil.

This manuscript derives from a master's thesis entitled "I Could Not Eat Because It Was Quizila": Commensality and Sociabilities as Challenges to Food Taboos in Interactions with Non-Initiates in Candomblé, authored by Sisnando Souza Pacheco and supervised by Débora Previatti and Vilson Caetano de Sousa Júnior. The study was developed within the Graduate Program in Food, Nutrition and Health at the School of Nutrition, Federal University of Bahia, and was published in February 2026.

Correspondence

Sisnando Souza Pacheco
sisnando.souza@ufba.br

Assistant Editor

 Fabiana Bom Kraemer

“I couldn't eat because it was quizila”: commensality and sociabilities as challenges to food interdictions in the coexistence with non- initiates in the Candomblé

“Não podia comer porque era quizila”: comensalidade e sociabilidades como desafios às interdições alimentares na convivência com não iniciados no Candomblé

Abstract

In African-derived religions, *quizilas* are prohibitions that regulate the relationship between initiates and deities, and may concern diet, clothing, or behavior. This article describes and analyzes experiences related to dietary taboos in the context of sociability among Candomblé initiates. It presents original qualitative research based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted with initiates from two Candomblé *terreiros* of the Ketu nation, located in the railway suburbs of Salvador, Bahia. The findings reveal tensions between conviviality and dietary taboos, which hinder the maintenance of such restrictions in contexts of sociability, particularly during shared meals. Initiates adopt strategies to avoid social constraint in these situations, as well as processes of social exclusion. In some cases, they avoid participating in events or gatherings; in others, they remain present but refrain from taking part in communal meals. The study shows that dietary taboos pose significant challenges to initiates' sociability, especially in their relations with non-adherents of Candomblé, due to a lack of understanding of the religious principles underlying these practices.

Keywords: Religious Dietary Restrictions. Sociability. African-descendant Population. Socio-Anthropology of Food.

Resumo

Nas religiões de matriz africana, *quizilas* são proibições que orientam a relação dos iniciados com as divindades, podendo ser alimentares, de vestuário ou comportamentais. São descritas e analisadas as experiências com as *quizilas* alimentares no contexto das sociabilidades de iniciados do Candomblé. Trata-se de artigo original que utiliza abordagem qualitativa, fundamentado em observação participante e entrevistas semiestruturadas, com iniciados de duas comunidades-terreiro de Candomblé de nação Ketu, localizadas no subúrbio ferroviário de Salvador-BA. Foram encontradas tensões entre a convivialidade e as *quizilas*, que dificultam a manutenção

destas em contextos de sociabilidade e participação em momentos de comensalidade. Estratégias são mobilizadas pelos iniciados para evitar constrangimentos sociais nessas situações e a exclusão social de certos grupos. Em alguns casos, evitam participar de eventos ou espaços, ou permanecem presentes, mas não participam da comensalidade. A pesquisa evidencia que as quizilas alimentares impõem desafios significativos ao convívio social dos iniciados, sobretudo nas sociabilidades com não adeptos do Candomblé, devido à incompreensão dos princípios religiosos que fundamentam essas práticas.

Palavras-chave: Restrições Alimentares por Motivação Religiosa. Sociabilidade. População Africana. Socioantropologia da Alimentação.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptions of food in Candomblé *terreiro* communities are strongly linked to the ritual practices of formerly enslaved African populations and their descendants, which influence dietary, cultural, spiritual, and symbolic practices, involving a diversity of knowledge, ingredients, and techniques.^{1,2} In these contexts, food occupies a prominent place, hence the idea of a hierarchy of eating – as an expression of belonging, importance, group identification, and the strengthening of existing bonds, reflecting a distinct worldview.³ Food constitutes a fundamental element for the performance of liturgical practices, which involve permissions, prohibitions, restrictions, and fasting. Food is viewed as sacred, as it establishes a connection between humans and deities; its presence or absence is understood beyond a merely nutritional and physiological perspective.⁴ It is more than just nutrients: it is linked to the senses, memories, and experiences, and people also eat for pleasure, not merely for what food represents nutritionally.

Food and dietary practices are deeply imbued with symbolic meanings, resulting from historical legacies combined with the realities of contemporary social life.⁵ Such practices are not immutable but evolve over time, adding or removing elements that sometimes represent, and at other times cease to represent, certain groups. Habits have changed, but people continue to gather around food and drink, including in religious ceremonies, nourishing more than just the spirit. Some individuals deepen bonds and identities through food and beverage practices.⁶ However, researchers have been questioning the future of conviviality in contemporary times, as they observe increasing particularities at the table.⁷ Dining and socializing are taking on new nuances, with specific challenges arising from dietary restrictions.⁸ While refusing a meal is often interpreted as a refusal of sociability,⁷ participating in dining situations may also entail loneliness and constraint.⁸

From the perspective of the socio-anthropology of food, the cultural and social aspects of food and eating are understood as mechanisms for understanding social change and culture itself⁹ – understood as a symbolic system, that is, a set of control mechanisms, plans, recipes, rules, and instructions that guide human behavior. These symbols and meanings are shared by members of the cultural system, taking on a public character rather than an individual or private one.¹⁰ Laraia¹¹ expands this discussion by defining culture as a cumulative element, resulting from ancestral experiences, which may limit or stimulate the creative intentions of individuals or groups. Hence the possibility of interpreting food both as a channel of affection and as a social barrier. It is therefore necessary to analyze it as a grammar of relationships, with the aim of decoding its rules.^{6,12}

When considering the concept of “not eating,” the terms *kizila* or *quizila*, of Kimbundu origin, and *èwó* (or *euó*), from Yoruba-Nago, stand out. The term also appears in Brazilian Portuguese (a variant of *quijila*; Kimbundu: *kijil*, “precept, commandment, rule”) and may denote repugnance or antipathy.¹³ One of its inflections, *kijila*, derives from the verb *jila* (to fast), with the prefix “ki,” meaning “precept of fasting” or “prohibition.” In general, these refer to prohibitions that guide the relationship between Candomblé initiates and the various deities that comprise their cult.¹⁴ These prohibitions may pertain to food, clothing, and behavior and are imposed on practitioners of these religions, with physical, mental, and spiritual effects. In Candomblé, these prohibitions are popularly known as *quizilas*.

Dietary *quizilas*, the focus of this article, are forms of identification and belonging between individuals and the deities to whom they are connected, revealing an epistemic perspective on food and dietary practices that differs from the hegemonic one, articulating material and immaterial dimensions,¹⁵ in practices rooted in the knowledge of these communities. *Quizilas* are understood in terms of meanings such as the deities’ preferences or aversions, always considering some previously established relationship. Most find explanation in the narratives known as *itans*,¹⁶ or in the poems called *orikis*,¹⁷ as well as in oral tradition; others relate to

bloodline or saintly ancestry. As a rule, as Lima, Oliveira & Leite¹⁸ state, a *quizila* is anything that an ancestor tends to reject, for reasons known or unknown, and whose offering and consumption are restricted by those who offer or consume it.

Based on the relationship between individuals, the community, and food, the construction of a Brazilian food identity or culture – formed through the amalgamation and influence of diverse peoples, each with its own specificities – includes, among these particularities, those proposed by African-derived religions, which, in their modes of existence and ritual practices, mobilize food in different ways.

We consider that, in the relationships between food, individuals, deities, and *quizilas*, the key issue is to understand how belonging to and respect for ancestral practices, imbued with mythical meanings, constitute the elements that sustain them. Based on this premise, the objective is to describe and analyze experiences with food-related *quizilas* in the context of sociability among initiates and their networks established with non-initiates.

METHODS

The railway suburb of the capital of Bahia, the location chosen for this research, is a suitable setting, given the existence of historical records of its occupation even prior to the official founding of the city of Salvador. Since 1544, the region has grown, offering opportunities to segments of the African and Afro-descendant population, who constitute the majority of participants in African-derived religions. Of the 1,165 cataloged *terreiros*, more than 178 are in this region. Among the eight neighborhoods with the highest number of *terreiros*, five are in the railway suburb.^{19,20}

This is a qualitative study that employed participant observation and semi-structured interviews as research methods, based on narratives collected in the field from initiates of two Candomblé *terreiro* communities of the Ketu nation, located in the railway suburb of Salvador (BA). Observation, insofar as it involves the threefold task of perception, memorization, and note-taking, serves as a powerful tool for uncovering and verifying the social world under analysis.²¹ Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, allow informants to recount significant events in their lives and enable the interviewer to reconstruct these lived experiences from the informants' own perspectives.²²

Participant observation was conducted between September 2024 and February 2025, during community celebrations, with records kept in a field diary. Regarding the interviews, the inclusion criteria were: (a) individuals who had already undergone the initiation process; (b) initiated individuals who engaged in activities outside the *terreiro* community (formal and informal work) and who exhibited some form of *quizila*. The interviews were conducted between November 2024 and February 2025, totaling nine—eight individual and one conducted in pairs—via the Google Meet platform, with audio recordings transcribed manually. The research subjects' information was kept confidential, and they are referred to in the text by the names Dofona de Oxum, Dofoninha de Nanã, Dofono de Obaluaiyê, Dofono de Oxum, and Gamo de Oxalá.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee accredited by the National Health Council (CAAE 81365124.2.0000.5023, under opinion no. 6,971,457/2024). All stages of the study were conducted in accordance with ethical research principles, and participants were required to sign the Informed Consent Form (ICF), in which they were informed about the objectives of the research, as well as the risks and benefits of their participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are initially presented through the recounting of an *itan*, followed by two sections: (a) the difficulties and lessons learned regarding *quizilas* during initiation, under the title "Beginning in Candomblé: Temporary and Permanent Quizilas"; and (b) the impact of *quizilas* on the lives of initiates, with the discussion centered on the title "The Challenges of Socialization."

To begin the discussion of this study's findings, we present an account from the literature concerning the deities worshiped by African and Afro-descendant populations, known as *itans*. These narratives have diverse origins and modes of transmission, but what matters most here is the shared knowledge that, through oral tradition, reveals the adventures, achievements, misfortunes, victories, and defeats characteristic of the *orixás*. The prohibition in question refers to the ban on eating pumpkin, whose sacred name is *Ñàngo* or *Ìnàngo*, linked to the deity Oyá. This prohibition goes beyond consumption: even saying the word "pumpkin" is avoided, being replaced by "red yam." It is said that Oyá stopped eating pumpkin after the food saved her in battle. Oyá, fleeing from her enemies, enters a property filled with pumpkins to avoid being killed, which confuses her enemies, who are unable to find her among the leaves and fruits; there she remains throughout the night. In gratitude to the pumpkins that saved her, she vowed that neither she nor her descendants would ever eat their fruit, out of an eternal debt of gratitude.

This story leaves an important symbolic mark: the food comes to be regarded as sacred to the deity. Most importantly, this prohibition continues to reverberate among her children, as most of them do not consume pumpkin. Regarding the repercussions of *quizilas* in the lives of initiates, Mãe Stella de Oxóssi warns of the effects that may be felt, physically and/or spiritually. Even if they do not manifest immediately, they can become channels of estrangement from the deities.²³ Among the consequences that befall the children of the saints in cases of disobedience are various misfortunes, aversion, repulsion, and clinical manifestations such as headaches, frequent diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and even occasional fainting spells.

Getting Started in Candomblé: Temporary and Permanent Food Restrictions

Didactically, dietary prohibitions in Candomblé are classified as temporary (or prophylactic)^{1a} and permanent. Their explanations are associated with different markers: (a) mythical, related to the stories told about the deities and their adventures; (b) community-based, according to the specificities of each Candomblé nation, such as Angola, Ketu, and Jeje;^{24,25} (c) collective *terreiro*-based, specific to each *terreiro* and applicable to all its participants;²⁴ (d) personal, pertaining to each initiate, based on the relationship established during the initiation process;^{26,27} and (e) recipient-specific, determined through oracular consultation,²⁶ known as *odu* or *caminho*.

During the first year of initiation in Candomblé, it is not uncommon for initiates to have to deal with prophylactic restrictions, or, in *terreiro* parlance, "resguardos de boca." In this phase, neophytes are deprived of a range of foods, a common prohibition that tends to last until the end of the first year. Among the foods prohibited during this period are cajá, sugarcane and its derivatives, pork and pork products, chili peppers and their byproducts, pineapple, jackfruit, alcoholic beverages, crab, tangerines, among others. Below is a key episode that relates to the paragraph above:

^{1a} They refer to prohibitions associated with specific moments; for example, when a ritual is sought, such as an *ebó* for cleansing and purification, there will be an associated set of foods that must not be consumed by those seeking these religious services.

In the first episode, the drink was consumed after fermentation had already begun, since it had been kept refrigerated for over 24 hours. Dofona de Oxum was the first to drink it and the first to feel the symptoms. Thinking I wouldn't feel anything, I started laughing about the situation, since we had been joking about who would show more interdctions. But as soon as I started laughing, a chill ran from my feet up to my head – I began coughing and felt nauseous and dizzy. The quizila was showing its signs. In the second episode – since in most communities people are encouraged to try it three times to be completely sure – we decided to drink sugarcane juice again to confirm the existence of the quizila. This time, the juice was being prepared on the spot. The vendor started serving us; I had a glass straight, with plenty of ice, and I was the first to be served, even before Dofona de Oxum drank it. As soon as the first sip reached my stomach, the same intensity came back: a darkness took over my vision, I couldn't see anymore, and I felt a tingling sensation throughout my body, along with vertigo – I had to be held up by the others. The vendor, extremely worried, kept saying that nothing like that had ever happened before, that everything at his stall was properly sanitized. He thought it might be some reaction caused by poor hygiene or food handling, while people were explaining to him that it was a religious manifestation of quizila. Even so, he insisted that we should go to the emergency room. In the meantime, Dofona burst out laughing, thinking she was free from the quizila, only to be interrupted by the onset of symptoms that began to affect her as well. At that point, everyone turned to look at her as she also started showing the physical signs. It was the saint's quizila too. (Dofona de Oxum, 18/11/2024).

Over time, it is understood that these *quizilas* are “tests of love” for the initiates by the deities who chose them and with whom they maintain a filial relationship. These prohibitions are part of daily life in the *terreiros*, and dealing with them is often easier than explaining them to others. They become a way of demonstrating belonging to the people of the saint and the *terreiro* community. The following narrative, which discusses the consumption of sugarcane juice, recounts the initiation of the Dofonitinha de Nanã group, which also includes the Dofona de Oyá and the Famo de Oxalá:

On one occasion, we had already been initiated for some time when Famo decided to drink a certain amount of sugarcane juice. As soon as he finished the last sip, he started to feel unwell – he was sweating profusely, like Brazilian corn couscous steaming under a lid – and as time went on, it only got worse. I was on my way back from school when I began to feel dizzy; the vertigo became so intense that I ended up fainting on the bus – fortunately, the other passengers helped me. When I got home, I told the Iyalorixá who had initiated me everything that had happened, and to my surprise, Famo de Oxalá was already there, trying to recover from the episode. The presence of that food – and, consequently, of the quizila – was the thread connecting us as co-initiates, to the point that when a third member of the initiation group consumed a given food, it reverberated in clinical manifestations in the other members as well. (Dofonitinha de Nanã, 21/11/2024).

It is very common for sugarcane juice to be among Oxalá's taboos, and some explanations link this prohibition to the deity's disapproval of alcohol consumption, since sugarcane juice is the base for producing *cachaça* (a sugarcane spirit). After that incident, Dofonitinha began joking by offering sugarcane juice to other initiates who also have this taboo. It was a drink she greatly missed, as she used to consume it in the heat, but she learned not to drink it, understanding the importance of the prohibition, which led her to accept it as natural. In contrast, she was allowed to consume sugarcane in its natural form.

Still within this line of discussion on learning about taboos, another narrative recounts how Dofono de Obaluaiyê discovered that his taboo was plantain, offering insights into how these taboos are perceived and managed by some initiated practitioners. This account is presented in the words of Dofono de Obaluaiyê:

One day, a few months after my initiation, I was still studying at a municipal school in Salvador. That day, the snack was Brazilian corn couscous with slices of plantain – one of my favorite dishes. After eating some of it, I began to feel chills and a sense of nausea, and then I started to feel really unwell – vomiting and having frequent diarrhea at school. My mother ended up being called. When I got home, it was initially assumed that it might have been caused by something spoiled that I had eaten. However, since I had been recently initiated, my *mãe de santo* [female religious leader] was contacted. After going over the list of foods I had consumed, it turned out to be the plantain, a food associated with Obaluaiyê. (Dofono de Obaluaiyê, 22/11/2024).

Dofono used to love plantains, but today he must be extremely careful not to eat dishes that contain them. When they are served at school, he ends up excluding himself from meals. When friends ask him if he is going to eat, he usually replies that he is allergic – one of the strategies he uses to avoid exclusion from the group.^{2b} When interacting with people who are unaware of his religious background, he fears being shunned. Even with those who are aware, he prefers to maintain the explanation of an allergy, as explaining the religious prohibition is too complex. When this food is offered to him under certain circumstances, his approach differs from that of Dofonitinha de Nanã, who attempts to explain the reasons for her restriction. If people insist, he responds firmly and authoritatively, demanding respect for his beliefs. While, within the *terreiro*, the kitchen and festive ceremonies function as vectors of sociability,¹⁸ outside of it, strategies and positions are required in order to remain faithful to these prohibitions.

Wettstein, Alves & Goldim,²⁸ in a study on religious dietary restrictions, applied a tool to assess the degree of coercion associated with such restrictions. They found that the majority of patients admitted to a university hospital reported having some type of dietary restriction, of which 7.3% were related to religious motivations. However, no patient reported feeling embarrassed when asked about their religious practices. The authors conclude that, although patients feel heard by healthcare professionals, their dietary restrictions are not effectively considered. An example of this is the event reported by Freitas, Minayo & Fontes,²⁹ in which the removal of beans from Tuesday lunches by a dietitian at a public hospital in Salvador caused perplexity in the community due to the absence of the food of Ogun, revered on that day of the week, indicating a still incipient consideration of the beliefs of Afro-Brazilian religions.²⁹

^{2b} See Previatti e Horn,²⁷ who identified, based on gluten- and lactose-free diets, that individuals adhering to restrictive diets adopt strategies to circumvent social conventions in order to avoid social exclusion, giving rise to a particular psychic economy within spaces of sociability.

The challenges of sociability

The act of eating together is unique to the human species, and gestures and choices at the table take on communicative and social dimensions. Eating the same food, at the same table, can be the first expression of belonging to a group³⁰ – and non-participation, a sign of exclusion. To broaden the discussion on sociability, we present other narratives of experiences lived by initiates. The first refers to Dofono de Oxóssi, who attended a gathering at his mother-in-law's house, and another situation in which he had to get off public transportation due to a *quizila*.

On one occasion, during a lunch at my mother-in-law's house, a family member started peeling a tangerine, and just from the smell I began to feel unwell. I felt dizzy and short of breath; the more the smell spread through the room, the worse it got, to the point that I had to leave the house in order to recover. [...] In another situation, I was on a bus heading home after a day of work. As I was getting close to my stop – about three stops away – someone on the bus started peeling a tangerine. I immediately began to feel unwell and asked the driver to open the doors urgently so I could get off. I had to walk the rest of the way because I couldn't remain in that space with the smell of the tangerine. (Dofono de Oxóssi, 02/12/2024).

Dofono de Oxóssi already knew that tangerine was a *quizila* of Oxóssi. He had this knowledge from a story involving a daughter of Oxóssi, a *mãe de santo* (female religious leader) from another community, who also exhibited this *quizila*. Whenever someone had recently eaten a tangerine and its scent lingered on their body, there was a heightened sensitivity to the aroma, and the person would feel unwell.

Not all *quizilas* have mythical explanations in the *itans*. Some are sustained by oral traditions, consolidated through generational transmission from *pais* and *mães de santo* (religious leaders) to their networks of family solidarity. Here, the concept of family is reinterpreted in light of the African worldview. In these religions, *pais* and *mães de santo* play the role of a social hub that provides inclusion and cohesion to historically excluded groups,^{31,32} in which biological kinship is replaced by kinship through the saint – hence the emergence and maintenance of these communities.^{33,34} Baptista³⁵ asserts that the saint's family is a network of personal relationships traversed by different hierarchical levels, which configures it as a complex system, marked by very particular behaviors, preferences, and reactions, and is considered a social and healthcare network.

In this context, some *quizilas* are followed based on tradition and the liturgical practices of the communities. Although it is said that foods with a very strong smell are not the deity's favorites, it is possible, based on stories heard in other *terreiros*, that this *quizila* has a familial predisposition. Some people inherit it from parents or grandparents due to blood ties, although this does not apply to the case of Dofono de Oxóssi. What is certain is that this *quizila* is particularly difficult during the months of May and June, the peak harvest season in Brazil, when the scent of tangerines spreads throughout cities.

Another narrative that relates to the above concerns a similarly familial episode experienced by Gamo de Oxalá, situated within the social constraints^{3c} imposed on initiates in African and Afro-Brazilian religions in

^{3c} The term "social constraints" is used throughout the text in the sense proposed by Bourdieu,³⁶ according to whom spaces such as the family and the school act as structures of social reproduction, preserving their values and beliefs through constraints on individuals' practices. It is also used in the sense proposed by Elias,³⁷ for whom the individual is embedded in networks of 9

the family context. Gamo de Oxalá is the biological son of a fisherman, whose family tradition included eating fish every Friday of the year, a custom inherited, in part, from the norms of Catholic Canon Law, which establish conduct and guidelines for both fasting and abstinence practices. Specifically regarding the consumption of meat on Fridays, there is Canon 1251.³⁸

In his home, there was a tradition of eating Bahian *moqueca* as a substitute for red meat or meat from warm-blooded animals. This dish includes, in its composition, fish (usually with scales), coconut milk, and palm oil. However, after his initiation process, Gamo de Oxalá began to observe a prohibition against consuming palm oil, and his family had to adapt by no longer eating *moqueca* on Fridays, given the mandatory presence of palm oil in the recipe according to Bahian tradition. At first, this was somewhat complicated, but over time, the family came to understand that the prohibition was definitive and directly affected their lives. Since this episode occurred within a smaller family unit, it was relatively easy to manage. In another situation, however, Gamo de Oxalá faced more significant difficulties due to a new prohibition, typical of religious dietary restrictions, since – as is the case with other dietary restrictions, such as among vegetarians³⁹ or people on gluten- and lactose-free diets²⁷ – the rejection of traditional dietary practices within the family environment can be interpreted as a rejection of the parents themselves.

As seen, in the *terreiro* community of Gamo de Oxalá, the consumption of pumpkin is prohibited. This restriction often caused some tension, as a dish called “vegetable stew”, which features pumpkin as a key ingredient, was served by his family. The mere presence of this food in the dish was sufficient to prohibit its consumption, which, on countless occasions, left him with nothing to eat. This dilemma is evident in Gamo de Oxalá’s account:

On a particular occasion, my paternal family decided to get together – which happens quite often – not just the nuclear family living in the same household, but the extended family as well. Once again, they served pumpkin, *and in order to avoid causing any discomfort, I ended up having nothing to eat and went back home hungry*. I felt awful – not only because I couldn't take part in that moment of social interaction due to the quizilas, but also because the people present criticized my behavior and were unwilling to understand that the restriction was religious. (I'm not sure whether they simply didn't want to understand or were in fact intolerant of my religious choice.) They insisted that, because it was a family gathering, I should eat, since everyone else was eating. After this episode, whenever I am about to attend any event, I ask my mother in advance to find out what dishes will be served so that I can prepare myself – either by bringing my own food or by letting people know ahead of time, so they have time to prepare an alternative meal. [emphasis added] (Gamo de Oxalá, 23/12/2024).

Dietary restrictions pose significant social challenges. Regardless of the motivation – whether for health reasons, ethnic-religious reasons, ethical-political reasons, or personal reasons – they vary according to the cultural context, the type of restriction, and the sensitivity and empathy of those around them. These restrictions can create difficulties in participating in social events, including group meals, whether with family, friends, or in school and work settings. According to Fischler,⁷ by refusing a prepared and served meal, the person is seen as rejecting a form of interaction, which can be interpreted as a sign of disrespect, an affront,

or even a serious offense. In families where food traditions are central to the social group, these restrictions can create tension, especially if family members do not understand or respect the choices of their members. Pressure, whether explicit or implicit, to break the restriction, as observed in Gamo de Oxalá's account, generates both discomfort and an internal conflict, simultaneously individual and social. Gamo had to carefully weigh the possible courses of action: to remain true to his religious convictions or to break them to be accepted by the group.

Another situation worth highlighting is that many people end up isolating themselves, being excluded, or self-excluding. Refusing to participate in a meal implies the emergence and maintenance of social barriers. Sharing food can become a key element of dialogue among participants, especially when a religious factor is involved. Food is also seen as a vehicle for transmission and connection, permeated by issues related to the sacred, both in its ability to bring individuals closer to the gods and/or spirits and to distance them from them.

Food taboos can also be viewed considering a lack of understanding or criticism, which exacerbates the challenges faced by those who observe them. Often, these restrictions are perceived as mere "fads", leading individuals to repeatedly justify their choices, which makes the situation even more exhausting and socially uncomfortable. Regarding this, Dofono de Oxum recounts an incident that occurred at work – related to his restriction on consuming black-eyed peas, a staple of Bahian culinary culture:

I was at a certain place where Bahian food was being served, and my plate included black-eyed peas. I ate everything except the black-eyed peas and left them aside. Someone asked me why I was going to waste that food – raising the issue of throwing food away and so on. I explained that I couldn't eat it because it was a quizila. The person then asked what that meant, and I said it was, let's say, a kind of restriction related to my religion. The person made a few remarks... somewhat inappropriate in that moment, but it eventually passed. As a person, I felt genuinely embarrassed – especially because their tone was somewhat arrogant, you know? At first, I responded a bit, but then I fell silent, which is already my tendency – to withdraw, stay quiet, and just move on. (Dofono de Oxum, 01/12/2024).

Social constraints imposes stigmas and stereotypes, to the point that those who are excluded are ridiculed, generating criticism or misunderstanding. In the previous account, social constraint arose in the workplace, where there is a strong expectation that individuals conform so as not to cause discomfort within the group, which often leads them to relegate their religious practices to more familiar contexts, where they feel more at ease.

There are several ways to deal with these constraints. Some examples include clear communication between the person with a religious prohibition and their social networks; planning and, when possible, learning about the menu in advance so they can prepare accordingly, either by informing the hosts or bringing their own meal; establishing relationships and connections within the religious group and the community, given the sharing of dietary restrictions and their meanings; and, beyond this, building support networks with friends and family who respect these restrictions. Sharing and informing others about one's dietary restrictions can contribute to a better understanding of these practices.

CONCLUSION

Religious dietary restrictions in the context of Candomblé highlight the interdependence between food and the individual and act as a symbolic mechanism of group adherence, grounded in the ritual demonstration of devotion to the deity. Aversion to certain foods can be explained by the degree of intimacy and representativeness these foods hold within the culture in which the individual is embedded. Expressing these aversions is equivalent to revealing an archetypal image of the deity into which one has been initiated.

The challenges faced by initiates in social settings – such as family, religion, work, communities, and school – reveal tensions between upholding religious values and conforming to social norms, imposing social constraints on individuals as a condition for acceptance or inclusion in groups. In many cases, individual strategies of “evasion” or disguise – such as claiming food allergies – are adopted to circumvent these social expectations and avoid explaining their religious motivations. Such social constraints may lead individuals to develop mechanisms of self-control and to adopt a more restrained and disenchanting way of acting, which, in the context of religious expression, can result in self-censorship, the silencing of one’s identity, and isolation. In such a scenario, overcoming this logic requires that institutions such as hospitals, schools, and companies incorporate respect for religiously based dietary diversity into their practices, including the provision of appropriate dietary alternatives. It is recommended that professionals be trained to ensure the safety and dignity of this population, recognizing their dietary practices as legitimate and grounded in cultural rights.

This phenomenon, often framed as complex or difficult to understand, in fact reveals racism in one of its most insidious forms – here referred to as religious racism – which, in other contexts, may also be identified as religious intolerance. Food refusal, when viewed in the public sphere, can function as a mechanism that exacerbates different expressions of racism, whereby stigma is imposed upon the bodies and beliefs of adherents, transforming religious practices into markers of difference subject to disqualification. Racism intervenes in the relationships established between the initiated and the uninitiated, producing an asymmetrical social dynamic between hegemonic, socially legitimized religious practices and those that are not legitimized.

Furthermore, this institutional guarantee constitutes a fundamental component of the Human Right to Adequate Food, as established in legal and conceptual frameworks, according to which adequate food, in addition to nutritional availability, must also be culturally appropriate. Religious dietary restrictions are therefore part of the normative content of this right, insofar as they involve respect for cultural practices and collective identities. As socio-religious and cultural constraints, these taboos must be respected, preserving the physical, symbolic, and spiritual integrity of individuals.

Finally, it is important to recognize that dietary taboos are an intimate aspect of the initiated, and not all individuals will adhere to them, nor will they experience the repercussions described above. The most relevant point is that these taboos are elements capable of both unifying and distinguishing these communities. Attempts to universalize these prohibitions should be avoided, as individuals and religious practices are not static but constantly interact and form their own networks of sociability, given that taboos are territorially localized. Recognizing these prohibitions in the public sphere is a way to reduce the asymmetrical sociability that characterizes relationships between adherents and non-adherents of Candomblé. Defending adherents’ right to these dietary practices is, above all, a matter of respecting the religious and ethnic diversity that underpins Brazilian society, ensuring that ancestral Black African traditions can continue to exist and be perpetuated in the contemporary world.

REFERENCES

1. Mascarenhas Y, Ribeiro DA. Alimentação dos deuses como prática terapêutica: ultrapassando os valores nutricionais e biológicos. *Rev. Alim. Cult. Américas*. 2024;5(2):40-58. <https://doi.org/10.35953/raca.v5i2.204>
2. Santos JM, Silva TLS, Olegário MECD, Gonçalves ACT, Silva KAM, Lisbôa CMP, Costa RRS. Culinárias africanas e seu potencial de saudabilidade. *Rev. Demetra*. 2025;20:e81021. <https://doi.org/10.12957/demetra.2025.81021>
3. Ribeiro C, Sousa Júnior VC. Comida de Santo que se come. Mairiporã (SP): Ed. Arole Cultural; 2019. 184 p.
4. Matos CCSA, Arantes LL, Silva Neto JP, Nogueira RG. Caderno de experiência de pesquisa em sistemas alimentares dos povos tradicionais de matriz africana: soberania e segurança alimentar e nutricional em interface com a saúde coletiva. 1a ed. Inátóbi, ilustrador. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. dos Autores; 2023. 161 p.
5. Geertz C. A Interpretação das culturas. 1a ed. reimpr. Rio de Janeiro: LTC; 2017. 323 p.
6. Nascimento AABS. Comida: prazeres, gozos e transgressões. 2a ed. ver. e ampl. Salvador: EDUFBA; 2007. 290 p.
7. Fischler C. Introduction: Is sharing meals a thing of the past? In: Fischler C, editor. *Selective eating: the rise, meaning and sense of personal di-etary requirement*. Paris/New York: Odile Jacob; 2015. p. 15-35.
8. Pellerano JA, Gimenes-Minasse MHSG. "Lowcarb, high fat": comensalidade e sociabilidade em tempos de dietas restritivas. *Rev. Demetra*. 2015;10(3):493-506. <https://doi.org/10.12957/demetra.2015.16108>
9. Kraemer FB, Tempass MC, Abdala MC. Saberes e práticas alimentares: um diálogo com a antropologia. *Rev. Demetra*. 2015;10(3):453-4. <https://doi.org/10.12957/demetra.2015.18567>
10. Braga V. Cultura alimentar: Contribuições da antropologia da alimentação. *Saúde Rev*. 2004;6(13):37-44 [Acesso 02 set 2023]. Disponível em: http://plataforma.redesan.ufrgs.br/biblioteca/pdf_bib.php?COD_ARQUIVO=3387
11. Laraia, RB. Cultura: um conceito antropológico. 14a ed. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar; 2001. 120 p.
12. Santos MO, Souza JB. Comida como afeto, conforto e refúgio: entendendo o ato de comer em tempos de pandemia. *Rev. Alim. Cult. Américas*. 2020;2(2):135-50. <https://doi.org/10.35953/raca.v2i2.42>
13. Ferreira ABH. Novo Aurélio século XXI: o dicionário da língua portuguesa. Curitiba: Editora Positivo; 1999. 2120 p.
14. Póvoas RC. A linguagem do candomblé: níveis sociolinguísticos de interação afro-portuguesa. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. José Olympio; 1989. 208 p.
15. Santos JMR, Santos SMC. É quizila do santo: vivências e interdições alimentares em um candomblé angola. *Rev. Alim. Cult. Américas*. 2022;3(1):28-51. <https://doi.org/10.35953/raca.v3i1.116>
16. Beniste J. Dicionário Yorubá-Português. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil; 2011. 820 p.
17. Sàlámí S, Ribeiro RY. Exu e a ordem do universo. São Paulo: Oduduwa; 2011. 483 p.
18. Lima LFP, Oliveira CL, Leite ME. Comidas de santo e quizilas: reflexões sobre as práticas alimentares de um povo de terreiro. *Rev. Em Soc*. 2022;4(1):189-213. <https://doi.org/10.5752/P.2595-7716.2022v4n1p189-213>
19. Centro de Estudos Afro-orientais (CEAO). Mapeamento dos Terreiros em Salvador [Internet]. 2016 [Acesso 02 set 2023]. Disponível em: <https://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/terreiro/config/20>
20. Fundação Cultural Palmares. Ministério da Cultura. FCP/MinC divulga dados sobre o Mapeamento dos Terreiros de Salvador [Internet]. 2007 [Acesso 02 set 2023]. Disponível em: <https://www.gov.br/palmares/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/fcp-minc-divulga-dados-sobre-o-mapeamento-dos-terreiros-de-salvador>
21. Beaud S, Weber F. Guia para a pesquisa de campo: Produzir e analisar dados etnográficos. Tradução de Sérgio Joaquim de Almeida. Petrópolis-RJ: Ed. Vozes; 2007. 240 p.
22. Jovchelovitch S, Bauer MW. Entrevista narrativa. In: Bauer MW, Gaskell G, editores. *Pesquisa qualitativa com texto, imagem e som: um manual prático*. 7a ed. Petrópolis (RJ): Ed. Vozes; 2017. p. 90-113.

23. Santos MSA. Meu tempo é agora. 2a ed. Salvador: Ed. Ass. Leg. Bahia; 2010. 182 p.
24. Ramos A. O Negro Brasileiro. 2a ed. São Paulo: Cia. Editora Nacional; 1940. 434 p.
25. Augras M. Quizilas e preceitos: transgressão, reparação e organização dinâmica do mundo. In: Moura CEM, organizador. Culto aos orixás: voduns e ancestrais nas religiões afro-brasileiras. 1a ed. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas; 2006. p.157-196.
26. Maupoil B. A adivinhação na antiga Costa dos Escravos. Tradução de Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura. São Paulo: EDUSP; 2020. 792 p.
27. Previatti D, Horn B. Burla, controle de si e disfarce da comensalidade: as maneiras de comer sem glúten e sem lactose em Porto Alegre. Rev. TOMO. 2021;(38):373-406. <https://doi.org/10.21669/tomo.vi38.13837>
28. Wettstein MF, Alves LF, Goldim JR. Restrição Alimentar por Motivação Religiosa e Coerção: Dados Preliminares. ClinBiomed Res. 2010;30(3):290-293. <https://doi.org/10.22491/2357-9730.15479>
29. Freitas MCS, Minayo MCS, Fontes GAV. Sobre o campo da Alimentação e Nutrição na perspectiva das teorias compreensivas. Ciência & Saúde Coletiva. 2011;16(1):31-38.
30. Montanari M. Comida como cultura. 3a ed. Ed. Senac: São Paulo; 2024. 208 p.
31. Barros JFP, Teixeira MLL. O código do corpo: inscrições e marcas dos orixás. In: Moura CEM, organizador. Candomblé: Religião do Corpo e da Alma: Tipos psicológicos nas religiões afro-brasileiras. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas; 2000. p. 103-138.
32. Caputo SG, Passos M. Cultura e conhecimento em terreiros de candomblé: Lendo e conversando com Mãe Beata de Yemonjá. Currículo sem Fronteiras. 2007;7(2):93-111.
33. Parés LN. A formação do candomblé: história e ritual da nação Jeje na Bahia. Campinas-SP: Editora da Unicamp; 2007. 424 p.
34. Lima VC. As dietas africanas no sistema alimentar brasileiro. In: Cardoso C, Bacelar JA, organizadores. Faces da tradição afro-brasileira: religiosidade, sincretismo, anti-sincretismo, reafricanização. 2a ed. Salvador: Pallas; 2006. p. 319-325.
35. Baptista JRC. Amigos amigos, negócio à parte... Mas nem tanto assim: uma abordagem preliminar sobre as relações entre clientela e saúde no candomblé. In: Mandarino CS, Gomberg E, organizadores. Leituras Afro-Brasileiras: territórios, religiosidades e saúdes. São Cristóvão: UFS, Salvador: EDUFBA; 2009. p. 241-261.
36. Bourdieu P. A distinção: crítica social do julgamento. 2a ed. Porto Alegre: Zouk; 2011. 560 p.
37. Elias N. A sociedade de corte: investigação sobre a sociologia da realeza e da aristocracia de corte. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor; 2001. 312 p.
38. Código de Direito Canônico. Lisboa: Editorial Apostolado da oração; 1983. 371 p.
39. Beardsworth A, Keil T. The vegetarian option: varieties, conversion, motives and careers. The Sociological Review. 1992;40(2):253-93.

Contributors

Pacheco SS, Previatti D, and Sousa Júnior VC participated in all stages of the study, from its conception to the review of the final version of the article.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Received: July 27, 2025

Accepted: February 24, 2026