Popular representations of black women in Brazilian Carnival are of hypersexuality, nakedness, and a certain exoticism linked to sex-tourism. These representations simultaneously make “Carnival in Brazil” synonymous with Rio’s carnival of tourism. Thus two distortions are reproduced, both of which encode race and gender in very specific ways. These stereotyped representations of women and of carnival, marketed internationally, run counter to the complexity of black women’s actual participation in Rio Carnival itself as well as that of the rest of Brazil and of Salvador-Bahia in particular, where this study is located.

Of particular relevance to this paper is the way these distortions erase African-oriented Carnival. Thus the construction of a hyper-tourist-driven Rio Carnival, similarly fails to delineate sufficiently the escolas de samba and blocos-Afro of Rio de Janeiro itself. Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos in her paper in this collection, “Samba Schools: The Logic of Orgy and Blackness in Rio de Janeiro,” delineates some of the inner structures of the Rio samba schools. These, I am asserting, often use the carnival occasion to make political statements in theme, music, and costuming about the condition of Afro-Brazilians—particularly their racial, social, and economic locations within the larger Brazilian state. Robert Stam (1988, 1989) challenges Roberto DaMatta’s reading of a flattened Carnival in which race, gender and a host of identities are of little consequence in the context of Carnival (1991). Rather, Stam asserts that there are various carnivals and that racial politics are often squarely and deliberately located in Brazilian Carnival.

The actual source from which much of (Afro)Brazilian culture emanates, the northeast, is perhaps the most exploited culturally in the context of Rio-tourist
Carnival is a celebration of joy and color, a time for people to come together and celebrate life. The festival is deeply rooted in Brazilian culture and is celebrated in many different ways throughout the country. The Carnival in Brazil is a vibrant and exciting event that attracts millions of visitors each year.

The Carnival in Brazil is a celebration of life, love, and joy. It is a time when people come together to dance, sing, and enjoy each other's company. The festival is celebrated in different ways throughout the country, with each city and town having its own unique traditions.

One of the most popular aspects of Carnival in Brazil is the colorful costumes. People wear elaborate and vibrant costumes that reflect the culture and history of the city or town they are celebrating. These costumes are often made of bright colors and intricate designs, and they add to the overall spectacle of the festival.

Another important aspect of Carnival in Brazil is the music. The festival is filled with lively music and dance, with people coming together to sing and dance the night away. The music is an important part of the festival, and it helps to create a sense of unity and joy among the participants.

Overall, Carnival in Brazil is a celebration of life, love, and joy. It is a time when people come together to celebrate and enjoy each other's company. The festival is a vibrant and exciting event that attracts millions of visitors each year, and it is an important part of Brazilian culture.
realizada como uma obrigação por elementos de certos candomblés’’ (40). [Black group of revelers which parades during Bahia Carnival. A semireligious festival realized as an obligation in certain Candomblé entities] (my translation). According to Daniel Crowley in Bahian Carnival (1984), an afoxé is “the unique grêmio of Salvador, traditionally recruited from Candomblé houses with costumes derived from India, Africa or Brazilian history, accompanied by chants, a drum bateria playing distinctive slow rhythms and alegóric floats representing African or Asian subjects” (20). He goes on to identify, in 1983, twenty-three afoxés with Filhos de Gandhi, founded in 1949, being one of the oldest of this group. This proliferation, in his view, seemed to signify a rebirth of earlier afoxés such as Filhos de Oba, Ordens Africanos, Congos da Africa. Other precursors of the contemporary afoxés include: Peis do Congo, Embaixada Africana and Pandegos da Africa (Gudolle Cacciatore 1977); Pierre Verger’s Retratos da Bahia 1946 a 1952 (1990) shows photos of Filhos de Oba (Plate 121) and Filhos de Congo (Plates 117-120), and Embaixada Mexicana (Plate 116), which resembles Trinidad’s traditional Robber Mas in costume.

It is impossible, however, to discuss afoxé in Bahia without some extended consideration of perhaps its most important exponent—Filhos de Gandhi (Sons of Gandhi). The group itself has produced its own text, Filhos de Gandhi. A História de um afoxé (Felix 1987), which is based on oral histories, memories, and conversations with some of its principal participants and some early photographs.

In one of the few available studies, “O afoxé Filhos de Gandhi pede paz” (The Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi Asks for Peace), Antonio Morales (1988) expresses what many Afro-Brazilian activists and scholars have identified—a pattern of resistance that includes the various sisterhoods and brotherhoods (such as Irmandade da Boa Morte and Filhos de Gandhi), Candomblés and Quilombos. Filhos de Gandhi was formed by a group of stevedores as a direct response to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. According to Morales they were described as follows: “Um grupo de pessoas de estiva, categoria profissional predominantemente negra, muito ligado ao candomblé decidiu levar a público a sua religião, certamente como forma de afirmação étnica” (269) [A group of stevedores, linked to candomblé, decided to make public their religion as a form of ethnic affirmation]. For them, Gandhi because of his association with peace, his use of white, carried the energy of Oxalá of the Afro-Brazilian Yoruba orixá cosmology who is also identified as the principle of peace. Thus the group in its origin made a variety of statements of resistance: First, since candomblé was persecuted tremendously during that time and not allowed to make public representations, their adoption of the energy of Gandhi allowed them a public presence that confronted the racist authority that was denying their existence; second, it was an affirmation of life and Afro-Brazilian presence; third, it effected an intersection of two major diasporas, Indian and African, in the representation of Gandhi as the spiritual figure who carried the group’s name; fourth, it allowed a group of working-class men public space. It is important

that these men were stevedores, as this gave them access to receiving information from outside the country and to utilizing their links with the exterior, international community for the benefit of the internal, local Afro-Brazilian community.

The link between afoxé and candomblé was therefore significantly rearticulated in the existence of the early Filhos de Gandhi. Interviews with the founders of the group identify this connection deliberately. Humberto Ferreira in interview with Morales (1988) says the following: “O candomblé era uma religião perseguida pelas autoridades e nós quando fundamos o Gandhi, tentamos demonstrar que somos pacíficamente. Por isso resolvemos-se adotar o nome de Gandhi que era o precursor da paz no mundo” (269). [Candomblé was a religion persecuted by the authorities and when we founded Gandhi, we were trying to demonstrate that we were parading peacefully. For this we resolved to adopt the name of Gandhi who was a precursor of peace in the world] (my translation).

The fact that the Catholic church which consistently seeks to deny and suppress Afro-Brazilian spirituality called them a bloco de feiticeiros (a group of wizards) or Candomblezeiros (Candomble worshippers) makes the point. And true, the group marched (and continue to march) the streets chanting various ritual Yoruba songs and chants under the slogan of peace and dressed in the color of peace associated with Oxalá (see Figure 3.1). Crowley (1984) identifies the link between afoxés and candomblé houses in the way in which “the theme song of Filhos attempts to integrate Gandhi into the cult hierarchy in ‘Salutation to Oxalá,’ the Orixá of African divinity who represents God the Father” (24). Significantly as well, a number of paes de santos (Candomble leaders) consistently participate in Filhos de Gandhi from its origin and a specific link with one of the oldest houses ile axé apo ofonja has been identified.

Today the group continues to be oriented to peace so much so that in some views it maintains a very conservative presence as distinct from the overt racial politics of the blocos-Afro. But Filhos de Gandhi is the largest of the groups, and they constitute a stream of white flowing for miles down the streets of Bahia when they parade for Carnival. They continue to make powerful public appearances at important ritual and public events like the lavagem de Bonfim, (the ritual washing of the steps of the Church at Bonfim) and the popular Festa de Yemanja (celebration of the Orixá Yemanja) in Rio Vermelho and a variety of other festive and popular events—particularly Carnival, where full numbers are represented.

The group remains exclusively male. Thus the question of gender in afoxé becomes important. While some of the afoxés tend to incorporate both men and women, Filhos de Gandhi is principally a brotherhood. Women affiliated to the men of the group had at one point formed a female parallel called Filhas de Gandhi (Daughters c Gandhi) which “chose as subject the local ritual of washing the steps of Bonfim Pilgrimage which takes place in early February in a Salvador suburb with no reference at all to India or Gandhi beyond their name”
Some of this tendency has carried over in some ways to Filhas d’Oxum (Daughters of Oxum) which some see as a new version of Filhos de Gandhi. This is aided by the fact that the primary organizer of Filhas d’Oxum, Rosangela Guimaraes, is the wife of the current leader of the Filhos de Gandhi. My research reveals, however, that while there are close links in terms of history, origin, and the expectation of support from the men; there are clear differences in the nature of the groups, which I will delineate later. My first encounter with Rosangela was in the headquarters of Filhos de Gandhi.4 She made a point of telling me that the group had acquired its own house, which was being renovated, and that she hoped to have office space included—with modern equipment—in order to manage the group’s interests. Thus, separate space was the first and most significant aspect of the group’s negotiation of identity. One of the primary interests she indicated was caring for the security of women during carnival. Filhas d’Oxum, she indicated, was open to all women of whatever racial identification or designation since “all women suffer and often do not have the space they need to become the best they can be.” And, I observed later, in the context of Carnival, that it is with security, that the support of the men is expected. She added though that the group wanted to amplify the condition of black people in Brazil. She wanted to see beauty, joy, life, which is the true energy of Oxum, triumph over adversity.

Thus, in politics and orientation, while there were initial assistance from the brothers, Rosangela was clear about not being identified as a female component of Gandhi and was very articulate about the possibilities of women in society and their right to realize their dreams. Clearly with its name and its identification with the Afro-Brazilian orixá of Yoruba derivation, Oxum, a specifically female orientation, linked to beauty, fertility, female power, wealth, and bounty, this group makes a more direct and public connection than Filhos de Gandhi could have, by naming itself in 1990s context with the name Filhas d’Oxum (see Badejo 1996). For one thing, it reinscribed the importance of the orisha tradition in a public way and removes itself at the level of the performance of its name from the male Gandhi. Further, by claiming itself as an all-woman afoxé, it makes a statement of women counterorganizing in contexts of male exclusivity.5

TRANSFORMING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN BRAZILIAN CARNIVAL

As I have argued, the popular constructions of Afro-Brazilian women by the dominant society, especially in the context of tourism and Rio Carnival, locate a specific construction of women as the most visible. Thus in the context of nakedness, sex and hyperexoticism, a specific type of woman is held aloft and the majority reduced to a mass of undifferentiated dancers. The distinctions that Carnival in Salvador da Bahia presents along the order of a reconstituted African identity become significant when the question of female identity is accounted for as is done in the case of Filhas d’Oxum. For one thing, Bahia Carnival is
Desfilando coming out to play in the carnival

After doing some preliminary research for my larger project on "Women, creativity, power" in a Carnival group brought together in one place the three female architects (women artists) involved in the Carnival, I resolved that it was possible that if I were to try to do a study of them, I could talk to one of them (with the help of my English-Galician research contacts for the following months) and see what kind of work they were doing. In order to introduce me to Rosalinda, one of the clearly identified participants, she agreed to meet with me and take me to the Carnival festival in Ovaro in Western Nigeria. As such, I was able to attend a Carnival festival in the sacred town of Candomblé, which is celebrated in the community of the same name in the province of Ovaro in Western Nigeria. This Carnival festival is renowned for its vibrant and colorful displays of traditional cultural symbols and practices, including the use of colorful costumes, music, dance, and elaborate floats. The festival draws thousands of participants and spectators from all over the region, who come together to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the community.

The festival begins with a parade of andro as the women take part in the festivities. The andro are a group of men dressed in traditional African clothing, who are used to lead the parade and set the tone for the rest of the festival. They are followed by the women, who are dressed in vibrant and colorful costumes that reflect the rich cultural traditions of the community. The women dance, sing, and perform traditional dances as they make their way through the streets of the community, accompanied by live music and drumming.

As the parade progresses, it becomes clear that the women of the community play a significant role in the festival. They are not only participants in the parade, but they also lead the way and set the tone for the rest of the festival. The festival is a celebration of women's creativity, power, and the rich cultural heritage of the community. The women's role in the festival is one of empowerment and celebration, and it is a testament to the strength and resilience of the women of the community.

The festival is not only a celebration of women's creativity and power, but it is also a celebration of the rich cultural heritage of the community. The festival is a way for the community to come together and celebrate their shared history and traditions. It is a way for the community to remember their past and look to the future with hope and optimism.

In conclusion, the festival is a testament to the strength and resilience of the women of the community. It is a celebration of women's creativity, power, and the rich cultural heritage of the community. It is a way for the community to come together and celebrate their shared history and traditions. It is a way for the community to remember their past and look to the future with hope and optimism.
Figure 3.2. The offering of flowers and perfume to Oxum at Lake Aibaete.

Figure 3.3. Lavagem: Washing the heads of participants and the community at Lake Aibaete.
tions on the issue of women and their roles and possibilities in Afro-Brazilian context. This initial inquiry produced a rather extended conversation with Rosangela Guimaraes, who welcomed me instantly once she understood my project. Among other things, I told Rosangela that I was generally interested in learning about the representation of women in Carnival in Brazil as well as in the larger social structures. Second, coming originally from Trinidad, I told her that I wanted an opportunity to study some of the Brazilian forms comparatively. We arranged succeeding appointments.

My next step was to consult Afro-Brazilian friends (artists, sociologists, ac-
tivists) and indicate what I was planning to do, but more so to inquire if there were particular questions that they would like me to ask. From these discussions and my own interests, we formulated a number of questions that would guide my inquiry. These were as follows:

1. Why the name Filhas d’Oxum?
2. When did the group begin?
3. What are its objectives?
4. What requirements are there for participation in Filhas d’Oxum?
5. What kind of women can participate? Is it for black women only?
6. Are white women welcome participants?
7. Are persons in this group singly those who carry the Oxum energy, or are other orishas also indicated?
8. What type of relationships does the group have with the ritual aspects of candomblé?
9. Is there any conflict in using an entity like Oxum as a Carnival figure?
10. What is the significance in having a bloco/afóxé for black women?
11. What is the exact relationship Filhas has with Filhos de Gandhi?
12. What do you think is the most important problem that black women have to address in Brazil?
13. What is the source of power for black women?

It is important that these questions were not going to be posed in their entirety, but that I would raise them sequentially as possible in formal interview contexts or that they would be revealed as the research process continued. Upon learning that I had several questions, Rosangela agreed to a formal interview. However, several crises occurred at the appointed time for each interview. For one thing, the Filhas were in the process of moving into their own house during this period and wanted to complete it before the Carnival arrived. Some of the times we had arranged to meet I found Rosangela in the building itself helping the men to work on the floors, just returning from a visit to the shoemaker consigned to make the sandals for the group; organizing the cutting of fabric for various aspects of the costume. Clearly, these times were all inappropriate for interviewing a busy woman, and instead I offered to help, to which she would respond with casual conversation and a rest break over a beer or some other refreshing drink.

A few direct answers were given, though: The group started in 1991 and Oxum was selected because of her maternal orientation as the mother of all waters. Rosangela apologized each time for the inconvenience and instead one day asked me to participate in the Carnival as a guest of the group, indicating that this would answer all the questions I had. Knowing that Carnival is to be experienced if it is to have meaning, I was ecstatic at this invitation for a variety of reasons. For one thing, it signaled a different type of relationship of trust and removed the time frame and formal interview orientation that was initially in place and instead made me the participant I wanted to be in the entire process rather than a spectator. As well, my Trinidadian Carnival inclinations were satisfied.

For the next few weeks I made several visits to the house for all sorts of reasons. Whenever I was in Pelourinho, I would drop by. On several occasions I went directly there to help. One evening, for example, my task was assisting in the cutting of numerous pieces of different types of gold fabric. All of this was cooperative work, with some women sewing, others cutting, friendly conversation, singing popular carnival songs. A carnival headquarters is a busy place and this was no different. But in the midst of that they continued the Wednesday community feeding as an obligation, sometimes with some difficulty while keeping the carnival preparations in place.

Some of my own observations in process was that they use Oxum as the principal energy of the group, but there is an actual referencing and praise of a variety of Orixa, predominantly female. On the walls are drawings of representations of Fansa and Yemanja. The feeding of the neighborhood children and adults on Wednesdays, often bread and soup, a year-long commitment is as integral a part of the meaning of the relationship with Oxum as it is a politics of community organization.

A variety of offerings were located in different locations in the house, behind doors, for example. An altar with a variety of Christian elements but also money, a written request in a bowl of honey, a lit candle is prominently located. All the women, especially Rosangela, worked in the kitchen preparing food and serving. So there is an ongoing interaction with two sets of communities—visible and invisible—the ancestors and the living community.

In the end, I paraded with them for Carnival. The group came out in the night each time and danced the street accompanied by pipped music from the Filhos de Gandhi trio elétrico (a huge tractor trailer that carries all the sound equipment and some members of the group, singers, etc.) and a core of male percussionists who provide music for the group. The music for the afóxé tends to be more percussive in orientation than the drum core of the blocos-Afro. While the last day of the parade is a dispatch that meets at Piata and then parades a few miles to Lake Aabaete, where there is another ritual offering, a community washing ritual that I have already identified, the opening of Carnival is an offering at the crossroads. (See Figure 3.6.)

In terms of costuming, because of the colors of Oxum, gold and yellow predominate. There are a variety of other color groupings that coordinate. For example an adolescent and little-girl section wore mostly white and silver. An Iansa section wore red and gold. One group of women wore all white. The predominant versions of different costumes were gold. While the blocos-Afro tend to use very specific fabric they have designed from year to year, the afóxé Filhas d’Oxum used color and texture to re-present a traditional entity in multiple ways in contemporary times. Each year are effected a number of var-
CLAIMING A PUBLIC SPACE FOR RITUAL

The house that is headquarters to Filhas d’Oxum is a basic two-story structure in Pelourinho, consisting of two front rooms, a balcony, a kitchen and dining area, and a back patio. Behind the steps of the entryway is constructed a font to Osun with some offerings. In an open area upstairs is a reception area that serves as a place for feeding, as it is directly in front of the kitchen. It is also the space from which the carnival activity emanates. When I met Rosangela at the headquarters of Filhos de Gandhi she came across as full of ideas but with a clear recognition that she was in an assistant role there. In the Filhas d’Oxum house she was in charge of operations—organizing the house itself, supervising the feeding of the community, supervising construction work, herself working as seamstress, cook, construction helper—making sure the people stayed on point. Always gracious, she offered food and gestures of friendship each time I visited.

So while in some of the community’s eyes this is still a subgroup of Filhos de Gandhi, the relationship in my view is more one of origins and some practical sharing for the protection of women in Carnival and the larger structures one needs to mount a Carnival band. Without research one is unable to delineate the complex set of articulations that were being posited. A mother of five children—ranging from three to eighteen years old—a wife as well, a former teacher who researches well her carnival representations, Rosangela Giureses is also a community cultural worker in the full sense, bridging in ways, unlike Filhos de Gandhi that space between service and commercial organization.

The house, then, is a location from which all emanates; it is here that ritual elements are prepared and rituals take place before making a public appearance. As in Candomblé ritual, there is a complex negotiation between the inner and outer space. The night of the first coming out for Carnival, for example, a core of participants, each dressed to portray an orixá, spent time in the house preparing themselves for the external presence. Once they came out publicly, the group made its way with firecrackers popping as is done at certain points in Candomblé rituals (often signaling the presence of the Orixá) up the streets to the center of Pelourinho. There, in a circle at the crossroads, offerings were made for the safe comportment of the group, protection from danger, and an entreaty to the energies and especially axé to provide safe passage. That having been done, the Carnival display began, moving slowly toward Castro Alves Square and then further into the center of the city, striking arescent yellow and gold.

The Carnival presentation then became a ritual space with the same play between inside and outside, a negotiation of public and private space, thresholds. A definable beginning in the public sense is the offering at the crossroads and a similarly definable closing on the Thursday after Carnival is significant as well, for it is outside Carnival space into the “Lenten period,” but within a definite other time sequence that does not accommodate itself to the Christian calendar.
The high point of the dispatch is the offering of flowers and food in bowls at the lakeside in Abaete, a traditional location for Osun and historically a place where other similar offerings have been made. Rosangela herself almost becomes transformed and embodied with the energy of the force of orisha and enters the water as streams of people come in lines to have water poured on their heads. Possession is common in this event from participants in the group as from the public until Rosangela herself, overcome, on the occasion when I participated in the event, was led away by her assistants. An amazingly powerful ritual moment, the idea of community work and spirit work was bridged in this process.

Clearly, the re-/presentation of women in the context of Carnival was one that sought to draw on traditional energy and power as identified in the female aspects of the Afro-Brazilian Yoruba cosmology and to relocate it in the carnival context. Carnival, then, is not about display and dance and body only—but the actual reclaiming of a certain ritual space, the molîity of traditional orisha practice and the identification of a particular link with the community as identified in the feeding and washing. The private/public negotiations, the carnival display itself that educates, and the healing as identified in the water are also significant aspects of this representation of the body of the culture of Afro-Brazilians. Moreover, there is a movement from circumscribed space (Filhos de Ghandi headquarters) to their house and further from the house of Filhas d’Oxum to the streets; from the streets to the lake. A series of public gestures in terms of the ritual and the meaning of Oxum in orisha tradition, Candomblé, Afro-Brazilian culture, African identity, and its reinterpretations are effected. And in particular the ongoing re-/presentation of female identity in these contexts consists in performing a range of black female identities.

NOTES

Many thanks to Milson Manuel dos Santos of Bahia, Brazil, for assistance in executing this project.
1. Refers to the set of practices of African religion in Brazil, particularly those of Yoruba derivation. See Abdias do Nascimento, Brazil, Mixture or Massacre?
2. Femi Euba in conversation with author in Quito, Ecuador, at International Congress of Americanists in the context of the presentation of a related paper on ashé: “Spirit Work/Community Work: Asé and Quilombismo in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Contexts” provided this interpretation of the meaning of afoxé.
3. Named after Mahatma Gandhi by longshoremen, Filhos de Gandhi started the project of breaking through the contempt under which Candomblé was held by deliberating working some of the iconography publicly under the cover of the “passive resistance and peace of Mahatma. See Morales 1988.
5. A more popular version of this in U.S. context could be the Million Man March of 1996, in Washington, D.C., which deliberately excluded women, and the Million Woman March of 1997 in Philadelphia, “the city of brotherly love.” Jonelle Davies repeatedly pointed out this connection to me. I thank her for this contribution.
6. As part of my Fulbright professorship in 1995.