

The ethno-scenology and ethno-culinary of the *acarajé*¹

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In this talk I want to talk about the *acarajé*, which, among the great contributions that African food cooking brought to the Brazilian cuisine, is special in that it is extremely important as a popular delicacy and as sacrificial food in the *candomblé* of Bahia. Exactly 200 years ago the *acarajé* was mentioned in the Vilhena letters as a delicacy sold in the streets of Bahia. The same dish was offered to the Yoruba divinities in the emerging *candomblé* houses at the beginning of the 19th century. Still today—or above all today—the *acarajé* is the specific ritual food of the orisha Yansan or Ojá, a divinity of the Yoruba pantheon and also of the Afro Brazilian religious system. Yansan is the goddess of the wind, of tempests and of thunder and lightening, one of the three known wives of Shango. (In Africa she is also the divinity of the Niger River).

Among the various foodstuffs offered to Yansan is the *acarajé*. “Food for praying, praying to God”. Indeed in some *candomblé* houses a special day called “the *acarajé* of Yansan” is set aside for this powerful divinity. The sacrificial food for Yansan includes the “animals she eats”, which are goat, duck, pigeon, and guinea fowl. Among the accompanying foods are *ecuru-arô*², chicken in peanut sauce, *bezó* and, naturally *acaçá*³ and yams which are eaten by all the divinities. But Yansan’s preferred food, as I have already noted, is *acarajé*. I cannot give details of all Yansan’s preferred foods, nor the myths that accompany them. I will concentrate on the *acarajé*, which, takes on a special form when prepared for this divinity in the most orthodox

¹ First published as Costa Lima, Vivaldo da 1999 Etnocenologia e etnociulinária do Acaraje. In Etnocenologia : textos selecionados. C. Greiner and A. Bião, eds. Pp. 30-39. São Paulo: ANNABLUME editora. Translated with some notes by Peter Fry.

² Like, *acarajé*, the *ecuru-arô* or *ekuru-arô* is prepared from Black-eyed beans and cooked wrapped in banan leaves, not fried.

³ A kind of blancmange made from maize flour cooked in coconut milk

or conservative *candomblé* houses, (which are, nonetheless not immune to change). It may also appear in another form, made with okra (maybe because Shango has a strong preference for okra) and which is called *acarajeilá*, where *ilá* is Yoruba for okra.

In this context one should remember Mary Douglas' Introduction to *The Anthropologists' Cookbook* (in the Berger-Levrault French translation⁴) when she says of the cultures mentioned in the book: "Food is above the theatre, music, dance and poetry..". And concludes: "Food is not feed. This notion should be the basis of an anthropology of food".

Outside the *candomblé* houses—here mentioned only en passant—the *acarajé* is sold in the squares, the streets and the beaches of the city of Salvador. Brought ready made from the vendor's home together with its inseparable pair, the *abará*,⁵ the *acarajé* is fried on demand under the gaze of the client. Indeed it is the best known of the "oil foods" (*comidas de azeite*) of Bahian cuisine, where the oil in question is palm oil extracted from the palm *Elaeis Guineensis* which has over the centuries become well acclimatized along the Brazilian coast.

The *acarajé* is one of the few "oil foods" in the daily diet of the people of Salvador. As most of us—if not all—know it is made from ground black-eyed beans (*dolichos monachalis*, L.), flavored with salt, grated onion and molded into rounded or slightly oval-shaped balls (these morphological differences are associated with certain regional myths and traditions of Yoruba culture). These balls are then fried in boiling palm oil. This is the recipe of the *acarajé*, which, in its apparent simplicity has become the symbol of an entire regional culinary system. The *acarajé* came with the Nago slaves from the Yoruba regions of Nigeria and present day Benin. Indeed, it was in Benin—then Dahomey—that Father Pierre Bouche encountered the *acarajé* and described it with precision, as "un hors d'oeuvre, presque une friandise". (The Slave Coast and Dahomey, 1885⁶) The status of hors d'oeuvre so dear to the French gourmands has been maintained in Bahia where it is eaten, as we shall soon

⁴ Douglas, Mary. 1977 Introduction In *La cuisine des ethnologues*. J. Kuper and A. Hubert, eds. Paris: Bibliothèque Berger-Levrault.

⁵ the *abará* is also made of ground Black-eyed beans and cooked in boiling water wrapped in banana leaves. It is served cold.

⁶ Bouche (Abbé), Pierre.1885 *La Côte Des Esclaves et le Dahomey, Sept Ans en Afrique Occidentale* Paris: Plon, Nourrit Et Cie.

see, as a starter, or as a snack between the principal meals of the day. These days it may be served as a substitute for lunch or dinner. And we find the *acarajé* offered as hors d'oeuvre at official receptions and in the houses of bourgeois families. Quite a lot has been written about the way the *acarajé* has passed from being basically a dish of the people to take its place also at the tables of the affluent classes. The social columnists describe the presence of Baianas⁷, dressed de rigueur—that is in their idealized Bahian clothing—frying their *acarajés* in a corner of the spacious verandas or by the swimming pools of the bourgeois mansions. This custom, which has become widespread, and which is offered by catering firms that supply food for the various events sponsored by businesses, banks, real estate agents and end of the year celebrations. Served together with canapés of salmon, pâté and caviar, the *acarajés* make their appearance to provide local flavor. *Acarajé* and whisky. *Acarajé* and *batidas*⁸. *Acarajé* and champagne.. The *acarajé* accompanies the drinks, which precede the main meal, which may consist of Bahian regional dishes or delicacies from so called “international cuisine” which is, in Bahia, a tropicalist version of French cuisine.

In tourist restaurants *acarajés* are served as an appetizer. In this case they are ordered by the maître d'hôtel and are smaller than usual. (When this is not possible, they are cut down the middle or into four parts before appearing at table. For, as one waiter of a well-known restaurant candidly confessed to me, big *acarajés* should never occupy the place, nor the gastronomical importance reserved for the more substantial and more expensive dishes on the menu...).

But all these habits are very recent and in places that claim to be elegant, the *acarajé* appears as a novelty, not a discovery. For, as I have already stated, the true dominion of the *acarajé* are the streets, squares and beaches of the city. That is where the little itinerary kitchens appear—those little vertical restaurants—which are the Baianas’ trays. (*tabuleiros*)

Over the past fifty years, these trays with all their ancillary equipment have gradually occupied strategic places in the city. They are the same trays that the vendors of the past carried on their heads to sell their wares, only bringing them to the ground when approached by their clients. These

⁷ Baianas means literally Bahian women. But as Costa Lima points out later in this text, it has come to refer specifically to those Bahian women who belong to the candomblé and/or make and sell *acarajés*. For this reason, I have maintained the Brazilian Portuguese word throughout the text.

⁸ Traditional cocktail made from sugar cane spirit (*cachaça*), fruit juice, sugar and much ice.

days the women do not move around. They arrive with their acolytes—this should really be the term for each arrival is marked by ritual with religious overtones—and begin to organize their trays. Those who live near their selling venues arrive already dressed as Baianas, as tradition demands and as the municipality's Tourism Department recommends. Others who come from far afield get dressed after they have arrived; putting on loose blouses, skirts over starched petticoats, and bead necklaces over the clothes they traveled in. They then survey the space that is now theirs. They check out the people around the tray, the cleanliness of the locale. (In these places you will never find suspicious packets or spilled fluids...)

Those Baianas who are most involved in the *candomblé* will at this moment discretely perform rites to purify and make sacred the space they have occupied. Some of them prepare little samples (*échantillons*) of their *acarajés*, which they throw to the ground as offerings to their ancestors but also to Eshu, the ambiguous orisha of beginnings. In a way, the Baiana's space is transformed into an alimentary hierophany, as the phenomenologists would say. Sometimes you will see on the tray leaves that are believed to thwart the evil eye and avoid accidents, such as the “spade of Ogum” (*Sansevieria guineensis*, L., a member of the liliaceae family). Many Bahian women put a sprig of rue (*arruda*) (*Ruta graveolans*, L. an oily rutaceae with a strong smell) behind their right ear. They then light up the carbon-burning stove in another ritual demanding great care. Then they organize the tray itself with the delicacies they have brought with them from home. Finally they sit down on their little stools to preside over the daily celebration: the making and selling of their food. I will return to this later, but before doing so I would like to point out a curious characteristic of the Bahianas' trays: the clients remain standing while the cook sits down. Maybe the anthropologists of symbolism will be able to interpret the meaning of this situation beyond invoking the practical reason of comfort?

The first ethnography of the *acarajé* was written by a Bahian anthropologist who studied the customs and traditions of his people—he was the grandson of slaves—and who became a revered writer and teacher, member of the Geographical and Historical Institute. In one of his works—African Customs of Bahia—he has a chapter called Bahian Culinary Art. (It was written in 1916

and was published in 1928⁹). Manuel Querino proposed classifying Bahian food in two categories: a “Bahian alimentary system” of Portuguese origin or influence and those foods which he termed “purely African”, that is those which maintained the form, constitution and name of African dishes, all of them of Yoruba origin. Querino researched with his ritual or consanguineous aunts who knew all about African cuisine and who belonged to the most traditional *candomblé* houses. I prefer to cite Querino’s recipe for the *acarajé*:

“The main ingredient is the black-eyed bean which is placed in cold water until it is easy to take off its skin and then grind it on a stone. Once this has been done, the ground beans are stirred with a wooden spoon and when the texture is thickish, grated onions and salt are added. A certain amount of palm oil is placed in a pre-heated clay frying pan and then small amounts of the mixture are placed in the oil with the wooden spoon and are then moved around with a fork until cooked. After the mixture has taken on the reddish hue of the palm oil as it fries and absorbs the oil, more oil is added. The *acarajé* is accompanied by a sauce made of dried malageta pepper, onion and shrimps, all ground together on the stone and then fried in olive oil in another clay frying pan.” This is the classical recipe. It is repeated to this day in all cookery books. All that changes are the cooking utensils, which accompany technological innovation. For example, when Querino says that the beans should be ground “on a stone” it is easy to see that he was thinking of the grinding stone that was basic equipment in those days. The stone of about fifty centimeters by twenty-five had a roughened and somewhat porous concave surface. A cylinder of the same stone, says Quirino “was pushed forwards and backwards over the stone to grind the maize, beans, rice, etc.” “These African utensils”, he adds, “are well known in Bahia and many people prefer them to the mechanical grinders.” Querino’s precise ethnography drew attention to a point that is important for our analysis. To this day, the maize, rice and beans are prepared for the divinities in the *candomblé* houses using a grinding stone and never with the manual grinding machines of Querino’s time (which are still in use in Bahia) nor with more modern electrical grinders which are called “electro-domestic machines” in the shops. Fidelity to the ancient African grinding technique secures the ritual certitude in the preparation of sacred food. Such

⁹ The edition with notes by Arthur Ramos: Quirino, Manuel 1938 Costumes africanos no Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

fidelity is maintained at all costs in the *candomblé* kitchens, but not just in relation to the technique but also the ingredients themselves, some of which are still imported from Africa, such as the *ori* (shea butter), *ataré* (chili pepper from the Coast, afro[a]momum malaguette, Sch.), *pejerecum* (African locust bean, parkia filicoidea L.) etc. However, when the *acarajé* is made for selling in the streets or in restaurants or private houses, the process is shorter and easier.

The women who make and sell *acarajés* in the streets are subject to the laws of the market and competition from rivals. Unconstrained by the ritual exigencies of the *candomblé* kitchens they now use mechanical mills to grind the beans while the more prosperous use electrical ones. For sure, the more conservative among them criticize this way of grinding the beans. But this is almost always a symbolic way of expressing or emphasizing the rigorous procedures of days gone by ... Laudator temporis acti... Some cognoscenti claim that they can detect whether the beans were ground on the stone or in a machine just by tasting the delicacy. The gourmets of Bahia discuss the *acarajé* as the *amis* of Bordeaux discuss wine. But the grinding of the beans is done at home, far from the eyes of the clients...

Tradition is also invoked to insist that the quality of the food depends on the use of charcoal or firewood and of a clay frying pan. Even so, these days, with the spread of gas ovens this particular tradition is only kept up in the *candomblé* kitchens. Even the Baianas who fry their *acarajés* in the streets and squares use little gas canisters and aluminum frying pans. These technological changes are rapidly adopted by the Baianas who love modernity. Yet it is these very same women who wouldn't even dream of using such modern equipment for preparing ritual food for the *candomblé*.

I spoke of the traditional sauce for *acarajés*. Strong and hot, it is made of malageta pepper, shrimp and palm oil fried together to the consistency of a dark and terrifying paste. This sauce is used with much caution and a whole folklore has grown up about its immoderate use by ignorant people, specially tourists. The categories of hot and cold are categories of pungency rather than heat. Hot means lots of pepper, cold little or none. But this sauce is used with secular food only. It is not used on the food offered to the divinities; food for the gods can never be hot. Other herbs – *ataré*, *pejerecum*, *iru* – may be used from time to time for certain ritual dishes. These particular peppers are always associated with the myths of the orishas, the owners (as one says in the language of *candomblé*) of such foods.

Over recent years, however, to the distaste of the orthodox and specialists in Bahian food, the Baianas have been developing, inventing, new sauces or, more recently still, utilizing ancient “oil foods”, such as *vatapá* and *caruru* as sauces or filling for the *acarajés*. Culinary specialists clamor against such “heresies”. Yet they become legitimate with use and may have been introduced under the influence of tourists from the South of Brazil who, according to one old Baiana, “love novelty”. And in this way new sauces arose: shrimp sauce (made from small shrimps that have been boiled and then briefly fried in palm oil); tomato sauce which is a kind of vinaigrette made of sliced tomatoes, parsley, olive oil and vinegar; *vatapá* sauce – *vatapá* which is usually served as a much appreciated dish in its own right and one of the best known of Bahian cuisine and which is generally served as a starter in restaurants and family homes. *Vatapá* is a kind of purée or pâté, made from manioc flour—sometimes old bread—well grated with onion, salt, roasted peanuts and cashew nuts, ginger and dried shrimp. The resulting mixture is then cooked in coconut milk after which palm oil is added. The result is a very tasty yellow-golden dish which is eaten hot—in this case I speak of temperature—or cold, from one day to the next. *Vatapá*, say the gastronomes of Bahia, is always better having slept overnight. Another recent invention is *caruru*, which appears as a filing for *acarajé* and *abará*. This other afro-bahian dish is based on chopped okra (*hibiscus esculentus*, a malvaceae, well known in Africa as *gom-bô* and among the Yoruba as *ilá*) flavored also with salt, onion, dried shrimp and palm oil. This dish has various ritual uses in the *candomblé*—it is the food of the powerful divinity Shango, god of thunder and lightening. It is also offered to the twins Cosmo and Damian who are associated in Brazil with the Yoruba cult of the Ibeji. The celebration for these saints in September is commemorated with a communal meal called “Saint Cosmo’s *caruru*” where *caruru* is served with a complete display of African dishes that have been assimilated into the ritual menu of Brazilian religious devotion. I say Brazilian devotion because Catholic families also enjoy the *caruru* of Saint Cosmo. In September, the newspapers publish notes in the social columns about the *caruru* “of the rule” or “of obligation” offered by the grand ladies of Bahia.

So *vatapá* and *caruru* are today sauces—also called “fillings”—of the dry foods served on the trays of the Baianas. I suggest that the growth of the city and of urban work, the transport problems suffered by those who live in distant suburbs and the price of food in restaurants have all contributed to the

transformation of the *acarajé* and the *abará* from “hors d’oeuvre” or “fiandise” to a quasi-lunch, or *merenda* as one says in Bahia, to a complete dish with the minimum number of calories necessary for a salesman or woman, a manual worker, a civil servant or a student. The argument becomes the stronger when one considers the size of these items: the *acarajé* is today twice the size that it traditionally was. That is, twice the size of the *acarajés* made as offering to the divinities of *candomblé*. Even so the size of *acarajés* has always varied, probably because of different ethnic models present among the Yoruba people of Bahia. Women from the Egbá nation, for example, made much smaller *acarajés* that are called *acarakere* in Abeokuta. In their turn, the people of Ilesha made a much larger *acarajé* called *acarájesha*. Whatever the case, the process of assimilation of these different sizes in Bahia has resulted in an average size without the disappearance of the original forms. Nowadays we find the smaller ones at parties and in bars while the larger ones are sold at lunch-time in commercial areas in the city center where they substitute a lunch that cannot be made or eaten at home. Not long ago I found an appropriate reference to the *acarajé* Baianas as “...true tropical MacDonald’s, making a considerable profit in their humility and sympathy” in an interesting and polemical book by Ildásio Tavares (*Our African colonizers*¹⁰).

All the Baianas, even those most attached to the ideology of the *candomblé*, have finally adopted these innovations—both in size and sauces—when they prepare the *acarajés* for sale in the street. And, I repeat, they end up being legitimized by the use and demand of their clients. Even so, one must also take into account a certain commitment to modernity and the creative fantasy and the logic of the *Baianas*’ culinary inventions. I should explain here for those who are not from Bahia that the adjective “*baianas*” has become—through a quite understandable metonymic process—a noun, which defines the women who sell “Bahian food” in the streets. So, when I speak of Baianas, you will understand that I refer to this category of the system. And the “*Baianos*”? Not long ago the first *Baianos* of the *acarajé* began to appear; men who cook and sell their *acarajés*—like the *Baianas*—and who are provoking debate and polemics among the “guardians” of tradition who gather in the Federation of Afro-Brazilian Cults. I cannot begin to analyze this

¹⁰ Tavares, Ildásio. 1966 *Nossos colonizadores africanos: presença e tradição negra na Bahia*. Salvador: EDUFBA.

phenomenon, which is in my view long overdue. Jussara Argolo is engaged in research on this topic under the suggestive title of *Why not the Baiano?*¹¹

Perhaps it is worthwhile insisting a little on the ethno-linguistics of the *acarajé*. In Abraham's Yoruba dictionary, still the most complete dictionary of this language, we find for *akara*: "An oily cake made of ground and fried beans". Nigerian cookbooks—The Kudeti Book of Yoruba Cookery and About Your Cookery, as well as two essays by anthropologist William Bascom, "Yoruba Food" and "Yoruba Cooking"—all describe the acará in the same way and with the same ingredients used in Brazil, noting that in Africa there is a variant, which is fried in peanut oil. It is worthwhile recalling that the oil palm was brought from Africa to Brazil and that the peanut left Brazil for Africa. In Brazil, however, only palm oil may be used for Bahian cuisine. The migration across the Atlantic of food plants and other vegetable species is a complex issue and specialists such as ethno-botanists, geographers and historians are not always in agreement over the chronology and orientation of the process. It is highly probable, and here I launch one more etymological hypothesis to join the many that already exist but which I cannot cite here—that the word *acarajé* is an abbreviated form of the cries of the original travelling vendors of this delicacy: "O acará já ecó olailai ô". This is the free phonetic transcription of one of the street cries one hears in Bahia and also cited by the great Brazilian—and Bahian—composer, Dorival Caimi. The song in question is called "The Black Woman of the Acaraje". Its author, composer and poet, explains in his book *Cancioneiro da Bahia* (Bahian Songs)¹² how he came to be inspired to compose this famous song. 'I was a small boy and I had already been moved by the cries of the Black *acarajé* vendor. The further I got away the more the cry took on the tones of a lamentation. The cry was in Yoruba, the vernacular of the Blacks, and it filled my ears with music and nostalgia. "Ô acarajé ecó olailai ô" and continued in Portuguese: "Come, bezê-ê-em, it's lovely and hot".¹³ Not a night passed without my hearing this cry. The black lady arrived punctually in my street with her tray at ten o'clock. And apart from her cry, as she put down the tray to sell her hot *acarajés* and *abarás*, she used to say something which years later I took as motif for a song

¹¹ Argolo, Jussara. Por que não o baiano? Pesquisa de Opinião Pública, FACS, 1996.

¹² Caymmi, Dorival. 1947. *Cancioneiro da Bahia*. São Paulo: Martins.

¹³ I have not found a translation for *bezê-ê-em* (Translator's note)

I was writing on this topic. It was almost a grumbling complaint (*grognement*): “Everyone loves *acarajé*, but the work in making it is what it is.” I put this lamentation into my song exactly as I heard it. In all truth, the song belongs much more to that black woman who sold *acarajés* in my street than to me....’ Caymmi’s words with their Proustian nostalgia are also a valuable part of ethnography and cultural history.

The habit of selling *acarajé* and other Bahian delicacies at night has almost disappeared. The Baianas are no longer peripatetic. Their power has increased and they have developed their own production process. Many years back each one chose her selling point in the city. In this way they ended up occupying strategic spots in the urban landscape: the exits from the public elevators; the squares of the civic center; the corners of the great streets and avenues and fashionable beaches. Many of them chose spots under trees that shelter them from the tropical rain and sun. The process of occupation did not take place without conflict and occasional battles. The municipality has often tried to control this kind of urban commerce with decrees and regulations. But the political game of influences, of clientage and “god parenthood” came into play in the context of the fragile structures of a city in growth. Two sociologists from the University of Bahia, Célia Braga and Zahidê Machado Neto, undertook a study of the informal female work of the Baianas: *Baianas of the Acarajé: redefining an occupational category*.¹⁴ The authors studied the migration of the female population and the strategies of the women who adapted to the new environment of mobile kitchens. Unfortunately I cannot comment on this pioneering study as much as it deserves. Their study was undertaken in 1977 and the field of sociological research continues as open as ever; unfortunately however no more research has taken place.¹⁵ In certain academic circles in Brazil the study of food and eating bring little prestige. A little freer from the sociologists—and less chained, maybe, to formalist schemas—anthropologists work on this topic as part of their concern with the study of the symbolism of everyday life.

¹⁴ Machado Neto, Zahidê, and Célia BRAGA 1977 *Baianas de Acarajé: uma categoria ocupacional em redefinição*. Salvador: UFBA (mimeo).

¹⁵ Interestingly enough, the last theses that Vivaldo examined was a master’s thesis supervised by Vivaldo’s former student, Jeferson Bacalar: Borges, Florismar Menezes. 2008 *Acarajé: tradição e modernidade, Pós Graduação em Estudos Étnicos e Africanos da Faculdade de Ciências Humanas Universidade Federal da Bahia*. (Translator’s note)

The Baianas of the *acarajé* have recently organized an association that has brought together the 1,800 Baianas registered in the Federation of Afro-Brazilian Cults, which is the organization that aims to bring together—with relative success—the *candomblé* houses of the State of Bahia. Many of these Baianas are famous for the quality of their food, and, of course, for the charisma of their personalities, accustomed as they are to the power that inheres in their roles in the *candomblé* houses. A gastronomic map of the city of Bahia not necessarily determined by the tourist departments has developed through oral tradition that transmits information about the quality, the cleanliness and the geniality of the Baianas. The cognoscenti discuss and defend—even in the media—their preferences, setting off on little excursions to eat Dinha's *acarajés* in Rio Vermelho, for example. Her reputation is recent and yet she has “branches” in other suburbs and “franchises”, so they say, in other states of the federation. You can usually see long queues of people at the trays of the most famous Baianas, waiting patiently to be served.¹⁶ Many of the Baianas have as many as six helpers, usually relatives—ritual or consanguineous—who share the work of the tray in a well-defined functional hierarchy: one “peels”¹⁷ the *abará*; another cuts the *acarajé* down the middle to put in the various sauces; another looks after the fire and safety while yet another helps the Baiana vigorously mix the bean mixture, which as we have already noted, is brought ready-made from home.

The work of the helpers obeys a scenography that deserves analysis but which I can only suggest here. Gestures are clearly defined. Each one plays her part. Here also, one can observe what we may call “metaphors of the body”—in the cutting, in the picking up, in the offering, in the asking with the eyes—the split *acarajé* waiting for the client's decision—with pepper? With vatapá? With shrimp? And in the bigger groups they now have a cashier, responsible for taking money and giving out change. But when the Baiana is alone, “owner of her place”, with only one helper, it is she who serves, who collects the money, who wraps and everything else. And we can watch the cadence of gestures learned and reproduced; the discipline and the

¹⁶ The author points out that the word used in Portuguese is “despachados”, which is the same word used when you are “served” by a civil servant. It is also used to refer to the making of magical potions (*despachos*).

¹⁷ The *abarás* are cooked in a “skin” of banana leaves.

respect for precedence—the democratization of the clients, leveled by the patient wait and by their shared love for the *acarajé*.

The municipality organizes special courses in hygiene and public health for the Baianas at the request of the tourism departments. When this course was inaugurated, partly as a result of a sanitary campaign that denounced the Baianas as latent foci of infection and disease, the Baianas didn't hesitate to enroll. At the height of its popularity there were 500 participants. The course is free. Organized by the Municipal Secretariat for Health it lasts for a week of intensive daily classes for groups of a hundred Baianas, who are given a diploma which they pin on their clothing or display on the ever clean table cloth which covers their trays as a medal or certificate of quality.

Of course the grand ladies of the *acarajé* superciliously ignore the course and, as one of them said to me: "Clean at home, clean in the street. Why should I go on a course to learn about cleanliness?"

The State interferes in the activity of the vast community of Baianas spread throughout the city but without major conflicts or ostensible sanctions. The Baianas themselves also constitute a political power. Most of them belong to the *candomblé* religion. They belong to a vast and influential network composed of kinsfolk, ritual kinsfolk, and neighbors, all of whom confer power. On the other hand, subtle or open conflicts arise over the control of or succession to the most important selling venues (controlled to a certain extent by the municipality). But these conflicts are almost always resolved through intra-group gossip and the equally effective if less anodyne practice of sorcery through the mediation of the *candomblé* houses.

Today I concentrated on a preliminary analysis of a popular item of food, prepared with its own ritual and with studied theatricality in the streets of Salvador. A food, which, to repeat, is subordinate to the religious ideological systems that are dominant among the people of Bahia. Even the so-called—with a certain irony—"new Baianas" or "phony Baianas" or even the "baianos" who dress up as Baianas and who are converted to the profession for a series of motives—generally economic—express, with rigor, through the symbolic exterior of the process – in their clothing, their ritual necklaces (signs of real or imagined religious affiliation) the prescribed scenography for preparing and serving food.

And now, really to conclude, I believe that I have been talking about what some American, English and French writers now call ethno-culinary or

ethno-cuisine. Perhaps one could suggest another neologism (surely with the permission of professor Jean-Marie Pradier) for these studies of the field of the anthropology of food; maybe an ethno-cibiology—from *cibus*, the Latin for food. And if we desired to avoid forming what purists might find inconveniently hybrid, we could suggest another name—more coherent in its Greek roots—an ethno-trophology, where the Greek *trophé* signifies prepared food—i.e. food itself. It would be the study of food, of eating, of the theatricality of serving, of conviviality, of toasting, of the hierarchies of the table, of the categories of meals and whatever else might be included!

I leave you with the idea for reflection and possible comments.