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Calundu

A Collective Biography of Spirit Possession in Bahia, 1618–Present

James H. Sweet

The biographies of individual healers in the Atlantic World are crucial to helping us understand histories of the body, circulations of medical knowledge, and evolving ideas about the power of the (super)-natural world. By tracing the lives of “professional” and popular healers over the *longue durée*, early histories of ideas about science, medicine, and the body come into sharper focus. In this chapter I take a slightly different approach, turning my biographical gaze onto a single idea and charting its genealogy from the seventeenth century through the late nineteenth century and to the present day. By concentrating on collective ethnographic ideation, even as we analyze the practices of individual healers, we can begin to see not only the importance of specific African healing spirits on Brazilian bodies but also the ways succeeding generations of Brazilians reconfigured these spirits into new other-worldly expressions of the body—through Catholicism, dance, and even blind anger. African ideas about bodily vulnerability and spiritual power have persisted in Brazil, providing crucial explanatory mechanisms for individual and collective health during times of rapid historical change.

CALUNDU DEFINED

In 1697 in Jaguaripe, Bahia (in northeast Brazil), Manuel de Brito invited a slave woman named Gracia to come to his property to help him locate a missing canoe. Gracia, a diviner and healer, was widely known for her powers. Indeed, she traveled from her master's home in Ilha de Maré, more than twenty-five miles across the Bay of All Saints, in order to reach Brito's property. Gracia arrived at Brito's house on a holiday, freeing Brito's slaves to join her in the planned ceremonies. The festivities began in the late afternoon in Brito's slave quarters, with generous servings of sugar cane liquor (*aguardente*). By late in the evening, the congregants began to dance and sing to the sounds of tabaque drums. Around midnight, the drumming reached a frenzied crescendo, when Gracia suddenly fell to the ground as though she had fainted. Then, rising to her feet, Gracia began uttering words "from her throat . . . in a falsetto voice" that she said were "her children." Brito asked if the children knew where he might find his missing canoe. They revealed that it had been stolen by a slave on a neighboring property, who sailed it twenty miles down the coast to the village of Guabim, where it ended up in the possession of slaves belonging to one Andre Cavallo.¹

Gracia's ceremonies lasted well into the night—"from midnight until sun rise"—according to one account. In addition to divining the location of Brito's lost canoe, other white Brazilians danced with Gracia and requested aid from her "children." Caterina Camella asked if her husband, João Coelho, had a girlfriend in the city center. Teresa de Brito wanted to know if her husband, Simão Francisco, was living "illicitly" with another woman on a sugar plantation in Mathuim. At the conclusion of the ceremonies the following morning, Brito paid Gracia and ordered his slaves to take her back to her house in Maré. According to several witnesses, Gracia was well-known across the region, and she earned her living through her divinations and healing.²

Gracia's ceremonies eventually came to the attention of the Portuguese Inquisition, which accused her of "fetishism, superstition, and Calundus." All of the eyewitnesses to Gracia's ceremony matter-of-factly called it "calundu." The inquisitors noted that "these dances and calundus are very frequent and common" in Bahia. Particularly concerning was Gracia's "invocation of the devil in her dances," which allegedly "caused great scandal among faithful Christians." The vicar of Bahia, Lourenço Ribeiro, argued that calundu "caused so much prejudice to Christian souls" that only a "prompt remedy or punishment" could

save people from this “damned superstition.”³ Lourenço was not alone in this assessment. More than ten years earlier in 1685, Father Domingos das Chagas wrote from the same town of Jaguaripe that the “diabolical pacts” of slave “fetishers” should be punished because “many white people cure themselves with [calundus] with such little unease of conscience as if they worked a very moral thing.”⁴ So what were calundus, and how did the Inquisition believe the devil manifested himself in these ceremonies?

The word *calundu* derives from the Angolan term “kilundu,” the generic name for any spirit that possessed a living person. Using historical linguistics, we can identify a broader field of meanings through which Angolans likely understood calundu in West Central Africa and Brazil. The root—*lundu*—derives from the proto-Bantu verb *dund*, which means “to store up; add to.” This verb, focusing on the active quality of accumulation, was widely distributed across Central Africa, encompassing a geographic swath from present-day Kongo/Angola to the Swahili Coast. From this proto-Bantu verb emerged the noun stem *dundu*, meaning “hill.”⁵ In the Kongo/Angola region and its immediate interior, the term *dundu* more specifically came to mean “anthep” or “termite mound.”⁶ Taken in the aggregate, the innovations to *dund* indicate both the action of accumulation (of health, wealth, and knowledge, for instance) and the product of that accumulation, like an anthill. As Kairn Klieman and others have noted, hills served as “receptacles for ancestral first-comer spirits who control the fecundity and fertility of people and land.”⁷ Anthills and termite mounds represented entire underground worlds where reciprocity functioned at a frenzied pace, as each insect cooperated for the benefit of the whole nest. At the juncture of the underground world of deceased ancestors and the world of living human beings, anthills and termite mounds represented robust vectors of social reproduction and spiritual power.

West Central Africans articulated ideas that tied accumulation to spiritual power and social reproduction in even more obvious ways. For example, one of the largest mountains in Angola was a dormant volcano between Libolo and Kisama, known to locals as “Moulondou Zambi,” or “mountain of spirits.”⁸ When the French traveler Jean Baptiste Douville visited the area in the 1820s, residents explained that the mouth of the volcano served as “the entrance of spirits into the other world.” If the volcano rumbled or the ground shook, people believed that the cause was “the movement of spirits going to their future homes.” Nobody dared climb the mountain for fear that flames would leap from the mountain and swallow them up. Some witnesses reported that the “vomiting part of the

fire” was the entrance to the world of the dead, and when their relatives died, they could see the flames emerge from the dormant crater, offering the spirits “free entrance,” before descending back underground.⁹

It does not take a lot of imagination to recognize how people came to understand these hills and mountains as endowed with awe-inspiring spiritual power. The dangerous, chaotic energy contained in these vessels might be harnessed for good or for bad, to harm as well as to heal. Just as ancestral spirits possessed hills and mountains, so too they could enter the heads of human beings. These spirits of deceased ancestors possessed the living for a variety of reasons but usually as punishment for lack of proper veneration. Kilundu most often manifested as chronic illness, eating away at a person’s soul until the person demonstrated respect and obedience to their ancestors. Failure to placate ancestors on a broader scale could lead to calamities like volcanic eruptions.¹⁰ Certain healers (*nganga*) had the power to harness the kilundu and learn their desires. These *nganga* utilized spirit possession ceremonies involving drinking, music, and dancing to call deceased ancestors into their heads to divine the cause of illness and prescribe remedies. Kilundu could reveal all manner of hidden or “secret” information, like the location of Brito’s stolen canoe, or the identity of João Coelho’s concubine, or even news from overseas. Thus, kilundu was at once the active, additive cause of illness, anxiety, corporal vulnerability, and social instability, as well as the potential cure for these ailments, via a powerful healer.

CALUNDU IN BAHIA

The proto-Bantu *dund*, “adding to,” “accumulating,” “storing up,” very likely formed the metonymic foundation for several Kimbundu concepts familiar to historians of Brazil. For example, scholars generally translate the Kimbundu term *malungu* as “giant canoe.” The additive process of packing the “giant canoe” with individual, natively alienated people resulted in the Brazilian *malungo*, glossed as “shipmate,” but signifying new kinship ties forged through the experience of the Middle Passage. Like *calundu*, *malungu* implies “filling up” as a catalyst for empowerment. The enslaved passed through the oceanic world of the dead (*calunga*) in the “giant canoe” and emerged as a new family. Ultimately, the Kimbundu *lund* and *lung* roots gesture toward broader concepts of lineage expansion and social reproduction crucial to the survival of enslaved Africans in the Americas.¹¹

Kilundu likely arrived in Bahia by the late sixteenth century, as large numbers

of slaves from West Central Africa began flowing into the Portuguese colony's largest ports. Over the course of the seventeenth century, only around one hundred thousand Portuguese immigrated to Brazil.¹² Meanwhile, more than three hundred thousand Africans arrived in Bahia alone, roughly 80 percent of these hailing from "Angola."¹³ Most of these Africans (as well as Europeans) brought with them an understanding that illness derived from some form of spiritual malevolence. Given the noxious environment of colonial Brazil—and most Atlantic locales during the early modern era—healers were in great demand. The first references to spirit possession in Bahia come from 1618, when "the negros from Guiné . . . called the dead to hear them . . . playing musical instruments and singing and eating and drinking with great excess." These ceremonies included the sacrifice of animals and anointing the sick with the blood, probably as offerings to the offending kilundu. According to testimonies, these "fetishers serve all the Guiné slaves in Bahia."¹⁴

Throughout the seventeenth century, Angolan men and women made cures in Bahia using ceremonies that were almost surely derived from kilundu. A man named Francisco Dembo (Ndembu), who lived in Itaparica, had achieved great fame as a healer when he was denounced to the Inquisition in 1634. Witnesses recalled stories of Dembo's healing going back to the early 1620s, and he was still plying his trade more than ten years later. Dembo claimed that "the souls of his children" from Angola came to him to provide cures to his clients. When the children possessed Dembo, he spoke in a "high, nasal voice," "in the language of Angola and Portuguese." At times, Dembo's children requested offerings of wine and liquor, which Dembo imbibed. Though Dembo stated clearly that his deceased ancestors were the source of his cures, his accusers insisted that he was "speaking with the devil."¹⁵

By the final two decades of the seventeenth century, calundu was well entrenched in Bahia. Gracia's divination of the canoe in Jaguaripe was one of many calundu cases brought before the Inquisition during this period in Bahia. That so many Angolan healers rose to the scrutiny of the Inquisition is striking, an indication of the ways calundu was beginning to spread across Bahian society. In the 1680s and 1690s in Rio Real, a woman named Caterina cured with "ulundus," which she said were "her relatives who died in Angola, the homeland of the said negra."¹⁶ In 1686, a woman named Dona Maria "cured various persons" in the city of Salvador with rituals that included singing and dancing to tabaques, drinking "wine and other liquors," followed by spirit possession. During the same year, witnesses in Tijuca denounced a slave named Lucrecia, who danced wearing a

crest of feathers on her head before falling to the ground “like a dead person.” Her followers then “rained white flour on her face” and she rose to her feet speaking in a different voice, explaining the sources of illness and the medicines that would cure them.¹⁷ In 1701, an Angolan named Branca danced calundus, also in Rio Real, to the sounds of tabaques and canzas. Wearing only a white loincloth, Branca had stripes of white clay painted on her torso. After hours of dancing and singing “in the language of Angola,” Branca fell to the ground as if she were asleep. When she was unconscious, two of her compatriots outfitted her with a “painted cat skin” and a band of red taffeta around her waist, a white cloth on her chest, as well as a “naked dagger” and a little hoop, one held in each of her hands. When she rose, she spoke in a voice that others said was that of nganga, and she called for her deceased eldest son. She offered her son food and drink, including an alcoholic beverage known in Kimbundu as “aluá.” Channeling the power of her deceased son, Branca offered remedies to cure a white woman of blindness.¹⁸

As these cases demonstrate, at the turn of the eighteenth century, calundu was a very specific Angolan-derived possession ritual with its own unique choreography aimed at removing malignant spirits that caused illness. Given the virulent disease environment and social anxieties of colonial society, alongside a majority Angolan population, it should not surprise us that Portuguese or Brazilians of European descent resorted to African healers. Nevertheless, European involvement in Angolan rituals generated great discomfort among those who believed that these rituals were an invocation of the devil. Portuguese observers often reduced all Angolan spirits (quilundo, ulundu, lundu) to the work of Lucifer. Brazil’s most famous seventeenth-century poet, Gregório de Matos, cautioned against Portuguese men and women taking part in “satanic” calundus. And a famous literary “Pilgrim” claimed that calundu was a pact with the devil aimed at deceiving people to sin, leading them down the path of perdition.¹⁹

Despite these negative assessments, the fact that calundu rose to the attention of authors and poets reveals the extent to which the idea of calundu penetrated deeply into the broader society as a set of embodied ailments or anxieties. In 1694 in Sergipe, a Portuguese man named Domingos Pinto Ferrás slept soundly in his bed one night when he was awakened by his wife’s restlessness. After a brief period of agitation, Ferrás claimed he suddenly felt for his wife “a vehement burning of sensuality that he only experienced before marrying her.” When he informed his wife, Maria Pereira, she responded that these “must have been her Lundus, which in the language of the blacks from Guiné are demons or malignant spirits.” Ferrás rejected Pereira’s response as insolence, but he was convinced that she

and her mother were out to harm him. He complained of fatigue, anxiety, and a “strange smell” emanating from his body, which he believed to be “some balm of the devil.” Ferrás gave his wife and mother-in-law several beatings, accusing them of trying to bewitch him, before he eventually denounced them to the Inquisition.²⁰

The number of calundu cases denounced before the Inquisition reached a crescendo in the first decade of the eighteenth century.²¹ By this time, several generations of native-born Bahians had lived in the Angolan-majority villages around the Bay of All Saints. Angolan language, culture, and ways of being suffused white and mixed-race communities, even as the Catholic Church tried desperately to prevent its followers from adopting “diabolical” practices. Among mixed-race slaves, the church faced an uphill battle. In 1713 in the town of Tapagipe de Riba, just outside of Salvador, three women presided over a ritual community, regularly healing with “Lundus,” and following much the same choreography we have described previously—dancing to musical instruments, spirit possession, transformation to “falsetto” voices, speaking in the “language of Angola.” What makes this particular healing center unusual was the lineage of the matriarchal leadership. Two women named Lourença were the principal vectors for channeling the ancestral spirits; one of these women was a “negra,” the other a “mulata.” The third woman, who everyone deferentially called the “Queen,” was a mulata named Ignes, the aunt of the mulata Lourença. Ignes did not dance in the calundus. Rather, she sat silently until the spirits possessed her, a sign of her experience and power. Given the fact that Ignes was a mulata, she was at least second-generation Brazilian. It seems likely that her mother was Angolan. Despite having a Portuguese father, she learned her mother’s Kimbundu language and ritual practices and continued them. Moreover, she passed these ideas on to her niece, Lourença, also a mulata, insuring that Angolan language, ideas, and ritual practices would continue to thrive in Bahia for at least a third generation.²²

Catholic priests and other pious observers bemoaned the influence of Angolan healers in Brazil, certain that rituals like calundu lured good Christians to Satan’s side. Nevertheless, church officials sometimes capitulated to calundu. In August 1715, Father João Calmon seemed to concede that the devil was winning the battle. He complained bitterly that the Lisbon Inquisition Tribunal was “very distant from this Bahia, where the fetishism and foolishness that the Negroes make, which they call Lundus or Calundus, are scandalous and superstitious, and it is not easy to avoid them, since even many whites can be found in them.”²³

Just a year later, the dean of the Cathedral of Salvador, Sebastião do Valle Pontes, successfully appealed to the Provedor Mor to release his slave Domingos from galley service. The state had sent Domingos to the galleys because he was “found with others in a calundu house.”²⁴ If Catholic priests could free their slaves from forced labor for taking part in calundu, could the practice really be considered a crime?

One year later, in 1717, a French traveler recorded what he believed to be a “comedy” or a farce in the Convent of Saint Claire in Bahia. There, Catholic nuns, priests, government officials, plantation owners, and foreign dignitaries celebrated Christmas mass. As part of the festivities, the nuns, nearly all of whom were the daughters of important sugar plantation owners, performed a strange act involving song and dance. One portion of the nuns sat in a balcony playing musical instruments discordantly. On the floor of the church, another group of nuns danced counterclockwise in a circle, each jumping, flailing, and singing her own song. Suddenly, the music and singing stopped, and one of the nuns fell to the floor. When she rose, she sat in an armchair and began a “long speech . . . in corrupt Portuguese, such as that spoken by the slaves.” The “speech” was a recital of the “gallant intrigues of the Officers of the Court of the Viceroy,” publicly revealing “the mistress of each one and citing her good and bad qualities.” The viceroy’s nephew, embarrassed by the revelations of his wayward behavior, stormed out of the church in anger.²⁵

Though the author does not use the word “calundu” to describe the scene in the convent, it is clear that the nuns followed the choreography of calundu ceremonies that were so common throughout the region and that they would have witnessed growing up. On the one hand, the performance might be read as a satire. On the other, it could be read as a singular opportunity for cloistered, female nuns to speak the unspeakable, to reveal “hidden” truths eating away at the social fabric of high society.

The gendered aspects of calundu are crucial here. As we have already seen, the white woman Maria Pereira claimed that her lundus awakened her husband’s desires. Likewise, the hierarchy of power in the calundu at Tapagipe de Riba was decidedly matriarchal across at least three generations. Perhaps more telling is the broader matriarchy of calundu in the African-descended communities of Bahia. Of the dozen cases denounced before the Inquisition between 1692 and 1722 that I examined, eleven involved African-descended women. Calundu provided a rare vector for women to embody social, political, and spiritual power that was most often the preserve of white men. In this way, the embodied spirits

in the convent endowed the nuns with the authority to heal prominent men of their demons, just as would have been the case in actual calundu performed by Central Africans and their descendants. Whether satirical or not, the calundu in the convent thoroughly subverted white male dominance, a tactic the nuns could have learned only from witnessing the calundu performed by Black women. The broad social and political power of these Black, female healers was implicit in the nuns' mimicry and the audience's knowing adherence to their prophecies.

Even as the majority of Bahia's white folk seem to have embraced the embodied aspects of calundu—through illness and spirit possession—deep tensions persisted over the precise source of these Angolan powers. During the early decades of the eighteenth century, it appears that white people's embrace of calundu in Bahia could only occur in the context of farcical "comedies" like the one in the convent or as subversive, sinful practices alongside demonically possessed Angolans. In this way, calundu remained distinctly alien, dangerous—Angolan spirits that were inaccessible and unknowable to most white people. In the 1730s, slave owners in Bahia approached a Carmelite priest named Luís de Nazaret to ask if he could exorcise the demons that were making their slaves ill. Father Nazaret examined the slaves and determined they were infected with calundu. He conceded that "exorcisms did not remove that caste of fetishes because they were a diabolical thing," and only the "Negroes" possessed remedies to calundu. Rather than attempt to remove the malignant spirits himself, Father Nazaret urged the owners to take their slaves to the experts on calundu, the Angolan healers.²⁶

To be clear, I am not arguing that the majority of people in Bahia held the view that calundu was "diabolical" or sinful. On the contrary, as the foregoing cases have shown, white slave owners frequently appealed to Angolan healers to solve their most intractable problems, and whites eagerly took part in rituals of spirit possession. Catholic nuns even replicated these rituals inside a Catholic church! Nevertheless, everyone understood that calundu was subversive and potentially dangerous. What made calundu dangerous was its capriciousness, its instability, and perhaps most importantly, its invisibility. Calundu manifested primarily as inexplicable illness or anxiety that plagued the body, or through mediums who provided remedies to these ailments. The unhealthy disease environment of Bahian slave society was new and unfamiliar, resulting in symptoms that European doctors and priests could not explain.

When healers of Angolan descent, mostly female, claimed power over these unfamiliar, invasive forces, performing elaborate rituals that invited the spirits

into their own bodies, they ceded complete control of their corporality. Their bodies became vessels for the soul, mind, and voice of a deceased ancestor. As the spirits washed over them, they literally became different people from another dimension of existence. By embodying the spirits of their Angolan ancestors, these healers staked a lineal claim to the knowledge of these ancestors and the ailments they caused. The Catholic Church wanted to reduce these spirits to the work of the devil, but the reactions of people like Father Nazaret belied a much broader recognition that Angolan healers possessed specialized knowledge about the body. If calundus were truly “a diabolical thing,” the priest should have been able to remove them through exorcism. But calundus were something else altogether. Just like the Catholic priests who channeled God’s energy to exorcise demons, so too did Angolan healers channel the energy of their ancestors to rid people of malevolent spirits. And only Angolan-descended healers possessed the knowledge over how to harness and control these dangerous spirits.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CALUNDU IN BAHIA

References to these distinct forms of Angolan calundu continued in Bahia at least through the middle decades of the eighteenth century; however, the idea of calundu underwent a series of transformations after the 1730s. Beginning in the last decade of the seventeenth century, the Bight of Benin replaced West Central Africa as the primary origin for Bahia’s slave population. This is not to say that Angolans ceased to arrive in Bahia. On the contrary, they still constituted around 28 percent of slave imports between 1700 and 1740; however, slaves from the so-called Mina Coast represented more than 60 percent of Africans arriving in the same period.²⁷ This new “wave” of African immigration into Bahia decisively altered the cultures of slave communities. In 1742, the archbishop of Bahia noted these transformations in a letter to Lisbon, in which he underscored “the great need for a Tribunal of the Holy Office, because beyond the negros being almost innumerable, there doesn’t pass a month that don’t arrive at this port two or three ships of these people from the Mina Coast and others, not only practicing their barbarous and diabolical rites, but they excite those who were already here, almost forgotten, who then accompany them.”²⁸ The bishop recognized a crucial trend: The shiploads of Africans from the Bight of Benin joined with those slaves already in Bahia to practice their “barbarous and diabolical rites.” These newly arrived Africans brought with them novel rituals and practices that ultimately expanded the Luso-Brazilian meaning of calundu to a form that would have been

unrecognizable to first-generation Angolans, or for that matter, Brazilians, just a generation earlier. During this transitional period in the origins and composition of the slave trade, Luso-Brazilians did not distinguish between the various African ritual forms they witnessed. Rather, they resorted to terms that were already familiar. Observers reduced African music and dance to calundu, regardless of the origins of those engaged in these practices. Thus, calundu became a generic form of African music and dance, shorn of its specific Angolan ritual meaning.

Several examples from the second half of the eighteenth century illustrate this trend. In the city of Salvador in 1754, an African slave named Custódia Gege, “celebrated Calundu parties” in which she “invoked the Devil.” Custódia’s master argued that her celebrations were “dedicated to the saints of her land,” almost certainly voduns. Nevertheless, authorities arrested more than a dozen slaves and free Blacks, including at least three other so-called Jejes from the Bight of Benin.²⁹ In 1785 in the Bahian town of Cachoeira, six more Jeje slaves were accused of calundu.³⁰ For witnesses, the Africans’ singing and dancing appeared to be calundu, but the ritual implements—a feathered arrow, coins, calabashes, and overall choreography did not adhere to the Central African ritual. Moreover, the language of the ritual was not Kimbundu but rather “the language of the Jeje.” Unsurprisingly, Luso-Brazilians grafted their generations of knowledge about calundu onto seemingly similar African practices, regardless of their origins. Even as far away as Lisbon, observers mistook specific rituals from the Bight of Benin for calundu. In 1771, a free Black woman named Teresa de Jesus denounced a woman named Maria as a *calunduzzeira*. In another apparent reference to voduns, Teresa asserted “the same saints they worship here, they also worship in the calundus of the Mina Coast.”³¹ Thus, across the Portuguese-speaking world, the distinctly Angolan ritual elements gave way to a generic form of calundu, essentialized as any African singing, dancing, and spirit possession for “diabolical” purposes.³²

Even as calundu evolved into a generic term to describe a number of African ritual forms, it took on yet another meaning for white Brazilians and Portuguese, who turned lundu into a popular dance. In 1775, Domingos Caldas Barbosa, the Brazilian-born son of an Angolan mother and a Portuguese father, performed lundu in some of Lisbon’s wealthiest salons. Barbosa drew elements from the music and dance performed in actual calundu rituals and naturalized them to the lighter, more lyrical, Portuguese *modinhas*.³³ This new lundu dance became popular among Lisbon’s well heeled, including at the royal court. The dance quickly made its way back across the Atlantic, where at least one government

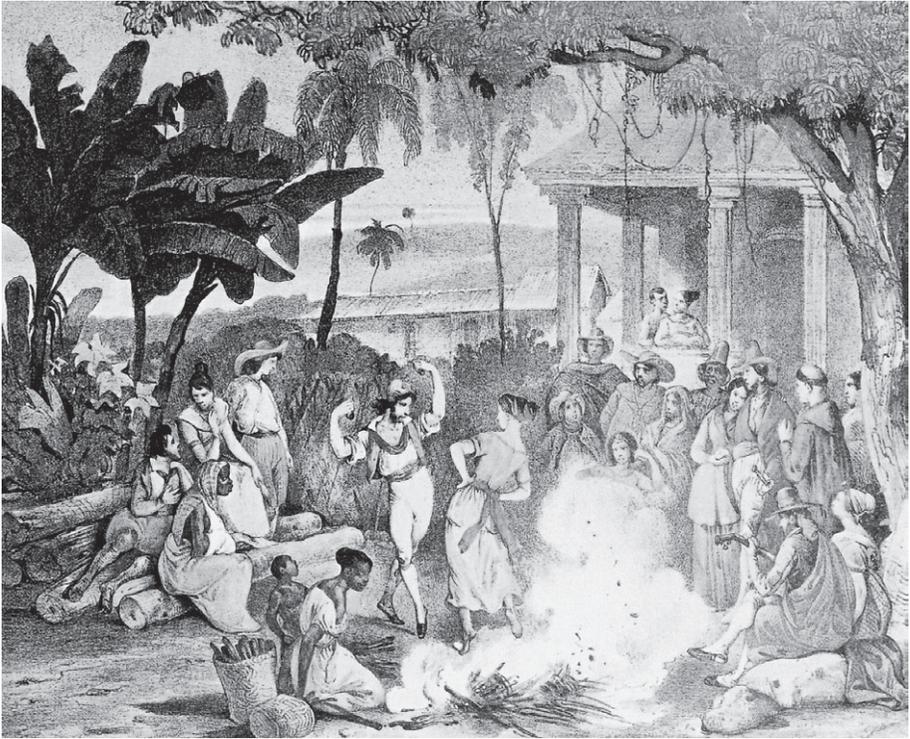


FIGURE 3.1. Johann Moritz Rugendas, “Lundu Dance” (1835).

official described *lundu* as common among “whites and pardos,” in contrast to the “more indecent” dances performed by Africans of various “nations.”³⁴

Lundu remained a popular dance in Portugal and Brazil well into the nineteenth century. For example, a famous Johann Rugendas painting from 1835, entitled “*Lundu*,” shows a rustic scene of mostly white people dancing around a fire to the sound of a lone guitar. Similarly, in 1837, a Portuguese glossary defined “*lundu*” as “dance practiced among the negro peoples of the Congo and Bunda nations, from whom we get the name.”³⁵ By this time, the long-version term “*calundu*” had all but disappeared from the Brazilian documentary record. Various African religious gatherings came to be known as *Candomblé*, while dances involving Africans were called *batuque*. We can surmise that Angolans in Brazil continued to perform *calundu* ceremonies—and describe them as such among one another—but the Luso-Brazilian variant of the term *lundu* referred to a dance performed by whites.

I have written elsewhere that *calundu* “lost nearly all of the distinct Central

African religious meaning that it had in its original form in seventeenth-century Brazil.³⁶ However, it seems clear that the central idea of calundu—the embodiment of some powerful, invisible spirit—lived on for many decades, even to the present. Though the Jeje men and women who conducted ritual practices in Bahia in the late eighteenth century never would have called them calundu (and, in fact, were probably performing some variant of vodun), the common denominator between the various African practices was spirit possession. Even in the high-brow, lyrical lundu dance, one can find the residues of spirit possession. After all, dancing is a window onto the spirit world, the vector through which dangerous spirits can pass into living bodies and transform them into mediums of otherwise inaccessible knowledge. Thus, even though the word “calundu” seemingly disappeared from the Brazilian lexicon for much of the nineteenth century, the spirits of possession survived in other guises.

CALUNDU’S MODERN RELEVANCE

After years of dormancy, these residues of calundu as spirit possession began to reappear in the documentary record by the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the most famous reference appears in Machado de Assis’s classic work *Dom Casmurro*, when the character Capitu complains of insomnia, headaches, dispiritedness, all of which she attributes to “her Calundus.”³⁷ The Brazilian Dictionary of the Portuguese Language, published in the 1870s and 1880s, included “words and phrases that originate in Brazil . . . and are not found in Portuguese language dictionaries.” Here the word calundu is defined as “frenzy, ill humored, anger, an attack of nerves, hemorrhoids, nervousness.”³⁸ The etymological discussion of the term seems to underscore its relative unfamiliarity. The first etymological entry speculates that the term is from the Guaraní “acânundú,” meaning “headache, to have a fever, feverish.” This is followed by a general statement: “Calundu in Angola is a part of fetishism.” The editors acknowledge the historical connection between Angola and Brazil, referencing the poet Gregorio de Matos. They also note that the shortened version, lundú, is derived from Angola, though they erroneously assert that “the prefix ca- is diminutive and pejorative” in Angola. Finally, they note that there was a sugar farm outside of Rio de Janeiro that was called “Calundu.”³⁹

During the same year that the Brazilian Dictionary of Portuguese Language appeared, the explorer, soldier, and politician Henrique Beaurepaire-Rohan published his own volume of popular, spoken Brazilian Portuguese. His entry

for calundu is more straightforward: “Ill humor that overcomes people and makes them insufferable because of their irascibility. In this way, one says that an individual is of calundu, or with his calundus, when his disposition is to be impatient with everything and all.” The author, who grew up in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro, speculates on the etymology, “I believe it to be an African vocabulary. In my infancy I heard it many times pronounced by slaves of the Angolan race.”⁴⁰ Here, it is clear that the idea of calundu survived colloquially in Brazil’s slave communities across the nineteenth century, though the frequency of use and the meanings were diffuse.

While these definitions provide us with an abstract sense of calundu’s meaning at the turn of the twentieth century, a concrete example will help illuminate further.⁴¹ In the late nineteenth century, the Brazilian state of Bahia annexed an old town house (*sobrado*) into the compound of the Governor’s Palace. Like most sobrados, this one had a large, main entry door, which government architects converted into a portal for coachmen to enter and exit the palace grounds. Outside this principal entry, a Portuguese immigrant named Joaquim Grulha operated a tobacco shop, where “a great number of black Africans and other plebeian people” gathered to purchase cigarettes and to smoke and gossip. From time to time, Grulha lost his patience with the unruly gatherings, and the crowd suffered his wrath. When Grulha fell into these episodic bouts of “impertinency and discomposition,” the plebeian folk concluded that he was “with the calundu.” Thus, the gate entering into the governor’s palace came to be known colloquially as the “Calundu Gate.”⁴²

Grulha’s periodic outbursts of anger clearly captured the meaning of calundu outlined in the dictionaries, and the subsequent labeling of the “Calundu Gate” gestures toward the rough-and-tumble scenes of Afro-Brazilian life that provoked his irritation. However, there is something missing from the definition—an implicit silence that seems to suggest a longer, deeper history of calundu. By the late nineteenth century, the word reflected a set of embodied behaviors—gestures, brusque words, obstinate silence, or darting eyes—that indicated intense irritation. Yet the Afro-Brazilians gathered at Grulha’s tobacco shop described him as being “with” the calundu. In other words, the calundu was not the actual behavior but rather the trigger for the behavior, some additive, external force that seemed to make Grulha lose his faculties. In short, calundu was the kind of impulsive, capricious anger that washed over certain people during fits of pique, as if they were literally possessed by an outside spirit.

Bahians of all stripes understood the embodiment of unpredictable, furious

anger as calundu. But if that fury emanated from an outside force, how do we characterize that force? Where did it come from? What was its history? And how did this force come to be widely understood in vernacular Brazilian language as a set of embodied behaviors? Brazilians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had no way of knowing that calundu had once been understood as a distinct, Angolan spirit possession ritual. However, the vestiges of Angolan knowledge systems survived. Modern science and biomedicine have solved many of the mysteries that were once the purview of the “masters of Calundu.” Yet there are still powerful, dangerous, invisible forces that can render people sick, depressed, or psychotic. Mental health issues, in particular, sit firmly in the “gray zones” of medicine and healing. In the absence of other explanations, calundu stands as an important explanatory mechanism for states of body and mind that are inexplicably outside the “norm.” Even today, short bouts of silence, irritability, or emotional instability are frequently attributed to calundu.⁴³

Though modern Brazilians can laughingly dismiss their calundus, they also serve as familiar comfort—as ancestors, as history, as a predictable body of knowledge that harnesses the unknowable and makes it known. This is a tribute to the dozens of mostly female Angolan healers who plied their craft under the oppressive conditions of Brazil’s seventeenth-century slave society. By tracing the *longue duree* history of calundu as an idea, we can see the ways that calundu evolved as a composition of healers, slaves, slave masters, Catholic priests, nuns, government officials, and others. The biographies of individual Angolan healers are crucial in rendering this composition, but these biographies only provide us a glimpse of broader ethnographic ideation. Calundu still represents capricious, other-worldly expressions of the body, even today. The durability of the idea across more than four hundred years of history in Brazil is the true signal of its breadth and power.

Pineda Ibarra, 1967), 246, 248. Ximénez continued to experiment with the bark to see “if in some way, as they say, that it brings back the dead from their graves” (si de alguna cosa se puede decir que levanta muertos de la sepultura). Ximénez, *Historia natural*, 247.

22. Ximénez, *Historia natural*, 247.

23. *Gazeta de México*, February 22, 1785, 241. This periodical also reported that *flecha* or *arbol de la Margarita*, used to treat typhus, reputedly cured rabies and smallpox as well.

24. “Relación de las raíces y yervas medicinales,” n.d., Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Indiferente General 1550, n.p.

25. “En obediencia y cumplimiento de despacho y supremas ordenas y con arreglo a instruccion que ellas se cita y he hallado en este archivo, yo Dn. Francisco Geraldino alc. mayor por S. M. y Teniente de Capitan Gral. de esta Prov.s de Guegue. y Toto[nicacán] formó un cajón con las producciones medicinales,” Huehuetenango, February 2, 1784, AGCA, A1–6088–55135, fols. 35r–39v.

26. “Una mulata llamada Phelipa ciega de la garganta quebrada.” Testimony of Ysabel Sánchez de León, AGN, Inq., vol. 729, exp. 4, fols. 331fv–32fv, especially fol. 331f.

27. For colonial Guatemala, see Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*. For contemporary practices of assault sorcery, see Neil L. Whitehead, *Dark Shamans: Kanaima and the Poetics of Violent Death* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

28. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 31–33, 40.

29. All the material in this paragraph comes from testimony of María García, AGN, Inq., vol. 729, exp. 4, fols. 342fv–43fv.

30. Testimony of Ysabel Sánchez de León, AGN, Inq., vol. 729, exp. 4, fols. 331fv–32fv, especially fol. 331f.

31. Testimony of Xerez, AGN, Inq., vol. 729, exp. 4, fols. 337fv–39f.

32. Richard P. McBrien, gen. ed., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1995), 798.

33. Testimony of María García, AGN, Inq., vol. 729, exp. 4, fol. 343v.

3. Calundu

1. For slaves’ mastery of the waterways of the Atlantic World, see Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

2. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Inquisição de Lisboa, Processos No. 12658.

3. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Processos No. 12658.

4. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 59, Livro 256, ff. 130–130v.

5. Crucially, at the same time calundu proliferated in Brazil, Portuguese Jesuit Pedro Dias composed a Kimbundu grammar in Salvador, Brazil, in which *malundo* translates as “hills” (oiteiros). Thus, proto-Bantu overlapped with innovations even in Brazil. Pedro Dias, *Arte da Lingua de Angola, oferecida a Virgem Senhora N. do Rosario, Mãe, & Senhora dos mesmos Pretos* (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Deslandes, 1697), 7.

6. *Bantu lexical reconstructions 3 / Reconstructions lexicales bantous 3*, Yvonne Bastin, André Coupeuz, Evariste Mumba, and Thilo Schadeberg, eds. (Tervuren, 2002), www.africanmuseum.be/collections/browsecollections/humansciences/blr. One can chart the innovations in *dund* through the derivations in BLR3. According to the database, the proto-Bantu *dund* was distributed across language zones C, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, P, R; *dundu* as “hill,” derived from *dund* was distributed across zones H, K, L, M, R; and finally, *dundu* as “antheap,” as an innovation of *dundu* as “hill” was distributed across zones G, H, L, and M.

7. Kairn Klieman, *The Pygmies Were Our Compass: Bantu and Batwa in the History of West Central*

Africa, Early Times to c. 1900 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 70, 151, 160. Also see Neil Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 184.

8. The more accurate rendering is actually “Zambi’s Mountain,” with Zambi being the supreme deity in Mbundu regions. Also note the change from *dundu* to *lundu* here, “mulundu” meaning hill or mountain.

9. Jean Baptiste Douville, *Voyage au Congo et dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique équinoxiale: fait dans les années 1828, 1829 et 1830*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1832), 228–30.

10. Angolans reported that Moulundu Zambi previously had destroyed entire forests and villages, but “serenity replaced this moment of fury.” Since that time, the spirits of the volcano only “scolded from time to time” with lightning bolts aimed at men. These spirits were also said to control the firearms that white men used against Africans. Douville, *Voyage au Congo*, 228.

11. The root *lung* is possibly a phonological innovation on *lund*. See the continuing research of Kathryn de Luna. On *malungu/o*, see the various works of Robert Slenes, most recently, “Metaphors to Live By in the Diaspora: Conceptual Tropes and Ontological Wordplay among Central Africans in the Middle Passage and Beyond,” in *Tracing Language Movement in Africa*, ed. Ericka A. Albaugh and Kathryn M. de Luna (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 343–64.

12. A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire, 1415–1800: A World on the Move* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 61–62.

13. Estimate Table, “Assessing the Slave Trade,” *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. From 1600 to 1700, estimates suggest 314,029 Africans arriving in Bahia; 244,570 of these came from West Central Africa.

14. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 784, ff. 65–66v, 81–82v. Also see the description of a Guiné woman in the Recôncavo de Bahia, who spoke to “the devil” in her chest and gave answer to future things. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 784 ff. 102v.103v.

15. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 18, ff. 305–13.

16. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 67, ff. 311–20v. For more on Caterina, see James H. Sweet, “Reimagining the African-Atlantic Archive: Method, Concept, Epistemology, Ontology,” *Journal of African History* 55 (2014): 147–159.

17. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 59, ff. 130–130v.

18. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 81, ff. 239–48.

19. *Obras de Gregório de Matos*, ed. Afranio Peixoto, *Satírica*, IV, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Publicações da Academia Brasileira, 1930), 186. Nuno Marques Pereira, *Compendio Narrativo do Peregrino da America* (1728), 6th ed., 2 vols. (Rio de Janeiro: Publicações da Academia Brasileira, 1939), vol. 1, 123–26.

20. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 68, ff. 176–83v.

21. I count nine denunciations that explicitly mention *calundu* (or some variation) between 1692 and 1708. Many cases that fit the choreography and description of *calundu* but are not referenced as such, appear in the years before 1692.

22. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 80, ff. 32–32v.

23. ANTT, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 83, f. 202.

24. *Documentos Históricos: Portarias, 1715–1718*, vol. 44 (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Saúde/Biblioteca Nacional, 1941), 188.

25. Le Gentil de la Barbinais, *Nouveau voyage autour du monde... T. 3* (Amsterdam, 1728), 149–52. For more on this case, see Sweet, “Reimagining the African-Atlantic Archive.”

26. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Processos, No. 3723. See also Laura de Mello e Souza, *O diabo e*

a terra de Santa Cruz: feitiçaria e religiosidade popula no Brasil colonial (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1986), 263–64. Likewise, some African healers claimed that they could not remove Brazilian spirits. For example, Domingos Pinto Ferrás called on an African healer to remove the malevolent spirits his wife and mother-in-law put in him; however, the healer revealed that they were “caboclo” spirits, which he didn’t have the power to cure.

27. Estimate Table, “Assessing the Slave Trade. Between 1700 and 1740, estimates suggest that 105,514 Africans arrived in Bahia from West Central Africa. Meanwhile, 230,727 arrived from the Bight of Benin. A further 41,437 arrived from other regions of Africa—Bight of Biafra, Gold Coast, Senegambia, etc.

28. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 110, ff. 41–41v.

29. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, No. 115, ff. 203–13.

30. For a detailed study of this case, see João José Reis, “Magia Jeje na Bahia: A invasão do Calundu do Pasto de Cachoeira, 1785,” *Revista Brasileira de História* 8 (1988): 57–81.

31. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, 129.

32. For greater detail on the diffusion of calundu in Bahia in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Elisângela Oliveira Ferreira, “O santo de sua terra na terra de Todos os Santos: Rituais de Calundu na Bahia colonial,” *Afro-Ásia* 54 (2016): 103–50.

33. José Ramos Tinhorão, *Pequena história da música popular: da modinha ao tropicalismo* (São Paulo: Arte Editora, 1986), 19.

34. As quoted in Tinhorão, *Os negros em Portugal: uma presença silenciosa* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1988), 362–63.

35. D. Francisco de S. Luiz, *Glossario de vocabulos Portuguezes derivados das linguas orientaes e africanas* (Lisbon: Academia das Sciencias de Lisboa, 1837), 64.

36. James H. Sweet, “The Evolution of Ritual in the African Diaspora: Central African Kilundu in Brazil, St. Domingue, and the United States,” in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*, ed. Michael A. Gomez (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 70.

37. Machado de Assis, *Dom Casmurro* (1899), chap. 46. Assis had earlier described this kind of catatonic malaise as “Calundutico” in his *História de Quinze Dias* (1877).

38. *Diccionario Brasileiro da Lingua Portuguesa (1875–1888)*, 138 in Annaes da Bibliotheca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, vol. 13, part 2 (Rio de Janeiro, 1889), 138.

39. Even today, there are streets called Estrada do Calundu in both Salvador and Rio de Janeiro.

40. Visconde Henrique Beaurepaire-Rohan, *Diccionario de Vocabulos Brasileiros* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1889), 28.

41. For yet a third, similar, definition of *calundu*, see Pacheco da Silva and Lameira de Andrade, *Noções de grammatical portugueza* (Rio de Janeiro: J. G. de Azevedo, 1887), 515.

42. José Alvares Amaral, *Resumo chronologico e noticioso da Provincia da Bahia: desde o seu descobrimento em 1500* (Bahia: Imprensa Oficial do Estado, 1922), 34.

43. According to the Michaelis *Dicionário Brasileiro da Lingua Portuguesa*, *calundu* is a “state of animus characterized by bad mood, irritability; emotional instability; nostalgia, boredom: ‘He spoke well; but when he was silent, it was for a long time; it was said that these were his calundus,’” <http://michaelis.uol.com.br/busca?id=D03a>.

4. Dorotea Salguero and the Gendered Persecution of Unlicensed Healers in Early Republican Peru

1. Manuel Cayetano de Loyo, *Defensa hecha a favor de Da. Dorotea Salguero, en la causa criminal que se le ha formado a mocion del protomedicato por haberse curado contra sus prohibiciones, y las del*