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Candomblé Beads and Identity in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil

Heather Shirey

ABSTRACT: Strings of beads made of plastic, glass or clay are the most common and visible material representations of the Candomblé *orixás* (deities) in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. At the most basic level, Candomblé beads are symbolic representations of the *orixás*. When they are consecrated with a bath of sacred herbs or blood from an offering, beads share in the *axé*—the spiritual force that resides in all living things and impregnates the entire Yoruba-Atlantic universe. With the appropriate offering, beads do more than *represent* the divine, they *become* the divine, providing their owners with a continual link to the spiritual force of the *orixá* and the Candomblé community. Based on extensive interviews and participant-observation, this fieldwork-based research focuses on Candomblé beads and the multiple roles they play in the lives of those who invest them with power and make them an important part of their spiritual lives. Ultimately, beads are symbols of status, protection, and affiliation with Candomblé, and to varying degrees they are recognized as such by people inside and outside of the Candomblé community.

KEYWORDS: Candomblé, beads, empowerment, consecration, Salvador da Bahia, *orixás*, *axé*

In the streets of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, colorful strings of beads peek out from under clothing and dangle from the rearview mirrors of taxis; in Candomblé *terreiros* (consecrated religious spaces) initiates load their necks with beaded necklaces that shimmer against a sea of white clothing [Photos 1 and 2].

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Photo 1. An acarajé vendor wearing beads as well as the clothing that is typically worn in a Candomblé ceremony. The clothing used in Candomblé was probably first worn by vendors before it was adapted for ritual use. Praça da Sé, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. Photograph by Heather Shirey, November 2001.



Photo 2. An initiate who has just entered into trance during a Candomblé ceremony. She wears a variety of beads around her neck, including a number of simple strands (quelê). Photograph by Heather Shirey, August 2001.

These colored beads—made of plastic, glass, or clay—are the most common and visible material representations of the Candomblé *orixás* (deities).¹ I argue that these beads are symbols of status, protection, and affiliation with Candomblé and function both inside the consecrated religious spaces and in the secular realm. Those who possess beaded necklaces often employ them strategically in multiple contexts to identify themselves and others with the religion, relying on a shared, coded language of beads based on visual cues such as the color, shape, size and position of the *contas* (beads).

At the most basic level, these colorful beads are symbolic representations of the *orixás*; however, when properly consecrated with a bath of sacred herbs or blood from an offering, they share in the *axé*, the spiritual force that resides in all living things and impregnates the entire universe of Candomblé.² They become portable containers for this powerful essence and provide the owner with a continual link to the spiritual force of the *orixás* as well as the community. With the appropriate offering, the beads do more than *represent* the divine, they *become* the divine.³ Empowerment gives beads the ability to guide and protect as well as harm their owners. Given the tremendous energy of consecrated beads, their ownership brings great responsibilities. When they become what Robert Plante Armstrong called objects of “affecting presence,” consecrated beads demand a level of interaction and devotion that ordinary objects do not.⁴

In Candomblé, as in many traditions in West Africa and the African Diaspora, tremendous importance is placed on the transformation of an object from *representation* to *incorporation* of a spiritual power. To this end, I use a series of case studies to explore ways in which objects are empowered, seeking to understand what purposes this power serves as well as ways in which the presence and particular nature of power are conveyed to the viewer through the use of certain aesthetic principles.

While many empowered objects remain inside the *terreiro*, infusing that space with *axé*, objects such as beads also transcend the *terreiro* and move into the public, secular world. While some people practice Candomblé rituals only within sanctified space and surrounded by other community members, for many others the religion’s material culture is part of daily life. As such, physical representations of the religion are transported with them outside sacred space. For example, people often wear empowered beads, representations of and receptacles for their *orixá*, as they traverse city streets, relying on them for protection in the most challenging of situations. In their ability to transcend boundaries of sacred and secular spaces, beads are a unique class of objects in Candomblé.

This research is based on fieldwork in Salvador, capital of the northeastern state of Bahia, from 1998 through 2002 and in 2009. I worked with individuals associated with Candomblé on a variety of levels,

including initiates who devoted a significant portion of their time to spiritual practice and developing a profound understanding of the religion, as well as more casual attendees at Candomblé events whose knowledge was more superficial. Some participants felt closely connected to Yoruba traditions, usually in an abstract sense, and saw their participation in Candomblé as a way to connect with this aspect of their identities. Others were less connected with Yoruba traditions specifically, and more engaged with spiritual forces rooted in other parts of central and west Africa as well as Amerindian sources.⁵ I am especially interested in the tremendous range of experiences people have with beads and the ways these experiences accord with and depart from ethnographic “norms.”

NEGOTIATIONS WITH “TRADITION”

Roger Bastide, Pierre Verger, and other scholars of Candomblé studying in the first half of the twentieth century observed the importance of beaded necklaces, and their findings are reinforced in the work of more recent ethnographers as well as my own research. These scholars noted that the acquisition and consecration of a string of beads dedicated to a particular *orixá* is often the first step to incorporate oneself into the religious community and share in its *axé*.⁶ Beads serve to link the owner’s head, where the spiritual force resides, to the object itself and to the *orixá*. This connection of beads to the head is crucial, because in Candomblé the head is the most important part of the body.⁷ The head is not simply the source of rational thought, but also the origin of one’s spirit. From the time a child is conceived, an *orixá* claims ownership of the head; often, this *dono da cabeça*, “owner of the head,” may be assisted by or struggle with another *orixá* (or even two) conceived of as ruling from the shoulder. At times, two or more *orixás* may struggle for ownership of the head, with one sometimes supplanting another.⁸

When beads are prepared, they are created especially for the *dono da cabeça* and serve to acknowledge outwardly a powerful relationship with the *orixá*. Consecration of beads sometimes involves a small incision in the scalp by which the same materials used to prepare the beads are connected to the head, thus strengthening the relationship between the head and beads.⁹ As a result, the beads are the private possession of an individual; their power to protect, as well as the owner’s responsibilities to take care of the beads and observe certain restrictions, cannot be transferred to another user without a new ritual of purification.¹⁰

Henry Drewal examined the presence of necklaces and other beaded objects in religious practice since the arrival of Africans in Brazil as slaves. He found evidence of early-nineteenth-century use of beads and

proposed the possibility that enslaved Africans were able to bring beads with them through the Middle Passage.¹¹ J. Lorand Matory also traced continuous connections between British West Africa and Brazil during the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, noting in particular the role of religious pilgrims and merchants who served as “retailers” of goods transported from Africa.¹² Given the presence of beads in African Brazilian culture by this time, it is certainly possible that such small, portable items could have been transported by travelers and merchants, although more research is required in this area. Certainly their accessibility has helped beads maintain their centrality in African Brazilian spiritual life to this day, and the portability of beaded necklaces means that, unlike the empowered ritual objects stored in a consecrated space within the *terreiro*, they easily can transcend sacred space and enter the secular realm.

Owners of consecrated beads maintain active relationships with these powerful objects and rely on them for protection, both inside and outside the *terreiro*, to convey important messages regarding affiliation with Candomblé, status within the religion, and association with particular *orixás*. Among objects used in Candomblé, beads are the most likely to move beyond sacred space and become recognized symbols of the religion in secular life.

Unconsecrated beads may also be used as symbols of individual or group identity. During certain public festivals, people may adorn themselves with bead strands to show pride in, or association with, African Brazilian culture in general. In some cases, it may be difficult for anyone to tell if the beads are empowered or not, making this language of beads a complicated thing to decipher. As Pravina Shukla argues in her analysis of beads in the secularized Bahian *carnival* and popular public festivals of Yemanjá and Nosso Senhor do Bonfim (“Our Lord of the Good End,” the crucified Jesus Christ, associated with the Candomblé *orixá* Oxalá), the language of beads is subject to shifts in meaning depending upon context of their use and intention of the wearer. Shukla’s nuanced examination takes into consideration the important fact that those who wear beads in public make a visible statement: the language of beads can be read on many different levels, making it accessible even to those who are not involved in the religion.¹³

People interact with, use, and think about beads in complex ways, constructing and reconstructing meaning through their actions. My interviews with people at all levels of involvement with Candomblé reveal that consecrated beads play a multitude of roles in the lives of those who empower them, wear them, and rely on them. Within this complex religious universe, actual experiences often depart from the ethnographic ideals established in scholarly literature and identified traditional norms within a given *terreiro*.

Although people are quite often aware of established traditions and rules governing the use of beads, these ideals are sometimes reinterpreted for specific individual experience. For example, a *mãe-de-santo* (priestess, “mother of saint”) might instruct her *filho-de-santo* (initiate, “child of saint”) to wear his or her beads constantly for protection, with the provision that they may be removed for work if the employer is antagonistic towards Candomblé. In another example, a person who feels a special connection to a particular *orixá* may use beads for a special patron spirit even while acknowledging that such behavior is not necessarily sanctioned by a *mãe-de-santo*.

In many cases, the codes of ritual behavior have been canonized in the works of anthropologists such as Roger Bastide and Pierre Verger. This is especially true of the Nagô tradition, the *nação* (nation) often identified as being most closely connected to Yoruba beliefs and practices.¹⁴ However, as many contemporary scholars in the fields of art history, anthropology, history, and other disciplines have argued, people interpret these codes of behavior differently, depending on their situation. Tradition and meaning are therefore constantly negotiated.¹⁵

Extensive interviews about beads and thorough observation of their use opens the door to a complex analysis of beads and the ways they are created, empowered, and used in people’s lives. An understanding of beads must take into account the agency of individuals who decide how to use sacred objects and employ them in construction of individual and group identity.¹⁶

ACQUISITION OF BEADS

Since I am primarily concerned here with the roles beads play in the people’s lives, I begin with a discussion of how beads are incorporated into an individual’s life, and progress to an investigation of the specific forms beads take. On the surface, the path towards bead acquisition seemed remarkably consistent among my research participants. In most cases, they first obtained a string of beads based on the recommendation of a *mãe-* or *pai-de-santo* (priest, “father of saint”), usually during consultation with the cowrie shells (*jogo de búzios*), and sometimes as a first step towards initiation. Cowrie shell divination generally is acknowledged as the only sure way to determine which *orixás* own the individual’s head and, consequently, which color and type of beads should be prepared.¹⁷ The seeker is sometimes instructed to purchase a quantity of loose beads or a pre-strung necklace. Some very large *terreiros* have a small, on-site shop with beads already strung and ready for sale, or they may be commissioned from someone within the *terreiro*. More often, an individual in search of beads is directed to

one of the Candomblé supply stores on the Praça da Sé, a centrally located plaza near Salvador's historic district, or to municipal markets.¹⁸

The Candomblé supply stores contain display cabinets full of loose beads in a seemingly endless variety of colors, shades and sizes, as well as an array of bead necklaces. The materials and origins of these beads vary greatly. Domestically produced plastic beads, inexpensive and available in many shapes and sizes, are the most common type used in Candomblé in all of the *terreiros* I encountered. In some communities the clay and glass beads imported from West Africa are the most highly valued, old trade beads being the most coveted among them. The relatively substantial Nigerian population in Bahia ensures a steady flow of trade, and some *terreiros* allow Nigerian vendors to set up temporary stands inside the *terreiro* on special occasions to sell beads, cloth, and other materials used in the creation of the rich material world of the religion. Because of their high cost, it is relatively rare to see imported African beads used in Candomblé.

In some cases bead acquisition is simply a sign that one feels a general connection to the African Brazilian cultural traditions. There are people who purchase beads or string them themselves without knowing their *orixás*, sometimes intending to tap into the religion's spiritual forces. People with legal problems to resolve, for example, may carry a red and white *conta* (bead) of Xangô, *orixá* of justice, even if they are not involved in Candomblé, and students are known to use beads occasionally for spiritual fortification during exams. Many participants in my interviews recounted a famous story about the use of Candomblé *contas* for the good of the nation in 1974. When the Brazilian soccer team was preparing for the qualifying rounds in the World Cup, a *pai-de-santo* known as Mário de Xangô sent a string of beads and a written oration to the team coach in Germany so that his own spiritual force could benefit the Brazilian athletes.¹⁹

In her study of beads in the secular context in Salvador, Shukla found that members of African-influenced *carnival* groups, such as Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, and the Filhos de Gandhi, sometimes wear consecrated or unconsecrated Candomblé beads as a sign of identification with Candomblé and African/African Brazilian culture in general.²⁰ This was especially true in the 2002 Carnival season, which took African Brazilian culture as its theme, but it is also evident in festivals such as the washing of the steps of the Church of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim, an annual January event.

I encountered this appropriation of Candomblé beads in a day-to-day context. One case study involves a young university student, known here as Rita, who had moved to Bahia seven years earlier. She was just learning about Candomblé through books, popular culture, and exposure as a research assistant to an anthropologist from the United States. Although Rita did not have strong personal connections with

the African Brazilian community, and even though she had only recently attended her first Candomblé *feira* in conjunction with her job, she felt an affinity towards the Candomblé culture. She did not associate herself with any religion, having rejected her mother's Catholic upbringing. During the course of the year that I knew her, Rita started wearing a strand of multi-colored beads for the Ibejé (twin *orixás*). When I commented on it, she sought confirmation that this strand of beads was indeed the correct one for the Ibejé; she liked it because it was pretty and wanted to show her respect to Candomblé. By adorning herself with beads, Rita chose to show her respect publicly, even though she had no affiliation to a particular *terreiro*. The beads Rita wore were not consecrated and served as symbols of association with the religion rather than a spiritual connection to the *orixás*. An outsider to the religion might not be able to tell the difference, but someone with knowledge of Candomblé would recognize that the way she wore these beads—sometimes wrapped several times around her wrist and sometimes draped around her neck with other jewelry—meant that this strand was a decorative object and not a thing of power.²¹

In many cases, the acquisition of beads *does* indicate a spiritual connection to one's *orixás* and perhaps a commitment to a particular *terreiro* as well. The type of beads and manner of preparing them often serve as symbols of a stage of religious initiation legible to others who share in the language of beads. A simple washing of the beads with herbs is a stage in pre-initiation, a way of sharing in the community's *axé* and demonstrating one's commitment to the religion, but without necessarily being *feito* (literally "made," or formally initiated).²²

An example of bead washing as a pre-initiation stage is found with Júlia, a woman in her thirties who had been actively involved with Candomblé for about a year and attended ceremonies regularly after many years of casual involvement. After attending many *festas*, she decided to have the community's *mãe-de-santo* throw the cowrie shells for her. Júlia had already had three divination sessions years before at other *terreiros*, all of which confirmed that the owner of her head was Iansã, the female *orixá* associated with the wind. She had never gone so far as to have beads prepared for her *orixá* since her previous involvement in Candomblé was sporadic.

This most recent cowrie-shell session showed that Yemanjá, *orixá* of the sea, had overtaken Iansã's position and now ruled Júlia's head. She had married, given birth to a daughter, and divorced since Iansã was owner of her head, and she saw a link between the shifts in power and the changes in her life. She literally felt like a different person than when Iansã owned her head, a period she referred to as her "old life." The *mãe-de-santo* suggested that beads should be prepared for Yemanjá, and Júlia purchased a *fió de contas* (string of beads) at the *terreiro* and had them washed. This act was a sign of her devotion to Yemanjá, but

she was also aware that it established a connection between her and the *axé* of the *terreiro* and signified a relationship of submission to the community's *mãe-de-santo* and other members more advanced in the Candomblé hierarchy.

In many cases, bead acquisition develops differently. In some situations it is necessary to consecrate beads to provide protection against negative forces harming the person or causing an illness, as was the case with one young man I interviewed. Dilton, twenty-one years old at the time of the interview, had his beads washed for Ogum and Iansã when he was fourteen. Before this he had been tormented by physical and psychological problems, which had been determined through the cowries to be evidence of an angry *egun*, an ancestor spirit. In the midst of a period of bad health and behavioral problems, a concerned relative took Dilton to see a *pai-de-santo* for a consultation with the cowrie shells.

Divination revealed that consecrated beads could provide Dilton with adequate protection against these negative forces, and he recounted that when the beads were placed around his neck he felt as if a weight was lifted off of his body. After that his problems were resolved, and his *pai-de-santo* determined that at that point no further steps were necessary to satisfy the spirit. Although actively involved in Candomblé and often drumming at ceremonies, Dilton has not taken other steps towards initiation. He believes that his *orixás* are satisfied with the two strands of beads, at least for the time being, and he sees no need to make a further commitment through initiation until the spirits demand it of him.

Although not the norm, it is quite possible for those devoted to a particular *orixá* to decide to acquire beads without having the cowrie shells thrown to determine the owners of their heads. An individual may sense a strong spiritual connection to an *orixá* and feel a need to have some representation of this force. Although for many people washing the beads is an initial step taken well before initiation, it is not unusual to participate in Candomblé for years without taking on the responsibility of beads until absolutely necessary. In these cases, beads are only washed later, as a step in the initiation process of the *iaô* (bride of the *orixá*; an initiate), *ogã* or *ikêde* (ritual assistants). I interviewed a young man who had worshiped Xangô for two years and spent his days off working at a *terreiro* out of respect for his *orixá*. However, he did not own any beads for Xangô or any other consecrated object. His material connection with Candomblé was a rock that he thought provided his link to Xangô. He showed me the rock, which he carried in his pocket, stating he had found it one day and felt that it contained power. The rock, however, had never been formally consecrated.²³ The initial throw of the cowrie shells did not indicate that he needed to do anything special to care for the rock or have

beads prepared, nor did he. If he wanted beads or felt he needed protection, it would be appropriate for him to ask the *mãe-de-santo* to wash them, but he preferred to wait until Xangô asked for them.

These cases are merely anecdotes when considered individually, but collectively they illustrate that actual experience often does not conform to a normative code of behavior in relation to beads. Although beads are often acquired as a step towards initiation, the rules are more flexible than they might seem at first glance. Similarly, as I discuss below, modes of interaction with consecrated beads are subject to interpretation based on an individual's needs and circumstances. Beads are perhaps the most personal of all Candomblé objects, so it is fitting that their use should be governed by rules that are quite open to interpretation.

READING BEADS

Beads vary greatly in size, shape, color, and the manner in which they are strung, all of which together create a language of beads deciphered on many different levels depending on one's position in the Candomblé hierarchy. Nancy da Souza e Silva, a long-time initiate in Candomblé and my research mentor, explained it is this way:

The beads you wear show your position, the steps you've already taken. Everything—clothing, color, beads, jewelry—you have to have *status* to use these things. For example, as we progress, fulfilling our obligations of three, seven, fourteen, twenty-one years, the beads will grow; we'll add to them with expensive, rich things. And this, in the eyes of someone who knows about these things, shows your position in the hierarchy of Candomblé.²⁴

In part, da Souza e Silva meant that beads will literally grow in size as new elements are added and as strands become more complex. At the same time, they will grow, or amplify, in a spiritual sense as their power increases in accord with the owner's increased spiritual knowledge and continued acts of consecration.

The language of beads follows certain conventions, but it is not completely rigid. Particularly in the addition of the "expensive, rich things," there is room for personal expression and creativity. The most basic string of beads—prepared for the non-initiate (*abiã*)—is called the *quelê*.²⁵ It is a simple, single string of small to medium beads varying in length according to the wishes of the user or the maker, with the most common length being to the navel. The *quelê* is the *fio-de-contas* that, even for an initiate, accompanies one on day-to-day journeys. It is intended to be worn around the neck, carried in the pocket, or hung

from the rear-view mirror of one's car.²⁶ It is an external, visible sign of devotion to an *orixá*, and an initiate will probably continue to use the *quelê* in all stages of religious development. A *filho-de-santo* I interviewed discussed the many elaborate strings of beads he acquired during his initiation and subsequent obligations. He recalled fondly his first string of beads and said he always keeps this *quelê* with him. In contrast, his other beads are stored in the sacred altar room (*peji*) of the *terreiro*, and he seldom has access to any beads but his *quelê*.

The *quelê* is made up of single-color beads or a simple pattern of alternating colors, in accordance to the *orixá*. Though the chromatic code is very complex and varies by *nação*, the different variations of Candomblé based on constructed ethnicity, the basic colors of certain primary *orixá* are easily recognized by many Bahians, even those who not involved in the religion. For example, most Bahians know that white is the color for Oxalá and many people not of Candomblé wear white in honor of Oxalá for his January celebration, the washing of the steps of Bonfim, and on Fridays, the day dedicated to him [Photo 3]. Likewise, gold is easily recognized as the color for Oxum, and shimmering blue or transparent beads are widely known as colors for Yemanjá.

The color symbolism has entered the public realm through popular media. Frequent general-interest newspaper articles discuss the basic symbols with a focus on color, familiarizing the general public with the chromatic code.²⁷ Public monuments tend to identify *orixás* by color.²⁸ As well, each *orixá*'s color is associated with the domain of that *orixá* in the natural world [Table 1]. For example, Ossain and Oxossi, who



Photo 3. A crowd marching to the Igreja do Nosso Senhor do Bonfim [Church of Our Lord of the Good End] on the day of the Festival dedicated to Bonfim/Oxalá. The two *baianas* in the foreground wear some blue and white beads that are probably simply decorative, indicating their dedication to Oxalá, as well as the simple strands of beads that, when consecrated, are known as *quelê*. Photograph by Heather Shirey, January 2009.

TABLE 1: Basic Chromatic Code for Major Orixá

<i>Orixá</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Natural element</i>
Oxala	white/light blue	sky/the heavens
Xango	red/maroon	fire/lightening
Iansa	red/maroon	fire/wind/thunder
Ossain	green/white	forest/herbal medicine
Oxossi	green/sky blue	forest/hunting
Ogum	dark blue	forge and iron/forest
Oxumare	sky blue/green/gold	rainbow
Oxum	gold or yellow	sweet waters
Yemanjá	transparent/green/white	ocean
Nana	dark blue and white (striped or alternating)	muddy waters
Omolu	black and white/red (striped or alternating)	earth
Exu	black/red/yellow (alternating)	crossroads

both reside in the forest, share the color green. Xangô, due to his association with fire, uses red. Indicating her beads for Yemanjá, one person pointed out that the color of the leaves used in the preparation showed through the transparent beads and looked just like seaweed floating in the ocean.

The basic language of the *quelê* is relatively simple and can be read by people of all levels of involvement.

The washing of these beads is usually done by the simplest method—a preparation of herbs, water, and *sabão-de-costa*, the soft, black soap imported from Africa. These ingredients must be prepared by a knowledgeable person and accompanied by sacred words and songs. However, a *quelê* can also eat from an offering, as I discuss below.²⁹ This brings a new level of power to a seemingly simple strand of beads, although the additional power is invisible to the viewer. In either case, beads are transformed by this process and cease to be mere material objects and become receptacles for the powerful *axé* of the *orixás*.

WEARING THE BEADS

Although the *quelê* usually stays in the possession of its owner and is intended for everyday use, many people choose not to wear these simple beads every day because of their visibility and the fact that their color symbolism is so easily understood by others. Almost any resident of Bahia will recognize the use of the *quelê* as a sign of some sort of commitment to Candomblé, even if the subtle language of beads eludes them. Some practitioners find it is necessary to keep their religious lives private

when in public, sometimes as a result of perceived prejudices towards Candomblé, particularly on the part of members of Bahia's growing Pentecostal population, commonly referred to as *crentes* or "believers."³⁰

Nancy da Souza e Silva told me that she knew if she wore her beads while passing through a certain neighborhood, some Christian *crentes* there would taunt her.³¹ Therefore, she was always careful to conceal her beads when walking along that route, often tucking them inside her clothing. Through the course of my interviews, others expressed unease when wearing their beads around the city. When I asked a long-time Candomblé practitioner, Jacira, if she wore her beads in the city streets, she responded: "Only in the Candomblé *terreiro*, because the place to use the beads is in the *terreiro*; if not, everyone sees them. There are folks who criticize. When I was an *iaô* [an initiate in the period when one must wear many beads all of the time], I was ashamed. I hardly left the house for the whole year!" Jacira decided she would wear her beads outside the sacred spaces of Candomblé only for a public Candomblé festival: "I'm of Candomblé, but for me to go out all dressed up?! Only at the washing (of the steps of Bonfim) or to go to São Lázaro (a Catholic church associated with the Candomblé *orixá* Omolu)."³²

A *filho-de-santo* also responded that during the period of his initiation he had to present himself at his job at a grocery store wearing many strands of beads, and when his neck was weighed down with beads he was teased by co-workers and suffered the critical gaze of customers. He returned to the *terreiro* and asked permission from his *mãe-de-santo* to wear only the *quelê* while at work so his position in Candomblé would be less apparent to outsiders. Given that his livelihood depended on his work, his *mãe-de-santo* consented.

An individual's personality traits are often associated with those of an *orixá*. Since the spiritual essence is located in the head and is the seat of the *orixá* and one's spiritual essence, it is assumed an individual will have some key personality traits and even talents in common with the *orixá*. For example, a *filha* of Ossain, the *orixá* who oversees medicinal and liturgical plants, is thought to have a keen sense of sight and an uncanny ability to find misplaced objects. Xangô is thought to be sensitive and charming but also prone to dramatic and violent outbursts if his word or will is contradicted.

Some people of Candomblé consider this kind of information to be private. One experienced *filho-de-santo* told me that if strangers discovered who his *orixás* were, they would know all of his weaknesses and could use this information against him. For that reason, if he does wear beads in public, he might use those of an *orixá* other than his own. For example, a *filho* of Ogum might choose to wear the beads of Ossain in public so no one would be immediately aware of his quick temper, a personality trait associated with Ogum, and use that against him.

Art historian and Candomblé practitioner Jaime Sodré explained to me that some *terreiros* have a policy forbidding members to wear their beads in public since they are sacred, and that their use should be confined to sacred space. Sodré proposed that this tradition lingers from the days in which Candomblé was persecuted and bead use could lead to imprisonment or, at the very least, confiscation of the necklace.³³

SPECIALIZED BEADS

Once initiated, a person keeps and protects the initial strand, the *quelê*, while beginning to acquire other strands, some with specialized uses and preparations. Initiates also will begin to prepare other simple strands of beads for *orixás* who do not own their heads.³⁴ For example, Jacira owns bead for several *orixás*:

I have beads for Ogum, who belongs to my *pai-de-santo*; Oxum, who is my *orixá*; Iansã who belongs to me; Obaluaê, because he is of the house [the *orixá* to whom the *terreiro* is dedicated]; Oxalá, who is the father of all of the *orixá*—whoever wants to uses that one; someone of Nanã or Obaluaê also has to use a *brajá*.³⁵

It is common for an initiate to own, at the very least, beads dedicated to the *orixás* of the *pai-* or *mãe-de-santo* as well as of the *orixás* who have mythical relationships with the owner of the head. A person of Iansã might acquire beads for Xangô and Oxossi, mythical lovers of the female deity. An initiate of Omolu whose *mãe-de-santo* was of Xangô might acquire red and white beads, even though Omolu and Xangô are known to have a mutually antagonistic relationship; the owner of these beads would likely store and wear them separately out of respect for these relationships between the *orixás*.

At ceremonies dedicated to a particular *orixá*, people commonly wear beads for *orixás* who have a mythical relationship with the *orixá* being honored. For example, at a *festa* for Oxalá, people wear *contas* not just for Oxalá but also for Yemanjá and Nanã, his wives, regardless of who their own *orixás* are. A young student participating in Candomblé for just a few months told me he had beads for Oxalá in addition to those consecrated for his own *orixás*, Iansã and Ogum, explaining that “Oxalá is the owner of peace, and the father of the universe, so everyone should have a *conta* for Oxalá.” He also commented that red, white and blue beads together were a nice reminder of the colors of the local soccer team he supported. Although there are certain unstated guidelines for selecting beads, clearly there is also a strong element of personal choice involved.

Other special strands of beads may have significance limited to a small group. At one *terreiro* I visited, each of the men initiated in ceremonial

positions and given the title of *ogã*³⁶ wore a single strand of beads incorporating the colors of each of the *orixás* manifesting among the group. Beads incorporating colors of all the *orixás* are quite commonly owned and worn by *mães-de-santo* but also are popular in tourist markets, since they can be used as a souvenir of *all* of the saints of Bahia.

Having washed the *quelê* and passed through the initiation stage, a new initiate will acquire complex beads such as a multi-strand set called a *dilogum* [Photo 4]. The *dilogum* follows the same pattern of color symbolism as the *quelê* but, being comprised of two to twelve strands (*pernas*) joined together by larger beads (*firmas*), demonstrates the owner's status and wealth.³⁷ The cost of the *dilogum* is about ten times the cost of the simple *quelê*, and this investment generally is not made until one has passed through the initiation stage.³⁸

Unlike the *quelê*, the *dilogum* is not worn day-to-day but rather on special occasions, perhaps because it is much larger and less discrete. It generally is worn within the *terreiro* and crosses into secular spaces for major festivals such as the washing of the steps of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim and the festival dedicated to Yemanjá. A notable exception is with vendors, perhaps the most visible being women who sell bean fritters called *acarajé*, a local specialty recognized for its origins in West Africa. In the Candomblé belief system, female vendors are thought to



Photo 4. *Janete, a mãe-de-santo who performs spiritual cleansings at the Igreja de São Lázaro, wearing a multi-colored dilogum. Photograph by Heather Shirey, September 2001.*

be protected by Oxum, perhaps one reason that vendors often wear beads for Oxum while at work, even if they are not of Candomblé. In many cases, *acarajé* vendors adorn themselves with beads because beads are part of the “typical” ensemble of female vendors.³⁹

People usually aspire to own two special strands of beads, particularly after seven years of initiation. First is a large, heavy, long strand of cowrie shells worn diagonally across the chest [Photo 5], called the *brajá*.

This is often a double strand of shells, and the cowries may be positioned back-to-back or placed in a zig-zag form with the open sides revealed, depending on the *orixá* or the creator’s preference. Due to the large quantity of cowries required, a *brajá* is expensive and therefore a sign of wealth and luxury. Ideally, a person in whom Exú manifests will own seven of these *brajás*, with a gourd on the tip of each, but in actuality this would be beyond most people’s reach. The prestigious use of *brajá* can also be used by others after seven years of initiation.

Second is the *ronjêve* [Photo 6], a single strand of red coral or small plastic disks resembling coral. The *ronjêve* is associated with Iansã, the *orixá* of wind and thunderstorms, as well as cemeteries and the realm of the dead. Even a person who is not a *filha/o* of Iansã may seek to possess a *ronjêve* because everyone will eventually encounter Iansã in death. In many cases, the *ronjêve* is the only possession that accompanies one in



Photo 5. A display of various *brajás* (long strands of cowries) and other items made with cowrie shells. Photograph by Heather Shirey, October 2002.



Photo 6. A long-time initiate of Candomblé who wears her *ronjevê*, the thin strand of beads that accompanies one throughout life and even in death, tucked inside of her dress. Photograph by Heather Shirey, November 2001.

burial, while all other beads are distributed to others in the community or dispatched in a special ceremony.⁴⁰ Because the *ronjevê* is so closely connected to human mortality, ownership seems to be a private affair. I found few people willing to talk about the *ronjevê*, and asking questions about it led to uncomfortable silences. Da Souza e Silva said she was especially careful to wear these beads in a way that shielded them from others' eyes, either tucked inside her clothes or bra, which she thought was the best way to keep the beads close to her body and protect them from the gaze of others.⁴¹

EMPOWERMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Beads used in the context of Candomblé are empowered objects, ritually transformed so that they do not simply represent the *orixás* but are containers of *axé*, physical embodiments of the deities' spiritual force. Beads do not exist in isolation but are part of the Candomblé universe. The ceremony of washing or feeding the beads links them to the owner, to all people in the *terreiro*, and to the altar of the *orixás* and objects associated with it.

There are different ways of empowering beads. I have discussed the simplest washing of the beads (*lavagem de contas*), in which *contas* are submerged in sacred leaves and water and washed with *sabão de costa*. This ceremony is accompanied by sacred words, which in some communities are spoken in Yoruba.⁴² The words contain power, thus strengthening the beads. For a super-charge of *axé*, the beads can be placed on an altar to consume symbolically the blood of a sacrificial animal. In the hierarchy of *axé*, animals have much more spiritual force than plants, so the degree of this offering is escalated. The feeding of the beads is often done in conjunction with a *bori*, a feeding of an individual's head.⁴³ It can also happen in preparation for a special ceremony for a particular *orixá*, when the altar is renewed with a new offering, often once a year. Beads are placed with other ritual objects, which also "consume" the offering. The increased power means the beads can do even more to protect the owner, but they also bring more responsibility and an even greater possibility for danger.

The ownership of empowered beads comes with obligations, which vary depending on the level of consecration. Due to their more limited capacities as storage containers for *axé*, beads washed by the more simple method bring with them fewer responsibilities than beads that have "eaten." The most basic obligation is to keep them in a safe place and not lose or give them away.⁴⁴ Washed beads are thought of as a valued personal possession and their power cannot be transferred to another person. If they are given away, they must be re-consecrated to provide protection to the new owner.⁴⁵ Beads empowered through a more intense process involving an animal offering may require future blood offerings to preserve and maintain their power.

The people I interviewed knew exactly where their beads were even if they were not wearing them, whether they were kept in the *peji* of the *terreiro*, at home in a drawer, hung on a nail, or on a special household altar. In addition, they mentioned that they would never wear their beads to go out drinking or for a fun night on the town, an especially strong taboo.

Some people consider it necessary to renew the *axé*, which may be done by lighting a weekly candle on the day dedicated to the beads' *orixá*.⁴⁶ Of those I interviewed, one person said he never fails on Monday to light a candle for his beads and for Ogum, syncretized with São Antônio, the *orixá* to whom his beads are dedicated. One *pai-de-santo* instructed me to place my beads on a plate every Monday, a day also dedicated to Omolu, and light a candle in the center so that my beads would receive *axé*. He emphasized that I should stay in the same room to benefit from the spiritual force of this offering. Leaving the lit candle unattended, he said, would be a waste of *axé*.

In general, rules most frequently observed require keeping the beads safe and offering them respect, along with the occasional lighting of a

candle. One person mentioned that in addition to taking off her beads to go out for the evening, she removes them to take a shower for fear that constant exposure to running water would wash away the *axé*. Most people, however, conceive of *axé* as an abstract spiritual force, not a concrete substance that can be washed away.

Many people I interviewed said they wore their beads every day without fail, with the rare exception of the particular day I happened to be interviewing them. People often came up with complicated and often unconvincing excuses to explain why they neglected to wear the beads on that particular day. I took this to mean that they felt they *should* be wearing them every day, and recognized that wearing beads would be the most appropriate choice, but chose not to or found the beads inconvenient for some reason.

After one's death, only the *ronjêve* accompanies the individual to the grave. Other beads are distributed to people in the community who may restring them or simply perform a new washing ceremony. Some choose to give away their beads before they die to make sure they end up in the right hands. If not, the person in charge of the Egun society, which deals with issues surrounding a person's death, or another community leader will decide how the beads and other possessions are divided up.⁴⁷ Sometimes a decision is made using cowrie shell divination. However, one *filha-de-santo* indicated she didn't trust those in power to distribute her belongings fairly and preferred to give them away herself. In some cases, beads are not passed on to others but returned to nature, where they are reunited with the *orixá*.⁴⁸

CONCLUSIONS: WHAT BEADS DO

Consecrated beads incorporate the powerful *axé* of the Candomblé community and, as an embodiment of the *orixás*, protect the wearer from physical pain, psychological struggles and social difficulties. Clutching or wearing a string of consecrated beads puts one in contact with the *axé* and allows the beads to absorb powerful, potentially dangerous forces.⁴⁹ Wearing empowered beads in everyday life ensures that one is always accompanied by the *axé* of the *orixás*, even when removed from the context of spiritual practice. In addition, beads forge a link with the *orixá* that provides a sense of well-being and self-confidence. While many sacred objects and visible symbols of Candomblé never leave the ritual space of the *terreiro*, beads—by way of their portability and legibility—easily transcend this sacred boundary and express the identity of the self and the group. In the sacred context, the type and color of beads identify an association or relationship with particular *orixás* and indicate the wearer's status. In the public context, beads identify one's affiliation with the religion and pride in African Brazilian culture. This recognition

of affiliation can be empowering and desirable, or it can be potentially dangerous in contexts in which Candomblé is perceived negatively.

My interviews and observations confirm that there are established codes of behavior in relation to beads, as established in earlier ethnographies. These ideas about how one *ought* to behave are relatively consistent even among members from a variety of distinct Candomblé communities. However, a closer look at behavior reveals a high level of variability in the rules and restrictions people associate with beads and a great deal of flexibility in the degree of adherence. Although a shared language of beads can be read by many people, the rules surrounding its usage are flexible and constantly reinterpreted, depending upon the situation. Through action, meaning is defined, constructed and reconstructed, and this is particularly evident in the consecration and use of empowered beads in Candomblé.

This essay draws on research conducted over several extended visits to Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, in part supported by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and the Faculty Development Center at the University of St. Thomas. Additional support for research was provided by the Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship, the Department of the History of Art at Indiana University, and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Indiana University. The material presented here draws from my dissertation entitled "Empowering Spaces: Candomblé Art in Sacred and Secular Contexts in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil." I offer my sincere thanks to Patrick McNaughton for years of careful guidance, as well as to John McDowell, Janet Kennedy, and Claude Clegg. My deep appreciation also goes to Nancy (CiCi) da Souza, my mentor in Bahia, whose deep love of the material culture of Candomblé inspired much of my research.

ENDNOTES

¹ Strings of beads are called *fios de contas* in Portuguese, but often are referred to as *contas*, *colares*, or *guias* (literally beads, necklaces, and guides).

² Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this article to explore the interesting nuances of *axé* in the Brazilian context in relation to the Yoruba concept of *ashe*. See Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred: Yoruba Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), for an investigation of Candomblé as a Yoruba-derived religion, and specifically an exploration of these key concepts in relation to the religion's material culture.

³ Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth and Affecting Presence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

⁴ Armstrong refers to objects of affecting presence as being "not, at base, symbolic of something else . . . they *are* whatever they are." Things of affecting presence are dedicated to the "management of the energies of the world" and

thus based on what Armstrong calls the “aesthetics of invocation.” Armstrong, *The Powers of Presence* 5, 10.

⁵ As a participant-observer in Candomblé communities, I conducted formal interviews concerning the material culture of the religion, including an examination, in Salvador and its periphery, of ways people acquire and incorporate beads into their lives. For my analysis of how people outside the religion interpret the meanings of beads in the secular realm, I interviewed approximately twenty people not involved with Candomblé, including self-identified Catholics, Protestants, Spiritualists, agnostics, and atheists. Even when limited to Salvador da Bahia, Candomblé is astonishingly complex and diverse in its origins and practices, with some communities strongly connected to Yoruba traditions and others not. On the complexity of Candomblé *nações* and historical connections to Africa, see J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁶ Pierre Verger, *Notas Sobre O Culto aos Orixás e Voduns [Notes on the Cult of Orixás and Voduns]*, trans. Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1998), 99; Roger Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia, Rito Nagô [Candomblé of Bahia, Nagô Ritual]*, trans. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001), 40–42. See also Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred*, 54–56; and Jim Wafer, *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomblé* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 112–13. This spiritual transformation, marked by a special relationship to empowered objects, is paralleled throughout the Black Atlantic world in ways flexible yet consistent. One particularly important parallel example is David Brown’s nuanced investigation of the “making” of a Lucumí *oricha*. See David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 195–96.

⁷ See, for example, Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983); Margaret Thompson Drewal, “Projections from the Top in Yoruba Art,” *African Arts* 11, no. 1 (1977): 43–49.

⁸ Wafer, *Taste of Blood*, 16.

⁹ Verger, *Notas Sobre O Culto aos Orixás e Voduns*, 91–92. Verger describes this in conjunction with the ceremony called the *bori* (washing of the head). The use of incisions varies widely depending on the *terreiro*, and its frequency has varied over time. In particular, I have heard mention of *terreiros* moving away from the practice due to concerns about potential HIV/AIDS contagion.

¹⁰ See Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia*, 40–42, 45; Verger, *Notas Sobre O Culto aos Orixás e Voduns*, 91–92; and Edison Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia [Bahian Candomblé]* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1977), 98.

¹¹ Henry John Drewal, “Yoruba Beadwork in Brazilian Candomblé,” in *Beads Body and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe*, by Henry John Drewal and John Mason (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998), 180. Drewal draws upon c. 1829 images from French artist Jean Baptiste Debret, painted in Rio de Janeiro. The Museu Afro-Brasileiro in Salvador da Bahia also houses various beads excavated in Pelourinho, some of which might date from the nineteenth century. More research is needed on this topic.

¹² J. Lorand Matory, “The ‘Cult of Nations’ and the Ritualization of Their Purity,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no.1 (Winter 2001): 171–214.

¹³ Pravina Shukla, “Beads of Identity in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil,” in Drewal and Mason, *Beads Body and Soul*, 188–97.

¹⁴ Roberto Motta, “The Churchifying of Candomblé: Priests, Anthropologists, and the Canonization of the African Religious Memory in Brazil,” in *New Trends and Developments in African Religions*, ed. Peter Clarke (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1998), 49–52; Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Nagô Grandma and White Papa: Candomblé and the Creation of Afro-Brazilian Identity*, trans. Stephen Berg (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and Tradition in Candomblé* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ See for example Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); Richard Price and Sally Price, *Maroon Arts: Cultural Vitality in the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Susan M. Vogel, *Baule: African Art, Western Eyes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997). Also influential is Michael Carrithers’ argument that the production of culture—and, by extension, tradition—is a continuous process in constant flux. Personal experience affects how traditions are constructed. Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Culture: Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992). Brown’s *Santería Enthroned* is an extremely effective case study exploring change over time and the flexibility of traditions in new contexts.

¹⁶ Bastide argued that the use of consecrated beads indicates submission to the *orixás* and the community’s spiritual leader, and that bead washing is a necessary first step towards initiation, the act itself being a sign of one’s status as a *filho* of a particular *orixá*. My investigation found that these generalizations in many cases are accurate, but describe only an ideal of how one’s involvement in Candomblé should develop. An ethnographic ideal cannot cover the full range of actions and reactions in the ways people relate to objects in their lives. In actual practice, the path towards and the significance of bead ownership are often more complicated than this model would make it seem. Bastide’s research neglects to arrive at an understanding of the motivations of people who own and care for unconsecrated beads, and it excludes consideration of individuals devoted to their *orixá* who do not have empowered beads, whether by choice or necessity. Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia*, 41.

¹⁷ Generally, beads will be prepared for the *dono da cabeça* as well as second or even third owners, who are conceived of as standing on the right and left shoulders of the individual. The prominence among these *orixás* can often shift. I was told at various times that Oxum ruled my head with Omolu as the “second,” although sometimes their position of prominence was reversed. At one point, Iansã emerged and supplanted Omolu’s prominence. Many long-time Candomblé participants I interviewed noted that a shift in their *dono da cabeça* had taken place, and this was generally associated with trauma or major life change.

¹⁸ Other bead outlets are at the Mercado de São Joaquim, the Mercado Modelo, and other religious supply stores near the Igreja de Bonfim and other churches. Praça da Sé stores are generally acknowledged in Candomblé communities as the best and most economical source.

¹⁹ This popularly recounted story has reached legendary status; people who practice Candomblé as well as people in secular contexts often told me this story when I expressed an interest in beads.

²⁰ Shukla, "Beads of Identity in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil," 188.

²¹ Reactions from Candomblé practitioners vary widely. Many are accustomed to secularization of their religion; some find popular appropriation of religious symbols to be a source of pride; others find it amusing or even offensive. A similar case might be the use of rosary beads as a fashion accessory, representing a clear deviation from the use of the rosary in religious practice.

²² Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia*, 41. "The individual who wishes to participate in the life of Candomblé should first consult the *babalão*, who will divine the owner of the head. Then a necklace corresponding to his *orixá* should be made or purchased at the market, and then taken to the *babalorixá* to be washed." Author's translation.

²³ Wafer, *Taste of Blood*, 19, describes the importance of found objects, especially stones known as *otá*. In this case, the stone was unconsecrated but perceived by its owner to be empowered.

²⁴ Personal communication, 11 July 2001.

²⁵ Carneiro calls this the *gaveta do orixá*, the necktie of the *orixá*, but I have never heard this. Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 98; Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia*, 40–41. The best source for a thorough discussion of the typology and morphology of beads is Raul Lody, *Jóias de Axé: Fios-de-contas e outros adornos do corpo: A Joalheria Afro-Brasileira [Strings of Beads and Other Bodily Adornments: African Brazilian Jewelry]* (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2001). Lody, through years of anthropological research and personal experience, has compiled an impressive volume on beads and jewelry used in Candomblé, outlining the typology and morphology of the objects. Lody's research is based on both contemporary and historical examples of beads, providing the potential to examine changes in beads over time.

²⁶ Lody, *Jóias de Axé*, 102.

²⁷ These popular articles about Candomblé were especially prevalent in the 1980s, when the religion was just entering the mainstream.

²⁸ One example is the circle of *orixá* sculptures by Tatti Moreno on the Dique do Tororó.

²⁹ The verb *comer* (to eat) in Portuguese is used to refer to the spiritual consumption of an offering.

³⁰ Especially the Igreja Universal do Reino do Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), also called simply the Igreja Universal.

³¹ Personal communication, 20 September 2001. According to Bispo (Bishop) Edir Macedo of the Igreja Universal do Reino do Deus, it is the obligation of church members to confront people of Candomblé in order to try to save them, so da Souza e Silva was probably correct. She had also had personal experience with this. See Bispo Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Gráfica Universal Ltda, 2000).

³² Personal communication, 20 September 2001.

³³ Personal communication, Jaime Sodré, May 2001. Sodré is professor of art history at the Universidade Federal da Bahia and a long-time Candomblé initiate. He is a member of the *terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá.

³⁴ Non-initiates also may have beads prepared to represent relationships with specific *orixás* and affiliation with particular Candomblé communities.

³⁵ Jacira also has two *brajás*, even though she is not a *filha* of Obaluaê or Nanã. Personal communication, 10 September 2001.

³⁶ An *ogã* is a male ceremonial role in the Candomblé community. The *ogã* does not receive the *orixás* in trace, but instead acts as an important liaison with the broader community.

³⁷ Lody, *Jóias de Axé*, 102.

³⁸ The simplest *quelê* costs roughly the same as a movie ticket. Depending on one's income, the price of a *dilogum*, about ten times as much, may require the buyer to make many sacrifices to save the necessary funds.

³⁹ Da Souza e Silva told me that vendors choose to wear beads for Oxum, patron of women in markets. Vendors' accounts vary widely. One told me she did not believe in Candomblé, even though she was wearing several strands of beads—not all new plastic beads but several elaborate strands of expensive glass beads—suggesting serious involvement in Candomblé. She told me the beads were borrowed from neighbors who didn't use them anymore. Beads were simply part of her work uniform and not indicative of a spiritual connection to the *orixás*.

⁴⁰ Knowing that most possessions, including beads and other liturgical items, will be redistributed after one's death, some people choose to give away their important sacred possessions before they die to ensure that things arrive in the hands of the person they think will be the most appropriate owner.

⁴¹ Personal communication, 11 September 2001.

⁴² Yoruba is more common in Nagô communities than in Jeje or "Angola" communities. See Wafer, *Taste of Blood*, 125. In communities where people have more access to education, some initiates more likely will have undertaken formal language study in Yoruba. Some words in Yoruba may be spoken in Jeje communities as well. It is not uncommon for Yoruba to be spoken as a liturgical language no longer comprehended by the majority of those present. Because my knowledge of Yoruba language is extremely limited, I do not have the capacity to analyze further the complex use of language in Candomblé. I do think it is possible that some words or phrases used in Candomblé and thought to be Yoruba actually have their origins in other African languages. See also Yêda Antonia Pessia da Castro, "Das Línguas Africanas ao Português Brasileiro," *Afro-Ásia* 14 (1983): 81–106.

⁴³ Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia*, 45; Verger, *Notas Sobre O Culto aos Orixás e Voduns*, 91–92. The term *bori* is Yoruba in origin.

⁴⁴ Generally the only reason one would give away beads is in preparation for death. A research partner and I once visited a friend's elderly mother who was no longer able to carry out obligations for the *orixás*. Recognizing our sincere interest in beads she decided to give us each a strand, saying she was physically unable to care for the beads and thought they were better off in our hands.

⁴⁵ This is the case, at least in theory. When I told da Souza e Silva about the gift of beads I received from a friend's aging mother, though, she said the beads' power to protect me came from the previous owner rather than the *orixá*. As my elder, the previous owner had spiritual power that could fortify me, though the power of the *orixás* was lost from the beads.

⁴⁶ Generally people use short, white tapers (like those used in Catholic devotion) readily available in supermarkets and neighborhood grocery stores in Brazil.

⁴⁷ Devotion to *egun* spirits, or ancestors, is usually somewhat separate from but associated with Candomblé. Some *terreiros* contain altars to the *eguns* within their walls. If there is no *egun* society associated with a particular *terreiro*, the community leader or other influential person will decide what to do with a deceased person's empowered objects, perhaps relying on divination for guidance.

⁴⁸ This idea of returning the beads to nature applies even when they are made of plastic and therefore not purely "natural."

⁴⁹ In this way, the use of beads has something in common with Catholic rosary beads, which also are consecrated and often used in moments of crisis for their power.