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3

## Candomblé in Brazil

Candomblé is the name given to a variety of African religious traditions established in Brazil during the nineteenth century. It has been continually nourished by contacts with Africa, and its priests and priestesses have been dedicated to maintaining the purity of its African roots. The city of Salvador da Bahia, or simply Bahia, is famous for this disciplined fidelity to the ways of the "old Africans," and it is from Bahia that the models for Afro-Brazilian religions radiate. By word, rhythm, and gesture, candomblé seeks to incarnate the ancestors, forging the link between the royal powers of Africa and their children in Brazil.

Candomblé is at once a space, a dance, and a community.<sup>1</sup> It is a consecrated, privately owned area within the environs of Bahia, often walled or hedged, where ceremonies to the spirits take place. It may be a large compound of many acres containing numerous shrines and sacred sites, or a simple building and yard screened from a city street. A candomblé is also the actions of the community within its sacred precincts. Devotees refer to group actions in honor of the spirits as "making candomblé," especially with reference to dances with drum music. Finally a candomblé is the community of devotees themselves, for the ultimate locus of the spirits is literally inside this community. Like vodou, the spirit of candomblé is shared in the dances carried out in sacred

spaces oriented to Africa. What follows is a portrait of the community of candomblé, the service which manifests it, and the spirit to which it is devoted.

### COMMUNITY

As the Haitian people were struggling toward freedom at the close of the eighteenth century, other colonies were becoming more firmly locked into economies driven by slave labor. Many more African slaves came to Brazil in the nineteenth century than in the previous three hundred years after the Portuguese landing in 1500.<sup>2</sup> Of the more than three and one-half million Africans who came through the Middle Passage to Brazil, nearly a million and a quarter came through Bahia, making it the largest slave port in the Americas.<sup>3</sup> In the early nineteenth century Bahia received a large number of people from what the Brazilian slavers called the "Mina Coast," the present-day countries of western Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Ghana.<sup>4</sup> This sudden and dramatic presence of Africans from contiguous areas, in a relatively short period of time, created a cultural homogeneity and hegemony which would distinguish Bahia as the preeminent city of the African diaspora of the nineteenth century. A French consul in 1848 wrote of the preponderance of "Nagô" people, an ethnic designation broadly synonymous with the African people termed "Yoruba" by English-speaking ethnographers today:

... the Nagos . . . probably account for nine-tenths of the slaves at Bahia and can be recognized by three deep lateral marks tattooed on each cheek. They are nearly all embarked at Onim [Lagos] or Porto Novo; the Hausa [are] mostly employed at Bahia as palanquin bearers; they nearly all come the Onim route.

The Gege or Dahomeyans, who are a powerful nation, have fairly numerous representatives at Bahia; they used to be embarked at Whydah, but now, for the most part, they come from Porto Novo.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of these African ethnicities struck Bahian slaveholders with particular force. Some eleven rebellions organized by slaves and free

people of color challenged their control over the city between 1807 and 1835. The power of the ethnic and religious solidarity displayed by Afro-Brazilians was not lost on the merchants and landowners of Bahia who petitioned the Portuguese Crown in 1814 for a free hand in crushing any signs of black independence. In the wake of a bloody uprising in 1814 they wrote to prince Dom João:

... gatherings of blacks can be seen at night in the streets as before, conversing in their language and saying whatever they like, and with constant whistling and other signals. They are so impertinent that even in our language they blurt out their reasons for putting off the day of their planned revolt. They know about and discuss the disastrous occurrences that took place on the Island of Saint Domingue, and one hears mutinous claims that by St. John's Day there will not be one white or mulatto alive.<sup>6</sup>

It was clear to these citizens that the gatherings of candomblé were important cells of revolutionary activity, and like Haitian voodoo, a potentially successful means to organize the overthrow of the slave system. The free citizens petitioned the crown to be able to prohibit gatherings with drums called *bataques* and were frustrated by the restraining hand of the local governor. Remembering the bloodshed of recent events, they presented their fears to the crown with sarcastic anger:

In payment for the barbarousness with which they treated people in the places they burned, where the houses numbered over 150, and the people killed more than a hundred, it is even suggested in this first order that interference with the *bataques* which might be performed elsewhere should be carried out with great moderation. Perhaps we should ask them on our knees not to dance the *bataque* and not to convert this country into a new Mina Coast, as they have been doing up to this time . . .<sup>7</sup>

The very first ordinance in the slave laws of 1822 authorized Bahian militiamen to reconnoiter slave districts "severely prohibiting their meetings under the pretext of performing *autabaquis*."<sup>8</sup> Both white authorities and the Afro-Brazilian communities found in candomblé a

linkage of African ethnic identity, religious ceremony, and cultural resistance. From the early nineteenth century until the very recent past, the candomblés were periodically harassed and suppressed. When they did not pose a threat as centers for insurrection, they offered an assertive alternative, a world where, in the words of one nineteenth-century observer: ". . . in dancing and singing, they forget their ills and servitude, and only remember their native country and the time that they were free."

The "memory" of freedom was and continues to be powerfully made present in *candomblé*, and the houses offer an alternative to the values of white society and the racism that so frequently underlies them. American anthropologist Mikkelle Omari writes: "Candomblé Nagô offers Afro-Bahians a channel through which they may gain a significant measure of self-esteem, social solidarity, prestige, and social mobility in a system which celebrates African values, behavior and skin color."<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the Afro-Haitians, whose revolution threw off slavery in 1804, Afro-Bahians were never able to overturn the slave system. Their bondage persisted more than eighty years longer, until emancipation in 1888. Yet despite the most virulent attempts to suppress the *autabaque* gatherings, Afro-Bahians were able to create a remarkable realization of a "new Mina Coast" in their candomblés. Their large numbers, the currency of their contacts with Africa, and their dedication to a once and future freedom made for a remarkable continuity with the traditions of their ancestors and nurtured in Afro-Bahians a force for resistance to the brutal system of oppression that they endured. The "*autabaquis*," the drum ceremonies of the Nagôs, the Jejes, and to a lesser extent, the Hausas and various Angolan peoples, were the means by which the Afro-Brazilian identity was maintained amid the horrors of a slave society. These gatherings became the models for the great houses of candomblé that arose in the mid-nineteenth century, which the present candomblés proudly name as their source.

The demographic shifts of early nineteenth-century Brazil ensured the permanent presence of the cultures of several different African ethnicities

or *nações*, "nations," in Bahia. Contemporary *candomblés* identify themselves with these African *nações*, though the wide variety of African ethnicity in nineteenth-century Bahia has been condensed into three principle *nações*: Nagô, Jeje, and Angola.<sup>11</sup> Within these classifications, which some houses would find too general, can be found Kêtu, Alakêto, Efan, Jexê, Ebâ, Mina Nagô, Xambá, Tapa, Congo, and Mina Jeje. Add to these the Muslim designations of Malé and Mucurumim, and the large numbers of *candomblés* called *cabodô* that receive Amerindian as well as African spirits, and the rich contributions of specific African peoples are apparent. If the name Nagô may be accepted as referring to a generally homogenous culture, language, and religion, nearly every house in Bahia receives Nagô spirits, if not exclusively. The nineteenth-century observers may have exaggerated when they claimed that nine out of ten Africans in Bahia were Nagô, but there is abundant evidence that the Nagôs were a dominant presence in the cultural life of Afro-Bahians. Not only did thousands of Nagôs come to Bahia as slaves, but free Nagôs became important figures in the trade of the city. In Pierre Verger's terms, there was a continual flux and reflux in the trade between Bahia and Africa, not only in Africans but by Africans, both in Bahia and on the Mina Coast.<sup>12</sup> Free African and Bahian *emancipado* merchants traded tobacco, firearms, sugar, and slaves across the Atlantic. They established multiple contacts between Africa and Bahia so that African goods were readily available in Bahia. African and Afro-Brazilian persons of means were able to travel between the old world and the new, and family and religious ties could be renewed. A number of Africans freely emigrated to Brazil, often at the behest of emancipated members of families and congregations of *candomblé*. Too, large colonies of Brazilian Nagôs returned to Africa to establish communities that continue to maintain their Brazilian identity.<sup>13</sup>

In this world of brutal slavery, crushed insurrection, constant trade, and cultural renewal, the most prestigious of the Nagô houses of *candomblé* was established. Around 1830 a Nagô priestess from the Kêtu region of what is today Benin, a free woman titled Iyá Nassô, came to Bahia to establish a religious community. Her mother had been enslaved

and brought to Bahia, but had won her freedom and returned to Africa, where she became initiated as a priestess. She joined Iyá Nassô, together with two other priestesses, to return to Brazil in order to bring the foundation power of the spirits (*axé*) to the Nagô community in diaspora in Bahia.<sup>14</sup> Toward the end of her life, Iyá Nassô sent her successor Marcelina back to Africa for a seven-year stay to complete her education with African religious teachers.<sup>15</sup>

The relative frequency with which exceptional individuals traveled to and from Africa to refine their understanding of Nagô theology and ritual raised in *candomblé* a special interest in the fidelity of the rites to their African sources. The continual renewal of *candomblé* ideas and practices by African emigrants and visitors created historical layers of African influence in every *candomblé* house and complex claims to authentic African precedents. Today every large Nagô house of *candomblé* has sent members to Africa, and the question of the *pureza* or purity of Bahian practice in relation to African standards continues to stimulate the most lively debates among the houses.

Afro-Brazilian life in Bahia offered many advantages for the development of great centers of African religious learning. Compared with the Creole peasantry of mostly rural Haiti, Afro-Bahian urban life allowed for relative freedom of movement, independent patrons who could endow the centers, and sufficient wealth and mobility to sponsor teachers and students to cross the Atlantic.

The history of some *candomblés* is better known to us than that of specific vodou *ounfos* partly because Brazilian intellectuals were attracted to the *candomblés* and wrote about them, but mostly because the *candomblés* themselves achieved a level of institutionalization and permanence never equaled by vodou *ounfos*.<sup>16</sup> The house of Iyá Nassô, most commonly called Casa Branca today, became the principle line from which most Nagô houses of *candomblé* trace their descent. Since the fortunes of a *candomblé* are tied to the charisma of its leader, it is always a delicate moment when leadership is passed on. The *dexaram o cargo*,<sup>17</sup> or willing of the office of leadership, has been the source of several succession disputes in Bahian *candomblé* which have led to the forma-

tion of sometimes competitive, sometimes cooperative, "branch" houses.

When Iyá Nassô's daughter, Marcelina, died, arguments about her successor led one of Casa Branca's senior priestesses, Maria Julia da Conceição to found the Ilé Iyá Omin Axé Iyamassé, a house best known today as Gantois, after the Bahian neighborhood in which it is located. A similar dispute around 1910 led a charismatic Casa Branca priestess named Aninha to form a new community called Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá. Despite the disagreements that led to this fission into new institutions, the younger *candomblés* have always recognized their debts to Casa Branca. Aninha of Opô Afonjá was the most eminent priestess in Bahia during the first four decades of the twentieth century and Meninha of Gantois became a national figure before her death in 1986, but each organized their ritual calendars around the cycles of Casa Branca. "Engenio Velho [Casa Branca] is the head and Opô Afonjá is the arm," was how Aninha characterized their relationship.<sup>18</sup> These three communities—Casa Branca, Gantois, and Opô Afonjá—comprise what is often called the *candomblé* elite of Bahia. They are the great houses, known for their unbroken link to Iyá Nassô, their fidelity and dialogue with African ceremonial models, and the social prestige of their members.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the Nagô *candomblés* of Bahia can trace their origins to one of the priestesses of Casa Branca, Gantois, or Opô Afonjá. Yet given the large number of contemporary *candomblés*, it might be imagined that not all these ties can be verified. In the 1930s a Bahian journalist and ethnographer, Edison Carneiro, sought to organize the *candomblé* houses into a self-protective union and thereby demonstrate the political power that the numbers of their adherents represented. He argued that a public organization, with a popular writer among its members, might shield the *candomblés* from the police harassment they were enduring at the time. The union counted some sixty-seven *candomblé* houses as members, representing seventeen *nações*. In 1950 Carneiro estimated that there were around a hundred *candomblé* centers in Bahia, each supported by an average of three hundred people. In a city of four hundred thousand, this would have made *candomblé* devotees about 7.5 percent of the city's

population.<sup>20</sup> By 1980 a census carried out by the Federação Baiana do Culto Afro-Brasileiro registered fifteen hundred *candomblés* and estimated innumerable clandestine centers amid greater Bahia's two million inhabitants.<sup>21</sup>

While the elite houses have continually added to their permanence and prestige, the great bulk of the other centers are small, short-lived, and devoted to the *caboclo* Amerindian spirits. The gap between the elite houses and the *caboclo* *candomblés*, like so much of *candomblé* self-identity, is measured by the elites' claims to the purity of their African practices. The American anthropologist Donald Pierson quotes an official of an elite house as saying, "Si seja mistura, é bobagem." "If it's mixed, it's nonsense."<sup>22</sup> In the same vein, the priestess Meninha told Ruth Landes that people came to her house of Gantois because of its Nagô purity: They like to watch us because they know we're genuine, they know that everything under my direction comes straight from the old Africans as taught me by my mother Pulcheria.<sup>23</sup>

The *candomblé* is at once a community and the activities that show it as a community. It is a mutual aid society, a residence, a family, and a dance. One of the formative influences on the establishment of the *candomblés* was the brotherhoods and sisterhoods of black slaves and *emancipados* organized by the Brazilian Catholic Church. Roger Bastide argues that the Portuguese colonists of Brazil were frustrated in recreating the town life of Portugal because so few of the Portuguese immigrants were members of the artisan classes. African slaves and *emancipados* filled these positions in the trade guilds of Brazil's towns and cities, but they were refused membership in the white Catholic brotherhoods and sisterhoods that organized them.<sup>24</sup> There followed a highly segregated "white Church" and "black Church." On some occasions this ecclesial segregation forced the construction of separate buildings for their separate services. The name of one of the most famous churches in Bahia, the magnificent Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos [Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks] indicates its grounding in a large Catholic religious brotherhood and its segregated status. It was built entirely with money raised by its black parishioners and is located in the square called

Pelorinho, "the Pillory," commemorative of the ordeal of Brazilian slavery.

The black Catholic brotherhoods and sisterhoods in some cases shared the same membership with the *candomblés*, in other cases they acted as alternatives to the *candomblés*, and in still others they were the very same organization with different names.<sup>25</sup> Their most visible function was and continues to be the mutual aid of their members. Among the poor in a poor city, the contemporary *candomblés* provide care for the sick, orphaned, and hungry, and burial for the dead. In slavery times they raised money for the emancipation of slave members, and even now they offer refuge for members who have run afoul of the law.<sup>26</sup> Some *candomblés* act as day-care centers for children and the elderly, and they may raise funds for their members' tuition, bail, or emigration. Some of the larger *candomblés* function as residences for their members, either those in need of special care, those undergoing lengthy initiations, or those with special skills needed by the community. In 1991 there were some thirty families living at Opó Afonjá, spread out in numerous small buildings within a large walled compound in the Cabula neighborhood of Bahia. Mikelle Omari lived at Opó Afonjá in the early nineteen-eighties. There she heard the word *roça* or "country" used to describe the life of the *candomblé*. She found that: "The frequent use of the term *roça* when discussing the *Candomblé* activities and the fact that a special uniform is worn in the sacred space support the interpretation of the *Candomblé* as a separate reality. There is a sense of leaving urban openness and entering a rural, cloistered space."<sup>27</sup>

The organization of a *candomblé* is that of a family, related not by blood but by initiation. One is reborn into a *candomblé* family presided over by a mother or father "of the spirit." The Nagô terms *iyalorixá*, "mother of the spirit" or the less common *babalorixá*, "father of the spirit," are used by the community when referring to senior female and male initiates. Their Portuguese equivalents, *mãe de santo* and *pai de santo* are known throughout Brazil to refer to priestesses and priests of African-derived traditions. The closer a *candomblé* community comes to the African standards of purity set by the elite houses, the more women

are found in leadership positions. While *babalorixás* or *pais de santo* may preside over newer Nagô and *caboclo* houses and dominate the Angolan ones, the established Nagô and Jeje *candomblés* have been controlled by women since their founding. Ruth Landes titled her study of black Bahia *The City of Women*, highlighting the dominance and independence of *candomblé* women in every aspect of their lives.<sup>28</sup> They were loath to marry and accept the legal control of men over them. Even if they were married they were always known by their affiliation with their spirits and never by that with their husbands. One of Landes's friends during her stay in Bahia was always referred to as *Zézé de Iansá* (roughly, Jo of Iansá, the spirit of wind and force), and never as Mrs. da Silva.<sup>29</sup> Edison Carneiro told Landes: "It is almost as difficult for a man to become great in *candomblé* as it is for him to have a baby. And for the same reason: it is believed to be against his nature."<sup>30</sup>

The *candomblé* belief is that men have "hot blood." They have neither the patience to submit to the discipline of *candomblé*, nor the control of their passions necessary to incarnate the spirits. Mãe Menininha told Landes, "The old Africans always said that a priestess should be so old that she could no longer remember the passions of youth."<sup>31</sup> It is these elder, senior women who direct *candomblé* and pass on the purity of the way of worship to new initiates into their families.

This is not to say that men are absent in *candomblé*, only that the critical offices of priesthood are only for the very few. Men serve a complementary function in the organization of the elite houses as *ogans*, literally "masters," a small board of advisers and protectors who see to the material welfare of the community. Today these board's include some of the most prominent citizens of Bahia, professionals and municipal and state politicians who, for a variety of motives, wish to be associated with a *candomblé*. Certain *ogans* also take on ritual roles as directors of the drummers at *candomblé* ceremonies or presiders over the ritual slaughter of animals at feasts.<sup>32</sup>

Priesthood is essentially the capacity to carry and pass on the presence of the spirit or *orixá* that one has received from another priestess or priest. One has reached the level of spiritual maturity when one can pass

on or give birth to the presence of the spirit in a spiritual "daughter" or "son." One's progress in *candomblé* begins when one is first called by the *orixá* to its service. The call usually takes the form of a crisis in an individual's life which he or she will take to an *iyalorixá* or *babalorixá* for resolution. If the *iyalorixá* or *babalorixá* determines that the problem is caused by an *orixá*, it can be resolved only with some commitment to the service of the spirit. The *orixá* is seen as both the source of the problem and as its solution, the focal point on which the life of the one called can be transformed.

On some occasions a parent will dedicate a child to an *orixá* seeing to its initiation when very young in exchange for the spirit's power to solve a problem. More often a young adult will appeal to an *orixá* for help in meeting a life crisis, such as serious illness, and upon recovery will dedicate herself or himself to the *orixá*'s service. A costly and lengthy ceremony begins one's life in the *candomblé* as a *iadó*, a bride of the spirit, a new wife with all the mental duties of a junior member of the household. If the spirit desires it, after seven years, a *iadó* may receive *deká*, necklaces, clothing, and altar objects that mark one as an *ebomin*, a senior woman in the *candomblé*. An *ebomin* is empowered to establish her own fundamental altars and, if the spirits desire it, be an *iyalorixá* in her own right, passing on her spiritual experiences to new initiates. The *iyalorixás* say, "To climb the ladder of the *candomblé*, a person mounts one rung at a time."<sup>33</sup>

The elite Nagó *candomblés* of Bahia have always been headed by women who have passed their authority, not always without dispute, to juniors in their houses. Ruth Landes gives us a portrait of the hierarchy at Gantois during the early years of Menininha's long reign. When Landes met Menininha in the late nineteen-thirties, Gantois was a community of some two hundred active participants with some fifty of them initiated priestesses.<sup>34</sup> Menininha had received the charge of leadership from the beloved Pulcheria who had initiated Menininha into the mysteries of the *orixá* Oxun when Menininha was only an infant. Thus while she was forty-six years old in the reckoning of secular and Europeanized Bahia, Menininha was forty-four years "in Oxun," the true mark of maturity and seniority.

In the confines of a *terreiro*, the sacred grounds of a *candomblé*, or in a conversation about *candomblé* life, initiates will give their ages according to their initiatory births and recognize the authority of their sisters and brothers on that basis. Each *candomblé* initiate has a human and an *orixá* parent. As they give their spiritual ages, they will also speak of the proximate human mothers who brought them into the spiritual world and the *orixá* who is their ultimate parent. On formal occasions a member will greet her or his senior in the spirit with a full prostration, indicating the relative importance of each member and the spirit whom the prostrator carries. Thus the *candomblé* is a family of human and spirit children and parents, with humans acting as mediums for the *orixás* under certain conditions and acting on their own under others.

The head of the *candomblé* is usually addressed as "mother": *mãe* in Portuguese, *iyá* in Nagó. Beneath her is the *iyá kékéré*, the "little mother" who is her assistant and usually understood to be her successor. The *iyá kékéré* is largely responsible for discipline in the *candomblé*. In Menininha's Gantois this role was fulfilled by Laura, who told Landes that she was fifty-five years old "in the world," with thirty-eight years to her Oxun. In *candomblé*, like *vodou*, the spirits are not necessarily single entities, but families or constellations of personalities, that can be conceived as having one, or a few, or unlimited identities. Thus *candomblé* members will distinguish among the *orixás* that have chosen them to be their children. Menininha's Oxun was both the same spirit as Laura's and could be spoken of as the same during certain circumstances, while at other times they would be distinguished in speech and in ritual attention. Landes reports that during her visit Menininha and Laura were not getting along, and there was a good deal of gossip that Laura was jealous of Menininha's elevation and was using sorcery against her. As mentioned previously, succession disagreements are frequent, and though Menininha became the most famous of all *iyalorixás*, even her prestige could not forestall disputes about the succession of her daughter in the late 1980s.

Assisting the *iyá kékéré* is the *iyá moró*, filled in Menininha's Gantois by Maria, who was forty years old with thirty-three years to her Omulu,

the *orixá* of disease and health. Beneath her stood Eudoxia, the *iyá basé*, the "mother who cooks," with twenty-eight years to her Omulu. Knowledge of the proper preparation of the foods of the candomblé is a critical duty. The *orixás* each have their own dishes which must be prepared and arranged at feasts according to certain orders and numbers. The success of the ceremony depends not only on culinary skills, but on a vast repertoire of secret prayers which must accompany the food's preparation. All Bahia loves *acarajé*, the bean-cakes sacred to Iansá, but only the *iyá basé* knows the active ingredients which will tempt the *orixás* to the feast.

In addition to the senior women were a number of priestesses who cared for particular sanctuaries in the Gantois compound, others who led the songs of the liturgy, and still others who were in charge of the introductory rites to Exu, the spirit who opens and closes all candomblé undertakings and who merits duties separate from the *orixás*. A priestess, again, has the ability to "give birth" to her own initiatory children. If she wishes, she is free to establish her own *candomblé*, or may choose to remain in service to her original house.

Beneath the *iyalorixá* in the larger Nagô houses are the *ebominis*, the "elder sisters" of the initiatory family, who are primarily responsible for acting out the liturgies and performing the work of the *terreiro*. An *ebomin* has at least seven years of life in the spirit, has undergone a costly and definitive initiation ceremony, and enjoys many preferences in clothing and ritual accoutrements.<sup>35</sup> She completes the relationship begun by the *iaô*, the junior wife of the *orixá*, who serves the elder sisters and *iyalorixá* on all occasions. These three levels of priesthood, *iyalorixá*, *ebomin*, and *iaô*, mother, elder sister, and junior wife, comprise the primary relationships of the candomblé. They themselves are attended by functionaries who have not been called to priestly service who can act as their personal aids during ceremonies.<sup>36</sup> All are supported by a large number of faithful attendees at ceremonies and still greater numbers of occasional visitors and clients.

The candomblé provides services to the wider community in the form of counseling and therapy. Priestesses charge fees for consultations and

serve a community that has virtually no access to the services of university-trained medical and legal professionals. They have also, especially in more recent years, enjoyed the patronage of wealthy and celebrated clients who have furthered the success and acceptance of the candomblés by the wider Brazilian society and media. Candomblé offers a thorough system of diagnosis and prescription based on the reading of sixteen cowrie shells.<sup>37</sup> The play of the shells, *jogo de búzios*, constitutes the instrument by which a trained *iyalorixá* or *ebomin* can consult the spirits and treat any infirmity or misfortune which is brought to them. The fall of the shells refers to an archetypal spiritual situation, a difficulty faced by the ancestors in Africa which acts as a paradigm for the diagnosis and treatment of the consultee's problem. The consultee is referred to the spiritual sources of his or her difficulty and offered a prescription for its resolution, usually involving certain ritual steps which will reestablish his or her connection with the *orixá* that has offered the paradigmatic problem and solution. The most frequent treatments involve the use of healing leaves, and priestesses learn a vast pharmacopeia of spiritually and chemically active plants. It can be argued that it is this knowledge above all else that gives the *iyalorixá* her authority and constitutes the principle secret teaching of initiation.<sup>38</sup>

It is in this professional context that the candomblé directly affects the wider society, contributes to its guidance, and receives from it important financial support and cultural prestige. While very few Bahians are initiates of candomblés, and relatively few attend public ceremonies regularly, it is likely that a great many have consulted the *búzios* with an initiate. Still, the most celebrated point of contact between candomblé and Bahia is in the public festivals that draw thousands of Bahians into the streets and have become international tourist attractions. While the *carnaval* in Rio de Janeiro has reached the gigantic status of the "eighth wonder of the world," the Bahian *carnaval* has become famous throughout Brazil as the "roots" *carnaval*, a self-conscious celebration of African authenticity. So many of the troupes have adopted candomblé costume and music into their processions that Bahian *carnaval* has been called "candomblé in the streets."<sup>39</sup> Other calendar feasts bring thousands to

the church of Bonfim and the beach at Rio Vermelho, where Catholic and candomblé services are conducted simultaneously. The parallelism or *sincretismo* of these occasions is often decried by purists in both the Catholic Church and the candomblé, but their popularity expresses the nearly universal acceptance of the outer forms of candomblé piety by Bahians and Brazilians in general.<sup>40</sup>

The candomblé has provided occasions for resistance to physical enslavement and cultural repression. It provides its family of initiates financial, legal, and medical assistance, with a variety of support services absent or out of the reach of most Afro-Bahians. It supports itself from the jobs that its members may have and from the counseling and medical services which it provides to the wider community. Together with these economic and social purposes, the candomblé exists to serve the *orixás*, the Nagô spirits. The *orixás* live in activities of the candomblé and, as they are empowered by careful ritual attention, so the community empowers itself. The *orixás* are made present in the service of the community. They are shown in the innumerable gestures of the candomblé, in the foods, speech, and music which communicate their power. But more than anywhere else, the *orixás* are present in the bodies of the devotees themselves. They are placed there in the ceremonies of initiation, and one serves the *orixás* and the community by offering oneself as a medium for their presence. As in the portrait of Haitian vodou, the keys to candomblé services are found in the reception of the spirit in initiation and in its manifestation to the community in dance.

#### S E R V I C E

The general word for service in candomblé is *obrigação*, obligation, with the dual implication of duty to the community and to the spirits. One is bound to the community through work for the spirits, and only in the communal context of the *terreiro* can this work be cultivated and shared. There are many ways of service to the spirits, but the one that receives the most ritual attention, that shows the community to itself in the purest form of spiritual presence, is the incorporation of the spirits in human

mediums. In human mediums the *orixás* may manifest themselves with all the subtleties of human intention and all the dynamism of human dance. The *orixás* may move and act with the capabilities of the human community, and the community may move and act with the timeless authority of the *orixás*.

#### *Iaô: Bride of the Orixá*

To become a medium an individual must be called by the spirit through a direct disturbance in her or his life. The more dramatic and obvious the disturbance, the more likely that one is being called. Often a serious illness, a direct confrontation with the reality of death, will constitute the first evidence of a call. Or it could be a spontaneous manifestation of a spirit at a ceremony where an *orixá* incorporates itself unbidden in the consciousness of an untrained individual. In each case, the cusp of a life-or-death situation is seen as the *orixá's* demand for the life of an individual. He or she must die to life in the ordinary world and enter a new one in the candomblé. The *búzios* are consulted, and if an *orixá* is determined to be at the source of the disturbance, preparations are made, with more or less urgency, to begin the process of initiation into the life of service to the spirit and the candomblé community which sustains it.<sup>41</sup>

In his 1978 film *Iawô*, Geraldo Sarno gives us a unique opportunity to observe some of the rites of initiation into a Nagô-*Ijeje terreiro* in Bahia.<sup>42</sup> We are led through the major steps of transforming three *abians*, young women called by the *orixás*, into *iaôs*, brides of the spirit.

Once it has been determined through the fall of the *búzios* that the women have indeed been called by their respective *orixás*, they are under "obligation" to "seat" or "make" the *orixá*, to bring the presence of the *orixá* into their lives and selves. Through prayers and offerings, the *orixá* of each *abian* must be "seated" or made present in a variety of objects culminating with the head of the individual herself. These *assentamentos* or "seats" are the initiate's altarpieces and are kept in the shrine room of her *terreiro*. They comprise a stone, the central focus of externalized worship of the spirit, which is fed, bathed, and cared for as the "head" of the *orixá* in its most durable of material forms. Surrounding the stone are

various tools and emblems of the *orixá* which also carry its presence and receive offerings. These may be swords, staffs, crowns, and other regalia finely worked in iron, copper, or brass depending on the *orixá* involved. Yet the most profound “seat” of the *orixá*, the altar receiving the most attention and preparation, is the head of the initiate herself. Initiation into candomblé, in addition to bringing privileged access to the spiritual power of the *orixás* through objects, also initiates the reception of the spirit into the *abian*’s very consciousness when it is “seated” in the *abian*’s head.

When the resources for the long and costly process of initiation have been assembled, the *abians* take up residence in the *terreiro*, the sacred precincts of the candomblé. They are housed in a special small room called *runkó*, itself set off from the ceremonial and living quarters of the community. They are said to be members of the same “boat,” fellow passengers on a great journey.<sup>43</sup>

They will remain in the *runkó*, except for daily ablutions and select public appearances, for at least six months.<sup>44</sup> Though they are constantly together, each *abian* is being prepared to “make” a different *orixá*, and so subtle but important variants enter into each *abian*’s experience. At each stage of the long process, confirmations are sought about the *orixá* to be made. Great cautions are taken to ensure that the *abian* is being prepared for her proper *orixá*. Should a mistake be made, disaster would follow. In fact at the beginning of Sarno’s film, the initiation of a fourth *abian* is shown to be postponed. She was separated from the others when it could not be confirmed which *orixá* was calling her. The three *abians* who proceed to undergo the initiation are making the *orixás* Iansá, Iemanjá, and Omulú, *orixás* associated with stormy winds, maternal seas, and transformative diseases, respectively.

The first rite shown is the *catulagem* or cutting of the *abian*’s hair. The women, who look to be in their early twenties, are seated on mats on the ground, each within the spread knees of the woman behind, as if in a small canoe. They are dressed in pure white dresses, shoulderless and elasticized at the bust. A senior priestess holds a lighted white candle while another cuts the hair of each *abian* in turn. The priestesses chant

soft songs for the appropriate *orixá* as they carefully clip the hair as closely as possible to the scalp. A white metal bell with a long handle, called *adja*, is rung hard and loud over each *abian*’s head as the *orixá* is invoked. Each head is bathed in an herbal infusion called *amaí*, carrying the candomblé’s *axé*, the spiritual power residing in the residue of all the *terreiro*’s sacrifices of old. Each *abian* is given bracelets, armlets, anklets, and a necklace bathed in the herbal liquid. The anklets contain a small bell, a sign of submission to the *iyalorixá* and the *terreiro*, while the armlets and bracelets are particularized for her *orixá*.<sup>45</sup> Around her neck is placed the *kele*, a heavy necklace of beads coded to the colors and numbers associated with her *orixá*.

During the long months of isolation the *abians* are being molded to better receive and manifest the presence of their *orixá*. The consciousness of each *abian* is made more permeable by the world of the spirits and, as they become dependent upon the senior priestesses who are preparing them, they manifest a child-spirit called *eré*. The *erés* are intermediate spiritual beings between the personal consciousness of the *abian* and that of the *orixá*. They are explained in a variety of ways: as children of the *orixá*; or the *orixás* themselves as children; or a special childish dimension in the personality of each *orixá*.<sup>46</sup> They are transitional manifestations of the *orixás* and often appear before and after the adult spirits themselves arrive. The *erés* of Sarno’s film laugh and giggle, blow toy whistles, and act like silly three-year-olds. They have been known to run about the *terreiro*, playing tricks and making all kinds of messes. But they are also quiescent and may render the *abian* motionless at the verge of consciousness for prolonged periods.

As the reception and manifestation of the *orixá* is a reorganization of the consciousness of the initiate, the focus of the initiation process rests on the *abian*’s head. The presiding priestesses set out candles and drape the *abians* in white cloth in honor of the foundation *orixá*, Oxalá. Washed in the herbal infusions of the *axé* of the *terreiro*, each *abian* undergoes the *raspagem*, the shaving of her head by her sponsoring priestess. The *adja* bell is again rung vigorously and, with her head’s preparation of exposure and herbal and sonic intensification, the *orixás* speak through the *abians*

and whisper their names to the priestesses.

With the identities of the manifesting *orixás* confirmed at this level, the *abians* are ready to be presented to the community of the candomblé. They proceed from the *runkó* into the public dance pavilion to the accompaniment of drums and the admiring eyes of the community of initiates, who sing songs in praise of the new initiates. Their heads are made luminous and cool by being painted with *efun*, a white chalky paste. The reference to the color white intensifies the presence of Oxala, the most senior *orixá*, and the foundation of all the others. All work with the *orixá* is built upon Oxala, and so as each *abian* is prepared to receive Iansá, Iemanjá, or Omulú, their heads are cleansed and consecrated by Oxala. The *abians* prostrate themselves before the drums, and then, bent over in the posture of supplicants, they dance before the community to the rhythms of their *orixás*.

The *abians* are ready to have the first offering made to the spirit inside them. Each head has become an important medium for the presence of its *orixá*, and the presiding priestess offers food to the spirits through this altar. Each *abian* holds a small white bird in her hand while the priestesses invoke the *orixá* within. The center point of the *abian's* head, the point of intersection between the spirit and the human, is marked with *efun*. The bird is throttled, its blood poured over the consecrated head and its feathers plucked and struck to the drying blood. The *abians* sit quietly while their *orixás* are strengthened by the infusion of lifeblood.<sup>47</sup>

After a second appearance before the drums and the community, the *abians* receive their final intensification of the head in the form of an incision. A cross is lightly cut in the center of the scalp, literally opening a point of intersection between inner and outer worlds. A thick poultice of the herbs of their *orixás* is rubbed into the spot, again literally placing the *orixá* inside them, inoculating them with the *axé* of their spirit. Their arms and shoulders are also incised with the marks of their *naçáo*, in this case the Nagó-Jeje nation maintained by the *terreiro*.<sup>48</sup>

With the presence of the *orixás* now firmly in place in the heads of the *abians*, they are now considered true *iaós*, brides of their *orixás*. They are ready for their final presentation to the community, this time a large

public feast which includes dignitaries from related *terreiros*. During the festive evening the newly made *iaós* come out three times before the community, each time in different costume and to different rhythms of the drums. On the first emergence from the *runkó*, they are dressed in white skirts with fine long cloths tied around their chests and in bows behind. The first appearance is in honor of Oxala, the foundation *orixá* whose creative color is white. Their heads are again painted with white *efun*, crowned by a small mound of ingredients called *oxu* at the point of their incision.<sup>49</sup> Placed in a band around each forehead is a single red parrot feather, reminding the *iaó* that the white creativity of the male *orixá* Oxala is complemented by the red of the female spirit Oxun.<sup>50</sup> They are bent well forward, from the waist, arms dangling as the drums announce them and their *orixás* to the large and happy congregation. Perhaps as many as three hundred people crowd the dance pavilion and many of the attending priestesses wear the full petticoats of the traditional Bahiana costume which constitutes the formal wear for the women of the candomblé. The priestesses guide them in their steps before the drums, ringing the *adja* to summon and direct the *orixá* in their heads.

On their second excursion they are dressed in the colors of their *orixás*, in the petticoated skirts reminiscent of the Bahiana style but with only the long *pano da costa* tied around their chests. Iansá, the warrior woman like the wind, wears pink skirts with a white tie. Iemanjá, the mother of the waters, wears blue and white like the waves. And Omulú, the earthly father of disease and death, wears multi-colored prints. At this stage the *orixás* within the *iaós* will repeat the earlier, private disclosure of their names for the public at large. The drums play the rhythms of each of the *orixás* and pause in expectant silence. Each *iaó*, cradled by a visiting dignitary or sponsor who will witness the presence of the *orixá*, in turn whispers her *orixá* name. The dignitary relays the name to the congregation, and amid their applause and delight, the drums sound the *orixá's* rhythms while the spirit in flesh dances joyfully to the songs of the community.

On their final appearance the *iaós* are dressed in the full regalia of their *orixás*. Iansá dances in pink taffeta, her head surmounted by a high-

peaked, studded pink crown with short lines of beads covering her face. She carries a bouquet of long lilies in her right hand and a short, ornamental copper sword in her left. Iemanjá wears white. Her crown is smaller and clear beads shield her face. Her bouquet of lilies is tied with a blue ribbon, and she holds the *abêbé*, the white metal mirror and fan of a great lady. Omulú's costume is the most dramatic of all. His head is covered in the *íko*, a great cone of dried raffia, golden palm straw from Africa. His skirt is also of raffia. In his hand he carries the *xaxará*, a short ornamental broom which sweeps the *terreiro* free of disease and death. Each *orixá* dances before the drums while the community opens itself to the reinvigorated *axé* that the newborn spirits bring to the *terreiro*.<sup>51</sup>

Sarno's film concludes with the public presentations of the fully "made" *iaós* incorporating their *orixás* in full regalia. The strict seclusion of the *trunkô* has come to an end, and only a few rites remain to reintroduce the *iaós* to the world that they left behind. Notable among them is the *paná*, a necessary but informal rite among candomblé initiates that brings the *iaós* from their long seclusion back into the world of everyday exchanges. The *iaós* are made to pantomime ordinary activities like cooking, cleaning, and selling, while great sport is made of their efforts.<sup>52</sup> At one point the *iaós* are "sold" at auction to the highest bidder, an opportunity for sarcastic humor, but also a serious way to raise money for the expenses of the initiation, and to set what will be longstanding relationships of patronage and mentoring.<sup>53</sup>

In many candomblé houses the process of making a *iaó* is brought to a conclusion with attendance at Mass at the Church of Bonfim, thus fully integrating the *iaó* into the official life of the city. Yet the process of initiation is never complete, and the outward ceremonies are only markers of a deepening inner relationship with one's *orixá*. After seven years a *iaó* may be called to make the *obrigação* to receive *deká*, and become a senior initiate, an *ebomin*. Now the *assentamentos*, the altarpiece "seats" of the *orixás* that the *iaó* received at her initiation and which were kept in the shrine room of the *terreiro* will be given over to her own care. As an *ebomin* she is empowered to make her own shrine, and she may transfer the *axé* of the mother *terreiro* to found her own candomblé. Yet she

always must remain loyal to the mother house and greet her superiors with the prostrations required of her. The mother *terreiro* still retains some of the *axé* of her initiation in its shrine room. This symbolic control is far-reaching although, in fact, the loyalty of daughter houses is perhaps challenged as much as it is honored.<sup>54</sup>

Sarno's film shows a continual intensification of the presence of the *orixá* in the heads of the initiates. The *orixás* first manifest themselves in disturbances to the heads of their children. They call human beings through life-transforming, perhaps life-threatening, events such as disease and accident. By clearing the head of its outward coverings and inner distractions, the presence of the *orixá* is recognized within the individual. The confirmation of this presence is found in the altered state of trance, when the spirit incorporates itself in the body of the human medium. The public presentation of the *orixá* in the body of the devotee is the most direct experience of the spirit that might be shared within the community. It is the desideratum of the candomblé gathering. As the individual is under "obligation" to manifest the spirit in her own person if called, the community performs its *obrigação* in manifesting the spirit in dance. The *orixás* are available to the community of the candomblé by the preparation of the *iaó* through her initiation. They are shared through the controlled construction of ritual time and space by means of festal offerings, drum and vocal music, and dance. The original meaning of the word candomblé is a kind of drum rhythm, a rhythm that activates the spirits to manifest themselves in dance.

#### *Festa dos Orixás*

We have seen that the distinctions among the various African ethnic groups in nineteenth-century Brazil were expressed in the different *nações* or nations of the candomblé. What made a *nação* a *nação* was the community's fidelity to a complex of gestures of service known to be, for example, Kêtu or Jeshá or Jeje. The complex is made public and shared in the drum rhythms, songs, and dances of the *obrigação*. A candomblé is a house united by its rhythms and distinguished from others by its patterns of rhythmic actions. A priestess in Sarno's, *Lawo* uses the phrase, "when

the *candomblé* is playing” to describe the ceremonies of the *obrigação*.

Each *candomblé* house has determined a liturgical calendar in which each of the major *orixás* is given an annual public *obrigação*. The cycle of the ceremonies may once have depended on the Catholic calendar since the feast days of saints provided some of the few opportunities for Afro-Brazilian gatherings and expression.<sup>55</sup> Though some elements of the Catholic correspondences remain in the festivals, the cycle is determined today by an annual divination among the senior houses, and the calendars of the houses are aligned with each other.

Though each *orixá* takes its turn as the *dono da festa*, the owner of the feast, all the *orixás* of each *terreiro* are honored at the *dono's* ceremony. The structure of these ceremonies is generally the same. One of the most important *orixás* honored in Bahia is Oxossi, the hunter-king. Oxossi, in ancient times, was the king of Kêtu, one of the most prestigious of the Nagô homelands in Africa. In the ritual time of the *obrigação* he lives on as a regal warrior, hunter, and herbalist. All the *terreiros* of Bahia hold an annual *obrigação* for Oxossi, remembering his past glory and his present power to defend, feed, and heal his community.

On a clear afternoon in the warm Bahian winter of 1991, a festival for Oxossi is being prepared at Casa Branca, the oldest Nagô house in the city. On this site, once well beyond the city of Salvador, was an old sugarmill which gave shelter to the *iyalorixás* who had repaired there in the nineteenth century to escape frequent police persecutions. Now the city has engulfed Casa Branca, a few acres of steep hillside ringed by crowded, busy neighborhoods. Cut high into the terraced slope is a long, one-story building, gleaming with fresh whitewash. It dominates several small, equally bright outbuildings, large herb and vegetable gardens, a well, and a number of sculptures. The trunk of a huge ficus tree is tied with a large white cloth bow, a shrine to *irôkô*, the cosmic tree which grounds the *terreiro* to the holy mother earth.<sup>56</sup> The outbuildings are shrines to some of the *orixás*, Exu and Xangô in particular. The white house is reached from the street below by a long twisting staircase which ends at

an entrance located well to the left of the building. Inside is the *barracão*, a large dance pavilion with a high ceiling and tiled floor. To the right are the private rooms of the *terreiro*: the *ruinô* seclusion room for the novices; altars for the *orixás*; vesting and storage rooms; work space and kitchens.

Preparations for the *obrigação* for Oxossi have begun many days before the public service this evening. The *barracão* has been decorated with Oxossi's colors and emblems. Oxossi's herbs have been freshly picked from the forest and now carpet the floor of the *barracão*, giving it the look of the forest and the pungent smells of fresh greenery. An ensemble of foods sacred to Oxossi has been prepared according to the strictest rules of slaughter, cooking, seasoning, and presentation. Guinea fowl have been purchased in the market and prayerfully slaughtered by the *axôgún*, the *ogan* charged with Ogun's knife. On the day of the feast the dressed meat has been cooked and seasoned in the forest plants of Oxossi's domain. The fowl together with the *orixá's* dish of *axoxô*, corn cooked with coconut, have been arranged before Oxossi's fundamental symbols in the *pegô*, the inner shrine room of the *terreiro*. The light liquor *alua* has been prepared. Tonight these foods will be shared with all the *candomblé* that they may join in communion with the *orixá* and each other.

At sundown the festival is officially opened with an offering to Exu, the liminal spirit who “clears the way” for the others. Like Haiti's Legba, Exu lives alone at the borders of the human world, forever “on the road.” Water, rum, and manioc flour fried in *dende* oil are presented with songs to the dangerous spirit at his house on at the edges of the *terreiro*. Then they are literally thrown into the street, to “send Exu away,” so that he will cross over to the world of the spirits and guide them to the human community, and so that he will not linger to disrupt the ceremony with his restless energy.<sup>57</sup> A song calls upon Exu in his elemental manifestation as *iná*, fire:

Iná, I present you with my humble respects

Iná, Iná, I present you with the respects of the world

Iná, don't come with cruel thoughts  
Iná, Iná, don't come with cruel thoughts for the world  
Iná, Iná, come and protect the world.<sup>58</sup>

Once Exu has accepted the offering, the conditions have been established so that the *orixás* might manifest themselves among their children in the *barracão*. Drummers arrive and tune their instruments. Dignitaries from other communities are greeted and seated in places of honor. The seniority and spiritual accomplishments of each member and visitor are marked through the formal courtesies of prostrations, handshakes, and embraces. Everyone presents himself or herself to the drums. Friends and neighbors of the *terreiro* arrive and find seats along low backless benches toward the main door. Even some tourists come to sample the pageantry of a candombe festival. Many are armed with cameras and likely frustrated by the signs on the *barracão* walls forbidding photography.

The room is a large one, some forty feet square, its stucco walls and tile roof painted bright white. Radiating from the top of a central column are strings of sky-blue streamers which shimmer with the movements of the people gathering below. This bright pale blue is Oxossi's color, and it appears in decorations throughout the room. The walls are hung with shields of Oxossi, decorated with his hunting symbols of bow and arrow and powder horn. A small shrine to one side of the room features statuettes of Catholic saints festooned with fresh-cut flowers and herbs. Near a small, balustraded enclosure for the drummers at the back of the room stands a larger statue of Oxossi, dressed in his characteristic soft leather hat. The eye is taken back, though, to the center of the room. Surrounding the top of the central column is an ornate baldaquin, a fabric canopy in gold and blue.

The column is called "the staff of Oranmiyan," a reference to the ancient pole at the center of the world in Africa.<sup>59</sup> At its base, in a small recess beneath the tiles is the *entoto*, the most powerful concentration of the presence of the spirits, the *axé* of the entire community. The *entoto* is the residue of all the works of the *terreiro*, the foundation symbols of the

community patinated with a portion of every sacrifice conducted within its precincts. It is the *terreiro*'s link with Africa and the earth itself. Surrounding the column and the *entoto* are ten or twelve formal wooden chairs. These are placed facing outward, in the four compass directions. Senior *iyalorixás* and *ogans* from different candombe houses are seated in them.

At last three of the white-clad *ogans* who have gathered in the corner of the *barracão* take their seats behind the three drums. These are handmade, conical, staved drums of the "conga" type.<sup>60</sup> The largest, called the *rum*, directs the rhythms of the other two smaller ones, the *rumpi* and the *lé*. All three are grounded in the metal bell, *agôgô*, which keeps the basic time. The heads of the drums, like those of the human initiates, have been consecrated into the spirit, and so they, too, are mediums of the spirit's voice.

As the gathering of some two hundred people settles, the drummers begin a series of preliminary rhythms in honor of the spirits. Ten *iaôs*, the junior initiates of the house, begin to file into the *barracão*. They are attended by *ekedís*, older women who support and direct them. They are dressed in their finest Bahiana clothes: brilliant pink and lime floral skirts flaring out over stiff petticoats; starched white lace blouses; and tied around their breasts or waists, shimmering wraps in gold, silver, and white. Their heads are covered with clear white headties. They dance fairly rapidly in a circle around the center column and the enthroned dignitaries. Backs are slightly bent, shoulders loosely hunched, elbows crooked sharply and extended a little from the body. At times their hands clench, at others they open and turn in swimming motions. Their feet are bare and step slowly and deliberately, crushing the leaves on the floor and perfuming the air.<sup>61</sup>

The chief *ogan* begins the first of three or seven songs to each *orixá* to be honored tonight. This is the *xiré*, the "play" or "entertainment" for the *orixás*, calling them to manifest themselves in the bodies of the dancers. "A *xiré Ogun ó*" . . . ("We play for Ogun") calls the *ogan*, and the congregation responds in kind.<sup>62</sup>

Ogun Onire O

Welcome Ogun of Onire

From across the ocean

Captain, you have heard our summons.

When we behold your bloody robes,

Durable father of iron,

We shall step back to let you by.

Welcome Ogun of Onire

Open the way through the bush

Put by your wrath, warrior,

Ogun, come and dance with us.<sup>63</sup>

After perhaps as many as seven songs for Ogun, the congregation takes up sometimes three, sometimes seven songs for each the *orixás* to be honored tonight. Oxossi follows Ogun, then Omulu, Iemanjá, Xangô, Iansá, and Oxun. Each song contains a series of phrases, sometimes intensifying into a single phrase which may be repeated for several minutes at a time. Each sung phrase is given expression and force by loud, hard, and ever-shifting drum rhythms and by vigorous cooperative movement and gestures of the *iaôs*. Each rhythm phrase and dance posture is related to the others. At some point during the rhythms for her own *orixá*, a *iaô*, will leave the circle to dance before the drums. Here she honors her *orixá*, displays her virtuosity, and opens herself for the manifestation of the spirit within her.

For Oxossi the congregation sings again and again in Nagô: "Oxossi shoots his arrow quickly!" Edison Carneiro described an appropriate dance for Ruth Landes:

Suppose that you are dancing for Oxóssi, the hunter. Touch your right forefinger to your left thumb and, besides these, let only your left little finger be extended. Shimmy your shoulders. Shake your arms, but keep your shoulders still. Keep your buttocks turned out. Your feet dance in the same tramp-tramp, but the upper parts of your body move in different rhythms, depending upon the drums. Now, flop your body down from the waist, and sweep it languorously from one side to another. Twist your pelvis around.<sup>64</sup>

Rhythms, dances, and songs follow for each of the other *orixás*, and it is some two hours before the cycle is completed. As the master of the feast, Oxossi has been the first to manifest himself in the body of the *iaô*, and he now calls each of the other *orixás* to come to the celebration. Each of the *iaôs* has come forward before the drums and either immediately or shortly thereafter has received her *orixá*. It is clear that it is this manifestation of the presence of the *orixás* that the congregation has been waiting for. All eyes watch expectantly as each of the *iaôs* begins the movements which indicate the incorporation of her *orixá*. As she dances before the drums, the drummers switch into the concentrated *adarrun* rhythm, "the voice that you have to say yes to."<sup>65</sup> Supported by the *ekedis*, the *iaôs'* bodies bend rapidly from the waist, thrusting forward, then well backward. Their shoulders shift as rapidly, back and forth, in a shuddering motion. An *ekedi* will often place her hand gently behind the head or under the chin of the rocking *iaô* should the movements become too sharp. Eyeglasses are removed, necklaces readjusted, and the shawl adjusted to bind the body of the *iaô* to its *orixá* head, like a horse is bridled for its rider. They will often give a shout in Nagô to show that the *orixá* is now in place.

In the film *Lawo*, a senior priestess describes her feelings as the *orixá* begins to manifest itself in her body:

I feel this way when the *candomblé* is playing . . . that the Orisha wants to get me, my legs tremble, something reaches up that takes over my heart, my head grows, I see that blue light, I look for someone to grab but can't find anyone and then I don't see anything anymore. Then everything happens and I don't see. Then I think that the Orisha must be something like a wind, it comes toward you like a wind and embraces you. Like a shock in my heart, my heart beats as fast as the lead drum plays, my head grows, and it seems like I see a blue light ahead of me and a hole appears in the middle of the room. Then I want to run, to grab someone, but people seem far away, out of reach. Then I don't see anything anymore.<sup>66</sup>

The spirit-filled dancers come, one by one, to dance alone a final time before the drums. Then, escorted by the *ekedis*, they retire to the dressing

rooms beyond the *barracão*. When the last *iaô* leaves the room, the drums stop, people stretch and chat, and await the return of the spirits in glory.

Roger Bastide calls the long first phase of the *obrigação* the "danse d'appel," the dance of appeal to the *orixás*, invoking them to manifest themselves amid the community within their *iaôs*. After a short time, the spirits will return in a "danse de dieux," "dance of the gods," a royal procession of the *orixás* enthroned in their mediums.<sup>67</sup> The drummers return to their places and take up the processional rhythms. The congregation comes to attention and stands. Expectant smiles are on all faces as a pair of *ekedís* emerge from the vestuary and flank the door to the *barracão*. In single file, the *orixás* emerge into the hall enthroned in the heads of their mediums, mounted on their human horses. The *iaôs'* faces are serene, their eyes downcast. Each wears gleaming regalia and their dances are stately and aloof.

First to emerge are two Oguns, the hard *orixá* of iron and blood. They wear chromed helmets, winged like those of ancient charioteers. Silver chains clank on their bright metal breastplates, armlets, and wristlets. They are armed with short straight swords. Following the Oguns come two Oxosis, dressed as the royal hunter of Kêtu. They wear soft leather hats and jerkins of untanned buckskin over their flaring Bahiana skirts. Each holds the *odé*, the bow and arrow of Oxossi. These are cast in one piece in gleaming silver metal. One of the Oxosis holds a small ornamental blunderbuss intricately worked in shining brass. Both have powder horns in silver draped around their shoulders. Omulu follows, trembling beneath his raffia *iko*, the golden palm straw crown that hides his face and upper torso. It is wrapped at the top in an elaborate cincture of black cloth and beads. He dances vigorously with the *xaxarâ*, the leather, shell-and-bead-wrapped broom with which he sweeps away disease and misfortune. Next is Iemanjá, the mother of the *orixás* and owner of the seas. She is dressed in white and blue and wears a silver crown that dangles clear beads before her impassive face. In one hand she carries a curved silver sword hugged tightly to her breast, in the other hand she delicately turns the *abêbé*, her mirrored fan. Two manifestations of her son Xangô follow, crowned, both with an *oxé*, or doubled-headed axe, in

each hand. Xangô's senior wife Iansá is next, crowned in shining copper and carrying a copper sword and an *iruke*, a black, horsetail flywhisk, symbols of her fiery military strength and her royal power. Last is Oxun in bright yellow with a brass crown and *abêbé*. All the clothes and instruments are kept secure in Casa Branca's vestuary, bright clean and ready for these moments.

The appearance of the *orixás* into the *barracão* is like a burst of light, dazzling and multifaceted. The polished crowns and instruments, and bright silk and satins of the garments, augmented by the rhythmic propulsions of the drums startle the senses to appreciate the epiphany of the *orixás* among the congregation. The atmosphere during the royal progress is one of reverence and joy. Bowls of rice and flower petals have been passed around the congregation and handfuls are tossed over the *orixás* as they pass. Nearly every face is smiling; happy whispers are exchanged. As each spirit files by, the congregants hold up their hands before their chests, palms out. It is a gesture of supplication, of openness to receiving the spirit's blessing, and perhaps it also protects the congregate from the power of the *orixá*. At times an *orixá* will leave the line to embrace someone, but these are only brief interruptions of the stately promenade. After several circuits around the *barracão*, each *orixá* comes to dance alone before the drums. The steps are complex and vigorous, and the community watches carefully to evaluate them and learn. Each dance highlights some feature of the personality and history of the *orixá*. Ogun dances with hard thrusts of his sword alluding to his battles. Oxossi Ogun dances with hard thrusts of his sword alluding to his battles. Oxossi picks healing leaves from the forest floor and draws his bow on his quarry. Omulu sweeps away disease and purifies the earth with his *xaxarâ* broom. Iemanjá brings the rolling ocean waves from her breasts. Xangô brings down lightning and justice. Iansá whirls in the storm winds. Oxun dances in luxury and refinement. With each dance the community participates in another phase of its history. Each dancer recalls the great dances of the past and the royal ancestors of Africa who now can emerge in this sacred space and time.

Perhaps another two hours pass. The *orixás* begin their final circuit of the *barracão*, turn one last time to the congregation, and back into the

vestuaries. The drums come to a hard stop and the formal ceremony ends. Intimates of the *terreiro* and invited guests may now partake of Oxossi's feast. His foods are presented once again before his shrine in the sanctuary and then shared by those present. People sit casually around tables and benches and talk of the music and dancing. The *iaós* will spend the night in the *terreiro*, attended by the *ekedís*, and gradually their *orixás* will leave them. There is often a lengthy transitional period when the *orixá* is replaced by its *erê*, the child spirit who manifests itself at the threshold of *orixá* consciousness. The night has been a good one. Oxossi is pleased with his ceremony, and the *terreiro* is renewed with the power of the hunter king of Kêtu.

## S P I R I T

The spirit of candomblé is the royal power of the *orixás* made present in the dances of their courts in Brazil. The candomblé rejoices at the public reinfusion of divine power. The members reaffirm their identity as Brazilian descendants and participants in African nations, they recognize the presence of the ancestors within and among them, and they share and show that power to serve the spirits and each other.

If the Haitian *ounfo* shows a world of revolutionary power and the easy familiarity of men and women of the land, the candomblé looks to the royal courts of Africa. While it may borrow elements of protocol from the Portuguese and Brazilian courts of Brazil's past, or from the still older ceremonials of Roman Catholicism, the candomblé *terreiro* faithfully carries on the royal traditions of Kêtu, Oyo, Ifesha, Oshogbo, and many others. In the services of the *ounfo*, the *lwa* enter into the drama of the ordinary lives of their Haitian serviteurs. They speak, joke, curse, prophesy. They are outsized images of and for the Haitian social environment: precarious military strength; lust of refinement; cousin farmers; and mocking death. The Brazilian *orixás*, by contrast, seem aloof, incarnate in the pageantry of the royal progress and dances of the *barracão*. They are dressed in extraordinary finery, wielding the most elaborate regalia. And amid this formal, hieratic display, they don't speak. The faces of their

horses are without affect, eyes are nearly closed, masks to reveal the *orixá* manifesting itself through them.

The candomblés of Bahia were unique among the communities of the African diaspora in the degree to which they were able to maintain continuous and reciprocal contacts with Africa. Yet, while the elite candomblés can all boast members who have visited Africa, the great majority of Bahians experience the mother continent in the dances of the *barracão*.

Roger Bastide notes how the architecture of the candomblé reproduces Africa in reduced form. Drawing a parallel with the Christian church's reduction of pilgrimage to Jerusalem into the stations of the cross in a Catholic cathedral, Bastide writes:

The *candomblés*, with the temples, the *pegi*, the groves of sacred trees, the houses of the dead, the spring of Oxalá, represent a reconstruction of the lost Africa. Moreover the first sacred stones were actually brought over from Africa, still impregnated with the supernatural force of the *orixás*—a force that, through mystic participation, was transmitted to the whole of the surrounding space.<sup>68</sup>

To enter the candomblé is to make Africa present, either by returning to Africa or bringing Africa to Brazil.

At Casa Branca the center pillar, the "staff of Oranmiyan," orients the community to Africa, the origins of the candomblé and of the earth itself. The staff is planted in the earth, connecting the community of Brazil with the earth of Africa. It brings the sky, the realm of the *orixás*, together with Onilé, the earth and ground of all life. By its reference to Oranmiyan, an ancient king of the Nagô people, the pillar has been likened to a phallus impregnating the cavity of the earth, engendering *axé*, the creative power of the universe.<sup>69</sup> At the pillar's base is secreted the *eroto*, containing the foundational symbols of the community, originally brought from Africa by Iyá Nassô a century and a half ago. The rhythms, songs, and dances call the *orixás* out of the earth, separating them out of the *axé* of the *eroto* into the personalities that will manifest themselves in the dancers. The invocation to each *orixá* is accompanied with bows "with eyes on the

For a discussion of its African roots, see Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, pp. 188-191.

46. Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, pp. 166-167.
47. Lowenthal, "Ritual Performance."
48. Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, pp. 175-176.
49. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 250.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
51. Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, p. 150.
52. Dunham, *Island Possessed*, p. 122.
53. Lowenthal, "Ritual Performance," p. 404n.
54. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 251-252.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 252. Other descriptions of the yanvalou may be found in Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe*, p. 42; Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, p. 190; Dunham, in *Island Possessed*, p. 135, calls the yanvalou the "signature of vaudun."
56. Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, p. 86.
57. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 254.
58. Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, p. 171.
59. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 256.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 258-259.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
63. Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, pp. 101, 100.
64. Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe*, p. 22.
65. The notion of *potò-mitan* as center and *vèwè* as edge is taken from the work of Karen McCarthy Brown who demonstrates the spirituality of spatial arrangement. See *The Vèvè of Haitian Vodù*.
66. Antoine Gérard Breton, "Le Poteau-Mitan," in *Cahier de Folklore et des Traditions Orales d'Haiti* (Port au Prince: l'Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique, n.d.), p. 133. This is a collection of student papers from the Faculté d'Ethnologie in the early 1970s under the direction of Max Benoit.
67. See Larose, "The Meaning of Africa," pp. 89-92.
68. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, p. 174.
69. Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*.
70. Courlander sums up the possibilities for this delineation of the lwa: "The 'surname' of a lwa can be a description of 'tribal' or 'national'

affiliation, regional provenience, character and temperament, or an indication of function." Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe*, p. 26.

71. Karen McCarthy Brown, "Systematic Remembering, Systematic forgetting: Ogu in Haiti," in *African's Ogun: Old World and New*, edited by Sandra T. Barnes. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) p. 78.
72. Dunham, *Island Possessed*, p. 128.
73. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 31.
74. Dunham, *Island Possessed*, p. 92.
75. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 249.
76. Deren, *Ibid.*, p. 249.
77. Several writers have looked upon this as a problem of interpretation. See Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, pp. 29-38; Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, p. 187; and Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe*, pp. 75-76.
78. Laguerre, *Voodoo Heritage*, p. 125.
79. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 235.
80. Dunham, *Island Possessed*, pp. 131-132.
1.
  3. *Candomblé in Brazil*In Portuguese "candomblé" is ordinarily preceded by an article in both its generic and specific applications. In English we drop the article before generic nouns, and so refer to the tradition under investigation as "candomblé" without a "the" or "a" preceding it. In more specific contexts the article might be appropriate when referring to the physical site of the ceremonies or the community of devotees: "there is a candomblé in the Cabula neighborhood," "the candomblé of Mãe Stela."
2. A rough analogy might be found in the English word "church." We use the term "the church" in reference to both the building in which ceremonies are carried out and the community that performs them. If outsiders unfamiliar with Christianity were to refer to the entire tradition as "church," it would not be too different from the situation in Bahia.
3. Pierre Verger, *Bahia and the West African Trade: 1549-1851* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964), p. 31.
4. Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 89, 268. Curtin estimates that 12.5 % of

all Africans carried to the Americas during the four hundred years of the slave trade went through Bahia.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 240–242. Curtin discusses the imprecision of the term “Mina,” showing that it meant different things at different times to different people. For the use of the term among the Portuguese, see p. 186.

5. Verger, *Bahia and the West African Trade*, pp. 32–33.

6. Quoted in Robert Edgar Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 405. Islam played a key role in many of these revolts, and they seem to have been organized more on Islamic lines than on ethnic ones. The slaveholders' recognition of this led to attempts to exclude Muslim slaves from Brazil, and many Brazilian Muslims were deported. After the great rebellion of 1835 the chief of police in Bahia reported (*ibid.*, p. 410):

Generally speaking, almost all of them can read and write in unknown characters which are similar to the Arabic used among the Ussás [Hausa], who now evidently have made an alliance with the Nagós. The Ussás are the nation which in earlier times rebelled on several occasions in the province, having later been replaced in this by the Nagós. Teachers exist among them who give lessons and have tried to organize the insurrection, in which many free Africans, even rich ones, were also involved. Many books have been found, some of which, it is said, must be religious precepts derived from the mingling of sects, mainly the Koran.

The Islamic heritage is remembered in contemporary candomblé by the Yoruba word ‘Malé [Islam] which is appended to some rites to indicate their origin among the community's Muslim forbearers.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 403.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

9. Adele Toussaint—Samson, writing in 1891, reproduced *ibid.*, p. 86. Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado tells a story common in candomblé lore in which the African spirits, incarnated in their human mediums, physically battle and vanquish the police squadron intent on disrupting the candomblé. See his celebration of Afro-Bahian life, *Tent of Miracles* (original Portuguese ed., 1969; New York: Knopf, 1977).

10. Mikkelle Smith Omari, *From the Inside to the Outside: The Art and Ritual of Bahian Candomblé* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History,

UCLA, Monograph Series No. 24, 1984), p. 18.

11. See Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, *Os Africanos no Brasil* (1906; 2d ed., São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1935); Arthur Ramos, *The Negro in Brazil* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1939); Donald Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil: A Study of Race Contact in Bahia* (1942; Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967); Edison Carneiro, *Candombles da Bahia* (3d ed.; Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1961); Vivaldo da Costa Lima, “Nações-de-Candomblé,” in *Econômico de Nações-de-Candomblé* (Bahia: Iannamá e Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais, Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1984).

12. Pierre Verger, *Trade Relations between the Bight of Benin and Bahia from the 17th to the 19th Century* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1976); Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, pp. 239–244.

13. Pierre Verger, “Nigeria, Brazil and Cuba,” *Nigeria* (October, 1960). In a personal conversation Didi Dos Santos told me of his mother, Mãe Aninha of Opô Afonjã, visiting Kêtu in post-emanicipation times and arranging the passage of African priests back to Brazil.

14. Carneiro, *Candombles da Bahia*, pp. 61–62. See also Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations* (1960; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 165.

15. In the late 1930s the North American anthropologist Ruth Landes met a famous senior candomblé priest, Martiniano de Bonfim. Martiniano had been sent to Africa by his parents in fulfillment of their promise to the spirits to educate their son. Landes likens this exceptional, but well-understood, Bahian pattern of study to British colonialists sending their children to Oxford and Cambridge. Ruth Landes, *The City of Women* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 22.

See particularly Rodrigues, *Os Africanos no Brasil*.

16. Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, p. 276.

17. Carneiro, *Candombles da Bahia*, p. 63.

18. While there are considerable differences of opinion about the relative merits of various houses, during my short visit to Bahia in 1991, these three were universally considered the most senior and authentic candomblé communities in the city. Mikkelle Omari points out that there are other important Nagô lines in Bahia, particularly that of the

- Alaketu house which claims a founding date of 1636. Omari, *From the Inside to the Outside*, p. 53n18.
20. Carneiro, *Candombles da Bahia*, p. 56. While Carneiro's União das Setas Afro-Brasileiras da Bahia has not survived, a number of successor and rival organizations have arisen to carry on the same work. One national group that has been particularly generous to me in my research is the Instituto Nacional e Órgão Supremo Sacerdotal da Tradição e Cultura Afro-Brasileira.
  21. Claude Lepine, "Os Estereótipos da Personalidade no Candomblé Nagô," in *Olôôrisá: Escritos sobre a Religião dos Orixás*, edited by Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura (São Paulo: Agora, 1981), p. 24.
  22. Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, p. 276.
  23. Landes, *City of Women*, p. 80.
  24. Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, pp. 113-119.
  25. Roger Bastide writes: "I have observed over and over again that in northeastern Brazil these black brotherhoods are composed of the same individuals who frequent the *candomblés* and even hold high positions in them." *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- Each of the three elite *candomblés* is dedicated to a Catholic saint and has the legal status of a Catholic brotherhood. For more information on these brotherhoods and sisterhoods, see Sheila Walker, "The Feast of Good Death: An Afro-Catholic Emancipation Celebration in Brazil," *Sage: A Scholarly Journal of Black Women* 3.2 (Fall, 1986); Luiz Cláudio Dias do Nascimento and Cristiana Isidoro, *Boa Morte em Cachoeira* (Cachoeira, Bahia: Centro de Estudos, Pesquisa e Ação Sócio-Cultural de Cachoeira, 1988); and A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists: The Santa Casa da Misericórdia of Bahia, 1550-1775* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).
26. Ruth Landes tells us that Menininha of Gantois met the father of her children when he took sanctuary from the police in her *candomblé*. *City of Women*, p. 147.
  27. Omari, *From the Inside to the Outside*, p. 17.
  28. Meville Herskovits seems overly critical of Carneiro's and Landes's assertions about the prominence of women. While he rightly stresses the importance of *ogans* in the hierarchy of the *candomblés*, he does not offer any evidence to contradict the preeminent leadership of

- women in the Nagô terreiros. See Melville Herskovits, "The Social Organization of the Candomblé," in *The New World Negro*, edited by Frances S. Herskovits (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1966), p. 230.
29. Landes, *City of Women*, p. 142. Sheila Walker refers to her teacher, Mãe Stela of Opô Afonjã, as Stela of Oxossi, after the priestess's patron *orixá*, Oxossi, the royal hunter of Kêtu. See "Everyday and Esoteric Reality in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé," *History of Religions* 30.4 (1991) One of the characters in Jorge Amado's fictional homage a Afro-Brazilian culture, *Tent of Miracles*, is known throughout the novel as Rosa of Oxala.
  30. Landes, *City of Women*, p. 36.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
  32. Vivaldo da Costa Lima, "Os Obás de Xangô," in *Olôôrisá: Escritos sobre a Religião dos Orixás*, edited by Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura (São Paulo: Agora, 1981), p. 92. See also Herskovits, "Social Organization of the Candomblé," pp. 236-237.
  33. Herskovits, "Social Organization of the Candomblé," p. 234.
  34. Landes, *City of Women*, p. 82.
  35. Omari, *From the Inside to the Outside*, p. 24.
  36. These are women of the *candomblé* who, for various reasons, are never called to become mediums for the *orixás* and, instead, serve the mediums as *ekedis*, literally "slaves" in Nagô. In her many conversations with *candomblé* women, Landes found that some of these attendants, far from feeling inferior to the *iadés* who enjoyed the center stage of the liturgy, could be somewhat scornful of women who lacked the personal control to avoid trance. See Landes, *City of Women*, p. 42.
  37. Herskovits argues that the translation of *ekedi* as "slave" is unfortunate and finds the word to be derived from the Yoruba *akede* meaning "public crier, proclaimer, herald." See "Social Organization of the Candomblé," pp. 239-240.
  38. See Julio Braga, *O Jogo de Búzios: Um Estudo de Adivinhação no Candomblé* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988).
  39. Robert Voeks, "Sacred Leaves of Brazilian Candomblé," *Geographical Review* 80.2 (April, 1990).
  40. Walker, "Everyday and Esoteric Reality," p. 107.
  41. Mãe Stela of Ilé Axé Opô Afonjã has become a public critic of the

- mixing of Catholicism and candomblé, a leader of a purifying movement of *contrasincretismo*. Sheila Walker quotes from one of Mãe Stela's many newspaper interviews to say: "The period in which we had to hide our religion has now passed. Our ancestors were forced to syncretize the religion in order not to be massacred. We want to stop syncretizing." *Ibid.*, p. 115.
41. Since the costs of the materials for initiation and the commitments of a new life of obligation are very dear, there are many stories of persons delaying their initiations, often with disastrous consequences. As might be expected, many people begin to think twice about promises made in the throes of illness or the heat of ceremonies.
42. *Lawo*. Directed by Geraldo Sarno. Produced by Sarue Films and Mariana Films, 1978. The film credits Juana Elbein Dos Santos's *Os Nagô e a Morte: Páde, Àsè e o Culto Ègun na Bahia* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1975), for its interpretations of the details of Nagô-jeje initiation.
43. It is interesting to compare this metaphor of boat travel with Katherine Dunham's observation about the fellowship symbolism of her initiation. She wondered if the crowding of the initiates in their isolation reenacted the great ordeal of the Middle Passage in slave ships. This historical memory, shared by all African American peoples, would form a powerful model for rites of passage. See Dunham, *Island Possessed* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 79.
44. It is this enormous investment in time which leads many researchers to explain the preponderance of women initiates in candomblé. It is argued by Pierson and Herskovits that men, since they are more likely to hold jobs outside the home, are both more socialized into Euro-Brazilian ways and less free to leave this work for candomblé obligations. Perhaps this may have been more true in the 1940s than today, although nearly all candomblé women seem to have been working outside the home then as they do now. Still they have most often been self-employed in their work. See Pierson, *Negrees in Brazil*, p. 285; and Herskovits, "Social Organization of the Candomblé," pp. 230-231.
45. Jim Wafer says that this bell indicates "the initiate's prisoner-like status." It warns the *iyalorixás* if the *abian* tries to leave. See *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomblé* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 122.
46. Wafer refers to the *eré* as the infantile *orixá* within the neophyte which

- is brought to maturity when it reveals its name in the public ceremony that closes the process. See *ibid.*, p. 129. A long discussion of the idea of *eré* in various areas of Brazil and Africa is offered in Roger Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia: Rite Nagô*, (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1958), pp. 179-202.
47. For a description of this "feeding of the head" see Pierre Verger, *Notes sur le Culte des Orisa et Vodun* (Dakar: L'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, 1957), pp. 79-95. See also Jim Wafer's description of his own *bori* with his immediate reactions and later reflections in *Taste of Blood*, p. 149f.
48. Wafer writes of cuts in the Angola *nação* made at the top of head, the tip of tongue, the back, the upper arms, and the soles of feet. He notes that some houses cut the thighs and buttocks as well. See *Taste of Blood*, p. 144.
49. Margaret Thompson Drewal, "Projections from the Top in Yoruba Art," *African Arts* 9.1 (Fall, 1977).
50. Babalawo Funjiala of the Jeje tradition told me that the red feathers are a reference to a story of resolved strife between Oxala and Oxun. The fathers, *ekojijide*, refer to menstrual blood and female procreativity. Oxala transforms Oxun's menses into the feathers and so the newborn *iaô* is born of Oxala's sperm and Oxun's "blood."
51. Magnificent drawings of these initiation markings, costumes, and instruments can be found in Carybé, *Iconografia dos Deuses Africanos no Candomblé da Bahia* (São Paulo: Raizes, 1980). See also Carybé and Pierre Verger, *Orixás*: 38 desenhos de Carybé, texto de Pierre Verger. Coleção Recôncavo N. 10. (Bahia: Livraria Progresso Editora, 1955).
52. Wafer attended a ceremony of the "marker" of the *iaôs* and speaks of the frivolity and cheer that attends the mock selling (and stealing) of wares. He notes that the *iaôs* were manifesting their *erés*, the child spirits of the *orixás*. *Taste of Blood*, p. 163.
53. Herskovits offers a sympathetic and detailed description of a *paná* in "The Panam, An Afro Bahian Religious Rite of Transition," in *The New World Negro: Selected Papers in Afroamerican Studies*. Edited by Frances S. Herskovits (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966).
54. On the controls among the candomblé generations see Herskovits, "Social Organization of the Candomblé" pp. 234-235.

55. See Roger Bastide, *African Civilisations in the New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 154.
56. Bastide identifies the Brazilian *irókó* as the *Ficus doliara*, called *gameleira branca* in Portuguese. See *Le Candomblé de Bahia* p. 64. Botanical geographer Robert Voeks concurs, noting the substitution that Nagô-Brazilians made when the African species could not be transplanted. See "Sacred Leaves of Brazilian Candomblé," p. 128. Orlando Espin presents an analysis of a myth of *irókó* in both Brazil and Cuba with an interest to "Yoruba-Christian dialogue." See "Iroko e Ará-Kole: Comentário exegetico a um Mito Iorubá-Lucumí," in *Perspectiva Teológica* 18 (1986).
57. For comparative data on Exu see: Donald Cosentino, "Who is that Fellow in the Many-colored Cap: Transformations of Eshu in Old and New World Mythologies," *Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 397 (1987); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), pp. 18-33; Verger, *Notes sur le culte des Orisa et Vodun* pp. 109-140; Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia*, pp. 148-172; Dos Santos, *Os Nágô e a Morte*, pp. 182-199.
- Wafar notes that Exu, more than any other spirit, is approached "in terms of metaphors of inducement." *Taste of Blood*, p. 15. The status of Exu among the *orixás* is ambiguous for on some occasions he can be seen as an *orixá* along side the others and at other times as an aspect of an *orixá*. It is said that each *orixá* has his or her own Exu, sometimes referred to as a "slave" or "child." Dos Santos argues throughout her construction of Nagô cosmology that Exu is a kind of dimension of matter, the creative origins of its force in the world. See *Os Nágô e a Morte*, especially pp. 211-219.
58. Dos Santos, *Os Nágô e a Morte*, p. 190, my translation and abridgement of Dos Santos's Portuguese.
59. Personal communication with José Laureano Santos, priest of Euá, 18 June 1991.
60. For a detailed article on the construction of Bahian drums in the 1940s, see Melville Herskovits, "Drums and Drummers in Afro-Brazilian Cult Life," *Musical Quarterly* 30.4 (1944).
61. A short, but detailed and informed description of Afro-Bahian dance may be found in Margaret Thompson Drewal's "Dancing for Ogun in Yorubaland and Brazil," in *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New*, edited by Sandra T. Barnes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
62. See *ibid.*, p. 220.
63. Verger, *Notes sur le culte des Orisa et Vodun*, pp. 175-206.
64. Landes, *City of Women*, p. 207.
65. Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits, notes to record album "Afro-Bahian Religious Songs", *Folk Music of Brazil*, Album L-13, Collections of the Archive of Folk Song (1942), p. 13.
66. Subtitled text from film, *Lawo*, directed by Geraldo Sarno.
67. Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia*, p. 23.
68. Bastide, *African Religion of Brazil*, pp. 247-248.
69. See Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia* pp. 68-72; and Dos Santos, *Os Nágô e a Morte*, pp. 65-67, 161-181. Bastide notes that the *potau mitan* of vodou is sometimes called the *potau Legba*, linking the phallicism of the penetrating spirit with the cosmic union of earth and sky.
70. Sung by José Laureano Santos, 18, June 1991.
71. Drewal, "Dancing for Ogun," p. 220.
72. Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, p. 281.
73. Landes, *City of Women*, p. 77, 95-97, 128.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.
75. For a systematic construction of Nagô psychology, drawing from African and Brazilian sources, see Dos Santos, *Os Nágô e a Morte*, pp. 200-219.
76. Sheila Walker notes this interior dimension of the *orixá* when she writes: "Since the Orisha represents the deeper, transcendent self of the person, the Orisha is already present in the individual in a latent state. The initiation process serves to teach the person to manifest this level of his or her being, which corresponds to a specific form of higher reality or consciousness, when given the proper stimulus of particular drum rhythms played in the appropriate ceremonial context." "Everyday and Esoteric Reality," p. 120.
77. Landes, *City of Women*, p. 96.
4. *Cuban and Cuban American Santería*
1. Most contemporary devotees of the Cuban tradition of the *orishas* seem to disapprove of the word *santería* as the appropriate term to comprehend the religion. They find it a colonial remnant that over-