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The Taste of Blood

Spirit Possession in
Brazilian Candomblé

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9. Tempo

It is a curious coincidence that the period of field work on which this account is based began and ended in liturgical seasons associated with the *orixás* of trees.

The phytomorphic deities of Candomblé go by a variety of names (cf. Carneiro 1981:178; Lody 1975:71; Cacciatore 1975:50 and *passim*). In Gege-Nagô *terreiros* the best known is Loko, whose name derives from the Ewe language. Loko is regarded as equivalent to Iroko, whose name derives from Yoruba but is less commonly used, even in those *terreiros* that trace their roots to the Yoruba region.

Some people consider Loko/Iroko to correspond to the Angola *orixá* Tempo; others do not (Cacciatore 1977:235). The reason for this difference of opinion probably has to do with a desire on the part of “pure” Gege-Nagô houses to avoid contamination from Angola influences, since the Angola nation has been branded by some anthropologists as the most “syncretistic” of Candomblé (e.g. Carneiro 1981:178, 192; Bastide 1978:205–6; cf. the discussion in Frigerio 1983:12–16).

But I visited many non-Angola houses that cultivated the tree deity under the name of Tempo. Even when I went to Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, the most Yoruba-centric of Bahian *terreiros*, the person who showed me around the grounds pointed out a group of enormous trees with pieces of white cloth tied to their trunks and hanging from their branches, and said they were the “trees of Loko or Tempo.”

Tempo is the only *orixá* who seems to be more popularly known by a name originating in the Bantu languages than by a Yoruba-derived name. The reason for this distinction probably lies in the allusiveness of the word *tempo* itself. Although the name can be traced etymologically to that of a Bantu deity, Zaratempo (Castro 1971:112), the significance of this link has been obscured by the multiplicity of associations that the second part of the Bantu word has in Portuguese.

Tempo means not only “time” but also “weather,” and thus, by exten-

sion, “the outdoors.” There are also several frequently heard proverbial expressions in which *tempo* occurs, for example:

Tudo com o tempo tem tempo.

“With time there is a time for everything.”

Dar tempo ao tempo.

“To give time to time.”

Entregar ao tempo, às águas, e a Deus.

“To hand over [a problem] to time, the waters, and God.”

All of these proverbs have the sense of allowing things to take their course, of trusting in the unfolding of destiny to bring about just resolutions.

Even the Gege-Nagô *orixá* Loko seems to have been influenced by these associations.

One of the first festivals I attended during this field trip was in honor of Loko, at the oldest Gege house in Bahia, on January 17, 1988. I have mentioned earlier that festivals of the *orixás* take place on or close to the Catholic feast days with which they are associated. The only major holy day around that date is the feast of the Chair of St. Peter at Rome (January 18).

A few days later I attended another festival, this time for what I was told was a particular “brand” of Xangô. The mother-of-saint who received Xangô had on a white costume and cruciform crown similar to those worn by the Gege mother-of-saint who received Loko at the previous festival. The most striking difference was that her Xangô carried an *axé*, or double-ax, in one hand, and an enormous silver key in the other. Exceptionally, all the *orixás* at both festivals also wore white.

It was not until months later that I came upon some information that allowed me to speculate about the connection of the two festivals with Tempo. As I have said, there are various forms of the tree deity. Sometimes he is regarded as an *orixá* in his own right, and sometimes as a “brand” of another *orixá*. As Loko he is often equated with the white Xangô (especially in Gege-Nagô *terreiros*), and as Tempo with Obaluaiê (especially in Angola *terreiros*). What is significant about his association with the white Xangô is that this *orixá* is represented iconographically as St. Peter. (Some *terreiros* celebrate this *orixá*, as Xangô Airá, on the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul, in June.)

St. Peter, of course, holds the keys to the gate of heaven, and administers justice to the souls of the departed. There are, I think, a number of ways in

which this symbolism connects him with the *orixá* of Time. At an abstract level, both St. Peter and Tempo are associated with the justice of destiny, and with the notion of an overview of the total pattern of human lives—an overview that is not available to humans themselves. There is a verse in Dante that is relevant here:

Oh predestination, how remote is your root from the sight of those who do not see the *whole* first cause! (*Paradise*, xx:130–32).

At a more concrete level, the compound of Tempo frequently stands just inside the front gate of a *terreiro*. (This was true, for example, at Marinalvo's and Biju's.) The reason I was given for this was that Tempo and the *exus* (whose house is also at the front of the *terreiro*) guard the entrance to the world of the *orixás*—the *barracão* and the room of the saints, which are “like heaven.”

In addition, at one *terreiro* that I visited in Fazendão the low white wall that surrounded the compound of Tempo was shaped in the form of an enormous keyhole, with the tree of Tempo growing in the circular part, and other shrubs and plants in the shaft. This seemed to be a clear reference to Tempo's role as guardian of an entrance.

It appears, then, that even when Loko and Tempo are treated as separate *orixás*, there is a significant overlap in the symbols with which they are associated.

Celebrations in honor of Tempo himself usually take place on August 10, the feast day of St. Lawrence. Marinalvo held a festival for Tempo on that date, a week before my departure from Brazil. It was the last public Candomblé festival I attended.

Marinalvo's explanation of the connection between Tempo and St. Lawrence had to do with the *ferramenta*, or metal sculpture, that is associated with the *assentamento* of the *orixá*. Often the base of the sculpture is in the form of a miniature brazier covered with a grate. St. Lawrence was martyred by being burned alive on a gridiron, although it is said that, by the grace of God, he was able to overcome the fires of his torment. The link with Tempo, according to Marinalvo, is that all the animals sacrificed to Tempo are broiled. Lody writes that the grate is called the “ear of Tempo” (1975:71). This is perhaps because it is to Tempo that people often turn to request justice.

Not all the *ferramentas* of Tempo that I sketched or made notes on included a brazier; but all are surmounted by a little metal banner. This rep-

resents the white flag of Tempo, which flies from the top of a tall bamboo pole in Tempo's compound. Many houses of Candomblé can be recognized from a distance by the fluttering of this flag above trees and rooftops. The use of such a flag is said to be an Angola custom, but it is one that has been incorporated by many non-Angola *terreiros*.

Another frequently occurring element of the *ferramentas* of Tempo is a miniature ladder. The ladder is there, Taís told me, because “Tempo ascends and descends.” Taís added that the ladder is “the same as the banner.” The equivalence of the two was made explicit in one *ferramenta* I sketched, where the ladder, instead of being placed vertically, was located at the top of a metal rod, and extended from it horizontally, in the manner of a flag. Taís said that people leave notes, on which they have written requests to Tempo, between the rungs of the ladder. If the request is benevolent in its intent, it is placed at the top of the ladder; if it is malevolent, it goes at the bottom.

Requests to Tempo may also be made by means of a *troca de língua*, or “exchange of language,” in which ritual experts converse with the spirits. Taís gave me an example:

Ala Tempo, Tempo Zará, Tempo da
Milagongá, Tempo da Muringanga, Tempo
Zirim: assim, Tempo, como você gira prá
frente, eu hei de ver esta pessoa
girando prá 'trás. Ala Tempo!

Ala Tempo, Tempo Zará, Tempo da
Milagongá, Tempo da Muringanga, Tempo
Zirim [these are “brands” of Tempo]: so,
Tempo, as you only turn forward, I have
to see this person turning backward.
Ala Tempo!

Taís added that time itself only goes forward, not backward. But Tempo is capable of reversing the direction of the wheel of fortune for the person against whom such a spell is directed.

Some *ferramentas* of Tempo incorporate various kinds of metal lances, spears, blades, and tools, which Taís said were the “weapons of the slaves [exus] of Tempo.” These “slaves” belong to Tempo, in the same way that other *exus* belong to their *orixás*, but they are also part of Tempo himself—

his “bad face,” as Taís put it. The other *orixás* are separate from their *exus*, and, according to Taís, cannot do evil. Tempo, however, can do both good and evil. Marinalvo’s housekeeper Angélica, who is a daughter of Tempo, said to me “Tempo creates and Tempo destroys.”

One *ferramenta* I sketched had, above the miniature banner, a kind of horizontal propeller or windmill. This is no doubt connected with the notion of time as cyclic. (Since Tempo’s name also means “weather,” the windmill is probably associated as well with the movement of the wind, and the changing of weather patterns.) One Tempo song that Taís sang for me expresses this idea of the revolving of time:

O Tempo virou,
Deixa virar.
O Tempo dobrou,
Deixa dobrar.
{ Vamos brincar com Tempo
{ Até o dia clarear. [bis]

Time [*or* the weather] turned,
Let him turn.
Time bent over,
Let him bend.
{ Let us play with Time
{ Until day breaks. [twice]

(Carneiro also recorded a song for Tempo that expresses the same idea [1964:154; 1981:177].)

The connection between time and rotation is also clear in the name of one of Tempo’s slaves, Exu Gira-Mundo—the *exu* who circles the world, and who is associated with the whirlwind.

There are thus three kinds of movement associated with Tempo. First, he ascends and descends, between the realms of the below and the above. Below are the flames of the brazier and the hell of the *exus*. Above are the white flag and the heaven of the saints. Second, he rotates, reproducing the motion of the world itself, of the seasons, of the heavenly bodies. Third, he bends, as a man bends under the weight of years, and, eventually, he breaks.

Taís sang a song that alludes to this third type of movement. It is asso-

ciated with a brand of Tempo called Tempo de Afunanga (whom Taís called the “Tempo of Battle”).

Na vaquejada eu fui feliz.
*Eu caí do cavalo.
Saravá foi quem quis.
*Eu quebrei o meu pescoço.
*Eu quebrei as minhas pernas.
*Eu quebrei os meus braços.

In the roundup I was happy.
*I fell from my horse.
It was Saravá who wanted this.

*I broke my neck.
*I broke my legs.
*I broke my arms.

(The first and the third lines remain the same in each verse. The second, asterisked, line changes. *Saravá* is usually a greeting in Candomblé. Here, according to Taís, it refers to Oxalá.)

In the dance Tempo performs while this song is sung, he shows the various parts of his body that were broken. As he does so he bends over and becomes increasingly smaller. Finally he has to be covered with a white cloth, so that people do not see what is left of him, because it is a kind of *egum* (spirit of the dead).

One way of interpreting these three kinds of motion of Tempo would be to connect the second two with the first. The turning movement could be seen as a symbol of eternity, and therefore associated with the top of the ladder, to which Tempo ascends; the bending and breaking could be regarded as signifying the ephemeral nature of humankind and of phenomena in general, and therefore associated with the bottom of the ladder, to which Tempo descends.

But there is a problem with this interpretation. I have mentioned earlier that Gira-Mundo, the entity whose name connects him with cyclical movement, is one of Tempo’s *exus*. This suggests that there is something diabolical about the idea of eternity. It is absurd because it is inhuman.

Conversely, if one considers the ephemerality of human existence, it is equally absurd because it is not eternal.

Carneiro writes of Tempo as the deity of "clock time" (1981:177), or what we might call "Newtonian time," since it was Newton who said that "absolute, true Mathematical Time, of itself and from its own nature flows equally without regard to anything external" (quoted in Lindbom 1976:71). This idea of rational, uniform time may, perhaps, be one of Tempo's faces. But there is another face that is at least as important. Tempo is also the god of warped, absurd, grotesque, fragmented, irrational time. Tempo is, in fact, a drunkard.

Tempo is the only *orixá* who drinks alcohol—and he drinks heavily. There are several songs that refer to this fact. This is one of them:

Aê Tempo!
Tempo está embriagado, [bis]
Quem foi que lhe embriagou?

Aê Tempo!
Tempo está embriagado, [bis]
Não conhece nem pai nem mãe.

Aê Tempo!
Tempo is drunk, [twice]
Who was it who got him drunk?

Aê Tempo!
Tempo is drunk, [twice]
He does not know his mother and father.

The tree god is also regarded as a madman. Loko, with whom Tempo is often equated, has a name that, like Tempo's, is allusive. *Louco*, in Portuguese, means "mad," "crazy." Taís told me a story intended to explain how the brand of Xangô called Loko became *louco*.

Xangô was involved in a fight with his sister-daughter-spouse Iañã. Iañã threw her sword at Xangô, and it hit a tree of the type called *pé de Loko* (*ficus sp.*—*Ficus religiosa*, according to Lody [1975:71]). The tree split in two. One half hit Xangô on the head, and he went crazy (*louco*), which is why he is called Loko, and why the tree that struck him bears his name. The other half split open the ground. Xangô disappeared into the crack, and lives there still.

Given his taste for the bottle and his psychotic episodes, it is paradoxical that the tree deity is frequently linked to the Holy Spirit. Several people I spoke to used identical words in making this association. They said, "Tempo is everything," and for this reason is like the Holy Spirit, who is *in* everything. According to Lody there are some *terreiros* in which Tempo is explicitly syncretized with the Holy Spirit (1975:71).

Anthropologists, I think, are in a particularly good position to understand the nature of this paradox.

One of the distinctive characteristics of anthropology as a social science is its goal of "holism." It aims for a complete overview of social life, in which all the different elements are integrated into a coherent synthesis. It attempts, so to speak, to "be in everything," and thus arrogates to itself the perspective of the Holy Spirit.

But there is a difficulty inherent in this endeavor, and it is the same difficulty that makes Tempo a drunkard.

Taís said the reason Tempo can do good or evil to any person is that he has no binding relationships, no family, no home. Having these things, as anthropologists know, entails partiality, partisanship, and a limitation of the universality of one's perspective.

But it is precisely the lack of these things that gives Tempo his taste for the bottle. The question asked at the end of the first verse of the song transcribed above finds its answer in the last line of the second verse. The reason Tempo got drunk is that he has no father and mother. Nor, according to people I spoke to, does he have a wife, siblings, or children. (It is worth noting in passing a contrast with classical mythology, in which Time, in his various forms, has descendants. According to Virgil, for example, "Truth is the daughter of time.")

There is another song that Taís sang me about Tempo's homelessness.

{ Eu avilê
Tempo mavila caçanje. [bis]
Tempo não tem casa,
Ele mora na rua.
Aonde Tempo mora?
Orai, meu Deus,
Mora no pé da cruz.

(Taís was not able to give a precise meaning for the African words in the first two lines of the song. The rest translate as follows:)

Tempo has no home,
 He lives in the street.
 Where does Tempo live?
 Pray, my God,
 He lives at the foot of the cross.

Here we have yet another twist in the story of this complex *orixá*. The mighty god of time, the all-knowing spirit who is present in every cranny of the universe, the ruler of the whole phenomenal world, discovers that he is the most abject of creatures, a homeless street-dweller, and ends up living at the foot of the image of suffering humanity.

It is perhaps for this reason that some *terreiros* associate Tempo with Francis of Assisi, the saint of the stigmata.

The symbolism associated with Tempo, like the symbolism of Candomblé in general, is too rich, contradictory, and context-dependent for me to feel justified in attempting to systematize it more than this.

The people of Candomblé know about the spirits more through interaction with them in various situations than because they are given to analytic speculation about them. When they do objectify the spirits in oral discourse, they are most likely to do so by means of narratives that weave the spirits into the fabric of the social context in which they and their listeners are participants. Such narratives are rarely attempts to reproduce faithfully an authoritative body of knowledge. Mostly they are creative endeavors whose purpose is to relate to the immediate situation the teller's personal and often contradictory experiences with the spirits, in a way that makes those experiences meaningful to both narrator and listener.

I have tried, at least partially, to adopt a similar procedure in writing about the spirits.

* * *

On the morning of Tempo's festival I walked across the dunes to Marinalvo's for the sacrifice. As I approached I could hear the sound of drums and *ngogô*.

The rectangular compound of Tempo is surrounded by a low white-washed wall with an entrance at the front. On one side of the entrance, painted in faded pink letters, are the words *TEMPO DE ÁMUÍLA*, and on the other, *ORIXÁ DO VENTO* ("orixá of the wind"). In the center of the enclosure grows a small tree, of the species known as *arueira*. Strips of

white cloth have been tied around its trunk and lower branches. Under the tree the *ferramenta* of Tempo stands on a small pedestal, and is surrounded by earthenware pitchers, pots, and bowls.

When I arrived the preparations for the sacrifice had already been made. Nine candles were burning inside the compound, and offerings had been placed there: plates of *ebô* (boiled white corn) and *acaçá* (cakes of corn meal), and bottles of beer and wine. Popcorn had been scattered over the offerings and the floor.

Although the sacrifice was essentially a private ceremony, it took place in full view of the street, because Tempo's compound is at the front of the yard. Marinalvo had also invited a local politician to join the half dozen members of the *terreiro* who attended.

There were four chickens to be sacrificed. Zita took one of them, opened its beak, and whispered into it a request to be carried to the *orixá*. Then she and Marta held the chickens while Marinalvo slit their throats. He proceeded to sprinkle the blood of each chicken over the offerings, the *ferramenta*, the vessels, and the interior wall of the compound, while we sang the chant "*Menguê, mengá*." (*Menga* is the word used in Angola *terreiros* for "blood.") He plucked out bunches of feathers, stuck them on the streaks of blood, and sprayed all the offerings with beer.

He called the *orixás* of the children-of-saint who were present. In the case of Gilberto, he did this by holding the point of the bloody knife used in the sacrifice to Gilberto's brow.

Then Marinalvo fell to the ground, with his body half inside the entrance to the compound. He writhed violently, knocking against the walls, and growling. His hands were contorted as in an extremity of anguish. Marta and I held him, to prevent any serious damage to the material vehicle into which the *orixá* had descended.

After about three minutes Tempo got up, put his hands behind his back and his nose in the air, and stalked haughtily around the front of the compound. His shirt was streaked with blood. We proceeded to greet him with full prostrations followed by an embrace. He did not speak, and stayed only long enough to receive our homage.

At the public festival that took place that evening, certain conflicts had been resolved. The chief drummer, whose *otá* had gone into the pot in Tempo's compound some time before, had been rehabilitated. I asked Marinalvo's mother what had happened. She said that Iañçã, the owner of Marinalvo's head, had instructed him to let the chief drummer return, and to permit the relationship that had caused the difficulty.

There were, of course, other problems to take the place of this one. I slipped away from the festival in the course of the evening to go for a walk with Taís, who received Corquisa. Taís had asked Marinalvo to place an offering to Corquisa among the elements of the morning's ritual. Marinalvo refused. As a result, Corquisa said, she had told Marinalvo that his plans for the festival would not work out. He had intended to take both me and Angélica into seclusion. But this had not happened.

In my case Marinalvo wanted to perform a *catulagem* (clipping of hair). In the case of Angélica, whose owner of the head is Tempo, he proposed to initiate her as a daughter-of-saint.

My own reason for declining the next stage of initiation was that I was leaving Brazil in a week, and had too much to organize to be able to afford the time and the emotional gymnastics. Marinalvo knew this well before the festival.

Angélica, however, had "rebelled" (as one member of the *terreiro* put it) the day before the festival, when all the arrangements had been made, and all the ritual objects purchased. I was to have been her little father.

In other words, life in Jaraci continued as usual.

* * *

A few days later, on my second-last night in Brazil, I walked once again to Jaraci, this time to take my leave.

I said goodbye to Marinalvo and the people at his *terreiro*, who wanted to know exactly where I would be going and when I would be back.

I went to Edivaldo's, where Corquisa was waiting for me. On the table under the window, where we sat, she had placed a vase of yellow wildflowers, a ceramic laughing Buddha, and two glasses. One of the glasses was a present for me. We drank beer, and had the last of our long conversations. At the end of it she said that the length of time she had known me was roughly the same length of time as she had been coming to earth. Now that I was leaving, she would be going away too, to let Sete Saia reign. She allowed me to kiss her hand, embraced me, and left Taís's body.

I said my farewells to the people at Edivaldo's, and Taís and I set out to go to Biju's. On the way we decided to stop for a drink at a new bar that had opened on a hillside in the invasion. The bar had been built by a young man called Felipe, whom I had seen a few times bicycling through Jaraci. I recognized him from a distinctive little crease above the bridge of his nose. The bar had a couple of tables outdoors, and a couple more inside. We

were the only customers, and sat indoors because of the stiff breeze that was blowing from the sea. There was a low partition at the back of the bar, behind which Felipe's two children were sleeping. The elder did not look to be more than about two years old.

Taís said Felipe had started young, at the age of thirteen. Felipe said this was a good arrangement, because by the time he was thirty he would be able to retire, and let his children look after him.

There was a tall drum at the back of the bar. I asked Felipe if he was an *ogã*, and he replied that he had been, in a different part of Bahia. He said he was from the same *terreiro* as Marinalvo's ex-boyfriend, Delcir.

The bar had been open only a week, but already it was doing a lively trade. Taís mentioned that a couple of nights earlier there had been several *exus* drinking at the bar, including Taís's own Sete Punhal, who had been making passes at the women present. We laughed at how different Sete Punhal was from Taís.

So the three of us drank on, gossiping about the people and spirits of Jaraci, kidding and philosophizing, finding out from each other how we contended with the human condition.

Taís and I made a move to leave, because we wanted to get to Biju's before it was too late. But Felipe invited us to stay for a complimentary glass of wine. He also took out of its cage a Brazilian cardinal, which he had raised from its chickhood. It ate from our hands, climbed on our bodies, perched on my head, and shat on my sweater.

I have asked myself why it seems important to include this extraneous little scene in my concluding chapter. I think it is because up until that moment I had expected that it would be a relief to be away from the pressures of "the field." But at Felipe's bar I realized that Jaraci was not "the field" in the anthropological sense. It had become my "earth."

Jaracians used the word *terra* ("earth," "land") to refer to a person's native soil.

I recall a party on St. John's day, at Edivaldo's mother's place in Fazendão. Edivaldo's boyfriend—a strong, sensitive young man, who had come from a different part of Bahia, and was subsequently drafted into the air-force—got very drunk and began to weep uncontrollably. When we tried to find out the reason for this display of emotion, he sobbed an explanation: he was so moved that the people of Fernando Pessoa treated him as though he belonged there, as though it was his "earth."

The earth has an important symbolic role in Candomblé. Juana Elbein dos Santos writes that "all the ritual action in the '*terreiro*' is indissolubly

linked to the earth" (1977:57). And Marlene de Oliveira Cunha, in her analysis of the "gestural language" of Candomblé, interprets a number of the most important ritual movements as referring to the earth: beating the earth with the feet during the dance; moving with head bowed and body slightly bent during the *roda*, in order to keep the earth in view; touching the earth, then the forehead and the back of the neck, as a gesture of greeting to the ritual space itself and to individual spirits (1986:144).

The axis of the circular dance that takes place during Candomblé rituals is a hole in the ground covered by a tile (or a small arrangement of tiles, usually in the shape of a square or a diamond). This is referred to as the *terreiro's* "foundation" or *entoto*. The central rite in the founding of a new *terreiro* is the offering of sacrifices to the *entoto*. Later the *entoto* is periodically opened, so that it may be "fed." I was told that Entoto is a brand of the *orixá* Obaluaíê who is connected with the earth.

Felipe, Taís, and I were all relative newcomers to Jaraci. But we all found there an earth in which we managed to grow. This process had not been without its conflicts. But that is part of belonging to an earth.

I realized, at Felipe's bar, that I was glad the people of Jaraci had made me part of their earth; that they had tasted my blood, and that I had tasted theirs.

When Taís and I got to Biju's he already had one visitor, and another arrived shortly after us. Biju soon received his *exua*, Pomba-Gira, and Taís received Sete Saia. We got some wine from Dona Nega's, and a party was under way.

In the course of the drinking Pomba-Gira asked me to accompany her to the house of Exu. She went inside, and I stood at the door . . .

It was the first time I had ever kissed the lips of an *exua*, and this was to lead to a long series of reflections on the interaction between people and spirits.