DRAFT (WORK IN PROGRESS, PLEASE DO NOT CITE)

POMBA GIRA

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

The Pomba Gira is an Afro-Brazilian spirit entity who condenses several related, but distinct, representations of femininity and female sexuality. She expresses the ambivalent, deeply-eroticized power of a particular form of femininity that emerged within the context of a heavily Catholic, male-dominated, urban, multiracial, lower-class, post-colonial culture in Brazil. This erotic power is expressed as a magico-religious power; that is, the Pomba Gira is a figure that is believed to possess the knowledge and resources necessary for the resolution of an array of human afflictions, most particularly romantic and sexual problems. However, a benevolent figure she is not, but rather must be persuaded to aid her human followers with flattery and gifts, most especially items that gratify her vanity or appease her obstreperous temperament.

Like the Devil, Pomba Gira is a folk figure recognized far outside the bounds organized religion. A Brazilian version of the vamp—a sexy, yet dangerous enchantress—she has become a stereotypical character in the Brazilian imaginary appearing in popular prime-time soap operas (*telenovelas*), in literature, in cinema, in popular music, and in street slang.[1] Popular books have been written about her various incarnations attempting to trace them to a real, historical person; yet these endeavors fail to satisfy the legions of her believers, for whom the temporal-historical dimension is

[1] As Reginaldo Prandi also affirmed in "Pombagira dos Candomblés e Umabandas e as Faces Inconfessas do Brasil." Revista Brasiliera de Ciências Sociais. Vol. 9, no. 26. Outubro 1994: 91-102. The most recent example of the Pomba Gira's cinematic appearances is the recent (2001) Brazilian-made film *O Xangô do Baker Street*. The film, a fantastical romp in which the 19th century Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro calls on Sherlock Holmes and Watson to solve a palace intrigue, includes a scene in which the ever-correct Englishman Watson is possessed by a bawdy Pomba Gira and hilarity ensues.

irrelevant.[2] What matters is that she is present in the lives of her followers, either as a source of succor or torment—and often as both.

The term "Pomba Gira" itself is the generic name for a class of female spirits, all of whom share the same fundamental characteristics, as well as a specific denominative. Pomba Giras are *feiticeiras*, a word that lacks a suitable English translation, but which may be rendered as witches or sorceresses—women who deal in magic, especially the so-called arts of "black magic", in order to achieve certain ends. As the modifier "black" suggests, these ends are in tension with more dominant understandings of morality and propriety, as opposed to the "white" magic ostensibly used for socially-approved purposes.

The semiotic characteristics that all Pomba Giras share converge around a conception of undomesticated female sexuality as dangerously ambivalent, and in this as indissolubly linked with *feitiçaria* (sorcery, magic, witchcraft).[3] In this way, the Pomba Gira is part of a larger history of female figures, both historical and fantastical, whose ambiguous sexual status—as widows, whores, adulterers, or sexually promiscuous unmarried women—renders them suspect of participation in the arcane arts of

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[2] For example, the extensive series of Saravá books published by a Rio de Janeiro firm called *Editóra Espiritualista* (Spiritualist Publishing) that are devoted to Afro-Brazilian spirit entities and practices. Also see Maria Helena Farelli's series of books on Pomba Gira: *Pomba-Gira Cigana* and *Pomba-Gira Maria Mulambo* which give a brief history of these entities as well as several chapters devoted to spells (*magias*), prayers (*rezas*), foods and other offerings to Pomba Gira for the achievement of certain ends.

[3] Another interesting example of the linkage between feitiçaria and female sexuality (here coupled in the figure of an "Oriental" harem girl) can be found in the figure of the *Feiticeira*, a tanned-and-toned bottled blonde who became an instant media sensation in the late 1990s for her regular appearances on a popular television variety/game show. Costumed in a miniscule version of a belly-dancer's outfit complete with a white veil that covered the lower half of her face, the Feiticeira's main job was to writhe her scantily-covered hips in front of the show's guests, all the while making vaguely exotic hand gestures reminiscent of "Oriental" dancing girls. Like other young, female television starlets, the Feiticeira soon expanded her empire to print media, including a hugely popular spread in Playboy, as well as beer and exercise commercials, never abandoning at least one component of her costume—the veil—with its allusions to an imagined Oriental world of dancing girls, genies, harem women and fortune-tellers, a redolent mix of sex and the sorcery of seduction.

enchantment, sexual and otherwise. They are the demonesses, witches, temptresses, hags, sirens, shrews and vamps of lore. Unlike "proper" women, whose sexuality is controlled by father, brothers, husbands, or priests and pastors, these women—deliberately or by circumstance—undercut this masculinist system and in this way represent a threat to the order on which it is based. The threat that these women pose is characterized as a dangerous power of seduction, an ability to beguile the unsuspecting (or the unprotected) and enthrall them. Condemned to the margins of their societies, whether symbolically or socially, they are believed to be dangerous exactly because of this transgression of masculinist codes of female sexual propriety.

In Brazil, the connection of the Pomba Gira with a transgressive female sexuality is rendered clear by the spatialized terms used to describe her.[4] Unlike the respectable Brazilian wife and mother, the *dona-da-casa* (housewife), who pertains to the realm of the *casa* (home, lair), Pomba Gira is said to be a "woman of the street": sometimes a whore, other times a courtesan, but always a woman beholden to no single man—a woman who uses her sexuality for her own advantage and not for the purposes of reproduction or marital harmony. The epitome of an unrestrained female sexuality, the Pomba Gira's power of seduction is both alluring and perilous. Alluring for its promise of sensual pleasures, and perilous for she is also Queen of the Cemetery, the quintessential death-dealing *femme fatale*. At the level of the cultural imaginary, she may be said to condense the collective fantasies as well as the cultural anxieties that surround female sexuality, particularly when undomesticated by patriarchal ideals of virginity and marriage. An examination of the various strains of thought and representations that have

contributed to her codification discloses a long history of conflict over the parameters that would define and constrain female sexuality, a reminder of the instability of these parameters and the dedicated efforts—both individual and social—that have gone into this project.

Pomba Gira interacts with human beings in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts, from dreams and divination sessions, to possession episodes. Customarily, however, she is ritually invoked to possess the bodies of her devotees (both male and female) in special drum and dance-based ceremonies that derive from Afro-Brazilian religious traditions. Once incorporated, she typically consults with followers who have come specifically to seek her advice. However, uncontrolled she may also possess the unsuspecting at will, provoking illness and adversity. Whether summoned by the insistent rhythms of the drums (*batuque)*, and the songs (*cantigas)* sung in her honor, or arriving unheralded and uninvited, Pomba Gira is particularly associated with the ambivalences of human desires: their ability to contradict dominant social norms and threaten the structures of that world, or to perfectly actualize these norms. And, because the vast majority of her followers find themselves on the economic and social margins, their relationship to the structures of the dominant world is, at best, a contested one. Thus, in her willful caprice, the Pomba Gira is also credited with the authorship of some of the very afflictions that plague her disciples—afflictions whose successful resolution depends on recognizing her power to satisfy or subvert human volition.

With a brashness that can swing to the vulgar, and a prurient interest in human intimacies, Pomba Gira is at once salacious and determined, coarse and intrepid. Street-

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[4] Roberto DaMatta most famously described the underlying structures of Brazilian society as series of negotiated oppositions between three realms: *casa*, *rua* and *espírito* (spirit). See Roberto DaMatta, A Casa

smart, she knows how to hustle a living, and the profits to be made mining the dark corners of human desire; she knows that strong perfume covers the scent of sweat, and that wine loosens the tongue. She arrives in midnight ceremonies in order to "work" (*trabalhar*), to consult with her admirers and to pointedly comment on their lives—sometimes scathingly, sometimes jocularly—but always bluntly truthful. What she lacks in discretion, she makes up for in candor: "she is scandalous, she speaks only the truth, even if it hurts," in the words of one young admirer.[5] An object of both fear and respect for her individual followers and for the larger community, she is a deeply ambivalent figure: powerful and dangerous, avenging and protective, capable of wreaking the most intricate havoc as well as restoring domestic tranquility. And in return, Pomba Giras reciprocate the ambivalence in which they are held by referring to their followers as "*filhos-da-puta*" (sons of bitches), whom they disdain for their weaknesses and incompetencies, and whom they castigate harshly for any disobedience.[6]

Mischievous and often perverse, a Pomba Gira is never without her own interests, she is said to never be completely trustworthy (*confiável*) or impartial (*desinteressada*).[7] As a result, she is associated principally with the hidden or illicit dimension of desire, especially—but not exclusively—as this may manifest itself in vice, gossip, scandal, deviance, and crimes of passion. In many ways, she incarnates those social desires and behaviors that are common, but negatively valued; the underside of a traditional, Catholic code of social mores that extols feminine virtue, fidelity and maternal respectability. In

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e A Rua: Espaço, Cidadania, Mulher e Morte no Brasil. 6th Edition. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2000.

[5] "*Ela é escandalo. Ela só fala verdade, mesmo que dor.*" Field notes, Nov. 19-24, 2000.

[6] This is a trait that Prandi also notes. See: "Pombagira dos Candomblés e Umbandas e as Faces Inconfessas do Brasil." Revista Brasiliera de Ciências Sociais. Vol. 9, no. 26. Outubro 1994: 93.

[7] Prandi, Reginaldo. "Pombagira dos Candomblés e Umbandas e as Faces Inconfessas do Brasil." Revista Brasiliera de Ciências Sociais. Vol. 9, no. 26. Outubro 1994: 91-102.

this way, she cannot be read outside of a larger framework of traditional Brazilian Catholic morality, especially as this has constructed an ideal of femininity and female sexuality that persists despite the decline of the Church's overt political power in Brazil. In stark contrast to the image of Catholic womanhood promoted by the Church, which divides the female life course into four distinct stages: chaste virgin, faithful wife, sacrificing mother and pious elder, all characterized by the subordination of female sexuality to the purpose of marital harmony and the production of children, the Pomba Gira owns her own sexuality and uses it to her own advantage. Beholden to no man, she is said to be the lover of seven, including Lucifer.[8] This association with vice and sensuality is cogently signified in her plunging decolleté and taste for gaudy jewelry, her alluring dance, her penchant for strong drink and her ever-present cigarette.

Yet neither can she be read outside of a larger context of modern (read disenchanted) civil society, with its social relations mediated by economic transactions and its ethos of consumption. In return for her protection, Pomba Gira demands the most luxurious of feminine vanity items, especially those that signal wealth and the social status associated with it: gold jewelry, expensive perfume, champagne. Yet, because most of her admirers do not actually possess the disposable income—or in many cases even a regular income—necessary to purchase these items, ersatz substitutes, like mathematical placeholders, take the place of real gold and champagne. For example, the jewelry offered to a Pomba Gira is typically yellow-plated, the "champagne", a low grade of fizzy

[8] The number seven has a prominent place in Afro-Brazilian religions as a mystical number, although I have been unable to trace the origins of this belief and its significance. Renato Ortiz suggested in A Morte Branca do Feiticeiro Negro, that it may be a trace of the influence of European occultism or of Old Testament numerology within Afro-Brazilian circles, although there is little direct evidence for this claim. See Ortiz. A Morte Branca do Feiticeiro Negro: Umbanda e Sociedade Brasileira. 1st reprint of 2nd edition of 1991. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1999, 117.

cider known for inducing thundering headaches. Rather than being valuable or expensive in and of themselves, these items serve to reinforce the illusion of wealth-based status—they are "luxury" items refracted through the prism of class. They establish a Pomba Gira's *glamour*: that elusive concoction of style and beauty that suggests wealth, the promise of pleasures to be had and desires to be sated. But, because she operates largely within the lowest of socioeconomic spheres, the wealth and status that a Pomba Gira communicates is spectral; the luxury items she is said to covet largely fake. Yet the glamour she incarnates—however garish—is fundamental. And this suggests that the figure of the Pomba Gira as a religious entity expresses not only the fetishism typically attributed to magic, but the fetishism of class and gender as well. Indeed, perhaps in the end, these are inseparable. This is a point to which I will return, and a point for which the concept of glamour provides an interesting insight. (chapter 3)

Historically speaking, Pomba Gira emerged as a fully-developed entity partially as a result of—and a creative response to—the convergence of several ideological formations: Catholic theodicy and its bifurcation of female sexuality, Afro-Brazilian religions, spiritist understandings of female religious agency, literary and cinematic representations of the *femme fatale*, and popular notions of lower-class femininity, all within a larger framework of possession healing cults among the urban poor. In this sense, the fixation of the Pomba Gira as a quasi-historical spirit entity can be understood as the discursive convergence of widely-circulated notions about femininity, the female body, sexuality and power—a power that is figured either as unruly, dangerous and needing control, or as creative, efficacious and beyond human control. From this perspective, the Pomba Gira is an attempt to make *practical* (ritual, performative) sense

from multiply-determined conceptions of female sexuality, and the tensions and contradictions of this contribute to her highly ambivalent status. She represents a heavily-charged nexus point that is imbued with individually and culturally-resonant desires. And it is this association with desire—whether of the licit or illicit variety—that makes her both powerful and dangerous.

I first met a Pomba Gira, Maria Mulambo to be exact, without knowing exactly what or who she was. After a couple of fruitless months and dissatisfying visits to different Afro-Brazilian religious centers, I was taken by an acquaintance to a candomblé *terreiro* (religious center) on the far outskirts of Rio. The center was located in Acarí, one of the most notorious of Rio's densely-packed favelas[9], bordering the valley of working class suburbs known as the Baixada Fluminense that lie just outside the city limits.

Acarí had gained its fifteen minutes of national fame in the mid-1990s when the escalation of armed violence between warring local drug lords, and a policy of the "wild west"[10] on the part of the police, culminated in more than one police-authored massacre of local residents, most of whom were underage boys suspected of involvement in narco-trafficking. In December of 1995, after an incident in which six young men—four of them under the age of 18—were summarily executed by military police, the secretary of security for the state of Rio de Janeiro, General Nílton Cerqueira, justified the act in the state newspaper *O Jornal do Brasil*, claiming that Acarí was considered a red zone (*zona vermelha*) according to the guidelines of the War Manual of the Armed Forces—an area

[9] Commonly translated as "shantytown", the term favela is not necessarily restricted to those areas of makeshift housing without electricity or sewage that the term "shantytown" suggests. Indeed, some of Rio's favelas are so long-standing that they have had street lamps, sewage and piped water installed by the Brazilian government. Acarí is commonly agreed to be one of the most dangerous favelas in the Rio metropolitan area due to the frequent gunfights that break out between warring drug lords, or between drug lords and local police. It has been estimated that over 40,000 homicides involving the use of firearms occur each year in Brazil (Viva Rio).

of extreme peril for residents and police.[11] Following on the heels of the General's declaration, in April of 1996, hundreds of heavily-armed Civil Police entered and occupied the entire area in an ostensible effort to eradicate the neighborhood drug trade, although it had flourished for years under a system of bribery and regular police pay-offs. This had an immediate and drastic effect on the local economy, particularly those establishments (bars, restaurants, markets, ambulatory vendors) that served the stream of addicts (*viciados*) entering and leaving the area, in itself augmenting a wave of unemployment that only worsened the poverty endemic to the area. Nonetheless, the police occupation was successful in diminishing the most visible drug traffic and its associated elements: omnipresent youth armed with automatic rifles who served as drug runners and lookouts; the constant threats of a rival favela "taking over" the local traffic; and the palpable air of insecurity that hung over the streets. Although the drug traffic was never completely eliminated (nor, given the involvement of a significant international element, could it), its diminishment did lessen the terror under which residents had lived for years.[12]

Perhaps in response to this climate of poverty, despair and terror, Acarí's residents, like many of Rio's religiously-inclined *favelados* (favela dwellers), seem equally split between evangelical Protestants and *macumbeiros*, practitioners of the Afro-

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[10] "Pólitica do faroeste"

[11] *Jornal do Brasil*, 15 December 1995. This incident became known as the Acarí Massacre ("Chacina de Acarí") and caught the attention of the nation, coming two years after the Massacre of Candelária, when a paramilitary death squad opened fire on a group of homeless people, most of them young men, who were sleeping near the Candelária Church in downtown Rio. These two episodes sensitized the nation to the acute problem of police violence against (mostly male) children, as well as the social conditions that in Brazil that have led to an epidemic of homeless youth and their association with drug trafficking and abuse.

The incident that became known as the Chacina de Acarí was not the first of its kind. A survivor of an earlier massacre in Acarí registered an "Act of Resistance" at the neighboring police district (Pavuna) claiming that the military police had entered the favela shooting and, lining up 20 young men behind their cars, executed them with shots to the head (citation)

Brazilian religion known popularly *macumba*, in which Pomba Gira plays a central role. **(ADD: data on evangelicism vs. afro-brazilian religious praxis)** Although the Catholic Church runs two social service centers in Acarí, it is far outnumbered by Protestant Evangelical (largely Pentecostal) centers. Of 38 churches in Acarí, 31 are evangelical, five are Catholic plus the two Catholic-run social service centers.[13] The number of Afro-Brazilian religious centers is far more difficult to say with any precision, due to a variety of factors that will be explained in Chapter Two. (this whole paragraph may be moved to a later chapter)

The terreiro to which I had been led is located an hour and a half by subway from central Rio on a decrepit road dotted with small *barracas* (kiosks or makeshift shelters) that sell eggs, canned good, snacks and other supplies to the neighborhood's residents. Concrete walls separate cinder-block houses in various stages of construction from the street and from each other, the houses getting progressively more makeshift and more densely packed as the road snakes up into the heart of the favela. A single doorway opening on to the street marked the entrance to the terreiro. The doorway was decorated with urns and offerings of eggs and small white balls of flour paste, ritual foods of the spirits. Iron implements encrusted with the dark, viscous residue of blood offerings guarded the doorway, warding away any negativity or evil that might seek entrance.

Being unfamiliar with this particular terreiro, my companion and I arrived just as the evening's ceremony was drawing to a close. The *toque*[14] (religious ceremony) had

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[12] See Marcos Alvito, As Cores de Acari: Uma Favela Carioca. Rio de Janeiro, Editora FGV, 2001: 55-60.
[13] According to Marcos Alvito in his ethnography of Acarí, As Cores de Acari: Uma Favela Carioca. Rio de Janeiro, Editora FGV, 2001: 165.
[14] The term *toque* comes from the verb *tocar*, to touch, to drum. The designation of such ceremonies as *toques* indicated the vital role of the drums in summoning the spirits. Similarly, ceremonies are often referred to as *batidas* or *batuques*, the nominative form of the verb *bater* (to beat), also used in reference to drumming.

started at 6 p.m. and at 10:30, as we walked in the front entrance, the drums had begun to urge the assembled spirits to depart, their incessant throbbing underlining the ritual songs of farewell that would send the spirits back to their otherworldly abode. We walked down a short hallway that ended in a low set of stairs opening on to the *barracão*,[15] which had a small aisle for spectators bordering a larger open space around which the dancing *filhos-de-santo* (children-of-saint) swirled. They were a raggedy lot, each dressed haphazardly in what looked like regular street clothes to my eyes, accustomed as they were to the ritual finery of much wealthier candomblé centers, where I had first attempted to initiate my ethnographic studies. The women had long patterned skirts over their clothing pulled up over the breasts. Some of the men wore all white, but others were dressed normally in light colored pants and t-shirts.

Tall, blonde and obviously foreign, my entrance had caused a ripple of curiosity to undulate among those assembled, working its way to the room's center, where the center's leader swayed in the grip of her spirit. To my discomfit, I was led by one of the members directly into the circle of dancers and introduced to this spirit, Maria Mulumbo de Sete Catacombas. She alone seemed to take the sudden appearance of a white foreigner as nothing out of the ordinary, being accustomed as she is to honorary visits and other acknowledgements of her distinction. Resplendent in a bustier with gold braid and an elegant overskirt of black lace stiffened by layers of underskirts, Maria Mulambo hugged me in greeting and asked if I found her beautiful, a question which I could only affirm. If vermilion nails, lamé, lace, and gold-plated trinkets were the relevant indexes of beauty, she was certainly a model of pulchritude. In response, she offered me a sip of

[15] In the religious vernacular, *barracão* indicates the main ritual area, usually a sheltered space with seating around the perimeter. The word itself means shelter or tent.

her wine and resumed her dance, puffing on her ubiquitous cigarette between sips. I was informed that over the course of the evening Mulambo had polished off several bottles of this particular wine, Martini and Rossi red vermouth, her favorite brand, although she also favors the local sugarcane rum known as *cachaça* and champagne, when available. As she danced she flirted with the audience, who laughed at her lewd comments and suggestive movements as they joined in the singing. But the filhos-de-santo and the drummers—who had been filling the room with rhythm, dance and song for several hours—were exhausted and their ardor was waning. Noting this, Maria Mulambo admonished the crowd brusquely that unless they showed more enthusiasm she would leave. People began to clap with more energy, and a circle formed around her. Satisfied, she swirled around and around, finally allowing the drummer to "pull"(*puxar*) the farewell songs that would accompany her back to the spirit world.

And so it was that Maria Mulambo left the human body that she had inhabited for much of that night, and Nazaré César da Silva, the center's leader, returned. As the spirit left her body, Nazaré convulsed and swayed, three filhos-de-santo ensuring that she did not fall from the force of its departure. Trembling and with unsteady legs, she was led to a chair and handed a glass of water. Upon recovering somewhat, my presence was explained to her, and I was introduced again, for Nazaré claims to have no knowledge of what transpires when she is possessed by one of her spirits.[16]

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[16] This is a common claim among practitioners of possession religions, especially candomblé, which traditionally only recognizes unconscious possession. Whether or not the possessed person is actually unconscious during the possession is, of course, another issue. On the strategic use of the discourse of unconscious possession see: _____. Daniel Halperin analyzed discourses of unconscious versus conscious possession among participants of *Tambor de Mina*, an Afro-Brazilian tradition prominent in Maranhão. See: "*Memory and 'Consciousness' in an Evolving Brazilian Possession Religion*," Anthropology of Consciousness. Vol 6, no. 4, December 1995: 1-17.

It was thus with a mixture of embarrassment, confusion and luck that I began my association with this particular center, Ilé Oriaxé dos Orixás,[17] and with Nazaré. The confusion and embarrassment were to become definitive of my experiences there, for as I was to learn, Pomba Giras delight in discomfiture and disconcertment. Although I gradually became less confused, Nazaré and her various Pomba Gira spirits never lost their ability to disconcert me, however slightly. And this makes sense, for Pomba Giras are female *exus*, trickster spirits who are known for breaking limits, exceeding boundaries—whether of social comportment or of "moral" action.[18]

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[17] As Nazaré explained to me later, the center's name, in the Yoruba language that is typically used for such things, means "os Orixás me deu uma casa de axé", that is, the Orixás gave me this house of *axé* (religious power).

[18] On the exu spirits as messengers, tricksters and otherwise liminal beings charged with mediating the world of the orixás and the world of humans, see: Edison Carneiro, Candomblés da Bahia. 8th Edition. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasiliera, 1991; Roger Bastide, O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô. Revised Edition. Trans. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz; tech. revision Reginaldo Prandi. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001; Reginaldo Prandi, Herdeiras do Axé: Sociologia da Religiões Afro-Brasilieras. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1996; Reginaldo Prandi, Mitologia dos Orixás, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001; Volney Berkenbrock. A Experiência dos Orixás: Um Estudo Sobre a Experiência Religiosa no Candomblé. 2nd Edition. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1997: 223, 229-231, and *passim*.

On the exu spirits as representations of the principle of disorder, see: Fernando Giobelina Brumana and Elda González Martínez, Marginália Sagrada. Trans. Rúbia Prates Goldoni and Sérgio Molina. Campinas, São Paulo: Unicamp, 1991; José Guilherme Cantor Magnani, Umbanda. São Paulo: Editora Atíca, 1991: 45-49.

On the exu spirits as transgressing moral boundaries, see: Liana Trindade, "Exu: Reinterpretações Individualizadas de um Mito." Religião e Sociedade, 8, Julho 1982: 29-36; Reginaldo Prandi, "*Pombagira dos Candomblés e Umabandas e as Faces Inconfessas do Brasil*." Revista Brasiliera de Ciências Sociais. Vol. 9, no. 26. Outubro 1994: 91-102; Monique Augras, "*Maria Padilla, Reina de la Magia*." Revista Española de Antropologia Americana. No. 31, 2001: 293-319. In earlier article, Augras argued that the figure of the Pomba Gira within umbanda circles resulted from the sublimation of the more explicit sexual aspects of the great goddesses of the Yoruba pantheon, in particular Yemanjá, who, as a result of a syncretistic process of association with the Virgin Mary, has come to represent a maternal form of love purged of its erotic aspects. See Augras, "De Yiá Mi a Pomba Gira: Transformações e Símbolos da Libido." In Meu Sinal está no Teu Corpo: Escritos sobre a Religião dos Orixás. Ed Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura. São Paulo: Edicon/EDUSP, 1989: 14-33.

The Exu Spirits

In the vast pantheon of the Brazilian spirit world, which includes Catholic saints as well as orixás—spirits of African origin brought to Brazil with the Atlantic slave trade—Exu is an important entity within the so-called Afro-Brazilian traditions of candomblé and umbanda. In both Yoruba cosmology and in the African-derived religions of the diaspora such as candomblé and umbanda, the orixás are deities that rule over the natural and physical world and the human activities associated with them, having been given this dominion by Olodumare (or Olorum), the originator of the universe and all its inhabitants. They are associated with elements of the natural world: the ocean, the fresh water of rivers, lightning, thunder, wind, tempests, fire, leaves and herbs, iron and the blacksmith's forge, etc.[19] Similarly, human activities such as hunting, fishing,

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[19] The literature on the orixás and African religions in the New World is vast. Here I cite those works that have been most influential to this project. For classic works on Brazil, see: Nina Rodrigues, O Animismo Fetichista dos Negros Bahianos. Civilização Brasilieria: Rio de Janeiro, 1935; and Os Africanos no Brasil. São Paulo: Cia Editora Nacional, 1932; Artur Ramos, O Negro Brasiliero. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasiliera, 1934; Donald Pierson, Brancos e Pretos na Bahia: Estudos de Contato Racial. São Paulo: Cia. Editora Nacional, 1945; Edison Carneiro, Religiões Negras. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasiliera, 1936, and Candomblés da Bahia. 8th Edition. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasiliera, 1991 (originally published in 1948); Manuel Querino, A Raça Africana e seus Costumes. Salvador, Bahia: Livraria Progresso Editora, 1955; Pierre Verger, Notes sur le Culte des Orishá et Vodoun à Bahia et à l'Ancienne Côte des Esclaves. Dakar, Sénégal: IFAN, Memória no. 51 do Institut Français pour l'Afrique Noir, 1957; Verger, Orixás: Deuses Iorubás na África e no Novo Mundo. Salvador, Bahia: Corrupio, 1981 and Verger's Fluxo e Refluxo do Tráfico de Escravos entre o Golfo de Benin e a Baía de Todos os Santos. Salvador, Bahia: Corrupio, 1987; Roger Bastide, Imagens do Nordeste Místico em Branco e Preto. Rio de Janeiro: Empresa Gráfica "O Cruzeiro", 1945; Bastide, As Religiões Africanas no Brasil: Contribuição a uma Sociologia de Interpenetração de Civilizações. São Paulo: Editora USP, 1971; Bastide, O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô. Revised Edition. Trans. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz; tech. revision Reginaldo Prandi. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001; Ruth Landes, A Cidade das Mulheres. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasiliera, 1967;

More recent works that also have become fundamental in the literature are: Claude Lépine, "*Análise Formal do Panteão Nagô*," Bandeira de Alairá: Outros Escritos sobre a Religião dos Orixás, ed. Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura, São Paulo: Nobel, 1982: 13-69; Reginaldo Prandi, Mitologia dos Orixás, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001 and Prandi's Herdeiras do Axé: Sociologia da Religiões Afro-Brasilieras. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1996; Volney Berkenbrock. A Experiência dos Orixás: Um Estudo Sobre a Experiência Religiosa no Candomblé. 2nd Edition. Vozes: Petrópolis, RJ, 1997;

metalworking, and war are thought to be under the protection of particular orixás, as well as particular animals, colors, days of the week, times of day, psychological states, and so forth. Like the ancient Greek gods, their relationships and rivalries form an overarching framework within which human beings live out their lives, and through the dissemination of a vast corpus of mythology and ritual, these characteristics continue to shape the lives of their followers in both Yorubaland and in the diaspora.

Although the orixás in West Africa are predominately associated with family lineages and are mostly venerated within a particular region or city (with some important exceptions), in Brazil, due to the mixture of slaves hailing from various regions, a pantheon of about 20 has become common among followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, regardless of the original geographical and familial association of each orixá.[20] Thus, while Xangô is Africa is venerated principally in Oió and Oxum in Oxogbó, in Brazil they are both revered within the same candomblé terreiro, and indeed, across the various terreiros that together form a particular candomblé "nation".[21] Having said this however, it should be noted that Afro-Brazilian religions like candomblé and umbanda are not centralized, doctrinally-oriented religions. Traditions and ritual practices vary from center to center, and although there exist various "nations", there is considerable variation as well, both between and among nations.

See also: Ferretti, Sérgio Figueiredo, Querebentan de Zomadonu: Etnografia da Casa das Minas. São Luís, Maranhão: Editora da Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 1986; Ribeiro, René, Cultos Afro-Brasilieros do Recife: Um Estudo de Ajustamento Social. Recife: Instituto Joaquim Nabuco, 1952.

[20] On the Brazilian orixá pantheon and how it has changed from the Yoruba pantheon, see, among others: Reginaldo Prandi, Mitologia dos Orixás, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001; Volney Berkenbrock. A Experiência dos Orixás: Um Estudo Sobre a Experiência Religiosa no Candomblé. 2nd Edition. Vozes: Petrópolis, RJ, 1997.

[21] *Nação*: a tradition of putative ethnic origins within candomblé indicating an accepted tradition, liturgy, set of ritual practices, and pantheon of spirits. There are five major nações: Nagô and Ketu, both of

As Africans brought to the New World were forcibly separated from their familial and ethnic groups, so too the gods that they brought with them were separated from those very same ties. Forced into new forms of cohabitation in a hostile environment, both humans and their gods came to new understandings, new arrangements. Thus, in Brazil some traits or associations of individual orixás took on new meanings while others faded into a remote, African past. In the context of forced servitude, aspects of the orixás that spoke to the exigencies of slave life were foregrounded, while other associations gradually disappeared. For example, many orixás lost their association with fertility and with agricultural themes as slaves had little motivation to ensure progeny, or a bountiful harvest, for their colonial masters. Instead, those aspects of the orixás that spoke to the physical and mental well-being under conditions of hardship took on central importance. (note: Exu)

Among candomblés that claim Yoruba lineage,[22] Exu primarily serves as the messenger deity charged with mediating the world of humans and the world of the orixás. Without him, it is held that humans and the orixás could not communicate. Forever circling between these two worlds, he represents movement, change, and intercourse—both human and social—as well as the flux of exchange that rules the marketplace. The crossroads is his abode and symbol, as he is guardian of the thoroughfare.[23] As a mediator, Exu represents liminality—the betwixt and between, possibility, dynamism.[24] A classic trickster spirit associated with the chaotic potential resonant in any

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predominantly Yoruba influence; Congo and Angola, characterized by Bantu influence; and Jéjé, of Dahomey.

[22] Ketu, Nagô, Efan, among others.

[23] See the myth explaining Exu's association with the crossroads in Reginaldo Prandi. Mitologia dos Orixás. São Paulo: Compania das Letras, 2001: 40-41, also reported in William Bascom. Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 101-102

[24] See Reginaldo Prandi. Mitologia dos Orixás. São Paulo: Compania das Letras, 2001: 20-21.

transformation, Exu is said to "open the passageways," (*abre os caminhos*) whether those lie between an individual and the spirit world, or between an individual and his or her destiny—and in this capacity he is often linked with the arts of divination.[25] He is also the master of magic, trickery, spells and enchantments.[26]

In his role as messenger, Exu must first be honored before the orixás are invoked, lest he take offense and cause trouble. In candomblé terreiros, Exus is typically saluted at the opening of a ceremony with the *padê*, a food offering of manioc flour mixed with palm oil, and then enticed to leave so that the orixás may be invoked without his troublesome presence. In these more traditionally Yoruba-oriented terreiros, Exu is reserved a special niche outside of the terreiro proper, and although highly respected, is not cultivated in the same manner as the other orixás. Unlike these, he has no "filhos"—that is, he is not cultivated through possession but through regular sacrifices that serve to keep him satisified—and at bay. For example, Roger Bastide reported that, when he asked a Bahian Mãe-de-santo if she had any filhos of Exu in her terreiro, she made the sign of the cross before replying: "God save me. He is the devil, I would never let him pass through my door."[27] In other centers, Exu may have filhos consecrated to him but they rarely (if ever) incorporate him in possession trance, as he is believed to be highly unpredictable and chaotic. In all of these cases, Exu remains a highly ambiguous entity and great care is taken to maintain him at some safe distance.

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[25] Artur Ramos, Antropologia Brasileira, I, p 362 as cited in Bastide, O Candomblé da Bahia, p 172. See also the myths linking Exu and Ifá, the Yoruba god of divination (Bastide, O Candomblé da Bahia, chapter 3)

[26] Roger Bastide called attention to the connection of Exu with feitiçaria in O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô. Revised Edition. Trans. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz; tech. revision Reginaldo Prandi. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001.

[27] Bastide. O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô. Revised Edition. Trans. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz; tech. revision Reginaldo Prandi. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001, p 162.

In Africa, Exu is considered a lesser—albeit important—deity. Capricious and unpredictable, he is constantly playing pranks on both humans and his fellow orixás that are based on cunning and wile. However, in Brazil Exu has come to take on a much larger importance than the clever prankster he remains in Africa. Because of his wily ways, Christian missionaries saw Exu as the devil, and this Christian interpretation has remained a significant part of his iconography in Brazil, as the remarks of Bastide's Bahian informant suggest.[28] Exu is thus frequently represented in the form of a devil: bearded, horned, and brandishing a three-pronged pitchfork (trident) and a long, forked tail. And indeed, Exu, although not necessarily seen as malevolent, is amoral, willful and irreverent, delighting in transgressing the structures of the world, whether moral or social.

This characteristic, amply supported by the many myths about Exu widely disseminated both in Africa and in Brazil, has caused many analysts of Afro-Brazilian traditions to assert that Exu—at least in the Brazilian context—represents the possibility of self-determination and the transgression of social interdictions that limit individual liberty. As one Brazilian scholar of Exu states:

> Exu is the expression of a symbolism whose meaning is found not only in the structure of the imaginary, but also in the structure of the real. He symbolically expresses human uncertainties in the face of established social conditions, the affirmation of freedom and the autonomy of the human being despite natural and social impositions.
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> ("Exu é a expressão de um simbolismo, cujo sentido se encontra não apenas na estrutura do imaginário, como na real. Expressa simbolicamente as incertezas humanas frente aos debates com as condições sociais estabelicidas, a afirmação de liberdade e autonomia do ser humano frente às imposições naturais e sociais.")[29]

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[28] See Bastide, O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô. Revised Edition. Trans. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz; tech. revision Reginaldo Prandi. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001, p 162.
[29] Liana Trindade. "Exu: Poder e Magia." In Oloorisa. Escritos Sobre a Religião dos Orixás. Ed. Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura. São Paulo: Editora Ágora, 1981: 3-10. Translation mine.

Within this analytical understanding, Exu expresses the symbolic possibility—realized within the religious sphere—of social transgression, of individual autonomy in the face of structural limitations. This makes Exu a particularly plastic symbol for concretizing class-based issues, a point that will be addressed in later chapters.

An important, although secondary, deity in the African context whose pranks allowed for the possibility of disorder, in Brazil, Exu was transformed into the god who incarnates the principle of disorder itself, and thus a potential threat to established social forms—a characteristic succinctly rendered through the use of devil iconography. And indeed, many Brazilians, regardless of their religious beliefs, commonly see in Exu a specter of the marginal—the evil or negativity that either implicitly or explicitly threatens the social order. He is widely thought to evoke, if not outright chaos, at least confusion (*confusão*). As a result, Brazilians regardless of their religious affiliation will take extreme care to avoid the offerings that are frequently left for Exu at major public crossroads; they will cross the street in order to evade the vicinity, or, if they have to walk by such an offering, they will make the sign of the cross over themselves as they hurry by, holding their breath to avoid breathing in the potential for confusion that this deity represents. If they are familiar with Afro-Brazilian religious praxis, they may salute the offering with the Yoruba ritual greeting "Laroiê!" which translates roughly to "peace, my brother," an acknowledgement of Exu's potential for chaos and a plea to be left unmolested.

Exu in Brazil is also frequently associated with uncurbed sexuality, and this affinity at times is rendered in visual form as a giant phallus forming a counterweight to

his devil's tail.[30] Yet even when not imaged with an enormous male member, Exu's sexuality, like everything about him, trangresses social boundaries and limits.

Although Exu plays an important role in candomblé, it is largely in his role as a messenger between the world of humans and the world of the orixás, and he is rarely the focus of sustained ritual attention in the same manner as the other orixás. It is among the cluster of Afro-Brazilian religions known variously as *umbanda* or *macumba*[31] that Exu has come into his own as a major deity, proliferating into a veritable phalanx of spirits.[32] Taking definitive form in the 1930s among middle-class practitioners of possession religions, umbanda developed from the encounter between Afro-Brazilian cults such as candomblé and European forms of spiritism that emphasized an evolutionary hierarchy of spirits arranged according to moral purity and a strict division of good and evil as two fields of moral action. Umbanda's official founders attempted to "purify" their possession practices of the "primitivity" that they associated with African religions (especially practices such as animal sacrifice), by cultivating more "evolved" spirits. These more evolved spirits included deceased European philosophers, but also spirits associated with the Brazilian past: *caboclos* (the spirits of Brazil's indigenous Indian inhabitants) and *preto velhos* (the spirits of African slaves). At the same time that they sought to purge Afro-Brazilian religious practices of what they saw as their primitive elements: drumming, animal sacrifice, and spirits deemed "without light" (*sem luz*)—labeling these

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[30] Bastide, for example, reports rather delicately that the oldest statues of Exu found in candomblé centers possess a "very accentuated phallic character." Several sentences later, he adds that this characteristic (which he reads as representing carnality) of Exu, along with his horns, accounts for the deity's syncretic identification in Brazil with the devil. (O Candomblé da Bahia, p 163)

[31] Note that these two terms are not interchangeable; the differences between them will be examined in a later chapter.

[32] Note that in some candomblé centers, Exu has also proliferated into a variety of exus (exus of the doorway, exus of the crossroads) and each individual may be thought to possess an exu that serves as a

as deviant or demonic—umbanda's founders asserted that they were practicing Brazil's *true* religion. This was symbolized most cogently by umbanda's mixture of European, caboclo and preto velho spirits: the mythical three races that contemporary scholars such as _____ were then insisting had come together harmoniously to form the Brazilian nation. This claim meshed well with concurrent nationalist projects that were attempting to forge a unified Brazilian people across the vast, heterogenous conglomeration of states. (Getulio Vargas, Estado Novo)

From the point of view of official doctrine, the faction of Afro-Brazilian religions that gradually came to be known as umbanda divided the universe into two "lines" (*linhas*): the line of the right, the dominion of good and the field of action of *Umbanda Pura* or *Umbanda Branca* (Pure or White Umbanda); and the line of the left, the dominion of evil and the field of action of *Quimbanda*,[33] whose entities were said to be "without light," "unevolved" or demonical. Within this official schema, Exu was classified as an entity of the left—that is, an entity without light. Yet paradoxically within umbanda—which claims to cultivate only the line of the right—Exu has proliferated into a category of spirits all of whom are said to "work on the left". That is, they can be invoked for evil purposes (*trabalhar para o mal*) in contrast with those entities of the "right" such as the orixás that are said to be invoked only for the sake of good. Thus, despite the officially sanctioned division of umbanda from quimbanda, line of the right from line of the left, the realities of religious practice are much more complex. For example, in some umbanda centers, spirits of the left can evolve and rise in the hierarchy

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kind of guardian angel. However, this tendency reaches its fullest expression (and logical limit) in the Afro-Brazilian traditions that came to be known as umbanda and macumba.

[33] Note that Quimbanda is a term of accusation rather than self-definition; the significance of this will be discussed in the following chapter.

through indoctrination and the performance of "charity" (*cariedade*). These exus are referred to as "baptized exus" (*exus batizados*), as opposed to those pagan exus (*exus pagão*) that refuse to (or cannot) evolve. The historical origins and development of both candomblé and umbanda will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, but for now it is important to note that it was largely under the influence of umbanda that the cult of Pomba Gira as a unique and fully-developed entity—the female Exu—was systematized.[34]

In both candomblé and umbanda then, Exu is an agent associated with the "evils" of disorder, liminality and transgression. While the most rigidly doctrinal forms of umbanda (Umbanda Pura/Umbanda Branca) associate exus with the "line of the left" where they represent "unevolved" or "degenerate" (*atrasado*) spirits to be either exorcised or indoctrinated, other umbanda practitioners actively work with exu spirits, incorporating them regularly in sessions devoted to this purpose. These practitioners do not see Exu as intrinsically evil or immoral, although he may be invoked for such purposes. In a seminal article on the topic, the Brazilian scholar Liana Trindade compared the conception of Exu according to official umbanda doctrine with that of 50 umbanda practitioners who regularly incorporated exu spirits. She found that all of her interviewees were unanimous in the conviction that a particular exu spirit himself is neither good nor evil, but that his actions depend on what he is asked to do.[35]

In her article, Trindade called attention to the discrepancy between "official", institutionalized doctrine and the lived realities of religious participants, who actively

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[34] As Reginaldo Prandi also notes. See Prandi. "Pombagira dos Candomblés e Umbandas e as Faces Inconfessas do Brasil." Revista Brasiliera de Ciências Sociais. Vol. 9, no. 26. Outubro 1994: 92.
[35] Liana Trindade. "Exu: Reinterpretações Individualizadas de um Mito". Religião e Sociedade, 8 Julho 1982: 30.

reinterpreted religious symbols in accord with their social position, aspirations and conceptions of the world. She concluded that for those actors who found themselves on the margins of a more dominant society—economically, socially, sexually or otherwise exu spirits were a powerful means of symbolic inversion of more dominant values. For marginalized actors, to "work" with an exu spirit functioned as a magico-religious means to rupture the established structures of the world and to affirm alternative readings. Trindade affirmed that exus "symbolize the conflicts of individuals who belong to unstable social groups that are themselves the product of ambiguous or contradictory social processes";[36] that is, they speak to the liminal position of individuals who belong to marginalized groups, at once in conflict with more dominant norms and yet participating in them as well.

Rather than seeing exu spirits as simply a means of inverting dominant values, when examined from a historical perspective, the processes that have shaped the various understandings of Exu within Afro-Brazilian religions may be better characterized as a series of repetitive negotiations in which certain actors, typically those inhabiting a position of relative privilege, attempt to differentiate a "good" set of spirits, practices and aims from a "bad" set; while those who are associated with the "bad" set are then forced to articulate a response that recuperates their value and dignity. Within this process, exu spirits functions in a liminal way: "bad" from the perspective of those actors who seek to justify the superiority of their own practices and who dispose of the means to exalt this point of view as doctrine; and "good" (or at least amoral) from the point of view of those actors who do not dispose of the means to establish their views as hegemonic. Thus, the discursive designation of certain practices, spirits, and goals as "bad" and others as

[36] Trindade, "Exu: Reinterpretações Individualizadas de um Mito". Religião e Sociedade, 8 Julho 1982: 32.

"good"—the differentiation first of candomblé from umbanda, and then of quimbanda from Umbanda Pura—is itself the result of a constant historical process in which certain groups attempt to assert the superiority of their views and practices over others. Trindade summarizes a similar idea in the context of exu beliefs in her conclusion:

> In the relationship between the discourse established by umbanda doctrine and that lived out by social agents we encounter a dialectic of power, of social conformity and contestation, revealing the nature of the limits between the individual and society. The liminal position of the magical hero [Exu] expresses the ambiguity that results from the struggle for equilibrium between opposing forces.
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> "Nas relações entre os discursos estabelecidos segundo a doutrina umbandista e aqueles concebidos pelos agentes sociais encontramos a dialética do poder aceito e do poder reivindicado, da conformidade social e da contestação, revelando a natureza das relações entre o indivíduo e a sociedade. A posição de liminaridade do herói mágico expressa a ambiguidade existente na busca do equilíbrio entre forças sociais opostas."[37]

The case of *macumba*, originally a derogatory term for Afro-Brazilian religious practices in general, as well as specific religious practices and the objects associated with them, illustrates this same historical trajectory. As I have mentioned, the exu spirits play a predominate role in those Afro-Brazilian religions that are referred to—by both insiders and outsiders—as macumba. Briefly summarizing the historical course of events that will be further addressed in the following chapter, the term "macumba" came to designate that set of spirits, practices, and religious goals labeled "bad" by a diverse set of actors in their struggle to assert the legitimacy of their own sets of spirits, practices and religious goals. In competition for religious legitimacy, certain Afro-Brazilian religions such as candomblé and umbanda (particularly those strains of candomblé that emphasize their Africanity and those of umbanda that style themselves "pure" or "white") were successful

[37] Trindade, "Exu: Reinterpretações" 35-36

in establishing themselves as socially legitimate—largely through a process of differentiating themselves from those practices they denigrated as primitive, syncretic, corrupt, immoral, evil, etc. Although the terms of denigration changed over time, the net result has been the stigmatization of a certain set of religious practices, spirits and goals that is loosely grouped under the rubric of macumba. Because of their association—in terms of imagery and comportment—with the devil, exu spirits in particular have become metanymic of macumba, and the evil that it is widely said to cultivate.

As a result, the term macumba has entered the popular vernacular as a pejorative designation for those Afro-Brazilian religious groups or practices that are believed to traffic in the forces of evil—those forces that threaten public notions of order, stability, and the social "good." Of course, public notions of order and the social good derive from the hegemonic success of certain groups who have managed to re-package their own interests as those of society writ large. We thus see a corresponding struggle on the part of those groups whose religious practices, spirits and goals have been demonized as evil to recuperate themselves. Often this occurs through contesting usage of the same terminology. For example, by reclaiming the term macumba, religious actors re-value what has been deemed "evil" as a source of power and subversion. This seems to be an especially attractive option for marginalized populations. In re-valuing macumba, and its distinctive set of spirit forces—the exus—these populations lay claim to that which has been excluded. Because they are thoroughly liminal beings, the exus lend themselves particularly well to this struggle between conflicting interpretations. Their rehabilitation in many ways represents the triumph of the marginal, the return of the excluded whose power of destruction is actively sought as a source of re-formation.

Within both umbanda and macumba, the marginality associated with the African notion of Exu is preserved and symbolized in physical terms: exu spirits are said to inhabit the darkness (*as trevas*), or to exist between light and shadow (*entre a luz e a sombra*). They are widely considered to be the spirits of people who have died, but who, due to unresolved dilemmas, continue to be linked with the world of the living.[38] And, it is precisely this liminality that makes exus efficacious: they are known for breaking limits fixed by normative society to the extent that these inhibit the resolution of the problems that confront their followers.[39]

This makes them particularly effective for the achievement of certain ends since, unlike other spirits, they will perform any request as long as they receive the proper recompense. Thus, they are thought to be particularly effective in the quest for money, power and sex, pursuits discouraged within other religious systems, but widely promoted by the translocal forces of capitalism and its accompanying value system. However, like everything else in this economic system, nothing is free, and exus demand payment for services rendered—either in money or in the luxury commodities that they favor: cigarettes and cigars, alcohol, jewelry, perfume, expensive clothing. Thus unlike Catholic saints, the Holy Spirit, or other types of spirit entities, exus are perfectly consonant with a world in which economic transactions regulate social relationships, luxury items convey status, and wealth and power are acknowledged goals. The contradictions of this structure of relationships and values with others that demand communal cooperation, reciprocity and generosity is particularly acute in low-income areas such as Rio's favelas, where

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[38] See Trindade, 1982; Prandi, 1994; Contins, Márcia. O Caso da Pomba-Gira (master's thesis, Museu Nacional, UFRJ), 1983.
[39] Trindade, Liana. "Exu: Reinterpretações Individualizadas de um Mito." Religião e Sociedade, 8 Julho 1982: 32.

survival often depends on the sharing of limited resources and jobs are difficult to come by. And it is precisely in these areas that exus are the most widely venerated, for reasons that will become more clear.

Unlike Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism, the cosmos in which exus operate is not one in which the good of the individual is proscribed by the good of the collective—or by a faction that represents itself as the collective—and individual behaviors are regulated by clearly-stated norms of morality. This has led some scholars to link exus with an individualistic orientation to the world. As Diana Brown states: "The Exus are associated with attaining power, money and sex, not only in their illicit form but of any kind…In their broader sense, Exus seem to assert the power and autonomy of the individual to have and to pursue his/her own self-interests, as against the interests and moral codes established by the state, civil society, and the family."[40] As I have observed, the contradiction between an individualistic orientation to the world, as most fully developed within capitalistic, market-driven economies, and more communally-centered orientations to the world that historically have been predominant in Brazil, is most particularly acute among the lowest socio-economic spheres of Brazilian society. It is the inhabitants of these spheres who in many ways are most caught betwixt and between two very different worldviews. And it is to these contradictions, as lived out in the context of particular lives, that exus in all their liminality speak most eloquently.

Exus represent one way of working through these tensions and contradictions, casting them into the world as concrete and thus subject to human manipulation. They represent a powerful means of objectifying larger-scale social forces and articulating

[40] Diana Brown. Umbanda. 91 James Wafer agrees, stating that "The exus are the spirits most closely linked to the individual and his or her destiny." (The Taste of Blood, 15).

alternative modes of thought and action amongst a population for whom other means of influencing, altering, questioning, protesting and critiquing the world are largely unavailable or perceived to be ineffective. (Prandi's argument that afro-brazilian religions do not foster political organization) In the chapters that follow, I examine four thematic nodal points that reveal the multiple ways that exus concretize socially-loaded issues and tensions that are felt especially acutely among those populations most marginalized by Brazil's overlapping hierarchies of class, race and gender. These nodal points, which crystallize conceptions of glamour, sexuality, the marketplace, and death intersect powerfully in the form of Pomba Gira spirits, who are believed to be intimately associated with all four realms. Chapter One lays the groundwork for this study by presenting an historical overview of Afro-Brazilian religions and their insertion within a larger field of power relations that includes the Catholic Church in alliance with the State. These two forces together succeeded in persecuting and outlawing Afro-Brazilian religious praxis until late in the 20th century. Indeed, it was largely due to the intervention of the academy, beginning with the 19th century medical-juridical doctor and psychiatrist Nina Rodrigues and continuing to the present day, that Afro-Brazilian religions like candomblé gradually achieved wide-spread social legitimacy. The resources of elite discourses such as academic scholarship and forms of argumentation also directly contributed to the discursive separation of umbanda from "primitive" or "nefarious" practices such as quimbanda and macumba. And, in a corresponding process, those marginalized by this set of operations attempted to rehabilitate their distinctive set of beliefs and practices by literally embracing and revaluing the nefarious as a source of religious efficacy.