

# Candomblé:

## A Socio-Political Examination of African Religion and Art in Brazil

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### INTRODUCTION

RELIGION AND ART CONSTITUTE the cultural spheres most clearly demonstrating the significant, pervasive impact Africa has had on Brazil. The obvious conduit of this impact historically was transatlantic slavery. The objectives of this chapter are to discuss critical repercussions of this impact through a socio-political examination of the religious institution known as Candomblé and to briefly review the art forms integrally supporting this religion. An initial consideration of the nature and meaning of Candomblé in general will precede a discussion of the ritual and art of Candomblé Nagô, which has close connections with Yoruba *òrìṣà* religion in Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>

“Candomblé” is the Portuguese term most commonly used in Bahia to describe Afro-Brazilian religion.<sup>2</sup> In the singular, it denotes the large body of ritual practices brought to Brazil by African slaves; in the plural it refers to individual sects or temples of the religion. “Candomblés” also in the past referred to huge festivals and parties held on the slaves’ free days that provided opportunities for honoring African deities. In current Bahian usage, the term “Candomblé” includes the ideological corpus of the group—its myths, belief system, worldview, cosmology, values, rituals, and ethics—as well as the physical locality where deities are enshrined and the ceremonies are held.

Candomblés may be viewed as extended family units with descent traced through initiations. Frequently allegiances are formed that even supersede biological family ties (Costa Lima 1967:65–83; personal communication: Oṣunlade 1982a). Ideally, initiation is seen as a rebirth, a creation of a new being. In this context, the officiating priest or priestess is considered to function in a creative capacity, which may be compared to the biological state of female parturition. Even when the initiator is a male, the same analogy is made. During my participation in initiation rituals, I have frequently overheard congratulations on the successful *parto* [birth],

much in the manner as would be extended a woman who had just recently terminated a successful physical birth.

The numerous ethnic “nations” formed during the period of slavery gave rise to the various different types of Candomblés. Gege [Jeje] Candomblés derive from the Ewe or Fon rituals brought from Dahomey (now Republic of Benin).<sup>3</sup> Their deities (known as *vodun* or *vodu*), dances, languages, and rituals vary only slightly from those derived from the Yoruba. This similarity is due to socio-religious amalgamation in Africa that reflected the frequent contact and wars between the Yoruba and the ancient kingdom of Dahomey (Mercier 1954:210–234). The striking Yoruba ascendancy in Brazil may be attributed to the great number of slaves of this ethnic group brought to Brazil during the mid-nineteenth century (Verger 1981a:55; Nina Rodrigues 1977 [1905]:107).

Angola and Congo Candomblés are derived from slaves speaking a variety of Bantu languages from areas now within the borders of Zaire, Cabinda, Angola, Mozambique, Zanzibar, and other Central, East, and Southern African countries. The grammar and vocabulary of these Candomblés’ ritual languages are basically Bantu yet also exhibit influences from Portuguese and from Amerindian languages such as Tupi or Tupinamba. Deities in these Candomblés have Bantu names although many of their attributes and ritual paraphernalia are derived from the Yoruba models (Carneiro 1948: 60, 77–78, 86–88, 97, 109). Dance and music differ from the Yoruba in these Angola and Congo Candomblés, although they clearly pay homage to Yoruba patterns. At every festival I attended in Bate Folha and Bogum—two very old, highly respected Angola Candomblés—all of the Yoruba gods had to be summoned, danced for, and sent away before the festival could end successfully. Another factor that distinguishes Angola ritual is the corporate manifestation of Exu [Èṣù, the Yoruba god of chance and unpredictability]. Although Exu manifests in indigenous Yoruba religious ceremonies in Africa and the United States, Exu never manifests in Yoruba-derived Candomblés in Brazil. My research indicates that the most frequent mode of Afro-Bahian ritual representation of Exu is by means of a conical clay form. This image varies from three inches to approximately four feet in height, with the eyes, nose, and mouth made of cowrie shells, with sacrificial materials inside and out.<sup>4</sup>

Caboclo [Indian] Candomblés are the only ones clearly inspired by Amerindian or Brazilian deities, but even these are frequently mixed with Angola, Gege, or Yoruba cosmology and ritual. Their deities are called *encantados* [enchanted or conjured ones], and all their ritual songs are in Portuguese. Surprisingly, the dances performed in these Candomblés and the national Brazilian dance (*samba*) are very similar (personal communication: Ijaola 1981). The *encantados* are the only gods manifested in the Caboclo Candomblé, which I visited in Bahia, who demonstrated the non-African traits of dancing with their eyes open, smoking cigars, and giving consultations and advice with the intention of healing during public festivals. Feathers and brightly colored costumes of Amerindian derivation dominate their annual festivals, while the yellow and green colors of the Brazilian national flag predominate in liturgical garments and house decorations. Fruits and vegetables are the most common sacrifices, rather than the animal sacrifices most

common in Yoruba and Angola Candomblés. These fruits and vegetables are present in abundance during public ceremonies for Caboclos and are distributed to the spectators near the end of the celebrations by the possessed Caboclos. According to Edison Carneiro (1948:88–89), *encantados* are mere duplications of the Yoruba *orixá* [gods]. Carneiro cites, for example, the amalgamation of Sultão das Matas [Sultan of the Forests] and Caboclo do Mato [Pure-blooded Indian of the Forest] with Oxossî, the Yoruba god of the forest and the hunt. My research indicates, however, that Caboclos exhibit more original, possibly Amerindian, traits than Yoruba ones and may therefore represent valid attempts to preserve aspects of indigenous Brazilian religion that have not been adequately studied.

## CANDOMBLÉ NAGÔ IN BAHIA

Candomblé Nagôs are the most numerous of Candomblés and appear to be the most influential religious associations in Bahia. Major portions of their ritual and cosmological systems and mode of liturgical vestments have been adopted by the Gege, Angola, Congo, and, to a lesser extent, the Caboclo Candomblés. The word *Nagô* is derived from *anago*, a term applied by the Fon to Yoruba-speaking peoples residing in the Republic of Benin. *Nagô* is now used in Brazil to designate all Yoruba, their Afro-Brazilian descendants and Yoruba myth, ritual, and cosmological patterns. However, distinct Yoruba nations in Brazil such as the Oyo, Ketu, Egba, Jebu [Ijebu], Jexa [Ijeṣa], and others from Lagos and Ibadan were noted by Raimundo Nina Rodrigues as early as 1890, two years after the abolition of slavery (Nina Rodrigues 1935 [1896]:104), and are still discernible or operative today.

The first securely dated Candomblé Nagô in Bahia was founded in 1830 in Barroquinha, an area now in the town center, by three African women: Iya 'Deta, Iya Kala, and Iya Nasso (Carneiro 1948:63–65). This Candomblé, named Ilé Iya Nasso [the house of mother Nasso], was moved sometime in the late nineteenth century to its present location in Vasco de Gama near the gasoline station São Jorge. It is currently called Casa Branca, the White House. Quarrels over the leadership succession of two chief priestesses led to the subsequent formation of two additional houses: the Candomblé of Gantois in Engenho Velho [the old (sugar) mill] where Nina Rodrigues conducted most of his research; and the Beneficent Society of São Jorge, more commonly known as Axé Opô Afonjá [the sacred force of the staff of (the *orixá* Xango) Afonjá]. This later Candomblé was founded in approximately 1918 by Aninha in São Gonçalo do Retiro and is where I conducted a significant proportion of my field research in Bahia.<sup>5</sup>

Although there are a few rural Candomblés Nagôs (e.g., in Cachoeira, Santo Amaro, and Feira de Santana), it is essentially now an urban phenomenon. As we will see later, however, a symbolic, ideological connection is maintained with rurality. An estimate of more than five hundred Candomblés Nagôs existing in 1983 is probably conservative (personal communication: Vicentio 1983); and these were especially concentrated in the metropolitan area of Bahia. This number included both the older, elite founding houses made famous by numerous researchers since the late nineteenth century, as well as the almost anonymous, proletarian, neighborhood Candomblés. The elite Candomblés command more prestige and attract more

adherents than the proletarian ones and therefore have a larger economic pool available for ritual expenses. I found that among these elite Candomblés, the temple area, *terreiro*, usually encompasses numerous acres of land and includes large areas of virgin forest and one or more brooks and streams. Elaborate separate buildings were built for each individual *orixá* honored in the *terreiro*. Each building (known as the *ilé orixá* [shrine of the god]) was constructed of mud and covered with cement or stucco. Roofs were composed of curved, elongated tiles, and the interior as well as exterior were painted in the appropriate symbolic colors of the *orixá* owner of the shrine.

The basic plan of the entire structure consisted of a sacred inner core room where the key objects and implements embodying the sacred force, *axe* [àṣẹ in Yoruba] of the *orixá* were located and an outer room where sacrifices and other rituals were conducted. Among these *axe* were various types of ceramic and porcelain pots and dishes containing the stones, bits of iron, brass, silver, lead, or other metal representing the natural essence of the *orixá*. Next were liturgical implements, which are type-motifs and are specific to each separate *orixá*. Last are numerous plates and dishes containing the remains of liquid and solid offerings, which are considered to have been the preferred food and drink of the *orixá* during their former existence on earth. The natural elements and liturgical implements all receive a portion of blood and food sacrifices, which are offered during daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rituals. Entrance is forbidden into this inner core shrine room except to the Iyalorixá [chief priestess], Bablorixá [chief priest], and Axogun [male official charged with sacrificing animals], the incarnated *orixá*, or a very few senior, elderly adepts who are initiates of the specific *orixá* owner of the shrine. All others must remain in the outer room of the shrine area during ceremonies. This outer area usually has photographs of the illustrious deceased dedicated to the *orixá* owner of the shrine or liturgical implements displayed on the walls. Some of these outer areas contain normal furnishings one would find in any domestic house, such as chairs, armoires, and so forth.

In contrast to the elaborate structures of the elite Candomblés, I found that the proletarian ritual spaces usually consisted of only one or two tiny rooms in a small house. However, even in one of the *terreiros* in Jardim Lobato, where I lived, a separate area to be used as an arena for the large, public annual festivals was incorporated. These proletarian Candomblés were frequently built near areas of trees, shrubs, and other forms of vegetation. This choice in location is undoubtedly linked to the central role that leaves, herbs, and flowers played in all of the rituals I observed.

At Axé Opô Afonjá, and Terreiro Omolu Xapana, where I also lived, many of the initiates live in the Candomblé during the annual festival and initiation cycles, which last from a few weeks up to several months. Initiates sleep in the Candomblé overnight for the weekly or monthly rituals. They commonly refer to this residence as the *roça*, a Portuguese term meaning country, rural region or backwoods plantation. It was recently pointed out to me that this term is also colloquially used to refer to the “interior” of Brazil, the vast, expansive rural area outside of any metropolitan city (personal communication: Augustinho 1984).<sup>6</sup> The frequent use



of the term *roça* when discussing Candomblé activities and the fact that a special uniform is worn while one is in the sacred space support the interpretation that for the initiates, Candomblé is viewed as a separate reality or microcosm, or minisociety. There is a sense of leaving the profane, urban openness and entering a rural, cloistered, sacred physical and spiritual space where different norms exist. During the ceremonial periods at Axé Opô Afonjá, the chief priestess also moves to the *roça* and lives in the major shrine, which incorporates her special official living area known as the *ile xango* [shrine of the *orixá* Xango Afonjá], patron of the *terreiro*. This building now also contains a basement museum. The residence of the Iyalorixá in the *roça* during the annual festivals signifies a heightened collective spiritual force that adds to the general excitement and sense of community. Located on the grounds is a school that teaches the resident and neighboring children the traditional history, music, dance, mythology, and songs of the gods. It is known as the Comunidade Oba Biyi, the community of Oba Biyi (the initiate name of Aninha, the founder of this *terreiro*).

The *roça* is permanently organized around older, committed initiates—usually Candomblé officials—and devotees who are destitute or infirm. Each permanent resident is provided with at least a private room or, if means permit, a separate house. Rooms are equipped with all the basic accoutrements, though all washing and bathing and some cooking are done in communal areas. Sometimes rooms are shared by relatives, close friends, or members of the same initiation group called a *barco* [literally, a small open boat]. Temporary residents will be given a separate room or share with someone else. My own residence at Afonjá was a sleeping room in the Casa de Oxala, a large, long, rectangular building serving multiple purposes, where the shrine of this god was also located. I shared my room with Oşunlade, an Iyalorixá visiting from Brasília. Although Oşunlade had been given her own room, she preferred to share with me, regarding my room as “better”. Because Oşunlade was unusually expansive and garrulous, this fortunate situation resulted in the collection of significantly rich and substantial research data by virtue of our almost continuous, close association.

## AFRICAN MICROCOSM AS INVERSION OF LUSO-BRAZILIAN MEGACOSM

Two tenets of Candomblé Nagô are the preservation of “pure” African ideas and the meticulous maintenance of the esoteric religious ritual processes of the Yoruba-speaking peoples of West Africa. The tropical climate in Brazil was similar to that in Africa, moreover, and it was thus possible to find the same or similar vegetable substances that played a central religious role in Africa. Candomblé sacred herbology may have been further augmented by knowledge gleaned from Brazilian Indians (personal communication: Abímbólá 1990). The transatlantic crossing led to some unavoidable alterations in other domains because of the oppressive conditions of slavery and the requirements and restrictions of a new socio-political environment. Many changes that occurred in the art and religion were adaptive and defensive; the amalgamation of African gods with Catholic Saints is just one example of this type of accommodation.<sup>7</sup> In some sects, conflicts caused by the pressures to assimilate

into modern Brazilian society led to the incorporation of Catholic altars into the ritual dancing space of the public Candomblé area.<sup>8</sup>

Field observations, however, indicate that values and behavior characteristic of the upper and middle classes (mimicked in the lower classes) in Luso-Brazilian society at large—in the megacosm—are *inverted* in the Afro-Brazilian religious realm, or microcosm. Thus, some of the criteria that accelerate upward mobility in Candomblé Nagô are the values placed on direct descent from Africans (especially the Yoruba, including the fact that black skin is prestigious), mastery of Yoruba language (used in chants, songs, and esoteric rituals), the ability to dance well, and familiarity with medicinal properties of herbs and the spiritual force contained in leaves and their proper combinations and uses.

In the megacosm of mainstream Brazilian society it is ideologically desirable to be as far away from the gods as possible except when asking for favors, whereas in the microcosm of the alternative Candomblé culture, closeness to the gods is desired and highly valued. Proximity to the gods is achieved through the performance of certain tasks, a prodigious investment of time as an active member, and the experience of trance. Careful and consistent attention to one's *orixá*, willing performance of *tarefas* [ritual duties] necessary for the efficient maintenance of the temple, and active participation in the preparation for annual festivals also affect how rapidly one moves to the top of the Candomblé hierarchy. Authority and permissible activity depend on length of initiation. Tasks associated with the initiatory rituals of novices, the collection and treatment of herbs and leaves, and responsibilities in the shrines of specific gods are seen as privileges to be earned, and they bestow substantial prestige and honor upon the recipient. Someone who is not permitted to work in the sacred space is relegated to the spiritually valueless status of a visitor. It is also deemed an honor to be able to offer a sacrifice—whether animal, vegetable, or material, including art—to an *orixá*.

Most people participating in the Candomblé Nagô *terreiros* that I investigated are of African descent.<sup>9</sup> Devotees are primarily from the lower socio-economic classes and generally hold blue collar or service-oriented jobs. A small but slowly rising number of members hold white collar jobs or are training to be professionals.<sup>10</sup> Such examples are usually encountered in the older, wealthier, more prestigious ritual houses such as those of Menininha de Gantois, Axé Opô Afonjá, and Ile Moroailaje. Robert F. Thompson (personal communication: 1981) has suggested that these Candomblés occupy the apex in the hierarchy of Candomblés<sup>11</sup> and thus constitute an elite.

In the *terreiros* I studied, only persons of clear African descent held important ritual posts.<sup>12</sup> Significant numbers of whites, however, do observe public ceremonies and participate in the secular aspects of the Candomblé organization. This is especially true of well-known temples, although it applies to lesser-known ones as well. The attraction of whites to Candomblé was first noted in 1896, only eight years after slavery was abolished in Brazil (Nina Rodrigues 1935 [1896]:155).

In contrast to the Europeanized capitalistic sectors of Bahian society that emphasize private property, individualism, and conspicuous consumption in the secular realm,<sup>13</sup> Candomblé emphasizes the welfare of the group as a whole.

Material display and embellishment are a form of sacrifice to the *orixá*, who dispenses spiritual (and, it is believed, material) rewards and benefits in return for these sacrifices. Rituals and large public festivals are financed primarily by members and affiliates, although money for extraordinary expenditures, such as the repair or erection of a shrine or other construction, may be solicited from wealthy or famous secular officials and patrons of the Candomblé such as Ogans or Obas (see Costa Lima 1977). While there is no cost for initiation into Axé Opô Afonjá, clothing, animal, and vegetable sacrifices are provided by the novices. These items are usually obtained only after saving for years, through loans, or with the help of extended family, friends, and patrons. My observation of Candomblé members during an interval of three years revealed that their greatest expenditures were in the service of the gods and not for personal secular needs. In fact, the startling simplicity of their Western type of daily dress provided a dramatic contrast to the rich, often extravagant, opulent luxury of the public ritual dress of the *orixá*.

Land belonging to the Candomblé is held in common, and it is dispensed by the head priestess to those who need it to build houses, pending civil approval. This practice may have its roots in Yoruba principles of land ownership and allocation. Food and economic aid are provided for devotees who experience unforeseen need. In this respect, Candomblé Nagô functions as a mutual aid organization.<sup>14</sup>

The overriding focus of the Candomblé is communal rather than individual. Indeed, one of the highest compliments that can be paid to an initiate is that he or she is obedient, meaning that he or she places the interests of the group in the service of the *orixá* above himself or herself. Candomblé Nagô also offers Afro-Bahians a channel through which they can achieve a significant measure of self-esteem, social solidarity, prestige, and social mobility within a system that celebrates African values, behavior patterns, ideas, and dark skin color. Thus Candomblé provides an important alternative to the megacosm and fulfills a critical need for its members, who are otherwise denied full participation in Luso-Brazilian society.

## CANDOMBLÉ NAGÔ INITIATION

Candomblé Nagô is characterized by belief in and worship of a pantheon of divinities of which Olorun [Olódùmarè in Yoruba] is the supreme, although nonworshipped, head.<sup>15</sup> The seventeen major *orixá* are regarded as spiritual forces based in Africa who can only be manifested or expressed by certain human beings of the deities' choice. The will of the *orixá* is ascertained through divination sought by individuals when persistent misfortune or illness is experienced. Dreams are also important indicators of the need for initiation.

If the outcome of the divination indicates the necessity to initiate, the individual begins to make preparations by amassing funds to pay for the clothing, food, animal and vegetable sacrifices, pots, liturgical implements and other items that will play an essential part in the extensive and complex series of required rituals. Because of the characteristically low economic status of the majority of initiates, it may take years to accumulate the necessary resources. I personally witnessed the initiation of one individual dedicated to the *orixá* Yansan who had saved for ten years to fulfill her initiation obligations (Itaparica Island, 1 July 1981). In order to defray some of

the expenses, a chief priest or priestess will frequently wait until a number of individuals can be initiated as a group. The group can then share some of the major expenses.

There are a number of levels of initiation and all of them involve similar learning procedures. They vary only in depth of learning and the degree of esoteric ritual detail involved. Common to all types is a specified period of seclusion during which the initiate is taught proper ritual procedures and behavior, the use of virgin and special symbolic clothing, and rituals involving the “inner head” [*ori*; Yoruba *orí*]—the seat of the sacred force and the god. The performance of any ritual act involving the head, *botar a mão na cabeça* [lit. “to put the hands on the head”], is believed to create a spiritual link and bond between the officiant and the recipient that can be dissolved only by death. The only way this link can be broken is by a ceremony similar in purpose and concept: *tirar a mão da cabeça* [lit. “to withdraw the hand from the head”]. Submission to this ritual incorporates the individual into the *familia de santo* [spiritual family group] of the temple in which it is performed (personal communications: Crispim 1981b; Kayode 1982a). Ndolamb Ngokwey (1984:50) noted that ritual manipulation of the head serves not only to “fix” the *orixá* in the head but also to “seal the asymmetrical relationship between the novice and initiator, a relationship patterned after the parental/filial model characterized by authority and dominance of the parent and the submission and dependence of the children”. Ngokwey further asserts that “this same asymmetry characterizes the relationship between the *filho-de-santo* and his *orixá*, as well indicated by the coercive power of the *orixá*” (1984:51).

The first and primary initiation in Candomblé Nagô that I experienced is the ritual procedure known as *bori* [*borí* in Yoruba: to “feed”, “propitiate”, or “worship” the inner head]. This generally consists of a ritual inside the sacred shrine precincts in which the individual is seated on a ritually prepared, natural straw mat and dressed totally in the sacred liturgical costume. All the colors of the garments and implements must be white or light colored, because it is believed that the *orixá* Obatala [Obátálá] governs all rituals dealing with spiritual creation, rebirth, or death. In these contexts, the color white symbolizes the sacred force and presence of Obatala. The basic ritual consists of the sacrifice of a white dove or pigeon, whose neck must be wrung in a special ritual manner rather than cut. The blood is placed on the head of the individual along with other sacred items such as kola nut and some of the favorite foods of the *orixá* owner of the individual’s head. Special songs and dances are performed throughout the ritual that can last from one to three hours. These are performed by the *Iya Kekere* (the assistant to the chief priestess and the second in command) and by any other elderly initiates or Candomblé officials who happen to be in the temple area at the time and who wish to participate. Divination with a kola nut cut into four pieces is performed periodically throughout the ritual to ascertain the will of the *orixá* being fed. Tiny portions of all the food and the sacrifice are placed on the tongue, palms of the hand, soles of the feet, and forehead of the novice before finally being placed in tiny bits in the center of his or her head and in the food receptacles of the *orixá*. Finally, a long white cloth is wrapped around the head of the individual and tied tightly. This head-tie serves to secure the

items placed on top of the head during the night-long seclusion of the individual after the ceremony. In the morning, the items are removed from the head and disposed of. The head priestess asks the novice to reveal any dreams that occurred during her or his night in the shrine and uses this information combined with the results of divination to ascertain the will of the deity. Finally, the individual is washed with a special herbal bath and the initiate's clothes are changed.

The next level of initiation, known as *assentar santo* [lit. to seat the *orixá*], consists of a series of rituals designed to localize the dynamic, immaterial force of the *orixá* into a material foundation such as a bit of metal, wood, or various types of stones according to the perceived nature of the deity. The stones, metal, or wood are placed inside lidded jars in water, honey, palm oil, vegetable oil, or any combination of these, according to the preferences of the deity symbolized by the specific material. The novice is secluded for seventeen days, fed special food, and is not allowed to speak except by means of a series of special handclaps. She or he is taught the special songs, history, and peculiar characteristics of her or his *orixá*. In the Candomblé I investigated, at this stage of initiation the head is not shaved nor are cuts made in the occiput of the initiate's head. *Assentar santo* can be seen variously as a means to an end or merely a preliminary step in the initiatory process usually reserved for those who will eventually become mediums of the *orixá*. During seclusion, the novice is cared for by a senior initiate of the same *orixá* owner of the initiate's head. This person is known by the title of 'Jibona. After this ritual procedure is terminated, the pot or receptacle containing the material symbol of the initiate's *orixá* is placed in the common shrine for all initiates of that level.

The most elaborate, lengthy, expensive, and intense initiation is that intended to prepare an individual to serve as a medium [*cavalo*, lit. horse] of the *orixá*. This procedure usually occurs just once a year, beginning in June or August, in the Candomblés I studied. Before scheduling this ritual into the annual calendar, the head priest or priestess will ordinarily wait until there are at least five or more persons who need to be initiated as mediums. The motives are largely economic, so the members of the initiation group and their families can absorb many of the costs collectively. If there are not sufficient novices, this type of initiation will be postponed until the following year. In an initiation cycle in which I participated at Afonjá (August to November 1982), there were six novices. Two were dedicated to Omolu, two to Oxala, one to Yemanjá, and one to Ogum. In smaller proletarian Candomblés, the number of individuals initiated at one time can vary from one to ten or more. The exceptions to the usual procedure of initiation are occasioned by urgency on the part of the novice, insofar as initiation is seen as a solution to extreme mental, psychological, physical, marital, or economic problems or pressures (personal communications: Hilda 1981; Crispim 1982a).

In this third type of initiation, the novices must make arrangements to live in the temple grounds for the entire period of seclusion, which can vary from seventeen days or three months to a year, depending on the outcome of the divination. This divination is usually performed twice, once with the *'dilogun* [a Portuguese abbreviation of *eerindinlogun*], the sixteen cowrie system, and once with four pieces of kola nut. Before entering the seclusion room, the initiates stay in various private

homes of initiates who live permanently in the *terreiro*. During this period the initiate is dressed in a simple, white liturgical costume. Each initiate is interned in the seclusion room [known variously as *ronco* or *camiarinha*] on the sacred day of Oxala, Friday. Beginning before sunup on early Friday morning, each novice is submitted to a special herbal bath and *bori* according to the hierarchical rank of the *orixá* owner of the individual's head. Afterwards, each novice is led to the seclusion room, which has been ritually purified by washing the walls with special water containing pulverized leaves sacred to the *orixá* of each novice. The walls were subsequently freshly whitewashed. Each group of initiates remains in this one room, which may be windowless and usually contains only one door. At the top of the door frame, fringes of fresh, young palm leaves are placed and serve as protective devices against the spiritual intrusion of deceased ancestors and other negative influences that might impede the successful conclusion of this process of rebirth. Each of the novices must sleep or sit on his or her own personal mat [*esteira*], which must not be used by anyone else. Except in special cases, such as prostrating to honor an *orixá*, no novice's body can touch another mat or use the mat owned by one of the initiation group. Each initiate has his or her own white enameled tin plate and wide-mouthed cup [*caneca*] on which is painted a special symbol. This must not be touched or used by anyone else except the 'Jibona of each initiate. All the members of the initiation group spend the majority of their time isolated in this room. All eating, sleeping, and learning is accomplished there and the initiates are not permitted to talk except by means of the special handclapping that functions as a special ritual language called *karake*, whose name is of unknown linguistic origin. The novices leave the seclusion room daily before sunrise and after sunset to be bathed in special ritual herbal water. They may sometimes be walked around the interior of the *terreiro* close to their cloister room, in order to obtain a minimum of exercise, but this must be accomplished only when the eldest initiates are in the vicinity. The only relief available to the novices during this extremely regimented period is by means of the trance-state known as *ere*, a form of infantile trance to be discussed more fully later. In this form of trance, the novices laugh, joke, tease, and generally behave like boisterous, mischievous children.

During the first few days of seclusion, the novices undergo many rituals during which their hair is cut, the scalp is shaved, and they receive a necklace made of *kele*—large, tubular beads in the sacred color(s) of their deity. They also receive an anklet, known as *xaoro*, made of braided raffia palm fiber to which small metal bells [*guizos*] are attached; in Africa these ornaments are used for children (personal communication: Rubin 1984). Both the *kele* and the *xaoro* symbolize the complete submission of the novice to the Candomblé as a general entity, to the *orixá*, to the head priest or priestess, and to the 'Jibona.

During this time, the novice also receives protective devices made of virgin, braided raffia palm fiber: a long necklace [*mocã*] used to force trance and armbands known as *contra-egun* that provide protection against ancestral spirits.

The most important portion of this type of initiation, that which specifically prepares the novice to enter into trance and incorporate his or her *orixá*, takes place in the restricted confines of the sacred shrine of the Candomblé. If the *terreiro* is



an elite one that encompasses many different separate shrines for the *orixá*, the novices are led, completely covered from head to toe in white cloths, to the main shrine; in the case of Afonjá, the main shrine was that of the *casa de Xango*. In the case of Dona Hilda's Candomblé, where all of the *orixá* are kept in one common room, the initiates are taken there. During this phase of the ritual only the Iyalorixá [chief priestess], the Babalorixá [chief priest], a senior cult official who functions as assistant, and the 'Jibona of the novice can be present.<sup>16</sup> During this portion, ritual songs recalling the role of Oxala, the creator *orixá*, are sung and cuts are made in the occiput of each novice's head. During the period in which cuts are being made, the novice is seated on a small stool made of virgin wood and painted with the symbols of his or her *orixá*. This stool is then placed on top of the individual's personal sleeping mat or a new mat. It is only during the period when ritual incisions are being made that the Brazilian novices sit on the stool (personal communications: Crispim 1981c, 1982e), contrasting with Santéria initiations in Cuba and the United States. Specific combinations of leaves, herbs and other natural ingredients are placed inside these cuts, made with a new, previously unused razor blade. These cuts are subsequently activated by placing sacrificial blood on the occiput—blood from two- and four-footed animals preferred by the *orixá*. The initiate then enters into the state of *orixá* possession trance. Feathers from the fowls are taken from the mouth, leg, and tail areas and placed on the initiates' heads. The initiates are then led out of the shrine area to dance the dances of their *orixá*. They are then led back into the shrine room and cuts are placed on the back (in the manner of the parallel Yoruba scarification marks), upper arms, and chest of the initiate. Into these are rubbed ingredients believed to contain sacred force. The initiates come out once again to dance and are led, entranced, back into the shrine room to pass the night.

The following day, initiates undergo rituals in which they receive necklaces [*ileki*, Yoruba *ilẹ̀kẹ̀*] of their *orixá* as well as of any accompanying *orixá* participating in their "road, destiny or direction of new life after initiation". At this time, they are given new initiation names symbolizing the rebirth [*sundide*], but these names may not be uttered publicly. During this portion of the ritual, the head is painted as a symbolic artistic and cosmic map that simultaneously evokes all the elements of the Yoruba concept of the cosmos and the specific type-motifs of each *orixá*. These motifs are painted on by the head priestess according to the patterns indicated by the results of divination. The colors most often used are those obtained from natural pigments imported from the West Africa Yoruba: *efun* [white chalk], *osun* [red camwood powder], and *waji* or *elu* [powdered blue indigo]. This design is used for subsequent rituals in the initiation process and especially on days of public presentation of the novices. These days are called *saidas* [lit. coming out or public appearances].

During the long period of seclusion, the novices are trained in the history, esoteric ritual language, mythology, and aesthetic and sacrificial preferences of his or her own personal *orixá*. Another crucial portion of this new learning involves the ability to control the state of trance in the proper ritual circumstances. In this manner, the possession trance does not occur spontaneously, but rather in response



to certain internalized cues such as the specific drumbeat, music, or songs of the *orixá*. In all the situations I observed, all the initiates exhibited the faltering, half-unsteady behavior of little children while learning these new concepts. Even those who had grown up inside the socio-ritual arena of the *terreiro* appeared to require teaching of the special dances of their *orixá* and I observed a number of these “practices” [*xire*] at Afonja, Curuzu, and Itaparica at which this learning took place. These “practices” were held during the weeks preceding the *saída*, the official public coming out party of the new initiates, also known as *orunko* or *dia de dar o nome* [the day of giving the name] because it is the first public utterance of the initiate’s new name. During *orunko* the new initiate wears a conical pack of protective leaves, herbs, and sacrificial and natural ingredients on top of the occiput, where the ritual incisions of the *orixá* have been made. The conical pack is known as *oxu*; the initiate is subsequently known as *adoxu* or carrier of the sacred cone on the head. After this ceremony, the new initiates, also known as *iyawo* [wives of the *orixá*] or *filhas/filhos de santo* [daughters or sons of the saint], are considered to be adequately ritually prepared and are permitted to end seclusion. The ceremony that marks this transition is known as *panan* or *quitanda*. It consists of a symbolic relearning of the daily procedures of life, such as cooking, ironing, washing, and getting married. This ritual underscores the belief that the *adoxu* are new beings. From this point on, they are subject to new laws and ritual obligations and are incorporated as members of the extended spiritual family of the Candomblé.

### ORIXÁ IN CANDOMBLÉ NAGÔ RELIGION

One of the most important keys to understanding Afro-Bahian art and ritual is to become cognizant of the preliterate, preindustrial worldview that characterizes the microcosm of Candomblé. In this respect, the regulation of life is regarded as emanating not from the individual or even the community (as is the case with Western technological society), but rather, in the microcosm, life controls emanate from a complex hierarchy of deities [*orixá* and *exu*], ancestors [*egun*] and other spirits.

The *orixá* form the most crucial components of the cosmological system of Candomblé Nagô. They are regarded as personifications of the forces of nature. Xango [Şàngó], in Yoruba, for example, represents thunder, lightning, and fire; others incarnate socio-political and economic forces. Ogum [Ógún] is the god of war and iron or other metals, while Oxossi is the god of the hunt. Other *orixá* are considered to have been actual heroes, persons of extraordinary force and abilities who were subsequently deified after death: e.g., Obatala [Obàtálá] is regarded as the “real” king of Ilé-Ifè the holy city of the Yoruba, and commemorated annually in this role, while Xango was once also a king [*alafin*] of Òyó, capital of the largest and most powerful of the Yoruba city-states. *Orixá* are also thought of as possessing human characteristics. They are honored and characterized by dance, music, and costume during public festivals. Their behavior is reenacted by means of mythical dramas or presentations that take place in the dance arena: for example, the quarrels and amorous rivalries of the male *orixá* (Ogum, Xango, and

Oxossi) for the female *orixá* Oxum [goddess of fresh water and sensual love]; or the jealousy of Oxum for the *orixá* Oba (another of Xango's wives), who was tricked by Oxum into cutting off her ear and serving it to her husband in a soup, thereby causing the eternal separation of Oba from Xango. These brief scenarios are typical of the complex store of lore associated with the character of each individual *orixá*.

An intricate symbolic system identifies each *orixá* by special songs, drumbeats, series of dance steps, beads, color combinations, costume, liturgical implements, leaves, herbs, food, and sacrificial animals. Each *orixá* governs certain geographical features (such as crossroads or bodies of water), and days of the week are consecrated to one or more distinct *orixá*. On this special weekday, a liturgical observance that is somewhat more elaborate than the daily worship takes place. This weekly ceremony is named *ossé* from the Yoruba word for week.

According to Claude Lépine (1981:13–23), each *orixá* possesses a distinct personality and characteristic mode of behavior that gradually becomes integrated with (or superimposed upon) the devotee's personality and behavior. Thus, an *adoxu xango* becomes forceful, noble, jealous, impulsive, unfaithful, proud, and stubborn according to the mythological prototype supplied by the *orixá* Xango. It is believed that the longer an individual has been initiated, the more his or her personality and behavior modes reflect those of the god, rather than his or her own. This phenomenon can be observed in general daily life but becomes more pronounced when the individual enters the possession trance of his or her *orixá*, known as *estado do orixá* [the state of being (in) the god].

The relationship between the initiate and the *orixá* who is the owner of his or her head is intense, personal, and reciprocal. The *orixá* is viewed as simultaneously possessing unlimited capabilities for coercive and punitive powers as well as supportive and beneficial powers. The concept that the *orixá* (and other supernatural forces) possess the power to intervene in a positive manner in all human affairs is counterbalanced by the idea that if they are offended, negative intervention is the unfailing result.<sup>17</sup> Candomblé members sincerely believe that the *orixá* possess the power to punish not only initiates and affiliates of the *terreiro*, but anyone who offends them, the initiates they protect, or the values they represent.

The Candomblé members with whom I interacted essentially viewed themselves as "powerless" in relation to the wider Brazilian society, and to life in general. This perspective is not surprising in light of the historical pattern of persistent adversity and socio-economic and political marginality that has characterized the Afro-Brazilian experience. This sense of fatalism and onerous destiny seems to be counterbalanced by the concept of the *orixá* and other spirits as possible providers of order, meaning, hope, and control over life inside the microcosm as well as out in the megacosm. In this worldview, it is interesting that art plays a central role in the attainment of positive goals and controls on life.

Each *orixá* (as well as each initiate and ancestor) possesses an aspect characterized by chance and unpredictability. This spirit or aspect is known variously as Exu or Elegba [from Yoruba Èṣù or Èlégbára] and is defined by Bastide (1978a:170–198) as a seventeenth *orixá*.<sup>18</sup> Exu can act out of greed or perversity,

with approval of the *orixá* owner of the victim's head, or at the behest of sorcerers. There are Exu that cause specific illnesses (e.g., tuberculosis, alcoholism); others cause marital, financial, employment, or mental problems.

Within the shrine [*peji* or *ile orixá*] each *orixá* is localized and ritually consecrated in a stone, seashell, piece of metal or some other natural element containing his or her sacred force. The liturgical implements symbolizing the *orixá* are also kept here along with an image of Exu, which must receive the first bit of any sacrifices offered to the *orixá* or their symbols. All of these objects remain permanently in the shrine. They are only taken out when the shrine is cleaned or (in the case of the liturgical implements) when they will be used by the incorporated *orixá* during the annual public festivals.

Among the West African Yoruba, there are separate temples and a specialized priesthood for each god. In Bahia, however, each temple space is used to house and worship all of the *orixá* honored by the particular Candomblé. The head priestess and devotees, therefore, become familiar with symbols, esoteric rituals, songs, rhythms, and costume elements of many *orixá* while remaining in command of those belonging to his or her own *orixá*. In contrast, a Yoruba devotee of Oṣun in Africa [Oxum in Brazil] is likely to be completely ignorant of the ways of Yẹmoja [Yemanjá] (Abímbólá 1976b:14–15).

There seems to be no consensus among Candomblés Nagôs regarding the hierarchical ranking of the *orixá*. As a rule, however, public festivals begin with celebrations of the youngest, most hot-headed *orixá* (e.g., Ogum) and progress to the increasingly cool-headed ones. They usually end with celebrations of Oxala, who is the oldest and regarded as father of all the *orixá*.

### POSSESSION TRANCE AS CENTRAL NEXUS OF CANDOMBLÉ RELIGION

In my opinion, features that distinguish Afro-Bahian Candomblé as a religion, in contrast to being considered “merely” as folklore (in the colloquial Brazilian sense of “folklore” as less serious than “religion”) are (1) the consistent, systematic, and active worship of a number of gods and the activation and maintenance of their combined sacred forces; (2) the ritual feeding and manipulation of sacred liturgical objects representing and imbued with the force of these gods; (3) the wearing of private and public ritual garments *always* confined within the physical and spiritual limits of the sacred space of the Candomblé;<sup>19</sup> (4) the continuous initiation of new recruits, who insure the continuity of the traditions; and, most importantly, (5) the phenomenon of trance, which is the critical determining qualifier of Candomblé as a religion, and in fact is the key means by which the religion has continued in the New World throughout the centuries of separation from Yoruba religion in Nigeria.

During possession trance, a human medium is possessed and serves as a vehicle through whom an *orixá* or saint [*santo*] corporalizes.<sup>20</sup> Possession trance is the central nexus of the religion, because it is only through trance that the gods “physically” come from Africa to the private shrines and public ritual dancing spaces in Brazil and bring with them the sacred force necessary to revitalize and



Plate 8—1. Senior initiates in trance, possessed by their respective *orixá*, Candomblé of Dona Hilda, Bahia, 1981.

sustain the religion (Plate 8–1). Ideologically and in reality, there could be no Afro-Bahian religion without the spiritual and ritual transformation of the possession trance.

The achievement of trance is communicated by visual signals easily recognized by Candomblé Nagô members: special body posture, specific behavior, and changes in key elements of the possessed person's costume.

As soon as Candomblé devotees enter trance, their eyes close. Conscious members then remove the possessed persons' shoes and head-ties. This allows their bare feet and bare heads to contact the earth and the air that members believe contain the sacred force and vital essence of the *orixá*. The devotees' clothing is loosened and a head-tie is arranged over each torso, the head-tie ending in a large bow at the small of the back in order to signal the change from normalcy to possession trance.

The hands of each entranced devotee are positioned to communicate the changed state. Specific positioning of hands while in trance varies from *terreiro* to *terreiro*. For example, at Axé Opô Afonjá, the *orixá* place their hands left over right at the small of the back, while in Curuzu the hands are placed on the left hip. As a final indicator of the state of possession trance, each devotee assumes the characteristic behavioral patterns of his or her gods during the dance. These behavioral patterns are supplemented by pacing back and forth while "at rest" (not dancing).

In all the Ketu "nation" Candomblés where I participated and observed, each incorporated *orixá* further communicated the state of possession trance by assuming his or her particular yell or shout [*ika*]. For example, all initiates possessed by Yansan [Oya] shout something like "Hayeeeeee!" The *ika* further serves to identify both the state of possession trance and the type and quality of *orixá* present. The congregation in turn greets each *orixá* by a specific individualized salute, such as "Epa Hei!" to salute or honor Yansan.

At the great annual festivals, during an intermission in the ceremony, the *orixá* change completely from the generic festival garments into elaborate clothing appropriate to each deity. The *orixá* are then led back in a row into the dancing arena to the accompaniment of the constant ringing of a special ritual bell [*agogo*]. They then reenact through dance the detailed myths and stories associated with each *orixá* present.

Trance functions emically as a religious communion for the Candomblé members and reinforces the solidarity of the group in addition to having cathartic, emotional compensation, or social power functions for individual devotees (Lepine 1981:27; Bastide 1978:259; Verger 1954:337–338; Ngokwey 1984: 54–55). Great prestige and admiration accrue to an individual who can easily become entranced by his or her *orixá*. The facility of trance is interpreted as evidence of the satisfaction of the *orixá* with the rituals and sacrificial offerings.

On the other hand, if trance is delayed, it produces great anxiety for the group: I have witnessed numerous occasions when an initiate desired trance but it would not come or was delayed. The usual reaction to this occurrence was increased group support expressed by louder singing in a more rapid rhythm than usual. In addition,

enthusiastic handclapping to the accompaniment of an extremely rapid drumbe at [adarrum] designed “to bring the *orixá* to the initiate’s head” was observed. In the event that all efforts to achieve possession failed, everyone was disappointed, and the ceremony was ineffective.

## BASIC CANDOMBLÉ COSTUME

Required Candomblé dress for all women<sup>21</sup> except the most casual visitors, suppliants, or visiting dignitaries is a ritual uniform composed of five elements: the *camizu*, the *saia*, the *oja*, the *ileki*, and the optional *pano da costa* (Plate 8–2).

The *camizu*, the name of which is derived from the Muslim burial tunic (Nina Rodrigues 1935 [1896]:152), consists of a short-sleeved blouse trimmed in lace and attached to a plain cotton slip. The *camizu* is a basic element of dress whether the devotee is in trance or conscious.

The *saia* is a full ankle-length skirt gathered at the waist and fastened by long ties extending from a narrow waistband. The material of the *saia* varies in accordance with the status of the wearer; increasing opulence is associated with increasing status. The *saia*—except for the universal white worn at funerals and at sacrifices or ceremonies for Oxala—is also an important visual communicator of which *orixá* the wearer serves (e.g., blue and white for Yemanjá).

The *oja* or *torço* is a long narrow piece of cloth, approximately 12 inches by 72 inches, that serves as a head-tie in the African fashion when the initiate is in a normal state of consciousness. The *oja* is usually white, made of varying materials, and trimmed in lace. It is this costume element that is immediately taken off the head and placed on the torso when possession trance first occurs. The repositioned *oja* indicates not only the changed state of being but also the identity of the *orixá* possessing the initiate. For instance, incarnated female *orixá*—known as *ayaba* or queens, including Yansan, Yemanjá, and Oxum—have their *oja* tied over their breasts and under their armpits into a big bow at the small of the back. Oxossi, a male *orixá*, has two *oja* crisscrossed front and back ending in a bow at each side of the waist. Oxala, another male *orixá*, has two *oja* crisscrossed in the manner of Oxossi but ending in bows at each shoulder. These symbols allow one to immediately identify the *orixá* possessing the devotee.

*Ileki* (or *eleke*) bead necklaces form the fourth important component of the daily liturgical uniform and indicate identity of the *orixá* by the color(s) and sequential arrangement of individual beads. The specific type of beads and length and type of necklaces used indicate full, partial, or noninitiate status.

All initiates are *adoxu*—carriers of *oxu*, the conical pack of ingredients that protected the sacred cuts on their heads during the initiation ceremonies discussed earlier. Recently initiated novices who are still in ritual seclusion, however, are known as *iyawo*. After *iyawo* leave ritual seclusion, they are *Filhas/Filhos-de-Santo*. While *iyawo* are still secluded, they are distinguished by a special necklace called a *kele*. The *kele* is also worn during seclusion for the transition ritual from *Filha-de-Santo* to *Ebomin*, a ceremony symbolizing the completion of seven years of initiate status.<sup>22</sup> The *kele* consists of large tubular beads worn close to the neck in choker fashion, the color(s) and material of which indicate the type of *orixá*

who is master of the new initiate's head. The name *kele* as well as its essential form seems to have been appropriated from the type and name of necklace associated with the West African *orixá* Šàngó, which is generally a choker type of necklace made of large round or tubular beads in red or red and white, the sacred colors of Šàngó (personal communications: 'Mogba Šàngó 1982; Baba Šàngó 1981). In Bahia the *kele* is a sign of submission to the *orixá* and is taken off only after the initiate's first public appearance [*orunko*], which is also the first day he or she utters his or her new sacred initiate name. Removal of the *kele* marks the end of strict ritual seclusion and total submission to the *orixá* and the initiating officials (personal communication: Crispim 1982b). The removal of the *kele* may also symbolize the initiate's newly acquired sense of power, since a major part of initiation is devoted to teaching control of trance so that the *orixá* will not come arbitrarily but rather only during specific rituals and in response to definite "cues" or "summons". Once the *kele* is off, the *adoxu* places the necklace in her ritual core of sacred objects along with the stone [*ita* or *ota*] in which her *orixá* is localized and consecrated. This complex of objects is commonly known as *assento* or *assentamento*, meaning "seat" or "foundation" in Portuguese.

*Firma*, a tubular bead or shell slightly larger than the other beads on the *ileki*, symbolizes the initiatory status of the wearer who has completed ritual seclusion. The *firma* also communicates the relationship between his or her patron *orixá* and other *orixá*. For example, an *adoxu* of Yansan would always have a *firma* for Xango, her principal husband, while an Omolu devotee would always have a blue-and-white striped *firma* for Nanán, his mythological mother. Thus, only someone who actually had ingredients containing the sacred force of his or her *orixá* placed in slits in the head would technically be entitled to wear a *firma* bead or shell on his or her *ileki* necklace. The absence of a *firma* indicates either an initiate at the lowest stage [*abian*] or someone who wears the beads as a protective device.

The fifth and optional costume element is the *pano da costa*, a wide, rectangular piece of cloth, 24 inches by 36 or 48 inches, depending upon the wearer's girth. The *pano da costa* is derived from the Yoruba strip weave cloth made by men and known as *ayo oke*.<sup>23</sup> It is customarily worn wrapped around the torso and over the breasts during annual public festivals. During the one formal ritual that I observed taking place outside of the sacred space (the annual gift-giving to Yemanjá formally marking the end of the Candomblé ritual cycle at Afonjá, November 1982), many participants were allowed great license regarding the use of the *pano da costa* and wore it draped over the left shoulder in the manner of an Iyalorixá. *Pano da costa* vary in quality and color depending upon the nature of the ritual, the patron *orixá* of the initiate, or the *orixá* for whom the festival is held [*dono da festa*], and the economic means and tastes of the initiate.

Sacred implements also form an integral part of the costume. These belong to and symbolize individual *orixá*. They are kept in the shrine of the *orixá* and are brought out for use only by an incarnated *orixá* during an annual festival, a three- or seven-year obligation [*obrigação*],<sup>24</sup> or at the first public festival of a recent initiate [*saída de iyawo*, literally the coming out of the *iyawo*].





**Plate 8-2.** Iyalorixá [chief priestess] wearing basic costume elements—*camizu* lace-trimmed blouse, *saia* ankle-length skirt, *oja* head-tie, and *ileki* head necklaces—plus *pano da costa* over her left shoulder as a sign of her status. Visitor to Maninha Gentas, Bahia, 1983.

## COSTUME AS AN EXPRESSION OF STATUS IN CANDOMBLÉ

Each level in the Candomblé hierarchy (Iyalorixá, Ebomin, Iyawo or Filha/Filhode-Santo, etc.) is distinguished by a special mode of social behavior. Within each level, status accrues with length of membership: even a few minutes' difference in time between processes of actual full initiation—such as cuts in the head and implantation of the god's sacred forces—confers seniority and, by extension, prestige. All high officials of ritual rank are selected from the high initiate class of Ebomin. Marked deference is paid by all initiates to the Iyalorixá when addressing her: the heads are bared, and bowing or prostrating full length on the floor is required in a manner similar to the Yoruba mode of paying respect to their kings. Within the sacred space of the Candomblé, priests and priestesses hold status that is—at least conceptually—on the royal level. This contrasts to the ambiguous status previously noted for priests and priestesses in traditional Yoruba society.

Socio-religious positions are communicated by modes of dress. During public and private rituals, the Iyalorixá traditionally wears a *pano da costa* folded into a rectangle and worn over her left shoulder. This costume item is a special prerogative of the chief priestess's station and distinguishes her from the others even in the proletarian Candomblés in which economics do not permit an elaborate and more formal mode of dressing as is characteristic of the larger Candomblés such as Afonjá and Gantois. In one proletarian Candomblé that I studied in Curuzu, the daily use of the *pano da costa* by the Iyalorixá was entirely dispensed with and reserved for only great ritual occasions. In the richer "elite", more "traditional" Candomblés, the Iyalorixá will frequently use for her *pano da costa* the highly prestigious *aço oke* cloth imported from Nigeria, and the colors of her personal *orixá* dominate.

The dress of the Iyalorixá in all Candomblés that I have studied is composed of special rich and unusual fabrics, and these cannot be duplicated by lesser members. These elements of costume are frequently gifts from clients who solicited divination that is given free of charge at Afonjá. Special necklaces and beaded bracelets or other materials of unusual size, shape, and combination form part of the entire complex.

Another special element of dress signifying status is the *bata*, a loose overblouse resembling the West African Yoruba *buba* but with flaring sleeves of medium length, worn alone or loosely over the *camizu* and the upper part of the *saia*. It is usually made of a richly embroidered transparent material, predominantly white or in various pastel colors according to the wearer's *orixá*. The *bata* is trimmed in handmade or machine-made lace according to the status and economic means of the wearer. The *bata* is a symbol of the completion of the seven-year *obrigação* ritual marking the transition from the junior initiate state to the senior initiate state of Ebomin. As a senior initiate, the Iyalorixá is entitled to a *bata*, but one that marks her rank by the quality of material used. Senior initiates can wear the *bata* tied at the waist with the *oja* head tie or under their *pano da costa*. Most frequently, in public festivals, both junior and senior initiates wear their *pano da costa* wrapped around the torso over the skirt and under the armpits. A tied *oja* secures the *pano da costa*.

## OBJECTS AND SPACES AS MARKERS OF SOCIAL STATUS AND RITUAL LEVEL

In principle, upon fulfilling the seven-year *obrigação*, any initiate with sufficient money, spiritual powers, a small following of potential clients, and the blessing of the Iyalorixá may undergo a ritual to prepare her or him to open her or his own Candomblé. The new temple and shrines must contain sacred items, including the consecrated sacred elements of the initiate's particular *orixá*, in order to implant sacred forces in the new *terreiro*. The complete grouping of ritual objects is known as *deka*. This process requires the help of many ritual specialists and elder priests and priestesses of other Candomblés<sup>25</sup> (personal communications: Oşunlade 1982b; Crispim 1982c).

Public rituals take place in the sacred space known as *barracão*—a large, square or rectangular, whitewashed building made of cement-covered mud. In the past, roofs were thatched, but they are now covered with red half-cylindrical tiles. In Afonjá and other major Candomblés, the *barracão* serves as a dancing arena during public festivals as well as a storage area for the ritual clothing of each *orixá*. Every full initiate stores the special clothes for her *orixá* in one of the three special rooms isolated from the major public area.

When the *barracão* functions as an arena for the drama of the *orixá*, seating is hierarchically arranged. Against the wall opposite the entrance is the throne of the Iyalorixá, the highest authority in the Candomblé. This chair is larger, taller, and more elaborate than any other in the *barracão*, befitting and symbolizing her status. At Afonjá, there are two smaller chairs on each side of the others. They are reserved for the Obas of Xango, the highest positions in the civil hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> Near the west wall is an area designated for initiates, furnished with long narrow wooden benches and square wooden stools. Directly opposite, along the east wall, are several tiered rows of chairs for officials and distinguished guests. Along the north wall are bleachers for spectators. Men sit on the left side of the public entrance and women on the right. On either side of the entrance is a reduced version of the bleacher seating. Immediately behind the dance arena, drummers are situated on a raised area in full view of the audience. Everyone pays careful attention to seating arrangements.

Inside the sacred space, ordinary material possessions also indicate status and ritual level. In her own home, an initiate uses whatever utensils she prefers, but in the sacred space, only the Iyalorixá uses fine china, or crystal, or chrome plates, cups, and glasses. A senior initiate is entitled to medium-quality dinnerware, while other initiates must content themselves with inexpensive enameled tin cups, of the wide-mouthed type known as *caneca*, and enameled tin plates signifying their low status. Usually lower-status initiates are required to eat with their hands.

Architectural form and setting also reflect ritual status. The Iyalorixá lives in the largest, most well-appointed house, usually located at or near the implanted sacred force in the shrine of the Candomblé's patron *orixá*. Other living areas are hierarchically arranged.

In the megacosm, the head priestess may possess the social status, dwelling, and clothing of the elite or she may come from the lower socio-economic class. Some,

such as Mae Estella<sup>27</sup> and Olga do Alaketu, are well educated and well traveled. Nevertheless, Candomblé imposes its own status, and within its parameters, the position of the Iyalorixá as the keeper, manipulator, and activator of the sacred force makes her status paramount.

## CONCLUSION

African religious expression and experience are impressively encapsulated in the African Diaspora religious system known as Candomblé Nagô, most pervasive in Bahia, Brazil. Candomblé Nagô operates as a minisociety or microcosm, based on a preliterate, preindustrial worldview, initially transported from precolonial Africa to the New World through the transatlantic slave trade and still maintained today within the sacred space of Candomblé Nagô. This religious microcosm helps regulate the lives of its largely Afro-Brazilian participants through the dynamic preservation and manipulation of a complex ritual system based on West African Yoruba deities and buttressed by African as well as Afro-Brazilian art forms.

While Afro-Bahian religions such as Candomblés Nagôs affect and are affected by Luso-Brazilian society, they constitute autonomous psychological and behavioral spheres. Afro-Bahian ritual art developed in this context and thus contrasts with the macrocosm because it sustains and mirrors internal "African" social and religious values. Afro-Bahian ritual art originally was and still is multifunctional. For Candomblé initiates, it recalls the legendary past and thereby maintains conceptual and formal historico-ritual links with Africa (personal communications: Crispim 1982d; Kayode 1982b). Rituals and symbols associated with religious ceremonies further reinforce the connection to the "mother country". Afro-Bahian art also serves as a system of nonverbal communication that conveys internal messages or cues concerning social status, appropriate social behavior, or spiritual states.

Candomblés Nagôs can be viewed as "political entities" in the sense that they directly or indirectly operate as "centers of cultural resistance" based on African precepts in the face of persistent and vigorous attempts by the wider Luso-Brazilian society to force the adoption of Western- or European-oriented ideas, values, and behavior patterns. African experience and expression are further maintained by placing emphasis on the welfare of the group and religious community, rather than on single individuals.

## NOTES

1. I am indebted to Wándé Abimbólá for critical commentary and a close reading of this chapter.
2. *Kandombele* is a Bantu root word meaning "African musical presentation or festival" (Castro 1976:144). Castro's dissertation is essentially a dictionary tracing the etymology of words used in Afro-Bahian religions.
3. "Gege" is a corruption of "Ewe".
4. Another frequently encountered image of Exu is a horned, iron humanoid figure with a long tail, probably a result of the Catholic syncretization of Exu with the devil (a phenomenon that also occurs in West Africa). Each initiate, ancestor, and *orixá* has

a personal Exu that must be propitiated first in any rite. The Exu serving the *terreiro* as a whole is frequently housed outside near the gate entrance in a separate shrine (e.g., at Lobato). In others, Exu has a separate shrine within the temple grounds proper (e.g., at Afonjá, where it is located next to the Xango shrine).

5. Although these are reputed to be the first Candomblés of Nagô origin, Chief Priestess Olga do Alaketu asserts a 1635 founding date for her *terreiro*, Ile Moroailaje in Luís Anselmo, Matatu de Brotas. This date is engraved on a plaque that hangs over the door leading from the public dancing area into the sacred shrine, but I could find no historical data corroborating this claim.

6. This usage was just recently confirmed by Annette Bird by whom I had sent a present to the Iyalorixá of Afonjá. On Bird's return, she indicated her unsuccessful attempts to telephone Mae Estela, being repeatedly told that she was not at home, but rather at the *roça*, shrine area (personal communication: 13 May 1984, Venice).

7. The Bahian brand of Catholicism seems to feature an intense personal relationship and identification with a particular saint on the part of the believer [*crente*]. Specific saints are prayed to for specific requests, for example, Santo Antonio for successful marriage; Cosme and Damião for jobs, luck, or removal of obstacles. The majority of households appear to maintain separate altars for one or more saints and regularly replenish them with lighted candles and fresh flowers. Thus it was an easy transition for slaves to identify their *orixá* with a personalized saint possessing similar capabilities, for example, Saint Lazarus (the saint of leprosy and oozing sores) with Omolu/Obaluaiye (the god of smallpox, AIDS, and other virulent diseases).

8. Casa Branca in Engenho Velho has a Catholic altar to the right of the entry of the building [*barracão*] where public festivals are held.

9. Based upon my observations, African descent is evidenced by extremely curly hair and dark skin color.

10. In September 1982, I participated in the initiation rituals of an office worker, a university student, and a medical intern. One woman undergoing *santo assentado* was a lawyer from Rio de Janeiro.

11. It is my opinion that the "status" of some houses was achieved from the attention focused on them by scholars (e.g., Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, Artur Ramos, Edison Carneiro, Pierre Verger, Melville Herskovits, Roger Bastide, and Ruth Landes). Jorge Amado (a writer) and Carybe (a famous artist) are celebrities of international importance who hold prestigious secular positions in these old houses (specifically Axé Opô Afonjá). They have contributed substantially to the reputation and renown of certain Candomblés. Thus the ceremonies in these older, elite *terreiros* attract huge numbers of tourists, eager to observe the "exotic" public rites.

12. This pattern of clear African descent did not hold true for every house. For example, the Candomblé of Menininha de Gantois was alleged to be a house full of white and foreign initiates (personal communication: Ebomin Detinha of Xango, numerous conversations, 1982). Among the *terreiros* I researched, there was only one white full initiate [*adoxu*] and that was Djalma of Yansan at Afonjá.

13. Webster's *Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1983) defines *capitalism* as "an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision rather than state control, and by prices, production and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market".

My interpretation of capitalism emphasizes large-scale ownership and production of goods for profit. I do not think that any Candomblé I studied would fit this description. Concomitant with a capitalistic economy are Western values and consumption patterns, which generally extol private rather than communal property.

14. During my stay, I met many destitute people who were given land, food, and money by the Candomblé, usually in exchange for the performance of regular ritual duties.

15. Olorun [Olódùmarè] is rarely worshipped in Africa as well, although he is clearly recognized as the High God (Ìdówú 1962:30–37).

16. As a junior initiate I was not allowed to enter the shrine during this restricted phase, although all the details of the procedure were related to me later. These details were confirmed by a Zairean colleague of mine, Professor Ndolamb Ngokwey, who, because he is an African, was allowed to assist and witness this portion in a Candomblé in Feira-de-Santana. Ngokwey was researching in Feira-de-Santana at the time I was conducting field research in Bahia.

17. One example (among many): a cousin of YedaMaria, the well-known Bahian artist, suffered frequent and intense headaches over a period of years. Despite frequent advice by a number of divinations to initiate, she consistently refused. Finally, when she was close to death, her parents took her to a Candomblé, where she was initiated: she subsequently recovered and prospered (personal communication: YedaMaria, July 1982).

18. Exu has been described as the “slave” of the *orixá* by some scholars but is more accurately defined as an ubiquitous dialectical principle functioning as a go-between, mediator, catalyst or activator, and messenger. Bastide’s information was gathered as an Ogan in a Candomblé (Bastide 1978a:49). He participated simultaneously in the civil hierarchy and sustained the *terreiro* through his regular contributions. Exu is neutral, positive, or negative, depending on the ritual context and other factors.

19. This space is defined as the physical area inside the fences or walls of the *terreiros*. During the ritual season, the sacred space could conceptually be extended to include the mental or spiritual space of the participants.

20. Since an *orixá* requires a medium in whom to manifest, many *orixá* known in Africa are not found in Brazilian Candomblés. Ewa (the *orixá* of the Yewa River in Ogun States, Nigeria) is an example of a deity rarely worshipped in Brazil, because the ritual link has been all but lost. Any medium who can serve as a vehicle for a rare *orixá* (such as Ewa, Oba, or Inle) is immediately initiated into the Candomblé regardless of the expense, as in the case of an Ewa initiation I recorded for Axé Opô Afonjá.

21. Men also wear a special uniform, consisting of a white tunic and trousers. Men who perform animal sacrifice [*axogun*] wear special white caps.

22. *Iyawo* are initiates with less than seven years’ membership or more than seven years without the completion of the expensive required ritual for advancement. I have found this term most frequently used to refer to novices during their seclusion throughout initiation. After they are released from seclusion and begin to assume the more normal Candomblé functions and to participate in the public annual festivals, there is a tendency to use the term *Filha-de-Santo* rather than *iyawo* for this category of initiates. This status may persist for many years (even up to twenty or more) if the initiate (or sponsors she may solicit) cannot finance the ceremony. The title of Ebomin [from the Yoruba *egbon mi*, my elder relative] is conferred upon completion of the ritual.

23. This cloth consists of extremely long, narrow strips sewn together to make a prestigious and very expensive cloth worn by the Yoruba for very “high” occasions (e.g., marriage, presentation to a king or an important party). In Bahia *aşo oke* has comparable prestige value. Since Yoruba imports are expensive, the majority of initiates must be satisfied with machine-made pieces.

24. Colloquially, any ritual in Candomblé is called an obligation [*obrigação*]. Every initiation involves an elaborate series of taboos [*ewo*], for example, avoidance of certain foods, curfews, restrictions on clothing, and physical contact at certain times.

25. A series of sacred items are necessary to enable a senior initiate to open a *terreiro*: the assent of the initiate’s *orixá*, seventeen cowries for *eerindinlogun* [*dilogun*] divination, new razors for shaving the head, and a cutting container in the parent *terreiro*. The new priest or priestess is still regarded as a member [*filha, filho*, lit. son or daughter] of the parent

*terreiro* and is required to participate in all major private and public rituals for his personal *orixá* and the *orixá* of his *mae* or *paidesanto* [mother or father of the saint]. I observed Moacir of Ogun, an initiate at Afonjá and an Oje at Ile Agboula, actively and regularly participate in the rituals at Afonjá although he was head priest of his own *terreiro*. Further, as a mark of respect, he was obliged to wait until the ritual cycle was completed at Afonjá before beginning his own. In turn, Afonjá begins public festivals for a particular *orixá* only after its parent *terreiro*, Casa Branca, has completed its ritual activity.

26. At the time of my research these positions belonged to Pierre Fatumbi S. Verger, Oju-Oba [the eyes of Xango]; Jorge Amado; Carybé; and Vivaldo Costa Lima.

27. Mae Estella graduated as a nurse in 1945 from the federal university. She accepted the responsibilities of spiritual leadership of the Candomblé of Axé Opô Afonjá only because divination forcefully dictated this path, and she feared the consequences of ignoring the instruction.

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