Stefania Capone

SEARCHING *for* AFRICA *in* BRAZIL

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Power and Tradition in Candomblé

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by Lucy Lyall Grant

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

In the Western imaginary, Brazil embodies the myth of a wild and enchanted land, inhabited by hospitable people who are at one with nature. Salvador has long been a city in which contrasts are diminished, colors combine, and beliefs intertwine. But Bahia is also the "Rome of Africa," a place in which religious traditions brought by slaves have been preserved and transmitted most faithfully. Bahia—with its *Nagô* Candomblé, which concentrates an ideal of Africanity—has become the promised land in which racial mixing and harmony reign, although the dream of African purity lives on in the quest for roots which animates conversations in the most traditional houses of worship.

In this work, it is another Brazil that I want to look at, a Brazil with thousands of exceptions to the rules—whether the rule be a law or a model to be respected—making the establishment of orthodoxy or a standard line impossible in the thousands of Candomblé centers spread throughout the country. Multiplicity dominates and is imposed, weakening the elegant—and, at times, too perfect—systematizations that attempt to crystallize the religion.

Writing about Candomblé is certainly a dangerous undertaking, with many pitfalls. Too many illustrious predecessors and too many works presented only one of this religious phenomenon's many forms. For a long time, there was even a feeling that nothing new could be said about this field, perhaps one of the most explored in religious anthropology.

Beatriz G. Dantas's pioneering work, which took Brazilian scholarship by storm, brought crucial criticism of the very idea

of "Nagô purity." Many other authors followed her example, analyzing the scholars' role in the making of traditions. A decade has passed since I published the first edition of this book in French, in 1999. The Brazilian edition followed in 2004. Today's American edition gives me the opportunity to clarify my personal approach to this issue.

While Dantas (1988)—like most authors who criticized the valorization of the Nagô model—attributes the imposition of a model of purity to the conscious action of intellectuals, in order to better "control" the cults, my aim in this work is to underline the agency of the Candomblé elites connected to the three houses of worship considered traditional in Bahia. As we shall see, these Candomblé leaders succeeded in imposing their own vision of the tradition upon the intellectuals, reshaping Afro-Brazilian religious practice in their own interest. This work addresses the issue in a way which is fundamentally different from Dantas's argument.

Dantas analyzed the past: the 1930s, a key period in the construction of national identity and in the creation of Afro-Brazilian studies. I decided to write not only of the past, but also of the present, highlighting the ritual negotiation which represents the core of religious life in Candomblé houses. The confrontation between an ideal model of tradition and the reality of ritual practice shows the agency of the initiates and their power of negotiation even at the very heart of ritual hierarchy. The "invention of tradition," then, is the product of a dual movement, a dual project linking religious elites with intellectual elites in the same quest for an ideal Africanity. Today, Afro-Brazilian religions cannot be considered merely as expressions of "Black Brazil," as some authors suggest, because they crossed the color line a long time ago, gathering white, black, and mestizo followers. It is not useful to make racial divisions when discussing the Afro-Brazilian religious universe: in Brazil, race and culture are dissociated, and one can be initiated in a "black" religion without being or considering oneself black.

My analysis of ritual practice shows the impossibility of seeking "uncorrupted" African origins in Candomblé. Nevertheless, young researchers are still too often oriented to reproduce the type of analysis in which Nagô Candomblé is taken as the embodiment of African tradition in Brazil. I hope that this study will help give a better understanding of a very complex universe, showing how tradition, which sees itself as eternal and immutable, is in fact reinvented day after day.

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A book is always a collective effort. This project could not have been completed without the support of certain people to whom I would like to express my wholehearted gratitude. Among the many colleagues and friends who have helped me, I would like to thank Marie-Hélène Delamare, Jacques Galinier, André Mary, Stephan Palmié, Susan Rogers, Michka Sachnine, and Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, as well as the many people who assisted me in this research, especially Leonardo Carneiro and Ana Messias. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Museu Nacional (UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro), where this story began, the Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative (LESC, University of Paris X), and to the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), which gave me a grant for the English translation.

A special thanks go to my husband Elliott Laffitte and my son Alexandre for their endless patience and support.

Finally, I am forever indebted to the Candomblé initiates and Umbanda mediums who shared their knowledge with me, particularly all the members of the Ilê Ifá Mongé Gibanauê in Rio de Janeiro, and the late Alvinho de Omolu. This work is dedicated to his memory.

SOME NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION

The Yoruba language is a tonal language with three relative tone (or pitch) bands represented by acute accents over the high tones, grave accents over the low tones, and no diacritical marks over the middle tones. Yoruba has eighteen consonants, seven oral vowels, and five nasal vowels, plus a syllabic nasal. All the vowels have a tone and can be marked by subdots, as can the consonant "ṣ." For example:

high tone—ọkọ́ (hoe)
middle tone—ọkọ (husband)
low tone—ọkọ̀ (boat)

Subdots indicate the following pronunciations:

e as in gay
ẹ as in net
o as in boat
ọ as in hot
s as in so
ṣ as in show

The letter "n" at the end of a word or before a consonant nasalizes the preceding vowel (as in French), and the sequence "an" becomes almost identical in pronunciation to "ọn," resulting in near homophones such as *efan* and *efọn*. Written "p" is pronounced as the voiceless labial-velar stop "kp" where "k" and "p" are simultaneously pronounced, and the labial-velar stop "gb" is its voiced counterpart.

In Brazil, the language employed in Candomblé rituals is called Nagô. It does not have any subdots and loses the three

tones, often transforming the Yoruba high tone into a circumflex accent: the Yoruba *ilé* (house) becoming the Nagô *ilê* (house of worship or *terreiro*). In Brazilian Portuguese, the circumflex accent marks a closed vowel, and the acute accent an open vowel (as in Candomblé). The consonant "x" corresponds phonetically to the Yoruba "ṣ": e.g., *Èṣù* in Yoruba is *Exu* in Portuguese and *Eshou* in English.

I shall use the Yoruba orthography when analyzing the role of this divinity in the Yoruba pantheon, and the Brazilian orthography when referring to its Brazilian counterpart. This choice is a significant one and runs contrary to the current use of Yoruba terms in anthropological writings on traditional Candomblé, which aim to highlight its African origins. My decision to use the Brazilian orthography serves a different purpose: to show how Candomblé is primarily a Brazilian religious product. I shall use capital letters when referring to the name of a god or a spirit, and small letters for generic terms such as *caboclos*, *orixás*, or *pretos-velhos*; therefore I will write of Exu in Candomblé and of exus in Umbanda. Vernacular terms are listed in the glossary.

Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

INTRODUCTION

This book is the result of a long personal journey. During my first trip to Brazil in 1983 for bibliographic research about Candomblé, many questions began to take shape. Why had most studies focused on only one of the modalities found in the Afro-Brazilian religious universe?[1] Why did the discourse—of people linked to Candomblé, but also of researchers who wrote on this subject—insist so much on religious "purity"? I was impressed by the apparent uniformity of the cult centers, which contrasted with the constant division of the religious universe into "pure" and "impure" cults along lines of religious genealogy, creating a hierarchy in the Afro-Brazilian religious field. The differences established by native discourse on origins appeared to permeate the discourse of the researchers, with little analysis of the mechanisms of how these differences were constituted. The two discourses, native and anthropological, overlapped curiously.

At first I thought that by presenting another tradition—the Angola tradition, for example—I could contribute to questioning what appeared to me to be an a priori in Afro-Brazilian studies: that the Yoruba (or Nagô) were the guardians of religious "purity," while the Bantu (Angola and Congo) had folklore as their "own special cultural focal point" (Bastide 1971, 194). And so, while defending my master's thesis at the Museu Nacional of Rio de Janeiro in 1991, I was hopeful that I had presented an original worldview, an expression of a lesser known

branch of Candomblé, the Angola "nation."[2] Two years earlier, I had found an ambitious and intelligent *pai-de-santo*,[3] who had just founded a *terreiro*[4] in Sepetiba (Rio de Janeiro). My primary interest—studying possession dances—led me into long discussions with him, which gradually revealed a symbolic universe that was truly unprecedented.

Unconcerned with the "purity" of this worldview, I became fascinated by the theoretical construction he presented to me as the heritage of a religious tradition transmitted by his own pai-de-santo, a native of Angola, who had passed away. I thought that the simple possibility of registering this worldview would be an interesting contribution to Afro-Brazilian studies. I was taken by surprise during my dissertation defense when almost all the criticisms concentrated on the very singularity of this narrative. Who asserted this universe? How many people shared this worldview? Wasn't my study legitimizing the authority of the pai-de-santo?

These questions appeared unjustified to me. I was accustomed to reading in the classic texts on Candomblé descriptions of a religious universe in which the legitimacy of narratives was never questioned. In most texts (e.g., Bastide 1958), it was impossible even to identify the terreiros where the study was carried out. Almost all the authors referred to one tradition, that of the Nagôs,[5] and emphasized the absence of tradition in the other nations, Bantu[6] in particular.

However, with the tradition I collected, I had suggested that, perhaps, there was also something interesting in the study of Angola Candomblé, although this kind of study could challenge the internal organization of the Afro-Brazilian research field.[7] In fact, how could I give legitimacy to something which, by definition, was the fruit of "degeneration," of the loss of African tradition? Furthermore, I was guilty of a dual audacity, as not only had I dedicated myself to the study of a religious cult considered less traditional, but I had done so in Rio de Janeiro and not in Salvador, the homeland of "true" Candomblé.[8]

I was thus forced to reconsider the mechanisms which made up the opposition between Nagô and Angola Candomblé, structuring both native and scientific discourses (see Capone 2000). Dantas's work—published in 1988—questioned what had appeared to be obvious until then: the predominant model of Nagô tradition. Nagô, synonymous with African purity,

revealed itself to be a category arising from converging discourses of researchers and religious elites.

The relativization of the categories—and of the oppositions making up the field of Afro-Brazilian studies—implied, to my mind, the need for a discussion of the power relations that are part of this universe. This is exactly what makes such a work particularly delicate: every researcher working in this field is aware that power issues are at the heart of his object of study, and that it is difficult to analyze this question without entering into conflict with part of his audience, colleagues, or members of the cult. Nevertheless, it seemed to me indispensable to dedicate myself to exploring the making of tradition, as well as the power relations that structure the Afro-Brazilian religious field.

"Pure" and "Degenerate"

One of the most marked characteristics of Candomblé studies is the striking concentration of ethnographic monographs on three terreiros of the Nagô nation, which are then seen as the embodiment of African tradition in Brazil. They are the Engenho Velho or Casa Branca, considered the first Candomblé terreiro founded in Brazil, and the Gantois and the Axé Opô Afonjá, both of which came from the Casa Branca. Other Brazilian cities, such as Recife, São Luís do Maranhão, and Porto Alegre, were considered, respectively, as traditional centers of three other modalities of Afro-Brazilian religions: the Xangô, the Tambor da Mina, and the Batuque. In contrast, the large cities of the Southeast (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo), were always considered the homes of Macumba, a "degenerate" cult par excellence, stemming from a mixture of African traditions (most of them Bantu), indigenous cults, and European Spiritism.[9]

Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, the pioneer of Afro-Brazilian studies, criticized the idea—supported by linguistic studies and prevalent in his time—of Bantu supremacy among Brazilian blacks. Indeed, the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil is heavily influenced by Kimbundu and, to a lesser degree, other Bantu languages. In order to criticize this predominance, Nina Rodrigues substituted the method based on linguistic analysis for one based on the observation of religious facts, comparing them with available

data about the African cultures. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Yoruba social and religious organization was depicted by missionaries and colonial administrators (see Peel 2000). The Bantu, in contrast, were associated with a mythology regarded as inferior, despite the complexity of the social organization of the Kongo kingdom. Several works, such as that of Charles Letourneau on the "religious evolution in different human races," published in 1892 and cited by Nina Rodrigues (1990), postulated the Bantu inferiority.

In his study about Africans in Brazil, Nina Rodrigues clearly asserted the supremacy of the Yoruba (the Nagôs of Bahia), whom he considered the true "aristocracy" among the slaves brought to Brazil. He based this on the studies of Ellis and Bowen, conducted in the late nineteenth century. In the same way, Nina Rodrigues declared that he had sought in vain, among the blacks of Bahia, religious ideas belonging to the Bantu. In reality, his research was concentrated in the Gantois terreiro, created in 1896 (Nina Rodrigues 1988, 239), as a consequence of a split within the Casa Branca. His informant and principal guide in the universe of the Afro-Brazilian religions was Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim, a historic figure in Nagô Candomblé, who later became one of the founders of the Axé Opô Afonjá (see Braga 1999; Matory 2005). Nina Rodrigues was the first to play down any other cultural contribution of African origin in relation to the culture and religion of the descendants of the Yoruba.

In the wake of Nina Rodrigues, the opposition between the "pure tradition" of the Nagôs and the mythical-ritualistic "weakness" of the Bantu took hold in later studies. Despite the proof of the existence in Bahia of terreiros as old as that of the Casa Branca,[10] the religious superiority of the Nagôs, a product of their supposed "racial superiority" (see Nina Rodrigues, 1988; Ramos 1979, 201), continued to be asserted by most authors studying Bahian Candomblé, thus enhancing the value of one cultural tradition over the others. It was not until Édison Carneiro's work on Bantu Candomblé in the late 1930s that researchers showed interest in another cult modality. Published for the first time in 1937, this study, however, only confirmed Nagô superiority (Carneiro 1991). The difference, initially asserted in the religious realm, was soon transferred into a regional opposition between the Brazilian Northeast (Nordeste), mainly Bahia, which exalted its cultural heritage by means of greater respect for the "superior" black Nagôs, and

the Southeast (Sudeste), which—although by the early nineteenth century it had become the administrative and economic center of the country—lacked a cultural tradition of equal value.[11]

Despite the existence of Candomblé at the beginning of the twentieth century in Rio de Janeiro, as shown by João do Rio (1976) and Roberto Moura (1983), most scholars preferred to see in the Bahian terreiros the ethnographic model of "traditional" Candomblé, and in those of Rio de Janeiro, the ethnographic model of the "degenerate" or "degraded" cults.

Roger Bastide is the author who asserted most strongly the opposition between these two forms of religiousness. For him, Nagô Candomblé, a traditional religion, represents the realization of a utopian community. The Bantu cult, in contrast, suffers from a degradation of African beliefs, engendering the "social marginalism" (Bastide 1978, 303) of Macumba. The "subtle philosophy" (Bastide 1958, 10) of African religion remained the monopoly of the Nagôs, with the predominance of Nagô Candomblé confirmed in later studies. A polarization was established between studies on Umbanda[12]—associated, like Macumba, with the degradation of African religions—and the studies dedicated to Nagô Candomblé, the embodiment of African tradition. Nagô Candomblé, concentrated mainly in the city of Salvador, thus represented a pole that reenacted, to use Bastide's term, an African gestalt. In contrast, the cities of the Southeast, swept up by modernity, had irredeemably lost African civilization's most important values. In fact, according to Bastide, immigrants coming from the Northeast in search of work could not recreate in the cities of the Southeast the community spirit that animated the world of Nagô Candomblé. They thus became "infected by a mentality in which material interests and their advancement by political parties and unions are more important than spiritual interests and which regards work as a surer source of reward than magical procedures" (Bastide 1978, 217). In "traditional" Candomblé, magic was transformed from a "potential source of internal conflict" into an element that increases the "integrative force" of the religion, "since all problems can be resolved through the authority of the priests and the discipline they impose upon members" (ibid., 227). In contrast, in the metropolises of the Southeast, this same magic was significantly modified and, in a context where control of the group disappeared, was reduced to a simple means for "the shameless exploitation of the credulity of the lower classes" (ibid., 300).

The opposition between Nagô Candomblé, an expression of the "true" religion, and Macumba, inheritor of European and African magic, once again divided the Afro-Brazilian religious field. But does this opposition between magic and religion really exist in the different modalities of Afro-Brazilian religions? Does it not merely express one of the foundations of the cults' internal logic, reinterpreted by means of oppositions (magic versus religion) that historically have helped construct anthropological discourse?

Magic is intrinsically linked to religion in Afro-Brazilian cults, because to believe in the divinities is to also believe in the magical skills they have to intervene in favor of their "sons." Accusations of black magic therefore represent, as in the classic case of the Zande system (Evans-Pritchard 1937), a tool for political control and legitimation. Thus, what was part of a typically African political discourse (accusations of witchcraft) is seen as the sign of an ontological opposition between "pure" religion and "degenerate" magic, without recognizing that the boundaries between these categories were—and still are—extremely fluid.[13]

The Construction of an Ideal Model of Orthodoxy

The convergence between research carried out by anthropologists and the harmonious systematizations they frequently produced have allowed, over the years, the construction of an ideal model of orthodoxy, identified with the Nagô cult, whose public is both researchers and cult members. A minimal distance between observer and observed is difficult to maintain when working on Afro-Brazilian religions. Most of the anthropologists studying Candomblé became involved in the religion, in one way or another, making a kind of pact with their "object."[14] The hegemonic discourse of heads of terreiros said to be traditional in Bahia has thus been legitimized by the discourse of anthropologists, who for nearly a century have limited their studies, with few exceptions, to the three same Nagô terreiros, although there are thousands of others. According to the September 1997 census, conducted by the Bahian Federation of Afro-Brazilian Religions (FEBACAB), there were 1,144 Candomblé terreiros registered in the city of Salvador alone, as many Caboclo and Angola terreiros as Nagô.

In the 1930s, Raymundo Nina Rodrigues and Arthur Ramos conducted their studies in the Gantois; Édison Carneiro in the Casa Branca; Roger

Bastide, Pierre Verger, Vivaldo da Costa Lima, and Juana Elbein dos Santos, among others, in the Axé Opô Afonjá. These are all terreiros in the line of the Casa Branca, considered the first Candomblé terreiro founded in Brazil. This concentration also led to the establishment of very special ties between the researcher and his object of study. Thus, Nina Rodrigues and Ramos became *ogans*[15] of Gantois (Landes 1994, 72). In the same way, Carneiro was ogan of Axé Opô Afonjá, the terreiro to which Bastide and Verger (who received the title of Oju Oba) also belonged. Many other anthropologists held ritual positions at this same terreiro. The ties between anthropologists and initiates became even stronger when, in the 1950s, trips to and from Africa, which had never completely stopped after the abolition of slavery, gained new impetus thanks to Verger's trips between Brazil and the Yoruba-land (Nigeria and Benin). The role of messenger, performed by Verger on both sides of the ocean, and above all the prestige that stemmed from the titles granted by Yoruba chiefs to the leaders of the Bahian terreiros, represented important elements in the construction of a traditional model, valid for all the other religious groups.

It was, however, Juana Elbein dos Santos, a disciple of Bastide, who in the late 1970s embodied the most complete example of the "alliance" between anthropologists and cult members. This Argentinean anthropologist—an initiate of Axé Opô Afonjá and the wife of Deoscóredes dos Santos, a high dignitary of Nagô Candomblé—was the first to state, inspired by Bastide, the methodological need to analyze Candomblé "from within," or as an active and initiated participant, in order to avoid any "ethnocentric deviation" (Juana E. dos Santos 1976, 18). The religious engagement of anthropologists in cult groups, which always existed but was rarely acknowledged, thus came to be one of the essential conditions for a true understanding of the culture studied.

The Constitution of the Religious Field

When speaking of Candomblé, it becomes necessary to take into account the other cults that belong to the same religious universe and help to define its borders. In Afro-Brazilian studies, Candomblé is often presented in opposition to Umbanda or Macumba, and Nagô Candomblé as opposed to Bantu Candomblé: the second item in each pair is always marked by in-

feriority and degradation in relation to an ideal Africanity. This is the result of a continual process of identity construction, by means of a progressive dislocation of the opposition that always defines the "Other" as degenerated, polluted, or inauthentic. But is this opposition truly experienced as such in the ritual practice of Afro-Brazilian religions? Is it possible to distinguish clearly between "pure" religions and "degenerate" cults? What does it mean to be an "authentic" religion? Authentic in relation to what: Africa, Bahia, or Nagô?

Today when we observe the panorama of Afro-Brazilian religions, we find an extreme heterogeneity in the religious field.[16] Each terreiro has its own ritual specificity, which is the fruit of the tradition to which it belongs, but which also stems from the idiosyncrasy of its religious leader. In reality, religious identity is constantly negotiated among social actors. The differences among these religions are, therefore, much less clear than anthropologists and Afro-Brazilian religious elites maintain. For this reason, an opposition between Umbanda and Quimbanda—in other words, between the realms of religion and black magic—asserted, for example, in Bastide's writings (1978), is recognized by several authors as merely a pattern of accusation seeking to demarcate different modalities of cult in the "religious market." David Hess (1992) asserts that there is a continuum between Umbanda and Quimbanda, which is not the expression of two opposing forms of magic (white and black). According to Hess, Macumba, Quimbanda, and Umbanda represent a unified and coherent system articulated around what he calls a "syncretic dynamic" (ibid., 151). In the same way, in her work about the Mina cult from Belém, Véronique Boyer-Araujo (1993, 19) has chosen a methodological approach emphasizing the profound unity of the Afro-Brazilian religions (Umbanda, Mina, and Candomblé) in that city.

In his analysis of the formation of Umbanda, Ferreira Camargo also puts forward the hypothesis of the existence of a religious continuum among the "African" forms of Umbanda and the most orthodox Kardecism. Camargo maintains that there is a "popular awareness of the continuity, if not of the religious identity, between Umbanda and Kardecism" (1961, 14). This continuum is not limited to the Spiritist cults in southern Brazil but is also found in regions with "the strongest influence of the cultures coming from

Africa": "in cities such as Salvador and Recife, a considerable part of the population adopts the religions of African origin, which are now beginning to suffer strong influence from Kardecism, thus tracing the formation of the 'continuum' studied, which appears to be more functional, in urban areas, than traditional Sudanese and Bantu practices" (ibid., 92). The presence of ideas of Spiritist origin among those who practice "orthodox" Afro-Brazilian religions is also claimed by Alejandro Frigerio (1989, 77), who highlights the growing influence of Umbanda in even the most traditional terreiros of Salvador. It would seem that the modalities of Afro-Brazilian religions observed in Brazil constitute different combinations of the elements of this continuum. The differences are thus established more by initiates' discourse than by a real opposition in ritual practices. In reality, even the terreiros considered most pure are not immune to the influence of Spiritism.[17]

Yvonne Maggie (1989) emphasized the coinciding of the discourse of anthropology and that of Afro-Brazilian religions: as in the social sciences, Candomblé, Umbanda, or Kardecist practitioners create their own classifications. They order the field of the Afro-Brazilian religions according to a hierarchical logic, based on categories of high and low, pure and degenerated, authentic and corrupted. In establishing an opposition between "pure" religions and "degenerated" cults, anthropologists use the same classifications as their informants. It is not necessary to say that mediums always claim that they belong to the cult considered most pure. Thus, no one would define himself or herself as a Quimbanda adept, just as no terreiro said to be *umbandomblé*[18] would identify itself as such—i.e., mixed, degenerated, corrupted. Self-identification always occurs with the most respected pole, "traditional" Candomblé in this case.

The same idea of a continuum linking the various cult modalities is defended by Inger Sjørslev (1989), who reinterprets Bastide's theories about purity and degradation as an example of "anthropological myth." According to Sjørslev, the observable changes in the new modalities of Afro-Brazilian religions—"the playing with elements or forms"—are not due to the degradation of something which should remain unchanged: "on the contrary, it is a precondition for the continuation of ritual" (ibid., 106). Candomblé and Umbanda thus represent two intermediary forms on the same continuum.

This continuity is well expressed by the figure of Exu, the divine messenger, master of magic, and the great manipulator of destiny. The central god in Candomblé, for it is through his intercession that communication takes place between the *orixás* (gods) and man, he is equally present in all the other modalities of Afro-Brazilian religions. Exu appears to serve as a pivot between the religious systems. He embodies the contact point between religion and magic: indispensable to the realization of any religious ritual in Candomblé, he is also the manipulator of magical forces in favor of those he protects. Exu's existence was denied for a long time, because his very presence was proof of the prohibited practice of magic and witchcraft. He was thus strategically erased in order to help the process of religious legitimation.

Candomblé, like most Afro-Brazilian religions, was repressed to various degrees by the police until the 1970s. Along with the illegal practice of medicine, Brazilian law expressly prohibited the practice of magic. Therefore it was necessary to "hide" any indication that gave credence to accusations of witchcraft, while at the same time asserting at any price the legitimacy of the terreiros, associating them with the practice of the "true" African religion. Furthermore, it was necessary to deny the presence of Exu, whom missionaries identified with the devil, in order to assert the cult's purity and legitimacy. But what could be done when the majority of rituals inevitably pass through the mediation of Exu?

Anthropologists who defended the traditionalism of the Nagô cult modality confined themselves to the study of its public rituals and cosmogony, avoiding analysis of the most problematic aspects: "magical works" in private rituals. As Reginaldo Prandi (1991) rightly maintains, it is through magic that Candomblé weaves its relations with the clients to whom it offers its services. A terreiro's importance is therefore proportional to its success in the religious market, marked by a large number of clients and sons-of-saint (initiates) attracted by the "mystical strength" of the pai-de-santo and his ability to manipulate magical powers. Paradoxically, its religious legitimation depends on the very denial of the origin of its success: a traditional terreiro should not practice magic!

In the writings of most anthropologists, magic thus remains limited to the "degenerate" or "syncretic" cults: Bantu Candomblé, Macumba, Quim-

banda, and Umbanda. The latter has become, in Bastide's work (1978, 324), the privileged space for the expression of white magic, with its function limited to the treatment of misfortune, linked to the problems of daily life in a particularly difficult urban and industrial context. The contradictions raised by modernity find a powerful symbol in Exu. He personifies the ambiguous hero, the trickster, whose weapons are shrewdness, mobility, and luck. However, Brazilian society is ambiguous and structured around a small elite. It is a society that offers individuals social objectives which are almost impossible to achieve and which create needs that cannot be satisfied. In the context of Afro-Brazilian religions, Exu thus represents a possible solution to the conflict between an unrealizable ideal and a reality in which the possibilities for upward mobility are greatly reduced. Exu is the owner of magic and the master of destiny: through his mediation, it becomes possible to influence daily life. The African Exu must, then, transform himself to adapt to a new reality. He becomes Brazilian.

Circulation between the Cults

The relation between the African Exu and the Brazilian Exu—including the multiple exus and *pombagiras* of Umbanda—is even more complex if we consider the great extent to which Candomblé spread in the cities of the Southeast. Until the 1970s, "white" Umbanda was held in higher esteem than Candomblé, which continued to be fundamentally "a black thing"; but since then Candomblé's image has changed considerably. Its social prestige increased with the growing participation of whites and, above all, intellectuals who gave it renewed social visibility and cultural weight. Today to be initiated in Candomblé raises the status of a medium[19] from Umbanda in the religious market.

In Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the large cities of the Southeast, mediums' passage from Umbanda to Candomblé constitutes a very important phenomenon that has entailed the reorganization of the Afro-Brazilian religious field. Umbanda is considered by many mediums to be an access route to Candomblé, a kind of preparation to achieve a higher level. To become initiated in Candomblé signifies a return to roots—a way to become "African."

Nevertheless, in this quest for Africa as a focus of legitimation, the

mediums bring with them the "entities" (spirits) that they embodied in Umbanda: the *caboclos* and the exus. The caboclo—an indigenous spirit reinterpreted as being the "master of the land"—is venerated even in the most traditional terreiros, despite all efforts to maintain "African purity."[20] In contrast, the persistence of exus and pombagiras in the passage from Umbanda to Candomblé causes several problems. Umbanda exus are considered disincarnated spirits, and possession by them conflicts with the prohibition in Candomblé of any possession by *eguns*, the souls of the dead. The proximity of the eguns is regarded as spiritually polluting. Umbanda exus are thus considered negative and harmful to the son-of-saint's life.[21]

Therefore if, on the one hand, heads of terreiros need a great number of initiates in order to establish themselves in the religious market, on the other hand, the initiation of mediums from Umbanda can be a source of conflict with those who maintain cult orthodoxy. There is a dual response to this paradox: either the leader of the terreiro imposes a spatial separation —that is, he does not accept possession by exus in his terreiro but tolerates it outside the terreiro (in the medium's home or terreiro, if he has one)—or he reinterprets these spirits by "Africanizing" them. Umbanda exus then become the "slaves" of the orixás, reproducing one of the ritual functions of Exu, who can be the servant of the other African divinities. They are thus inscribed in Candomblé ritual logic. Even if most mediums assert that Pombagira is a typically Brazilian creation, she can also be reinterpreted and legitimized as the "slave" of a divinity—in other words, as one of the aspects of an African Exu in Candomblé.

In Umbandist writings we find constant ideological reformulations that seek to resolve the conflict between doctrinaire and conservative demands and the immediate interests of a cult's adepts. This has led to the reintegration of the once denied and weakened figure of Exu into the Umbandist system. In the same way, the reinterpretation of these spirits in Candomblé reveals a parallel strategy of adaptation of an ideal orthodoxy to the real interests of the mediums. We find the same opposition existing in Umbanda between the official discourse that seeks the "whitening" of the religion and the ritual practice of its followers, who see in Exu's power a form of adaptation to the social reality of large cities. Mediums overcome the difficulties of daily life using the same instruments as their protective spirits: cunning, guile, and the manipulation of destiny, all characteristics of Exu.

The complex rearrangements of Candomblé orthodoxy in ritual practice indicate that Afro-Brazilian religions are neither completed, fixed religious constructions nor mutually exclusive entities. Furthermore, ideal models bear little resemblance to ritual reality: neither the ideal Umbanda described by its theologians nor the "pure African" Candomblé preferred by the tradition's spokespeople ever really existed.

In Umbanda, as in Candomblé, official discourse seeks to reproduce an ideal of purity defined differently according to the situation: the whitening of black culture in Umbanda in the 1930s, or the re-Africanization of Candomblé through the struggle against syncretism since the end of the 1970s. The two "orthodoxies" constitute ideal, historically determined models that are linked to terreiros' legitimation in the religious market. Both (more aspirations than realities) must learn to coexist with the multiple arrangements that allow the ideal model to adapt to the complexity of ritual practice.

Africa in Brazil

The re-Africanization process that we see at work in the ritual reinterpretation of Umbanda exus originates in the tireless search for "Africanisms" in Afro-Brazilian religions. Since Afro-Brazilian studies began—and the very name of the discipline highlights this—researchers' attention has often focused on cultural traits that show African origins. Religions were analyzed with regard to elements that cannot be explained as social facts belonging to Brazilian society, "given that their origins are in Africa" (Birman 1980, 3).

Thus, the quest for these Africanisms constitutes the principal approach of the majority of anthropologists who have studied Afro-Brazilian religions. If for Nina Rodrigues (1900) the surviving African elements confirm the primitive and inferior character of Brazilian blacks (despite an internal distinction between more or less inferior blacks), for Bastide (1978) remaining true to an African past becomes a positive sign of social and cultural cohesion. "Black memory" becomes a sign of faithfulness to one's origins, and therefore of ritual purity. On the other hand, "betrayal" of these origins, caused by the loss of collective memory, characterizes "degenerated" or "degraded" cults.

Remaining true to the past defines "pure" religions as traditional, but the

very idea of tradition raises epistemological problems that must be considered. Tradition commonly involves the survival of the past in the present. However, for something to become traditional implies not only repetition but also transformation. Traditions, in reality, tend to constitute a system of references that establish distinctions between what is traditional and what is not. Being part of a tradition, therefore, means establishing a difference. It is then necessary to question the political functions of traditions: they are not merely systems of ideas or concepts, but models of social interaction.

Asserting tradition, however, was often interpreted as intentional in Afro-Brazilian studies. People from "traditional" terreiros assert their loyalty to tradition because they are conservative, because they have maintained ties that keep them close to their origins. This assertion is often presented as a fact, or as a universal trait of human psychology, without further explanation. This trait, however, is not a common heritage. In the case of Candomblé, it is distinctive only to the Nagô cult, becoming a sign of superiority in relation to other African cults which have lost their roots forever.

The traditionalism of Nagô Candomblé, a notion already found in the writings of early researchers, was reiterated by Bastide (1978 and 1970b), based on the concept of collective memory. This notion—which Maurice Halbwachs (1925) associates with the construction of a symbolic space set in a material space—enables, according to Bastide, an African space and metaphysics to be reconstituted in Candomblé. However, the very idea of collective memory implies a superorganic view of culture. This vision is still found in the writings of several intellectuals linked to Nagô Candomblé who use, as we shall see, this recollection of an original *arkhé* as a political instrument.

The notion of tradition associated with Africanisms in Afro-Brazilian religions began to be questioned, starting in Maggie's (1977) work. Patricia Birman's (1980) analysis of Afro-Brazilian studies, for example, sees Africanisms—and indigenous elements found in the terreiros—as direct reproductions of what, in Brazilian society, was conventionally considered representative of the African and the indigenous in religious practices. Birman suggests that the origin of these surviving cultural elements is not to be found in a collective black memory, as Bastide claims, but in Brazilian (and non-Brazilian) intellectuals' scientific literature, and in their reconstruction

of this tradition. Their responsibility has been brilliantly analyzed by Dantas (1988). However, while she sees this tradition as the invention of intellectuals used to better control the cults, this relationship of domination is by no means in one direction only. In reality it is also a political instrument which legitimizes the hegemony of the pure over the degenerate, being the product of scholars' "evangelization" (Maggie 1989) by Nagô religious elites. Africa—or at least the image of it constructed in Brazil—thus becomes the source of religious legitimation, in which the initiates' and anthropologists' discourses overlap in the same quest for roots.

Ritual Reorganization

This quest is also found in some studies of Umbanda. Liana Trindade, who analyzed the figure of Exu in Umbanda, sees in this divinity's characteristics proof of Africa's survival in a "white" religion. However, what seems important in this context is not to rediscover the Umbanda Exu's original African characteristics, but to see how a symbol from another context becomes part of a mythical and ritual structure, according to a specific operating logic. Religious systems, therefore, should be analyzed as codes for structuring the world—that is, as systems of signification. The mythical and ritual structure tells of the relations binding followers to the social system, by means of a complex network of symbolic mediations and solutions to social contradictions. In this way, each element does not have autonomous and absolute value, because its significance changes according to the position it occupies in a given context. The elements of heterogeneous origin are part of a vast process of symbolic bricolage, in which origin counts less than the significations currently attributed to them by believers.

The figures of Exu and Pombagira are, then, simultaneously symbols of faithfulness to African roots in Umbanda (Trindade 1985) and heterogeneous elements, signs of degeneration from their original purity, during the medium's passage from Umbanda to Candomblé. These spirits should therefore be reinterpreted and re-Africanized, in order to be assimilated back into Candomblé's religious structure. The separation between the ideological level—the "pure African" orthodoxy, as the source of legitimacy—and the ritual practice level is perpetuated, and the various ritual arrangements constitute the difficult mediation between the ideal and the reality.

Thus, while the principal concern of some authors has been to demonstrate the continuity of African thought in Umbanda, mine, in contrast, will be to analyze the ritual arrangements enabling the formation of a religious continuum which runs through the entire Afro-Brazilian religious field. At the same time in which Africa survived the "whitened" Umbanda, thanks to the daily practice of mediums and clients of Umbanda centers, the adaptation of Candomblé initiates coming from Umbanda has kept its links with the original religious context. The factors that were preserved—fiercely defended and reaffirmed—are those that more directly evoke a critique of the hierarchical system on which Candomblé ritual organization is based. What is at stake, then, is no longer the survival of an African heritage, but the operating strength of these symbols—the exus and pombagiras—and their importance in the interpretation of mediums' experience.

While Exu certainly acts as an element of adaptation to the chaotic reality of urban Brazilian society, offering symbolic assistance to resolve conflicts, he also is the protector, the "compadre" or friend of the individual, and the mediator of social conflicts between different hierarchical positions, between pais-de-santo and initiates, and between men and women. Through the discourse of Exu and that of his female counterpart, Pombagira, religious, social, and sexual power is constantly called into question.

The words of the spirits allow the power relationships within the cult or the family group to be criticized directly. Initiates, who owe obedience to their initiator, can thus create for themselves a space of autonomy and rebellion. The medium is not responsible for what is said, because officially possession leads to total loss of consciousness. Any critical judgment thus becomes legitimate because it comes from the spirit. The only way to react to these criticisms is to contest the spirit's presence and accuse the medium of simulating possession.[22] Such criticism, however, is not limited to the religious structure. Pombagira frequently becomes a pivotal figure in marital dramas, when gender relations are directly questioned. Thanks to the words of the spirit, female mediums can contest their partners' primacy and manage to impose their own conditions, renegotiating their inferior position.

These spirits' persistence in the passage from Umbanda to Candomblé also provokes rivalry between the medium and his pai-de-santo, who asserts his "power" in the religious market through his clientele and spiritual kinship. The practice of divination using cowries (*búzios*) is the pai-de-

santo's principal means of resolving his clients and initiates' problems. On the other hand, possession by Exu or Pombagira puts the client in direct contact with the spiritual realm, since it is the spirit itself who offers a solution to his problem. The widespread practice of consulting mediums possessed by these spirits is thus a gauge of success—having many clients guarantees the mediums' economic independence and social status, resulting in their being in direct competition with the head of the terreiro.

Scholars and Tradition

We saw how the writings of intellectuals—physicians, sociologists, and anthropologists—on Afro-Brazilian religions have a direct influence upon the object of their study. The reformulation of the religious field through anthropologists' discourse is evident when studying Exu. How can we explain the fact that from the early twentieth century until the 1950s, Exu was identified with the devil, and then—in the works of Carneiro (1950), Bastide (1958), and above all Juana Elbein dos Santos (1976)—became the great mediator, the great communicator, the conveyor of the divine force (*axé*)? What is the explanation for this semantic shift based on a "pure African" tradition which is suddenly echoed in Bahian terreiros?

Is information gathered from the last slaves and reported in Nina Rodrigues's work at the end of the nineteenth century more "traditional" than that of African *babalawo* (diviners) which formed the basis of Juana Elbein dos Santos's analysis almost a hundred years later? Why did the last freed slaves hide Exu's fundamental importance in the Candomblé universe? Is it because the figure of Exu was associated with magic and, because of this, denied in the discourse of religious elites and anthropologists linked to traditional terreiros?

The alliance between scholars and Candomblé elites was able to disguise the quest for legitimacy of one sector of this religious universe with a scientific discourse, thanks to the pretended neutral and objective systematizations made by anthropologists. After the research of Juana Elbein dos Santos in Africa, Exu could occupy once again the central place in the internal logic of the cults, which led me to ask the fundamental question: what does tradition really mean?

In fact, we must not forget that what is told to anthropologists is always

in accord with the ideological background of the informant, according to his own strategy of social adaptation and legitimation. There is no scientific objectivity because there is no objective discourse on the part of the subject. The Exu who was "forgotten" in the first part of the twentieth century could be "remembered" when his presence became coherent with the informants' goals and the reconstruction of an African tradition. The importance of the alliance between the terreiros and the scholars is confirmed by the emphasis given to the anthropologist's presence in a terreiro. To be studied by a researcher is equivalent to a certification of traditionalism and of one's close ties with African tradition.

Furthermore, when analyzing the re-Africanization process at work in the reinterpretation of the exus and pombagiras of Umbanda, it is important to understand that to "be re-Africanized" does not mean being or wanting to be black, or African. The re-Africanization process, as shown by Prandi (1991), implies, on the contrary, familiarity with all the literature on African and Afro-Brazilian religions. To "become African" signifies, therefore, the quest for a scientific explanation for religious practice.

The enormous success of the Yoruba language and civilization courses in Brazil demonstrates Candomblé initiates' constant quest for all the elements of the religion, now lost, which are thought to reconstitute an African purity. In this way, books—especially the vast amount of anthropological literature about Africa—become keepers of the lost tradition. Re-Africanization appears as an exercise of bricolage, in which each element is carefully sought in scientific literature. Initiates are thus transformed into researchers attempting to reconstruct their own culture, piece by piece.

The continual search for information about African religions, and the resumption of journeys to Africa (which played an important role in the legitimation of Afro-Brazilian religions in the beginning of the twentieth century), are the expression of this quest for African purity.

Mediums' Discourse

I chose to use the life stories of mediums possessed by Exu and Pombagira to better understand the central role performed by these spirits in their mediums' lives. The constant reinterpretation of everyday troubles as the

sign of spirits' intrusion in the medium's life is indispensable for understanding these spirits' persistence in Candomblé, despite the problems it creates for maintaining an orthodox model.

During each interview, the medium organizes his experience: he presents himself as a social actor and, at the same time, offers an image of the society in which he lives. The majority of writing on Candomblé, however, does not accord much room to the individual; religion seems always to stem from an immutable past imposed upon its followers. Initiates appear as dispossessed of their material and spiritual lives: they are controlled by the gods and rarely described as social actors or political subjects. In interviews, on the other hand, they clearly reveal what Jeanne Favret-Saada calls a "specific experience of time" (1991, 671): the reinterpretation of misfortune through mediumship implies a reorganization of time, personal (and biographical) as well as social. The spirit is presented as the medium's only ally when faced with the difficulties of daily life.

My main concern was to avoid what Pierre Bourdieu, as well as Jack Goody, calls the "privilege of totalization" (Bourdieu 1977, 106). Therefore I kept a dialogical relation between my informants' speech and my perspective and interpretation. In this way, I sought to explain the constant process of creation and reformulation that forms the basis of every cultural construction. It was necessary to escape from the illusion of a perfect formal coherence that had tempted me in the past, and that appears to be the dominant line in Afro-Brazilian studies. I did not want to erase the contradictions among my informants' different theories and political projects, or to erase the authors of the statements by replacing them with an undefined collective subject: the *povo-de-santo* (Candomblé initiates). It is important to remember, however, that these narratives are not all equally significant, because the position that each informant occupies in the group modifies the information that he presents. It is very different if the person speaking is a pai-de-santo or a son-of-saint, and if he is regarded as belonging to the African tradition or to the syncretic cults.

I am aware that the continuous dialogue between the medium and his spiritual companions, as well as the constant shifts between the I and the Other, may shock more than one rational mind. In Brazil, however, the material world and the spiritual world are often very close—in no other