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Exu:Trickster by Default

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EXU:TRICKSTER BY DEFAULT

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THE SETTING

We find Exu in that unique Afro-Brazilian religion, *Candomblé*, concentrated primarily in the city of Salvador (often called Bahia). *Candomblé* is often dubbed by Westerners a fetishist cult, a ‘primitive’ belief system, and at best a religion. Rarely is it considered a rich philosophy of life. Actually it is more than a religion in the Western sense. It is also more than Western-style word-spinning philosophy divorced from concrete living. It entails a world vision, a way of life. It is practicing philosophy (Luz 1995), much in the sense of Richard Shusterman (1997). How did this living philosophy come about in Brazil? Ironically, through master-slave interrelations.

The Portuguese colonial economy rested on the broad but weary, lash-marked backs of African and mulatto slaves and so-called ‘free’—but still brutally exploited—workers. This climate eventually gave rise to *Candomblé* practices. Through *Candomblé* philosophy-religion, the Afro-Brazilians developed a sense of community. This community spirit gave them the wherewithal for coping with, and eventually resisting, the awful lot destiny seemed to have held in store for them. It became a means of survival. In order to survive, however, first and foremost the slaves had to present a show of *conformity* toward their masters. *Conformity* suggested peaceful coexistence. The aura of peaceful coexistence put the masters into a soporific state, blissfully confident that all was well on the *fazenda* (plantation). But all was definitely not well. The outward show of *conformity* concealed seething *resistance*. *Conformity* and *resistance* became the name of the game. And to an extent it still is, for Brazil’s downtrodden people, as Marilena Chaui (1986) effectively argues. For, ‘wherever there was slavery, there was resistance’ (Reis and Gomez 1996:9).

The Portuguese tried to impede development of the Afro-Brazilians’ community spirit. One of their methods for accomplishing this was by forcing the diverse African ‘nations’ together into a wretched concoction of human souls. By mixing Africans of different linguistic and ethnic

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origins, they thought they could keep their assortment of slaves in a state of confusion. The idea was to limit communication. Without being able effectively to communicate, the slaves could hardly organize a rebellion. What the slave owners didn't account for was the Africans' ability to cope. They coped, by bringing their ethnic differences together and organizing them into a vibrant, dynamic, perpetually changing cultural whole capable of making do with whatever resources might be at hand. They made do through intensive, often clandestine, and always cunning, imagination, invention, and improvisation.

The Portuguese slave owners underestimated the Africans' ability to bring their differences into an amorphous whole. They simply didn't understand the African communities' organization and function. The so-called 'nations' were actually not nations in the European sense. There were no strictly defined territorial boundaries and features of national identity. Communities existed according to language. The boundaries were ethnic rather than national. They were cultural rather than economic. Consequently, interrelationships between communities were more complementary than competitive. This allowed each community to maintain certain autonomy with respect to the other communities. At the same time, the communities were woven into a whole punctuated by conflict and wars over ethnic rather than national issues. In Brazil, the Portuguese mixed African slaves from different languages and ethnicities together into what they considered a confusing mix. This was supposed to prevent the slaves from organizing themselves into a rebellious force. But their project backfired on them. Their reasoning was no match for the slaves' ability to improvise with the sparse resources at hand.

The Europeans' efforts were largely in vain, above all, for Candomblé incorporated a supreme illustration of *conformity* and *resistance*. Candomblé was no mere 'primitive' cult, as the colonizers usually had it. It involved the slaves' pride in tradition, their resilience, and their *resistance* toward any and all attempts to emasculate their sacred practices. Candomblé, in short, was and is a living, practicing religion-philosophy. It entails a holistic form of life. Indeed, it pervades everyday living to the maximum. Its purpose is to live life to the utmost, through outward *conformity* to the norms set down by those who were in control, coupled with clandestine, and on occasion open *resistance*. *Conformity*, for the very purpose of survival. *Resistance*, for there was no breaking of the African will. And *resistance*, afforded by the social cohesion that emerged during the colonial period. These characteristics become strikingly evident from the earliest anthropological works (Bastide 1945, 1971, 1973 1978, Nina Rodrigues 1935, 1977, Ramos 1937, Verger 1981, 1987).

BUT WHO IS EXU, AND HOW DID HE EMERGE?

The first permanent Candomblé religious center, *Ilê Axé Iyenasso Oka* or *Casa Branca* (White House), is believed to have been founded in 1830. Rivalries soon erupted among families associated with the *Casa Branca*. Numerous groups split off into various parts of Salvador. Nevertheless, Candomblé practice eventually became quite widely disseminated among many of the slaves and free blacks alike, although their activities had to remain under cover for the most part. By keeping their traditional practices in hiding, they presented the outward appearance of conformity with white rules and regulations and customary cultural practices, while beneath the surface an entirely different cultural of resistance manifested itself.

Indeed, the resistance and vitality of the Candomblé belief and its practitioners was extraordinary. Every attempt on the part of the Europeans to erase the practice out of existence was in vain. Prolonged repression on the part of masters and administrators alike, often vicious and inhuman, was no less violent than brutal treatment by the police. There were incessant complaints by 'proper folks' of the upper classes, and demands that the black 'evil' be snuffed out once and for all. Resistance persisted in the guise of conformity, however, and Candomblé continued regularly, spreading out and engulfing principle cities in Bahia. The Candomblé place of worship, the *Terreiro*, is where the resistance emerged as a unique Afro-Brazilian practice.

The *Terreiro* (occasionally called the *Roça*, a plot of land) is the floor of the temple. Sometimes concrete, and sometimes earthen, it is a place, a concept, a form of life; it is the source of life; it is life itself. The collection of *Terreiros* in Brazil makes up a part of Africa mythified. Each *Terreiro* is like an African island in a foreign land; it is a re-construction of Africa. It is an island; yet it is still Africa, because the *Orixás* (Afro-Brazilian divinities) are there. The *Orixás* came from Africa to dance with their sons and daughters in this alien environment. Their very presence brings Africa to this strange yet somehow familiar land. Now, during the coming and going of everyday life, they can learn to cope with their *saudade* (a profound nostalgia and longing for Africa, for times in the distant past). Thus they can once again begin to sense harmony between themselves and the natural world. In this manner Candomblé activity in the *Terreiro* within the African-Brazilian form of life becomes radically participatory.

'Christianization' of the *Orixás* hardly does more than paralyze this process. Exu, the messenger *Orixá* who mediates between humans and the other *Orixás*, is a good example. Exu is often 'syncretized' with Satan. This is erroneous. Exu satanized as evil in contrast to good is Exu transformed into something he is not. Exu is no Satan. In fact, there is no good/evil in the Candomblé cosmology (Serra 1995:156-57). Truth/falsity and good/evil values belong to language and customary Western forms. Candomblé will have no truck with this 'logic'. It is a

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general philosophy of life, and life in its pure form is both positivity and negativity mediated by the emergence of newness. This vague, qualitative rather than strictly quantitative 'logic of life' is just what it is: *process*. That's all. Hardly more can be said, for, I repeat, Candomblé philosophy is 'practicing philosophy'.

Buddhism and other Eastern world visions, like Candomblé, are not religions in the Western sense; there is no Western concept of God—the *I Ching* is comparable in terms of its practice to the Candomblé toss of the *Búzios* (a collection of 16 small shells or *Búzios* [dowries] that are thrown by a *Pai-de-Santo* [*Babalorixá*, or Orixá Priest] or *Mãe-de-Santo* [*Ialorixá*, or Priestess] on a specially prepared surface and after the proper ceremony in order to determine one's physical and spiritual condition). Candomblé as simply one religion 'syncretized' with another religion, Catholicism, stifles and limits Candomblé as practicing philosophy. The Terreiro bears witness to this limitation. As far as the people intimate with Candomblé living are concerned, the Terreiro is so much a part of their lives that they hardly give it a moment's thought. They don't ponder over its origins or the very idea of it. All that is for academics who have nothing else to do with themselves. Candomblistas just take the Terreiro for granted; it is part of their everyday practices (Aflalo 1996:139-50).

Most Terreiros belong to a particular Candomblé community, but some are rented property. In all cases, through *Axé* (spirit, or vital energy) all Terreiros are interdependently interrelated in philosophy and practice, though on the surface they might appear quite different, from time to time and from one area to another. There are three foci of *Axé* in the Terreiro: (1) where the Orixás are moving about—actually, they are never at a standstill, (2) within members of the Terreiro when the Orixás 'mount' them and induce a trance state, and (3) in deceased members (*Eguns*) of the Candomblé community. When everything is lively, the entire Terreiro is impregnated with *Axé* (Verger 1981).

A Terreiro community has a keen sense of sacred and profane space. This is not the same as Mircea Eliade's (1959) concept of sacred and profane. The building they call their everyday home, and the world of work and play and commuting and shopping, is profane. The Terreiro, in contrast, is sacred. But there is the implication of a third term between traditional values and modern capitalism. The Terreiro is neither exactly traditional nor modern, for *Axé* pervades all activities within holistic Candomblé practicing philosophy. *Axé* is like Buddhist 'emptiness', that gives rise to all processes that render the universe the universe. *Axé* maintains the continuous, effervescent flow of activities in some form or other of complementary balance. Candomblistas need their Orixás in order to participate in the life-giving, cosmic force of *Axé*; without *Axé*, everything would soon become paralyzed (Machado 1999).

DOES THE CONCEPT OF SYNCRETISM REALLY GIVE AN ADEQUATE ACCOUNT?

'Syncretism' of two or more religions, and particularly, of Christian divinities and the Orixás, is a complex issue that has engendered considerable debate and controversy. This question bears on the relevance of 'syncretism' to the nature of Exu.

Somewhat like Catholicism, there are two levels of existence in the Candomblé world view, *Aiyê* or the physical world, and *Orum* or the supernatural realm. What exists in the one has its correspondence in the other. *Orum* governs *Aiyê* by means of the Orixás, and Exu. As mentioned, Exu's function is that of a mediator opening up lines of communication between the Orixás and earth-bound humans, somewhat in the order of mediation by the Virgin and the saints. *Olorun*, the supreme being, is the Lord of *Orum*, and hence also of *Aiyê*—s/he has been compared to the Christian God, and in this sense it can be said that Candomblé is actually monotheistic. *Olorun* is source of three forces: (1) *Iwá* (possibility of existence), (2) *Axé* (dynamic spirit or force bringing whatever is emerging into existence into existence), and (3) *Abá* (affording purpose and direction to *Axé*). Together, *Aiyê* and *Orum* form a complementary union that provides equilibrium about which the sense of life rotates.

Volney J. Berkenbrock (1995:63-66) enumerates various characteristics of Afro-Brazilian religions that maintain 'syncretic' links with Catholicism: (1) faith in a supreme being (*Olorun*), (2) belief in life after death, and (3) belief in the existence of spirits. However, as mentioned, one of the chief characteristics that sets Afro-Brazilians apart from Catholicism is their tendency to make no categorical distinction between sacred and profane, which falls in line with their sense of continuity between human and natural, between the individual and her ambient. Sérgio Figueiredo Ferretti goes a giant step further, arguing that the creation of syncretism follows five paths: (1) early *separation* of Catholicism and African practices, or non-syncretism, (2) *parallelism* or juxtaposition such that the two practices are separable (an either/or affair), (3) *mixed* practices, such that they become inseparable (a both-and affair), (4) *convergence* of the two practices, such that there is no longer the one nor the other (a neither-nor affair) but something else emerges, and finally (5) recent *re-Africanization*, or separation, once again, for all practices concerned have been 'purified' and returned to their original condition. Nevertheless, many anthropologists have often remained within a binary, language-driven, bookish rendition of syncretism (Ferretti 1999:113-24, also Droogers 1989, Epega 1999:163-65).

In a nutshell, Ferretti's typology of syncretist practice within Candomblé living takes on four general forms in today's unique Salvador scene:

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(1)Both religions may coexist side by side such that one religion is practiced at certain times and places and the other religion at others (Ferretti's *parallelism*). Believers of the two practices say they have no problem with the distinctions of both Catholicism and Candomblé; the points of divergence and contradiction between the two religions are not viewed as of any serious consequence.

(In my own conversations with people of Salvador, I am told that they liberally engage now in one practice, now in the other, yet they believe in both, for all religions are equally good even if they are completely different. Thus they derive comfort and solace from both Catholicism and Candomblé, though in different ways.)

(2)One religion masks the other religion while both remain virtually unchanged. In certain areas around Salvador by the end of the nineteenth century the Orixás were on the surface while trappings of Catholicism remained under cover (Ferretti's *mixing*). However, this mixing was subject to persecution, since the two religions were to be maintained entirely distinct—according to surface appearances, at least (Ferretti's *separation*).

(In this sense Abdias do Nascimento writes that syncretism, rather than fusion, was cultural resistance for survival. True fusion existed only between African religions from the Yoruba and Bantu regions. Post-slavery theories of syncretism, he goes on, are more in the order of 'folklorization' [Nascimento 2002:161-72].)

(3)The two religions may merge into an interdependent, interrelated, interactive

whole that presents the becoming of something that is radically other than what was becoming in the two religions when maintained relatively independent (Ferretti's *convergence*).



**Ogum/São
Jorge**

(Formal interviews with Candomblé practitioners tend to bear this out. When asked about syncretism they invariably resort to a ‘logic’ of yes-yes and no-no. They concede that they are Catholics and in the next breath they concede that they are not Catholics, and they say basically the same of Candomblé. In this sense, Catholicism and Candomblé are different yet unified. It is a matter of yes to the one and no to

the other, or yes and no to both, or the assertion that neither is pure and you can’t separate them, yet you do separate them. In other words, they don’t think in ‘logic’ and ‘reason’ but through vague both-and and neither-nor modes of sensing and thinking. This flies in the face of the ‘re-Africanizers’, who are trying to eradicate the one and purify the other once and for all [Sanchis 1999]. Actually, Ordep Serra writes that Candomblé isn’t any more syncretic than Catholicism; it’s a two-way street, not one-way and linear. Moreover, he finds inconsistency from Terreiro to Terreiro, but this doesn’t bother the candomlistas a whit; it’s not like hyperintellectualized textuality that quivers in the face of contradictions, for it embraces the both-and and the neither-nor. In this respect, the idea of syncretism as a ‘confused mixture’ has it all wrong [Serra 1995:194-99, 285-86]. ‘Confused’ for whom?—we might wish to ask. The very notion of ‘confusion’ implies contradictory elements, but there is no contradiction as far as the Candomblistas are concerned. Rather, there is a sort of *coalescent complementarity* .)

(4)Attempts to recover ancient African patrimony in its pristine form can likewise never be complete, since vestiges of Catholicism and perhaps Caboclo beliefs cannot be entirely eradicated (Ferretti’s *re-Africanization*).

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(Many academic re- Africanizers in Bahia reject the idea of syncretism. They see it as a strategy for survival during slavery and the years after abolition, but it no longer has any meaningful function; they wish to move on toward a more pure 'African' expression. Nascimento writes that the 'process of syncretization among African religions was of an entirely different nature from the interaction between the official state religion, Catholicism, and African worship. It is misleading to suggest that syncretism occurred between Catholicism and African religions, because the implication is that the exchange would have occurred on a level of equality and spontaneity' [Nascimento 1979:104]. In reality, 'African religions were outlawed by a colonial regime which knew that in order to maintain complete control over Blacks they must enslave not only their bodies but also their spirits.... What scholars have called "syncretism" between Catholicism and African religion was really a cover under which Africans continued clandestinely to practice their own religious worship. It is a tribute to the ingenuity of the Black people in preserving their own cultural heritage in the face of Aryan cultural repression: not, as Brazilian official history would have it, a symptom of liberalism and generosity of the colonial white aristocracy' [Nascimento 1979:105, see also Henry 1987, Ortiz 1980, Serra 1995].)

This summary reveals Candomblé living as *interdependent*, *interrelated interactivity*, for Orixás have no meaning without candomblistas, and vice versa. Together, they create a union between *Orum* and *Aiyê*. The candomblista resides in *Aiyê*, and at the same time she, along with the entire Candomblé community, embodies something of *Orum*. In other words, there's a little of one or more Orixá within everybody at all times and in all places. Each person is a plurality of manifestations and forces of nature and the realm of the supernatural.



**Xangô/São
Jerônimo**

Yet Orixás and human selves do not inhabit the same bodies, for they are different processes. Neither do Orixás and selves have their separate existence and then they unite, for they were never categorically separated. They are one and they are divided; they are neither one nor are they divided. Orixás depend on human subjects for their process of becoming; human subjects depend on Orixás for their process of becoming; without both, *Orum* and *Aiyê* cannot continue to maintain their tenuous balance; all are interdependently, interrelatedly, interactive (Berkenbrock 1995:277-81). Obviously, binary logic becomes impotent.

Obviously, if the various sorts of syncretistic practices outlined above existed at the same time, confusion would be inevitable. According to many reports, that was the prevalent Candomblé-Catholicism scene: confusion. Yet it seemed to present no problems, as far as Afro-Brazilians' religious life went. Of course, there is evidence of personality clashes among leaders and conflicts between groups due to differences of beliefs and ceremonial methods. But as far as the apparently logical inconsistencies inherent in syncretism—'logical' in the classical Western sense, of course—there seemed to be no quandary. Life went on, and the Afro-Brazilians survived as best they could (Consorte 1999, Wimberley 1998).

Since spirit possession is at the ritual core of Candomblé, a further word on the function of the Orixás is in order before proceeding to further discussion of syncretism.

CONVERGENT COMBINATIONS THAT 'MAKE STRANGE'

Above all, Candomblé consists of a set of precepts, rules and regulations, and rituals and practices that make up a broad world view. It is a general means by which the practitioner confronts natural processes and other human communities as well as members of the home community, drawing from energy existing within body and mind. The Orixás don't exist outside body and mind, or more effectively put, *bodymind*—since in Candomblé and Eastern religion-philosophies alike there is no Cartesian distinction. I write *bodymind*, because I cannot overstate the importance of the body's ways of kinesthetics and somatics in Candomblé and Capoeira and other Afro-Brazilian practices. In Candomblé philosophy, balance, equilibrium, and bodily and mental health, are of utmost importance (Verger 1981:108-11; also Barros and Leão Teixeira 2000, Nina Rodrigues, 1977:47).

If I might be allowed to indulge, I'll present a personal story. Steeped as I was in my own academic past oriented in the hard sciences that had obviously carried over and into my studies in the social sciences and the humanities, in June 2000 I consulted with the person I had recently chosen as my Pai-de-Santo, Hermes. After expressing my difficulty in confronting the idea of my own Orixás, he gave me a knowing grin, and linked with me in consultation and after a throw of the Búzios. The sixteen Búzios are thrown after the proper words to the Orixás have been uttered in the Yoruba language. The pattern they form when then come to rest, according to whether they land on the curved side or the somewhat flat side, and what

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interrelationships exist between them, tells the story of the particular patient's future if she conducts her life in balance with her Orixás—that are most often three in number though the number may vary from patient to patient (Sales 2001).

I then asked Hermes why my main Orixá was *Oxalá*, and why were my other two patron Orixás *Xangô* and *Oxum*. They possess conflicting characteristics and appear quite incompatible. How was it that, within my own physical and psychological make-up, could I incorporate so many contradictions? How could I ever hope to maintain any balance whatsoever? His response was that these were my Orixás because that's just the way it is, no ifs, ands, or buts. At the time of my birth, he patiently explained, there was a collusion of these particular Orixás, and I have been playing out the struggle of tensions all my life and that it was basically up to me—with the aid of the Orixás, if I remain faithful to their call—to come to terms with myself and become one and comfortable with myself and my world. The first step in this process was a *banho de limpeza* (cleansing herbal bath). Obviously, his answers were hardly any solace, and they certainly didn't satisfy my 'logico-rational' intellectual curiosity. It seemed a relatively quick-fix equivalent of psychoanalytic babble during an interminable series of sessions.

Back at Purdue University in July 2000, it took me almost a year of frequent meditating on that strange experience for it finally to sink in. But since I hadn't taken my Pai-de-Santo's advice to engage in a *banho de limpeza*, there were those lingering questions as to whether I might have missed something important. Was I lacking in a proper combination and dosage of Axé? Were mind and body out of kilter, incapable of maintaining a healthy balance, in a dismal state of disequilibrium? The very thought of my pondering over the questions went against the grain of my intellectual upbringing. Looking at my dilemma from my logico-rational self, it was all so absurd. Yet, *bodymind* was hinting at something else. I couldn't get into the proper flow of things; something was askance. That was then. After my *banho de limpeza* and other cleansing ceremonies during Hermes deemed necessary during June 2001 and June 2002, perhaps I have become somewhat more attuned to myself, my environment, and my condition. Perhaps. Why did all this at the outset appear so strange to me? Why does it somehow seem natural to me now? After much mind-wrenching over the problem, in my readings I learned about Exu.

WHAT, THEN, CAN WE SAY ABOUT EXU?

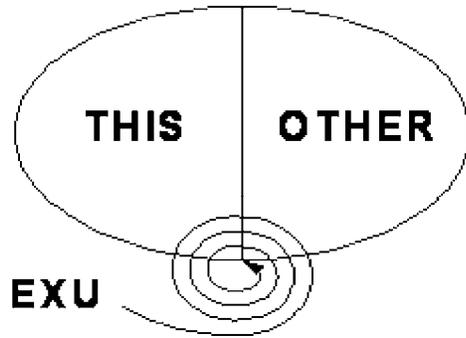


FIGURE 1

Exu within oversimplified Catholic teachings as Satanized becomes a malignant force. According to Candomblé tradition however, Exu is a mediator and messenger interacting between the Orixás and worldly beings. He is who helps make Axé happen. Consequently, he existed before all the other Orixás; he existed before the world order. In fact, he is of the nature of life itself. He incessantly brings about the emergence of novelty; he is the supreme improviser from what often appears to be chaos created by his own hand (Barbosa 2000, Trinidad 1985).

Exu is a cunning customer. You never know if his countenance is genuine or fake, if the twinkle in his eye reveals empathy or malice, whether the twitch of his eyelid is just that or if it is a calculated wink, whether his popping up now here, now there, is an aid or a trip-up. You never know, that is, unless you know in a sort of *precognitive* way. Friedrich Nietzsche (1968:289) once observed that: 'Before judgment occurs there is a cognitive activity that does not enter consciousness'. The Candomblé practitioner somehow has the capacity to know, without the need consciously to reason out her knowing. She just knows, before consciousness has had time to make its move. She knows, because it's in her *bodymind*, not in the relatively torpid, linear workings of her mind. At this level, there is no sharp boundary between memory and imagination, tacitness and intentionality, voluntary and involuntary, for everything is interrelated. In other words, Exu is the embodiment of *coalescent*, *contradictory complementarity*. The faithful candomblista knows this, because she has Exu qualities.



**Iansã/
Santa Bárbara**

In a certain manner of speaking Exu may be regarded as evil, though tenuously so, because he always shows an ingratiating ludic streak. He is dubiously good, though his actions would lead one to believe otherwise. He is Mercury, messenger and mediator between the Orixás and mere mortals. Privy to the codes that govern the designs and actions of the Orixás, he is in a position to play the role of patron saint, though he rarely does so, because he is too busy manifesting his talents as trickster. Take him seriously, and you get burned. Ignore him, and he'll slap you in the face when you least expect it. Try to play his roguish game, and he'll turn the tables on you when you're off guard. Resign yourself to whatever fate he

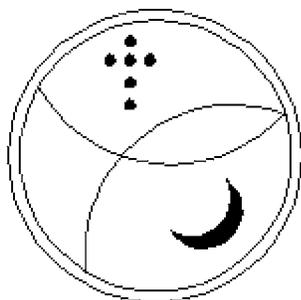
chooses to mete out, and you'll lose all vestiges of control and self-control. You can never win for losing whether you try to play his game or not. Exu is like the syncopé in Brazil's samba beat: he is the moment of 'emptiness'. He is like Duke Ellington once said of the *Blues*: it is

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sung by a third person who is not there (Sodr  1997:17). Exu is resistance in process:a samba of ironic ecstasy, shifty ebullience, screaming silence, a cauldron of effervescent bubbles, an in-your-face smile (Lamego 1934:87, Sodr  1997:47-49).

Exu's image is a mythical sign, a supreme expression of resistance. He is unaccepted conformity and submission; he is the projection of the Africans' longing for freedom beginning with the first cargo of slaves that made the trip to America, longing that is self-perpetuating up to the present and will endure into the unseen future. He is a presence that throws caution to the wind and defies rigid colonial codes and formalities and impositions of neocolonial and postcolonial states. Whatever stereotype is slapped on him, he negates; whatever identity is attributed to him, he flouts; whatever history he is crammed into, he rebuffs.

Exu is the quintessential rebel against customs, conventions, and norms. In Brazilian Candombl  he is guardian of a loose, vague sense of Africanness, *negritude*; he is a slippery link between past and present as he wiggles his way into the future. Exu as 'everybody's Exu' is nonetheless the only Exu who cannot be charged with lying down and syncretizing with some Catholic saint or deity. Indeed, since the good Fathers didn't know how to classify him, given his resistance toward the holiest of images, equation between him and the Devil was inevitable. I repeat, there is in Candombl  no good/evil dichotomy. If within Christian thinking Exu must find a place, it can be within none other than the virgule between Good and Evil. He is neither the one nor the other, yet he is both the one and the other. He is living paradox, the paradox of life itself, life within process, which is to say, paradox. He creates an enigmatic union between the Sacred and the Profane, Culture and Nature, Civilization and Barbarism, and between Everywhere and Nowhere, Everywhen and Nowhen. As illustrated in Figure 1, Exu is never simply *either* the one *or* the other, nor is he literally speaking *both* the one *and* the other. He is *neither* the one *nor* the other, for he is the supreme expression of the world in its process of becoming something other than what it was becoming.



**Yemanj /
Virgin Mary**

Exu is a model of freedom, evidenced by his mental agility and his physical plurality through his diversity of appearance that pervade Exu functions. Through his incessantly changing space-time situatedness, he perpetuates a sense of selfhood that is always becoming other than what it was becoming and is at the same time what it is in the here and now. He is self-preserving and self-transmuting. His is self-preserving in his unwavering refusal to submit to any set of fixed defining characteristics, and he is self-transmuting insofar as he resist any and all labels that might conceivably be attached to him. He appears comfortable with himself but he is not; he makes everybody squirm in face of the unexpected that gives them a sense of helplessness and at the same time he leads them to an understanding of their

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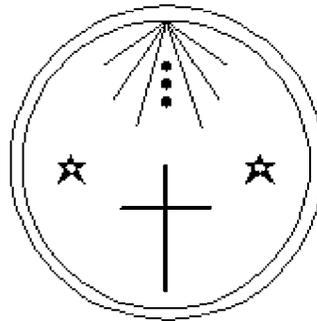
strengths. In part because of Exu, candomblistas become resigned to their weakness, and so they conform. In the same breath they become aware that they are of indomitable will, and so they resist. In this regard, Exu is the spirit of those communities of escaped slaves, the *quilombos*: the people resisted and freed themselves of their chains and now they submit to the collective will; the collective will manifests bellicose resistance even though it is of the most benign form of conformity (Bastide 1971, Carvalho 1995, Freitas 1982, Moura 1981, Ratts 2000, Vasconcelos 1995).

When one meditates on Exu's pluralistic personality throughout time and space, one cannot but garner a sense of particularity within an image of the most general sort, a generality that paradoxically and enigmatically somehow allows a plethora of diverse particular manifestations perpetually to emerge at apparently the most inopportune of moments. Exu is dynamic, courageous, and aggressive, yet he is instrumental in perpetuating harmony among the Orixás, among the Orixás and their human subjects, and between the Orixás and nature. He is charged with the responsibility of maintaining harmony and unity in spite of the fact that he is always in the act of disrupting the apple cart to create apparent chaos.

Exu lurks around in the back alleys, the side streets, and the dark corners. He is neither inside home nor Terreiro nor is he outside, in the open streets where the big, wide world of social, political and economic institutions exercises their dominion. Yet he is everywhere. He embodies neither order nor disorder. Yet he embodies both. He is neither friend nor adversary. Yet at any moment he can don the mask of either of them and play out the role magnificently. He unites yet he polarizes; he is playful yet dead serious; he is a fighter yet his pliability, his suppleness, gives rise to the idea that he is always giving in to the pressures that be; he is hard as rock yet he is fluid, slipping and sliding in and out of every situation. He exists on the borderline between the either and the or; he is always there, now, in the margin. That is how he seems to be nowhere at all, yet he is omniscient.

Putting all Exu's qualities together, one must conclude that he forms a *coalescent*, *contradictory complementary* package that never ceases to writhe, like two piglets confined within a burlap bag on their way to the nearest market. Thus Exu is a supreme 'sign of resistance'; he is conformity and resistance, contestation and negotiation. He is a radically heterogenizing force, for religious freedom, social freedom, rebellion against norms and restrictions. This role is also taken up by *Pomba-Gira*—female counterpart to Exu—who creates confusion where homogeneity was thought to exist (Lody 1995:80-85, Teixeira 1975).

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**Oxum/Our Lady****Oxalá/Christ**

Exu constantly changes, but not evenly, because he changes the rules of the game as he pleases. He is smart, conceited, intelligent and ambiguous—to

such an extent that the first missionaries were scared and compared him to the devil, making him a symbol of all evil. But due to his energies and paradoxes, he is who keeps things alive. Since it is he who makes it possible for Axé to circulate, if treated with consideration (offerings), he reacts favorably, showing himself willing and at our disposal. In a manner of speaking, Exu is the most human Orixá, for he is neither totally evil nor totally good. Since he is interrelated with the peoples' ancestors, he is the caretaker of the temples, houses, cities and people. Each person has her own Exu—even each Exu has his Exu. He is everywhere and with everything, for he is the eternal intermediary between men and women and the gods. For this reason, in all Candomblé ceremonies his offering, called *Padê* (re-union), comes before all the other offerings. In *Padê*, Exu is called, saluted, greeted and sent beyond with two objectives: (1) to summon the other Orixás for the party and at the same time, (2) to remove him from there, so that he does not disturb the ceremony with his tricks.

Exu is responsible for maintaining a balance of exchanges between the various character traits of the three or so Orixás each person possesses. He often provokes conflict to foster balance and mediation, for without conflict there is nothing to balance and mediate. Everything that is thus joined with Exu subsequently multiples, separates, transforms itself. Everything that is in incessant change, which is to say everything, period, is the consequence of Exu's dynamic role. He is the very personification of the transformation principle. His day of the week is Monday. He is associated with the now and the future—I write 'now' and 'future' instead of 'beginning' and 'end', for there is no beginning and ending; there is just perpetual change. His color is purplish dark blue, color of the mystery of procreation. His animal is a canine friend; one of his plants is the cactus—that should give you an idea. He is often involved with sex, lascivious sex, that borders on what may be taken by the outsider as lewd—significantly, regarding this theme, he often wears a hat similar to a phallus. In fact, there can be no sensuality without Exu.

According to the Candomblé tradition, Exu's son or daughter—a person one of whose Orixás is Exu—has the following psychological characteristics: strong, agile, dynamic, untiring, overflowing with vitality. She loves the pleasures of life, she is greedy, always hungry, and she has a liking for alcoholic beverages. If she imbibes during a Candomblé ceremony, she always spills a little of the drink for Exu's benefit. She is happy and playful. She likes to play

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tricks, hide objects, tell lies, and above all, she takes pleasure in always doing things the wrong way. She is always going against the grain. She loves to shock people, liberally using four-letter words for that purpose. She is untidy, and she loves to disturb parties and meetings. However, if it is to her advantage, she can be extremely hard working, efficient, untiring and obstinate.

SOME OTHER ORIXÁS, FOR THE PURPOSE OF ILLUSTRATION

Oxalá the white deity enjoys 'syncretism' with Christ. *Oxalá* is the holder of the progenitor of both male and female power. In contrast to Exu, he shuns all violence, disputes, fights. He likes order, cleanliness, purity. White dominates whenever he is present, and his day is Friday. His children should wear white on this day. Like *Oxalá* they are benevolent and paternal, wise, calm, patient, and tolerant; they are slow, closed, cold; they are also obstinate, works best when in silence.

Oxalá has two forms when manifesting himself through an initiate: *Oxaguia*, the young warrior, and *Oxalufa*, the old man leaning on a silver cane. *Oxalufa* is fragile, delicate, subject to colds because he feels cold. He makes up for his physical fragility with a great moral force, and his objective is to realize the human condition in what is noblest. He is faithful in love and friendship. The *Oxaguia* type is a young, pugnacious warrior. He is usually tall and strong, but neither aggressive nor brutal. He is happy and loves life deeply; he is talkative and playful. At the same time he is somewhat of an idealist. He jumps to the defense of those who need justice, the weak and the oppressed ones. He is proud, craves for glorious deeds, and is sometimes a sort of Don Quixote. His original thoughts usually anticipate his times. *Oxaguia* is the beginning, the East where the sun rises, and *Oxalufa* is the setting, the West where it sets'.

Yemanjá is the mother of some of the most important Orixás—*Ogum* (of iron, a blacksmith), *Xangô* (fire and thunder warrior), *Oba* (of water and a female warrior), *Oxossi* (the hunter), and *Oxum* (the eternal feminine, of springs, streams, lakes, and all fresh water)—who were born from an illegitimate affair. She also enjoys a 'syncretic' affair with the Virgin Mary of the Catholic tradition—the parallels, and even the illegitimacy of her children is suggestive. *Yemanjá* is deeply revered in Bahia. In fact, a cult of fishermen emerged around the image of *Yemanjá* that eventually became well nigh independent of Candomblé ceremonies. She is often depicted as a mermaid with long black hair. She is 'mother' of the fish, so to speak, and through the sea image represents fertility. She loves flowers and is usually given seven open white roses, which are thrown to the sea in thankfulness during the day of the year in her

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commemoration. Her color is white and blue. During Candomblé ceremonies the person representing her wears bead fringes hiding her face and holds a round silver metal ritual fan in her hand with a mermaid cut in the center.

Yemanjá's children are imposing, majestic and beautiful. They are calm, sensuous, fertile and irresistibly fascinating. *Yemanjá*'s daughters are especially good housewives and mothers. They are excellent educators, and they are remarkably generous. They are known to raise other people's children when they feel the need to do so out of their love for all children. Yet, when offended, they do not forgive easily, and they are possessive and very jealous. Since *Yemanjá*, guides the formation of her children's individuality, which is in the head, she is present in all rituals.

Oxum depicts the image of beauty, femininity, grace, charm, and sensuality, along with a dose of spice and coquetry. She is the matron of love, and of the rivers and lakes; as such she complements *Yemanjá*'s mastery over the seas. She is quite vain, and takes pleasure in embellishing herself with perfume and jewels, especial made of copper, the metal with which to cast a spell over her husband, *Xangô*—actually her second husband, since she had previously cohabited with *Ogum*. She protects women during their periods of pregnancy, and wives who suffer cruelty at the hands of their husbands. At the same time, she loves to party, dance, and entice men with her charms; the fact that they might be married doesn't deter her a whit. She is a close friend of *Yemanjá* and Exu, her protector. Her color is yellow and her day is Saturday. She has been linked with the Catholic images of Our Lady of Candeias, Our Lady of the Conception, and Our Lady of the Apparition, all of the Brazilian Catholic tradition.

Oxossi's day of the week is Thursday, his colors are light blue and green, and he has often been syncretized with Saint George, and occasionally with Saint Sebastian. According to legend, he was once King of the Ketu nation, where he dedicated himself to hunting and often lived for prolonged periods in the jungle. While in the wilderness, he cohabited with *Ossaim*, who taught him the medicinal value of many herbs. Consequently, he is known as lord of the jungle. He is a provider, as a result of his hunting skills, and given one of his most outstanding characteristics, physical nimbleness and agility. *Oxossi* and *Ogum*, lord of iron, metallurgy, and war, whose chief characteristics are virility and violence, are brothers

Xangô, so the legend goes, was King of one of the principle cities of the Yoruba speaking people. He is lord of lightning and thunder. He metes out justice to all, and he is marked by vanity, royalty, wealth, power, and at times by violence. His colors are red and white, and his day is Wednesday. Syncretically, he is usually interrelated with Saint Jerome and Saint Peter—since he is said to guard the gates to the heavens. As the Exu who established justice and has the power to establish and re-establish cosmic equilibrium, he can be cruel, especially to those who step beyond the cosmic laws. The sons and daughters of *Xangô* are large of stature, vigorous and energetic, but with a tendency toward obesity. At the same time they are

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charismatic, able to attract others to their way of thought and sentiment. The problem is that they sometimes become arrogant and haughty, and as such they don't realize that their very charisma can lead them to harm those people that are most attracted to them if and when they take a violent turn toward others. On the other hand, when those who are closest to *Xangô* don't pay him what he considers to be proper respect, he can become vengeful.

The process of *Orixá* manifestation in the *Terreiros* and in worldly affairs is like water. It takes on the contours of whatever contains it, whether smooth or rough, of variable contours or not, whether there is meandering or rippling or choppy or violent flow or not. Water and *Orixá* processes are continuous, homogeneous, and completely pliable, incessantly flowing and changing form. Yet, on the surface, there may be no indication whatsoever of change. The surface, if smooth, it affords a mirror-image that which lies outside it, and balance may be forthcoming. If the surface is rough, discordant, dissonant, tension-ridden interaction may ensue. The waters, whether placid, smooth, effervescent, or unstable and heaving, set the mood of the interdependent, interrelated, interaction between *Orixás* and earthly *bodymind*.

During a *Terreiro* ceremony, certain *Orixás* return to earth and take possession of key initiates dancing about the center of the *Terreiro*. An *Orixá*, according to the prevalent image, 'mounts' the person who was born with some of the characteristics of that particular *Orixá*. This has a dramatic effect on the initiate. Her entire body jerks violently as if she were the victim of a bolt of lightning. Supporting female onlookers, called *Quedes*, are always around the circle with a watchful eye, and they immediately jump in to assist her in the event her body completely collapses. She will be helped to an adjacent room, while the other initiates continue around the circle, in counterclockwise direction, as if nothing out of the ordinary had transpired. Once the *Orixá* has incorporated her on earth, she assists her victims of Diaspora in America. She protects them from harm, cures ailments, and grants their pleas—if made with contrition and for noble purposes.

I should not omit further mention of *Olorun*, the grandest deity of them all. *Olorun* incorporates the whole universe and has three powers that rule and keep everything in existence. The three powers are *Iwa*, who allows generic existence, air, and the breath of life, *Axé*, who allows existence to become dynamic, and *Aba*, who gives it purpose and direction. *Iwa* begins the process of becoming, *Axé* perpetuates the process, and *Aba* guarantees the becoming of everything that is. By combining these three powers, *Olorun* transmits them to the *Orixás* and Exu carries them to *Olorun*'s earthly inhabitants. When everything is operating harmoniously, the universe maintains its balance. For obvious reasons, *Olorun* enjoys no representation in the form of some visual or material image.

I provide only a few sketchy examples of the *Orixás* for the purpose of affording a glimpse of the reputed process of uniting images from supposedly otherwise incompatible religious

practices.

ANCIENT YET 'POSTMODERN'?

The merging of conformity and resistance to which I have alluded is a complex affair. In spite of the miscegenation of multiple African ethnicities into a community of resistance, there was always a tendency toward fractionation, as various benign and a few antagonistic enclaves tended to spin out and away from the central cultural core. Miscegenation took place chiefly between Nagô and less populous groups from West Africa, on the one hand, and the Bantu peoples from the Equatorial region on the other hand. There was an interpenetration of cultural compatibilities and a few relative incompatibilities that eventually gave rise to emergent, novel religious groups, most of them sporting some *Caboclo* or Amerindian influence, and some of them, especially *Umbanda*, a mixture of Candomblé and Catholicism with a tinge of spiritism imported from France by way of Alan Kardec (Brown 1986).

Most of these sects are quite foreign to the spirit of Candomblé that originated in the Benin Sea area of West Africa and especially among the Nagô (Yoruba) and Jêjê (Dahomey). Among the less traditional Terreiros, a mixture of Angola (Bantu) and Caboclo (Amerindian) traits can be found. Taken as a whole, however, these diverse practices are one. They are interdependently, interrelatedly, interactively interconnected. This interconnectedness has little to do with analysis, discourse, intellection. It just is. It is what Candomblé practitioners do. It is practicing philosophy. (For example, my experience with Hermes, who resides in the Fazenda Grande do Retiro neighborhood of Salvador and practices at a Terreiro [*Ile Ase Odé G'Mim*] located in the township of Areia Branca about an hour from Salvador by bus, doesn't conform to most scholarly accounts of Candomblé. Hermes is no scholar. He enters into no debates over the status of the religion-philosophy, and political activism leaves him cold. Yet he presents his interpretation of what the 're-Africanizers' would call 'pure' Candomblé ceremonies, or he offers his conception of a Caboclo ceremony—his principle Orixá is *Ossosi*, the hunter—depending on the needs of the community. When I asked him about this, however, he told me they are not separate, for they need each other. He went on to give concrete examples about members of the community who were able to harmonize with the group and with nature only after experiences both strains of Candomblé. I left with the feeling that each ceremony by itself is incomplete. Together they are whole. The fact that they can't both be practiced simultaneously is due to our own physical limitations. The Orixás' world is a continuous whole, and unlimited by time and space. If it is as if the two strains were complementary, or in the terms of this essay, coalescently, contradictorily complementary.)

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Candomblé trance-states raise the role of body, of *bodymind*, to its limits. In this light Barbara Browning (1995:48) reflects on Candomblé choreography and ritual in writing that it ‘is not meant to be read. It is not meant explicitly to suggest. We are the suggestion of divinity’. In this manner *bodymind* during the Candomblé ceremony suggests divinity. It doesn’t actually or metaphorically become divinity. There is not simply a metaphorical image or symbolic (linguistic) meaning. It is not merely a matter of ‘this person here is dancing like Oxum and hence metaphorically speaking she is Oxum’. The metaphorical allusion is there for the taking, to be sure. However, when *Oxum* mounts her Candomblé subject and she enters the trance-state, there is more than metaphor, or icon. There is, in addition to metaphor, implication—indexical—cause-effect (but interrelated and nonlinear) or part-whole, container-contained—the Candomblé body is a container, a vessel; it is indexical.

Metaphor implies that the subject both is who she is and at the same time she is somebody else: she is *Oxum*. This is, if I may say so, comparable to Charles Sanders Peirce’s category Firstness coupled with category Secondness. The Firstness of a sign qualifies the sign as what it is; it enjoys no interdependent, interrelated, interaction with anything else. But there is something else, Secondness: the subject is not only what she is, she is *Oxum*. In this sense she is neither what she is nor what she is not, but something else: she is her own becoming and *Oxum* becoming; she is process. The indexical nature of the trance-state is outwardly an either-or affair. The subject is either vessel for *Oxum* and *Oxum* occupies the vessel, or the other way around. The subject is container and *Oxum* is contained, and that’s that, no question about it. But not so fast. The subject is not who she is without everybody and everything interconnected within the context of the entire ceremony, and as *Oxum* she is not who she is without the entire pantheon of Orixás.

The either/or of the indexical or metonymical nature of the trance-state is no linear cause-effect affair. Rather, everything is the cause and it is also the effect of something else. There is no atomistic ‘I’ or ‘this’. There is holistic ‘we’ and ‘everything that is becoming’. Peirce’s Thirdness and symbolicity thus enters the scene. Language as symbolic interrelatedness interacting with what is becoming is both metaphorical and metonymical, iconic and indexical. Yet it is neither the one nor the other but something else. It emerges from within the imaginary (Firstness, iconicity) and physical (Secondness, indexicality, *Other* than the First) context and begins its process of becoming *Other* than the *Other*, mediator and moderator, suggestion of what is becoming *Other* from within that which is and its *Other* (Thirdness, symbolicity, agent of interconnectedness) (for further on Peirce’s categories in this regard, see merrell 2000a, 2000b).

In this regard, Candomblé is an ancient practice, yet it is in a certain manner of speaking ‘postmodern’. It is ‘postmodern’, yet it is not ‘postmodern’, nor are we, for, as Bruno Latour (1993) puts it, ‘we were never modern’ anyway. We never entirely took leave of our enchanted world. Our enchantment left nature and found a home in the abstract disciplines

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(science, logic, mathematics). It began playing a symbolic role, though it was never able to discard its erstwhile iconic and indexical window dressing.

THEN WHAT SORT OF CULTURAL MIX?

The phenomenon of *conformity* and *resistance* allowed for both Candomblé and Catholicism, in the fashion commonly touted as syncretism. On the one hand, practices were *both* the one thing *and* the other, as a contradictory combination and fusion, though the contradiction presented no problem since in the two practices' combination they became as if one practice. The one practice camouflages the other and the other the one. Noncontradictorily, on the other hand, at a moment's notice *either* the one practice *or* the other could dominate and in the process place the other practice under closely guarded cover. The nature of this now contradictory, now noncontradictory mixture of two homogeneous yet on many points incompatible entrenched practices subverts at one level and at another level pays homage to binary, linear, classical logic of the Western sort.

Putting Candomblé and Catholicism into one ball of wax slips a knife into the left backside of classical logic by creating a noncontradictory, *both-and* condition 'as if' it were as natural as could be, yet by pulling *either* the one *or* the other into the light of day pays homage to the classical Principles of Identity and Noncontradiction. Linear, binary thinking is both applauded and given a thumbs down. In this manner: the *both-and* mode creates the appearance of homogeneity usually manages to prevail—albeit while doing a cover up of the underlying tension between incompatibles; the *either/or* mode allows for the appearance of whichever practice is most advisable under the circumstances, but the now this alternative, now that alternative at different times and places creates disharmony and heterogeneity as a relatively mild subversion of the dominant culture's effort to impose homogeneity. In a nutshell, this, I would suggest, is the Bantu way from equatorial Africa, which evinces a greater tendency toward syncretism than the Nagô way.

Then what is the east African Nagô way? A more subtle form of treachery. The Nagô way includes a dose of the Bantu way. And it is something in addition to the *both-and* and *either/or* modes. It entails the more radically subversive *neither-nor* mode. How does this come about? Consider the *neither-nor* mode this way. In the Bantu mode, two cultural practices can exist side-by-side as the consummate odd-couple; yet each member of the couplet is no more than a possibility. Actualization of *either* the one *or* the other does not ordinarily and should not come about during the same time and in the same place. There can be no more than

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now the one, now the other. Hence as possibilities, two apparent incompatibles can become the strangest of bedfellows; as actualities they should never meet face-to-face on equal terms. There is no problem here, not really, from within the purview of classical logic. There is really no rape of the Noncontradiction Principle as long as *A* and Not-*A* are no more than mere possibilities. At different times and places if *A* pops up at one juncture and Not-*A* at another juncture, there is still no problem. What is now *A* is not Not-*A*, and what is now Not-*A* is not *A*. If the Bantu way becomes rebellious it might abolish *A* (Catholicism) with a wholehearted embrace of Not-*A* (Candomblé), or vice versa. Or it might make an outwardly brash show of *both A and Not-A* as some sort of confusing mixture, which would undoubtedly bring down the Inquisitorial guardians' wrath full force—recall, in this regard, Figure 1. So far, so good.

Now comes the quiriness. The Nagô way usually has no need for an incongruous mixture of *A* and Not-*A* as two incompatible and, according to prevailing assumptions, relatively fixed practices. That would be too easy, too reasonable, too logical. The Nagô way is more slippery, or in other words, it contains a larger portion of Exu qualities. It says 'No' *both to A and to Not-A*. So, what is there? What can there be, if everything is negated? There is nothing, no-thing, if we take the existence of some-thing to mandate what there must be and is at a given point in time and place. There is no-thing following the Nagô way, for all that is in process. To repeat myself, everything is in the process of becoming something other than what it was becoming.

Process: within the *interconnected whole*. Process hints that what there is is not what is becoming for what is becoming never is in a fixed sense. It hints that there is *neither* what there is *nor* is there not what there is, but rather, some-thing different, novel, perhaps hitherto unheard of, is making its entrance onto the stage of universal flux. Flux and reflux: Exu at his raucous best. That is the Nagô world view in its briefest. It is saying *neither A becoming nor Not-A becoming* but the becoming of some-thing other than what was becoming. It says that *either* the one *or* the other is impoverished, that *both* the one *and* the other is fine as far as possibilities for everyday practices go, but it can't make its presence known without actualization into not *either-or* dualism; it also needs the *neither* and the *nor*. The *neither* and the *nor* is a fluctuating, oscillating, scintillating, effervescent process of what manifests itself to a greater or lesser degree as perpetual creativity, novelty, and yes, perpetual resistance and rebellion. Yet, like the *either-or* mode, there is a show of assimilation, accommodation, and conformity, by way of *deception*, always the element of *deception*. *Deception* is a shuffling and slithering, a clever maneuvering about while slipping a knife blade into the dominant culture's back. It is a means of maintaining tradition in the face of powerful attempts to snuff it out; it is a means of getting one's way come what may; it is a means of survival when conditions dictate that survival value is virtually nil. In this regard, it is not that the candomblistas aren't capable of or don't comprehend Catholic principles and thus syncretize them with Candomblé practices. Rather, they are engaging in *conformity* and *resistance*, that is, in *cultural guerrilla* warfare by following one of the few remaining paths available to them.

How can this survival value be properly qualified? If the concept of syncretism doesn't quite cut the cake—as we shall note in more detail below—then what alternative accounts for Afro-Brazilian staying power might we have at hand? For a preliminary step in this direction,

allow me another digression in order to take a further look at the

BOTH-ANDS AND NEITHER-NORS WITHIN CANDOMBLÉ LIVING

In my experience—albeit admittedly limited—with Candomblé culture in Salvador, as I mentioned above I have often been told by practitioners: ‘Yes, we go to mass, we’re Catholics, but we also participate in Candomblé ceremonies, because they help us solve our problems, and, well, they’re just beautiful; we feel something in them that we never feel in the Catholic church’. There seems to be no problem here, no concern of the inherent contradiction. One might suspect at the outset that here we have Ferretti’s ‘*parallelist* syncretism’; then, on second thought one might tend to conclude that it must be ‘*convergentist* syncretism’. However, I would suggest that we must look further.

Catholicism and Candomblé are *both* acceptable, as possibilities for actualization in *either* the parish *or* the Terreiro. In this case linear, binary logic chopping in the order of the Principle of Non-Contradiction inheres. However, in their everyday coming and going these people evince the making of *neither-nor* principles, it would seem. In their speech patterns in Portuguese, a Western language imbued with Catholic values, they evoke Christian images and concepts; at home, Candomblé images may be found. If they have the money they might pay a visit to the doctor practicing Western medicine; the next day they might consult with a Mãe-de-Santo, purchase the necessary herbs, that take their place among other items in the kitchen. On Friday, a son or daughter of *Oxalá* might properly dress in white and eat ‘soul food’ of the Orixás—served in many popular restaurants on that day, yet when seated before the meal mumble a few words of thanks in the Catholic tradition. This is not merely syncretism, I would argue. Catholicism and Candomblé practices in each case are in the process continually become some-*thing* other than what they were becoming. They are no longer the Catholicism and Candomblé culture they were, but some-*thing* else, some-*thing* different, some-*thing* new (The most notable example is the washing of the steps at the Church of the Senhor do Bomfim on January 13).

When *neither-nor* liminality becomes a trickster, the classical Excluded-Middle principle opens itself up to new possibilities. *Either/or* binary rules and regulations meted out by *Xangô*, and *Ogum*’s war and vengeance that wreak havoc on everything around, are for the time being of no consequence: we are now in the arena of myriad possibilities between the *eithers* and the *ors*. We have been transported into Exu’s unruly playground, where the hitherto unimaginable always stands a chance, however remote, of popping up somewhere and somewhen. Now it’s not what goes around comes around, but whatever was in the process of

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going around is now coming around in a slightly to radically different guise. It is coming around to offer something fresh, something new, that is not simply there for the taking of the most aggressive macho mind and body around in order to make it his and his alone, for in order that it may emerge there must be participation. We are actor-participants in the grand drama of processual becoming. There is no becoming without the whole of the world's actor-participants and each and every actor-participant stands no chance in hell of beginning his becoming without the whole of all actor-participants, and that includes the entire world, from the Orixás to subnuclear particles to the most remote galaxies.

Yet, we can't simply leave things in a state of mumbo-jumbo. We must give articulation of this strange alternative cultural 'logic' the good 'ole college try. Brazilian scholar Roberto Schwarz, writes how a form of circular Brazilian 'logic' may have emerged prior to and especially during latter nineteenth century:

precisely because I am a liberal in Congress (i. e. , as recognized in national public life), I have the 'right' to be a slave-holder or a paternalist at home! To use the very example of Machado de Assis, it is precisely because Machado is 'a combative journalist and an enthusiast of the proletarian intelligence, of the classes,' that he may also be (within the system that separates the streets and the home) the 'author of chronicles and commemorative pieces on the occasion of the marriage of imperial princesses ... a knight and eventually an Official of the Order of the Rose'.
(Schwarz 1977:21)

The knight's behavior in the street might seem to confer the right to be the opposite at home. Would this be a personal inconsistency or a deeply rooted manifestation of a system that does not operate in linear terms and is not, in fact, governed by a single set of rules? Such would be the case of the knight's complying with the rules. At the same time, the knight subverts those rules at a higher level, where the tacit assumption exists that at this level the rules don't apply. They don't really apply, for the conditions are different. In other words, the rules apply at the level of the individual and egalitarianism (the knight's public life—in the street), but they don't apply at the level of the person and hierarchical culture (the knight's private life among family, friends, and nobility—in the court or the home). This concept is germane to Latin American cultures in general and specifically to Candomblé living.

When we academicians study and write about Brazilian life, we are rarely able to do so within what Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta calls Brazil's 'illogical sociologic'. We simply

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can't break out of the logical straitjacket that has been drilled into us since childhood such that we might enter into the Grand Temple of Robust Western Knowledge. We learned that logical contradictions end in mental quagmires, and we should categorically reject them. We learned that what is is what it is and it can't be anything else, period. We learned that the answer to a problem must be either right or wrong, true or false, black or white, and any other alternatives leave us in muddles, so they shouldn't even enter into the picture.

DaMatta, among few scholars, puts the whole matter in another way:

We may speak of Brazil as a system of oppositions between blacks and whites with Indians mediating between the two; or between people and the government with the church mediating. Mediatorial figures are neglected in Brazilian sociology.... This has led analysts to see our social logic as contradictory when it is also triadic, complementary, and hierarchical. From a formal academic position the mulatto can be reduced to black or white, and this has been presented as an "advance" over other explanations. From a societal perspective, however, the "mulatto" is not simply the empirical result of a physical and sexual relation between "races" but also the crystallization of the possibility for encompassing opposition. Using comparative historical analysis, Carl Degler ... understood the mulatto within the Brazilian racial system as an "escape hatch"—a valve that liberates social tensions and allows for compensations. I similarly interpret the Brazilian system as *substantively functional* and exhibiting original sequences of *social compensation*. (DaMatta 1995:281)

Along these lines there is a strange anecdote about an American journalist's interview with Haiti's Papa Doc Duvalier that bears this impertinent 'illogical logic' out. The journalist asked Papa Doc what percentage of Haiti's population was white. Ninety-eight per cent, was the response. How could this be? Perplexed, the American asked Duvalier how he defined white. Duvalier answered the question with a question: 'How do you define black in your country?' The journalist patiently explained that in the United States anyone with black blood was considered black. Duvalier nodded and said, 'Well, that's the way we define white in my country'.

How can we get a grip on the strange 'logic'?

WHAT NOW IS, WHEN IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED, IS NOT WHAT IT IS

However one wishes to look at the issue, if we take process philosophy seriously—and Candomblé certainly falls within this purview, I would suggest—we cannot help but conclude that Candomblé living is a re-invention, a re-construction. This is Maria Lina Leão Teixeira's (1999) thesis. If nothing is what it is but is in the process of becoming something other than what it was in the process of becoming, then after Candomblé passed through the stages of separation and mixture and convergence and then separation once again, it is by no means what it was, however well-meaning and faithful the re- Africanizers, for it is always already in process.

This process, I must repeat, is a far cry from a philosophy of individualism in the Western sense. There is no self here in process and other selves 'out there' in their own processes. There is just process. Process is by nature a community affair. Consequently, there is no 'I think, therefore I am'. There is 'I am becoming, therefore I am not yet'. It is all one interdependent, interrelative, interactive whole. Above all, the re- Africanization movement chiefly since the 1970s is product and parcel of literate culture, written language, textuality (Caroso and Bacelar 1999, Soares 2000). That is to say, once Candomblé entered the academy in the guise of Afro-Brazilian studies, it became more than a matter of anthropological studies in the sense of some exotic, romanticized, idealized, folkloric, or whatever, academic endeavor. It became the focus of study by Afro-Brazilians of their own Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions. The tendency was to de-folklore, de-romanticize, de-idealize, and de-exoticize it. This is quite understandably a noble undertaking. However, during the process, Candomblé became alphabetized, textualized, and relatively stultified and fixed as a consequence, for good or for bad. This new Afro-Brazilian generation of students took it upon themselves to de-Africanize their cultural practices and in the long run they textualized them, intellectualized them, made them a matter of bookish knowing.

Sandra Medeiros Epega notes that a certain disillusion began to creep in. Gradually, some observers began to see the re- Africanization movement as somewhat artificial. Something was lacking in this new bookish form of Candomblé and other facets of Afro-Brazilian culture. In the push to re-discover their African past, an increasing number of new Africanists left the São Paulo airport for Nigeria and other African stopping place, where they became aware that what they expected to experience was not there at all. Rather, language, cuisine, and general cultural traits were quite alien, and had to be internalized in much the same way one would internalize any other foreign culture. This was disconcerting. Within this new cultural setting, even the venerated Orixás appeared as if behind a mist. They were not transparent at all, but to

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a greater or lesser degree opaque, and had to be translated anew. The re- Africanizers left Brazil, looking forward to rescuing their ancestors' Axé, but they found language and cultural barriers that must be transcended before they could even begin. Nevertheless, many returned to Brazil with the status of pilgrims who had experienced the long journey to mecca and returned with great tidings for all. Yet, in spite of the fact that true believers in Salvador now walk in African dress with some vague notion of the motherland's culture, syncretism prevails to a disappointing degree. Occasionally one might even sense some form of a satanized Exu (Epega 1999:165-66).

But after all, should Candomblé have remained fixed since its inception with the ancient African cultural context? It shouldn't, and it couldn't have even if it so desired. Should it have become 'whitened' to the maximum with a proliferation of Umbanda and other hybrid expressions? That might be inevitable. To an extent, in fact, this is precisely what's going on these days. Well, then, should one just give in to flow and navigate it as smoothly as possible? That, I would suggest, is what has been going on from the beginning. Candomblé living has always been in the process of going with the flow, conforming, but at the same time setting up resistance in assertion of its own values. There was syncretism, of a sort. But it was interdependent, interrelated, interactive syncretism. All that, for survival value. And the culture survived. Then there was 'whitening', after Candomblé culture realized lesser levels of suppression and discrimination. This rendered it a tad more 'respectable' for the Europeanized middle-class folks, and consequently it was allowed to go its way. But it continued its process of changing, always changing. At the propitious moment, when things seemed to be going along smoothly and the 'white' culture was making Candomblé theirs and 'proper', a slight eddy appeared in the stream, it dissipated, and picked up its rhythm, becoming at times well-nigh chaotic; it bucked the flow, attempting to go its own way; it more openly asserted itself, until the entire stream was in disarray. And it continued along some newly found course. All in the name of survival, and a degree of autonomy such that it might evolve as it pleases.

Once again, is all this good or bad? We might say that no aspect of it is either wholly good or wholly bad (in the Protagorean sense), but feeling and sensing and a little nonlinear, nonbinary thinking can make it so—if I may be allowed roughly to paraphrase Shakespeare's Hamlet. This is to say that if we put one thing that is neither bad with something else that is equally neither good nor bad, we'll get a concoction that is of the nature of incongruous, contradictory complementarity of the sort briefly described above. This is also Candomblé living at its best. Candomblé living confirms one's suspicion that, as they say in Brazil, 'Cada cabeça é um mundo' ('Each head [brain-mind] is a world'). But Candomblé actually takes the equation a step further, as if to say 'Each head is a slightly to radically different world'. There is allowance and tolerance for difference and diversity within the community's general homogeneity. The community: heterogeneity within homogeneity, a homogeneity that is heterogeneous with respect to other local homogeneities within the overriding more or less homogeneous culture at large (Póvoas 1999).

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This difference and divergence within the community and the *neither-nor* mode is perhaps no more adequately in evidence than through Exu, transporter of *Ebó*, or sacrifices from fallible human communities to the Orixás, transporter of *Axé* from the Orixás, and general facilitator of communication between this world and the other world. Exu, deceptive, always gives the appearance of what he is not. But what is it that he is not? He is not what he appears to be. Then what is he? He isn't, that is, as some fixed essence or other. He is the supreme example of processual becoming. He is never becoming what he was becoming but something else, something different, something novel and fresh.

As in the process of becoming what he was *not* becoming, Exu is always on the negative end. Granted, so was Satan as the antipode of Christ. But that is not Exu. In fact, he can possibly be whatever you say he is, yet that is not what he is. He is not even what he is not. He is *neither* this, *nor* that, *nor* that, *nor* that, . . . potentially to infinity. If *Orun* (Sky) plays out the function of *both-and*, as the composite form of everything and its *Other*, and if *Aiyê* (Earth) is *either-or*, where the division of actualized things plays out its role on the world's stage, then Exu is *neither-nor*. He is *Ifá* (Exu of knowing, but knowledge ultimately derived from the accidental, chancy, chaotic). He is the aleatory principle as in the throw of the 16 *Búzios*. Indeed, in Brazil, 16 is quite commonly the number of Orixás selected to do their thing according to the cosmic principle within a particular *Terreiro*. In this manner *Candomblé* in the best of all its possible worlds is a form of life. It by no means no more than 'mere primitive religion'. Nor is it a 'religion' in the customary Western sense of Christianity. The ultimate dream of the Christian is by good living to merit a return to the presence of the omniscient creator, author of all that is and guardian of humankind.

It should by now be quite apparent that this conception of God simply doesn't exist in *Candomblé* culture. Neither does it exist, I might add, in Eastern philosophy-religions, that, much like *Candomblé*, entail a form of life. There is no place for a God as provider, who is responsible for the well being and future salvation of all those who are of good will and act accordingly. As far as these philosophy-religions go, there is no supreme transcendent deity somewhere 'out there'. If deities or deities there may be in any religious sense, there are always and invariably 'here', immanent, within and the very spirit of everything that is, that is, is in the process of becoming. Men and women are part of this process. They are within it, and they participate in the process, helping keep the things in balance and on an even keel. Ultimately, the *candomblista* is responsible for her/his own 'salvation', which is to say, for whatever role s/he may carry out regarding the future of this process.

I must repeat myself: there is no God or Devil here, no 'otherworldliness', but rather, the goal is that of finding a balance in concrete everyday living, rather than preparation for some coveted place in the hereafter. The entire process is radically participatory. There are no spectators—that is, unless there are a few tourists around with eyes wide and jaws open and index fingers ready to click the camera button. There are only participants, for the actors on the stage of *Candomblé* are within the world and the world is within them.

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