

## The gods sell when they give: the meanings of money in candomblé<sup>1</sup> exchange relations

José Renato de Carvalho Baptista

Doctoral student on the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology, Museu Nacional, UFRJ.  
E-mail: <zrbaptista@terra.com.br>

### ABSTRACT

The article investigates the meaning of exchange relations involving the use of money among followers of candomblé. These relations, which unfold within the space of a saint family, activate symbolic dimensions that derive from a connection with the sacred. Here I study the border zone where an economy of the gift or grace continually merges with the world of interests, just as the latter sometimes mobilizes aspects linked to divine grace. Examining these relations mediated by money, I try to expose not only the imprecise limits between gift and interest, but the vast field in which the exchanges between social agents are processed. Adopting a wider perspective on the questions raised here, the text aims to comprehend the social meaning of money in the relations that constitute religious experience and practice.

**Keywords:** Money, Candomblé, Exchange, Gift, Interest

*Os deuses vendem quando dão  
Compra-se a glória com a desgraça  
Ai dos felizes porque são  
Só o que passa*  
Mensagem, Fernando Pessoa

On the advice of a cousin, Rui decided to visit Edson, a young saint-father (*pai-de-santo*)<sup>2</sup> who tells people's fortunes using the *jogo de búzios*, or 'cowrie shell game.' On the day of the consultation, he takes a friend for company, Helena, since "they are no secrets between Rui and his friend," but especially "because she has more experience in this consultation stuff." His cousin had already told him the cost of the session. The consultation goes normally. Rui asks

some questions, Edson goes into great detail on some topics, but slips up on a few trivial matters, such as people or places that he tries to divine without success.

At the end of the consultation, Rui asks Edson about the payment. The latter says he should place the money on top of the game table. However, as Rui only has a R\$ 50 note, and the consultation fee is R\$ 40, Edson pulls open a small drawer underneath the table top where he reads the shells and takes out a R\$ 10 note, leaving the R\$ 50 note given by Rui untouched. Rui and Helena chat to each other as they leave:

— So what did you think of the shell game?

— Expensive for what it was... – she replies.

— Sure, but he got some things right, especially what we came to find out – Rui retorts.

— Yes, but the consultation was really short. He said very little.

— So you weren't pleased, it wasn't what you expected.

— That's not what I mean, the lad is serious enough, but he tried to show off and ended up losing his way.

— That's true.

### **Opening conversation: on the gifts sold by the gods**

In the opening paragraphs of *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Marcel Mauss argues that exchanges and contracts take the form of gifts, in theory voluntary in kind, but in actuality compulsorily given and returned. In the course of the essay, the author reinforces these ideas by showing that underneath the voluntary and apparently free nature of the prestations made in the form of gifts, the generously offered present, we find formalism, lies and social fiction, driven by a combination of obligation and self-interest (Mauss 2003:188).

One of the key ideas permeating this article is the recognition that, in social life, self-interest and disinterest, gifts and commodities circulate indistinguishably via the same relations. Hence what the gods *sell* to men and what men exchange among themselves do not pertain to separate and distinct universes. The objects, gifts and presents that flow through such relations, on the contrary, are always hybrid, they wander through domains that intercommunicate with each other permanently and form a unity.

When someone requests a shell game,<sup>3</sup> makes an *ebó*,<sup>4</sup> a *despacho*<sup>5</sup> or an offering<sup>6</sup> to the orixás, the person is not entering an isolated or purified dimension of real life. On the contrary, these relations occur in spaces in which everything so densely overlaps that a client can ask whether the price paid for a religious service or an oracle is reasonable. At the same time, it becomes a source of shame for a young woman to ask her friend, a saint-father, how much he charges for a divination. And similarly, when someone pays for a shell game, the money is not handed to the diviner, but placed on the game table.

These situations reveal that in the universe of *candomblé*, the presence of money is a constituting element of relationships. Along with this naturalization, though, there is also the tension and embarrassment stemming from the idea of polluting the sacred space of religion with the self-interested domain of money. An ambiguity derives from the notion that various existential dimensions are radically separate, based on the belief in the existence of relatively autonomous spheres of value, such as work, the family, religion or the economy.

The social scenes that serve as a basis for the argument of this text not only place in question the separation of religion and money, they primarily reveal that for the actors involved in each situation, a variety of possible relations with money exist. While it appears very natural for these agents to handle money in religious contexts, its presence also seems to place people in situations that are not always natural or comfortable to them.

Social scientists commonly apprehend money as an instrument of pure rationalization and instrumentalization. In this conception, money possesses a unique meaning as a medium of exchange or measure of value, making any social situation in which it is involved impersonal and opportunistic. This analytic premise also contains a subjacent idea concerning the *place of objects*, in which money is associated with self-interest, matching means and ends, and pure rationality based on calculation.

For Karl Marx (1983), for example, money is a pure and complete expression of commodity fetishism, since insofar as the conversion of human work into a commodity alienates the worker from the product of his or her work, money is a perfect form of distancing producers from their products, transferring the measure for valuing the work to a third object. Marx argued that exchange relations involve a commerce between agents who trade the work contained in the things exchanged. The operation of converting work into currency shifts relations onto a plane of abstraction situated beyond the concreteness of the actions of individuals.

Georg Simmel (1977) also asserts that money is an element that dissolves social ties and founds a society based essentially on pure rationality, breaking traditional relational patterns and imposing an abstract dimension on relations grounded on an element exogenous to them. On the other hand, Simmel looks to transcend the exclusively economic or political dimension emphasized in Marx. His concern focuses on the effects of money on human sociability, on the forms assumed by relations in response to its presence.

Simmel also observes that through money we can establish a mechanism of quantification, transferring the measurement of the value of things to a third object. The author argues that this value derives from the sum of a set of qualities possessed by things, a sum that represents a principle whose measurement confirms or diminishes its value. Money, therefore, is a concrete object to which we transfer an abstract measure of the value of things. Here we find an explicit reference to the fact that money is a referent for the measurement of the value of *things*, in a narrower sense, of objects, commodities and labour, supposedly measurable things or things belonging to a domain in which self-interested relations predominate.

This approach includes a subjacent idea concerning the *place of things*, in which money is associated with the world of self-interest, matching means and ends, and pure rationality based on calculation. Since money in Simmel's view is an element placed above relations, a third term to which values or quantities are transferred through an abstract operation, this type of perception of monetarization imposes a single and obligatory meaning onto relations involving money.

The approach I am suggesting, however, differs from this widespread view of money. My proposal is to consider its sociologically productive nature, the capacity of agents to multiply its meanings, producing currencies, creating new values and using it as a means of exchange and, sometimes, even as an object of sacred use. By perceiving that money is not an element employed exclusively for quantification, or furthermore, that quantification itself may possess distinct meanings for different actors, it is possible to discern that money is not just something that “cools down and objectifies relations,” “breaks ties of sociability” or “creates distance between people.” More than this, in my view, it appears like a window through which it is possible to observe the relations between people. A window through which we can, in more general terms, discern the relational universe of *candomblé*. Thus money allows us to consider relations that are not limited merely to the economic dimension, establishing, as Viviana Zelizer (2002) suggests, a deeper comprehension of the way in which people relate to each other, creating bonds of solidarity, intimacy and conflict.<sup>7</sup>

The research that grounds the present article is the result of my own lengthy first-hand experience with the universe of Afro-Brazilian religions, initially through religious practice and later as a result of study interests, which enabled intensive contact with various terreiros (*candomblé* religious sites) over the last ten years.<sup>8</sup>

The ethnographic data presented below was organized around the concept of *social scenes*, as proposed by Florence Weber (2001), a ‘conceptual tool’ that suggests a system of interactions whose meanings are shared among the agents involved in these relations. Social scenes offer unique frameworks for observing certain types of relations, revealing momentary networks of non-crystallized interactions of varying types and durations.

The social scenes examined by this work occur in the context of *candomblé* terreiros, where I investigate the relations between followers (initiated or not), the leaders of the terreiros, their networks of clients and certain ritual sequences in which money is used, looking to discern the meanings of money or, in a very broad sense, the meanings of the relations in which money becomes present and may become a constitutive element in bonds of solidarity, affectivity and intimacy or, on the contrary, of accusation and rupture. One of the essential characteristics of the interactions analyzed here is their high degree of intimacy and trust, consistent with the notions of a ‘saint-family’ and a ‘religious clientele.’

The relations established in the midst of a saint-family<sup>9</sup> can be seen as very similar in numerous aspects to those occurring in various family configurations. As Edison Carneiro (1967 [1948]) and Vivaldo Costa Lima (2003) point out, saint-children’s commitments in relation to the saint-family are, at root, the same found in many extended families in which children must help in the work of sustaining the family.

The bonds established between the saint-child and the *candomblé* house are not only related to religious affiliation, but above all to a field of reciprocal obligations, to the deep subsoil of emotions and feelings. Affiliation to a *candomblé* terreiro implies entering a circle of intimacy and fulfilling a rigorous agenda linked to the saint-family and its leader.

The notion of saint-family is linked to another, that of religious clientele. This category is used by *candomblé* followers to define a type of relationship based on the demand for religious services, without the establishment of any formal affiliation to the terreiro. It involves a connection essentially based on the magical efficacy of the saint-parent. The relation involved in selling and purchasing religious services opens a privileged window onto a wider perception concerning the presence and meanings of money in the exchange relations in a terreiro.

The clientele's bond is always associated with the magical efficacy of the work of the head of the religious community, and a substantial part of a terreiro's capacity to survive and flourish stems from this condition: the maintenance or expansion of the clientele are the source of a terreiro's credibility and power. This perception, though, provides space for accusations of commercializing articles of faith, or polluting the sacred space of religion, a theme arousing controversy in various religious traditions.

It is curious to note, though, that in the case of *candomblé* the status of magician is not formally separate from that of priest – instead, these positions are continually blurred within a feedback relationship. Magical efficacy produces a house's clientele and prestige, and above all it is from this set of clients that most of a terreiro's followers are formed. A great saint-father is also a great manipulator of magic, since his capacity to perform magic acts ensures the prosperity of his house and of his saint-children.

In *candomblé* terreiros, relationships are based on a hierarchy established by seniority, as in the majority of family configurations, divided into multiple functions, all of them controlled by the saint-father, the spiritual and material leader of the saint-family. At the same time, the terreiros are circuits through which material and symbolic goods transit indistinguishably. These circuits reveal the tenuous line dividing the relations founded on the idea of a gift or favour from the opportunist relations aimed towards profit; likewise, they show that goods and commodities circulate in a vast field whose meanings are activated in distinct forms by the actors in their interactions.

In the prevailing view, the domain of religion is isolated as a space purified of self-interested relations, a space exclusively involving the circulation of gifts between persons and between the latter and the sacred or transcendent. From this perspective, which is more normative than descriptive, the presence of opportunism inevitably functions as a source of accusations. The circulation of money in the context of the sacred is seen to compromise the purity of the religion.

In the course of this work, we shall see that the real life experiences of agents provoke accusatory discourses in certain kinds of interaction and according to particular interests. In other words, it is possible for agents to naturalize the presence of money in their religious practices as long as certain rules of conduct or etiquette are observed.

By this I propose the existence of a specific etiquette that allows money to be present in the domain of religion without causing problems. But this etiquette is not rigid, and it is the dynamic of the relations that, at the end of the day, determines which acts are interpreted by agents as correct or incorrect, transforming what, under specific conditions, pertain to the order of the correct and the normal into something that is the motive of an accusation.

The article is divided into three sections that analyze distinct aspects of relations in which money is found to be present in *candomblé*. In the first section, I investigate the religious clientele relationship, the course of initiation and how the transferences of money from client to saint-parent change in status in the process of passing from a 'client' to a 'saint-child.' A child cannot be treated as a client, and the essential difference between clients and saint-children is the latter's privileged access to the terreiro's circle of intimacy. From the viewpoint of practices, however, definition of these limits is highly complex: indeed, these only become perceptible during accusations.

In the second section, I discuss the forms of participation adopted by the children in working to maintain a saint house. Taking part in the economic life of a terreiro takes the form of *help*. I describe how the role of the saint-child is to provide the divinities (and the community) with the best of themselves, based on the ethics of sacrifice, in which the volume of offerings determines the exact dimension of the grace obtained from the orixás. *Help* becomes a kind of euphemism through which saint-children manipulate the transfers of money to the candomblé house.

In the third section of the article, I present the reader with a description of rituals involving cash. While the earlier sections deal with situations in which money appears explicitly but without being manipulated (in the relation between clients and the saint-father) and is present but not mentioned (in the relations between the saint-father and saint-children), in this section money is shown to be ostensibly manipulated by agents in the large rituals. Money is part of the system of objects linked to the ritual praxis of candomblé, not only as old currency, no longer in circulation (Vogel et al. 1987), but as a circulating medium, a commodity that accesses a circuit through which gifts flow. Money, which until then had appeared in veiled form, here assumes an omnipresence in the domain of religion.

### **1. How much does it cost to be a saint-child? The price of intimacy**

Marcela, the saint-daughter of Mother Lílian, is single and childless; her father is a top public servant and, as a result, she enjoys an unusual position among terreiro members. Despite having an excellent job, her housing and living expenses are paid by her father, who lives in Brasília. The latter, for his part, makes no objection to Marcela's religious position, although he neither becomes involved or provides support. In Mother Lílian's words, "Marcela can help because she has no financial problems."

Mother Lílian's nephew, César, also her saint-son, enjoys a good financial situation as a company auditor. César is one of the house's oldest initiates and, after his 'seven-year obligation' (a ritual period described below), was allowed to set up his own terreiro. Mother Lílian claims that "César does not need to help the terreiro because he has to try to sustain his saint house first." For Marcela, though, "what really matters in this situation is that César is Mother Lílian's nephew, which means less pressure is put on him to contribute money or provide material support to his aunt's terreiro."

These facts would be unimportant were it not for the fact that they affect Marcela intensely, making her deeply uncomfortable. Marcela "feels exploited by Mother Lílian." One day we went out together for dinner. When the bill arrived, César took it upon himself to divide the amount evenly between the three of us: himself, Marcela and myself, leaving out his wife and Mother Lílian. At first, I thought that he was being chivalrous; however since Marcela had paid a third of the cost of the meal, it occurred to me that her contribution had been disproportionate. In a private conversation, Marcela explained that throughout the time she stayed in Rio de Janeiro, living at the terreiro of Father Júlio, she was the one who paid almost all Mother Lílian's expenses. She then began to talk about her initiation when she banked practically all the costs of her own 'making'<sup>10</sup> and that of her 'iaôs boat'<sup>11</sup> sister, Priscila. She also explained how the system of contributions works for maintaining Mother Lílian's terreiro, where all the terreiro's members pay a kind of 'monthly fee.'

According to Marcela, "the price of this monthly payment varies, people pay as much as they can afford." Consequently, given her socioeconomic condition, she contributes fairly high amounts.

As the terreiro is relatively recent, the house is still under construction with a large number of works and improvements being undertaken on the site. As a result, Marcela is entreated to 'contribute' too, since as well as paying a 'monthly fee,' which she says "is higher than those of the terreiro's other members," she says that she is "also obliged to bankroll most of the construction work."

One of Marcela's concerns was the high price charged by Mother Lílian for her religious services, obligations, ebós or consultations, acting, according to her, "similarly to Father Júlio, who can change up to R\$ 15,000 for a seven-year obligation." I said I thought she was exaggerating, to which she replied insisting that "being Júlio's saint-child gives status, it's like a top label or pedigree, that's why he charges so much."

### **Being a client, being a saint-child, or from 'how much does it cost?' to 'how can I help?'**

The relationship with the clientele is a constitutive part of the moral universe of the candomblé terreiros; buying and selling religious services are perfectly natural to the followers. On the other hand, the candomblé terreiros are structured on the principle of the saint family. Hence there are two essential categories that allow us to comprehend the relations involving money in a terreiro: 'client' and 'saint-child.'

The clientele relationship presumes a connection based on the purchase and sale of services, while the status of saint-child indicates an involvement in the terreiro through material or financial 'help.' Even so, the idea of 'help' can be a source of accusation, especially when a saint-child believes that he or she is being treated as a client.

The status of client is not the direct opposite of that of saint-child, although it does denote distinct kinds of connections with the terreiro, less intense ties with the religious community. Nonetheless, although initiation is the way of entering the saint family, it does not necessarily represent privileged access to a terreiro's intimate circle, and as the social scenes illustrate, there are an unlimited number of potential ambiguities in this kind of situation.

The definition of the status of client has been broadly explored by Peter Fry (1982) and Reginaldo Prandi (1991). Patrícia Birman (1985), used the scheme proposed by Fry to discuss how umbanda terreiros are structured and, in a more recent work, analyzed the idea of a 'religious transit,' exemplified by the client's position in relation to the process of joining a terreiro and the intensification of the ties of responsibility and obligations that this affiliation implies (Birman 1996:95).

It seems clear that the clientele relationship is one of the constitutive aspects of candomblé, playing an important role both in terms of maintaining the infrastructure of the group, since clients are an important source of material resources for the terreiros, and in its reproduction through the affiliation of a section of the clientele who become saint-children.

The clientele are also one of the sources of prestige and political power, since the quantity of clients and their satisfaction with the purchased services help divulge a saint-father's capabilities. Expressions of this power include the public festivals, which involve a sizeable amount of material resources, very often obtained through the direct participation of the clientele, either through payments for services or through donations to the terreiros.

The idea of a 'saint family' is continually invoked and reaffirmed, creating the idea of a context of intimacy and complicity between a terreiro's members. However, the existence of a 'family'

does not necessarily mean equal treatment for all the children. The seniority-based hierarchy determining the terreiro's relations implies different treatment for older children, as well as those recently initiated, who are carefully watched over and given special care, like the youngest children in a family.

The intimacy creates the separation of a particular universe from another, larger universe, a kind of 'doorway' through which some can gain access to the interior, an inside from where it is possible to look and know that one is being looked at differently. The word 'intimacy' is Latin in origin and expresses an idea of interiority, that which is deeper, singular and internal.

Neiburg (2003:65) writes that the sphere of intimacy presupposes the involvement of individuals in feelings taken by themselves to be intense and genuine, and arises from bonds of proximity constituted by consanguinity or by sharing a common territory, producing a climate of authenticity. Zelizer (2005), investigating commercial transactions mediated by money, details some of the aspects characterizing situations of intimacy, such as a body of highly personal knowledge resulting from shared secrets: the awareness of certain physical details or particular body signs, especially embarrassing situations and some private rituals.

The course taken in becoming an *axé* child also involves distinct relations with money. The person moves from a clearer and more explicit relation, marked by buying and selling services, to a relation of intimacy and familiarity in which money does not always appear in such an explicit way. Although sometimes money cannot be touched in the relation with the client, its presence is made evident insofar as there is a demand for a service, which is supplied by the saint-father and obtained by the client. By becoming a saint-child, as in any transaction involving finances within a family, the references to money become much less explicit, something that cannot be mentioned, although ever present. Consequently, a specific etiquette is adopted in the terreiros in relation to money.

While the client has a formal obligation to pay in money for a rendered service, for the saint-child this relation takes on a different form; not a remuneration for services, but a contribution to the community, or in the term typically used in the terreiros, a form of *help*. This *help* can assume various forms, such as the purchase of food, the payment of a monthly fee, the payment of electricity, water or telephone bills, the purchase of gas bottles, construction material, and other kinds of contribution to the community.

The *help* may not involve the direct use of cash, meaning its presence often becomes implicit in contrast to the relation openly assumed by the client in which money is always made evident. Clients may also *help* the terreiro, but their relation is basically one of remunerating services provided by the saint-father. As I emphasized earlier, only in the passage to the status of saint-child does the client's link with the terreiro and the use of cash take on other aspects.

### **“How much do you want to pay?”<sup>12</sup> or “what can money buy in a candomblé terreiro”?**

Marcela complains that Mother Lílian treats her like a client even though she is a saint-daughter, since she “has no problem with contributing a lot of money to the community;” what really bothers her is that her status should give her access to her saint-mother's intimate circle, a position occupied, she believes, by her nephew César. Marcela wants to be treated with the same reverence that she thinks Mother Lílian grants to César or, alternatively, that what they are asked to contribute financially is re-evaluated, so that César, who also enjoys a comfortable social position, is asked to participate more to the terreiro's running costs.



The problem Marcela faces is belonging to the terreiro's intimate circle and thereby becoming recognized as someone 'important.' Marcela feels unaccepted by Mother Lílian due to the way she favours her nephew César. Marcela also suspects that her continual contributions of money to the terreiro lead some people to accuse her of "trying to buy her way into the group, trying to buy the saint-mother."

Despite everything, Mother Lílian does not allow space in her intimate circle for someone who contributes substantially to the house, even though Marcela is responsible for most of the terreiro's upkeep. At the same time, Marcela is not popular with other members of the community, being frowned upon by her saint-brothers and seen in particular "as someone who wants to upset the terreiro's order."

The difference between being a *client* or a *saint-child* is, in fact, a continual source of tension. Although some saint-children expect to be treated differently, since they have passed from the circle of *clientele* to the *family* circle, the distinction between these two circles is less than clear: indeed, it can become highly ambiguous and transform into an object of disputes and accusations.

One belief held by followers who shift from the status of client to that of the initiated is that by entering the intimate circle of the terreiro and the saint-parent, their relationship with the money flowing in these internal transactions will necessarily change. Their supposition is that among 'family members,' relations will not be subject to monetary calculations; the sphere of intimacy cannot and should not be the place for opportunist relations.<sup>13</sup>

The source of these ambiguities stems from the belief in a supposed *purity* of relations in intimate environments. Relations mediated by money in these contexts are seen to be *contaminated*, in the sense suggested by Mary Douglas (1976): "things out of place." In fact, in the modern conception of the world, founded on the division between the public and private spheres, the home, intimacy and/or the family appear as purified spaces, preserved from the contamination of self-interests and the search for profit.

The social differences between members of the terreiro can lead to tensions. In these situations, agents mobilize meanings as a way of resolving ambiguities either through radical ruptures or through remedial actions that look to heal these divisions. On the other hand, the publicity of the acts seems to be an important issue: the ambiguities of the relationship come to the fore during moments when issues over money surface, ceasing to be a topic known to a few to become public knowledge among members of a social grouping, whether the latter is a terreiro or a family.

Although generosity is perceived as one of the virtues of a good saint-child, in certain cases it may become a source of tensions, creating the idea of an attempt to bargain for spaces and prestige. There is an immense difficulty in setting limits given that the client is allowed and, indeed, required to remunerate the terreiro with high amounts of cash, while the saint-child has to help his or her house in a generous fashion. So far I have discussed the problems that arise from the way in which saint-children and clients may be treated in a candomblé terreiro. The space between the two positions is blurred, implying the absence of any clearly defined boundaries.

From the viewpoint of 'native ideas,' the forms of relationship with money that involve saint-children are distinct from those characterizing clientele relationships, since while in the latter cases money appears explicitly (the client 'pays' the saint-parent for the services he or she provides), in the case of the saint-child, by contrast, money is treated in veiled form, assuming the character of *help*, of cooperation with the saint house.

## 2. Rose and Marcelo, the ethics of ostentation and the spirit of *candomblé*: ‘helping too much’

Rose and Marcelo occupy somewhat unique positions in the terreiro of Father José. They are considered ‘rich people’ and often insist on advertising this status. Their social position and close relationship with the head of the house create curious situations that sometimes subvert the terreiro’s hierarchy. The couple are frequently involved in conspicuous everyday scenes, primarily due to their displays of opulence. In actuality, this kind of attitude seems compatible with *candomblé*’s ethos in which power and prestige are also measured by the capacity to spend money and by the generosity with which people present themselves.

As an initiate of the orixá Oxum, Rose spared no efforts in adorning herself with lavish jewellery and expensive clothes. Marcelo likes to show off his sophisticated taste, a result of his social origin, always speaking of elegant restaurants, fine food and his appreciation of wines. Despite her humble background, Rose incorporates the spirit of her husband. Marcelo is a doctor with a military training and comes from a well-off family with important political connections. He has also already held a public post in a cultural foundation linked to the Bahian state government. His brother is currently secretary of tourism and, along with Marcelo, was one of the people most active in negotiating the preservation order for the terreiro as part of the state’s cultural heritage. This preservation order attracted considerable attention in the press and assured the terreiro some exceptional conditions, including exemption from taxes and the provision of some public services provided by the State.<sup>14</sup>

Father José frequently travels to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, using the opportunity provided by these trips to purchase fine, high-quality fabrics in order to manufacture festival clothing and clothes for the orixás. In addition, a saint-daughter who lives in New York works with Indian and African fabrics and sends him a constant stream of ‘presents.’ With these fabrics, Father José asks a trusted seamstress to make *xirê* skirts.<sup>15</sup> The results are magnificent: beautiful skirts using original or exotic fabrics, which Father José offers as presents to his children or puts up for sale on festival occasions.

On the day of the festival when the orixás Ogum/Oxossi are celebrated, after breakfast, a kind of show room is set up in the house’s *barracão*. Some of these skirts were on sale for prices ranging between R\$ 200 and R\$ 350. José eventually presented a skirt to one of his saint-daughters, an *ebomim* of Oxum called Cida. At that time she was experiencing serious financial difficulties following her separation from her husband and would have been unable to prepare a new skirt for the festival of her orixá.

One of the skirts, though, stood out from the rest. White, fashioned from fine lace produced in the Brazilian Northeast, it cost R\$ 800 and although all the skirts were made from quality fabrics, each with a different pattern, this looked like an exclusive article, made especially to present to an important saint-mother or someone who had been initiated for some time.

The skirt, which aroused the desire and vanity of all the terreiro’s women, seen as “worthy of a saint-mother,” was ‘grabbed’ by Marcelo to present Rose. The incident generated numerous comments, some of them fairly malicious saying that she “wanted to show off using that kind of skirt,” others less barbed to the effect that Rose “had been a saint-daughter for too short a time to use that type of skirt.”<sup>16</sup>

It seems clear that Rose and Marcelo contribute substantially to the house, both in the area of political dealings, and with large amounts of money given in various forms, such as, for example, the purchase of food and the 'special meals' prepared for the festivals, when the couple buy all the ingredients, but especially by delivering large quantities of money in cash or cheques directly into the hands of the saint-father.

On one specific occasion, I witnessed Father José refuse an offer of money placed by the couple directly into his hands. It was something like R\$100, in two banknotes of R\$50, which Rose insisted on handing to him in public. The scene occurred as people were leaving on a Monday morning after a festival, already anticipating a contribution towards the next festival. José refused saying that they "already helped too much."

In another situation, I heard Marcelo speak loudly and clearly, for everyone to hear what he was saying to his wife Rose, that she "should wait for her brothers and sisters to contribute, since you're not the house's only daughter of Oxum." Marcelo seemed to be fully aware of the effect of these contributions on his own role; sometimes he even seemed to believe that this is what ensured him a prominent place in the terreiro's hierarchy.

### ***Helping and the ethics of sacrifice: the forms of piety in candomblé***

Marcelo and Rose look to distinguish themselves from the other members of the terreiro through their habits, manners and tastes, but above all by publicly displaying their capacity to access and spend considerable financial resources. But they are people who form part of the terreiro's intimate circles, admitted by most of its community. They are not worried about being 'accepted,' since they are already part of the group. The curious fact is that, even so, they look to cultivate distinctive traits that differentiate themselves from the other members.

The skirt buying episode exposed a number of tensions arising not only from social differences between community members. These tensions throw into question the hierarchical position of individuals in the structure of the terreiro. They arise from inversions or disturbances in these positions. Marcelo, although he had not undertaken his 'obligation' with Father José, was initiated by another saint-father and is an *ogã* recognized both by José and by the older members of the terreiro's hierarchy, especially for his vast ritual knowledge. Rose, by contrast, is a 'new saint-child,' a *iaô* initiated three years ago and therefore subject to a series of hierarchical restrictions.

In a way, Rose breached etiquette by buying a "skirt worthy of a saint-mother." This type of lavish costume is allowed to the older members only. A *iaô* must dress elegantly but austere. However, the definition of elegance and austerity varies widely. In effect, no fixed rule exists; however, some indications are made by older members. The Richelieu lace, for example, is a sign of seniority and thus forbidden to younger members, though this does not prevent a *iaô* from receiving fabric made from this material as a present from an older initiate. The ideal behaviour, however, is to keep the fabric until attaining the position of *ebomim*, obtained after completing seven years of initiation and the accompanying obligations.

At the same time, though, purchasing the skirt was a great *help* to the house since the saint-father put the skirts on sale not only to recover the outlay spent in making them, but also to raise funds to keep the terreiro running and hold the festivals. José could have prevented Rose from purchasing the skirt, but she was actually one of the few people able to buy an item at this price. By allowing her to buy the skirt, José placed himself in an ambiguous situation since he needs the money, can make the sale and has the authority to stop Rose from using it. The reaction of most

of the terreiro's members was one of disapproval, affirming that she could not – or at least should not – use the skirt in question. For everyone it amounted to a display of ostentation, which Rose should not have made given her status as a 'new iaô.' The purchase of the skirt, however, reinforced the distinctiveness of Rose and Marcelo in relation to the other terreiro members. Few have the wherewithal to buy such a skirt, even the oldest.

This situation was linked to another scene that I witnessed at the terreiro, when Father José offered a skirt as a present to another saint-daughter, an ebomim of the same orixá as Rose whose longer period of initiation meant she could use more luxurious clothing, but who was unable to do so due to a complicated financial situation. José presented her with a skirt, allowing her to dress in new clothes at the festival of her orixá. Despite her social position, Rose did not have the right to breach the hierarchy. It was expected "that she would have the good sense to not use the skirt and wait for the right time to do so." Father José, nonetheless, do not place any restrictions on her wearing it. It was left to Rose to comprehend her place in the hierarchy.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, by making the sale to Rose, José was also able to give another saint-daughter a more modestly priced, but new and elegant, skirt for her "to present herself in a dignified way at her orixá's festival."

### **The host provides a banquet**

Far from the merely instrumental relation often exposed by the idea of *help*, a modality exclusively directed towards the running costs of a religious community, the meaning of the term in this context refers to notions of religious service, dedication to the temple, or even something or some form of work sacrificed to the gods. There is, therefore, a subjacent idea of sacrifice in the type of relation in which 'help' occurs, since the individual dedicates part of him or herself to the gods.<sup>18</sup> In this case, the idea of sacrifice proposed by Mauss and Hubert (1981) may offer some insight, insofar as it models the bond between people and divinities established through a religious act in which a sacrificial victim is consecrated, altering the moral state of the individual who performs the act or modifying the objects involved in the process. There is, though, a superlative dimension involved in these exchanges with the sacred. The offering needs to be maximized in order to receive the divine gifts or grace. The person needs to be *helping* constantly for the gods to be generous. And nothing better exists to prove the presence of the favour of the gods in one's life than the abundance of the sacrifice.

For the followers of candomblé, the sacrifice performs two functions: one is therapeutic, centred essentially on solving specific problems linked to health, love or finance; the other is prophylactic, seeking to avoid misfortune. Neither takes precedence over the other, except for the fact that the therapeutic function may sometimes be the initial reason for affiliation.

Vogel et al. (1993) provide an analysis of the *bori* ritual<sup>19</sup> where they look to understand precisely these two dimensions by emphasizing the oracular and divinatory role involved in the act of providing sacrifices to the divinities. The sacrificial ethic, the giving of oneself or part of oneself to the gods, seems to inform the actions of the followers of candomblé. *Help* is based on this principle by means of which followers must always be ready for misfortune or a divine calling, offering themselves through their own work, or the product of the latter, in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the religious group's structure.

Bastide (1971) suggests that what he determines as the 'traditional' forms of candomblé there is a separation between the capitalist economy and the 'pure' relations of gift and countergift proper to religious acts.<sup>20</sup> I disagree with this position. Based on the cases presented here, I propose a more flexible reading, arguing that we are not dealing with a 'pure gift' in opposition to a

'capitalist economy,' but, as Bastide himself later suggested, an exchange relation in which an equilibrium between the partners involved is sought. However, these exchanges are sustained precisely on the asymmetry between the gift and its counterpart, or on the time involved in the exchanges. The sacred link between man and divinity has to be continually renewed, maintaining the circuit in constant movement through the celebration of diverse rituals and *obligations*.

The very word *obligation* already suggests a type of relation between the candomblé adept and divinity that is not free. Although strictly speaking the obligation refers to the link between a person and a divinity, it always includes or alludes to a relationship between persons. The initiate completes a cycle of *obligations* that mark his or her rise in their spiritual career. The acceptance of the term, according to Cacciatore (1977:192), relates to the set of invocatory or propitiatory ritual offerings to the divinities, whose non-fulfilment may lead to severe suffering for the person in default.

Obligations, though, do not necessarily imply a direct cost-benefit equation to the relationship; instead, they are based on an *ethic of sacrifice* which is not sustained by the idea of direct reward or punishment, but on an *etiquette* intrinsic to relations with the sacred – an etiquette typical to the piety observed in candomblé. The *ethic of sacrifice* presumes that the individual recognizes his or her link with the divinity and, by extension, with the community that worships the divinities. It involves preventing misfortune through the constant prestation of offerings to these divinities. From this perspective, misfortune results from a lack of commitment to the gods, the failure to fulfil *obligations*. Bad luck and misfortune are not the outcome of divine punishment, but a consequence of the rupture of the ties that unite individuals and their gods, since plenitude only occurs through the perfect integration of people and the orixás.<sup>21</sup>

In examining the practices of candomblé followers, we discover very tenuous limits between *generosity* and *ostentation*. The forms in which saint-parents and their communities employ these notions and how the latter translate into tensions in the terreiro's internal relations involve a veritable gymnastics. The luxury and wealth of the festivals and obligations serve to display a house's prestige, suggesting that gods, much more than people, have tastes and desires that need to be attended. In reality, the behaviour displayed by individuals is a kind of mimesis of their protective divinities.

From the outset, there is a significant opposition between the ethos of candomblé and Protestant asceticism: while divine grace is responsible in both cases for producing worldly wealth, in Protestantism this presence is reflected in the devout believer's spirit of labour and, above all, frugality. The candomblé follower sees wealth and abundance as manifestations of divine presence in his or her life, but in contrast to Protestant asceticism, he or she must publicly show this satisfaction of the gods by making constant sacrifices, offering his or her wealth to the divinities. And the best means of doing this is through public festivals and the extravagant rituals involved in obligations, revealing the opposition between the ostentatious exhibitionism of candomblé and the Protestant spirit of austerity described by Weber (1996).

Vogel et al. (1993) provide an interesting analysis of the *orunkó*, the public initiation ceremony for the iaô, also called the *naming day* in reference to the fact that the novice's orixá announces his or her initiatory name. Their analysis focuses on diverse aspects of the public dimension of candomblé festivals, emphasizing in particular their importance as demonstrations of the terreiros' prestige and power. According to the authors, this type of celebration is "a proof of the fecundity of the house's axé through the lavish display not only of ritual skill but also of the power to mobilize the material and human resources necessary to hold the event [...] making

evident the capacity [of the terreiro] to expose itself, placing its name at risk in the desire to augment it.” (Vogel et al. 1993:79).

Terreiro leaders organize and manage material resources from various sources without, though, letting go of the prerogative that they, the saint-fathers or saint-mothers, are the ones who actually command and control the ritual event. Although the recourses do not always come out of the pocket of the saint-fathers, their behaviour seeks to demonstrate that they are the source of all the resources mobilized on a festive occasion. And, in a way, the acquisition of the means for holding a festival does indeed arise from the personal capacities and administrative skill of the terreiro’s leader.

There are numerous references to the role of the ogãs in providing the candomblé terreiros with the conditions needed for them to run smoothly. Initially, it was believed that the ogãs merely performed a protective role, most of them being recruited from wealthier sections of society or because of their political prestige.<sup>22</sup> It becomes clear, however, that some of them perform ritual functions in the terreiros, playing ritual instruments and performing sacrificial tasks.

This fact leads to a certain distinction between two types of ogãs: some more linked to the ritual aspects of the religion; others, the so-called *ogãs de salão*, little involved with the rituals, but very active in terms of acquiring financial and political resources for the terreiros. In the latter category we can include Marcelo, despite his involvement with rituals, since he acts as an outside negotiator for the terreiro, working to obtain public benefits and jobs for members of the community.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that the terreiro festivals manifest a form of participation based on the principle of *help*, which for the people involved is the form assumed by the gift of the gods, expressed in the exchanges between people. These exchanges involve a fabulous amount of financial resources; however, they are not understood by the agents as payment, but as a way of integrating, participating and redistributing the *axé*, the sacred force, the divine energy.

On the other hand, the economic dimension involved in these exchanges never drops out of sight. For the agents concerned, it very often highlights forms of distinction or manifests power. The economic dimension is a source of ambiguity in these relations. It excludes the belief in the purity of the gift proposed by Roger Bastide and allows us to glimpse a particularized universe where expenditure and consumption have meanings very different to those found in merely utilitarian relations.

Bastide (1971) is not totally wrong in his analysis when he claims that these exchange relations are not expressed in the logic of capitalist interest; on the other hand, neither can they be said to consist exclusively of relations between gifts and counter-gifts founded on disinterest. As I suggested earlier, we should pursue a more flexible reading of these exchange relations, affirming that they are always ultimately hybrid: gifts can be commodities and commodities can transform into gifts, depending on the viewpoint of each agent and the specific circumstances of each exchange. People confer distinct meanings to their relations, invoking interests when they believe this to be necessary. Marcelo thinks that his wife Rose exaggerates in her donations and that she should “wait for her brothers and sisters to contribute,” while the saint-father José himself claims that they “help too much.”

However, while the logic of relations is not necessarily governed by the pursuit of profit, it still mobilizes interests – principally because these relations are not located beyond the universe of capitalism and the market, but instead constitute a type of internal economy of their own.

The idea of *help* expresses an economic participation without necessarily invoking the explicit presence of money, though the latter always appears subadjacently. The idea of *help* is sustained by an *ethic of sacrifice* in which the relation between people and divinities is expressed in the ties between the terreiro's members through constant prestations, creating a flux in which material goods, money and spiritual goods circulate indistinctly: the *axé*. The position of the candomblé follower is to prevent misfortune by fulfilling his or her obligations to the orixás. The capacity of a saint-parent to mobilize the help of his saint-children is also an expression of his or her ritual power.

### 3. The ballet of the gods: the divinity (personally) collects its tributes

There was intense excitement in the house of Paulinho de Oxum on the naming day of the *iaô* of Iansã. This excitement arose not only from the simple fact that the house would gain a new child, but also because of the large festival that had been prepared after a long period without new initiates. The death of Paulinho's saint-mother had closed the terreiro for a year for festivals and public obligations. The birth of a new saint-child was a golden opportunity for the house to resume its days of lavish festivals and splendour.

Occasions like these are extremely important to a terreiro, since as well as mobilizing all the community's members, they create the chance for the house to welcome illustrious visits. Saint-fathers and mothers, *ogãs*, *equedes* and older initiates from other houses are invited to celebrate the new initiate. The *orunkó* ritual itself requires the presence of outside guests, since the arrival of a *iaô* must be recognized by members of other houses, a kind of 'presentation to society' of the new children.<sup>24</sup>

The house filled with guests. Paulinho – wearing a white *abadá* with golden details in homage to Oxum, his orixá, and carrying the *adjarin*<sup>25</sup> in his hands – presided over the ceremony and began the candomblé by playing the *avamunha*.<sup>26</sup> He entered the *barracão* followed by his children in Indian file from the oldest to the youngest in order of initiation, making two complete circuits of the hall where the public festivals are held before sitting on his chair of honour, signalling to the *ogãs* for them to terminate the opening music and begin the *xirê*, greeting the orixás one by one, each of them with just three songs, since there was still a lot to do that night.

At a certain point, Paulinho asked the *ogãs* to play an *ilu*<sup>27</sup> in homage of the orixá of his deceased saint-mother, Iansã, inviting some of those present, older initiates, to dance. The rhythm, which starts slowly, gradually gains pace and some of those invited to dance begin to feel the effects of their orixás approaching. The public claps hands, excited by the prospect of the orixás appearing before them. Jorge, an initiate of the orixá Ogum, starts to lose control of his movements, his face twisting, altering his features. There is a clear sense that the trance is imminent.

Paulinho's saint-children become excited since "they were going to see the Ogum of Uncle Jorge dance." They sing and clap their hands more eagerly, invoking the warrior orixá with cries of welcome, *Ogum îê*. The *ogãs* *dobram os couros*, 'beat the leather harder,' in the expectation of making the ebomim *virar no santo*, 'turn into the saint.' The air is filled with an intense excitement. Jorge goes into the trance. The *equedes* present, eager to help, rush to remove him from the hall and dress him. Ogum, no longer Jorge, will return to the hall in his ceremonial attire.

Shortly before the orixás returned to the hall, I used the interval to make a quick tour of the terreiro and talk to some of the people from the house. At that moment, I could see the orixás being dressed to enter. With the orixá already wearing his ceremonial attire, dressed completely in white and silver and covered in *mariwò*, the leaf stripped from the oil palm, and carrying a silver sword, Jorge seemed taller with a nobler and more distinctive air. He was in fact thin but tall and broad shouldered; in the clothes of the warrior divinity, his physical size became striking. The transformation of the man into a warrior orixá radically changed his physiognomy and physical features to the point of making him almost unrecognizable.

The ogãs begin the drum beats for the dressed orixás to enter the hall. The procession of orixás arrives to the beat of the batá rhythm, slow and cadenced, with a chant greeting those present and asking permission on the way, the line led by the Ogum of Jorge and followed by an Oxossi, a Xangô, two Oxum and, finally, the iaô of Iansã. The orixás make two complete circuits of the hall and are positioned on one side, *the oldest*<sup>28</sup> sat in chairs. Paulinho asks the ogãs to begin the music *to give rum* to each of them.

Although Ogum is the oldest among those present, Paulinho discretely asks the orixá to make a concession and leave his dance until the end. The saint-father seemed to know what the dance of his brother's orixá held in store and wished to avoid creating a kind of anticlimax to his festival. Despite dawn approaching, nobody wished to leave without seeing the Ogum of Jorge dance. The expectation was huge when the ogãs began the chants welcoming Ogum, sung to the strong rhythm of the *adarrum*.<sup>29</sup>

Brandishing his sword, the dance of Ogum is made up of aggressive but graceful gestures. The large man dances with the lightness of a feather, despite the violence of his movements. As the pace quickens, the gestures become ever more precise and Ogum fights his imaginary adversaries found in his warrior sagas, illustrated through the songs in Yoruba. These are succeeded by dances with short pauses, leaving the audience increasingly overwhelmed. Some of those present fall into a trance and are removed from the hall. The public applauds to the same rhythm as the atabaque drums. Ogum gestures to the ogãs, who draw on new and stronger songs.

With the audience in ecstasy, Ogum turns to an equede and asks for something with another gesture. The equede understands and immediately heads off to the kitchen, returning soon after with a white plate which she hands to the orixá, taking the sword from his hands. Ogum then turns to the audience present, still dancing, with the plate in his hands. He passes the plate to the public who fill it with notes and coins.

After a complete circuit of the hall, the plate is piled with money. Ogum then turns back towards the atabaque players and places the collected money at their feet, offering it to the ogãs with a gesture, crossing his arms across his chest, as though embracing them. The audience claps wildly and the orixá walks to the exit accompanied by the applause of the public present. Paulinho asks the ogãs to play for Oxalá, announcing the end of the festival. The first signs of light indicate that the sun will rise to the sound of the last song, greeting Oxaguiã, the dawn.

### **Between “serving God and Mammon”: more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our vain philosophy**

By undertaking a more thorough and careful observation, we can conclude that there are many contemporary religious rites in which money takes the form of an offering or sacrifice to the gods. According to some interpretations, in Christian religions, for example, there has been a kind of sublimation of sacrificial acts that assumed the form of tithes, offerings and alms.<sup>30</sup> This,



though, does not mean that there is a naturalization of the presence of money: on the contrary, it is almost always a motive of discredit and a source of accusations.<sup>31</sup> What interests us here essentially is observing that the explicit presence of money in religious acts is very often a motive for accusation.

The concern with such accusations has always marked the practices relating to Afro-Brazilian religions. There has been a constant attempt to distinguish between ‘trustworthy practices’ of ‘African origin’ and those dubbed ‘black magic,’ the object of accusations. This polemic pervades the works of Édison Carneiro and Roger Bastide, for example, who look to distinguish ‘true Yoruban priests’ (or Banto priests, in the case of Carneiro) from the ‘opportunists and charlatans.’ The work of Paulo Barreto, *As religiões no Rio* (2006), originally published in 1906 under the pseudonym of João do Rio, looked to investigate in detail the practices of the curers and sorcerers of the city of Rio de Janeiro, associating the practices of the former with the ‘African’ – or candomblé – priests.<sup>32</sup>

The presence of money in religious acts can provoke deep distrust. An entire religious economy exists that stipulates the gestures and actions appropriate to sacred things and which is seen to be radically distinct from the human behaviour shown towards the mundane world. This economy of the sacred leads individuals to act scrupulously in response to certain facts or situations, following a kind of etiquette of the sacred that guides actions, creating hostile universes where the things pertaining to Mammon cannot be mixed with the things pertaining to God. The Bible itself proclaims this separation between the religious life and money, the former being the opposite of the latter insofar as expressions of the power of money are perceived to be extremely different to expressions of divine power. As I have stressed at various points throughout this article, money – usually taken as the universal mediator, lacking any value apart from that of generalized exchange – in fact acquires other meanings based on the relations in which it is implicated. As a result, sacred things may be exchanged for money and money may enter in various ways into the world of the sacred.

My interest here resides, then, in examining situations in which money is not a self-explanatory object, possessing a nature that places it above relations, focusing instead on precisely how, when and why it assumes an ambiguous nature. In fact, I would go further and say that money always possesses an ambiguous nature. By mixing with sacred acts, by being placed in the hands of gods manifested in people, money undoubtedly takes on other meanings, without losing its characteristics as a means of exchange and an object imbued with value.

The question is indeed ambiguous, since the money received by the ogãs in the scene described above is not really a payment, but may still be understood as such, given that they are the ‘fathers’ of the orixá and are working directly to please the gods. A saint-father told me that this type of act on the part of the ogãs “highlights a dimension of the ‘give and take’ usually found in the religion.” And here we return to the issue of commercializing faith, an accusation particularly felt by followers of candomblé.

Accusatory discourses are incited during moments of crisis or tension. The naturalization of money’s presence can only in fact happen in situations where there is a tacit agreement between the agents: it is the rupture of such agreements or the breach of certain rules that provokes the accusations.

One of the most eagerly awaited moments in the public candomblé festivals is when the saints *give rum*. This is a special moment, surrounded by expectations, in which the reputation of a house is very often placed at risk. An orixá must dance correctly, know the *orôs*<sup>33</sup> relating to each

song, and dress appropriately, wearing all his insignia and vestments. The beauty of the clothing is another element that draws the gaze. The layers of fabrics with brilliant, shining details of unequalled richness, compose a rich panorama of inescapable imagery.

A house's reputation is closely associated with the ballet of its orixás. The dance must be free of affectation or exhibitionism, reflecting instead the characteristics of the orixá. Ogum, Xangô and Iansã, for example, are orixás with vigorous dances filled with rapid and aggressive movements. Oxalufã, on the other hand, demands a slow ballet at the pace of the crab, one of his sacrificial animals. Omolu has a slow dance but with firm and very pronounced movements. The *iabás* Oxum and Iemanjá, female water gods, must dance gracefully and lightly. The dances also mimic the movements related to the orixá's attributes. Oxossi moves rapidly as if hunting. Oxumarê dances like a winding snake or the rainbow that takes the water from the earth to the skies and returns to earth again as rain. Oxum and Iemanjá dance sinuously like moving water. Xangô and Iansã, meanwhile, act like storms, the former hurling his rocks of lightning, the latter moving as quick as the wind.

This moment is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular features of candomblé, its public dimension being the most performative and consequently the most attractive aspect. As José Jorge de Carvalho (1994) astutely observes, this is the Apollonian facet of Afro-Brazilian religions, in direct opposition to the Dionysian character of possession by exus, more typical of umbanda or the Angolan forms of candomblé. There is a coordinated order to the subtle gestures and commands based merely on the subtle exchange of glances between the participants of a public festival.

In the scene presented above, we can see these codes being manipulated the whole time, as if each gesture or action was part of a lengthily rehearsed show, but which in actuality involves considerable improvisation on a basic script: the *xirê* and the manifestation of the orixás. The rest is produced in the here and now. The events unfold sequentially, giving the impression of having been predetermined, but flowing with such a naturalness that it becomes impossible to discern whether something was rehearsed previously or not.

The dance begins and the *ogãs* want to *shake the barracão*. Ogum performs the *orôs* with incomparable beauty and vigour, and the *ogãs* chant the songs one after the other, bringing pleasure to the orixá. The public's excitement with his dance is the thermometer for the final act: using signals, Ogum asks for a plate and collects money from the audience, offering the cash to the *ogãs* who performed the ceremony with him and without whom it would be impossible to satisfy the public. Those present give the money because they are taking part in the festival and want to offer something to Ogum; at that moment, they wish to seal an alliance with the warrior orixá and receive his protection in their day-to-day lives.

There is a clear exchange between the public and the orixá, and between the latter and his *ogãs*. By giving money, the audience solicits Ogum's protection. By placing the notes and coins on the collection plate, these people believe that they establishing a link with the orixá that must be renewed continually, whether by attending other celebrations or by giving offerings or *ebós*, or by joining the group and completing the obligations. The manifested god collects the tributes directly from the hands of his followers, where they deposit their offering to the orixá, imploring him for protection and assistance.

But the collected tribute is not passed to the house or the community as a whole; instead, it is shared by the orixá with those who, along with him, provided the show, namely the *ogãs*. Through his gesture of collecting tributes in a plate, Ogum asks those present to offer gifts to

those who play the drums to invoke the gods and who perform the music essential to the ballet of the orixás. This money is given exclusively to the ogãs, who divide the amount among themselves. It is a way of the orixá thanking them for the chance to be manifested in such a beautiful and fascinating way, but also represents a kind of commitment of these ogãs to the orixá.

We are faced, then, with a circuit through which gifts circulate: the dance and axé of the orixá, the music of the ogãs, the money of the public, which flow in the exchanges between the followers and their gods, and between the orixá and his acolytes. Money is effectively one of the primary means through which the exchanges are expressed. The central action played by money stems from its role as a key element of interaction between the orixá, the terreiro members and the public that watches the festival; it is the means through which exchanges take place between the religious community and the public, which is not necessarily made up of followers of the religion.

From this perspective, money appears as a gift that circulates between the ritual's participants. In other words, without losing its essential characteristics as a means of exchange, money acquires another meaning. The payment for the orixá's dance and the amount given for this to the ogãs presents us with a relationship that, in many ways, "naturalizes the presence of money in a purely religious act."

This is a universe of meanings that allows money to become part of religious practice; "it is the bearer of axé" – axé cannot be bought, but can be made to circulate within the saint-family and among those present at a festival. It serves to buy the leaves of Ossanhe, it makes Exu dynamize the principle of movement. As a result, money is an essential element in the religious practices and representations and activates crucial aspects of interpersonal relations and the relations between people and orixás.

This near omnipresence of money in sacred acts links the social scene described in the final section to the others presented in this article. We can identify a trajectory ranging from the presence of money in the relations of buying and selling religious services to a person's complete affiliation with candomblé; it includes the large festivals and public celebrations with their clearly ostentatious meaning of maximizing grace through offerings and sacrifices, and finally concludes as a natural part of the religious rituals, a meaningful element of the circulation of the dynamic principle of existence: the axé.

Consequently, it is impossible to separate what pertains to Mammon, money – with all the accusatory meaning that identifying its presence provokes – from what pertains to God, or more precisely, the gods. Money has various destinations: to sustain the community and provide for the group; to propitiate the relationship with the gods; and finally, to be an integral part of magical rituals or direct exchanges between gods and people.

In the first part of this work, I looked to analyze the relationship with the religious clientele and the trajectory of initiation, as well as studying how the transfers of money between client and saint-father change in status during this process. By joining the circle of the saint-family, the situation of buying and selling religious services disappears to be replaced by an effective (and affective) involvement in maintaining and reproducing this family. The commitments to the saint-family are, in some ways, analogous to people's commitments to families in general. However, the transfers of resources between saint-parents and saint-children are evidently capable of producing situations involving accusations where certain expectations are frustrated. A child cannot be treated as a client and the essential difference between clients and saint-children resides

in the latter's privileged access to the terreiro's intimate circle. From the viewpoint of praxis, though, defining these limits is far too complex – indeed, these can only be perceived in situations involving accusations.

In the second part, we saw how the participation in the economic life of a terreiro takes the form of *help*. *Helping the house* becomes a kind of euphemism through which the saint-children deal with the transfers of money to the candomblé house.

In the third and final part, we examined rituals that involve cash. These are situations in which money appears in explicit form, but without being handled in the relation between client and saint-parents. It is present, though not mentioned, in the *help* given by saint-children, and becomes freely handled by agents in the grand rituals. Money forms part of the system of objects linked to the ritual practice of candomblé, not only as an old currency already out of circulation (Vogel et al. 1987) but as a circulating medium, a commodity that accesses a circuit through which gifts flow. The relations between people and divinities can include money and the payment of tribute in cash to the gods. Hence, money is invested with distinctions, whether as part of the sacrifices to the gods, as a means of exchange with the god that takes away sickness and brings health, or as an offering to the gods for their danced, invoking them to provide protection and axé. Money, which until then appeared in veiled form, assumes its omnipresence in the domain of religion.

In sum, there is a specific etiquette that allows money to be present in the domain of religion without causing problems. But this etiquette is far from rigid. In the end, it is the very dynamic of the relations that determines which acts are interpreted by agents as correct and acceptable, or incorrect and subject to accusations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Here I adopt the definition of candomblé used by Vivaldo Costa Lima (2003): “The term candomblé, established by modern dictionaries of Portuguese and by the vast ethnographic literature on the topic, is widely used in the linguistic area of Bahia to designate religious groups possessing a system of beliefs in divinities called *santos* [saints] or *orixás* and associated with the phenomenon of possession or mystical trance [...] The meaning of the term, however, leaving aside its disputed etymology, is extended to the ideological corpus of the group, its myths, rituals and ethics, to the actual place where the religious ceremonies of these groups are practiced, when candomblé becomes synonymous with *terreiro* [yard], *casa de santo* [saint house] and *roça* [plantation]” (Costa Lima 2003:17).

<sup>2</sup> *Pai* or *mãe-de-santo* [saint-father or mother] are the generic names identifying the priests in Afro-Brazilian religions. The terms derive from the designations in Yoruba *babalorixá* or *ialorixá*, which mean “father or mother of the orixá.” *Orixás* are African divinities transposed to the Brazilian context through the slave trade, reorganized into a pantheon of sixteen basic divinities who form the set of gods worshiped in the candomblé groups and are also referred to as *saints*.

<sup>3</sup> A divinatory system adopted by Afro-Brazilian religions, based on the oracle *Ifá*, the divinity responsible for divination, in which 16 signs are recombined by throwing cowrie shells, providing the various possibilities open to the fate of the person requesting the consultation.

<sup>4</sup> A generic term used to designate any offering to the gods. It may also refer to the *despacho* or spell, or to rituals for curing or spiritual cleansing.

<sup>5</sup> The *despacho* is a propitiatory offering made to Exu with the purpose of sending him as a messenger to the orixás, soliciting their good will for performing a religious work, or to avoid their disruptive presence.

<sup>6</sup> The offering differs from the ebó and the despacho insofar as its aim is to provide retribution for a received grace or to maintain the spiritual bond between the follower and his or her entities.

<sup>7</sup> Along the same lines, see too Bloch's critique of the tendency prevalent in the social sciences of treating money as a destroyer of social ties, whose presence is merely synonymous with opportunism and self-interest (Bloch 1994:6). As we can perceive in the described scenes, money is not a one-dimensional object: on the contrary, agents invest it with a variety of meanings according to specific interactive contexts.

<sup>8</sup> The research material providing the basis to this article was undertaken for my master's dissertation. The findings presented here were mostly obtained during my three-month stay at a candomblé terreiro in the city of Salvador, enabled by funds granted by CAPES, via the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology of the Museu Nacional/UFRJ, and by the Culture and Economics Research Centre (NUCEC). I spent the months of January, February and March 2005 staying at the Pilão de Prata terreiro, Ilê Odô Ogê, located in Alto do Caxundê, in the Boca do Rio district of Salvador. The terreiro, run by Air José Sowzer, kindly accommodated me during this period, allowing me to accompany the entire cycle of festivals and obligations for that year. I also had the opportunity to revisit the terreiro in August 2005, when I witnessed the presentation of the iaôs boat. Accompanying the day-to-day life of this community enabled me to collate a large amount of material which, on returning to Rio de Janeiro, I was able to combine with findings accumulated during research and personal experiences linked to candomblé terreiros over an approximately ten-year period.

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent definition of the nature of the 'saint family,' applicable to the case presented in this work, see Silverstein (1979:150-151).

<sup>10</sup> "Making" (Feitura) is a term adopted by adepts as a synonymous of the initiation

<sup>11</sup> The iaôs boat is the name given by adepts to a group of people initiated together.

<sup>12</sup> A slogan from an advertising campaign run by a large electrical appliance retail chain.

<sup>13</sup> The dossier of the magazine *Terrain*, entitled 'Largent en famille,' examines various questions relating to the presence of money in the family universe. Some of the articles show how self-interest is not completely excluded from this universe, although it is mobilized through very particular rules that guide transactions (see especially Journet 2005:5-6).

<sup>14</sup> The specific case of the couple Rose and Marcelo allows us to ponder the extent to which mythical aspects related to the orixás can shape their behaviour and social position within the group. Marcelo comes from a rich family and his social status and behaviour are not necessarily linked to his orixá; this contrasts with Rose, a woman from a humble background, whose orixá, Oxum, is associated with luxury, wealth and ostentation. Rose, differently to Marcelo, whose

attitude is closely linked to his social origin, embodies the character identified by her orixá. For a better understanding of these aspects, see Segato (1986).

<sup>15</sup> Large traditional Bahian skirts used in candomblé. The Yoruba word *xirê* means 'joke' or 'play,' and corresponds to the dance of the orixás in the public festivals held by the terreiros. As well as the skirt, traditional candomblé clothing includes the *camisú*, a kind of smock, the *ojás* which cover the heads of the older female initiates, bows and shawls.

<sup>16</sup> The candomblé groups, especially the terreiros where my research was carried out, allow the older initiates to use certain details in their clothing with the passage of time. Younger members, however, are completely prohibited from using materials on their clothes, or necklaces and other accessories. The hair of women must also be kept tied up or in braids.

<sup>17</sup> As the skirt in question was made entirely in white cloth, and the period of festivals in which the use of white is obligatory was already over, Rose ended up not using the skirt, keeping it for the following year's festive cycle.

<sup>18</sup> Georg Simmel (1977) developed a theory of the value of objects in modernity linked to the notion of sacrifice. Desiring and trying to obtain something requires the individual's willingness to lose a part of him or herself to obtain the desired thing.

<sup>19</sup> The head performs a central role in the cosmology of candomblé, worshiped as an essential part of the individual in his or her entry into the cult of the orixás. The *bori* ceremony corresponds to the act of "giving food to the head," seeking to re-establish personal equilibrium and the connection with the initiate's protective divinities (see too Goldman 1985).

<sup>20</sup> According to Bastide (1971:318), "While it is necessary to pay to consult Ifá, to perform a magic ritual, to be initiated or to give the head food to eat, this is not a purchase; it is an obligatory return gift for the excess of being, force and life that we receive in exchange. And even this word exchange is not ideal here, since the sacred is manipulated and this manipulation requires a balance of the forces at work; what we call exchange is ultimately nothing more than balancing forces and the proof resides in the fact that, generally speaking, it is not money that intervenes, but the exchange. [...] There is no profit, no search for an advantage, the wish to receive more than one gives. The balance is never disturbed."

<sup>21</sup> Vogel et al. (1993:63-65) analyze this question on the basis of mythic narratives.

<sup>22</sup> According to Landes (2002) [1940], "The structure of the cult involves men as *ogãs*, protectors, sponsors. The *ogã* is expected to subsidize the elaborate ceremonies, to maintain the cult house in a good state and to help finance the ritual obligations of one of the priests" (p.324).

<sup>23</sup> The preservation order not only enabled economic changes, it also attracted government investments, allowing the construction of a public square in homage of the 'Black Mother,' the terreiro's matriarch, a sports field, and paving and lighting in the nearby streets.

<sup>24</sup> As Vogel et al. (1993:78-79) propose, the recognition and reputation of a candomblé house stem from its public festivals, especially the festival of *Onrunkó*, the naming day of a new initiate.

<sup>25</sup> A small metal double bell used to invoke the entities.

<sup>26</sup> Also known as *avanaia*, *avaninha*, *rebate* or *arrebate*, this rapid and syncopated rhythm is a kind of summoning of the orixás and marks the beginning or the end of the religious ceremonies. The term *avanaia*, according to Cacciatore (1977), comes from the Yoruba language and breaks down as *à*, ‘they;’ *wá*, ‘move;’ *níhà*, ‘towards’ (p.55).

<sup>27</sup> A vigorous and quick rhythm with a marked cadence, attributed especially to the orixá Iansã, but also accompanying the songs of other orixás.

<sup>28</sup> The designation *older orixá*, in the case in question, refers to the saint-child’s period of initiation, but may also refer to the fact that in the cosmology of candomblé some of the orixás, such as Oxalá and Nanã, are the oldest gods of creation.

<sup>29</sup> A strong and heavily marked rhythm, which quickens pace continuously; invocatory in nature, it is used for all the orixás with the aim of “beating the resistances to the trance” (Barros 1999:67). According to Arthur Ramos (*apud* Barros 1999:67), the rhythm “has the property of evoking any saint.” This rhythm is also said to have the power or function of invoking the orixás for war. It appears as an accompaniment to many xirê chants used to *give rum* to the saints, as in the case in question.

<sup>30</sup> According to the book *O caminho: síntese da doutrina cristã para adultos*, the Catholic mass is divided into two essential parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word is divided, in turn, into the Liturgy of Prayer, which includes the Preparatory Prayers, the Gloria and the Collect, and the Liturgy of the Word properly speaking, which comprises biblical readings. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is divided into four parts; the one to which I refer here is the first part, denominated the Presentation of the Gifts: “a) the presentation of the gifts: bread and wine are carried to the altar. At this moment, the Christian also spiritually places on the altar his offering: life, work, suffering, happiness, etc. Nobody appears before me empty-handed (Ecl. 35, 5)” (p.235). The other parts concern the acts of consecration and communion. Curiously, the booklet makes no mention of the Collect, which despite being presented as an offering at the altar, is part of the Liturgy of the Word rather than the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

<sup>31</sup> The question of the tithe for followers of Evangelical churches is a theme of heavy debate and controversy. For an analysis of some events involving public denunciations of the misuse of the tithe, especially in the Universal Church, see Mafra 2001.

<sup>32</sup> An episode narrated by Ruth Landes (2002:249-250) illustrates this opposition between a ‘legitimate’ priest and the supposedly opportunist attitude of a saint-mother. Landes recounts in rich detail how she became involved and pressurized to give money to a saint-mother, which she eventually evade to escape thanks to her relations with Édison Carneiro and Mother Menininha do Gantois.

<sup>33</sup> According to Barros (2000), the word *orô* designates the special rites dedicated to the orixás, who may also be their foundations or secrets. The term in Yoruba translates as *incitement* and, for this reason, also refers to certain special chants of praise.

## Bibliography

- A Bíblia Sagrada. Antigo e Novo Testamento. 1967. Rio de Janeiro: Sociedade Bíblica do Brasil.
- APPADURAI, Arjun. 1986. (ed.). *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BARROS, José Flávio Pessoa de. 1999. *O banquete do rei... Olubajé: uma introdução à música sacra afro-brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: UERJ/ INTERCON.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. *A fogueira de Xangô... o orixá do fogo: uma introdução à música sacra afro-brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: UERJ/ INTERCON.
- BASTIDE, Roger. 1971. *Religiões africanas no Brasil*. São Paulo: Pioneira.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. *O candomblé da Bahia*. São Paulo: Cia. das Letras.
- BIRMAN, Patricia. 1985. *O que é umbanda?*. Coleção Primeiros Passos. São Paulo: Brasiliense.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. "Cultos de possessão e pentecostalismo no Brasil: passagens." *Religião e Sociedade*, 17(1-2):90-109.
- BLOCH, Maurice. 1994. "Les usages de l'argent." *Terrain*, 23:5-10.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. 1982. *A economia das trocas simbólicas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. "Marginália: algumas notas adicionais sobre o Dom." *Mana. Estudos de Antropologia Social*, 2(2): 7-20.
- BRAGA, Júlio. 1998. *Fuxico de candomblé*. Feira de Santana: UEFS.
- CACCIATORE, Olga Gudolle. 1977. *Dicionário de cultos afro-brasileiros*. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária/ SEEC-RJ.
- CARNEIRO, Edison. 1967 [1948]. *Candomblés da Bahia*. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro.
- CARVALHO, José Jorge de. 1994. "Violência e caos na experiência religiosa: a dimensão dionisíaca dos cultos afro-brasileiros." In: C. E. M. de Moura (ed.), *As senhoras do pássaro da noite*. São Paulo: EDUSP/ Axis Mundi. pp. 85-120.
- COSTA LIMA, Vivaldo. 2003. *A família de santo nos candomblés jejes-nagôs da Bahia: um estudo de relações intragrupais*. Salvador: Corrupio.
- DANTAS, Beatriz Góis. 1979. "A organização econômica de um terreiro de Xangô" *Religião e Sociedade*, 4:181-191.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. *Vovó nagô e papai branco: usos e abusos da África no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal.



- DOUGLAS, Mary. 1976. *Pureza e perigo*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- FRY, Peter. 1982. *Para inglês ver: identidade e política na cultura brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.
- GOLDMAN, Márcio 1985. "A construção ritual da pessoa: a possessão no Candomblé." *Religião e Sociedade*, 12/1:22-54.
- HART, Keith. 2001. *Money in a unequal world*. New York: Texere.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "Money: one anthropologist's view." At: <http://www.thememorybank.co.uk/publications/monney-one-anthropologists-view/>
- HERSKOVITS, Melville. 1930. "The negro in the New World: the statement of a problem." *American Anthropologist*, XXXI(1):145-55.
- INGHAM, Geoffrey. 2004. "The nature of money. Economic sociology." *European Electronic Newsletter*, 5(2): 18-28.
- JOÃO DO RIO (pseudonym of Paulo Barreto). 2005. *As religiões do Rio*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio.
- JOURNET, Nicolas. 2005. "L'argent en famille." *Terrain*, 45:5-12.
- LANDES, Ruth. 2002. *A cidade das mulheres*. Rio de Janeiro: EdUFRJ.
- MAFRA, Clara. 2001. *Os evangélicos. Coleção Descobrimdo o Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor.
- MAUSS, Marcel e HUBERT, Henri. 1981 [1899]. "Ensaio sobre a natureza e a função do sacrifício." In: *Ensaio de sociologia*. São Paulo: Perspectiva. pp. 142-227.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. "Ensaio sobre a dádiva: forma e razão da troca em sociedades arcaicas." In: *Sociologia e Antropologia*. São Paulo: Cosac e Naify. pp. 183-314.
- NEIBURG, Federico. 2003. "Intimacy and the public sphere. Politics and culture in the Argentinian national space, 1946-55." *Social Anthropology*, 11(1):63-78.
- PRANDI, Reginaldo. 1991. *Os candomblés de São Paulo*. São Paulo: Edusp/ Hucitec.
- PROVÍNCIA ECLESIAÍSTICA DE ALAGOAS. 1985. *O caminho: síntese da doutrina cristã para adultos*. São Paulo: Loyola.
- SEGATO, Rita Laura. 1986. "Inventando a natureza: família, sexo e gênero no Xangô do Recife." *Anuário Antropológico*, 85:11-54.
- SIGAUD, Lygia. 2005. "Se eu soubesse: quando os dons tornam-se mercadorias." Paper presented at the International Colloquium Quantification and Temporality: ethnographic perspectives on economics. Rio de Janeiro: Museu Nacional/UFRJ.

SILVERSTEIN, Leni. 1979. "Mãe de todo mundo: modos de sobrevivência nas comunidades de candomblé da Bahia." *Religião e Sociedade*, 4:143-169.

SIMMEL, Georg. 1977. *Philosophie de l'argent*. Paris: PUF.

VOGEL, Arno et al. "A moeda dos orixás." *Religião e Sociedade*, 14(2):5-17.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *A galinha-dangola: iniciação e identidade na cultura afro-brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas/ FLACSO; Niterói: EdUFF.

WEBER, Florence. 2001. "Settings, interactions and things: a plea for multi-integrative ethnography." *Ethnography*, 2(4):475-499.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Práticas econômicas e formas ordinárias de cálculo." *Mana. Estudos de Antropologia Social*, 8(2):151-182.

WEBER, Max. 1996. *A ética protestante e o espírito do capitalismo*. São Paulo: Pioneira.

ZELIZER, Viviana. 1994. *The social meaning of money*. New York: Basic Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Intimate transactions." In: M. Guillen et al. (eds.), *The new economic sociology*. Nova York: Russell Sage Foundation. pp. 274-300.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2005. *The purchase of intimacy*. New York: Princeton University Press.

Received on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2006

Approved on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2007

Translated by David Allan Rodgers

Translation from **Mana**, Rio de Janeiro, v.13 n.1, p. 7-40, Apr. 2007.