Transforming the Orixás
Candomblé in Sacred and Secular Spaces in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil

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In the streets and plazas of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, representations of the orixás, the deities of the African-Brazilian religion Candomblé, are visible throughout the city. Mural paintings appear on walls and signs where they blend in with advertisements and graffiti, allowing motorists to contemplate the entire pantheon of orixás while filling up the gas tank (Fig. 1). A sculpture of Exú, the guardian of the crossroads and the orixá who oversees all forms of communication, is positioned, most appropriately, in front of the city’s central post office (Fig. 2); a painted mermaid associated with Yemanjá overlooks the sea (Fig. 3); and on the Dique do Tororó, a large lake and recreation zone in the middle of the city, a group of orixá statues dances in a circle on the surface of the water (Fig. 4).

Richly varied in scale and medium, visual references to Candomblé in the streets of Salvador are so frequent that they blend in with the surrounding urban landscape, merging with the multitude of colors that adorn nearly every surface. Although most Candomblé ritual practices take place in private spaces, the frequency of public art with a focus on the religion makes the presence of these images in the secular realm seem as natural and acceptable as advertisements for toothpaste and legal services. The movement of imagery from the sacred space of the Candomblé terreiro (temple) to the city streets, however, requires extensive intervention, as the complicated aesthetics of Candomblé must be recast in a way that is comprehensible and palatable to a broad public.

The group of sculptures on the Dique do Tororó by the Bahian artist Tatti Moreno is arguably the most famous public and popularized representation of Candomblé in Bahia. This sculptural project effectively illustrates the artistic mediation that is necessary in order to present Candomblé effectively in the public sphere. This transformative process in the realm of public art, explored here using Moreno’s orixás as a case study, parallels the popularization of Candomblé in festivals, most notably Bahia’s carnival and the annual summer festivals dedicated to Yemanjá and Nosso Senhor do Bonfim/Oxalá (Crowley and Ross 1981:56, Crowley 1984:13, Pinho 2006:275, Shukla 1998). Given that Candomblé is rich in its aesthetic principles and that engagement with empowered objects is central to ritual practice, one must ask how, and to what end, are these secularized images constructed? In what ways, for example, does a representation of Oxum in the city

1 Orixá murals on the wall of a gas station gas wash, Avenida Vasco da Gama, Salvador da Bahia. This mural included paintings of some of the most well-known orixás. Like many popularized images that can be found through the city of Salvador, these paintings place an emphasis on clothing and accessories as identifying features for each of the orixás. September 2001.

(opposite)

2 Mário Cravo, Jr. Exú. Pieced iron. Central Post Office, Pituba, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, 1970s. For public art projects such as this, artists must represent the key characteristics of the orixás in a way that is recognizable by and palatable to a broad public. March 2001.
center relate to the aesthetic principles and devotional practices surrounding the orixá within the sacred context? And given the complicated position of Candomblé in the contemporary cultural landscape of Bahia, how are popularized images received by people who identify with a variety of religious practices in this cosmopolitan setting, some of whom are antagonistic towards the use of Candomblé as a symbol of regional identity?

THE DIQUE DO TORORÓ ORIXÁS

Moreno’s work on the Dique do Tororó consists of eight figurative sculptures positioned on cement pylons, creating the illusion that the orixás float on the surface of the water. The sculptures are arranged in a circle facing outwards with a fountain in the center, and at night individual spotlights mounted on the bases illuminate the figures. The sculptures, averaging 22 feet (6.7m) in height and 2 tons in weight, are constructed of fiberglass over iron armatures.²

The Candomblé orixás are named deities with complex personalities and attributes, and people who practice Candomblé develop close relationships with particular orixás that are nourished through ritual practice. The orixás in Bahia relate to Yoruba orishas that have remained relatively intact in Candomblé. It should be noted that in Bahia, the vast number of individual Candomblé communities are not unified under one larger ritual authority and liturgy is not completely standardized.³ Individual Candomblé communities are effectively independent from one another, and consequently beliefs and practices are not entirely consistent. Bahian Candomblé communities identify with a number of nações (nations; sg. nação), one of which, Nagô, has come to be seen as the dominant Candomblé nation in scholarship as well as in the popular understanding of the religion (Motta 1998, Omari-Tunkara 2006, Parés 2005, Santos 1998, 2000, Selka 2005, 2007, Wafer 1991). Followers of Candomblé Nagô are particularly devoted to the orixás and the ancestry of these entities is rooted specifically in Yoruba practices from Nigeria. Members of Candomblé terreiros of other nações, such as Jejé and Angola, however, accord special attention to other kinds of spirits (caboclos and exús, for example), usually alongside a variety orixás, some of which differ from those revered in the context of Candomblé Nagô. In this case, the origins of the spirits can be found throughout West Africa as well as in Brazil. Given the diversity of beliefs and practices among the various nações, is it not surprising that connections to Yoruba ritual practice vary from community to community; among some followers of Candomblé, Yoruba is spoken as a liturgical language, for example, but this is certainly not universal. Likewise, the relationship of the Candomblé orixás to similar spiritual entities in Yoruba practice is by no means precise.⁴

Moreno’s monumental sculptures represent orixás often associated with Candomblé Nagô. They are shown in figurative form, and each one is identified through color associations and liturgical objects (Fig. 5). The figures wear columnar skirts made of overlapping sheets of fiberglass, representing the multiple lay-

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ers of clothing that, in real life, would flutter dramatically with the body in motion. Given the inherent qualities of fiberglass and iron, each figure appears quite static; however, Moreno used varying gestures and postures to create the impression of dance, which in Candomblé ultimately serves to invoke spirit possession. In a Candomblé festa or xiré, a ceremony that takes place within the terreiro but that is open to the public, participants usually dress in white clothing, with women wearing heavily starched, lacy, flounced skirts and headscarves. In many communities, when an initiate receives the orixá in trance, the headscarf or another long strip of cloth is tied around the torso to indicate the presence of the orixá (Fig. 6). When the initiate enters into trance during the course of a public festival, a state that may be achieved by several initiates at once, he or she may be led to a more private space and then dressed in the sacred clothing of the orixá and given the liturgical items that are usually stored on the altar. Properly dressed, the orixá returns to the public ritual space and the ceremony resumes (Fig. 7). Moreno’s sculptures appear to represent people who are in trance with the orixás as indicated through clothing and sacred objects.

Given the diversity of beliefs and practices within Bahian Candomblé, then, one of the challenges Moreno faced was to create a body of work that would be appealing to people who associate themselves with various Candomblé nações. The decision to depict orixás without reference to other spiritual entities such as the caboclos, for example, favors the Nagô tradition and this is in keeping with the public face of Candomblé. At the same time, Moreno’s sculptural group included text that identified the figures in relation to Catholic saints, in spite of the fact that a number of well-known Nagô communities have taken steps to separate the two religions (Fig. 8). The challenge of creating images that are acceptable to a diverse audience within Candomblé adds a new layer of difficulty to the goal of translating the aesthetics of the religion into a visual language that is legible to a wide audience of outsiders to the Candomblé universe.

My discussion of these works is based on a series of research trips between 1998–2002. In addition to research involving the written documentation of the Dique do Tororó sculptural project and reactions to it, I participated to various degrees in the social and ritual life of a few very different Candomblé communities in the city of Salvador. One of these is the spiritual descendent of the famous Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, located in a suburb of Salvador. This community, led by a pai-de-santo (saint-father, or priest) who is known here as Pai Alfonso, identifies with Candomblé Nagô. Pai Alfonso’s community has a long tradition of relationships with researchers, writers, and artists, who have traveled from all parts of the city to participate in the ritual life of this terreiro. Some of the people who participate in the religious life of Pai Alfonso’s community are among Salvador’s wealthy, powerful and educated elite. As is the case with a number of the elite Nagô communities in Bahia, in Pai Alfonso’s terreiro the inclusion of Catholic images has been eliminated in favor of art forms that are defined as more “authentic,” which in this case means non-figurative and presumably derived from Yoruba sources.

The other Candomblé community with which I was closely associated is lead by an older mãe-de-santo (saint-mother, priestess), Mãe Alice, who moved to Salvador from the interior of the state as a young adult (Fig. 9). Rather than sensing strong connections to West Africa, members of Mãe Alice’s community perceive their practices to be rooted in the Candomblé that emerged during slavery in the rural, sugar-producing regions of Bahia. The terreiro is located in an impoverished neighborhood near the city center. It is a small community and its members, generally less affluent than in Pai Alfonso’s community, face greater economic challenges in meeting their ritual obligations. Most of Mãe Alice’s filhos-de-santo (saint-children, initiates) reside in the neighborhood of the terreiro, which is located inside Mãe Alice’s own small house. Mãe Alice’s terreiro defies clear categorization by nação; her community blends together practices that are defined as Nagô, Jejé, and Angola. The caboclos and exús
are important here, as are a number of orixás. Catholic imagery pops up on altars throughout the terreiro, blending comfortably with the orixás. Although scholarly literature places an emphasis on the “purity” and “authenticity” of Candomblé Nago (Bastide 2001, Carneiro 1997, Omari-Tunkara 2006, Rodrigues 1935), terreiros like Mãe Alice’s, which blend together Catholic and African-Brazilian beliefs with no inherent conflict, are probably more common in actual practice.

A close examination of these two communities yields many similarities. Ideas about empowerment and possession trance are central in both cases, for example. Core concepts are recognizable to each group, but at the same time there is not universal agreement about how Candomblé should be practiced. I was especially

4 Tatti Moreno. Orixás. Fiberglass and iron. Dique do Tororô, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, 1998. The orixás by Moreno are arguably the most recognized secular representations of Candomblé in Salvador. The photograph illustrates the careful landscaping around the water as well as the neighborhood surrounding the Dique. A busy street separates this residential neighborhood, called Vasco da Gama, from the Dique do Tororô. January 2009.

5 Tatti Moreno, detail of Orixás—Oxalá (in white), Iansã (in red), and Ogum (in blue)—on the Dique do Tororô. 1998.
aware of this as I showed photographs taken in each community to the other. Members of both communities were interested in seeing how Candomblé was practiced in different terreiros, but they were also quick to pick apart particular details that vary from place to place. Since this involved looking at photographs, these critiques were usually focused on visual elements of ritual practice such as altars and clothing used for the orixás. Particularly helpful in this regard were the keen insights of a self-taught art historian who had been practicing Candomblé for most of her life, Nancy de Souza e Silva. De Souza e Silva, known as Cici, is associated with Candomblé Nagô and she is especially attuned to the visual aspects of the religion from that perspective (Fig. 10).

In addition to participant-observation in these two contexts as well as in a variety of other communities throughout the city and its surrounding suburbs, I conducted interviews with approximately sixty people on the topic of Moreno’s orixá sculptures specifically. Through these semi-structured interviews I sought qualitative responses to a series of questions relating to the aesthetics and meaning of the sculptures. Approximately a third of these were on-site interviews at the Dique do Tororó, mostly with people who were visiting the area for recreation, whether they were residents of the neighborhood or visitors from other parts of the city. I also sought out more substantial discussions with people who had particular religious affiliations, focusing on Candomblé, Catholicism, and Pentecostalism. Over these years I met on several occasions with the artist, Tatti Moreno, and discussed the works in his home and his studio (Fig. 11).

The incorporation of popularized Candomblé imagery in Salvador is politically and socially charged. The high visibility of secularized Candomblé imagery in public spaces provides sup-
port for the constructed idea that African-influenced culture is an essential and natural part of regional identity (Dantas 1988, Freyre 1933, Rodrigues 1935, Sansi 2007, Santos 1998, 2000, Selka 2005, 2007; Van de Port 2005, 2007). As Mattijs Van de Port has noted, references to a shared corpus or “image bank” of Candomblé images defines space and events in relation to this constructed identity to the extent that “in contemporary Salvador it is next to impossible to articulate one’s Bahianness without making use of Candomblé imagery” (2007:267). Consequently, the “image bank” to which Van de Port refers, the body of extracted signs and symbols that come to represent Candomblé in the public imagination, is often dismissed as an oversimplified, sanitized version of the religion’s complicated aesthetics and symbolism (Sansi 2007:167–68).

I am also of the opinion that the secularized images of Candomblé essentially erase references to many of the ritual practices that are central to the religion. Secularized images in the public realm downplay complexity and internal variation in terms of beliefs and practices, homogenizing Candomblé and the people who practice it. The specific visual vocabulary used to craft the public image of Candomblé necessitates analysis, though, and this is especially true with a public art project on the scale of the Dique do Tororó orixás. This very literal representation of the orixás appears as a monumental text, read in multiple ways depending on the preconceptions of the viewer. This image of Candomblé is pervasive, and it becomes the public face of the religion in spite of, and perhaps because of, its real failure to capture complexity.

“THE MOST AFRICAN CITY OF BRAZIL”: AFRICAN IDENTITY IN BAHIA

The presence of Africa is quite visible in this city, where a large percentage of the population is African descent. African-derived rhythms dominate popular music, and local culinary specialties—based on ingredients like okra, black-eyed peas, and palm oil—would not be out of place in West Africa. Since Candomblé has strong connections to West African traditions, it is often held up as a symbol of the presence of Africa in Bahia. A billboard campaign in 2001 sponsored by the State Board of Culture and Tourism referred to Salvador as “Black City: The Most African City of Brazil” (Fig. 12). This speaks to the fact that the region’s unique “African” identity serves to sell Bahia to visitors from other parts of Brazil and abroad. The incorporation of a popularized version of Candomblé into the cycle of festivals promoted by the state and local governments has served as an important device to draw national and international tourists to Bahia, and this has also provided Candomblé with visibility and perceived legitimacy in mainstream society (Crowley 1984, Crowley and Ross 1981, Dantas 1988, Graden 2006, Lopes 2004:856, Pinho 2006, Santos 1998, 2000, Selka 2005, 2007, Shukla 1998, Van der Port 2005, 2007). But of course the acceptance of Candomblé and other cultural practices defined by the dominant culture as “African” is relatively recent in the history of Bahia.

From the time of their arrival in the slave port of Bahia, Africans and their descendents began to transform the beliefs and practices of their diverse ancestors into Candomblé, the religion as it is practiced today. Scholars across the disciplines have examined the history of Candomblé, exploring, among other questions, its relationship to self-help organizations affiliated with the Catholic Church and its role in identity formation in Bahia and elsewhere. Emerging from these numerous rich studies is a history of repression, sometimes violent, and the development of the religion as a subculture and a site of resistance (Butler 1998, Harding 2000, Johnson 2002, Omari-Tunkara 2006, Reis 1993, Walker 1988). In addition, many of these studies have sought to trace the complicated and shifting relationship between the dominant class, mostly wealthy and identified as “white,” which recognized and feared the power of Candomblé, and those who practiced the religion, most of whom were of lower socio-economic status and identified as “black” or “African.”

After the abolition of slavery in 1888 and until the 1930s, the state of Bahia repressed the practice of Candomblé by outlawing
provided support for Candomblé from the influential intellectual community, as the religion was presented as the unique heritage of Brazil and panelists urged for protection from continued repression (Sansi 2007:52–53).

Beginning in the 1930s and in the decades to follow, prominent scholars from abroad arrived in Bahia and focused their research on Candomblé, which they identified as an African religion in Brazil. Roger Bastide, Melville Herskovits, and Ruth Landes, among others, established research relationships with the Candomblé communities and emphasized rich connections with Africa through their writings. Candomblé’s previous image as a “primitive ritual”—one that was perceived to be potentially dangerous and corruptive to the dominant culture—was recast as a “religion” that contributes to the shared identity of Bahia (Motta 1998, Santos 1998, 2000, Selka 2005, 2007, Van de Port 2007, Wafer 1991).

The alliance between Candomblé leaders and Bahia’s political elite also has its origins in the transformations that have taken place since the 1930s. In this context, many prominent politicians associate themselves with Candomblé leaders, thus gaining a new base of political support.16 Public art projects that depict the orixás are a tangible demonstration of support for the religion and a way for politicians to gain popularity with the most disenfranchised portion of the African-Bahian population, since Candomblé is mostly practiced by the lower class. These sculptures also promote an image of an exotic Bahia to tourists from other parts of Brazil and abroad, thus serving as permanent advertising for one of the state’s valued industries: tourism.17

Many Bahians express a sense of pride in Salvador’s African-Brazilian identity, often describing their city as more “exotic” and more “African” than the cosmopolitan areas to the south, particularly Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. This sense of pride, in fact, is a way of responding to the Brazilian northeast’s lower levels of economic development and standard of living in comparison to the states in southern Brazil. In spite of the complex historical factors that have led to unequal development in the north and south of Brazil, overwhelming racist attitudes have attributed lower levels of development to the greater African-Brazilian presence in the northeast. By identifying their state as the “Africa of Brazil,” taking pride in its African heritage, and calling upon its cultural influence to promote the state’s important tourist industry, residents of Bahia and governmental agencies subvert racist attitudes, turning the region’s African identity into a lucrative asset.18

Yet at the same time that notions of African identity are celebrated in the public realm, Bahians who are more clearly of African descent continue to suffer from racial discrimination in the private and public sectors.19 In actuality the practice of Candomblé remains marginalized in mainstream society.20 In spite of the prevalence of secularized references to Candomblé in public spaces, it is a religion practiced by the minority of the people in Bahia. And at the same time that Candomblé is celebrated by way of public festivals, many Bahians continue to hold a low opinion of the religion itself, referring to it as “witchcraft” or simply dismissing it as “garbage.”21 Although legal barriers that inhibited the practice of Candomblé in the past have been lifted, some more rigid members of increasingly popular Pentecostal churches mount verbal ceremonies, confisca...
and physical attacks on those who worship the Candomblé orixás (Lopes 2004:839, Sansi 2007:185–86). Attitudes towards Candomblé in Bahia, then, are full of contradictions. While images of the orixás hold center stage at the Dique do Tororó, fear of being looked down upon or discriminated against often leads people who participate in Candomblé to maintain their religious practices and beliefs strictly separate from other aspects of their lives. I found that it is not uncommon for people to compartmentalize their lives, maintaining clandestine connections to Candomblé. Among the people with whom I worked most closely, most acknowledged that they had concealed their participation in Candomblé at some point in their lives in order to avoid discrimination in the workplace and in official business. Jorge, for example, is a man in his twenties who was initiated in Candomblé a few years before I met him. A few months before he went through an early stage of initiation, he started a job at a supermarket in an upper-class neighborhood in Salvador. He petitioned his mãe-de-santo to allow him to forgo requirements that he wear a number of strands of consecrated beads during the period following his initiation, arguing that this would make his involvement with Candomblé too conspicuous. Jorge thought that his beads would create a negative impression at his workplace and possibly lead to the termination of his official business. Jorge, for example, is a man in his twenties who was initiated in Candomblé a few years before I met him. A few months before he went through an early stage of initiation, he started a job at a supermarket in an upper-class neighborhood in Salvador. He petitioned his mãe-de-santo to allow him to forgo requirements that he wear a number of strands of consecrated beads during the period following his initiation, arguing that this would make his involvement with Candomblé too conspicuous. Jorge thought that his beads would create a negative impression at his workplace and possibly lead to the termination of his official business.

Although Candomblé is sometimes denigrated in private, public art projects are understood as governmental endorsement for Candomblé and as an indication of its official acceptance in contemporary secular society. Publically funded projects such as Moreno’s orixás signal an incorporation of African religious heritage into the state’s constructed image of regional identity, even though Candomblé continues to be scorned by some circles. Moreno’s project, then, also demonstrates the way in which imagery relating to Candomblé is used to promote the presence of African-Brazilian culture in Bahia for political and commercial ends.

The following sections provide an overview first of altars in the sacred context and then of the public representation of Candomblé on the Dique do Tororó. The comparison of the two illustrates the shift in aesthetics and symbolism that was necessary in order to mediate the image of Candomblé and craft it into something comprehensible and acceptable to an audience of insiders and outsiders to the religion.

Candomblé Altars in Sacred Spaces

Axé, the powerful force that drives the universe, holds a central position in the practice of Candomblé. Axé is an energy that resides in the natural world; it exists in people and animals as well as in trees and leaves, the sky, the wind, shells and rocks, and the Earth itself. Finding a way to access and manipulate this power (most often through offerings and trance), and using it to the benefit of an individual and his or her community in a concrete way is a central motivation for religious practice (Drewal 1996, Johnson 2002, Omari-Tunkara 2006, Sansi 2007, Wafer 1991). The pragmatism of Candomblé, its emphasis on the resolution of immediate problems accomplished through the manipulation of axé, is one feature that distinguishes it from Evangelical Christianity and Catholicism, the other dominant religions in Bahia (Chesnut 2003:102–27).

Trance, invoked through drumming, dancing, and singing, allows for the individual and the community to be filled with axé, providing strength and protection. Whether private or public, many ceremonies performed within a sacred space have the goal of invoking trance, thereby benefiting the community and providing all involved with axé (Drewal 1996:270). Just as people can receive this powerful force in their bodies through trance, objects are also impregnated with axé. Often the objects that are empowered, and therefore containers of axé, are found in the natural world. Since the orixás are conceived of as spiritual forces that reside in nature, special rocks, shells, seeds, and pieces of wood are revered for their potency and...
incorporated on altars. Likewise, metal, wood, or fiber objects serve symbolic representations of the orixás and can be receptacles of axé. Whether found in the natural world or created by artists, objects used within the sacred space of Candomblé are empowered through a process that requires secret knowledge passed on within the community by way of oral tradition and observation. Ritually prepared specialists pack objects with power through the selection and arrangement of potent materials, creating sacred altars with powerful cores that embody the spiritual force of the orixás.

The orixás are each associated with specific objects, and in this way the material culture of Candomblé conveys the rich history and belief system of the religion. Specifically, each orixá "owns" certain objects and clothing that are used when an initiate incorporates the spirit in trance. Some orixás are also associated with ferramentas, or metal altarpieces. Ferramentas and other objects on altars recount the stories of the orixás and serve as symbols of their characteristics. For example, the ferramenta for Ossain is a schematic representation of a tree in the forest, from which the orixá of healing gathers his herbal medicines. A bird, the orixá's assistant, rests on top of the tree (Fig. 13). In addition, these metal sculptures serve as invocations, which has lead Drewal to refer to ferramentas as "visual praise poems" (1996:275).

In the traditions of the various Candomblé nações, altars are portals that connect the mundane world to that of the orixás or other spiritual entities. Some altars consist of offerings of gifts presented in a way that is pleasing to the spirits. Others contain empowered objects, and therefore serve to connect the spiritual essence of the worshipper and the worshiped. In either case, altars are often collaborative works of art, created and maintained by the pai- or mãe-de-santo and members of the community. In addition, they are nearly always works-in-progress, subject to constant change. New things are added over time, such as food for the orixás or objects representing new members of the community. Likewise, things are sometimes taken away: occasionally members may leave the community, taking with them objects on the altar that belong to them and their orixás, caboclos, or other spirits. In addition, organic substances presented on the altar as offerings or for empowerment are expected to decompose over time.

The potency of any one particular altar often relates to the physical space in which it is constructed, with some of the most powerful altars being those that are concealed behind closed doors. These altars are kept in the most private spaces of the terreiro, sometimes locked in the back of the terreiro, sometimes hidden behind curtains, and generally concealed from people who lack the appropriate level of ritual knowledge. Normally, non-initiates are never allowed to see the consecrated altar spaces of the orixás and, recognizing the power contained within and the danger it can bring to someone who lacks the adequate level of spiritual fortification, they might not desire to do so. In addition, the air of secrecy around altars can increase and intensify the power that surrounds them (see Johnson 2002).

The most private and powerful altars are housed in a dedicated room called the pejí, or the quarto dos santos, literally "the saints' room." The pejís that I have seen were small rooms concealed by curtains and locked doors, although sometimes they are individual houses in and of themselves. In the case of small terreiro such as the one I discuss here, the pejí is a communal altar that houses the specially prepared objects dedicated to the orixás who control the heads of each of the initiates in the whole house. The orixá who is said to be the dono da cabeça, or the

11 Tatti Moreno preparing his sculpture of Iansã for transport to São Paulo. Left: The sculpture in the studio, Tatti Moreno (left) with his cousin (right). Right: Tatti Moreno’s assistants load the sculpture onto the truck as he looks on. August 2001.
owner of the head, is the principle orixá to whom an individual is dedicated. Upon reaching a particular stage in initiation, each person will prepare an altar to the owner (or in some cases, the owners) of the head and will take on the life-long responsibility of caring for the altar, jointly with the pai- or mãe-de-santo.27

The peji illustrated here belongs to Mãe Adriana, the leader of a community that incorporates orixás and caboclos and also includes Catholic imagery (Fig. 14). This peji is located in a room hidden behind a door that is further concealed by a curtain and blocked by a sofa.28 The room contains several shelves that go all the way to the ceiling, which rest the earthenware pots that hold consecrated materials, connected through ritual practice to individuals initiated in the terreiro. The pots and other surrounding objects in the peji are called assentamentos (seats). The assentamentos are simple earthenware containers filled with stones, water, oils, and other organic materials (fundamentos or foundations) that physically embody the relationship between the Candomblé initiate and the orixá who “owns” his or her head. Prepared during initiation rites, the assentamento is filled with the axé of the initiate and the orixá. Traditionally the initiation ceremony will involve adding the initiate’s blood, acquired through a small incision in the head, to the assentamento, along with the blood of the animal offering, thus mixing these spiritual essences. In this way, the assentamento provides a continuous link between the initiate and his or her orixá.29

Assentamentos are perhaps the most powerful of all of the objects in the Candomblé world and, combined together in the peji, their power is magnified.

Mãe Adriana’s peji is a small space, roughly four feet deep and six feet wide. The room is kept dark, resulting in long shadows cast by the many objects clustered together on shelves. Aside from a small, low-watt bulb in the corner, the only light comes from candles and the daylight that seeps in through the cracks between the wall and the terracotta ceiling tiles. From floor to ceiling, the entire room is filled with assentamentos, along with ferramentas and adereços (articles of clothing), sculptures, and ritual accessories that identify the orixás who are present. The dirt floor has been stained by previous offerings and a section of the floor is covered with a fur skin that was offered as a gift to an orixá. Enamel basins and terracotta vessels, the assentamentos on this altar, hold empowered materials. Several of these assentamentos are encrusted with the blood of offerings and embellished with pieces of cloth and small gifts. The altar also contains a large plaster sculpture of Saint George, who is associated with Oxossi in some Candomblé communities. In addition to this figurative sculpture, which symbolizes but does not embody the spirit, one can see several ferramentas, metal implements that stand for the orixás in nonfigurative form. The curved metal arches that resemble a bow and arrow represent Oxossi, serving as a compliment to the hybridized sculpture of Saint George slaying the dragon. This ferramenta makes reference to Oxossi as a master hunter, a resident of the forest, and to oral tradition related to the orixá.30

Altars like the one that Mãe Adriana allowed me to photograph are generally concealed because of their tremendous power. Not only do each of the pots contain potent axé, the ferramentas that adorn them are also often empowered through offerings, as is the whole conglomeration of objects. Streaks of blood, dried animal skulls, and other encrusted materials on this altar tell the story of continuous offerings made in order to invest the community with more power. It is for the protection of the orixás and for the power within these objects that the altar must be concealed, but it is also important to shield people from the tremendous power contained within this altar. In the hands of someone without adequate knowledge or training, a person with fragile disposition, or someone with bad intentions, this power could be dangerous. Guarding the secrets of the altar also augments the mãe-de-santo’s own power. Since the contents of the peji are kept secret, outsiders cannot possibly attempt to quantify the amount of power contained within the community by counting the number of assentamentos or judging the quantity and freshness of the offerings.31
The public image of Candomblé, on the other hand, is intended to be consumed by a broad public and so it must be legible, clear, and in concordance with mainstream (and therefore Western) aesthetic principles.

**The Dique do Tororó as a Sacred Site**

Moreno’s monumental fiberglass orixás sculptures have served as a focal point in the city since their installation in 1998. The Dique do Tororó is an artificially constructed lake that is thought to have been built by the Dutch for defense purposes during their occupation of Bahia in the seventeenth century. It is located in a central position in the city near the large public transportation station where one can transfer from one bus line to another, and right next to the soccer stadium. The installation of the orixás sculptures was intended to be the highlight of the revitalization of the long-neglected Dique do Tororó area, which involved cleaning the polluted water and populating it with freshwater fish, clearing overgrown trees, shrubs, and weeds, landscaping the surrounding area, and constructing a sidewalk and running path surrounding the water. One of the project’s goals was to transform this space, which had been a high-crime area, into a recreation and leisure zone. To this end, in addition to the running path, there are playground and exercise areas, a fishing dock, boat rentals, and a pizzeria (Fig. 15).

The Dique do Tororó has always held special significance for those who practice Candomblé because it is a sacred site for the orixá Oxum. Prior to its revitalization in late 1990s, popular opinion held that the area surrounding the Dique was dirty and plagued by crime; at the same time, people who practice Candomblé made regular visits to the site for offerings. It is believed that the spirit of the vain and capricious deity of fresh waters resided in the Dique and, according to oral tradition, people have revered her here by making offerings since at least the late nineteenth century. Since offerings to Yemanjá must be preceded by a gift to Oxum, the annual festival for Yemanjá, which takes place on the beach in the neighborhood of Rio Vermelho, traditionally begins at the Dique as well. These offerings usually consist of food, liquor, and other gifts for the orixás.

The Dique has also served as a receptacle for Candomblé objects that can no longer be cared for. Nancy de Souza e Silva recounted to me the story of dispatching empowered objects in the Dique, and I have heard various versions of this account over the years. In this particular story, a mãe-de-santo kept an altar in her house with several empowered objects. Over time the filhos-de-santo in her community drifted off, and she was eventually unable to keep up with the demands of the orixás. Knowing that neglecting the orixás would lead to problems, she decided to find a way to safely dispose of the consecrated objects. Given the power associated with these objects, the only option was to dispatch the objects in a sacred space, and so she selected the Dique do Tororó. The mãe-de-santo prepared a special dish of white corn and wrapped the objects in white cloth. She then asked for permission from Exú, followed by Oxum, Oxalá, Naná, and Yemanjá, all orixás with a strong presence in the Dique, before throwing all of the objects into the water, thereby freeing herself of all obligations to these consecrated items. As indicated by this story and other similar accounts, the Dique is identified as one...
of the appropriate places to discard consecrated objects, whether the circumstances are death or a rejection of the entire belief system through conversion to Evangelical Christianity.

It is important to note, then, that the Dique itself has traditionally served as a sort of natural altar site. Like the pejí located in the terreiro, the Dique is a container for empowered objects that are concealed from view. Also like a pejí, the Dique is augmented spiritually as it receives new offerings. The decision to place monuments dedicated to the orixá in this spot, then, was clearly not arbitrary. And naturally, the transformation of this site altered the way that people of Candomblé interacted with this space. Although many followers of Oxum stated that they had previously made offerings to the orixá at this site, the general opinion was that given the new state of the Dique area, it was better to seek alternative locations for such activities. Many filhos-de-santo told me that Oxum was no longer present at the Dique; others also offered the opinion that the site was no longer private enough to allow for spiritual reflection. According to the administration of the Dique, responsible for its upkeep, the volume of offerings decreased drastically following the revitalization project. In part this may be because in its current state, the area is more open and less private than it once was: in the past, the overgrowth of trees and brush muffled the sounds of traffic and allowed for a more contemplative atmosphere and offerings were shielded from view by casual passersby.

AESTHETIC SHIFTS IN PUBLIC ART

The creation of public art projects depicting Candomblé, such as the orixá sculptures by Tatti Moreno, necessitates a fundamental shift in aesthetics, function, and meaning as sacred symbols are removed from the context of the terreiro and reinterpreted for a broad audience. The members of this audience come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, and individuals in this varied population interpret the works in a multitude of ways. In general, representations in a public context are intended to be seen as art works, not as ritual objects. Therefore, the element of empowerment, so important within the sacred context of the terreiro, is eliminated in public art.

A view of a private altar room called a pejí serves to illustrate the very different aesthetic system employed in the sacred context. While art in public spaces must be neat and easy to read, a Candomblé altar is intentionally messy and convoluted as a result of accumulated offerings. The plaster sculpture of St. George represents the Catholic equivalent of the Candomblé orixá Oxossi. The iron ferramentas to the left of this sculpture are more traditional, nonfigurative representations of Oxossi. The silver headpiece and green cloth on the far left are worn when an initiate enters into trance. In the upper right is the ferramenta of Omolu, which consists of an inverted terracotta bowl with metal spears emerging from it. November 2001.
Specifically, recall that Moreno’s images on the Dique are figurative representations of people who have incorporated the orixás in trance, and they are depicted as they would appear in a Candomblé ceremony. In contrast, objects in the pejí do not represent the orixás in a literal, figurative fashion. Ferramentas are symbolic representations that are often empowered; assentamentos are containers that embody rather than represent the orixás. Catholic imagery such as the sculpture of Saint George seen in Mãe Adriana’s pejí serves as a surrogate representation rather than a literal image of the orixá, who, after all, is an energy rather than a person, a force rather than a concrete being.

The Dique area is also meticulously maintained and perpetually neat and clean. The area is carefully landscaped and it is generally free of debris. Signs throughout the area instruct visitors to stay off the grass and dispose of their garbage properly, and these rules of engagement are enforced. Due to their location on the water, the view of the orixá sculptures from water’s edge is never obstructed. This is in contrast to intentionally cacophonous nature of empowered altars which, when visually consumed at all are meant to overwhelm the viewer through layers of meaning. This is evident in Mãe Adriana’s pejí as well as in more visible altars such as Mãe Alice’s altar to Tempo (Fig. 16).

Tempo is an orixá who is most rooted in Candomblé Angola, and festivals in his honor generally take place in August (see Wafer 1991:166–78). I photographed this altar for Tempo one afternoon in August 2000, as it was being prepared for a public festa to take place later in the day. Altars for Tempo are typically located outside the central ritual space of a terreiro to acknowledge the orixás role as a guardian (ibid., p. 168), and this is the case in Mãe Alice’s community, where the altar is situated in a niche outside the side entrance. Inside the niche one finds low shelves and a high pedestal, which supports a large enamel basin that contains empowered objects associated with Tempo. Propped up in the basin is Tempo’s ferramenta, made of iron and painted white. The lower shelf holds smaller earthenware and ceramic containers containing other empowered materials; these containers are difficult to see in this image as a result of the recent offerings that obscure one’s view. Popcorn, symbolic of the disease spread by and cured by Obaluaiê/Omolu, with whom Tempo is associated, appears on the altar (ibid., p. 167), as do chicken feathers from the offering made just before this photograph was taken. Blood is splattered throughout, marking a strong contrast to the whiteness of the space (Tempo is also associated with Oxalá, whose color is white). The feathers and blood are especially concentrated on the assentamentos. Greenery has been provided for the occasion to remind Tempo of his forest home and this further obscures the view of the altar itself.

This altar differs from the pejí in that it is located in a more public space and it is therefore accessible to anyone who passes by. This is also an altar to one specific orixá as opposed to a collection of many spiritual entities. Consistent, though, is the intentional obscurity created through offerings and the visual evidence of the altar as a perpetual work-in-progress. The objects that embody the orixás are the most difficult to see and the altar itself is transformed into a record of on-going interaction with the orixás as indicated through constant change.

This offers an especially strong contrast to Moreno’s orixás on the Dique. In the public context, legibility is crucial and meaning is intended to be accessible to all viewers, located on the surface rather than obscured by the murkiness that comes from spiritual engagement. The clear color symbolism and concise use of clothing and accessories allowed Moreno to achieve this goal. In this detail of the sculpture of Oxum (Fig. 17), for example, the abebé (mirror) and sword make a clear reference to a particular manifestation of the orixá called Oxum Apará (see Prandi 2001:323–25). A viewer who lacked knowledge of the ritual accessories

15 A view of the Dique do Tororô showing Moreno’s sculptures from across the water. This photograph illustrates the careful landscaping around the lake, including tulips. The tulip is non-native flower in Bahia, but one that recognizes the former presence of the Dutch in northeastern Brazil. August 2001.
of the orixás would probably still recognize Oxum by the color yellow. And even a viewer who had no knowledge of the world of Candomblé could access knowledge through the didactic plaque located along the shoreline, which identifies each of the orixás. Although the associations with Catholic saints indicated through the written text on the plaque would alienate anti-syncretic practitioners from some more “traditional” Nagô communities, these references ultimately make the work more accessible to the broader population.

On the day that the sculptures were installed, Giselle Moreno, the artist’s wife, recalled that people from nearby Candomblé communities spontaneously participated in the process:

All around the Dique, there are a lot of Candomblé terreiros … On the day that the orixás were arriving, the pais- and mães-de-santo came down, and at first they were a little reserved, but then they started talking and they pointed and said “There, right there is the bacia [basin] of Oxum, there is the bacia of Yemanjá.” So Tatti listened and accepted these suggestions to position them the right way, respecting their suggestions.

This involvement in the installation was understood by the artist and Giselle Moreno as an indication that the sculptures had been incorporated into the site in a manner appropriate to its associations with the sacred. However, when I asked people who practice Candomblé about the relationship of the images to religious practices, most respondents quickly asserted that these artworks in fact have nothing to do with Candomblé as a religion. They were described as merely superficial representations, created by an outsider for an audience of outsiders. One Candomblé initiate I interviewed articulated his keen awareness of the different aesthetic principles at play, noting that that “… those statues there represent, symbolize, the orixás, but they do not have a fundamentação [a consecrated or empowered core].” Similarly, when I asked if the sculpture of Oxum looked the way Oxum should, this filho-de-santo responded that “no, it doesn’t really look like her. That’s not Oxum. This just shows the kind of ferramenta that she carries, how she dresses, but it isn’t really like it is in our religion. Because Oxum is nature, not a person.” The real Oxum, then, had truly gone away.

The aesthetic shift involved in the production of public art on this larger site is highly evident to people who practice Candomblé. Ultimately the work, meant on the surface as a celebration of the contribution of African-Brazilian culture to regional identity, undermines the power of Candomblé by defusing the site, diminishing its role as a living empowered altar. The irony is that although the installation of the sculptural cycle served to strip the site of its ritual power from the perspective of Candomblé initiates, the sculptures themselves were invested with power in the eyes of Pentecostal residents of Bahia, who attributed to them satanic forces and the ability to corrupt the citizenry.

**POSTSCRIPT: THE DEMONIZATION OF MORENO’S ORIXÁS**

A few days prior to the official inauguration of the sculptures, members of Pentecostal churches surrounded the Dique, joining hands in protest of the orixá imagery. They demanded the removal of these works that represent, in their point of view, the work of the devil. Given the antagonistic attitudes of the Pentecostal Church towards empowered objects and towards Candomblé (Sansi 2007:168, Lopes 2004:839, Van der Port 2006:446), it is not surprising that many followers of the religion felt obligated to protest when the sculptures were initially installed. The Pentecostals I spoke to said they were offended by being confronted with images representing what they thought of as a negative force that would have a corrupting effect on the citizens of the city. Some individuals even spoke to me about feeling physically ill when in the presence of the sculptures.

**16 Altar to the Angola orixá Tempo following an offering. This altar was prepared for a festival dedicated to Tempo in August 2001. August 2001.**
practicing Pentecostalism also protested the sculptures on the grounds that, although they were publicly funded, they did not represent the population at large, since Candomblé is religion practiced by the minority of people.

Pentecostal groups came together for a peaceful protest a few days before the official inauguration of the sculptures. In addition, one man swam into the Dique and tried to destroy one of the works, and the artist reported that he was chased down in his car by women who yelled out the window, imploring him to follow a more Christian path.\(^2\) Not surprisingly, these reactions demonstrate that the Pentecostal audience attributed to these representations of the orixás the negative power of satanic forces.

Pentecostals also protested the fact that the state was using its power to define Bahia through art. This definition of group identity, they argued through their words and actions, did not properly represent all of its citizens.\(^3\) A young Pentecostal woman protested to me that the majority of the population was not consulted in the creation of the project and was also excluded from this particular construction of Bahian identity. Ultimately the demands of the Pentecostals that the sculptures be removed were not met, and the controversy fizzled out. During my interviews in 2001–2002, many Pentecostals said that they had come to recognize that the sculptures are merely works of art and that they do not embody satanic forces. Sansi has also noted that the controversy surrounding the figures eventually lost momentum (2007). Most people from the Pentecostal community emerged from this controversy with the attitude that the state is in fact more powerful then the collective citizenry and that concession was their only option. As Sansi has observed, the failure of the Pentecostal protestors in Bahia to change the course of the commission indicates that at that particular historical moment, the Pentecostal movement, and specifically the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, a political force in southern states such as Rio de Janeiro, did not have enough political leverage to counter the strong cultural politics of Bahia (ibid., p. 172).

When the Pentecostal community originally protested these works, they attributed power to them, arguing that they would unleash a negative force in the city and could even cause physical illness to viewers. In other words, they failed to recognize (or acknowledge) the shift in aesthetics that to Candomblé participants was immediately obvious. However, people who were familiar with the aesthetics of Candomblé knew that there was nothing of sacred power in these sculptures. They recognized right away that while the artist certainly knew how to manipulate fiberglass and steel, he had not penetrated the secret knowledge of empowerment that is central to the material culture of the religion.

By commissioning these sculptures, the government appropriated the language of a religion that was once oppressed and remains marginalized, and used it to promote tourism and create an image of a Bahia that is inclusive and diverse. These public sculptures represent the symbols of Candomblé, but they do not harness its powerful essence. Therefore, members of the Candomblé community, and ultimately even the Pentecostal Church, have arrived at consensus and accepted the images as secularized representations of the orixás. They are powerful representations, certainly, but not empowered works of art.

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Notes

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1 The group of sculptures was commissioned by BBV Bank and the National Postal Service of Brazil (Correios). Additional support for the project was provided by the Museum of Modern Art of Bahia, the Secretary of Culture and Tourism of the State of Bahia, Visa, and the Brazilian Ministry of Culture.

2 In addition to the eight sculptures on the water, Moreno constructed four other orixás sculptures that are situated along the opposite bank of the water. These sculptures are smaller in scale, and they were installed later the same year. Due to their position on the far bank of the water, these works are more easily viewed as individual pieces; they are not visually incorporated into the circle of figures placed on the water from any vantage point and for that reason they will not be discussed here. The large sculptures on the water represent some of the most widely recognized orixás—Oxum, Logum Edé, Oxlá, Xangô, Yemánjá, Iansã, Nanã, and Ogum. Notably absent from this sculpted pantheon is Exú, whose associations with the Judeo-Christian devil and the frequent focus on his prominent phallus in Bahia certainly made him a more difficult figure to interpret for a broad audience in a public context.

3 The Federação Bahiana do Culto Afro-Brasileiro (Bahian Federation of the Afro-Brazilian Cult; FEBA-CAB) serves to unify the terreiros in an administrative sense, in that all communities are required to register with this centralized organization. This administrative unification, however, does not result in actual concordance across communities in terms of ritual practice.

4 The spelling and pronunciation of the names of the orixás have responded to the constantly changing contexts of their lives. Regarding similar transformations in Haitian Vodou, Karen McCarthy Brown (1989:65–86) has investigated the transformation of Ogou in Haiti.

5 The figures are accessorized with the sacred implements appropriate to each orixá: the ibrí for Nanã, a double-headed axe for Xangô, and the opaxoró for Oxalá, for example. Overall, there is an emphasis on color, as the colors associated with each orixá serve as an easily interpretable code that the public can use to identify the individual orixás. For a discussion of the color associations, or “chromatic code” associated with the orixás, see Lody 2001, especially p. 73.

6 Omani-Tunkara (2006:53) describes a phenomenon that I have also observed: the ojá (headscarf) is tied around the body of the initiate in trance in a way that indicates the identity of the orixá who is present. The specific “language” of the ojás, though, seems to vary widely between communities. Selka (2007:11) also describes the way in which a change of clothing marks the trance state.

7 Moreno also stated that he chose to depict the figures with a range of skin tones from very pale to very dark so as to indicate the mixture of racial backgrounds present in a Candomblé community. Personal communication, September 8, 2001.


Following the II Conferência Mundial da Tradição does Orixás in June 1983, a small number of Candomblé communities issued an important statement about the nature of the blending the Candomblé and Catholicism. This initial document was published in the *Jornal da Bahia* on July 29, 1983. This document is often discussed in relation to the movement towards re-Africanization. See for example, Dantas 1988, Sansi 2007, Santos 1998, Wafer 1991.

9 See Omari-Tunkara’s study of Ile Àxes Opô Afonjá for a discussion of the history and influence of this terreiro. Much of the current scholarship on Candomblé, including Omari-Tunkara 2006, demonstrates the leadership role played by Opô Afonjá, currently led by Mael Stella de Oxossi (Maria Estella Avezado dos Santos).

10 Following the mentioned movement towards “re-Africanization” (see n. 8), a number of communities removed references to Catholicism from ritual spaces. At Ile Àxes Opô Afonjá images of the saints were relocated to an on-site museum, where they are presented along with written text explaining the motives for their removal from the ritual spaces of the terreiro.

11 I once heard Mael Aficé mocking a visitor who was dressed in a tailored outfit made of cloth imported from West Africa. “This is Brazil,” she said, “not Africa. It’s too much.”

12 One can observe practices and art forms at Mael Aficé’s terreiro that seem to blend traditions from various nações. In addition, when I asked about the nação of her terreiro, Mael Aficé acknowledged that her practices did not clearly fit into any of these categories. She described her terreiro as Ketu-Bantu-Jeje (Nagô-Angola-Jeje).

13 I did not conduct interviews of this sort with tourists from outside of Bahia, although I undertook a similar project in São Paulo on another occasion.

14 It is difficult to determine with great precision what percentage of Bahia’s population is of African descent, especially since notions of race are highly fluid in Brazil. According to 2007 statistics from the *Síntese de Indicadores Socias* produced by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, Salvador’s population of people identified as “black” and “brown” is over 80%. http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/codindaevidacindicaresminimos/sinsetesindicoci- ais2007/default.shtm. Accessed July 6, 2008.

15 The use of these terms is, of course, complicated and even contentious, as racial identity in Bahia is especially fluid.

16 The affiliation of Bahian politician Antonio Carlos Magalhães with Candomblé is especially notable. See, for example, Sanni (2007:172) specifically addresses the personal relationship between Tatti Moreno and Antonio Carlos Magalhães. Moreno’s political connections are well known in Bahia. See also Dremel 1996.

18 David Guss (2000) discusses cases that may be seen as parallel to these transformations in Bahia. In relation to this issue, Omari-Tunkara argues that the Nagô tradition in particular has been particularly vulnerable to appropriation by the dominant culture and has had to “resist attempts to exoticize, folklorize, and commercialize it” (1989:54).

19 Continued discrimination against people of African descent is well documented, and scholars and activists actively challenge the powerful “myth of racial inferiority.” The use of iron to construct this cement floor, the choice to keep a dirt floor in the terreiro, or the construction of altars will be constructed; the individual is also likely to keep the area was perceived to be dangerous, dirty, and very polluted. The vast majority of the people I interviewed said the project at the Dique brought about enormous improvements and described it as a safe, clean area of the city. However, residents of nearby neighborhoods complained that the reformation of the Dique was limited to the areas designated for recreation and tourism; the surrounding neighborhoods received few benefits from these improvements and continue to suffer from lack of access to public transportation, sewage, and electricity. (A Tara, *A Tarde*). Jacira was very insistent on making a distinction between a religious ceremony and a secularized performance. To Jacira, it was clear that she and other women associated with Candomblé were invited to represent Bahian cultural heritage, not to worship the orixás. To this end, Jacira and other participants from Candomblé communities wore their finest ritual clothing and brought their drums and other sacred instruments to the sides of the lake, providing the ceremony with a demonstration of the support of the Candomblé community, which was necessary because the sculptures were already controversial at the time of the opening ceremony. Musicians drummed sacred rhythms while initiates performed dances. The inauguration was intended as an evening of entertainment, complete with big-name musical acts. At the culmination of the event, fireworks exploded in the sky as the floodlights illuminated the sculptures that were to become a centerpiece of the city from that point on.

22 The oldest written reference to the Dique do Tororó is from 1671. This consists of a document written by the engineer João Coutinho, who described a large and small Dique. Historian Rita da Cásia argues that the Dique was originally a natural lake that was enlarged by the Dutch, and which has undergone several changes in shape and size over time (Ramos 2001:14).

32 See Johnson 2002 for an illuminating discussion of the nature of secrecy in Candomblé. I photographed and present this image publicly with the explicit permission of Mãe Adriana.

33 On April 2, 1998, the circle of sculptures was officially opened to the public with an inauguration ceremony that celebrated the contributions of Candomblé to the formation of Bahia. The mayor of Salvador recruited Candomblé leaders from throughout the city to participate in the event and sent shuttle buses to their communities in order to provide transportation to those who signed up to perform in the commemorative ceremony. Jacira, an initiate in Mãe Alcís’s community, was recruited to participate in the inauguration ceremony and she recounted her experiences to me. Inollowing the event, Jacira was very insistent on making a distinction between a religious ceremony and a secularized performance. To Jacira, it was clear that she and other women associated with Candomblé were invited to represent Bahian cultural heritage, not to worship the orixás. To this end, Jacira and other participants from Candomblé communities wore their finest ritual clothing and brought their drums and other sacred instruments to the sides of the lake, providing the ceremony with a demonstration of the support of the Candomblé community, which was necessary because the sculptures were already controversial at the time of the opening ceremony. Musicians drummed sacred rhythms while initiates performed dances. The inauguration was intended as an evening of entertainment, complete with big-name musical acts. At the culmination of the event, fireworks exploded in the sky as the floodlights illuminated the sculptures that were to become a centerpiece of the city from that point on.

35 The public perception of this site as dirty and potentially dangerous might, in fact, have emerged because of its associations with Candomblé and a continued association of the religion with criminality in the popular imagination.

36 See Sanni 2007:750 for a discussion of the iconoclastic demands made on people of Candomblé who convert to Pentecostalism. I conducted one interview with a member of a Pentecostal Church who had recently converted from Candomblé. He reported that when he left Candomblé to join the Pentecostal Church, he also discarded his consecrated objects in the Dique. He did this because he believed
that objects contained too much power and energy to dispense of by more conventional means.

37 The Dique is extremely muddy, and objects quickly sink to the bottom of the lake. There are several deep and muddy areas in the Dique known as the bacias (basins) of the specific orixás, and these are seen as the appropriate places to deposit offerings.

38 There is, in fact, many misconceptions about the very possibility of using the Dique as a sacred site for Candomblé, that its role as a receptacle for empowered offerings. Offerings at the Dique are in general more difficult than in the past because of the presence of hired guards on the site who do not allow visitors to step on the grass or get very near the water. The kinds of offerings that are allowed are also limited. It is now illegal to make animal offerings at the Dique, for example, although this practice is important to the religion. However, it is possible to make offerings of other objects and food items at the Dique do Tororó, especially if one has the opportunity to take a boat to the center of the lake, depositing the gift in particular places dedicated to specific orixás.

39 These distinctions between sacred and secular art in Candomblé compliment Robert Plant Armstrong’s (1981) classifications of the powers of invocation and the powers of virtuosity.

40 Guselle Moreno, personal communication, September 12, 2001.

41 Many respondents described the representation as “folkloric,” which has a derisive connotation in Brazilian Portuguese (see Crowley 1984:32). Sansi (2007:68), who asked similar questions of his respondents from another perspective, received similar responses. Prior to the installation of Moreno’s Orisha, there were sounds of dissent from the Candomblé community. Tatti Moreno is viewed by most people who dedicate themselves to Candomblé as an outsider. Moreno, who was already well known as a sculptor by the time he received this commission, is from an upper-middle-class background and received formal training in the arts. Given his physical characteristics and social class, Moreno would be identified as white, and therefore not a member of the historically repressed group of people who have long turned to Candomblé as a site of resistance. Even so, Moreno has a connection to Candomblé, filling the role of an orixá at the terreiro de Gantois. The role of orixá is often largely ceremonial, however, and insiders to the religion recognized that this level of access did not necessarily provide Moreno with a deeper understanding of the spiritual principles of the religion.

42 Tatti Moreno, personal communication, September 12, 2001; see also Sansi 2007:372.

43 See also Selka (2005:72), who argues that many evangelicals actively seek to separate Afro-Brazilian Bahia from Candomblé.

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