

CANDOMBLÉ AND UMBANDA

Brazil — Beliefs, Rituals, and Traditions

From the African Roots to the Living Synthesis

*Candomblé: the Orishas preserved in Brazil with extraordinary fidelity —
Ogun, Yemanjá, Oxum, Xangô, Exu working through the terreiro
communities
that survived two centuries of persecution and suppression.*

*Umbanda: a deliberate 20th-century synthesis of Candomblé, Spiritism,
Catholicism, and Indigenous Brazilian practice — perhaps the closest
existing structural model to what Haligrlicity is doing.*

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Introduction

Brazil is home to the most vibrant African diaspora sacred traditions outside Africa itself — a consequence of the largest slave trade in the Atlantic world (Brazil received approximately 4.9 million enslaved Africans, nearly half of all those transported across the Atlantic) and of the extraordinary tenacity with which African peoples preserved their sacred heritage under extreme persecution. The two primary traditions that emerged from this history — Candomblé and Umbanda — are distinct in origin, theology, and practice, but they are part of the same Brazilian sacred story.

Candomblé is the tradition of preservation: the effort to maintain the African sacred traditions — primarily the Yoruba Orisha religion, but also Dahomean Fon and Central African Bantu traditions — as close to their original form as possible in a New World context. The Candomblé communities of Bahia in northeastern Brazil achieved something extraordinary: they transmitted an essentially intact African religious tradition across three centuries of slavery, persecution, and oppression. The Orishas of Candomblé are recognizably the same beings as the Orishas of Yoruba tradition — the same characters, the same domains, the same songs (often still in Yoruba), the same sacred protocols.

Umbanda is the tradition of synthesis: a 20th-century deliberate integration of Candomblé, Kardecist Spiritism (a 19th-century French philosophical and spiritual movement emphasizing communication with spirits and moral development through incarnations), popular Catholicism, and Indigenous Brazilian spiritual practices. Umbanda emerged in the early 20th century as an explicitly Brazilian tradition — not an African tradition preserved in Brazil, but something new, born specifically from the Brazilian cultural experience. For Haligrity, Umbanda is uniquely significant: it may be the closest existing structural model to what Haligrity is doing — a deliberate, spiritually serious synthesis of multiple traditions into a coherent living practice.

African Roots

Yoruba, Fon, and Bantu in Brazil

The African peoples transported to Brazil came from multiple distinct cultural and linguistic groups across West and Central Africa. The three most important for the development of Brazilian sacred traditions were the Yoruba (from present-day Nigeria and Benin), the Fon and Ewe (from present-day Benin and Togo — the peoples of Dahomey who are the primary source of Haitian Vodou), and the Bantu-speaking peoples of Central Africa (from present-day Angola, Congo, and Mozambique).

The Yoruba Presence

The Yoruba were transported to Brazil primarily in the late 18th and early 19th centuries — the period of the Oyo Empire's collapse and the subsequent Yoruba civil wars that produced large numbers of enslaved people. Concentrated in Bahia, the Yoruba (called Nagô in Brazil, from the term used to describe them in Dahomey) brought the Orisha religion, the Ifa divination system, the sacred drum traditions, and the entire theological framework of the Yoruba world. Their concentration in specific communities, combined with the relative autonomy that urban enslaved and freed Africans in Bahia maintained, allowed them to preserve the tradition with extraordinary fidelity.

The Bantu Presence and the Angola Nation

The Bantu-speaking peoples of Central Africa — the Congo, Angola, and Mozambique peoples — brought a distinct sacred tradition centered on the Nkisi (sacred forces comparable in some ways to the Orishas) and the Inquices (the Bantu-tradition divine forces that appear in the Angola nation of Candomblé). The Bantu tradition's emphasis on ancestor veneration, on the sacred power of specific natural substances (especially stones, water, and specific plants), and on the minkisi (sacred objects containing concentrated divine power) fed into Candomblé's Angola nation and into Umbanda's diverse toolkit of practices.

Candomblé

The Tradition and Its Nations (Nações)

Candomblé is not a single unified tradition but a family of related traditions organized into nations (nações) — each nation corresponding to a specific African ethnic origin and maintaining its own specific liturgical language, its own specific divine beings, and its own specific ceremonial forms. The major nations are Ketu (Yoruba origin, the most widely practiced), Angola (Bantu origin), Jeje (Fon-Ewe origin, closely related to Haitian Vodou), and several smaller nations including Efon, Ijexá, and Caboclo.

The Ketu Nation

The Ketu nation is the dominant and most influential form of Candomblé — the one that has shaped the public understanding of the tradition and that most directly preserves the Yoruba sacred heritage. Ketu ceremonies are conducted partly in Yoruba (called Nagô in Brazil), the Orishas are addressed by their Yoruba names (with Brazilian phonetic adaptations — Shango becomes Xangô, Ogun becomes Ogum, Oshun becomes Oxum, Yemoja becomes Yemanjá), and the sacred songs, drum rhythms, and ritual protocols are recognizably continuous with Yoruba tradition.

The three great Candomblé terreiros of Bahia — the Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká (Casa Branca do Engenho Velho, founded approximately 1830), the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá (founded 1910), and the Gantois (Ilê Iyá Omi Axé Iyamassê, founded approximately 1849) — are the sacred centers of the Ketu nation and among the most important sacred sites in the African diaspora world. They have been led for much of their history by women — the Mãe de Santo (Mother of the Saint), the female senior priestess whose authority in Candomblé is absolute within her terreiro.

CANDOMBLÉ IN BRIEF

Tradition type: African diaspora, preservation-focused Primary African root: Yoruba (Ketu nation), with Fon-Ewe (Jeje) and Bantu (Angola) nations Geographic center: Salvador da Bahia, Brazil Primary divine beings: The Orixás (Brazilian Orishas) Sacred language: Yoruba (Nagô) in ceremony Primary practice: The terreiro community, Orisha possession ceremony (xirê), initiation (feitura do santo) Leadership: Mãe de Santo (female) or Pai de Santo (male) Legal status: Persecuted until 1970s; now protected under Brazilian religious freedom law

The Ketu Nation Yoruba Orishas in Brazil

The Ketu nation's preservation of the Yoruba Orisha tradition in Brazil is one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of world religion. Under slavery, with African religious practice illegal and Catholic baptism mandatory, the Candomblé communities of Bahia maintained not merely the general idea of the Orishas but specific sacred songs in Yoruba, specific sacred drum rhythms for specific Orishas, specific colors and sacred objects and foods and ritual protocols — details that require ongoing transmission from specialist to initiate to be maintained with any fidelity.

How Preservation Was Achieved

Preservation was achieved through the terreiro community — the tightly organized, hierarchical, family-like community of initiates centered on a senior priestess (Mãe de Santo) who carried the tradition's sacred knowledge and transmitted it to her initiates. The terreiro functioned as both a sacred community and a social safety net for its members — providing community, support, and sacred life to people denied these by the colonial and post-colonial social order. The intensity of community belonging and the practical benefits of terreiro membership were powerful incentives to maintain the practices that the terreiro required.

The Candomblé community also used the same syncretism strategy as Cuba's Lucumí tradition: identifying each Orixá with a Catholic saint, allowing public display of the sacred images under the guise of Catholic devotion. But unlike in Cuba, where the syncretism was thoroughgoing, Candomblé maintained a clear internal distinction between the Catholic saints (public face) and the Orixás (the actual sacred beings). The saying in Candomblé is: 'The saints are the clothes the Orixás wear to go out in public.' Inside the terreiro, the Orixás are addressed in their own names, in their own language, with their own protocols.

The Major Orixás of Candomblé

The Orixás of Candomblé are the same sacred beings as the Yoruba Orishas — same characters, same domains, same fundamental theological nature — expressed through the specific lens of Brazilian cultural experience. Some have acquired specifically Brazilian dimensions through their long residence in the New World; all are recognizably continuous with their Yoruba originals. Below are the major Orixás with their Brazilian names, Catholic saint correspondences, and complete practical descriptions.

EXU
<i>The Lord of All Crossroads and Divine Communication Saint Anthony or the Devil's imagery (deliberately ironic)</i>
Exu is the first Orixá honored in every Candomblé ceremony — no communication between humans and Orixás is possible without Exu's cooperation. He is the Orixá of the crossroads, of all beginnings and endings, of speech, of the marketplace, of sexuality, and of the life force in its most raw and immediate form. He is not evil — the Christian missionaries who equated him with the Devil were expressing their fear of an Orixá whose function (opening all channels, including the dangerous ones) they could not accommodate within their theology. In Brazilian practice, Exu has multiplied into a family: Exu Tiriri, Exu das Almas, Exu Veludo, Exu Marabô — each a specific aspect of the crossroads principle operating in a specific context. His colors are black and red. His number is seven. His offerings include red palm oil, rum, cigars, and raw meat at the crossroads. He is honored at the beginning of every ceremony with a specific rhythm on the agogô (iron bell) and specific songs that thank him and ask him to clear the path for the ceremony. HOW TO HONOR EXU AT HOME: Place a small clay or iron figure of Exu at the entrance to your home or sacred space (never inside — he guards the threshold from outside). Offer a small glass of rum, a cigar (unlit is acceptable), and a coin. Light a candle — black or red. Address him: 'Exu, guardian of the gateway, I honor your presence and ask that all paths be open for this work. Laroyê Exu!' The phrase 'Laroyê Exu!' is his honorific greeting.

YEMANJÁ

Queen of the Sea and Mother of Waters | Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception or Our Lady of Navigators

Yemanjá (Yemoja in Yoruba) is the mother of the sea in Brazilian Candomblé — the vast, encompassing, powerful mothering force of the ocean. She is the most publicly celebrated Orixá in Brazil: her February 2nd festival in Salvador and December 31st celebration in Rio de Janeiro are among the most attended public religious events in the country, when thousands of Brazilians carry offerings of white flowers, perfume, mirrors, and small boats to the sea's edge and release them to float toward her. Yemanjá in Brazil has developed a specifically Brazilian dimension: she is understood as the mother of all the other Orixás (not just the sea creatures, as in the Yoruba tradition), and her relationship with the sea has deepened to encompass the vast, ambivalent, beautiful and dangerous character of the Atlantic Ocean that carried enslaved Africans to Brazil. She is at once the force that brought the ancestors across the water and the living memory of that crossing. Her colors are blue and white. Her number is seven. She loves mirrors, blue and white flowers, and perfume. HOW TO OFFER TO YEMANJÁ: On February 2nd or the full moon nearest the new year, go to the ocean, a river, or a large body of water. Prepare a offering of white flowers (roses, carnations), a small mirror, perfume (unscented is fine), and a small white candle. Wade in to knee depth if possible. Light the candle (it is traditional to protect it in a small boat of leaves or foam). Hold the flowers and speak to her: 'Yemanjá, mother of all waters, I bring these offerings with gratitude for your protection and with love for your children.' Release the flowers into the water. Watch them move — the direction they travel is considered her response.

OXUM

Orixá of Sweet Waters, Love, Beauty, Gold, and Abundance | Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception (in some regions) or Our Lady of Aparecida

Oxum (Oshun in Yoruba) is the goddess of all sweet waters — rivers, waterfalls, springs — and of love, beauty, fertility, gold, and the abundance of life's sweetness. She is vain, sensuous, generous, and fierce when wronged. Her mythology in Brazil contains one of the most important theological narratives in the Candomblé tradition: the story of how Oxum saved the world by seducing Ogun (who had retreated into the forest in rage and left humanity without iron tools) with honey, bringing him back to the community. Love, beauty, and sweetness are not frivolous — they are the forces that hold the world together. In Brazil, Oxum is associated with the color gold and yellow, with brass mirrors and fans, with honey (her sacred food — always offered with a drop of oil and a request to make sure it hasn't gone bad before tasting), with freshwater fish, and with all forms of feminine beauty and creativity. She is the patroness of pregnant women and of all forms of abundance. HOW TO PERFORM A RITUAL BATH TO OXUM: Prepare a bath with fresh water, yellow rose petals, a spoonful of honey, a few drops of perfume (something sweet — vanilla, rose), and a pinch of gold glitter or a small piece of brass jewelry. Light a yellow candle. Before entering the water, pour a small amount on the ground with a brief prayer: 'Ori ye ye o' (her honorific greeting). Soak for at least fifteen minutes while holding your intention for what you are asking her to bless — love, creativity, abundance, healing of the womb. After the bath, do not dry yourself fully — let the water absorb into your skin.

XANGÔ

Orixá of Thunder, Lightning, Royal Power, and Justice | Saint Jerome or Saint Barbara

Xangô (Shango in Yoruba) is the Orixá of thunder, lightning, and the fierce justice that punishes injustice wherever it is found. He was historically the fourth Alafin (king) of Oyo — deified after his death — and in Brazil he retains this royal character: dramatic, powerful, imperious, demanding of respect, and capable of extraordinary generosity to those who honor him properly. He governs the courts of law, the justice system, and all situations in which right must be separated from wrong. Xangô's double axe (oxê) is his primary symbol in Brazil as in Yoruba tradition. His colors are red and white. His sacred stone is the thunder stone (pedra de raio) — the prehistoric stone axes found in fields after lightning strikes, which the Yoruba-Brazilian tradition understands as literal lightning bolts that have solidified in the earth. His foods include amalá (a corn paste cooked in palm oil) and various meats. HOW TO APPROACH XANGÔ FOR JUSTICE: When facing a legal situation, an injustice, or a situation requiring moral clarity, light a red and white candle before his symbol or a thunder stone. Speak directly and honestly — Xangô cannot abide deceit. State the situation clearly, state what justice looks like to you, and ask for his intervention. His offering is amalá (which can be prepared simply as cornmeal porridge with palm oil) and red wine or rum. The key in working with Xangô is absolute honesty — he will not assist a case built on deception.

OGUM

Orixá of Iron, Labor, War, and the Opening of Paths | Saint George or Saint Sebastian

Ogum (Ogun in Yoruba) is the Orixá of iron — and through iron, of all tools, all technology, all labor, and all situations that require a path to be cut through resistance. He is the one who opens the way — before any new venture, any journey, any project requiring that something be cleared or opened, Ogum is invoked. He is the patron of soldiers, surgeons, farmers, mechanics, engineers, and anyone who works with metal and tools. In Brazil, Ogum holds special significance as the Orixá who opens paths — the phrase 'Ogum abre caminho' (Ogum opens the way) is one of the most commonly heard invocations in Candomblé and Umbanda. His colors are dark blue or green and his metal is iron. He lives at the crossroads and in the forest — often near Exu, with whom he works closely. OGUM PATH-OPENING RITUAL: On a Monday (his day in many Brazilian practices), go to a crossroads. Bring a small iron nail or piece of iron, a cigar (or incense), and palm oil. At the crossroads, dig a small hole or simply place your offering on the ground. Light the incense or cigar. State clearly what path you need opened: 'Ogum, guardian of iron and the open way, I ask that you clear the path before me. Open what is closed. Remove what blocks. I honor your power with this offering.' Leave the nail, pour a few drops of palm oil. Walk away without looking back — this is important in Brazilian practice.

OXALÁ

The Orixá of Creation, Peace, and Pure White Cloth | Our Lord of Bonfim (Jesus Christ)

Oxalá (Obatala in Yoruba) is the eldest and most venerated of all Orixás in Candomblé — the Orixá of creation, of peace, of purity, and of white cloth. He is Olodumare's primary agent of creation — the one who shapes human bodies. He is also the Orixá of calm, of patience, of the wisdom that comes from the deepest experience, and of the capacity to hold conflict in peace rather than in suppression. Oxalá has two primary aspects in Brazil: Oxalá Velho (the old, serene, extremely ancient aspect — Oxalufã) and Oxalá Novo (the young, vigorous aspect — Oxaguiã). His colors are pure white — only white is permitted at his ceremonies. On Fridays (his day), devotees wear white as a mark of devotion. He is honored by the washing of his sacred objects with clean cold water and by the offering of white corn, shea butter, and white foods. HOW TO HONOR OXALÁ FOR PEACE AND CLARITY: Wear white on Fridays as a practice of devotion. Prepare a bowl of white corn (or white rice), a small piece of shea butter (ori or cocoa butter), and cool water. Place these on a white cloth. Light a white candle. Sit in silence for at least ten minutes before speaking. Then address him: 'Oxalá, father of creation, I ask for clarity in this situation and for the peace that enables right action.' His work is slow — he asks for patience. Do not rush his counsel.

IAN SÃ / OYÃ

Orixá of Wind, Lightning, Change, and the Threshold of Death | Saint Barbara

Iansã (Oyá in Yoruba) is the Orixá of the wind, of storms, of lightning alongside Xangô, and of the dead. She is the only Orixá who has no fear of death — she governs the threshold between life and death, escorts the dead on their journey, and is present at the moment of the body's final breath. She is fierce, independent, unpredictable, and magnificent — a warrior-woman who fights alongside Xangô and who cannot be controlled or contained by any force. In Brazil, Iansã is particularly associated with the storms that come from the north — sudden, violent, clearing storms that arrive without warning and leave the air clarified and transformed. Her colors are copper/orange and dark red. She is honored at the cemetery gates and in situations requiring radical change — when something must be swept away to make room for what needs to come next. **WORKING WITH IANSÃ FOR TRANSFORMATION:** When you are facing a situation that needs radical change — when something in your life must end so that something new can begin — Iansã is the force to call. On a Tuesday or Thursday (her days), go outside in windy weather if possible. Light a copper or orange candle. Speak to the wind itself: 'Iansã, mother of winds, sweep through what must be cleared. Take what no longer serves. I am ready for the change.' Her offering is a small piece of red fabric tied to a tree in the wind, or red wine poured on the earth at a cemetery entrance.

The Candomblé Terreiro

Sacred Community and Space

The terreiro is the sacred community of Candomblé — not merely a physical place but a community of initiated practitioners organized under a senior priestess (Mãe de Santo) or priest (Pai de Santo) who is the terreiro's spiritual head, sacred knowledge keeper, and primary vehicle for the Orixás. The terreiro is simultaneously a religious community, an extended family, a healing center, and a sacred institution that preserves the African heritage.

The Physical Space

A traditional Candomblé terreiro includes several distinct sacred spaces: the barracão (the main ceremony hall where xirê ceremonies take place and where the Orixás descend into their horses), the peji or quarto de santo (the inner sanctuary where the Orixás' sacred objects are housed — accessible only to initiates), the roncó (the initiation chamber, sealed during initiations), individual houses or shrines for specific Orixás in the terreiro's outdoor space, and the axé point — the sacred spot in the terreiro where the concentrated spiritual force of the tradition resides, often near a specific tree or stone.

The Hierarchy of the Terreiro

The terreiro is organized in a strict hierarchy based on initiation seniority. The Mãe de Santo or Pai de Santo is the unchallenged spiritual authority. The equede (female initiated who does not receive the Orixás but serves them) and the ogã (male initiated who does not receive the Orixás but plays the sacred drums) are specialized roles. The filhos and filhas de santo (sons and daughters of the saint) are the general initiate community, whose seniority is counted in years from their initiation. The iaô is the newest initiate — in their year of restricted practice, wearing white, following the protocols of the newly initiated.

Candomblé Initiation

Feitura do Santo — The Making of the Saint

The *feitura do santo* (making of the saint — 'saint' here meaning the initiate's head Orixá) is the central transformative event of Candomblé practice — the multi-week process through which a person's head is formally opened to receive their Orixá and through which they become a member of the *terreiro* community with specific sacred obligations and specific sacred identity.

Bori — The Initial Head Feeding

Before full initiation, the candidate undergoes the *bori* (feeding the head — *ori* in Yoruba, *ori* being the personal divine nature within the head). The *bori* is a ceremony in which specific offerings are made directly to the person's *Ori* — the divine spark within them — to strengthen, cleanse, and prepare their head to receive the Orixá. The *bori* may be performed multiple times over years before full initiation. It is the foundational practice of Candomblé — the recognition that before working with the cosmic Orixás, the practitioner must attend to and strengthen their own inner divine nature.

HOW TO PERFORM BORI FOR YOURSELF:

PERSONAL BORI PRACTICE — Head Feeding for Clarity and Strength

This simplified *bori* is for home practice and self-preparation. It is not a substitute for the full ceremonial *bori* performed within a *terreiro*. 1. Prepare: white cloth for your head, a small bowl, cool water, shea butter (*ori*), white corn or white rice, and a white candle. 2. Sit quietly and place the white cloth on your head. Breathe deeply. Feel the weight and warmth at the crown of your head — this is the seat of your *Ori*. 3. Speak to your *Ori*: 'Ori mi, I honor the divine presence within me. I feed you with love and ask for clarity, strength, and alignment with my true path.' 4. Take a small amount of shea butter and anoint the top of your head — gently rubbing in a small circle. Then anoint your forehead, temples, and the back of your neck. 5. Place a small amount of white corn or rice in the bowl. Add a pinch of shea butter and a few drops of cool water. This is the symbolic feeding. 6. Sit with the candle lit for at least fifteen minutes, holding your intention for what your head needs — clarity, healing, strengthening, alignment. 7. After the practice, eat something white — rice, coconut, white bean — to complete the feeding through the body.

The Full Initiation Process

Full *feitura do santo* initiation is a multi-week process conducted entirely within the *terreiro* under the *Mãe de Santo*'s supervision. It involves: determination of the head *Orixá* (confirmed through *jogo de búzios* divination), a period of preparation and instruction, the ritual shaving of the head (representing death to the uninitiated state), ritual baths with specific sacred plants and waters, the application of sacred markings (painted in the colors of the head *Orixá*), the presentation of the sacred objects (*assentamento*) that will serve as the *Orixá*'s material home for the initiate, the first public presentation of the new initiate to the community in their *Orixá*'s colors, and a period of up to a year in white before the initiate is considered fully integrated into their new sacred identity.

Candomblé Ceremony

The Xirê — How to Understand and Participate

The xirê (from the Yoruba word for play or celebration — shèrè) is the primary public ceremony of Candomblé — the gathering of the terreiro community for drumming, sacred song, and the invocation of the Orixás, culminating in the possession of initiated devotees by their Orixás who then dance, distribute blessings, and receive offerings.

The Structure of the Xirê

XIRÊ CEREMONY STRUCTURE

OPENING (Entrada): The ceremony begins with the padê — the honoring of Exu and sending him away from the ceremony space so the other Orixás can come without his interference. This is done before the community enters the barracão. Specific songs and a specific rhythm signal Exu's departure. **CALL TO THE ORIXÁS:** The assembly enters the barracão. The drummers begin. The filhos de santo form a circle (the roda) and begin to sing and move in sequence through each Orixá's specific songs — starting with Oxalá and proceeding through the full sequence. **EACH ORIXÁ'S SONGS:** Each Orixá has a specific sequence of three songs (in most traditions) — the first calls them, the second invites them more strongly, the third is the moment of greatest intensity when the Orixá may descend. The songs are in Yoruba (Nagô) and are accompanied by specific drum rhythms (toques). **THE DESCENTS:** As the appropriate songs are sung and the appropriate rhythms played, initiated devotees whose head Orixá is being called may begin to receive that Orixá. The equede assist — supporting those receiving, helping them to dress in the Orixá's specific costume stored in the peji. **THE DANCING:** The manifested Orixás dance in the barracão — each with their specific movements, their specific costume, their specific way of moving that expresses their character. The community sings and the drumming continues. **BLESSINGS AND OFFERINGS:** The manifested Orixás move through the community, blessing specific people, receiving offerings of food and flowers, speaking (some Orixás speak, some do not). **CLOSING:** The Orixás depart. Specific closing songs are sung. The community shares food.

Axé

The Divine Power in Brazilian Practice

Axé (pronounced Ah-SHAY — the Portuguese transliteration of the Yoruba Ashe) is the foundational sacred power concept of Candomblé and Umbanda — the divine creative force that flows from the Orixás through the terreiro community, through sacred objects, through properly performed ritual, and through the practitioners who have cultivated their relationship with the sacred adequately to serve as vehicles.

Axé is simultaneously: the sacred power itself (the thing that makes things sacred and effective), the affirmation spoken at the end of prayers and ceremonial declarations (equivalent to Amen, Ashe, So be it), the name for the concentrated sacred force housed in the terreiro's foundational objects (the axé of the terreiro — its core sacred power and identity), and the general quality of effective sacred force in a person, place, or object.

AXÉ — The Affirmation in Brazilian Practice

In Candomblé and Umbanda ceremony, 'Axé!' (pronounced Ah-SHAY) is used: • At the end of prayers and petitions to affirm that the sacred force is present and active • As a greeting between practitioners who are affirming their shared sacred connection • As a closing affirmation after ceremony to seal what has been done • As an acknowledgment of something powerfully true or beautiful: 'That touched me deeply — Axé!' In Haligrity, this is the same word used as Ashe — same pronunciation (Ah-SHAY), same Yoruba root, same theological meaning. The Brazilian form is simply the Portuguese phonetic spelling of the same word.

Candomblé Divination

Jogo de Búzios — The Shell Game

The jogo de búzios (game of shells) is the primary divination system of Candomblé — a direct descendant of the Yoruba tradition of casting cowrie shells (■bì or dilogun) that is one of the most widely practiced forms of divination in the African diaspora world. It is simpler than the full Ifa system (which requires years of training in the 256 Odu) but shares the same fundamental principle: the shells are cast, their pattern is read, and the pattern reveals which Odu (sacred story and teaching) is relevant to the querent's situation.

The Instruments

The búzios are cowrie shells (*Cypraea moneta*) — the same shells used as currency across Africa and Asia for millennia. In divination, 16 shells are used, each with the top cut so that it has an open face (boca aberta — open mouth) and a closed back. When cast, each shell falls either mouth up (open — positive, speaking) or mouth down (closed — negative, silent). The number of shells falling mouth up determines the Odu that is speaking to the querent's situation.

HOW THE JOGO DE BÚZIOS WORKS:

READING THE SHELLS — Basic Jogo de Búzios Framework

The reader (Mae/Pai de Santo or trained initiates) casts the sixteen shells on a special mat after cooling them in their hands, blowing sacred breath on them, and asking the Orixás and the querent's Ori to speak clearly. THE COUNT OF OPEN SHELLS: • 16 open: Odù — the Orixá Odudua speaks; a sacred, rare sign • 15 open: ■jú ■bà — very serious; indicates death or transformation • 14 open: Ofu — powerful sign of Oxalá; serious matters • 13 open: ■b■t■ — serious; caution required • 12 open: ■jilá Shebora — speaks of Xangô; power, justice • 11 open: ■j■ — speaks of Oxalá; peace and completion • 8 open: ■j■ — speaks of Yemanjá; abundance and protection • 5 open: ■■■■ — speaks of Oxum; love, money, healing • 3 open: ■tà■ — speaks of Iansã; change, warning • 1 open: ■■kànran — speaks of Exu; everything possible, choose carefully Each count then undergoes additional throws to determine positive or negative aspect, the specific message, and the appropriate offering (ebó) to address the situation.

Offerings, Ebó, and Ritual Reciprocity

The ebó (offering, sacrifice) is the primary ritual technology of Candomblé — the material expression of the practitioner's side of the sacred exchange that sustains the relationship between human beings and the Orixás. The Orixás give their power, their protection, their guidance, and their presence. The practitioners give offerings: food, drink, light (candles), flowers, sacred objects, and in specific ceremonial contexts, the life force of sacrificed animals.

The Logic of Offering

Offering in Candomblé is not bribery and not supplication in the sense of begging a more powerful being for a favor. It is reciprocity — the acknowledgment of a relationship of mutual exchange and the maintenance of that relationship through the material expression of gratitude, devotion, and the desire for continued connection. The Orixá who receives proper offerings is not indebted to the practitioner — the practitioner who makes proper offerings is maintaining the health of a relationship that was already there, keeping the channels of communication open.

How to Perform the Offerings Step by Step

The following are practical guides for making offerings to the Orixás. These are accessible practices that can be undertaken by any sincere practitioner. Full initiation changes the nature and scope of what is appropriate, but these foundational practices are available to all.

BASIC OFFERING PRACTICE — FOR ANY ORIXÁ

WHAT YOU NEED: Candle in the Orixá's color, small plate or tray, the Orixá's specific food (see list below), water in a glass, and a quiet space. THE PROCESS: 1. Clean the space. Physical cleanliness is the first step — the Orixás do not come to dirty places. 2. Light the candle. This signals that you are opening sacred space. 3. Pour a small amount of water on the ground or floor before the altar. This grounds the energy and acknowledges the earth. 4. Prepare the food offering on the plate. It should be the best quality you can offer — not leftovers. 5. Place the plate before the candle. Hold your hands over it briefly and speak your intention clearly. 6. Address the Orixá by name. State what you are offering and why. State what you are asking. Be specific and be honest. 7. Leave the offering in place until the candle burns out naturally. Do not blow out the candle. 8. After the candle is done, the food offering should be disposed of respectfully — taken to the appropriate location for that Orixá (Yemanjá's offerings go to the water, Exu's to the crossroads, Oxalá's can be left at the foot of a white tree or simply on clean earth).

ORIXÁ OFFERING GUIDE — FOODS AND CORRESPONDENCES

EXU: Red and black candle | Rum, cachaça, or rum | Cigars | Pepper, roasted corn | Crossroads location YEMANJÁ: Blue and white candle | White flowers, perfume, mirrors | White food (rice, coconut) | River or sea edge OXUM: Yellow or gold candle | Honey (taste it first), yellow flowers, brass fan | Fried fish, shrimp | River or waterfall XANGÔ: Red and white candle | Amalá (cornmeal in palm oil) | Red wine, rum | Hilltop or tree OGUM: Dark blue or green candle | Palm oil | Iron objects | Crossroads or forest edge OXALÁ: White candle only | White food (white corn, white beans, shea butter) | NEVER offer alcohol to Oxalá | Foot of white tree IANSÃ: Copper or orange candle | Red wine | Red fabric tied to a tree | Cemetery gate or windy hilltop YEMANJÁ'S FESTIVAL OFFERING: White flowers, small boat filled with: perfume, combs, mirrors, blue fabric, small figure of the Orixá | Release into the sea

Sacred Foods and Ritual Preparation

Food is sacred technology in Candomblé — not merely sustenance but the primary material vehicle for the Orixás' force, the medium through which axé is transmitted to the community, and the form of offering most directly connected to the Orixás' specific characters and powers.

SACRED FOOD PREPARATION — THE PRINCIPLE

BEFORE PREPARING SACRED FOOD: • Wash your hands thoroughly — this is mandatory and sacred, not merely hygienic • Wear white or clean clothing • Set a clear intention before beginning: 'I am preparing this food as an offering and as a vehicle for axé' • Do not taste the food before offering it — it belongs to the Orixá first • Do not prepare sacred food when in a state of anger, grief, or significant emotional disturbance • Cook with attention — sacred food preparation is a meditative act

THE AMALÁ (Xangô's sacred food): Cook cornmeal with water until thick. Add palm oil (dendê) — a generous amount. The dendê oil is what makes it Xangô's. Serve warm on a round plate. This dish is the most widely prepared sacred food in Candomblé and can be offered to Xangô at any significant moment — legal situations, situations of injustice, situations requiring royal power.

The Birth of Umbanda

1908 and the Brazilian Synthesis

Umbanda was born on November 15, 1908 — at least according to the most widely accepted founding narrative — in the city of Niterói near Rio de Janeiro. A young man named Zélio de Moraes, who had been ill and whose illness was not responding to medical treatment, was brought to a Kardecist Spiritist session. In the session, Zélio was possessed not by a European spirit (as Kardecist Spiritism typically expected) but by a caboclo — the spirit of an indigenous Brazilian man — who announced himself as the Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas (the Caboclo of the Seven Crossroads). When the session leader objected to the appearance of an 'inferior' spirit, the Caboclo responded that there were no inferior spirits — that all souls in their development were worthy of respect. He announced that a new religion would be founded the following day, one that honored all the traditions of Brazil without hierarchy.

What Umbanda Is

Umbanda is deliberately syncretic — it synthesizes Candomblé's Orisha tradition with Kardecist Spiritism's spirit-communication framework, popular Catholicism's saints, and the traditions of indigenous Brazil. Its spirit guides are not the ancient Orishas of Africa (though Orixás appear in Umbanda too) but the spiritual archetypes of Brazil's own history: the Preto Velho (Old Black One — the spirit of the enslaved African elder), the Caboclo (the spirit of the indigenous Brazilian), the Exu and Pomba-Gira (the crossroads spirits), the Criança (the child spirit), and others.

Why Umbanda Matters for Haligrlicity

Umbanda may be the closest existing structural model to what Haligrlicity is doing. Like Haligrlicity, Umbanda is: deliberately synthesized from multiple traditions rather than preserved from a single origin, organized around practical service to the community rather than doctrinal purity, open to practitioners from all backgrounds rather than restricted to a specific ethnic or initiatory lineage, continuously evolving rather than fixed, and understood as a living tradition rather than a historical one. Umbanda took the sacred tools of multiple traditions and built something new — something Brazilian, something that could serve the specific needs of the Brazilian community in the 20th century. This is what Haligrlicity is doing for the 21st century globally.

Umbanda Cosmology

The Seven Lines of Force

Umbanda organizes the divine world differently from Candomblé. Rather than the Yoruba system of individual Orixás with their specific domains, Umbanda uses the Seven Lines of Force (Sete Linhas) — seven primary streams of sacred energy, each governed by an Orixá and containing multiple spirit guides who work under that Orixá's vibration.

THE SEVEN LINES OF UMBANDA

LINHA DE OXALÁ (White Line): Governs peace, healing, spiritual evolution, and the highest spiritual guidance. Spirits who work in this line bring clarity and elevated counsel. LINHA DE YEMANJÁ (Blue Line): Governs the waters, motherhood, abundance, and emotional healing. Spirits in this line work with family healing and the healing of the emotional body. LINHA DE XANGÔ (Red Line): Governs justice, truth, the law, and the destruction of falsehood. Spirits in this line work with legal matters and moral clarity. LINHA DE OXÓSSI (Green Line): Governs the forest, nature, hunting, abundance, and indigenous wisdom. The Caboclos work in this line. LINHA DE OGUM (Blue-Red Line): Governs the opening of paths, protection, and the removal of obstacles. Spirits in this line clear blocked ways and protect practitioners. LINHA DE EXU (Black and Red Line): Governs communication between worlds, crossroads, and the transformation of difficult situations. The Exus and Pomba-Giras work in this line — misunderstood as evil, they are actually the tradition's most effective workers in difficult human situations. LINHA DAS ALMAS (Purple Line): Governs the dead, the souls in development, and the healing of grief. The Pretos Velhos and souls in transition work in this line.

The Umbanda Spirit Guides

The spirit guides of Umbanda are not abstract forces or ancient gods — they are the spiritual archetypes of Brazil's specific historical experience, expressed as the spirits of specific categories of people who lived, suffered, served, and developed through Brazil's specific history. They are the tradition's most human faces of the divine.

PRETO VELHO / PRETA VELHA

The Old Black Ones — Spirit Guides of Wisdom, Healing, and Patience

The Preto Velho (male) and Preta Velha (female) are the spirit guides most beloved in all of Umbanda — the spirits of enslaved Africans who lived, suffered, and developed extraordinary spiritual wisdom through the experience of Brazilian slavery. They manifest in ceremony as very old, slow-moving, tobacco-smoking elders who move carefully, speak gently, and listen with complete, unhurried attention. Their wisdom is the wisdom of extreme suffering transformed into compassion — they have seen the worst that human beings can do to each other and they have emerged not bitter but profoundly loving. The Preto Velho is the counselor of Umbanda — practitioners bring their most difficult problems, their grief, their confusion, their shame, and the Preto Velho listens, advises, and offers simple remedies (specific prayers, specific herbs, specific behavioral changes) with the authority of one who has survived everything. His pipe is sacred — the smoke carries prayers. His chair (a small, low stool) is always available in the terreiro for him to sit when he manifests. **WORKING WITH PRETO VELHO:** Light a white or purple candle. If you have a cigar, light it and allow the smoke to rise as an offering. Speak to him as you would to a wise elder: with respect, with directness, and with complete honesty about your situation. He does not respond to elaborate requests — he responds to genuine need and genuine honesty. His characteristic phrase in ceremony is 'Minha filha' or 'Meu filho' (my daughter, my son) — terms of endearment that carry the weight of an elder's unconditional love.

CABOCLO / CABOCLA

The Indigenous Ones — Spirit Guides of Strength, Nature, and Directness

The Caboclos are the spirit guides of indigenous Brazilian peoples — the original inhabitants of the land whose wisdom about the forest, the plants, and the sacred geography of Brazil has been partially preserved through the Umbanda tradition. They manifest as powerful, sometimes brusque, direct figures who move with the energy of the forest — strong, clear, uninterested in social niceties, intensely present. The Caboclo's primary gift is strength and clarity — he cuts through confusion with the directness of a machete through undergrowth. His knowledge of medicinal plants (materia herbal), of the forest's sacred geography, and of the specific healing practices of indigenous tradition is his gift to the practitioners who work with him. He smokes indigenous tobacco (or accepts cigars as a substitute), drinks specific beverages associated with the forest, and demands directness and courage from those who seek his guidance. **WORKING WITH CABOCLO:** Go outdoors if possible — his energy is most accessible in natural settings. Light a green candle or incense made from forest materials (cedar, copal). Speak clearly and without preamble — the Caboclo has no patience for elaborate social performance. State your situation directly, ask your question directly, and be prepared for a direct answer.

EXU AND POMBA-GIRA

The Crossroads Workers — Fierce, Effective, and Misunderstood

The Umbanda Exus and Pomba-Giras (the female aspect of the crossroads force) are the most misunderstood figures in the entire Umbanda tradition — they are routinely portrayed as demonic by evangelical Christian critics of Umbanda, and they are the spirits most associated with the tradition's darker reputation. This portrayal is completely wrong. Exu in Umbanda is the spirit guide who works with difficult situations — the situations that the more elevated guides cannot or will not address. Addictions, sexual issues, dangerous relationships, situations involving the less spiritually developed aspects of human life — Exu works there because someone must. He is not evil: he is the sacred force that operates in the shadow zones of human experience where the light has not yet reached, and he transforms what he finds there rather than condemning it. The Pomba-Gira (female Exu energy) is the spirit of feminine power in its most assertive, most sensuous, most transgressive expression — the woman who refuses to be diminished, the force of feminine desire in its completeness. Working with Exu and Pomba-Gira requires courage, honesty about one's actual situation (including the parts one is ashamed of), and the willingness to receive help in forms that may not look polite or dignified. They are workers, not priests. They get things done.

Umbanda Ceremony Structure and Practice

Umbanda ceremony (gira — a word meaning turning or circulation, describing the rotation of spiritual energy through the ceremony) is more accessible and less formally restricted than Candomblé ceremony — it is one of Umbanda's fundamental principles that the sacred should be accessible to all, regardless of initiation level.

The Gira Structure

The gira begins with Catholic prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed) — Umbanda's formal acknowledgment of its Catholic dimension. Then the opening song (ponto de abertura) for the line of spirits being called. The mediums (médiuns) who are incorporated by the spirit guides stand in a line or circle. As the specific songs and rhythms for each spirit guide are sung and played, the mediums begin to receive their guides — the manifestations typically less dramatic than Candomblé Orixá possessions, often characterized by subtle physical changes, a changed posture, changed voice, or changed gestural vocabulary.

The spirit guides, once manifested, work directly with the community members who queue to receive their counsel. The Preto Velho listens to the visitor's situation and offers advice, prayer, and sometimes a specific herbal prescription. The Caboclo may perform a specific healing gesture over the visitor's body. The Exu may deliver a specific, direct instruction about what must be done. The session ends with the spirit guides departing and the mediums returning to their ordinary consciousness, followed by specific closing prayers.

How to Perform Umbanda Opening Ritual

UMBANDA HOME OPENING — For Personal Practice

This is the foundational Umbanda practice for any personal sacred work — it is the calling of protective and guiding spiritual forces before any ceremony, meditation, or significant intention-setting. **WHAT YOU NEED:** White candle, glass of water, incense (sandalwood or frankincense), small offering of food for Exu at the threshold (small piece of bread, a coin, a cigar if you have one). **STEP 1 — PREPARE THE THRESHOLD:** Place Exu's offering at the door or threshold of your space before entering. This sends Exu to the threshold to guard — outside the space, not inside. If you have an image of Exu or a crossroads symbol, place the offering before it. **STEP 2 — CLEANSE THE SPACE:** Light the incense and walk through the space counterclockwise, letting the smoke reach every corner. As you walk, say: 'I cleanse this space of all that does not serve the work of love and light. I ask that only forces of elevation and healing be present here.' **STEP 3 — PLACE THE GLASS OF WATER:** A glass of fresh water on any altar or table draws spiritual energy and keeps the space clear. This is one of the most simple and most powerful practices in Umbanda — a glass of clean water, refreshed daily, is the minimum Umbanda home practice. **STEP 4 — LIGHT THE WHITE CANDLE:** Light the candle for Oxalá — the highest spiritual vibration — and sing or speak the opening salutation: 'Saravá Oxalá! Saravá todos os Guias!' (Honor to Oxalá! Honor to all the Guides!) **STEP 5 — CALL YOUR GUIDES:** Sit quietly. Breathe deeply seven times. Open your awareness to any impressions, images, or feelings that arise. These are your spirit guides making contact. Stay with this awareness for at least ten minutes. **STEP 6 — STATE YOUR INTENTION:** Speak clearly what you are working on — what healing, what guidance, what transformation you are seeking. Be specific. **STEP 7 — CLOSE:** When you are ready to close, say: 'Saravá! I thank all the guides who have been present. I close this space with love and gratitude. Axé!' Extinguish the candle (snuff, do not blow — breath disturbs the spiritual atmosphere).

Candomblé and Umbanda Today

Both Candomblé and Umbanda are thriving — and both are under significant pressure. Candomblé, concentrated primarily in Bahia and spreading through Brazil's major cities, faces ongoing religious intolerance from the evangelical Christian community, which has become increasingly aggressive in its attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious practice. Terreiro spaces have been physically attacked; practitioners have been harassed; sacred symbols and ceremonies have been condemned as demonic. The Brazilian state's formal protection of religious freedom has been only partially effective against the practical reality of community-level intolerance.

Umbanda, with its more socially accessible structure and its explicitly Brazilian identity, has spread more broadly — estimates suggest between one and two million active Umbanda practitioners in Brazil, with significant communities in Uruguay, Argentina, and growing interest from practitioners in Europe and North America. Umbanda's synthesis model, its openness to practitioners from all backgrounds, and its practically oriented spirit guide tradition make it particularly adaptable to contexts outside Brazil.

Haligrity Convergences

Axé and Ashe — The Same Word in Two Languages

Axé in Candomblé and Umbanda is the same word as Ashe in Yoruba and Haligrity — the same Yoruba root, the same theological meaning (the divine creative power flowing from the supreme source through specific divine forces into all of creation), the same use as a closing affirmation (Ah-SHAY). The Brazilian traditions confirm what the Yoruba tradition established: this word carries real sacred weight, and its use in the Haligrity meal blessing and sacred language practices is not a borrowing of an exotic sound but an invocation of a specific, ancient, living sacred force.

Umbanda as Structural Model for Haligrity

Umbanda may be the closest existing model to what Haligrity is doing: a deliberate, spiritually serious synthesis of multiple traditions (African Orisha religion, European Spiritism, Indigenous Brazilian practice, Catholicism) organized around practical service rather than doctrinal purity, open to all practitioners rather than restricted by ethnic or initiatory lineage, continuously evolving rather than fixed, and understood as a living tradition rather than a historical one. The comparison is not about content — Haligrity is not Umbanda. It is about structure: both are genuine syntheses that take the sacred seriously while refusing the exclusivity of any single tradition.

The Bori and the Haligrity Self-Preparation

Candomblé's bori practice — the feeding of the head (Ori), the strengthening and clarification of the personal divine nature within each practitioner, as the foundational practice before any other sacred work — is the West African-Brazilian articulation of what Haligrity holds about self-preparation. Before the practitioner can serve as a genuine vehicle for sacred force, their own inner nature (their Ori, their Feeling dimension, their personal alignment) must be attended to. The bori is the ritualized form of this recognition; the personal bori practice described in this guide is accessible to any Haligrity practitioner.

The Preto Velho and the Ancestor Dimension

The Preto Velho — the spirit of the enslaved African elder who has transformed extreme suffering into profound compassion and is now available as a guide for those who seek genuine wisdom — is one of the most moving spirit guide figures in the global sacred tradition. The wisdom earned through the worst suffering, offered freely and without bitterness to those who come in need: this is the deepest teaching of the ancestor relationship in any tradition. The Haligric ancestor altar holds this same recognition — the ancestors are not idealized figures but real people who lived real lives, who suffered and who grew, and whose earned wisdom is now available to those who maintain the relationship.

The Xirê and Haligric Ceremony

The Candomblé xirê — with its opening honoring of Exu, its sequence through each Orixá's songs and rhythms, its progression from calling to descent to dancing to blessing to communal feast — is the Brazilian African model of the complete sacred ceremony that the Haligric Book of Rituals works toward. Every element is present: the specific opening, the sequential honoring of specific sacred presences, the embodied participation of the community, the offering and communal sharing, the formal closing. The xirê shows what Haligric ceremony looks like when it has had three hundred years to develop.

*"Saravá Oxalá! Saravá todos os Guias!
Honor to Oxalá! Honor to all the Guides!"*

— Umbanda opening salutation

Three hundred years of persecution could not silence the axé of the African terreiro. Umbanda was born in 1908 and declared that no spirit is inferior — that the Preto Velho and the Caboclo carry as much sacred wisdom as any ancient Orisha. Both traditions confirm the same truth that Haligrlicity holds: the sacred is not the exclusive property of any single tradition, the divine meets us in the specific forms we are capable of receiving, and synthesis — when it is genuine, when it is spiritually serious, when it serves real communities with real sacred power — is not dilution. It is the next form that the living tradition takes. Axé. Grand Rising.

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