

The Fetish and the Stone: A Moral Economy of Charlatans and Thieves

BRIAN BRAZEAL

Emeralds are like possessing spirits. They are beautiful but they can be dangerous. Like the *espíritos obsessores* of Kardecian mysticism, emeralds can take over the lives of well-meaning devotees and lead them down the road to perdition. Like Macumba, emeralds can bring comfort and solace, but they can also be a vice and an addiction. Like the *exús* of Candomblé, emeralds promise wealth to those who know how to deal with them, but the profits are fraught with peril. Dealers in emeralds, like those who earn their living purveying spiritual power, are not always to be trusted. The fact that charlatans and sharp dealers abound only augments the mystique of the reputedly authentic priestess and of the *pedra extra*, the fine stone hidden in mica schist that promises a life of leisure to the man who finds it.

This volume attempts an excavation of the relations between spirit possession and material possessions. Paul Johnson takes an ethnographic approach to the history of European philosophy to show how savage notions of things as possessors of men provided a foil against which modern notions of men as possessors of things could take shape. This chapter explores how perspectives derived from the study of Afro-Brazilian spirit possession religions might shed light on the mostly irreligious trade in emeralds in the Bahian backlands.

I ask questions that should probably be left alone. They concern religious charlatans who act in bad faith and deceive their clients by claiming powers that they will never have. They concern emerald thieves who steal with glib deceit rather than guns and knives. They concern the dangers of excessive profits garnered from saints and stones alike. They explore the inevitability of evil in the struggle to reproduce families and communities in a morally fraught economic milieu.

This chapter is the overripe fruit of an ethnographic project that is a

decade old and the still-bitter pith of a study that is just beginning. I have been going to Bahia to investigate Afro-Brazilian religions since 2000 and have spent approximately three years living and working in backcountry religious communities. An otherwise unfortunate coincidence in 2004 led me to the Rat Market (Feira do Rato), where emeralds are traded in Campo Formoso. I've been back in the Rat Market every year since, but the visits have been too brief and too sporadic to constitute a conventional ethnographic engagement. A long fascination with the cultural determinants of economic value leads me to hope that I can build a bridge from the spirits to the stones. I explore the convoluted relations between trickery and authenticity negotiated every day by religious entrepreneurs and emerald dealers. I examine the consequences of immoderate profit earned from dealings with gods and emeralds alike.

There are adepts of Afro-Brazilian religions who work for evil. There are others who misrepresent their powers for pecuniary gain. Sometimes they are the same people. There are dealers in emeralds who willfully inflate the value of their merchandise to buyers and who lie to the people whose stones they sell about the money they received. There are workers in the bottoms of the mines who filch stones that should belong to the mines' owners. These are facts beyond dispute. Religious communities, like miners and traders, recognize the existence of thieves and charlatans. Adepts, miners, and dealers alike confront the image of the unscrupulous practitioners of their trades as they negotiate with their clients.

This does not mean that all priestesses practice fakery or that all emerald dealers always steal. I have witnessed innumerable demonstrations of sincere religious faith and healing ceremonies that might be described as miraculous in a less adamantly secular genre. I have also been party to honest and straightforward transactions for precious stones. But a careful exploration of the role of the unscrupulous adept and the dishonest dealer can illuminate the contours of the moral economies that bind communities of coreligionists and gem merchants together.

Priests and priestesses of Afro-Brazilian religions use the fruit of their spiritual labor to sustain large ritual families, to keep centenarian temples afloat, and to uphold the beautiful, multifaceted cult of their high gods. Many of these adepts find large followings and comfortable lives. But there are those for whom the wages of sorcery are poverty, insanity, and death. The remunerative rituals of Afro-Brazilian religions call upon deities whose cults carry a decidedly evil tinge. Those who do not reinvest their profits in more benevolent undertakings run the risk of divine retribution.

There are dealers in emeralds who plough their profits into the complex

of overlapping credit relations that allow the trade to sustain itself. They use them to educate their children, to sustain their churches, and to better their community. But there are those who dissipate their wealth in games of chance, sumptuary consumption, and the easy but expensive virtue of the soiled doves who flit about the mining camps. A lapidary put it succinctly: “Garimpeiro tem uma vantagem, quando tem dinheiro, é cachaça, puta e carro novo” (Miners have one advantage; when they have money it’s booze, whores, and a new car).

My argument unfolds as follows: ritual services and uncut emeralds are both commodities in that both condense labor into highly desired forms that can be exchanged for money. The prices of these commodities are subject to intricate and uncertain negotiations because their value rests on qualities that are hidden, ineffable, and numinous. The difficulties in determining the value of stones and ceremonies leave the clients of Afro-Brazilian religious adepts and emerald dealers uniquely open to fraud. Fraud is an openly acknowledged and even celebrated aspect of religious and mineral commerce alike. The existence of deceivers in both of these realms of exchange does not undercut but rather reinforces the value of the putatively genuine article. The genuine articles are efficacious ceremonies and elusive *pedras extras*, or gem-quality stones. Dishonesty and greed carry their own punishments in the form of divine retribution, alcoholism, and poverty. In order to avoid such dire consequences, spiritual and mineral merchants must reinvest the profits accrued in plying their trades into the communities that encompass them. These might be ritual or temporal families, networks of credit and trust, or even Protestant religious congregations. Those who would enjoy their wealth alone will suffer.

Thus we see a moral economy that functions with a logic alien to the self-maximizing impulse to truck and barter described by classical economics. Personal profit beyond what is necessary to sustain one’s self is anathema. The maintenance of community takes precedence over individual gain. The thief, the sorcerer, and the charlatan are not deviant elements to be expunged. They are the lynchpins that allow the moral economies to sustain themselves.

The City of Witchcraft and the City of Gunpowder

This story takes place between Bahia’s arid backlands and its fertile littoral. Cachoeira is a colonial coastal town known throughout Bahia as the Cidade da Macumba, the City of Witchcraft. Campo Formoso, where emeralds are traded, is the oldest city in the Bahian west. It is situated in a

fertile valley in an otherwise harsh and famous region known as the *sertão*. Most of the emeralds in Campo Formoso come from the nearby settlement of Carnaíba, a small town with the improvised and impermanent feel of a mining camp. Both Cachoeira and Campo Formoso were once flourishing hubs of regional and international commerce. However, both towns are well past their prime, having ceded their pride of place to larger cities situated along Brazil's national highway network.

In Cachoeira, the religion of Candomblé holds out the promise of prestige and economic opportunity to a large Afro-Brazilian population that has never known prosperity. However, Candomblé's promise is tinged with danger. The most profitable spiritual services are those that call upon diabolical *exús* and fearsome spirits of the dead. Work with these pantheons can prove perilous. Tales of sorcerers' downfalls into misery and death provide a check on the ambitions of Candomblé adepts. In Campo Formoso the mining and marketing of emeralds provides the material for the innumerable rags-to-riches stories told in the Rat Market and the mining camps. Riches-to-rags stories circulate with almost equal currency. Bars, brothels, and purveyors of recreational alkaloids abound. Fortunes in emeralds are drunk, snorted, and fucked out of existence.

Thick historical connections link the two cities. The expeditions to subdue the native peoples of what is now Campo Formoso began and ended in Cachoeira (Freitas 2004). The search for the *Itaberaba-acú*, a mythical mountain of emeralds, was part and parcel of these expeditions (Buarque de Holanda 1968). However, it was not emeralds but gunpowder that first brought riches to Campo Formoso and cemented its connection to Cachoeira. The mule trains that brought the saltpeter from Campo Formoso's Rio Salitre to the Campo da Pólvora (Field of Gunpowder) in the Bahian capital passed through Cachoeira on Brazil's Royal Road.¹ The equipment and supplies that sustained the mines were disembarked from ships in Cachoeira to begin their overland journey into the *sertão*. Through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century the two cities were linked by Bahia's railroad network, the *Viação Ferrovária do Leste* (Zorzo 2001). Campo Formoso's mineral commodities went through Cachoeira on their way to the coast and the capital.

Today, however, these connections have lapsed. Highways have eclipsed railroads and waterways as the main means of moving goods and people through the interior. Cachoeira is no longer a hub of international commerce, but it remains a hub of a spiritual commerce that follows the routes traced by gunpowder. This commerce has taken a form that few could have predicted.

Nowadays, when the name of Cachoeira is heard in Campo Formoso, it is usually on the radio. Itinerant practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions arrive in Campo Formoso or a nearby city and buy advertisements. Sonorous voice-overs promise potential clients that they can heal their struggling marriages, that they can reel in would-be lovers and straying husbands, that they can cure intractable diseases, break addictions, or ensure commercial success. New Age synthesizer music meanders in the background. Hard-bitten stone traders chuckle. If Macumba could really help you make money, then the *macumbeiros* would all be rich. Clearly they are not.

Many, perhaps most of the ads invoke Cachoeira: "Brother Cachoeira is consulting on Mondays and Thursdays in Senhor do Bomfim." "Sister Juréma from Cachoeira de São Félix has the solution to your love problems." Cachoeira is famous, and its fame is worth money in this context. It is the Cidade da Macumba, and people from the sertão have been going there to solve their spiritual problems for generations. Now Cachoeira comes to the sertão to save the *sertanejos* (backlanders) the trouble and expense of the journey.

The trouble is that these media-savvy healers are usually not from Cachoeira at all, nor are they adepts of Cachoeira's Candomblé. They practice a homegrown bricolage of palmistry, cartomancy, crystal-ball readings, and cowry-shell divinations. They prescribe ritual treatments that can be performed by the priest alone or even by the client herself with materials readily available from the local *loja de ervas*, or herb store. They charge for their divinations. They also charge for the rituals that those divinations reveal as necessary to cure the client's ills. Their diviners' fees are reasonable, but from the perspective of Cachoeira's Candomblé temples, the services they provide are not reasonable at all.

This is not to say that they don't work. Orthopraxis is by no means the sole determinant of ritual efficacy. Clients must believe that these traveling salesmen of the spirit can solve their problems; otherwise why would they pay them? Their faith, measured by the money they spend, can work wonders. However, to someone who has gone through the arduous initiation to Cachoeira's Candomblé and who has earned the right to work for clients through years of hard spiritual labor and the slow accumulation of ritual expertise, the ministrations of these itinerant magi are so much legerdemain and incoherent nonsense.

This perspective may not be available to sertanejo clients, and it might not matter if it were. These clients have no interest in maintaining the integrity of the initiatic system of Cachoeira's Candomblé or the ritual families it establishes. They have problems that they want to solve. If, during

the process of their consultation, the priest or priestess can establish their authenticity, legitimacy, and efficacy to their clients, then the clients will contract their services, and those services will probably be effective. If the priest fails in this delicate act of self-presentation, the client will pay the fee for the initial consultation and go on her way.

Traveling healers are not the only ritual adepts who must argue for their authenticity. Respected priestesses in established Cachoeira cult houses undertake the same delicate negotiations, and they often fail. This in turn requires that the returns from successful spiritual transactions be high enough to maintain the priestess through the long dry spells that inevitably await. The shadow of the charlatan raises the prices for spiritual services across the entire Afro-Brazilian ritual continuum.

Prospective clients believe that some healers are effective and others are frauds. Stories of wondrous cures and money spent in vain on bogus rituals are equally easy to elicit in any backland Bahian town. They bubble up unbidden at any mention of Cachoeira in the sertão. The stakes are high. The clients are concerned with love and money, life and death. The prices for ritual services in Cachoeira and Campo Formoso alike can quickly exceed a month's wages. But there is no definitive way to distinguish the wheat from the chaff. True priests and gay deceivers alike draw on a common bank of symbols, techniques, and linguistic formulae. Authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, and the proof of efficacy is firmly in the pudding.

The value of a ritual service depends on its efficacy. However, it is impossible to determine the efficacy of a ritual in advance. This makes negotiations over the price of that ritual especially problematic. A ritual that is sold too cheap probably won't work. Simmel has it that money measures the desire of the individual to make use of a commodity. It is the objectification of the subjective value of that commodity (Simmel 1990; Deflem 2003). If the price of a ritual is set too low, it shortchanges the client's desire to see her problem resolved. It undercuts the subjective value and thus the ultimate efficacy of the ritual.

On the other hand, if a ritual is sold too dear, it leaves the priest open to the suspicion of fraud and thus undercuts the claims to authenticity on which the efficacy of the ritual is founded. This is particularly true of itinerant adepts. Does the radio priest want to make a killing and leave town before his ministrations are revealed as *ackamarackus*? Healers must make a living, but if they are gouging their clients, then their benevolence and thus their ability to heal becomes suspect.

Adam Smith's labor theory of value brings us to similar conclusions by a different path. "The real price of every thing, what every thing really costs

to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it" ([1776] 1976: 34). Spiritual power is won through long service to the *santos*, a toilsome and troublesome process by any measure.² Ritual efficacy is the fruit of that labor. A low-cost ritual would suggest that its purveyor had not worked long or hard enough to make that service truly effective. But a healing priced too high would make the client reflect on his own toil and trouble and measure it against a ceremony that is always potentially worthless.

The delicacy of negotiations over the price of a ritual ensures that many prescribed ceremonies go unperformed. They are commodities whose value is impossible to determine until after the transaction has been completed. Furthermore, they are sold by a group of people with a long-standing reputation for trickery. The immense potential value of a healing ceremony must be weighed against the possibility that the client's time and money will be spent in vain. Much the same is true of uncut emeralds.

All the Science in the World

Emeralds belong to the beryl family of minerals. Beryls form hexagonal crystals of varying clarity. Pure beryl is clear, but admixtures of other minerals give it various colors. When the aluminum ion in beryl is substituted for chrome, the crystals take on a distinctive and bewitching green hue. They are emeralds (Martins dos Santos 2009). The beryl family also includes aquamarine, heliodor, and other less-well-known gems. But emeralds alone have achieved the contentious and coveted title of precious stone.

The emeralds mined near Campo Formoso are found in a matrix of biotite schist, a crumbly black rock. They have formed through metasomatic processes at points of contact between layers of serpentine and layers of granite and quartz. They are also found in the faults and fractures in the rock near the contact points. In the early 1970s deposits of emeralds were found very near the earth's surface in the outlying district of Carnaíba. Today miners go more than two hundred meters into the ground in search of the green beryls.

What they find does not look like the emeralds in a jeweler's display case. When workers hit productive veins in the bottoms of the mines, they extract fist-sized lumps of black schist with beryl crystals inside them. Many of these emerald-bearing rocks find their way into mine workers' pockets and the tops of their heavy rubber gum boots, unbeknownst to the managers and owners of the small mines. Many more are carted out with the slag only to be discovered (and often secreted away) at the surface. This small-

scale filching is universally recognized. It is considered a roguish and clever way to supplement a mine worker's meager salary. A man in Carnaíba who often deals in such stolen stones explained that you can't expect a worker to go underground all day for seventy or a hundred reais a month and be content with it.³ If he sees something, he's going to take it. If the owner or the manager sees him doing it, he'll make him put it back in the sack, but he won't necessarily fire him for it. More stones are discarded in slag heaps only to be found by the *quijilas*, women who sift through mineralogical refuse looking for stray emeralds and molybdenum ore.

The stones that are not pilfered or thrown away are carried out in sacks by mine owners and the managers they employ. They then begin the laborious process of preparing them for sale. The outer layers of schist are chipped off with heavy pliers to reveal glimpses of the flat green crystal beneath. They are washed and oiled to provide potential buyers with a glimpse of the gems that they might contain. The stones then enter a series of complex and overlapping circuits of exchange.

Some buyers wait by the mouths of the mines to purchase the low-grade stones discovered by the *quijilas*. Others sit at the white tables that line the main street of Carnaíba de Cima, the hilltop settlement around the mines. Each one looks for lots of a particular kind of stone, large or small, potentially valuable or practically worthless. Buyers from Campo Formoso prowl the streets looking for stones to add to the lots that they will sell to the Rajasthani traders who cycle through the city. *Fisqueiros* (or sparkers) carry stones from their owners to potential buyers in hopes of miniscule commissions. *Corretores* (correctors, or sales agents) do much the same thing on a larger scale. The finest stones may never see the light of a Bahian day. They are quietly whisked off to the lapidaries who cut them and from there to international buyers who sell them in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America or to the large jewelry firms in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Stones pass through dozens of hands before they find their way into a golden setting or a North Indian emerald workshop. My focus is on the negotiations that accompany each of these transactions. These negotiations are animated and complex, with sellers' asking prices and buyers' offers differing by orders of magnitude. Take this relatively simple example extracted from my field notes from August 6–8, 2009:

I asked Xuxa what he was after. He wanted stones to sell to the Indians, but at the high end: big stuff in the neighborhood of ten reais per gram. The first

thing that caught his eye came soon after we got out of the car. It was a huge pedra. He peered at it and cupped his hands around it to catch the light, but it was heavily overcast and not very good for looking at big stones. He asked the weight, and the seller told him that it was over seventy-five grams. [The rough is measured in grams vs. the cut, which comes in carats.]⁴ So we took it into a café where an incandescent lamp was screwed to the wall expressly for the purpose of peering at big stones. Xuxa was very impressed but was doing his best not to look excited. The seller brought us coffee, bread, and butter. They both hemmed and hawed before anyone was willing to name a price. Eventually it came out that the seller was asking 1,500. Xuxa offered 750. The seller looked crushed and walked away. We had another cup of coffee and went after him. After about an hour of wheedling each other in the streets and shops of Carnaíba, they settled on 850. Xuxa paid in cash in another café up the street. He chortled over his purchase and received the adulations of his colleagues all the way down the hill on our way back to Campo Formoso. They figured that he must have paid at least 1,500 for it.

The next day, Xuxa took the stones that I watched him buy and put them into a lot that weighs 2 kilos. The lot is all made up of stones of that type, big and reasonably good. The lot is lacrado [closed and labeled] in the Indian's office while they work on a price. Xuxa's asking price was 32,000 reais. He said that he'd be willing to go down to 28,000. He paid an average of 6.69 r\$ per gram for what I saw. If he got 28,000 for 2,000 grams, that would be 14R\$ a gram, better than double what he paid. Nicely done, Xuxa.

These transactions are far simpler than the bulk of the emerald deals that happen in Campo Formoso. Xuxa bought the stone from its owner, added it to a lot that he owned free and clear, and brought it to the Indian buyers to negotiate with them himself. Most transactions would involve a much longer series of middlemen and professional negotiators, successful and failed deals, and a seemingly endless process of aggregation, separation, and improvement of larger lots of smaller stones. But even in this straightforward transaction we can see that the prices of the stones themselves are by no means fixed. The price of the seventy-five-gram rough pedra ranged from 750 to 1,500 reais. The price of the two-kilogram lot would be between 28,000 and 32,000 reais.

The prices ranged so widely because it is impossible to guess what sort of cut emerald the rough stone will yield. The seventy-five-gram pedra might yield a giant gem that was clear and richly colored and worth tens of thousands of reais. But it might just as likely be shot through with inclu-

sions and imperfections. Its color might be dull and inconsistent. It might contain some hidden flaw that would cause it to turn to dust on the cutter's wheel.

Buyers can and do scrutinize the stones to their hearts' content, but the emeralds they contain will not reveal themselves until they are cut and polished by a lapidary. The balletic ritual of pouring over rough stones and the verbal performance of negotiating their price have far more to do with establishing the credentials and the savvy of the buyer and seller than with the characteristics of the stones at issue. These characteristics that differentiate a pearl beyond price from a piece of refuse are largely impossible to distinguish. One lapidary told me, "Pra comprar pedra bruta, toda ciência é pouca" (All the science in the world is not enough to buy rough stones).

The Art of Hammering a Nail

Emeralds are not like other mineral commodities. Gold, diamonds, and oil (all of which are mined in Bahia) are valued according to a fixed set of measurable characteristics. These characteristics are internationally recognized. The markets in these commodities are therefore far more efficient. A gram of gold or a round one-carat diamond graded G, VS1, or a barrel of light sweet crude will command much the same price in Rio de Janeiro, Amsterdam, or Istanbul.⁵ This is not the case for emeralds. Their price and value defy international standardization. The qualities that make one emerald more desirable than another are beyond words and numbers. No international cartel controls their trade. No stock market determines their price. The value of the gems is an outcome of negotiations between miners, brokers, and traders.

The impossibility of determining the value of the cut emerald that a raw stone will yield makes the range in the price of a rough stone very wide. The indeterminacy of the price of raw stones makes transactions for emeralds uniquely liable to fraud. The most common form deception takes in the emerald market is known locally as "*batendo prego*," or hammering a nail.

Nails are hammered when the owner of a stone or a lot of stones employs a professional negotiator to find a buyer for his merchandise. These negotiators are known as *corretores*, or correctors. Corretores know potential buyers, the sort of merchandise they prefer, and their bargaining styles. They are willing to perform the tiresome and occasionally vexing task of finding a buyer and negotiating a mutually acceptable price. The owner of the stones gives the corretor his merchandise and the range of prices that

he will accept. Corretores either assess a flat fee or else take a percentage of the total transaction for their services.

Corretores will occasionally find a buyer who is willing to pay a price at the high end of the seller's acceptable range. The corretor will contact the seller and tell him that he has found a buyer but that the buyer is only willing to pay less than the owner is willing to accept. If the owner of the stones agrees to accept the price, the corretor hands the merchandise over to the buyer, gives the putative sale price to the seller and accepts his commission. Since the buyer in fact paid a much higher price than the corretor led the seller to believe, the negotiator can pocket the difference. He has hammered a nail into the owner of the stones.

Batendo prego is a universally recognized feature of dealings in the Rat Market. Sellers can expect that some of the corretores they employ will do their best to hammer them full of nails. This is not necessarily held to be a bad thing. The *prego* is evidence of the sort of roguish quick-wittedness that is essential to success in the emerald trade. Some dealers even claim to refuse to do business with corretores who do not *bater prego* because their lack of self-interest makes them worthless as negotiators.

Xuxa and his colleagues had a long conversation about pregos hammered on them as we returned from our trip to the mouth of the mines. It was as though the wily corretores, who are their colleagues and competitors at the same time, had beaten them at their own game, fair and square. In these stories the hero was clearly the corretor.

It is expected that *garimpeiros*, or mine workers, will steal any emeralds that present themselves in unguarded moments. It is equally expected that corretores will exploit the indeterminacy in the value of emeralds to dupe their owners into parting with their merchandise for far less than their clients are willing to pay. These two streams of deception often cross. The pilfering *garimpeiros* are particularly apt targets for the corretores' wiles, since they are not experienced traders and they would like to get rid of their merchandise quickly.

Deception and thievery are rife in the emerald business. The nimble-fingered *garimpeiro* and the sharp-dealing corretor are recognized and even celebrated by the very people whom their actions would seem to exploit. Labor relations in the emerald mines and the indeterminacy of the value of rough emeralds furnish the opportunities for pilfering and lies. But how are we to account for owners' complicity and even exultation in their trickery?

Perhaps it is because the ever-present possibility of self-interested deception brings into sharper relief the promise of the well-struck deal. When

the corretor pockets the proceeds due to the stones' owner, he highlights the potential for those who have stones to sell them for ever-higher profits. Dealers often tell stories of the pregos they have received. They tell stories of buyers who paid ten times what they would have accepted just as often and with equal relish. The sneaky corretor reminds them that the indeterminacy of the value of raw stones can also work in their favor if only they can find the right buyer. They pursue their trade with renewed vigor in the hope of striking the deal that will change their lives. By the same token, when the mine worker filches a stone and turns a tidy profit, the owner realizes how much more wealth lies in the productive veins of his mine. Stealing is not a threat to his profits; it is their harbinger.

The specters of deception and thievery increase the allure of the rich vein and the profitable deal. So, too, does the ever-present shadow of the charlatan serve to underscore the value of the services of the authentic purveyor of magical services. Bad faith increases the value of the stones and ceremonies that are held to be good and true. This would seem to contradict classical economic and philosophical notions about the rational individual agent entering into exchanges with the totality of information available to him.

Saints of Lies, Saints of Liquor

The knowledge of the existence of charlatans is not the only factor that throws the value of Afro-Brazilian ritual services into question. Just as a shell of mica schist can conceal a worthless rock or a brilliant gem, so too can the bodily hexis of spirit possession performance conceal a fraud or reveal a veritable god on earth. With rough emeralds, as with saints incarnate, one can never be completely sure. The gods of Afro-Brazilian religions behave in stereotyped fashions during their sojourns on earth. These stereotypical performances vary among pantheons and regions. But they are recognizable and therefore imitable by those who are not actually possessed.

The caboclos are spirits of wild cowboys and Indians. When they come to earth in Cachoeira, they clench one fist behind their back and pace, their eyes bulging. They speak a distorted but conventionalized version of backland Portuguese and address their interlocutors as *Seu Moço* (Sir Youth) regardless of their age or sex. They dance a histrionic samba, kicking their legs toward the drummers. The *orixás* are more serene. They keep their eyes closed and do not speak or sing. They keep both hands behind their arched backs and sway gently as they wait for the drums to call them. Their dances

are tightly choreographed. Even their characteristic screams (*ilá*) are somehow dignified and predictable.

Children in Cachoeira's poor neighborhoods grow up alongside its Candomblé temples. They delight in imitating the gods they see. Boys beat out the sacred rhythms on tin cans. Girls mime the behavior and the dances of orixás and caboclos. They mimic the screams of the saints that possess their neighbors, aunts, and grandmothers.

Tour groups and the occasional film crew come to Cachoeira to experience and record its Candomblé. But Candomblé ceremonies often take place at inconvenient times and with inadequate lighting. So tourists and videographers will sometimes contract a *folklore*. "Folklore" in the local parlance refers to a staged ceremony. Real adepts of Candomblé don the sacred wardrobe and dance the dances as *santos de mentira*, saints of lies. Observers who are not intimately acquainted with the participants in such performances may not be able to distinguish them from the real thing.

Such saints of lies appear for the amusement of the Candomblé faithful as well. Initiated members of Candomblé temples who do not become possessed will sometimes parody the possession behavior of the gods in informal ritual contexts. These are often the occasion of great drunken hilarity. I am often egged into adopting the role of Caboclo Gringo for the amusement of my Cachoeira coreligionists.

Children imitate the gods, drummers parody them, and tourists pay to see convincing simulacra. *Santos de mentira* are well ensconced in Cachoeira's streets and temples. The existence of saints of lies is fully accepted as a source of amusement or revenue. However, they become problematic when they seem to appear in actual Candomblé festivals, where divine visitations should be strictly authentic. This happens when those who are initiated to incarnate the orixás and caboclos fake their possessions for attention, for alcohol, or to conform to the expectations of the crowd.

Accusations of this sort of fakery are rarely made outright. But as members of other temples walk home, they begin a brutally critical *resenha*, or recounting, of the night's happenings. This *resenha* often includes speculations on the veracity of the possessions they witnessed. The next day, as the night's events are retold to friends and members of ritual families, accusations are amplified. The dances and actions of the saints of lies are mimicked to the cackles and guffaws of listeners.

The problem of fakery is especially acute in ceremonies for the caboclos. Drink flows freely at caboclo festivals. The gods themselves may demand or simply take it at any time. Spectators must wait for a divine invitation or accept it when it is proffered by the mistress of the house. After caboclo

parties the alleged gods are often accused of being mere humans feigning possession for access to alcohol or reeling from the fumes of the booze that they had already consumed. Such false gods bear the name *santos de cachaça*, or saints of liquor.

The ubiquity of such counterfeit saints throws yet another wrench into negotiations over the efficacy and value of the ritual services sold by Candomblé adepts. If so much fakery abounds, how can a client be assured of the veracity of the saints whose powers she pays for? How can a priestess be sure that her children are bringing the gods she serves to earth and not merely imitating them for her benefit? These questions cannot be definitively answered. But the shadow of the false god makes the light of the putatively true orixá shine all the brighter. The successful priestess defines herself in explicit contradistinction to the charlatan and defines the gods whom she possesses and who possess her as true saints and not hollow, earthly imitations. If she can do so convincingly, the value of the services she provides will rise. Indeed they will rise all the higher for the knowledge that others are certainly faking it.

Marmots, Jelly, and Potatoes

As if that were not enough, perfectly respectable priestesses at the helms of centenarian temples are well known to stray from their own orthopractical canons. Goaded by necessity or by the demands of exigent clients, they mix elements of disparate traditions or perform ceremonies without the proper preparations to ensure their success. Thus wealthy clients on tight schedules may undergo a drastically abbreviated version of the initiation process but still consider themselves *feita*, fully “made” members of Candomblé houses.

One morning, five years ago, I was walking through a Saturday market with a Candomblé devotee. We spied an *iyawô*, a recent Candomblé initiate, walking with a member of her temple. She was tall, dark, and very beautiful. She had been born in Bahia but had married a foreigner and moved abroad. She had returned to be initiated and had undergone the ceremonies, but she still had a thick mane of curly hair. Initiates in the tradition of that temple should be shaven from head to toe with a straight razor. She was wearing colored clothes, while *iyawôs* are supposed to spend a year in pure white. She did not wear the *kelê*, a thick braided raffia cord, or the *chocalho*, a rattle worn at the ankle, that denotes her subordination to her initiating priestess. She did not wear the beaded necklaces that mark her subservience to the orixás.

I pointed her out to my companion. "Marmotagem," she scoffed. *Marmotagem* (literally translated as marmotry, the behavior of a marmot) is the defiance of Candomblé convention for fun or profit. But how could she do it, I asked. That priestess is one of the most respected religious leaders in town and is known all over the country. "She is a *marmoteira* and one of the finest," my friend responded. "She is the one who brought marmotagem to the city." I saw that priestess do wonderful work in Candomblé on many occasions, but she was not above exploiting her wealthy clients to sustain her temple.

Priestesses are often accused of using their divination ceremonies (*jogos de búzio*) to "discover" problems that clients do not actually have. They find dead relatives haunting the clients' lives and closing their roads to romantic and financial success. They discover jealous neighbors and rivals scattering sorcery powder at their homes and places of business. The clients must then decide whether or not to contract the expensive ceremonies that would remedy these ills. But it is impossible to know whether these malignant spirits and poisoning neighbors actually exist. A savvy and unscrupulous priestess with a convincing patter to go with her cowry-shell oracle can quickly make marmots of her troubled and unsuspecting clients.

By the same token, priestesses may take money for ritual sacrifices but skimp on the necessary supplies and pocket the difference. They may ignore the ritual prohibitions on drink, sex, and certain foods called *resguardos* that are necessary to ensure that ceremonies will succeed. They may put on lavish public ceremonies without performing the series of private oblations that ought to underlie them. They may borrow elements from multiple traditions and mix them indiscriminately while still claiming an orthodox adherence to one of Candomblé's denominations (*nações*). They may invent new traditions or new ritual actions while boasting of their fidelity to the ways of their ancestors. They may learn songs, ceremonies, or ritual formulae from books, even books published by anthropologists, but claim that they had learned them through oral transmission or divine revelation. This sort of self-interested, showy spirit-mongering is reviled in the community of Candomblé practitioners as *gelaba com batata*, or jelly with potatoes, the pernicious mixing of things that should be kept separate.

Along with marmotism and the saints of lies and liquor, the possibility that a priestess might be mixing jelly with her potatoes complicates the negotiation of her religious legitimacy and the efficacy of the ritual services that she provides. Clients can never know for sure. Neither can anyone else. A caboclo could be a true saint one day and an ethanol-fueled delusion the next. Two observers of the same god at the same time might disagree

as to his veracity. A priestess might conduct a ceremony for one client with loving care and for another with greedy deceit and deeply cut corners. She might adhere to putatively pure traditions on one occasion and invent incoherent mixtures on another. There are no external means by which her conduct may be judged. There is only the encounter with the client over the divining table and the momentous decision as to whether or not to contract her services.

Profit and the Problem of Evil

The indeterminacy of the value of rough emeralds and the ritual services sold by adepts of Afro-Brazilian religions makes these two forms of commerce especially liable to fraud. Clients and buyers cannot know what they are getting ahead of time. They enter into negotiations with priestesses and sellers knowing that they run the risk of buying substandard stones or contracting worthless ceremonies. These same negotiations are fraught with peril for the sellers and priestesses as well. They work in a morally ambivalent arena, dealing in valuable and troublesome commodities and trafficking with powers that can defy their control. The money that they gain from these transactions can be dangerous and must be spent with circumspection. Otherwise the stones and the spirits may get the best of their purveyors and lead them down the road to perdition. The money becomes dangerous to the people who make it.

The dangers associated with earning a living from sorcery or from the emerald trade can be ameliorated if the money is used in the service of moral causes. Successful traders and priestesses alike must not grow too rich from their occupations. They must funnel the profits back into their communities lest they get the better of them. This popularly held belief is reinforced by numerous stories recounted in Cachoeira and Campo Formoso alike.

Perhaps the most famous and the most tragic tale of the dangers that attend on success in the emerald trade is the story of Gupta. I heard it on my first trip to the Rat Market and many times since. In its broadest outlines, it goes something like this.

Gupta was the first of the Indian traders to come to Campo Formoso. He bought vast amounts of emeralds of all qualities and took them back to Rajasthan. He was well loved by miners and traders for his open disposition. However, he was the only buyer capable of dealing in large quantities of low-grade stones. He was therefore able to exert great control over the prices. He prospered. He founded a firm in India and built a huge home in

Campo Formoso. One day he became embroiled in a dispute over money with one of his Brazilian partners. Heated words and accusations of thievery were exchanged. The Brazilian left, procured a gun, and then shot and killed Gupta. Gupta's wife, distraught, would never return to Campo Formoso. She donated their home to the city, and it is now a clinic for the aged and disabled.

Gupta's story is only one of the many that remind emerald dealers of the dangers of immoderate profit. An affable trader told me how he had made more than a million reais after being granted the exclusive right to scavenge the slag heaps of a famous mine at its productive peak. He married the beautiful daughter of a local landowner. Then he lost his millions at a poker table. He is respected and well loved in the Rat Market for his openhanded generosity and his breadth of experience. But he is reviled by his in-laws for his relative penury. His taste for strong drink and extramarital dalliance does little to raise him in the estimation of his Presbyterian relatives by marriage. Today he tries to raise capital to make his next big score, and he swears that he'll never go near a poker table again.

Dona Gracina is a widow who could have been rich many times over. Her now deceased husband extracted millions of reais worth of emeralds from their mine. He also gave her twelve children, who have given her sixty grandchildren. Her sons, like their father before them, are able miners and ardent procreators but not astute managers of their personal finances. In tunnels hundreds of feet underground they told me stories of designer shoes and old scotch whiskey; of cars and motorcycles bought, totaled, and replaced; of women in the once resplendent brothels of Carnaíba's salad days. But their tales of luxury stood in sharp contrast to the torn and faded dresses of their wives and the bare feet of their children who gathered around Gracina at the mouth of the mine. They were looking for the sparkle of *estanho* in a rusted sieve. This molybdenum ore sustains many owners of unproductive emerald mines. They needed to find enough for their weekly trip to the market, and there were many mouths to feed.

Josana works underground in Gracina's mine and as a corretora in Carnaíba's stone markets, runs a bar on weekends, and raises the daughter that she bore to her now estranged husband. He was a miner but was ruined by his own success. He abandoned his wife and their child in the first flush of prosperity. Now that he is broke and an alcoholic, he is too ashamed to return. Today he raises some skinny cows and stunted crops on a small patch of toxic earth. Emeralds form in the fissures of serpentine rock. But serpentine poisons soil (and miner's lungs), and it makes a mockery of farmers' attempts at agriculture. It is a humiliating fate to go from mineral

riches to manual agricultural labor. Josana's husband won't speak to her, and a cloud passes over her proud face at the mention of his name.

These sorts of stories abound. People whisper about the once great fortunes of the drunken bums who beg them for change or cadge drinks and cigarettes. The outlines of such tales are always the same: someone strikes it big through lucky mining or smart trading. They spend their money on intoxication, adornment, automobiles, lavish entertainments for their many new friends, and extravagant expenditures on ladies of the night. They are ruined or killed, or they find themselves back in the bottom of a mine looking for the next big strike. Local lore once had it that the only way to ensure that one would find more emeralds was to spend the money earned on parties and prostitutes. Profits gained through the emerald trade ruined so many lives and families that they seem immoral even to the people who are chasing them. An aging woman pouring over the slag heaps told me that "*esmeralda é do diabo*" (emeralds are from the devil).

Profits from sorcery are at least as dangerous as those from emeralds, and their diabolical origin is much more in evidence. Even ritual healing carries significant risks. All sorts of instrumental magic in Candomblé and its associated Afro-Brazilian religious traditions call upon pantheons of *exús* and *egúns*. *Exús* are amoral and occasionally diabolical demons, pimps and tricksters. Their imagery abounds with horns, skulls, pitchforks, and engorged phalli. Their songs are replete with references to Lucifer and the gates of hell. *Egúns* are the much more dangerous spirits of the dead. They are treated with much greater care and circumspection than the rowdy and companionable *exús*. Witchcraft that calls upon their powers is especially feared, and healing clients of such witchcraft is especially dangerous to the clients and the adepts alike.

In healing ceremonies, priestesses and their congregations seek to propitiate these troublesome spirits with song and sacrifice so that they will leave their clients in peace. In magic rituals with specific earthly ends, they render offerings to these demons to work on clients' behalf. In the case of sorcery proper, by which I mean rituals with specifically malignant intent, they render similar offerings with an eye toward harming the client's enemies. Adepts may also manufacture magical poisons called *pemba preta*, infused with the power of these spirits, and sprinkle them on the home, the possessions, or the person of the intended victim.

In each case the adept is taking a calculated risk. Popular wisdom holds that "*o feitiço vira contra o feiticeiro*" (the sorcery can turn against the sorcerer). Too intimate relations with such powerful and problematic entities can jeopardize the life and the livelihood of the practitioner. But a Can-

domblé adept in Cachoeira can no more live without magic than an emerald miner can live without emeralds. Exú and egún are their stock-in-trade. Clients may come to consult caboclos incarnate, they may pay *promessas* (ritual debts for divine services rendered) to the orixás, or they may orient their lives on the basis of cowry-shell divination. But for the most part they come to be healed of the supernatural malice inflicted on them by their enemies, to inflict their enemies some supernatural malice of their own, or to advance some earthly scheme using the power of exú. They pay handsomely for these services. Their payments sustain priests and priestesses as religious professionals.

Sorcery is a dangerous means of production. Those who succeed too well may pay the ultimate price. One night in 2004 I heard an unfamiliar name in a litany of egúns who were called upon in a healing ceremony. The singer was invoking powerful deceased priests and priestesses to expel the spirits of the dead from the body of his client. I knew most of the names from my genealogies, but one stood out. When the work was done, I elicited his story. His name was Adalho. He was a priest with no temple but a great reputation. He had engaged in magical duels with another famous sorcerer of yore. But what killed him in the end was his own witchcraft. He used it to kill the wrong person. His tutelary gods withdrew the mantle of their protection. He was left exposed to attack. He joined the egúns, still powerful, but now unquestionably dead.

Nicolau was a sorcerer who never charged in advance.⁶ He never needed to. He would tell his clients that if their enemy was not brought low within twenty-one days, his services would be free. But if the sorcery worked, they would have to pay him immediately, or else they would be next. He did his work possessed, consulting his clients and performing the services they required while incarnating exú. His exú, like so many others, had a taste for cane liquor and cheap cigars. As Nicolau's fame spread and his clientele increased, he earned more money, but he also spent more and more time possessed. His own personality merged with that of the demon whom he was supposed to command. The slave god came to own his putative master. Alcohol, tobacco, and a life of unalloyed malice killed Nicolau. In spite of his hundreds of paying clients, he received a pauper's funeral with no one to mourn his untimely passing.

Stories like these highlight the dangers associated with success in emerald dealing and in magic, healing, and witchcraft. But it is not as though these dangers overtake every dealer, priest, and priestess. Many of them manage to counterbalance their participation in these risky trades with a steady stream of payments to the people in their community and to the

gods or god whom they serve. These remittances ameliorate the perils of personal success in these troublesome trades. They allow adepts, miners, and dealers to sustain themselves and their families and to support their communities even as they work against the untrammelled aggregation of individual wealth. The section that follows shows how moral community can be born from such morally fraught enterprises as the selling of emeralds and spiritual services.

Laying Up Treasures in Heaven

In spite of their often unsavory reputations, emerald dealing and Afro-Brazilian religion can both be eminently moral occupations. Both provide paths by which perennially impoverished and disenfranchised people from backland towns can prosper in the economic milieus that were built on their exploitation. This prosperity depends on the restraint of individual avarice with all of its attendant risks. In order to avoid the twin jeopardies of divine revenge and sumptuous self-destruction, those who ply these risky trades must plough their profits back into enterprises that are unequivocally good. For Afro-Brazilian adepts this means investing in the cult of the orixás and in their own ritual families. For emerald miners and dealers it means lending money to fellow traders in tight straits or subsidizing the Protestant congregations that have been evangelizing the backcountry for more than a century.

There is much more to Candomblé and its cognate Afro-Brazilian religious traditions than the healing, sorcery, and magic discussed above. The profits from these instrumental ceremonies underwrite a complex and beautiful cult of orixás, caboclos, ancestors, and the saints of popular Catholicism. Healing and witchcraft are most often done for clients who seek out adepts, contract their services, pay them, and go on their ways. Ceremonies for orixás and caboclos, on the other hand, anchor large ritual families into webs of obligation to each other and to the gods they serve.

The high gods of Candomblé are very demanding of their devotees. They require lavish parties replete with the finest raiment, delicate cuisine, and sumptuous decorations. They also require untold gallons of sacrificial blood to cement their relationships to their initiatic children. While the blood feeds the gods, the meat from the sacrificial animals feeds the hundreds of attendees at parties in honor of the orixás. Animals, lace, liquor, brocade, beans, honey, oil, and the rest of the supplies necessary to honor the orixás do not come cheap. Some of these expenses are defrayed through the mundane day jobs of devout practitioners. But day jobs are

hard to come by in rural Bahia. Even the most exacting economies might not satisfy the demands of the gods and the desires of the practitioners to fête their tutelary deities in regal style. Some of these expenses are defrayed by the wealthy (and often white) patrons of Candomblé temples. This fact has been frequently cited by anthropologists who have fallen into this role (for example Ramos [1934] 1988). But such patrons can be hard to find, and anthropologists (though they are not in short supply) may not have the resources or the inclination to assume the role of religious benefactor.

Priests and priestesses have a revenue stream that does not depend on mundane work or on the largesse of local whites and foreigners. The work that they do with *exús* and *egúns* sustains their cult of the *orixás*. It also sustains many of the initiatic obligations of their ritual children. If work with *exús* and *egúns* is morally problematic, the worship of the *orixás* is held to be unequivocally good. If the *orixás* are properly propitiated, they can shield their followers from the potentially negative consequences of working too closely with *exús* and *egúns*. The constant demands of the *orixás*, coupled with the need to care for the spiritual and physical needs of large ritual families ensure that priestesses who uphold their obligations will not grow rich. However, with some luck and some astute dealings with their clients, most of them can at least get by. *Exús* are the slaves of the *orixás*, and if devotees pay the requisite homage to the high gods, they can be assured of their ability to appropriate the labor of their slaves on earth.

In addition to these strictly religious duties, priestesses have a host of mundane obligations. Their temple compounds often house members of their extended families and local communities whose religious faith is surpassed only by their poverty. Such indigent acolytes live in the temple's rooms and sup at its table until marriage, success, or interpersonal strife leads them to seek a house of their own. Many priestesses raise the children born of evanescent unions in the backcountry. Their impecunious mothers know that adepts of Candomblé have a stream of income and a strong religious sensibility. All priestesses raise large families of initiatic children, who often lack the means to fund their own devotions. Priestesses are often pillars of communities, even in matters that are not strictly religious. Many temples hold secular entertainments at which they provide music, food, and drink to the members of their communities. The sacred and profane demands on a priestess's largesse only increase with her income. If she fulfills them, she will not run much risk of becoming wealthy.

Emerald miners and traders may have a slightly easier time of it, but there are plenty of claims on their mineral wealth as well. Stones can be very expensive, and local traders might not have the capital necessary to

buy the large lots that the Rajasthani traders demand. The cost of Xuxa's transaction described above was more than triple the annual municipal GDP per capita in Campo Formoso in 2007.⁷ In order to defray these costs, miners borrow from their colleagues. Upon the successful completion of a lucrative transaction, they pay off their debts and loan out their profits through an elaborate system of postdated checks, promissory notes, and hastily negotiated handshake agreements. Some of these agreements include a provision for interest, but many more do not. These overlapping credit relationships allow the traders to sustain their enterprise without the vast sums that would be required to go it alone. Banks are understandably unwilling to make loans to participants in this gray-market economy. The traders provide for one another. If they do so conscientiously, they can avoid the pitfalls of unrestrained consumption and be assured of the largesse of their colleagues in the inevitable hard times to come.

The mundane necessity to lend out money to ensure access to capital in the future might seem like a self-interested and even rational capitalist endeavor. However, there are sacred claims on miners' profits as well. These often come from the Protestant churches that dot the Bahian backcountry. The ethic that they inculcate seems to have little to do with the worldly asceticism of Weber's ([1904] 2003) sturdy Puritans. It does protect miners and traders from the potentially negative consequences of their own success.

I was surprised by the profusion of Protestant churches of all stripes in Campo Formoso and Carnaíba. One finds North American missionary denominations alongside Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal congregations, Seventh-Day Adventists, and more. Towns that once echoed with gunplay and the music of the brothels now echo with the amplified voices of pastors overtaken by the Holy Spirit. Men who once destroyed great fortunes in orgies of sumptuary consumption now invest in their homes, their families, their churches, and the education of their children. An ethic of character development and moral improvement has begun to replace an ethic in which men were judged by their liberality in consumption and entertainment. A network of Pentecostal miners and traders now extends throughout Brazil and connects Brazilian gemstone dealers to their church brethren in the United States and across the world. This network, anchored in religious faith, has temporal dimensions as *irmãos em Cristo* (brothers in Christ) enter into reciprocal relationships of trust and credit.

The trader Daniel exemplifies this trend. Daniel is a lifelong Seventh-Day Adventist. He regaled me with stories of great strikes, vast profits, trips to the United States, Mercedes-Benzes bought and sold. But his house was

that of a comfortable but humble workingman. We were sitting in the living room. "Garimpeiros are supposed spend all their money on liquor and prostitutes," I said, "but you don't even eat meat. If you've made all this money, why aren't your rich?"

He opened his Bible (though he didn't really need to) and quoted me some verses about treasures in heaven (that he had clearly memorized long ago). He explained that he had used his money to build churches. He had already built six Adventist churches in Brazil, and if God continued to bless him with prosperity, he would build one for every year that he lived on earth.

By expending the profits from emeralds on religious obligations and supporting the efforts of fellow traders, emerald dealers avoid the dangers associated with excessive consumption. These dangers are real. Drugs, alcohol, gambling, and prostitution have destroyed many families in Carnaíba and Campo Formoso. Evangelical miners may not save and accumulate as Weber's Protestant ethic would prescribe. They do, however, manage to keep their businesses afloat and even reasonably prosperous. If emeralds are from the devil, at least some of the miners have managed to marshal their profits in the service of God.

The Fetish and the Stone

Candomblé was born in the maw of one of the most brutal labor regimes that has ever existed: the Atlantic system of slavery, sugar, and tobacco. The emerald trade in Campo Formoso arose from the expeditions that sought to evangelize or exterminate the native peoples of Brazil. Adepts of Afro-Brazilian religions took the phantoms that haunted the nightmares of the people who enslaved them—their devils, demons, and evil spirits—and turned them into sources of power and profit on earth. The miners of the sertão catered to the baser desires of their colonizers. They provided the gunpowder that fueled their wars. They provided the gold, diamonds, amethysts, and emeralds that stimulated their vanity.

Bahia's interpolation into world economies has rarely been beneficial to its inhabitants. Yet the same people whose labor was exploited carved out a few niches for themselves at the interstices of this economy, and some even found a modicum of prosperity. They struggle to sustain and reinvigorate their communities in contexts where the decks have always been stacked against them. They exploit the evils and the ambiguities in the system that encompasses them. In doing so, they transform both moral and economic values. The malice inherent in sorcery and even healing underwrites the

families that are united in the worship of the benevolent and beautiful orixás. The vanity of women from Jaipur to Manhattan who want to deck themselves in precious stones funds the propagation of Protestant asceticism in the Bahian backlands.

These processes are not straightforward by any means, but this is perhaps for the best. If sorcery and ritual healing and the mining and marketing of emeralds were susceptible to capitalist rationalization, then the capitalists probably would have rationalized them long ago. Instead they depend on ambiguity and unpredictability. Values can never be precisely calculated. Profits can never be accurately predicted. Fraud is omnipresent and ineradicable.

Deception is not anathema in this system, and neither is transparency necessarily valued. Adepts of Afro-Brazilian religions and traders in emeralds alike thrive on the ambiguities inherent in their professions. The ever-present possibilities of hucksterism and sharp dealing enhances the values of the commodities that they provide. In order to prosper, these entrepreneurs of stones and spirits must present themselves and their wares as authentic in their negotiations with their clients. The value of the goods that they purvey comes to depend on interpersonal relationships formed through intricate negotiations. The knowledge that these negotiations can and usually do fail only raises the stakes.

Perhaps this perspective derived from the ethnographic study of charlatanism and thievery could be applied to other, more familiar spheres of economic action. Perhaps the apparently rational, mathematical calculations of profit and loss in other industries shrouds a confidence game in which authenticity and morality are really at issue. Perhaps the invisible hand that guides the market is more akin exú's deceptions than God's providence. Perhaps the commodities transacted in stock markets are no more subject to exact valuation than the rough emeralds in the Rat Market. But perhaps these depths are better left unplumbed.⁸