The City and African-Brazilian Religions

Marcia Contins

Abstract

In this article, I discuss the relationships between ethnicity and religion, based on anthropological studies of religions in the urban context. I also discuss the transformations of these studies since the 1970s. Since I have myself contributed to this field of studies, my own experience as a researcher must be taken into account. I focus on the uses of the categories of ethnicity and religion during two distinct periods in the history of Brazilian anthropology. In each of these periods, I point out significant transformations in the way Brazilian researchers describe themselves and how they conceive the relationship between their research topics and the city.

Keywords: Ethnicity and Religion; Anthropology of African-Brazilian Populations; Religion and the City; Fieldwork; Pentecostalism; Candomblé

Resumo

Neste artigo discuto as transformações no campo de estudo das religiões afrobrasileiras desde a década de setenta. Exploro os usos das categorias etnicidade e religião em dois momentos distintos da história da antropologia no Brasil. Em cada um desses momentos aponto transformações significativas no modo como pesquisadores brasileiros descrevem a si mesmos e como concebem a relação entre a cidade e os temas de suas pesquisas. Minha própria experiência, enquanto pesquisadora, foi incorporada nessas reflexões.

Palavras-chave: Etnicidade e Religião; Antropologia das Populações Afrobrasileiras; Religião e Cidade; Etnografia e Religião; Pesquisadores e Religiões Afrobrasileiras

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Religions in the city

This article discusses the relationships between ethnicity and religion from the perspective of the field studies produced on religions in cities located in Brazil and the Unites States. Before focusing on these issues through my current fieldwork, I would like to explain my background as a researcher and how I came to work on this subject. I shall also explore the transformations in this field of study. This discussion of my perspective as a researcher should be situated in to the context of the perspectives of others who have researched religions in major cities since the 1970s.

My present-day research seeks to describe the diverse forms of religious frameworks and their transformations in urban areas, especially those related to African-Brazilian religions.

While reflecting on the categories of ethnicity and religion indifferent research contexts and their changes over time I suggest that the mode of description and anthropological analysis has also been modified. In carrying out my research on such diverse religious experiences as the Umbanda and Candomblé *terreiros*,[1] African-Brazilian Pentecostals, Charismatic Catholicism, and immigrants from the Azores participating in the festival of the Divine Holy Ghost, in contexts as distinct as the United States and Brazil, I did not imagine uniform and homogeneous cultures and identities. According to Geertz, in an increasingly globalized yet also compartmentalized world, the different countries and diverse religious and ethnic identities cannot be seen as 'seamless unities' or 'unbroken wholes' (Geertz 2000: 246). The relationship between religion and ethnicity is not immediately obvious.

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1   Umbanda: one of the denominations of African-Brazilian possession religions, the temples of which are known as *terreiros*. Candomblé: an African-Brazilian denomination originating in Bahia, the term is also used in Rio de Janeiro to refer to one variety of the rituals adopted in *terreiros*.

It requires an understanding of the mediations between them. In fact, this relationship is part of a process of the "invention of culture" (Wagner 1981), a process mediated in this case, sometimes by the religious code, at other times by the ethnic code, without either performing a all-determining role.

What I wish to explore more specifically here are the relationships between religion and the urban context, analyzing how particular religious groups distinguish themselves through their mode of insertion within the space of the large modern city, particularly Rio de Janeiro, as conceived from the viewpoints of informants themselves (Contins 2005, 2009, Contins & Gomes 2007, 2008).

One important aspect to be considered is the comparison between the experiences of followers of African-Brazilian religions and the opposition that they face from Pentecostal and Charismatic Catholic churches.

The discussions about the relationships and experiences of these religious groups necessarily include their constant circulation through the space of the large city and a deepening of the notion of 'urban circuits.'[2]

The relationship with the large metropolis has repercussions for the process of constructing subjectivity, as several authors have already highlighted, notably Simmel (1987) and the tradition of studies in so-called urban anthropology in Brazil (Velho 1980, 1994; Oliven 1985; Magnani 2003). In the past the research locations – the *terreiros*, the *casas de santo*, the churches – were perceived as points of stability. To borrow Tim Ingold's formulation, the group was perceived as a kind of dotted line; today, they are more like continuous lines that interweave with one another (Ingold 2007).

The constant movements of incorporation and differentiation of distinct life styles and worldviews is typical of the large city (Simmel 1971, 1987; Velho 1980, 1994, 2010). Cosmopolitan life thus offers possibilities and alternatives to the individual through networks of belonging, exchange systems, mediations and continuous exchanges inscribed in the context of the city. The flow between religious and ethnic borders and the re-interpretations of institutional guidelines permit new representations of spatial and social categories.

The ways in which the space of the city are used by different religions afford new forms of perception of religious phenomenon, redefining the

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2   I link the definition of 'urban circuits' to the notion of 'flows' in Hannerz (1997), thereby seeking to highlight the constant mobility and circulation of these individuals and groups.

diverse forms in which this space is appropriated by religious experience. The social actors establish multiple bonds and develop different and creative collective arrangements in their uses of the city. *Terreiros* that once appeared very distant now seem remarkably close. Fieldwork undertaken in the 1970s and 80s was grounded in the perception of a considerable physical and social distance between researchers and researched. Today, though, when visiting a *terreiro* in Baixada Fluminense, the distance travelled seems much shorter.

The city back then was highly diverse and its points of interconnection less numerous. The question of authenticity[3] was projected onto an other at a physical and social distance, whereas today it does not appear to be situated anywhere stable. While 'authenticity' on one hand can be connected to restoration projects and their transformation of places into 'heritage sites,' on the other, it may also be constructed by the religious participants themselves.

In this article, I discuss these urban religious frameworks from the viewpoint of both the development of my own fieldwork and the work of various other anthropologists from the 1970s onwards. In so far as I focus on my experience in the field and the process involved in producing an ethnography, I am questioning the conventional forms of understanding such practices. Ethnographic observation is decomposed into an endless series of practical and commonplace activities: moving about in the field, forms of mobility, ways of staying in the field, where to sleep, where to eat, how to dress and so on.

Religions and the space of the city in the 1970s and 80s: fieldwork

During the 1970s and 80s, I carried out research on the Umbanda and Candomblé religions in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, specifically in Baixada Fluminense. At that time, few Pentecostal churches were found in the region but there were countless Umbanda and Candomblé *terreiros*. These were all local: in other words, they had a clientele basically formed by people from the neighborhood, though visitors from other localities were welcomed.

The role of these Umbanda centers in neighborhood life was analyzed in an article written by myself and a colleague, entitled "Gueto cultural ou a umbanda como modo de vida" (Cultural ghetto or umbanda as a way of life;

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3 For a discussion of the notion of authenticity in the cultural history of the West, see Trilling 1973 and Sapir 2012.

Maggie & Contins 1980). The fieldwork informing this study was undertaken in locations that felt a long way from the city center. For us researchers, the greater the social and geographic distance, the more 'authentic' the field.

Generally speaking, these were less urbanized locations, with unpaved roads and little public transport available for the local population. The route to these areas of Baixada Fluminense necessarily involved taking the Via Dutra highway and then a series of narrow roads, generally dirt tracks, until we finally arrived at the houses in which the *terreiros* were located.

We frequently slept at the research sites since the Umbanda and Candomblé sessions would last the whole night, only ending in the morning. At that time, a significant social and psychological distance seemed to separate ourselves from the group we were studying. The return to the city of Rio de Janeiro after the ritual ceremonies were over was very difficult and hazardous due to the dark roads and the lack of security.

The field experiment made a significant impression on the researchers since all the interpretations we developed subsequently only seemed to diminish and simplify the reality lived by these people. It was important to work from the native point of view, trying to comprehend the significance of the religion for their lives as a whole. It became clear to us that in this type of religious situation, especially in the case of Umbanda, a very closely intertwined relationship existed between everyday practices and the religious domain.

These *terreiros* operated, therefore, as the creative epicenter of a web of symbolic, ethnic, social and economic relationships. To treat Umbanda solely as a religion would entail failing to perceive the wider dimension of this phenomenon where the entire life of the people from the neighborhood was related to what happened within the *terreiros* and developed out of them. We called this specific type of social, economic and ideological relationship generated by the *terreiros* the 'Umbanda lifestyle' (Maggie & Contins 1980).

At that time, Baixada Fluminense – particularly the neighborhood where we were studying – was both socially and spatially isolated. We started from a case study involving a description of the local neighborhood, the background history to the *terreiro*, and its social and economic organization. The *terreiro* studied in this case was the center where many of the social, ethnic, economic and symbolic relationships experienced by the group unfolded. As 'cultural ghettos,' these *terreiros* were distant from the centers of decision-making, employment and governance, for example, meaning that they

inevitably centralized the cultural production of these groups. Today these areas of the city seem much closer compared to the period when my research was conducted in the 1970s and 80s.

The fieldwork and the analyses pursued in specific situations, whether a single *terreiro* or a group, over these decades were a marked contrast to the analyses of development conducted earlier by studies adopting more generalizing approaches.[4] During this period a debate also took place with those authors who treated Umbanda as part of the urbanization process of the city. In Chapter 5 of his book *As religiões africanas no Brasil* (1971), Roger Bastide discussed the urbanization of Brazilian cities and highlighted the differences between 'rural Candomblé' and 'urban Macumba.' In 1974, Diana Brown, in her doctoral thesis in anthropology, discussed the relationship between religion and politics in urban Brazil. It is also worth highlighting the works linking studies of Umbanda, Macumba and Candomblé to their urban and regional contexts. These are numerous and I limit myself here to picking out a few classic examples – Rodrigues 1935, Carneiro 1978, Ribeiro 1952, Ramos 1932, Rio 1906, Bastide 2001 and Landes 1967 – as well as a few contemporary studies: Prandi 1991, Carvalho 1984, Segato 1995, Motta 1988, Lima 1977, Fry 1971, Oro 1994 and Santos 1995.

Maggie's book *Guerra de Orixá: um estudo de ritual and conflito* inaugurated this anthropological shift. According to the author herself, this was a book written "amid a whirlwind of changes in the country and in Brazilian anthropology" (Maggie 2001: 7). She explained how her generation had been prevented from expressing itself politically in the 1960s and 70s, leading her to pursue less orthodox methods in the attempt to provide an alternative description of the country.

In terms of the anthropology of African-Brazilian religions, the approaches remained centered on specific fields and case studies, implying a rupture with earlier studies into the origin of these religions, which were mostly related to the search for an African authenticity. Africa was now located in the *terreiros* themselves. Extensive fieldwork, obligatory for

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4   There were many studies that focused their research on a single Umbanda or Candomblé *terreiro* or that produced dense ethnographies, establishing personal long-term relationships in the field: Beatriz Góis Dantas 1988, Juanna Elbein dos Santos 1986, Yvonne Maggie 2001, Zélia Seiblitz 1979, Anaiza V. Silva 1976, Renato Ortiz 1978, D. dos Santos 1988, Marcio Goldman 1984, Sérgio Ferreti 1985, Patrícia Birman 1995, Paula Monteiro 1983 and Marcia Contins 2009. Also see the extensive bibliography regarding these studies in Maggie 2001.

any anthropologist intending to produce a worthwhile monograph, was still essential.

In the 1980s, various authors came to discuss the role of ethnographic authority. Anthropological research sought to work with the narratives of the actual 'informants,' now considered authors in their own right. In my doctoral thesis, based on comparative research on African-American Pentecostals and African-Brazilian Pentecostals and followers of Umbanda in the 1980s and the start of the 1990s (today various Brazilian anthropologists conduct their fieldwork outside Brazil), I not only tried to foreground my interpretation and analysis of the studied groups, I also sought to emphasize the fact that my voice was only one of many to appear in the research (Contins 1995).

The fieldwork in the USA and the relationships established with my main informants began with periodical visits to the neo-Pentecostal Bible Way churches. During this period, I realized that my involvement with the group demanded the use of a specific ethnographic approach, one elicited by the questions being asked by the informants themselves. My interpretations only became possible when I recognized how these informants constructed and made explicit diverse interpretations of their own lives and religious beliefs. The 'natives' were not there just to be observed and analyzed: they were present as active participants who spoke about themselves and were, to a certain point, co-authors of the final text.[5] These questions had been raised by various US anthropologists (and historians of anthropology) in the 1980s (Geertz 1973, 2002; Clifford 2008; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Crapranzano 1977). They foregrounded the intersubjective dimensions involved in collecting field data, focusing on the power relations that became established between anthropologists and the groups under study that proceeded to affect the interpretations presented in the resulting ethnographic text.

The idea for this comparative study had been stimulated by my experience of carrying out fieldwork in the United States from 1984 to 1989, when I lived in Charlottesville, Virginia. During this time, I began to study an

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5   I say "to a certain point" because ultimately the anthropologist has to accept responsibility for authorship. Clifford Geertz (1988), for example, suggests that the author needs to assume greater responsibility for the text and the interpretations made therein. He writes: "Once ethnographic texts begin to be looked *at* as well as through, once they are seen to be made, and made to persuade, those who make them have rather more to answer for" (Geertz 1988: 138).

African-American community in the South of the United States: more specifically, a religious group calling itself the Bible Way, an African-American Pentecostal church also active in other US states. Flourishing in social and cultural contexts as distinct as the United States and Brazil, and obviously other national contexts beyond, the Pentecostal religions presented a challenge for comparison. In the US case that I researched, the Pentecostals were clearly associated with African-Americans. In Brazil, however, any identification between color and religion appeared much less evident. Even in the case of the African-American Pentecostals, though, where ethnicity and religion are to some extent conjoined, the idea that Pentecostal cults derive from an 'African-American culture' must be treated with considerable caution.

The religious group studied by myself specifically belonged to a Pentecostal sector of African-Americans. To some extent, therefore, the religious group in question could be said to possess an 'ethnic narrative.' Members of this community created and recreated a 'religious culture,' including, for example, a common language, a way of dress, a moral code, a very intense relationship among its members, and a very pronounced appreciation of the economic aspect of both the individual and the religious group. What the research suggested, then, was that 'religious symbols' and 'ethnic symbols' had to be treated as parts of narratives continually being renewed by differences. The Pentecostal believers projected these differences beyond themselves in order to construct their own subjectivity. This was a ceaseless project of constructing a simultaneously African-American and Pentecostal subjectivity.

My objective was to pursue an ethnographic comparison of the expressly ethnic and religious dimensions of the discourse of African-Brazilian Pentecostals in Brazil and their oppositional relationship with African-Brazilian religions. Comparing with the American Pentecostals, the construction of a 'Pentecostal' and 'African-Brazilian' identity can also be seen as an important process in the case of some of the Pentecostal cults in Rio de Janeiro. These identities are confirmed dialogically through the differences continually established in relation to other religions, particularly in relation to Umbanda and Candomblé.

My doubts concerning traditional method of ethnographic interpretation originated from my growing dissatisfaction with the anthropological discussion on the perception of the 'native' as an 'other,' a debate separated from

ethnography and supposedly invested with an intrinsic truth that needed to be uncovered by myself or other researchers. Interpretation only became possible when my informants were transformed into more than objects of study: they became interlocutors in a dialogue that allowed diverse interpretations of their lives and religious beliefs to emerge.

Vagner da Silva in *O antropólogo e sua magia* (2000) points to what he calls an "ethnographic dialogue." Based on his own field experience as a researcher and a Candomblé adept, as well as interviews with other researchers, he recounts the dialogic relationship maintained with the people being observed. Hence, he shows, the understanding involved in participant observation goes far beyond a simple technique or a methodological procedure adopted by the researcher to learn about the studied community.

In his book Silva sets out from this ethnographic dialogue in order to discuss the active participation of anthropologists in the initiation rituals of African-Brazilian religions and, in more extreme cases, their actual conversion to these religions. From the anthropologist's point of view, is it possible to gain access to the religious group by merely being an observer, or does he or she need to observe from the inside, turning native? Rather than engage in a naive discussion of the problematics of fieldwork, the author places this debate within the dialogue that ethnography maintains with the people it studies.

African-Brazilian religions and social movements: a dialogue between the academic world and the African-Brazilian movement

Since the 1970s, and principally from 1988 onwards, the relationship between African-Brazilian religions and national society intensified and diversified with the emergence of numerous social movements and networks. Various researchers analyzed the effects of these networks in articles produced for a series of events held in recognition of the centenary of the official abolition of slavery in Brazil (*100 Anos da Abolição da Escravatura*, Contins 1997).

In 1988, a study was conducted at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Cultural Studies (ECO/UFRJ) in conjunction with the Nucleus of Color at UFRJ, with financial support from the Ford Foundation. This research aimed to map the many different visions of abolition with the idea of producing a surprising angle on racial relations in Brazil one hundred years after slavery had been abolished.

One of the results of this survey was the production of a valuable collection of documents concerning everything undertaken during this centenary year. The interesting part of this work was the dialogue that unfolded between the discourses produced by the academic world and those produced by militants from the African-Brazilian movements and also by people not involved in either of these two universes.

Militants and academics, despite adopting distinct positions in terms of their engagement in the fight against discrimination, talked among themselves and shared similar views of the nation, the individual and citizenship.

Also exploring the commemorations for the one hundred years since abolition in 1888, the book *Lideranças Negras* ('Black Leaders,' Contins 2005) turned to examine those responsible for promoting many of these events. Its proposal was to hear from the female and male leaders of African-Brazilian movements in Rio de Janeiro. The interviewees' accounts of their experiences of activism expressed the positions that they occupied – and in some cases still occupy – in the African-Brazilian movements, reflecting their personal knowledge of distinct forms of militancy. This political activism from the 1960s, 70s and 80s – sometimes dating back even further – gave them a senior vantage point onto the history of the movements.

It is also worth emphasizing that the testimonies assembled in this study revealed aspects that went beyond the political or doctrinal dimensions of the African-Brazilian movements concerned. The interviews displayed a remarkable existential richness, perceptible in the diverse narratives framing the biographical and political experiences of the interviewees. They amount to life histories of individuals, families, kinship relationships, religious experiences and neighborliness in various places in Brazil, mainly within the city of Rio de Janeiro. These narratives perform a fundamental role in constructing the images of the experience of being African-Brazilian in Brazil during a particular era.

Other studies were also carried out during the 1990s and 2000s (Fry 1991, Contins 1997, 2004, Contins & Sant'Ana 1996, Fry & Maggie 2002, Strozenberg 1996, Pacheco 2003, Paiva (ed.) 2004) on the circulation and effects of concepts such as 'affirmative action.' Various activists from African-Brazilian movements, as well as African-Brazilian religions, took part in academic seminars on these issues. Some went on to study on postgraduate courses in anthropology and sociology, researching themes related to their militant and religious lives.

Restoring and listing the Umbanda terreiros: the relationship with other religions in the city

At the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s, researchers and official government bodies sought out groups related to African-Brazilian religions in order to restore their *terreiros*. This work of listing the *terreiros* as 'intangible heritage' elicited a closer dialogue between researchers and the African-Brazilian religious groups under study. For the latter, the experience of 'becoming heritage' was already part of their expectations and did not freeze them in time as elements of the past. Instead it allowed them to become recognized as groups active in the present and open to the possibility of change. The listing of the *terreiros* and the discussion regarding their authenticity is now undertaken too by the worshippers of these religions themselves. Today various *terreiros* have been surveyed in Rio de Janeiro's metropolitan region, demarcating their location and religious affiliation, and including interviews with the *mães-de-santo* and *pais-de-santo*.

It was within this new configuration of studies in African-Brazilian religions that research emerged concerning the relationship between religion and the city. In recent decades, as various authors have remarked, the religious space in Brazil's larger cities has been undergoing profound changes (Maggie & Contins 1980, Silva , V. 1992, 2000, Mariz & Machado 1998, Contins 2003, Contins & Gomes 2007, 2008). One of the factors in this process has been the growth and visibility attained by Evangelical Pentecostal denominations, especially the so-called neo-Pentecostals, along with the increase in Catholic churches adopting elements of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

It is worth emphasizing that these changes did not just occur externally, in the relationships established with and through public space, but also internally, within the religious denominations involved. The Umbanda and Candomblé *terreiros* have been obliged to share their space in these urban areas with Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. The point I wish to stress is how these African-Brazilian groups now position themselves in response to the growth of other religions in the city's metropolitan area. African-Brazilian groups, for example, make their presence felt in schools and on religious courses, and hold large show-like events in their *terreiros*, similar to the neo-Pentecostals.

While the older Evangelical churches already operated in localities where the Catholic Church and Candomblé and Umbanda *terreiros* were

predominant (such as Baixada Fluminense) and prioritized religious activities intended for the congregation and the local population, the neo-Pentecostal churches took another approach. These are churches, like the Assembléia de Deus, that basically appeal to the general public, very different from the more traditional Pentecostal churches. As well as their fixed public, they invest in attracting a diffuse and mobile clientele. Their architecture also distinguishes them from the smaller neighborhood churches still found in the 1970s and early 80s. One of the important characteristics is their location, generally at the intersection of large avenues, where they are highly visible to the constantly mobile population.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, despite operating within the limits of the Catholic Church, also holds masses and events aimed at the general public. This characteristic is reflected in the choice of the locations used for holding such events and in the relationship established with the space of the city.

Following the increase in the number of neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, the African-Brazilian groups have also had to coexist with the former's enormous architectural scale, allowing them to hold an enormous quantity of worshippers at any one time.

The space of the city involves a context of plurality in which religious practice has become more transient and the search for new experiences has gone beyond their original spaces. One of the important points that we perceived concerning this new religious configuration of urban space was the positioning and visibility of African-Brazilian religions.

The terreiros turning to the general public

In more recent research (Contins 2013, 2014), I observed various initiatives pursued by Candomblé houses with the aim of attracting a wider public. Significant attempts were made to work with the media through local radio and television programs. Courses were made available on the history of Africa in some Candomblé houses in Baixada Fluminense, along with African language courses, and the production and distribution of CDs and videos of their rituals, focusing on different Candomblé entities. The type of dialogue involved looks to connect with the general public and avoid being confined to the small houses or *terreiros* situated in Baixada Fluminense. What we

find today are different Candomblé and Umbanda houses in Rio de Janeiro that prioritize the relationship with the market, the university and African-Brazilian movements. The participation and recognition of researchers in these *terreiros* also contribute to their visibility.

As an example of different African-Brazilian groups that have developed innovative versions of their rituals, I pick out some groups from Rio de Janeiro's suburbs and West Zone that have built larger *terreiros* or have modified them in order to increase their accessibility to the general public. One Candomblé house, for example, is located in Vila Valqueire, another in Irajá, and a third in Anchieta. Informed by the discussion on ritual and performance, I analyzed the importance of these houses for the local community and for populations beyond these neighborhoods. Comparing the first two *terreiros*, which had a significant local influence – during their rituals there is an enormous exchange and participation of several *terreiros* from the region – with the house in Anchieta, it became clear that the difference compared to the first two resided precisely in the 'show' that the latter put on during its rituals. The first two houses were smaller and had a public that came mainly from nearby neighborhoods. The festivities performed in Anchieta for the Candomblé entities took place in a large house with the participation of a large audience from outside the neighborhood. The rituals were filmed and recorded onto DVDs to be sold later in the Madureira Market.

The *pai-de-santo* in Alcântara hosts a weekly radio program and presents various television programs. At the same time, though, I realized that the internal rituals – intended only for people from the Candomblé house itself – retain a fundamental importance for the house's continuity. The ritual as a spectacle, however, is part of this relationship with the general public. Its architectural form is also quite significant in terms of the relationship established between the African-Brazilian religions and others, since the type of architecture employed is more reminiscent of the neo-Pentecostal churches.

The house in which the *terreiro* operates is similar to a three-storied church. On the first floor is the hall where the ritual for the entities is performed. People from different neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro and Baixada Fluminense frequent this hall to see the spectacle. One member of the *terreiro* films the event and the CD is later sold at the Madureira Market. Next to the house is an entrance to the lower part of the *terreiro* where the obligations to the saints are performed. This is also where the *terreiro* members dress and get ready for the

rituals. It functions in effect as a 'backstage' area to the house for use by religious members only. The guests watch everything in the hall, which is shaped like a theater with seating around the stage. The Anchieta *pai-de-santo* has produced more than 20 CDs of his festivals, each dedicated to a specific entity. This religious material, which is not limited to CDs and videos, can be found displayed on the shelves of various stores in the Madureira Market.

The question of the authenticity of the Africanness of Bahian *terreiros* (in studies that have already been discussed by various anthropologists) is constructed, in this case, through the images distributed in the market by the author himself. The *pai-de-santo* and some other members of the *terreiro* prepare a specific ritual for an audience, rehearse the participants, film it on a CD, and then distribute the work for sale at the market.

The Procession of São Miguel Arcanjo

The religious processions performed by Umbanda followers from the São Miguel Arcanjo Spiritual Centre (CESMA) in Magé, Baixada Fluminense, also express the growing importance of African-Brazilian religions and their relationship with the city. CESMA is located in an area comprised by three plots, each approximately 360 m² in size. The *terreiro* takes the name of the religious leader's patron saint, São Miguel Arcanjo or Ogum-Megê, the head Orixá of the House. The mediumistic group composed by the *filhos-de-santo* and *filhas-de-santo* contains approximately three hundred members. However, if we add those who have already passed through the house of worship and now run their own spiritual centers, or those who have already concluded their obligations to the Orixás, the number is even higher: around three thousand members. Some seventy terreiros are estimated to be affiliated to this center, including *filhos-*, *filhas-*, *netos-*, *netas-*, *bisnetos* – and *bisnetas-de-santo*, all ritualistically and hierarchically subordinated to the center. The large majority of the affiliated *terreiros* are located in Rio de Janeiro state, with one in Brasília and another in São Vicente, São Paulo, and one more due to open in Rio Grande do Sul. The mediums, or *filhos-de-santo* and *filhas-de-santo*, regular visitors and clients come from various neighborhoods, cities and even other states, as well as diverse social classes and different ethnic groups. They range from housemaids, housewives and street cleaners to district attorneys, mayors and local politicians.

The Procession of São Miguel Arcanjo, or Ogum Megê, is always held in September. All the *filhos-de-santo* participate, in addition to the affiliated *terreiros* with their *filhos-*, *filhas-*, *netos* – and *netas-de-santo*. Dressed in white and carrying the 'guides' of their entities, each affiliated *terreiro* brings its 'flag' with the emblem and insignias of each *casa de santo*. Everybody carries a 'lantern' with a lit candle.

The procession passes through the center of the municipality of Magé, leaving from and returning to the center, alternately singing songs in honor of their patron saint and the Hymn of Umbanda. In the streets where the procession passes, people wait at their gates or windows with candles and cups of water. In the main square, a crowd of people awaits. The procession is at once a religious act, transporting the religion's belief beyond the limits of the *terreiro*, and a social act. A fixture on the religious calendar, it also forms part of the secular calendar since each year the city anticipates the procession and greets it when it goes by. There is a direct relationship between the religious calendar of the *terreiro* and the Catholic religious calendar.

The people who watch the procession are not necessarily followers of Umbanda and the procession is not restricted in any way when it passes in front of the Pentecostal churches and even the Catholic churches, at least not in recent years. According to the *pai-de-santo*, when they first held the procession it was not well received by the Catholic Church, much less by the Pentecostal Church. At the end of each procession, after touring the entire city and being seen by everyone waiting for it to pass by, the participants return to the spiritual center. In the procession, the spiritual center displays its ritual objects and beliefs in the street, while the relationship with the city becomes more visible and closer.

In an interview, the *pai-de-santo* described the change in behavior of the other religions in response to the procession. In the past there were frequent complaints and disputes, and the neo-Pentecostal churches closed their doors and declared their opposition to the procession. The local Catholic church also kept its doors shut on the day in question. Today, though, there is a clear receptiveness from the Catholic Church and the Pentecostals make no protest.

This does not mean, however that there are no disputes about the efficacy of each religion and the administration of each of their spaces at a day-to-day level. One interviewee, also a *filha-de-santo* from the center with her own *terreiro* located very close by, explained how she set up a *terreiro* in

her own house. In front of her house was a neo-Pentecostal church whose pastor would frequently vow that he was going to buy her property one day. Every time they met, the pastor said that she was "working for evil." After a few months, this same *mãe-de-santo* was able to buy the pastor's church and annex it to her own *terreiro*.

In Baixada Fluminense, there is also a substantial religious movement among the members of various religions. On another occasion, this same *filha-de-santo*, following sickness and death in her family, left the Umbanda spiritual center and converted to Evangelicalism. She began to frequent a neo-Pentecostal Church but after two years went back to the *pai-de-santo* of Magé. She has now built her own *terreiro*. She says that the relationships she maintained and still maintains with her Orixá entities are so close that she could become a medium, even though she converted to another religion at one stage of her spiritual life.

Conclusion

Through the fieldwork that I undertook with these different religious groups, I was able to perceive the significant social, cultural and ethnic proximity between them. A large flux of people are leaving the African-Brazilian religions to become Pentecostals, generally joining churches close to their original *terreiro* or localities close to home with which they are familiar. The contemporary city allows more mediations between researchers and those researched, turning into a vast mixture of fragments. The possibilities for moving around are much greater and the urban space, from the native viewpoint, has expanded considerably. People are exposed to a huge variety of mediators: lawyers, journalists, social movements and the media. We can say that the religious narratives are inevitably interconnected with the conceptions of the city.

Likewise, there is also a religious movement of people returning to the African-Brazilian religions. The biographical accounts of the interviewees concerning their personal life and religious backgrounds proved essential in terms of revealing their own interpretations of their religious experiences and their religious objects and rituals, as well as how they deal with distinct interpretations of the same, sometimes through Umbanda and Candomblé, other times through Pentecostalism.

Moments of crisis in people's religious and personal lives allow them to change religion. In this sense, insofar as this access to the sacred takes place in the universe of a large modern metropolis, Rio de Janeiro, these practices tend to assume, beyond their ritual form, the aspect of a 'spectacle,' in order to meet the demands of the clientele living in this heavily populated city.

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