

A BRIEF SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE
PRODUCTION CONCERNING RELIGION AT THE
ANTHROPOLOGY POST-GRADUATION AT THE FEDERAL
UNIVERSITY OF PERNAMBUCO-UFPE

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Abstract: In a general way, anthropology in Pernambuco developed itself from the scientific interest of psychiatry for the African-Brazilian religions and its articulation with the regulative action of the *New State* (Estado Novo), which established the so-called “scientific control”. In Pernambuco, during the last century thirties and forties, some psychiatrists of the Mental Health Service (MHS) like Ulysses Pernambucano de Mello, Albino Gonçalves Fernandes and René Ribeiro were among those who were engaged to make the fathers and mothers of saints along with their houses of cults more socially acceptable and also, free of the New State repression. Moreover, it is remarkable the influence of the publishing of *Masters and Slaves* (*Casa Grande & Senzala*) in 1933, and the intellectual alliance between Gilberto Freyre and Melville Herskovitz. Founded in 1977, under the coordination of Roberto Motta, the Anthropology Postgraduation Program had its first ensemble of master dissertations concerning religion in the eighties, between 1983 and 1988, with a defense each year. The production of dissertations in the Anthropology Postgraduation Program at the UFPE has, since the Program foundation, displayed an expressive opening to the most different religions, a diversity also shown when concerning the regions of the country and the theoretical approaches used, both sociological and anthropological.

Keywords: history of anthropology, religion and society.

It is not possible to analyze doctorate thesis yet, considering that only in the end of 2005 and beginning of 2006 the defenses of the first class began.

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Therefore, the informations and reflections developed here are focused on the production of Master dissertations. Among these, the ones that discussed the topic *Religion* were defended from 1983 on, five years after the outset of the Anthropology Postgraduation Program, at the UFPE.

To produce an essay on the anthropological production about Religions at the Anthropology Postgraduation Program of the UFPE, put us under the obligation to comment the historical roots of anthropology in Pernambuco.

In a general way, anthropology in Pernambuco developed itself from the scientific interest of psychiatry for the African-Brazilian religions and its articulation with the regulative action of the *New State* (Estado Novo), which established the so-called “scientific control”. In Pernambuco, during the last century thirties and forties, some psychiatrists of the Mental Health Service (MHS) like Ulysses Pernambucano de Mello, Albino Gonçalves Fernandes and René Ribeiro were among those who were engaged to make the fathers and mothers of saints along with their houses of cults more socially acceptable and also, free of the New State repression. Moreover, it is remarkable the influence of the publishing of *Masters and Slaves* (*Casa Grande & Senzala*) in 1933, which makes noteworthy the contribution of the Africans and its descendants along the development of Brazilian society. Freyre’s work got back the studies of Nina Rodrigues concerning the Negro, which were somehow reduced to silence till then,² renewing and stimulating the investigation of African culture in Brazil.

The first African-Brazilian Congress, organized and encouraged by Gilberto Freire and Ulysses Pernambucano de Mello in 1934, happens in this political and intellectual atmosphere. Under this intellectual context, religion meant the intellectual path to African culture, which by its turn is linked to the matter of the Negro in Brazilian National State. The II Congress was taken to Salvador by Nelson Carneiro, having been overtook right way by the prohibition of meetings concerning this topic, executed in the course of Getúlio’s dictatorship.

² Arthur Ramos comments this period calling it “the conspiracy of silence”.

The researches in Pernambuco within this ambit were characterized by the monographic way of writing, with a strong emphasis on the exegesis of the cosmological contents of African-Brazilian religions. The *Candomblés* and *Xangôs* were considered exotic religions that needed to be translated and understood from the inside. In this direction, we may say, the solid dialogue with the American School of Anthropology was already been established, which was certainly created by Gilberto Freyre, who had been Franz Boas' student. This contact will be expanded to Melville Herskovitz who, through Gilberto Freyre, will establish closed dialogue with Albino Gonçalves Fernandes and René Ribeiro. However, it is René Ribeiro who gains a scholarship to study anthropology in the United States, under the direction of Herskovitz, later becoming one of the founding members of the Anthropology Post-Graduation Program of UFPE, at Pernambuco.

It is also important to mention the influence of American anthropology over the work of the founder coordinator of this Postgraduation Program in Anthropology, the reputed researcher of African-Brazilian religions: Roberto Motta, who worked under the supervision of Robert Murphy, at the Columbia University.

Founded in 1977, under the coordination of Roberto Motta, the Anthropology Postgraduation Program had its first ensemble of master dissertations concerning religion in the eighties, between 1983 and 1988, with a defense each year. Given the fact that the history of anthropology in Pernambuco was strongly marked by the concern over the African religions, with a comprehension about these influenced by the early American anthropology, the first remark to be made on this first decade is the existence of only one dissertation about African-Brazilian religion: *Family of Saint within some houses of cult in Olinda: kinship and conflict (A Família de Santo em Alguns Terreiros de Olinda: parentesco e conflito)*, by Maria do Socorro Mendonça, oriented by Roberto Motta. This dissertation must be relighted because it is the only one that deals with African-religion topic among a wide range of religious objects of study.

Another aspect of diversity among the dissertations defended during this first decade concerns the place where the research is undertaken, which changes in terms of field and city, and also regarding various states of north and northeast (Acre, Piauí, for example).

So that, a first brief analyses about the approach over the topic religion within these dissertation gives evidence of a variety of chosen objects of study. At the same time, it is also remarkable the diversity of regions the students come from: they come from the North and, mainly from the Northeast, not only from Pernambuco. It could be put forward as a hypothesis of the insufficient academic production on the African-Brazilian religions, the social stigma – we could say, the social repulse –, here included the state media, to inform and lean over the themes related to the African religious contribution, especially in the northeast. Besides that, we could suppose the “fear of the unknown”, since we are dealing here with religions imagined by the common sense as carriers of evil effects for those who come close to the faithful and the spiritual leader without the intention of becoming an adept. Another fear that deserves to be marked is the possibility to become distrusted by the society for visiting repeatedly the *terreiros* (*houses of cult*), even under the justification of studying religious traditions.

Another important remark is that the anthropological support do not characterizes or gives particular identity to the dissertations mentioned above, been understood by the word “support” the analytical approach to the religious cosmologies expressed through rites and specific beliefs, developed predominantly through the concept of culture (cf. Montero, 1992).³ What is noticed, on the contrary, is that the dissertations defended in the course of this first decade developed a strong subject concern more incorporated to sociology or social logic than to cultural analysis contributions. Such concern is related to religious affiliation and its relation with matters referring to social structures and social processes, such as migrations and the economic and social pressures inherent to the material conditions of existence. Religious affiliation is also analyzed as a problem, on account of the social and ideological consequences of this phenomenon.

² See MONTERO, Paula. “Religiões e dilemas da sociedade brasileira”. in MICELI, Sergio (org.) (1999) *O que ler na Ciência Social Brasileira* (1970 - 1995) - Antropologia (vol 1). São Paulo: Editora Sumaré, ANPOCS-CAPES,

The reasons for such direction may be found in the strong influence of Marxist approach at the anthropology and sociology programs of the UFPE by these seventies and eighties, which was strengthened through new partnerships, in a national level, between these programs and the National Museum (Museu Nacional), undertaken by the researchers Moacir Palmeira and José Sergio Leite Lopes, who were concerned with work relations, rural transformations and the situation of the rural worker in Pernambuco. This intellectual and institutional association with the National Museum (Museu Nacional), by reason of researches on peasants and workers in Pernambuco, certainly brought up new topics and theoretical adhesions to local scene. For instance, the researches on religion, with cultural perspective, began to compete with investigations on social classes, incorporating Marxist interpretation in the formulation of its inquiry matters.

Besides that, there is also the strong influence suffered by Roberto Motta from the cultural materialism and its uses by Robert Murphy and Robert Lowie. We shouldn't forget that the adhesion to Marxism may be related to the national political events. Brazil was going through military dictatorship and the armed and unarmed reaction to it were taking place both in the cities and in the country, and occurring likewise inside the universities, among researchers, lecturers and students.

Never the less there are three important dissertations properly formed through the key concept of culture, having the rituals, the beliefs and the festival as the selected concepts and categories by which the analysis of the religious phenomenon is made. Those are the works of Clodomir Monteiro da Silva, entitled *The Palace of Juramidán Holy Daime, a ritual of transcendence and purification* (*O Palácio de Juramidán Santo Daime: um ritual de transcendência e despoluição*), oriented by Roberto Motta; of Bartolomeu Figueirôa de Medeiros, *Our Lady of Carmo, a shining lady of many faces and her festival* (*Nossa Senhora do Carmo do Recife: a brilhante senhora dos muitos rostos e sua Festa*), also oriented by Roberto Motta. The third one is a dissertation about the Assembly of God, *Transe and Extasis* (*Tranxe ou Transa*), written by Hulda Helena Stadler, oriented by Judith Hoffnagel. Moreover, an important remark on the works of Stadler and Monteiro da Silva concerns

the arrangement of anthropological support – the exegesis of the cosmology, emphasizing the rituals and beliefs as analytical categories – and a sociological analysis, which relates religious phenomenon to the large-scale social structures and processes. Clodomir Monteiro da Silva's dissertation was perhaps the first work on the *Holy Daimé* in a national level, given the reason that *the Daimé* was still, at the time, a relatively new object in the anthropological field of studies. Without question, the work was one of the first researches on ayahuasca, long before this plant has become one of the "Brazilian manias".

Therefore, along the first decade, the dissertations concerning religion portrayed a variety of origins, signaling perhaps an inclination of this Anthropology Post-Graduation Program to an inter-regional or even national reach. The varieties of religious traditions studied, as well as the study of the various themes connected to these traditions, contrast, as we have seen, with the training of the majority of the "religion anthropologists" who worked at the early times of the Program. Indeed, among the six doctors or masters who did supervision on studies about religion, three of them investigated in their thesis the African-Brazilian Cults of Recife, especially the *Xangô*⁴ (René Ribeiro, Roberto Motta and Maria do Carmo Brandão); and only one defended a thesis on the Pentecostal Protestantism (Judith Hoffnagel). It expected that the production would mainly reflect the African source dimension which lies in the religious field of Recife, but such tendency didn't occur.

Could be inquired if, instead of specialize the studies on religion through the exclusive direction to African-Brazilian topics, the early masters and doctors mentioned above didn't create "schools" in order to respect the students' tendency concerning the research subject choice? What the facts reveal is that these researchers sustained a wide spectrum of topics and subjects which were institutionally crystallized as center of research, entitled Center of Popular Religions – by the way, the first Center of Research that had a central role in

⁴ Xangô means the name of the ioruba-nagô tradition in Recife. Nowadays, on account of babás and iás who have been doing *refoundings* in *terreiros* from Bahia, the name *Candomblé* is been introduced, because of the influence brought by the houses of cult from this state.

the foundation of the Postgraduate Program in Anthropology at the Federal University of Pernambuco.

Along the next decade – from the nineties till 2000 –, the periodicity of defenses is intensified as well as the diversity of subjects, with new topics. It is certainly a generation of works marked by the multiplicity of subjects, elaborated in relations with others “minor” topics such as: gender, healing, popular culture, identity etc. However, inside the news are the continuities which were represented by the works on Catholicism, festivals and religious affiliation, this last topic been adorned at this time with questions related to power, gender and healing.

In the course of this generation, especially under the supervision of the researchers Roberto Motta and Maria do Carmo Brandão, the output of thesis on African-Brazilian religions is consolidated as a research topic at the Program. The relations with topics like gender, healing, kinship, power, cultural patrimony, and, by the end of the decade, the matter of the Negro, became prominent. Somehow we are back to the origins of anthropology in Pernambuco.

In order to give full account of how the studies concerning religion, along this decade, will be related with the most different topics, we have the following new studies, oriented by researchers not always members of the Center of Popular Religions: The speech of the medium and the doctor: historical construction of the discourse of the doctor and the Umbanda healer (*A Fala do Mêdium e do Doutor: a construção histórica do discurso médico e umbandista*), by Moab D. Acioli, which analyzed the discourse of the professional doctor and the one by the “voodoo healer” as symbolic mediators, both situated in a conflict trying to seek supremacy, persuasion mechanisms and social adaptation. This work was oriented by Professor Danielle Perin R. Pita, who belongs to the *Research Center of Imaginary* (Centro de Pesquisa do Imaginário). Following this, by the order of sequence, we have the first dissertation about Judaism and social identity in Pernambuco, defended by Tânia Kaufman; the researches on religion and symptomatology related to the African-Brazilian cults continue, reassuming and recontextualizing René Ribeiro’s idea and the debate attempted by the others “anthropologists doctors”

of the so called “Recife School”, who rejected the alleged straight correlation between mental illness and the religious practice of the *Xangô/Candomblé* and the *Umbanda*.

By the way, another characteristic of our Program was consolidated during this decade: if its initial phase was marked by the work of the psychiatrists doctors who became anthropologists – as we have seen above –, the recent pursuit made by these professionals and the ones from psychology towards our Master, intensified in the nineties, seems to follow the major tendency from the early times of the so called “Recife School”: the one that tries to adapt the knowledge that comes from the sciences of human behavior to the one produced by cultural influences, which, it is important to stress, attend this behavior and had strong influence upon it.

Other tendencies which were announced and stayed on: the first one, religion and cultural patrimony, a relation studied through the multicultural and multiethnic baroque arrangements present at the tercentenary festival of Our Lady of Pleasures (Nossa Senhora dos Prazeres), which happens in the metropolitan area of Recife – a dissertation defended by Dr. Alexandre Fernandes Correa, a lecturer nowadays at the UFMA and one of the first to develop contributions to the Brazilian anthropological thought on the subject of cultural patrimony – the others: religion, relations between sacred and profane kinship and power relations in African-Brazilian cults.

It is also important to mention are the first studies on the use and ritual of the *Jurema* sacred drink, a familiar feature of the native *Torés*, the *Umbanda* and the *Xangôs* of Recife, which were inaugurated by the dissertation of Clélia Moreira Pinto, oriented by Maria do Carmo Brandão. At this period we will have the first dissertation on the topic of Hare Khrisna Community. The decade ends with a diversity of works concerning African-Brazilian religions – one of these with a focus on the homosexual practices in the religious setting, by Felipe Rios do Nascimento; another, by Ulisses Raphael de Menezes, around the complex religious field of a city located in the state of Alagoas; two dissertations dealing with the *kardecista* spiritualism, and other one studies a Chinese religion in Brazil, the Soka Gatai, within the orientalist inclination. By the end of the nineties, a new approach appears:

the relation between religions and popular culture. All of these subjects will be consolidated as research topics studied by the Program.

About the works related to religion and popular culture, after the turning of the century, the ones oriented by Bartolomeu Tito Figueirôa de Medeiros are the leading: the dissertation of José Artur Tavares de Brito about the Pilgrimage of Land (*Romarias da Terra*) that takes place in the arid interiors of Pernambuco, the work of Helena Tenderinni “*Na Pisada do Galope...*”, which analyzes the frolic of *Cavalo Marinho*, including the study of “personages” with high religious density inserted along the festive reunion; and the one by Sêrvia Sumaia Vieira, about the *maracatu de orquestra*, which displays in an eloquent manner the crossing between the play and ascetic behaviors that takes place during the carnival.

By the side of these hybrid topics, we also had dissertations that considered the religious phenomena itself and its internal issues as the center of interest. One of the first was the work on catholic religion and death, by Mísia Lins. Also important are the ones that analyzed religious phenomenon relating it with the matter of religious market, by the way a much discussed topic in the field of socio-anthropological investigation at the time. On the other hand, continuing the discussion about religious affiliation, which had been a topic in the first generation of works, we had one of the first dissertations about the Universal Church Kingdom of God, in the national circuit: “Emotion, Magic, Ethics and Rationalization: the various faces of the Universal Church Kingdom of God”, by Roberta Bivar Carneiro Campos. This work also combined the approaches of sociology and anthropology. This combination was seen as a promising tendency toward a renewing of the way religious phenomenon was been thought in Brazil, which can be found in the works of Cecilia Mariz and Wilson Gomes by the nineties (Montero, P., 1999). Therefore, it is important to point out the influence of Cecilia Mariz at this time, for the reason of her presence at the UFPE as a lecturer.

In the next generation, an unclosed decade yet – from 2000 to 2005 –, we have knowledge of more continuities, instead of novelties. Some topics are consolidated and others become “new” anthropologies. The strong relation with the ethnic studies diversifies the works about the African religions, bringing up matters related to African identity, native peoples from Amazon

and Pernambuco and the ancient communities of fugitive Negro slaves, analyzed through the researches undertaken by Bartolomeu Tito Figueirôa de Medeiros and some of his orientations, like the work done by Nilton César de Paula about the catholic pastoral care and its repercussion among the native peoples inhabiting the High Black River. Also important are the orientations given by Maria do Carmo Brandão, crossing the *Tambor de Mina* from Maranhão with the feminine prestige (the dissertation by Claudia Rejane M. Gouveia), an ethnography of the *mina* tradition in Pará (the dissertation by Taíssa Tavernard de Luca), and a work about religion and Negro conscience in an African-Brazilian group in Ceará, by Ana Claudia Rodrigues.

As continuity, we have the crossed topic of religion and gender, and if this topic had been a main characteristic of the African-Brazilian studies, now will also be related to studies about Catholicism, as in the dissertation of Guilhermina D'Arc about feminine leadership in the groups of Catholic Charismatic Revival in Recife. The topics of religion and healing, formerly studied with a marked emphasis in the African-Brazilian groups, will be expanded to studies about neopentecostalism: that's the case of the research about healing in the Universal Church Kingdom of God, by Eduardo Henrique A. de Gusmão. Both dissertations were oriented by Bartolomeu Tito; the religions that were generally named of "New Age" during the eighties, are studied at the present time with a more detailed terminology, as shown by the research on Wicca, neopagan religion. Judaism is consolidated as a topic by four dissertations defended during that period, under the orientation of the visiting Professor, Dra. Tânia Kauffman, founder of the Jewish Cultural Center located in the city of Recife, which functions at the restored building of the first Jewish temple built in the American Continent.

On the other hand, the matter of the relation between the protestant ethos and Brazilian culture appears as a research topic in the works of Cristhiany Moraes de Queiroz, by the supervision of Roberta Bivar Carneiro Campos, which analyzed the schism of the Anglican Church in Recife, by the way, a religious group somehow insufficiently investigated by Brazilian anthropology, and also, in the dissertation of Rosa Maria de Aquino on

music in the Presbyterian Church, which had as a leading matter the “whitening movement” that goes on in these cults. Another important aspect concerns the diversity of researches about African-Brazilian groups undertaken in different states (Rio Grande do Sul, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Pará, Maranhão, etc.), and a strong interest on the African-Brazilian religious organization and its relation with the expansion and recrudescence of these groups, a research topic found in several dissertations oriented by Roberto Motta.

In order to close, but not end, what is noticed is that the production of dissertations in the Anthropology Postgraduation Program at the UFPE has, since the Program foundation, displayed an expressive opening to the most different religions, a diversity also shown when concerning the regions of the country and the theoretical approaches used, both sociological and anthropological. If, on one hand, a “school” was not created, on the other, since its outset, this Program production exhibited a strong synchrony with the dynamics of Brazilian religious field and the wider social processes. In this direction, the matters related to *gender* and *healing* and, in a more visible fashion, the matter of the Negro and the African source religions, been present as topic researches in the dissertations of this Anthropology Postgraduation Program, express the current social requires. What is felt is that this academic production indicates that religion remains the symbolic mean by which the social processes are revealed and acquire social strength.

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Recife, June 2007.

(Translated by Eduardo Henrique de Gusmão
and Roberta Bivar Carneiro Campos)

