

# The Mechanics of Religious Synthesis in the Barquinha Religion

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## Resumo

Este artigo apresenta um esboço inicial que pretende explorar os mecanismos pelos quais diferentes tradições religiosas que influenciam a religião Barquinha" têm sido sintetizados. Barquinha é uma igreja Cristã recentemente fundada na Amazônia que usa "Ayahuasca" (chamado Santo Daime) como um sacramento central e possessão espiritual vinda da tradição Afro-brasileira. A análise distingue a contribuição diferencial e fusão das diversas tradições nos rituais e também na cosmologia.

## Abstract

This paper provides an initial outline which intends to explore the mechanics by which the different religious traditions that inform the *Barquinha* religion have been synthesized. *Barquinha* is a recently founded Christian church in the Brazilian Amazon that uses Ayahuasca (called *Santo Daime*) as a central sacrament and also spirit-possession derived from the AfroBrazilian tradition. The analysis distinguishes the differential contribution and fusion of the several traditions in the rituals, and also in the cosmology.

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## Introduction

The Barquinha religion has been variously identified as *syncretic* (e.g. Mercante 2002) and also as *eclectic* (e.g. Mercante 2002; Sena Araújo 1999). This paper<sup>1</sup> intends to expand upon this program, especially by offering more discussion as regards to the *mechanics* of syncretism and eclecticism. That is, the paper highlights, in accordance with Shaw & Stewart (1994:7), that an "interesting line of study is to focus upon *processes* of religious synthesis and upon *discourses* of syncretism" (original italics). In particular, this paper focuses on the

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Peter Gose for reading and helpfully commenting on a draft of this paper.

processes and synchronic mechanics by which elements of different traditions are involved in the *corpus* of knowledge and practices. The paper takes for granted that the Barquinha is a new and original synthesis and intends to show just *how* the traditions have been fused.

Agency is a primary source of synthesis and interpretation in the Barquinha. The agency of leaders appears to have been the most influential. The Barquinha churches do not have a centralized authority (Mercante 2003), as well as a relatively shallow history and a limited geographical expansion. In addition to the reinterpretation and use of elements derived from pre-existing traditions, a number of original innovations can be traced to distinct moments and persons. The charismatic leaders of each church have incorporated their own modifications to the architecture, rituals and other elements of the *corpus*. Some of these have been continued with the successive opening of new churches, some have been discontinued, and others have been modified. They are also ongoing. For example, in April 2003, I witnessed a new addition to the uniform that is used in one of the Barquinha churches. The Barquinha religion is also subject to ongoing supernatural revelations, which have also determined much of the current *corpus*. Further ethnography is required to trace with more precision these different developments and their mutual influences.

This paper, therefore, will devote attention to just one aspect of the fruitful discussion concerning the complex process of religious fusion, which can be supported by the preliminary fieldwork of the author. Unfortunately, the history of the church and of its rituals will not be analyzed here, nor the identification of the sources for many innovations and incorporations. It is clearly the case in the Barquinha that all traditions have been resignified and have mutually influenced each other (such as in the identification of Catholic saints with West African *orixás*). It is also clear that there are many original elements particular to this religion. The local rhetoric distinguishes traditions at times, and other times they are fused in a singular expression. A general lack of commentary concerning the particular moment that a certain incorporation or adjustment was made to the *corpus* is also common, which may not be intentional, but may give an effect of timelessness. Therefore, the church-members' sense of boundaries between the traditions and of the relative presence of original elements is a matter of ongoing research, and will require a finer analysis at a later date.

Instead, the analysis presented here will use a synchronic perspective, in an attempt to show how each tradition plays its part within each ritual and physical space. Thus, the traditions will

be fictitiously considered as given, so that they can be analytically contrasted one to the other. Although church members do sometimes make explicit the origin of a trait, in most cases this is left uncommented. Thus, most of the distinctions that are recognized here respond to a classification given by the author, on the basis of analogy of traits that are found in the nurturing traditions. For example, the 'Hail Mary' prayer, which is commonly prayed throughout rituals in the Barquinha, is assumed by the author to have been incorporated from the Roman Catholic liturgy; fieldnotes do not record a church member explicitly having declared this to be the case. Thus, rather than trace the origins of incorporations, fusions and adjustments, this paper will attempt to see how they are positioned *vis-à-vis* each other in the ritual practices and within the inclusive cosmology. Currently, this is an analytical exercise, as the actual participants' sense of the quality of the relationships between the traditions is a matter of further research.

The paper consists of two sections. In the first section analysis will be offered concerning the differential contribution that elements of each tradition have in the rituals, as well as the differential contribution of two fundamental categories of participants (*fardados*<sup>2</sup> and spirits). Thus, the first section places the emphasis on the ritual practices. The second section will consider the knowledge and cosmological understandings, and how synthesis in the cosmology has been achieved. The religion is self-defined as Christian, and there appears to be hegemony of Catholic knowledge and worldview. This is particularly evident in the hierarchy of beings that compose the cosmology, and in the soteriological explanations. There is also an active work of baptizing and christianizing entities. Thus, entities which may have an ambivalent axiological standing in Amerindian cosmologies (such as river dolphins or mermaids (see Luna & Amaringo 1999)) -which includes their being perceived to be dangerous- are being pacified and converted to Christian doctrine. At the same time, though, other aspects of the cosmology remain coherent with Amazonian Amerindian perceptions, such as the existence of three basic realms: Sky, Forest (Land) and Underwater (Luna & Amaringo 1999).

The most salient Amerindian contribution, though, is the sacramental use of Ayahuasca (called *Santo Daime*), which plays a fundamental role in facilitating access to spiritual knowledge and cleansing. A similar situation of valuing the West African tradition, in order to

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2 Members of the church are referred to by this term, which denotes the use of a uniform (*farda* in Portuguese).

fulfill a Christian mission, can also be detected. Generally speaking, spirit-possession is one of the vehicles of the extension of the Barquinha mission; a mission which effectively involves a joint participation of all cosmological realms. Through spirit-possession, Spirit-Guides offer moral counseling, teachings, healing and other forms of assistance to participants, which typically involve a visible, performative and materially mediated service. Spirit-Guides are provided with a special room and the necessary paraphernalia to perform this service, which occupies a central concern of participants and visitors, and has become an identifying trait of this religion. The Spirit-Guides may also be seen providing this service in other spaces of the church grounds. Thus, the analyst can perceive that African techniques and knowledge are used to fulfill the Christian mission of the church.

Generally speaking, then, it would seem that the Amerindian and African traditions have been incorporated as adjunct vehicles for fulfilling the Christian mission, in at least two basic areas of extension: moral development and ultimate salvation, and a healing-and-counseling service for immediate concerns. Thus, the mode of incorporation of these diverse elements does not appear to be an expression of cultural resistance, antagonism or subversion. Instead, it is more likely that church-members perceive them as useful and self-validating contributions. They imply a valorization of these traditions, and are given a prominent ritual role. However, they remain subordinate to and transformed by the Christian agenda.

It is interesting to note that, unlike in Candomblé, the West African *orixás* do not possess mediums. Instead, mediums only lend their bodies to unsaved beings. Primarily, this is probably coherent to the mission of charity, which is fundamental to this religion. That is, mediums are providing charity for the beings by allowing them to use the mediums' bodies (Mercante 2002). Participants explain this, though, using a metaphor of 'energy', which directly describes the subjective possession experience. Mediums can only just withstand the energy of the irradiation (to use a locally relevant and more precise term) of the Spirit-Guides, who are yet unsaved. They would not be able to contain the energy of the powerful and divine *orixás*. This stands in contrast to Candomblé, where the intense ecstatic experience of being possessed by the *orixá* is a self-justifying reason for participation (which is also viewed as an obligation (Carneiro s.d.)). In the Barquinha, though, the medium is primarily performing charity, allowing the Spirit-Guide to irradiate the body. It seems that there is an 'other-orientedness' inherent to Barquinha ethics. Coherently the beings that irradiate the

mediums do so, further, in order to provide their own service of charity and mediation. Whereas the *orixás* deal quite directly with pure spiritual forces, the Spirit-Guides attend to material effects and reflections of spiritual activity, and they themselves operate by refraction through the medium's matter –and have a jurisdiction which is focused on helping people deal with concrete daily difficulties and suffering.

Barquinha syncretism appears to involve a blurred rhetoric, where at times the different origins are explicitly recognized, but on the other hand the persistent synthesizing appears to construct the cosmology and practices as part of a unique coherent whole. The inclusive cosmology would also tend to justify a perception that the traditions are in fundamental accord with each other. Although, for example, there is a basic spacialization and specialization principle that orders the co-presence of elements of the different traditions, these are neither adhered to rigidly, nor imply an emphasis on difference. Instead, it seems that participants tend to construct an understanding that is inclusive and coherent. Especially, each tradition appears to provide a distinct contribution, which participants probably perceive as part of a whole that is being realized in the Barquinha. Sena Araújo (1999) has suggested thinking of this process as a “cosmology undergoing construction”.

The reader should note that the paper is based on preliminary fieldwork, and thus, is mostly an incipient proposal of a useful analytical strategy to pursue, rather than a conclusive analysis. In particular, the highlights of this paper need to be further contrasted with the understandings of participants themselves to assess the plausibility of the analysis.

### ***Brief contextualization of the Barquinha***

The Barquinha religion was founded by Daniel Pereira de Mattos (known by followers as Frei Daniel) in 1945 in the then outskirts of the city of Rio Branco, in the state of Acre in the Brazilian Amazon region (Sena Araújo 1999). Before this, Frei Daniel had been a member of the church of his friend, Raimundo Irineu Serra (known by followers as Mestre Irineu)<sup>3</sup>, who in the 1930s founded the first Christian church to use Ayahuasca (called *Santo Daime* in this context) as a central sacrament, but which also incorporates elements of other traditions, such as the esoteric teachings of the *Círculo Esotérico de Comunhão do Pensamento*, a group based in São Paulo. Ayahuasca is a widely used entheogenic tea, which has been

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3 Further data on the church and legacy of Mestre Irineu can be found in Bolsanello (1995), Mac Rae (1992), Fróes (1983), Groisman (1999), Labate & Sena Araújo (2002) and others.

used for sacramental purposes by Western Amazonian Indians for thousands of years (see e.g. Harner 1973; Metzner 1999).

In addition to the Santo Daime religion founded by Mestre Irineu, the other basic founding religious matrix of the Barquinha is the popular devotional rural Catholicism of Brazil. After this, Frei Daniel successively permitted the inclusion of practices from other religious traditions, most notably spirit-possession, according to the AfroBrazilian matrix (especially, and increasingly, according to Umbanda). Further, the practice and notion of Spiritism is now fundamental to the Barquinha cosmology and ethics. Some of the central categories of spirits which assist the mission are the *Pretos Velhos* (the spirits of former Black slaves that lived in Brazil), *Caboclos* (the spirits of fiercely independent indians), *Encantados* (an array of mythical beings, such as mermaids, dolphins, wood spirits, dragons, and others), amongst several others.

Several years after his passing away, some of his disciples successively opened more Barquinha churches. Each of these disciples made successive adjustments to the rituals, practices and architecture. The fieldwork site of the author is the most recently opened church, called the *Centro Espírita e Obras de Caridade Príncipe Espadarte* (referred to in this paper as the Príncipe Espadarte). It was opened in 1994 by one of the most senior and highly respected friends of Frei Daniel and his principal medium, Francisca Gabriel dos Campos Nascimento (known by followers as Madrinha Chica Gabriel) (Sena Araújo 1999). Further data on the Barquinha can be found in Sena Araújo (1999), Mercante (2002, 2003), Queiroz (Araújo de 1999), Paskoali (1998), A Barquinha (2004) and other sources.

Another preliminary note needs to be made regarding spirit-possession. It was explained to me by a *fardado* that full possession does not occur in the Barquinha, as the medium would be unable to withstand the experience. Instead, the spirit only partially occupies the body of the medium, a process locally known as 'irradiation' (*irradiação*).

## Section 1: Synthetic rituals

### *Rituals*

Generally speaking, the different religious traditions that inform the Barquinha practices are harmonized in a particular way in which there is a tendency to allow a distinctive contribution from each. However, this is always performed within a common *locus* which the traditions



share (say, the ritual, or the physical space, for example). Thus, segregation is not enforced. Instead, there tends to be integration. Grossly, the different traditions are juxtaposed within a common territory, rather than segregated to a distinct territory of their own. The juxtaposition runs along a general line of specialization of expertise, and so there is no conflict of the distinct contribution of each tradition within that *locus*.

However, the analyst can perceive that each tradition effectively expresses signifiers of the other traditions too. As alterity is not displaced, in many cases the traditions have been fused in very complex ways. Thus, it might be the case that participants are not entirely aware of the diverse historical origins of the elements which compose a complex, and possibly tend to see them as given wholes. As an example, I once witnessed a conversation among *fardados* in which one explained to another that a certain hymn that refers to St. Francis of Assisi, and is sung frequently in the Príncipe Espadarte, has been taken from the contemporary Roman Catholic liturgy in Brazil. The *fardado* responded with surprise and declared that he had always thought that it was a hymn that was original to the Barquinha repertoire.

Another example is a *ponto cantado*<sup>4</sup> that I once heard sung in a *gira*<sup>5</sup> in the Príncipe Espadarte, which successively announced several *Pretos Velhos* that were descending and irradiating the mediums. The *Pretos Velhos* that were being named were the ones that currently descend in the Príncipe Espadarte. I later heard this same *ponto cantado* on an Umbanda website, but naming different *Pretos Velhos*, ones that do not descend in the Príncipe Espadarte. In this example, it appears that the *ponto cantado* has been adapted to the context of the Príncipe Espadarte. The melody, most of the lyrics and the spiritual purpose has been retained. Only the names of the entities have been adjusted.

The *Instrução* ritual carried out in the main church hall can be used to illustrate how the different traditions are welded in a single ritual. During this ceremony, the liturgy essentially consists of an alternating litany of Catholic prayers that are recited in succession to the singing of *salmos*<sup>6</sup>, for several hours. This part of the ritual is performed by the *fardados* and

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4 Special songs which invoke and call upon entities to descend. The term is used in Umbanda.

5 A typical Umbanda collective ritual, in which entities are successively called to descend, according to a predetermined order of categories.

6 Hymns which are particular to the Barquinha, and have been received through revelation.

resonates of practices of devotional Catholicism. Now, another fundamental aspect of this ritual is the interspersed spontaneous descent of spirits, who irradiate mediums, and give speeches and teachings to the congregation, usually of moral content. The inclusion of spirit-possession, and their agency, is widely agreed by participants to derive historically from the West African tradition, via the AfroBrazilian religion of Umbanda. Simultaneous to this, *fardados* and other human participants have drunk *Santo Daime*, which is known to have derived from Western Amazonian Amerindian religious traditions, via the foundational act of Mestre Irineu.

Thus, in this example, each tradition provides its distinctive contribution to the ritual. In this case, generally speaking, it can be said that the Catholic tradition provides the prayers, the African tradition provides spirit-possession, and the Amerindian tradition provides the spiritual experience associated to the use of *Santo Daime*. This has already been pointed out by Sena Araújo (1999). So, there is a single ritual, but different components of the ritual can be traced to different historical origins. They are compiled together to create a unique ritual, and do not conflict with each other, as they involve a specialized contribution.

At the same time though, the analyst can perceive that each of these contributions expresses signifiers of the other traditions. For example, the *salmos* do not only contain Catholic lyrics, but also make mention of the West African *orixás* and other beings (such as the *Encantados*). The spirits, who descend to give speeches, tend to reinforce Christian ethics and knowledge. The intense spiritual experience that sometimes is revealed after drinking *Santo Daime* is called *miração*, which is a term and interpretation of the experience according to the understandings of *daimistas*<sup>7</sup>.

The integration of the different traditions within this ritual involves a process of selectivity and reinterpretation, which not only involves the contributive elements, but also those that are excluded. For example, the gender distinction in the leadership of Catholic ceremonies is not followed in the Barquinha. The Príncipe Espadarte, as an example, is run by a woman, Madrinha Chica Gabriel<sup>8</sup>. Also, when the spirits descend to give teachings, the mediums are rarely donned with a change of costume or provision of paraphernalia that identify the spirit,

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7 As members of the Santo Daime matrix are called (this term is inclusive both of Mestre Irineu's church and legacy, as well as that of Frei Daniel).

8 It is common for AfroBrazilian temples and rituals to be led by women.



as occurs in Candomblé (Carneiro s.d.), in certain rituals of Umbanda, and in other rituals of the Barquinha. Despite the drinking of *Santo Daimé*, the *maracá* (a metal rattle), which is a distinctive instrument used in the rituals established by Mestre Irineu and agreed to have derived from the Amerindian rattle commonly used during Ayahuasca ceremonies, is not used in the Barquinha.

A similar analysis can be made for rituals performed in the *terreiro*, which is an outdoor space used for certain rituals (especially dancing, and also some Umbanda rituals). In this space, Catholic icons or symbols are generally not at all present. The practices and ritual objects reminisce of the West African tradition. There is dancing, spirit-possession, playing of drums (which are only played in this space), and other elements. Yet, during the rituals, the Catholic pantheon (but not only) is remembered in prayers and lyrics of songs that also interpret the experience (such as interpreting emotions). Broadly speaking, discursive and interpretive pronouncements may contain Catholic messages (but not only), however actions are mostly of African origin. *Santo Daimé* is also drunk in these rituals. This is another case where specialization of the contribution of each tradition is compiled into a single ritual. Just like in the *Instrução*, in this case too, prayer (and lyrics), *miração* and spirit-possession (Sena Araújo 1999) are the different contributions of each tradition. Elaborating further on this idea, it might be broadly proposed that, in the Barquinha, the European tradition<sup>9</sup> has provided the greater discursive and interpretive matrix (which, however, is also due to revelation), while the African tradition has provided much of the localized materially mediated spiritual practices (but not all, some are indeed original), and the Amerindian contribution is, especially but not only, the intense hermeneutic experience of immersion into the spiritual world sometimes revealed by the *Santo Daimé*<sup>10</sup>.

### ***Iconography and use of spaces***

It is now useful to focus on the iconography of the liturgical spaces, which also presents an interesting canon that organizes the use of the space and serves as a representation of the celestial hierarchy.

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9 Catholicism, Spiritism and the *Círculo Esotérico de Comunhão do Pensamento* (Sena Araújo 1999).

10 This is a very broad categorization, of course. As has been mentioned previously, the Barquinha religion does not tend to rigidly segregate the traditions, and so there is much boundary crossing concerning the pattern which has just been outlined.

Both the main church hall and also the *Congá* room (where the healing entities attend clients<sup>11</sup>) are adorned with a variety of iconographic representations and objects which are sometimes understood by participants to have their origin in several religious traditions. Such is the case of representations of entities that have undergone a baptism after they joined the Barquinha mission. Generally speaking, though, the main church hall was pointed out to me as “the Catholic area”, a description that coincides with the pervasive iconography. In the Príncipe Espadarte, it is adorned with the Stations of the Cross, large paintings of several Catholic saints represented according to classical iconographic canons, and notably has a large shrine on the wall facing the entrance which is packed with statues and pictures of saints, members of the Holy Family and angels, as well as candles, flowers and other elements. They have a prominent and central position, in terms of spatial localization. This same aesthetic principle can be found in other Barquinha churches (see Sena Araújo 1999; Paskoali 1998).

However, in the Príncipe Espadarte, the main hall also has images that refer to other religious traditions, such as mermaids and sea creatures, representations of the *orixás*, as well as representations of *Pretos Velhos* and other entities (Mercante 2002). Now, an important issue to note is that the icons of different traditions are not positioned randomly. Instead, in general, Catholic representations occupy higher positions, and are not typically seen on the ground. In contrast, objects of pagan origins are most commonly placed below the Catholic ones (see for e.g. Mercante 2002). This indicates that *fardados* have an awareness of the different origins, despite the inclusive cosmology which assigns them a certain spatial position within a unified pantheon. The explanation for the positioning given by Mercante (2002) is that the pagan elements are not linked to Jesus *through Catholicism*, but have been specially baptized to work for Jesus. This appears to suggest a hegemonic relationship among the traditions. Although, currently, many formerly pagan entities are baptized, converted and work for Jesus, they are placed on a lower position in respect to entities that belong to the classic Catholic hagiography.

This same aesthetic canon is repeated in the *Congá* room. In this room, there are several cabinets or shrines where each healing Spirit-Guide successively attends clients in the *Obras de Caridade* ritual, which occurs on Saturday evenings. These cabinets have fundamentally

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11 The term ‘client’ is used in a technical sense, as in Kleinman (1980).

two sections for placing images. The top shelf, which is generally dominated by Catholic images (such as crosses and statues of saints), and the floor or near floor, where the pagan iconographic references are placed (such as pieces of iron representing the *orixás*, statues of *Pretos Velhos*, beads, etc.) (Sena Araújo 1999; Mercante 2002). Sena Araújo (1999:135) includes a quote from a *fardado*, who explains that the entities that occupy the higher celestial realms are placed above, and the images that refer to the entities of the lower cosmological realms are placed below. Therefore, for the *fardados*, the iconographic spatial principle mirrors the cosmological cartography. A quick conclusion can be drawn. The cosmological realms parallel the sociological colonial context of Catholic hegemony over the other religious traditions.

In the Barquinha, the cosmological realms are called *Mistérios*. They are essentially three: *Céu* (Heaven), *Terra* (Earth) and *Mar* (Sea). Sena Araújo (1999) explains that there is a hierarchy among the *Mistérios*. *Terra* and *Mar* are below *Céu*. In accordance with the principle that was inferred before, although ranked, the different traditions are valued as providing inherently unique benefits for the general mission. A differential expertise is attributed to the entities that occupy the different realms. According to Sena Araújo (1999), Catholic saints occupy the higher realms, whereas *Pretos Velhos*, *Caboclos* and sea creatures occupy the lower realms. More discussion concerning this ordering of the entities and the logic that underlies it is provided further below, in the section on cosmology. However, at this moment it is useful to focus on how this differential ranking is played out in the actual ritual performances, in order to perceive the differential contribution that is provided by the different beings.

When this iconographic canon is placed into the context of ritual performances in the Príncipe Espadarte, while the *Congá* is being used in the *Obras de Caridade*, it is notable that the Catholic representations end up occupying the spatial periphery of the therapeutic action, from a horizontal point of view. Secondly, while the Spirit-Guides (who come from the lower cosmological realms) are at work, much pragmatic use is made of the pagan elements, such as many of the objects used in the treatments, and the paraphernalia of the Spirit-Guides themselves. It is especially notable that the center of the room is gradually covered with *pontos riscados*, which are magical drawings with candles lit on top that are understood to have a therapeutic effect, and are progressively added throughout the evening by the

healers. Thus, while the healers are attending clients, despite the Catholic entities occupying higher celestial planes in the cosmological pyramid and their icons occupying higher spatial positions from a vertical point of view, the pagan expertise and knowledge of the *Preto Velhos* quite literally occupies the center stage. From the horizontal perspective, the Catholic icons become peripheral, and the center of the room is busy with the work and knowledge of the Spirit-Guides. Moreover, the central axial element of the room is the *Pedra de Xangô*, a stone with a candle lit on top that is dedicated to the *orixá* Xangô. Interestingly, the Catholic syncretization of Xangô at this time is left mute<sup>12</sup>.

The clients come to receive assistance for dealing with a variety of concerns. These include health problems, emotional difficulties, and social relationship strains, as well as the effects of black magic or of evil or underdeveloped spirits. Generally speaking, these are very specific individual concerns, which are related to the ongoing flow of the clients' daily lives. From this, it can be inferred that part of the specific expertise that the Spirit-Guides have to offer is a therapeutic mediation for resolving immediate and specific practical concerns. The Spirit-Guides offer a service that includes a lot of *doing* and performance. Their collaboration with the mission is very visible, highly enacted and focalized. During the *Obras de Caridade* service, this expertise of the Spirit-Guides is given a central and prominent attention within the *Congá* room.

This can be contrasted to the ritual actions that are simultaneously occurring within the main church hall, during the *Obras de Caridade*, while the clients are being attended in the *Congá*. In this case, the congregation of *fardados* and other participants remain seated for several hours, essentially praying and singing *salmos* intermittently. They have drunk *Santo Daime* and are expected to focus on their own spiritual development and needs. They should be attempting to seek their increasing moral conversion, forgiveness of sins, and working towards their ultimate salvation. Generally speaking, the *salmos* and Catholic prayers will make ongoing reference to the highest of entities. These entities do not irradiate mediums. In this case, the iconographic dominance of the Catholic hagiography is mirrored to a high degree in the ritual actions. Although there is still a presence of alterity, it should be noted how the dominance of the Catholic element is related to the intentions of this section of the

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Peter Gose (personal communication) for drawing my attention to this 'center-periphery vs. vertical' use of space.

ritual. The Catholic hierarchy do not relate to the participants through performance but through internal revelation and insights.

On a larger scale, therefore, the difference in the activities of each room that is used in the *Obras de Caridade* ritual also reflects Sena Araújo's (1999) seminal insight, developed further here, by which the West African tradition offers materially mediated spiritual practices, whereas the Catholic-Amerindian contribution is the discursive-hermeneutic experience. According to Kiernan (1994), Zulu Zionism harnesses the resources of Christianity to satisfy African concerns with health and well-being. Kiernan suggests that in that religious complex, "while the healing synthesis is incontrovertibly Christian, it permits the conditions on which it operates to be interpreted within an African worldview. Only the problem is African; the answer is Christian" (Kiernan 1994:82). The Barquinha would appear to offer the inverse situation. The dominant worldview and concerns are viewed and interpreted through the Christian prism, but for many cases, the solutions and strategies used to address them are African and also Amerindian, considering the central role assigned to *Santo Daime*.

It should be stressed that this Amerindian contribution is quite central. For the *fardados*, *Santo Daime* is a teacher and sacrament. It can heal, cure, purge and cleanse both material and spiritual matters. It may allow the participant to unveil, and have access to, spiritual realms and direct teachings. *Santo Daime* receives a ritual treatment that equates it to other divine entities. For example, a candle is always lit when it is being served (as also occurs when the Spirit-Guides descend). Also, the objects used for making and serving *Santo Daime* are never used for other purposes. And it is served in all rituals. Alongside Catholic prayers, it appears to be the only other constant presence in any ritual. Thus, although Christianity structures and interprets the phenomenological experience of *Santo Daime*, it should be noted that this vehicle for addressing the Christian concerns of the participant is originally Amerindian. In my own case, the *Pretos Velhos* that I consulted with during the *Obras de Caridade* ceremony always enquired whether I had drunk *Santo Daime*. Thus, the entities themselves (former pagans, of African descent) validate the central importance of this sacrament, and its Christian use. The Amerindian tradition may be present in other important ways, such as providing the knowledge of three cosmological realms.

## ***Participants***

It has been suggested above that the traditions very broadly provide a differential, but complimentary, contribution to the rituals. This same distinction can be found in the differential participation of humans and spirits in the ceremonies. Already, in the *Obras de Caridade*, it has been noted how *fardados* and other human participants are expected to remain in the main church hall sustaining this part of the ceremony. For the most part, the Spirit-Guides, on the other hand, are in the *Congá* attending clients<sup>13</sup>.

Let us return to the example of the *Instrução* ritual. In this ceremony, the descent of spirits is a spontaneous occurrence, and is not predetermined by the leaders of the ceremony. Typically, the arrival of a spirit is announced by the whistling and loud whooshing sounds produced by the medium. Once the prayers that are being recited are finished or the *salmo* has been completed, an assistant (who does not incorporate a spirit) will place a microphone near the medium, and the spirit will give a speech, usually of moral content. When the speech is finished and the spirit leaves the body of the medium, the litany of prayers and *salmos* is continued from the exact place it was left, until another spirit descends to give a speech, and so on. It can be seen that the spontaneous interruption by the beings from the spirit realms is successfully accommodated into the otherwise predetermined sequential order of the session. Broadly speaking, the spirits provide teachings, and the human participants sustain the general ritual structure.

A similar situation occurs in the *Bailado* ritual. In the Príncipe Espadarte, human participants dance one behind the other in single file in a ring that surrounds a central axial element<sup>14</sup> and moves counter-clockwise<sup>15</sup>. This is the basic ritual template for participants. However, when a medium incorporates a spirit that for some reason does not or cannot adjust its dance to the general conditions for being in the ring, they will usually dance on their own in their particular individual style in the center. This is often the case of the *Pretos Velhos*, for example, who have the restricted movements of aged people.

<sup>13</sup> Though some *fardados* occupy ancillary positions, such as assisting the Spirit-Guides, guarding the gates to the church grounds, or generally overseeing other matters.

<sup>14</sup> Which in the older Barquinhas is the orchestra, and in the Príncipe Espadarte is the *Pedra de Xangô*.

<sup>15</sup> In the *Príncipe Espadarte* the genders are not interspersed, but all men dance behind each other and all women behind each other, thus the single ring is usually one-half male and one-half female. When there are too many people for one ring, women will form their own ring inside the external ring which is all male. I am under the impression that the genders are mixed in the older Barquinhas, and that they do not form single-file rings.



Thus, again it can be seen that the ritual allows for spirits to engage in actions which depart from what is the prescribed behavior for human participants; and also that a segregated space is provided for this. This is homologous to the situation of the spontaneous speeches given by spirits in the *Instrução* that are enclosed by a structured litany of prayers and *salmos*. In the one ritual, spontaneous speech is enclosed by structured speech, and in the other spontaneous action (dancing) is enclosed by structured action.

As can be seen, sustaining structured speech and behavior is the prescribed duty of the *fardados*, whereas spirits represent an autonomous force that is channeled within the structured aspects of the ritual. In effect, this is not dissimilar to what is occurring on the individual level when a medium channels a singular spirit. Thus, it would appear that a fundamental responsibility and task of the *fardados* is to materially sustain and assist the mission. It seems that, essentially, the specific jurisdiction of humans is on the material level, on the one hand to serve as vessels that channel higher spiritual forces, both as individuals and as a community.

On the other hand, embodied humans are particularly apt for physical work and so the material sustenance of the Barquinha mission is a responsibility of the *fardados*. Aside from sustaining the ritual structure, their duties include the production and storage of sufficient *Santo Daime*, the cleaning and maintenance of the church, the supply of candles and other ritual needs. So, the service that a member of the Barquinha mission can offer (whether spirit or embodied human), is also related to their existential condition.

Although this section has not strictly discussed the mechanics of syncretism, it will be seen how the distinction of the type of contribution that a member of the mission can provide is related to the religious synthesis that ideologically sustains the Barquinha cosmology, which is discussed in the following section.

## **Section 2: Synthetic cosmology**

It was explained above that there are essentially three cosmological realms, called *Mistérios*. Further, it was seen that there appears to be a distinction of the inhabitants of the realms which very grossly coincides with the cultural tradition which originally recognized these beings. That is, the Catholic saints are most definitely in the higher realms, whereas

*Encantados, Pretos Velhos, Caboclos* and others, appear to occupy the lower realms (Sena Araújo 1999).

Sociologically, this can be interpreted quickly as a residue of social hegemony. But, in addition, my fieldwork appears to indicate that this ranking may be related to the specific jurisdictions of the entities and their personal soteriological positions. This was insinuated above, and will be further developed here, when it was noted how the Spirit-Guides in the *Congá*, during the *Obras de Caridade*, offer a service which deals with very localized and concrete concerns of clients, whereas as the Catholic hierarchy invoked in the central hall tend to more abstract soteriological issues of the participants. Of course, the following analysis does not deny the workings of colonial social hegemony, but intends to place attention on the logic by which the different beings derived from the different traditions have been assigned differential jurisdictions and celestial rank.

As in mainstream Umbanda (see e.g. De G. Brown & Bick 1987:78), in the *Barquinha*, many high-ranking entities have a dual or multiple identity, in the sense that they are known by different names, according to each tradition. More precisely, though, it appears that they have a synthesized identity that selectively combines elements of the different traditions. In the *Barquinha* they may be variously invoked using the different names, though they are subjectively considered by *fardados* to be the same entity. In particular, there is a full identification of the main *orixás* of Umbanda with some Catholic saints. Already this is important to bear in mind, as it immediately means that the highest cosmological realms are, in a sense, just as well inhabited by the main *orixás* (see Sena Araújo 1999:135).

This stands in contrast to the lower beings, such as the *Encantados, Pretos Velhos* and *Caboclos*. These beings do not have identity equivalences in the different traditions. On the contrary, they stand on their own as individuals. Further, they have (ongoing) biographies. This is a very important fact. Members of the *Barquinha* (such as *Madrinha Chica Gabriel* in Mercante 2002) claim that these lower beings are purging sins and working towards their salvation (a concept which is understood in Christian terms). This is why they join the *Barquinha* mission, and voluntarily provide their collaboration.

However, the saints/*orixás* are already 'saved' (they are divine). I infer that they are in Heaven (*Céu*). They have omnipresence, and real power to combat evil. They can offer authentic spiritual protection. I am under the impression that, often, little is known about the

lives of these saints, and more is known or understood about their jurisdiction in the Heavenly Armies. A prime example is St. George, the dragon slayer. In my fieldwork, I heard no biographical references attributed to this saint, yet persistent remarks as to the conquering and triumphant power of Ogún, his *orixá* identity. Significantly, in the Barquinha, in contrast to Candomblé, the *orixás* do not possess mediums (see Krippner & Villoldo 1976:117). They do not materially localize their presence in the terrestrial plane. Instead, they must be related to in more abstract ways (such as through prayer or invocation).

This is not the case of the Spirit-Guides, who essentially have esoteric knowledge and moral virtue. They offer a very specific and individualized service. Coherently, they *do* localize and materialize their presence amidst the participants of the ceremonies. Unlike the *orixás*, the lower unsaved beings do irradiate mediums. They do this as part of their collaboration with the mission, which needs be localized, as they are not immortally omnipresent and powerful like the *orixás*. They are localized presences with specific boundaries. They have specific identities with individual subjectivities. And they intervene in very localized and concrete concerns.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. On the one hand, the beings of highest jurisdiction in either the Catholic or the West African tradition have been identified. In the least, this resolves possible intellectual conflict. They are synthesized, and henceforth considered to be the same. Complementarily, the lower beings do not present such an intellectual threat. They can retain their individual identities, whilst they are assigned to lower or intermediate cosmological realms. They do not have universalistic jurisdictions, but rather concrete and highly specific modes in which they can assist or intervene in human affairs. Thus, part of the mechanics of synthesis is related to the jurisdiction of a being –which involves a circumscription of their jurisdiction in the case of the lower beings that are not related to Jesus through Catholicism, and a wider and soteriologically more final jurisdiction, in the case of the Catholic hierarchy. The baptism of entities, formerly pagan, also resolves their dubious axiological status. They are no longer dangerous to humans, but become collaborators for the Christian mission. This conversion is made visible, as they thenceforth materialize themselves in the ceremonies and offer a collaboration which is publicly visible and recognizable.

A second conclusion relates to the antiquity of the beings. Many of the lower beings (such as the *Pretos Velhos* and the *Caboclos*) are understood to have lived in Brazil until quite recently. They are somehow close in their life experiences and afflictions to the clients that they assist. Thus, in the cosmological geography, they are assigned ranks that indicate that they are quite close to the clients and their needs. They are indeed felt to be intimate, and given honorary kinship treatment (such as calling the *Pretos Velhos* 'grandfather' and 'grandmother', or 'mother' and 'father'). This intimacy may have also been present in early Christianity concerning the saints, and possibly influential in the origin of their devotion in European peasant Catholicism, but today their biographies have mostly faded into vague hagiomythic pasts. Eventually peasant devotion attributed them with miraculous powers (De G. Brown & Bick 1987). The same is often claimed concerning the *orixás*, some of whom are said to have been ancient warriors or kings. The more ancient personalities, then, whose biographies have mostly faded, are placed higher up in the cosmological ranking.

So, jurisdiction and intimacy are possibly two guiding principles in Barquinha cosmological synthesis. They possibly also indicate the rank of a being in the cosmological hierarchy.

## Conclusion

The paper has intended to initiate a discussion that attempts to identify the processes and discourses concerning religious synthesis in the Barquinha religion. A most fruitful source of future enquiry is to focus upon the operation of agency, especially concerning the influence of the successive charismatic leaders and founders of the handful of Barquinha churches. Despite this, preliminary fieldwork of the author has been used to attempt an exploratory broad synchronic analysis of the differential contributions of the various religious traditions that are combined in the rituals, and also in the cosmology.

By commenting on ritual practices, the discussion has sought to show that the different religious traditions that inform the Barquinha church are brought together in a way in which uniqueness of each tradition is generally offered as a distinctive contribution that is played out in a common territory. Each tradition appears to offer a generally specialized kind of contribution. Briefly, these can be summarized as "prayer, *miração* and possession", as already has been suggested by Sena Araújo (1999). Elaborating further, the European tradition (which includes Catholicism, Spiritism and the esoteric teachings of the *Círculo*

*Esotérico de Comunhão do Pensamento*) tends to provide the overarching ethical values and soteriological understandings. The Western Amazonian Amerindian tradition has most fundamentally provided the sacramental use of *Santo Daime*, though interpreted through the foundational act of Mestre Irineu, and also cosmological understandings (such as the three realms, and some of their inhabitants, such as some of the *Encantados*). The West African legacy is especially seen in the practice of spirit-possession, and associated practices of moral teaching and healing, but also in cosmological understandings (as in the hierarchical supremacy of the *orixás*). The Barquinha is also infused with original elements, such as the use of a sailor-type uniform, sea metaphors and imagery, some of the rituals, the *salmos* and other elements.

It is also important to note that there is much mutual influence, and the practices do cross-signify the traditions to each other, making segregation more of an analytical exercise, than an ethnographic fact –a fertile ground for future research to elucidate. This is coherent with the general Barquinha ethics and practice of synthesis and inclusiveness. Generally speaking, territory (be it the body of the medium, the ritual, the liturgical space, etc.) is a place for the encounter of alterity. This eventually leads to a tendency to fuse the specialized contributions into a coherent whole. Fine analysis (which has only been outlined here) would show that there is no ‘purity’ in the practices. The coming into being of a synthesized worldview has been described by Sena Araújo (1999) as a “cosmology undergoing construction”<sup>16</sup>.

This specialized contribution in the rituals is paralleled in the differential jurisdiction, obligations and participation of the various categories of participants in the Barquinha mission. For example, embodied humans are generally expected to sustain and assist with material obligations, such as sustaining the structure of the rituals, and also general material needs of the church. Spirit-Guides, on the other hand, offer expertise in their moral counseling and teaching, and also other knowledge that they have (such as for healing). Spirit-Guides represent an autonomous higher force, which, generally speaking, is channeled both individually and as a community, by the *fardados* –and is attempted to be conformed to the Christian agenda.

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16 Sena Araújo’s notion also contemplates that some elements are eventually dropped or excluded.

In a parallel manner, the entities themselves can also be distinguished by their jurisdiction, and this is seen both in the rituals and in the inclusive cosmology. In the Barquinha cosmology, synthesis and rank appear to be related to jurisdiction and intimacy. Higher beings derived from different traditions tend to have their identities fused, and are attributed with jurisdiction over soteriological issues, and themselves are considered to be omnipresent and divine. On the other hand, lower beings from the different traditions that are considered still to be unsaved, collaborate with the mission by offering a distinctive service to the other members. They irradiate mediums, generally interact with the public, and most often attend to very particular concerns. Their dubious axiological status has been resolved, and thus they can now offer their specialized knowledge. Their conversion is made public through their material presence and actions.

The cosmological geography is inclusive and encompasses the beings from several traditions. They are differentially distributed among the *Mistérios*, often according to their soteriological status, ethnic origin and jurisdiction. In some cases identities are fused (this is especially the case of the higher beings); in other cases they retain individuality (such as lower pagan unsaved beings).

The fusion of elements in the Barquinha is unique, and not a straightforward result of macro-historical conditions. There is an independent religious production, which in part, at least, seems to be subject to the agency of influential members. As explained by Shaw & Stewart, hegemonic practices are never simply absorbed wholesale; at the very least their incorporation involves some kind of transformation, some kind of deconstruction and reconstruction which converts them to people's own meanings and projects (Shaw & Stewart 1994:20-21). In the Barquinha, there is an important influence of agency that requires further research, but which apparently orients religious synthesis according to some predefined principles and mechanisms. Interestingly, these principles appear to involve a blurred rhetoric of both tolerance and hierarchical encompassment (Shaw & Stewart 1994:22).

Spirit-possession religions are often noted to have this blurred rhetoric. Possession contradicts the modern Western notion of unique selfhood contained in a unique defined boundary. Possession allows for different identities to share a common territory (the body of the medium), which may be why these religions flourish and easily adapt to conditions of colonialism and other forms of cultural and political dominance. In a sense, the possessed



medium is a metaphor for the historical context of a subjugated people (see Boddy 1994; Behrend & Luig 1999; Stoller 1995). Although the dominating group has denied their historical agency, at the same time, it is worthy to note that this is never effective. Commonly, the community puts embodied alterity to a beneficial and therapeutic use. Possession religions attempt to channel the 'other' in a way that they can make use of the 'other's' specialized knowledge or capacities. As a metaphor for a dominated history, possession is no less a statement of local agency too. Thus a primary question to consider for future enquiry is to further comprehension of the Barquinha participants' understandings of the nature of the relationship between the traditions that are fused and/or co-present in a shared *locus*.

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