

Body-Crossroads as Performing Experience in the *Congado* Ritual

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ABSTRACT – Body-Crossroads as Performing Experience in the *Congado* Ritual – This article discusses the *congado* ritual as a performing experience based on the notions of body-crossroads. First, it studies the *congado* universe and its symbolic complexity, perceiving it as a *crossroad culture*. The *congado* ritual is the nodal point of this manifestation. The relation between the body and the performance characterizes the ritual. This work is based on theoretical studies and field research carried out with the Catopês of the city of Bocaiúva, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, and aims to be a reference for studies on Brazilian culture, especially on Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations.

Keywords: **Ritual. Congado. Performativity. Body-Crossroads.**

RÉSUMÉ – Corps-Carrefour comme Expérience Performative sur l’Congadeiro Rituél – Ce texte vise à discuter Le rituel du *Congado* comme l’expérience performative Du *corps-carrefour*. Nous partons de l’étude du l’univers Congadeiro et as complexité symbolique, percevant comme *carrefour culturel*. Le rituel Congadeiro est le point nodal de cette manifestation culturel, caractérisé par la relation entre Le corps et la performativité. Ce travail est basé sur des études théoriques et des enquêtes de terrain menées sur le Catopês dans la ville de Bocaiuva/MG, et vise à être une référence pour les études sur la culture brésilienne, en particulier sur les manifestations afro-brésilienne culturelles.

Mots-clés: **Rituél. Congada. Performativité. Corps-Carrefour.**

RESUMO – O Corpo-Encruzilhada como Experiência Performativa no Ritual Congadeiro – O artigo tem como objetivo discutir o ritual congadeiro como experiência performativa a partir das noções de corpo-encruzilhada. Parte-se do estudo do universo congadeiro e sua complexidade simbólica, percebendo-a como *cultura de encruzilhadas*. O ritual congadeiro é o ponto nodal dessa manifestação, sendo caracterizado pela relação entre o corpo e a performatividade. O presente trabalho se fundamenta em estudos teóricos e pesquisas de campo realizadas junto aos Catopês, da cidade de Bocaiúva/MG, e pretende ser referência para estudos sobre a cultura brasileira, especialmente sobre as manifestações culturais afro-brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: **Ritual. Congada. Performatividade. Corpo-Encruzilhada.**

The *congado* universe comprises numerous images, sensations, gestures and ritual practices that researchers, in the Performing Arts field, have frequently described and named; *a set of organized spectacular practices, Afro-Brazilian cultural performances, black rituals, and extra-daily performing practices* are some of those designations. These studies often analyze and reflect on corporeality, orality and performativity in *congado* rituals and ceremonies to understand the relation between the ritual and the arts scene.

In this direction, two reflections guide this research. The first reflection is that the *congado* culture is a *crossroad culture*, formed by the interrelationship between African, Luso-Hispanic and Brazilian indigenous cultures; the second reflection is that the *congado* ritual, an essential part of this cultural manifestation, is fundamentally a performative act, which can be seen mainly in the body of the *congadeiro* [*congado* practitioner].

From this perspective, the terminology *body-crossroad* promotes the observation and the reflection on the dialog between the *congado* manifestation and the studies of arts scene.

Conceptually, the body-crossroad is a crossed space-body, intersected by elements, knowledges and practices that form the universe where it belongs. It carries a notion of spiral and curvilinear time-space that points to a *gnosis* in a movement of endless return, not to the initial point, but to the reminiscences of a sacred past, to strengthen the present and to dazzle the future. Body-crossroad is a characteristic presented in a performing dimension of the body in rituals; artists can experience it as a technical and aesthetic element in scene.

This paper reflects on the body-crossroad in the *congado* ritual experience. We analyze the performing dimension of the ritual, reflecting on the cultural, social and artistic dimensions that support the *congado* universe. We also point out interpretative directions and possibilities of the body-crossroad notion in the performing experience of the *congadeiro*'s body.

This study is based on the interdisciplinary reflections between the field of Performing Arts and the fields of Anthropology, Performance Studies, Ethnoscenology, Linguistics, and History. This research focus on the performing dimensions of the *congado* ritual with the body crossed by elements such as ancestry and memory.

***Congado*: a crossroad culture**

The *congado*, one of the most important Brazilian cultural traditions, is a cultural manifestation resulting from the inter-relation of the African, Luso-Hispanic and indigenous cultures in Brazil. Leda Maria Martins (1997) claims that this manifestation is the result of a dialogism full of linguistic, philosophic, religious, cultural and symbolic codes, created from a sign displacement and transcreated by a ritual *gnosis*, which comprehends all the knowledge that forms the cosmological view of this cultural manifestation.

The *congado* manifestation as known today emerged in Brazil. This manifestation of singular characteristics and expressiveness developed from the union of different cultural logics – the black African, the catholic European, the Native American Indian – in a specific time-space, i.e. the Colonial Brazil. In this context, *congado*'s groups organized themselves around micro-societies (black communities), which historically and ritually assembled know-hows that made of this manifestation a Brazilian peculiarity.

The consolidation of black communities was fundamental in the creation of Brotherhoods (*Irmandades*), which reflected on the organization of social life and *congado* manifestations in Brazil. According to Gomes and Pereira (1988), the Brotherhoods allowed the black slaves to affiliate to a specific social and religious group, ensuring their cohesion by their ethnic and political representations.

The black Brotherhoods became spaces of resistance that allowed black slaves to organize groups and communities and, consequently, the existential affirmation to preserve their cultural and identity values. They favored the development of religious ceremonies and actions that valued both freedom from the slavery system and the organization of communities and social groups formed by black people. This organizational characteristic promoted different forms of expressions of black communities around the country; one of them was the *Congado*.

The *congadeiros* assign the reason of their existence to the origin myth of Our Lady of the Rosary. The devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary – who would have been responsible for the liberation of black slaves – unites and keeps the feast tradition alive. Although the myth that founded the devo-

tion to this saint has many versions¹, they converge to the same theme: the appearance of the image of the saint in the sea; it was taken by the black people, who inaugurated the *congado* ritual with songs, rhythms, music and dances dictated by the sacred African drums. Martins (1997, p. 49) affirmed that “[...] the transcreation of the fable by the *congadeiros* is based on a collective textual creation act that creates a discursive web in a continuous movement”.

The re-elaboration of the worship at Our Lady of the Rosary, anchored in a black mythology, placed the black as agents within the mythical narrative. According to Martins (2003), at least three elements in the narrative of the origin myth for the devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary are constantly repeated in *congadeiro*'s different narratives throughout the Brazilian territory:

1st) the description of a situation of repression experienced by the black slaves; 2nd) the symbolic reversal of this situation with taking the saint out of water or stone, captained by drums; 3rd) the establishment of a hierarchy and another power, both founded by the mythical framework (Martins, 1997, p. 56).

The groups of *Congado* and the festivities with a ritual organization appeared to celebrate and remember the myth of Our Lady of the Rosary. This mythical text, which *congadeiros* narrate very passionately, rules the whole liturgy of the rituals performed by *congado* groups, represented in their singular forms of expression and devotion and in their religiosity, formed in the hybridism of different forms of devotion of the popular Catholicism.

The Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary and other saints to whom *congadeiros* devote (Saint Benedict, Holy Spirit, Saint Ephigenia, Virgin of Mercy, Our Lady of Aparecida) is the peak of celebrations and the ritualization, according to Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (1978; 1985). *Congadeiros* have transmitted this narrative orally for centuries in different places in Brazil. In feasts, the narrative of the Origin Myth is recreated and retold, which keeps alive the collective identity that represents the symbolic construction of the *congado* subject, preserving historical characteristics of the development of *congado* around Brazil. Therefore, the ritual is a fundamental element to construct a collective cohesion of the mythopoetic narrative, emphasizing

the contours of a knowledge transmitted to young people as they experience the ritual and its cyclical renewal (Gennep, 2011).

Congados spread throughout Brazil are formed by seven groups²: *Congo*, *Moçambique*, *Marujada*, *Catopês*, *Caboclinhos*, *Vilão* and *Cavalhada*³. They preserve traditions, religious ceremonies and beliefs linked to this devotion. According to Martins (1997, p. 34), the current *Congados* and *Reinados*⁴ maintain “the same basic disposition as in the eighteenth century, attesting the permanence of a paradigmatic continuum in the links of the *congados*’ traditions and afrographies”.

Each of these groups represents one of the people that constitute the Brazilian population. According to Martins (1988), the *Catopês* represent the African indigenous, which differs from the Brazilian indigenous, represented by the *caboclos*; villains and the horseback riding represent the warriors, and their role is simply decorative. In their rites, they use songs, sounds, dances and representations, expressed in a *corpus* full of cultural signs and festive, religious symbologies, to express their devotion to the celebrated saints and protect the historical symbologies of their rite’s formations and functions.

The state of Minas Gerais stands out among the Brazilian states where *congado* groups are found due to its diversity of celebrations, multiplicity of groups and reach of the manifestation, one of the most important forms of cultural expression. In Bocaiúva, in the north of the state of Minas Gerais – the observation *locus* of this study –, only the *Ternos de Catopês*⁵ group represents this manifestation (Picture 1).



Picture 1 – *Terno de Catopês* of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict in the decade of 1980. Source: Personal archives of Beatriz do Lino Mar.

Internally, the *Catopês* groups of Bocaiúva have a hierarchic and strict organizational structure constituted of Masters, Foreman, Flags or Standard-bearer and Dancers. Externally, two elements stand out: the ritual dynamics of celebrations and the visual of the groups' presentations during the rites. The ritual dynamics consists in raising flags; fulfilling promises; masses; novenas; processions; parades; coronation of kings, queens, princes and princesses; collective banquets; auctions; presentations with singing and dancing; firework shows.

The groups wear specific clothing at their presentations. They also use drums of different sizes, timbre and functions; banners with pictures of the saints; songs that tell the history of their ancestors and that celebrate the feast, the faith and the devotions; dances that reinforce the elements of the African / Afro-Brazilian culture in the dancer's body; ornaments and head adornments that complete the image of the groups and their spectacularism.

Presently, Bocaiúva has two *Ternos de Catopês* groups: *Terno* of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict (Picture 2) and *Terno* of the Holy Spirit (Picture 3). These groups are responsible for the feast of Saint Benedict, which happens after the Holy Week; the feast of the Holy Spirit, which happens close to Pentecost; and the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, which happens in October.



Picture 2 – *Terno de Catopês* of Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Benedict's feast in 2006.
Source: Data survey during field research by Jarbas Siqueira Ramos.



Picture 3 – *Terno de Catopês* of Holy Spirit at the 2016 Holy Spirit feast.
Source: Data survey during field research by Jarbas Siqueira Ramos.

The differences between the groups are (i) in the clothing (especially the color, as the *Terno* of Our Lady of the Rosary wears pink and the *Terno* of Holy Spirit wears red), (ii) in the musical instruments and the manner they are played (Picture 4), (iii) their position, and (iv) in the way they organize themselves within the ritual, depending on what is celebrated. However, regarding the mythical-religious symbologies and meanings and the

structure of the rituals of saint devotion, these groups have the same structure mostly.



Picture 4 – Drums of *Ternos de Catopês* of Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Benedict (2007).

Source: Data survey during field research by Jarbas Siqueira Ramos.

Each moment of the *congado* ritual has an order of days, moments, conducts and practices that produce a codified system of information, practices and positions during the performance. This organization has three different moments, namely:

- 1) *preparing the feast*, which starts two months in advance and consists in the search for support and donations for the flag-raising and community lunch; preparation of instruments, clothes and ornaments; rehearsal of songs; visits to butlers' and feast goers' houses, and novenas.
- 2) *the celebration*, which begins on Saturday and ends on Sunday evening. It congregates all the elements, like flag-raising; establishment of *Reinados*; parade; solemn mass; community lunch; processions, and final blessing.
- 3) *closing the celebration*, which happens at the end of Sunday with the draw of butlers and feast goers for the next cycle; the delivery of the flag and the crown; the closing of the feast at the Masters' homes of each group.

The knowledge and experience of the *Ternos de Catopês* and *congadeiros* are based on their cosmological view. From our point of view, it is anchored in the performance of their rituals, which are fundamentally performative acts. Considering the performing characteristic of *Congado*, it oc-

curs mainly in the *congadeiros*' bodies. We will direct this reflection to those two dimensions.

The *Congado* Ritual as a Performative Experience

Considering the African, Luso-Hispanic and Brazilian Native indigenous characteristics in the *congado* culture, its ritual practices and processes are part of a complex set of actions, which Ligiéro (2011) calls the *Brazilian ritual performances*. The ritual, whose main characteristic is performativity, is the main element of congregation of *congado* groups. Concerning the organization and performance of the *congado* rituals, Martins (2003) states:

Performed through a symbolic structure and complex liturgy, the rituals comprise the participation of different groups, called *guardas*, and the establishment of a black Empire. In this context, *autos* [plays] and dramatic dances, coronation of kings and queens, embassies, liturgical, ceremonial and scenic acts create a mythopoetic performance, which represents the blacks' voyage from Africa to America (Martins, 2003, p. 71-72).

Based on Richard Schechner's (2003) reflections, we understand performativity in *congado* rituals as the subject's ability of expressing, of their highest degree of conduction of an activity. For the author, the performativity of daily times and extraordinary times is a product of a complex relation between *being*, *doing* and *showing themselves self-acting*, which is based on the idea of *restored behavior*.

Schechner (2003) claims that *restored behavior* is the act of recognizing that the current actions are built on pieces of behavior, which, after being rearranged and remodeled, may produce in the audience the sensation of familiarity, i.e. it is recognized in different spaces of social life. Therefore, this symbolic production about the collective action promotes reflection. The restored knowledge is a process by which people become aware of their own performative acts.

The consensus that daily and extraordinary performances are made of *restored behaviors* is the same that considers and affirms that each performative act is different. The particularity and peculiarity of each performative act, even within the *congado* ritual, lies in its ability to establish interactivity with other producers or viewers of this act.

The performing characteristic of the ritual, as pointed out by Peirano (2000) and Tambiah (1985), lies in the subjects' and groups' abilities to

perform to each other, talking about their sociocultural universe and communication. This performing characteristic is found in the ritual moments as a form of updating the group's cosmology.

This is based on Victor Turner's (1974; 2000) reflection on anthropology of experience. For the author, the nostalgia through a collective experience is what allowed him to think about the ritual processes and their performativity. The nostalgia from a collective experience is an experience commonly lived, passed from generation to generation and able to recreate a symbolic universe and all the meaning on which it was built. The experience lived is an *Erlebnis*, or a unique experience, according to Turner (1974). The performance can complement those experiences. Thus, Victor Turner describes, as suggested by John Dawsey (2005), five *moments* that may constitute the procedural structure perceived in each *Erlebnis*:

- 1) something happens at the level of perception (considering that pain or pleasure may be felt more intensely than repetitive or daily behaviors);
- 2) images of past experiences are acutely evoked and outlined;
- 3) emotions associated with past events are revived;
- 4) the past articulates with the present in a 'musical relation' (according to Dilthey's analogy), promoting the discovery and construction of meaning; and
- 5) the experience is completed through a form of 'expression'. Performance – term that derives from the old French *parfounir*, 'to complement' or 'to accomplish completely' – refers precisely to the moment of expression (Turner apud Dawsey, 2005, p. 19).

Understanding the experience, procedural and performing character of the ritual is to seek its relation with the *experience lived* and its form of socialization, which occurs by communication and aesthetic experiences of ritual processes and practices. Müller (2000, p. 2) states:

It is in the performance of an expression of a lived experience that it is possible, according to Bruner, to re-experience, to revive, to recreate, to retell, to reconstruct and to remodel a culture. The performance does not release a preexisting meaning that is dormant in the text, but it is part of the meaning, as the meaning is always in the present and not in past manifestations, as, for example, in historical origins and in an author's intentions. Giving voice and expression to a text turns it into a performed text, which is active and alive, and moves the experience.

The performances of *congado* rituals comprehend, thus, lived experiences; articulated to the society's and/or group's cosmological views, these experiences give meaning to the acts. Understanding the performativity of

the *congado* ritual promotes the comprehension of the ritual act as an experience that can reinforce the context, accept change, realize the language in use and update the group's cosmological view.

Two issues are fundamental to understand the performing dynamics of the *congado* ritual. The first one is the idea of *ancestry* as a philosophical and metaphysical conception of the groups that constitute the *congado*. The African descendant rites, whether religious or secular rites, confirmed a specific cosmological view based on the relation of ancestry between the subjects and their divinities in the Brazilian territory. In this respect, Martins (2003, p. 78) states:

The African ancestral conception comprises, in the same phenomenological circuit, the divinities, the cosmic nature, the fauna, the flora, the physical elements, the dead and the living people, and those who will be born, conceived as yearning of a needed complementarity in a continuous process of formation and creation.

The second issue refers to the *memory*, which produces all the knowledge instituted by the ritual performance. The body institutes the knowledge and experiences in the *congado* performance; it reorganizes the entire repertory of texts, histories, sensations, concepts and scores that are recreated based on memories and reminiscences of the *crossed memory* of the subjects – who have knowledge and experience regarding this manifestation. Memory reveals the *congado* world based on cosmological views, as a form to reconnect the sacred world (created and lived by the *ancestor*) and the current world.

Living this sacred time, constituted by the performance of *congadeiros' ancestry* and the *memory*, refers to a specific way of inhabiting a curvilinear temporality, which restores the groups' and subjects' cosmologies that comprise the *congado* universe. By performing the ancestral memory, knowledge and experience become oral and body repertory; they consolidated as materials and means of creation, passage, reproduction and preservation of the *congadeiros' knowledge*. According to Martins (2003),

[...] each ritual performance recreates, restores and reviews the phenomenological circle in which pulses, in the same contemporaneity, the action of a continuous past, synchronized in a current temporality that attracts to itself the past and the future, in which is scatters, not abolishing the time, but abolishing its linear and consecutive conception. Thus, reactivation and in-

novation of the similar and diverse action erases the idea of temporal successiveness, played before and after the moment in which it is restored in the form of an event (Martins, 2003, p. 79).

The rite performances in the *congado* reveals the group's cosmological view. The main goal of a *congado* performance is to update the collective memory, which comes from performances/dramatizations. The recreation of this collective memory, a memory slipped from oblivion, transcreates the knowledge produced by the sacred ancestors, restoring its alterity. The dramatized ritual performance is an act of inscription, of graphies or, yet, as Leda Maria Martins (1997) postulates, an "Afrographies of memory".

In the *congado* performance, successors experience sacred ancestors' acts in the *traces* they left behind. These traces are observed in the *congadeiros'* bodies and voices, whether in physical action or in the enunciated text during the performance. As Martins (2003, p. 70) states:

[...] the body, in the ritual performance, is a place of inscription of a knowledge that is written in the gesture, movement, choreography and in the skin surface, as well as in the voice rhythms and timbres. What repeats in the body and in the voice, is an episteme. In oral performances, the gesture is not only narrative or descriptive; it is, fundamentally, a performative act.

The update of the tradition imprints the tones and marks of current *congadeiros* in ancestral traces, recreating the tradition and renewing the performative act in their place, times and moments. Thus, the body-voice during the performance in the *congado* ritual is not limited to repeating a habit. As Martins (2003) suggests, the performer instituted, established, reviewed and often updated his/her own performative act; then memory is written, registered, transmitted and modified as the performance occurs.

The body-voice mirrors the ancestor's time and the current time in the *congado* ritual. The body-voice is, at the same time, the place of belonging and presence, the space in which the cumulative, compact, fluid temporality is engendered. Thus, the body-voice still *is*, *remains* and may *be created* as the ritual performances occur: "to perform, in this sense, means inscribing, writing, repeating by transcreation, revising what it represents" (Martins, 2003, p. 82).

The nodal point of this reflection is the *congadeiro's* body, which is crossed by ancestry, memory, performativity, spatiality and spiral temporali-

ty dimensions; it can be transported to other dimensions during the ritual. When we adopt the terminology *body-crossroad* as the guiding axis of this discussion, we refer precisely to the *congadeiro*'s body.

The Body-Crossroads in the Congado Ritual

Leda Martins's (1997) detailed study on the *congado* of Jatobá – municipality of the central region of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil –, defines *congado* as a “crossroad culture”. She points out that the crossroad is not a concrete place, but rather a metaphor for the notion of time-space of the in-between place. The author understands crossroads as:

The crossroad, tangential locus, is here stated as a symbolic and metonymic instance from which several discursive elaborations are processed; such elaborations are motivated by the discourses that coexist with the crossroad. In the rite's scope and, therefore, in the performance's scope, the crossroad is the radial place of centering and decentering, of intersections, influences and divergences, of fusions and ruptures, of unity and plurality, of origin and dissemination. The crossroad, which is an operator of languages and discourses, as a different place, generates the production. The notions of hybrid, mestizo and liminal subject, articulated by post-colonial critics, may be seen as indicators of the effects of diverse, intertextual and intercultural discursive processes and intersections (Martins, 1997, p. 28).

She emphasizes that the crossroads of *congado* cultures (especially because they are Afro-Brazilian manifestations) can weave the subjects' identities from where they arise. For the author, those identities are thought, modulated and organized through the body in a process of ritualization and reupdating of the thoughts, knowledge and actions (which are processed in the discourses, gestures, actions and expressions in different – daily or extraordinary – ritual places and practices). Therefore, she states:

[...] the Afro-Brazilian identity is woven by those crossroads in a mobile process. Such identity may be thought as a fabric and a texture in which the mnemonic discourses and gestures of the oral African archives – in a dynamic process of interaction with the other – are transformed and continually reupdated into new, different language and expression rituals, choreographing the black singularity and alterities (Martins, 1997, p. 26).

The notions of *body-crossroad* are based on the relation between the *congadeiro*'s body and the different crossroads during ritual performance.

Two assumptions support the term *body-crossroad*. The first one concerns the *congado* culture as a *crossroad culture*, recognizing, therefore, that it is not only a single crossroad, but several possibilities of nodulations attached to groups and subjects; the second assumption is based on the perception that every knowledge and practice learned and condensed by this manifestation occurs in the *congadeiro's* body during the performance; therefore, this knowledge is incorporated in a body that is ritually crossed. Thus, this terminology fosters the operation of an in-between place, which is an intersection place where the dimension of the *congado* ritual (and all its cosmology) and the body (and all its anatomic, aesthetic, poetic and symbolic dimensions) are produced, creating a new nodal point capable of revealing the meaning of the processes of signifying *congado* groups and subjects. This nodal point, which crosses in and through the *congadeiro's* body, is exactly what we call *body-crossroad*.

In general, we understand the *body-crossroad* as a metaphor⁶ that localizes the performing body in the nodal point of crossings. Thus, we corroborate with the idea proposed by Silva (2010), who points out that the *body-crossroad* is a tangential place where different crosses meet. Such crosses create the in-between place as a symbolic place of cultural representations by a discursive process. Based on the semiotic dimension of the body in the culture, Oliveira (2007) proposes the following reflection on the body as a crossroad:

The body, as a crossroad, is a sign that confronts the semiotic regimes at stake in the comprehensive society. Signs are mediations of the exercised power; so, they establish conflict and dispute. The movement of culture is in the movement of the body. In any case, this is what is at stake when it concerns the comprehension of the sources and bases of a philosophy that expresses and understands itself through and from the body – and not against it (Oliveira, 2007, p. 120).

Thinking of the notion of *body-crossroad* in the *congado* ritual, we try to analyze how the crosses intersect within a performing relation of the *congadeiro's* body in the ritual. As Martins (1997) has already pointed, this relation is characterized by the presence of a spiral and curvilinear time-space, which points to a *gnosis* in a movement that points to numerous directions, from a relation with the reminiscences of a sacred place to strengthen the present and to dazzle the future.

The performing dimension of the *congadeiro's* body produces new meanings in the interlocution with the traditional knowledge and experience of this cultural manifestation as it is available for the experience in the ritual. Each subject produces, in a particular and peculiar way, his or her performance, considering both the function executed and the place occupied during the ritual.

The performing experience of the *congado* ritual creates the in-between place⁷ of the *body-crossroad* in its universe. This in-between place, which is a nodal and tangential point, is a symbolic place built during a performing experience. Thus, the *congadeiro's* body is the locus where all the elements that constitute the performing experience are crossed.

Observing the *congado* ritual in Bocaiúva, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, we realized how each *congadeiro's* body deals with the crossings/crossroads that take place during the ritual. The body drives the spaces, the dynamics, the moments and the possibilities of moving between times and places – varying among the past, the present and projecting into the future – in a very smart and intelligent way. This ability to deal with what is *unexpected* and *new* is what allows a state of presence and readiness in the performance in the ritual.

During the observation and analysis of the body-crossroad in the *congado* ritual, we organized some elements of this crossing process that may be analyzed from three perspectives. First, we have the *metaphoric* perspective. It concerns the epistemological and discursive way through which each element of the manifestation is perceived and embodied in the process of learning and experiencing the *congado* ritual. The second perspective refers to the *symbolic anatomy* that is related to how we perceive – based on Rodrigues's (1997) proposal of elaboration of the Dancer-Researcher-Interpreter Method – the different forms in which the *congadeiro's* body organizes itself in the ritual. It considers the possibilities of organization of muscles, frames, positions and body structures as the symbologies of the elements that the subject embodies to constitute the ritual. Finally, the *performing* perspective is linked to how those elements (metaphoric, anatomic and symbolic elements) are organized in the ritual act and effectively presented to the audience.

The experience of the *body-crossroad* in the *congado* ritual is fickle, unstable, imprecise and full of surprises. This imprecision is exactly what provokes the necessary displacements to produce new meanings for the body experience in the ritual. We called such displacements *movements*, a mode of organization in which the symbolic movement of transition occurs because the territory where they are comprehended is unstable. Thus, as knowledge is constituted in the ritual act, the structures and processes of transposition and inter-locution in the sense assigned to the body – in metaphoric, anatomic and performing perspectives – are determined.

The *body-crossroad* is, therefore, a possibility to understand the meanings assigned to the experience of the *congado* ritual. By the crossroad, the ritually and performatively organized body will carry out the ritual acts. As they are carried out, new references for the cosmological view of the *congado* universe are produced. That is how the *body-crossroad* becomes an important reference towards the comprehension and production of meanings in the *congadeiro*'s ritual practices.

The proposition we present here – thinking the *body-crossroad* as an experience in the universe of the *congado* ritual – does not aim to reduce the knowledge on the subject, restricting the access to these practices to a single direction or perspective. The proposition is actually a reflection and investigation that seeks to broaden the perspective of analysis and observation of the ritual practices, especially those linked to the dimensions of the body. New perspectives and procedures may arise from this reflection and expand to other Brazilian ritual practices (mainly those Afro-Brazilian), considering their contexts and cosmological views and recognizing the complexity of their ritual practices.

Notes

- ¹ Gomes and Pereira (1988) point out that, “[...] according to the Church’s guidance, the myth on Our Lady of the Rosary would maintain its consistency as long as its divinity remained out of human reach. For this reason, according to sacred accounts, the image of the Saint, after been taken by the white owners and placed in a chapel, disappeared and reappeared in the place of the mystery, represented by the sea or the desert. The Catholic myth fed from the presence and absence of the divinity, establishing a statue that could not be

broken: the Saint visited the men and then moved away” (Gomes; Pereira, 1988, p. 101-102).

- ² The terms *guarda* and *terno* are commonly used as synonymous of group in the *Congado* manifestations in the state of Minas Gerais. Thus, the groups are called *Guarda de Moçambique*, *Ternos de Catopês* and so on.
- ³ Considering the manifestations of *Candomblé* in the state, some researchers claim that eight groups comprise the *Congado* in Minas Gerais. However, we divide them into seven groups considering the idea disseminated by the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the State of Minas Gerais: *Candomblé* is not a *congado* group, but the union of the Masters of the groups in the feasts.
- ⁴ Martins (1997) differs *Congado* from *Reinado*. *Congado* is a manifestation of groups due to devotion to saints or due to its relation with the community. *Reinado* has a dense symbolic structure constituted of every segment responsible for the celebrations: *Congado* groups, the Empire with its kings, queens, princes and princesses and other parts of the *congado* performance.
- ⁵ In this paper, we use the term *terno* to refer to the studied groups, as it is how they usually call themselves and how the people of the city call them.
- ⁶ I understand the metaphor from Lakoff and Johnson’s perspective (1980): as a discursive construction that allows a conceptual deviation of one thing in relation to another.
- ⁷ The notion of in-between place refers to the idea Homi K. Bhabha proposes in his book, *The location of culture*.

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