

# Afro-Brazilian religions and audiovisual narratives in Amazonia

Research tools

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## Abstract

This text discusses the use of audiovisual resources like cinema and video by Afro-Brazilian Religions practitioners in two ethnographical contexts of Amazonia, namely the urban areas of Cururupu and Belém. In Cururupu, the production of amateur videos commissioned in a local audiovisual store serves as a source of self-recognition and enables the discussion and continuous experience of the rituals. In Belém, a documentary film on the cosmivision of Tambor de Mina, the most widely practiced Afro-Brazilian religion in the city, was made through a partnership between a *father of saint* (Afro-Brazilian religion priest) and a filmmaker using federal government funding. Setting out from these ethnographic examples, I explore how audiovisual resources are employed by a religious tradition whose reproduction is based on a centuries-old orality. The text points to the advantages and potential uses of these kinds of audiovisual narratives by anthropologists as a means of access to native cultures.

**Keywords:** Afro-Brazilian religions, Tambor de Mina, visual anthropology, cinema, video.

## Resumo

Este texto discute a utilização de recursos audiovisuais como o cinema e o vídeo por *afroreligiosos* em dois contextos etnográficos na Amazônia, as cidades de Cururupu e Belém. Em Cururupu, a produção de vídeos amadores encomendados em uma loja de filmagem local seve como fonte de autorreconhecimento e possibilita a discussão e a vivência contínua os rituais. Em Belém, um *pai de santo* e um cineasta produziram, com recursos do governo federal, um filme documentário sobre a cosmivisão do Tambor de Mina, religião de matriz africana mais praticada na cidade. A partir destes exemplos

etnográficos, proponho uma reflexão sobre como os recursos audiovisuais são instrumentalizados por uma tradição religiosa que há séculos baseou sua reprodução apenas na oralidade. O texto aponta vantagens e possibilidades da utilização dessas narrativas audiovisuais por antropólogos como via de acesso às culturas nativas.

**Palavras-chave:** Religiões Afro-brasileiras, Tambor de Mina, antropologia visual, cinema, vídeo.

# Afro-Brazilian religions and audiovisual narratives in Amazonia

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This text reflects on the impacts of contact with new audiovisual media on the identity construction and subjectivity of followers of various Afro-Brazilian religions in two contemporary contexts in Amazonia. The first is the town of Cururupu, in the state of Maranhão, with around 30,000 inhabitants, situated in the transition zone between the Brazilian northeast and Amazonia. The two most widespread popular religions in this region are Pajelança, a kind of Amazonian shamanism whose rituals centre on therapeutic practices (Galvão 1976, Maués 1990), and Tambor de Mina, a variant of African religiosity originating from the Casa das Minas, in São Luís, a *terreiro* (a temple, literally ‘yard’) founded by African slaves brought from the São Jorge del Mina Castle (Ferreti 2009). Both these traditions are combined in an eclectic manner by local religious specialists, generating a complementary religious system (Cordovil 2002, Ferreti 2010, Pacheco 2004).

The second ethnographic context is the African-originated religion practiced in Belém, the capital of Pará state. Today around two million people live in the city’s metropolitan region, which also contains more than a thousand *terreiros* according to a mapping project undertaken by the federal government (Brazil 2011). The field of Afro-Brazilian religions in Belém includes a number of different sects or ‘nations’: Tambor de Mina, also known as Mina Nagô, is the oldest of these traditions, brought by migrants from Maranhão state at the end of the nineteenth century (Luca 1999, Vergolino 1976, Leacock & Leacock 1972). As well as Tambor de Mina, other religious practices in Belém include Pajelança, Umbanda and Candomblé sects belonging to the Ketu, Angola and Jeje nations.

In this text I examine and discuss the form in which these religious adherents relate to the audiovisual recordings produced by themselves in terms of their rituals and cosmology. In Cururupu audiovisual products mostly involve semi-professional recordings commissioned from a local audiovisual store. In Belém a partnership between a filmmaker and a priest led to the filming of a documentary on the religious cosmology of Tambor de

Mina, made with the aid of resources from a program run by the Ministry of Culture. The documentary *The Discovery of Amazonia by the Enchanted Turks*,<sup>1</sup> narrates the history of spiritual entities considered to be of Turkish origin, worshipped in the Tambor de Mina religion. Consequently the present text aims to examine how followers of Afro-Brazilian religions produce identities from audiovisual narratives which they themselves have been closely involved in making.

The Afro-Brazilian religions in the different ethnographic contexts analyzed here display many different configurations, constituting an amalgam of practices derived from different religious traditions of African or Amerindian origin. For this reason I take *afroreligiosos* to refer to people who practice at least one of these religious variants (Tambor de Mina, Umbanda, Pajelança, Candomblé, etc.). The term *afroreligioso* functions here as an analytic category, though in some contexts it is also cited as a native category. In Belém followers of different traditions use the term *afroreligioso* as an identity category that includes the practitioners of any of the traditions. In Cururupu, the term *umbandista* is used instead as a generic category to refer to a practitioner from any possession cult present in the town, whether they belong to the Mina or the Pajelança traditions (Cordovil 2006). In this text I shall use *afroreligioso* as a generic term, though, since in many contexts the term *umbandista* refers to practitioners of Umbanda only.

To understand and contextualize the use of the term *afroreligiosos* to define even followers of Pajelança, it should firstly be stressed that the *cabocla* Pajelança practiced by autochthonous populations in rural and urban regions of Amazonia is not to the same as indigenous shamanism, even though some authors considered the religion a form of shamanism (Maués 2008, Vilacorta 2008). In both the contexts studied by myself, Belém and Cururupu, Pajelança is mixed with other religious traditions of African origin, especially Tambor de Mina.

African and Amerindian spiritualities have maintained a strong presence in the Amazonian region since the colonial period when the processes of syncreticism began between these two religious traditions and between them and Catholicism. The latter process occurred primarily within religious brotherhoods (Figueiredo 2001). After persecution by religious and secular

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1 In the Portuguese original, *A Descoberta da Amazônia pelos Turcos Encantados*.

authorities for over a century, these religious traditions have now acquired a new status, recognized by government bodies linked to cultural policies as a vital part of Brazilian culture and consequently receive incentives towards their divulgation and documentation.

As a result audiovisual records of African-originated religions are no longer made to show 'barbaric' or 'exotic' cults to the wider Brazilian public, as occurred with the photographs published in popular magazines during the 1950s (Tacca 2009). Instead they are made with the backing of government cultural projects intended to strengthen Brazilian cultural expressions.

The government projects also promote the consumption and circulation of these forms of documentation, generating a reflexive process of debate among these religious followers. The main such initiative has been a project to introduce cine clubs in *terreiro* communities: in Belém various cult houses already receive support. The cine clubs run in weekly sessions and generally screen films of interest to the *povo de santo*<sup>2</sup> (Brito 2012). These circuits include films like the documentary to be analyzed in the present article.

The article provides an analysis of two ethnographic examples. The first, a case study carried out in Cururupu, a town in Maranhão state, shows how a team of native visual producers creates images and narratives on the main performances and events that constitute the local cultural identity.<sup>3</sup> In the second example, I examine how a documentary produced with support of a program run by the Ministry of Culture (DOCTV) contributed to crystallizing a mythic narrative on the Tambor de Mina cults in Pará, the main local Afro-Brazilian religion, as well as discussing the uses and processes involved in the production and consumption of these images.

The present research aims to reflect on the production of audiovisual recordings made by two Afro-Brazilian groups in Amazonia in two distinct geographical and temporal contexts. Through the analysis of these cases, my aim is to obtain a clearer understanding of the relation between religious practitioners and the images they themselves produce to document their

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2 The category *povo de santo* is another native term used generically to denominate a religious community that practices Afro-Brazilian religions such as Umbanda, Candomblé or Tambor de Mina.

3 The empirical data cited in this text is the result of research conducted by myself in the city of Cururupu, in Maranhão state, between 1998 and 2004, which formed the basis for my master's dissertation and doctoral thesis in Social Anthropology at the University of Brasília (Cordovil 2002, 2006).

beliefs and practices, identifying new possibilities for anthropological research on African-originated religions conducted with the aid of audiovisual materials produced by the *povo de santo* themselves.

In both cases I show how the construction of images and narratives by followers of Afro-Brazilian religions using audiovisual tools subverts entrenched social hierarchies, removing them from the limbo caused by the preconceptions surrounding their practices and beliefs. Hence the production of images affords these religious practitioners a subjective feeling of belonging to a larger history, that of the group, and at the same time introduces them to experiences linked to the wider universe of the mass media and all the subjectivities involved in this domain.

### **VHS tapes and the recording of the festival: an ethnography of native viewpoints**

The first example of the construction of subjectivities through the image that I shall explore in this text was perceived by myself when pursuing my field research in Cururupu, in the microregion known as the Western Maranhão Coast, situated between the cities of Belém and São Luís. The religious and cultural practices in the town are influenced by these two large urban centres and has a very intense ritual life, both religious and secular. Carnival, reggae, Tambor de Mina, Pajelança and Tambor de Crioula, are some of the performances making up the town's ritual life (Cordovil 2002).

From my first trips to the field, I was interested in mapping these cultural expressions. An interesting fact soon became evident: as well as spending most of the time rehearsing, organizing or performing rituals, Cururupu's residents adored recording these events with photographs or films, even at a time when these technologies were neither as cheap as today or so readily available.<sup>4</sup> The festivals were still filmed on VHS tapes, the films commissioned beforehand from the town's audiovisual store and later enjoyed by the event's participants who would meet up afterwards just to watch them.

Cururupu's only audiovisual store at the time had a large clientele and demand for its services increased on the eve of the town's major events, such as

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4 My last field research trip was in 2004, but the majority of the data used in the present account was obtained in 2002 when I conducted an intensive study of carnival and reggae festivals.

carnival and the Junina festivals. During these periods people looked to commission the recording of the events. They also liked to film their saint festivals at Pajelança temples, as well as anniversaries and political events.

While investigating these images, I contacted a young native filmmaker called Emilene. She was employed at the local audiovisual store where she worked with all kinds of audiovisual media: developing photographs, recording audio CDs and taking photos and shooting films of events on commission.

The store in which Emilene worked was an important source of local sociability. The store's owner, Dona Francisca, involved herself intensely in the festivals and rituals. She organized the parade for one of the town's largest street carnival blocks and was always present at the festive events.

In Cururupu the calendar of festivals spans the entire year. There is no period without at least one festivity being organized or held. The year begins with the Festival of Saint Sebastian in January and the intense preparations for carnival. Shortly after carnival people are already planning for the Junina festival, an equally intense period of cultural activity that lasts until July. The second half of the year begins with preparations for the Festival of Saint Benedict, the town's patron saint, which takes place in October, and finally in December there are the festivals of Iemanjá and Christmas.

The most important *terreiros* or temples hold their saint festivals over the course of the year and have *irmandades*, brotherhoods of worshippers who organize to raise funds and make preparations for the festival. Each *terreiro* usually celebrates its own patron saint once a year. In this festival masts are erected and processions held along with religious and secular festivities. The *toques*, nights when the drums are played to 'receive' the spiritual entities, are usually held over five to eight consecutive nights. There is a generous distribution of food and drink. Some nights the *Tambor de Crioula* [Creole Woman's Drum] is played, a local rhythm danced by women, as well as dancing to secular music. The only kind of music not permitted in the *terreiro* is reggae, associated in Cururupu with 'scoundrels' and 'nutcases,' supposedly delinquent and untrustworthy youths.

Reggae festivals were a universe apart. As these events were considered associated with criminality, many young people in Cururupu worked hard to change this image. They brought large *radiolas* from São Luís, sound systems with their own records that animated the local population. Reggae in

Cururupu strengthened the identity of a younger generation, who looked to challenge their parents by creating their own lifestyle, but still associated with a black identity.

The media aspect is particularly important for reggae lovers. Most of their musical records was ‘smuggled’ in from the UK or Jamaica. During the period when I conducted my research, before piracy and easy access to the internet and digital media, owning rare music and CDs was a status symbol and the music arrived to be sold retail in specialized stores in Cururupu or São Luís.

This was one of the appropriations that Cururupu’s residents made of media technologies and products, but the most significant of them, and the one that interests this discussion directly, was the use the local population made of their own photographs and films.

The most interesting and emblematic case of this relation with the image that I researched was that of *Pajé* Dona Benedita, one of the town’s most respected and well-known religious leaders. Dona Benedita held two large festivities each year at her *terreiro*, along with a series of smaller events. She had a large brotherhood, composed of relatives and religious followers numbering around 150 people. The festivities were the moment for publicly affirming the size, legitimacy and power of the *pajé* and her brotherhood, as well as strengthening the ties of solidarity between followers (Cordovil 2004). Months of preparation and organization were usually needed to ensure everything went smoothly. All this dedication explains the desire to document the event as accurately as possible.

The most interesting aspect, however, is not that Dona Benedita and other *pajés* commissioned film recordings of their saint festivals. What really calls attention are the ways in which Dona Benedita used these images. Any time I arrived at her *terreiro* she could be found sat on the veranda of her house with some female companions from the brotherhood and occasional visitors, watching and commenting on the films of the festivals.

The repeated screening of the films, so frequent that they became a daily part of the house, led me to reflect on the real role that these media occupy in the life of Cururupu. The recorded and shown images repeatedly served the purpose of reproducing and amplifying the ritual’s function. By filming and reliving these moments, Dona Benedita and her companions

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5 TN: The term *pajé* is also a regional term usually translated as shaman.



appropriated and amplified the magical effects of the ritual moment, making it part of the quotidian.

Walter Benjamin (1993) in his classic essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” explained how photography enabled an art without aura, i.e. without the feeling of distance and mystery that separates the work of art from the observer. The possibility of reproducing the work provided by photography makes art, especially painting, everyday and accessible.

Cinema takes this transformation of art to an extreme when it allows the viewer feelings of movement and intensity unknown in painting. Benjamin argued that cinema reproduces an aesthetic sensation of experience, in detriment to its essence, since it emphasizes the experience of shock caused by the speed of modern life. In his view all these transformations were related to life in the metropolitan centres. The city dweller experiences rapidity and movement much more intensely than in rural areas. To offer a clearer idea of this relation, Benjamin describes the vitrines of nineteenth century Paris and the figure of the *flâneur*, the passerby who refuses to be swept up in the daily rush and wanders slowly along the sidewalks and public passageways, sometimes even walking a pet tortoise.

Thus at the same time as photography and cinema result from modern man’s mastery of technology, they are also both product and producer of a new lifestyle, centred on velocity and bustle. They enabled the emergence of a new sensibility and a new art, an aura-less art, focused on apprehending the everyday.

The appropriation of cinema and photography as forms of documentation by followers of Afro-Brazilian cults, even in places distant from a city lifestyle like Cururupu, suggests a transformation in the sensibility of these religions, previously centred on tradition and the transmission of the secret, to enter a period of modernity where the practitioner’s identification with the mystic includes the use of audiovisual media. Just as Benjamin considered that photography banalizes the work of art, making it quotidian and aura-less, the filming of the saint festivals enables a moment that was unique and mystical to be relived in the everyday life of religious sociability.

### **‘The Enchanted Turks’: interfaces between making cinema and constructing a religious tradition**

At the Redenorte Encounter for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property, held in Belém in 2006, a film was presented that had already been shown by the video and cinema circuits in Belém since the previous year, *The Discovery of Amazonia by the Enchanted Turks*.

Classified by its producers as a documentary, the film contained what an anthropologist would call a 'mythic narrative': the history of the formation of the *encantaria* of Tambor de Mina.

The concept of *encantaria*, the Enchanted Realm, has been fairly widely discussed by the anthropological literature on Amazonian religiosity. The first author to approach the subject was Eduardo Galvão (1976) in his classic study *Santos e Visagens*, where he describes the religious beliefs of the Amazonian *caboclo*.<sup>6</sup> The book is the outcome of ethnographic research conducted in 1948 in the municipality of Gurupá, which appears in the work under the pseudonym of Itá. Galvão writes the following about the Enchanted Realm:

Among the supernatural beings believed to inhabit the bottom of rivers and streams or the 'deep pools' are the *companions of the depths*, also called *caruanas*. They inhabit an 'enchanted realm,' a kind of submersed world. The 'realm' is said to be similar to a city with streets and houses, but where everything shines as though coated in gold. The inhabitants of this 'realm' of the river depths are similar to human creatures, their skin is very light and their hair blonde. They eat a special food that if tasted by the inhabitants of our world transforms them into *encantados*, the enchanted, who never return from the 'realm.' The *companions of the depths* act like familiar spirits of the shamans or curers. (Galvão 1976: 67)

Galvão's discussion focuses on the interactions between Catholicism and Pajelança; his ethnography does not include the presence of African religiosities in Gurupá. However in the study by Seth and Ruth Leacock (1972), *Spirits of the Deep*, whose field research was conducted in Belém in the 1960s, the authors describe the system of religious beliefs involved in the Batuque, the name by which Afro-Brazilian religions were then known. The Leacocks explore the meaning of the notions of *encantaria* and *encantados* among the cult's followers. According to them:

The *encantados* are thought to live below the surface of the earth or the seas in

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6 TN: The term *caboclo* traditionally refers to someone of mixed Amerindian and European ancestry.

their own special dwelling places called *encantarias*. The nature and location of the *encantaria* varies with the type of encantado. American Indian encantados live in villages in the depths of virgin forests; water spirits have their *encantarias* under water in rivers, lakes, or the sea; while still other encantados live in elaborate cities that may be directly under human cities. While they remain in their *encantarias*, the encantados are thought to have bodies, but when they rise above the earth they rise as spirits, invisible to man, and it is thus that they enter human bodies” (Leacock & Leacock 1972: 52-53)

The legends of enchanted princesses are a constant presence in the cosmology of Amazonian Pajelança and Mina. The places of enchantment are magical portals allowing those who pass through them to inhabit another time and space. Many geographical locations exist in Amazonia that are considered enchanted places, especially in Pará and Maranhão, including the Lençóis Beach in Maranhão (Pereira 2008) and the Pirabas Beach, in the Salgado Zone of Pará (Vergolino 2008).

Real people who lived in the past, such as noblemen and princesses, entered these locations and became enchanted beings. For Amazonian *caboclos*, these enchanted places are generally located at the bottom of rivers while the enchanted people themselves are frequently described as light-coloured and blonde beings. In Tambor de Mina some of these enchanted people are in fact noblemen from the European royalty of Catholic countries. Taissa Tavernard de Luca writes:

The majority of the enchanted are described as beings (people, animals) who were once alive but who did not experience death. They left this world in a fantastic form (Todorov 2003) and began to inhabit the enchanted realm located in specific geographical places, like forests, rivers, beaches, rocky outcrops and so on. (Luca 2010: 67)

Luca adds that the pantheon of Tambor de Mina is split between high and low status entities: high status entities include the divinities, Voduns and Orixás, and the Senhores de Toalha, a category of enchanted figures made up of European nobility from Catholic countries, such as Dom Sebastião, Dom Luís, Dom Manoel and the Marquess of Pombal.

At an intermediate level of the pantheon are located the Turks, a category of enchanted people “defined by some as Muslim, by others as Christian” (Luca 2010: 69).

These Turks are the subject of the film *The Discovery of Amazonia by the Enchanted Turks*.

The talk given by the director Luiz Arnaldo Campos prior to the film's screening at the Redenorte Encounter explained the idea behind the film: namely to 'document' the 'history' of the *encantaria* of Tambor de Mina, taken by those who practice the religion as a real history of the world rather than a myth. The process of drafting the film script involved a dialogue between the filmmaker Luiz Arnaldo and the *pai de santo*, Father Luís, also known as Babá Tayandô.

Luiz Arnaldo explained that after he heard about the history of the Enchanted Turks from Babá Tayandô, he had agreed to the challenge of producing a script and making a film that told the history of the community of *mineiros* and *pais de santo* (as the followers of Tambor de Mina and their priests, or saint fathers, are called). His objective was to make a record, a codification, of the history narrated in the so-called 'doctrines,' the music sung by the enchanted people when they are incorporated by the *pais de santo* during the Tambor de Mina ritual trances. There exist hundreds or even thousands of 'doctrines' known by the *pais de santo* who 'work' with Tambor de Mina.

In order to narrate the history of these enchanted people, Luiz Arnaldo submitted the project for a documentary to the DOCTV Project run by the Ministry of Culture in 2004. Production of the film began after the application was approved.

Tayandô was unsurprised that the funding had been approved to back his director friend's project, after all the Enchanted Turks had themselves approved his decision to break the secrecy surrounding them in the Mina *terreiros*: they now wanted to tell their story.

In all the process of producing the film lasted two and a half years. The script was developed only after exhaustive interpretation of the 'doctrines,' similar to the kind of work undertaken by Christian theologians when analyzing Bible passages. The difference was that Luiz Arnaldo and Babá Tayandô were carrying out this work for the first time in the history of Tambor de Mina. Luís Arnaldo approached the doctrines as historical fragments and compared them with books and historical facts, looking to identify to which historical moment the doctrine referred. His work presented Babá Tayandô with hypotheses that were then tested through the latter's personal contact

with the enchanted people. Through his work as a medium and practitioner of shell divination, Tayandô was able to test hypotheses raised by Luiz Arnaldo, asking the enchanted if they were true. After obtaining confirmation of the hypotheses, they began to be used to develop the documentary script. It is important to emphasize that Babá Tayandô started but did not complete an undergraduate course in history at Pará Federal University.

After finishing the script, the actors were selected, most of them followers of Tambor da Mina. The scenes filmed among the Indians were recorded in the Tembê Village while those depicting the enslaved blacks were filmed among the quilombo<sup>7</sup> communities in Abaetetuba municipality. The actress who plays the *cabocla* Mariana, one of the Enchanted Turks, is a *filha de santo* (saint daughter) from the religion with the same going for the other actresses playing Turkish women in the film. In the Afro-Brazilian religions, the enchanted people provide personality archetypes (Segato 2005) and behavioural models for their *filhos* or children (Augrás 1983). In the film the actors enact themselves by playing the enchanted owners of their heads, living myths that give form to their real personalities.

They are accounts of numerous interventions by the enchanted during the recordings. The example most cited by Tayandô is the thwarted attempt to make a plaster image of Toy Darsalã, an enchanted Turk. According to Tayandô the plaster statue became deformed, even after various attempts, because the Islamic tradition outlaws production of images of the sacred.

The process of producing the film did not take place outside the community since it was the religious practitioners themselves who explored their own history, to codify it, combining its fragments and transforming it into a narrative with a pre-established format: that of a documentary film. The film director accepted becoming a partner and an instrument in this codification process. He and the saint father engage in the process of translating the religion's oral history, previously told through the doctrines taught to mediums during trance, and undertake the construction of a work of audiovisual art. The film's objective is to match the history of the *encantados* with the events narrated by official history such as the crusades, the conquest of America and black slavery. The film is the way in which Tambor de Mina reinterprets these historical events.

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7 TN: The term quilombo refers to settlements originally founded by runaway black slaves.

Babá Tayandô is the film's narrator. In the first scene he appears dressed entirely in ritual attire and announces that he will tell the story of the emergence of the Amazonian Enchanted Realm, how the Turks became enchanted in Amazonia. The film narrates a thousand years of history. Everything begins when, after the defeat of the Turks by the Christians in Jerusalem, in the first crusade, there remain just a few outposts of resistance on the coast and the Sultan Fierabras or Darsalã<sup>d</sup> decides to send his three daughters to take refuge in a friendly kingdom in Mauritania. On the sea journey, the three princesses cross the Strait of Gibraltar and without realizing enter the Enchanted Realm.

In the Enchanted Realm, defined by Tayandô as a “three dimensional kingdom without time or space,” the three princesses, Mariana, Jarina and Erundina, pass four hundred years. In 1500 the princesses awake on Joanes Beach, on Marajó Island, by the shores of the Amazon River. When they arrive at the beach, they meet the *cabocla* Pororoca and the Indians from her tribe, who are saddened the loss of their kin who have been taken to Europe, captured as slaves by the Spanish. On this beach the princesses have contact with the Amazonian Enchanted Realm for the first time. From there they travel along the Amazon River until reaching the village of Caboclo Velho, where they come into contact with the shamans and herbs of Amazonia.

In the village a cultural encounter is celebrated in which, the film narrative tells us, “Indians turn into Turks and Turks turn into Indians.” In the Enchanted Realm, cultural differences can be overcome and everyone contributes their part to the creation of a better world.

The film celebrates an ideology that extols syncreticism. This syncretism involves exchanges between a wide variety of religious traditions, exchanges that occur in the realm of the divine, in the Enchanted Realm, and do not rely on the power of men. The history of the incorporation of the Turkish family into the Tambor de Mina cult is the history of the very emergence of this cult, interwoven with the history of the different peoples as told by official historiography. To depict these relations faithfully, Babá Tayandô and the director Luiz Arnaldo conducted extensive research, supported by consultation with the enchanted people and interviews with different priests from Tambor de Mina.

The next moment in the history narrated in the film describes how, after the departure of the three princesses, the Sultan Darsalã and his Grand Vizier

Ludogan themselves entered the Enchanted Realm and followed the same route as the princesses. In Amazonia, Darsalã also encountered the Caboclo Velho and learnt from him, although he was still reluctant to abandon his people in Turkey for good and become an Indian.

While these encounters and discoveries were happening in the Enchanted Realm, the conquest of America by the Portuguese was occurring in the Realm of Men. The Tupinambá were enslaved and expelled from their lands. In the indigenous tradition it was the white man Sumé who came to the village to teach the Indians laws, rituals and curing practices. In the myth Sumé left but promised to return when the Indians most needed him. While the European whites enslaved them, the alliance between the Caboclo Velho and the Turks provided the first step towards the construction of the Amazonian Enchanted Realm. For the indigenous people, the Sultan Darsalã was himself Sumé, the white man who came to offer them help.

In the Enchanted Realm, the three princesses also encountered King Sebastian, the Portuguese king who had disappeared in a battle during the crusades in the sixteenth century. In the Enchanted Realm this known enemy of the moors forged an alliance with the Turkish princesses and their father, the Sultan Darsalã, since in the realm there is no place for wars and terrestrial disputes: there traditional enemies can become brothers.

The last moment of the narrative occurs with the arrival of the enslaved blacks in the Amazonian lands of Grão Pará and Maranhão. These blacks brought with them pain and suffering, but also their Orixás, Voduns and Inquices, which combined formed the pantheon of the Enchanted Realm of Tambor de Mina. At this moment the film presents a scene in which different Voduns and *encantados* dance in circles in the forest.

After completing the formation of the Enchanted Realm at a spiritual level, the enchanted agreed to intervene again in the fate of men through the rituals and incorporation. At that moment in eighteenth century Maranhão, the Voduns began to manifest themselves in the material world through trance in Pajelança halls. This, the film's narrative tells us, was how Tambor de Mina came into being.

Though no precise historical records exist on the arrival of Tambor de Mina in Belém, the supposition is that it was brought to Pará by migrants from Maranhão arriving during the rubber boom in the nineteenth century. As they became established during this period, the African and indigenous

religiosities began to be described in the newspapers and police reports under the generic terms of 'sorcery' or 'shamanism' (Figueiredo 2008). The first audiovisual record of these practices was made by the Folklore Research Mission, headed by Mário de Andrade, who was in Belém in 1938 and noted the term 'batuque' or 'babassuê' as the form of self-identification used by followers of the cult (Alvarenga 1950). The self-denomination as *mineiros* and the name of the religion as Tambor de Mina or Mina Nagô only started to be used widely from the 1960s when the arrival of Candomblé, brought from Bahia, caused increased differentiation within the religious field (Luca 2010).

According to Luca (1999), the Tambor de Mina practiced in Pará lacked an origin point, referred to as a root *terreiro* or *casa mater* by scholars, a cult house founded by Africans from which its tradition descends. In Pará the Afro-Brazilian tradition located its main point of references in the Maranhão houses of Casa das Minas and Casa de Nagô, founded in the nineteenth century.

Faced with this lacuna, the *povo de santo* from Belém elected Mãe Doca as the founder of Tambor de Mina in Pará, considered the first person to the practice this particular religious cult locally. The film shows the process of choosing this *mãe de santo* by the enchanted people and her migration to Belém, where she establishes the cult.

The film constructs a heroic narrative, replete with mysticism. The Enchanted Realm, its gods and its herbs are presented as formative elements of the Amazonian identity, landscape and human population. The Enchanted Realm and the Tambor de Mina cults create a geography and a history for Amazonian people, founded on a syncretic religiosity.

It remains for us to analyze some of the consequences of a film being chosen as the format to codify a religious tradition, when the written word was for so long the medium par excellence for divulging the Christian tradition and, until the making of the film, the sung doctrines had been the main way of transmitting the Tambor de Mina tradition.

### **New forms of dialogue: the followers of Afro-Brazilian religions are actors, narrators, script writers and co-authors**

Both the home videos produced in VHS format by the native filmmaker in Cururupe and the sophisticated documentary produced by Babá Tayandô and



director Luiz Arnaldo are forms of audiovisual recording elaborated by the followers of Afro-Brazilian religions themselves on their experiences, their myths, their dogmas and their theology. At the same time that these narratives put them on a par with modern city folk for whom the media are one of the main forms of expressing identity, these images break the strict rules of silence and the secrecy on matters of African religiosity that held sway for centuries in these religions of oral tradition.

Films like *The Discovery of Amazonia by the Enchanted Turks* tend to foment polemical discussions between those supporting the written transmission and diffusion of religious knowledge and those opposed to using visual and written media to reproduce and conserve sacred forms of knowledge. Though praised by academic critics and widely divulged in universities, the film *Enchanted Turks* was criticized by the magazine *Orixás*, a periodical with a large readership among religious followers, for revealing the religion's secrets. The film is also the focus of an endless polemical debate between the Afro-Brazilian religious communities of Belém, who disagree with the version given by Babá Tayandô of the history of the three Turkish princesses.

We can conclude by reflecting on the surprises and possibilities of this new form of dialogue for anthropology. What is the anthropologist's role in processes of media construction that involve the self-image of groups who used to prize secrecy and discretion? What place should the production of images and the reflection on these rituals occupy in a future visual anthropology?

The documentary on Tambor de Mina in Pará state shows a good example of the production of images in dialogue with the group and through collective authorship. Through an audiovisual medium the film achieves the co-authorship advocated by postmodern anthropology. On the other hand, the amateur recording of images of religious rituals in Cururupu already calls attention to how the image can be an important source of recognition for followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, irrespective of the complexity of the technology and visual language deployed.

In the two examples analyzed in this text, the image was used to construct identities. In both cases this process occurred with the minimum of intermediation. In Cururupu, the audiovisual store functioned as a source of discourses and at the same time as a meeting place, amplifying the effect of the rituals. In the case of the documentary *The Discovery of Amazonia by the Enchanted Turks*, the cinema is used by the *povo de santo* to crystallize a

history, generating a debate on something that is already by itself an endless source of discussions in Tambor de Mina, namely the cosmology and doctrines of the enchanted people and the role of the image in the reproduction of this knowledge. To illustrate this point it suffices to recall that the film, widely watched and praised by the academic community and general public not belonging to the Tambor de Mina religion, is heavily criticized by other *mineiros* who believe that the way in which the events in the film are narrated is not entirely faithful to their religious doctrine.

Arjun Appadurai (1990) analyzes the media forms and identities produced by subcultures as part of contemporary mediascapes. For Appadurai these mediascapes are a field in which the products created for the dissemination of information circulate, a kind of production generated by globalization:

‘Mediascapes’ refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, film production studios, etc.), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world; and to the images of the world created by these media (Appadurai 1990: 5)

These cultural products create a universe of meanings and narratives that make up the lived world of human beings transiting through diverse cultures. The author calls these cultural groups in transit ethnoscapas. Mediascapes are producers and the product of lived experiences that generate meanings for ethnoscapas, groups and cultures in transit in the globalized world.

The notion of mediascapes is particularly important in terms of analyzing the relation between practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions and their visual productions. By examining films and scripts created and produced by themselves, we have seen how these followers give new meaning to their religious experience, constructing new forms of dealing with religious dogmas, such as the transmission of secret knowledge, with the learning of body techniques and the experience of trance. The circulation of information in the mediascapes represents, for religious practitioners, one of the aspects of supermodernity identified by Marc Augé (2000), the spatial abundance of images of fiction and reality that combine with each other and replace the old universe of the anthropological place in the production of everyday meanings for social agents. In supermodernity the meanings of the social world do not just come from everyday representations linked to kinship and

the neighbourhood, they are very often mediated by languages and codes produced in diverse cultural contexts. *Place* for followers of Afro-Brazilian religions also comes to be produced with the help of meanings coming from *non-places*.

Postmodern anthropology advocates an egalitarian dialogue between the anthropologist and his or her research subjects. Here the role of the anthropologist is that of an interpreter who at most provides a voice to non-western cultures in order for them to be able to express themselves in our language (Clifford 1998). However in today's world it is necessary to be attentive to situations in which intercultural dialogue does not require the anthropologist's mediation and the language utilized, both by anthropologists and by the subjects of their research, have many more elements in common than may be foreseen. Situations in which both the anthropologist and the natives share the same culture, the same media and even the same mass media. In such cultures the role of the anthropologist may no longer be to mediate but to interpret dialogues between worlds and cultures.

Marc Augé recalls that the radical separation between the anthropologist's world and the world of the native, along with the illusion of totality constructed around the objects of anthropological research, are all fictions, put to the test by the transformations in subjectivity introduced by modernity (Augé 2000). In cultural dialogues, the anthropologist is merely one more participant and is side-by-side with the natives and other interpreters of culture, such as scientists, artists and so on. Their texts and images will form part of a weave of unending relations where the anthropologist and the subjects of his or her research circulate. They will provoke all kinds of reactions and interpretations, good or bad, and generate comments. Anthropology as a practice must adapt to these new realities in order to survive as an anthropology of complex media-based societies, especially in terms of a visual anthropology, a field in which the productions of anthropologists and natives must be ever more carefully negotiated.

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