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Deus É Brasileiro:

A Comparative Study of Contemporary Religiosity in Late Modern Brazil

by

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Abstract

Recent decades have seen a renewed sociological interest in religion. However, contemporary sociological interpretations of religion tend to be oriented towards the global North, overlooking vibrant religious life present in the South. Brazil represents one of the most religiously diverse regions in the world, with 97% of the populace affirming a belief in God (Datafolha 2007), and many Brazilians integrating religious and spiritual practices into their daily lives.

By exploring contemporary Brazilian religiosity through adherents' experiences and perceptions in three distinctive religious communities (the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Umbanda and Salto Quântico), this study seeks to determine the role of religion in late modern neoliberal Brazil. Religious adherence represents the distinct and often creative ways that individuals of diverse backgrounds and identities deal with the trials arising from the interface of the individual life world with wider structural forces. The problems individuals bring to religion are a reflection of socially, politically and economically situated phenomena taking place in contemporary Brazil. However, religion also speaks to the search for meaning and answers to "ultimate questions" in the late modern context of relativism and uncertainty.

This study considers three specific areas of focus: firstly, the role that religion occupies in the lives of adherents in Brazil and their motivations for seeking out religious communities; secondly, the appeal of religion as a form of meaning making in various aspects of personal experience; and finally, the ways in which religion is integrated into everyday life, particularly through experiential spirituality and embodied practices.

Drawing on two and a half months of fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Aracaju, this study engages an ethnographic methodological approach, informed in part by grounded theory. Through data collated from participant observation and semi-structured life history interviews, insights are provided into the myriad ways in which individuals engage with religious practices on a daily basis, how they derive meaning from their spiritually informed interpretations of personal experience, and the symbolic and tangible ways they perceive their lives to be enriched by their religious affiliation.

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Introduction

The gods, their myths and rituals have changed their names, but they are still hard at work in both sociality and the environment.

Maffesoli 1995:139

A hot Sunday in the lush gardens of the Frei Luiz Spiritist Centre in Jacarepaguá; hundreds of Brazilians wander around, chat, or sit, as they await their consultation or spiritual surgery with disincarnate spiritual entities.

In the early hours of morning on the shore of the Pão de Açúcar in Rio, a lone person gathers shells, inscribing JESUS on the golden sands.

In an Umbanda centre on a hilltop in the midst of a crowded favela, mediums and onlookers with ribbons and purple flowers dance and sing in praise of the Orixá Nanã Buruquê.

These snapshots represent evocative interactions with the spiritual encountered during my fieldwork in Brazil, a region steeped in layers of long enduring and diverse religiosities. From the earliest moment of the arrival of indigenous peoples to the area until the present historical moment, the sediment of religious experience has long been accumulating and bearing influence on the social fabric of Brazil, permeating the quotidian with elements of the sacred. In fact, there is an oft-spoken dictum in Brazil, “*Deus é Brasileiro*” (God is a Brazilian) which embodies the centrality of belief in God, and of a divine hand bearing influence over the region that endures in contemporary life. For many individuals in Brazil, religion still forms a significant dimension of their personal identity,

formative and fundamental in their daily lives. In areas of the world such as Western Europe where pervasive processes of secularisation have been well documented, Brazil presents a converse trend with a vibrant and bustling religious life. The persistence and strong presence of religion in Brazil has been noted by scholars such as Andrew Dawson (2007:3) who declares, “Brazil, with its huge diversity of religious movements, has established itself at the vanguard which has helped to re-ignite academic interest in religion”, or José Jorge de Carvalho (2000:275) who observes that the interfaces, superimpositions, oppositions, continuities and singularities of the Brazilian religious field have constructed it as a unique religious universe composed of distinct, yet intercommunicating elements.

Making sense of why individuals in Brazil choose to adhere to a particular religious community and the multifarious ways their adherence impacts on their identity, life experience, relationships and interactions with the world at large constitutes one of the central concerns of this study. Religious identity can represent a powerful force in one’s personal biography, as Otto Maduro (1982:116-117) outlines:

Believers know the world-perceive it and think it- through their religious worldview. By that very fact their activity upon that world is guided and directed by this perception of the world that their religion makes possible, limits and orientates. Likewise, believers know themselves- perceive and think themselves-through their religious view of the world (of which they form the centre). They are held together and identified in their activity by this perception of themselves made possible, limited and oriented by their religion.

Aside from the importance of understanding the extent to which religious adherence bears influence on an individual’s interactions with the world, developing an understanding of the factors that motivate one to become part of a spiritual community also offers insight into the state of the society within which the individual lives. Durkheim (1975:94) underlines how critical it is to seek the determining cause of religious phenomena in the *nature of societies to which they relate*, not in human nature in general. The responsibility of the sociologist is to determine the social role of religion (Durkheim 1975:19). Durkheim calls for the sociologist to question what social causes arouse religious sentiment and lead individuals to express such sentiment in diverse forms. Critically, he asks, “*What*

social ends are satisfied by the organisation arising in this way? If we accept that religion is essentially a social thing, it makes religion comprehensible to human intelligence. If it emanates from the individual, it remains an incomprehensible mystery”(Durkheim, 1975:94).

Exploring the interface of individual religiosity and the wider social sphere represented a fundamental orientation of this study. This thesis focuses on three religious communities in contemporary Brazil informed by different traditions and belief systems (the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Umbanda and Salto Quântico) and will seek to argue that religion does not exist in a void separate from everyday reality, but is deeply intertwined in diverse aspects of social life, with the boundaries blurred between the sacred and mundane. For adherents of these three religious communities, their religious orientation infuses and bears influence on mind, body and spirit; providing them with a spiritually-informed paradigm to mediate the challenges of life within the context of late modern neoliberal modernity.

Setting the Scene: Religion in Brazil

Religion constitutes an elemental facet of individual and social life in Brazil. A survey carried out by *Datafolha* in 2007 found that 97% of the Brazilian populace affirm a strong belief in God (*Datafolha* 2007). Brazilian society is simultaneously characterised by the co-existence of secular and sacred, scientific and magical and most of all, the traditional and modern, side-by-side. The modernisation of Latin America did not bring an end to traditional forms of production or beliefs, but rather produced hybrid cultures that integrate multiple dimensions of tradition and modernity (*Garcia Canclini*, 1995). This merging of modern and traditional has seen the enduring visibility of religion and ubiquity of religious paraphernalia in the public sphere, even within the modern secular Brazilian state.

A permeable membrane divides the sacred and profane in Brazil. Religious life is present in society in multiple ways: for example, sacred offerings of flowers, fruit and *cachaça* to ask favours of the *orixás* (deities of Afro-Brazilian religions) are placed at crossroads, waterfalls and seashores and symbolise one of the fundamental ways in which religion overflows into the wider social arena, infusing it with a mystical tinge. *Mãe-de-Santos* and devotees of the *orixás* stand at street corners, giving out pamphlets, such as this one, advertising their services:

Temple of Magic! Don't confuse me with others; I have 50 years of connection with the Saint! Get that person you love in three days, find happiness; tie the person you love to you for 7, 14, or 21 years. Do you want to keep someone away who is bothering you, have financial problems, addictions, panic attacks or is your health not good? Stop suffering! I can resolve your problems no matter how difficult they might be, I don't promise, I do!

Religion has gained a foothold in cultural industry as well: Spiritist novels and romances have more than 50 million works in circulation (Dawson 2007:24), and Spiritist films such as *Nosso Lar* (2010) and *Chico Xavier* (2010) respectively earned in excess of \$R6 million each in their opening weekends in Brazil (Guerini, 2010). Brazil's geography is even coloured by sites of mystical pilgrimage, such as Alto Paraíso, a New Age Mecca that attracts visitors from all over the world who come to experience the "super-energised geology" of luminous crystal beds lying beneath the surface of the earth (Slovick 2007), or the house of John of God in Abadiânia, home to a psychic healer who treats hundreds of patients for diverse illnesses.

Although census data has limitations in revealing the true nature and scope of religious adherence, it is constructive in creating a general sense of religious affiliation and shifts that occur over time and space. The 2010 Brazilian census depicts a number of such significant trends in religious adherence, portraying a rapidly changing religious landscape since the previous census in 2000. Those who identify as Roman Catholic now constitute 64% of the population, declining from 74% in 2000 (Pew Research 2013). Protestants now represent 22% of the population, a significant increase from 15% in 2000. Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals compose 13% of the 2010 Protestant population. The Protestant population tends to be urban and young, while those who identify as Roman Catholic are more likely to live rurally and be older (Pew Research 2013). Notably, those who identify with Spiritist and Afro-Brazilian religions now number 10 million (5% of the population), an increase from 6 million in the 2000 census.

A socio-historical context of religion in Brazil

In order to comprehend the deeply rooted nature of religion within the social in Brazil, it is useful to briefly reflect on the origins of religion in the region. Religion has had an extensive and at times

convoluted history in Brazil, pre-dating official historical records. Prior to the encounter with Portugal in 1500, the indigenous peoples of the region (between 2 and 4 million) such as the Tapuia, Guarani and Tupi, had their own religious cosmologies in place to organise and make sense of the environment in which they lived. However, following the Portuguese colonisation of the region, Catholic doctrine and beliefs were immediately imposed with the goal of civilising and evangelising the indigenous with the first Jesuit missions constructed in 1549 (Rocha, 2006: 92). For some indigenous who were subject to evangelisation, storytelling and oral history allowed their religious cosmologies to continue through to future generations. For others that were not subjected to processes of colonisation, their religious systems continue, nourished by the continuation of their traditional lifestyles in and around the Amazon following acknowledgement of indigenous peoples in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution and the 2007 UN convention recognising indigenous rights to self-determination.

1550 saw the first influx of African peoples as slaves for the burgeoning sugar cane plantations (*fazendas*). African slaves were the property of plantation owners so were not subject to catechisation in the same way the indigenous were. Although their religions were strictly banned, syncretised forms began to proliferate, as African descendents adapted Catholic doctrine to suit their beliefs by appropriating saints to represent their *orixás*. This hybridisation, which anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) refers to as *bricolage*, allowed long-held belief systems and ways of knowing to continue into future generations for many of Brazil's marginalised communities. Rocha (2006) observes that the encounter between African and indigenous religiosity with Catholicism during the colonial period was significant as it exposed Catholicism to processes of creolisation and planted seeds for religious hybridisation. Another formative event in Brazilian religious life was the introduction of Kardecist Spiritism by Brazilian elites during the imperial period (1822-1889), as the belief in spirits, the proximity of the spiritual world and the ability of spirits to intervene in earthly life would come to characterize many autochthonous religions in Brazil. European immigrants who came to work on coffee plantations during this era also brought Protestantism with them (Rocha, 2006). The emergence of these other religious influences in the 19th century helped to undermine the institutional power of the Catholic Church, which officially separated from the state with the onset of the Republican regime in 1890.

The change to a Republican system was profoundly influenced by the positivist writings of Auguste Comte. Brazil adopted the motto "*Ordem e progresso*" (Order and progress), championing the advances of science, rationalism and efficiency, whilst rejecting mythical belief systems and superstition. This positivist turn led to the brutal repression of some of Brazil's religious movements, best represented by the example of Canudos. Canudos refers to a millenarian movement founded in 1893 by Antonio Maciel, which led to a physical settlement of impoverished and primarily indigenous Northeasterners awaiting the second coming of Christ in Belo Monte, Bahia (Pessar 2004). The movement, seen as atavistic and backward by the government, was crushed by the Brazilian military, which killed most of the movement's members. It also served as a warning to future generations to not pursue religious autonomy against national interests. Nonetheless, religious life continued to evolve, as in the 20th century immigrants brought with them to Brazil other religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. The 20th century also witnessed the reclamation of the religion of Candomblé, a religious symbol of Afro-Brazilian resistance practiced widely in and around Bahia, and the rise of Umbanda, a religion originating from Brazil, combining indigenous, Spiritist, Catholic and African elements.

Throughout most of Brazil's colonial and post-colonial history, religion can be seen to function as a gauge of tensions and reflection of events taking place within wider society. This is especially true of the 20th century, when global and local occurrences impacted on many religions. Bernice Martin (1998) argues that given the primacy of religion in Brazilian social life, it should not come as a surprise that religious movements have accompanied the social and economic upheavals that have been caused by Latin America's integration with the globalising forces of modernity. The emergence of Liberation Theology in the 60s provides such an example. Liberation Theology, directly influenced by Marxist ideology, encouraged Catholic priests to reconsider the way in which they understood and applied Catholic doctrine by seeking to address the roots of poverty. Priests involved with the movement privileged the collective needs of the poor and encouraged proactivity among those involved to demand social justice and the reformation of land ownership laws. The establishment of Catholic Base Communities was one of the fundamental ways that Catholicism immersed itself among local people, empowering them to interpret the Bible and put it into action for the improvement of their everyday lives. Liberation Theology was particularly active throughout the repressive military dictatorship, which lasted from 1964-1985. During this

phase there were clashes between the state and Catholic priests, many of whom were identified as insurgent Marxist forces and killed. The dictatorship signified a phase of considerable religious repression in Brazil, pushing heterodox religions such as Umbanda underground, only to re-emerge following the adoption of the new Brazilian Constitution in 1988 which guaranteed adherents the right to practice the religion of their choice without fear of reprisal or discrimination.

The implementation of neoliberal structural adjustment policies in the mid-80s following the end of the dictatorship opened the region up for exploitation and extraction of its natural resources. These policies, along with rising global awareness of environmental issues such as global warming, led to environmental concerns that were reflected in religious change. Many disenchanted middle-class Brazilians began to embrace more holistic earth-focused religious modalities based on New Age or indigenous spiritual beliefs, typified in religions such as Buddhism, Umbanda and Santo Daime (Dawson 1997). At the same time, belief systems typical of modernity that celebrated the autonomy of the individual and gave the freedom to explore alternative identities meant many Brazilians felt more liberated to embark on a search for a more subjective form of spirituality, seeking out many new religious forms from abroad. Brazilian literary critic Roberto Schwarz (1992) writes that Brazil has long had a fascination with foreign models and a desire to use them in Brazilian culture, tied to the belief that examples of modernity were to be gleaned from abroad. This tendency was founded on the anxiety that Brazil represented a “second-rate” version of cosmopolitan modernity (Rocha 2006). The preoccupation with foreign models as more representative of modern authenticity is embodied in the discourse of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God that will be examined in this study, which asserts its Christian spiritual dominance over indigenous Afro-Brazilian religiosities.

Locating Brazilian religiosity in a contemporary sociology of religion

Recent decades have seen a renewed sociological interest in religion sparked by phenomena as diverse as the rise of fundamentalism, New Age spiritualities, the relationship between religion, globalisation and post-modernity and the rapid spread of Neo-Pentecostalism, particularly in post-communist and developing regions across the globe (Turner 2009; Rorty and Vattimo 2005; Heelas

2008; Martin 2006). Brazil is strongly representative of such transformations as a developing country subject to the flows of globalisation, late modernity and neoliberalism.

Such phenomena challenge some of the fundamental precepts of secularisation theory, long upheld by sociologists informed by the classical tradition as the theory that best explains the transformations that have taken place among religions in the modern world. Secularisation theory, however, is a term that entails quite distinctive perspectives, as has been noted by scholars such as Casanova (2008), Martin (1965) and Stark (1999). The theory corresponds with three distinctive tenets: the first being that religion is in decline, the second that religion is a private phenomenon disappearing from public view, and the third that religion has become emancipated from the secular sphere due to structural differentiation. Similar to locales such as the US, Brazil represents a case of *structural differentiation*: religion is not in decline, and is increasingly visible in the public sphere, but has been separated from the state, which in actual fact (as Stark and Finke theorise) has been advantageous, allowing pluralism to flourish and invigorate the religious marketplace. This is echoed by Bernice Martin (1998:109), who notes that in many ways secularisation theory does not speak to a Latin American reality where although the church and state have long been separated, everyday society and life remains vibrantly “inspired”.

Whilst secularisation theory in its fullest expression speaks almost exclusively to the experience of Western Europe, the New Paradigm developed by R. Stephen Warner speaks almost exclusively to the case of the USA in accounting for the vibrant pluralism there. Whilst each theory captures elements of the religious trends present in Brazil, neither fully encapsulates the role of religion in Brazilian society. Finke and Stark’s rational choice theory provides insights derived from their axioms that are useful and most certainly applicable to making sense of religiosity in Brazil (the concept of the religious marketplace, interpreting religious adherents as rational actors and investigating the role of the supply side of religion in stimulating demand) but again, is derived from research focused on religious transformation over time in the US. What becomes increasingly apparent is that contemporary interpretations of religion tend to be very oriented towards the global North. These theories elevate Christianity to a position as the paradigmatic modern religion, and as a result there is a dominant empirical focus on Christian beliefs and practices (Vasquez 2013). As a result, such approaches to understanding religion are inherently limited in comprehending the current state of religion in Brazil and the wider global South

(Vasquez and Marquardt, 2003:3). The bias towards Northern experience in knowledge production overlooks different ways of knowing and interpreting social phenomena in the global South (Connell 2007). For Connell, developing an understanding of epistemologies in regions peripheral to the Metropole is a crucial way in which the neoliberal impetus that privileges Western ways of thinking can be overturned. There is a rich diversity of knowledge projects in the post-colonial world, some of which are religious in orientation, which can offer a deep understanding of ways of being and knowing that fall outside Western parameters.

Vasquez and Marquardt (2003) call for a new approach to understanding the role of religion in Latin America, with its rich religious history that has resulted from colonisation, slavery and immigration and high levels of religious creolisation which blend elements of native and African-based religions, European Spiritism and Iberian Catholicism. The existence of syncretism in many Latin American religions, according to Vásquez and Marquardt, challenges secularisation discourse around the decline of religion whilst simultaneously questioning the New Paradigm's presupposition that religious traditions are self-contained wholes competing against one another in a pluralistic market (2003:60). This resonates with the work of Brian Turner (2009), who proposes that there is an increasing need to consider religious adherence in terms of globalisation. Shifting identities and hybridised cultures means that theories and explanations of contemporary religion can not necessarily be reductive analyses. A globalised understanding of religion is useful in considering Brazil, with its many syncretised religions that draw on diverse cultural and religious traditions. Syncretism helps make sense of phenomena such as multiple religious affiliations, "believing without belonging" (Davie 1994) and religious improvisation, innovation and syncretism among religious groups. For Vasquez (2012), emphasising Latin American religious specificities such as the Brazilian case, helps in destabilising the hegemonic discourse at the heart of the existing sociological models of religion that tend to speak to European and North American realities.

In addition, Vasquez and Marquardt (2003:7) call for religion to be accorded its proper epistemological status, and to progress beyond explanations that privilege objective and quantitative understandings or give little empirical representation of the human face of religion or the views of religious adherents. Peter Berger (2007) himself notes that more impersonal means of gathering data on religion, such as surveys, consist of categories formed by researchers who are

often quite removed from the social milieu of the respondents. McGuire (2007) writes that religious censuses often orientate questions around belief and cognition, evading issues of emotion and embodiment. Furthermore, analysis of such data can often paint a very abstract picture of a very complex phenomenon, which is in fact quite remote from people's actual realities (Berger 2007). Religion presents diverse techniques for conceptualising self, space and time. For vast sectors of the world's population, it constitutes an integral way in which people interpret and make sense of their lives, and a respectful analysis of its significance merits reflexive and engaged research.

Furthermore, the Protestant-oriented focus in the sociology of religion encourages a view of religion as excarnated, belief-oriented and textualised rather than practice-oriented, ritualised and embodied (Vasquez 2012). Such an approach does not broach the multifarious ways in which religion, society, nature and the human body interact. Contemporary studies of religion need to acknowledge the importance of collective and individual practice in an everyday sense and relationship with the body and engagement with the material world (Vasquez 2012). These articulations resonate with the Brazilian case, and inform the framework, orientation and methodology of this study.

Contextualising Religiosity in Late Modern Neoliberal Brazil

Having situated the relevance of religion in Brazil in a sociological context, it is essential to next address the ways in which religion speaks to and is influenced by broader social and economic trends in society. Stark and Finke (2000), drawing on Durkheim, contend that religious organisations do not exist in a vacuum and therefore cannot be analysed without taking into consideration the socio-cultural and historical environments within which they exist. One immensely influential dimension of Brazilian society that has had massive repercussions for individuals is the political economy of neoliberalism. Everyday life in Brazil has undergone immense transformation in the past three decades following the implementation of neoliberal policies in the region, which have undeniably contributed to re-shaping the contours of the religious landscape.

Scholars such as Petras (2013) and Furtado (2001) identify Brazil's social inequality as directly linked to the adoption of the Washington Consensus that saw Brazil open its market recklessly and undergo mass privatisation and deregulation. Neoliberal structural reforms were especially pernicious for the lower socio-economic sectors that faced extreme inflation and poverty during the "lost decade" of the 80s and the transition period of the 90s. During this time, Brazil became notorious for the gaping disparity between rich and poor. At one of its most unequal phases in 1995, one fifth of the population (32 million people) received only 2.5% of the national income. The lowest 40% received slightly more than 8% of the total, and the poorest half only one tenth of it. The highest quintile received 64.2% of the national income (Greenfield 2008: 149). Inequality has been embedded in the structure of Brazilian society since colonisation, but significantly worsened with industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation and the mass migration of rural peoples to the crowded metropolises. There is a significant segment of the population who remain at the bottom of the heap, making up the informal economy eking out an existence selling gum and sweets on street corners, shining shoes, collecting recyclables and scavenging rubbish dumps (Martin, 1998:115). Recent scholarly attention on Brazil's *catadores* (rubbish sorters) highlights the initiative needed to operate within these informal markets, and the precariousness that characterises their existence. Eduardo Galeano wrote in 1973, with words that still resonate in the Brazil of today:

A myriad of laborers flees the poorest areas of each country: the cities attract and cheat whole families with hopes of work, of a chance to better their condition, of a place in the magic circle of urban civilization. But hallucinations do not fill stomachs. The city makes the poor even poorer, cruelly confronting them with mirages of wealth to which they will never have access- cars, mansions, machines as powerful as God or the Devil- while denying them secure jobs, decent roofs over their heads, full plates on the midday dinner table...

Galeano 1973: 248.

Wacquant (2008) writes that contemporary Brazil still remains characterized by "vertiginous social inequalities", noting that since 1989, lethal crime, a key social indicator of inequality, has been Brazil's leading cause of mortality. Petras (2013) argues that following the election of the Workers'

Party in 2002, Brazil became one of the largest extractive commodity exporters in the world, with overseas investors and foreign banks propelling this extractive drive and industrial demise, referred to by some Brazilian critics such as João Pedro Stedile of the MST (Landless Workers' Movement), as "*capitalismo bonitinho*" (prettified capitalism). The wealth gained from the boom in the agro-mineral extractive model saw industry profit massively while small farmers struggled, the wealth trickling into the economy in a very unequal fashion. Civil society also took a blow, with the masses experiencing a sharp decline in public services: 10 hour waits in public emergency rooms, crowded public transport and threats to personal safety were all contributing factors to the mass public protests in June 2013 in Brazil.

Following ongoing initiatives such as the *Bolsa Familia* (family fund) which awards cash benefits to mothers who ensure their children attend school and receive healthcare and immunisation, severe poverty has been alleviated somewhat. 28 million have been lifted out of extreme poverty and 36 million have entered the middle class in the past two decades. The government also has new initiatives in mind to reach out to impoverished citizens who are unaware of their eligibility for government aid or are geographically isolated. Nonetheless, the cost of living in cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo is extremely high, and 16.2 million Brazilians continue to live below the extreme poverty threshold, on less than US\$1.30 a day (de Sainte-Croix 2012). The hardship of life and material scarcity still impacts seriously on many Brazilians, especially in the context of consumer society and media bombarding people with images of consumer desirables. The aspiration to acquire material comforts and methods to deal with everyday challenges is evident in the popularity of religions such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and Umbanda, which offer people spiritual ways to approach problems related to finances, debt and employment. Neo-Pentecostal churches in particular speak directly to those most affected by severe poverty, providing a religious avenue to explore ways of overcoming the issues faced by the poor caused by deficient public services, rampant unemployment and a corrupt justice system (Wacquant 2008).

In addition to speaking to the structural challenges brought about by the onset of neoliberalism, many Brazilian religions also speak to the particular requisites of living within the late modern era. Late modernity, as hypothesised by theorists such as Lash, Beck, Bauman and Giddens, contends that contemporary societies are a continuation of modernity, where many of the traits of modernity are deepened. However, late modernity also implies the notion of reflexivity: that modernity has begun

to reflect upon its own foundations, reanalysing and reconstructing them (Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003). Reflexivity also carries the notion of radical doubt, that all knowledge is open to revision (Giddens 1991). For Giddens (1991), the state of the late modern is characterised by intrinsic problems such as new threats of personal meaninglessness, due to relegation of problems of meaning from public space to the private realm. Heaphy (2007) writes that issues and modes of behaviour that are potentially disturbing to the social order and our sense of social reality are sequestered from view. Giddens (1991) also refers to the “sequestration of experience” whereby everyday life is emptied of authentic experience. Increased reflexivity, the search for meaning and restoration of authentic experience, particularly experience located in the body, are all representative of changes incited by late modernity, and constitute significant dimensions of life that many individuals seek and find within religious communities.

A central feature of the reflexive late modern condition that distinguishes it from modernity is the challenge posed to symbols of epistemological authority. Unlike post-Enlightenment society, which was characterised by universally accepted understandings of phenomena and the idea of a unified and objectively knowable social reality (Martin 1998:103), there is no longer any authoritative claim on truth within any one discipline. Rorty et al. (2005) note that in this “age of interpretation”, neither science, religion nor philosophy can claim authority as all have equal validity. However, the consequent privileging of individual subjectivity and personal belief systems creates a collision of discontinuous discourses, causing fragmentation and a crisis of authority (Martin 1998). This is seen in the vast array of religiosities present in Brazil that draw on New Age values, encouraging adherents to see the inner self as the highest spiritual guide. However, there is a simultaneous quest for authenticity as a value. This is very apparent in the three case studies of this thesis, which all proclaim to bear unique spiritual knowledge from an authentic source, thereby separating themselves from a surfeit of impostors. This paradox of the crisis of authority and search for authenticity is reflected in the Brazilian religious marketplace¹, where diverse religions attract adherents with promises of long-established religious heritages and access to privileged authentic knowledge.

Another defining aspect of late modernity is high mobility. Lash and Urry (1993) call attention to the “mobile subject” who can move fluidly, shifting from rural areas to urban ones and changing

jobs and personal associations many times in one life. The burden of responsibility is placed on the individual, who is given almost complete autonomy and responsibility to direct their own life path and find success, and faces anxiety in deliberating over which choices to make. Bauman (2000) refers to this state as emblematic of “liquid modernity”. He further characterises liquid modernity by the concomitant uncertainty and ambivalence it carries with it: many are caught up in a universe of events that they do not fully understand, marked by contingency and disjuncture, partly because long-held knowledge is no longer infallible and social networks are prone to disintegration. Overtones of this ideology are overwhelmingly evident within the religious communities analysed in this study that offer an individualistic spiritual focus exhorting adherents to take responsibility for their lives, wellbeing and happiness in different ways. The mobility of the individual subject is also highly visible, with participants narrating the ways in which their shift to different religious faiths was interwoven with changing life experiences, jobs, moves to the city or personal transformations.

According to Giddens (1991), the practice of reflexive self-identity is another prominent feature in late modern life. One’s life is seen as a project, with one’s lifestyle choices a fundamental way in which the individual works on cultivating their own identity and developing belief systems with which they personally identify. Benita Luckmann’s (1978) work on the small life worlds of modern man is in many ways a forerunner to this theory, and provides a thorough analysis of how lifestyle choices are formative in generating one’s identity. She writes that the contemporary individual inhabits many small life worlds. Everyday life has a multi-dimensional nature, with the individual no longer defined by his/her pre-ordained place and specific function in the community. An encompassing sense of order has been broken, resulting in the search to find something solid or unifying to hold onto (Luckmann 1978: 279). The individual no longer sees herself/ himself as a necessary part of a social whole, inhabiting one meaningful divinely-ordered world to which they owe their loyalty, but inhabiting diverse structured worlds to which they are obliged to only give partial allegiance. Michel Maffesoli (1996) echoes a similar idea, personalising the small life worlds as “little masses” or the “time of the tribes”: groups distinguished by members’ shared lifestyles and tastes, where one’s social life is characterised by membership in a multiple overlapping groups.

Luckmann (1978) theorises that in these enclaves of freedom, man can turn to the idea market in which various cultural and religious industries and ideologies compete in offering meaning,

happiness, fulfilment, truth and togetherness. The innate biological sociality of the human being, their desire to construct a meaningful social reality and the experience of life in close-knit communities means that the private sphere becomes the place where he/she can participate in small universes of existence *of their choice* which may include membership in a club, political party or church, choosing a new partner, moving into a new house, learning a new language, altering their appearance or undergoing psychoanalysis to change their personality or attitudes (Luckmann 1978). Furthermore, residence within their small life worlds is often migratory and temporary, meaning the mobile subject can change these small life worlds as often as he needs in order to arrive at a fulfilling, and meaningful sense of self. Nonetheless, although the individual is involved within these small life worlds, he or she often also tries to fit them into a meaningful whole. This means that the one or two that have the most enduring permanence and significance are singled out, and become the nucleus around which the other life worlds are arranged (Luckmann, 1978: 285).

This is reflected in religious movement in Brazil, where people shift affiliations from one religion to another based on personal preference at the time, needs and desires, seeking out the religion that will best respond to their specific criteria, but keep religion as an overarching category vital to their personal biography. Angela, an adherent of Umbanda in her late fifties, explained to me that when she was in need of healing she would visit a specific Umbanda centre, but when she was in need of an uplifting, ecstatic experience, she would visit another that specialises in drum and dance. High mobility among religions in Brazil is a phenomenon noted by many Brazilian scholars, such as Pierucci and Prandi (2000), who note that people maintain multiple affiliations, drawing on the religion most suitable for tackling the particular problem they are facing at the time even if the religions are diametrically opposed, as in the case of Candomblé and the Universal Church (Selka 2010). People must constantly choose which gods to worship, and be aware of the consequences of embracing one over another. Many Brazilians eclectically combine elements of different traditions to form their own truths, and may practice diverse rituals and ceremonies in search of the cure they desire, whether it is healing of mental or physical illness, resolution of domestic strife or of debts. This resonates with the idea of *bricolage* or “patchwork religion” as theorised by Robert Wuthnow (1998), and is also representative of the disintegration of overarching meta-narratives of truths, typical of late modernity. A residual consequence of this

high religious mobility is the existence of a diverse and dynamic religious sphere, which competes for adherents.

Locating the Study within the Literature

Religious re-enchantment and the search for meaning

For those in Brazil who experience late modernity with ambivalence, seeking refuge in religious activities represents a form of resistance or means of overcoming some of its inherent limitations. The notion of religious re-enchantment is raised by many scholars with reference to Brazil, the works of de Carvalho (2000), Martin (1998), Dawson (2007) and Chesnut (2007) notable among these. Lee and Ackerman (2002) offer a very comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon; making the case that global religious revivalism is on the rise everywhere, challenging the Cartesian, secular outlook of the world and defying disenchantment. The beneficiaries of re-enchantment are those individuals whose identities have been sharply affected by the crisis of modernity. The experience of the desolate landscape of modernity drives such individuals to experiment with esoteric forms of religious consciousness. In the case of Brazil, this is especially apparent amongst educated liberal middle class who reject bourgeois values and adhere to the magical mastery of the world taught by Umbanda and Candomblé centres, religions that are characterised by their oral traditions such as singing, dancing and embodied rituals such as spiritual incorporation. One must learn proficiency through experience, through embodiment and initiation. Rejection of bourgeois values is also seen in adherents of Salto Quântico, who follow New Age ideologies that promote self and spiritual growth over personal success and acquisition of worldly goods.

The privileging of these kinds of spiritual knowledge and experience (accessible to all, originating from one's inner, spiritual self) run in direct opposition to rationalised and specialised knowledge predominant in modern life. Lee and Ackerman (2002:10) articulate that the knowledge needed by the general public for survival and world mastery has become increasingly more exclusive. Increased differentiation in the economic, cultural, social and technological spheres creates more obstacles to general understanding. Although rationalisation leads to increased efficiency, predictability, and calculability it can be dehumanising or even destructive: for as Weber argues, over-rationality ultimately leads to irrationality.

Kelly Besecke's (2007) concept of reflexive spirituality also draws on the significance of meaning and metaphor in contemporary spirituality. Besecke draws on Wade Clark Roof (1999) who proposes that reflexive spirituality describes a deliberate and self-directed approach to the cultivation of religious meaning, or the means by which individuals bring religious meaning into their personal lives. Reflexive spirituality recognises that religion is sought for its wisdom and meaning and not for its literal truths, and in this way it carries a cultural critique of contemporary social institutions that over-emphasise the importance of rationality and literalism (Besecke, 2007:172). Excessive literalism, particularly in terms of seeing or reading only apparent surface meanings, is seen to obscure the possibility of connotation: the symbolic value of objects, events and narratives relating to human life and experience to reveal deeper truths. In the case studies of this thesis, the quest for meaning was axiomatic for many who shared their testimonies and narratives: literal interpretations of why individuals had trouble becoming pregnant, or why they were plagued by depression were unsatisfying. Furthermore, reflexive spirituality challenges the binary that exists between science and religion: religion does not necessarily need to be undermined by scientific rationality, a belief that is prevalent in many Weberian readings of religion (Besecke 2007). For individuals of the Umbanda communities who participated in this study and those in Salto Quântico, religion and science were seen as compatible or even interlinked.

New Age ideologies and contemporary religiosity

Ideologies stemming from New Age spirituality appear both implicitly and explicitly in the three case studies. Paul Heelas (1996) presents a deep analysis of the New Age movement, with his more recent 2008 work looking at the correlations between spiritualities of life and consumptive capitalism. Heelas sketches out some of the controversies related to inner life spiritualities, such as whether they lead to the engorgement of capitalism through consumption as often accused, or actually hold the possibility of breaking out of the confines of the "iron cage" by providing an avenue for true human flourishing. Heelas (2008) writes that one of the intrinsic criticisms of New Age movements is that they oriented towards the self and emphasise the importance of the consumption of individual experiences, for one's own hedonistic pleasure and deepening understanding of the self. Heelas also examines the social significance of inner-life spiritualities beyond consumption: is there sufficient good in New Age movements to positively affect wider

social life, that is to say, do they hold the potential of taking on an engaged, relational form with the world around them? His answer, despite the caveats discussed above, is a strong yes, and he argues that inner life spiritualities could have a role to play in making a real difference in society, in promoting “social good-living”, harmonisation and circumventing the boundaries of the capitalist system.

Although Heelas (2008) acknowledges that New Age spiritualities represent the tendency to foster self-indulgence, selfishness and narcissism and consequently privatization of individuals’ lives, he also raises the possibility that New Age movements can be constructive and are productive, rather than consumptive. Spiritual movements often offer holistic, face-to-face interactions that facilitate meaningful experience between individuals, and a way to develop basic spirituality, with often extremely positive benefits to adherents’ lives, without necessarily gratifying consumptive emotions (2008:9). For Heelas (2008:87), practitioners of New Age spiritualities do not consume for pleasure, but engage with spiritual practices in order to be consumed by them, to further their spiritual growth. Furthermore, he argues that the most axiomatic element that lies at the heart of all New Age movements is a fulfilled, experientially rich life. New Age spiritualities offer adherents a way to get more deeply in touch with their lives, and live their lives in more satisfying ways through spiritual experience. What appears most striking about many New Age movements today are the this-worldly, secular ends which they serve, intimately bound to everyday life. These are all issues that resonate with the religious communities examined in this study. Narratives from participants expressed the centrality of experience in their religious lives and the ways in which spiritual identity and practice permeates their everyday reality. Heelas’s critically engaged gaze will be used in contemplating the effects of New Age ideologies on the individuals and groups discussed in this study, and the ways in which these ideologies are representative of broader social trends at play.

Religion as lived experience and embodied practice

The concept of religion as lived, or everyday religion, offers a holistic framework for making sense of religious adherence. Developed in different contexts by scholars such as David Hall, Robert Orsi and Nancy Ammerman, lived religion sees personal religious adherence as dynamic and privileges an understanding of religion as practiced and the ways it is experienced by everyday men and women (Hall 1997). Applying an understanding of religion as lived in a Brazilian context is vital to

comprehending the ways the sacred infuses the secular sphere in Brazil, and vice versa. Delving deeply into the centrality of experience and the concept of religion permeating everyday life Nancy Ammerman's (2007) work around the ways religion is experienced by non-experts provides an invaluable source of scholarship that speaks to the concept of lived religion as a vital component of the quotidian for many individuals. Ammerman (2007:5) calls for a sociological focus on *everyday* religion. She hypothesises:

To start from the everyday is to privilege the experience of non-experts...we are interested in all the ways that non-experts experience religion. Everyday religion may happen in both public and private life, among both privileged and non-privileged people. It may have to do with mundane routines, but it may also have to do with the crises and special routines that punctuate those routines. We are simply looking for the many ways religion may be interwoven with the lives of the people we have been observing.

Meredith McGuire's work closely examines what is signified by "lived religion" (which in many ways resonates with Heelas' focus of spiritualities of life), and focuses on how religion is experienced by adherents, particularly through embodied practices. She condemns the impoverishment of the epistemological tradition that has radically split materiality from spirituality and mind from body, promoting a "disembodied" focus around religion and asks, "*What if people -the subjects of our research and theorising -had material bodies?*" McGuire argues that religious adherents are not merely disembodied spirits, but that they experience the material world in and through their bodies (McGuire 2003). The notion of the body as a socially inscribed site resonates with the sociological shift in recent decades that acknowledges the validity of the body and emotions as subjects worthy of analysis (Scheper Hughes and Lock 1987; Barbalet 2001). Religious adherence or spiritual affiliations indubitably have effects on the way adherents experience their bodies, and bodies conversely may have great effect on which religious community one chooses to participate in, and the way in which they participate. The body matters in considering social aspects of religion: they matter to the persons who inhabit them, and for those who often come to religion seeking understanding around many body-oriented issues. Humans strongly identify with their bodies and human agency in society is accomplished through the body (McGuire 1990).

McGuire (1990), drawing on Merleau-Ponty, also contends that the body matters because it *is* matter: the materiality of the body grounds human experience in reality, and provides a vehicle through which the individual perceives and interprets the world, and vividly experience the material circumstances of social existence. The body is the phenomenological basis for apprehending and producing social meanings of self, others and society. With regard to specific religious phenomena such as spiritual healing, exploring somatic ways of knowing can provide the researcher with a more nuanced and sensitive perspective to make sense of alternate states of reality, ritual, spiritual healing and spiritual ways of knowing such as prophecy (McGuire 1990). In addition, embodied spiritual practices that people call upon to remember, enact, adapt and create the stories out of which they live, are brought into being by seemingly mundane practices which transform meaningful interpretation into action (McGuire 2003). People's material bodies become linked to their lived religions through embodied practices (McGuire 2007). Bodies feature prominently in the discourses of adherents in this study, who seek spiritual ways of making sense and engaging with their body, their sexuality and their bodily health and wellbeing. The significance of embodied practice is also emphasised as vital in creating a bridge between the material world and the spiritual, and bringing spiritual experience into the bodily domain.

Courtney Bender's (2007) work also re-theorises the importance of religious experience in sociological understandings of religion, articulating the distinctions between everyday, lived religious experience and nonhabitual, mystical experience. She highlights the need for sociologists to locate religious experience as a central consideration in the study of religion, with attention given to the way in which individuals construct narratives of their experiences, and how the sociologist might go about interpreting these experiences within the context of everyday social life. Bender argues that religious experience should not be taken merely at the word of the experiencer as a "natural" occurrence without its own history. Religious experiences are intellectually, emotionally and culturally complex and cannot be reduced to secondhand accounts or privileged "real" events experienced by individuals. Vitality, Bender also identifies that religious experience is intimately bound to the desire for experience of the "real", to the ongoing yearning to grasp, touch or be touched by that which is real and true. This contemplation of the appeal of the real or true and search for the authentic appears in participants' narratives in each of the religions studied in this thesis, and the specific expressions religious experiences take in each religion.

Religion as an alternative form of social engagement

James Holston's superb ethnography of the New Age Spiritist group Valley of the Dawn accounts for the rise and popularity of this religion in a peripheral region of Brasilia. Although his research is focused on a specific case, it nonetheless has elements that help in understanding the ways in which religious communities in these case studies provide a space for alternative social engagement. He rejects compensatory understandings of religious participation, such as those of Jean Comaroff and Douglas Monteiro, who frame religious adherence among the poor and oppressed as compensation for the failures, privations, exclusions or traumas suffered in modern society (Holston, 1999:612). Instead, he contends that participation in a religion may act as an *alternative modernity*, providing an alternative identity and arena of participation to that of the citizen oppressed or devitalized by the nation. To those who ridicule religious participation, he counters that like religions, nation-states, also compete for allegiances, demonstrate power, create hierarchies, have specialised vocabularies, structures and procedures and "like prophets gathering flocks, modern states invent nations where they do not yet exist and create polities to which they later belong" (Holston 1999: 606).

Religion may afford individuals an opportunity to feel modern, to engage with modernity in an alternative way and direct its forces. Many religions in Brazil embody the modernist presupposition that misfortune can be overcome, destiny transformed, development accelerated by adherence to their spiritual paradigm (Holston 1999:624). In questioning the assumed "rationality" of the modern nation state, he also calls into question the classical thesis that modernity means secularisation and that sacralisation is anti-modern, saying there is no simple binary opposition, and that both religion and state can be rational and further modernising projects. Such ideas are also voiced in the arguments of Talal Asad (2003:25), who posits that the religious and the secular are not static categories, but contingent and shifting. Scholastic readings of the secular and the sacred have obscured them, depicting them as binaries.

The concept of religious participation as a space for alternative social engagement is present to differing degrees in all of the case studies of this thesis, but is particularly evident within the case of Salto Quântico which advertises itself as a scientifically grounded spiritual path to happiness and fulfillment. Salto Quântico has a large membership of gay, lesbian and transgender adherents, and the religion offers them a unique way to understand themselves that subverts the label often placed

on them by society. For Salto Quântistas, their homosexuality is divine, not a genetic or social aberration. Salto Quântico invokes an alternative scientific and spiritual reality (but still functional within mainstream reality), with study groups, meetings and internal hierarchies that encourage members to immerse themselves as much as possible in the alternative spiritual space offered by the group.

Religion as rational

Stark and Finke (2000) also echo the idea of religious adherence as fundamentally rational. They adopt a symbolic interactionist approach to understanding religious participation, whereby one must know how the actor subjectively defines the situation in order to assess the rationality of the choice (Stark and Finke 2000). They contend that the notion of religion as “antithetical to the rational calculus” has emerged from long-privileged but unempirical data of social scientists of the 19th century, such as Levy-Bruhl and Comte, that smacked of prejudice, racism, ignorance and anti-religious sentiment (Iannacone, Stark and Finke 1998:374). For Stark and Finke, the generally rationality of the role of religion can be measured by its utility in one’s life, or a variation of Pascal’s Wager. Whether a supernatural force is real or not is irrelevant, as the rational returns to a person’s life provided by religion is what is important, an idea explored prolifically by Durkheim, and visible to a degree in Nietzsche’s parable of the mad man. Writer Steven Barnes (2006) expresses it in this way: *“Faith, then, is a belief beyond the edge of what we can see...A disproportionate number of the highest-performing, happiest, sanest and healthiest people I have known or studied around the world have such a belief. That doesn’t make it true—but it does imply that it is useful.”*

There is a vast body of contemporary literature (George, Ellison& Larson 2002; Clark, Beeghley and Cochran 1990) that supports the idea that religion is instrumental in contributing to various rational behaviours (e.g. risk aversion and protective behaviours) that have consequences for physical and mental health. This includes formal proscription of specific behaviours that engender health risks (e.g. dietary restrictions and prohibitions against the use of alcohol and tobacco, adultery, gambling and drug use which are very rigorously directed in Neo-Pentecostal churches). Many scholars (Martin, 1998; Robbins 2009; Chesnut 2003; Oosterbaan 2008) note that the rational restrictions in place within Neo-Pentecostal churches such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God have very positive rational outcomes for adherents’ lives. A more “moral life” can

have diverse positive effects for a person: better health, more stable relationships, more disposable income, more time to spend with family and friends, and a better attitude to work. Religious involvement often confers a number of benefits such as the development of close bonds and friendships with members in the church community (Clark et al. 1990) and increased instrumental and socio-emotional support from members of the community (Ortega, Crutchfield and Rushing 1983; Taylor and Chatters 1988), which can promote both individual and community healing. These diverse lifestyle and health behaviours associated with religiosity could result in lower rates of chronic and acute illnesses, reduced stress in individuals and positive emotions in terms of the self. Furthermore, many religious teachings (such as those of Salto Quântico and Umbanda) discourage individual deviance and encourage harmony in personal relationships. For all participants in this study, participation in a religious community vitally contributed to their overall happiness and wellbeing.

However, over-rationalising religious adherence also carries its own dangers. Nancy Ammerman (2007) offers a useful critique of rational choice theory, arguing that although religious actors make decisions about religion based on the religious market and what they are willing to invest, placing costs, rewards and market structure the primary explanation for religious activity overemphasises the theory's validity. Over-rationalising religion may under-privilege other valid dimensions of religious adherence, such as the desire for connection with the divine, yearning for spiritual experience or the emotional dimensions of spirituality and morality. For example, in this study, the Spiritist-based religions of Umbanda² and Salto Quântico have a very strong focus on morality and social justice that follow a different line of rationality based on the importance of *spiritual capital*. The idea of spiritual capital cannot be understood in the Bourdieusian sense of spiritual authority or influence. It refers to spiritual plenitude, attained through the cultivation of strong relationships, spending time with loved ones, carrying out charitable acts that are often immaterial (listening to someone in need of company or support, offering time or resources to help the poor or indigent, practising forgiveness) and maintaining awareness that excessive wealth and material success do not necessarily bring with them fulfilment but often carry deep problems

² It is important to note here that there is great diversity within Spiritist and Umbanda centres. Umbanda is often deemed to fall along a spectrum of values, ranging from white Umbanda, with a focus on Spiritism and Christian morals to black Umbanda, which is seen to be more about manipulating religion for personal use and potentially to do harm to others.

of their own. Like karma, spiritual capital gained during earthly existence is believed to help the spirit move to a more evolved spiritual place of existence in their next incarnation.

The religious marketplace

In religious economy theory, Stark and Finke (2000) propose that the sub-system of religion within society runs parallel to the commercial economy, involving the interplay of supply and demand for products. Current and potential followers constitute the “demand”, the religious organisations seeking to serve that market are suppliers, and the doctrines and practices they offer represent their products (Stark and Finke 2000). Their central premise is twofold: competition results in more energetic and efficient religious groups, and the more that religious groups are unregulated and left to compete, levels of religious commitment will correspondingly be higher (Stark and Finke 1998: 762). Stark and Finke identify the U.S. as exemplary of this phenomenon, but the religious marketplace in Brazil also embodies this principle: Brazil is one of the world’s most diversely pluralistic nations and also ranks amongst the highest figures of religious affiliation globally.

This argument challenges the long-held belief best articulated by Peter Berger (1967) that the plausibility of religion is eroded by pluralism and that universal confidence is only possible where one faith dominates. Stark and Finke (2000) allude to research carried out by Neitz (1987: 257-258) that demonstrates that Catholic charismatics’ awareness of religious pluralism did not undermine their beliefs, rather that “they had engaged in a rational decision-making process, weighing alternatives, categorising and comparing-before coming to a choice”. For those who gave testimonies of their religious affiliation in this study, this was a commonly asserted truth: many had been through a process of trying out different religious groups on their spiritual quest, before finally settling on the religious community that held the most meaning and resonance for them such as in André’s case:

I was born into a Catholic family. I studied a bit of Judaism with friends....and I spent some time at a Buddhist temple, but none of my experiences convinced me...until I came across Umbanda.

However, it is important to point out that the concept of a religious marketplace has been contested, with critics such as Heelas (2008:183, 184) arguing that applying the language of

consumption to a religious context is misleading, deflecting attention from spiritual activities that do not enter the market. There is an ambiguity around what notions such as “consumer” and “marketplace” actually denote, with connotations of the terms also problematic in the negative associations they inspire. Heelas (2008) also calls attention to the fact that religious adherents do not identify themselves as consumers. This is a valid critique, and thus the use of “religious marketplace” will be used sparingly in this study in specific contexts, to speak specifically to the interaction and flows that occur between competing religions within the broader religious sphere in Brazil.

In making sense of the specificities of the Brazilian religious marketplace, Sidney Greenfield’s work on “religious patronage” is highly relevant. Greenfield (2006) contends that patronage is deeply embedded in Brazilian social and political fabric, whereby the poor and workers depend on bosses for help and protection in times of need. Brazil’s skewed distribution of wealth and income mean that for the masses, the most efficient way to gain access to resources needed is through relationships with members of the elite (Greenfield 2006, Da Matta, 1991). Drawing on the research of Daniel Gross, Greenfield argues that patronage is the dominant pattern of relations represented between the worshipper and the supernatural (2006). By demonstrating loyalty or performing a service for their patron, the client traditionally receives assistance and favours granted in return for this loyalty. Translated to the spiritual realm, adherents pay respects, leave offerings and honour particular folk saints and spirits (in Umbanda and Candomblé, spiritual guides and *orixás*) in order for favours to be granted. Greenfield notes that this idea is also replicated in the Universal Church as a slight variation. Payment of the tithe is a demonstration of faith, making God indebted to the church member (Greenfield 2006: 83). However, Greenfield observes that if a patron or saint fails to fulfil a request, “there is a no appeal to a higher power possible” (Greenfield, 2004:64).

However, Greenfield’s conclusion undermines religious consumers’ savvy regarding the religious marketplace. For many Brazilians, as long as they perceive their loyalty to a spiritual entity as rewarded, they will remain faithful to that spiritual entity. However, should the favours go unheard; the individual will find a more powerful entity to honour and petition. In Brazil, religious pluralism is fluid: individuals often vary attendance between different churches in order to get what they are looking for with no perceived discrepancy in sporadically adhering to distinct

ideologies. The act of making a choice of one religion over another is empowering, in the sense that the individual is selecting the religious system they perceive to be most relevant and beneficial to them at that time. However, it is crucial to add a caveat to this interpretation: religion does not have this significance for all, with many Brazilians cultivating a very deep and enduring involvement with one religion only. A clientelistic attitude (in Umbanda these individuals are actually called *clientes*) is more common among those who have a specific agenda and are seeking to solve problems, such as the return of an ex-partner, a new job, a debt paid, a loved one's release from prison, and will move from centre to centre until they find a resolution. The streets of urban Brazil are coloured by posters on lamp posts, billboards and people jamming leaflets into passers-by's hands advertising their spiritual services to potential religious *clientes*.

In this sense, some individuals peruse the religious market with an eye out for a specific religious product. Andrew Chesnut (2003) observes that it is the product of spiritual healing, eagerly sought by adherents of diverse religious backgrounds, which largely drives competition in the religious marketplace in Brazil. Across the three case studies of this thesis, spiritual healing reappeared multiple times as a motivation to start frequenting a religion, or as the driving force behind a quest for spiritual understanding tied to physical healing. Thus is it essential to give to a brief consideration of what spiritual healing entails and the social context that has given rise to the abundance of healing products within the religious marketplace.

Contextualising the desire for spiritual healing in Brazil

Brazil's spiritual panorama abounds with diverse spiritual healing products, each endeavouring to fulfil a niche and attract new adherents. The facility with which new religions and ideologies about health and healing are integrated into Brazilian society can be partially attributed to Brazil's lack of secularisation. The public sphere continues to be enchanted in Brazil, representing fertile ground for alternative therapies to flourish. To seek spiritual healing in Brazil is accepted and congruent with Brazil's religious and social history, as the Brazilian *habitus* is well versed with belief in spirits and the proximity of the spiritual world. Medical practitioner and anthropologist Cecil Helman (2007:7), writes that one's social context has enormous bearing upon the way in which an individual identifies and reads the experience of illness. He propounds:

One cannot really understand how people react to illness, death, or other misfortunes without an understanding of the type of culture they have grown up in or acquired—that is, of the “lens” through which they perceive and interpret their world. In addition, it is also necessary to examine the social organisation of health and illness in that society (the healthcare system).

A preoccupation with monitoring and controlling the body is widespread in Brazil, both in a cosmetic and functional sense. Health stores and gyms are plentiful, however, it is difficult to walk down any street in urban Brazil (be it in a *favela* or in affluent Ipanema) and not come across several drugstores. In 2011, Brazil had more than 79,010 registered commercial drugstores and pharmacies (Paim et al. 2011). There are estimations that by 2013, Brazil will boast the 8th largest drug market in the world, as revenue from drug sales between 1997 and 2009 grew at a rate of 11.4% per year, totalling a profit of R\$30.2billion (Paim et al. 2011). The Brazilian social sphere in many ways reflects the social phenomenon Robert Crawford (1980) terms “healthism”, whereby health-giving initiatives and habits such as exercise, diet, vitamin supplements, anti-stress, anti-alcohol, anti-fat and anti-smoking measures become normalised. Healthiness constitutes a model for good living and unhealthiness becomes a form of deviance.

Another consideration vital to understanding why spiritual healing has flourished in Brazil is the state of the Brazilian health system. Jorge Brito, a leader of an Umbanda centre studied in this thesis, noted that for many poorer Brazilians spiritual healing is one of the only free alternatives available to the often overcrowded, underfunded public health system or to expensive prescriptions. The current Brazilian health system, the *Sistema Único de Saúde* or SUS, has largely been shaped by a health reform movement driven by civil society at the end of the dictatorship period. Approximately 75% of Brazil’s population rely on the SUS exclusively (Jurberg and Humphries 2010). A 2011 report on the current state of the Brazilian health system released in the medical journal *Lancet* underlined that as a result of a shift to a neoliberal approach in the early 90s, the private subsector has continuously been expanded, subsidised and protected by the state. This protection has fostered the creation of specialised diagnostic and therapeutic clinics, private hospitals, and private health insurance companies, to the detriment of the underfunded public subsector, compromising its ability to provide access to quality care for all Brazilians. Brazil

currently spends US\$252 per capita on health, while other South American nations such as Uruguay spend US \$431. The vast majority of Brazilians in the middle and upper socio-economic brackets opt for private insurance (as many as 26% of the total population in 2008). However, access to private healthcare does not necessarily signify satisfaction with the treatment provided; for the Brazilians of the higher socio-economic classes that seek out spiritual healing, Western medicine is seen as having inherent limitations, which will be explored in greater depth in the case studies.

Limitations of biomedicine

The appeal of spiritual healing can be comprehended in part by first looking critically at the limitations of biomedicine. For critics such as Illich (1977) and Baer, Singer, and Susser (2003), the limitations of mainstream medicine are numerous and rarely acknowledged, such is the power and privilege present in the scientific-medical institution. Biomedicine is the preeminent medical system in the world not necessarily because it is the most effective, but because of its self-regulation, the medicalisation of all aspects of our social lives and its links to western/scientific power and corporate and industrial interests. The medical establishment draws on scientific discourse (one of the most eminent and privileged discourses in contemporary society) to justify and legitimise knowledge and practice.

Biomedicine is often portrayed as value-free, free of economic or political influence; however, it is nonetheless embedded within the larger socio-cultural system. Like all healing systems, biomedicine too has its own rituals and traditions, but these are not obvious due to the hegemony of the biomedical system which appears as the norm. Illich (1977) defines biomedicine as sick religion, or black magic, as it transforms the sick individual into an apathetic voyeur of her/his own treatment, carrying out rituals that focus the entire expectation on science and technology instead of encouraging the patient to seek a meaningful understanding of their predicament and their suffering. Such technology in reality confers very negligible benefits, and engenders a reliance on the ability of experts to discover ever new ways of “fixing” individuals through new methods of diagnosis, prognosis and cure (Broom 2009:438). Nonetheless, it is the inefficacy of biomedicine to “fix” the distress and illness stemming from chronic disease, cancers, even the common cold that engenders medical pluralism, and the search for spiritual and alternative forms of healing (Baer et

al. 2003; Broom 2009). Broom (2009) calls attention to the tensions and power struggles that occur between alternative therapies and biomedical treatments, with many clinicians and specialists drawing on unsubstantiated discourses of risk to discourage patients trying alternative therapies in order to maintain medical dominance. Biomedicine retains privileged status over heterodox and alternative medical practices by subordinating them as a lesser form of healthcare (Baer et al. 2003).

The biomedical paradigm cultivates the patient's dependency on the doctor and system. Illich's critique points to doctors holding power over bodies, taking away the individual's potential for autonomous healing and exonerating the sick from accountability for their condition by devising ever new categories of disease. Institutionalised health care is tantamount to health denial, as it expropriates power from the individual to deal with human weakness in his/her own way, make sense of his/her illness or shape his/her environment. Furthermore, the biomedical system presents health as a commodity of which there is a supply, that can be acquired through the purchase of medicine, vitamins or supplements (Illich 1977: 16, 70). To varying degrees, the instances of spiritual healing discussed in the case studies of this thesis encourage autonomy over one's body, construction of meaning around illness and responsibility for personal wellbeing, in contrast to the general lack of agency promoted by mainstream medicine. In the cases of spiritual healing in Umbanda in particular, there is an evident shift towards resisting biomedicine, the panacea of drug culture, and re-appropriating traditional ways of knowing and healing.

Concepts of health and illness

For those participants who came to religion seeking spiritual ways to restore their health, spiritual understandings around health and wellbeing often differed quite significantly to those of the biomedical model. Health is a highly contested concept, with many definitions of it rejected for being too limited or static in scope. For Illich (1977), a vision of health should include a notion of adaptation. Health is not a fixed end point to work towards, nor a perfect state of wellness, but is dynamic and includes the ability to adjust to changing environments, to growing and aging, healing when unwell and to suffering and death. Health levels are at their optimum when society promotes the idea of health as a natural endowment and autonomous coping ability. Health levels decline when survival comes to depend on a heteronomous means of regulating the individuals'

wellbeing, and is seen as a perpetually-receding end goal towards which one must aim (Illich 1977: 14, 129). Saltonstall's research on definitions of health revealed that many individuals, when asked to define health, defined it comprehensively including most aspects of being human: physicality, consciousness, spirituality, emotional wellbeing and social circumstances (Saltonstall cited in Owoahene-Acheampong 1998:111). Good health is symptomatic of correct relationships between individuals and their environments, their supernatural environments and with other individuals in their society (Owoahene-Acheampong 1998). These perspectives of health, that imply notions of fluidity, agency and holism, are also concepts prevalent within spiritual healing discourse and practice.

Sander Kelman's (1975) analysis of functional and experiential health represents a useful way to conceptualise how the ideas of health in orthodox medicine and spiritual medicine can be distinguished from each other. Kelman (1975) identifies functional health as the optimum health necessary in a capitalist society to carry out productive work that contributes to profit making. This interpretation views the body in mechanistic terms, according to whether or not it is capable of performing labour. On the other hand, experiential health entails a more reflexive conception of health, linked to freedom from illness and alienation that allows one to engage in processes of self-discovery, rather than simply maintaining the health necessary to carry out work. Such a view encompasses the idea that health is the responsibility of the individual, and that healthful behaviour involves the pursuit of maximum wellbeing for self-fulfillment. This perspective corresponds to the importance of seeking meaning in illness and learning from it, a theme raised among adherents in the three religious communities in this study.

Like the concept of health, the meaning of illness is unstable, negotiated and contested in different contexts. Although it occurs to the individual and is experienced within the individual body, illness is also socially located. Owoahene-Acheampong (1998) argues that social issues, such as unemployment, have significant influence on human wellbeing. Illness and its symptoms are coded metaphors that speak to diverse aspects of social life, a phenomenon often overlooked in biomedical diagnoses:

(There is) interaction among the mind/body and the individual, social, and body politic in the production and expression of health and illness. Sickness is not just an isolated event, nor an unfortunate brush with nature. It is a form of communication-the

language of the organs through which nature, society, and culture speak simultaneously. The individual body should be seen as the most immediate, the proximate terrain where social truths and social contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity, and struggle.

(Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1986:31).

The constant broadening of the definition of illness places increasing numbers of individuals in the care of the biomedical system for issues as varied as alcoholism, criminality, antisocial behaviour, anomie, loneliness, stress and developmental issues (Duhl: 1980:44). Many of these illnesses have a social dimension, along with emotional, environmental, psychological, political or spiritual dimensions that may go unacknowledged by biomedicine that primarily treats the biological pathology. However, spiritual healing practices often address the multiple other dimensions of one's personhood affected by illness.

Spiritual healing and CAMs

For those dissatisfied with biomedicine, complementary and alternative medicines (also known as CAMs) are an increasingly sought alternative. Spiritual healing represents one variation of CAM. CAMs tend to be holistic or spiritual in their philosophy by looking at multiple factors that contribute to illness, thus challenging the reductionist and mechanistic approach of biomedicine which prioritises biological abnormalities and microorganisms as central to understanding disorder (Morrall 2009). Some of the fundamental characteristics of CAM treatments include: recognising the body's ability to self-heal, identifying the person as a subtle mixture of body, mind and spirit, the treatment of root causes, the importance of the patient taking responsibility, intimacy and trust in the client/healer relationship and awareness of the multiple causes of illness (Broom 2009:435). Broom elaborates that in focusing on these aspects of treatment, CAM achieves certain successes that are not "done well" in the biomedical realm (Broom, 1999:444). Furthermore, CAM treatments articulate the notion of achieving "wellbeing" rather than health, which is represented by notions such as authenticity (being true to one's self), recognition (the acknowledgement of the validity of subjective experience) and agency (the individual must take responsibility in the healing process.)

CAM treatments, such as the spiritual healing ones explored in this study, emphasis a *doing* rather than a *getting*: fully engaging with a healing process that goes beyond apathetic consumption of medicine. It is important to distinguish how spiritual healing differs from biomedical curing. Curing implies successfully treating a condition, whereas healing looks at the overall person as an integrated system of physical, mental, social and spiritual components that all merit equal attention. In addition, Owoahene-Acheampong (1998) reminds that healing carries with it a sense of agency, whereas curing carries a sense of dependancy on the work or expertise of another. In the biomedical paradigm, one may be cured but not healed, and conversely in spiritual healing one may be healed but not cured.

Broom (2009:439) identifies the increase in popularity and legitimacy of CAMs as linked to the postmodernisation of social life, processes of reflexive modernisation, and the emergence of new methods of developing selfhood and wellbeing. These are undeniably wider social trends that impact on the increasing attraction of CAM treatments, especially with regard to the prominence of the individual within all of the above. Postmodernity and reflexive modernity both encompass notions of increased critique and scepticism towards science and expert knowledge, with individuals' own worldviews and perspectives gaining increasing dominance in understandings of illness and treatment (Broom 2009). In this way, use of CAM becomes linked to the creation of individual identity, or the self as a project. This was evident in the discourse around illness and healing among adherent of Salto Quântico and Umbanda. Nonetheless, this also indicates one of CAM's limitations: the emphasis on individual responsibility for health can generate guilt and a sense of failure when health is not achieved, and does not recognise the social origin of some diseases.

In her work around spiritual healing, McGuire (1988, 1990) explores the ways in which sociological analysis may be applied to comprehend individuals' reasons for drawing on spiritual healing methods, and what increasing adherence to such methods suggests about society and the social location of these practices and beliefs. She proposes that sociology has tended to misapprehend spiritual healing as a phenomenon which is pursued as a last resort when orthodox medicine fails. She challenges this, articulating that most adherents who seek out spiritual healing are attracted by its larger system of beliefs, of which health/illness beliefs only constitute one part. For the patient it is vital to find meaning in experience, and for those who undergo experiences of

severe illness, chaos, loss, or hopelessness, a new way of interpreting and making sense of their suffering and personal experience is often sought. This resonates with Giddens (1991) argument that late modern society ascribes the responsibility for finding meaning in life and challenging circumstances to the individual. Finding symbolic meaning in illness also plays a part in the cognitive management of illness, helping to explain it and providing a bridge between cultural and physiological phenomena.

In the narratives that feature in this study, there were different motivations to turn to spiritual healing. For some, the impetus was to seek a way to deal with suffering from illnesses such as depression, anxiety-related disorders and chronic illnesses that cannot be easily treated by mainstream medicine, often just alleviated at best. For others, spiritual therapies were sought because of increasing scepticism towards the efficacy of the medical system and fear of iatrogenic illness³. Guilherme Lopes de Moura, 20, a student and medium at an Umbanda centre, explained that these clients... ”will very often come seeking spiritual cures...because they judge the effects of certain medicines, like anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, and others, to be very strong, causing side-effects.” Some wanted a deeper and more holistic means of addressing and understanding the root of their illness, while others endeavoured to combine biomedical and spiritual treatments for greater efficacy.

Thesis Outline and Structure

Developing an understanding of the relevance of religious adherence in late modern Brazilian society offers insight into the nature of everyday life in Brazil. Religious adherence represents the distinct and often creative ways that individuals of diverse backgrounds and identities deal with the trials arising from the interface of the individual life world with wider structural forces. The problems individuals bring to religion are a reflection of socially, politically and economically situated phenomena taking place in Brazil at present. Religion also speaks to the search for meaning and answers to “ultimate questions” in the late modern context of relativism and

³ Iatrogenesis, first theorised by Ivan Illich in 1975, broadly refers to negative/ fatal errors caused by conventional medicine including non-erroneous side-effects of drugs, hospital infections, other hospital errors, unnecessary surgeries, and errors in the medicating of patients. Illich writes that iatrogenesis affects society on three levels: clinical iatrogenesis (described above), social iatrogenesis, which speaks to the expropriation of health from the individual and community, and cultural iatrogenesis, which impinges on people’s ability to deal with human weakness, vulnerability and suffering. Illich’s work has been further developed in numerous studies, such as that of Dr. Barbara Starfield, whose July 2000 article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* revealed that iatrogenic disease was the third greatest killer in the U.S. behind heart disease and cancer.

uncertainty. To develop answers to these issues, this study has engaged with three distinct religious communities: the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Umbanda and Salto Quântico. These groups encompass a spectrum of belief systems and a diverse representation of Brazilian adherents, in order to construct an inclusive understanding of contemporary religious experience in Brazil.

This study considers three specific areas of focus: firstly, the role that religion occupies in the lives of adherents in Brazil and their motivations for participating in a religious community. The second area of interest is the appeal of religion as a form of meaning making in diverse aspects of personal experience. The final focus concerns the way in which religion is integrated into everyday life, particularly through experiential spirituality and emotive and embodied practices⁴.

A phenomenological conceptual framework

The sections of each chapter will be organised into a phenomenological taxonomy based on the seven distinctive dimensions of religion identified by Ninian Smart (1996) in *Dimensions of the Sacred*: the ritual dimension, the doctrinal/philosophical dimension, the mythic/narrative dimension, the experiential/emotional dimension, the ethical dimension, the social dimension and the material dimension. Smart (1996) reasons that using a phenomenological schema functions as a realistic and balanced checklist of aspects of a religion and presents “an attitude of informed empathy” by endeavouring to convey what religious acts mean to actors. Such an approach also engenders an incarnated worldview whereby beliefs and values are grounded in practice, which resonates with a lived and embodied approach to understanding religion. Finally, the phenomenological taxonomy presents a useful conceptual tool, helping to organise, delineate and identify patterns across the religions. Importantly, the taxonomy does not exclude the possibility of correlation between dimensions; depending on the religion, elements of the dimensions may interact in distinctive ways.

This approach will consider individual and collective experiences of religion in everyday life across the seven dimensions and sub-categorise them into more specific themes and concepts. Although there is diversity present in the themes that emerged from each case study, the application of

⁴ The subject of emotion has been traditionally under-theorised in sociology, primarily due to the belief that emotions are irrational forces originating in the body that lie outside the boundaries of sociological concerns (Fish 2005). In much the same way, the body has also been overlooked. Nonetheless, both constitute a critical dimension in making sense of religious experience, and sociology’s recent material turn in the 80s has opened up more dialogue around these critical components of human and social experience by influential theorists such as Jack Barbalet.

Smart's phenomenological taxonomy encourages comparison across chapters. For the purposes of this project, I have restructured and reconceptualised Smart's categories slightly to conform to a sociological gaze: Smart himself notes that there are other ways of defining and detailing the dimensions, and encourages experimentation and different approaches (Smart 1996: 297-298). The following are the slightly modified dimensions of the sacred that informed and organised the analysis of the religions studied in this thesis:

The material dimension: Here, "the material" speaks to how religious life is perceived to impact on the material life of the individual. This refers to the body, finances, everyday problems, health and wellbeing. From the narratives of interview participants, participation in a religious group had pragmatic effects on everyday life.

The ritual/practical dimension: This aspect speaks to the practices of the religion, the meaning invested in ritual by adherents as well as the social function of ritual.

The organisational/social dimension: Smart's definition of the social dimension encompasses an understanding of how religion is coterminous with society. This understanding will be integrated into my reading of the social dimension, but there will also be discussion around how participation in religious life impacts on the social life of participants, and the socio-economic sectors of society represented by the adherents in each religion.

The experiential/emotional dimension: This speaks to an area of religion often overshadowed by doctrine and beliefs. The experiential/emotional dimension encompasses all non-tangible experiences linked to religious involvement, including making sense of emotionality, embodiment and spiritual incorporation (in common parlance, often referred to as "possession"). Smart himself observes that the focus on experiential aspects of religion correlates with the search for meaning that is becoming increasingly sought by many religious adherents.

The narrative dimension: This dimension includes narratives around the history and origin of the religion that help to socially locate it and stories of creation that trace the roots of the group.

The doctrinal/philosophical dimension: Smart defines the doctrinal/philosophical dimension as having a descriptive function, describing the relationship between the transcendent and the broader social world, and defining the religious community.

The ethical dimension: This dimension is the least theorised aspect of Smart's phenomenology. It speaks to regulations within the religious community, but more crucially, how rules underpin moral teachings and motivations to be virtuous. The sections pertaining to the ethical dimension in this study will engage with moral teachings disseminated by the religious communities.

There is a final dimension that Smart refers to as an adjunct, not formally included in the schema of the other dimensions, but recognised as significant nonetheless. This is the domain of the political. The nexus of the political and the religious is complex and often characterised by tensions, and is more relevant to certain social contexts than others, as Smart observes (1996). In the case studies presented in this context, the effects of the political on the religious group or conversely, the group's intentions to exert influence over the political domain are not explicitly apparent, and there are several reasons for this: in the open-ended questions posed to interviewees during data collection, matters pertaining to politics and religion did not arise⁵. This could be because I did not expressly question adherents about it; however, had it formed a significant aspect of their experience within the religion discussion would most likely have arisen. Furthermore, as theorists such as Lasch (1996) and Heaphy (2007) point out, the rise of the individualistic subject in late modernity has been synonymous with a shift away from politicisation: emphasis on self, agency, responsibility and identity has meant less focus directed to collective mobilisation and political consciousness, which is reflected in many ways in the findings of this thesis. Nonetheless, allusions to the political remain implicit throughout the participants' testimonies, in the sense that many of the motivations that have impelled individuals to become part of religious communities speak to the lack of political action present in civil society: religious communities, in many cases, offer a space of alternative civil engagement that is not merely a palliative, but a creative and pragmatic way for members to seek that which they are lacking in Brazilian society.

⁵ The only exception to this was one interviewee, who briefly referred to the difficulties the Universal Church had encountered with the government during the period in which Bishop Edir Macedo was imprisoned. The Universal Church has some impact on the political arena, with numerous members of the Congress aligned with the Church, working to represent the Church's interests.

This thesis will proceed by first providing a reflexive methodological basis for the case studies and a discussion of the methods used in carrying out the research. The following chapter will examine the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil, a Neo-Pentecostal church widespread in Brazil, frequented primarily by those in the lower socio-economic sectors of society. The study will then shift its gaze to an analysis of Umbanda and the experiences of adherents within this unique Afro-Brazilian religious tradition, whilst the last chapter will move to Aracaju, Sergipe, to follow a contemporary New Age/Spiritist religious movement called Salto Quântico.

Methodology

In *Emotions and Fieldwork*, Sherryl Kleinman and Martha A. Copp (1993) propose that fieldwork can be seen as an adventure that can take the researcher into hidden pockets of society. In my case, the research project that I embarked upon took me into some remarkable pockets of religious life in Brazil, investigating three distinct religious communities: the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Neo-Pentecostal), the Casa da Caridade and Templo de Guaracy (Umbanda centres with syncretised Catholic/New Age/ Afro-Brazilian beliefs) and Salto Quântico (a New Age/Christian Spiritist group). These groups fell along a spectrum of religious beliefs and practices, had largely urban followings and were contemporary in that they had been established from the 1980s onwards⁶: The purpose of the study was both descriptive and exploratory: to develop rich descriptions of the realities and experiences of religious adherents of the three communities and to explore the ways in which religion was lived everyday, ways participants drew on religion to make meaning and how religious practice and doctrine engaged the body. Fieldwork took place over 2011 and 2012, consisting of two and a half months in total in the field, with regular contact maintained with some of the adherents following my return to New Zealand.

A matter of deep consideration from the outset of the research project was linked to determining a way to explore and communicate the spiritual themes and concepts that emerged from research in a balanced way without veering too much towards the cynical or idealistic. Taking a cynical stance in research is often the default position, as researchers equate cynicism with lack of emotion (Becker 1970a), especially in dealing with matters pertaining to religion and spirituality. Jeffrey Goldfarb (1991:1) interprets cynicism as “a form of legitimation through disbelief”. Cynicism operates as a means of winning credibility among one’s readership by that the researcher is critical

⁶ 1985 marked the termination of the dictatorship in Brazil which lasted for 21 years, and the restoration of electoral democracy, the implication of neo-liberal initiatives and the re-opening of personal and religious freedoms. The “*abertura*” (opening) began in the early 80s whereby the military began restoring civil rights and liberties gradually. The end of the dictatorship coincides with the onset of the late modern period in Brazil. For a more in-depth discussion of the late modern period in Brazil, see the Introduction.

and does not simply take the participants' stories at face value. Admiration for a group is often equated with a lack of objectivity.

In addition, there are many enduring prejudices around religion within sociology. Vasquez (2012) notes that sociology has constructed religion as an epistemological "other" in time and space in order to appear as an autonomous and modern scientific discipline. He even goes so far as to argue that sociology has carried its own form of epistemic violence against religion, identifying it as archaic, irrational, temporal and emotional, in the process rendering itself incapable of comprehending the social vigour of religion (Vasquez 2012:27). Sociological ambivalence towards religion originates from the fact it is often treated as a residue or false front, veiling a more genuine reality. Religion is marginalised from other areas of sociology, and decentred in the face of the broader discipline (Fish 2005). When asked what I was studying, many colleagues responded with gently mocking or derogatory comments about religion and those who adhere to religious organisations as misguided, naïve and uneducated. Iannacone, Stark and Finke (2007:385) note that of all the scholarly disciplines, scholars within the fields of psychology, anthropology and sociology are the least likely to maintain a religious affiliation or belief, and most likely to be opposed to religion.

Thus I was made acutely aware of the inherent bias within the social sciences towards the "type" of person that maintained strong religious affiliation in this day and age. Taking religious experiences seriously can position researchers as "taken in" by participants, as having failed in maintaining sufficient analytic distance. However, by avoiding the inclusion of divine experience in research accounts, the reader fails to appreciate how people manage to weave a sense of the sacred into the mundane. The work of Meredith McGuire and Courtney Bender was particularly instrumental in helping to develop an awareness of how to integrate participants' everyday experience of the divine (particularly embodied experience) into a critical discourse.

Ontological Approach

According to Hesse Biber and Leavy (2006:7), research is best approached holistically, by viewing the epistemology, ontology, methodology and methods as interconnected, a research nexus. For Strauss and Corbin (2008), methodology does not only evolve from practice, but is also informed by the researcher's ontological beliefs regarding the structure of reality and the world. Considering

who we are and what we believe is vital to understanding how we as researchers shape the story (Kleinman and Copp 1993). Sociologists are undeniably part of what they study; they are present in the statements they make and cannot avoid their social background influencing their judgements during research and analysis.

Therefore it is appropriate to firstly situate myself with regard to the research. In 2008, I (a 23-year-old, white, middle-class female who regularly engages in spiritual practices) spent three months living in Brazil's Northeast in the city of João Pessoa. Of the places I visited and experiences I had, what remained with me most was the high visibility of religion in everyday life. Brazilian religiosity colonised the space of the profane effortlessly in Brazil, and this was fascinating and compelling to me having been raised in highly secular New Zealand society. Not a practitioner of any of the religions I elected to study but intrigued by them all, I had questions regarding what compelled people to engage in these particular religious communities and what they perceived to gain from their participation. I felt that my familiarity with Portuguese and Brazilian society and culture would allow me a vantage point from which to commence a study of the religions from an outsider perspective. Lofland and Lofland (1984) assert that studying the unfamiliar engenders a more critical research approach, as researchers who remain within familiar surrounds often take the familiar for granted. An outsider also has "stranger value", meaning that interviewees may feel more comfortable discussing certain aspects of their lives than they otherwise would with someone who has closer proximity to them (Reinharz 1984:181, 335). Cesara (1982) also observes that collisions with others' horizons can help to make one aware of deep-seated personal assumptions that would otherwise go unnoticed.

The methodological approach was qualitative and interpretive in nature. Studies of spirituality and religion can benefit from a qualitative data approach as qualitative research can give voice to religious adherents allowing them to explain their feelings and experiences. In addition, qualitative data has strength in the sense that it can make sense of religion in a way that analyses of censuses and statistics cannot; people's religious views are often far more complex than a category in a survey can hope to encompass. In the case of Brazil, for example, although 64.4% of Brazilians identified themselves as nominally Catholic in the 2010 Census, many of those may in fact be practising or frequenting other religions simultaneously, or may not even attend Catholic church at all (Dawson 2007).

Qualitative methodology also carries with it its own ontological assumptions about the nature of reality. Qualitative research generally recognises the world as a fluid, ambiguous and complex place in which human actors change the world around them through diverse models of action and interaction (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Within such a world, actions do not always appear inherently rational. Many are non-rational, or in other cases may be rational but mistakenly perceived as not so by other actors (Strauss and Corbin 2008). Actions have emotional aspects, and both emotion and action must be addressed as part of the same flow of events. In this way, means-ends analytic schemes are not sufficient to profoundly understanding action, interaction, or making sense of human conduct. Kleinman and Copp (1993) claim that researchers often write the following story: despite the challenging circumstances in which participants find themselves, they deal with the system creatively as active players or set up an alternative.

This was the story many with whom I spoke expected me to write, and to some degree, this story is present in the research. The taboo against representing participants as victims can also lead the researcher to omit key physical, emotional and psychological aspects of their experience. Kleinman and Copp (1993) point out Erving Goffman's (1961) *Asylums* as an example of such a "normalising" account, which depicts mental patients just like everyone else. However, such an account omits to mention how patients experience their own world, or what it feels like to have experiences that make one think they are crazy. Therefore, I wanted my research to include participants' cognitive, emotional and embodied experiences of the divine in the context of their own life circumstances. I felt it was vital to allow the participants' narratives to convey the importance of religion in their own lives, not merely as a strategy used for dealing with challenges, but as something enjoyable, a lived aspect of the quotidian.

Epistemological Approach

Howard Becker (1996) offers a succinct articulation of the epistemological approach required for qualitative research practice, identifying first and foremost the need for deep and accurate awareness of the actor's point of view. Blumer (1969) contends that all social scientists, either implicitly or explicitly, ascribe a point of view to the actions of the people they study. For Blumer, the real issue is not whether this should occur or not, but how accurate the descriptions and points of view the researcher attributes to the participants actually are. According to Becker (1996), the researcher can find out, not with complete accuracy but with some precision, what people think

they are doing and the meanings they associate with objects, people and experiences in their lives. This information can be sought out by engaging in informal or formal interviews with actors, in quick exchanges, observing them as they go about their business and participating in their activities. In addition, the closer the researcher can actually get to the conditions experienced by the actor, the more accurate their descriptions and understandings are likely to be. Engaging with this epistemological approach in my research meant participating in the religious life of the group, striving to use emic language and references wherever possible in order to approximate the adherents' perspectives better, writing questions or issues of uncertainty down during observation in order to ask later in order to get as close to the meaning as possible, and always trying to be reflexive in recognising when ethnocentric bias or assumption was hindering my understanding of the actor's perspective.

Becker (1996) notes that epistemological danger arises when the meaning of an actor's action or perspective is not fully grasped by the researcher and so they guess, drawing on their own reasoning and attributing to the actor what he/she would feel and understand in the circumstances. To avoid this, it is imperative for the researcher to suspend their beliefs, leave aside their own points of view, expectations and interpretations. Reinharz (1992) contends that research often implicitly transmits the researcher's own beliefs, veiled under the guise of theoretical frameworks and objectivity. It is vital to incorporate *verstehen* into data collection and analysis, that is, empathically endeavouring to understand the meaning of action from the actor's perspective. In "Life History and the Scientific Mosaic", Becker (1970b:64) depicts *verstehen* thus:

To understand an individual's behaviour, we must know how he perceives the situation, the obstacles he believed he had to face, the alternatives he saw opening up to him. We cannot understand the effects of the range of possibilities, delinquent subcultures, social norms and other explanations of behaviour that are commonly invoked, unless we consider them from the actor's point of view.

To not engage in this way, according to Becker, is "wilful ignorance". However, although rigorous investigation of the actor's perspective is a requisite, there is also a need to be aware that the meanings that people give to actions, experiences or objects can be unstable (Becker 1996). Meanings can shift or be ambivalent, and participants may also give vague interpretations of events and people. Therefore the researcher must also respect the actor's inability to be decisive,

and not attribute more fixed meaning than the people involved do (Becker 1996). Linked to this is the additional need to situate meanings and contextualise them in terms of the political economy and large scale social structures. Participants' subjectivities need to read against the background of larger political and economic stories and gendered, sexualised and racialised considerations (Wekker 2006). In this study, this meant contextualising participants' narratives and actions in terms of the neoliberal political economy in Brazil and late modern society.

The second significant element of qualitative epistemology that Becker considers is an emphasis on engagement with the everyday world and life of the actor as a technique of accessing the meanings people give to their world and experience (Schutz 1962). In this context, "the everyday world" refers to understandings that are shared by actors and are taken for granted, which make concerted action possible (Becker 1996). Individuals act on the basis of assumptions that they rarely inspect, secure in the belief that others will react to those actions in an appropriate manner. In this sense, everyday understandings can be aligned with the epistemological beliefs that underpin all shared ideas of which actors are not necessarily aware that make shared life possible (Becker 1996).

Making sense of everyday reality also means making space for what is unanticipated and being open to the mundane or unusual explanations actors may attribute to their actions. This reinforces Becker's first point that it is imperative to allow the actor's viewpoint to come through as much as possible to avoid engaging in "social scientific reasoning" (Becker 1996).

However, a consequence that arises from the researcher observing day-to-day reality is that there are unavoidable degrees of interference and influence that occur during the research process. In some cases, the researcher's opinions and actions are viewed as consequential, and participants alter their behaviour aware of the researcher's gaze or even take measures to manipulate what will be discovered. During my fieldwork, this occurred explicitly in the case studies of Salto Quântico and the Universal Church, which will be discussed in greater detail in the methods.

The final aspect of qualitative research epistemology advocated by Becker (1996) is dense and detailed description of social life (what Geertz (1974) refers to as "thick" description). A full description of social life allows the researcher to talk with more assurance on the subject. However, Becker (1996) proposes that this adherence to thick description be modified slightly, arguing that it is instead more important to abstract the most relevant details in order to answer research questions. Becker also suggests that description with breadth is better than description with depth:

by attempting to find out something about every topic that the research touches on, even tangentially. Fieldworkers encounter a lot of incidental information during the course of interviewing and observation, and giving description with breadth allows a more holistic and balanced picture of the phenomenon. This premise strongly resonated with my research approach, and my decision to adopt a framework based on Smart's (1996) dimensions of the sacred that encompassed a consideration of all of the elements of religious life.

Methodological Approach

As outlined by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), holistic research encompasses coherence in all aspects of the research process. In this way, beliefs about how one might understand and discover knowledge about the world irrevocably impacts on the methodology selected to best reveal that knowledge. Following this perspective, the methodological approach that best resonated with my ontological and epistemological perspectives and fit the research project was an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research aims to construct a holistic understanding of how individuals in different social settings or cultures make sense of their lived reality (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006). A central characteristic of ethnography is that it supports a flexible framework for analysis. The research field can be classified in a number of ways (eg. geographically, spatially) and ethnography also permits the use of diverse methods for collating data (Goulding 2005: 299). This was highly appropriate for this research project as it allowed engagement with a variety of research methods (case studies in different locations, life history interviews with members of the religious communities, observation of practices and firsthand experience for deeper understanding) to effectively gather a range of data in a relatively short time frame.

Ethnographic methodology is experientially driven in nature, drawing on fieldwork to make sense of what is done and why, and how it is experienced by the participant. Often eschewing focus on the unusual, it favours sustained engagement on the part of the ethnographer with actors in their natural settings by concentrating on the daily lives and experiences of members. Through prolonged and direct contact ethnographers aim to develop rounded and holistic explanations (Boyle 1994). Ethnography is also fundamentally interpretive, based on the premise that since the social world is constantly being created through interaction, social reality can therefore be interpreted through the viewpoints of the actors engaged in activities of meaning making (Van

Maanen 2011:4). It bridges two systems of meaning: the life world of the insider member and that of the ethnographer and the reader. Drawing on Barthes (1972), Van Maanen contends that ethnography necessarily decodes one culture in order to recode it for another (Van Maanen 2011:4). Emic and etic perspectives can also combine to provide deeper insights than would be possible by either alone, resulting in the co-construction of knowledge. Additionally, ethnographic research favours thick description in order to effectively communicate the actors' social realities and systems of meaning.

However, ethnography has limitations and requires attentiveness during the research process due to the close work carried out alongside participants. Ethnography irreversibly influences the lives of people represented in them for better or worse and carries significant moral and intellectual responsibilities, as the representations of participants in writing are never neutral (Van Maanen 2011). The voices of the participants provide a formative source of data and should be heard in the final product as their words best express their own views (Boyle 1994). Ethnographic research must take care not to resort to reductive analyses as the social field is more complex than the researcher is capable of envisioning; or their theories are capable of encompassing (Van Maanen 2011). These were all areas of consideration of which I was acutely aware upon entering the field, and continued to form an ongoing concern up until the very final stages of writing, particularly in ensuring the participants' voices came through in the study.

Critical reflexivity is also essential in ethnographic practice to expose where the biases of the researcher may have emerged. Researchers need to be able to critique what they are doing in the field, while they are doing it, as a reflexive practice. Reinharz (1992:251) champions reflexivity in the research process, advocating self-awareness and reflexivity to be re-claimed as a source of insight. Research should also take into account the way the researcher's emotions affect data collection and analysis, but without privileging self-understanding over sociological understanding. The research project should be tripartite; new insights gained into the person, the problem, and the method. Incorporating these three elements as key parts of a project serves to re-humanise the research in the context of the discipline (Reinharz 1992). Pratt (1986) writes that many ethnographic accounts end up being surprisingly boring because they report in a language that masks subjectivity and ignore or hides troubling feelings, and privilege cognitive and behavioural observations and data over the emotional. Reflexivity during fieldwork encouraged me

to ponder what was going well and what was going poorly and why, and the manner in which my emotions and personal beliefs bore an influence on the research.

Although an ethnographic approach informed the basis of my methodology, some aspects of the research process were also guided by tenets of grounded theory. Skodal-Wilson and Ambler-Hutchison (1996) write that it is valid to combine different methodological theories so long as the objectives are made clear. Grounded theory in this case was used to strengthen the inductive approach to the data in the early and final stages. Grounded theory iterates a continuous research process, rather than a methodology punctuated by distinct phases. Data can first be collected and then inductively analysed to generate new theories and understandings of a subject.

A particular element of grounded theory that guided my research approach in its preliminary phase was the principle of entering the field as soon as possible, without conducting an exhaustive literature review beforehand. The literature is instead consulted on an ongoing basis, as part of an iterative and inductive practice of data collection, analysis and interpretation. This was useful in allowing emergent themes and theories to arise organically from the data to then be compared to existing theories and literature. In addition, adopting this approach meant I entered the field with a more open mind and less preconceived notions of what I expected to find, and my engagement with the literature was more directed and active.

Methods

Sampling

One of the overarching initial objectives of the research was to collate a sample of diverse religious experience in Brazil. Prior to fieldwork, case studies were settled upon as the most effective way of gaining insight into distinct groups while also allowing for common themes to be identified across the communities. Case studies are a useful methodological approach of locating the global within the local (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin 1993:v). Hamel et al. (1993) define the case study as an in-depth investigation of an identified social group that draws on a variety of methods to collect various kinds of information and observations. As a sociological approach, the case study strives to highlight the features of social life, and gives the actor's point of view due weight, as their voice is incorporated directly into the data gathered during fieldwork. By adopting an approach of comparative case studies, the research avoids established representations of subjects, and

encourages the researcher to construct analytic categories that take other cases into consideration. As a qualitative approach, it simultaneously describes, understands and explains a given case, and makes provision to define the process of transformation from the specific to universal (Hamel 1993: 39).

The religious communities that were to be represented in each case study were determined prior to arrival in Brazil, and these were selected based on several factors: the openness of the group to participating in research (two of the groups, Salto Quântico and the Temple of Guaracy demonstrated preliminary interest in taking part in the study when I made initial contact), the accessibility of the groups (ie. they were found in accessible urban areas, with regular meeting times), and the likelihood of a substantial base of adherents. For this reason the Salto Quântico headquarters in Aracaju, Sergipe was chosen, the Universal Church in Botafogo in Rio de Janeiro for its multi-class and diverse religious community, and the Templo Guaracy in Sao Paulo. Later, when I arrived in Rio, I also made contact with an Umbanda temple located there (*Casa da Caridade Caboclo Peri*-the Caboclo Peri House of Charity) that ultimately became my main source of information for the Umbanda chapter.

Another issue that was taken into consideration and impacted upon the choice of research settings was personal safety. Reinharz (1992) points out that for many solitary female researchers, gender must be negotiated in fieldwork as multiple obstacles may arise, including sexual harassment, physical danger, and gender stereotyping. Women who embark on fieldwork must adapt methods that men do not necessarily have to in order to ensure safety. In my case, the decision to choose the three states of Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Sergipe as my fieldwork loci was also influenced by contacts I had in those areas, familiarity with the areas and the perception that they would be easiest to negotiate and navigate my way around.

Upon arriving in Brazil in July 2011, contact was immediately established with the predetermined groups. The *Salto Quântico* community were very enthusiastic about taking part in the study and gave me access to private meetings, organised one-on-one interviews with long-term adherents and open discussions with the leader of the group. On the other hand, as the Universal Church had not responded to my efforts to initiate contact, I visited the church in Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro and informed the pastor of my position and research objectives, about which he was supportive. However, that pastor was replaced within a week and from that point on the church treated me

with deep distrust and suspicion, and ultimately forbade me from carrying out further interviews. With regard to the Umbanda communities, both exhibited a more neutral attitude to the project: they were happy and willing to assist, as long as I did not get in the way of the day to day running of their busy centres.

With the loci of research established (Umbanda temple in Sao Paulo, the other in Rio de Janeiro, each representing different elements of Umbanda, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Rio de Janeiro, and Salto Quântico in Aracaju) I then set about developing my participant sample. I had estimated that in order to acquire a sample that provided me with qualitative depth in the restricted time available for fieldwork, I would require around 10-15 informants from each religious tradition who had been involved with the group on a regular basis⁷. Another issue of which I was conscious was the possibility that the leader of the religious group would select the interview participants for me in order to best represent their community. In the cases where interview participants were in fact selected for me, they tended to be long-term adherents or members who were rigorously involved with the group. This ultimately fit within an ethnographic sampling framework as ethnographic methodology encourages the use of purposeful sampling strategies to select the individuals who have the most extensive knowledge regarding a topic.

In addition to purposeful sampling, snowballing was decided upon as another suitable sampling approach given the nature of the research and the limited time frame in which to carry out fieldwork. Purposeful sampling and snowballing allowed me to recruit participants when the opportunity arose, and then ask those participants if they knew of others who would be interested in participating in the study. These sampling techniques enabled me to find participants from the Umbanda and Salto Quântico communities relatively easily.

Instruments

In carrying out the research, various ethnographic methods were used in combination to collate data from different sources. The research drew on unstructured life history interviews, participant

⁷ “Regularly” was left deliberately undefined for several reasons. As I had limited time in Brazil, and an objective of gaining as many interviews as possible and was aware of the time and energy I was asking of the religious leaders to help me recruit participants, I didn’t want to confuse matters or make things difficult by specifying restrictions or definitions around how often constituted regularly. I felt the leaders implicitly understood what was meant by “regularly”, and all the participants ultimately involved in research were those who participated on a weekly basis at least, often bi-weekly or even more. In addition, with regards to Umbanda specifically, clients of Umbanda tend to come on a regular basis only when they are receiving treatment or attention for a specific problem.

observation, note taking and diaries from fieldwork, email correspondence and analysis of documents or promotional material produced by the religious groups where available. These research instruments were decided upon as the most effective for promoting breadth and scope of data collection. In general, I regarded the instruments from a social constructivist perspective, that is, that it was through my use of them and the participation/input of the participant that meanings came to be made. Charmaz (2003) observes that the analysis and writing of research does not have a life of its own, and the facts do not speak for themselves. Analysis is produced by interaction with participants, even if the researcher does endeavour to maintain distance.

Interviews were the most important instrument in collecting data from the adherents of the religious communities. Life history interviews are a useful tool in ethnographic research as they lead to “thick descriptions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006). Based on life histories to encourage personal reflections of meanings and experiences, the interviews comprised of open-ended research questions to prompt participants to speak without overly directing the conversation. Reinharz (1992) points out that researcher’s questions can sometimes create reality rather than reflect it, by forcing respondents to respond to what researchers deem important, instead of describing their experiences in their own terms. Interviews can be seen as social productions, and within such an orientation, respondents can be seen as narrators and researchers as participants in the process of the “production”. In this orientation, both the narrator and the interviewer collaborate to actively construct a story and meaning, challenging the assumption that respondents are repositories of information, waiting to be mined by a researcher (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). For Wekker (2006), life history interviews reveal less about the “absolute truth” of an individual’s life, but more an individual’s own reading of his/her experiences. The questions I asked were the following:

-Please introduce yourself, and give any details you would like to share, for example, age, profession and civil status (in the Salto Quântico interviews, people often voluntarily divulged their sexuality as well).

-Please explain how you came to be involved in this religious group.

-Could you explain what was happening in your life around the time you entered the group?

-How do you feel this religion impacts on your life?

-What do you think the significance of this religion is in wider Brazilian society?

-Are you frequenting any other religious groups at the moment? Why/why not?

-Could you describe how you relate to others in the religious group?

-What do you think this religion can offer people?

-In your opinion, what are some of the challenges facing people nowadays? What role does your religious involvement play in confronting these challenges?

In general, these were the questions that were posed to all the participants with whom I conversed. Sometimes, extra clarification was added if necessary, and in a few interviews, I added questions based on the direction that the interview took in order to clarify things for my own benefit (people often used the questions as a platform from which they launched into personal accounts or experiences, which was exactly as I had hoped for). In general, I allowed the interviews to run as naturally as possible so that they were more like conversations or informal chats. Successful interviewing technique is free flowing, casual and natural to help mitigate the effects of “interview circumstances” that can represent obstacles to respondents’ articulation of their particular truth and shape the form and content of what is said (Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

The social milieu in which communication takes place also exerts influences over what participants choose to say (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). This was something I noticed immediately upon commencing participant interviews; the symbols of the interview such as the voice recorder, question sheet, notebook, and creation of the “formal interview” in the exchange between myself and the participant made some participants visibly uncomfortable and prone to give curt, precise answers. In subsequent interviews I changed my approach, memorising the key questions I had to ask so I wasn’t reading from a sheet, which allowed me to conduct the interview more like a chat,

and I always struck up conversation prior to the interview to create a more relaxed interview environment.

An essential note to add and briefly discuss here with regard to the interviews is the issue of translation. All interviews, except one (Luciane Azevedo Dias, of Salto Quântico) were given in Portuguese. Questions were asked in Portuguese, and respondents answered in Portuguese. No interpreter was present in any of the interviews, and I conducted the interviews and subsequent transcriptions into English. Where issues of understanding or clarification became an issue (eg. regional slangs, dialects, poor recording quality, etc.) a native speaker was consulted. Pauses in the participant's discourse are shown in the interviews as "...", and laughter is also noted. However conversation fillers, stutters and so on are not included as inclusion of those features of speech is more emblematic of ethnomethodological conversation analysis, which was not a theoretical concern of this thesis.

Some of the instruments, specifically personal journals and note taking, were decided upon in the field when it became apparent that they could supplement and enrich the material being collected. The journal allowed me a way to become more reflexive in note making, engendering awareness of my personal biases and perspectives, and space to make notes about data that required clarification to avoid misinterpretation. Note taking was used before or after interviews to add notes and observations. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) point out, participants often offer their most interesting data when the tape recorder is no longer playing. She attributes these "revelations" as possibly due to participants feeling uncomfortable about revealing sensitive information that would be recorded. In my experience, participants also felt self-conscious speaking with the voice recorder nearby, and spoke more naturally and at greater ease with me when they weren't giving an "official interview". In these cases, asking permission to make notes of what had been said added considerable material to that given in interviews. Email correspondence was used following my return to New Zealand when I came across matters that required further elucidation from participants.

Across the three religions studied, observation was used extensively as a research instrument. There were several reasons that participant observation constituted such a useful research method: Agar (1980) notes that verbal description alone does not always create a true picture, as people do not always say what they do. Corbin and Strauss (2008) underline that ethnographic observation is

an extremely useful instrument of qualitative research, important in that it can be used to confirm if there are differences between what actors say they do, and what they actually do in practice. In addition, I wanted to immerse myself as much as possible in the day-to-day realities of the religious groups due to the limited time I had in Brazil. Being present to observe, make notes, participate in activities and communicate with the members of the group (ethnographer Renato Rosaldo refers to this process of presence and interaction with members as “deep hanging out”) seemed the most effective way to develop a more rigorous understanding of the religions in a short period of time. Participant observation was also an indispensable tool of research in the case study of the Universal Church where I was disallowed from continuing interviews or communicating with participants after a week. Observation and note taking during Universal Church services, and to a lesser degree, analysis of promotional material and newspapers handed out during services became my sole means of construing an understanding of the church and its appeal to followers.

In addition, participant observation reveals significant practices and rituals that are often overlooked by participants in interviews, and locates individual actors within a collective milieu. It allows the researcher to observe the subtleties of interpersonal interactions between participants that they may not be consciously aware of. Patton (2002) writes that creative fieldwork means drawing on every part of oneself in order to experience and understand what is taking place. Creative insights stem from direct involvement in the setting being studied. Such an approach requires the researcher to give more of themselves and their time by working directly with participants to verify interpretations of particular actions, ultimately resulting in a collaborative effort to construct an understanding of meaning.

I also participated in activities in the groups myself, especially in Umbanda, where I was urged to receive the energisation and cleansing treatments and have consultations with the spirits. In these instances I experienced a privileged position from which to make observations and engage and interact with the leaders and mediums of the group. Taking part in church services was also necessary in the Universal Church, which always held extremely energetic and active meetings with members singing, crying, expelling demons, holding hands and often screaming. To not join in would have been to attract attention to myself, something I was conscious not to do as I had already experienced difficulties in my dealings with the pastors. In addition, I did not want to be an intrusive presence in the church and ironically, being quiet, sedentary and contained would have

constituted very unusual behaviour to those who came to worship. In these participatory experiences I suspended my beliefs and endeavoured to leave aside my own expectations and interpretations in order to try to approximate an insider's point of view.

Following an ethnographic approach, the self was also viewed as an instrument of research that inflected the nature of the data collected. Utilising the self as research instrument is a two-fold process: the phenomenologist must be reflexive and introspective in using his or her own subjective process as a resource for study, whilst making an empathic effort (*Verstehen*) to move into the mind of the other (Truzzi 1974). This implies that the researcher constantly takes into account what action they take and why during the research process, and the effects the research has on them.

Data collection

Data collection was carried out slightly differently among the three religions studied due to variation in the way each group was structured, the regularity with which they ran their meetings or services and the level of familiarity that had been developed with the leaders and adherents.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God

Before going to Brazil I regularly attended sessions of the Universal Church in Otahuhu, South Auckland, New Zealand in order to familiarise myself with the style and nature of the services and get a feel for the dynamic of the church, informally chat with some of the regulars, and discuss the aims of my project with the pastors there. This prepared me well for my research in Rio, as Universal Church services are run almost exactly the same all over the world. The day that I arrived in Rio, I visited the church in Botafogo. Botafogo has one of the largest Universal Churches in Rio, with frequent services (five times a day or more) and a church that can accommodate more than 1000 adherents.

Existing scholarship around the IURD had signposted the potential difficulty of gaining proximity to the church and to its adherents, as pastors and church hierarchy were extremely cautious of research due to reoccurring bad press concerning their tithing practices and scandals involving corrupt handling of church finances. However, I could not believe my good fortune when I was

welcomed into the Universal Church almost immediately by Pastor Marcos⁸. Younger than the other pastors and passionate about his work in the church, he would often remain after services talking to members seeking advice or assistance, or “liberating” people from evil spirits troubling them. He encouraged me to speak to some of the longstanding members of the church and “*obreiras*” (assistants), and within two days of arriving in Rio had arranged for me to interview four women, aged between 35 and 70, who had volunteered to participate in my research. Considering the secrecy of the IURD, to have the opportunity to interview some members of the church and hear their life stories and perspectives was extremely fortuitous. The interviews I carried out at the Universal Church were the first of the whole project, and represented a major learning curve, becoming aware of the challenges of the interview process. In those first interviews I tried to encourage the participant to talk as much as possible, interjecting with questions only to clarify or verify statements they made. The major pitfall that arose in data collection was that three of the four interviews were mistakenly erased from the audio recorder. Upon realization of this, comprehensive notes of the interviews were made immediately, and the participants were contacted by email to verify key elements of their interviews and to re-answer questions that had insufficient notes.

Two weeks after my arrival in Rio, Pastor Marcos was re-located to another Universal Church in the outer reaches of Rio⁹, and despite my best efforts appealing to the other pastors and visiting other churches, I was informed that carrying out any more interviews was absolutely forbidden without the approval of Bishop Edir Macedo, the leader of the church. I was allowed to sit in on services, but was closely watched by the pastors, an ironic inversion of the observer becoming the observed. Nonetheless, the interviews held and conversations conducted over those first two weeks of research were instrumental to helping develop a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the way in which the Universal Church appeals to adherents. I attended at least one, and sometimes two services a day, which over two and a half months led to detailed participant observation notes. In addition, I received significant amounts of promotional material handed out during services and Universal Church newspapers that were also used for analysis.

⁸ In the Universal Church, it is common practice for pastors to be relocated to other churches frequently and without notice. The building of relationships between the pastor and the congregation is not encouraged.

Salto Quântico

Data collection in Salto Quântico also generated its own set of issues. Salto Quântico, as a relatively contemporary group with its origins in the early 90s, represented an opportunity to explore a rapidly growing spiritual movement that had not been previously researched. However, a time frame of eight days in which to research the group and gain an informed understanding of their beliefs and practises presented a challenge. Fortunately, as the group is strongly anchored in written and spoken teachings that are all posted online, there were ways in which I could maintain my analysis and involvement even after the period of fieldwork ended.

Contact had been established and maintained with the leader of the movement, Benjamin Teixeira de Aguiar Machado in the months leading up to research, and the group was eager for me to be involved in their weekly activities as much as possible to compensate for the fact that I would only be spending a week among them. My flight landed in Aracaju, Sergipe at 2am on a Monday morning, and I was collected at the airport by two of the group's most established members, Angela Novaes and Maisa Marante. Angela had insisted on hosting me for my stay and so for eight days I lived and breathed Salto Quântico, both as participant in and observer of the religious life of this group. It quickly became apparent as the week progressed that while I had a clearly set agenda (collect data, record observations, conduct interviews, familiarise myself with their schedule of weekly meetings and seminars and charitable work), they also had an agenda for me: the group assumed that I was completely empathetic and in accordance with their beliefs and spirituality, and that I would academically validate their spiritual group and disseminate their message to the wider Western world.

Although Angela and the other group members showed me immense hospitality, friendship and generosity, it was challenging and awkward to relinquish my autonomy as the week had been completely organized for me and I was expected to attend all group meetings, both of a religious and more personal nature. These included meetings about an upcoming fundraiser, personal meetings celebrating a member's birthday, mediums' meetings, the centre where social aid was given, Teixeira's seminars, lunches with the women in the group and meetings with Teixeira's spiritual guides to name just a few. I had very little opportunity to take time off from the research intermittently just to relax and reflect which was extremely challenging. For example, I would be informed that Teixeira would allow me to interview him (even though I had not expressed any

interest in interviewing him as my interest lay more with the adherents) at 11pm at night and I felt obligated in every sense (because of the hospitality, kindness and good intentions of the members) to oblige.

However, these encounters with Teixeira where he talked extensively about himself, his spiritual experiences and beliefs until 2am in the morning were exhausting. I had to endure two of these three hour “interviews” with him responding to my open-ended questions with often irrelevant long-winded answers he later informed me he was taping and using as promotional material on the website. I became disenchanted when I realized that Teixeira was manipulating me, as he had dishonestly publicised my arrival among the group and wider community of Aracaju as an esteemed professor of sociology from New Zealand who had come to study the successes of his revolutionary New Age religious group. Furthermore, he organised (without my consent) television interviews, public speeches and addresses in which I was expected to affirm and praise the group, and most shockingly, insisted on giving me a private (unrequested) spiritual reading one night only to publicly announce it in one of his seminars the following day, and ask me to stand and affirm it.

Hochschild (1983/2012) questions whether researchers should disapprove of what participants in a study say, think and do. Kleinman and Copp (1993) assert that most researchers believe that they should act as if they are in agreement with those they study, or at least refrain from disagreeing, as sympathetic displays acquire better data. In my case, I felt that I had no choice but to agree and speak positively on behalf of the group every time I was cast into the spotlight against my will. This made me feel exploited, and I felt very negatively towards Teixeira at the time, who I sensed was using me as a tool to further himself and the group’s image. In addition, I felt as if I had engaged in immoral behaviour for validating the group to audiences of potentially easily-influenced new members, when I did not believe in several of their fundamental claims, such as divine protection from death being given to those who frequent particular meetings. However, I was aware of how hard the members of the group were trying to show their love for the group and admiration for Teixeira to me, and how fundamental Salto Quântico had been in helping to give meaning to their lives. They were all extremely welcoming, treating me like a very close friend and loading me with gifts and cards when I left eight days later, but made me feel tense as I sensed the group members constantly seeking my approval. Although Teixeira’s behaviour undeniably impacted on my

perspective of the group, I did not want this bias to strongly impact on my analysis of the experiences of the adherents with the groups, many of whom had genuine experiences of transformation that they wanted to share with me about the formative influence Salto Quântico had had in their lives.

The accessibility of the group and the adherents made data collection very easy. However, there were different levels of involvement within the group (there were the most casual, who frequented the Sunday seminars only; there were the more involved, who attended the seminars and the study groups; and then there were the inner circle who had proximity to Benjamin and were involved in the mediums' group). I was only able to carry out interviews with those in the inner circle (all of whom were well-educated and of upper-middle socio-economic background), and so did not gain the perspectives of some of those who were less regularly involved.

These issues of differing and sometimes conflicting agendas between myself, Teixeira and the members of the group speaks to the complexity of researcher/researched relationships and power. It is often seen as a given that the researcher holds more power, with many feminist models of research engaging with binary constructions positing the researcher as oppressor and powerful, and researched as oppressed and powerless (Thapar-Bjorkert & Henry 2004). However, drawing on examples from their fieldwork on middle-class women in India, Thapar-Bjorkert and Henry (2004) suggest that researchers can be manipulated, exploited and objectified and argue for a reconceptualisation of the uni-directional power dynamic in the research process. They suggest a Foucauldian framework of power, imagining power as shifting, intersectional and fluid, dispersed throughout the research process and research relationships (Thapar-Bjorkert and Henry, 2004). Thus, according to this view, researchers are not all powerful and the research process itself can be seen as the site of complex power relations involving multiple actors. Although Salto Quântico represented the religious community in which these power struggles played out most acutely, power held by the researched was in fact present across all of my case studies: the pastors who monitored me in the Universal Church and forbade me from carrying out interviews, and the leaders of the Casa da Caridade who decided what rites and ceremonies I would be permitted to attend. Much of the time, as a young New Zealand woman with limited fluency in Portuguese and dependant on the help and participation of these religious communities, I felt as if my power was tenuous at best.

Umbanda

Data collection with the spiritual communities of Umbanda was the most straightforward of the three religions. Falling somewhere between the extreme zeal of Salto Quântico and the disapproval towards my research exhibited by the Universal Church, the Umbanda centres with which I worked were friendly and open to participation in the study, but displayed no agenda in taking part. If anything, the only desire expressed to me was for my research to contribute towards engendering more tolerance and understanding of the role of Umbanda in Brazilian society. As the weeks went on, I developed strong relationships with some in the groups, especially at Caboclo Peri House of Charity, and this in turn heralded more opportunities for me to bear witness to the group's more private activities (such as the mediums' meetings, not open to the public, and their social work in Coelho da Rocha.)

The leaders of the groups with whom I met, Tina de Sousa of the Templo Guaracy in Sao Paulo and Dona Sandra and Senhor Brito of the Caboclo Peri House in Rio seemed genuinely happy that an interest had been taken in their groups, and both made an effort to show me around the grounds of their temples, explain the functions of certain rituals and objects and encouraged me to witness and participate in sacred ceremonies. Of all the religions I studied, Umbanda was the one with which I identified most and enjoyed studying. This could have been because its values and beliefs resonated with many of my own, but also because the research was easier and I did not encounter any major difficulties during the data collection phase.

After establishing contact with the Caboclo Peri House in my first few days in Rio, I was invited to sit in on all the services/rituals being offered to the public and make notes. When consultations with spiritual guides (*caboclos*, *pretos velhos*) were taking place on Tuesday or Thursday nights, the spiritual entities often invited me to the floor to consult with them and receive their advice and guidance. Although participation had never initially been something I had envisioned as being a central practice in my data collection, in the case of Umbanda it was extremely useful as I became familiar with how the consultations worked, the kind of help and counsel the spiritual entities gave out and the importance of spiritual embodiment, spiritual songs, physical proximity and touch to Umbanda. Although note-taking, participation and participant observation went smoothly, organising interviews represented more of a challenge. I went to the House almost every day, but mediums were so busy that they would not commit to an interview time readily. When they did

agree to interviews, they often could not spare more than 30 minutes and arranging a time to talk outside the centre hours was not easy as many of them worked fulltime jobs all day, then went straight to the centre and stayed until late at night. With regard to the Templo de Guaracy in Sao Paulo, I visited there for a weekend and during that time managed to organise interviews with both a leader of the centre (Tina) and a medium, Andre. I was fortunate enough to be at the centre on a Saturday morning to witness their huge weekly *gira*, a meeting held outside with singing, dancing and consultations with the entities. Interviews and observations from the two different centres reinforced the data by helping me to create a more balanced picture of Umbanda and the diversity of practices that characterise it.

Data Analysis

In approaching the data analysis, Glaserian grounded theory was combined with ethnographic analysis. Glaser's approach to analysis and coding emphasises the importance of induction. Following the Glaserian perspective, codes and categories emerge from the data naturally without being forced (Glaser 2005). However, ethnographic analysis was also drawn upon during this stage of research, which emphasised the importance of humanising the codes and categories with emic perspectives in the form of the voices and beliefs of participants, thus constructing a portrayal that drew on and rendered participants' lives.

A central element of the analysis phase was transcription of the interviews. Transcription and analysis of tape-recorded interviews can represent one of the most challenging phases of research due to the overwhelming volume of material to deal with (Kleinman and Copp 1993). Although coding can constitute the most methodical way to approach the data, by breaking it down into manageable sections and analysing words or groups of words for meanings, Copp and Kleinman (1993) also warn that over-coding can become a crutch that prevents the researcher from thinking holistically about the research. Subsequently this can run the risk of creating a written document that reads more like a list of findings than an integrated story. Glaser also (2005) calls attention to the dangers of "forcing" the theory to emerge. Following these caveats, I approached the coding process cautiously, always trying to contextualise the codes I did identify within the research as a whole.

To begin the analysis process, I began with basic coding, searching for patterns, meanings and explanations in the text data. As I transcribed each interview, I examined the data in chunks, identifying the ideas and processes that were present. Some of the preliminary codes captured at this stage were very evident and included themes such as: illness, spiritual quest, spirituality and sexuality and individual spirituality. During this very initial stage of coding I also began memoing, writing notes in the margins next to the text and in a notebook where I recorded potential theoretical concepts I could see emerging.

Once I had a set of codes from the complete transcriptions of the three religions, I compared the codes, many of which were similar (such as “sense of community” from a Salto Quântico interview, and “belonging” from an Umbanda interview). In this way I set about clustering and categorising the codes, and reduced the number of codes into more specific, encompassing categories. Key categories identified at this stage included the role of embodied practice within religion, which linked to practices of spiritual incorporation, spiritual deliverance from demons and rituals involving the body; the search for spiritual authenticity, which included codes such as spiritual quest and finding truth in one’s religious practices; New Age discourse, which encompassed themes such as emphasis on individualistic spirituality and the self as a tool for transformation; and finally spiritual healing, which clustered dissatisfaction with orthodox medicine and the importance of giving spiritual meaning to illness.

I then set about refining the categories to and synthesising them with the other information that had been collated (through field notes, observation, participation etc.), to inductively identify key concepts and patterns. Stern (1980) argues that concept formation is prompted by the discovery of the main problems in the social scene from the perspective of the actors, and how they deal with the problems. The specific concepts that came to light from this stage of coding often specifically spoke to one group (for example, sexual identity and spirituality really only figured within the narratives from Salto Quântico adherents), however, there were also analogous concepts across the three case studies, especially in terms of spiritual healing which emerged as a major category with various concepts closely bound to it (for example, dissatisfaction with orthodox medicine, desire for the integration of spirituality into treatment and the search for meaning around illness). As spiritual healing was not a concept I had foreseen as being so central I needed more data to explore it further, to create a more sophisticated understanding of it from religion to religion, thus

theoretical sampling was carried out. This occurred during my second research trip to Brazil, when I followed up on the theme of health and healing among the religious groups, and in some cases conducted email interviews concerning this matter with participants when I was returned home to New Zealand. The theoretical sampling procedure definitely confirmed that it was a major category across the three religions.

The final stage of analysis was concept modification and integration. I looked at the existing literature, initial codes, categories and concepts to abstract and refine the theoretical concept. The central theoretical concept that emerged that was apparent across the three religious case studies was the following: religious participation in Brazil functions as a *symbolic* means through which one can make sense of and give meaning to personal reality in a multiple ways, but also represents a *practical* means which encourages individuals to be active agents in re-conceptualising or rearranging elements of their everyday material lives to their advantage. The notion of religion having practical benefits is one that is often under-investigated or theorised as religious culture is often represented as a moral order not significantly influenced by practical concerns (Smilde 2012). However, as discussed earlier in the work of McGuire and Heelas, individuals' religious identities are strongly informed by their material lives, and the religions in this study speak to everyday, earthly needs. In addition, as Heelas (2008) purports, there is a fluidity that occurs between secular life with its material concerns and spiritual life, with the two informing each other.

Importance and Limitations

The findings of this research are significant in a variety of ways. Firstly, the data paints an up-to-date picture of the contemporary reality of Brazilian religiosity in the context of late modern neoliberal society: its importance as a part of everyday experience that enriches life, the perceived benefits religious adherence bestows upon adepts and the role of emotive and embodied experience within religion. I think it is vital to point out that most of all, the data demonstrates that for the participants religion constitutes a meaningful lens through which to make sense of the world and personal circumstances. Most critically, religious affiliation not only provides adherents with a way to find meaning, but is also perceived by participants as having pragmatic benefits.

However, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged in the research design. Most prominent is that the fieldwork I carried out in Brazil was relatively brief, consisting of two and a

half months in total over a two-year period. Ethnography ordinarily requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the field for long periods of time, with projects sometimes stretching out for years. My initial enthusiasm for the project probably overshadowed the realistic constraints of a doctoral research project: limits on funds and on time available to be spent in the field meant that it may have been wiser to focus on one or two religious communities, rather than three. However, awareness of the time constraints during my time in Brazil made me very proactive in engaging with the religions; I made myself available as much as possible to spend time at religious spaces where the groups met and worshipped, attended services every day and followed up leads for potential interviews or conversations whenever possible. In addition, I maintained contact with many of the adherents upon my return to New Zealand. Shulamit Reinharz (1984) writes that the brief field trip offers a prime opportunity to generate theory from data, rather than verify it. This is because the brevity dismisses from the outset any hope of collating sufficient data to create a complete description or expertise, but enough to engender alternative perspectives on familiar phenomena. Project brevity increases the efficiency, vitality and attentiveness of a researcher. Furthermore, the researcher is firmly kept in the role of temporarily affiliated outsider, a role with its own benefits; for example, the researcher is less likely to meddle in the affairs or politics of the setting (Reinharz 1984: 181,335). In addition, as discussed earlier, a focus on breadth rather than depth can be advantageous, allowing the researcher to paint a more balanced and holistic picture of a phenomenon as a whole, and follow up on tangential leads as they emerge during research.

Another limitation is that the data gathered on the Universal Church is less enriched with the voices of the participants because of the interview restrictions imposed by church authorities. This demonstrates the importance of good organisation during short field trips: following the Universal Church's lack of contact regarding the project prior to my trip to Brazil, I should have researched the possibility of using another neo-Pentecostal church in the study that was more amenable to participating. However, the paucity of participant interviews in the Universal Church chapter has been supplemented by close reading of other material from the church and testimonies, along with my field notes and observations from the many services I attended.

A third limitation is the applicability of the findings of the Umbanda chapter. Umbanda in practice is very heterogeneous. The specialisations, beliefs and rituals vary significantly from centre to centre; therefore some of the findings from this research may be too specific to be applicable to

other Umbanda centres. In addition, the participant interviews are heavily weighted in favour of mediums' accounts, not clients. This is for several reasons: firstly, mediums are those who are regularly involved with Umbanda and deeply identify with its doctrine and principles, whereas clients may only frequent centres as need dictates. Secondly, requesting and arranging interviews with clients was a delicate matter as many were not willing to be forthcoming with their personal reasons for coming to the centre, possibly also influenced by the fact that many come in secrecy because Umbanda centres are still slighted in Brazilian culture. Nonetheless, having said this, the sample taken gives a very strong specific representation of one centre in Rio and those who constitute its most regular adherents, the mediums. Given the heterogeneity of Umbanda in Brazil, it would be near impossible to gain a representative sample of mediums, clients and centres without traversing the country and having unlimited time and resources.

A final limitation regards the sampling method. Purposeful sampling means that the sample does not capture a representative sample of all who frequent the church, or the different ways in which they engage with it (as discussed earlier, the interviews tended to be with participants who benefit most from the church or religious group, rather than those who have experienced some ambivalence in its efficacy or are more casual in their association). Nonetheless, as this thesis sought to determine the importance and role of religion in the lives of adherents, the voices portrayed here are consistent in that they represent those who generally subscribe wholeheartedly to their religion, regularly frequent services and can speak with conviction and authority about their spiritual experiences.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has reflexively outlined the methodological process that took place in designing and carrying out the research and its analysis. The next chapters will examine the three case studies, and will give a more detailed and complex examination of the concepts and categories that emerged from the analysis of the data.

“Give It Up or Get Out”: The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God

Pentecostalism continues at the vanguard of Latin America’s religious revolution...Pentecostal churches, such as the Assemblies of God (AD) and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), continue to be the main architects of the new religious landscape.

Andrew Chesnut, 2003:3

The Doctrinal/Philosophical Dimension

The *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, or IURD) is a Neo-Pentecostal church of Brazilian origin. With hundreds of branches in most states in Brazil, and churches even located along dusty red roads in small townships, the IURD has transformed the religious landscape and constitutes a major force in the increasing shift to Neo-Pentecostalism that is occurring throughout Brazil and wider Latin America. The church’s ability to mobilise a crowd is renowned, be it staging a mass baptism of 10,000 on a beach in Mozambique or stopping traffic along Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro during its Day of Decision. The subject of much consternation and critique among critics and the media in Brazil, the IURD has been much maligned for its tithing practices and multi-million dollar empire that includes Brazil’s second largest media organisation. However, among its adherents, the church is lauded for its transformative power in helping people to overcome addiction and poverty, and re-direct their lives. To these adherents, the IURD offers an easily accessible, inclusive religious community. To be an adherent does not require the precondition of literacy or high education. Church services are structured to be inclusive of those who cannot read, and all church members are encouraged to participate actively in services. Anyone can participate, and anyone can feel moved by the spirit to initiate ritual (Robbins 2009).

The IURD constitutes an example *par excellence* of a third wave Pentecostal church. Pentecostalism emerged very strongly in Brazil in its third phase, the wave often referred to as Neo-Pentecostalism. Originating in the 70s, the Neo-Pentecostal movement in Brazil was influenced by the teachings of the Canadian missionary Walter Robert McAlister who founded one of the first Neo-Pentecostal churches in Rio de Janeiro. Neo-Pentecostalism maintains characteristics that are apparent in first and second wave Pentecostalism, such as the belief in supernatural gifts given by the Holy Spirit, the importance of observing baptism and communion, the belief in the divinely ordained ministry of the pastor, and the belief in spiritual healing and prosperity gospels. However, it also embraces additional features in its doctrine, such as the relaxation of asceticism (especially in the realm of material acquisition), the valorisation of pragmatism, the application of business management in running churches, the use of media for mass evangelism, spiritual warfare exercised against other religious denominations (which is particularly pronounced in Brazil) and the exorcism of spirits associated with them (Gonçalves da Silva 2007). Gonçalves da Silva (2007) also posits that third wave Pentecostalism in Brazil has been radicalised to the extent of transforming it into a new denomination where renewal is experienced in the body itself. This aligns the church with some Spiritist and Afro-Brazilian religions, which also experience religious renewal within the body. This line of continuity with Brazil's most popular autochthonous religions facilitates the process of recruiting new members from those religions, where there is an emphasis on embodied experience and belief in the proximity of the spiritual world.

According to Bernice Martin (1998), those who opt to become Pentecostal do so with real agency, based on a rationality that although not necessarily correlative with Enlightenment rationalism, nonetheless provides adherents with alternative options and ways of living out their lives in constricting circumstances. Belief in miracles and miraculous transformation constitutes an essential part of the IURD rhetoric and ideology. Harvey Cox (2006:19) writes that it is because Pentecostals believe that the age of miracles did not end with the apostles that they have found such a strong following throughout the world. For Michael Goodich (1995), the supernatural tends to intercede when structures of human origin, such as the state, prove unreliable, and the brutalisation of human relations demands outside intervention to achieve equity. In neoliberal Brazil where inequality is a fundamental characteristic of society and access to social services is fraught, Universal Church services often have an intense emphasis on the "miraculous" power of

the church to improve the lives of those with faith in Jesus. Healing services often see the infirm spontaneously healed: in meetings I attended during research, the wheelchair-bound walked and those crippled by pain overcame their physical disabilities, all with the urging that for God anything is possible, so long as one demonstrates sufficient faith.

In scholarly literature, the rise of the IURD is well represented, frequently with a functionalist theoretical underpinning focusing on deprivation and compensation (Robbins 2009), and often lacking the narratives or perspectives of those who frequent the church. Too often the church is reductively categorised as an institution exploiting desperate individuals with its stringent tithing practices, however, such an assumption deprives people of their agency as rational actors. Developing a more nuanced understanding of the role of the church in the lives of adherents requires close examination of the ways individuals draw on church doctrine and practices to re-imagine and re-map their lives within the constraints of neoliberalism. This chapter will examine the pragmatic ways the IURD helps bring about change in members' lives, the importance of embodiment during religious practice, members' perceptions of tithing practices, the relationship between the church and neoliberalism, and the prevalence of spiritual healing.

Fast religion: the expansion of the IURD

Considering the relatively recent inception of the Universal Church in Rio de Janeiro in 1977, its vertiginous rise through Brazil and rapid expansion across the world has established it as one of Brazil's most successful exports. Anacy, a longtime adherent of the church since its formation noted that in its early days,

There wasn't even a church yet, it was in a funeral parlour first, then later it was in a shed that we used to go to. And there it began, there it began.

Established in 120 countries as of June 2013, that number is likely to climb as the church moves into new territories. As a point of comparison, Starbucks, one of the world's most recognizable global brands since 1971, has only set up shop in 55 nations. As an economic entity, the church's wealth is on par with other big companies in Brazil. Between 2003 and 2006 in donation alone, the church is reputed to have collected at least \$1.85bn, and experts estimate the actual sum to be much higher (Phillips 2011).

This expansionary success could be linked to the emergence of a global underclass that sees ghettos distributed across the globe, no longer confined to the Third World (Lash and Urry 1994). Many major global metropolises are characterised by peripheries where invisible, or sometimes visible, lines separate the indigent and importunate from their more affluent counterparts. In cosmopolitan areas those who dwell in the peripheries are often those who have migrated in search of work or a better life for their family. In New Zealand for example, the church's main branch in Otahuhu is frequented largely by members living on the outskirts of wider Auckland, in the lower socio-economic suburbs south of the city.

The IURD is receptive and becomes attuned to the lived experiences of its adherents, and so reflects their experience back at them by privileging issues relevant to their everyday lives in church services. The spiritual guidance it claims to offer relates to issues around employment, family, relationships, finances, health and addiction. One enters the church with a specific objective or desire in mind (overcome cancer, find a new job, purchase a new car, resolve family strife) and is then directed to the day and campaign most aligned with the needs of the person. It is for this reason that the church proclaims itself to be a "24/7 Help Centre" more than a church, for it is all things to all people, embracing the ideal of fluidity in the true spirit of late modernity.

The Universal Church operates like a multinational franchise: open 7 days a week, with between 3-7 services daily and pastors available to talk with during the day and into the night. Like so many all-night supermarkets or pharmacies in populated urban areas, the church avails itself to those who have become accustomed to accessing services when convenient: not dissimilar to fast food outlets, the Universal Church represents fast religion. Each day of the week is characterised by a different spiritual focus (Monday's service deals with business and finances, Tuesday's service offers spiritual healing etc.), and the churches all implement regular spiritual campaigns which may for last a few weeks to a month to help adherents focus their energies on one particular spiritual task at hand (such as fighting poverty or eliminating familial disharmony).

Thus, the church offers a spiritual philosophy which appeals to those desirous of an active, even aggressive approach, to their earthly problems. It has a this-worldly orientation that urges its members to take charge of their lives, their circumstances and enact personal change. Salvation is to be sought after death, but also is to be sought in the here and now. Members of the church are

encouraged, as one pastor put it, to “get angry” about the quality of the lives they are leading, to “revolt” against their unhappiness and bring about change.

The Narrative Dimension

Spiritual authority in an inauthentic world

A theme that dominates pastors’ discourse during services is the constant reiteration of the church’s spiritual authenticity. Although the inception of the Universal Church was relatively recent, pastors take care to firmly trace the lineage church as originating from the biblical roots of Christianity. Pastors frequently cite excerpts from the Old Testament, invite adherents to experience bodily renewal through the experience of the Holy Spirit, show footage during services of pastors climbing Mt Sinai during holy pilgrimages, and provide adherents with blessed oil or consecrated soil from Israel. These tokens often act as a link between the sacred and profane worlds, imbuing the individual with the spiritually authentic powers symbolised by the tokens. On one occasion, helpers distributed a piece of “blessed mantle from Israel” during service that had been consecrated by Bishop Macedo on the mountain where Jesus had been transfigured. The pastor then went on to cite from Acts 19:11,12, that God worked through Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons brought from his body to the sick would heal the ill and remove the evil spirits from them. However, how Bishop Macedo knew the whereabouts of the historically unknown mountain where Jesus was transfigured and appeared shining before Peter and John (Matthew 17:2) was not explained. The looseness of exegetical analysis of the Bible within the Universal Church indicates that the Bible’s power stems more from its function as a symbol of spiritual authority. In this case, the Bible was drawn upon to authenticate the pastors’ promise that a small square of rough calico held a divinely bestowed power to keep the influence of evil and illness at bay. The fabric acted as a barrier between the impurity of the exterior world, and the fragile purity of the individual’s inner life, which needed vigilant protection.

Most significantly, the IURD is currently constructing a replica of the biblical Temple of Solomon in Sao Paulo, with seating for 10,000. The temple has been constructed using modern technology, but with every effort to evoke the past and transport people back to the origins of Christianity for an authentic spiritual experience. The construction of this building will herald the ultimate symbol

of spiritual power. In an interview published on the church's website, Bishop Edir Macedo explained:

We've ordered, from Jerusalem, the same kind of stones used by Solomon, because we want to cover the walls of the temples with them. We want people to have a beautiful place to seek God and also have the opportunity to touch these stones and pray.

One of the major dilemmas posed by the existence of a dynamic religious marketplace, such as that of Brazil, is the issue of which religion offers the best path to spiritual and earthly enlightenment. The rise of authenticity as a value is highly esteemed nowadays as the industrial revolution made counterfeits prolific, and late modern society is characterised by an influx of imitation products and ideologies. The IURD recognizes this ambiguity present in society, and assertively markets itself as the only church with authentic roots offering a path to Jesus, proclaiming itself as the true spiritual authority in a religious sphere colonised by weak imposters and fakes.

An area that the church has identified as inauthentic and spiritually corruptive is the influence of secular information systems and media in the world. Oosterbaan's (2009) study on radio in a Rio de Janeiro *favela* discusses the prevalence of evangelical radio stations in the *favela* soundscape that offer evangelicals a substitute to mainstream radio, with its so-called impure content. The IURD owns a mass media conglomerate to rival Brazil's *Rede Globo* media empire, and offers adherents current event shows, newspapers, radio programs, pop music and soap operas that allow them to reject secular media and consume media transmitted through a spiritual filter. These forms of media offer up-to-date reports and commentary on current affairs and politics, celebrities, cuisine, women's issues (trafficking of and violence committed against women constituted a major focus for several weeks in July 2011), health, wellbeing and relationship advice. Many of the articles presented in the newspaper in particular are aimed at women and are evocative of glossy magazines with articles dealing with issues as diverse as quitting smoking, managing PMT, having pap smears and aging gracefully. The availability of this free media facilitates adherents in the shift from the media saturated secular sphere to the authentic spiritually informed media of the church.

Furthermore, the IURD holds an annual Fast of Daniel for 21 days that aims to "bring people closer to God, preparing them to be baptised with the Holy Spirit" (IURD promotional material,

20 March 2012). During the fast they abstain not from food, but from all types of secular information and media. This fast, according to the IURD, allows the individual to be cleansed of sinful and impure influences, transforming them into a vessel worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. Blocking oneself to potentially negative or detrimental secular influences is vital to foster conditions necessary to receive the ultimate spiritual authority, the embodied experience of the Holy Spirit. According to an IURD brochure, the person will then speak in “the tongue of the angels...to enable the Christian to pray in a way he cannot in His own words, for his own spiritual build-up. As he praises God, God gives him new words to talk to him.”

This emphasis and marketing of spiritual authenticity attracts those who are looking for a solid reference point in an unstable society, a connection to the biblical origins of Christianity and is also prominent in the church’s engagement with spiritual warfare against other Brazilian religions which will be explored later in this chapter.

The Social Dimension

Deliverance from poverty

As widely documented, most who frequent the Universal Church are the urban poor and the working class. Kramer (2005:99) notes a 1996 ISER (the Brazilian Institute for Religious Studies) statistical survey looking at evangelical members in Rio de Janeiro demonstrated that the socioeconomic profile of Universal Church placed members among the poorest, least educated and with the darkest skin colour of the evangelical churches listed. Its main constituents (who often refer to themselves as “*crentes*” or believers) tend to be Afro-Brazilian women of lower socio-economic class. Within Brazil, although class disparity is subtly and gradually closing aided by recent initiatives such as the *Bolsa Familia* that help to alleviate the effects of extreme poverty, widespread poverty nonetheless continues and the indignity of it is still great. There is still a sense of disrespect demonstrated towards the lower socio-economic classes that bears on their civil and social engagement, exemplified by the punitive containment within *favelas* and areas of the marginalised and dispossessed. Disrespect leads to a lack of social development or stilted integration into society, marginalising and disempowering the individual.

For Loïc Wacquant (2008), the penalisation of poverty and the militarisation of areas of concentrated marginality in Brazil, whereby *favela* residents are treated as potential terrorists, is a

symptom of a deeply neoliberal state. He points out that ironically the Brazilian government deploys “more state” in dealing with the social problems and poverty stemming from the government’s adherence to the neoliberal ideal of “less state” interference in market dynamics. This penalisation occurs at the expense of treating the root of poverty with a view towards social justice outcomes. Social change as a result of deregulation has unleashed numerous ills on Brazil, including increased marginalisation of the poor, decreasing wage labour, weakened social institutions often unable to help those who are vulnerable to social and economic transformations and more deeply entrenched poverty. This occurs in the context of society where affluence is highly visible, and the mass media fuels desire for wealth and possessions (Martin 1998). The contradiction of indigence or poverty with the desire for upward mobility and the acquisition of commodities is an issue of which the Universal Church is profoundly aware, and pastors address this in services, teaching that all are equal in the eyes of God, and all therefore have equal right to enjoy the pleasures (specifically, material pleasures) of life. Poverty is no longer a sign of meekness or humility, and pastors exhort adherents to aspire for more, to lust after cars, new houses, and accoutrements of success by changing their attitude towards money:

*Money can be looked at two ways: as a seed, or as money. Which is more powerful?
Which grows when you plant it? God wants you to plant seeds, not money.*

Pastor Marcos

The Universal Church speaks to those, as Wacquant terms it, who are *penalised* by poverty, whose civil engagement and full potential as citizens is compromised by their financial situation. To be poor in Brazil is to have fewer options, less care and support, less safety nets should you slip through the cracks, ultimately to have a lesser status. The intertwining of racial stratification with class discrimination further exacerbates inequality in Brazil. Filling the yawning gap left by social services, the Universal Church offers immediate assistance for those who need it, with online chat services with pastors, private counselling, churches that offer services throughout the day to cater to those working difficult shifts and with doors that are always open for those who walk in from the street. Most IURD churches are strategically located in the entertainment sectors of cities (Martin 1998), so pastors and *obreiros* can walk the nearby streets late at night recruiting street children, the homeless, prostitutes and drug addicts offering them support and the chance to transform their life.

Pastors persistently teach during services that wealth and good health can and should be enjoyed by all. Being born into a lowly position or having disreputable circumstances or lifestyle does not impact on one's worth. This provides those in difficult conditions with a strong affirmation to enact change in their lives and renews their sense of self-worth. The church is welcoming of all who walk through its doors, regardless of their social position, and services are often characterised by a *mélange* of people, ranging from the homeless, to domestic servants, to the occasional white-collar worker. However, developing a personal relationship with God is dependent on the individual person. The potential of collective solidarity to enact change in society is overlooked, and emphasis is placed on individual faith and effort. Through the cultivation of an intimate relationship with God, one is empowered and as an individual they can seek transformation in their life. For Anacy, who had been frequenting the IURD for more than thirty years, this was a distinguishing factor that separated the IURD from the Catholic Church services that she used to attend:

(The Catholic Church) doesn't pass on to you, like, they don't inject into you, this idea of faith nor this idea of freedom, for you... to live. You know, there's a veil. There's still a veil that separates...there is. And here, in the Universal Church, I didn't find that veil. Everyone has freedom, you know, sometimes in the assistants' meetings, you say something to the pastor, and he says, you have the same authority as me, so you can do the same prayer.... I met God, I got to know him in the Universal Church. I couldn't get to know him there (in the Catholic Church). I had to know the priest, but I couldn't talk much with God. They don't pass on this intimacy with God, they don't pass it on, this is the truth, they don't give it.

For Christiane, a small business owner in her late forties, the Universal Church has a fundamental role in encouraging individuals to believe in themselves and their potential by acting with faith. It is through practice and action that lives are transformed.

The Universal Church doesn't only teach us to know the word of God, but above all else to practise it. And when we act with faith, God feels obligated to show his power in our lives. The work of the IURD is this, to teach its members to take action. We learn to believe in

our potential and that God is working to make everything possible. With this our self-esteem is elevated.

However, in spite of the emphasis on individual responsibility in taking action and developing their personal relationship with God, the IURD also offers support services to new adherents and those undergoing difficult times. The support is more therapeutic than material in nature, in the form of counselling, advice and a listening ear. Anacy explained the church's stance towards material aid thus:

If you are hungry today, today we will feed your hunger, today only, because you can't learn how to feed yourself if you are hungry... so we will feed you today, but you won't be receiving food for the rest of your life because we don't have the conditions to do that. We have a really great phrase...we won't give you fish, we will teach you how to fish.

However, some adherents, such as Sheila, 54, viewed the IURD's antipathy to material aid as callous. Sheila, a woman whom I met on the streets of Botafogo in Rio, was on the cusp of slipping into indigence, currently just managing to pay the lodgings of the boarding house where she was staying while she sought work. She related that she had been to the church on two occasions, the first time to cure a painful knee, and the second time to beg for food as she was starving. The first occasion the pastor told her she would be unable to heal the knee without giving a tithe, and the second time he gave her 7 reais (approximately 4 NZ dollars) to buy a snack, and instructed her to return when she had a tithe to give and therefore had faith that she could leave her poverty behind her. Sheila explained that she found this treatment humiliating, and therefore did not return to the IURD and began frequenting the Igreja Apostólica (Apostolic Church) instead. Therefore although the Universal Church offers support to adherents, it does not offer social ministry in the form of food parcels, soup kitchens or handouts, and discourages adherents from becoming dependant on government aid and benefits. In the *Universal News: I Accessed the Type of Support that Brought Real Benefits* (Feb 2012), Paula tells of her transition from benefit recipient to business owner. Her testimony explains that as a new migrant to the UK:

Although I didn't speak English, I did understand I could claim benefits to sustain my son and me...I used to receive a maximum of 300 pounds a month. This was just enough to

pay rent, bills, transport and food...when I came to the UCKG Help Centre in that same year, I learned that I should not depend on benefits or centre my entire life on handouts. Rather, I should organise myself and be determined to develop and improve my skills in order to get a job.

Paula, Universal News, 2012

The article continues, contrasting Paula's modest annual benefit with her comfortable annual salary nowadays as the owner of a bridal boutique, concluding that if she had continued as a benefit recipient her English would have never improved; she would still be eking out a meagre existence, and be a burden on the government and the taxpayer. The message to IURD adherents is clear: move beyond subsistence and support, gain skills and find work that allows for a comfortable existence.

In this sense, the IURD does not attempt to structurally challenge or change the shape of society as other Protestant movements do. However, Martin (1998) asserts that for those near the bottom of the social ladder, alteration of macro social structures is unrealistic. She also expresses that Western intellectuals tend to regard political protest as the most appropriate and legitimate response to social upheaval, dismissing religious movements such as that of third-wave Pentecostalism, a genuine movement of the masses that does bring about transformation in the lives of its members. Martin writes that what the poor do exercise control over is how they respond to the limiting conditions of poverty, and Pentecostal churches such as the IURD empower poorer citizens to tackle these conditions in a proactive way. The individualistic orientation of the church equips adherents to learn to live within the challenging parameters of the neoliberal order. The discourse around poverty within the church is very aggressive, calling people to "revolt" against their conditions, and to stand up and say no to poverty-induced misery. During one campaign that lasted several months, pastors wore red t-shirts emblazoned with "*Meu Nome É Revolta!*" (My name is Revolt!). On another occasion, pastors distributed slips of paper structured like a legal affidavit, entitled "Declaration against Poverty". The document articulated the following:

I, _____(name), DECLARE, that I do not accept poverty in my life, I refuse to depend on other people to pay for my activities, and that through my own efforts, I will

guarantee the physical and financial conditions necessary to sustain myself and my family. This being a true statement, assuming the whole responsibility for the declarations above, I sign this present declaration in order to produce its legal effects.

Rio de Janeiro, ___of_____ of 20___, _____(signature).

Such symbolism and discourse against poverty is extremely powerful, encouraging adherents to feel empowered and determined to overcome their financial difficulties. Documents such as the one discussed above are distributed during church services for people to take home and place in their homes, as a reminder of their commitment to changing their situation. These documents, along with the other objects that are given out (holy oil, mantle, etc.) also provide a link between the church (sacred) and secular (profane) world, harnessing the individual to the church and its promises, even when in the secular world. Often adherents are given an object, told to take it home, think it about it or keep it near them, and then bring it back for a series of services in order to fully activate its powers to help them. This also helps to integrate individuals into the church by encouraging them back for multiple services.

Integrating with civil society: transference of skills from the sacred to the secular

The church seeks to construct its own autonomous spiritual space that pulls the marginalised back into its folds or what Holstein terms an “alternative modernity”. For many marginalised and subaltern peoples, the nation has bound and confined its citizens, offering a set of hierarchically marked positions, often devoid of prestige or power. Segato (2003) identifies class stigma as being the underlying repressive force within the Brazilian nation that impels people to join the IURD. The challenge posed by the Universal Church towards the Brazilian state and its dominant institutions by appealing to those who suffer this stigmatisation produces enormous friction, with the state enforcing repressive measures against the church at times during its history. The expansion of religions such as Pentecostalism into new territories can be interpreted as emblematic of the process of globalisation, but may also demonstrate a discourse of resistance against the hegemony of the nation-state that appeals to those who live on the margins of society. Those who contemplate religious alternatives can be seen as dissatisfied with their place within the nation (Segato 2003:23) Adherence to a religious community is often seen as an “escape hatch”. It offers these groups another means to express and develop their identity within a community other than

the nation-state. However, membership and participation within the IURD also offers a platform for those wish to acquire the means (symbolic and material) to enter the nation state. One of the principal ways in which these symbolic skills are acquired is through participation in various tasks and responsibilities in church life.

Chesnut's (1997:141) study on urban Pentecostalism in Brazil discovered that the time sacrifice demanded of adherents is fairly intensive, with an average of 4.7 church-related activities per week. Congruent with this study, involvement in the IURD often requires significant dedication of personal time and efforts. However, individuals' interaction and participation in church life also has the concomitant effect of helping develop skills useful in the secular world, particularly in gaining work. All of the women interviewed for this study participated actively in church life outside service times, by helping as *obreiras* (guiding members and assisting the pastors during services, carrying out cleaning, organisation and maintenance duties after hours), teaching in Sunday schools and helping recruit new members after hours among the community. Maria, a young migrant from the interior, mentioned a program with which she was involved with called "*Perola da Noite*" (Pearl of the Night) where she evangelised prostitutes in Copacabana at night. Anacy explained that the church had an active involvement with local communities, offering jiu jitsu lessons for youth in poorer suburbs of Rio and visits to the ill in public hospitals. The IURD in NZ offered help beautifying the inner city streets of Auckland in the lead up to the Rugby World Cup in 2011, and regularly extends help to elderly members of the congregation with house and garden maintenance.

These activities foster the development of skills transferable to the wider social and labour sphere such as interpersonal communication, organization, leadership, the ability to speak in public and to take responsibility (Martin 1998; Robbins 2009). Some IURD churches, such as the one in Botafogo, also claimed to help people to become literate and prepare them for job interviews. Essentially, the church grooms individuals for survival in the secular world and broader participation in civil society, giving them the means to attain skills to shift them from the margins of the *favela* by encouraging initiative not passivity.

However, apart from involvement in church life having a practical application, it also has the function of making members feel connected and socially involved. For many urban migrants, such

as Maria, originally from Sertão do Maranhão, migration to Rio left her struggling to find work and make ends meet. Lost and lacking any sense of direction or purpose in her life, she was barely eking out an existence and thought she had nothing to lose when a friend recommended she try the Universal Church. The church community welcomed her openly, and Maria explained that she began to experience a sense of care, love and wellbeing she had not experienced since moving to Rio. She began frequenting the meetings 3 times a week. Maria reported that as a result of her integration into the church community she now has a sense of meaning and purpose in her life, a good job as a hairdresser, and derives immense happiness from providing companionship to the lonely in hospital and teaching in the IURD Sunday school. Clearly demarcated in Maria's narrative are the feelings of dislocation, solitariness and unhappiness prior to the church, and the transformative shift post-IURD of belonging, being loved and part of a community. Maria emphasised the importance of the church as an egalitarian space, where all come together before the eyes of Jesus as equals and associates, and all are welcomed regardless of their social status, regardless of whether they are alcoholics, drug addicts or indigents.

Another way that the church engenders critical change in the lives of poorer adherents is through the encouragement of the creation of small business. The IURD serves to develop attributes in its adherents which fit the exigencies of a deregulated labour market that requires and rewards the following: micro-entrepreneurial initiative, the ability to operate as an individual, self-motivation and a flexible approach as employment can be insecure, transitory, with irregular hours (Martin 1998). The church's Monday services, devoted to improving finances, groom adherents for taking on small business initiatives such as beauty parlours, landscaping businesses, hairdresser salons, bakeries and catering businesses.

For Cristiane, involvement with the IURD encouraged her to start her own boutique cake shop. In the case of Denise, 53, setting up her own therapeutic massage business helped her to take control of her life and the difficult domestic situation she was undergoing, and gave her the independence to support herself, her children and grandchildren when her husband left her. The church encourages adherents to aim for economic liberation, to work independently and to provide their children with all the necessities and pleasures of life.

The image the IURD disseminates reinforces this notion of success, with well-equipped churches, up-to-date media and sharp looking pastors. In many ways, the body of the pastor functions as a microcosm of the church's body politic. Pastors are well dressed and look on trend, rather than in traditional religious garb. Bernice Martin (1998) describes the pastors of the IURD as holy hustlers, a combination of rock star/DJ and television game show host while Kramer (2005:105) writes "the bodily presentation of the pastor becomes a form for the modelling of highly desired social values (power, individual autonomy, wealth and health) that his discourse in turn aims to inculcate. They are often strong young men, with their posture, oratory skills and gestures enforcing the idea that the church is orientated towards actions and results". Kramer (2005) notes that in a documentary about Bishop Edir Macedo filmed by a dissident pastor, footage portrayed the bishop teaching the pastors of the importance of conviction and confidence in their role:

You have to get up there and take charge: "People, now you're going to help in the Lord's work. If you want to help, Amen. If you don't want to help, God's going to find me another person to help, Amen." Understand? If you want to, good. If not, get lost! It's "Dá ou desce" (this saying has a sexual connotation, and roughly translates to give it up, or get out). Understand? That's it. Because that's where people see your courage. People have to believe in you. If you act weak and timid people won't believe in your prayer.

(Macedo cited in Kramer, 2005:104)

The pastor represents a "superhero of the people." He is a courageous individual: brave enough to fight the devil, bold enough to challenge God to uphold his promise to the faithful and realise his Word (Macedo cited in Kramer, 2005:104) and an example to adherents of how to put faith into action and change one's circumstances. For enacting change is dependent upon one's personal commitment to action:

From the moment that we start to put into practise what the men of God-the bishops, pastors and workers- teach us, automatically our life begins to change in every sense. We become more confident, we have peace 24 hours a day independent of whatever struggle we are facing because we are certain of victory. We are cured of illness, our families

convert, the addict becomes freed of his vice, our financial life is transformed, and so on. Of course this doesn't happen over night, there is a lot of struggle, but as I have said, victory is certain

Christiane

However, despite the church's protestations of everyone having equal access to God, the pastor is seen by adherents as possessing privileged access which also reflects a gendered power imbalance, particularly because only men can be pastors. Following services, many women would queue to talk to the pastor, requesting him to pray for them, bless or touch various personal effects thus bestowing his privileged spiritual status on them.

The Ethical Dimension

The correlation between moral conduct and practical benefits is an area that has long been acknowledged in religious scholarship, with Pentecostal morality exemplifying this. Promotion of virtuous behaviour within Pentecostal religious communities has been identified as one of the most evident ways in which religious adherence equates to tangible benefits in everyday life: abstinence from alcohol use, drug use, philandering and gambling ultimately promotes greater financial stability and increases chances of gaining and holding work (Chesnut 2003). The IURD appeals most to those who recognise the effects of poverty on their lives, who aspire to rise higher and are looking for long-term resolutions to their situations (Cox 2006). Adherents were constantly reminded to be vigilant about giving into sinful conduct, with Pastor Marcos teaching: "The worst virus on the face of the earth is emotion... Desires of the flesh and emotions lead us towards detrimental behaviours. Earthly inclinations carry us towards death faster, while the spirit takes us towards a better place."

Furthermore, virtuous behaviour encourages a range of other traits such as self-discipline and an ethic of hard work that also result in pragmatic benefits. However, as mentioned earlier, the asceticism of Neo-Pentecostalism is more relaxed than that of its predecessors, encouraging aspirations of wealth. Virtue is encouraged up to the point that the benefits stemming from it can be enjoyed in the form of the trappings of wealth and material comforts. Moral behaviour is aligned with gains from both a worldly perspective and a perspective of salvation.

Another form of ethical behaviour that is strongly encouraged in the church is participation in church life. Giving up one's free time to work as an *obreiro* or *obreira*, working with youth, partaking in evangelising missions or community clean-up projects are all encouraged as moral activities. However, they have the additional advantages of integrating the individual into a spiritual community as discussed earlier, fostering a sense of spiritual identity and purpose and providing an environment in which the individual can learn skills applicable and useful in the real world. For those who are marginalised, engagement in these "moral behaviours" can be crucial in forming a bridge between marginalisation and deeper engagement as a citizen.

The Emotional/Experiential Dimension

Spiritual warfare and spiritual protection

In the IURD, Friday's service of *libertação* (deliverance from demons) attracted the largest number of members to its daily services. Of all the services, I found Friday's services the hardest to sit through. These meetings were characterised by foreboding organ music, agonised and sometimes deafening screaming, and individuals led from their seats for "*libertação*". One service I attended was so vitriolic and anguished, punctuated by such piercing screams that I found myself quietly leaving when the opportunity presented itself.

According to an IURD newspaper (February 2012), deliverance enacts liberation from demons that bring about problems as diverse as anger, depression, drug and alcohol addiction, hatred, anxiety, familial disunity, failure in love, financial problems, psychosis, insomnia, illness, suicidal thoughts and emptiness. According to the IURD, nearly all afflictions can be related to the presence of demons in one's life. Evil associated with demons becomes a generic, demobilising force, which lies at the source of all life's problems, and often stem from "hereditary ancestral demons" passed down through generations afflicting members of the family for decades (with the demon's influence often manifesting as cancer, gambling addictions, alcoholism, or domestic unhappiness and violence), and as a consequence the church frequently stages rituals to break the demon's hold over the family.

There are also demons brought about by participating in the religions of Umbanda, Candomblé and Spiritism. Pastors often invite adherents who are guilty of dabbling in these religions to come forward on Fridays and have the evil forces drawn from them. Spiritual warfare, as transmitted by

the IURD, encourages adherents to view day-to-day life in terms of a spiritual battle between the forces of God and demons which can malevolently affect all aspects of one's life. The discourse and imagery around deliverance in services is extremely strong, even verging on the violent, with images of soldiers in battle surrounded by fire, a metaphor for the vigilance and militancy required to expel these demons from one's life. Demons offer a source of blame for ongoing problems such as marital infidelity, drug abuse and unemployment. Individuals are not held responsible for the problems that beset them, however, the church teaches that they are responsible for how they choose to *respond* to these problems.

However, social and historical bases of inequality do not figure in Universal Church rhetoric. Never is the idea proposed that the poverty that persists through generations may be linked to a social system mired in inequality. This has the subsequent effect of depoliticising people somewhat and reducing their awareness of structural realities that may have led to their current situation. Many of the hardships that adherents of the church face stem from circumstances over which they have little control, therefore, to identify the cause of these hardships as demonic and symbolically cast them out through the Friday "liberation" can act as a constructive metaphor for helping individuals take control of their lives. In this sense, the IURD depoliticises in that it does not identify the structural source of oppression faced by impoverished Brazilians, however, it does offer a symbolic alternative to transform one's life.

There were many diverse rituals held to enact this symbolic transformation: for example, in one case, adherents were given wristbands for protection from demons, while another ritual involved adherents bringing along an old t-shirt to the service, tying a knot in it at the pastor's orders and holding it above their head, collectively chanting that they were binding their financial, health or relationship worries with the knot and therefore binding the evil spirits that may be causing them difficulty in these areas. As another example, plastic cups were distributed and adherents were instructed to write all the things going wrong in their lives on them, hold them over their heads and pray for deliverance, then at the end of the service the pastor collected them to crush in a sacred place. The crushing of the cups would thus symbolise the crushing of the curses plaguing the adherents. Services also placed a heavy emphasis on ritual objects given out to help ward off evil that were imbued with the blessings of the pastors. Sheila, for example, revealed to me two satin handkerchiefs that she kept close to her heart that were supposed to bring prosperity to the

holder. Objects distributed include bottles of consecrated holy oil, ribbons, capes, holy water, stickers, banners and salt as enforced vessels of the Holy Spirit, possessing curative and protective powers.

Mary Douglas (1966:115) writes in *Purity and Danger* that practices of separating between the pure and impure are ordering mechanisms used universally whereby, “the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious”. This is echoed by Bauman, who argues that the body and community are sometimes regarded as, “the last defensive outposts” in the uncertain conditions of liquid modernity (Bauman cited in Oosterbaan 2009). The rituals and objects provided by the IURD help the individual purify their person and their personal space. Collective deliverance represents one of the most meticulous ways in which an individual can cleanse themselves of the malevolent and pollutive influences of the outer world. During the *libertação* services workers would patrol the church, looking for signs of people manifesting demonic influence and would place their hands on the person’s head or shoulders, uttering strong prayers invoking the power of Jesus to release the individual of the demonic force, and restore them to a state of spiritual cleanliness.

“Deliverance” as a spectacle

One of the distinguishing features of the Universal Church is the way it integrates aspects of the theatre to create a “spectacle of faith”. Kramer (2005:102) elaborates:

*Services of the Universal Church are undoubtedly theatrical in ways that dramatise as well as serialise religious participation. Churchgoers play an active role as performers in an unfolding drama that brings together their individual struggles of self-transformation within the cosmology of the church and its collective project of salvation. Emotion is a defining element of participation (Corten 1996). Certainly the core of many Neo-Pentecostal services and perhaps their principal dramatic event is the ritual expulsion of demons. The Christian comes into full possession of him- or herself by a process called *libertação*, or “deliverance,” whose point of departure is exorcism.*

This proximity of the church service to a spectacle fulfils multiple functions. It represents a form of entertainment, staging of power (showing the church's might in the war against demons, and weaker religions that invoke those demons), and encourages embodiment and emotional engagement. All Universal churches have the same architectural layout, with a clearly demarcated stage area at the front, separating the pastor (performer) from the congregation (audience). The importance of the church service as a show or spectacle cannot be underestimated, encouraging people to engage in the dramatisation of issues giving them difficulty and spectate as others are cleansed of their demons.

Kramer (2005) describes the IURD exorcism ritual as “a spiritual drama with three acts”. This was most certainly manifested in the services I attended in Rio. The first part of the service involves setting an emotional atmosphere (in services I observed, this atmosphere was cultivated by heavy and foreboding music, and the pastor's warnings, such as those of Pastor Marcos: “The devil circles around us like a lion looking for our weak spot, so it can attack...the cursed devil is one the who is taking the spark from your marriage!” The service then shifts to the more practical segment of workers and pastors wandering among the audience, identifying those who are plagued by demons, and drawing on the word of God to bring them out (inevitably, it seemed in every deliverance service I attended I was identified as one of those badly tormented by demons and submitted to some extremely intense deliverance.) This would involve the workers placing their hands on the heads of the afflicted, and ordering the demon to leave their body, which sometimes followed along the lines of, “Cursed demon, stop plaguing this girl and her family, you who are responsible for her poor health, the one who is causing her unhappiness in her relationship, you who are forcing her to live in poverty, leave her alone, in the name of Jesus, I command you to LEAVE! LEAVE! LEAVE!” This process could sometimes take as long as 5 minutes, especially if the adherent did not make any clear display of the demon being expelled from him or herself.

Often during this second stage, the pastor would identify a particularly afflicted individual and lead them up onto the stage for everyone to witness the spiritual drama unfold between the demon and pastor. On one particular occasion, the pastor dragged a young woman to the stage. As she writhed and screamed, the pastor held her by her hair, intoning, “What is your name demon! In the name of Jesus, tell me your name!” Gasping and growling, the demon rasped out, “*Tranca rua*” (an *exú* commonly invoked in Umbanda to bring bad luck upon a person by blocking their path.)

The demon was made to confess its role in causing the girl problems in employment and her love life. Turning to the audience, the pastor warned of the dangers in engaging in Umbanda and Candomblé practices.

The final “act” in the deliverance service is the collective expulsion of the demon. At this stage, the atmosphere within the church is characterised by screaming, rephensions of the devil and the pastor invoking the audience to join with him to ordering the demons to leave, with the words SAI! E SAI! E SAI! (LEAVE, and LEAVE, and LEAVE!). In the unfolding of the drama of deliverance, the pastor’s persona, his command and powerful oratory are absolutely fundamental to creating this climate of tension and mobilising the crowd to seek out and expel the demons from within them. As Kramer (2005) notes, the pastor “is the embodiment of a ritual system that enacts power in spectacular form”. He is also the director of the deliverance ceremony, who guides the adherents throughout the expulsion of demons from within them.

Embodied experience

Embodied experience holds a prominent place in the Universal Church, and is exhibited and explored through actively practicing one’s faith, singing in worship, laying of hands in healing, the reception of the Holy Spirit in the body and most significantly, the expulsion of demons. Some scholars note that sensuous bodily practices within church tend to be gendered, with more women experiencing the embodiment of the Holy Spirit and demonic possession than men (Rabelo, Mota and Almeida, 2009). While Pentecostal churches such as *Igreja Pentecostal Deus é Amor* (the God is Love Pentecostal Church) focus on uplifting embodied experiences such as being filled by the Holy Spirit, the IURD tends to devote more attention to more serious forms of embodiment such as deliverance of demons. The embodiment experienced by adherents in the Universal Church also contrasts with that of adherents in Umbanda, for whom embodiment tends to be a joyous state. Nonetheless, for many adherents, the church allows them the space to physically explore their spirituality in a context where they do not need to feel embarrassed or self-conscious.

In the context of the IURD during Sunday’s services dedicated to encounters with the Holy Spirit, adherents are encouraged to renounce self-control and exhibit emotion, including crying, laughing, shouting and jumping. Rabelo, Mota and Almeida (2009:8) note that loosening controls acts as a sign of liberation from the world, but in order to experience this liberation they must

learn to overcome the shame associated with free emotional expression. Sheila informed me that although she had frequented her local Catholic church several times, she felt humiliated when the priest informed her that her emotional outbursts were inappropriate. Miller and Yamamori (2007) write that such exhibitions of embodiment and spontaneity are often characterised as a reversion to primitivism. However, they counter such charges by proposing that Pentecostalism is actually postmodern in nature, merging the mind and body and encouraging emotional expression as a legitimate and necessary part of worship experience, claiming that there is a spontaneity to Pentecostal worship that calls out to the kinaesthetic senses for participation.

Ironically, although the church adheres to and embraces certain neoliberal ideologies, it provides a space in which one can challenge the homogeneity and standardisation of the neo-liberal capitalist order. Experiential religions therefore fill what theologian Harvey Cox (2006:17) has termed an “ecstasy deficit” left by the secular worldview. Churches such as the IURD present a way for people to re-engage with their bodies, senses and emotions spontaneously in a religious context, encouraging authentic personal experience. The IURD resuscitates the “feeling dimension” that has been squeezed by the neoliberal order, for those who are starved of authentic emotional experiences. Dalla Costa (2009) writes that this yearning for physicality and feeling is symptomatic of the need to experience the body as a whole, rather than merely treating it as a vessel for performing labour. Furthermore, collective exorcisms, such as those held by the Universal Church, engender effervescence and a sense of being part of something larger than oneself. Cox (2006:17) elaborates,

...the market revolution results in massive uprooting, displacement and the destruction of traditions. The result, for millions of people, is a sense of bewilderment and disarray. Chaos is one of the principal ways in which the poor experience the globalising landscape. But Pentecostal worship with its ear-splitting noise and tumultuous prayer is something of a homeopathic cure. It invites people to plunge into the chaos to overcome it, by the power of the Holy Spirit...

Collins (2004:44) argues that humans go through life seeking emotional energy by participating in as many interaction rituals as they can. People tend to move from one ritual to another, tending to invest in the experiences that most successfully provide this emotional experience for them

(Collins 2004). Within the church, the deliverance episodes are highly physical and require stamina. People are kept standing for almost the entire duration of the service and are encouraged to talk back, yell, stamp their feet, clench fists and break their plastic communion cups. Every physical act must be performed with conviction, as an act of defiance against the devil and his cohorts. These episodes of embodiment create more immediacy in the spiritual experience and allow a direct encounter with the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in defeating demonic influence causing oppression in the individual's life.

The staging of power

Another integral aspect of “deliverance” on Friday's service is to demonstrate the strength and virility of the church in the battle against demons, most of which the IURD believe originate from Umbanda, Candomblé and Spiritism. One of the ongoing projects of the church is to win new souls from those who frequent Umbanda and Candomblé centres. Peter Fry and Gary Howe's (1975) work on Umbanda and Pentecostalism investigates the feasibility of two distinctive religions such as Umbanda and Pentecostalism existing among Brazilians of the same socio-economic strata. They argue that each movement represents a distinctive cosmological way of interpreting and dealing with life's afflictions. Pentecostalism resonates more with the world of order, or the renunciation of illicit pleasures. The Pentecostal churches help adherents find a way of dealing with social disorder by the imposition of an ascetic system. Umbanda, on the other hand, also acknowledges this disorder but rather than imposing asceticism, provides people with magical tools to manipulate the profane world to their own benefit. However, the IURD finds a way between the two extremes, what Fry and Howe term the “third response to affliction”, which draws on the two alternatives in its own way. Neo-Pentecostalism “softens” the asceticism of historical Protestantism by legitimating materialism and the acquisition of worldly goods.

Deliverance performs the vital function of forming a bridge between the belief systems of Afro-Brazilian religions and the Universal Church. The IURD does not deny the existence of the Afro-Brazilian deities and spiritual entities, but simply shifts adherents' perceptions of them from being perceived as helpful and beneficial, to malevolent and evil. Thus it is easier for neophytes to convert, as elements of their old religious paradigm are incorporated and re-interpreted in the new

one, smoothing the transition from one religion to the other. The church even offers “*descarrêgo*” sessions, a ritual often found in Umbanda houses whereby individuals receive spiritual “discharge” treatment from mediums, helping them to rid their aura of negative spiritual influences that may be affecting their health and wellbeing. The essential difference is that the IURD offers “*descarrêgo*” of negative spiritual influences stemming from involvement in Umbanda and Candomblé. Bishop Edir Macedo (1997) himself notes that in the services where people are “liberated” from demons, it may appear more similar in nature to an Umbanda session than a Christian church service, but these services are crucial in helping new members to shift from seeing *exús* as helpful spirits that can be called upon for favours, to seeing them as demonic forces.

The church stresses its strength in the battle for spiritual supremacy in Brazil’s religious market by rearticulating the power of the spiritual guides and *orixás* in its discourse. One information sheet distributed to adherents re-categorised the Afro-Brazilian deities with descriptions of their evil powers linked to their connection to nature. Iemanjá, goddess of the sea, was re-imagined as causing “problems that slowly grow, like an inundation, or rapid and strong, like a tsunami or wave”. Oxossi, god of the forest, of the *caboclos*¹⁰ and the hunt, was depicted as making “his victims feel lost in the face of all their problems, like they are lost in a wood”. Adherents were encouraged to bring ribbons associated with the symbolic colour of the deity that seemed to be causing their problem, to release into a fire on Friday’s deliverance service to bind and banish the *orixás*’ influence from their life. In some ways, this demonisation of Afro-Brazilian deities and beliefs hints at internalised colonialism, as Afro-Brazilian deities are forsaken in favour of Western ones. Martin (1998), however, points out that pre-Christian Africa was characterised by a readiness to desert one’s own gods in order to embrace those of a more powerful group. She even contends that it is possible that Pentecostalism could be seen as a form of indigenised resistance to colonial Catholicism.

For those in the lower classes navigating the uncertain terrain of life in late modern Brazil, the idea of spiritual supremacy and might on one’s side is appealing. The Universal Church markets itself as a church with a direct connection to a deity, Jesus, where one’s pact (the *tite*) guarantees one the right to demand Jesus to keep his word. Unlike Umbanda, where one must petition the *orixás*

¹⁰ Caboclos are spiritual guides in Umbanda. They are linked to the indigenous spirits of the forest.

and spiritual entities for favours with offerings (Gonçalves 2007) but is ultimately at the mercy of the deities' will, Neo-Pentecostalism has enforced its position of superiority by replacing the "favour" with "the right". The Neo-Pentecostal adherent invokes his "right" to divine grace, because of his sustained demonstration of faith through the tithe.

Significant publicity and energy is spent on defamation of Afro-Brazilian religiosity. Oosterbaan (2009) observes that the IURD also associates other cultural relics connected to Africanness, such as samba and carnival, with immorality, alcoholism, drug use and philandering. The church publishes a regular magazine, *Plenitude*, and a weekly newspaper, *Folha Universal*, which include weekly reports and members' testimonies on the harm caused by participation in these religions. Bishop Macedo's (1997) publication, *Orixás, Caboclos and Guias, Deuses ou Demónios? (Orixás, Caboclos, and Spirit Guides, Gods or Demons?)* has also aided in further exacerbating negative sentiment towards Afro-Brazilian religiosity. J. Cabral's preface notes, "...Bishop Macedo has launched a full-scale holy war against all the devil's works. In this book he notes the satanic movements behind Kardecism, Umbanda, Candomble and other similar sects..." Macedo's exegesis indicates that demons are disembodied spirits that inflict people's bodies with sickness and cause misfortune, distancing them from God. Those who frequent *terreiros* increase the likelihood of being personally possessed by a demon, or being in close proximity to friends or family who frequent centres can make one vulnerable by association. The book seeks to expose the religions as savage, primitive and immoral. Anacy blamed Afro-Brazilian religions for trying to defame the IURD and bring about its downfall during the period when the church was being heavily critiqued in the media:

Well, those "macumbeiros" went to them (government officials) and asked them to close the church, this was done with macumba, because those macumbeiros come here...macumba is mau-cumba (bad cumba) it's only bad, macumba is only bad...the orixás...all of them.

In addition, physical aggressions carried out on Afro-Brazilian religions by the IURD are occurring more frequently and are indicative of the increasing tensions and contestation over religious space in civil society. Gonçalves (2007), closely following reports in the printed press and academic articles, has noted the following: physical aggressions perpetrated by the IURD against

centres and their members, attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies in public locales, attacks on symbols linked to Afro-Brazilian religions and attacks from politicians aligned with the IURD. These attacks have prompted redress from representatives of Afro-Brazilian religions. In Bahia alone, more than 200 formal complaints have been laid over 7 years, including legal action against these churches. Tião Casemiro, an Umbanda representative in Rio, mentioned that there is a surge of ecumenical movements arising, whereby diverse religions have banded together to rise against the antagonism of the Universal Church. One of the most symbolic annual events of this spiritual battle is the Battle of the Gods on New Year's Eve. New Year's Eve is marked by the traditional Umbanda event of presenting offerings to the goddess of the ocean, Iemanjá, dressing in white and enacting rituals on the beach (such as offering flowers and food to the goddess). The church has taken to challenging and antagonising those who carry out this sacred ritual. In many ways, the drive behind this spiritual warfare is really a symbol for the battle for authenticity that presents the church as the answer to the crisis of authority present in society.

The Ritual Dimension

The tithe

Ritual is manifest in manifold aspects of Universal Church life, with practices around the expulsion of demons, symbolic rejections of poverty and distribution of sacred objects for protection all indicative of the centrality of ritual. However, the most prominent ritual carried out at least once and often twice during services is the collection of the tithe. Tithing is portrayed by the IURD and its pastors as the strengthening of a sacred and symbolic contract between the tither (*dizimista*) and God. The tithe does not conform to one clear-cut form of ritual but is aligned with several of the forms of ritual outlined by Ninian Smart (1996): it symbolises a regular activity carried out in honour of God, it is a *harnessing* practice whereby the pattern of behaviour is part of a disciplined process that seeks the attainment of benefits for the human being, and it is also a form of magic which attempts to influence God on behalf of human goals.

The tithe has its biblical origins in the words of the prophet Malachi 3:10¹¹. Anders Ruuth (2006) points out that the person that gives material and monetary offerings has the right, and even the obligation, to demand that God fulfil his terms of the contract. A concept that was constantly reiterated among all the interviewees was the notion of necessary reciprocity between God and man. God will serve the tither, on the premise that the tither gives what he is obligated as well. Often the pastors would call adherents to stand on the envelopes that were distributed during services, and pray to Jesus to help them to be able to fill the envelope the next time they came with more money. In the Universal Church in Botafogo, Pastor Marcos encouraged worshippers to give as much as they possibly could, and to even go beyond that, preaching, "Have credit with God, then you can charge him; he will owe you favours...being a tither means having a pact of faith and loyalty to God. God is loyal to you, so the tithe proves you are loyal to him." In this way the appeal to adherents to tithe was always framed in terms of the individual needing to fulfil his loyalty and obligation to God. The greater the tithe, the greater the faith in God, and the more God would reward the individual. This kind of rhetoric was often heard around the discourse used to convince people to give the tithe: most pastors emphasised that the church did not care whether they tithed, nor did Bishop Macedo himself, as the only one watching was God. Anacy admitted that she experienced initial suspicion towards tithing when her husband first started frequenting the church:

I didn't like the idea of giving money, no. Because I didn't have it, I didn't. And he (Anacy's husband) said, "They only ask it from those who have it. And they pray for those who don't have money." And I didn't! I didn't. And he also said, I know, I don't have money either, I don't give anything because I don't have any money, but I ask God to give it to me.

However, as she and her husband became more involved with the church, she explained that they began giving larger amounts, for special campaigns held by the church such as those fundraising for the construction of new churches:

¹¹ "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

My husband, he said: "However much you have in your savings account, take all of it out tomorrow, tomorrow, and leave it on the altar. Tomorrow." And at that time, I had about 400,000 reais. And years later, he said again, "Take all your money, and leave it on the altar. And he did this too...because of faith. Look, nowadays, thank God, financially, I'm really good. I live well, I love my work, earning a lot, because this job earns me a lot, and I'm very happy. Very happy.

This appeal for adherents to give the tithe to aid in the expansion of the IURD was raised during my second visit to Rio de Janeiro in July 2012, where the church had a heavy focus on summoning funds for the construction of the Temple of Solomon. Services would begin with a videotaped 10 minute address from Bishop Edir Macedo, explaining the importance of the tithe in the continued construction of the temple. Appealing to adherents' faith, Macedo explains that the more that one dares to give the more that individual can ask from God. He exhorts people to give whatever they have, be it money, gold, or even clothing, to help carry out God's work but also to prompt the manifestation of God's prosperity for themselves. A similar argument was used in the church in New Zealand, where the tithe would be used to fund "the expansion of the IURD project in the lowliest of God's continents." Pastors would remind adherents that tithing was primarily their personal responsibility to God as a demonstration of faith, but also that the tithe served the purpose in helping the church spread the work and word of God. However, in the same way that the pastors asked demonstrations of faith from the tithers, they would often reciprocate with acts of faith, undertaking arduous tasks to prove their solidarity. On one such occasion after a service in New Zealand, Pastor Marcelo walked to Mount Mangere in heavy winter rain from the church, a distance of approximately 8km, to prove his sacrifice to the members. Stories of pastors committing similar feats in other churches are advertised on the IURD website, such as the story of the highest pastors in the church hierarchy trekking to the top of Mt Sinai as a mark of how to put faith into action, to propel members to demonstrate their faith through tithing. Christiane identified that as an adherent, maintaining a state of faith was a challenge that the Church and pastors had to constantly address:

A challenge, without a shadow of doubt, is maintaining high, elevated levels of faith. And that's why the work of the IURD is always encouraging people to be participating in what's going on in the church, in the campaigns.

An important consideration to reflect on is how the adherent perceives the tithe, and the ways it may in fact engender wealth. Giving sacrifices creates a sense of power and empowerment in what may be powerless circumstances for many. Furthermore, the conviction with which pastors create feelings of expectation around the tithe may be instrumental in transforming individuals' mindsets around money, and the acquisition of it if they believe they have God behind them. What became apparent in the field is that for all of the members of the church, tithing has an inherent logic and even appeal. Often the tithe is generalised as blackmail or manipulation, with the pastor pressuring people to give against their will. While it is true that the IURD places significant importance on the collection of money, most people were in fact eager or proud to come forth to the altar to offer their tithe. One Monday at the IURD in Botafogo, the man seated next to me who appeared to be indigent placed approximately R\$500 into the church's collection envelope without a shadow of doubt or hesitation. For the adherents with whom I spoke, participation in the tithe was seen as an empowering act.

This also works in the opposite way, with one informant mentioning to me that she believed so strongly in the power of the tithe that she feared not giving, even at times when she was facing severe financial hardship. She knew the consequences and the bad luck she had encountered on previous occasions when she had failed to tithe.

For Gomes Esperandio (2006:60):

The person who comes to the centre is frail and vulnerable, often feeling worthless, with low self-esteem, low self-confidence and with wounded narcissism. When the church presents the sacrifice as a condition for prosperity and happiness, the person must let go of a passive attitude toward suffering and make a "self-investment"...here, the act of self-sacrifice does not mean resignation. On the contrary, when the person gives more than he/she possesses, he/she is overestimating him/herself. So a frail and worthless person leaps to a status of worth, since he/she is making a self-investment...

Gomes Esperandio goes on to add that money is what gives distinction to those in a capitalist society, as a means of identifying oneself or acquiring status or social capital. When money, the

highest symbol of value, is added to the prayer request, a feeling of apathy transforms into one of power. In more concrete terms, the tithe also has associated benefits when conducted in correlation with certain ascetic practices: abstinence from alcohol, gambling, prostitutes and drug use. This combined with more business minded entrepreneurial behaviour as encouraged by the church, encourages wealth acquisition through the simple act of ceasing unproductive and costly habits.

The Material Dimension

The neo-Pentecostal ethic and the spirit of neoliberalism

The fluidity between the Universal Church's spiritual philosophy and the economic framework of neoliberalism is a fact often noted in literature that teases out the relationship between the two ideologies. Many scholars draw lines of comparison between Weber's association between Protestantism and capitalism, evoking conclusions of a relatively similar phenomenon occurring between Pentecostalism and neoliberalism. As there is already substantial research around this theme, this section will briefly outline existing theories and then direct focus to the concept of prosperity theology within the IURD.

For Gomes Esperandio (2006:63), the church is a potent symbol of the neoliberal, and can be summarised thus:

IURD evidences a typically postmodern religious production, well adapted to neo-liberal values: syncretistic, flexible, individualistic; narcissistic, seeking well-being and happiness at any price; without a boundary between sacred and profane, emphasising the person's internal resources and minimising the necessity of interaction. This last characteristic brings important consequences in relation to the constitution of subjectivity, which becomes more individualistic, and in relation to society, which becomes bereft of solidarity. Its ambiguous discourse "con-fuses" itself with the market, in a double movement of secularising religion...and sacralising the market.

Anders Ruuth (2003) makes sense of the church's economic stance in the terms of the maxim "*do ut des*" (I give you something so that you may give me something). The mentality that the church teaches adherents is that there is no place for what is *gratis*, everything comes down to a question

of exchange. One gives, so that they may receive (Ruuth 2003). Furthermore, the more one gives and sacrifices, the more God will accordingly give back. This idea correlates to a deeply embedded belief in Brazilian society that one must pay, in some form, for favours requested of God or the saints (Ruuth 2003). God and one's relationship to God can be more easily interpreted and understood in an economic sense, especially in Brazil where many are accustomed to experiencing the world in this way, where a "dog eat dog" mentality prevails.

For Berge Furre (2006) and Sturla Stalsett (2006), the Universal Church heralds the advent of a postcolonial religion of globalised capitalism. Furre writes that as feudalism engendered Catholicism, and commercial capitalism shaped and begot Protestantism, so the IURD demonstrates a connection between neo-liberal globalisation and neo-Pentecostalism (Furre 2006:40). The church's notable popularity in Latin America and Africa, global regions acutely impacted by the imposition of neoliberal adjustment policies, gives weight to this theory. Stalsett (2006) situates the Universal Church within the context of globalization and its concomitant effects, but Furre (2006) goes further and compares it to a religious transnational corporation. The church has modelled itself on a corporation, with a tightly managed hierarchical structure with Bishop Macedo at the top. Universal churches the world over adhere to structural uniformity. Like any successful multinational business or franchise, the IURD identifies and maintains the iconic features that make it successful; for example, the 24 hour open door policy, the various symbolic objects given out during services (holy oil from Israel for example) or the system of each day having its own specific service focus. Ruuth (2003) also emphasises that the church essentially functions as a religious company. It has Brazil's second largest media conglomerate in its ownership, Rede Record, and owns a bank, Banco de Crédito Metropolitano, in Sao Paulo.

Interpretations of God, the Bible and spirituality are modified to be better suited to the sensibility and experience of a consumer, and rhetoric within the church is often contextualised with references to debt, loans and buying goods. Pastors seek to make sense of Bible passages by transforming them into analogies with a material focus: for example, in one service the pastor compared John 4:14 (whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst) to having an overflowing tank of gas all the time and never again having to experience to the feeling of not having enough money for petrol, only enough to get from A to B.

Ever present is the notion of *borrowing* from God: everything is his property. Many of the adherents I spoke to explained the relationship between God and man as something more akin to landlord and tenant, or a banker and a recipient of a loan. Christiane articulated it thus: "We do not own anything, everything belongs to God, and it is up to us to repay him for our space on earth, the possessions he has lent us", whilst Anacy told me, "I have already bought my lot in Heaven...my blood, my financial blood is already there, all my (financial) reserves are already there." Anacy's words are indicative of neoliberal mentality, where market rationality can be applied to almost anything, even to the point that one can make down payments for their place in heaven.

Prosperity theology and narratives of transformation

Prosperity theology argues that Christians have the God-given right to a life free from illness and poverty. Adherents see faith as a supernatural force, the medium through which the full power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed (Lioy 2007). This faith can be used to pursue whatever the believer wants, be it physical health or material wealth. Through the force of faith, the positive power of God is set in motion, and negative forces stemming from Satan are negated (Lioy 2007). True faith is the agency that brings about transformation. The biblical grounding for the belief in prosperity comes from the promises of spiritual, physical and financial blessings made by God to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:17-20; 17:1-8; 22:15-18 cited in Lioy, 2007). Followers of prosperity theology believe it is God's will that the truly faithful enjoy life to the fullest extent possible, including financial success (cf. Deut 7:12-26; Joshua 14:9; Mal 3:10; Mark 10:29-30; 3 John 3:2 cited in Lioy, 2007).

In many ways, prosperity theology resembles prosperity ideologies present within the New Age movement. It unites Christian doctrine with positive thinking and ideology, and is world-affirming. Heelas (1996) describes this as an "instrumentalised form of spirituality", whereby spirituality can function as a means to external ends, even "sanctifying capitalism". Heelas (1996:62) draws on Weber, who noted in 1922, "the most elementary forms of behavior motivated by religious or magical factors are orientated to this world". However, whereas Weber anticipated a withering of this orientation over time, this decline has not taken place and rather, religion nowadays is more imbued within the worldly than possibly ever before. The pastors teach positive

affirmations and constantly reinforce throughout church services the idea of a prosperous God, able to bless everyone with abundance on the condition that the adherent demonstrates their faith:

Our God is a God of prosperity, a prosperous God. We must demonstrate our appreciation of all that God has given us and we must give thanks. We can't just say it or sing it, that we give thanks, because how does God know? We must prove it, by giving back a small percentage of what God gives us, to prove that we are grateful and conscious of God's generosity, and to show our faith.

Pastor Marcos

The church's ideology around prosperity indicates its strong connection to neo-liberal ideology. Contrary to traditional Protestantism, the IURD focuses on acquiring earthly pleasures in this lifetime. Struggling for salvation in the next life is more of an afterthought; rather, salvation is to be sought in the here and now. Worshippers are encouraged to strive for materialistic desires. During IURD services, adherents in the church are urged, "*Don't you want a bigger car, a better house, more toys for your son?*" The notion that a person's worth is enhanced by what they possess is propagated by the church. In addition, the increased ability to consume will likewise leave them a happier, more complete person, more deeply integrated into mainstream capitalist society.

Brazilian anthropologist Cristina Rocha argues that neo-Pentecostal movements such as the IURD attract lower-socio economic classes because they offer *immediate material results*. Drawing on Bourdieu, she writes that upwardly mobile individuals are prepared to engage in religions such as Buddhism that defer immediate gratification, but offer satisfaction in the effort itself. There is clear delineation between the material yearnings of the lower socio-economic classes, and the tastes of those with social, cultural or financial capital, resonating with the assertion of one of Rocha's informants, "*People who want bread don't go to meditation sessions*" (Rocha 2006:142).

The process of personal transformation needed to attain prosperity is transmitted to adherents through the use of pre-recorded video testimonials in services. These testimonials are used to exhibit the importance of the tithe or personal sacrifice, as a demonstration of faith. This individual attests to having defeated great obstacles through faith and determination to attain success. Testimonials invariably include emotive music and end with the pastor stressing the point that in order to experience such radical transformation in one's life, one must change themselves

and be willing to demonstrate enormous self-sacrifice as a sign of one's faith in God, even giving beyond one's means in order to experience truly miraculous transformation. One such testimonial shown at an IURD service involved a man who was desperate for a position as an accountant in a highly regarded firm. He decided to pledge his entire wage as his tithe, until he got the job. He explained at one point, he could not afford to pay his rent or even eat, reduced to scrounging leftovers in his office kitchen, but so strong was his faith he continued until he obtained the dream job. These video testimonies attest to the unyielding power of faith as the ultimate tool for bringing about change in one's circumstances.

Participant narratives also articulated the road to transformation as requiring significant sacrifice, with the implication of a gamble with God, which seemed for many of them to have paid off. Denise told me that during the Church's most recent forty-day campaign for change, "Ask", she had tithed her business (a massage therapy clinic) to the church as a symbol of her faith in God to grant her wish for a larger, better clinic. With eyes alight, she told me that during the last campaign she had asked for this salon, and God had told her that in order to show her faith so he could manifest her wish, she would need to leave the man with whom she was currently involved. Denise did so, and soon found herself the owner of her own salon. She said she experienced a thrill in the knowledge that when she sacrificed something so meaningful and important, God would reward this faith with something even greater. She also added to reward her faith for giving up her partner, God promised to return her daughter to her (who was dating a drug dealer and working as a prostitute). This took place, and her daughter was now involved with the church as well. Her narrative characterised her transformation as a passage from a location of social disrepute, feeling outcast and overwhelmed by forces influencing her life and the life of her family, to a place of security, prosperity and happiness. Chesnut (2007) observes that these narratives are a powerful part of the Pentecostal experience, testifying to the ability of Jesus or the Holy Spirit to restore health or alleviate financial troubles.

In addition to the importance of material sacrifice, Anacy also emphasised the importance of cultivating an intimate relationship with God through communication and prayer in order to experience God's abundance.

When you're close to him, you can say, Father, I want this! Father! And he can also say, "Daughter, you aren't doing what I want you to do!" He is so strong! ... I don't make

prayers, I live in prayer. I don't say prayers, I live in prayer. If I'm on the bus, I think something like this, "My Lord, now in this moment, I need this and this"...you know, sometimes I wake at night and I think, "My God, I need you now to answer me, give me an answer to this, and this..."I live in prayer.

In this sense, prayer in many ways functions as a positive affirmation of the individual's intimate relationship with God and God's ability to hear and help bring about the requests for prosperity. Heelas (1996) suggests that the success claimed by adherents of prosperity ideologies could be linked to several factors: magical power (in the context of the IURD it could be referred to as the power of the Holy Spirit); the focus on this power helps adherents to focus on what they really want, motivating them to work harder in order to obtain their goals. Douglas' (1966) work around the efficacy of ritual also iterates a similar point: that ritual works to encourage the individual to focus more intently on the desired result or outcome. Another factor that Heelas highlights is transformed character. Adherents have a transformed outlook and attitude to life, often more empowered, focused, energetic and responsible, and this can help in bringing about concrete gains. Heelas also contends that participation in rituals and services orientated towards prosperity may enable people to handle the stresses and pitfalls generated by the capitalist system, and to approach them in a creative and positive way.

Making sense of spiritual healing within the IURD

For Thomas Csordas (2002), whose work is focused on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, religious healing represents an attempt to provide humans with meaning, although ironically it is often found by invoking powers or entities that are wholly other than human. In the case of the Universal Church, there is not so much a holistic quest for meaning around illness, as in the other case studies of this thesis, but a desire for a spiritual approach to conclusively treating debilitating illness and chronic pain following the failure of biomedicine.

Faith healing within Christianity extends far further back in history than its most recent manifestation within Pentecostalism. Aldridge (1991:425) writes that in part Christianity survived under Roman persecution because of its ability to attract followers with spiritual healing, shunned only when it began to pose a threat to the hierarchy of the church and later when medicine began to form into an authoritative body of knowledge. Nonetheless, despite the rapid growth and

privileged status awarded to science and medicine, Christian spiritual healing has persisted throughout history in diverse locations. The rationale behind belief in faith healing is similar to that of prosperity theology as God wants the faithful to experience perfect health, and instances in the Bible that speak of Jesus' crucifixion are interpreted as proof of spiritual healing: "...the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5) and "he took up our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8:17).

Furthermore, as was discussed earlier in the introduction, spiritual healing constitutes one of the most sought after products in Brazil's extremely competitive religious economy. Religious groups that do not locate faith healing at the centre of their praxis will fail to gain mass appeal. Chesnut (2003) notes that the healing product offered must be novel enough to pique the potential consumer's interest, drawing them away from other religious products. This resonates with Stark and Finke (2000) who emphasise the pragmatic benefits and "spiritual compensators", offered by different religions. Chesnut (2003:7) observes:

...it is the economic model with its emphasis on religious competition that reveals the importance of religious organisations as personal-problem solving agencies, especially among the popular classes...the economic model reveals that there is a strong consumer demand for the production of divine healing, and those religious firms that produce it most efficiently and market it attractively will be the ones to prosper.

Scholarship around Latin American Pentecostalism notes that faith healing is the most compelling product in attracting new converts (Chesnut 2003:45; Westmeier 1999). In Brazil, the 1996 ISER study of Pentecostalism in Rio revealed that 55% of the Pentecostal population converted during a time of serious personal crisis (ISER 1996). Recent analysis of the 2010 Brazilian census and research surveys determined that the main factor in Pentecostal growth appeared to be switching from one faith to another, with 45% having converted from Catholicism (Pew Forum 2013). Sickness and alcohol abuse constituted the primary motivation for 49% of those who had converted during a time of crisis (ISER 1996). For the lower socio-economic classes, illness can have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of an entire household, especially if the sole breadwinner is the one who is ill and unable to work (Chesnut 2003:46). Sickness is a pathogen of poverty and the working class and those on the margins often face what Meessen et al. (2003) term "iatrogenic poverty" whereby uninsured individuals receive substandard care compared to those who are

insured, or where those who are forced to pay for healthcare bills, prescriptions and care are driven into debt.

The Universal Church identifies illness in a very broad sense: one can seek healing from physical illness, emotional issues, financial problems, suicidal thoughts, relationship issues, possession by evil spirits, familial disunity, ancestral curses and addiction, which is treated as an illness, rather than a moral weakness or failing. Thomas Csordas' tripartite model for making sense of healing within the Catholic Charismatic movement resonates with the concept of healing perpetuated by the Universal Church¹². According to Csordas, the Charismatic movement frames the person as a tripartite entity, capable of experiencing healing on three distinct but interrelated levels: physical or bodily healing, inner healing of emotional/mental distress, and spiritual deliverance from the adverse effects of demons/evil spirits (Csordas 2002:14). Spiritual healing is privileged as the most effective way to overcome illness and gain wellbeing in the three dimensions, with the IURD dismissing pharmaceutical products and drugs as selling "deceit" and "false hope". For true healing to occur it must address the spiritual source of illness, and as in the case of prosperity theology, a lack of faith is identified as one of the largest inhibitors for Christians who fail to be healed.

Tuesday's services are dedicated to spiritual healing, though Friday's deliverance service also has a focus on liberating those who are ill from demonic interference. Spiritual healing services sometimes also include purifying rituals: one service in Botafogo saw assistants sprinkle salt in two parallel lines at the front of the church, and invoked the congregation to walk through the "valley of the salt" to purify them, facilitating the healing of their illnesses and to protect them from evil forces. On another occasion, pastors handed out holy oil from Israel and taught adherents how to anoint themselves and others who were ill in order to enact healing, to overcome addiction or emotional distress, and to resolve non-health related issues such as prospering one's business, clearing debts and uniting the family. Brochures handed out prior to the service informed that, "For thousands of years, olive oil has been used for anointing, as an act of faith. Anointing with oil is like turning on a signal flare to the heavens. It's a sign to God that you require special attention in a time of need." Included was a testimony from a woman who had healed her daughter of terminal leukaemia, by anointing her with the sacred oil. According to the testimony, doctors at

¹² The Catholic Charismatic movement has been described by Csordas as the union of Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism, an initiative carried out partly due to the popularity of spiritual healing as seen in Pentecostal churches in the late 60s.

the best children's hospital in Texas had told the woman that her daughter's condition was so advanced that neither chemotherapy nor radiotherapy were options. What is being transmitted here is that authentic spiritual healing, aided by consecrated oil from Israel (seen as a spiritually potent region) has the ability to heal what had been deemed impossible by the Western medical establishment. These stories seek to dislodge Western medicine from its position of privilege and invigorate adherents to try the healing model of the IURD.

Chesnut (2003:12) writes that whereas classic Pentecostal churches tend to offer a more traditional form of faith healing, the IURD specialises a specific type of faith healing involving exorcism. The "hands-on healing" services offered by the IURD offer relief from all manner of ills (back pain, cancer, depression, kidney problems, chronic pain) but are not hands-on in the sense of the traditional laying of hands. Rather, these healing services involve assistants prowling the church, seeking out people in need of healing (those in wheelchairs, for example, or those showing signs of discomfort or emotional distress), placing their hands on their head and most frequently, invoking the demon possessing them, causing them pain or suffering, to leave their body. For the most part, healing occurs through the liberation of members from the malevolent influence of spirits causing ill health. During one service in Botafogo, the pastor leading the service explained that all of those who had recently been to the doctor, suffering from nervous disorders (*nervos*), aches and pains that the doctor had been unable to diagnose, were suffering from illnesses caused by demons. Identifying illness, depression and addiction as correlated with demonic interference effectively removes a sense of ownership or responsibility from the victim for their illness, placing it in a broader spiritual context that is outside the domain of immediate human rationalisation. This approach can be tremendously liberating for those who have been living with conditions that stigmatise, especially when they learn that for healing to occur, they need only to yield to Jesus and place their faith in him. Thomas Csordas (2002) writes that identifying a demon as the cause of illness works in a similar way to diagnosing a disease. It names the problem, offers a sense of control and reassurance of knowing what is wrong, offers specific choices for treatment, and shapes the course of the illness.

In one service, pastors invoked the congregation to "get angry, get really angry" at the demon inside them, causing their body to be in pain. The pastor informed the members that before Jesus can heal or offer salvation, "all evil must be cast out before entering Gods' kingdom". To

ritualistically expel the demons, regularly, in an emotionally cathartic way, is to metaphorically expel the illness. Ritual performed with conviction, in both conventional medicine and spiritual healing, has undeniable effect on the healing process. Daniel Moerman (2002) writes: “Pills work fine, but shots work better. Surgery works better yet...the form of medical treatment, not just its content, can have a dramatic effect on human well-being”. This analysis has important implications for understanding the treatment of spiritual healing: the way in which a treatment is given, the degree to which the treatment is “performed” by the person administering it, the extent to which the rituals around it are convincing all have considerable impact on its efficacy. Fry and Howe (1975:90) assert that the likelihood of an individual undergoing spiritual healing increases when the symbols used by the religion hold significant meaning for the patient. A powerful motive which compels an individual to become part of a religious association is the extent to which the belief and ritual of the church resonates with them and holds meaning. In these narratives, the perceived efficacy of healing corresponded to the religious worldview embodied by the participant, the correlating symbols and vectors of meaning within this worldview and ritual that helped enforce and manifest this paradigm of belief. Spiritual tools hold the same legitimacy as medical tools: the Bible and holy oil hold the same power in spiritual healing within the Universal Church as a scalpel and stethoscope hold in biomedicine.

Narratives of healing

For Salvatore Cucchiari (1988), narratives of personal revelation and self-transformation are the primary way in which individuals validate new understandings of self and their new spiritual identity. Storytelling is at the heart of Pentecostalism, as the religion diverges from impenetrable theological discourse and instead uses stories of evangelism and transformation to demonstrate the Holy Spirit working in people’s lives. For those from the IURD who shared their stories of divine healing, their narratives tend to use similar discourse. The rhetoric of such narratives frames everything in Manichean terms, demarcating an explicit contrast between the chaos and illness characterising life before entering the church, and the immense wellbeing and healing encountered from integration into the church. Some adherents related stories of searching for cures from terminal cancer, whilst others referred to a quest for healing from ongoing mental health afflictions, or peace from spiritual disenchantment. The healing and deliverance services are

forcefully advertised in the church's promotional material, on its website, Facebook site and in its weekly newspapers, with thousands of testimonies such as these (Universal News, February 2012):

I was suffering with severe headaches (migraine) and nightmares every day, and it made me a very angry person. I tried to find a solution in many different places and religion, even doing spiritual rituals but it didn't work. When I came to the church I found out that my spiritual life was very weak, then I decided to attend the deliverance services and through the prayers from the pastors God set me free from all the evil that had been causing my health problems. The evil left and so did the problem. I was very happy.

Irene

I suffered with (sic) serious breathing problems and chronic (sic) pains all over my body and joints. I was always in and out of hospitals without any solution for my problem. I would spend more time in hospital than with my family at home. My sister invited me to attend the IURD and I decided to go and I kept attending the weekly services. Today I am free from all health problems and I'm living in peace.

Ann

At a young age I was diagnosed with uterine cancer. It had already advanced to stage three and I needed a hysterectomy and chemotherapy to keep it from spreading. I was devastated because my dreams of having children and raising a family were being devoured by cancer. It was then that I decided to come to the IURD. Long story short: by using my faith and learning how to pray, I was completely healed of my cancer. God made possible what modern medicine said was impossible. I am so happy to say my husband and I are now looking forward to the birth of our baby.

Lety

While Lety's testimony reflects the miracle narrative of spiritual healing and the power of prayer triumphing over modern medicine, Ann and Irene's testimonials both draw a very stark demarcation between the variety of pains, discomforts and depression that characterised life prior to entry to the church, and the freedom from illness following integration into the IURD community. These women mention cases of general chronic health issues (migraines, joint pain,

breathing problems). For Irene, this is because the loss of general wellbeing was linked to demonic influence. However, although these testimonies give an account of the debilitating effects of their various illnesses and the role of spirit in healing them, they do not provide a context of what was occurring in their lives in the time they were ill. As discussed in the introduction, Owoahene-Acheampong (1998) proposes that social issues have far-reaching effects in human health. Economic, social, and political issues can strongly affect one's health, especially when they manifest as poverty, insecurity or unemployment. Furthermore, emotional states and consequences originating from these social issues, such as injustice, selfishness, disrespect, intolerance and exploitation, also bear significant influence on human wellbeing. The omission of these structural factors in these illness narratives means that a key element of the etiology is overlooked by the individuals, and not addressed by the spiritual healing paradigm within the Universal Church. However, what is identified as crucial by participants in the narratives is the imposition of a spiritual system of meaning in which to make sense of their illnesses, and move towards overcoming them through the practice of faith and prayer.

Almost all the members of the church with whom I spoke personally about healing experiences framed their narrative in terms of this "quest" which involved the following central elements: an obstacle to be overcome or defeated, the need for demonstration of faith, and subsequently, miraculous transformation. Hayden White suggests that narrative forms have been adopted out of a desire to "have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness and closure of an image of life that can only be imaginary" (1987:24). These narratives demonstrate the desire for meaning: as Illich (1977) reasons, religion offers a rationale/logic, a style, and a community setting in which suffering/illness can manifest as a dignified performance. Furthermore, spiritual/religious logic often stimulates personal responsibility for healing. For these members of the church, narrative accounts of illness and the path to healing are intensely meaningful as they trace a trajectory from a state of spiritual apathy and physical illness to a place of wellbeing and control over their bodies.

Christiane's Story

For Christiane, the church helped her to confront and resolve the multiple health-related troubles present in her life. She related that at the time leading up to her entry into the church, she was suffering from depression, re-occurring bouts of bronchitis and intestinal problems. Her teenage daughter was debilitated by obsessive-compulsive disorder and hallucinatory tendencies with

which she was having trouble coping. Feeling hopeless and isolated, unable to find sufficient support or guidance from doctors, governmental agencies or friends, she began looking for spiritual help. With a bachelor degree in psychology, she also tried Spiritism, Buddhism and Catholicism in turn, all of which left her feeling dissatisfied.

Some friends recommended her to try to the Universal Church in Castelo, Rio de Janeiro. After attending the first service, she felt unsure about going again because of the church's reputation, but was compelled enough to return. She continued attending services, began paying the tithe and making her sacrifices, and according to her, witnessed her life and her health dramatically improving. Her daughter stabilised and the state of her mental health improved as she entered the church as well. Her obsessive-compulsive tendencies had been caused by an oppressive demon, which left her following strong prayers for liberation. Christiane ceased to be affected by depression and suicidal thoughts and followed her dream of opening her own business, specialising in cakes and desserts. For Christiane, one of the most significant changes she experienced was in completely coming off all of her medication:

I used to spend around R\$2000 a month on medicine. I would take antidepressants and tranquilisers for insomnia. In addition to this, because of the bronchitis and my weakened respiratory system, I always had colds, and about 2 or 3 bouts of pneumonia a year. Today I don't take anything at all. I have perfect health, I don't need to live off medicine.

For Christiane, healing was experienced on an emotional/mental level, while in her daughter's case, healing occurred through deliverance from the evil spirits that were inducing her disorder. However, the social element also plays a role here. Christiane's narrative revealed a significant amount of turmoil taking place in her home environment and wider social sphere, and felt isolated as she endured these experiences alone. The shift to the church provided her with emotional and social support and her health returned as her circumstances improved.

Anacy's Story

Anacy explained that her integration into the Universal Church was due to her husband's illness:

My husband was only 42 kilos. He had cancer. It was inoperable; he was at home waiting to die. One day, he was (sitting) at the door, in a wheelchair. I was at home, with my two children, one 4 years old, the other 3. He was not working anymore... For this reason, everything is still marked in my memory. Anyway, a lady passed by the gate, and commented, "Why are you so thin, so sick looking? What's wrong with you?" And he told her. So she said, "If I was you, I'd go to this place, where you'll get healed, if you have faith". My husband said, if it's a centro (Spiritist Centre), then I'm not going. And she said, "No. It's a place where only Jesus heals you."

Upon the woman's exhortations, he decided to go to the church, just to see what it was like. However Anacy was sceptical:

I was doubtful. He came to me, and said... Anacy, I want to go to Abolição. I said Abolição? Abolição is a suburb ages away from Copacabana. I said I can't, there's no way I can drive you there in your condition with two small children. He said, well I need to go, and asked a friend to take him by car. I asked him what he thought he'd find there, and he said, "I don't know, but I will find out." (It was) 19th April, 1980. He went Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday he drove himself!

Anacy questioned him about driving himself, but her husband told her, "Yes, I'm going because I received a force there...I am so sick, so weak, I have nothing more to hope for, I'm just depending on this force." Following those days, Anacy saw her husband steadily improve, fuelled by what she described as him being "thirsty, thirsty, thirsty for the Holy Spirit." When I inquired if he went back to the doctor for a check-up, she responded, "No, he didn't go back, he was good, he never went back. Everything was already perfect, all good! He already had ripped up everything from the doctor! It was over, and he was loyal to the church now."

For her, the most significant symbol of the church's role and the power of the Holy Spirit in the healing of her husband was his death. In October 2004, many years after he had been healed, the couple was attending church on Sunday together, and without warning he passed away. For Anacy, the death was immensely meaningful in two ways: Sunday is the day of celebration of the Holy Spirit, and he passed away in the very place that the Holy Spirit had previously saved him. She informed me that she had a total sense of peace and acceptance around his death, influenced by

her spiritual convictions: that his time had come and his passing occurred in a way that was resonant for the both of them. Anacy's interpretation of his death resonated with a holistic and spiritual view of health that includes death as its final stage. This strongly contrasts with the mentality around death in biomedicine, which cultivates a loss of autonomy, fear and unwillingness to die in the patient, seeing death as a failure (Illich 1977).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored data that emerged from research based on the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Although the church has been subjected to multiple critiques from both the academic world and the Brazilian media, the testimonies and experiences of adherents offer insight to help understand the motivations that compel members to tithe their savings and invest significant time and energy into the church, either through attending its services or through their work as *obreiros/obreiras*. It is evident that the church represents a source of support, constancy and reliability in a political context where social welfare and government support of those who are indigent or marginalised is almost non-existent.

The Universal Church thus speaks to the constituent of the population who are most vulnerable to the contingencies of neoliberalism and late modernity. Pastors exhort adherents to revolt against their poverty and aspire to acquiring material wealth through entrepreneurial means such as creating their own businesses, or learning skills within the church context that can be applied in the labour market. For adherents such as Christiane, Anacy and Denise, the IURD discourse equates a relationship with God as one of exchange, faith and reciprocity. Poverty can be overcome so long as one demonstrates sufficient faith and adherence to the teachings of the church. Furthermore, poverty is articulated as stemming from generational or ancestral demons that plague families; paradoxically, the notion that poverty may be linked to a social system founded on centuries of enforced inequality is never raised.

Finally, the church seeks to fill the "ecstasy deficit" left by late modernity and neoliberalism, whilst ironically supporting adherents to conform to a neoliberal status quo. Embodied and emotive religious practices are highly prevalent in the church, with services encouraging clapping, stomping, screaming and even writhing as a means of showing faith in Jesus, or attempting to expel demonic forces from one's body. Focus on the body is also apparent in the services directed

to spiritual healing, a highly sought after religious product that attracts many adherents to the church.

Vem pelo Amor, ou Vem pela Dor: Umbanda in Urban Brazil

You no longer feel abandoned or alone. Things become simpler, more obvious. And soon, absurd as it may seem, everything begins to go better: work, romantic or psychological problems, everything improves or is resolved...all you can do is observe what happens...it would be better for you to see it with your own eyes.

Bramly 1994:8

...to the vast majority of people who seek help both spiritual and psychological, Umbanda does bring relief. Odd though it may seem, unbelievable though it may appear, it works. Undeniably, it works.

McGregor 1967

The Doctrinal/Philosophical Dimension

The most widely practised of the Afro-Brazilian religions; Umbanda represents a spectrum of synthesised beliefs rather than one fixed point. It syncretises¹³ an eclectic blend of Yoruba, Catholic, Spiritist and indigenous beliefs and often integrates currents of mysticism or Kabbalah. A spoken, sung and performed religion with no formal doctrine, it is a living and changing body of knowledge (Cumino 2010) and was described by research participants as a pragmatic religion, privileging practice, embodiment and ritual over the exegesis of texts. In a sense, it is a truly Brazilian religion as it assimilates and reflects many aspects of the formative historical, cultural and religious experiences that have led to the creation of modern Brazil. According to historical and academic accounts, Umbanda originated in Rio de Janeiro under the psychic Zélio de Morães, and later spread south to Sao Paulo and parts of Argentina and Uruguay.

¹³ Cristina Rocha (2006:19) suggests that as in the case of many syncretic religions in Brazil, employing the idea of creolisation to transmit the process of syncretism is preferable as it incorporates notions of colonialism, but also of creativity, agency and innovation on the part of the colonised.

Adherents of Umbanda fall into two categories: those who frequent Umbanda centres on a casual or regular basis in need of spiritual help or services (*clientes* or clients), and those who provide the services: mediums and leaders of the centres (leaders are sometimes referred to as *Mãe-de-Santos* or *Pai-de-Santos*) who are more deeply involved with the centre, its activities and the doctrine of Umbanda. This flexibility of association also means that although Umbanda is prevalent throughout urban Brazil, many who frequent centres do not necessarily identify themselves as adherents. In some ways, clients of Umbanda engage with its services in a way that conforms to Durkheim's definition of magic as opposed to religion. Durkheim (1912/1975:121) writes that those who engage with magic "are perfectly comparable with those of a sick person and his doctor." However, for the mediums Umbanda is a religion, with a belief system that binds adherents together and unites them in a shared, common life (Durkheim, 1912/1975).

Although the Umbanda centres with which I became familiar were located in middle to upper-middle class areas, they attracted a diverse range of individuals. Umbanda transcends socio-economic lines. In a religious marketplace where many religions encounter success by offering a religious product that is strongly targeted at a distinct sector of the population, Umbanda is unique in that it does the contrary, often operating in secrecy, frequented by those who actively seek it out. Many centres are concealed from street view, so that to the casual passer-by the centre may just look like a residential dwelling. Centres most frequently gain new clients and mediums by word of mouth or on the recommendation of others.

In the 2010 Census, 5.2% of Brazilians identified themselves as followers of other religions (Umbanda, Spiritism and Candomblé the most prominent in this category). Umbanda is often under-represented demographically, and thus its visibility in the media and public sphere is subsequently also diminished. Census results conceal more subtle truths about the true reach and influence of Umbanda in Brazilian society. Brazilian anthropologist Reginaldo Prandi (2000) postulates that practitioners of Umbanda realistically constitute approximately 8% of the Brazilian population. Sebastião Casemiro de Azevedo, a 57-year-old leader and representative of Umbanda in Rio, told me that he was familiar and welcome at more than 4,500 *terreiros* (Umbanda centres) throughout the state. Prandi and Pierucci (2000) write that those who practice Umbanda will often nominally associate themselves with either Catholicism or Spiritism. Dona Sandra, the leader of the Casa de Caridade in Botafogo where I carried out the majority of research affirmed this, telling

me, “I was born into Umbanda, but like all of us here in Brazil, I came from the Catholic religion. We are baptised in the Catholic Church, and then each one follows their own path...” This is partially because Umbanda integrates elements of Catholicism into its practice, but also because it is not a religion that demands exclusivity from its adherents.

Furthermore, Umbanda does not have a strongly demarcated identity distinguishing it as separate or distinctive to other religiosities. It does not require monetary support or regular attendance from its casual user base. In addition, to align oneself with Umbanda or publicly declare an affiliation with the religion can be frowned upon and interpreted as uneducated or backward. In Serge Bramly’s outstanding ethnography of Macumba¹⁴ in Rio de Janeiro, a Brazilian friend informs him, “Here, no one likes to admit to practicing Macumba... most people prefer to deny its existence rather than exposing themselves to ridicule for believing in things which science disputes. But all Brazilians have at least one Macumba story up their sleeve, and you would be astonished to learn how many people keep candles and amulets hidden in their dressers...” (Bramly 1975:5). Taking these issues into consideration, Umbanda is more deeply embedded in urban Brazil than would otherwise appear.

This chapter will draw on data collated in and around Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo in three centres of Umbanda: the *Casa da Caridade de Caboclo Peri* in Botafogo, Rio (the Caboclo Peri House of Charity, a centre specialised in spiritual healing); *Caminhos do Bem* (Ways of the the Good) centre in Jacarepaguá, Rio (a centre oriented to a more Africanised Umbanda), and the *Templo Guaracy* in Sao Paulo (Guaracy Temple, a centre more focused on connection with nature) to examine the role and appeal of Umbanda in the lives of both mediums and clients within the current socio-historical moment in Brazil.

The Ethical Dimension

Umbanda is unique in Brazil for its free spiritual services that offer Brazilians an alternative way to address problems related to love, family, finances, employment and health. Brazilian writer, Oliveira Magno (1962), distinguishes between the two most prominent Spiritist denominations in Brazil as follows. “Umbanda,” he writes, is Jesus working; Kardecism is Jesus teaching.” Sebastião

¹⁴ Another form of Umbanda, which engages in practices such as animal sacrifice.

(Tião), leader of the Caminhos do Bem centre in Jacarepaguá articulated that the practice of charity is the most fundamental premise of Umbanda:

Umbanda is the manifestation of spirit for the practice of charity... Umbanda attracts people from all walks of life. This house, here, for example, receives 4,500 people each month on average...people come here asking for help, unemployed, sick, with something or another. Umbanda was created in this tradition, with this purpose of cure that comes through the spirits. Umbanda embraces everything and everyone; it doesn't close the door to anyone.

Echoing Spiritism's ideals of love and charity, Umbandist doctrine considers it unethical to ask for remuneration for services offered. Those who come to Umbanda centres (the clients) will be offered support, herbal remedies, a listening ear, spiritual advice for their problems or spiritual healing treatments free of charge. Umbanda centres that do try to charge and make a profit are said to fall apart very quickly. Centres survive on donations, and often small monthly fees charged to mediums who work in the centres to help pay for water, electricity, rent and expenses.

Thus, the ethical/moral dimension of Umbanda is present in its strong moral belief in the importance of charity performed through spirituality for the benefit of the wider social sphere. Interestingly, this view of morality aligns with a sense of responsibility towards the wider community rather than morality for the benefit of the individual practitioner. The importance of offering assistance to those in need of help was stressed by all the mediums, especially Carlinhos, a medium who had been involved with the Casa da Caridade since its inception: "Umbanda is helping your neighbour...if someone comes to the centre when the doors are closed, you help them. Like today, we close at 4:30, but if someone comes at 6, you answer." However, moral behaviour is also expected on the part of the individual (particularly the mediums) towards their *orixás*: they must honour them and make offerings regularly in order to ensure their goodwill.

This orientation towards the practise of charity is also visible in other practices within Umbanda communities. The Casa da Caridade for example, ran a sister centre in an underprivileged neighbourhood in Coelho da Rocha, a suburb on the outskirts of Rio. Those who called on the Casa da Caridade requiring services or help were asked to bring with them a bag of basic foodstuffs (rice, black beans, cornmeal or sugar) as their form of payment. These bags of food would go

towards making up the 1000 basic food packages that were distributed to inhabitants of the neighbourhood each month, along with secondhand clothing, blankets, toys and household goods. According to Ana, a medium at the Casa da Caridade, some of the children that had grown up and been educated with the help of the Casa within this community had gone on to find good jobs and later joined the Casa as mediums. The Casa carried out monthly homage to the *orixás* and special celebrations at the other centre in Coelho da Rocha, encouraging the local people to join and be part of festivities. For many mediums, the dissolution of social segregation through charity was an aspect of Umbanda of which they were very proud; visible in the community of Coelho da Rocha and also evident in the centre in Botafogo where Brazilians of all walks of life converged seeking spiritual guidance.

With respect to individual adherents, Umbanda does not enforce moral restrictions around sexual activity, alcohol consumption or the consumption of certain foods¹⁵. Senhor Brito, one of the leaders of the Casa, articulated that Umbanda teaches adherents to trust in God, to not be fanatical, and to enjoy everything in moderation: to drink wine when one feels like it and to romance someone when you need love! He explained that this relatively relaxed attitude towards earthly indulgences stems from the indispensability and familiarity with the body in Umbanda practice. The body is natural and vital, and does not need to be punished or disciplined. Senhor Brito often declared: “God gave us feet to walk, hands to get things and eyes to see. Enjoy life, be moderate, not excessive!”

The Narrative Dimension

Academics such as Diana Brown (1994) identify Umbanda as having developed in the urban confines of Rio in the late 20s and early 30s; although most practitioners of Umbanda I spoke to affirmed that its true origins stretch far back into history. Religions with complex historical narratives are often rendered as having greater spiritual authenticity. For some, the roots of Umbanda are indisputably African, with the religion carried across the Atlantic to Brazil by African slaves; others affiliated with esoteric Umbanda identified it as having originated from Atlantis, others still emphasised the contribution of indigenous knowledge and spirituality to its

¹⁵ The only time when restrictions are put in place is during the period leading up to or following a spiritual treatment. Individuals are generally told to avoid engaging in sexual activity or the consumption of meat or alcohol to avoid exposing themselves to strong energies while their physical body is vulnerable and undergoing healing.

development. From its beginnings, Umbanda has always had a significant support base of white and mixed-ethnicity Brazilians as it negotiated a new religious space for itself between the elitist overtones of Spiritism and the darker magic of Macumba and Candomblé. Although Umbanda includes strong influences from African religions, particularly those of the Yoruba, it does not seek to preserve African cultural patrimony in its purest form. Rather, syncretism represented in Umbanda makes it more flexible and accessible to a diverse range of Brazilians who can alternately identify with its African, European and indigenous influences. Its ethnic diversity speaks to the miscegenation of the Brazilian nation. Some centres establish themselves with a closer proximity to Candomblé, while others are known as “white” or “pure” Umbanda and follow more Spiritist-oriented ideologies.

These distinctions can be attributed to the fact that Umbanda has developed as a heterodox religion through a dialectic process, which has expressed the contradictions and competitions among the various interest groups that identify with it. There is not and may never be a single form of Umbanda, but this can be interpreted as advantageous, as Brown (1994) refers to Umbanda as “protean”, in the sense that it is eclectic, fluid and flexible, continually absorbing and responding to new social and political currents, and able to take on many roles, appearances and meanings, a living religion. This was pointed out by Guilherme, a 19-year-old medium at the Casa: “The composition of Umbanda, it involves various lineages right? It is constantly reinventing itself, there is no fixed codification. Umbanda is always happening, all the time, integrating other lines of thought.” This is because Umbanda is anchored deeply in the practical: if something works as part of worship, if it doesn’t bring results it will be cast aside. New rituals take their place alongside existing ones (Bramly 1994). However, many who are deeply involved in Umbanda, such as Tião, lamented its lack of unification and national organisation and identify this as hindering it from progressing and becoming a stronger force in Brazilian society. Each centre has its own way of doing things, with its own specialisations and beloved saints and *orixás*.

All forms of Umbanda share a belief in the intervention of spiritual guides in human lives, and the practice of mediums physically incorporating these spiritual guides as the fundamental means by which these guides communicate with and help or hinder humans. (Brown 1994) Spiritual possession is achieved through trance. Contact with the spiritual entities is most frequently reached by the mediums performing the necessary rituals to induce a trance, and hailing the

entities, sometimes with drumming (*atabaque*) dance and songs (*ponto*), or with a sacred bell (the *agogô*). The entities recognize their own song, or dance, and descend to their medium.¹⁶ Advice, spiritual healing, energisation, cleansings and operations can only be carried out when the spiritual entities have incorporated the bodies of the mediums. While Spiritists communicate with the spirits of eminent scientists, physicians, philosophers, and other paragons of elite culture, Umbandistas receive the spirits of the ancestors of the common Brazilian people, *o povo*.

The entities I encountered during my research included *pretos velhos* (African plantation slaves), *marinheiros* (sailors), *Baianos* (Bahians), *caboclos* (indigenous), *ciganos* (gypsies), *exús* (trickster spirits, of which the female representation *pomba gira*, is a seductive prostitute), *crianças* (child spirits) and *boiadeiros* (cowboys). However, *caboclos*, *preto velhos*, *crianças* and *exús* are the most common. Each type of spiritual entity in Umbanda has its own area of experiential wisdom to impart to the client. *Caboclos* and *caboclas* teach cunning, determination and loyalty, whilst *criança* spirits (the spirits of children) embody play, innocence and fun. *Pretos velhos* are seen as the most important and authentic spiritual expression of Umbanda as they connect back to the experiences of African people in Brazil, and the humility and wisdom they embody as a result of their history of exploitation and suffering (Bramly 1994: 118). The four major spirit types in Umbanda (*exú*, *criança*, *caboclo*, *preto velho*) symbolise the major ethnic heritages of Brazil. *Preto velho* represents the African influence, *caboclo* the indigenous, *exú* the other foreign elements (often European), and the young *criança* spirit represents the new Brazilian (a mixture of these three heritages), with its outgoing fun-loving personality (Pressel 1973). Each medium incorporates his or her national heritage, when they incorporate the four entities.

The spiritual entities can be male or female, and a spirit of either sex can possess both male and female mediums. Each entity brings with it certain influences, specialised knowledge and wisdom to impart to the human it incorporates, and each entity has its own degree of spiritual evolution. *Caboclos*, *preto velhos* and *criança* are said to be entities of the light, which means they lived “good” lives and following death passed into *Aruanda* (heaven). The *exús*, on the other hand, led morally

¹⁶ It is important to note here the language used around spiritual possession. Umbandistas do not refer to a medium as possessed; instead they refer to the medium as a “horse” being “ridden” by the spirit. The medium is seen as vessel that the entity incorporates in order to temporarily assume human form. Mediums who have been incorporated display the characteristics and affinities of the spirit, for example, *preto velhos* usually walk with a stoop or a limp from their years of slavery, have a lisp from missing teeth, smoke cigars or drink cachaca.

dubious lives and specialise in more nefarious acts such as breaking up marriages. However, there can also be more spiritually evolved *exús*, which can be called upon to counteract the evil of the bad *exús* (Pressel 1973). Many Umbanda centres downplay their involvement with *exú*, but nearly all will have at least one night a month working with *exú* spirits, and a shrine hidden at the back of the centre with offerings such as popcorn, liquor or tobacco for *exú*. The degree to which *exú* is prevalent in any given centre indicates whether the centre leans more towards the Umbanda Pura, or Umbanda Branca (pure or white Umbanda) end of the spectrum, or Quimbanda, or Macumba, which deals with more ambiguous or black magic.

The entities all correlate to specific legions, or *falanges*, and the legions in turn make up one of the 7 lines which fall under the spiritual direction of an *orixá*, the African deities that can also be associated with particular Catholic saints. For example, the *orixá* Ogum, deity of blacksmiths and protector of iron tools and weapons of war, is associated with Saint George. The *orixás* are the most highly evolved spirits; often recognised by most Umbandistas to be too elevated to commune with humans, and therefore frequently send entities such as the *caboclos* or *preto velhos* as their emissaries instead (Hale 2009). However, the *orixás* are important and honoured as each Umbanda member is the son or daughter of a particular *orixá*, who is said to be the “owner of their head”, and their protector, and to whom they must honour with offerings and prayers. Often a person is recognised to have two *orixá* protectors, one embodying female force, and one representing male force.

There are several ways one can discover their *orixá*: either by divination with cowrie shells thrown by the leader of the centre, or through self-discovery, by finding as they become more familiar with Umbanda the goddess or god they have the greatest affinity with. While I was at the Casa, Senhor Brito, one of the leaders of the centre, informed me that my *orixá* was obvious to him, based on certain personality characteristics that I had. *Orixás* are believed to exert a certain amount of influence over the everyday behaviour of the adherents connected to them, who will take on their attributes. This association with *orixás* is a fundamental aspect of Umbanda, and represents a significant way in which one feels a sense of belonging and community within the centre. There is an implication of family in the association with *orixás*, as individuals are identified as daughter or sons of the gods and goddesses, and leaders of the centre are referred to as mothers or fathers of the saints. For Guilherme de Santos Moura, a 19-year-old student and artist and adherent of

Umbanda since the age of 15, what attracted him most to Umbanda was its spiritual proximity to everyday human experience. “Umbanda doesn’t have such a ...distant discourse. For example, my girlfriend is Hare Krishna, and she says, “I listen to things there, but it all seems so distant from me.” The *orixás* and spirit guides are seen as living and powerful, with strengths and weaknesses of their own. Umbanda offers techniques for individuals to communicate with the *orixás*, and encourages believers to develop a personal relationship with them, ask favours of them, depend on them, but also respect them and pay them their dues.

The Social Dimension

Umbanda in the urban milieu

Since its inception, Umbanda has remained closely intertwined with urban life. This was reflected in the 2000 Brazilian Census results that showed that 97% of *Umbandistas* (Umbanda practitioners) lived in urban locales. To make sense of Umbanda is to simultaneously confront Brazil’s urban environs, which gave rise to this unique religious modality. Prandi and Pierucci (2000) write that since the 1950s, Umbanda has flourished and increased in popularity. He argues that the urban nature of Afro-Brazilian religions such as Umbanda can be traced back to the Africans brought to Brazil in the late 19th century who were largely placed to work in urban areas. This engendered propitious social conditions for the survival of African religiosities. However, while this factor was decisive in establishing the presence of African religion in urban centres, the expansion of Umbanda has been precipitated by the challenges that arise from living in Brazil’s cityscapes. Umbanda speaks a language that hails and appeals to those afflicted by diverse urban issues such as fear, poverty, separation from nature, anomie and the blasé attitude theorised by Georg Simmel. For those who come to Umbanda regularly, there is a desire for a spiritual reconnection with nature, with the physical body and with the roots of authentic Brazilian identity.

In cities such as Rio de Janeiro, there is an increasing prevalence of “non-places” or placeless geography, sites synonymous with global consumer society that are moved through rather than lived in (Auge 1995). Such “non-places”, sites such as shopping malls and parking lots, erode the authenticity and unique character of cities, dilute the sense of connection to local cultures and the environment, and provoke brittleness in human interaction (Auge 1995). This changing sense of place is further exacerbated by the rise of spatial segregation within the cityscape. In the

Architecture of Fear (1997) Nan Elin contends that cities came into existence to protect the citizens within from the dangers lurking without. The city was built for the sake of security, sealing out marauders and invaders who could present danger. Now cities themselves are perceived to be a source of danger, with fear engendered by the “enemy inside”. Recent decades have seen fear and paranoia around urban danger exponentially grow, leading to the desire to safely isolate and fortify one’s own abode within the city (Davis 2005; Harvey 1985; Wacquant 2008). Fear of crime is used to legitimate increasing surveillance measures. The proliferation of talk around crime advances the generation of stereotypes as lower socio-economic groups are labelled dangerous, to be feared and avoided. These generalisations result in those with higher levels of affluence being aligned with good, and those with lower levels, with evil. The walls that once shut out marauders or invaders now run throughout the city itself, shielding gated communities, heavily patrolled public areas and neighbourhoods with security guards from the city’s unwanted citizens. Residents from lower socio-economic groups are excluded or denied access to certain areas. However, the affluent are also restricted, as their fear repels them from regions of the city that are denoted as dangerous (Caldeira 1996).

Brazil’s urban sprawls nowadays are a testament to such forms of spatial segregation and characterised by constructions called “fortified enclaves” by Brazilian anthropologist Teresa Caldeira (1996). These are privatised, enclosed and monitored spaces for consumption, work and leisure that reject public space for the poor and marginalised. This phenomenon was incited and catalysed by the “lost decade” of economic recession of the late 80s and early 90s, which brought with it high inflation (in the late 1980s, reaching more than 1000% a year), chronic unemployment and a subsequent relocation of many Brazilians to inner city *favelas*, as housing in the city’s periphery became increasingly unaffordable (Caldeira 1996:307). Research demonstrates that the effects of the economic crisis were especially brutal for the lower socio-economic sectors and aggravated the already iniquitous distribution of wealth in Brazil (Rocha 1991; Caldeira 1996). During this period there was an increase in urban violence, and the fear associated with it compelled many to adopt new strategies of protection. Although recent years have seen the growth of a Brazilian middle socio-economic class and the decrease of those living in extreme poverty, figures released by Brazil’s Institute of Public Security revealed that in the months of January to July 2011, there were 3,088 cases of violence resulting in death in Rio de Janeiro, 2,587 of which

were cases of homicide (Tavener 2011). While this represents a significant improvement from previous years, it nonetheless bleakly contrasts similar statistics in New York (which has a slightly larger population), which recorded 337 homicides for that same period.

As a consequence of the threat of urban violence, the nature of urban life has been transformed, along with the city's landscape and people's everyday trajectories and habits. Whereas physical distance once separated Brazil's haves from its have-nots, it is now physical barriers, concrete walls and fences embedded with barbed wire and broken glass, surveillance cameras, guards and security gates that demarcate where the wealthy live, work and play. Public transport, especially buses, and traversing the city on foot is reserved for those without private transport. The socially homogenous, fortified enclaves also confer status on those who have the means to live within them, allowing them to literally turn their back on the deteriorated, polluted, noisy environment of the city to experience a world of perceived pleasure and safety amongst peers. Class separation remains a form of distinction, and Caldeira (1996:310) takes care to labour the point that in cities where the fortified enclave is present, social inequality becomes explicit and interactions among people of different socio-economic backgrounds diminishes. Social inequality is also spatially manifested by one's mobility: some can traverse freely through space; some are forced to move, while some are stuck and confined (Bauman 1998).

Umbanda, however, represents one way in which the highly contested and segregated confines of urban Brazil are transcended through the creation of a spiritual place for all Brazilians. For theorists such as Michel de Certeau (1984), space is a practised place, manifesting as the effect created by the ensemble of movements performed within it, which orient it, situate it, temporalise it and modify it through successive contexts. For Bachelard (1969), space is lived and intricately linked to emotion. Spatial milieus are the contexts that allow social relations to unfold and inversely, space itself is actively produced through social relations. Umbanda centres are paradoxical spaces that invoke religious imagination as demarcated sites separate to the socially contested confines of the city, while still existing within it and as part of it. They are spaces that have been worked over and inscribed with spiritual, material and social values different to those of the rest of the city. Robert Orsi articulates the significance of spatiality and religiosity succinctly:

Religious cartographies disclose co-ordinates of alternative worlds for practitioners, re-making the meaning of ordinary places and signaling the location of extraordinary ones, establishing connections between spaces of the city and other spaces, real and imaginary, between humans and invisible sacred companions of all sorts.

(Orsi 1999: 54).

When entering a centre of Umbanda, the separation of sacred space and street is evident upon crossing the threshold through multisensory experience; the evocative smell of herbs and cigar smoke, the colours of the effigies of saints and *orixás* and offerings to them, the sound of chants, drums and running water and the awareness that one has crossed from the rational, profane everyday into an enchanted space, a site which follows a logic different to that of the rest of the city. According to one *Mãe-de-Santo* (spiritual leader of a centre), Umbanda centres must be clearly marked off, even if only with a wooden fence. They sometimes have small gardens with sacred plants growing at the back of them, and may have special objects buried under the floor to consecrate and protect the spiritual potency of the space. The rituals, songs and traditions that take place inside the centre further help to create this division, by using narrative to transform place into space, and to inscribe meaning (de Certeau 1984).

However, while the sacred and profane are spatially demarcated in Umbanda, people of different socio-economic backgrounds are not. Umbanda attracts an enormously diverse range of people to its centres. For *Mãe-de-Santo* Maria-José (cited in Bramly 1994), Umbanda excludes no-one, no matter what their religious affiliation or background, opening its doors to people of starkly distinct socio-economic classes. At the *Casa da Caridade*, I always found it fascinating to observe the diverse queue of Brazilians that would inevitably begin forming around 1:00pm weekdays for the 2:00pm intake of clients. Often the queue would extend so far down the footpath from the door of the Casa that passersby would stop and inquire what was going on. This collection of people would invariably include middle-aged to older *mulata* (mixed ethnicity) women, but also young Afro-Brazilian men, white-collar office workers, mothers with young children, university students, and unemployed people. In addition, all would remain waiting with supermarket bags in hand, full of rice, beans, pasta, sugar and cornmeal as donations in exchange for spiritual aid. Ana explained to me that the resonance of Umbanda across different socio-economic classes was very meaningful:

“Brazilian society has class divisions. There is a really big disparity between the lower and upper classes. There is still a lot of illiteracy, but Umbanda has messages for all social classes.”

This sight of so many Brazilian of different backgrounds united in one place attested to the reach and appeal of Umbanda’s services across Rio’s social and spatial divides. Furthermore, all were treated with equal respect and consideration. The leaders and mediums of the Casa would warmly greet those who entered the centre “brother” or “sister”. Furthermore, the people waiting in the queues outside the doors would chat amicably with each other, turning a mundane and potentially solitary practice into a social one. Whilst such actions resonate on a more symbolic level, they nonetheless indicate the role of Umbanda as a space of resistance where urban segregation is challenged.

In Serge Bramly’s 1994 ethnography on Macumba, his chief informant *Mãe-de-Santo* Maria José, affirms that in modern life cities respond to a need, standing for guaranteed jobs, social progress and hopefully for many, a better standard of life. Nonetheless, the transition from rural to urban life enacts losses. Cities drain vital energy from people and dislocate people from their natural contact with nature. This is why Umbanda centres are such a vital addition to urban life, because people in cities have greater need of gods, powerful objects and sacred places that link back to one’s roots, to nature. She claims that when one walks through a city, no forces can enter through the feet; the ground is dry and sterile. When one walks in the forest, or through a space with power (such as an Umbanda centre), energy has a way of entering the body (Maria-José cited in Bramly, 1994). Indeed, in every centre I visited, mediums carried out rituals and gave spiritual treatments barefoot. Tião explained that *orixás* are grounded; they will not connect with mediums unless they can sense the earth and nature. Those receiving treatments or consulting with the mediums were also asked to leave their shoes at the door. Umbanda, according to Maria José, is not incompatible with the modern world; it is more necessary than ever. Drums, trances, rituals and ceremonies can in fact go hand-in-hand with fast-paced, modern life. Rituals with flowers, herbs and water link humans back to nature and their representative *orixás*. In addition, Umbanda’s connectedness to Brazilian history and roots through iconic spiritual entities, song, dance and ritual practice is a way that Brazilians can resist the spread of generic “non-places” in the city and celebrate a religious form that is truly evocative of “*Brasilidade*”, or Brazilianness.

Festivity and play in Umbanda

For many of the mediums involved in the three centres, participation in Umbanda was an immensely enjoyable element of their day-to-day life. Guilherme explained to me that although he recognised charity and helping those in need as one of the most important functions of Umbanda, he kept coming because he personally loved being involved with the religion and found it fun. André, a 32-year-old lawyer and medium from the Templo Guaracy articulated a similar idea, but also emphasised the vitality of embodied experience:

To be an Umbandist, to be a medium, you need to have happiness and passion for this. And I think our songs help a lot with this, our rituals are really fun, you dance, you sing, you clap...the cult is fun, it's a way for you to cultivate happiness, love, good vibrations.

Religion and play have long been treated as incompatible categories, impeding the development of a more nuanced qualitative understanding of the religious experience (Salamone 1975). The solemnity of religious activity attracts scholarly focus more frequently than the fun element present in many religious activities. As Salamone (1975:201) asserts, “play soars beyond ordinary boundaries and creates a world in which extraordinary things are possible, where the unthinkable is thought, and the forbidden is performed as commonplace.” Elements of Umbanda such as spiritual incorporation certainly resonate with this, allowing adherents to perform the “forbidden” and “soar beyond ordinary boundaries” by incorporating spiritual entities totally distinctive to their everyday personalities. In mediums’ gatherings and meetings, entire afternoons and evening are spent with mediums incorporating their distinctive spiritual entities (some mediums may incorporate 7 or more different entities) and interacting and socialising with each other. The element of play is highly visible in these encounters, with general frivolity, dancing and fun. Nelson (1978) describes play as a form of sensuousness, which encourages the mind to wander without inhibition and for the body to be free and loose. In this way, it demands the devaluation of control and rationalisation, in order to advance freedom and openness (Nelson 1978).

However, as many mediums cautioned me, there is also an element of competitiveness and vanity present in their encounters. Huizinga (1938) theorises that the ludic element in culture often involves a competitive element that corresponds to struggles for recognition. Poly, of the Casa da Caridade, explained to me that mediums are often surreptitiously competing during meetings, to prove the authenticity and status of their spiritual incorporations. In Poly's case, during one mediums' meeting, one of her spiritual entities was likened by another medium to a *Pomba-gira* (*Pomba-gira* is a female manifestation of *exú*, associated with prostitution, seduction and the use of feminine wiles for malign purposes). This caused immense animosity between Poly and the medium that was effectively undermining her ability to incorporate "good" spirits and commenting on the way she incorporated this particular spirit. As Huizinga theorises, this competitive element is intensely linked to the notion of recognition. As a new medium, Poly was undermined and challenged by a more established medium. The space of the meeting is where the game is conducted, and mediums and their spiritual entities come up against each other to demonstrate their ability to enact successful incorporation and attain recognition as competent mediums.

Nonetheless, an extremely important dimension of Umbanda is its social/recreational aspect: mediums have parties, festivals and celebrations in honour of the *orixás* with special food and drink, excursions to beautiful natural locales where they carry out rituals, dancing and singing in their daily activities, all of which are enhanced by the close bonds and strong friendships present between many in the centre. Carlinhos explained: "We all like to talk, I have good friendships with everyone here in the centre, everyone knows me, we all go out to chat, get a Coca Cola." The recreational aspect in Umbanda is vital, because being a medium requires an investment of considerable time and energy. Mediums must incorporate their entities to serve the public (often twice a week, sometimes more) and these public sessions can last four or five hours in total. They must also pay monthly contributions to help cover costs in the centre, such as electricity, rent and cleaning costs. There are also regular meetings for the mediums to attend (at the Casa they were fortnightly) and special festivals, charity events, *giras* and homages to the *orixás* throughout the year.

Festivities constitute a meaningful element of social life in Umbanda. Events in the forest are held to honour *orixás* and entities associated with the forest (such as the *caboclos*), and often involve hiring a bus for the mediums to travel together to a secluded forest some distance away from the centre where they perform rituals. For Durkheim (1995)[1912], these rituals are vital in creating and circulating the effervescent vitality which sets collectivity in motion, uniting individuals, helping them to create contacts and deepen the bonds of existing contacts. The moral solidarity engendered by such ceremonies only occurs if emotional manifestations are able to take precedence over ideas. Collective effervescence stimulates feelings of joy, serenity and enthusiasm that are often interpreted by the faithful as proof of their beliefs (Durkheim (1995)[1912]). There is always a sense of occasion with these events and Emilio, a filmmaker in his thirties and a long time adherent, told me that as a child with a godmother who was a *Mãe-de Santo* of a *terreiro*, he felt like he was watching a spectacle:

It was a theatre, folklore, a party. Everyone dancing...the drumbeats-when you hear the atabaque, you go into a trance, in the middle of the forest. The smell of the forest in this atmosphere is really conducive to helping with the ritual and so on, and the energy- the energy! For me it was a ritual that was sometimes beautiful, sometimes frightening to me, because I didn't want to see certain entities, entities from the middle of the forest. I was scared, I still didn't understand everything very well. But Umbanda is a beautiful religion.

Emilio highlights here that an integral element of such events is the theatrical aspect. There is special ritual garb used for such occasions, public dancing and singing, and the recognition one receives from their performance. Such events sometimes have overtones of Brazilian carnival, with the strong drum beats that hearken to samba *batucada*, and elaborate costumes which transform people and lift them from their everyday realities. In addition, in private celebrations such as these where the wider public are not present, the spiritual entities behave and interact in a much more informal way with each other. In one private celebration that I attended in honour of the *orixá* Nanã Buruquê, the mediums spent the entire afternoon and evening incorporating all of their entities, laughing, dancing and singing with one another, like long lost friends. The playful aspects of the sacred in Umbanda, rather than detracting from its grandeur, make it more accessible to adherents.

However, in addition to these private festivals and celebrations, there are also ones that the public are welcome to participate in. One such event is the New Year's Eve celebration. Mediums and supporters dress in white and go in procession to the ocean, where they light candles, sing, dance and make offerings and dedications to the goddess Iemanjá (often identified with the Virgin Mary, or Our Lady of the Glory). Tião told me that what he loved most about this celebration are the young children who participate: "I take a choir of children to the beach...on the 29th of December we go to Copacabana, 28 children singing, playing drums for Iemanjá, some as young as three years old, they arrive there singing...all dressed up and proud of themselves!" This tradition has become so embraced by wider Brazilian society that now many Brazilians welcome in the New Year on the ocean shore, dressed in white.

The celebration that best typifies the importance of play in Umbanda is the *Dia das Crianças* (Children's Day), in late September. This day commemorates the child martyr saints Cosmas and Damian (or the *Ibejis* in West African mythology). The *criança* entities are celebrated in almost all Umbanda *terreiros*. It is a day greatly enjoyed by mediums and onlookers alike. Huge quantities of cake, soft drinks, sweets and toys are put out for the *crianças* to enjoy, and many mediums bring along their own special objects connected to their *criança* entity. In one celebration I attended at the Casa, the child spirits were incorporated towards the end of the festivities and mediums brought out crazy-looking hats, yoyos and other toys for their *crianças*. While incorporating the spirits, mediums will often gorge on the sweet treats, smearing them over their faces, and are spoilt and fussed over by adults present who are not incorporating entities. Lindsay Hale (2009:11) writes of experiencing Children's Day firsthand:

I must admit that I found these encounters with the child spirits tedious, though intellectually fascinating when seen from various psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives. To literally get in touch with one's inner child, to escape the cares and responsibilities of adult life, to be pampered and catered to, to smear oneself with candy and cake, while careening through the labile emotions of childhood, protected from any sense of shame or embarrassment at such release by the belief that, after all, it is the spirit,

not the self acting out, and the positive sanctioning of the acting out-not my cup of tea, but I could understand the draw of these things.

Hale's account conveys the range of frivolities enjoyed by the mediums on the occasions where the child spirits are incorporated. Incorporation of the *criança* spirits allows mediums to engage in play in one of its most pure forms: the play undertaken by very young children, with no inherent purpose other than to indulge one's whims and have as much fun as possible. Most importantly, as he underlines, mediums can enjoy their incorporation of the child spirits wholeheartedly as they are protected from any sense of shame or embarrassment, as they have no agency when incorporation occurs. For Andre, a lawyer from Sao Paulo studying towards a Masters degree in international relations, incorporation of his *criança* spirit represented a challenge:

It took a while to incorporate my child. I was fearful, I was really scared of incorporating mine. I was scared of ending up in some ridiculous situation like many mediums end up in. But when I incorporated mine, it was great, because it was one of the most intense incorporations that I've had! My criança talked a lot! We got on really well...I don't know how to explain, but I think I had my greatest development as a medium with my criança. I understood her, I felt her.

The incorporation of the child spirit gives the medium the opportunity to re-live moments of childhood with abandon and carelessness, behaving and speaking in a way that would be totally inappropriate in any other social context. The importance of this element of play in Umbanda cannot be underestimated when apprehending its appeal, especially in the Brazilian religious context where institutional Catholicism offers a completely different religious experience. As Ana, a medium at the Casa da Caridade reasoned: "Umbanda is a really happy, light religion. It's not heavy, putting blame on you; it works on the positive in the person and tries to accentuate the good in everyone, to increase your positive potential."

Cultural appropriation and identity

Umbanda doctrine and practice speaks profoundly to Brazil's African and indigenous cultural heritage. For some, participation in Umbanda is a source of pride, while for many others it is a

source of embarrassment that is kept a secret: a revealing commentary on the continued ethnic discrimination that persists in late modern Brazil. Although religious plurality has always existed in Brazil due to its highly miscegenetic population, religious tolerance has not always been practiced. Afro-Brazilian religions in particular, have been marginalised and forced into hiding during various periods of Brazil's history. This has been partially due to Umbandist rituals that are looked on by many as superstitious black magic, and because the spiritual entities that incorporate mediums often symbolise society's subaltern groups: gypsies, streetwalkers, African slaves, and indigenous people.

Bramly (1994:ii) writes that racial, political and economic considerations have far-reaching consequences on religion, as when its doctrine is denied respect, its practitioners are denied power. The struggle for legitimation has been a long one, with instances of prejudice still continuing today. Tião explained: "In the past you would come to a house of Umbanda and you would be really badly judged. It was seen as a house of demons, of the Devil, because we have entities with names, who talk, who converse. Other religions attack us because of this; we have always been persecuted for this." Interestingly, around the mid 20th century, another Afro-Brazilian religion, Candomblé, gained increasing respect as an authentic and pure African religious representation and form of resistance. Umbanda, however, never won respect to such an extent in the wider social sphere due its syncretisation that was neither here nor there: Guilherme explained that Umbanda was still commonly seen as a less prestigious, less authentic version of Candomblé.

For some long-term adherents, such as Miriam, a Brazilian now based overseas who makes regular trips back to Brazil for Umbanda treatments, her Umbanda practice had to be concealed from neighbours and colleagues. She told me she was shocked that I openly admitted to researching Umbanda and warned me to not readily divulge such information to others, as many Brazilians would judge me harshly for it. She told me that several years ago she had been in her local Catholic church and was forced to witness a neighbour make a scene to the priest that she shouldn't be in the House of God as she was a *macumbeira* (practitioner of black magic). Although Miriam stressed her devotion and love of Umbanda to me, she said she could never acknowledge such a thing in public, or even to her husband. On the other hand, many of the other mediums I spoke to indicated total ease and pride in acknowledging their religious affiliation. There was a very strong

sense of appropriation of African and indigenous identity as a Brazilian, and pleasure in acknowledging one's spiritual status as an Umbandist. For Andre, being an Umbandist is an unnegotiable part of his self-identity. He told me:

Look- as opposed to most people, I make a point of saying that I'm an Umbandist. I say it on my Facebook, post photos of our festivals...when I arrived at this moment in my life, with this conviction that I have today (for Umbanda) I had no problem telling people about it. The fact that I have a good education, a good socio-economic position in society and me saying that I'm an Umbandista contributes to helping people see the appeal of Umbanda.

Tião affirmed that the increase in professional and highly educated people in Umbanda as helped to raise its prestige within society. This was reflected in the 2010 census results, which indicated that those who identified with the “other” category (in which Umbanda was included) were more likely to have a high school education (Pew Forum 2013). Tião also revealed that former Brazilian presidents José Sarney and Luis Inácio (Lula) da Silva had both held positions as *oguns*¹⁷ in centres. Senhor Brito of the Casa da Caridade took pride in pointing out the professional people among his mediums: dentists, business owners and university lecturers. This kind of association is extremely significant for Umbanda, as it demonstrates more widespread acceptance and appreciation of the religion in the higher socio-economic levels of society. Furthermore, it was also symbolic of increasing public awareness respect for previously ignored epistemologies and cosmologies of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian peoples, especially among the educated middle classes.

There is a space where society is starting to make us out. Society is trying to discern what we are...from soap operas where the Negro was always portrayed as a slave, or with a drum in his hand. We have moved beyond this, you know?

Tião

¹⁷ An *ogun* is a male patron of an Umbanda centre, who can provide financial support and political protection to the centre from any kind of attack. *Oguns* are affiliated with Candomblé and may not be found in all Umbanda centres.

A sense of awareness and respect for other ways of knowing is also becoming increasingly common. Whereas the entities of Umbanda were once looked down upon as inferior spirits lacking education and enlightenment, many Brazilians now recognise and celebrate them as teaching important lessons in a more grounded way. The Temple of Guaracy, located in Sao Paulo with offshoots all over the world, openly privileged indigenous/Afro-Brazilian knowledge over Western knowledge, especially in relation to the natural world. Mediums that spiritually incorporated *caboclo* spirits would always impart their advice during consultations with the public using narratives or metaphors, often using stories linked to nature. From these narratives the clients had to discern the moral or meaning behind the message themselves. Indigenous people have always recognised the importance of the symbolic dimension, and the significance of imparting knowledge through oral tradition and storytelling (Illich 1977; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Tião also emphasised the wisdom of the indigenous, the *caboclos* in comprehending the natural world in Umbandic practice: “This is a centre of good, and bad. Both use fire. You use fire to do bad; and to purify. In the same way that fire burns, it purifies. The indigenous taught us this.” Recognising that these Brazilian historical figures such as the *caboclo* and *preto velho* have their own valid wisdom and insights to share demonstrates that the Brazilian people are comfortable with identifying Brazil as having its own sources of authentic knowledge. In this way, practitioners of Umbanda articulate their resistance to foreign imposed religions and knowledge systems through their religious adherence. No longer is it necessary to look to Europe or North America as staking the definitive hegemonic claim on what constitutes wisdom or learning. Umbanda challenges the status quo by privileging the wisdom of indigenous and marginalised Brazilians.

Increasing respect for Umbanda and its relics is also visible in public spaces. De Carvalho (1990) writes that thirty years ago, offerings to the gods (*despachos*) left in forests, at crossroads, by waterfalls, were considered a form of symbolic pollution by Catholics who felt they had the monopoly on representing religion in Brazil. In addition, they were viewed as a sign of Brazil’s backwardness, an impediment to social evolution and modernity. Nowadays, however, a general awareness and respect for Afro-Brazilian religions such as Umbanda is more common. Religious paraphernalia and *despachos* (offerings) that cross from the spiritual realm into the public sphere are left intact. While carrying out research in Sao Paulo, I stayed with a close friend who lived in the upper middle-class neighbourhood of Alto da Boa Vista, a suburb characterised by its

European influences with Swiss chalet style homes and Anglican churches. Nonetheless, when out walking one morning, we came across a basket left at the corner of a cross roads, with a bottle of *cachaça*, red rose petals and a handwritten note. My friend, who barely batted an eye, told me such offerings are entirely common to encounter in public places, even in the part of Sao Paulo where he resided, and cautioned me to not touch it. In the wider public sphere, ritualistic offerings are generally respected and not violated. De Carvalho (2000) points out that the *pontos* (songs) of Umbanda ask for these practices of leaving offerings in certain public spaces to be respected. He writes of a *ponto* sung in honour of *Pomba Gira* in temples of Recife, which speaks of sacrifices laid at the crossroads. It goes:

*Quando você passa/Pela encruzilhada/Ver uma moça bonita/ Com uma rosa na
mão/Peça licença e passe/So não apanhe o quê estiver no chão*

(When you pass/ by a crossroad/ and see a pretty girl/ with a rose in her hand/ ask permission and go/ but don't pick up what's on the ground (de Carvalho 2000: 289). This is a polysemic text, advising that it is in the passerby's interest to not tamper with offerings left to spiritual entities, lest they suffer the effects meant for someone else. However, the text is also a request for inter-religious tolerance in public spaces. Even those who are not adherents of Umbanda must respect its sacred objects and rituals (de Carvalho 2000). For Guilherme and Ana, a major sign that Brazilian society was moving to a stage of increased tolerance and deference for Afro-Brazilian religiosity was symbolised by the advent of special reserved areas for rituals and offerings in national parks and forests. In these spaces, such as the well-known *Santuário Nacional da Umbanda* (National Sanctuary of Umbanda), practitioners of Umbanda are permitted to perform sacred rites and leave biodegradable offerings for spiritual entities.

However, the main source of antagonism directed towards Umbanda centres now comes from evangelical churches such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

...We were very persecuted and we still are. But I think this persecution is coming to an end. There is going to be a walk for religious tolerance, and this walk is for all religions, which really are against one, except that we don't say this. And this religion attacks us

because our centres are always full, and they call us Macumba, and they don't even know what Macumba means.

Tião

Through intensive use of radio, TV and mass rallies along with ever-present defamation in church services, the Universal Church has unleashed a “holy war” on Afro-Brazilian religions. On Fridays, the church holds services dedicated to the exorcism of Afro-Brazilian spiritual entities. These entities, which are identified with the devil, are held responsible by the pastors of the church for causing illness, depression, poverty and hardship in the lives of those who frequent the temples. For de Carvalho Soares (1990), the methods used by the pastors and church hierarchy are similar to an advertising campaign or political propaganda used by authoritarian regimes and aim to intimidate both those who practice as mediums and those who go to Umbanda as clients. These confrontations play out in the public sphere and are a testament to the crisis of religious authority currently present in Brazil, which is tied to the decline of the institutional hegemony of the Catholic Church and vibrant Brazilian religious plurality. With so many distinct forms of religiosity saturating the Brazilian marketplace, some religions attempt to win new adherents by claiming spiritual authority.

The Ritual Dimension

The fundamentals of ritual and embodied experience in Umbanda

Religious phenomena can be separated into beliefs and rites. The first consist of representations, the second are determined modes of action (Durkheim [1912](1975)). Religious beliefs are representations that depict the nature of sacred things, and express the nature of collective reality. Rituals invoke ways to express these common collective representations in identical practices that create and maintain specific mental states within these collectives (Durkheim [1912](1975: 111, 120)). Ritual is an element of all religions that is no less essential than faith. Practices are bound to beliefs, and vice versa. Durkheim [1912](1975) argues that religion is simultaneously a philosophy and practical discipline, to the point of inseparability. Ritual attempts to control experience by framing and selecting experiences for sustained attention. Engaging in ritual enlivens perception,

helping the agent to experience more vividly what they would have experienced anyway (Lienhardt 1961). In this sense, ritual is not always outcome oriented, or concerned with external efficacy.

Ritual in Umbanda is vital and ubiquitous, practised by clients (taking shoes off before entering sacred space, making sure their arms and legs aren't crossed during consultation¹⁸, cleansing themselves with baths of rose petals, leaving offerings for the *orixás*) and by mediums (wearing white, rubbing the soles of their feet with sacred *pemba* (chalk) for protection from evil influences, prostrating themselves before the altar before formally receiving their entities, commemorating the *orixás* on their sacred feast days), for tasks of both minor and major significance. However, the rituals are often also enjoyable: as Bramly (1994:8) explains, "Perhaps I returned those first few times (to the centre) simply for the pleasure of it. To listen to the drums, watch the dancers, smell the incense..."

In the Casa da Caridade, mediums often emphasised the importance of the ritualistic aspects of Umbanda as having greater underlying depth than mere symbolism. Ana Cristina de Santos Moura, a 45-year-old university lecturer and medium at the centre, constantly stressed "*Umbanda tem fundamento*" (Umbanda has fundamentals). She told me that knowing why things are done in a certain way in Umbanda is vital, as many look at Umbanda and see only mythology or mystification. However, nothing in Umbanda is done solely for aesthetic purposes, although that aspect of it is appealing. Every ritual has a fundamental meaning and an objective, and helps adherents to affectively connect with the *orixás* and focus their attention on the purpose of the ritual. In addition, ritual is seen to offer protection when working with strong spiritual energies.

You only leave here when the ritual has been closed. The entities go and take with them all that was out of harmony. For this reason you can't do healing work in just any place. You have to light candles to build a bridge to the other plane, to get the energy of the fire, you make the evocation, call the phalanges...

Ana

¹⁸ Approaching an entity with folded arms or even sitting cross legged while waiting for one's consultations is frowned upon. It symbolises a negative gesture or attitude of refusal to the spiritual entities working in the room (Bramly 1994). I was often quickly corrected by those seated around me when I unconsciously sat and crossed my legs.

Fundamento is described by the Templo Guaracy as coherence contained in the philosophy, representation and the method of an act or ritual. Emma Cohen writes that the notion of *fundamento* has a high valence in Afro-Brazilian practice and ideology, and corresponds to the idea of deep knowledge, secrets and specialised ritual and ancestral knowledge passed from *Mãe* or *Pai-de-Santo* to sons or daughters of the centre. For Durkheim, mythical descriptions of existence and nature provide the adherent with a special way to recognise and know symbols of religious significance, in a way that detaches them from how they are ordinarily known in empirical processes of representation.

Representation, it's like this. Human beings need mental representations (of things), logically, all religions work in this way because it's a way humans can affectively connect to them...and Brazilian mentality is tied to images, to flowers, to pictures...the visual is very important to us...for transcendence to take place. So in this way Umbanda has a set of rules. It has a reason for everything, and a specific outcome, right? For example, with the woven ribbons and candles we use. For Iemanjá, we are going to celebrate her this coming week with light blue and white ribbons, with light blue candles too, white flowers, so everything will be tied to the vibration of Iemanjá, who works within the vibration of light blue and white.

Ana

Carlinhos, a 67-year-old medium who had been part of Umbanda for 42 years, explained that, “every material object in Umbanda has an energetic function.” Mediums have a “toolbox” of sorts by their side during consultations, filled with sacred sticks of chalk, notepaper, cigars, honey, rice, tobacco, candles and shawls, depending on the tools their entity works with. However, Ana took care to highlight that it is not the entities that need the props; it is the humans who benefit from the vibrations tied to those material objects.

Embodied religious practices and rituals in Umbanda, such as dance, spiritual incorporation, spiritual healing and spiritual energisation engage the senses, evoke memory and imagination, and reflect a deep connection with the natural environment, as well as produce an integrated mind/body/spirit awareness of spiritual truths or religious presence. Humans are not disembodied spirits; religions become lived only through the involvement of body, mind and emotions

(McGuire 2007). Collective embodied practices (such as *giras*-the mediums' meetings) foster experiences of community and connectedness. Even mundane embodied practices link the material with the spiritual, the secular and everyday with the sacred. As Heelas (2008) notes, spiritualities of life and New Age movements increasingly promote ways in which the spiritual can flow easily through the secular and break down distinctions between the two. Umbanda, which has aspects that resonate with New Age ideologies, promotes the merging of the sacred and the mundane. For Miriam, this union was recognised in a ritual she practised every morning when she left the house, thanking her *orixás*, guardian angel and the powers above that protect her and guide her through her day.

Many mediums also explained to me that trying to make Umbanda intelligible on paper, and attempting to fit it within the confines of analysis lifts it from its true context, which is its practice. The importance of practice and experience can not be underestimated. The role of the mind in Umbanda is tenuous, as it is through intuition and the body that one learns. This was repeatedly emphasised to me by Ana:

The more we live learning, through experience, the more true wisdom we gain. God willing, it's in practice that you are going to learn...because we often separate intellectual learning from lived experience. So Umbanda brings this, God knows, it's in the practice that you will learn! And this way of living connects you with your heart, with your feelings...

Practice provides adherents with a way to nourish their bodies, their feet, their hands and their skin with vital energy (Bramly 1994). What an adherent touches and what they do is seen to have immense significance on their wellbeing. On the other hand, thought, trying to explain or analyse things is seen to be detrimental, taking the strength out of things (Bramly 1994). For many of the professional middle-class adherents that were interviewed, such as Ana, Andre and Miriam, the shift away from rationalising and intellectualising things was liberating, privileging instead the experiential.

Ritual, emotion and placemaking in nature

God is always present. We can find God in diverse forms in nature...Spirituality is entering into concentration with our inner world and respecting nature through the earth, the sea, the wind, the infinite sky, fire, trees, plants, flowers, roads. All have their own powers, and we must respect them.

Miriam

Umbandists strongly identify with the natural environment as the power of the *orixás* is tightly interwoven with the power of nature. An earthy and natural aesthetic permeates Umbanda, manifested in the nature of its practices and rituals that are often orientated to venerating the restorative power and energy of the natural world. Even in temples in the midst of the crowded city, natural tools are present within many of the healing rituals, such as the *descarrêgo*, which uses native plant leaves such as *pão de alho* and *pitanga* to brush people down. The relaxation ritual sees clients lying on the ground on coarsely woven flax mats, guided by a *caboclo* through a visualisation in the forest and sprinkled with water and leaves after. The integration of the natural world into healing treatments is also indicative of the holistic view of health discussed earlier in the introduction, which includes correct relationships with the natural environment (living in harmony with nature) as a significant part of wholeness and total health. Nature is sacred, and the health and balance of the individual is intimately linked to it. For Tião, the connection with nature was vital for connecting with the spiritual world, because the deities of Umbanda, the *orixás*, are grounded and will not come forth if they can't feel nature.

Umbandic ideology promotes respect for the natural world and environment, currently an issue of major contention in Brazil with the ongoing deforestation of the Amazon and the construction of the Belo Monte dam, placing the existence of many species and unique ecosystems under threat. The Earth has recently begun to be seen as a living organism of which humans are a part, whose survival depends on the continued life and equilibrium of that ecosystem. This recent perspective starkly contrasts that of previous centuries, which posited nature as a force to be dominated with resources to be appropriated (Dalla Costa 2009).

There is an emotional relationality and connection between people and their environments, and space becomes place when meaning and experience become attached to it. For Umbandistas, significant points in nature are identified as spiritual places, not mere spaces. The beach represents one such sacred place that is the locus of many important rituals, especially those involving the *orixá* of the sea, Iemanjá. Matthewman (2004) writes that aside from metaphysical and spiritual connections, the beach is also conceptualised as a liminal space, a space of otherness, a threshold often associated with rites of passage or with the passage from one state of being to another. This is evidenced in the popular festivities around New Year performed on the beach, as Umbandists witness and celebrate the transition of one year to the next, and in the more everyday rituals requesting the help of Iemanjá which take place on the seashore.

One of Umbanda's most important functions is to re-create the sacred and vital connection with nature that humans once had. Fostering a connection with nature also cultivates a sense of sociality and collectivity with other living beings that opposes the isolation of individuals within the wider body of society, and the sense of estrangement from nature that city life often brings about (Dalla Costa 2009). This re-fostering of bonds between the human being and the natural world also symbolises a form of resistance to the mentalities aligned with the post-industrial urban landscape, where many forms of life are standardised, digitalised and pre-programmed. The contemporary world is one where people are conditioned to *get* rather than *do* things, where they expect to be taught, moved and treated rather than learn, find their own way and heal (Illich 1977:217). In this way, people lose their connection with their environment and their ability to draw from it in order to deal with problems or suffering. André of the Templo Guaracy centre remarked:

A relationship with nature enters into things, because Umbanda offers nature as a tool. Instead of kneeling by your bed praying, you can collect some herbs and make a bath. When you are collecting the herbs, you are thinking about this problem, when you're boiling the water, you're working with this energy...the sea has energy and vibrations, plants too...everything is alive, everything has an energy you can benefit from and use in a good way. Then you stop destroying nature, and start building with natural energy instead.

In this way, an interaction with the natural world provides a pragmatic means by which one can engage in *doing*, rather than *getting*. Entering in contact with nature encourages an understanding of nature and how it can affect the human being.

In nature, each place, each point of force, like a waterfall, is a point of force of the planet, so there is the place where you would summon the energy of Oxum, the energy tied to freshwater, and Xangô is (tied to) the rocks. So when you make an offering, the offerings are made so the human being can enter into contact with nature again, because we lost this contact long ago, so we have this return to nature. Umbanda brings humans back to nature...to the wisdom that the energies of nature can teach us...if you go to Oxum's place, where her force is, and you leave rubbish-it can't be done! You have to make it beautiful, leave flowers.

Ana

As Ana highlights, the aesthetic of ritual is strongly connected to nature. Many Umbandist rituals are designed to engender reverence towards the natural world, and the deities that reside within the respective natural realms. For both mediums and clients alike, Umbanda offers a way for them to reintegrate with the natural world and to escape the symbolic and physical boundaries of the city through spiritual practice. Answers to problems can be found by engaging in rituals and practices with nature, as André explains:

When I started going to Umbanda, a Cabocla¹⁹ entity gave me a task to do. I had a problem that was not letting me sleep. So I arrived there (at the Umbanda centre), and the entity told me to plant two pots, one with rue, the other with rosemary. So I got the pots, planted the seeds, covered them with earth. And when they germinated, I was supposed to tell the cabocla. Every day, I looked at the pots, waiting for the solution. I can't remember how long it took the pots to germinate; 6 weeks maybe, perhaps two months even. When they germinated, I went back there and told the cabocla, but the problem had already been resolved...because while they were germinating, things were

¹⁹ Cabocla is the female version of a Caboclo spirit.

happening. By concentrating on the pots, I distracted myself from getting anxious about the problem, and just let things happen naturally.

In this narrative, nature is the teacher, demonstrating the importance of patience and the natural passage of time in the resolution of problems. The role of the *cabocla* is to convey that the natural world has things to impart to us, often with simple and very straightforward lessons. André explained that in the Temple Guaracy, indigenous peoples such as the *caboclos* represent a far more advanced level of evolution than Westerners because of their understanding and empathy for nature, and appreciation for natural energy and its many benefits. Dalla Costa (2009) writes that a special synergy links indigenous issues with issues relating to the Earth, and that both are assuming growing importance. This is because the path towards a different kind of development must address both issues, and because indigenous people have access to repositories of knowledge that could help in the preservation of the Earth and its resources.

For some adherents, the logic of ritual and tradition steeped in African and indigenous culture is the cornerstone of the religion. This seems more apparent in the centres run and frequented by members of the upper socio-economic and educated classes who place greater emphasis on ritualistic attire, more refined and naturally beautiful surroundings, and the visibility of the African and indigenous influence in the material elements of the practice. This is epitomised by the Templo Guaracy (Temple of Guaracy), which has its base in Sao Paulo but also has branches in Switzerland, France, Austria, Portugal, Canada, USA and the Dominican Republic. The Temple has been referred to as the reinvention of Umbanda for a more modern and sophisticated religious consumer. Its Brazilian centre, located on the outer periphery of Sao Paulo, has been constructed in harmony with the natural environment. Carlos Buby, the temple leader, explains on the group's website (www.templogaracy.com.br):

From the physical point of view, the elements or spaces used for the consecrations must be the most natural possible, avoiding the use of synthetic, plastic and acrylic products. These products do not allow for good energetic performance.

The “sacred field” (an outdoor arena) with a sacred fire and beautiful individual shrines for each of the *orixás* constitutes the heart of the Temple of Guaracy. The grounds are divided into designated sacred spaces, with waterfalls, archways and natural features demarcated for specific ritualistic purposes and separate quarters for study and spiritual retreat. Female mediums dress in traditional Angolan clothing, with bright full skirts, white chest wraps and colourful head scarves, whilst the men wear white trousers, brightly coloured shirts and fitted hats or turbans. Classical readings of religion, such as those of Kierkegaard, view the religious and the aesthetic as occupying distinct spheres. Religion is often more evocative of sensations of dread, rather than pleasure. However, sociologist John Carroll (2011:210) argues in contemporary society that the aesthetic has become more prominent in serving as a vehicle to experience the divine.

In addition, each type of spiritual entity within the Temple of Guaracy (the temple recognises 8 different types) has its own designated space, which allows adherents to connect to the entity in surrounds that are conducive to their characteristics and preferences. In turn, this association allows adherents to explore particular aspects of their own psyche that are emblematic of the entity. For example, mediums connect with their cowboy (*boiadeiro*) spirits in an outdoor riding ring. Nearby are the stables with different farm animals, which are included in festivals and celebrations involving the *boiadeiro* spirits, who come from the same vibrational currents as the *orixá* Oxossi. For the Umbandists, incorporating the *boiadeiro* spirit cultivates a deeper understanding and empathy towards animals and a connection to the land, as well as a means of becoming better acquainted with their own deeper natures. Symbols are also used in ritual to augment meaning or call attention to other levels of existence (Douglas 1966), as explained by Buby on the temple website:

Umbanda’s symbols, which are rich in details, integrate primitive information of the greatest relevance to the modern world. The meaning of colors, ritualistic clothes, gestures, dances, songs and pontos (cabalistic symbols), transcend their practical form and are meant to translate different manifestations of Nature. Therefore, reading Umbanda symbols cannot be limited to intellectual understanding. We need to perceive the existing symbolic structures that represent the Natural Laws...

The use of symbolism or connotation in religious experience and discourse provides a pathway to deeper or more profound meaning (Besecke 2007). Besecke (2007) writes that the privileging of the symbolic experience counters excessive literalism and is indicative of *reflexive* spirituality, a deeper, more enriched mode of spiritually orienting oneself. This spiritual perspective rejects the concept that the veracity of religion rests on literal accuracy or the plausibility of the doctrine, but instead emphasises the search for transcendent meaning (Besecke 2007).

The work of Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman (2002) explores the increasing prevalence of New Age oriented spiritual practices among the middle classes. They posit that middle class society is largely responsible for the religious developments that challenge and attempt to reverse disenchantment. Lee and Ackerman postulate that this is because it is the middle classes who have most acutely experienced the consequences of modernity, such as the quantification of values, alienation, mechanisation (or we can now say digitisation), dissolution of community and abstract rationality, which have subsequently fostered conditions that are conducive to new forms of consciousness. New Age religious romanticism, embodying the emotional, intuitive and creative attributes of the individual, has resulted as a response to instrumental rationality. The authority of the rational has been eschewed, and replaced with an appreciation for the irrational and for wisdom and knowledge that comes through experience and embodiment. As Lee and Ackerman (2002) articulate, the “desolate landscape of modernity” has driven the middle classes to seek refuge in new religious activities. Carlos Buby echoes many of these ideas, elaborating that the establishment of the Temple Guaracy was based on spiritual wisdom that comes through experience, embodiment, and contact with nature:

The founding of the Temple of Guaracy in 1973 allowed me to put into practice all the knowledge and wisdom that was not revealed by the limited scope of concepts and ideas. The encounters with Nature, the ritualistic gatherings, the bonding of the group, the songs, the dances, the spontaneous solidarity, the research, the supporting rituals for healing, the personal spiritual assistance, became a part of my life and of the daily life of many friends.

The Material Dimension

Umbanda as problem solving

In Umbanda, you bring your everyday problems to talk to the preto velho. It's always everyday stuff. You're always learning about how to deal with the everyday stuff.

Guilherme

In July 2012 when I returned to the Casa da Caridade de Caboclo Peri, Guilherme told me that the house was dealing with ever greater numbers of people, upwards of 600 each week, seeking guidance and assistance for all kinds of problems. Umbanda prides itself on being well-adapted to modern life and highly practical in its application (Bramly 1994). Many of the problems that bring individuals to Umbanda are material in nature. According to many western religious teachings, those who want to enhance their spiritual lives must overcome the burden of their materiality, material urges and concerns and even the pollution of the body (McGuire 2007). However, the link between spirituality and human material concerns remains and is evidenced by the materially oriented things people pray for, although many consider material concerns less worthy than spiritual requests (McGuire 2007: 190). André explained that the efficacy of Umbanda in helping him deal and manage with challenges in his life was one of the main attractions of the religion:

I don't know whether the fundamentals of Umbanda work or not. But it's a practice that's helping me. Whether the entities exist or not, I'm going to keep going to Umbanda, because things are turning out well in my life. Experience after experience is proving this to me...there's a saying, "What is of man, is of man, what is of God, is of God. They are two worlds that influence each other, the earthly and the spiritual, but we are not going to resolve problems on Earth only talking about the spiritual.

For those who come to centres as clients, Umbanda appeals as an alternative problem-solving agency that offers spiritual ways of engaging with material problems. Although the Casa da Caridade was known in Umbanda circles for its expertise in dealing with health, people sought guidance for diverse personal issues, seeking counsel from the *caboclos* and *preto velhos* during

public consultations and slipping *pedidos* (requests) written on small scraps of white paper underneath the shrine to the patron saint of the Casa, St. Francis of Assisi. Antonio, a long serving medium at the Casa, told me that people come looking for help with absolutely everything. Guilherme noted that there are people who come seeking “*besteira*”- help with trivial matters- such as answers to tests or lotto numbers, and these people would be turned away. Sometimes requests were of a more nefarious nature, requesting revenge, or that someone die. Those seeking such things were promptly set straight and informed that this was not a Casa that dealt in such matters. However, those who genuinely came wanting help in dealing with an issue were always supported. Some of the problems people more frequently requested help with included: fertility problems, finding a suitable place to live, finding a companion or lover, getting a lover back, knowing when a loved one would be released from prison, getting a job promotion, wellbeing at work, overcoming addiction, protection during travel, getting someone to repay an overdue personal loan or passing university entrance exams.

Asking the entities for help with problem solving is closely linked to the patronage system in Brazil that has long shaped social relations. Peter Fry (1978:45) postulates that Umbanda is plausible in that the personal relations established with the spirits are homologous with actual relations established with people in the wider social system: in this way Umbanda represents ritual dramatisation of the principles and systems that preside over life in Brazil.

In Brazil, the scope of one’s agency in the wider social arena can be somewhat restricted. There is a lack of confidence in the impersonal system, which is partly due to the fact that bureaucratic and other public systems are sometimes corrupt, inefficient and irrational, which subsequently leads to a reliance on personal relations in order to get things done (Engler 2009: 484; Buarque de Holanda 1984; Da Matta 1991). Umbanda creates a form of spiritual patronage where Brazilians build relationships with spiritual entities to solve these problems. The spiritual entities will listen, offer support and advise clients with suggestions (Pressel 1973), and the entities that are seen as offering the most effective advice will be the most patronised.

Nonetheless, the leaders of the centre were very pragmatic in recognising the limitations of the role of Umbanda in helping people to solve their problems. Senhor Brito would frequently reiterate to those who came in that, “God gave you feet to walk with, hands to carry out work, eyes to see”, and that they too had agency in helping themselves to heal and manage life’s challenges. This was

echoed by his wife, Dona Sandra, who told me that mediums regularly informed people that ultimately it is down to the individual to enact their own healing, with Umbanda steering the person in the right direction. She explained that Umbanda is a spiritual perspective to integrate into one's life to impart clarity, not a religion that spontaneously brings about miracles. The tenor of such comments undeniably resonates with the responsibility placed on the individual in late modernity to assume ownership of their life and circumstances.

In addition to giving advice, the entity may identify spiritual or energetic causes as the explanation for the person's problems. Umbanda explains and treats phenomena on an energetic level: André, Ana, Guilherme and others identified understanding how to manipulate and direct energy as an axiomatic element of Umbanda, or as Maria José articulates, "capturing it, taming it and using it" (Maria José cited in Bramly 1994: 64) Often the individual will be prescribed specific rituals to re-balance their energy, such as taking a prescription to make a bath²⁰ at home, doing a ritual with honey, lighting certain coloured candles, or leaving a glass of water near the bed at night to draw away negative spiritual fluids. For those with more pervasive problems, the entities will recommend clients to return for repeat spiritual treatments or sessions, or in some cases if the client seems very unstable, the entity may advise them to develop their mediumship with the social support of the Umbanda centre. However, the problem that most commonly draws individuals to the centre is ill health, and the search for spiritual treatment. An engaged analysis of the circumstances that engender the quest for spiritual healing will be discussed below.

Spiritual healing and meaning making in Umbanda

While visiting the Casa, I was introduced to Angela, a woman of mixed ethnicity in her early sixties who was just commencing a spiritual treatment. Several weeks prior she had been diagnosed with a cancerous nodule in her left breast, but had resolved to treat it with Umbanda before trying the course of radiography the doctor had recommended. An adept of Umbanda her entire life, she would attend different centres based on her needs at the time. As the Casa da Caridade was well

²⁰ Baths (*banhos*) are a ubiquitous practice in Umbanda. They are usually comprised of natural ingredients such as rose petals, basil, salt, lavender or orange skin added and left to steep in boiled water, and applied to the body in a private ritual often at the beginning of the day (Hale 2009:144). Depending on the ingredient added, *banhos* have different purposes, but generally they cleanse and fortify the spiritual self by way of the body, altering physical symptoms and negative moods.

known in Umbanda circles in Rio for its expertise in healing and surgeries, she had recently begun frequenting its sessions. She told me she had unyielding faith that Umbanda was capable of treating her cancer, in a far more effective and less harmful manner than the surgeons at the hospital could.

The lure of Umbanda for those seeking healing represented a reoccurring theme that emerged during the research process. In excess of 600 individuals receive help and healing from the Casa da Caridade's 150 mediums every week, and most who pass through the centre doors seek a more natural approach to understanding and resolving illness that also takes their spiritual identity into consideration. Like Angela, many had questioned the hegemony of the Western medical paradigm and sought Umbanda as an alternative. However, mediums at the Casa identified other reasons why individuals came to Umbanda, including: the inability of doctors to diagnose their illness, a desire to integrate orthodox medicine with heterodox treatments for greater efficacy, fear of the side effects of certain medical treatments or drugs, belief in the ability of the self or spirits to recognise and heal the source of the problem, desire for a more holistic approach to healing, or a lack of financial means to access private health care. Some, like Miriam and Emilio, had engaged with spiritual healing practices from Umbanda throughout their lives, drawing on traditional herbal remedies rather than drugs or medical treatments.

The healing paradigm embodied by Umbanda centres such as the Casa da Caridade is one that promotes meaning-making in its process of healing, involving the individual coming to terms with spiritual, mental, emotional or psychological issues which impact on their overall health and manifest in the form of illness. The individual is encouraged to be an active agent in their own healing, supported by the spiritual entities and the healing treatments administered by the medium. Illness is seen within the healing paradigm of Umbanda as having a didactic function, a means through which one's spirit alerts a person to an issue that needs to be acknowledged by manifesting sickness through the physical body. Spiritist/Umbanda doctrine proclaims that not necessarily all illness can be healed in the sense that there is a positive outcome of the person recovering and being restored to full health. Promises of miraculous cures are not necessarily made to individuals who come to the centre, as cautioned by the centre's leader, Sandra Brito:

Many people are healed, but some are not, because I want to be honest about this. There are cases, where cancer disappears, diminishes, we don't ask heaps of questions, asking

exactly what's happened after you know, but there are many cases, with many cures, that have happened. It shows the power of the mind, the power of the mind of the medium, together with the spirit, and the power of the mind of the patient, no? Together with the power of our Father Oxalá. A perfect triangle.

However, even if the individual is not necessarily *cured*, there is always healing in the sense that the person is led to understand why they have been afflicted by that particular illness, to possibly avoid making the errors again that may have instigated it in the first place, or come to terms with facing their death without fear, and with understanding.

Whereas the biomedical system disempowers people in the experience of pain and suffering, Umbanda offers a way of treating it by making sense of it. Under the auspices of biomedicine, pain is not seen as natural, but as an inconvenience or obstacle for which painkillers are prescribed to induce insensibility and unawareness. Painkillers smother what Illich (1977:150, 156) terms “pain’s intrinsic question mark”, or the effort of the body to act in self defence to avoid further damage, and represent instead a transformation of the pain experience as a social curse. Illich writes that traditional understandings of pain and suffering saw it fundamentally differently in three ways: its meaning was seen as cosmic and mythic, not individual and technical; as a corruption in nature, of which man constitutes a part, and as an experience of the soul. These readings of pain resonate with both McGuire’s (1991) conceptualisation of the body, mind, spirit and society as a near unitary, intricately meshed phenomenon and Scheper-Hughes and Lock’s (1987) concept of “the mindful body”.

An experiential conception of health is upheld by Umbandist ideology and practice. Umbanda interprets illness as having origins that extend beyond corporeal boundaries, often influenced by the state of one’s spiritual health. In Umbanda, many afflictions or illnesses are diagnosed by mediums as *desequilibrio*, (or spiritual disequilibrium) and can manifest symptoms that appear in the physical or mental body. In order to treat the physical symptoms, the spiritual dimension must be addressed to make sense of the origin and purpose of the illness. This resonates with what Heelas (2008:172) refers to as the sacralisation of illness: illness appears secular until a spiritual reading is imposed on it, then the way the pain is experienced and the meaning behind it becomes sacralised.

Illnesses caused by spirits can have exactly the same symptoms as physiological illnesses. Pressel (1973) identified six major spiritual causes of illness classified by Umbandists, including illness as a consequence of evil thing done to a person through the casting of black magic; illness resulting from religious negligence (neglecting to make offerings to the *orixás*); sickness caused by spiritual perturbations, whereby unenlightened spirits may agitate the “spiritual fluids” of an individual leaving them sickly and troubled²¹; illnesses resulting from past life karma; illnesses caused by the evil eye (*mau olhado*) and illnesses linked with undeveloped mediumship. Miriam articulated that many people are mediums, but resist or choose not to follow the path, and therefore leave themselves vulnerable to illnesses that are spiritual in origin that cannot be healed by conventional medicine²². Many Umbandists claim success with spiritual treatment as they treat the spiritual source of the illness, not only the biological symptoms. Chronic illness, cancer and liver problems, for example, may be physical manifestations of spiritual dis-ease. Treating the spiritual element first helps in the healing process of the physical healing.

If someone is sick, once you do the spiritual energy discharge, the only thing that remains are the physical symptoms. The bad energy or obsessor is taken away. So this helps in the cure.

Carlinhos

Shifting power: restoring agency and empowering the individual in healing practice

Healing within Umbanda represents a challenge to the biomedical paradigm, which often exempts the patient from responsibility for the illness. It offers an alternative to nefarious effects of iatrogenesis that cultivate a dependence on medicine to the extent that the individual loses their ability to make autonomous judgments about their own bodies and wellbeing (Illich 1977). Morbid society promises the individual the role of the patient as a form of legitimized deviance: those who are sick, tired and passive use the sick role as a way to be relieved from normal duties and political

²¹ Ana Santos, a medium at the Casa informed me that many people with addictions or bad habits (alcoholism, drugs) are usually strongly influenced by bad spirits who are influencing them energetically. They must first undergo spiritual treatment to cleanse their spiritual fluids, then psychological treatment in the support group held at the center for those with addictions.

²² Spiritual diagnosis of undeveloped mediumship also functions as a means of recruiting new mediums: those who come to Umbanda centres and are identified as having mediumistic abilities are often invited to develop their mediumship and later practise as a medium in the centre.

and social responsibility as they are depicted as an innocent victim of biological and environmental pathogens (Illich 1977:129). On the other hand, those who engage with alternative healing practices such as Umbanda are active in the construction of their own ideologies about health and disease, aided by the spiritual entities to decide the right course of action for their own personal wellbeing. An often-repeated maxim around the centre was, “*não existe doença, só existe doente*” (There is no such thing as illness, only an ill person). This very constructionist approach challenges the notion of illness as physical fact, rather positing that it is borne of the sick person’s frame of mind and that the individual does have some measure of control over the experience of illness. Biomedical diagnosis, however, defines incapacity, imposes inactivity and leaves the patient apprehensive about recovery, all of which results in loss of autonomy (Illich 1977).

Many Umbandist spiritual beliefs around healing resonate with New Age concepts of healing, whereby the state of one’s spirit has bearing on aspects of their physical, mental and social wellbeing. New Age religions and spiritualities are often anti-authoritarian and informed by epistemological individualism, shifting authority of the body from exterior agencies such as doctors, to restore power, authority and responsibility to the individual “self” (Heelas 1996:82). There is a strong belief among various New Age groups that the body has an inherent capacity for wellness, but one’s “inner-doctor” must be contacted in order to facilitate this wellbeing (Heelas, 1996:84).

Guilherme Moura, a 19-year-old medium at the Casa observed that Brazilians engage with Umbanda for two significant reasons. There are those who come for love (who want to learn more of the religion, and immerse themselves in it), and those who come because of suffering and pain (*vem pelo amor, ou vem pela dor*). However, those who did come seeking an instant cure were exposed to a different kind of healing process whereby healing was dependent on inner transformation. Healing would not come without understanding, and discourse with the spiritual entities facilitated a better understanding of self and illness. Guilherme also underlined the value of assuming responsibility for one’s personal health and wellbeing, rather than adopting the persona of a victim. Seeking meaning for illness and being proactive about engaging in healthy behaviours falls on the individual’s shoulders. Biomedical ideologies tend to orientate illness and suffering as a biological issues, thereby depriving them of inherent meaning and disabling people from

recognising illness as a challenge which requires the individual to shape their own experience accordingly (Illich 1977).

Many people come to Umbanda because they are seeking material things, such as a cure, and so on. It's not that you shouldn't want these things, but you can't think of Umbanda as only for this. Umbanda doesn't exist just for this purpose. It's for people to learn about themselves, to gain self-knowledge. With the public meetings if you are having problems that's good, because you can go up and talk to the entities, and say, I'm having a problem with this issue," and they can tell you, "why don't you try seeing it like this, look at it that way", you know, living is learning... people come thinking they should get instant cures, but the most important thing is to learn. If not, the problem is going to continue; they will keep having that illness, because they haven't learnt.

Guilherme

Understanding illness as a lesson in self-realisation resonates with an experiential view of health. As one of the mediums at the *Casa* emphasized to me, those who come seeking help from the centre come for a myriad of different personal reasons, but the assistance and therapy they receive from the entities will always prompt them to think about how they are developing and evolving as a person, and the way in which they can be responsible for improving their life and health themselves.

Umbanda gives equilibrium to those who are unbalanced, to people who come full of problems, anguished, desperate...so with the word of a preto velho, of a caboclo, that conversation you have (with one of them) is like a conversation with a psychologist, it gives balance. That is not to say that Umbanda resolves your problems...the person that resolves your problems, is yourself, with the help of our Father Oxalá, you know...but Umbanda can show you the path, the path that you need to take.

Dona Sandra (leader of the Casa)

Everything comes down to how you see it. We choose how we see things. Umbanda helps you to see things in a different light. You can go through life as a victim, or you can be responsible for your own life.

Those who come to the centre with depression are told to listen to the advice and counsel of the spiritual entities, as they offer a kind of spiritual therapy. Guilherme gave the example of a girl attending the centre who had recently overcome depression, who had said to him, “I really liked it here, it was great for me because it wasn’t my problems that changed. It was me who changed.” This statement symbolises the inversion inherent in the Umbandist framework of healing where the individual becomes better because they enact transformation of their bodily pain and illness into personal experience. Illich (1977:149) links the concept of illness, pain and suffering to a sign for something that has not been answered, and articulates that although doctors may be able to link the pain to a specific bodily symptom and technically treat it, the cause for the suffering generally goes unacknowledged. Developing what Besecke (2007) calls a “metaphorical consciousness” encourages the individual to look beyond literal answers for deeper truths. She gives the example of a person with a constant stiff neck treating the symptoms, but also asking him or herself, “is there a way in which I am being rigid in my life?” (Besecke 2007:180).

However, this emphasis on the individual as responsible for precipitating/alleviating personal illness is also emblematic of late modern ideologies that overlook structural causes for individual problems. The ideology of taking responsibility and placing the burden for illness on the individual’s shoulders can be problematic as it does not always recognize the social context from which illness may originate (Broom 2009). Giddens (1991) emphasizes that late modernity has a strong effect on the individual, resulting in more knowledgeable, reflexive agents, empowered to create their own identity and to a certain degree, life-world, while Bauman (2008) emphasizes the ongoing cultivation of the self as a project, seeing the self as the “artist of their own life”. These late modern norms correspond to New Age ideologies where the responsibility for maintaining health, wellbeing and life satisfaction falls squarely on the individual’s shoulders, regardless of social circumstances and context. Meaning making around illness also speaks to this late modern trend of reflexivity and identity, where the individual can conceptually shape their illness to be representative of their understanding and perspective of it: thus the illness becomes representative of multiple factors tied to the self.

The Umbandic approach to healing and understanding illness also empowers patients to trust their own understandings and senses around their body. Guilherme explained that many clients came to the centre seeking confirmation that they were unwell, having been to the doctor and sent home with a clean bill of health, or prescribed medication they have found to be ineffective. In his work on healing in Umbanda, Sidney Greenfield (2008) echoes a similar idea: that people often come to Umbanda to seek healing for illnesses that doctors have dismissed as psychosomatic, finding no physical evidence of disease. The complaints of such clients, which range from issues such as fainting/dizzy spells, anxiety and nerves, aches and pains, are usually dismissed by the biomedical establishment, or dealt with by prescribing medication. In Western medicine, illness is often treated as pathology of the body. This means that those who present with illnesses that have no physiological pathology are often dismissed as psychosomatic. Andrew Strathern and Pamela Stewart (1999) write that biomedical practice frequently discounts patients' own narratives about their illness, dismissing them as ignorant of their condition. The power dynamic present in most biomedical institutions constructs the doctor as expert, awarded the ultimate power to definitively identify and treat sickness or disorder (Foucault 1973). Clients whose illnesses have been dismissed by doctors come to Umbanda seeking acknowledgement and affirmation from an alternative source that the sense of disequilibrium in their body is real, that there is a cause for it and that it can hopefully be healed. A 14-year-old boy, who had been frequenting the centre due to his repeated sudden fainting episodes at school, informed Senhor Brito that he was now completely healed thanks to the treatment he received in Umbanda that addressed the emotional and spiritual causes of his fainting. Doctors had carried out various tests and found him to be in a perfect state of health, so he had come to the centre under the guidance of his mother, who had been receiving treatment there for breast cancer.

Although Umbanda does not necessarily politicise its adherents to see and rise up against the structural causes of their illness, it does nonetheless cultivate within them a mode of imagining and treating their illness that offers an alternative to the hegemonic biomedical model. The practices employed by Umbanda integrate African and indigenous healing styles and herbal remedies. In a sense, they can be interpreted as an expression of resistance to medicalisation, by engaging a healing practice that harkens back to a more traditional, egalitarian era. However, mediums were not necessarily opposed to biomedical surgery or intervention:

What happens is that the person tells the entity what the doctor has said regarding whether surgery is needed, and from that point the entity will ask the person to wait a little and have spiritual treatment instead. In the case the person doesn't get better, the operation will go ahead...of course the spiritual entity isn't going to risk the person's life, ok? But oftentimes, the person doesn't need to be operated on, because the person can also see that it can be resolved spiritually. If the person does have the surgery, they will also have spiritual treatments so it (the surgery) can take place in the best conditions.

Guilherme

In this way, the spiritual treatments offered by the Casa da Caridade did not set out to undermine mainstream medicine, rather, they offered a spiritual supplement for the gaps and weaknesses present in the biomedical model, especially by acknowledging the interconnectedness of the body, mind and spirit. The immense numbers of people crossing the doors of the Casa testified that many Brazilians were interested in experiencing a free healing alternative, and the increase in clients visiting the centre between 2012 and 2013 indicated that for at least some, the spiritual alternative was successful.

Umbanda as an open and egalitarian healing space

The power embedded within biomedical institutions is undeniable. For Melvin Konner (1993:29), the hospital is “our modern cathedral, embodying all the awe and mystery of modern science, all its force, real and imagined, in an imposing edifice that houses transcendent expertise and ineffable technology”. The hospital is embedded in the collective social imagination as an institution that represents efficiency, authority and hygiene. The Casa offers a more egalitarian alternative to the power, hierarchy and sterility tied to the hospital system.

Firstly, the Casa provides a setting in which people are encouraged to feel at ease, comfortable and safe. While the hospital or clinic environment is often formal, clinical and intimidating, in the Casa (and in many other Umbanda centres) emphasis of integration with the natural world means a preponderance of plants and running water creating a relaxed atmosphere. Throughout the centre, regardless of the spiritual treatment that is being administered, space is shared and respected. Those who consult with the spiritual entities in Umbanda do so in a large open space

with other clients simultaneously carrying out their own consultations, and the resulting atmosphere is one of collectivity, ease and informality. The entities embrace and give reassurance to upset or concerned clients, with the relationship more symbolic of a kindly grandparent or community elder giving aid rather than a doctor and patient. This means that sometimes the entire room will be witness to someone's personal distress. However, the collective dynamic of the consultation in many ways enriches the healing experience as a unique and united process. At the Casa, there may be up to 10 consultations happening with different mediums simultaneously, whilst those waiting for their number to be called look on.

Illich (1977) writes that many traditional cultures and religions provide people with a means of making pain tolerable, sickness or impairment comprehensible, often in a compassionate way that helps the individual to feel that they are not suffering in isolation. Furthermore, he argues, awareness of pain is a fundamental component of our shared humanity and compassion towards those experiencing it is vital in helping break that isolation:

Just as "my pain" belongs in a unique way only to me, so I am utterly alone with it. I cannot share it...indeed, I recognise the signs made by someone who is in pain, even when this experience is beyond my aid or comprehension. This awareness of extreme loneliness is a peculiarity of the compassion we feel for bodily pain...

Illich 1977:148

The compassion and comfort extended to those who request the counsel of the spiritual entities is indicative of this paradigm of care, which counters the ideology of the medical enterprise which promotes self-care and suffering (Illich 1977). Pain, in the biomedical context, calls for a method of technical control, rather than a compassionate approach that may encourage the person to take on responsibility for his experience or give meaning to it.

The Casa also differed from the biomedical model by not imposing time restrictions on the length of the consultation. While orthodox practices commonly impose time restraints on consultations, sometimes giving each patient as little as 7 minutes with the doctor, in the Casa and others centers I visited, clients were free to spend as much time as was necessary with the entities in order to arrive at an understanding of their problem. For most individuals, 10 to 15 minutes seemed sufficient, but some spent in excess of thirty minutes, which could dramatically slow proceedings if

there were large queues of clients waiting to be seen. On one particularly busy Thursday night at the Casa, a young Afro-Brazilian woman who was clearly distraught and with a very young child, was called forward for her turn. As the waiting area was open, and directly facing the large space where the entities consulted with clients, I couldn't help but observe her as she had her consultation. The *caboclo* entity that was incorporating the medium took great care with her. He cleansed her with the *passe* and then proceeded to blow smoke from his cigar very slowly over her entire body as she stood in front of him. These rituals are common in Umbanda, and their familiarity seemed to soothe the girl and she began to calm down. He listened to her carefully, all the while holding her hand, and then asked her to turn around, and spent the next ten minutes with his hands on her upper back, talking to her while he worked. When he finished, she turned to face him and again they spoke as he wrote out a prescription for her on a small piece of white paper. He then draped a white linen scarf around her shoulders, took her by her hand and led her over to the altar to pay her respects to St Francis (Ogum Irokô, the patron saint of the house), and she left smiling.

By the time the consultation had finished more than half an hour had elapsed, and the line of people waiting for their turn had grown so long they were queuing down the staircase onto the second floor. I stayed for another hour that night to observe the comings and goings, and when I left at 9:30pm there were at least 50 people still waiting to be seen by the ten mediums working. Later, Senhor Brito told me that the mediums had remained until midnight that night, taking no break. However, regardless of how busy the centre was, those who came in were always treated with care and respect. This connects to the immense importance associated with charitable acts in Umbanda, as discussed earlier.

Another critical way in which Umbanda promotes an egalitarian healing space is through the use of democratic language, which can be understood by all, regardless of educational or socio-economic background. The spiritual entities are representatives of the *povo brasileiro*, (Brazilian people) and communicate with the clients in the vernacular often using analogies or stories to convey their advice or recommendations. Language can frequently express power differentials, and language in the medical context serves to confirm the authority and knowledge of the physician, and often generates barriers in communication. Morrall (2009) asserts that although patients are encouraged to speak and are listened to, their participation functions more as a form of

interrogation through which the medical perspective can be instituted. The patient's view enters the epistemological territory of the doctor, and becomes absorbed within the medical discourse. Such discourse is frequently at odds with the way patients communicate and experience their symptoms, with illness narratives that do not conform to what doctors expect to hear. Strathern and Stewart (1999:175) refer to the case *par excellence* of angina, which has myriad symptoms, some of which may appear relatively harmless but in actual fact mask an insidious disease. They refer to one woman who referred to it as her "elephant", and another man who named the pain associated with it as "his little friend". These descriptions demonstrate that a patient's understanding and the language with which they experience their body may differ from the medical discourse used by doctors (Illich 1977). However, in Umbandist consultations, the entities communicate with the clients using everyday dialogue. The entities represent figures that are not intimidating or threatening to speak with.

Finally, many of the entities that incorporate the mediums within Umbanda endeavor to symbolically demonstrate to all clients that they will be treated equally during their consultation. For those mediums that receive the spirits of *caboclos* or *preto velhos*, it is common practice that they close their eyes during incorporation. The act of conducting the consultation with closed eyes symbolises that all who come seeking help will be treated equally, and not judged according to their status in society, nor on the basis of their skin colour. Miriam called attention to this:

With closed eyes, the medium doesn't know who is in front of them, and this means their clairvoyance works better. True Umbanda is charity, which means, you do good without knowing to whom you do good.

Miriam

Moreover, mediums in the Casa are constantly encouraged to acknowledge that they are mere vessels for the spiritual entities, and it is the entities that carry out healing. This is to avoid vanity and competition between the mediums, and power inequalities between mediums and clients.

The commitment to equality is highly significant, as Umbanda centers pride themselves on being an open space for Brazilians from all walks of life to converge upon. Many of those who come to

Umbanda live on the outskirts of civil society, and represent a large percentage of the Brazilian population who do not feel “*gente*” (the notion of being a full citizen with rights). These people sometimes receive treatment in traditional biomedical institutions with a lack of respect, dignity and attention that is disempowering. The poor in Brazil often are viewed as a social problem, rather than a vulnerable sector of society. Within the healing paradigm of Umbanda, Brazilians from the lower socio- economic classes are treated with respect, as *gente*.

Types of spiritual healing in the Casa da Caridade

The Casa da Caridade offered many variants of spiritual healing all administered free of charge, including reiki, crystal therapy, relaxation, herbal baths, energisation, spiritual surgery, disobssession and consultations with the spiritual entities to help clients to examine their own spirituality, behavior, attitudes and beliefs, and embrace a position of agency and responsibility towards their wellbeing. Less severe health issues are treated with anything from energisation rituals and consultations with spiritual entities to *descarrêgo*, which is literally a spiritual discharging of negative energy around one’s aura that may be making them feel depressed or unwell. In addition, the Casa has treatment programs for those with addictions, which is considered a form of illness as well, as outlined by Ana:

There are spiritual treatments for vices and bad habits. All people with serious bad habits are usually tied to bad spirits who are influencing them energetically. First there is a spiritual treatment, then a psychological support group for people with alcoholism, drug habits, and so on.

Interestingly, although the centre differs from biomedicine in many ways, in others it actually emulates its structures to engender a sense of familiarity, efficiency and competency in its healing practice.

Umbanda is like a hospital of the poor. There are so many different treatments here, and the entity that directs proceedings, Seu Cobra Coral, he says that we are a hospital. We (mediums) are nurses here! But we know at the same time that we are being treated, as are the patients, while we are working.

The healing practice within the Casa bears a resemblance to the organized model of the hospital. Mediums attend clients wearing white robes, or traditional white Umbanda garments²³ (layered flouncy white skirts and loose-fitting singlets or blouses for the women, and white trousers and tee-shirts for the men). White is worn as it radiates positive and purifying energy. This uniform distinguishes the clients from the mediums and creates a sense of formality around the healing practice. From the moment a client enters the Casa, they are subject to a variety of administrative measures. They must approach the receptionist behind the main desk, receive a form to fill out and an assigned number and wait for their number to be called. When their number is called, they must approach another desk, where their name and details are recorded in a registration book. They will then be given a card with the entity with whom they wish to consult, and their number in the queue. There may be up to 15 entities working on any given night, and regulars frequently have a predilection to consult with an entity with whom they have created a strong relationship, or with those whom they perceive to be particularly effective in dealing with specific problems. Clients are then directed to wait in the waiting room, where they talk quietly with each other, pay their respects to the shrine of Saint Francis in the courtyard leaving requests under his statue, or even read magazines as if they were in a waiting room at a clinic.²⁴ When the mediums are ready to receive clients after they have carried out the necessary private rituals around greeting and receiving their entities, the clients are then directed upstairs to wait in pews for their number to be called.

Following the consultation, clients are given a prescription from the entity's *cambonô* (the assistant that provides help or support for the entity), and the client takes the prescription to the helper behind the main desk. The helper would interpret the prescription, and then give the client the suitable slip of paper (from a range of more than 15 slips) that had appointment days and times for different types of healing or spiritual work to be carried out with mediums if the client had an ongoing or chronic problem, and instructions for cleansing spiritual baths (infusions of specific plant or fruit material to be boiled and steeped, then applied to the body) to be performed at home.

²³ White garments in Umbanda also hold symbolism as the clothing worn by African slaves on the plantations was white (Bramly 1994).

²⁴ This process appeared to me to be at times unnecessarily complex. However, when I returned to the center in 2012 and noted the increased number of people frequenting the centre, the necessity of it became more apparent; having a system in place to deal with hundreds of people coming in to a relatively limited space and waiting sometimes hours for their turn was absolutely fundamental.

However, for those with serious health issues, spiritual surgeries are recommended. The Casa kept an appointment book noting all the surgeries carried out since the centre's inception, and common causes of surgery included breast, cervical and prostate cancer, disorders of the liver, kidneys, heart or lungs, depression, hemorrhoids, varicose veins and *nervos*²⁵. Spiritual surgeries are conducted with the guidance of a different set of spiritual entities: doctor entities with a specialisation in the art of healing. The Casa had 5 mediums that regularly performed surgeries (treating as many as 45 patients a day). Each incorporated a different spiritual entity and each had their own specific rituals around surgery, sometimes using certain sacred fruits, woven cords, Brazilwood rosaries or crystals as tools in the surgery.

The spirits of doctors carry out the spiritual surgeries²⁶. We have here Friar Luiz, Friar Ben, Brother Ramiro, Brother Johnathon and Sister Benedita. Each one has their specialisation. Some work with crystals in operations, they might use the little crystals also as if they were surgical tools, which is interesting.

Dona Sandra

These spiritual surgeries would take place in a smaller shared room downstairs. The surgeries work on an energetic level, without any manipulation or penetration of the physical body. Sidney Greenfield (2008) notes that in many cases of spiritual healing in Brazil, mediums in trance use surgical instruments and tools to make incisions and remove tumours or other organic material causing disease. In these cases, this physical surgery is only practiced because many patients feel more convinced of the efficacy of treatment when they can see physical proof. However, mediums at the Casa explained that physical surgery is completely unnecessary, as the spiritual entity is able to work on the human body on a subtle energetic level that renders physical surgery superfluous. Individual surgeries would generally take around 10 minutes, and would be repeated perhaps monthly over a six-month period depending on the patient's illness. Many of the mediums had anecdotes to share about individuals who had come in to receive treatment for serious illnesses who had been healed by spiritual surgery:

²⁵ *Nervos* can be translated as "nerves". It is a type of folk illness common in Brazil and other parts of Latin America, and is often dismissed by the medical establishment as psychosomatic. For an in-depth discussion refer to Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping* (1993).

²⁶ Doctors who were once incarnated in earthly bodies.

I know a woman who had an operation here. Then she went back to the doctor who said, "Did you have your surgery done in another place?" And she replied, "No, no! I went to an Umbanda centre." He said, "Well, please pass me the name of it because I'd like to take my sick wife there."

Guilherme

Most people who came seeking surgery would usually have several pre-operative and post-operative spiritual treatments, and would be informed of unnegotiable prohibitions that must be enforced for a specified time period prior to surgery taking place. For example, patients are prohibited from consuming meat, alcohol or engaging in sexual activity. This prohibition is believed to prevent the energy of the individual mingling with strong energy from other living beings, or destabilising forces like alcohol. The individual's energetic body is vulnerable when undergoing spiritual surgery and must be treated accordingly.

Those who are receiving spiritual surgeries also receive homemade herbal remedies to support their healing during periods between treatments. One of the mediums at the house expounded that all herbal remedies were made with care and love, and given to those who required them free of charge. Medicine must be given to patients *gratis*: to seek financial recompense for it is detrimental to its efficacy. The energy that is put into making the medicine is focused on the healing and wellbeing of the patient, rather than creating a product from which one can profit. The little bottles were presented with labels specifying what the remedy was to be used for, and how it was to be taken. Although this constitutes a stark contrast to pharmaceutical products advocated post-surgery by biomedical practice, the ritual and system of receiving medicine and instructions for post-surgical care remains comfortably the same for those who come to Umbanda seeking healing who are more familiar with biomedical practice.

The use of herbs was prevalent in various healing treatments in Umbanda, and is strongly tied to a deep appreciation of the untapped reserves of the healing powers present in nature, and the revival of the connection between the human being and the natural world. As has been discussed in the introduction, the extensive use of pharmaceutical products for relatively minor complaints is

commonplace in Brazil, and most drugs are easily accessed without prescriptions. In Bramly's ethnography, Maria-José postulates that herbs have strength unparalleled by any other remedy. She vehemently dismisses the efficacy of drugs in healing illness, asking,

What strength can there be in a pill? What energy, what power? A pill has no life. It contains drugs, nothing more. That works upon one part of the organism but what about the rest? The human being is a whole. While you can find pills to help you sleep, eat, feel better, calm down or forget yourself, they do not bring equilibrium. People who think they will find answers in pills have a very poor opinion of themselves. The problem lies elsewhere. People need life, the dimensions of life make us suffer and our problems stem from that. Umbanda offers a way to expand one's life possibilities, the possibility of living out one's deepest nature...

Maria Jose 1994:220

For critics of the biomedical system such as Illich (1977), drug taking is endemic in post-industrialised society, where individuals are encouraged to get or purchase what they need, dependant on the market. Illich (1977) comments on the increasing prevalence, power and danger of drug culture, remarking that doctors now work with two groups of addicts: those for whom they prescribe drugs, and those who require drugs to counteract the effects of the ones they have taken. Dependence on drugs disempowers the individual to be able to cope with his or her own body. In embracing holistic and herbal medicine, however, one must re-instate their connection with the natural world and become more aware during the healing process. Miriam explained that herbs are incredibly powerful and diverse in their healing potential. She makes annual trips back to Brazil for energisation rituals with Amazonian herbs, even wrapping certain herbs in tinfoil to smuggle back to Belgium to cultivate in her garden. For Emilio Dantas da Silva, a social activist and filmmaker from one of Rio's more marginalised neighbourhoods, herbal treatments were far-ranging in their potency and linked to generations of acquired knowledge around their use:

For everything, the Mãe-de-Santo had a solution. She had, in her house, diverse mixtures of herbs. She knew all the different kinds of herbs... She used to make remedies...if you cut

your leg; she had a remedy for a cut leg. Fever, she had a remedy. Sore throat, she had a remedy. And everything worked, everything.

Finally, across all of the healing treatments offered by the Casa, a significant practice that was present in all was the prominence of touch and nearness²⁷. Although healing in Umbanda has a resolute spiritual focus, the primacy of sensory experience and embodiment in the healing process is crucial. Human experience is inevitably embodied. It is how we live in the world, and how we exist for others. Touch diminishes the distance between human beings, so we can better understand the reality of another's world (Peloquín, 1989). As touch is so direct and tangible, it constitutes one of the most effective ways that human beings can directly impact the sensory world of each other, for as Blake (2011) points out, that which is touched, touches back. For phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2003), our senses help us not only to perceive others and the world we live in, but also to share and to take part in constructing it. Perception guides our understanding of and interaction with the world.

Touch and sensory experience is a vital consideration in the realm of health and healing, as sufferers experience illness and disease as physiological sensations. Rosemary Blake (2011) highlights in her work around the ethnographies of touch that research tends to privilege the visual, that which can be observed and recorded, rather than what is felt, embodied or experienced. For Classen (2005), touch in the biomedical realm is often applied to create and maintain power dynamics between the doctor and patient. However, touch can be powerful in healing practice when it is used to communicate love and care, and give comfort (Classen 2005). In Umbanda, touch is an absolutely integral. It is used to welcome and greet those who come to the centre (by means of a tight embrace or kiss), to make people feel relaxed and at ease (with a reassuring hand on the forearm, or on the shoulder), to convey importance of speech (Leader Jorge Brito and some of the other mediums would clasp the hands tightly of those to whom they were speaking), to demonstrate love and affection (many of the mediums and clients were extremely affectionate with each other, regarding one another as family), and to soothe and reassure clients in the healing process during consultations, energisations, and spiritual surgeries. In ceremonies of spiritual energisation and cleansing, patients were gently brushed all over their bodies with sacred plants, such as the *jaca*.

²⁷ Here, I use the term nearness to mean physical proximity of bodies, but without emotional intimacy. Some treatments in Umbanda require physical proximity, but don't actually engage in touch.

Often, however, physical touch would only occur as a prelude to the actual healing. The healing itself would have no physical contact between medium and client at all if it was based on reiki, passe or *descarrêgo* in which there was no contact with the person's body. Ana clarified the ritual of *descarrêgo* in this way: "I was once told that the "descarrêgo" is really an energetic alignment, as if you were aligning the person's body. It's more this, than taking away the bad, as people seem to understand descarrêgo." A fundamental element of the *descarrêgo*, and of nearly all the healing rituals used at the centre is the *passe*. The *passe* comes from Spiritism, and is similar to the Christian notion of the laying of hands, or reiki. The medium administering the pass acts as a channel through which spiritual energy (from the spiritual entities present) and vital energy (from the medium him or herself) can flow into the person receiving the *passe*. The process usually lasts several minutes, and follows a certain method with the person who is receiving it usually sitting or standing with eyes closed. The medium stands close to the receiver, and moves their hands around the person's body in a specific way in order to best dispel and cleanse negative energy, and transmit positive energy.

Ana explained that during the *passe*, the entity guiding the medium often directs the healing energy to the place on the body most in need of healing without the individual needing to say anything or give direction. She mentioned a recent case where a woman had come in and as Ana was giving the *passe*, she sensed a very strong vibration over her left eye. Later, the woman told her that she had been experiencing a lot of pain in that eye. Ana said, "I didn't know this, but my (spiritual) entity knew it! And that's why there was so much vibration there..." Andre told me that experiencing the *passe* is something very powerful for him, and one of the rituals that led him to become a medium and more deeply involved in Umbanda:

When I took the passe, although I could see that there was no-one was touching my body, I sensed that my body was stirring on the inside...I kept thinking about this over and over for a number of days...

Although the *passe* does not engage touch on a physical level, it does engender closeness and a connection between healer and receiver. It is a very intimate act and positions the person giving the pass not in a superior role to the receiver, but merely as a means through which energy can pass. Miriam disclosed that when the *passe* is administered by a very accomplished medium, the receiver could easily feel it as a strong surge of energy, or a very pleasant sensation that could bring

one to their feet by the sheer appeal of the force. It seemed to be a symbiotic treatment, as the mediums with whom I spoke explained that the pass transformed both the medium channelling the energy and the person receiving it in positive ways. Ana articulated: “no matter how tired you are when you go into the Casa, you always come out after your spiritual work feeling really good and energized”. This further emphasized the egalitarian nature of the relationship between medium and client; the process of healing itself was one where there was no true authority, and was mutually beneficial in that both parties gained from the shared experience of healing.

The Emotional/Experiential Dimension

Making sense of spiritual incorporation in Umbanda

The phenomenon of possession was something that was fundamental to Umbanda practice, and incredible and sometimes frightening to witness. One event that stands out in memory was the final day of research in July 2012. I was attending a special celebration in honour of an *orixá*, Nanã Buruquê. The Umbanda centre was located on a windy hilltop in the midst of a *favela*, and the wind blew softly through the cracks and openings between wall and rooftop, rustling through the streamers representing all the colours of the *orixás*. In the moments before the mediums began to incorporate their entities, there was a sudden stirring in the room, and the purple balloons hanging from the walls began to spontaneously pop. In a matter of minutes, what had been dozens of balloons was reduced to about ten. I commented on this to the woman next to me, who informed me without batting an eye that such phenomena often happen as a signal from the spiritual entities that they are in the process of descending.

The barrier that separates the spiritual and earthly worlds is paper thin in Brazil. Possession is detectable across the Brazilian religious landscape: it is present in Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism, the Catholic charismatic revival, Candomblé, Umbanda and Spiritism (Engler 2009). These various religious traditions all have distinctive rituals and norms around spiritual incorporation: pertaining to who may or may not incorporate a spirit, the level of preparation needed (or not) to practice spiritual incorporation, the way in which one enters and exits a spiritual incorporation, and the types of spirits who are normally incorporated. For many Brazilians, the reality of spiritual incorporation and its concomitant social outcomes are embedded in the collective Brazilian *habitus*, the “active residue” of cultural and spiritual practice and beliefs

spanning generations (Crossley 2001). Possession exists because agents of spiritual incorporation (mediums) grow up within this social field or are attracted to take part in it, so much so that they began to experience it as a profound and significant element of their identity and thus became disposed to reproduce it by way of their continued participation (Crossley 2001).

Ritual possession has long elicited unease in the academic community. Far from being a rare and exotic phenomenon, Erika Bourguignon claims that of a sample of 488 societies worldwide, 437 (90%) claimed one or more institutionalized forms of altered states of consciousness (1973:9). Unfortunately, despite its prevalence, there is at present a limited understanding of the phenomenon of possession and its social function within academia. Morton Klass (2003) argues that the lexicon frequently used to describe spirit possession has psychopathological overtones, (altered states of consciousness, dissociation, dissociative state, hysteria) and thus runs the danger of sounding like euphemism for the older (and supposedly discarded) explanation that those who receive spirit possessions “are crazy” or primitive.

Among the Umbanda communities I researched, the term “*incorporar uma entidade*” (incorporate an entity) was widely used to identify the act of receiving a spiritual entity. The use of the word “*incorporação*” clearly denotes corporeality, and the explicit notion of incorporating something else in one’s own body. The physicality and embodiment present in possession and its appeal strongly resonates with a re-enchantment of the body. Meredith McGuire argues that scholarly discourse within the social sciences of religion has long privileged belief-oriented and cognitive aspects of religion over embodied practice. (McGuire 2007:198).

The profanity and even pollution associated with the material body in Western religious teachings following the Long Reformation (and indeed some Eastern religious teachings) has encouraged the construction of a binary opposition between the spiritual self and the material body. In traditionally Catholic Brazil, Umbanda has faced denigration for its provocative dancing, and “magical” practices and rituals that involve the body (such as giving baths or *banhos*), which are seen by some as dangerous and possibly sinful. She also notes that as dominant and hegemonic religious groups engendered this belief, religions that maintained embodied practices began to be denigrated and socially constructed as marginal, impure, superstitious, overly sensuous or even dangerous (McGuire 2007: 189). Institutional religious hegemony in Brazil has constructed

Catholicism as the most spiritually developed, purely cognitive and unemotional, and relegated Umbanda as a folk practice. For McGuire, this definitional bias has also become replicated in scholarly discourse, privileging belief and cognitive aspects of religion. However, she ultimately contends that exploring the way in which spiritual and religious expression engages the material body and address material concerns extends a more nuanced understanding of religion as it is lived.

Spiritual incorporation is an essential embodied practice in Umbanda, with mediums acting as the channel between the divine and the earthly, allowing clients access to guidance, healing and help from spiritual sources. Mediums who incorporated entities were often referred to as “*cavalos*” (horses) for the entities. The process by which an entity began to incorporate a medium was known as “*baixar*” (to lower into the medium’s body). In order to honour the testimonies of participants, those are the terms that will be used in this analysis. For mediums, ritual incorporation was often a very enjoyable spiritual experience that allowed them to experience dimensions of self otherwise unavailable to them in everyday life.

As ritual spiritual incorporation constitutes such an elementary part of Umbanda practice for mediums, considering its appeal and what it may reveal about those who practice it and its relevance within the wider social sphere is important. Many theories around spiritual incorporation situate it as engendered and driven by one’s social circumstances. Cohen (2007) argues that potentially there are many ways of understanding the phenomenon of spiritual incorporation that preclude any single authoritative interpretation. Nonetheless, the theories that will be explored below offer a range of perspectives that help to socially locate the significance of spiritual incorporation.

For Roger Bastide, spiritual incorporation is used to heal. Bastide argued that human dissociative phenomena in Afro-Brazilian religion is socialised, domesticated and highly ordered. Bastide’s fieldwork on Candomblé found that mental illness increased when cults disintegrated or were persecuted by the police, suggesting that spiritual incorporation could possibly have a therapeutic function (Despland 2008: 70).

Erika Bourguignon (2004) contends that spiritual incorporation, having a higher incidence among women in most cultures, is a psychodynamic means of wish fulfillment for women in positions of

powerlessness. Integration into the religious sphere of Umbanda provides women with some degree of independence from their husbands, liberates them to be in the company of other men at night when they may otherwise be unable to, empowers them to make important life decisions for their clients and bestows upon them the respect that is accorded to a successful medium. However, as Cohen (2007:93) fairly points out, “one could probably build a good case for characterising almost anybody as relatively disadvantaged, distressed, or oppressed in some way, particularly women in traditional marriage partnerships.”

Offering an emic perspective, Maria José (cited in Bramly 1994:126) comments on the prevalence of female mediums in Umbanda as well, but offers a different angle: she remarks that women are more open to trance because they have a deeper harmony between their mind, body and spirit; stronger intuition and a more direct tie to their true nature, offering themselves to the gods more completely and more generously. Men are less open and less receptive, and therefore encounter more trouble in undergoing spiritual incorporation. However, in many Umbanda centres nowadays, there are frequently equal numbers of male and female mediums, and male and female clients. Men can incorporate feminine entities without fear of reprisal and women likewise can incorporate male entities. The director of the Casa da Caridade was a strong male *caboclo* entity called Seu Cobra Coral, who incorporated Dona Sandra who was in her seventies.

More recently, Steven Engler (2009) has put forth the theory that elements of spiritual incorporation in Umbanda echo the pervasive patron-client relationships still present in Brazilian society. He contends that the prominence of spirit possession in Brazil is linked to bureaucratic, inefficient and irrational public systems that in turn limit one’s personal agency. Spirit possession rituals therefore create a virtual space where participants can dynamically rehearse and re-imagine alternative senses of agency and intentionality. In this sense, rituals around spiritual incorporation for both mediums and clients can help prepare individuals to be more active agents, or to compensate for their lack of personal agency by reflecting, critiquing, distorting or even romanticising social reality.

Harding (2003) emphasises that spiritual incorporation is strongly linked to corporeality and Afro-Brazilian repression. For Brazilians of African origin, the body historically was a contested site, manacled and controlled by slave owners. In trance and dance, however, the body is recaptured, and reclaimed by the *orixás*. She concludes that, “the body as territory is at the heart of re-

territorialisation” (Harding 2003:153). In their exploration of the primacy of spiritual incorporation in Umbanda, Fernando Brumana and Elda Martinez (1989) propose that it is the emphasis on the body that accounts for its popularity among lower socio-economic sectors. They argue that the body represents the source of material affliction (illness, hunger, desire), and therefore spiritual incorporation symbolises a corporeal way of confronting and seeking to resolve these problems.

However, it is important to acknowledge that forms of material affliction affect members of society across diverse social stratifications. As Meredith McGuire (2007:190) points out, bodily illness and pain, concerns pertaining to fertility and protection from adversity are matters that dominate everyday prayers, and affect everyone, regardless of their social position. McGuire adds that many highly educated, economically comfortable Christians, Muslims, Jews and non-religious people turn to “popular religion” for concerns pertaining to the material body. What is crucial to develop here is a more nuanced appreciation that possession is not necessarily confined to those experiencing powerlessness. Spiritual incorporation is not inevitably a psychological means through which subaltern groups can attain agency and gain a sense of control over their lives. While linking spiritual incorporation to agency and empowerment offers perhaps one important element in understanding its appeal for some, there are other contributing factors at work that merit exploration.

Emma Cohen (2007) argues that there is growing evidence that many contemporary centres in Brazil are extremely heterogeneous. She writes that in the centre where she carried out research, there was a lack of evidence to link ethnic categories to religious participation (Cohen 2007: 36). Diana Brown (1994) first identified the appeal of Umbanda to the middle and upper socio-economic classes in 1979, and since then the popularity of Umbanda among more upwardly mobile Brazilians has increased. Most of the mediums interviewed for this study were middle to upper-middle class.

Therefore, to understand the ongoing social significance of possession, other motives and reasons must be sought. My analysis of participant accounts from fieldwork gives a strong indication that spiritual incorporation offers the agent a way of exploring divinity and spirituality through embodiment. In many testimonies, the appeal of spiritual incorporation appears to be twofold: firstly, mediums emphasise feelings of elation and joy experienced during spiritual incorporation,

where spiritual learning is embodied and experiential. However spiritual incorporation also provides a way of experiencing diverse aspects of social identity, gender, sexuality and personality, pushing the boundaries and confines of their everyday personhood without fear of reprisal or transgression of social norms, *because* the individual's agency is recognized as being displaced. Present within both of these notions is a sense of development and evolution for the medium.

Spiritual incorporation as embodied experience

In her article "Religion and the Body: Rematerialising the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion", Meredith McGuire (1990:283) theorises,

Bodies are important; they matter to the persons who inhabit them, and religions speak to many of these body-oriented human concerns. Part of the reason our bodies matter to us is that we strongly identify our very selves with our bodies... Our agency as active personae in society is accomplished through our bodies...Real bodies suffer illness, pain, chronic disabilities, and death...Real bodies also experience pleasure - aesthetic pleasures, sexual pleasures, and sensuous pleasures.

The living body is the phenomenological basis for apprehending self and wider society (McGuire 1990). In understanding spiritual incorporation, the role of the body is seminal. As discussed above, many of the theories pertaining to spiritual incorporation underline its potential to empower the actor, providing a new way to re-imagine agency. Such theories fundamentally overlook that spiritual incorporation is an embodied phenomenon. This is because up until recently, research methodologies in the social sciences of religion have tended to neglect the fact that believers experience a material world in and through their bodies, not simply through their mind or spirit.

Spiritual incorporation is not amenable to exegetic analysis, because it is not centered on doctrine or beliefs; it is firmly rooted in the physical realm. Participants who regularly experience spiritual incorporation explained it in sensory terms such as: *electrifying, re-energising, invigorating* and *satisfying*. Incorporation is extremely enjoyable and gives the agent a distinct way to experience spiritual learning, and in addition, a unique way to experience their body. Also, it is vital to remember that because experience is subjective, different individuals experience the same thing in

different ways. Contrary to many other religions in Brazil such as Catholicism and Spiritism, Umbanda promotes the body as the site from which spiritual learning and transformation can take place and the point from which the profane can be transcended and the sacred encountered. The body is used to access the spiritual, and through the practice of mediumship the body becomes a sacred site.

Below are some of the thoughts from participants regarding embodiment in spiritual incorporation.

With everyone singing a strong chant, a summoning hymn...you don't even need to stay in a state of concentration...And I think the best incorporation is not the one where you sit focusing on incorporation, its where you focus on the circle, and you pick up the movement, from the songs of the Gods, from the wind passing, they go dancing with you, and this provides good energy...

Tião

Try to imagine some moment in your life of extreme happiness, of rare satisfaction. Your first kiss or something...if you notice carefully, in that moment, you feel a totally different perception of the world. In that instant, your perception of time and space is also different. It's you, but it's like its not you. Incorporation gives you this complete happiness. Incorporation makes you feel a different way, like being in an "alpha" state... The first time I incorporated, it was like...you're sleeping, and you experience an involuntary movement of your arm or leg. So you don't make this movement, but your body does. It's like dancing, you loosen your body, you don't hold back your arms or legs, you let them go with the movement. In incorporation it's the same, you have to let the entity use your body.

André

My first experience with Umbanda, I was on a beach, witnessing homage to Iemanjá. And there on the beach, I had a mediumistic manifestation of a preto velho. I fell...totally unconscious. I put my two hands on the sand to push myself up, but I couldn't lift myself up, no way. I couldn't get back on my feet, no way.

Antonio

When you receive an entity you feel electrified. Following that you feel full of energy. You feel a peace in your spirit, happiness. Total plenitude. As if you have done four hours of cardio fitness.

Miriam

When I asked Ana if mediumship was tiring, with the responsibility of attending clients for successive hours without respite, she told me:

No, no, on the contrary. You enter without energy at times, very tired from work, and the entity reinvigorates you with energy. The energy that comes is not yours, so you receive it too. Aside from what you give (to the client) you get what's left over, and moreover, when you are giving the passe, you are receiving and you receive the energy of the person...I never leave here feeling worse (than when I arrived).

Ana

Indeed, during homage to the *orixá* Nanã Buruquê held by the Casa da Caridade, mediums danced and sang without ceasing for five hours, some of whom were in their seventies and eighties. Whilst this could be partially attributed to collective effervescence, the significance of the bodily pleasure experienced by the mediums cannot be understated. The effect of the entity's activity on the medium's body also seemed negligible. For Carlinhos, 69, a medium for more than 40 years at the Casa, his experiences with the exigencies of spiritual incorporation have borne no ill effects on his body.

He (the caboclo entity) smokes a lot. He smokes more than 100 cigars a month. I had never done a lung exam, but just recently I did one, because I had a cold, and the x-ray came back completely clean.

Ana explained to me that entities protect the bodies of the mediums, leaving them healthy and robust. This reinforces the reciprocal role of the healing process.

Displaced agency and the experience of the other

In his article on ritual theory and attitudes to agency in spiritual possession, Steven Engler (2009) discusses at length the attitude of objectivity towards mediums that are incorporating spirits. Clients replace their reactive attitudes with objective ones as they recognise that the mediums are acting with non-intentionality and their actions are not their own. When a medium has incorporated an entity, there is a clear assumption and implicit understanding among those present that their state of incorporation temporarily suspends their personal agency. The medium is no longer recognised as the medium, and cannot be called as such. For those familiar with this practice, this is entirely acceptable and comfortable, and they have no trouble identifying the entity temporarily residing within the body of the medium, and the range of behavior that may be representative of that particular entity and possibly uncharacteristic of the medium whose body is being incorporated by the entity. Although the border between the entity and the medium seemed to be fluid, because of the shared body, it was soon made explicit that there were very strong boundaries that rendered the medium and their entities as distinct, autonomous persons. This was evidently an issue of consideration to clients, as those mediums who had a distinctive personality when incorporating their spiritual entity seemed to attract more clients than those whose personalities seemed to blend and overlap.

It is critical to point out that spiritual incorporation does not necessarily require the medium to be in a completely unconscious state. Nearly all of the participants with whom I spoke affirmed that they remained aware during most of the incorporation. Being conscious or semi-conscious during trance allows mediums to experience the benefits that accompany spiritual incorporation whilst simultaneously relinquishing responsibility for what takes place while in this state. This was summarised by Ana and Guilherme:

Ana: Something about incorporation. Nowadays, incorporation is a little more mentally based. It's no longer so necessary that the medium lose consciousness...so you are present, then you can learn too.

Guilherme: You can be an observer.

Ana: Like...more a witness who participates. My mediumship isn't like this (demonstrates someone out of control). There are people who do go around, walking in

circles like... (laughs). Another thing that's good to explain. No incorporation of an entity of the light²⁸ happens without the permission of the person (the receiver of the entity). They cannot go against our wishes. There are kinds of energy that sometimes come in a way that cause a very intense, pure vibration, and sometimes, this energetic shock is what causes the lack of control. Our Mãe-de-Santo receives her entities like this.

This preference to maintain some level of consciousness was also echoed by André who told me: “It’s very much my personality to rationalise everything a lot, so I never lose total consciousness, I like to know what’s happening.”

For all sessions provided at the Casa, spiritual incorporation was ritualistically extremely controlled and monitored. Only those in the centre with the proper authority to incorporate entities were allowed to do so. Numerous times I witnessed clients or onlookers spontaneously begin incorporating entities or entering trance, and they were immediately identified and firmly stopped, often by being led to the altar which I was told has a very strong grounding force. Certain indications that showed that a medium was undergoing the process of incorporation included eyes closing or rolling, sudden movement, spinning or pivoting on one foot, sudden falling or bending in half, jerking of the head and chest, finger clicking and changes of tone or pace of voice. Neophytes would be helped into trance by more established mediums, often by rocking back and forth on their feet slowly, or spinning. Poly, a medium still in the process of learning to manage her mediumship, explained that in places of strong emotional or spiritual energy there is often an overwhelming urge to incorporate from which they must abstain. These rituals and norms around entering the state of spiritual incorporation clearly demarcated the shift from conscious medium to embodied entity.

Once the entity is embodied, he or she usually exhibits particular behaviour or idiosyncrasies that show his/her identity. When Senhor Brito incorporated his *preto velho* Pai Chico for example, he was so badly hunched he would sit on a small stool, always with a red gingham shawl covering his knees. He had a constant shake and quavering tremor in his softly-spoken voice, indicative of hardships faced during his life as a slave, and was never without his pipe. This behavior helped identify him as Pai Chico, differentiating him from Senhor Brito’s *caboclo* entity that was strong,

²⁸ An entity of the light connotes an entity which comes to teach, that is spiritually enlightened (in contrast to an entity such as Exú).

upright and stern, and preferred to smoke an earthy smelling cigar. Nonetheless, both entities allowed Senhor Brito to temporarily embody and apprehend the way in which these ethnicities and cultures viewed the world and engaged with it.

Erika Bourguignon (1974) speculates that spirits may represent alternate roles that a medium may call upon in his interpersonal relations. Although spiritual incorporation is identified in Umbanda as serving the purpose of helping those in need, it also provides a safe space in which adherents can regularly explore spiritual embodiment, gender play and distinct aspects of their personhood, with onlookers recognising that the mediums' agency is displaced. However, spiritual incorporation also has its own social norms and regulations. While mediums are not held responsible for their behaviour while incorporated, if they behave extremely inappropriately (for example, asking for money for services, discussing people's personal matters publicly) then they may be identified as being in a state of false trance and the validity of their ability to incorporate will be doubted.

Adherence to spiritual incorporation as a method of exploring and re-integrating aspects of one's personality was deeply explored in the Temple of Guaracy. Tina de Souza, *Mãe-de-Santo* of the temple and lecturer in psychology at the University of Sao Paulo, underlined the importance of uniting the psychological and the spiritual. She asserts that the system of psychology united with the system of Umbanda allows for a deeper level of self-understanding of what it is to be human, as well as facilitating better understanding of spiritual and emotional disequilibrium. Unlike other centres of Umbanda that usually focus on the incorporation of 3 entities (*criança*, *preto velho* and *caboclo*), the Temple of Guaracy encourages its mediums to incorporate 7 distinct entities, each believed to possess and help cultivate specific qualities within the medium leading to a better integrated individual. The *marinheiro* spirit (sailor), for example, was responsible for helping the medium with "inner search", understanding the importance of solitude, and promoting inner solidarity.

For André, who had recently just begun the process of "meeting and becoming familiar with all his entities", the notion of spiritual incorporation was initially overwhelming and frightening.

It used to scare me a bit, this notion of...incorporating an entity...of speaking with something that speaks, that thinks, but that uses another body. I felt really strange about it...It's a process. It's more or less like the first time you go swimming. You don't just dive

in and go swimming...it won't happen if you don't want it. It happened because I wanted it. It's funny, in the beginning, because you imagine what it will be like. And it can be totally different to how you imagine it to be....

Some of the hardest but most rewarding entities to incorporate for him were his *exú/pomba gira* entities (spiritual entities associated with darker energy). With respect to the *exú* entity, André explained:

The first entity that I incorporated really, that I incorporated in my whole body, that I moved with, that was present in my body, in my movement and in my steps, was exú. It was beautiful, it was great. It was a wonderful feeling, like I could do anything, I was a super-hero! Nothing was impossible for me anymore...There was one time that I began to incorporate a pomba-gira, which is a feminine (exú) entity. I began doing her movements-and the movements were terrible! They were the movements of a belly dancer herself! There was a girl who was an assistant at that public meeting and she said to me, "Those movements looked almost like sex!" Pomba Gira works really closely with sexual energy. But it was a really hot feeling.

This testimony reveals the way in which mediumship promotes the exploration and embodiment of gender and sexuality that the medium is at liberty to explore whilst under the influence of incorporation. Even in a society with rigidly constructed gender roles, with the enduring prevalence of traditional macho values, Umbanda provides a space to cross gender boundaries and experiment with expressing characteristics normally aligned with the opposite gender. Gender affects the way in which humans interact with their social and physical environments, and in turn, affects how the physical and social environment will respond to them. As McGuire (1991) points out, if someone is tall, or female, or has darker skin, or is blue eyed, all of these embodied features have distinct effects on the way a person experiences and interacts with the world around them. Individuals are taught and socialised to internalise gender so it is experienced as part of their own body, their own self.

For André, who depicted himself as a very studious, hardworking, serious and shy person, exploring *exú* (the darkest entity incorporated in Umbanda) was very exciting, sensuous and emotional. His *pomba-gira* and *cigana*, (gypsy spirit) entities that were female gave him an

opportunity to experience femininity in two distinct ways. These spirits offered a way to step outside the boundaries of the lifelong personhood he had cultivated in Sao Paulo as an upper-middle class, university-educated professional of European heritage (that in some ways was rather restrictive as he had to conform to work and social expectations others had of him) and discover other ways of being, experiencing and interacting with the world through the agency of his spiritual guides. In this sense spiritual incorporation can be read from a dramaturgical perspective: incorporation of these entities offers the actor a way of relinquishing their “frontstage” persona and performance of self in order to engage with the social identity of the other.

Conclusion

For adherents of Umbanda, the religion represents a diverse range of possibilities. It embodies a spectrum of beliefs and practices, as seen among the different centres discussed in this chapter, and also enables adherents to participate in religious life in distinctive ways, based on their identification as a client or a medium. Clients can seek out rituals, guidance and advice to help in the managing of everyday issues and problems with no “cost” or regular membership required. The ethos of the religion teaches that the practice of charity and helping others in need is essential, and clients who come seeking Umbandist services benefit from this philosophy. In the *Casa da Caridade* in particular, those desirous of alternative methods of treating disease and illness are drawn to seek the help of the spiritual entities and encouraged to engage in embodied practices and more conscious behaviours. Umbandist views and practices around health, illness and healing are holistic, and in many ways offer a complement to the elements of biomedicine that are, as Broom (2009) articulates, “not done well”.

For those who are mediums, Umbanda symbolises something more profound: an experiential spirituality that encourages the adherent to participate in embodied practices such as spiritual incorporation as a means of connecting with the divine, with one’s spiritual self, and with the marginalised “other”. For the mostly middle-class professional mediums that were interviewed from the Casa da Caridade and Templo Guaracy for this project, the experiential aspects of Umbanda appealed as an alternative to disenchantment and the iron cage of rationalised society, by encouraging adherents to cultivate a personal relationship with deities, reinvigorate their connection with the natural world and become acquainted with Afro-Brazilian and indigenous epistemologies. Mediumship, in contrast to clientelism, necessitates significant time and energy,

but it also evokes a strong sense of community and social bonding among the mediums who enjoy outings and private ceremonies for their entities together.

Finally, a significant aspect of Umbandist philosophy also that is also present in the findings from the Universal Church is the emphasis on personal agency and responsibility. Mediums and leaders in the Casa repeatedly underlined that Umbanda provides a tool to help on the path to healing or transformation, but that ultimately change had to come from within: through the individual recognising their role in enacting personal change which would concomitantly affect other dimensions of their life. Such discourse distinctively resonates with New Age ideologies, and with neoliberalism as well.

Happiness is not only your right, it's your duty!

The New Age Spiritism of Salto Quântico

The lessons we learn from our Masters of Spirituality... are challenging but they set you free to be who you truly are... Here we learn we are responsible for everything in our lives. Every experience we consider bad, we brought it on ourselves. We are not a victim of society, or our families. We have all the tools to make things work and we shouldn't expect others to do it. God's will might be different to ours, which actually happens quite often, and so we must learn to be humble and try to understand the lesson that that experience is bringing us. And keep fighting for what we know is true in our hearts...

Luciane

The Doctrinal/Philosophical Dimension

Salto Quântico (in English, Quantum Leap) is a contemporary spiritual movement based in Aracaju, in the Northeast of Brazil. It identifies itself as a philosophical scientific doctrine rather than a religion, and follows a syncretic set of beliefs that draw on Spiritism²⁹, New Age ideologies and Christianity. Led by Benjamin Teixeira de Aguiar Machado, Salto Quântico speaks to the uncertainty and chronic dissatisfaction present in late modern society, referring to itself as a spiritual institute of happiness, with its catchphrase: "Happiness is not only your right, it's your

²⁹ Spiritism, or Kardecism, as it is sometimes referred to in Brazil, has more adherents than any other nation in the world. Spiritists identify themselves as Christian, taking the *Gospel According to Spiritism* as their primary text, and believe Jesus to be the most prominent and influential example of a highly enlightened spirit to have ever incarnated on the earth. From the knowledge disseminated by enlightened disincarnated²⁹ spirits through mediums and *The Spirits' Book*²⁹ psychographed by Allan Kardec (1857) among other Spiritist texts, Spiritists learn about the earthly plane, the plurality and hierarchy of spiritual worlds, what happens after death, morality and ethics. From an eschatological perspective, Spiritists believe in the law of karma and reincarnation, the existence of a spiritual body (perispirit) and the universal spiritual evolution of mankind. Human beings must pass through multiple spiritual worlds and incarnations as part of their spiritual evolution in order to ultimately reach a state of spiritual purification and perfection.

duty!” According to Salto Quântico doctrine, happiness is the barometer that signifies if the individual is on the right spiritual path, in flux with himself and with the universe. Teixeira points out that “*felicidade*” (the Portuguese for happiness) comes from the Latin, *fe licitas*, genuine faith.

Salto Quântico offers a spiritual discourse that speaks to issues relevant in late modern society, and makes spiritual sense of matters such as sadomasochism, homosexuality, drug use, suicide, addictions, the search for self, depression and major global events such as the war in Iraq, the politics of George Bush, the death of Pope John Paul II, the tsunami in South East Asia and the crisis in Brazilian politics; controversial issues often avoided in religious dialogue. It promotes a lived spirituality, teaching its adherents to integrate spirituality into their everyday practices and lives. On the Salto Quântico website (saltoquântico.com.br), the institute proclaims to offer:

...Spirituality, with an open, modern, practical, rational, laidback and light-hearted vision (enriched by videos and cinematic material) aimed at the solution of everyday conflicts and issues, the search for self-knowledge and happiness, with special focus on action against every type of prejudice and castration of human liberty, with due respect given to one's neighbour.

Spiritual teachings in the group are disseminated through a community of enlightened spirits who speak through Teixeira as their intermediary. A broad cultural pattern in Brazil of prevailing supernaturalism, the possibility of communication with spirits and reincarnation has largely been influenced by the prevalence of Spiritism in the region (Dawson 2007; Hess 1991), thus paving the way for groups such as Salto Quântico which perpetuate and further develop these beliefs. The highest of the spiritual teachers in the group is Eugenia³⁰, the guide of Salto Quântico who has an extremely close bond with Teixeira and is venerated by followers of the movement. Teixeira (2011) writes that five channels are used as a means for Eugenia and himself to communicate: bodily incorporation, where Eugenia uses Teixeira's body to speak, through sight, hearing, automatic writing (psychography) and through “heart-intuition” which allows Teixeira to feel her presence directly and telepathically. Teixeira writes of his relationship with Eugenia: “*I see Her, I feel Her and I hear Her, as she is part of my own nature...we are joined as two Spirits in one brain, or as She prefers to say, two brains in one mind, formed by the fusion of our psyches...*” (Teixeira 2011: 21,22).

³⁰ Whilst Eugenia is Benjamin's main spiritual guide, he also incorporates others, including Roberto, Gustavo Henrique, Anacleto and Lidiane who all represent enlightened spirits with different backgrounds.

Teixeira refers to Eugenia as his mother, his channel to God, his teacher, and emissary of the Virgin Mary. His union with Eugenia was formalised on the day he married his current partner Wagner de Aguiar, also marrying with Eugenia in a symbolic mystical union of their bond.

The group's structure and many of its beliefs are informed by Christian doctrine, Spiritism and New Age ideology. Salto Quântico maintains strong connections with Christianity and recognises a supreme God, but also a trinity of Christs as Father, Son and Mother: Gabriel, Jesus and the Virgin Mary (referred to as Maria Santíssima by followers). However, many of the group's spiritual teachings are also reflective of themes prominent in New Age movements, especially with regard to discourse around quantum physics, self-help, the divine feminine, the discovery of an authentic self, and spiritual healing.

The group eschews allying itself with a religious denomination and prefers to be referred to as an institute, seeing its spiritual values as compatible with science and modern life. This belief stems directly from Spiritism, which strived to demystify religion and demonstrate that it could be scientific and empirically proven. For those who believed in both science and religion, Spiritism was seen as a means of reconciling the two through the naturalisation of the spiritual: spiritual phenomena were not necessarily supernatural phenomena; instead, they could simply belong to the realm of the natural world as a phenomenon not yet understood (Vasconcelos 2008). By naturalising the spiritual world, Spiritism would disenchant the world without exterminating spirits, instead making them intelligible and acceptable to the newly enlightened republics of the world. Through the development of the Spiritist doctrine, founder Allan Kardec intended to introduce the world to a new system which would not only forge an alliance between science and religion, but also dispel the obscurantism fostered by the church which posited God, souls and spirits as mystical and privileged knowledge, and the clergy as the guardians of this esoteric knowledge, ensuring their continued authority. The proximity of spiritual world is also present in Salto Quântico, with adherents having direct access to the spirit guides and encouraged to develop their own mediumship to communicate with the spiritual realm.

Besecke (2007) calls attention to spiritualities such as Salto Quântico (which she terms "reflexive spiritualities") that challenge the cultural construction that science and religion are inimical. Instead, such religions simultaneously embrace both scientific rationality and religious meaning.

Salto Quântista philosophy also attempts to call into question the thesis that modernity is synonymous with secularisation and that sacralisation is anti-modern. Therefore a spiritual identity as a Salto Quântista doesn't preclude a rational, scientific, or modern perspective. In his study of a New Age Spiritist movement located in Goiás, Holston (2000:614) theorises that rationality, secularisation and spirituality may in fact all exert influence over modern experience. He goes so far as to say that religion may even provide people with the chance to engage with modernity, acquire a sense of control over its forces, and engage with its shortcomings (Holston 2000).

Salto Quântico attracts a diverse membership demographic depending on one's involvement with the group. Those who are most deeply immersed in the group tend to be educated, from the middle to upper middle socio-economic classes and mostly women, although those that attend the popular Sunday evening seminars open to the public represent a diverse range of age, gender, ethnicity and class. Religious meetings and activities occur almost on a daily basis, with varying levels of involvement depending on one's integration into the group. Some of the key activities include the prominent Sunday seminar taken by Teixeira (the biggest meeting of the week). New adepts are encouraged to first attend the weekly seminars presented by Benjamin on Sunday evenings which constitute upwards of 300 adherents. Should they become interested in becoming more regularly involved by joining the mediums' groups, they must complete an initiation process whereby they assiduously attend the Sunday seminars for six months then become involved in the doctrinal study groups in order to familiarise themselves with the tenets of the Institute and Spiritist literature. Doctrinal study sessions are a common feature in Spiritist groups across Brazil, as Spiritism places strong emphasis on reading as a means of cultivating spiritual growth: Dawson (2007:24) notes that Spiritist literature is extremely popular in Brazil with more than 50 million works in circulation. Following the satisfactory completion of these prerequisites, adepts undergo interviews with from representatives of the Institute, and must make a commitment to pray daily for at least fifteen minutes.

Once the six month "candidacy" is completed and a person demonstrates that they have devoted themselves sufficiently to the erudition of the textual material and attendance of Teixeira's weekly seminars, they then progress to the weekly mediumistic meetings where adepts practise their mediumship in pairs (with one person as a medium for disturbed disincarnate spirits that have not yet passed from this plane of existence, and the other as a clarifier, helping them to come to terms

with whatever they have not yet resolved that is preventing them from moving on to the next spiritual plane). Such meetings are often believed to help the living as well as the disincarnate, as “obsessed” spirits frequently hang around the living to attach themselves to their energy. Communication with spiritual guides is a focal practice in Spiritist groups, and occurs primarily through psychography or through incorporation as in Umbanda. However, Spiritists receive “evolved” European spirits, who are often doctors, lawyers, religious figures and intellectuals and reject Afro-Brazilian and native spirits as they are believed to be insufficiently evolved. This is also true of the spirit guides received by Teixeira in Salto Quântico, and speaks to issues of implicit racial tensions still present in Brazilian society.

Teixeira, 43 years old, describes himself as always having had a fascination for the paranormal subject and empathy for understanding the challenges of the human condition. He lists Plato’s “*Myth of the Cave*”, Jungian psychology, Eastern and Western philosophies, extra-sensory phenomenology, depth psychology and Spiritism as formative influences on his spiritual beliefs. He became a Spiritist in February 1988, and writes in *Modern Responses from Greek Wisdom* (2011) that his first direct psychographic encounter with a spirit was in 1988 when he began to write automatically in formal, old-fashioned Portuguese in a high school class. Psychographic writing is common among noted mediums in Brazil, and is considered a “proof” of the existence of spirits, who use spiritual mediums as channels through whom they can disseminate messages pertaining to matters often beyond the person’s levels of understanding or education. In 1989, Teixeira entered the School of Law at the Federal University of Sergipe, and studied until his senior year when he dropped out, choosing instead to dedicate himself exclusively to the work he had already started in the area of television, writing and public speaking, disseminating spiritual teachings that spoke to contemporary life and the shortcomings of institutionalised religion. Although Salto Quântico initially identified itself with the Spiritist movement, in 2008 Teixeira chose to eschew this label, promoting Salto Quântico as an independent movement.

A distinctive way in which Salto Quântico disseminates its spiritual message and philosophy to a wider audience is through its dynamic website and blog, which is meticulously maintained with regularly updated spiritual self-help messages from Teixeira’s guides, new testimonies of those who have been healed or received helpful messages from the spirit world through Teixeira, themes discussed in seminars and updates about Salto Quântico’s TV show (accessible in diverse locales

throughout Latin America), programmes and activities. The site also has an English counterpart for its offshoot located in Connecticut in the United States. The group makes use of Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and online streaming sites to show Teixeira's Sunday evening seminars in real time. The site is graphically sophisticated and appealing and integrates music and spiritual images and visuals to supplement its textual material. Graphics that precede or follow interviews or spiritual messages often depict the Salto Quântico text smashing through walls or breaking down obstacles. An adherence to modern technology is vital to draw in savvy religious consumers because as Ammerman (2007) points out, religion is one of the subjects most sought on the Internet, following pornography and commerce.

Salto Quântico, New Age discourse and modernity in crisis

Beliefs emblematic of New Age ideology permeate Salto Quântico rhetoric and teachings. Focus on the improvement of self, spiritual healing, references to Jungian psychology, the divine feminine, Eastern and Western philosophical thought and depth psychology conducted through the guidance of Teixeira's spiritual mentors encourage the individual to take full ownership over their own happiness and destiny. Emphasis on the spiritual evolution of self and teachings on how to improve one's inner life are themes regularly addressed in Salto Quântico seminars, meetings and Internet posts.

Although New Age spiritualities demonstrate significant heterogeneity, they also exhibit constancy and a lingua franca with which they communicate their ideologies (Heelas 1996). The most fundamental of the constant qualities that Heelas (1996) identifies is that the self is sacred, and the most urgent task in the quest for spirituality is to make spiritual contact with one's self. Closely implicated in this belief is the general agreement among New Agers that it is vital to shift from our current way of being, which has been contaminated by our socialisation, to a way of living which better nurtures our authentic nature (Heelas 1996). *In Modern Responses from Greek Wisdom*, Eugenia quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson's "I must be myself" and exhorts adherents to "get to know yourself deeply...in a general sense, when people say that they want to be themselves, they are making an allusion to the values inculcated in them by the family, society or by the specific group which they belong to, be it religious, professional or political" (Teixeira 2011: 103-104). Eugenia teaches that reaching the purest essence of self lies out of reach for humanity due to

the influences present in society that unavoidably have bearing on how humans perceive and experience the world, but that by getting to know thyself deeply, one is taking steps towards reaching a deeper experience of this true inner state (Teixeira 2011).

The focus on self as a spiritual resource must also be understood in a broader cultural context: Lasch (1978) associates the increasing preoccupation with the self with the failed political project of the sixties and seventies. Disempowered to change society and the exterior world, people instead to shift their focus to the self, cultivation of happiness and improvement of the world within (Lasch 1978). For Heelas (1996), the New Age simultaneously represents both a radical spiritual alternative to mainstream culture and spirituality symbolic of our times, emblematic of late modern society. New Age ideology speaks to the uncertainties associated with the late modern era that generate doubt about one's identity, and impel individuals to be active agents in directing their life paths. Mobility and fluidity present in late modern society engender risk and anxiety, with the specter of uncertainty flowing across socio-economic lines (Bauman 2000). However, as seen in the Umbanda chapter, Lee and Ackerman (2002) theorise that it is the middle classes who are most alienated and affected by the crisis of modernity, and who are also most likely to embark on a "sojourn of re-enchantment". With physical and economic needs secured, many people look to fulfil "higher" needs (Maslow 1943). Finding meaning and identity in one's life trajectory and the desire to feel connected with one's occupation, sexuality, friends and family draws many to seek out Salto Quântico. This is representative of adherents who engage with New Age religions, who want to change the way they experience and understand themselves, others, and the world (Heelas 2008). For Luciane, her involvement with Salto Quântico helps her in constructing a spiritual identity and developing a strong sense of agency in the confusion and "meaninglessness" of late modernity:

I think one of the biggest challenges of life today is the emptiness that comes with all the competitiveness and materialism that our society demands... The lack of love (in society), including lack of self-respect, leads us to disrespect others and the environment, drugs, abuses, corruption of all kinds. If you think it is you against the world, that you are isolated and, especially, that you are not responsible for the consequences of your actions, your life becomes a hell and inevitably you will make a hell of other people's lives...Here we learn we are responsible for everything in our lives. Every experience we consider bad,

we brought it on ourselves. We are not a victim of society, our families. We have all the tools to make things work and we shouldn't expect others to do it.

Furthermore, Salto Quântico provides a spiritual paradigm to make sense of a universe of events that are not always immediately comprehensible, and which in large part seem out of the domain of human control. Cristiane Carmelo describes how the sudden death of her husband Chico brought her to Salto Quântico, seeking a way to make sense of his death and make contact with him:

One month after the disincarnation (of Chico) I felt him place his hand on my leg as a request for help. He was lost in the Umbral³¹ regions and was suffering a lot! Words came to my mind, one at a time. From that moment on, I went looking for help and found it in the seminars that Benjamin was administrating. Soon after I identified with the philosophy of Eugenia and I started to attend services assiduously. In the third week of attending services, without even knowing me, Benjamin received a message from Chico directed at me with facts that only us two knew.

In this way, Salto Quântico challenges the late modern condition in that adherents have the conviction that their choices and lives in this incarnation have meaning and repercussions. Choices in life are narrowed down, because adherents of Salto Quântico are aware that any choice made will impact on their spiritual trajectory, and their happiness and wellbeing in their present life. This counteracts the moral and existential crises many face in mediating the vast sea of life choices, where the weight of making the right decision dictates their future life experiences, lifestyle and self-identity. Luciane also explained how her involvement in the group informed her life choices to help her find her true, most authentic self:

Everywhere people are looking for more meaning, connections with something higher than themselves and the world around them, deeper and more honest relationships. I guess more and more people are getting tired of a life that consists of getting a better job, a better house, making a nice trip. In the end we all long for hope of a better future for everyone and love, most of all...After joining SQ, I found my real professional vocation, I

³¹ The *Umbral*, as portrayed in the Spiritist work *Our Home* by Chico Xavier, is a liminal region spirits may occupy for a period between existences when they must confront the impact of the choices they made during their lifetime that may have been injurious to others.

started studying what I love, made many new and better friends, got away from a bad relationship, helped my parents deal with the passing of my brother...But better than that, besides realising many dreams, I feel much better about myself.

Lulu iterated along similar lines:

The group has given me happiness, a sense of purpose and life, you know? Because I didn't have this before. I had a very materialistic life, because my former religion didn't show me this other side. Salto Quântico is different. You know that you have a purpose here. You have to make an effort, to improve yourself.

Lulu's narrative demonstrates that work is required for productive participation to overcome what Heelas terms "the stagnant self": the adherent must engage in cognitive work and emotional work, exercising self-responsibility (Heelas 2008:155). The quest for holism and the path of self-discovery calls for self-discipline to monitor and be aware of one's state of being (Heelas 2008:156). For Luciane, her involvement in the group helped her to identify the life choices that would benefit her most and positively affect those around her, and ultimately lead to a state of happiness and certainty. The search to find greater meaning in life and to undergo positive personal transformation is a task that requires commitment. This flow between the spiritual and the mundane, whereby one's everyday secular life benefits from their spiritual engagement, is identified by Heelas as a common feature among many adherents of New Age movements (Heelas 2008). For Heelas (2008), this is not a lightweight matter indicative of hedonistic gratification or utilitarian individualism. Holistic spiritualities such as Salto Quântico offer adherents the chance to have meaningful experiences and offer spiritual teachings that have significant influence on the quality of their lives.

The Narrative Dimension

The divine feminine

In the group's spiritual pantheon, the divine spirits who are most venerated are both female: Eugenia (also referred to as *Mestra Sabia e Bondosa* (the wise and good Teacher) and Maria Santíssima (the Virgin Mary). Eugenia functions as an emissary for Maria Santíssima, who is not

regularly incorporated by Benjamin. However, Maria Santíssima is believed to make her presence known to adherents by descending from the sky in Aracaju on rare and special occasions, to which Teixeira alerts his adherents. On these days she is seen as a huge ball of light rapidly emanating from in front of the sun. Photographs of her descents are celebrated as proof of her existence and support of the group, and often commented on by Teixeira.

Eugenia, on the other hand, is normally incorporated by Teixeira for the day-to-day meetings and seminars of the group. She is venerated as an powerful spiritual figure, who can trace her lineage of previous earthly incarnations to some of Western history's most influential and powerful women: Claudia Procula, granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus and wife of Pontius Pilate, Aspasia of Miletus, teacher of rhetoric to Socrates and lover/advisor to General Pericles, and Bernadette Soubirous, a French medium to whom the Virgin Mary appeared. Teixeira (2011:23) attributes Eugenia as "one of the creators, if not the creator of the method of maieutics³²". Eugenia's lineage of strong and influential female figures who resisted patriarchy provides authenticity to the spiritual claims of Salto Quântico, and symbolises that the spiritual leadership and origins of the group has strong connections with history, classical culture, feminism, the cult of the Virgin and intellectual knowledge.

In two of his earlier spiritual texts, *Metanoia* and *the Sun of Hope*, Teixeira explores and discusses the archetype of the divine feminine in relation to the development of the spiritual self, the challenges of modernity, the psychological "shadow", neuroses, the layers of consciousness and cultivation of super-consciousness, and the process of individuation. The *Sun of Hope* develops issues pertaining to the oppression of women in patriarchal society, with a prominent focus that proposes reinstating the divine feminine to its rightful place as a powerful generator of life, and challenging the patriarchal attitudes, institutions and traditions which still hold sway over society. For the group, the Virgin Mary, referred to by members as Maria Santíssima represents the restoration of the sacred feminine to her rightful place.

³² Maieutics refers to the process of "giving birth" to the truth, which lies latent in each individual, through asking intelligent questions. It is a dialectical method, pitting opposing points of view against each other in order to strengthen the argument. Salto Quântico encourages its adherents to ask questions, in order to overcome stagnant or prejudiced ideologies and find answers.

We believe that most Blessed Mary, the historic Mary of Nazareth, mother of Jesus Christ, is, in the same way as her Son...able to channel divinity to Earth. In the epoch when our Sacred Mother and her Son lived, it wasn't possible for a being of this evolutionary lineage to reveal the plenitude of her spiritual condition, considering the strong ruling patriarchalism of the time...in our Era, it has become necessary to find historical references, human symbols in our culture, that represent the Divine Feminine. In this way, Mary of Nazareth represents this most sacred figure, the Christ-Mother, sent to the side of Jesus Christ, to be understood as equally important as her Son, that is to say, equal Masculine and Feminine, symbolically and psychologically, in value and significance...

Teixeira

Long a symbol of the feminine dimensions of God, the Virgin Mary represents divine humanity and mercy (Nelson 1978). Nelson writes that while medieval theology strenuously emphasised the feminine aspects of God, the Protestant Reformation reduced this emphasis on Mary, relegating the role of the feminine in the church to a much more passive space. Christianity promoted a dualistic way of seeing men and women, with masculinity being associated with structure, judgement, intellect, logic and order, and the feminine aligned with nature, mysticism, immanence and change. Following Jungian thought, Salto Quântico embraces the need for the return to the divine feminine following the repression of the female deity in Western civilisation for hundreds of years. Teixeira underlines the significance of the archetype of the Goddess-mother, exemplified by deities such as Isis in Egypt and Parvati and Kali in India. However, in Salto Quântico, Mary is no longer a mere archetype, but a spiritual presence who is able to communicate with the Earth through Teixeira's mediumship and offer guidance in correcting the wrongs inflicted by an aggressively masculine society.

The emphasis on the divine feminine in Salto Quântico endeavours to compensate for and correct a cultural and social history that has for decades prized the masculine to the exclusion of women, and marginalised groups such as the gay and lesbian community. Teixeira engages with various lines of feminist thought through his seminars, referring for example to the recent movement of

masculinity which inverts the Freudian thesis that women have unconscious envy of the male phallus, or in Aristotelian terms, are “unfinished men”. This new current of thought asserts that men are subject to a sense of inferiority because of the biological superiority of women who are able to give birth. In Salto Quântico posts, the ideal of female virginity before marriage is identified as an archaic social institution repressive to women. Teixeira (2011) writes that historically, patrilineal society needed the guarantee of the woman’s sexual fidelity. To marry a virgin was to have more assurance that a child born to her was the product of wedlock. He resists the concept of no sex before marriage, declaring it “an absurdity”, as it deprives one from knowing their partner on intimate physical, emotional and spiritual levels, and contends that sex before marriage is a moral and spiritual obligation: to enter into a lifelong commitment without knowing one’s partner in a sexual capacity is irresponsible. In other posts and texts, Eugenia argues that those who reach the highest points of spiritual evolution on earth do so because they have passed through long phases of continuous incarnations as women, thus helping the development of their emotional intelligence (Eugenia cited in Teixeira 2011:251).

In addition, the site has an archive of Maria Santíssima’s letters and messages to humanity, with prescriptions for improving the state of life and spirituality on Earth by adopting more feminist values. In “Letter from Maria Santíssima to Humanity, 2006” for example, Mary communicates that the earth is lacking a “mystical Mother”. She articulates that patriarchy has taken undesirable routes, with men and women becoming grossly over-masculinised in the psychological and psychosexual senses, and aggressivity and competitiveness causing extreme disequilibrium. She points out the permanent spectre of nuclear war of grand proportions, the omnipresence of terrorism, the potential devastation of nuclear technology, and the misuse of genetics as apocalyptic corollaries of male-driven society. The letter encourages humanity that the evil inherent within every individual must be addressed and Maria Santíssima advocates an approach to understanding the self as prescribed by the teachings of depth psychology. Finally she implores humanity to pray for her, both individually and also collectively, as this will raise mental vibrations that impact on the physical plane, permeating and breaking the deleterious mental emanations which cause negative phenomena to occur.

The Social Dimension

Charismatic leadership in Salto Quântico

Although Teixeira largely attributes the teachings disseminated by Salto Quântico to Eugenia and the other spiritual guides, his role as charismatic facilitator and leader of the movement is indispensable to its success. It is only through Teixeira as intermediary that the spiritual messages are disseminated, as no other member of the group has access to messages from the spiritual guides. Members with whom I spoke emphasised the importance of Teixeira's support and guidance in the development of their spirituality and self-growth, as fully integrated members of Salto Quântico maintain personal friendships with Teixeira, enjoy participation in Institute activities outside normal group meetings, and are often privy to receiving messages and advice concerning personal problems from Eugenia. All adherents with whom I spoke emphasised Teixeira as bearing immense importance in the life of the group. Lulu, a 57 year old former teacher explained:

He has this tremendous capacity to liberate and redeem everyone...He says its Eugenia, our Lady (Virgin Mary) who saves but we know that this redemption, this liberation begins with him. Without him, it wouldn't be possible, the incredible messages of spirituality come through him, the incredible changes and transformations.

For Bellinha, a 17 year old student, in Benjamin she finds, "A mother, father, Professor, guru...Mamin³³ is an example to us all, everything that he says, he does..." while for Cris, a 52 year old civil servant, "Benjamin brings Our Lady and Eugenia closer to us...it is wonderful to have faith and feel that you are loved, guided and fulfilled at every step, it's fantastic."

Charisma is a critical consideration in understanding the social context of the group and the circumstances that engendered its creation, the importance of Salto-Quântista doctrinal teachings and philosophies as a challenge to existing institutionalised religious beliefs, and the expectations

³³ Members of SQ frequently refer to Benjamin affectionately as Mamin.

and obligations that unite Teixeira with his adherents. Weber's definition of charisma is useful in conceptualising some of the indispensable features of charisma in a religious capacity:

By "charisma" is meant a quality of a personality which is esteemed as extraordinary, and because of which (its bearer) is considered (to be endowed with) supernatural or superhuman or at least extraordinary-not given to every man-powers or properties, or as God-sent or exemplary, and thence as "the leader".

(Weber cited in Cavalli 1987: 317-318)

Although Weber's definition is frequently called upon to underline the fundamental premises of charisma, many scholars such as Cavalli (1987), Burke and Brinkerhoff (1981) and Barnes (1978) contend that understanding charisma also demands attention given to the social circumstances which foster conditions for charisma to arise. Barnes (1978) distinguishes four variables that must coincide within and around the individual for charisma to come about. The first condition Barnes stipulates is that charismatic leaders will be de-alienated because they identify sacred symbols as open to interpretation or verification through their own subjective experience with the divine. According to Peter Berger, de-alienation is the conscious realisation that the social world is humanly constructed and therefore unstable (Berger, 1967: 96-101). Charismatic leaders frequently have a close connection with a transcendent or immanent divine source. This intense connection with a being or force beyond everyday reality allows the leader to perceive religious symbols in a de-alienated fashion. In addition, because charismatic leaders manipulate religious symbols, they are aware that they are subject to change. Often religious change is incited because the leader has received an updated version of an already established religious doctrine from a divine source. With regard to Teixeira, his intimate bond with Eugenia has led him to re-interpret religious symbols and texts, and led to an overhaul of classic Kardecist Spiritism which allows for a progressive reading of Spiritism that is more pertinent to contemporary life and to the particular issues which affect the group's adherents.

The second condition required for charisma according to Barnes is that charismatic leaders will live through a period of social change, or be members of a minority group. This strongly resonates with Cavalli's argument around the necessity of a social context with an "extraordinary situation" and a leader with a "mission" (Cavalli 1987: 318). In this critical situation, a person with an

“extraordinary quality” offers an explanation for the situation and a way out of it. The extraordinary situation is the point of departure for the charismatic process, and is deemed extraordinary from the viewpoint of people involved in it. Current values and social norms are seen as inadequate or contradictory. The leader him/herself is driven by a sense of mission, duty or calling, bringing about a new order where true values and norms will be encountered to guide the individual, setting the followers free from any sense of guilt towards the old laws and principles which are rejected (Cavalli 1987: 325). Teixeira’s charisma in this sense can be aligned with the social circumstances from which he has emerged: an authoritative spiritual voice for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual communities in Brazil’s smallest state, Sergipe. The extraordinary situation here is to incorporate the LGBT community into the folds of spiritual/religious community from which they have been rejected or overlooked by traditional spiritual groups. In many of the participants’ narratives in this case study, there was a yearning to unite spiritual and sexual identity, and Teixeira has put himself forward as the leader capable of undertaking this mission.

Thirdly, Barnes theorises that the leader will have an innovative set of teachings. Charismatic leaders either appeal to followers through the force of their personality, or the innovation of their teachings, or sometimes both (Jones & Anservitz, 1975: 1097 cited in Barnes, 1978). Innovative teachings also differentiate the religion from other religious groups, demonstrating the leader’s ability to recognize under-addressed issues in institutionalised religious doctrine. A space for new leadership may occur when the institutionalised religion, in this case Catholicism, becomes resistant to change and so becomes less effective in dealing with problems of meaning in life. In Teixeira’s case, the innovation in his teachings lies in reconciling spirituality and sexuality: affirming the sacredness present in homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual unions, the sacredness of sexual union in general, and challenging archaic and *machista* beliefs concerning gender. These were issues not adequately addressed by Spiritism or the Catholic Church, and thus Salto Quântico has garnered a following among members of the homosexual/ bisexual/ transsexual communities, but also among heterosexual sympathisers looking for a more progressive and relevant religious cosmology to provide meaning and guidance in navigating everyday life. Barnes (1978) writes that if such concerns are widespread among the populace, the leader’s divinely guided solutions may meet the standards of others in society. Luciane, a 34-year-old journalist, explained that Salto Quântico appealed to her as a more progressive religious community:

I was looking for...a more modern group with less ritual and more studies about Spirituality and its practical connections to everyday life. I was tired of the superficiality of the Catholic Church (my parents were Catholic) and I wanted a place that I could question things and use my reason...

Finally, Barnes (1978) hypothesises that a charismatic leader can either emerge from within or outside the context of traditional religion. He makes a point of mentioning this because earlier theoretical treatments of charisma generally identified it as coming from outside institutionalised religious traditions. This belief came from Weber's assertion that as an ideal type, or in its purest form, "the holders of charisma, the master as well as his disciples and followers, must stand outside ties to this world, as well as outside the routine occupations of family life" (Weber 1922, cited in Barnes 1978:5,6). However, although Teixeira self-identifies as being different and an outsider: "I was an adolescent who was...a little complicated, shall we say. Not adapted to the conventional educational system, I didn't fit in when I was playing, neither in sports, nor in any usual form of leisure with boys my age. More than once I was rudely asked if I was crazy, or sick..." he did emerge from the context of institutionalised religion. Teixeira (2011:18) writes that up until the 14th December 2008, he still saw himself and Salto Quântico as linked to the Spiritist movement. However, from 2008 onwards, Eugenia encouraged him to take a position of independence in relation to organised religion.

However, Peter Worsley (1968) points out that at the most elemental understanding of charisma, it is an issue of recognition, or a social relationship between people. It cannot be based solely on an individual personality or a "mystical quality" as the wider inter-relational context must be also considered: specifically, the relationship between the followers and the leader. Without the followers, the leader has no power. This means that although social conditions may engender the emergence of charismatic leaders, it is only an initial catalyst for gaining recognition. As theorised by Weber, the leader is under constant pressure to continuously prove him or herself to the benefit of the followers in order to sustain popularity and prove their power and authority. In the case of Teixeira, such proofs are strenuously demonstrated and made explicit in all public forums for adherents to see, especially around the occurrence of miracles: miracles that occur through

spiritual healing, people being miraculously saved from certain death and the occurrence of strange coincidences (as proof of spiritual intervention in earthly matters) and most championed, that none of those who are fully integrated members of the group have died (implying supernatural protection for true devotees). The website also functions as a testament to Teixeira's charisma, with constant updates of his abilities to intuit the divine.

The significance of spiritual community

Of the three religions studied in this thesis, Salto Quântico exhibited the strongest sense of community and intimacy among its members. For regular members, the group represented another or true spiritual family for them. This was constantly reasserted in interviews as one of the aspects that attracted them to continue to be deeply involved in Salto Quântico life, with many of them participating in activities and meetings most days of the week, although it was not what attracted them to the group initially. In many of the life history interviews, informants iterated three central reasons for entering Salto Quântico, tracing a trajectory from point of crisis to place of stability within the Salto Quântico community: firstly, they were suffering from depression and were taken to Salto Quântico by a friend or loved one, as in the case of Ana, 47, general physician, who had been deeply affected by depression for a long time.

I came in extreme, severe crisis. I had long had depression that not even the psychiatrist could understand...How could I be a doctor working in emergency, working relatively well, and have depression? I was going to the psychiatrist, and she was prescribing increasingly stronger and more severe drugs, until I watched Benjamin's program, and from that moment, everything changed.

Some were in a state of personal upheaval, as in the case of Linda Brasil, 39, make-up artist, and Lulu, a retired schoolteacher in her late fifties:

I was passing through a very difficult time, in both my sexual life and because of the death of a friend, so I met with Benjamin, and from that moment my life was transformed, because I managed to get a new perspective on the disincarnation of my friend...and also I began to accept myself as well, my sexuality and my sexual identity as a transsexual.

Linda

I was going through a separation...so I went (to Salto Quântico) because of the pain, right? ...The separation was really difficult. I'd had a really neurotic relationship, really neurotic....I separated from him, but would then go back to him...

Lulu

For Angela, 46, a dentist and longtime adherent, Salto Quântico helped her to make spiritual sense of the difficulty she experienced in trying to fall pregnant.

I joined Salto Quântico with a lot of faith- in the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, spiritual faith...and I was trying to get pregnant. And I'd already done three IVF fertilisations with a really complicated treatment, and I was going to Benjamin's lectures...and then the latest fertilisation didn't work again, but I didn't feel as sad as I thought I would...because the financial and psychological effort was so draining, and so I didn't feel so devastated...Salto Quântico stimulated me to read more, read the Spiritist books of Benjamin, Chico Xavier, all the collections. I threw myself into reading for spiritual growth and knowledge.

Angela explained that Eugenia's guidance helped her come to terms with the fact she would not have her own biological children in this lifetime. However, within the community, she developed a very close relationship with three young women, Carol, Bellinha and Lorena, who nicknamed her "Mum" and whom she referred to as her "daughters".

The final factor that attracted individuals to the group was a spiritual quest, the search for a religion which personally resonated with them. These individuals were dissatisfied with institutional religion (Catholicism, Spiritism) and seeking a spiritual community with which they identified, such as in the case of Luciane, 33, journalist and civil servant:

I was feeling at that time the need of something different to all the religions with which I was familiar... I was Catholic until I was thirteen because of my family. After that, I

started to look for other religions and groups that I felt more affinity with. I started reading about Spiritism and the New Age, but I chose to join the Salto Quântico institute.

However, for all informants, upon resolution or address of their personal issues or searches that brought them to the group initially, what made them stay or increase involvement was the sense of belonging they encountered. Many framed their narratives in terms of a spiritual quest where they ultimately found personal meaning and a sense of community with Salto Quântico. Many of the friendships crossed age, gender, sexuality and socio-economic lines. Often informants alluded to other members of the group as their family, as expressed in testimonies such as Bellinha's: "There, in Salto Quântico, we have wonderful friends, brothers and sisters, mothers who are always at our side" and Cris: "The fraternity is, without doubt, another enormous benefit of participating in Salto Quântico."

Since then, I haven't felt the necessity of looking anyplace else (for a religious group to join). It feels like home, I feel I've found my group there, in every way. In Salto Quântico we have many different activities throughout the week. ... It is a spirituality that makes me more connected with the world around me... in Salto Quântico I have found such special friends, people that I can really talk to because we have similar views on life.

Luciane

Angela, pointed out that the close bonds between members of the group with Teixeira, and indeed with Eugenia, is because many of them shared past life relationships or friendships.

I went there...and he (Benjamin) opened his arms, and said, "Welcome!" And it was like we already knew each other! Like I recognised him from the street; but I'd never seen his program, never read any of his material, only I knew him somehow, though I'd never had contact with him before. In February 2006, Benjamin asked me to join with the group of mediums and that was it. I feel that it's really here (with Salto Quântico) that my heart belongs...the best part of Salto Quântico, apart from our Professor himself, is the family. You have the chance to know, to feel...never alone, in whatever moment, be it happy, sad, difficult...this, I think, is the best part of Salto Quântico.

Angela

Studies from a wide range of disciplines indicate that religious involvement has positive effects on mental and physical health, as well as the ability to provide a sense of meaning, coherence and wellbeing to adherents. While many studies focus on the positive correlation between health and religious attendance (George, Ellison & Larsen: 2002; Pollner, 1989), another important element of the religion and wellbeing paradigm is the increased social capital often gained by those who are integrated in religious communities. Shared norms of altruism and reciprocity mean that those in religious communities can expect kindness and support from those within their church (George and Ellison, 1994). Research indicates that religious services and activities often unite people with common religious beliefs or similar social and political values, and this ideological homogeneity provides fertile ground for close friendships to develop (Clark, Beeghley and Cochran, 1990). Participation in such religious activities also promotes interpersonal trust and mutuality. Salto Quântico's full weekly program of varied collective activities engenders strong bonds between those who attend services and meetings regularly.

Adherents of religious communities with close-knit congregations enjoy larger and denser networks of friendship and greater social support, in the forms of informational aid (referral to external support groups or services), socio-emotional support (confiding and companionship) and instrumental aid (money, goods) (Ortega, Crutchfield and Rushing 1983; Taylor and Chatters 1988; Maton 1989). In addition, Ellison and George (1994) argue that participation in religious communities not only increases the quantity of non-kin ties, but also the quality of interpersonal relationships. This is because relationships with others within the spiritual community may be experienced as more satisfying or fulfilling than those outside the church, as they are mutually reinforcing because of the shared values and worldviews. Individuals can gain affirmation that their perceptions and behaviour are correct from their cohorts (Ellison and George, 1994:8). In addition, those in religious communities often share a common cultural discourse about what constitutes supportive or comforting "helping behavior" in times of need. Those from shared religious communities can often help each other place life experiences into broader contexts of meaning (George and Ellison 1994:49).

Salto Quântistas refer to themselves as brothers and sisters in humanity, and fully integrated members of the group (who are members of the mediumistic meetings, currently numbering upwards of 200 people (Teixeira, 2011:34) participate in religious life in a variety of ways. There

are overseas trips (for example, in 2012 there was a reunion with the North American component of Salto Quântico in Connecticut with a series of seminars and presentations, and the preceding year a trip to visit the body of Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes, France), social outings and regular workshops.³⁴ In addition, the group holds an annual free event in Aracaju, called Maria Cristo, in which volunteers and members of a lower socio-economic community in Santa Maria work together to present a variety show focused on Maria Santíssima, with choral performances, ballet, dance and speeches dedicated to her. The show is held in one of Aracaju's largest stadiums, and attracts a significant audience from wider civil society. In some ways it also works as a proselytising event, giving those who are not currently affiliated with the group exposure to Salto Quântico philosophies.

The Ethical Dimension

Aside from the strong bonds between fully integrated adherents, the group reaches out to create bonds with civil society and the local community in Aracaju as well. Salto Quântico, like many Spiritist groups, and similar to Umbanda as discussed earlier, places immense importance on the practice of charity, embracing and enforcing Christian morality (Hess 1991:17). Morality is the link that bonds Salto-Quântico to wider Brazilian society. In Eugenia's teachings, she recommends that one of the best ways to gain proximity to knowing one's true self "*is to grow in your spirit, by exercising it through love, charity, service and the giving of yourself for the good of someone else* (Eugenia cited in Teixeira, 2011:107). This emphasis on charity is not representative of many New Age groups, which usually have a specific focus on the spiritual growth and evolution of the individual. That said, Salto Quântico teachings do also carry moral recommendations for the individual to work towards which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter: for example, fostering happiness in everyday life, enjoying one's sexuality in moderation, and engaging in the search for one's true self.

The charity most commonly practiced within the group is charitable aid, especially in the form of medical services in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods. Salto Quântico has an outreach centre located in the poorer suburb of Santa Maria in Aracaju, where a variety of different social aid is carried out: on Saturdays there is Bible study and meals distributed, on Sundays there is free dental

³⁴ During my fieldwork in Aracaju, I had the opportunity to participate in one such workshop which was held over a weekend: members played team-building games, Teixeira and built new friendships and bonds with new members.

and medical attention given to those in need, reiki, educational and Bible classes for children, workshops for mothers and mothers-to-be, snacks and soup distributed to the hungry, and classes for children and young people including choir, music, ballet, craft making, and English. I visited the centre on a Sunday and it was evident it was a vibrant place in a poor and peripheral community that endeavoured to educate and empower children and mothers. Many volunteers give their time in the weekend to assist at the centre, especially those trained in medicine and dentistry, and they see their work as a living testament to the fact that Salto Quântico takes a proactive, socially conscientious role in its community.

However, for Roger Bastide (1978), Spiritist adherence to charity symbolises more of an adherence to helping Brazilians of lower socio-economic strata become moral and upright Christian citizens rather than an initiative promoting social justice. Such critiques are heard of many religious communities in Brazil, including Umbanda and the neo-Pentecostal churches, as detractors argue that churches only operate as a band aid for social ills, without addressing the source of the problem. This was implicit in some of the informants' narratives, such as Angela, who told me she endeavours to integrate her spirituality and morality into her work as a dentist who often treats Brazilians in the lower socio-economic sectors. She explained that her advice to those facing problems associated with poverty was prayer:

Many understand, but others don't understand Salto Quântico, because they are simple people...but you can tell them how to direct their lives, like "hang on, pay attention, why are you repeating these mistakes in your life", but in popular language, in language accessible to the people...and to tell them to say more prayers, pray when you leave the house, say prayers for others, just talking about the power that prayer can have on one's life is a lot.

It is also crucial to point out that like Spiritist groups throughout Brazil, Salto Quântico's commitment to charity is not purely altruistic and functions in some ways more for the spiritual evolution of the members themselves. According to Spiritist doctrine, it is only by engaging in moral practices such as charity and cultivating an awareness and sense of duty to those less fortunate that one can spiritually evolve and improve oneself (thereby increasing their chances of a spiritually more evolved incarnation in the next life).

Although the examples above indicate a disjuncture between the privileged position of Salto Quântico adherents and the reality of those living in material hardship, Salto Quântico's emphasis on aid through educational/creative classes does represent a point of divergence from typical Spiritist charity work, giving children and young people access to learning experiences that they would not otherwise have. In addition, many from Salto Quântico would argue the most important transformations occur inside the person and not in the material realm, such as transformation of consciousness, spiritual growth and understanding. Teixeira's teachings exhort the individual to take full ownership over their own happiness and life choices, and this is transmitted in the social outreach programme at the centre of Santa Maria, where spiritual education helps those in the centre to recognise their own agency in the choices they make in their lives, even if their socio-economic situation narrows the range of choices available to them. This is totally congruent with the teachings of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which gives limited material aid but teaches the importance of enacting individual agency in the transformation of personal circumstances that resonate with the dictum; *God helps those who help themselves*. Ideologies around individual responsibility are rampant in New Age religious principles and also present in neoliberal discourse.

The Emotional/Experiential Dimension

The search for happiness

The pursuit of inner happiness has long been a concern of New Age ideology. Paul Heelas' extensive research and reflection around New Age practices and beliefs provides a highly relevant departure point from which the search for happiness as a focal point of Salto Quântico can be analysed. Heelas reports that for many who do adhere to the principles of New Age spiritualities, the majority overwhelmingly report a positive difference to their lives, with 72% in a magazine survey of 900 reporting more happiness and 80% affirming more meaningful lives since adopting New Age values (Heelas 1996:182). Indeed, the fixation with happiness is present in the discourse of Salto Quântico, the many blogs and discussions about it on the website, and in the testimonies of adherents of the group, who trace a transformation from a state of confusion/depression/crisis to a place of happiness and meaning. New Age spiritualities concerned with "inner life" encourage the "spiritual flow" to cultivate all dimensions of one's life, experiencing one's mind, body and

spirit as a whole and encouraging self-fulfillment through the assimilation of the spiritual into the quotidian (Heelas 2008:5).

As identified by Heelas (2008), one way in which the New Age-ascribing individual can move towards the elusive state of happiness is by undergoing transformative spiritual experiences. Heelas (2008) notes, however, that critique directed towards New Age movements identifies consumption of spiritual experiences as a self-enhancing hedonistic practice, comparable perhaps to an indulgence at a spa. When individuals consume spiritual experiences, it is at its most fundamental level, an individualistic and self-oriented act, as the experience belongs to their private, interior life. When consumption occurs increasingly for pleasure rather than need, the pursuit of happiness can result in “the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation” and the individual runs the risk of staying locked within “the land of the self-indulgent self” (Lasch 1980:xv cited in Heelas, 2008: 7). As many other theorists such as Bauman and Lacan have extrapolated, seeking happiness in itself represents a never-ending quest, linked strongly to the idea of the self as a project that is perpetually worked on. Nonetheless, although the quest to find happiness can be aligned in some cases with narcissism or hedonism, seeking happiness in one’s life can also be positive and socially constructive: happiness can serve to inspire, emphasise the positive aspects of life, enhance the quality of relationships or even focus attention what is detracting from happiness and needs to be worked on (Heelas 2008). For the individual with a holistic outlook, happiness is not an end in and of itself, especially when it is experienced in such a way that serves both oneself and others.

Many followers of the group had been subject to highly emotive, transformative spiritual experiences during meetings or seminars. Angela explained that Eugenia and Teixeira taught adherents to privilege their emotional side, over their rational one. Undergoing experiences with a deeply emotional element was linked to the transformation of the self:

I went to the seminar, sat down, listened to the lecture and in the second part of the final prayer, I got really emotional, and cried a lot, compulsively. I knew that something had happened...what we learn here is to not valorise so much what we see, but much more, what we feel.

Angela

One day I had my eyes closed, praying, and I saw Eugenia open her arms. She was immense, and when she opened her arms, they looked like wings...Her body took the form of a uterus. And inside that uterus, I saw about 1000 people...it was a vision that I don't know how to describe. A happiness, an ecstasy...for a person who is really scientific, rational, and a doctor, I felt such happiness.

Ana

Aside from experiencing happiness through transcendent, transformative moments, adherents are also encouraged to see themselves as responsible for planting the seeds of happiness in their everyday lives. Spiritism in general posits individuals as accountable for their own lives and the trajectories that their lives take, as each spirit chooses the challenges and difficulties that will be encountered in life prior to earthly incarnation for their own spiritual growth and evolution. Thus at all times, the spirit is in charge of its own life trajectory. Adherents find this notion empowering. As Carol, 19, says, “We learn that we have the most responsibility for our own lives, we cannot blame others and that the answers lie in our own conscience”.

This philosophy coincides and resonates with neoliberal ideologies prevalent in contemporary society, which dictate that individuals are responsible for the choices they make and the potential consequences of those choices. Salto Quântico reinforces the belief that the individual alone is responsible for what occurs in their life. There are no victims, only agents who choose the path they will take. While Spiritists believe in a just, loving and forgiving creator, they also believe that each spirit has the free will to make their own decisions, and therefore suffer, or enjoy the resultant consequences. Heaphy (2007:112) outlines the expectations placed on the individual in late modern society which concur with this perspective:

The weight of success and happiness rests squarely on the shoulders of the individual. Individuals must accept full responsibility for their actions, and cannot ascribe blame to others with experiencing negative consequences that can only be attributed to their own error and neglect. The growing hegemony and importance of therapeutic knowledge in explaining personal problems and helping individuals to recognise the role of their own agency and attitudes in overcoming issues also indicates the influence of psychological surveillance in the late modern period.

Salto Quântico devotes extensive discourse and focus to the development and surveillance of self, combining Jungian psychology, depth psychology and the guidance of Teixeira's spiritual mentors to help the individual take full ownership over their own happiness and life...This is affirmed by the Salto Quântico motto which declares, "Happiness is not only your right, it is your duty!" The website has headlining articles that change weekly, boasting titles such as "*Be a victim or be a victor, what do you want?*" (Teixeira 2013a), teaching that in life there are only two choices, "to struggle and be determined to achieve what is possible...or yield and be dragged by the force of circumstance." Jungian psychology in particular pervades much of Teixeira's self-help literature and online articles. A seminal figure in the development of self-spirituality, Jung promoted the discovery of self as separate from the collective unconsciousness of society (Homans 1979:200), and the ideal of liberation through self-knowledge.

Heelas (1996) points out that many of those who engage in "self-spirituality", are already looking for something more, poised for the next step in fulfilling their aspirations, and therefore already "primed." What they hear and learn in New Age discourse strongly resonates with their prior values and assumptions. Angela, for example, explained: "I entered (Salto Quântico) with a lot of faith, in the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, spiritual faith", affirmed this. For Lulu, however, Salto Quântico's teaching helped move her from a static and apathetic state of spirituality which she was experiencing in Catholicism, to a state of ever-evolving happiness fuelled by the yearning to know and understand herself better. This path of increased self-understanding led her to leave a destructive relationship, improve her relationship with her teenaged son and give up her heavy smoking habit. She expounded:

In my opinion, the greatest challenge is for us to overcome our shadow. We have to search for self-knowledge, self-esteem, because my self-esteem was very low, you have to shed light on your own being...you have to get to know those parts of yourself that you don't want to admit you have, and realise it's part of being human. My education and background taught me I had to be a perfect human being, a perfect mother, you know? Like a saint! And we internalise this from a very young age, and we blame ourselves a lot. I did this a lot with my youngest son.

Although Salto Quântico does reinforce ideologies such as the responsibility for one's own happiness, it does resist heteronormative ideas around happiness. Teixeira's teachings advocate a

path to happiness that fully embraces a full range of human emotions and experiences as part of the process. A post entitled “Realistic Happiness” (Teixeira 2013b) on the site teaches:

Happiness has nothing to do with ease, joy or continuous pleasure, but instead with the fulfillment of being, which includes conflicts, challenges, disappointments and failures. A constant smile will destine one for the asylum.

This idea of happiness engages a process of adaptation and flow, not a fixed end point to work towards. In many ways, the Salto Quântista reading of happiness embodies a more holistic conception, similar to Illich’s idea of health as a process of adaption and change. Furthermore, Salto Quântico promotes a vision of happiness accessible to all, regardless of one’s gender, sexuality or socio-economic status. Ahmed (2010) notes that prescriptions of happiness often correlate with social norms such as heterosexuality and marriage, which exclude certain subaltern groups. Teixeira resists these norms and teaches that happiness should be accessible to and experienced by all, especially with respect to sexual orientation. It should be accessible to those in heterosexual relationships, but also to those in gay, lesbian or bisexual partnerships, and to those who engage in relationships that fall outside the boundaries of the social norm (Teixeira, for example, lives in a union with both his husband and ex-partner). One’s ability to move towards a state of happiness is dependent upon the work they do on their inner self-spirituality, their relationship with God, and in living a life that is reflective of their spiritual values. This is also evident in Teixeira’s belief that depression represents a lack of God, which will be discussed next.

Making sense of depression and mental illness

At the opposite end of the emotional spectrum to happiness, Salto Quântico also deeply engages with the prevalence of depression and mental illness in contemporary society. Here, it is useful to again draw some comparisons between Salto Quântico and Spiritism, in order to understand the connection between the spiritual world and mental illness. Spiritism upholds deep-seated beliefs about psychiatric disorders and mental illness as symptomatic of spiritual disturbance, which may stem from several causes: undeveloped mediumship making one more prone to psychic/spiritual disturbances³⁵, confusing past life recollections, or most prominently, the negative effects of

³⁵Psychiatric patients who report seeing visions or hearing voices are believed in many cases to not be suffering from hallucinations, but to in fact be mediums who are unaware of their abilities of heightened psychic perception.

obsessive spirits, whereby patients are troubled by earthbound spirits who evoke unhealthy behaviour in spiritually weakened individuals, encouraging alcohol and drug addiction (Bragdon 2013). Such spirits influence the person's thoughts and diminish their willpower by repeating negative thoughts, which the individual comes to recognise as their own. J.L. Azevedo, doctor and advocate of Spiritist treatment for mental illness argues:

If the spirit is not acknowledged as existing and real, psychiatrists will only pay attention to effect. They will be impeded from divining the root causes and will never cure effectively... New theories—with solid experimental foundation—point at illuminating and unveiling the spirit. But, we need courage, not only to acknowledge these theories, but also to examine them.

J.L. Azevedo 1997:66

This acknowledgement of the role of the spiritual self as elemental to the overall health and wellbeing of the individual is discussed at length within Salto Quântico, with many adherents joining the group seeking to make spiritual sense of depression. Eugenia explains that depression is a scourge of modernity that at its deepest level is fundamentally a spiritual problem (Eugenia cited in Teixeira 2011). Depression stems from the severe frustration of the spirit, caused by the rejection of the spiritual fulfilment and expansion of self. According to Teixeira, many try to deal with this spiritual lack by finding solace in addiction, distractions and futile interests. However, the only effective treatment for depression is a deeply engaged search for one's true and authentic inner being, which can be cultivated by daily contact with God through meditation, prayer and charitable service (Teixeira 2011: 238). Angela expressed it thus: "It's inside ourselves, not in our external bodies, that the most significant cures happen...not the salvation of our physical body, but in our spirit." The healing of the inner self is directly linked to the nurturing and maintenance of a relationship with God.

Eugenia additionally cautions that depression can originate from the chronic repression of intense rage, that after being expressed as depression, often flows into becoming organic illnesses such as rheumatoid arthritis and cancer (Eugenia cited in Teixeira 2011.) This resonates with the many New Age texts and teachings that align illness with ill-managed or repressed emotion. The human being is seen as vulnerable to the detrimental effects of earthly pleasures, vices and detrimental

behaviours such as prejudice and ego. Unconscious adherence to damaging mental patterns and addictions can impact the individual's physical or mental health, once again underlining the need for development of the spiritual self to evade illnesses stemming from injurious behaviours or emotional states.

Similar to the case of Umbanda discussed earlier, Salto Quântico does not reject biomedical practices outright; however, it does recommend using them judiciously. The efficacy of psychotropic medications and treatments cannot be wholly successful without taking the spirit into consideration.

With all respect to the work of psychiatry and the innumerable schools of psychology on Earth, severe depression will never be eradicated in an enduring or profound way, without referring back to issues of spiritual nature and religion.

(Eugenia cited in Teixeira 2011:237)

The entwining of mental and spiritual health is exemplified in the case of Lulu, who traced her trajectory of depression back to a lack of true spiritual engagement.

After I separated (from my husband), I had depression, and I began having private consultations³⁶ with Benjamin...and one time, he asked Eugenia about a treatment for me. And Eugenia responded that what was necessary was spiritual growth, because she perceived that I didn't have spiritual devotion...because I hadn't been a devoted Catholic, I didn't have that conviction.

For Ana Cristina de Santos Sá, a 47-year-old doctor deeply involved with Salto Quântico, her depression was linked to a lack of understanding of the spiritual world. Ana had been haunted by visions and voices throughout her life, leading her to feel isolated, different to others, and psychologically unstable.

I used to have these crises. I began university, and the crises got worse, and my sister was worried. "My God, Ana is different, she tells me things, she tells me things"... I was tormented. Everything was lacking, I felt lost...I used to hear and see visions, for me, it

³⁶ In the earlier years of Salto Quântico, Benjamin offered adherents private consultations with him.

was normal, but for others of course it wasn't. So I thought, I'm going to have to find a psychiatrist, because this is wrong.

She began seeing a psychiatrist, and was put on various courses of antidepressants for ten years, to little effect. The psychiatrist then recommended she increase her medication, which left her despairing as she felt strongly against a move to stronger drugs. Literature around the use of psychotropics (Morrall 2009; Lake 2011) indicates that psychiatry is the most irresolute area of medicine with treatment used in conventional health care often only providing temporary alleviation, seldom addressing the root causes or the meaning of mental illness. James Lake (2011) also argues that current conventional psychiatric treatment is inherently limited for several fundamental reasons; firstly, it has inadequate understandings of the mechanisms of action of many drugs; secondly, the efficacy of many drugs currently in use is limited; thirdly, there are often toxic side effects of drugs currently in circulation or dangerous drug-drug interactions, and finally, many psychotropic drugs are unaffordable or often subject to limited availability. For Illich (1977:79), dependence on mood-enhancing drugs is emblematic of medicalised addiction, favoured above all other forms of fostering well-being. Dependency on psychotropic medication is prevalent in Brazil, especially among the middle to upper classes and women. Quintana et al. (2013) note that a case study carried out in Rio de Janeiro over 2007-2008 demonstrated that the prevalence of psychotropic drug use is gendered, with 6.55% of the population depending on drugs, increasing to 9.13% among women.

For Ana, the limitations of conventional psychiatric treatment were all considerations of which she was acutely aware. Leaving the psychiatrist's office, she recalled that her sister had pointed out on TV earlier the *Salto Quântico* TV programme, and spontaneously decided to go to Teixeira's seminar which had been advertised for that afternoon.

I arrived, sat down, and I was really depressed. And Benjamin started to talk, talk, he talked between 15-20 minutes...and then I thought, "Where is my depression? Where is the depression?" The lack of energy, the fatigue, the body pains...all disappeared. And at that exact moment, Benjamin said, "Depression is a lack of God!" He said it as if he had perceived me and understood me...I'm a doctor, very scientific, very rational...although I became Salto Quântista soon after, my voice, the "I" continued, "How can it be a lack of God?"

Soon after attending this first seminar, Teixeira invited her to have private consultations with him, advising her to supplement the medical treatment she was receiving with spiritual work, and then to aim towards leaving the psychiatrist and medication when she felt ready. She confided in him about her crises, telling him,

I'm a doctor...I've got my diploma. But I don't really think I'm a doctor...and he asked, "How so?" I said... I have difficulty studying. And I choked, and stopped talking...it was the first time I had spoken to anyone about this...I use guidance I receive...I don't think I'm a doctor. But Benjamin suddenly burst out laughing! And I turned red, yellow and white and got upset! And I thought, "Oh my God, why is he laughing!?" ...I had never told this to psychiatrists or psychologists before...about the "voice"...and Benjamin smiled and smiled and told me, "You're a medium Ana."

Although, initially scared, Ana came to understand that mediumship is simply a heightened sense of psychic perception, or a form of psychic intelligence.

I began to understand that another world exists, and that it always existed inside me, but that I didn't know what to call it. And so everything, everything, everything changed. From that moment, I began another life; inside this life...I perceived that I was never alone, that I "had" something, although I didn't know what it was...It was a process, to understand this world of spirituality. It was difficult because it was real, and because it was part of my life, my whole life.

Teixeira helped her to understand that the nature of her mediumship was mediumship of cure, which allowed her to spiritually heal the sick. In Ana's case, her spiritual guide is a German doctor called Hans who works through her as a channel. She related stories of her ability to deeply communicate with patients and understand them, and of the many patients who walk through her doors and after the consultation leave, already healed. Ana refers to this mediumship as "medicine of the spirit". She explained to me that just as conventional medicine requires learning, understanding and application, so too does spiritual healing. For Ana, once a rigid sceptic but now converted, the over-emphasis of the material body in science has been to the detriment of understanding the more subtle body; understanding the importance and validity of emotions and intuition, for example. "No-one teaches this...and people like me that do perceive them (the

spirits), are classed as having phobias, neuroses, because of this lack of information”. Ana’s narrative resonates with the notion of “sacralisation of illness” discussed earlier in the Umbanda chapter: as Heelas (2008) articulates, a spiritual interpretation of an illness can present an entirely different reading to that of biomedicine. Spiritual interpretations of illness impose a sacralised meaning and experience of it. Ana’s despair of her stigmatised mental illness that had worried her sister and left her in a profound state of despair strongly contrasts Teixeira’s spiritual analysis of it, which engaged a positive spiritual understanding. With the spiritual paradigm offering an alternative means of understanding the voices, Ana was able to cease the medication and resume her life without the stigma of seeing her condition as a mental illness.

The Material Dimension

Salto Quântico discourse and risk society

For Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990) the late modern era is synonymous with “risk society”: essentially the culmination of modernity, confronted with the inherent limits of its own project (Heaphy 2007). Humanity becomes aware of these limits, and is made fearful of the dangers and risks that have arisen as a result of the modern project. The lack of established bases to aid with understanding the most appropriate course of action to safeguard against risk ultimately heightens the ambivalence already felt by many, and furthermore, risk is omnipresent and represents a threat to all, regardless of socio-economic class (Beck 1992). Salto Quântico calls attention to this omnipresent risk, especially in the forms of dangers such as traffic accidents, air accidents, violence, assaults and homicide, and offers divine protection for those who truly embrace the group and its teachings. For those in Brazil, who are all too acutely aware of how quickly and randomly a life can be ended by a stray bullet in a gang crossfire, such promises are alluring. As discussed earlier in the Umbanda chapter, fear permeates the Brazilian social psyche, with gated communities, security guards, cut glass and barbed wire fences separating the haves from the have-nots, to seal off the danger presented by the vast inequalities present in Brazilian society. Many adherents articulated that one of the great benefits of being part of the Salto Quântico community was that they perceived their spirituality brought safety and a sense of security. Cristiane revealed that the sense of protection she felt within the group was extremely comforting: “Benjamin brings

Our Lady and Eugenia very close to us. It's wonderful to have this faith, and to feel that you are loved, guided and sheltered at all times.”

Regular attendees of the medium's groups are promised divine protection from the risks and dangers present in everyday life: Angela, 42, the presenter of Benjamin's weekly seminars, explained that those who attend the mediums' meetings are given 100% protection by Maria Santíssima. 90% protection is promised to those who attend the Sunday seminars, and 80% is given to the loved ones of those who attend the medium meetings. Because of this promise of protection, the group had seen its numbers swell:

The mediumistic groups are popular, they have increased in size, so now there are a lot more meetings and there are enormous waiting lists of people...trying to get in.. So there are certain rules, conditions which have been established because there are so many miracles and phenomena that happen that people may want to come to the medium groups just to receive protection, so there's a selection process, you know, people have to attend the seminars without missing any. They have to go to the study group, they have to say what their objective is, you know...generally spirituality determines who gets in.

Lulu

Teixeira himself states that for those who regularly attend mediumistic meetings, in 22 years, no one has passed away:

In fact, it is an extraordinary phenomenon, although we don't know for how much longer this indice of zero mortality of those who attend the mediumistic meetings in our institute will last, as it has already been 22 years (without any deaths). What the Spiritual Guides have told us with respect to this surreal protection is that it happens to call attention to and simultaneously endorse the extremely liberating discourse (of the group) and resist ingrained conventions and traditions and social and cultural paradigms which have been consolidated in Western civilisation. To receive this protection if you live in a city where there are no Salto Quântico groups, you must assiduously attend the Sunday seminars at a distance through the Internet and the Solene medium meetings on Thursdays, which are televised live on the site.

Teixeira thus rationalises the phenomena by suggesting that the miracles and healing are a way to initially attract people to the group, and then subsequently raise their consciousness to the spiritual messages and transformations being promoted by Salto Quântico teachings. Healing and miracles thus occur as a result of engagement with transformative discourse and thought. However, there is tension in the sense that only those who adhere to the spiritual beliefs and practices of Salto Quântico by being fully involved in the group's activities are eligible for divine protection. In the context of the Brazilian religious marketplace, such assurances speak to those seeking authenticity, for a religious product that comes with guarantees. To emphasise this message, the Salto Quântico website boasts testimonies of “*salvamento extraordinário*” (extraordinary rescue) where people share stories of miraculously avoiding death due to their adherence. New extraordinary rescues are often shared on Sundays in the public seminars. The website abounds with such narratives from followers who feel that divine intervention protected them in a particularly dangerous moment. Some of the testimonies listed include the brother of a member who missed TAM flight 3054 from Florianopolis to Sao Paulo and was spared from certain death in Brazil's worst air disaster, a driver who was saved from “a terrorist shooting” of a government car punctured by multiple bullet holes who emerged unscathed, escapes from armed assault and multiple accounts of serious traffic accidents where members walk away unharmed, such as Lulu who survived the impact of a serious collision:

Benjamin called me...to ask if I had recuperated, and that was when he confirmed that I had been spiritually saved, because my karmic programming was set to disincarnate then. I had a 90% chance of disincarnating at the moment (of the crash).

Lulu's narrative is representative of the quantification of mortality and scientific exactitude used in the group's discourse: faith and adherence is rewarded with 100% protection, and those who attend the mediums' groups have a 100% survival rate. Numerically calculating the extent to which one benefits from involvement with the group speaks to the fears of risk society. However, in addition to these narratives of miraculous rescues, there are also numerous recounts of extraordinary cases of healing. Salto Quântico provides its adherents with protection not only from the risks and dangers of late modern society, but also from the weakness and vulnerability of the incarnate human body.

Charismatic faith healing

Salto Quântico extends a second type of healing to its adherents: spontaneous faith healing. This brand of healing resonates with the charismatic healing ministry of Pentecostalism, and with the healing present in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, which Thomas Csordas (1995) has identified as an elaboration of Pentecostal faith healing. Csordas (1995:6) writes that while the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is seemingly an oxymoronic “juxtaposition of two incompatible versions of Christianity”, in actual fact it is more emblematic of a “short circuit” or breakdown of boundaries between symbolic forms which no longer have stable referents. The charismatic healing present in Salto Quântico is of a similar dynamic, whereby its scientific/psychological/Spiritist discourse is combined with Pentecostal-type faith ministry, with Teixeira acting as a channel for divine gifts of healing. However, distinct to Pentecostal faith ministry, the healing gifts come not from the Holy Spirit, but of the Virgin Mary and her spiritual emissary, Eugenia. Members of the Salto Quântico community experience miraculous healing from illness and these cases are known within the group as “extraordinary cures”.

During the weekly Sunday seminars open to the public, those who have received the benefits of Eugenia/Mary’s protection come forward to provide testimonies, which now number into the hundreds: cases of cancer, epilepsy and macular degeneration among many other illnesses, healed miraculously. These testimonies are filmed and made available online, accompanied by doctors’ reports, x-rays and photos as physical evidence of the charismatic gifts available to those who are truly faithful. . These accompanying ”proofs” from conventional medicine function to affirm the validity of spiritual healing for those adherents more primed to orthodox healthcare, while also emphasising the role of the divine in these healings: where conventional medicine has faltered or failed, the divine is infallible.

Testimonies from adherents abound on the website. Cris Carmelo, long-time devotee, reported leaving a mediums’ meeting of the group and intuitively feeling that she should have a colonoscopy carried out. The doctor conceded because of her insistence, although she related that he was surprised at her request for a colonoscopy with no concrete basis for it. According to Cris, he was astounded to find an intraepithelial carcinoma, a precocious tumour. When she was tested again a week later, there was no trace of the carcinoma. Monica told of a nodule that had been growing on her thyroid for five years. Her doctor arranged for a test to determine whether it

should be removed, but the test showed that the nodule had disappeared. Other cases include accounts of healing from a severely fractured coccyx after two weeks, pregnancy in an older woman who had trouble conceiving, restoration of eyesight, a cure from lung cancer with reverted metastasis and husband and wife both cured from cancer.

The vast majority of these narratives emphasise the occurrence of a miracle: the illness or problem is resolved or healed instantaneously, acknowledged by all those who have experienced the healing as due to the spiritual intervention of Maria Santíssima recognising the truly faithful. Other stories, such as that of Salete Almeida and Heron Alencar, however, identify Teixeira as a channel for these divine forces. Stories around Teixeira's divine healing ability further strengthen his position as a charismatic figure, indispensable to the movement. Salete described how a lesion on her nose was identified as cancerous, and began the process of finding a doctor who could remove it. Following a medium's meeting, Benjamin asked Salete what was wrong with her nose, as it was covered with a bandage. She told him of the lesion, adding, "I know we have to seek conventional medicine, but the medicine of heaven is far more important", asking him to place his hands over her nose. He did so, and she reported that the next day the lesion had dried up and soon disappeared completely. Heron also suffered from a cancerous lesion on his face. Teixeira kissed his bandage, and the next day recounted that the lesion had scabbed and was healing. All adherents emphatically expressed the belief that their involvement in the group means they enjoy the benefits of divine protection. However, as discussed earlier, the protection given by Maria Santíssima is only fully extended to those who are regularly involved with the group and its various activities.

Sexuality and spirituality

Carl Jung once remarked that when people came to him seeking help with sexual issues they were often really religious problems, and religious problems brought to him turned out to be sexual in nature (Jung cited in Nelson 1978). Jung's insight underlines that there is an intertwining of spirituality and sexuality that is often separated in Western religiosity and thought. James Nelson (1978) postulates that there is a need for a sexual theology that positively affirms the embodied self, the goodness of sexual pleasure and the significance of sexual self-affirmation in an incarnational theology. Sexuality is a vital element of personhood, permeating and affecting emotions, thoughts and actions. It strongly influences self-understanding and one's way of being in the world, and influences the individual's appropriation of attitudes and characteristics that have been defined as

masculine and feminine, affectional orientation towards others of the same or opposite sex, and attitudes about our own bodies and those of others (Nelson 1978:18).

The reconciliation of spirituality and sexuality is an issue that Salto Quântico ardently takes up, resisting traditional Christian readings of the body. For Salto Quântistas, the body is divine, not pollutive. A significant portion of the teachings of Salto Quântico are oriented around making sense of identity, sexuality and spirituality, and the convergence of earthly desires with the spiritual being. Interestingly, although questions of sex and sexuality are embodied issues, Salto Quântico explores them primarily through discourse, debate and literature, not through embodied ritual or practice, as in the case of Umbanda.

Christian and Spiritist understandings of the body and sexuality

Throughout history, Christian discourse and exegesis around the human body has underscored the need for the exercise of control over carnal desires. At its most fundamental level, the body is interpreted as pollutive; a source of temptation that leads the individual astray to commit sins of the flesh; matter that separates us from our divinity and something that must be controlled and disciplined. Nelson (1978) argues that the self is unnecessarily separated from the body, and experienced in terms of binary opposition: me/not me, male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, healthy/ill, good/bad. As a consequence, the mind becomes alienated from the body and the body from the mind, resulting in the depersonalisation of sexuality. The body thus becomes a physical thing, object or machine possessed and used by the self, as a sort of slave (Nelson 1978: 39). Furthermore, the experiences, pleasures and pains of the body are interpreted as experiences of the baser realm, separate from the spiritual, moral self.

Christian orientations towards sexuality have been influenced by the story of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis, which many orthodox Christians read as the Biblical proof of God's disapproval of homosexuality. The book of Leviticus also refers to homosexuality, defining holiness by separation, correct definition and order. Leviticus shuns "unclean" animals for food, such as crawling creatures, because the Israelites believed they did not adequately conform to their appointed category, or their category contradicted the intended scheme of the

world. Thus it also shuns homosexual behaviour: “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22-23). Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger* (1966:36) that human pollution behaviour is a condemnation against any object or idea that may confuse or contradict cherished classification systems. Attributing danger to those that cross boundaries of classification is one way in which conformity is enforced. Furthermore, avoidance of anomalous things strengthens the definitions of those categories that are acceptable or approved (Douglas 1966:39). In the same way, individuals with sexuality or sexual preferences that defy orderly classification pose a threat and unleash danger. This notion is developed further by Nelson (1978) in his argument that those who do not conform to these categories experience alienation, which is at the root experience of sin. Sin alienates the person from their self, their neighbour and from God.

While Christianity interpreted in its most literal sense disapproves of homosexuality, Spiritist doctrine provides a limited, but open-minded understanding. Interpretations of the Spiritist doctrine indicate tolerance and respect towards homosexuality, stemming from the belief that spirits are androgynous, that gender binaries are a human construction and if anything, a sign of our lack of spiritual evolution. The concept of androgyny has long been explored by scholars such as Nicolas Berdiaev (1914), who writes that androgyny signifies “the transformation of past role expectations into more humanised ways of being”. For a person to attain full personhood, the cultivation of both “feminine” and “masculine” traits is necessary in order to find a space between the gender polarities encouraged by society. Feminist Rosemary Ruether (1985) argues that the concept of complementarity of masculine/feminine depends on the notion that two kinds of personalities naturally exist in males and females which are each partial expressions of a larger whole. Such a view allows neither men nor women to be whole persons who can develop both their active and affective sides. This rejection of gender dichotomies is also echoed in Teixeira’s discourse, who writes that he often refers to Eugenia, “in the masculine gender, to confer psychosexualneutrality, as she herself would want done” (Teixeira 2011).

The ideal of androgyny is echoed by many other mediums that psychograph messages from spirits, such as Jane Roberts of the *Seth* book series, and Chico Xavier, Brazil’s most celebrated Spiritist medium. Xavier’s contribution to clarifying issues pertaining to sexuality came in the form of *Life and Sex (Vida e Sexo)* (1970), psychographed by the spirit Emmanuel through Xavier. This book

argues that there is no such thing as complete masculinity or femininity on Earth, because as spirits undergo multiple reincarnations in both male and female bodies, the polarities between sex and gender become more fluid and the phenomenon of bisexuality and androgyny become increasingly established. Furthermore, transgenderism and transsexuality are also briefly discussed in Xavier's (1957:200) *Action and Reaction*, psychographed by the doctor André Luiz. In chapter 15, Silas clarifies that the spirit will tend to be embodied numerous consecutive times in one sex in order to correct past wrongs that were committed in previous incarnations:

However, on many occasions...when a man tyrannises a woman, stealing her rights and committing abuses, he disorganises himself to the point that, unconscious and unbalanced, he is driven by agents of the Divine Law to a painful rebirth in the body of a woman, so that in extreme intimate discomfort, he learns to worship from within a woman; his sister and partner, daughter and mother, before God.

In *Life and Sex* (1970), the spirit Emmanuel elaborates that homosexuality is perfectly understandable when viewed from a reincarnational gaze. Cultured and sensitive spirits, aspiring to carry out tasks specific to the elevation of human society as a whole and their own spiritual elevation, ask the Instructors of Higher Life to assist in placing them in the physical realm, in a physical body which opposes the psychological structure that defines them for that earthly incarnation. This suggests that spirits undergo the experience of homosexuality in order to become more spiritually evolved, implying that homosexuality is a spiritually positive experience.

Making sense of spirituality and sexuality in Salto Quântico

Salto Quântico expands on Spiritist beliefs around homosexuality, drawing on interpretations from the New Testament, recent scientific studies³⁷ and messages and lessons received by Teixeira from the spiritual guides to promote the sacred nature of homosexual union. However, the teachings also place significant focus on a re-imagining of sexuality, resisting typical religious silence around sexual issues. Themes openly discussed and critiqued in seminars include

³⁷ One of Spiritism's most important codes is that it is flexible to change. If science should prove that an element of the doctrine is outdated or scientifically disproven, that element of the doctrine must be disregarded and updated.

denunciation of the ideal of no sex before marriage, gay marriage, homosexuality, gender binaries, the necessity of the right to divorce, sadomasochism, promiscuity, lust, dealing with break-ups, infidelity and masturbation. Salto Quântico endeavours to establish new and progressive ways of understanding and making sense of embodied matters as a departure from institutional religion, reinforcing that the body can be reunited with the spirit, enjoyed and celebrated, but within reason: in an article available on the site entitled *Sex and Sublime Sex*, Eugenia advises the reader that although the act of sex must be enjoyed and given due value, it must be enjoyed in a balanced way and sexual excesses are to be avoided as the focus must always remain on the spiritual (Eugenia, 1996).

For Marcuse (2001), there is a link between the alienation of the human being from society and alienation from our own sexuality. As a result of capitalism, sex and love have become linked to work, productivity and performance, to the detriment of sexual love. The body, and its role in giving, receiving and feeling in sexual pleasure, as an act of love or to nourish a human relationship is overlooked in favour of mechanical sexual acts. Virginia Johnson and William Masters (1974:90) argue:

Sex, like work, becomes a matter of performance. There is always a goal in view- ejaculation for the man, orgasm for the woman. If these goals have been achieved, the job has been satisfactorily performed...Sex...is not a way of being, a way of expressing identity or feelings or a way of nourishing a commitment.

Linked to this “production and performance oriented” view of sex is the concept that those sexual acts which host no possibility of producing offspring are fundamentally wrong, as they defy this rationality. In a text posted online in 2006, Eugenia resists the traditional Christian notion that the primary purpose of sex is for reproduction and argues:

Sexual desire...aside from being a physical impulse to re-create the body, expresses an irresistible way of exchanging energies from spirit to spirit, on a very deep level. It is not by chance... that sexual desire extends itself beyond the periods of female fertility and beyond periods of desired pregnancy. Sexual exchanges between people of the same sex,

which confirm this thesis, entirely incomprehensible from a reproductive point of view, characterise...at least 10% of human populations on the Earth.

Eugenia cited in Teixeira 2006

Eugenia³⁸, Salto Quântico's most outspoken spiritual defender of the homosexual community, establishes both on the website, blog, in literature and public seminars (the weekly *palestras*) the importance of the issue of discrimination against the homosexual community and the need to transform societal prejudice and intolerance. The website has a major section which deals exclusively with matters of homosexuality and homophobia, combining social commentary and excerpts from local newspapers in Aracaju on gay pride parades of which Teixeira is an ardent supporter, video testimonies, autobiographical material of Benjamin's experiences growing up gay, articles concerning Benjamin's civil union with his current partner Wagner, and statements received by Benjamin from Eugenia and from other spiritual guides who speak through him in support of the naturalness and innate divinity of homosexuality.

In one such dialogue, spiritual guide Brother Chico speaks of a conversation he once had with a farm labourer named Tonico, who is in a state of self-loathing and fear about his attraction to men. Tonico comes to Chico in search of spiritual comfort for what he believes to be his immoral and degenerate lust. When Chico queries him about who told him it was degenerate for one man to desire another, Tonico responds:

The Father, Chico. He told me I have been taken by the Enemy, and that only when I expel these improper thoughts, will I be able to feel and be considered a son of God.

Chico replies:

The Father is mistaken, Tonico...Everything in nature is of God. And like the current of a river that has no linear form crosses an uneven terrain, we must circumvent what hinders

³⁸ It is important to re-affirm here that Eugenia is the spiritual teacher, who uses Benjamin as her mouthpiece. When I referred to points Benjamin made during lectures and question and answer sessions in Aracaju, he would often correct me and say that it was Eugenia. However the distinction between Benjamin and Eugenia's words and teachings wasn't always immediately clear to me, and the personality cult around Benjamin would indicate that to his followers, he was esteemed as much as Eugenia.

us, channeling the energy from what is socially frowned upon nowadays into other tasks...

This dialogue reveals several important themes: firstly, the matter of coming to terms with one's homosexuality in a traditionally *macho* society; secondly, the naturalness of the state of homosexuality rather than seeing it as an aberration, and finally, a critique of the Catholic Church for its treatment and indoctrination of homosexual individuals that they are polluted and evil. Salto Quântico affirms that homosexuality is not synonymous with deviance and that one does not need to preclude their spiritual identity from their sexual one. In *Modern Responses to Greek Wisdom*, Teixeira (2011:83) writes as a preamble to the chapter focusing on homosexuality:

I see my homosexual brothers and sisters with tears in their eyes as they read this. You can shed tears, my friends, tears of relief and comfort: you are not alone- the angels of Heaven watch over all of us, but especially over the most oppressed (!) of us, principally those who suffer oppression for loving, and not being able to express their love!...

Creating a religious doctrine anchored in both Christianity and Spiritism that embraces and legitimates homosexuality is a central focus of Salto Quântico. As Nelson (1978:209) points out, gay Christians have long been pushed away from Christian churches and forced to find a sense of community in gay bars, baths and ghettos, or others, as Eugenia (cited in Teixeira 2011:88) points out, slide into compulsive promiscuity or opt for heterosexual marriage as they find no space open to them in civil society. Salto Quântico attempts to create an inclusive, supportive spiritual community for both homosexual and heterosexual individuals. Although various religions in Brazil are accepting of gay and lesbian members in their spiritual communities (Umbanda as one prominent example), Salto Quântico makes a point of not merely accepting them, but supporting them as perhaps the most truly devout and spiritual of all by defining homosexuality as moral. Eugenia (cited in Teixeira 2011:90) states:

You, today, my dear tormented friends, having suffered so much attack and lack of understanding, constitute one of the main groups of martyrs of the modern age. There was a time in which prophets, and apostles, Christians and women were oppressed for

centuries and centuries. Now Spiritists, mediums and gays are the ones who are oppressed, for different reasons.

Krista McQueeney (2009) writes in her studies of sexuality in lesbian and gay affirming churches that some members draw on specific strategies to perform their identities as good Christians to overcome or resolve the conflict of being both homosexual and Christian. The strategies include minimising, normalising, and moralising their sexuality. For those who moralise their sexual-spiritual identity, they define themselves as more spiritual and more moral than those who claim to be Christian but are condemnatory of the homosexual community (symbolised by the epithet, love the sinner, hate the sin). McQueeney (2009:101) notes that in the churches that she studied, those who moralised homosexuality saw in their stigmatised sexuality a mission to save gay and lesbian souls, and some even believed they had been “called to fight homophobia within Christianity” and believed they may even be “God’s chosen ones”. Another informant discloses that she, “was like David, an outcast of the community...I had to get away from the prejudice and drama so I could find my calling as a preacher (and) let people know that being gay is a blessing...” (McQueeney 2009:101). These narratives imply a special moral identity for homosexual individuals. Different individuals within Salto Quântico had their own strategies for reconciling their religious and sexual identities: some minimised their sexuality, downplaying it, while others normalised it, emphasising their adherence to the Christian institutions of marriage, family, and monogamy. However, the discourse presented by Teixeira and Eugenia overwhelmingly encourages members to see their homosexuality as natural, normal and moral.

Eugenia acknowledges that although humanity in its present state is still not completely accepting of homosexual individuals, in 100 to 200 years, “future human society will reserve total citizenship for the homosexual component of society; the prejudice, discrimination and every form of marginalisation practiced today will be seen as signs of primitivism and unconsciousness that will be completely overcome in the near future...” (Eugenia cited in Teixeira, 2011:84). Eugenia then goes on to justify and validate homosexuality drawing on Spiritism first, then Christianity. She declares that Spiritism is, first and foremost, a science, and its codifier, Allan Kardec himself, postulated that if the doctrine ever contradicted new scientific discoveries, it must incorporate the new scientific knowledge into it. As both psychiatric and psychological communities are

unanimous in affirming that homosexuality does not constitute an illness or a dysfunction, Spiritism must embrace this scientific knowledge as part of its doctrine.

With respect to Christianity, Eugenia asserts that Jesus himself never showed respect for social convention, and always challenged the hypocrisy of Jewish Pharisaism. She further mentions that while Paul's passage pertaining to the condemnation of homosexuals is often cited, perhaps we should then too pay heed to other passages of Paul's, such as the recommendation that women remain silent in the church and must be obedient to men (Timothy 1, 2:11-13, Corinthians 1. 11:7-9). Finally, Eugenia comments on the prevalence of intimate same-sex friendships in the Bible. She states that during the Last Supper, John lays his head on Jesus's breast and often refers to himself in third person as Jesus' most beloved disciple. She reveals that John was gay, and that this Biblical reading should serve to liberate the 600 million in the world who are gay and suffer greatly at the hands of the heterosexual majority. In this way, Eugenia's teachings offer an alternative reading of Spiritist and Christian doctrine to further validate the spiritual legitimation and morality around homosexuality.

Narratives of reconciliation: the experiences of LGBT adherents

With such intense focus dedicated to the effort of educating adherents about homosexuality and eradicating homophobia, it is interesting to look in more depth at how this teaching bears upon members of the Salto Quântico community. In most major religious denominations where homosexual behaviour is deemed immoral, gay men and women are forced to either suppress their homosexual inclinations or reject the church in the belief that the two are incompatible. Rejection or suppression of an important aspect of self often results in the individual experiencing profound and negative effects of their overall happiness and wellbeing. For those growing up gay, being labelled as deviants by wider society and immoral by religious communities often incites internalised homophobia, whereby individuals integrate these negative labels into their own images of self (Wagner et al. 1994). Gonsiorek (1988) describes internalised homophobia as one of the greatest obstacles to the mental health of homosexual individuals, while Nungesser (1983) identifies religiosity as an "important ideological correlate" of internalised homophobia, asserting that those influenced by traditional religious values are most likely to be anti-gay, suppress their

sexuality or delay the development of their gay orientation. Chris Glaser (1977), writing on the experiences of gay people coming out, expounds that for many individuals coming out in the church has meant coming out of the church, and for others it means choosing to simply not come out in order to stay in the church. McQueeney (2009) notes that for many of her informants, simply being part of a religious community that did not openly criticise or lament homosexuality was already seen as progressive.

What becomes clear from existing literature is that for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals the longstanding Christian disapproval of homosexuality has discouraged many from seeking to involve themselves in a religious community, or prevented them from being open about their sexuality in a religious context. Sexuality and spirituality can both constitute fundamental components of one's identity. For the Salto Quântistas who participated in interviews, one of the major reoccurring themes were the notions of acceptance in society, being forced to choose to live out one aspect of their identity to the exclusion of other, and overcoming the internalised homophobia or belief that they were "immoral", "an aberration", or "perverse". Many had long experienced consternation and anxiety about reconciling their sexual orientation with their spiritual selves that their involvement in Salto Quântico helped to resolve. All narratives referred to the fear and anxiety initially experienced upon coming to terms with their sexuality, because of their awareness of the potential implications. Anderson Muniz, 37, noted:

As a homosexual, we have this issue of being in a world where you don't see--and I didn't see in my childhood or adolescence-- a couple consisting of two men, or two women... and so it's difficult to accept, and it creates a series of issues...and various religions denominate us as aberrations.

For Linda Brazil, 39, the challenges of being a transsexual were slightly different:

The difficulties I face as a transsexual are many, mainly because of my own self acceptance, because it's a dilemma and causes a lot of conflict to discover you are transsexual... with very strong familial, social and religious pressure...transsexuality is

very intense, in that it doesn't give me a chance to say who I am, people just see me and already form judgements, very often negative judgements, and all of this is tough.

For those who were bisexuals, there often discrimination from wider society but also from the homosexual community who were sometimes unaccepting of them. Iris, 29, English teacher noted:

When I discovered I was bisexual, I had had a boyfriend...for a long time. But I fell for Ana, we met each other working in the centre of Santa Maria, and we began a relationship. This discovery was really difficult, because in fact, bisexuality isn't talked about so I had prejudice towards myself, and there's prejudice outside too. The fact that you don't see bisexuality in culture, there really isn't identification of it in films, it's really not there like in the case of homosexuality.

For all informants, the support and spiritual teachings of Teixeira were instrumental in overcoming these challenges of self-acceptance and developing one's identity as both a spiritual and sexual being. Salto Quântico posits that the union of two homosexual people is as divine as that of a heterosexual couple, if not more so, because of the trials and obstacles homosexual individuals face in assuming and living their true identities. One of the themes that was most predominant in interviewee narratives was the sense of "liberation" or relief they encountered in coming to terms with their sexuality, and the realisation that they could live full and happy lives. Informants such as André, felt empowered to accept their sexuality because of Teixeira's teachings. André told me: "I give thanks that people can liberate themselves more and more from what science, various thinkers and Quantista philosophy have been saying for years". For Iris, who first came to terms with her bisexuality in her early twenties, her spiritual education helped her to not only overcome her internalised prejudice, but to make sense of her sexual orientation which she little understood:

I had no idea what bisexuality was, nor the concept of sexuality! Through Salto Quântico, through Benjamin's lectures, the seminars, the classes, I began to think, "Oh my God", it's possible to be bisexual, to be in a homosexual relationship, to have sex, and be spiritual at the same time! (laughs)

Anderson added that the way Salto Quântico encouraged adherents to embrace their sexuality was liberating:

Salto Quântico Institute teaches us to leave behind this pattern of being a victim and above all, brings us what Christ promised: the Kingdom of God on Earth. The Kingdom of God, overcoming prejudice, bringing us happiness... It is reconciliation in my case...because I saw myself from a religious viewpoint as someone who could not be seen well in the eyes of God because I was homosexual. But thanks to Salto Quântico, the studies, the way of understanding the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it brings us the light of spirituality, and of science.

For André Luiz de Jesus Moraes, 33, nurse:

After Salto Quântico...everything got better, we flourished. I really see conciliation between my sexuality and the religiosity of Salto Quântico. I see sexuality and religiosity as completely natural elements of the human being. Before Salto Quântico, I had this scission inside me. I thought I wouldn't be able to live my sexuality, because I was taught that it wouldn't be possible, because I was a homosexual. But it became something completely normal, completely natural, completely viable, completely common because we see in Salto Quântico, it's hammered into us, through the science and philosophy of Eugenia, through Benjamin, the naturalness and the happiness of being able to marry, and live out our sexuality and spirituality.

André's partner, Carlos Henrique, 31, lawyer, summarised and affirmed the importance Salto Quântico has had in liberating him and allowing him to live out his sexuality thus:

I found myself, I found true happiness. I can be myself, I don't need to hide myself...I can live fully, in all senses....from the moment I began to live the Salto Quântico philosophy, I

stopped attacking myself so much in relation to my homosexuality, that it wasn't something wrong, which is what society had put in my head.

Conclusion

Salto Quântico presents itself as a contemporary movement informed by Spiritism, Jungian psychology, New Age ideologies and Christianity. However, the group eschews identification as a religious denomination, preferring instead to identify itself as a scientifically informed “institute of happiness”. The group’s existence and success is dependent on the charismatic leadership of Teixeira, who acts as a conduit for various spiritual guides (the most prominent being Eugenia), and is revered by adherents for his confrontation of controversial issues, such as homosexuality, depression and chastity, many of which have traditionally been ignored or ignited contention within a religious context. The most engaged constituents of Salto Quântico are from the middle to upper socio-economic classes; however, the general activities and seminars open to the public attract individuals from diverse social backgrounds. Similar to the Universal Church and Umbanda, Salto Quântico disseminates teachings that resonate with neoliberal ideologies such as the sense of responsibility that falls on the individual to take charge of their own life trajectory and the need to foster personal happiness. Notably, the group makes extensive use of the Internet as a means of distributing videos, seminars and blogs that speak to these issues.

For followers who are from the LGBT community, the group’s spiritual discourse is deeply liberating and presents a way to break down boundaries between sexuality and spirituality. However, Teixeira’s discourse seeks not only to challenge long held-beliefs that view homosexuality/bisexuality/transsexuality as antithetical to religiosity, but also to contest patriarchal and Christian conceptions of God, femininity, sexuality and marriage. He presents a religious hermeneutic that is anchored in both Christian and Spiritist traditions, but embraces and legitimates alternative expressions of sexuality and gender. As manifest in the adherents’ narratives, this discourse that seeks to reconcile spirituality and sexuality has borne strong influences on their everyday lives, perspectives and understandings of self.

Finally, Salto Quântico also speaks to those who are aware of the inherent risks present in late modern life, particularly risks such as traffic accidents, homicide and assault that are ubiquitous in urban Brazil. In seminars Teixeira regularly provides “proofs” of dramatic escapes or miraculous recovery from illness, attracting those who are aware of the everyday perils that characterise contemporary life and seek to spiritually defend themselves. According to Teixeira, the divine protection and healing is promised to loyal followers, in order to entice new members and raise their consciousness to a more spiritually evolved level.

Discussion

Religion does not exist in a vacuum in Brazil, sacred and distinct from secular reality, but is part of everyday life, informing and bearing influence on it. The three religious communities considered in this study are indicative of the diverse plurality of religiosities in the Brazilian marketplace, each offering their own specialised products and paradigms to make sense of late modern life. This study explored contemporary religious adherence in Brazil, determining factors that compelled individuals in Brazil to engage regularly with a religious group and the ways that involvement in a religious community impacted on their lives. This research contributes to the phenomenological movement in current scholarship that seeks to understand religion and spirituality as an integrated and comfortable component of life that is experienced in the mind, body and spirit of the individual on an everyday basis (McGuire 2003; Ammerman 2007). In particular, it extends this body of knowledge (which at present is largely based on North American scholarship) by specifically considering how embodied religious practice and everyday religion play out within these three Brazilian religions, and additionally situating this understanding within the broader social context of late modernity and neoliberalism.

Understanding religion as lived and embodied is vital to re-humanising it and re-imagining its significance within social sciences. Recent theoretical shifts in sociology have come to emphasise the importance of the body and emotions as valid aspects of human experience worthy of critical analysis, and re-envisaging religious participation through this more grounded view is imperative. As these case studies establish in the participant narratives, adherence to a religious community bears both symbolic and pragmatic consequences, and is deeply relevant in everyday life. A grounded understanding therefore challenges theories that relegate religion to the realm of fantasy; designate it an opiate of the masses, or generalise it as a form of compensation for material lack. For the participants of this study, religion not only presents a way of making sense of events taking place in their lives, but also provides a useful way of interpreting and living out social reality. The three religious communities in this study did not encourage adherents to withdraw from

mainstream secular life, but equipped them with a spiritually inflected paradigm and techniques to better negotiate its challenges.

Patterns and Relationships across the Case Studies

A vast collection of concepts surfaced from the participants' narratives, indicating the diffusion of religion and spirituality into diverse aspects of everyday experience and embodied practice. Although distinctive concepts and sub-headings appear in each of the three case studies, overlapping themes became evident across the data. Using Smart's (1996) taxonomy helped in conceptually arranging and contrasting the themes associated with the seven dimensions of religion, and made identification of patterns straightforward. The patterns demonstrated that in spite of relatively significant distinctions between the three religious communities and the backgrounds of the adherents associated with each, there were issues that were common. The patterns that emerged as overarching themes comprised the following: the search for spiritual authenticity, the reintegration of the body into spiritual practice, meaning making around illness and spiritual healing, the religious community as a site of alternative social engagement, the presence of neoliberal ideologies to varying degrees across the three religions, and the construction of a personal relationship with God. These concepts were expressed both implicitly and explicitly within the case studies.

Spiritual authenticity

The search for spiritual authenticity in each of the case studies emerged in different ways. Although the Universal Church was the most aggressive in its marketing of its claims of spiritual superiority, both Salto Quântico and the Umbanda temples expressed claims of authenticity in their own ways: Salto Quântico through its claim of privilege and protection for the genuinely devout, and Umbanda by promising to re-unite the individual with his or her ancient spiritual heritage by fostering bonds with nature through embodied ritual and practice. Making sense of claims of spiritual authenticity is significant on several levels. It resonates with the search for what constitutes the authentic in the post-industrial age of counterfeits and copies, and also speaks to the late modern era with its loss of overarching meta-narratives and authoritative epistemologies of truth. However, the search for the authentic also resonates on a more microcosmic level, particularly in Salto Quântico where discovering one's true self is paramount.

It is also useful to situate claims of spiritual authenticity in the case studies in the context of the religious marketplace in Brazil. Despite advocates of the New Paradigm and rational choice theorists dismiss claims of pluralism harming religion due to competing religious groups undercutting each other, religious groups must nonetheless compete in order to win adherents: as the cases of the Universal Church and Umbanda suggest, the religious marketplace is fraught with struggles caused by competing claims of legitimacy and authenticity. Although adherent loyalty figures to a certain degree in the success of religious communities, success is also contingent on supply side initiatives, or the group's capacity to speak to gaps in the religious market. Based on the findings of this research, spiritual authenticity is a religious product that religious groups must champion in order to appear valid among a sea of alternatives. Claiming access to ancient sacred knowledge (such as that disseminated by the *pretos velhos* and *caboclos* in Umbanda, long lineages of divinity (such as in the case of Eugenia in Salto Quântico who links her spirit back to Socrates and to the Virgin Mary) or biblical origins (such as the Universal Church, with its spiritual talismans sourced from Israel) distinguishes the religious group as unique in the spiritual marketplace, and offers the religious adherent reassuring guarantees of the authenticity of the religious product they are being offered.

Stark and Finke (2000:227) cite Neitz's 1987 study that states that for religious adherents, awareness of other religious choices does not undermine their belief systems, as most felt they had "tested" the belief system and were convinced of its superiority. Adherents were pragmatic about their religious adherence and used rational choice in making decisions about the religious group they would adhere to, weighing alternatives, categorising and comparing, before they made a final choice. This "testing" of the belief system also speaks to the notion of authenticity; as the belief system most effective in the eyes of the adherent is the most authentic. This was evident in participants' narratives around trying different religious groups and not finding a connection, as indicated by Luciane's testimony in Salto Quântico and André's narrative in Umbanda, but knowing their spiritual quest was complete when they "tested" their current religious group and encountered success. In the Umbanda chapter, André's narrative revealed that the validity of spiritual entities was irrelevant in many ways, because what was most important to him was that Umbandist practices were effective in his life. This also imparts a sense of spiritual authenticity being a subjective, not objective state based on the resonance it holds for the individual.

Embodied Spiritual Practice

The fundamentality of the body, emotion and experience was highly visible across the three groups. As McGuire (2007) contends, to understand the full range of religion as experienced by people in the context of their everyday lives, mindfulness of the way spiritual expression engages the material body is vital. In this sense, the case studies demonstrates that diverse forms of embodiment were significant in religious practice: for example, dancing, singing, ritual bathing and play in Umbanda, and singing, shouting, stamping of feet in the Universal Church, or even transformative emotional experiences in Salto Quântico. Such practices offer a glimpse of how individuals accomplish their spiritual lives and live out their religions (McGuire, 2007: 188).

Spiritual incorporation represented one of the fundamental ways in which spiritual practice was embodied across the three groups. The incorporation of spiritual entities by way of the human body is a culturally located religious practice in Brazil as discussed earlier, with many Brazilians believing in the possibility of communication with spirits and in reincarnation (Dawson 2007). This cultural belief is inflected in the findings of each of the case studies, which all refer in their own way to the fundamentality of the incorporation of spiritual entities through the human body. For those who are part of Salto Quântico, it is practised only within the mediums' groups in a quiet and in a controlled manner, as opposed to Umbanda, where it is undertaken with ritual, song and dance, or experienced through touch or *passe* in spiritual healing. For those who frequent the Universal Church, it manifests most commonly as the pain of being tormented by demonic spirits determined to wreak havoc on the individual's life, and the exhilaration of ridding oneself of those demons. For each group, it is synonymous with displaced agency: those in a state of true spiritual incorporation cannot be held responsible for their actions, but are often conscious and aware of the experiences undergone within this state.

As explored in their respective chapters, for individuals undergoing this simultaneous physical and spiritual experience, it can be tremendously liberating, intense, frightening or transformative. As Harvey Cox comments, such experiences speak to the "ecstasy deficit" in contemporary life, or what Paul Heelas (2008:2) refers to as "the expressive self undergoing the suffocating squeeze". Spiritual incorporation is also indicative of the ways that religious groups offer a space in which intense emotionality and embodiment can be sought through spiritual experience.

The centrality of the body was significant in one other way: within the religious communities of Umbanda and Salto Quântico, it was symbolic in showing the overcoming of binaries between the mind, body and spirit. In Umbanda, the body was understood as a conduit to reach the spiritual world, and was included in sacred rites. For those in Salto Quântico, embodiment was privileged in a discursive sense: much of the seminar content articulated by Teixeira was oriented towards reconciling the spiritual and material self and emphasising the inherent sacredness of sexual union and sexuality. This was indicative of the strong New Age overtones of the two groups, which also sought to overcome other binaries such as the distinction between the secular world and sacred life, encouraging flows between the two.

Religion as an alternative space of social engagement

The notion of religion as an alternative space of social engagement was also discernable within each of the three communities. Participation in religious life was eagerly embraced by those who had indicated dissatisfaction with mainstream social life, were marginalised, or whose ability to participate in the social realm was impacted by lack of education, money or discrimination. Each group represented a microcosm of broader social life, offering adherents a diversity of ways to become involved with the religion: in Umbanda; there were various outings to sacred locations in nature where the *orixás* were celebrated, festivals, mediums' meetings and charitable work to help underprivileged communities. In Salto Quântico, adherents had the choice of attending seminars, workshops, carrying out social aid, mediums' meetings, study groups and intimate gatherings, whereas in the Universal Church participants could work in their communities evangelising, take up positions as *obreiros* or workers in the church, teach in the Sunday school or undertake community work such as making hospital visits. McGuire (2007) notes that these forms of spiritual involvement also constitute embodied practice, with the lived experience of these spiritually oriented acts, (such as practices that support efforts for social change) representing a way that the sacred can transverse from formal religious spaces into the space of everyday life. For Heelas (2008), these also constitute gentle ways that spiritualities can challenge the capitalist neoliberal order, by enacting positive social change, albeit in subtle ways.

As outlined earlier in the introduction, Holston (2008:606) asserts that participation in religious life should not be seen condescendingly as a pathetic or compensatory imitation of secular life, but as a homologous or even alternative form of modernity that endows the adherent with agency

where they may not have access to it in civil society. Across the religions, the narratives of interviewees affirmed the primacy of social engagement with the group providing them with a sense of belonging, community, purpose and identity. This resonates with Luckmann's (1978) thesis regarding the small life-worlds of the modern individual: the human being no longer sees himself/herself as a member of a social whole aligned with a meaningful plan of existence, but as able to choose which "existential universes of the private sphere" he/she will inhabit. These enclaves of freedom allow the individual to construct a private life that give order and meaning, and place the complex and often perplexing wider world as separate from these small life worlds (Luckmann 1978). Thus in this interpretation, religious adherence represents one meaningful world system chosen by the individual as a framework to live by, in lieu of the failure of faceless late modern social institutions to provide meaning and order.

The function of these religious communities as an alternative space of social engagement was also significant on another level. Religions and spiritualities that have strong discourse around wellbeing and New Age values are representative of "gentle flows of counter-culture", often implicitly making a stand against the derelictions of the capitalist mainstream (Heelas 2008). In the cases of Umbanda and Salto Quântico, and to a lesser degree the Universal Church, there were definitely ideologies and practices enforced that undermined more detrimental mentalities normalised by free-market capitalist logic. Umbanda for example, emphasised the importance of equality and charity in its treatment of Brazilians of diverse social backgrounds and the need for a more harmonious and respectful interaction with the natural world. Most prominently, those in Umbanda advocated an approach to health and wellbeing that undermined many elements of biomedicine which were closely intertwined with the free market. Adherents in Salto Quântico enjoyed the benefits of feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance in a spiritual community that allowed them full expression of their spiritual and sexual selves, along with teachings highlighting the importance of wellbeing and happiness in all aspects of life. In addition, the group explored the need to shift towards a more feminised experience of society, with the group teachings identifying the detrimental effects that a patriarchal legacy has had on both society and the wider environment. The IURD also provided a community of sorts to those who were displaced and marginalised, offering them support, even if it was a "tough love" variant.

Spiritual healing and meaning making

As discussed earlier in the introduction, the proliferation of religious healing products in the marketplace reflects the preoccupations of a society afflicted by healthism, but also is reflective of a conscious or sometimes unconscious dissatisfaction with the biomedical system. Looking at the experiences of those who engage with spiritual healing provides a unique perspective from which to explore some of the limitations of biomedicine and the impetus that compels individuals to actively seek spiritual treatments in addition to, or instead of mainstream ones.

Although each group studied in this thesis cultivated their own specific ideology around spiritual healing, making sense of it, the conditions were necessary for it to take place and ways it should be practised, there were overarching themes of confluence across the three groups. Fundamentally, each healing paradigm presented adherents with an alternative means of making sense of illness and conversely, wellness. Even when not explicitly expressed, (although in many cases it was explicitly expressed, especially in the case of Umbanda practitioners) adherence to a spiritual healing paradigm intimated dissatisfaction with biomedical modes of treatment of symptoms and medicalisation of disease, with little consideration for the impact of one's spiritual, mental and emotional health on their physical body. Across the case studies, individuals sought a more holistic and spiritual perspective to understand the origin of the disease or illness afflicting them. In particular, narratives around mental illness and spiritual deficiency, such as that of Ana of Salto Quântico, and Christiane of the Universal Church, portrayed a correlation between the spiritual world and mental imbalance. Teixeira unequivocally expressed depression as *being* a lack of God. Within Umbanda, mediums attributed mental illness to spiritual disequilibrium. Both the Umbanda and Salto Quântico doctrines underlined the necessity of the individual taking an active role in their own healing, identifying their behaviours and attitudes that may engender and perpetuate the state of mental un-wellness and by cultivating a strong interior spiritual identity.

As argued in the introduction, spiritual healing in many cases encourages the individual to give meaning to their illness by adopting personal responsibility, autonomy and agency in the healing process. Therefore, engaging in spiritual healing offers a form of resistance to what Illich terms the "medical nemesis", by encouraging the individual to take responsibility for their health and self-care. The extent to which each group advocated proactivity in healing fell along a spectrum, with Umbanda emphasising the need for self-agency the most, with Salto Quântico to a lesser degree,

and the Universal Church placing the least responsibility on the individual: the identification of demonic forces as responsible for illness removed accountability from the individual, but the obligation to rid oneself of them and return to health was dependant on the individual's participation during deliverance services and the use of spiritual talismans outside the church.

Although in some cases there was coercion present in the spiritual healing offered by the Universal Church and Salto Quântico (one can only be fully healed and protected if they are a committed member of the group), the general encouragement of agency in spiritually making sense of illness was empowering for many adherents. Many who came to the three religions in search of spiritual healing had felt their autonomy unacknowledged by the medical establishment. As articulated by Illich (1977) earlier, medicalisation devalues the patient's reading and understanding of their body, leaving them vulnerable and powerless, dependant on the expertise of the medical industry. On the other hand, as demonstrated through the narratives presented, spiritual healing re-empowers the individual and honours their interpretation of the body. The turn away from pharmaceutical medication and drugs, such as in the case of Emilio Dantas and Miriam, who turned instead to the herbal treatments of Umbanda, and in the case of Ana, who rejected psychotropic drugs, indicates a re-possession of autonomy and reflexivity in understanding one's health, largely spurred by the shift away from biomedical modes of meaning-making. A corollary of this re-empowerment is the refusal to recognise the hegemony of biomedical institutions and their claims of legitimacy and superiority over other alternative forms of treatment. Thus there is a flow of power back to those individuals who are aware of the power bound to orthodox medicine who choose instead to ascribe to spiritual treatment.

Embodiment represents one final area of consideration that emerged in the narratives and observations about healing illness and spirituality. Spiritual healing offers a very distinctive way to experience the ill or weak body. As McGuire (1990) reminds us, many come to religion propelled by bodily concerns, with many embodied issues dominating everyday prayers: in the Casa da Caridade underneath the shrine of St Francis were hundreds of slips of paper, many with requests for restoration of health and wellbeing. Western medicine treats illness primarily as a pathological condition of the body; however, illness has multiple effects on the body and mind that may affect the individual. Illness has multiple layers of meaning: it reminds the individual of their limitations, their ultimate mortality and their personal agency as dependant on their body (especially if they

experience an illness which is overwhelming and uncontrollable). Illness also holds more abstract correlations: influencing how an ill individual may experience time (McGuire points out that chronic illness can sometimes spur an individual into radically reassessing their present and future) and their understanding of self: when the body is sick, sometimes a subtle shift occurs and the body becomes the other: one no longer *is* the body but *has* a body (Bergsma 1982; McGuire 1990). All of these considerations convey the multitudinous ways illness may potentially impact on understandings of the body, and why individuals from the three religious groups may have sought spiritual alternatives to make sense of illness, given the paucity of scientific and medical meaning making around bodily experiences of pain. Furthermore, spiritual healing also preserves the integrity of the body keeping it intact, thus presenting a less invasive alternative to biomedical medicines and surgeries.

Neoliberal discourse

The influence of neoliberal ideology was evident in each of the religious groups, indicating the proximity between wider societal values and religious trends. In each religion, the self constituted the major locus of attention: there was significant focus placed on the role and responsibility of the individual in enacting personal change, be it in terms of their financial position or employment, health or desire to change their life. The focus on the agency and responsibility of the individual is a fundamental feature of neoliberal ideology. Within the Universal Church in particular, those seeking to move out of poverty were instructed to get motivated, entrepreneurial even, and were discouraged from seeking assistance. Structural causes of poverty and illness were overlooked in favour of a spiritual gaze that placed sole responsibility on the individual for personal change. The privileging of the acquisition of material wealth and a calculated shift away from asceticism was also present in Universal Church dialogue. Pastors encouraged adherents to have faith that God is a God of abundance and prosperity, and that access to all the trappings of wealth and material success could be available if only the individual believes.

Neoliberalism in many ways resonates with the New Age ideologies present in both Umbanda and Salto Quântico. Heelas (2008) identifies that there has been significant critique directed towards self-oriented spiritualities emblematic of New Ageism as reinforcing hedonism, consumption and in particular, narcissistic individualism. However, he identifies quite rightly that even when an individual engages in the most altruistic or loving of acts, it is still possible to identify self-interest.

He draws on Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (1993:322), who point out: “It is possible to define a person’s interest in such a way that no matter what he does, he can be seen to be furthering his own interests in every isolated act of choice”. With this in mind, the individualistic self-oriented focus (that appeared in all of the three religious communities) may not always necessarily be a bad thing, as the self also represented a conduit that could provide the individual with the means to transform their life circumstances for the better, by accessing their deeper spirituality and looking inward to locate the deeper self. Maria de José, the *Mãe-de Santo* in Bramly’s ethnography summarises this particularly eloquently:

Most of all, we want our followers to become conscious of themselves. I told you we believe the most essential thing is to discover your own deep nature and learn to live it fully. I think if people become better, they are taking a bigger step forward than if they seek to change the people around them. Individual progress leads more surely to group progress than vice-versa.

Maria-José 1994:216-217

This emphasis on connecting with the deeper self as a tool for self-transformation was especially prevalent in Umbanda and Salto Quântico. Mediums in Umbanda emphasised that the efficacy of guidance from the spiritual entities and spiritual healing was limited in that ultimately it had to be up to the individual to make the active choice to change their detrimental behaviour, attitudes and mentalities. In Salto Quântico, connection with the self was crucial to developing a strong spirituality and navigating one’s way through the challenges of contemporary life. Although elements of New Age ideology do sometimes seem to be aligned with neoliberalism, promoting narcissism and self-indulgence, in many of the narratives shared in this thesis, elements of the New Age also appear to exert a positive influence in the transformation of adherents’ lives, such as the re-connection with nature encouraged by Umbandists, and the critical engagement with happiness and depression disseminated by Teixeira in Salto Quântico.

The construction of a personal relationship with God

Finally, the last significant pattern that emerged across the three groups was the myriad ways in which adherents developed a personal relationship with the divine. Religion constituted an essential aspect of their everyday lives, and an everyday, personal and sometimes intimate

relationship with God or the group's deities and spiritual guides helped to counter the impersonality found in late modern social life and its institutions. In the Universal Church this was evident in the pastors' urgings for adherents to ask for things from God and to communicate with him directly in prayer. This was expressed by Anacy, who elaborated that she spoke to God on the bus and when she was sleepless; such was the relationship between God and the faithful that was cultivated by the IURD. For her, the church had "lifted the veil" separating the human being from the divine.

In Umbanda, adherents expressed how much they enjoyed being able to engage in direct conversation with the spiritual guides: Guilherme explained that one of the things that attracted him most to Umbanda was that it did not have such a "distant discourse" like other religions. The *orixás* and spiritual guides remained close to humanity, advising and counselling them, and could be called upon with offerings of flowers, food and gifts to perform favours. Furthermore, many of the spiritual guides, having once been human during their mortal incarnations, had human qualities: pride, frailty, weakness, but also wisdom gained as a result of all their earthly experiences, particularly in the case of the *pretos velhos* and *caboclos*.

Finally, Salto Quântico presented yet another way in which adherents had daily, everyday contact with the divine. Teixeira's mediumship provided a channel to convey messages from the spiritual world to followers, as seen in the case of Cristiane who received a message from her dead husband. Teixeira's spiritual incorporation of Eugenia also represented a form of contact that allowed adherents to communicate directly with an emissary from the spiritual realm. Her words of advice and guidance were deeply valued by adherents, who felt a strong personal relationship with the spiritual guide. In Ana's case, Salto Quântico helped her come to realise that the spiritual and material worlds were inextricably interlinked, with her mediumship constantly present and bearing influence on her everyday life as a doctor: "It was a process, to understand this world of spirituality. It was difficult because it was real, and because it was part of my life, my whole life."

Interpreting the Results

The three questions this thesis set out to investigate were the following: the role of religion in the lives of adherents in Brazil and the socially located motivations that propel them to seek out religious communities; secondly, the appeal of religion as a form of meaning making in various

aspects of personal life; and finally, the ways that religion is incorporated into everyday life, especially through experiential spirituality and embodied practices.

With regards to the first research question, each of the case studies revealed that religion holds a diversity of functions for adherents. Individuals entered into religious commitment and adherence as a rational, logical process, weighing up the alternatives. As many participants revealed in their narratives, they tested many spiritual groups and communities before settling on one that best answered their specific needs and what they were seeking in a religious experience.

The guidance individuals sought from religion was in many ways informed by socially, politically and economically situated phenomena taking place in Brazil. Each religious community tended to attract a specific demographic (apart from Umbanda, which was highly mixed in its adherents' backgrounds), and therefore the motivations that brought adherents to the religious communities varied. In the Universal Church, adherence was more aligned with material concerns, and functioned as a means of conceptualising a path out of poverty, overcoming personal chaos to find direction and clarity, and the ordering of one's life by the imposition of religious norms, obligations and responsibilities. The Universal Church speaks to lower socio-economic adherents who frequent the church, to whom matters such as finding a job, overcoming family difficulties and having the material conditions to feed and care for one's family were issues of central concern. It is necessary to articulate, however, that for these adherents, attendance was not merely a way to spiritually compensate for material lack³⁹. Church services offered a spiritual but also pragmatic way to raise confidence, encourage members to believe in themselves and go about creating conditions to shift themselves from poverty. Although many aspects of the church are critiqued, it is important to recognise that the church does provide a form of support to marginalised individuals, who are often overlooked by larger social institutions.

For those in Salto Quântico who tended to be upper-middle class and educated, there was a clear correlation between adherence and more ideologically oriented concerns, such as the search for making sense of self and understanding one's sexuality from a spiritual perspective. The preoccupation with self, identity and happiness was reflective of the New Age focus of the group,

³⁹ Theories of religion as a compensatory mechanism, such as those discussed by Stark and Finke (2000) and Holston (1999) allude to religion often being viewed as a painkiller or form of compensation for material deprivation, which deprive adherents of any form of agency.

and material concerns did not constitute such a focus, as followers of the group were not as vulnerable to the risks of unemployment and poverty as were adherents of the Universal Church.

Umbanda centres represented a combination of adherents (mediums) and clients who came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds seeking spiritual help for an assortment of problems. Nonetheless, for the mediums of the *Casa da Caridade* whose perspectives predominate in this study, Umbanda functioned as a way of exploring spirituality through embodied practice by embracing marginalised figures in Brazilian culture and history, engaging with spirituality in a “fun” and leisurely manner and making sense of illness through a spiritually informed perspective. Many of the mediums were from the middle class, and thus religious adherence for them functioned as a means of discovering the inner self. As mentioned earlier in the Umbanda chapter, Guilherme articulated that there are those who “*vem pelo amor, ou vem pela dor*” (they come either because of pain, or out of love). The clients tend to come out of pain, seeking help, whereas those who become mediums come to Umbanda centres out of love for the religion, and a desire to learn more about themselves through spiritual experience and practice.

The role of each religion in the lives of different adherents is representative of Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, which dictates that human areas of preoccupation will shift from materially oriented concerns to more abstract and spiritual ones as the elementary material requirements become fulfilled. However, in spite of the socio-economically located motivations for seeking religion, there were strong areas of overlap as articulated in the patterns/relationship section. The search for answers to ultimate questions in the context of the uncertainty and ambivalence of the late modern era transcends socio-economic boundaries, such as understanding illness and why it occurs, and looking for a sense of belonging within a community to overcome personal meaninglessness.

With regard to the second question, participation within a religious community undoubtedly operated as an alternative, spiritually informed gaze through which adherents could make sense of events happening in their lives. Adherence to a religious community provided a way that individuals of diverse backgrounds and identities could interpret and give meaning to the challenges that arose from the collision of the individual life-world with the wider structural forces of late modernity. Across the three case studies, a religious paradigm of meaning making helped adherents come to terms with illness and disease, why it occurred and how it could be treated on a

spiritual level, identity: cultural/ethnic/national identity (as in the case of Umbanda), sexual and spiritual identity (as in the case of Salto Quântico), meaning around how happiness and wellbeing could be approximated (in the case of Salto Quântico and Umbanda) and meaning around poverty, its concomitant effects and how they could be overcome (Universal Church).

In many of these cases, interviewees articulated that religious sources of meaning were looked for where secular or other religious meaning systems had failed them or were seen as unsatisfactory. In Salto Quântico, for example, mainstream religious interpretations of sexuality and spirituality were seen as exclusionary, outdated and discriminative, and Salto Quântico spoke to those wanting a way of reconciling their sexual selves with their spiritual selves. In the case of the Universal Church, troubles afflicting individuals, their finances, families and health were interpreted as being caused by demonic influences. This form of meaning making displaced personal agency, with ritualistic deliverance liberating individuals from the influences of the demons and the troubles they brought. Whether deliverance actually functioned on a literal or metaphorical level, it was effective in promoting a state of mind where adherents felt empowered and invigorated to take stock of their lives.

With respect to the third major research question, the data collated represents how profoundly intertwined the sacred and the everyday are, and the many modes through which an individual's spirituality is practiced and embodied. As Ammerman (2007) articulates, everyday religion is about understanding who participates in religion and why, where religion happens, how its meaning may be negotiated or may combine multiple elements from diverse sources, and the ways in which it mingles with other aspects of social life. One major way in which the "everydayness" of religion can be understood is through acknowledgement of how it appears in embodied practices. Material bodies come to be linked with spiritual bodies through both lofty and mundane practices that include cognition, emotion, mind and body, making religion lived (McGuire 2007). These findings challenge the long held divisions that have characterised social scientific studies of religion that privilege binaries of sacred (religious)/profane (everyday) and spirituality/materiality, and do not give due importance to the ways in which spirituality is experientially and affectively encountered through the body (McGuire 2003, 2007).

This was notable in Umbanda, where practices of the sacred colonised the everyday in diverse ways: in the celebration of the natural world, the use of specific colours to create energies or

vibrations, outdoor festivals such as the *Festa de Iemanjá* held by the seashore, the consumption of sacred herbs and remedies in place of medicines and the washing of the body with distillations such as *banhos*. There was an immense range of embodied practices available to the adherent of Umbanda that could be practiced as a way of acknowledging the influence of the sacred in everyday life. Embodiment was vital in Umbanda, as the body was seen as indispensable to experiencing the spiritual, far more than the mind or intellect, which was a liberating feeling for adherents such as André who had to lay aside their intellectual/rational perspective in order to undergo spiritual incorporation.

The permeation of elements of the sacred in the everyday was also seen in the Universal Church, where adherents could integrate IURD television shows, radio stations, newspapers into their media consumption as a way of reaffirming the sacred in the secular everyday space. Embodied practices, such as singing, screaming and stamping, and the physical expulsion of demons were an essential part of services and enthusiastically practiced by adherents, far more so than reading or exegesis of the Bible. The predominance of touch between bodies in services, such as the touch from the pastor or from *obreiros* to aid with promoting healing and the spiritual cleansing of the body also represented a form of embodied practice that occurred between individuals.

In Salto Quântico, religious activity spilled over into everyday life, with adherents able to access live streaming messages and blogs of spirituality and self-growth via the Internet. Teixeira's insistence on the Internet as the main medium of dissemination of his spiritual teachings ensured that the group's spirituality could reach people at home, at work or at leisure. In many ways, this was fitting as the objective of many of the messages was to impart lessons about how spirituality could be incorporated into everyday life, and make sense of everyday concerns such as living out one's sexuality in a way that also considered one's spiritual identity, an issue often overlooked by traditional religious institutions. In addition, even though Salto Quântico represented a more textually-based religion with emphasis on reading, discussion and analysis of spiritual texts, embodied practice still figured as part of its practice: through spiritual incorporation practiced by mediums in the mediums' groups, through the transformative emotive experiences undergone by adherents, and in its "doing spirituality" through its social aid programme in the *favela* of Santa Maria. All of the religions expressed, albeit in distinctive ways, the primacy of the body in the experience of spirituality.

Theoretical Implications

It is thus important to now shift focus to contemplate the implications of these findings in the context of existing research. At the most general level, the findings confirm that religion is vibrantly present in Brazilian society, fluid and ever-changing and evolving, as maintained by Dawson (2007), DaMatta (1995) and Rocha (2006). The research findings support the arguments of theorists who contest the major claim of secularisation theory that religion is decline (Finke and Stark 2000, Berger 2007, Warner (1993), Vasquez and Marquardt 2003, Martin 1998), and contend that religion still occupies a public space of significance in society (Casanova 2008).

The findings also clearly resonate with some of the central premises of rational choice theory: the data indicate that adherents often approach their adherence to a religious group in a rationally informed, pragmatic way (restoring the agency of the adherent); that the religious marketplace in Brazil is vibrant and dynamic as a result of pluralism; and the relevance of supply-side innovation, with religions endeavouring to offer specialised religious products to appeal to need, or gaps in the market (Finke and Starke 2000; Finke, 1997). However, this research expands on the very general deductive notions presented by rational choice theory, to determine that the high incidence of spiritual healing as a coveted religious product within these three religious communities is symptomatic of a society disenchanted with its hegemonic healthcare system, in search of spiritually informed ways to understand illness.

However, the data also establish that applying an overly simplistic rational choice model is also problematic: Neitz and Mueser (1997) articulate that in imposing an economic logic of what constitutes rational behaviour, rational choice theory polarises emotion and embodied experience causing it to appear irrational. Ammerman (1997) echoes this, arguing that there is a real danger in assuming human social life can be understood in terms of cognition and reason, omitting to take into consideration intuition, emotion, affect and transcendent experience, all of which constituted significant considerations in the findings of the three case studies. For this reason, the everyday/lived approach to making sense of religion and the embodied understandings theorised by McGuire present a useful method to interpret these more intangible, subtle and phenomenological aspects of religious experience. The findings of this thesis contribute to the emerging literature around embodied religious culture, notably in discussion of the prevalence and appeal of spiritual incorporation which occurred across the three groups.

Finally, the research calls attention to the need to consider the experience of so-called peripheral regions such as Brazil, religiously vibrant and pluralistic, that are seemingly overlooked in the creation and construction of theory (see Connell 2007) but offer abundant opportunity for insight into understanding the changing role of religion in the social world today. Although the Brazilian religious experience is in some ways unique and distinctive to the region, what is taking place in Brazil is mostly concurrent with many of the contemporary religious trends that are visible across the globe (the rise in New Age ideology, an increasing emphasis on experiential and embodied religious practice, religiosity increasingly influenced by the conditions of late modernity and neoliberalism). The privileging of North American and Western European religious life as a departure point for the construction of theory misses the chance to develop more nuanced, critical and inclusive understandings of religion by drawing on material from religiously rich regions that are not part of the Metropole.

Recommendations

Each of the case studies reveal diverse themes that have arisen from a study that has endeavoured to make sense of the reasons that people inscribe themselves within three specific religious communities in Brazil. As argued by Becker (1996) ethnographic research often gives rise to findings that are characterised more by their breadth than their depth, and this is in fact desirable, allowing the researcher to touch on all the themes that arise, even tangentially. The findings of this research are evocative of this, and indicate that there is the potential to delve into a more intensive exploration of salient themes that surfaced such as the role of the body and emotion in religious practice; the ways in which one's religious practice is integrated into other aspects of daily life; further exploration of the reconciliation of sexual and spiritual identity; and the experiential spirituality represented by spiritual incorporation.

There are several other notable themes that could profit from more profound analysis: in particular, further study around the phenomenon of spiritual healing could be insightful in a number of ways. As highlighted earlier, the research findings illustrate that in Brazil, religion is often sought because it encourages individuals to engage in processes that construct meaning around physical affliction and illness. The increasing visibility of CAM treatments globally (Heelas 2008), many of which are spiritually oriented, speaks to dissatisfaction with the biomedical model, questioning of the power dynamics associated with the biomedical system and also resonates with

the holism and meaning-making prevalent in New Age ideologies. Further explorations of these themes and the way in which spiritual healing in other religiosities and regions articulate discourse around healing and the experiences of adherents could be an area worthy of sustained research. In addition, additional study specifically investigating the experiences of those who have undertaken both spiritual healing and biomedical treatments could help to more clearly develop understandings around how each modality is perceived and experienced, and its respective strengths and weaknesses.

The results also illustrate the need to look more deeply at New Age movements and their consequences for social life. Heelas (2008) makes a valid point in commenting that the study of the rapid growth of New Age spiritualities has been neglected by the social sciences, with academics often dismissing it cynically or labelling it as relatively irrelevant. He calls for a more inclusive “sociology of religion and spirituality” and asserts that New Age movements need to be looked at from a balanced perspective: whether they offer an invaluable, ultimate resource that can counter the effects of the “iron cage”, provide techniques for living a good life and engage in a constructive and positive manner with the wider world; or if on the other hand, they do affirm capitalist individualistic value systems. There are multiple avenues to research, and at present a paucity of ethnographic studies to contribute to current repositories of knowledge. In this sense, this thesis presents an engagement of sorts with ways in which inner-life spiritualities impact on individual life-worlds, but a more profound examination of ways in which they interact with the broader social sphere could be revealing.

It could also be useful to more critically examine the personal experiences and narratives of adherents who frequent churches such as the Universal Church, and investigate the ways in which spiritual teachings promoted in the church translate to tangible benefits in secular life. Due to the limitations discussed earlier in the methodology, the sample size presented in this study does not provide adequate discussion around this issue. The scarcity of interviews in the case study indicates a gap in knowledge in actually tracing adherents’ trajectories of poverty to becoming owners of small-business holdings, how these shifts come about, and the degree to which the church plays a role in these personal transformations. That said, it is equally important to investigate the experiences of those who fall out of church life and their narratives and reasons for leaving religious communities.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, this study demonstrates that there should be a forum for more candid discussion around some of the complex issues that emerge from qualitative research. Engaging in research with human participants is a convoluted process, with open dialogue needed to explore the complications and issues that can arise. In particular, as was highlighted in the case of Salto Quântico, it is critical to re-conceptualise the distribution of power present in researcher/researched relationships: although the researcher clearly holds power and has an agenda, the researched may also have their own agenda and attempt to re-direct the flow of power for their benefit.

Conclusion

When I began initial readings and research for this thesis, I came across an old book about religion and spirituality in the library that imparted an analogy that has long remained with me. The analogy attempted to account for the enduring place of religion in human society, and went something like this: in a small village in Africa, the grain sheds that supplied the village with a supply of food in times of scarcity were decimated one night. One of the village people came to find them ravaged by locusts, with barely a grain left inside, and the villagers fell into a state of devastation at what they could have done to upset the gods. Although the “how” of this anecdote can be scientifically answered (times of drought bring locust swarms), the “why” cannot be satisfied with a scientific response: because the search for meaning behind seemingly incomprehensible but also commonplace events remains the domain of religion. Religion offers people techniques and methods of imagining and dealing with the “why” present in so many aspects of human experience. Durkheim himself recognised this, and affirmed in *Pragmatism and Sociology* (1983)[1955]:

Scientific thought cannot rule alone. There is, and always will be, room in social life for a form of truth which...will nevertheless have a mythological and religious basis. For a long time to come, there will be two tendencies in any society: a tendency towards objective scientific truth and a tendency towards subjectively perceived truth, towards mythological truths.

The case studies that form the body of this thesis confirm the myriad ways in which religion with its dynamism and ubiquity maintains this role in Brazil, providing individuals with creative and

spiritual ways (be they cognitive, emotional or embodied) of making sense of the “why”. However, this thesis has also endeavoured to establish that the place of religion in the lives of the individuals who participated in this study is not merely a symbolic tool, but one that provides avenues for personal transformation and empowerment, with the potential to have very tangible effects on one’s life as represented in many narratives, such as Tião’s:

I learnt something, that Umbanda taught me, you know? To be tolerant, patient...and there’s something else, called “street sense”. Life experience...the laws of the streets. Umbanda opened doors for me in all kinds of places...I owe my life to this religion. I was at the bottom of a deep dark well; I didn’t know what to do. And I asked the Gods, to either take my life away or give it back to me...and I think my prayers were answered, definitely. When I die, I want to pass on what I have learnt to the younger generation...

Religion has traditionally been dismissed as an epiphenomenon, interpreted as an anachronism not worthy of sustained focus or analysis within the social sciences. However, we are entering an era when the privileging of science, objectivity and rationality in research over human emotion, experience and meaning is finally beginning to be questioned, and there is an emerging body of literature exploring the role and relevance of religion in contemporary life that is testament to this. The vitality of religion in Brazil, as established in the findings of this research, serves to confirm the need to reconsider religion as an essential component of human experience worthy of understanding, and to engage with new ways of making sense of it.

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Appendix A:

Photographs from Umbanda



Drumming practice at Tião's centre. Tião centre right, leading.



(Left to right) Guilherme, Dona Sandra, Senhor Brito, Ana and Nelson of the *Casa* .



Exterior of the *Casa da Caridade Caboclo Peri*.



Researcher and Senhor Brito in front of the altar at Coelho da Rocha.



Mediums entering a state of spiritual incorporation at a celebration in Coelho da Rocha.



Offerings to *Exú* at Tião's Umbanda centre, *Caminhos do Bem*.

Appendix B:

Photographs from Salto Quântico



Adherents of Salto Quântico: from left, unknown, unknown, Loreнна, Angela, Bellinha and Carol.



Adherents of the group preparing lunch for the members of the Santa Maria community outreach program.



Adherents in front of a representation of Eugenia.



Teixeira giving a Sunday seminar.



Members of the women's education program at the Salto Quântico outreach centre in Santa Maria.

Appendix C:

Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title:

Contemporary Religions in Brazilian Life: Agents of Change in Late Modernity

Name/ Background of the Researcher:

My name is Emma Francis Stone, and I am enrolled as a PhD student in the Sociology Department at the University of Auckland. I completed my Masters' thesis in the Spanish Department of the University of Auckland, and lived in Brazil for four months in 2008.

About the Project:

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. The aim of the project is to analyse the role of religion in modern Brazilian life, and to understand the way in which religion may help adherents adjust to different elements of social life in our day and age. I am interested in speaking to participants of all backgrounds: for example, those who have been involved with this religious community for a long time, those who have only recently joined the group, those who have had a clear motivation for becoming part of the group. With this information I intend to contribute new understanding of this field by giving Brazilians who are participants in these religious communities a chance to share their voices, stories and experiences.

Should you accept this invitation, you will engage in individual private discussions with me (and an interpreter, should you wish one to be present). The interviews will take 1-2 hours over one session. They will explore the role religion plays in your life, the experiences you have had that you feel caused you to engage with the religion, your personal background and history, and how you feel your religion aids you in adjusting to/ understanding changes taking place in your life, your community and in wider society. To acknowledge the time and efforts you are contributing to this project, you will be reimbursed with a voucher to the value of 25 Reais. **The project will be funded from three sources: my postgraduate research student support account, the University of Auckland Faculty of Arts Doctoral Research Fund, and my own personal funds.**

How Your Story Will Be Used:

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, your story may be used as data for this project. I would prefer to audiotape the interviews as this will allow me to ensure accuracy and integrity in my representation of your interview, but this would only be done with your consent. If you do take part, you will be offered the chance to listen to the audiotapes after the interview. You will also be offered the opportunity to edit the transcripts of the recordings if you desire. Once the research findings have been written up in the thesis and it has been passed, a copy will be sent to you should you wish to have it.

All audio data and transcripts of your interview session will be stored at the University of Auckland premises for 6 years in a locked cabinet. The tapes and data will be treated as highly confidential. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this material. After the period of 6 years, the tapes and data will be destroyed through incineration.

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Right to Withdraw:

You are free to withdraw from participation in this project at any time, and you can request that any data that is related to you be withdrawn up until November 1st 2012, after which the final report will have been written.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

All information you provide in the interview session is strictly confidential and you will not be named in the research, or in publications/reports about the research unless you expressly indicate to the contrary. However, due to your role within your religious community, and your relationships to others in the community, some may be able to identify you. All of this will be explained to you, prior to signing the consent form, so you are fully informed of any consequences if you do choose to sign and take part.

Many thanks,

Emma Stone

Researcher: Emma Stone
Address: Sociology Department
Human Sciences Building
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92109
Auckland, New Zealand
Phone: 021 171 2108
Email: esto014@aucklanduni.ac.nz
Brazilian Contact Details: To be advised

Primary Supervisor/
Head of Department: Dr Tracey McIntosh
Email Address: t.mcintosh@auckland.ac.nz
Phone Number: 09 373 7599 extension 85123/86113

For Ethical concerns please contact: The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Level 3, 76 Symonds Street, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel. 09 373 7599 extension 83711

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS

COMMITTEE ON.....for.....years on....., Reference number 2010/376

Reference 2010/376

INFORMAÇÕES PARA PARTICIPANTES

Título do Projeto:

Religiões Contemporâneas na Vida Brasileira: Agentes da Mudança na Modernidade Atrasada

Pesquisadora:

Emma Francis Stone, estudante de Doutorado no Departamento de Sociologia da Universidade de Auckland. Mestrada em Espanhol, com experiência de três meses em João Pessoa-PB/Brasil no ano de 2008.

Sobre o Projeto:

Gostaria de convidar-lhes a participar desta minha pesquisa. O objetivo deste, é analisar a função da religião na vida moderna brasileira. Compreendendo a maneira do qual esta *influência* seus aderentes a se ajustarem aos elementos variados da sociedade atual.

Estou interessada em falar com participantes que sejam adeptos a religião por muitos anos, que tenham ingressado recentemente ou/e em especial a quem tenha tido uma extra motivação para se manter ou associar com a comunidade.

Caso estejam aptos, serão direcionados a uma individual entrevista comigo, e se necessário um tradutor.

As conversas terão a duração de 1 à 2 horas no máximo.

Investigarei a função e a *importância* da religião na sua vida, suas experiências e causas a se associar com a religião, sua história pessoal e as maneiras do qual esta lhe ajudou ou ajude a se ajustar as mudanças que ocorrem na sua vida, na comunidade e na sociedade em geral. **O projeto será bancado por três fundos: a minha conta de pesquisa de pós-graduação, financiamento do Fundo de Pesquisa Doutoral da Faculdade de Letras, e meu próprio financiamento.**

Como será usada sua história:

As entrevistas serão gravadas para assim assegurar a precisão e a integridade da representação das respostas e perguntas - Resaltando que isto será feito com seu consentimento. Após a gravação, esta será transcrita em tese com o consentimento (se for de interesse) da participação da edição e transcrição. Também te ofereceremos a opção do envio de uma cópia final.

Toda a informação auditiva da sua entrevista será armazenada na Universidade de Auckland por 6 anos em um armário trancado. As fitas e os dados serão tratados como altamente confidenciais.

Estritamente, apenas eu e minha supervisora teremos acesso a este material. Depois do período de 6 anos, todos os materiais usuados serão destruídos por incineração.

Direito de se retirar:

Sua participação é completamente voluntária. Sendo assim, você está livre a se retirar da participação neste projeto a qualquer momento antes do dia 1 de Novembro de 2012. Depois desta data, o rascunho final será escrito.

Após seu desejo, antes da data justificada, todas as informações relacionadas com você serem retiradas.

Reference 2010/376

Anonimidade e Confidência:

Todas suas *informações* de entrevista é estritamente confidencial. Você não será nomeado na pesquisa ou nas publicações/reportagens a menos que você indique ao contrário. Entretanto, devido ao seu papel na comunidade religiosa e as suas relações com outros na comunidade, é possível que alguns se reconheçam. Tudo será explicado, antes de assinar o formulário de consentimento, para que você seja completamente informado das consequências da participação.

Declarações:

Sua participação é completamente voluntária. É possível que sua história se torne uma informação para o projeto. Para reconhecer os esforços que contribue a este, será oferecido uma ficha moeda ao valor de 25 Reais.

Muito obrigada,

Emma Stone

Pesquisadora: Emma Stone
Endereço Sociology Department
Human Sciences Building
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92109
Auckland, New Zealand
Telefone: 64 21 171 2108
Correio eletrônico: esto014@aucklanduni.ac.nz
Endereço no Brasil: Para ser aconselhado

Supervisora principal/
Diretor do Departamento: Dra. Tracey McIntosh
Endereço do correio eletrônico: t.mcintosh@auckland.ac.nz
Número de telefone: 09 373 7599 extensão 85123/86113

Para preocupações éticas, entrar em contato com: the Chair, the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, the University of Auckland, Level 3, 76 Symonds Street, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel. 09 3737599 extensão 83711.

ESTE FORMULÁRIO FOI APROVADO PELA COMISSÃO DE ÉTICA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE AUCKLAND EM.....por.....anos em..... Número de referência 2010/376

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**CONSENT FORM FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT
THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS**

Project Title: Contemporary Religions in Brazilian Life: Agents of Change in Late Modernity

Name of Researcher: Emma Francis Stone

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research
- I understand that participation in the one-on-one interviews will take between one to two hours over one session
- I understand that I am free to leave the interview at any time, and do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to
- I understand that the interview will be audio-taped
- I understand that I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time
- I wish/ do not wish for an interpreter to be present.
- I understand that while every effort will be made to protect my identity in the research findings /subsequent publications/reports if I so choose, there still remains a chance I could be identified.
- I understand that should I desire a copy of the audio tape, this will be made available to me.
- I understand that should I desire a copy of the research findings, this will be made available to me.
- I understand only the researcher will transcribe the tapes.
- I understand the audiotapes and transcriptions will be kept securely for 6 years on University of Auckland premises, where only my supervisor and I will have access to them, and destroyed by incineration at the end of the 6 year period.

I agree/ do not agree that the interviews will be audio-taped.

I wish/ do not wish to have a copy of my interviews.

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I agree/do not agree to the using of my name.

I would like/ would not like a copy of the summary in email.

Email: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS COMMITTEE
ON.....for.....years on....., Reference Number 2010/376**

-Reference 2010/376

**FORMULÁRIO DE CONSENTIMENTO PARA PARTICIPAÇÃO DE ENTREVISTA
ESTE FORMULÁRIO SERÁ MANTIDO POR UM PERÍODO DE 6 ANOS**

Título do projeto: Religiões Contemporâneas na Vida Brasileira: Agentes da Mudança na Modernidade Atrasada

Nome da Pesquisadora: Emma Francis Stone

Estou de acordo com a ficha de informações para participantes, compreendi a natureza da pesquisa, e estou consciente da minha seleção. Tenho a oportunidade de fazer perguntas, e de esclarecer qualquer questões ou preocupações.

- Concordo em participar desta pesquisa;
- Entendo que a participação nas entrevistas durará de 1 à 2 horas durante uma sessão;
- Entendo que estou livre a sair da entrevista a qualquer hora, e não tenho que responder perguntas do qual não sejam de meu desejo;
- Entendo que a entrevista será gravada.
- Entendo que tenho o direito de pedir que a gravação pare a qualquer momento.
- Eu desejo/não desejo que um tradutor esteja presente durante a entrevista;
- Entendo que, embora a pesquisadora se esforce ao máximo para proteger a minha identidade na pesquisa, publicações subseqüentes ou reportagens. Haverá uma chance de ser identificado;
- Entendo que se desejar uma cópia das fitas de gravação, elas estarão disponíveis para mim;
- Entendo que se eu desejar uma cópia da tese, ela estará disponível para mim;
- Entendo que somente a pesquisadora transcreverá as fitas;
- Entendo que as fitas e as transcrições serão mantidas seguramente por 6 anos na Universidade de Auckland, onde somente minha supervisadora e eu as acessaremos;
- As fitas e transcrições serão destruídas por incineração depois de 6 anos;
- Desconsideração da participação, será aceita antes da data relatada (1 de Novembro de 2012).

Estou de acordo/ não estou de acordo de que as entrevistas forem gravadas.

Desejo/ não desejo receber uma cópia da minha entrevista

Desejo/ não desejo editar as transcrições

Estou de acordo/ não estou de acordo de que a pesquisadora use meu nome na pesquisa.

Gostaria/ não gostaria receber uma cópia do resumo por e-mail.

E-mail _____

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Nome: _____

Assinatura: _____

Data: _____

ESTE FORMULÁRIO FOI APROVADO PELA COMISSÃO DE ÉTICA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE
AUCKLAND EM.....por.....anos
em..... Número de referência 2010/376

Reference 2010/376