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# Ancestral knowledge and the cosmopolitics of healing in Afro-Brazilian religions

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## ABSTRACT

Afro-Brazilian religions enhance various entities and territories («orishas», plants, animals, substances and humans) that constitute their modes of existence. Their ancestral knowledge mobilizes not only religious attributes, since Nature and the Cosmos erupt in their practices. We present two ethnographies, carried out between 2011 and 2020 in three «terreiros», in the states of Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. In these modes of existence, the concept of healing goes beyond the biopsychosocial dimensions in a series of procedures (cleansing, blessings, prayers, herbal baths, teas, smoking, among others) that promote the restoration of health and well-being of these groups.

**KEYWORDS:** cosmopolitics; Afro-Brazilian religions; folk healers; health

## RESUMO

As religiões afro-brasileiras potencializam diversos entes e territórios (orixás, plantas, animais, substâncias e humanos) que constituem seus modos de existência. Seu conhecimento ancestral mobiliza não apenas atributos religiosos, uma vez que a Natureza e o Cosmos irrompem nas suas práticas. Apresentamos duas etnografias, realizadas entre 2011 e 2020 junto a três terreiros, nos estados do Paraná e Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. Nesses modos de existência, o conceito de cura extrapola as dimensões biopsicossociais em uma série de procedimentos (limpezas, benzeduras, orações, banhos de ervas, chás, defumações, entre outros) que promovem o restabelecimento da saúde e do bem-estar desses coletivos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** cosmopolítica; religiões afro-brasileiras; benzedeiras; saúde

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Several Afro-Brazilian religions actants such as «valorixás», «babalorixás», «babalossains», «tatás», «mametus», «etemis», «iyatemis» – and their variations the «mães-de-santo», «pais-de-santo», «filhos-de-santo» or «filhas-de-santo» –, «juremeiros»<sup>4</sup>, «macumbeiros»<sup>5</sup>, «curandeiros» [traditional doctors], «feiticeiros» [sorcerers], «benzedores»<sup>6</sup> [folk healers], and others, promote health inside their communities. Among the Kimbundus, the «kimbanda» was a priest who was also a doctor in their communities, where assemblages of nature were part of their healing activities. The term «kimbanda» etymologically means «healing». As for the prefix in the word «kimbanda», if «ki» is replaced by «u», it composes the word «umbanda», which means the art and/or occupation of healing, which is something practiced by the «kimbandas» (Nathalia Siqueira 2016).

It is possible to say that Afro-Brazilian modes of existence potentialize associations with a variety of beings and territories, going beyond the recurrent characterization of religiosity. The agency of entities, «orixás», plants, animals, substances, and humans takes place at the «terreiros»<sup>7</sup>, constituting an ethical and political form in which thought experimentations and life practices are crossed (cf. Roger Bastide 1978).

In this text, we consider Afro-Brazilian religions<sup>8</sup> as modes of existence<sup>9</sup>, according to the approach of Wanderson Flor do Nascimento (2016) regarding

«candomblé» and, on what José Carlos dos Anjos (2006, 2009, 2019) states about Afro-Brazilian ‘cosmopolitics’. This perspective has no purpose of dismissing the notion of religion, widely employed to define an array of practices intensively connected with human and extra-human<sup>10</sup> forces<sup>11</sup>. What is established as Afro-Brazilian religions goes further than the ‘belief’ or even the mere notion of ‘reconnecting’: they are human and extra-human modes of existence in constant multispecies<sup>12</sup> and pluriversal interaction. In line with this understanding, we seek to analyze the associations made among humans and extra-humans promoting the healing within this ‘cosmopolitics’. Following Bruno Latour (2004, 2019), we employ the concept of ‘actants’, aiming to establish the same level of symmetry and treatment among the beings, which are not hierarchized into the modern categories of subject and object.

Therefore, we evoke the possibility of an amplified comprehension of what is nature and culture, recognizing that there is Afro-centered<sup>13</sup> existential territoriality in which ‘the Africanism’ might be “assessed as a set of procedures of world creation” (Anjos 2009, p. 3). The activities the Afro-Brazilian religions operate in the religious sense and medical-spiritual treatments («benzeduras» [incantations], healings, «atendimentos» [consultation], teas and herbal baths) may present modes of coexistence, aggregating different beings in associations and compositions, in addition to the “use of a much broader territory than that restricted to the religious house” (Nuer 2017). Thus, we might say that this “strong interrelation [...] expresses a mode of being, of living, as part of life, of the cosmos, which connects human beings to nature and the deities” (Nuer 2017).

Therefore, “orixás, voduns and Nkisi are members of the community, not deities apart [...], they depend on their community just as all other components and, like them, they have tasks to perform. The dead are a part of the community as well and, like the «orixás», «voduns», and «Nkisi», they also have roles in it, they feast and party with it”. During the period of slav-

4 Religion present in the North and Northeast regions of Brazil. It is quite similar to «umbanda», in which the practices revolve around Amerindian spirits, called «caboclos» and «encantados», which heal and advise practitioners. Its adepts are known as «juremeiros». The plant jurema and several other herbs are liturgically used in order to prepare ritualistic objects and healing practices.

5 People who practice «macumba», Afro-Brazilian ritual of Nagô origin, with catholic, spiritist and occultist influence.

6 People who own specific knowledge of herbs, substances and other methods of healing, using ritual practices in which praying and enchantments are largely employed along with hand gestures and word evoking. When lacking medical doctors, «benzeduras» [incantations] are a quite common resource in many Brazilian communities.

7 Emic word meaning the temple, as well as the words «abaça», «terreira», «ilê», «casa», «centro».

8 We understand Afro-Brazilian religions as the spectrum of religious forms which are activated by different expressions, such as the «batuque» in Rio Grande do Sul – similar to the «Candomblé» of Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and other places in Brazil –, in which «orixás» of jeje-nagô origins, African deities brought by the individuals enslaved for over four centuries, are worshipped; the «umbanda», Brazilian religion that its origins African ancestors («pretos-velhos»), to indigenous spirits, natives of the American continent, known as «caboclos» and, yet, to a reformulation of Allan Kardec’s spiritism and of popular catholic saints; and the «quimbanda», which is the worshipping of «exus» and «pombagiras», spirits attributed to the marginal forms in society, connected to alcohol consumption, prostitution and magic. In the context of our research, what is identified as «Linha Cruzada» [intercrossed lined] is an aggregative form of those three religious lines («batuque», «umbanda» and «quimbanda»), which have different rituals that occur in the same «terreiro». For more information on, see Bastide (1974). *As Américas Negras*. São Paulo, DIFEL.

9 According to Bruno Latour (2013, p. 183), a mode of existence is “a version of being-as-other (a debiting of discontinuity and continuity, difference and repetition, otherness and sameness) and also its own regime of veridiction”.

10 We use this expression in a similar meaning of Philippe Descola (2008, 2016), when he refers to continuous, ecological and social relations among humans and nonhumans, through mechanisms of participation, alliance and conflicts.

11 «Forças» [forces], in the Afro-Brazilian religions aspect, refer to the intensities which affect human and extra-human beings in different ways, as an energy perceived in a quite close way to the notion of «axé».

12 According to Anna Tsing (2019, p. 15), it is crucial to expand social sciences beyond human exceptionalism. Therefore, referring to multispecies implies the assumption that “humans are incapable of surviving without other species. We are beings within ecological webs not outside them. Multispecies landscapes are necessary to being human”, in Anna Tsing, “In the midst of disturbance: symbiosis, coordination, history, landscape” (Tsing 2015, p. 5).

13 According to Elisa Nascimento (2009, pp. 182-191), the Afro-centered perspective is “o lugar de onde o olhar parte” [the place where the eye starts]. Therefore, the “concept of ‘place’ reveals how Afro-centricity is not based on biological or genetic categories of race”, leading to a criticism of the hegemonic ethnocentrism and to a possibility of starting from other references, non-Eurocentric.

ery, the Africans were ripped off their continent and brought to America against their will. They brought along a myriad of elements which were incorporated “to the religions born in Brazil as a result of their necessity of not losing” their “identity references”. Thus, “the candomblés support an integrated cosmology of reality, which we could identify as holistic since it considers a radical interconnection among all elements of human and non-human nature” (Nascimento 2016, pp. 156-158).

Furthermore, it is noticeable that Afro-Brazilian religions are “updated when in Brazilian lands, in the social relations that occurred in the plots in the state of racial horror to slave descendants”, though causes the manifestation of “diversified responses to that violence, responses which would never have occurred the same way in Africa” (Anjos 2019, p. 508). Therefore, the rhizomatic logic<sup>14</sup> of these modes of existence allows the differences to get connected, following as pluralities, instead of dissolving and unifying (Anjos 2006).

All Afro-Brazilian knowledge is not focused only on human, cultural, and religious attributes, since nature, the Cosmos, breaks out in what humans do. For instance, when the «trabalho»<sup>15</sup> is made outside the «terreiros», such as in the «matas» [woods], it occurs because these other places are «pontos-de-força» [places-of-power]: when one enters the woods, permission must be sought from Oxóssi (the «orixá» of the hunt and the forests) and to all the people<sup>16</sup> who inhabit it. Similar procedures are held in other places as well: for Bará («orixá» of the «batuque» in Rio Grande do Sul, associated with crossroads and commercial relations), Ogum (warrior «orixá», associated with metals and technology), «pombagiras»<sup>17</sup> and «exus», at the «encruzilhadas» [crossroads], streets and roads; for Oxum (female «orixá» of fertility and money, associated with freshwater streams), by the rivers and waterfalls; for Iemanjá (female «orixá» of wisdom, associated with the sea), in the beach and in the sea; for Xangô («orixá» of justice, associated with quarries), on stone quarries and hills; for Oxalá («orixá» associated with the creation of the world and the beings), in meadows, etc.

The crossroad, besides being a place-of-power where there is an intersection among streets or avenues, also refers to a mode of thinking and acting, in

which there is a multitude of Afro-Brazilian religious practices, forms, and matrices. Anjos perceives the crossroads as a “temporal-spatial” perspective of the world, which justifies what we may identify as socio-cosmic cartography of the assembled actants (Anjos 2006, p. 19). For this reason, rituals, offerings, iconographies, dreams, places-of-power, «assentamento» [settlements], and lines<sup>18</sup> operate as different crossroads running through life as a whole, in relations that operate a network (humans, deities, natures).

In ancestral Afro-Brazilian knowledge<sup>19</sup>, African «orixás» and catholic saints are interrelated in «Umbanda»; «Pontos cantados» [songs] have Christian, Amerindian and African bases<sup>20</sup>; the concepts from Kardec spiritism, such as evolution, «aparelho»<sup>21</sup> and medium are widely employed at the «terreiros»; gypsy and the «Povo do Oriente»<sup>22</sup> [Eastern People] spirits land or embody in the «linha dos exus»<sup>23</sup> [line of exus] and in the «umbanda»<sup>24</sup>. It is possible to verify

<sup>18</sup> See Jean Favaro and Hieda Corona (2020, p. 11). This line is characterized by assembling the actants who “carry ideas of transformation and movement”. Each «linha» “connects a specific sphere of existence, in which legions of spirits are gathered into several other lines and sublines according to their features akin”. In our understanding, these lines are linked to the concept of «povo», though they are more comprehensive as they encompass offerings, plants, animals, etc.

<sup>19</sup> In accordance with Eduardo Oliveira (2009, s.p.), “the ancestry becomes the symbol of Afrodescendent resistance. It plays an essential role in the historical and cultural formation of the black figure in Brazil, and it triggers a new sociopolitical project as well, which is based on the principles of social inclusion, on the respect for differences, on the sustainable coexistence between the Human and the Environment, on the respect for elderly’s experience, on gender complementation, on diversity, on conflict resolution, on community life, among others”.

<sup>20</sup> Aided by the drums and other musical instruments, the «pontos» [songs] are used to greet the entities and to bring them into the «terreiro». Among other examples of Amerindian-African-Christian crossovers, there are the following «pontos cantados» [songs]: “Caboclo Arapuã, sua estrela é minha guia. Ele é filho de Ogum e da Virgem Maria” [«Caboclo» Arapuã, his star is my guide. He is the son of «Ogum» and the Virgin Mary]; “Seo Zé Pelintra não teve pai, Seo Zé Pelintra não teve mãe. Ele foi criado por Ogum Beira-Mar, pela mãe de Deus e por todos os orixás” [Mr. Zé Pelintra had no father, Mr. Zé Pelintra had no mother. He was raised by «Ogum Beira-Mar», by the Mother of God and by all the «orixás»] and “Dizem que Xangô mora na pedreira, mas não é lá sua morada verdadeira. Xangô mora numa cidade de luz, onde mora Santa Bárbara, Oxumarê e Jesus” [They say Xangô lives at the quarry, but that is not his real home. «Xangô» lives in a city of lights, where Saint Barbara, «Oxumarê» and Jesus live].

<sup>21</sup> People able to embody the spirits. Another recurrent expression is «cavalo-de-santo» [divine horsemen].

<sup>22</sup> «Povo» formed by spirits from heterogeneous places, such as the Mayans, Aztecs, Greeks, Japans, from the Himalayas, Hindus/Indians, Chinese, etc.

<sup>23</sup> «Exus» are different from the «Orixá Exu» of «Candomblé», since they denote classes of spirits connected to «umbanda» and «quimbanda», in our context, in the marginal forms of expression – called bohemians, sorcerers, «malandros» [tricksters]. The equivalent to the «Orixá Exu» is, therefore, «Bará», the male deity of paths and messenger of the «Orixás». Nonetheless, the spirits of «quimbanda», both «exus» and «pombagiras», have the power and strength of the messenger, and they are the deities which inhabit the crossroads.

<sup>24</sup> Roger Bastide (1978) says that the exu is a kind of ambassador or messenger of the gods.

<sup>14</sup> Isabelle Stengers (2012) addresses the rhizomatic form as “[...] an ecological anarchy, because while connections may be produced between any parts of a rhizome, they also must be produced. They are events, linkages—like symbiosis. They are what is and will remain heterogeneous” (s.p.).

<sup>15</sup> It refers to every activity that mobilizes forces and actions at the «terreiros» and other places as well.

<sup>16</sup> Set of entities which belong to a specific socio-cosmic gathering. Hence, each «pontos-de-força» has its own people, for example, the people of the woods, the people of the waterfalls, the people of the crossroads, among others. Each initiate has his or her own «povo», formed by entities working along with him or her.

<sup>17</sup> Women spirits, associated with prostitution and witchcraft. In general, they attend cases related to sexuality and violence against women, and they fight alongside with the victims.



the territoriality of actions, relations, and presences of beings, such as black ancestors («pretos-velhos»), Amerindian spirits («caboclos»), «pombagiras», «exus», «orixás», saints, «ibejis»<sup>25</sup> (children spirits), «eguns» (dead people's souls), etc. In these relations, there is "a particular way of thinking [...] in which caboclos, pretos velhos, children and some other minor forms of human bring up questions about human's fate". Those temporalities are distinguished from official historiography and constitute a counterbalance to the "European colonial modernity" (Anjos 2019, p. 516).

There is no unification, neither of forms nor intensities, as some elements are activated and some are not. In any crossroad, a multitude of possibilities of "experimentations of thoughts, modes of existence and problematizations of potentially endless reach and consequences" (Anjos, Oro 2009, p. 57) occurs. Thus, through a cosmo-ontologic diplomacy, it is possible to assess the potency of healing practices, in which the dosages create openings and closures, updated in events, territories and beings, moving the «axé»<sup>26</sup>.

The comprehension of the African matrix and its forms of resistance to contexts of violence and persecution, allows us to perceive Afro-Brazilian multispecies therapeutics. The concepts of health, illness, and healing overpass cosmologic, ecologic and biopsychosocial dimensions, which are indissociably connected in these ontologies. Thus, the treatment of a disease extrapolates the physiological level of the human body: cosmic potencies, plants (seeds or beans, fruits, leaves, barks, roots), animals, «pontos-de-força» («encruzilhadas», «matas», «calungas» [cemeteries], etc.) are activated and made through «ebós»<sup>27</sup> for cleansing, incantations, prayers, baths, teas, smoking rituals, among other procedures, which enable the establishment of health and well-being of these groups. In a cosmo-ontology, that creates a mode of existence which stands out for the linkage of actants – that is connected with the Congo-Angolan «kimbandas», whose name is strongly active inside their community, updated in a context of resistance to a modern, industrialized and racist society.

The analysis presented here is the outcome of ethnographies realized between the years of 2011 and 2020, involving three «terreiros» in the South region of Brazil, more specifically in the State of Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul. In Paraná, Abaça de Oxalá is a «terreiro» that includes «umbanda», «quimbanda»<sup>28</sup>, and «candomblé» (Nagô nation). It is located in the town of Pato Branco, in the Southeast of Paraná, and its

«pai-de-santo» is Aldacir de Oxaguian<sup>29</sup>, a black male, 47 years old (Favaro 2018). In Rio Grande do Sul, the «terreiros» are both of «Linha Cruzada»<sup>30</sup>. One is the Centro Espírita Umbandista Reino de Oxum e Ogum Beira-Mar e Seguidores do Sete Encruzilhadas<sup>31</sup>, which is located in the town of Mostardas, mid-coast of the State; its «mãe-de-santo» is Irma d'Oxum, black female, 70 years old, descendent from «quilombolas» [maroons communities]<sup>32</sup> – her grandmother and her mother were «benzedadeiras» [folk healers] and midwives –, who was initiated in «umbanda» almost 50 years ago. The other «terreiro» is the Ilê África Reino de Iansã e Xangô, Iemanjá e Bará e Seguidores do Sete Encruzilhadas, located in Rio Grande, a town in the south of the State; its «mãe-de-santo» is Jalba da Iansã<sup>33</sup>, white female, 100 years old, who was initiated into the «Candomblé» from Bahia in early 1940s.

## 1. The cosmopolitics of Afro-Brazilian religions

The «terreiros» are connected to identity political processes, to collective repertoires, to religious, festive, cultural, and healing practices, and the relations among humans and extra-humans. We understand that the «terreiros» create modes of existence, a cosmopolitics in which the conceptions of cosmo, of politics, and of bodies have nothing to deal with the way modern science conceives them (cf. Stengers 1997; Anjos 2006). The «terreiros» are territories that are ethnically marked by a unique space-time that expresses a diversity of modes of existence – they aggregate and agency other beings, as participants in the cosmos (Ramos 2015a). These places also operate as

[...] another way of peering the past, not through memories, but through the recreation of past series thanks to artifacts which ensure the continuity in the series of body dispositions. It is not about presentifying the past, as it happens when ancestors are summoned up, but it is about composing along with them, in the same series of

<sup>25</sup> It refers to the souls of children, like the «erês», though these are connected to the Ibeji twins.

<sup>26</sup> According to Ivan Poli (2019, p. 27), the «axé» is a Iorubá concept meaning a "vital force that is expressed in each word as well".

<sup>27</sup> Ritual of energetic cleansing, which involves several elements tied around the bodies of the individuals.

<sup>28</sup> The Afro-Brazilian expression «quimbanda» refers to the adoration of the spirits of «exus» and «pombagiras», which notably originated from the dimension of healing practices, suggested by the word «kimbanda», explained in the first paragraph of this text.

<sup>29</sup> Oxaguian is the young form of the «Orixá» Oxalá, who carries an «idá» [sword], a white metal pestle and a shield.

<sup>30</sup> «Linha cruzada» [intercrossed lines] is one of Afro-Brazilian religious forms that aggregate rituals and practices from the «bатуque (candomblé)», «umbanda» and «quimbanda». See Anjos (2006) and João Daniel Dorneles Ramos (2015a).

<sup>31</sup> The Caboclo Sete Encruzilhadas is an indigenous spirit, associated with the institutionalized establishment of «umbanda» as a religion in Brazil. In our ethnographic context, it is connected to the «Orixás» Ogum and Oxóssi, and its «pontos-de-força» are the woods and the beings which inhabit them.

<sup>32</sup> At present, "the «quilombola» mobilizations arise as actions of groups which were historically marginalized and excluded from the social and political representation in the country and arise in movements which [...] enable the creation of social and political forms of organization in their daily lives under a claimant and contestatory aspect" (Ramos 2015b, p. 23).

<sup>33</sup> Iansã or Oyá is a female warrior «orixá», queen of the dead, associated with rainstorms and windstorms, whose temper is strong and independent.

present events. In other words, this is an extemporaneous intervention of an occurrence that disrupts the chronological sequence of everyday events to force the intervention of another temporal series, which allows the coexistence between past and present (Anjos 2019, p. 509).

«Terreiros» are spaces where Afro-Brazilian religious practices take place and, nonetheless, they preserve certain aspects of African-derived cultures – which came into interaction with other Amerindian and Christian elements, emerged in the Afro-diasporic context in Brazil. They are, in general, a place attached to the houses of «mães-de-santo» and «pais-de-santo», with public space («congá») and a hall, full of statues, frameworks, pictures of different saints, «orixás», entities. This public part is where the so-called assistance («consulentes», follower, etc.) gathers around the group of mediums and entities or deities for consultations, celebrations, and rituals. Also, it is in the space of the «terreiro» where people may meet and establish relations with their kinship and friends, get spiritual support and the healing of diseases, ask for advice, access non-conventional medicine, among other elements.

Furthermore, the «matas» (areas of forests, woods, parks), the «águas» [waters] (the sea, lake, beach, waterfall, etc.), the «encruzilhadas» (intersections of roads or streets) are existential territories, since the entities who make specific tasks inhabit and arrive in these places (cf. Ramos 2017). One might say that a series of superpositions of “Catholic and Afro-Brazilian devotional territories” (Anjos, Oro 2009, p. 14) occur in these places, as cosmopolitical places, which reduce or even eliminate any distance between «orixás» and Catholic saints, as well as between images and «acutás»<sup>34</sup>.

In their daily lives, Afro-Brazilian collectives interact with plants, animals, minerals and territories, in particular practices that form them. For them, as in other traditional groups, the Earth is alive. The cosmic forces operate in specific places, such as in the «assentamentos» – formed by stones, metals, vegetables, along with other elements –, which are «plantados» (implanted with rituals) in the «terreiros», as well as in what is used for the procedures – the garments of «pombagiras», used for the «giras», Ogum’s sword, used in a «passe», the «preto-velho»’s hand-rolled cigarettes, which he smokes in a consultation, the «exu»’s hat, used when it embodies in a person, etc. The expression of this mode of existence, in which both the agency and the thought operate in coexistence with other beings, by the potency, indicates a perspective that is not exclusive to human beings. Therefore, we are facing an intense interlinking of several tangled fields; this interlinking is made of relations and assemblages, of events, in an ethic pursuit of existence

<sup>34</sup> «Acutás» are stones which inherently carry the cosmic energy from «orixás», forming the «assentamentos» in the «terreiros», though they may act in other spaces as well.

(Michel Foucault 2012), where therapeutical forms are activated, enabling the association with the diversified beings and life as becoming.

The concept of Tsing about multispecies association (cf. Tsing 2019) is relevant for us, since it allows to perceive what other territories and practices form the «povos de terreiro» [peoples of «terreiros»]. For instance, the «woods» and the diversity of beings that inhabit them evoke health, healing, well-being and protection, assembling people and extra-human beings, in a socio-cosmic cluster that differs from the Eurocentric model – in which humans are dissociated from other beings, where the multispecies interdependence is dismissed and which causes the events we commonly identify as “crisis” (epidemics, environmental collapses, global warming, etc).

Nonetheless, the Afro-Brazilian religions people constantly face religious racism; their practices are demonized, their temples, their physical integrity and their lives are attacked; they are represented to look like “the great enemy to be fought” (Nascimento 2016, p. 168), in a deeply racist society where the remnants of slavery cause violent actions every day. Besides that, the Brazilian Government has been attempting to prohibit some practices (such as the sacrifices of animals (cf. Ramos (2016), or the performance of religious processions) and/or, also, to adopt measures regarding the restraint of the use of ‘public’ spaces, which deter the practisers from placing their «oferendas» [offerings] in the streets and other places, such as cemeteries. As a reaction to racism, Afro-Brazilian collectives fight for social and political recognition of their modes of existence, their knowledge, and their practices.

## 2. The art of healing: ancestral knowledge

It is commonly said that “each house is a case” (Edgar Barbosa Neto 2012, p. 23), a strong aphorism used in Afro-Brazilian religions to evoke the diversity of forms of coexistence in the «terreiros», as each place has its singular relations, as well as a countless number of practices, based on a vast epistemic array of knowledge and techniques, allied to different actants. This knowledge is expressed through the practices of «ebós», herbal baths, smoking rituals, incantations, prayers, teas, ointments, and many sorts of «trabalhos», among others, with the aim of healing<sup>35</sup>. In Pai Aldacir’s «terreiro», the healing practices are disseminated by liturgic models involving the «quimbanda», the «umbanda» and the Nagô «candomblé», and, even though they differ, they are also interconnected by constant flows and intercrossing. The «quimbanda» (or left-side line) has its own precinct,

<sup>35</sup> The potency of healing through cosmopolitical assemblages is not stationary, as they might interpenetrate different Afro-Brazilian religions, such as «umbanda», «quimbanda», «linha cruzada», «candomblés», «bataques», «catimbós», «tambores-de-mina».

known as «canjira», where there are the settlements of «Pombagira Rainha das Sete Encruzilhadas»<sup>36</sup> and of several «exus»: Sete Ventanias<sup>37</sup> [seven winds], Chama-Dinheiro<sup>38</sup> [money-charm], «Exu» do Lodo<sup>39</sup> [of mud], Tranca-Ruas das Almas [Road-blocker of Souls]<sup>40</sup> and «Exu» Caveira [Skull]<sup>41</sup>. Besides, there are the settlements of the «Orixá» Omulu<sup>42</sup> and the «firmações»<sup>43</sup> of Exus Tiriri<sup>44</sup>, das Sete Encruzilhadas [Seven Crossroads]<sup>45</sup> and Veludo<sup>46</sup>, of Pombagira Maria Padilha<sup>47</sup> das Almas, of Pombagira Cacurucaia<sup>48</sup> and of Pombagira Cigana [Gipsy]. By the door of the «canjira», there is the «cruzeiro dos eguns» and settlements of the Orixá Ogum. A corridor leads from this space into the «congã» of the «terreiro» – which is a place designated for the entities of «umbanda» (or the right-side line), with the settlements of the Orixá Xangô and Orixá Iemanjá, as well as the «firmações» of «Oxalá», «Oxum», Nanã Buruquê<sup>49</sup>, Iansã, Oxóssi, Saint Michael the Archangel, Saint Cosmas and Damian, Ogum Beira-Mar<sup>50</sup>, Caboclo Guaraci, Preto-velho Pai Guiné, Preta-velha Vó Benedita and Preta-velha Maria Conga, as well as Zé Pelintra<sup>51</sup>. Within this «terreiro», all cosmic potencies and entities from «quimbanda» and «umbanda» are identified as

36 Female entity of «quimbanda» that reigns over the crossroads.  
 37 Entity that commands the winds storms and thunderstorms. It works alongside the «orixá» Iansã.  
 38 It rules the aspects of money exchange, market and wealth.  
 39 «Exu» that inhabits swamps, beaches, riverbanks and all forms of mud. It is also present in cemeteries. It is a great doctor of «quimbanda» and is able to reverse any unstable situation that may happen to a person.  
 40 Among its many attributes, it can open and close any path. It is the «Exu» that supervises the activity of souls in ritual spaces.  
 41 «Exu» that rules over cemeteries and the moment (time) of death.  
 42 Omulu or Obaluaie is the «orixá» of healing in all its aspects, of earth and is the protector of health.  
 43 The «firmações» are composed by different iconographies of entities, and are liturgically prepared. Sometimes they contain «acutás» and other «axés». Their difference from the «assentamentos» is perceived through the smaller quantity of associated elements.  
 44 «Exu» Tiriri is the entity that allows spiritual vision, connected to the «Orixá» Ogum, to the journey and to the return of magic against people.  
 45 According to Mãe Jalba: «Exu das Sete Encruzilhadas [Exu of the Seven Crossroads] is the same Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas (Seu Sete) [Caboclo of the Seven Crossroads (Mr. Seven)]”. However, its presence is felt among the «povo da rua» [people of the street], in the «linha de quimbanda» [«quimbanda» line], in one of its possible «viradas» – a temporary form the entities take in order to act. It is the «exu» responsible for one’s life paths.  
 46 «Exu» associated with diplomacy, politics and wealth. Its iconography is a man covered with hair. Some mediums say that, in the spiritual realm, it appears as a big old red dog.  
 47 Maria Padilha is the most popular «pombagira» and her history intertwined with the presence of Iberian witchcraft in Brazil.  
 48 It is an elderly «pombagira», a traditional doctor summoned to assist in case of mental disorders.  
 49 Female «Orixá» associated with mud, is responsible for the portal between life and death, and a descendent from Abomey (Benin).  
 50 «Caboclo» from «umbanda», associated with the warrior «orixá» Ogum and with Iemanjá.  
 51 An important entity among Afro-Brazilian religions, known as the protector of bars, of gambling places and of ditches. He is linked to bohemians and the «malandros» [tricksters], who are represented by a black man wearing an all white suit, a red tie and a white hat.

«orixás», not limiting the use of this word to Nagô’s «orixás». For Pai Aldacir, the rituals of «assentamentos» [settlements] and «matanças» [sacrifices of animals], which are pivotal to the place and directed to the «exus», «pombagiras» and «orixás», are practices that belong to the Nagô «candomblé». From Pai Aldacir’s perspective, his temple is constituted as a «candomblé terreiro», interconnected to the lines of «quimbanda» and «umbanda», although, the «exus» and «pombagiras» are the protagonists in the celebrations and they transmit or operate their practices, giving a path in order to make the connections with the «orixás» and «eguns» to happen. A concrete example of this intercrossing of lines may be identified in the fact that the «umbanda» entities, such as the «pretos-velhos», «caboclos», and «eres» don’t receive offerings of «menga» [animal blood] in their rituals, thus, these entities of the right-side line are not intersected with «candomblé».

It is worth mentioning that, even if the difference between the lines is upheld, all the entities from this «terreiro» enhance and convey the healing «axé», which allows the cosmic forces to restore health, paths, and lives. This form of medicine evoked during the «trabalhos» happens through the «giras» (rituals of embodiment and consultation), during private consultations with oracles, when the diseases start to be treated through a constant dialogue among the «mãe-de-santo» or «pai-de-santo», entities and ‘patients’ and also through prayers, offerings, «ebós», herbal baths, etc.

The dialogues established with the «orixás» during the «giras», private or oracular consultations constitute, from our perspective, an assembly of human and extra-human actants gathered to act on behalf of the situations brought to the «terreiros», such as the cure of diseases and the opening of life paths (business, prosperity, employment, love affairs, prestige, etc.). To perform a consultation, all the entities «assentadas» and «firmadas» in the «terreiro» receive libations of candles and prayers. During the «giras», when there is the presence of people from different social status, seeking the help of the «orixás», Pai Aldacir pronounces the initial prayers summoning his entire entity chain, and usually starts embodying the «orixás» from the «umbanda» line<sup>52</sup>. After him, the mediums from the «corrente»<sup>53</sup> embody «pretos-velhos», «caboclos», and other «oguns», disseminating the cosmopolitics of cure and discharging all the people at the place through «passes», incantations using herbs, and through cigar and pipe smoke. When necessary, these entities teach «trabalhos» to those in need.

52 Pai Aldacir usually embodies «Preto-Velho», Pai Guiné, «Preto-Velho», Pai João de Angola, «Caboclo», Guaraci or even Ogum Beira-Mar in the «linha da direita».  
 53 Association of the members of a «terreiro».



In this context, «pretas-velhas» or «pretos-velhos»<sup>54</sup> are most renowned for curing illnesses derived from jealousy, evil-eye, obsessions from enraged spirits, and depressive thoughts. These curses cause high-level stress and multiple events that can be a set back to the victims' lives. If treated by these entities, they discharge or cleanse all the charge that could be in the affected person and direct it to the «pontos-de-força» (crossroads, roadside crosses, «calungas», woods, etc.), in which the «energia» will be conducted and dissipated by other spirits endowed with socio-cosmic skills to do so. Differently, at «terreiro» of Linha Cruzada, a place in which three religions are practised, located in Rio Grande do Sul, another «locus» for our analysis, the first activity to happen is the «umbanda» line – during it, the people of the spiritual chain incorporate «caboclos» and «caboclas» and later, when the «gira» happens, the people of the street line occupies the place and people incorporate «exus» and «pombagiras». In both «terreiros», this process may include an intermediary moment between these two lines, so «pretos-velhos» or «pretas-velhas» embody people of the spiritual chain and perform consultations. At the beginning, «caboclos» and «caboclas» carry out individual consultation, where people receive a «passe» (laying of hands) and even prescriptions to treat illnesses and other problems. Among the people of the street line, «exus» and «pombagiras» do not perform consultations. However, they can interact with a few specific persons to offer help or prescribe something.

Throughout our ethnographic journey, we frequently dialogued with the different entities that, in turn, presented a diagnosis with a prescribed treatment to solve some problem or to do the maintenance of some intentions. An «orixá em terra» [on earth, embodied] is always accompanied by other «orixás» and «eguns» with whom the «gira»<sup>55</sup> is held [«correr gira»] and, collectively and relationally, they decide and prescribe the assemblage that should be done. In this regard, it was possible to perceive the «giras» and other kinds of appointments as an assembly of human and extra-human actants, which allows to convey the cosmopolitics of cure possible (cf. Ramos 2020).

The «trabalhos» performed after the appointments can result in an immediate therapeutic effect, regard-

ing the stress relief, and making the person feel better the days after the «gira», to the 'patient', as reported by a few 'patients'<sup>56</sup> from the «terreiro» located in Paraná: "During the (private) appointment I felt strong dizziness and my hands tingled. I left there feeling lighter. I was stressed before" (Moisés, personal communication, 2017); "I could not sleep for days, it felt like he («Exu» Sete Ventanias) was reading my mind, I was a little scared at the time, but left there feeling well and did not experience insomnia anymore" (Joelma, personal communication, 2017); "I spent the weekend tormented as if someone was in my head. When I got inside, it disappeared. I got blessed by Saint George's sword<sup>57</sup> and they lit gunpowder inside a bowl and made the discharge with the cape, but I must do the things he told me, so that it doesn't return" (Estela, personal communication, 2016); "I've been thinking all week that I should go (to the consultation), and felt much better after I left. He («Exu» Caveira), drew a star on the floor, placed a cup of water inside it, passed a white candle around me, and placed it there too. It felt as if it had taken all the evil away" (Vladimir, personal communication, 2017). On a certain occasion, a 'patient' from this «terreiro» was suffering disturbances and misfortunes derived from «demandas» [jinx or curses]. At her first time there, when the «gira» turned into «quimbanda», «Exu» Tiriri from Pai Aldacir came to Earth (embodied) and realized a strong presence of obsessor spirits in that woman. He drew his «ponto riscado» (sacred writing) on the floor and lit up white, red, and black candles, along with prayers and cigar puffs of smoke. The «Exu» ordered the opposing spirits to retreat and, in that moment, the 'patient' fell into a trance, rolled her eyes, growled, and started to act aggressively. Two «cambones» («orixás» assistants) held her arms while another «cambone», following «Exu» Tiriri's instructions, put 2 leaves of the Saint George's sword plant crossed on the woman's chest, since she was possessed by «eguns». Under the «Exu's» stipulations, with its hands and the cape placed on the head of the 'patient', the spirits retreated. The woman was instructed to «bater cabeça»<sup>58</sup> to «Oxalá» and to make an «ebó» to «Exu» Sete Catacumbas [«Exu» Seven Catacombs] was prescribed, who is one of the «exus» experts in their socio-cosmic skill of repelling the presence of «eguns» and «kiumbas» (obsessive, dangerous spirits), sent through the «demandas» to lead them to the catacombs realm, where the souls exhaust their attachment to the material world. The operating cosmopolitical assemblage in the suggested «ebó», in turn, brought a «padê» (a «farofa»

54 According to Anjos (2019, p. 512), another temporality comes to the surface in the «terreiro»: "The «Preta-Velha», during the ritual, travels to the past. When she speaks about the suffering in the «senzala», she settles in the present of her audience, while her body goes back to a past that is incompatible with this present. The dissociation between the time of the body and the time of the voice supposes a combination of disjunctive series. Summarizing, it is possible to talk about disjunctive time series of body and voice. This is the first Afro-Brazilian time paradox".

55 The action of «correr-gira» is about all sorts of communications and movements among the spirits and their gatherings around the territory of the spiritual world. The «orixá» holds a «gira» when it is embodied and also when it takes part in a ritual in which it must request that the entity holds its «gira» with its phalanges, souls, etc., to succeed in its purpose.

56 The names of the 'patients' are fictitious in order to preserve their identities.

57 Plant of African origin, widely used in the «terreiros». Scientific name: «Sansevieria trifasciata».

58 «Bater cabeça» (hitting head) means greeting all the house's lines; in front of the «conga», the person lightly hits the head towards the ground, three times to Oxalá in a straight line, three times to every right-side line pointing right and three times to every left-side line pointing left. This procedure means that the initiated person recognizes the «orixá's» sovereignty on his or her life.



made of manioc flour and palm oil), seven «bolinhos das almas» (“souls’ balls”; balls of manioc flour, made with water), «doboru» (popcorn), seven white eggs, seven balls of white rice, pieces of red cabbage, seven «acaçás»<sup>59</sup>, the sacrifice of a white chicken, seven cigars, a liter of brandy, a white seven-day candle and seven black candles. On the «congó» [altar], on a white towel of 2 by 2 meters, the ‘patient’ was put on at the center, surrounded by these elements inside bowls. Three «cambones» helped the «pai-de-santo» in this ritual. Pai Aldacir put the «alguidar» [traditional «candomblé» bowl] with the «padê» in front of the towel, a glass of brandy and lit a white seven-day candle and a cigar, summoning «Exu» Sete Catacumbas, with prayers followed by the «ponto cantado» [song]: “É Seu Sete Catacumbas que chegou para «trabalhar»! A «mironga» dessa filha o Seu Sete vai levar!” [Mr Sete Catacumbas arrived at the ritual! This woman’s «mironga»<sup>60</sup> Mr Sete will take away!]. Proceeding with the prayers and songs, alternating – one «cambone» would reach the recipients with the aforementioned elements to the «pai-de-santo», and they are tied around the ‘patient’s’ body. The last element was the chicken, sacrificed over the «padê». After, the «padê», the white candle, the drink, and the cigars are taken to the «canjira». The elements laying on the floor and the sacrificed chicken were put inside the towel that was tied up with seven knots. Then they were taken to the same place. Moreover, seven black candles were tied around the woman’s body and lit upside down, in the «canjira», being addressed to «Exu» Sete Catacumbas, in such a way that the «demanda» would return to its recipient<sup>61</sup>. To finish this ritual, Pai Aldacir embodied «Exu» Tiriri, who brought both short and long-run recommendations to the ‘patient’, regarding the precautions concerning her spirituality, so her paths would be opened. It was also necessary to make the «preceito», abstaining herself from sexual intercourse, alcoholic drinks, and eating any food containing the elements that were tied around her body for seven days, since the charge from the «eguns», death, and misfortune was transferred to these elements. Still in this period, the «Exu» would be «correndo-gira» with its «axés», to dispossess the charge. Finally, the elements lying inside the tied towel were taken to the «calunga», where they were discharged by the seventh catacomb located after the «cruzeiro das almas» [roadside cross]. Therefore, the «preceito» emphasizes that the «axés» assembled by the elements used in that ritual are strongly connected to the physical body and mind of the ‘pa-

tient’, indicating a relation in which body and mind are not separated.

It is possible to see that, from the consultation until the discharge of the «trabalhos», all the «orixás» are being assembled at their «assentamentos» and «firmações» (which were ritualistically activated during their preparation). The settlements contain dirt, «acutás», leaves, roots, seeds, and other elements that are collected at «pontos de força», which allows nature from where they were taken to be linked to a new territory. In each described action, a web of actants was also brought, operating the cosmopolitics. The aforementioned «ebó» connected not only his material elements (food, «mengá», candles, tobacco, etc.) but also spiritual ones, because besides «Exu» Sete Catacumbas, several other «orixás», which work alongside him, were summoned to enhance the required action<sup>62</sup>. These alliances with actants of different natures, in the cosmopolitics of healing, can be explained through the concept of «axé», which is a “cosmic force which operates on the material connection” (Anjos, Oro 2009, pp. 88-90) of the actants. These forces operate in a multidimensional way and “exist as long as they are embodied during events, manifesting through the intensity of ‘things’ arranged in series” (Anjos, Oro 2009, pp. 88-90), where the spiritual world and its entities operate and “come into evidence as the place of presence if they are linkable” (Anjos, Oro 2009, pp. 88-90). Thus, the bodies, “through several particular moments, socialization and connections are also formed through flows. The entities absorb the «axé» as well as the people and, in this intake of energies, the strengthening of the body and the relations are permeated by the medicine that exists within the practices” (Ramos 2015c, p. 35). Afro-Brazilian religious practices denote the way the bodies are formed and perceived beyond the biological and social spheres, since it is an established link between the human and extra-human actants. All participants are affected by the «gira» that is held during the «trabalho», by the «cambones», the attending mediums, besides the guardian angels and well-«firmados orixás». Besides, the «guias» [sacred necklace] used by the people to promote the protection, as well as the discharge baths which, after arriving home, the persons involved in the ritual should take so that opposing forces do not run across their bodies.

59 The «acaçá» is a white maize flour dough, wrapped in banana leaves.

60 This term has uncertain origins, making its translation complex. It means something mysterious, indiscernible; something that involves a secret.

61 Bastide (1978, p. 69-70) also states that “it is through the bloodbath that all are established [...] the relationships between objects, human beings and the Orixás all participations are made, all changes of force”.

62 In a ritualistic context, summoning the names of entities allows the use of greater powers in the accomplishment of goals, as no entity performs «trabalhos» alone. The initiated person must know what the cosmic potencies they can summon are, on the basis of their names and associations. For example, Exu Sete Catacumbas, aside from commanding the people of the catacombs, also works alongside Orixá Omulu, Iansã de Balé, Ogum Megê, among others linked to the cemeteries.

### 3. Assemblages of plants in «terreiros»

The «orixás», the «terreiro», the «mães-de-santo» and «pais-de-santo», the members of the «corrente» [chain], among other actants, are qualified to deterritorialize the negative charges and to reterritorialize them into other physical dimensions (for example, the settlements and/or places-of-power) or astral dimensions (crossroads realms, cemeteries, catacombs). These practices lead to a complex assemblage and extrapolate the dualistic notion of symbols and representations, since the «axé», inherent in any body and entity tangibly runs inside those connections, which results in daily outcomes expressed through the narrative and actions of those who enter in that web.

Isabelle Stengers and Tobie Nathan (2012, 2018) point out that we should consider the healing assemblages as “dynamic”, because they operate in the “construction of people” (Stengers, Nathan 2012, pp. 226-227) as heterogeneous elements, intercrossed in these relations and seen as a “tangle of concepts”, operating as “an infinite number of effective therapeutic systems” which “are real conceptual systems and not mere ‘beliefs’” (Stengers, Nathan 2012, p. 114). It is through these elements dosages that it is possible to assemblage the «axé» and to enter in contact with other modes of existence, not only in ritualistic moments but also in everyday life.

Therefore, we observe that there is an art of dosage in the use of certain assemblages (material or not), and it contemplates the dynamic of the relations established among humans and extra-humans. It shows the existence of other forms of healing and health that differ from the traditional forms of medicine, because it takes into account the intense relationship between the entities and territories and it represents an Afro-Brazilian cosmo-ontology. The practical way to understand this matter is, as we suggest, a visualization of “existential territories”, according to Félix Guattari (1992), as ethical-aesthetic in which there are continuous flows, occurrences, intensities, witchcrafts, etc.

In some situations, certain entities might be more proficient in treating some diseases, such as in the above-mentioned example, when «Exu» Sete Catacumbas [«Exu» Seven Catacombs] was asked to solve disturbances caused by «eguns», but «Exu» Kaminaloá, «Exu» das Matas [«Exu» of the Woods] or «Pombagira» das Almas [«Pombagira» of the Souls] could also have been summoned to solve the issue. However, it was «Exu» Sete Catacumbas who held the «gira» and offered to help in this task. Among many examples, «Pombagira» Cacurucaia, «Exu» Sete Sombras, and «Pombagira» da Figueira [«Pombagira» of the Fig tree] are specialized in treating panic disorders and other mental conditions. The «Orixá» Omulu is a specialist in treating skin diseases. «Exu» Dr. Caveira [«Exu» Dr. Skull] and «Exu» Quebra-ossos [«Exu» Bone-breaker] are specialists in healing bone fractures. «Exu» Maré [«Exu» Tide], «Exu» dos Rios [«Exu» of the Rivers], «Exu» do Lodo [«Exu» of the Mud] and «Pombagira» da Praia [«Pombagira» of the Beach]

are specialists in taking people’s sentimental pain and traumatic emotions to the bottom of the ocean. «Exu» Morcego [«Exu» Bat], «Pombagira» Maria Molambo<sup>63</sup> do Lixo [«Pombagira» Maria Trash Rag] and «Exu» Tata Caveira [«Exu» Tata Skull] are, on the other hand, specialists in healing addictions and destructive behavior. All the street «exus» and «pombagiras», as «Exu» Tranca-Ruas [«Exu» Road-blocker], «Pombagira» Maria Padilha, and «Exu» Tranca-Tudo, are specialists in opening blocked paths. For example, in the cosmopolitics of healing, the plants are a significant part (component) in teas «cruzados» to the «orixás» to be ingested, in herbal baths, in smoking rituals, in incantations with leaves and twigs, in the offerings, and through the by-products of plants (manioc flour, palm oil, etc.). The tobacco is also used as fume in cigars and pipes, because it is a powerful agent used to link both the physical and the spiritual world; it is essential in multiple practices and to facilitate the healing and reparative «axés» from entities and cosmos to run along with the bodies, even if it is through the smoke.

According to Pedro Carlessi (2016, p. 58), “a herb frequently assumes multiple ontological statuses, all of them interchangeable but guarded against the conflicts and negotiations that are common to this relation.” Therefore, they “are not mere objects waiting for a meaning given by men”, but rather entities participating in the “condition that introduces a subtle but important effort to decrease the divisions between subject-object that substantiate the modern thought [...]” (Carlessi 2016, p. 9). The author proceeds, describing the use of different plants, in several methods of preparation,

[...] advances towards the promotion of balance among soul, body and social life of the “patients”. [...] The plants which carry the «axé» of Ogum, for instance, usually are the punctate leaves, used to ‘protect/discharge’ the “patients” and to ‘keep enemies away’. The ones carrying the «axé» of Oxum or the gypsies usually have rounded and aromatic leaves and are related to abundance and prosperity and are used to ‘bring good luck’ and to ‘bring love closer.’ (Carlessi 2016, pp. 32-33).

Another way to assemble these plants is by keeping them in the «terreiros». By the entrance of Mãe Irma’s «terreiro», aside from the «casinhas»<sup>64</sup> [little houses] of the «exus» and «pombagiras» and the «casinha» of Bará, there is an assortment of plants such as «comigo-ninguém-pode» [dumb canes], dozens of Saint George’s sword plants – to protect not only the shrine, but also the people residing there. There are other plants in the backyard, used in herbal baths, initiations, teas, settlements, etc. Mãe Irma gets a share of

<sup>63</sup> The «Pombagira» Maria Molambo is rather popular among «quimbanda» rituals, known as “the queen of the poor”, the one who cleanses humanity from the “spiritual dirt”.

<sup>64</sup> Small spaces, commonly painted in red, located on the outside of «terreiros» where settlements and/or entities images of «exus», «pombagiras» and «Orixá» Bará are kept.

the plants she needs for her «trabalhos» from kinship networks, «quilombolas» [maroons] in the area, neighbors, and other people. When she needs to make a «trabalho de mata» [a ritual in the woods], she goes to the «Comunidade Quilombola» at the Beco dos Colodianos (Ramos 2015b), where she was born and her sisters and brothers still live there. When the «mãe-de-santo» makes an incantation in a cornfield, she asks for 'the protection of God', but, as it was told, she calls for «Orixá» Ogum, since he is more green-inclined, and sympathizes with plants. She also made «benzeduras» [incantations] on animals, in order to protect them from being stolen or from other problems: for the pigs, the incantations go to «Orixá» Odé<sup>65</sup>; for the sheep, to «Ogum» and «Xangô»; to protect the cattle, to «Bará». When she was young, Mãe Irma says that she learned several incantations from her mother and grandmother (who were midwives and «curandeiras» [traditional healers]) and that, later, she anchored some other beings, like «orixás» and other «umbanda» and «quimbanda» entities.

We agree with Cauê Machado (2016, p. 100), when he states that, in «quilombolas» communities and among Afro-Brazilian religions collectives, "the relation between body and territory points to a non-disjunctive ontology in which the person and the land where they live and find sacred herbs are imbricated" in a coexistence where "relatives, religion, objects, leaves, prayers, water, animals, etc. are part of a chain of things that are connected to expand parts of the body and the notion of being a person aside from the biological notion of the body [...]". Thereby, we learn that Afro-Brazilian collectives are composed by other "more than human" socialization, according to Tsing (2019), whereas modes of existence – that operate using the logic of multiplicity and territoriality creations – broadening coexistence practices because, as an important Afro-Brazilian aphorism states, "nunca, neste mundo, se está sozinho" [you are never alone in this world].

The African cosmo-ontology these practices inherit "does not support a rupture between what is sacred and what is profane", because "this notion of religion as «religare» between people and deities is only one of the many meanings this practice can have" (Nascimento 2016, pp. 158-161). In this logic, there is no pursuit of unity and it is through this understanding that we can grasp the emic concept of a path holding nomadism of forms within what is transmitted through the different passages by the «axé» and the flows. Thus,

Further from destiny or destination, the path is about aiming, always on the move, because nothing is ready along the path when the walking is not in motion. And walking is always, somehow, not completely predictable, because there are always encounters in it. This is a fundamental idea of the path as a motion: it is always collec-

tive. One never walks alone, be it because the very road is already their companion, be it because the roadsides and the path themselves bring other people to walk along (Nascimento 2016, p. 166).

In this cosmo-ontology, plants, minerals, animals, humans, among others, must be prepared, «aprontados» [initiated], in a complex relationship – which goes beyond devotional practices or the idea of religion as a way of "reconnecting". According to Sueli Carneiro (2005, pp. 303-323), in the "construction of collective individuals, freed from processes of subjugation and subordination", the "care of the self, to these individuals, is about taking care of others and freedom is the aesthetic of their existence". As Mãe Jalba said once: "the body has orixás in its arms, legs, back and front [...] each [body part] has an owner..." This conception of each body part having an owner (or multiple ones) is also seen when the «mães-de-santo» and «pais-de-santo» advise that one should always interact with entities, comprehend the energies conveyed by and in them (to eat or not certain foods, to thrive in the religion, to fulfil certain duties, to take part in the «aprontamento» and reinforcement...).

The «axé» is at the central scope of this logic of accomplished actions among the actants and the cosmos, which operates multiplicities and differences. It is the vital element forming possible paths, good or bad that, for instance, are understood as passages that intertwine and cross, that get stronger and then retreat, because they are neither completely separated spheres nor pure essences. During the «trabalhos» with entities, be it in a «gira», «benzedura» or «ebó», there is an ongoing movement that discharges the person from bad energies and brings the beneficial «axé» from the «orixás». In this way, the «gira» is held in a movement to deterritorialize illnesses, misfortune, closed paths, and, at the same time, to reterritorialize health, luck, and the «abertura de caminhos» [opening of paths]. In these assemblages, entities, food, plants, animals, «pontos-de-força», priests, «cambones», 'patients', songs, techniques, among other elements work together. All beings (humans and extra-humans) which establish an alliance may be perceived as recipients and carriers of «axés».

#### 4. Final Considerations

The practices among Afro-Brazilian religions are part of a mode of existence associated with connecting and also not connected possibilities. Each «terreiro» is derived from another just like each person is «aprontada» [initiated] by a «mãe-de-santo» or «pai-de-santo» in the «terreiro» they attend. If this person opens his or her «terreiro», it will be linked to the one where he or she was initiated. However, this works in a rhizomatic way, since territoriality, in Afro-Brazilian religions, is always defined and redefined, built and rebuilt. Besides, in this relation of coexistence with other beings, the person is taken by the care of the self practices,

<sup>65</sup> Hunter «Orixá», lord of the woods and of all of its inhabitants. Known as the King of Ketu, is associated with abundance.



resisting the processes of capitalistic subjectivation which persist in acts of harassment and racist violence.

Stengers (2017) suggests the reactivation of what was taken away from us, not in the sense of reconnecting to something transcendent, but something close to the Afro-Brazilian concept of «fundamento»<sup>66</sup> [fundament] – the creative act of bringing beings in the African diaspora to America: an act of claiming the collective existence. Despite a series of violence against them, these peoples (human and extra-human) live and fight for healing, of and for the Earth, reterritorializing their ancestral knowledge and their (our) different paths.

In these Afro-centered modes of existence, there is another conception of medicine that is imperative to these healing practices: the word itself and the healing desire from both the «benzedeira» [folk healer] and the sick person, which happens in a distinct relationship that goes against the western terms of doctor-patient. It is about a relationship based on trust and the activation of extra-human components, so they can operate in the composition and caring of others. It is the precise meaning of «benzer», an act of blessing. As stated by Pierre Verger (2017, p. 20), the “oral transmission of knowledge is considered, in Yoruba tradition, as a vehicle of the «axé», the power of words” that, in order to succeed, “must be pronounced”.

The examples presented here, regarding the need for healing and the treatment of diseases such as envy, evil-eye, «demandas», situations in which negative vibrations from a person destructively affect the lives of others, denote that the conceptions of health, mind, and body also depend on the intricacy of connections in which social and cosmo-ontological elements affect, constructively, the modes of existence.

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<sup>66</sup> The «fundamento», in Afro-Brazilian religions, has to do with creating and recreating procedures - be it from a person, an entity or another mode of existence, is considered to be part of the African roots.

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