ARTICLES

WHAT DOES THE PHOTOGRAPHY REVEAL? ETHICS, IMAGE, AND MEMORY IN AFRO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES, PERFORMANCES AND RITUALS

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ABSTRACT
This paper discusses photography and Afro-religiosity based on the researcher's experience as a photographer in the field of Afro-Gaucho religions. First, the text situates the relationship between photography and Afro-Brazilian religiosity to explore the different facets of obtaining technical images within the sacred, pointing out cases that can help us reflect on the prohibitions imposed and accesses granted to photographic productions in the Afro-religious context. It argues that the construction of an ethics of visibility within religious practices is intertwined with the contexts of meaning production in which these images appear. The essay reflects on the challenges of construing an anthropological ethics of image production in such contexts, and the possibilities of an intersubjective negotiation when photography acts as a material support for perpetuating the collective memories of religious groups.

WHAT DOES THE PHOTOGRAPHY REVEAL? ETHICS, IMAGE, AND MEMORY IN AFRO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

This paper discusses photography and Afro-religiosity, considering my experience as a photographer and researcher in Afro-religious contexts. This research is based in the project: The Tradition of Bará of the Market [*A Tradição do Bará do Mercado*], in which I worked as a photographer between the years of 2006 and 2007, and in the ethnography of the Center of Umbanda Kingdom of Yemanjá and Oxóssi [*Centro de Umbanda Reino de Yemanjá e Oxóssi*], in the Ilha da Pintada[1], between the years of 2009 and 2010, both in the city of Porto Alegre, RS. Initially, I place the relation between photography and Afro-Brazilian religiosity in the search to understand the different facets of obtaining technical images in the sacred realm. Without doing a historical revision on the topic, I point out to some cases that can help to understand the interdicts or the accesses imposed or conceded to the photographic productions in the Afro-religious contexts. I intend to show that the construction of an ethics in the visibility of the religious practices is intertwined with the contexts of production of meaning in which these images appear. I discuss the challenges in building an anthropological ethic in the production of images in such situations, and the possibilities of an inter-subjective negotiation when the photographic production acts as a material support for the reverberation of collective memories of these religious groups. I also analyze the interpretation of the interlocutors' comments about a set of images obtained by me in a ritual festivity.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SACRED TERRITORY: PLACING A QUESTION

The photographic documentation in various rituals that involve Afro-Brazilian religions has historically been a controversial subject. Inescapably, the researchers who engage in this field are faced with the barrier of secrecy. There are dimensions of religiosity that are not possible to enter or unveil without a process of initiation or a long coexistence with the group (Carvalho 1985, Gonçalves da Silva 2006). Researchers, as those who seek a religious initiation, do not receive information and orientations. To the contrary, they are challenged to "join the pieces", trying to make sense of the scattered narratives and experiences found along the way (Goldman 2003). Seen as a barrier or a path, the dimension of secrecy always prompts the anthropologist to face a negotiation of meaning within their own construction of knowledge, namely between the rationality as a privileged quality in the scientific knowledge and the order of the unknown that govern the terrain of the research. In this game of hide and seek, in which secrets and revelations shape the inter-subjective relation between researcher and researched group, the production of visual images – photographic or filmic – often interposes itself as an

1. The Ilha da Pintada is one of the sixteen islands that constitutes the neighborhood Arquipélago, which belongs to the municipally of Porto Alegre.

unwanted revelation of visible and non-visible aspects in the ritualistic of a *terreiro²*.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the relation between photography and *Candomblé* has been mediated by conflict. Historically, the photographic records of *Candomblé* have recorded the processes of tradition and change in this religion, in which the hierarchical relations in the liturgical structure and the oral system of knowledge transmission and spiritual powers take a decisive relevance in the determinations of the interdicts of the image photographed.

The most emblematic and foundational example of the controversies involving the photographic documentation of the forbidden rituals in Brazilian *Candomblé* was the news article which had a national reach: the news magazine *O Cruzeiro*. In 1951, with images taken by the photographer José Medeiros in the *terreiro* of *Mãe Riso da Plataforma* in the outskirts of the city of Salvador, in the state of Bahia. José Medeiros documented an initiation ritual of the three *iaôs*, showing through photography details of the ritualistic procedures never shown before by the Brazilian media, causing a very strong public commotion. The anthropologist Fernando de Tacca (2009), in his research about the repercussions of the publication of these images made by José Medeiros in *O Cruzeiro*, showed that the interdiction in the production of images of some *Candomblé* rituals was mainly associated with the possibility of revealing initiation secrets and the occurrence of psychic damages for those who are photographed in trance during ritualistic procedures.

The tradition of the Afro-Brazilian religion *Batuque* or *Nação³*, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, also imposes a rigorous interdiction in documenting the *orixás* or Entities of the world. In other words, it is forbidden to photograph the practitioners in trance (Correa 2006, Pólvora 1995). This interdiction was explained to me by another *Babalorixá* during the visual documentation of the project The Tradition of Bará of the Market⁴, as a result of the fact that the *batuqueiro⁵*, according to tradition, does not know that he experiences the possession of his *orixá*. Therefore, the episodes of possession, although frequent and essential in a house of religion, are always kept secret. The portrait of the *orixá* in the world would constitute a testimony to the trance, and to know that one is possessed could lead to mental disturbances. For the *Batuque* tradition, to capture the image

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2. Terreiro or terreira is a temple in Afro-Brazilian religions.
3. Regional denominations for *Candomblé* in Brazil.
4. It took place between 2006 and 2007 in a partnership with CEDRAB-Congregation in defense of Afro-Brazilian Religions [*Congregação em Defesa das Religiões Afro-Brasileiras*], UFRGS-Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, and the Cultural Memory Coordination - Municipal Secretariat of Culture of Porto Alegre [*Coordenação da Memória Cultural – Secretaria Municipal da Cultura*], sponsored by Petrobrás Cultural.
5. *Batuqueiro* is a member in the religious practice.

of possession could mean the interruption, the blockage, and even the revelation of transcendence (Pólvora 1995, 140).

The whole secret dimension of existence needs to be surrounded by interdiction, as showed by the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1976), since it is in its nature the imminent danger of losing its distinctive and fundamental characters. Religious cults are, for different cultures, spaces of sensibilities that express circumstances in which photography, as John Collier Jr recognized, "could be completely unacceptable, extremely dangerous, or literally impossible" (Collier Jr. 1973, 61). In the Afro-Brazilian cults, photography, for its character of "double real"[6] that removes what is portrayed of its context inserting it in new fields of meaning, could corroborate for the violation of sacred time and space (Coster 2007). For the anthropologist Vagner Gonçalves da Silva (2006), sound and photographic records are frequently considered illegal by Afro-religious groups, because they represent a distortion between what is said and done with when is said and done.

In this perspective, if *Candomblé* and *Batuque* traditionally keep an orientation of interdiction of capture of images of the *orixá* "in the world",[7] *Umbanda* would be more accommodating to the integration of new elements in its religious forms. However, the structure of the Afro-Brazilian religions does not contemplate a centralizing and agglutinating power in a single religious hierarchy, but is organized in a plurality of *terreiros* and federations endowed with divergences and rivalries among themselves (Oro 1997, 15). This means that the positioning of spiritual leader is not tied to its religious affiliation, assuming consensual criteria in *Candomblé*, *Batuque*, *Linha Cruzada* and *Umbanda*. On the contrary, the same branch could express different determinations following the orientation of the *Babalorixá* or *Yalorixá*[8], and above them, from the *orixá* that governs the house.

The polemics involving the authorization of *Mãe Riso da Plataforma* in the visual documentation of the initiation of the three *iaôs* is enlightening in this sense: Mother Riso consulted and had permission of her *orixá Oxóssi*, which means that she was supported in her decision in order of the divinity, or more specifically, in her mythical ancestry. It is in this perspective that Fernando de Tacca (2009) discusses the responsibility attributed to Mother Riso in the case of the reportage published in this religious context, where the representativeness of the leaderships and

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6. For Phillip Dubois (1993), photography triggers "an insurmountable feeling of reality that we cannot get rid of, despite our awareness of all the codes that are in play in it and that have combined for its elaboration" (1993, 26).
7. "*Orixá* in the world" is an emic Afro-religious expression that denotes the moment when the *orixá* descends from the spiritual plane to manifest itself in a human body.
8. Male high priest and female high priestess in *Candomblé*. This article also uses the expressions *pai de santo* (father-of-saint) and/or *mãe de santo* (mother-of-saint) as synonyms to *Babalorixá* and *Yalorixá*, respectively.

federation can always be questioned, since in the mythical quality of the African-based religiosity the spiritual leaders have legitimate channels of communication with the *orixás*[9].

Frequently, the authorization to take photographs depends a lot on the relation that the photographer/researcher establishes with the *Babalorixá* or *Yalorixá*. If a relation of proximity, trust and reciprocity exists, the researcher could obtain authorization to take pictures, even in forbidden rituals, as reported by Norton Correa in an interview given to Vagner Gonçalves da Silva (2006, 61). The revelation or preservation of the secret in the photographed images is, in this sense, connected to the anthropological ethic. For José Jorge de Carvalho (1985), these are the situations that the anthropologist is challenged to evaluate his primordial fidelity: on the one side, with the research partners in safeguarding their secrets, which guarantees the continued existence of an ethical agreement and also the maintenance of an inter-subjective negotiation process; on the other side, with their peers, to the extent that the anthropologist uses a specific Anthropology code to rationally interpret the information collected in the field (Carvalho 1985).

If the inter-subjective relation that is established between photographer/researcher and the religion or the religious authority initiates the construction of an ethic that leads and guides the production of technical images, the interpretative contexts that underlie these images are crucial to the establishment of an ethical understanding with the researched group. The publication of these images reshapes the culturally determined situations caught by the lenses of the anthropologist/photographer to the measure that they begin to circulate in the public domains as part of research or are broadcasted in the media, associated with various discourses. In this sense, interdicts imposed on the visual documentations of Afro-religious cults not only express the issue of the revelation of secrets, but also question the imprisonment of these images in offensive and discriminatory discourses about the Afro-Brazilian religiosity.

The headline-grabbing discourse that involved the publication of the photographs of José Medeiros in the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, for example, marked a rupture in the negotiation built in the field, since the content was predominantly offensive to *Candomblé*[10]. Six years after that, the same

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9. The realization of the Bará of the Market project was also possible only after the permission of the *orixás*, in special the *orixá* Bará, responsible for opening the way, for being the messenger *Orixá* between the world of men and the world of the *orixás*. A series of bureaucratic obstacles prevented the release of the resources for the occurrence of the work, which was effectively developed and concluded in 2007, the year of the Bará for the religions of African origin.

10. The photographs by José Medeiros were published in 1951 in an article called "The Brides of the Bloodthirsty Gods" [*As Noivas dos Deuses Sanguinários*], containing 38 photographs accompanied by a text from the journalist Arlindo Silva.

publisher of *O Cruzeiro* magazine, put out a book called "Candomblé", with 60 photographs taken by José Medeiros, 22 more than those published in the magazine. Without the same appeal used in the former, the book highlighted the visual narrative of the initiation made by the photographer, which later was considered a material of ethnographic value. If in the first version the images represented a profanation of the sacred, the new contextualization offered by the publication of the book crowned the images with a new aura of the profaned sacred (De Tacca 2009).

The French photographer Pierre Verger, a contemporary and friend of José Medeiros, extensively and intensely documented *Candomblé* and African cults, establishing ethical agreements not only with the subjects directly portrayed by his lenses, but with the African-based religiosity as a whole. To Fernando de Tacca (2009), Pierre Verger's work on the religious world of *Candomblé* and Afro-Brazilian culture acts as an ethical "counter-field" to the sensationalist discourses in which the images made by Henri-Georges Clouzot[11] and José Medeiros were inserted.

Pierre Verger's decision to keep many of his negatives under wraps, waiting for an occasion away from the polemic caused by José Medeiros' images to publish some (but not all) photographs of Afro-religious rites, refusing proposals from publishers interested in his images, displays how this photographer shared a common feeling with the subjects he photographed, showing solidarity in maintaining the secrecy.

In Pierre Verger's work, as Jerôme Souty (2011) has rightly pointed out, the relational and affective use of photography is inseparable from its documentary and heuristic uses. Beyond his emotional involvement with *Candomblé*, Verger was, in his own way, a researcher deeply involved in the themes he photographed. Even while been a photo-reporter of *O Cruzeiro*, the magazine was never the place where he published his photographs about *Candomblé*. His images of religiosity were accompanied with texts of Roger Bastide, with whom he established a prolonged friendship and shared points of view about the cultural and religious influence of Africa in Brazil (Lühning 2002). The interpretative view offered by texts that went along with his photos, initially by Roger Bastide and later by himself, offered a semantic and reflexive uptake to the images, inserted in his investigations about the shared bonds, both cultural and religious, between Brazil and the African continent.

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11. French filmmaker who came to Brazil with the objective of "showing Brazil to Brazilians", he published in 1951 an article in the magazine "Paris Match" named "The possessed of Bahia" [*As possuídas da Bahia*]. The publication of a reportage about Brazilian *Candomblé* outside Brazil encouraged José Medeiros and the editor of *O Cruzeiro* to produce a similar material in the country, generating a journalistic dispute around the theme.

After more than half a century of controversy involving José Medeiros' photographs, the centrality of discourses in the configuration of meanings involving the publication of photographs of Afro-Brazilian religions remains. Especially in the mass media, there are frequent images followed by discriminatory or offensive texts. The research of Stela Guedes Caputo (2012) shows how different meanings can be made around the same image. When she was a photo-journalist of a daily newspaper, one of her photographs of children in the *terreiros* of Baixada Fluminense[12] was sold by the agency of that newspaper to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God [*Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*], and later published in the newspaper of such group called *Folha Universal*[13], in an article with the title "Children of the Devil", generating terrible consequences for the children whose images became part of a religious discourse in which they appeared as examples of bad behavior and "problem children".

Is important to note that all these examples are part of an outdated debate in the relation between photography and Afro-religiosity, in which the discussion is placed in terms of a binomial between the "subject that photographs/holder of technical knowledge/outsider" and "subject photographed/holder of the image and religious knowledge/insider". This simplification reduces the complexity of the motivations associated with the visual record of the Afro-Brazilian religiosity, specially in the context of the new digital medias, where texts and images circulate and are widely reproduced and shared, providing greater visibility and expression to dissensions in the Afro-Brazilian religious body.

During the writing of the doctoral thesis, I accompanied the debate around the spreading of a set of images in a virtual social network that showed the complexity of aspects interwoven in the production of photographs of Afro-religiosity. The photographs had been united in an album[14], containing images of Afro-Brazilian cults, notably in houses of different religions, which suggested that images of different sources had been gathered to create a visual narrative around Afro-Brazilian religions.

The album was shared on the social network by an Afro-Brazilian religious leader from Porto Alegre, who expressed with practitioners the indignation over such images. The album, which was not of his authorship, was called "What a shame of these people my Goooood!" and contained 374 photos of Afro-Brazilian cults, which mainly depicted parties and rituals in honor of spiritual entities and initiation rituals that involved the cutting of

12. T.N. [Translator Note] Baixada Fluminense is a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro.
13. *Folha Universal* is a print newspaper owned by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a company that quickly won concessions/licenses for mass media in Brazil, such as radio and television stations. In 2012, the newspaper weekly circulation reached 2.4 million copies printed, more than any other Brazilian newspaper.
14. The compilation of photographs or images into virtual albums is a recurring practice facilitated by a virtual tool in these web-based social networks.

animals, images always controversial for its known ritual interdiction in certain religious affiliations. Some of these photographs had a strong sexual connotation in the gestures, body positioning and facial expressions of those portrayed. At the parties of spiritual entities as *Exus* and *Pombagiras*[15], the images showed excessive drinking, cigarettes, and men incorporating *Pombagiras* with daring female attire. Other photographs depicted dead or injured people, ritual sacrifices, suggesting violence and dangers in the Afro-Brazilian cults.

The diversity of the photographs gathered in the album showed an ambiguity that made it difficult not to emphasize a devaluation of this religious matrix. All the pictures were taken by amateur photographers and showed an "inside look" that engaged with the subjects and obtained their consent. We could see an explicit interaction between photographer and photographed, expressing a desire of visibility, to be seen as *Pombagira*, to be seen in trance, to be seen initiated. The images were interpreted by components of a social network as a bad example that would be ending religion and bringing negative visibility, in the sense that the free circulation of these images could serve as illustration of discriminatory discourses. Some religious leaders argued against the sharing of these images, urging that they should be deleted because they would promote religious intolerance.

On the one hand, the documentation of rituals in photographs and their dissemination in virtual networks allows the religions of African origin to broaden their knowledge about the heterogeneity that characterizes the different worship practices, explained by both belonging to distinct religions basins and lineages, and by ignorance and unawareness of its fundamentals. In this context, photography acts as a testimony capable of proving what is considered as a mistake in the conduction of the rituals: some images featured descriptions satirizing carnival inspired vestments, the use of plastic flowers in the offering to entities as something poor, Omolu using sandals instead of being bare foot, or the substitution of ritual elements by cheaper ones. Nevertheless, the set of images did not explicitly demonstrate a criticism of the loss of foundation and tradition: the comments that followed the images questioned the absurdity of certain scenes, like the picture of a spiritual cleansing rite performed by a woman lying in a plastic pool without water, placed in a small room between the bed and the closet, using a jocose tone that made one laugh. Even though many Afro-religious people disagreed with and ridiculed the

15. *Pombagira* is very popular in the Afro-Brazilian cults. It corresponds to the female version of the *Exu*, the trickster *Orixá*, phallic, a messenger between the world of men and the world of all *Orixás*. The Kardecist influence in *Umbanda*, modeled *Pombagira* as the spirit of a woman with a mythical biography "who in life would have been a prostitute or courtesan, a woman of low moral principles, capable of dominating men by her sexual prowess, a lover of luxury, of money, and all sorts of pleasures" (Prandi 1996, 140)

conduct of the rites displayed in the photographs, the concern with the unrestricted circulation of such images was not consensual.

On the other hand, some religious leaders, especially those with political activities, raised the debate about the loss of foundation and the value of actions in benefit of the knowledge of practices of the cults among the African religious matrix. It was possible to perceive the existence of a code that recommended a selection of what would be visibly desired for the Afro-Brazilian religions, associated with a concern of the leadership that participates in the public debate against religious intolerance and in favor of public policies that safeguard the continuity of the cults: photography figured as one important piece in a game of hide and seek that reveals the dissensions in the structure of a religious matrix. The limits placed in what can be glimpsed through photography clash with the jocular uses of photographs made by/for adherents who do not participate in the religious debates in the political scene.

Evidently, nowadays the photographer no longer holds the secrets of the image: it is captured by cameras and cell phones and shared on the web, available to different interpretations and discourses. The control of secrecy and visual interdicts in religions becomes much more difficult with the multiplicity and fluidity in which these syncretic forms are taken and made accessible in spaces of virtual sharing. If the case of the magazine *O Cruzeiro* started a controversy in which people who occupied very distinct social spaces and can be representative of the inside/outside, black/white binomial – the *Mãe Riso da Plataforma* and the photographer José Medeiros –, the current issue intertwines these two places in a field of tensions of difficult negotiations on the "inside" of a religious matrix that shows itself as multiple and fragmented.

A very different case are the photographers specialized in Afro-gaucho[16] religions whom I met at various public parties and tributes during the documentation of the Bará of the Market project. These freelancers sold their images to newspapers specialized in Afro-religiosity, as well as to the adepts of the religion who wanted to keep a memory of a public party in which they took part. In many cases, they were called by spiritual leaders to take portraits in vestments for publicizing services in newspapers or magazines, or even images of parties and incorporations in the houses of worship. These were pictures that were consented, requested, and paid for.

Within the circulation of photographic images in blogs, websites and social networks that show, in virtual environments, different houses,

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16. T.N. The author uses the term "gaucho", that in Brazil is specific to the people of the Brazilian state where she did her research.

traditions and Afro-religious practices, the website *Grande Axé*[17], self-titled as the "newspaper of the Afro-umbandists" brings a photographic collection of parties, rituals, and processions of different *Babalorixás* and *Yalorixás* of Porto Alegre.

The photographs that make up the site's collection are separated by year, month, spiritual leader of the houses of religion and commemorated event. When we click on the name of *Babalorixá* or *Yalorixá*, a set of images containing the title of the event is open, followed by the address and telephone number of the place in question. The photographs resemble social column images, where the hosts are pictured with the practitioners, relatives and guests. With certain frequency, the public recognizes the people in the pictures, such as politicians or local artists. The photographs depict public parties and, in some cases, personal events of *Babalorixás* and *Yalorixás* outside the *terreiras*, in graduations and weddings[18].

Recognizing the importance of these debates and the complex nature of the place of technical images in the context of the African matrix religiosity, I propose to resize this question based on the ethnographic research carried out in a *terreira* of Ilha da Pintada, during my doctorate, searching for some meanings used by these people-of-saint [*povo de santo*][19] in the production and observation of photographic images.

ENTERING THE CIRCLE

If in my experience in the *Nação* or *Batuque* the photograph of the *Orixá* in the world revealed a mythical identity of the practitioner, bringing dangers to his consciousness, when researching the Center of Umbanda Kingdom of Yemanjá and Oxóssi, I could find other meanings brought by the photographed image in the rituals and practices of *Umbanda*. In this *terreira*[20] the photograph revealed the celebration that the eyes of the practitioners could not see when incorporated. Looking at these pictures was a way of sharing an imagistic set of ritual circumstances experienced only by the *Orixá*. Details in the clothes, decoration, manners and even the confirmation of the presence of the guest could be observed in the photographic images. This impossibility of seeing when other senses

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17. The *Grande Axé* was founded in 2008 and it is still today one of the main references of media content production of Afro-religions in Rio Grande do Sul. The data related to the website refer to the year of 2011; currently the website is off-line, but the content is still being published on virtual social networks such as Instagram and Facebook.
18. In this regard, the instigating research by Leonardo Oliveira de Almeida (2018) brings important and more recent data on the phonographic field of Afro-gaucho religions and the growth of Afro-religious media in that state.
19. The expressions *povo de santo* [people-of-saint], *filho/a de santo* [children-of-saint], *mãe de santo* [mother-of-saint] and *família de santo* [family-of-saint] inform the belonging in an Afro-religious congregation.
20. I use spelling in italic in reference to the expressions self-defined by the interlocutors. Although in some moments they use the expression *terreiro*, *terreira* is the main form of denomination of the place that gathers the cultural and and Afro-religious activities of this family-of-saint.

operate during the trance was reported by Bia, mother-of-saint, when she saw the pictures of the Gypsy Party [*Festa da Cigana*]:

> Guys! What a beautiful thing! And you got the details like that, from the people who were there, isn't it! (…) These things people tell us, but we don't see, we don't know![21]

The place that I started to occupy and be recognized by the residents in the Ilha da Pintada during my fieldwork was of photographer and photography teacher[22], even though I was also a researcher doing interviews and taking notes.

During the year I was in the field, I could participate in a series of rituals, tributes, and celebrations, which mobilized the whole social network of the *terreira* and put on display a set of Afro-religious cultural expressions. The group was organized on an annual calendar of festivities that demanded from the people of the house participation and mobilization, and in some cases, such as carnival, of a wider social network that connected residents from inside and outside the island.

The annual calendar marked several moments in which the *terreira* was intensely mobilized, among special celebrations and regular rites, tributes, works, processions, and excursions. Among these, the Gipsy Party was a celebration of the upmost importance, mobilizing work, resources, and strong spiritual and social investments. In some rites of lesser scale, I got used to hear comments of children-of-saint that indicated the Gipsy Party as a good opportunity to photograph: it was a very long party, which often ended at daybreak. That year it would mark the inauguration of the new hall of the *terreira*, which had been finished just a few days before. Since it was a year of heavy expenses, the party would be considerably smaller than in prior occasions and was scheduled to end at one o'clock in the morning.

I arrived at the party carrying my camera, as usual. There was intense movement inside and outside the *terreira*. Food, flowers, and ornaments arrived by the hand of the children-of-saint. The entrance of the *terreira* was illuminated by a tent with torches: there, some practitioners dressed in white clothes received the guests. From the doorway I caught a glimpse of the colorful pink robes of the people of the house, who were dancing in a circle in the center of the hall, lit by the lamps and by the brightness of the wood in the new building. As usual, I was gradually recognized

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21. Interview with Bia in December 2009.
22. The doctoral field work research took place mainly during the years of 2008 and 2010 and was characterized by engagement and performance via cultural projects in the research areas. Therefore, while I was a researcher interested in photographs of this family-of-saint, I was also responsible for teaching photography to the young people of the *terreira* and members of this network, as well as a photographer of the events in the house [*terreiro*].

and received gentle smiles or nods from my students, their parents, and acquaintances.

Even though in all my trips to the Ilha da Pintada I took my camera with me, I had not previously agreed with the mother-of-saint that I would photograph the party. Despite being in the field for about six months, the possibilities and interdiction in the documentation of the parties and rituals of the *terreira* were still unclear matters to me. I had never received formal consent to take photographs in the field. There was no harassment around the camera: no one sought to smile or pose for the photo, no one asked to see the photographs once they were taken. In the beginning I felt indifference towards my presence, with or without the camera. Little by little, in the interstices of some comments made among the practitioners, I realized, throughout the months of field work, discreet manifestations of gratitude towards the presence of the camera, as well as regrets on the occasions in which the camera was not there.

On the night of the party, I asked Rosi, Bia's biological sister, if I could take pictures and she replied positively. I started to move discreetly in the little space available in between the chain *[corrente]*[23] and the guests. When she saw me bending down, positioning the camera between the legs of the children-of-saint that were part of the chain, Rosi came close and, looking me firmly in the eyes, she said that I was the only person autho-rized to enter the circle. Rosi was referring to the uninitiated, those who did not belong to the house and the religion, and who only attended the ritual as spectators. By authoring my entry to the chain, she was placing me inside a sacred space in which I was summoned to produce images[24]. There, amidst the entities that took over the bodies of those present, it was difficult to ask myself whether or not I would photograph the enti-ties in the world: I found myself immersed in this religious atmosphere. Nevertheless, I could only stay down and look at them from the bottom up making portraits in *contre-plongée*.

Gradually, I noticed the presence of other photographers at the party, who positioned cameras and cell phones, with or without flash, documenting the party, the guests, the children-of-saint, the circle, the drummers, and the entities in the world. These photographers positioned themselves outside the chain, looking for stools and higher surfaces to frame the largest number of people and situations in the party. The exception was

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23. Chain [*corrente*] is an emic expression that relates both to the circular alignment of the people-of-saint at the *terreira* parties, and to the movement of spiritual elements among the practitioners.

24. As the sociologist José de Souza Martins (2008) points out when reflecting on religious and acts of faith photographs, not only the photograph is incorporated to the sacred, but also the photographer. To admit the photographer in the sacred scene, to tolerate his acts that are not exactly liturgical, is to recreate him symbolically as a protagonist of the cult (Martins 2008, 94).

a practitioner that documented the entities inside the circle with his cell phone, and minutes later fell into the saint, receiving an *Exu* that made him abandon the place of photographer.

I perceived that the authorization for me to remain inside the chain was linked to the fact that I was an outsider carrying professional equipment, who had good relations with the house directors, privileged access to sectors of the municipal and cultural policy and to the university, and all that enlarged the reach of the images I would produce. It was not at stake the risk for me to produce images that would work against the people of this house or its leaders. The party was beautiful, the entities ruled the celebration, and I was affected by the atmosphere shared in that aesthetic experience. In that night, I met several collaborators who offered to hold my bag, guard my shoes in case I entered the circle, or even change places so I could have better positions to photograph.

IMAGES AND MEMORIES OF THE FAMILY-OF-SAINT

On more than one occasion, women of the *terreira* commented on the need to organize the photographs taken during the rituals in albums, so that these records would not be lost. As the photographs of the festivities were often taken by people from outside the *terreira*, due to their privileged access to equipment and technical knowledge, as well as their availability, to the extent that they were not part of the chain, to record in simpler devices as compact cameras or cellphones, most of these images did not return to the *terreira*. As Bia told me when I brought to her house a package containing all the pictures taken in the field work, "people consume and then we never see them again, we never know".

The necessity of the *terreira* to have autonomy and to act with protagonism in the production of visual records informed both a rupture of a logic of reciprocity by the researchers and outside photographers, as well as the value attributed to photography in the documentation of the memory of the *terreira*. Bia's concern about building a memory in photographs that would communicate to her descendants the ritual practices in the *terreira* was rooted in her frustration with the lack of previous records of her people, in which she could ground the recognition of a religious tradition.

In part, the private photographic collection of Leoni, Bia's biological mother, brought this memory of religiosity and belonging to her mind. Leoni was the "memory keeper" of the paths taken by the family connected by blood and spiritual ties. Among the images of family celebrations, trips and portraits of Leoni and her children and grandchildren, there was a set of scattered photographs depicting the Afro-religious historical trajectory on the Ilha da Pintada in its various expressions: images of offerings,

incorporations, parties, rituals, and public presentations of the Afro-Brazilian culture and carnivals.

The photographs in Leoni's collection also showed her religious trajectory and some of her passages[25] in *Umbanda*, showing entirely different manifestations on the same body that was taken by different entities. One of the photographs in black and white, showed Leoni still young, with her eyes closed and smoking a cigar with an expression of an Old black man [*Preto Velho*]. Like most photographs of her collection, Leoni could not say who the photographer was. In that image, the entity taking over her body was the photographer's focus. A more recent image depicted Mother Mary [*Mãe Maria*] cradling a child in a white skirt, both intensely linked by the gaze. In both images, the surroundings are emptied or left to the margins of the photographic frame, favoring the representation of Leoni's religious identities.

The portrayal of spiritual entities as a photography consented and posed appears more explicitly in one party of *Pombagiras* and *Exus* in the Madam Tereza *terreira*. The photographs were organized in an album made by a long-gone photo-developing company in Porto Alegre. At the opening of the album, the slogan "where the amateur becomes a professional" alluded to the democratization of the access to photography in non-professional segments, something that made more explicit the domestic character of this photographs of ritual contexts. The photographs of the party in the album show two incorporated entities dancing in a frontal pose, facing the photographer who was documenting the scene. In the first photograph, *Exu* looks at the camera displaying his robes under the watchful eyes of five children in the background, behind the table. The photographs of this entity that dances in its red and black robes, that holds cigars and display laughing faces, surrounded by images of Jesus Christ, the symbolism of the cross that shapes the decorated cake, shows well the intersection of religious symbols in this *Umbanda terreira*.

A completely different atmosphere had been captured in the set of photographs that showed a party in the old and small *terreira*, constructed by Bia next to Leoni's house. The white robes, the half-closed eyes, with almost everyone present framed in the little space of the hall, reflected the early days of the *terreira*.

> Oh, A party of Preto Velho, here's a Preto Velho cattleman arriving, oh. Inside the old terreiro. (...) It is Father Ogum that is in this world, oh. This is an Ogum party. This here was when Bia lived here, it was an old terreira, and then Bia took a room of it, and we never stopped doing it. Because

25. The expression "passage" *[passagem]* is used by *Umbanda* practitioners to describe an opening of the body to *Orixás* and entities that temporarily take over during moments of incorporation.

we had dismantled the terreira, right, and then she took a room, made the terreira, and we never stopped doing our works, oh. And it was a party, by chance, of Ogum, and we made the party there, and it was a small party, just like this one here. But I think that, our roots have been shown always, in any place, right[26].

Another children-of-saint, upon seeing the photographs, also referred with great emotion to this little *terreiro*, whose portraits showed a spiritual force condensed on the place:

Then we would spin on...it was a little thing like this, oh, from my bookcase to there, oh. It was a long thing like this, and everyone spun around. Perfectly, nobody fell, nobody got hurt...it worked very well. Then when it was Exus', something like that, we would put some tarps in the street, and do it in the street, because then more people would come, you know. We used to do it in the street, it was oh, a beauty of terreiro. If you were moved by that one that was bigger, if you saw the other smaller ones, you..it would then burst in tears.[27]

Children-of-saint who have left the house or moved to distant places, people who had died, the changes in the space of the *terreira*, the changes in the body due to the passage of the time. A whole memory of religious expressions recognized in the material support of the photographed moments that marked the trajectory of this family-of-saint and the intersections and encounters between individual, collective and spiritual trajectories. Kept within a family memory, the image does not profane the sacred, because it becomes a part of the individual and collective memories of important moments in the biographical trajectory of the people, just like baptisms and other religious initiation rituals that are carefully organized as objects of remembrance in the family photo albums of the most varied religious tendencies[28].

The photographs that depicted collective moments at the parties and homages at the *terreira* were complemented by portraits referring to the status of the individuals as members of this family-of-saint, articulating the dimensions of a collective and individual memory that intertwined and built this kinship.

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26. Interview with Rosi in August 2009.
27. Interview with Eliane in June 2009.
28. Even though the research of Fernando De Tacca (2009) emphasizes the controversy caused by the publication of the images of the initiated *iaôs*, his investigation also shows how this images that profane the sacred when printed nationally, decontextualizing the religious event, are rearranged in the context of the family memories of the *iaôs*. In an interview with a daughter of Perrucha, one of the *iaôs* portrayed by José Medeiros, she shows an album of memories organized by a niece of her mother with clippings of the photographs and captions published in the magazine, rearranged under the title "Memories of my epilation", featured in the magazine *O Cruzeiro* of September 1951 (De Tacca 2009).

Sometimes, while recording the collective preparation of the parties, my attention was led, even if under the appearance of disinterested attention, to portray scenes that would be overlooked from my lay point of view. Being available and allowing my gaze to be directed in the field by these interlocutors, assuming a "collaborative" mode in the production of images (Caldarola 1998), helped me to understand the place these images would occupy in the ordering of individual memories, as in the occasion that I photographed the preparation of a big cake in honor of Oxum, made by two children-of-saint, one of them honoring an obligation with the homage. During the preparation, in which four women chat excitedly in the kitchen while I took the pictures, Cláudia commented on her interest in having a picture of the whole cake, as a reminder of the tribute. With some difficulty, I framed the big cake in the visor of my camera and took the photo that she received with enthusiasm days later. For Cláudia, more important than the photograph of the ritual itself, was the photograph of the cake, which she would offer to Oxum. Carefully prepared, the large cake with yellow icing represented a series of spiritual investments made by Cláudia, to be consecrated in the ritual homage.

FIGURE 1
Fernanda Rechenberg.

gis - gesture, image and sound

FIGURE 2
Fernanda
Rechenberg.

FIGURE 3
Fernanda
Rechenberg.

gis - gesture, image and sound

The many portraits taken at the wedding of Bia's biological sister, Rosi, also reaffirm a spiritual journey, but in this case, a journey intertwined with a rite of union between a woman and a man and their respective families. Besides me, the wedding had the presence of another photographer carrying professional equipment. At the wedding, the photographs framing Bia's incorporation, who received Yemanjá to bless the bride and groom, were scaled in the context of a ritual family where the photography is part of the rite. Photography was a means to acknowledge such culminating moments of social life in which the group solemnly reaffirms its unity[29], whose family ties celebrated in the ritual was not restricted to the blood family but incorporated to the entire religious network linked to the *terreiro* as the family-of-saint. Rosi, at the weeding held in a small ceremony restricted to a few guests and family, made sure that there would be photographers with professional equipment, in addition to the guests' records.

29. As Pierre Bourdieu states "everything leads one to believe that there is no marriage without photography" (Bourdieu 1965, 40).

In other cases, the photograph operated as a witness of the children's bond to religion, such as the image made of a grandson of a children-of-saint of the *terreira*. The baby was less than a month old when he accompanied the image of Our Lady of Aparecida [*Nossa Senhora de Aparecida*] in the same boat in the procession that would take it to the Gasômetro[30] for the tributes of October 12, 2009. When they arrived on land, after the image was brought in front of the stage where homages would be made in an ecumenical ritual, the mother of the young baby dressed in yellow positioned him in front of the image of the saint to take photographs. In capturing the image of the photograph, I was able to register the moment in which the mother held the fragile body of the newborn baby in front of the image of the saint, and the moment afterwards in which the mother, aunt and grandmother celebrated the making of the photograph under the somewhat apprehensive gaze of the father. The photography embodied this belonging of the little child's body to a spiritual entity, "the saint" [*a santa*], incorporating the image of the expression of a spiritual connection.

During the field work, in which I frequently acted as the photographer of the house, the images I produced were added to the memories of this sociability of the family-of-saint. Many of these images delivered to the people portrayed, which narrated an individual, familiar and spiritual journey of these women, would be added to other images in the line of their biographical trajectories.

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30. T.N. A popular and open place in Porto Alegre, near the Guaíba Lagoon.

FROM IMAGES OF RESEARCH, NEW SENSES

Over a year after the beginning of my field work research, having pho-
tographed different parties and tributes at the *terreira*, I had a meeting
with Bia at her house to show her the set of photographs I had taken. It
was a long and unhurried conversation. While showing the photographs
to Bia and her son-in-law, our comments were registered in a small tape
recorder placed on the sofa. Together, we looked at the amount of printed
photographs I had brought with me.

Like most of the images taken in the field, the photographs of the Gipsy
Party were taken with photographic film and an analog camera. This

gis - gesture, image and sound

option for an analog technology was due in part to the equipment that was available and my preference for film, but also to the recognition of the liminal space of the latent image, which made me believe in the creative power of a time that goes through and, little by little, forms the printed image in milliseconds in the period between the shot and the photo development, unlike the immediate unveiling of digital photography. This quality of latency seemed to create a more effective, emphatic dialogue, between photography and ritual, in which I shared a kind of lack of control with my interlocutors. It was as if my rationality was unable to control or govern the photographs I took, subject to the co-emergence between photographic capture and the ritual, where the choices of shots and framing were guided by conscious and unconscious motivations, contemplating the unpredictable, the unintentional[31].

During the party, I played with high and low velocities, trying to "dance" and move together with the people I was portraying. As a photography teacher, I used to teach my students the motto of the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson: "the world is in motion, and we cannot have a static attitude towards what is moving" (Cartier-Bresson 2003, 223). But far from making concise images that would translate the concept of the "decisive moment", my corporal attitude resulted in imprecise, confused photographs, with blurred movements and overlapping people. More than the precision of lines and shapes, my interest was to capture the ambiance, the movement. In a way, it was an attempt to extent the reduction operated by the camera in the "freezing" of the image[32]: the non-freezing of the image caused the effect of a distention of the bodies in the flow of time.

31. For the anthropologist David MacDougall (2006) no matter how directed the camera is, there is an irreducible part of the photographic image that eludes us, that uncovers something uncontrollable and uncontrolled in this attempt of technical reproduction (MacDougall 2006, 03).
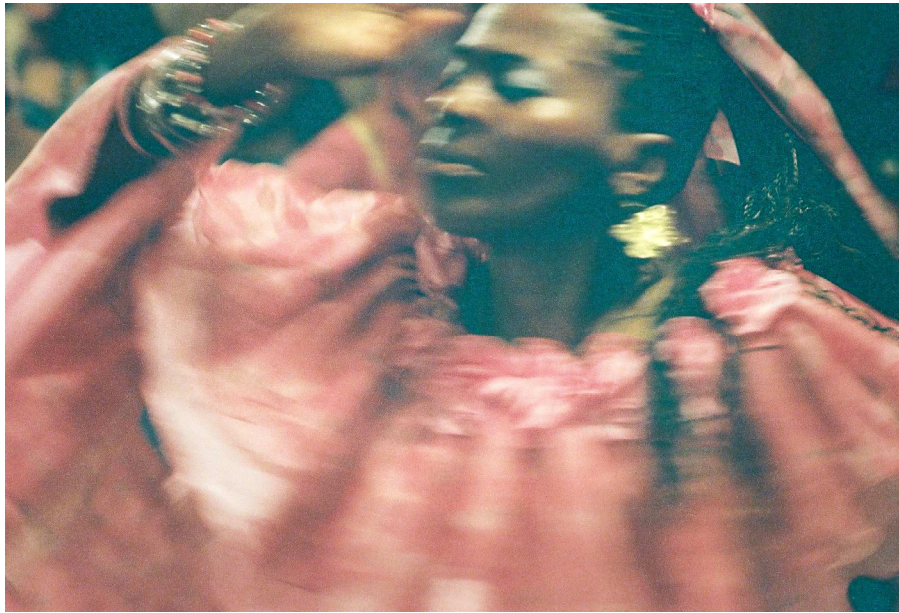32. To the sociologist José de Souza Martins, the photographic instant does not "freeze" the image but reveals the reduction of mismatched times in a single time, the time of photography (Martins 2008).

FIGURE 8
Fernanda
Rechenberg.

gis - gesture, image and sound

FIGURE 9
Fernanda
Rechenberg.

Yeah...[she looks at the photographs for a long time and in silence]. Well, but what looks like that, it doesn't look like me! Where am I, where am I!?[33]

The experience of multiplicity and the disappearance signaled by Bia pointed to a real presence of the *orixá* and the recognition of a third party in the dual relation between photographer and photographed. Bia did not recognize herself in the picture: she wasn't there. She had not

33. Interview with Bia in December 2009.

gis - gesture, image and sound

witnessed, on the night of the party, the images that now showed through the details and the atmosphere created by the Gipsy Party. As Bia studied the photographs, she was surprised at every detail captured by the lens: the candles, the bare feet, the pink tones of the gypsy robes, the dance of the entities, the audience at the party.

Bia's surprise when looking at the photographs of the entity took over her body, spoke of the ever-present relationship between the non-individual-ization that characterizes the incorporation of the *orixá* or entity, and the individualizing instances that mark the peculiar qualities resulting from the encounters of the *orixá* or entity with the body that receives it. Even though the photographs had a lack of sharpness and a lot of movement, favoring a confusing ambiance for the recognition of a physiognomy in the individuality, they displayed the change in the faces and bodies of the subjects who, that night, took on the features of their entities. Cláudia's gypsy, Nice's Padilha and Daltro's Exú were commented in their beauty, strength, and exuberance. In this environment of positions, relationships, and individuality, where the limits between the individual, the person, and the spiritual entity were fluid and shifting (Velho 2003, 61), I asked myself, after all, who the camera was actually portraying.

FIGURE 12
Fernanda
Rechenberg.

For the Gipsy Party, I took only two films: the first was an ISO 800 color film, which allowed me shoot without flash, taking advantage of the ambient light, although at low speeds, which blurred the movement. The other was black and white. The multicolored film ended just as the gypsy people were saying goodbye, giving way to the *Exus* and *Pombagiras* who took over the salon. Therefore, all the visual documentation of the second part of the party happened in black and white portraits, giving another

gis - gesture, image and sound

tone and atmosphere to the images, which until then had been softened by a certain harmony between the pink of the clothes and the gestures of the gypsy people. These pictures, in spite of being taken from the same position I occupied in the salon, showed another aspect resulting from the encounter with the *Exus* and *Pombagiras*.

Bia's son-in law often attended the parties and photographed his wife with small cameras and cellphones[34]. He was a vocalist of the samba school presided by Bia, but was not initiated into the religion. Like Bia's husband, he participated on the outside in the parties and rituals of the *terreira*, helping in the preparation, welcoming guests, and even taking pictures. Despite being well acquainted with his wife's incorporation, the contact with the photographs I had produced seemed to have triggered an unusual and even uncomfortable effect in the unveiling of the multiplicity experienced by his wife. Something that, as he said, was impossible to understand.

FIGURE 13
Fernanda
Rechenberg.

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34. It is worth noting that in the year of 2009, the camera technology available in cellphones was quite precarious, resulting in pixelated and non-shareable images.

Most of the images framed the circle, delimited by the chain [*corrente*]. That place was inhabited by the people of the street. Rarely centralized, the *Exus* and *Pombagiras* appeared at the edges of the pictures, sometimes framed by the details of the bodies that composed the chain, in the foreground. The Lady [*Dama*] appeared in the "confines" (Calabrese 1987) of a permeable boundary that separated and united her multiple and possible identities and passages. Bia and her son-in-law, when mentioning that "it's in the photos that we see", and that "we see even things that we don't want to", showed how the photograph, in its unveiling instant, had anticipated something that one day her husband would see, and would not like, as his wife's biological grandmother and mother-of-saint had warned him. The entity in all its strength, in its mocking laughter, provoked the young man to know the multiple facets of his wife.

The photographed image also becomes part of a set of symbols embedded in the production of religious meanings and knowledge[35]. Unlike the idea of photography as a dead being, a representation devoid of vividness, the uses and narratives that unfold from the technical image, reframe photography as a "living representation", filled with emotion (Martins 2008, Head 2009). The anthropologist-photographer, therefore, begins to build

35. Regarding this aspect, the dissertation of Eliane Coster (2007) shows interesting interpretations of *ialbs* and *babalorixás* concerning images of Bahian *Candomblé* produced by professional photographers such as Mário Cravo Neto and Adenor Gondim.

gis - gesture, image and sound

images, symbol-signifiers, interfering in the composition of the symbolic universe of the group she researchers.

Among these symbols produced by photography, the details of the party were object of special attention in Bia's eyes. In photographs with closed frames and close-ups, the details of the party gained importance by being resized in the entire frame of the photogram, in a "boundary plane"[36] (Satt 1996) that directed the gaze to contemplate separately scenes that composed, in an integrated way, the aesthetic experience of the party. The motion cut and the choice of close-ups showed the detail apprehended in depth, thanks to the immobility of the object observed, indicating what the anthropologist Scott Head (2009) calls the "paradoxical advantage" of photography over audiovisual languages, in the sense that it evokes something not fully visible, involving more the expression of emotions than the impression of reality in motion (Head 2009, 54).

This emphasis on detail, as pointed out by Omar Calabrese, allows for a reconstruction in the system of which it is a part (Calabrese 1987). The specifics of the interlaced hands, the bare feet, the lit candles, did not create a dissociation from the integrated atmosphere of the party, but deepened the meaning of every single thing that had been carefully planned by the Gypsy entity and executed by the children-of-saint. Bia, as she looked at the photograph that framed the detail of the two hands joined in the composition of the chain, paid attention to the non-visible dimension of energy in circulation, something that was allowed by the linking of the bodies in the chain..

FIGURE 17
Fernanda
Rechenberg.

36. In her dissertation on the circularity of *Batuque* images, Maria Henriqueta Satt (1996) proposes this concept to designate an aesthetic choice of framing video-graphic images where the detail configures the edge of the scene.

Also in this direction was Rosi's comment when she saw the pink candles that illuminated the crestfallen faces of those present. During the party, Rosi's non-incorporation allowed her to report to Bia the conduction proposed by her Gypsy.

> Oh, this here was in the terreira, this is what I told you about the Gypsy who made all the lights go out..., oh... gave each one a candle...[37]

> What a beautiful thing, I saw this picture...well, I fell in love! It's one thing for you to say, but it's another thing for us to see, right...[38]

The comments made around the photographs showed how the images in their plasticity could communicate a religious cosmovision of the group. Not only the framing proposed by my perspective selected the images that seemed expressive of that *terreira*, but the very limitations imposed by the equipment in the visual documentation built this concreteness of the apprehended forms, which could be looked at and narrated later.

If by framing the images of the party we produce religious symbols that begin to converge with the other images that make up this sacred atmosphere, it is when they are translated in the light of a religious "ethos" that animates these images, that the meaning of the photographs opens itself to an investigation, evoking reactions, comments, alignments, and comparisons. This space of interaction constituted in the return of the images allowed me to reconsider the pictures based on interpretations that were entirely different from the ones I had learned about the fundamentals of photography in my professional career, and which I tried, with great difficulty, to teach to the young students on the island who were part of the *terreira*.

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