

# The enigma of Quimbanda: forms of existence and showing of an African-Brazilian religious modality in Rio Grande do Sul<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT**

Quimbanda is a ritual modality that has assumed unparalleled status in Rio Grande do Sul when compared to the rest of Brazil. Designating the cult of exus and pombagiras, Quimbanda has reached a prominent place in relation to other Afro-religious expressions, such as Batuque and Umbanda. The objective of this text is to point out the conditions of possibility of Quimbanda, showing how it corresponds to a displacement in principles that are essential either to Batuque or to Umbanda. The forms of exus and pombagiras, Showing, associating spiritual manifestations, photographic records and internet propagation, are also addressed as part of the development of Quimbanda. The analyzes are based on the discussion of bibliography on Quimbanda, on the ethnography of rituals, and on interviews with priests. The text seeks to contribute to the debate about the religious modalities generated by the cult of orixás in Brazil.

**KEYWORDS**

African-Brazilian religions, Umbanda, Batuque, eshu

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## INTRODUCTION

The focus of this text is the ritual forms in which Afro-Brazilian religions are expressed in Rio Grande do Sul. We are interested in analyzing a peculiar aspect of the Afro-religious field in Rio Grande do Sul, an aspect that reveals itself even in statistical terms. In 2010, a project carried out the mapping of *terreiros* [yards] (cult place of “Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Indigenous religions”) in four metropolitan regions, including Porto Alegre, Recife, Belo Horizonte and Belém<sup>2</sup>. With regard to the state capital, 1342 houses were catalogued, the highest number among the four environment, a magnitude that is confirmed in other surveys. To the questions “what is the religion of its *terreiro*/house?” and “what other religious forms are practiced in this *terreiro*/house?”, the combined indications reached 2743 responses. The most common references were “umbanda”, with 36% of responses; then “batuque”, with 30%. While Umbanda is a nationally disseminated religion, batuque is the denomination that, in Rio Grande do Sul, would be an analogue to Candomblé in Bahia and other local expressions present in many Brazilian metropolises. However, in third place in the answers, with an expressive 28%, a term appears that is not included in the results of other cities and acquired its own unique meaning in Rio Grande do Sul: “Quimbanda”.

Quimbanda is, for anyone familiar with Umbanda literature, or its studies in the fields of history and the social sciences, a familiar word. It so happens that, generally, it has consolidated itself as an accusation category. It is impossible to specify when this is confirmed, but there are records that go back to the 1940s, that is, to the time in which Umbanda seeks to present itself as an autonomous religion and with its own doctrine. According to the formulations that follow this institutionalization, Quimbanda would be a kind of negative strand of umbanda, both in moral terms (“works for evil”) and in cosmological terms (a symmetrical and reversed pantheon of entities). Based on this, in his extensive study, Capone (2004: 100) reiterates a conclusion that translates into a widespread appreciation: “It is evident that no templo will claim to be Quimbanda because of its association with black magic”. As the statistics mentioned above, this is not true for the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre. In this region, and in other cities in Rio Grande do Sul where Afro-Brazilian religions are significant, “Quimbanda”, understood as the cult specifically aimed at *eshus* and *pombagiras*, is something that is declared.

This is easily seen in incursions into the Afro-gaúcho universe. Quimbanda is considered, in Rio Grande do Sul, as something with great vitality. In his thesis, Almeida (2019) faced the strength and expansion of these rituals. The author sought to understand the performance of drums used in Afro-Brazilian religions in Rio Grande do Sul, including the greeting of *eshus* and *pombagiras*, in a transformations context in the religious field and the intense use of “new media” and technologies. From a broad media perspective, more aligned with the mediation idea (Meyer, 2020; Stollow, 2005; Engelke, 2010), the work analyzes some agents and objects in constant dialogue

<sup>1</sup> | We would like to give, in advance, our thanks to the *pais* and *mães* de santos, the owners of media companies and all the *alabés* who, in a friendly manner, granted us the interviews mentioned in this article. Also to the interlocutors who directly or indirectly contributed to the writing of this article, including colleagues from the Center for Religion Studies at UFRGS, including colleagues from the Center for Religion Studies at UFRGS and the Afro Studies Group - GEAFRO.

<sup>2</sup> | Socioeconomic and Cultural people Inventory and Traditional Communities of *terreiros* [yards] (Brasil, 2011).

with different expressions of the real universe Afro-gaúcho. Along this path, observations about Quimbanda and its material expressions played a prominent role and will provide some of the arguments and reflections present in this article.

Based on this framework, this text aims to contribute to the discussion of what we would call “the enigma of Quimbanda”. What conditions occurred for something categorically negative in other contexts to acquire a certain positivity in Rio Grande do Sul? What are the relationships between these conditions, devotion and worship configurations to which Quimbanda from Rio Grande do Sul is associated? Furthermore, what expressive forms were and are being associated with Quimbanda from Rio Grande do Sul, contributing to its affluence? Although we make considerations that involve some historical aspects, our reference is based more on the present features of the Afro-Gaúcho field. If we resort to history, it will not be to establish genealogical conclusions, but to find the signs of elements that seem to us to be structural to account for the existence, in a sense that will be necessary to specify, of Quimbanda.

Based on these objectives, we point out two sets of interlocutions. The first has to do with studies on the configuration of ritual forms – and their counterparts in terms of naming categories – in the Afro-Brazilian religious universe (Maggie, 1992; Silva, 1995; Serra, 1995; Brumana and Martinez, 1995; Carvalho 1995; Birman, 1997; Giumbelli, 1997). Rather, it is a multiverse, shaped by a proliferation of terms and practices, not necessarily in step. Its borders are not well defined either, as shown by its relationships with other references, especially Kardecist-inspired spiritism. In this field, each term – Candomblé, Umbanda, Spiritism, etc. – inspires an investigation capable of showing a lot about the status (often contested) and the configurations of ritual forms (often heteroclitic). We want to target the word “Quimbanda” in the context of the conditions of Afro-religious practices established in Rio Grande do Sul.

A second set of discussions has to do with a material approach to religions, as synthesized by authors such as Engelke (2010) and Meyer (cf. Giumbelli, Rickli and Toniol, 2019). It is a theoretical strand that rejects the distinction between content and form, message and environment. With this, questions about the means of expression and modes of religions showing gain matter. Applying this perspective to our investigation about Quimbanda, we privilege the way in which entities worshiped in this ritual modality show themselves, through performances, with their production, recording and dissemination forms. It is especially in the second part of our analysis that this perspective will have good results.

In methodological terms, this text is based on two procedures. First, the discussion of the bibliography dedicated to the configuration description of Afro-gaúcho cults. Without neglecting to take into account a greater number of references, we will focus this discussion on two theses (Barbosa, 2012; Leistner, 2014), whose analyzes and materials seem central on Quimbanda investigation. Second, the exposition

of relevant work aspects that resulted in another thesis, which has already been mentioned above (Almeida, 2019). Having dedicated himself for four years to the activities of *tamboreiros* [drummers] who work in Afro-Brazilian religions in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, the path of its elaboration came across “the enigma of Quimbanda”. The present text was made exactly from the ethnographic research related to this thesis, inflected by questions created in the dialogue with discussions on the ritual forms configuration and modes of religion exposition.

### QUIMBANDA ON THE CROSSED LINE

Even though, as we have already mentioned, our démarche is not genealogical, some historical elements seem essential to us to access the “Quimbanda enigma”. Among them is what we might call a certain “balance” between batuque and umbanda in terms of its rootedness in the Afro-religious field in Porto Alegre and in other cities where its presence is significant<sup>3</sup>. Balance in the sense that, as opposed to in other contexts, a more Africanized reference (batuque) and a less Africanized one (umbanda) were equally rooted<sup>4</sup>. The gaucho batuque, as a local variant of the Jeje-Nagô cult, traces genealogies that go back to at least the end of the 19th century. Although today's temples do not have long biographies, priests and priestesses of batuque indelibly mark the history of cities and their culture. When Umbanda is established in Porto Alegre, it is faced with the stick presence of practices referring to batuque or its “nations”. This occurred from the 1930s onwards, although the first federation – União de Umbanda [umbanda unification] – was only founded in 1953. Umbanda that predominates in Porto Alegre and other regions is “white”, refusing practices established in batuque such as use of drums and animal sacrifices.

According to Leistner (2014), however, since the late 1950s, another possibility has emerged in Rio Grande do Sul, described as follows: “The crossed line arises from an approach between Batuque and Umbanda motivated by the trajectories of some religious agents who, after initiation in one of these aspects, they joined the second, starting to enlist both practices in their temples.” (:133). Although with a much smaller percentage (less than 3%) of the answers, “crossed line” is a category that also appears in the above mentioned mapping results, again only for Porto Alegre (Brasil, 2011). This percentage clashes with the Leistner observations, who estimates that “in the current segment creation of the Rio Grande do Sul *terreiros*, the Crossed Line consist to about 80% of the religious configurations present in the existing places of worship” (:158). Although there is no consensus on the relevance of the category to designate a specific form, researchers in the Afro-Gaúcho field agree that it is very common to find *terreiros* in which both ritual modalities, batuque and umbanda, are performed, usually with the inclusion of Quimbanda. The houses researched by Barbosa (2012), in which their priests maintain ties – differential but not exclusive – with entities from Umbanda

<sup>3</sup> | It is basically the coastal region delimited by the metropolitan capital towards the south, covering other important cities such as Pelotas and Rio Grande. In Rio Grande do Sul are 14 municipalities with the highest rate of Afro-Brazilian religions supporters, according to the 2010 IBGE Census. See: <https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/geral/noticia/2012/06/dados-do-ibge-colocam-municipios-do-esta-como-campeoes-em-credos-3806966.html>

<sup>4</sup> | Contrasting cases would be, on the one hand, Salvador, with a predominance of Candomblé; on the other, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with historical prevalence of umbanda.

and Batuque, could serve as an example, although they do not assume themselves as “Crossed Line”. An important point is that, although Quimbanda is established as a ritual form, the term appears much less than batuque and umbanda to designate places of worship (temples).

In fact, there are important differences between the two works in their understanding of the crossed line. For Leistner, “Crossed line” is a kind of predecessor of Quimbanda, whose description as a religious system of its own thesis is dedicated. For Barbosa, on the other hand, “crossed line” is the expression of a logic that works simultaneously through connections and distinctions, which allows us to understand the passage between worshiped entities without producing a confusion between them. For us, both works are valuable. By situating our undertaking in relation to them, we maintain: on the one hand, we question the autonomy that Leistner attributes to Quimbanda as a religious system; on the other hand, we keep interest in the conditions of Quimbanda possibility, an issue that Barbosa does not consider. We could equally say: we agree with Barbosa about the logic that works through connections and distinctions, but we insist on Leistner’s question about the ways of Quimbanda existence. That is, even if this existence takes a way that fundamentally depends on others, there is no denying that it has settled down to the point of receiving a very recurrent nomination - judging by the data from Brazil (2011), as significant as “umbanda” and “batuque” – in the Afro-gaúcho field.

Our procedure will consist of starting from some features of the entities worshiped in Quimbanda in order to characterize their possibility conditions. These entities, according to the terminology established by their ritual practitioners, are mainly “eshus” and “pombagiras”, but also “eguns”. While “eshus” and “pombagiras” are terms that, in the Afro-gaúcho context, refer to umbanda, “eguns” is something that refers to batuque. However, as is known, “eshu” is also the name of one of the orixás worshiped in the Jeje-Nagô tradition to which batuque is associate while, for batuqueiros, “spirits of the dead” - “eguns” - is a definition that would apply to all entities revered in Umbanda. This brings us to an important observation: we do not assume that umbanda and batuque corresponding to pure religion models. We agree with Barbosa and others (for example, Chiesa, 2012, for umbanda; Serra, 1995, for candomblé) that the Afro-religious field is composed of heteroclite formations that allow passages between and beyond them. Even so, the recurrence of some categories shows the stability of certain configurations. Let’s left the models idea, but keep the notion of principles. Next, we will take some crucial features of umbanda and batuque to demonstrate how the entities referred to Quimbanda ply a kind of short-circuit - through which the principles connection such as “evolution” and “action” generate new possibilities - which provides the ritual forms that define it. To do so, we will use some references that Leistner and other authors summarize, based on native vocabulary, in the expressions “exu da alta” and “Exu cruzado”.



## EXU DA ALTA [HIGH ESHU]

By presenting the path that would have taken from the Crossed Line to the Quimbanda, Leistner (2014) illustrates part of the innovations that took place from the second half of the 1960s onwards in several *terreiros* in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre with the case of Ieda of Ogum. In it, considered one of the first quimbandeiras in the region (:147), the Exu Rei das Sete Encruzilhadas [The king eshu of the seven crossroads] (“Seu Sete”) was incorporated. Registers Leistner’s thesis (2014:148):

As Mãe Ieda mentions in her narratives, the differences between her Eshu and the Eshus who until then participated in Umbanda sessions consisted in the fact that “Seu Sete” could be understood as a more evolved Eshu, an Eshu of high, in opposition to those, considered as entities without light and placed in the lowest hierarchy of spirituality, according to the representations widely disseminated in the region by the “white” Umbanda.

This distinction between two types of eshus also appears in one of the cases followed in Barbosa’s thesis (2012), that of Mãe Rita, strained by her relationship with two pombagiras: “And I, who always dreamed of a beautiful pombagira, started to have one drunken spirit, falling through the *terreiro*” (:33).

A primordial notion of the idea of “high eshu” is that of evolution. Here is an important principle of umbanda, on two levels. First, the cosmological, which organizes the relationship between a set of entities, in which *caboclos* and *pretos-velhos* stand out in their opposition to the eshus. The former are said to be “more evolved” than the latter. This evolution, however, is relative, which takes us to the second plane- morality. *Caboclos* and *pretos-velhos* demonstrate to “do charity” and, by helping people, they contribute to their own evolution. The principle of evolution is appropriated from Kardecist spiritism, noticing that Umbanda, even the “white one”, undertakes a transformation by recognizing the strength and rendering a cult to entities indigenous and black, that spiritism, in general, would have a minor role.

Referring to the past of umbanda in Rio Grande do Sul, Leistner (2014: 140) states that, in ritual practice, “the Eshus only arrived at the end of the sessions to clean the *terreiro* crawling around and drinking cachaça on the floor, being treated as slaves of the guides of light, realizing that there were not even specific ritual sessions for these entities.” A similar statement can be heard from many *pais and mães de santo*. The pai de santo and *tamboreiro* of the “old guard” of batuque, Alfredo Ferreira<sup>5</sup>, for example, stated that:

He came once a month to clean the house. In the end, the umbanda session ended and he arrived to clean the house. Eshus were not materialized as they are today. The eshu drank cachaça on the floor, walked around crookedly. And then, it evolved. People made the evolution

5 | Interview, July 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

of eshu. [...] The eshu was wearing black pants, a red shirt, barefoot and that's it. Today, eshu wears shoes, eshu wears a suit, eshu drinks beer. It didn't have any of that, it was pure cachaça and that's it. There was no eshu party.

It is commonly said by the pais and mães de santo that the eshus dressed simply and with few pieces, had a brief and controlled presence during rituals and walked barefoot or, described in another way, without necessarily being redundant, did not wear shoes.

The "high eshu", on which the Quimbanda depends on, means a transformation. In Umbanda, eshus and pombagiras can be positive – for example, if they undergo a "baptism" (Ortiz 1978). As seen above, they are not denied a ritual role, as "astral garbage collectors". In any case, their subordination to caboclos and pretos-velhos is asserted, and their designation as "slaves" of those entities is not uncommon. In Quimbanda, a liberation takes place, breaking this eshus and pombagiras subordination. These entities are further on the cosmological scale, which imposes moral demands on them. Like caboclos and pretos-velhos, it is trusted that eshus and pombagiras can "do good" – according to evaluations that are always relative, as it is recognized that good for someone is capable of being evil for others. Again, like caboclos and pretos-velhos, they are called to "work" in exchanges that are not devoid of morality, as they depend on "deservings" and "efforts" from both sides (entities and humans).

This leveling between eshus and pombagiras, on the one hand, and caboclos and pretos-velhos, on the other, does not eliminate the difference between these entities in terms of their description. If marginality is a trait that applies to all of them, eshus and pombagiras remain associated with more urban and liminal forms, figures that lead "nonconforming lives". In the pombagira's case, the dominant reference is prostitution. In the eshus case, the references are wider, exploring the many possibilities of combining vulnerability and cunning. In Quimbanda, these pombagiras and eshus are seen and treated with nobility, subverting the notion of slave<sup>6</sup>. Let's see what the references to this nobility are, how they are represented and what is their relationship with the morality expressed in the "deservings".

Pai Geison of Xangô, pai de santo who has his terreiro in Alvorada, in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, comments on the spiritual eshus biography:

The eshus are from ancient times, it's different from today. In ancient times you have a lot of baron, baroness, capitão do mato [a bounty hunter]. So they are from that origin, that's why in their manifestation they are like that. Every eshu was a baron. If it wasn't a baron, it was a bounty hunter. If it wasn't a bounty hunter, they owned gambling houses. So it wasn't this popular life. Not so in their manifestation as a human being. It was another time, so they were emperors, kings, queens, baronesses, barons. So that's why this imposing, being more

6 | Tamboeiro [Drummer] Alfredo, when asked about possible explanations for the phenomenon of Quimbanda growth, stated that "the eshu began to grow when he stopped being a slave and became king" (Alfredo, July 2018).

authoritarian, even [in the way] of dressing, imposing and speaking. Or they were a doctor... it does not find a worker eshu, a "general helper" eshu. Let's say, service functions, that didn't exist.<sup>7</sup>

7 | Interview, September 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

Pai Geison's speech does not seem to announce only an evolution process, but also, based on the research we have been carrying out, a process of valuing mythical personalities linked to certain modes of social power. This "old time" and the alignment of the eshus to the clothes of the elite was evidenced by Cesar of Xangô, pai de santo and owner of an axós shop (religion clothes) in Porto Alegre. Pai Cesar also tells us about the importance of the rituals practiced in the *terreiro* of the mãe de santo leda of Ogum, which is, as stated by several mães and pais de santo interviewed, one of the great references in Quimbanda gaúcha.<sup>8</sup>

8 | Interview, July 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

One of the main ialorixás, caretakers of Eshu, Mãe leda of Ogum, who belongs to Seu Sete, they started with this more visual issue, this King issue, this thing about the King of the Seven Crossroads. So the clothes, the decoration, that chair style, Luiz XV, something more medieval, came from this religious family, which is vast. And that was spreading, people took a liking to it and everything is duplicated over time. So today, this issue was created that the party owner has its moment, its triumphal arrival (court). The more frilly, the more coats, the more vests, the better.

9 | The court (procession) refers to a kind of "triumphal arrival" of the eshus and their most illustrious guests during a Quimbanda party.

10 | In addition to Leistner (2014), Silva (2003) and Bem (2012) note the importance of what they write as "high eshu" for Quimbanda.

Many Pais and mães de santo, when interviewed during the research process that led to this article, highlighted the influence of Mãe leda and "Seu Sete" for the constitution of evolutionary models in the Quimbanda gaúcha. This Mãe de santo is also attributed, for example, to holding Quimbanda parties in concert halls and sheds, that is, outside the *terreiro*; the procession<sup>9</sup> existence; and other aspects of that "more visual thing", such as the throne, the costumes and the features of royalty.

Several elements that constitute the "high eshu"<sup>10</sup>, such as garments, thrones, scepters, sacrifices, decorations, place where the Quimbanda parties take place are part of what is commonly called deserving, that is, the receipt of gifts for the works provided. These eshus "dress deservings", as described by Teixeira (2005) based on his research on the clothing of eshus and pombagiras from the Quimbanda gaúcha region. The quimbandeiro eshu, therefore, "works to evolve", just as in the times when it was an "umbanda eshu", but now it has autonomy in relation to other entities. Receiving more and more beautiful objects, as well as the frequency with which new gifts are received, is a source of pride for pais, mães de santo and for the eshus themselves.

An important character in the English monarchy, Mãe leda's "Seu Seven" is treated as a king whose attributes have been acquired over the years. The entity was born in umbanda, manifesting itself at the end of the rituals and, at a some point in its trajectory, started to work in what years later would become the Quimbanda, until



becoming, as Mãe Ieda considers, the *hors concours*.

My eshu wore an apron, pumps, sneakers. It didn't arrive dressed as a man. It arrived all crooked, screaming, drank cachaça on the ground, ate candles, unloaded the terreiro and left. After years it asked for white pants and a red shirt. It asked for the guide, red and white... When I started to do its magic, which it asked for, I started to make a table, placed on the cruise, which it asked for. Red tissue paper, a tray, a cachaça, a cigar, a candle and a piece of meat and palm oil. I started like this. It asked and got clothes, a cape, a top hat, shoes, a good cigar, a good whiskey.<sup>50</sup> years ago there was none of that. It was gaining. And it has a stylist. The one who makes Seu Sete's clothes is a stylist who makes samba school clothes. So if it ask for a king's outfit, it will know. The court Seu Sete did. Seu Sete had seven women (who goes to the court with him), seven queens made by him, in his house. I didn't choose it, he did it. He was asking. Seu Sete worked on the cross like a king, not like a Zé Pilintra dancing samba.<sup>11</sup>

11 | Interview, July 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

12 | Interview, December 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

It is important to highlight that royalty is not limited to the image of the European monarchy, as is quite common among the quimbandeiros eshus, but also presents characteristics that follow different models of social prestige and power. Another well-known eshu from Porto Alegre is “Seu Belo”, eshu of the pai de santo Neco of Oxalá<sup>12</sup> This pai de santo said that his eshu manifested for the first time in 1966, when he was still seven years old. His mother, Teresinha of Oxalá, known as the mãe de santo of the Quimbanda Portoalegrense, received the Eshu Sete Cruzeiros and, as a help from that entity, she negotiated with Mr Belo. Since Pai Neco, at the time, was only seven years old, Mr Belo had to wait until the maturity of his new “horse”. In exchange, the entity made two requests: its own settlement and, in addition, work on Fridays. Until then, Mãe Teresinha's house had worked with Umbanda entities on Tuesdays, with sessions for pretos velhos, and on Thursdays, with sessions for caboclos. The performance of a ritual intended only for eshus, a practice that began in the late 1960s, is confused with the emergence and constitution of Quimbanda as a specific ritual in Porto Alegre.

According to Pai Neco, his mother's Exu Sete Cruzeiros never accepted to be treated like royalty, nor to change its clothes: “The only change in my mother's eshu, in my whole life, was to accept black color [until then, I used only white], in 89, and then, in the 90's, accepting the little cap”. Contrarily, “Mr Sete” treated “Mr Belo” as a king: “Mr Sete treated Mr Belo as a majesty. It called 'my king, what do you need?' It keep going:

I don't agree that eshu is an animal, I never accepted it. We built an image of an eshu that was totally different from the eshu being called the devil, of things like that, the eshu who drank cachaça on the ground, ate candles, crawled. So, from the 60's, when we started doing a session for eshu, we started to build an image of a different eshu, the king eshu. Eshu with shoes, with cape, with cane, eshu treating people as lordship, by kings and queens. Take ok the issue of eshu eating candles, drinking cachaça. No! Eshu has to drink whiskey, has to drink sparkling wine.

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In 1967 we gave them, as axé [ashé - Strength, sacred energy of each orixá], when eshu arrived, we gave them the cape, hat, cane, shoe, everything was ashé. They earned by merit, by work, by time service. So the eshus had to do their best, show their work, help people to earn the shoe, then the cape. In the 70s, in 76, 78, around, at parties Mr Belo arrived in a limousine. Now I have a filho de santo, Sidnei, who (Eshu) Maré arrives by limousine in Tramandaí.

The royalty of Eshu Belo does not come from European royal models, as in the case of Mãe Ieda's eshu. Its majesty comes from being Lucifer, the "great architect of the universe": "Its story is that it was Lucifer. The story that everyone knows. It was always treated by majesty, for being a major eshu, the great architect of the universe. We gave it an affectionate name, Mr Belo, so it wouldn't be called Lucifer, who scared people". Here we observe another model of royalty, which would be consolidated in the 1970s and 1980s, especially after the treatment given to Mr. Belo by Eshu Sete Cruzeiros. Mr. Belo started to have large parties in well-decorated halls, to receive gifts and to have a triumphant arrival with distinguished guests and trumpet calls.

Mr. Belo also began to crown other eshus, a practice that is currently quite common in Quimbanda gaúcha.<sup>13</sup> In recognition of the work done, the coronation gives the entity a new status, now of "crowned eshu". One of the entities crowned by Mr. Belo, Maria Mulambo, reinforces the resignification of the evolution principle. In Rio Grande do Sul, the imagination of royalty helped the eshus to assume moral aspects previously denied by the "white" umbanda.<sup>14</sup> Maria Mulambo is also called the "Queen of Garbage". This entity shows that it is possible to be queen and, at the same time, maintain marginality, as her point sings: "She won a gold crown / She won a silver crown / But she preferred to live in the garbage / with her tin crown". Maria Mulambo takes on the garbage work, which gives the eshus the possibility of moral reconfiguration of evolutionary processes. Eshu is "the Showing of what is in degradation" (Anjos, 2006: 87). The quimbandeiro eshu seems to act on the "evolutionary illumination", proposing other types of evolutionary recognition to the eshus that for a long time were considered devoid of light.

In short, the "high eshu" – and we can add the "luxury pombagira" – makes a transformation in the Umbanda arrangement, allowing these entities to relate to caboclos and pretos-velhos in another way: no longer as "slaves", but as more marginal. Neither Umbanda cosmology or morality are categorically rejected, as marginality is a fundamental component of them. But there is a displacement, which produces curious scenes, such as "giras de galas" in which swearing and sex games are common – just as dimly lit environments can be described by adjectives as "brilliant" (Leistner, 2014: 265).

Eshus and pombagiras no longer crawl on the ground, nor do they support cheap cachaça anymore, but they do not fail to present themselves as closer to the human beings who seek them out, "working" for those who "deserve" and to earn

<sup>13</sup> | In Rio Grande do Sul, the expression Eshu Catão is also used to identify evolved and crowned eshus.

<sup>14</sup> | Based on Jurema, Assunção (2004: 211) highlights the existence of a process that, on the one hand, seeks to moralize the entity's attitudes. This can be identified with the modes of spiritual evolution present in the so-called "white Umbanda". Contrarily, and in dialogue with the previous process, "evolution provides the emergence of new entities that start to assume the side that was 'rejected' by the moralizing process."

“deserving”. Under these conditions, short-circuiting the lines of evolution, the Umbanda principles are urged to produce another modality of spiritual action, to deserve a cult, which in Rio Grande do Sul is called Quimbanda.

### EXU CRUZADO [CROSSED ESHU]

Let's move on to “crossed eshu”, again asking permission to quote another excerpt from Leistner's thesis (2014: 143):

Until the mid-1960s, the cults of Eshus and Pombagiras in Rio Grande do Sul were still based on Umbanda conceptions, even those present in the initial formation of the Crossed Line. (...) However, the first changes already happen in these temples, being initially observed in the domains of the ritual code, especially with regard to innovations in the making of the Eshus. (...) Thus, if in the Umbanda version those deities were only tolerated in the temples to work in exchange for spiritual evolution, now they started to have their own settlements and receive animal sacralization as a symbolic mediation resource (...). The reference to the cut for the Eshus is constant in the narratives from the Afro-Gaúcho field as a fundamental element in the distinction between an old conception and a new perspective of worshipping those deities (now present in the cross-line).

To this, it is worth adding how Barbosa (2012) summarizes what a pai-de-santo from Pelotas tells him exactly about the eshus making:

The eshu becomes a “freed eshu, a more evolved eshu”, while on the umbanda side, he tells us, “the eshu is crooked”. Doing this spirit from the side of the Quimbanda is to break it, making it “a ready eshu, who acts more”, whereas that of the umbanda, “it is more difficult to be indoctrinated, it drinks on the ground, it crawls” (:43).

According to several sources, the eshus and pombagiras makings is one of the main description of the current Quimbanda. This implies the carrying out of animal sacrifices for the production of settlements that work as linkers between people and entities. Thus, a priest or priestess dedicated to Quimbanda rituals must be initiated (or “ready”) and be linked to settlements corresponding to the entities with which they work. One way to understand the movements that are at play in this established procedure is to relate them to some principles of batuque, specifically two of its notions, the orixá and the egum.

As Barbosa well understands, “crossing the eshu (...) is to give it a ritual treatment analogous to that given to an orixá” (2012:41). But isn't eshu already an orixá? This is a complex issue in gaúcho batuque. The entity that corresponds to eshu in the Jeje-Nagô pantheon is called bará in batuque. According to Corrêa (2006: 182), “images and symbols of the Eshu do not exist in the houses considered to be ‘pure’ Batuque”. However, according to the same researcher (see also Barbosa, 2012: 248-52),

the term eshu is used in order to reveal equivalences with bará. Another point is that there are several modes (or “qualities”) of bará, and among its distinctions, one of the most important is that which separates the house from the street. The “bará from house” receives a similar treatment to other orixás, but the “bará from the street” has few initiates, even these rather to link “to another, calmer Bará” (Corrêa, 2006:181). Considering these points, we can suggest that by “crossing the eshu”, the Quimbanda is pointing to the problematic presence of this orixá in batuque.<sup>15</sup> More than that, it is, as a short-circuit, reformulating the distinctions that maintain distinctions between eshu and bará.

It is important to point out that, in batuque, Bará receives a deference that is not the same as that of Eshu in Candomblé. Among the people interviewed during the research process that led to this article, we have Alexandre of Bará, Chaninho of Bará, Wesley of Bará Agelu, Pai Marquinho of Bará, among others. In other words, they express a different reality from that exposed by some Candomblé ethnographies, as Bará commonly fill its children and acts as “the master of the head”, as well as the other orixás of Orumélé. Perhaps the contrast with the Eshu observed by Roger Bastide (1959: 241) in other regions led him to assert, when he came from Rio Grande do Sul, this side of the country there was “an energetic opposition to the recognition of Bará with the devil”. It is also valid to consider what Silva (2019: 144) points out as being, “in Brazil, perhaps the best known case of public worship of Eshu”. He refers to something we see in the central markets of Porto Alegre and Pelotas, shelter places, according to well-disseminated narratives, settlements of the Bará and that participate in public ritual activities of batuque.

Let us now return to the Quimbanda eshus, with the hypothesis that they may have benefited from the deference given in Rio Grande do Sul to the Bará. A dialogue with the Pai de santo Cesar of Xangô, whose crossed terreiro (umbanda, Quimbanda and batuque) is located in the city of Alvorada, allows us to consider this hypothesis when dealing with the settlement as a promotion. In the moment that precedes the excerpt quoted below, Pai Cesar spoke about the sacrifices that, “a few decades now”, began to be made for the eshus, with, therefore, an approach of these entities with the models of offering made to the orixás and, at the same time, moving away from the practices present in the so-called “white umbanda”. Next, regretting the “disappearance” of main entities to Umbanda, Pai Cesar comments on animal sacrifices:

*There is almost no more caboclo, even less pretos velhos. Only a few remain and unfortunately it's getting lost more and more. In some houses, they are still involved in this matter of evolution, bringing saint-making into umbanda. Like, cutting, sacralizing into umbanda. Things that weren't like that a while ago. They are trying to give Umbanda an "up" in some way, and then bring the blood, the axoro.<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>15</sup> | This is a point that extends to Candomblé, as noted, in different perspectives, by Barbosa (2012), Silva (2019) and Capone (2004).

<sup>16</sup> | Interview, July 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida

In other words: once the growth of Quimbanda and the eshus evolution is attested, one way to evolve or express evolution is to bring the entities of the orixás closer with regard to provision, sacrifices and settlements. Along these lines, it becomes possible to suppose that the evolutionary advantages of the quimbandeiro eshu are related to the way in which Bará is worshiped in batuque.

This fact, considering the Rio Grande do Sul case, does not seem to reveal a search for (re?) Africanization of Quimbanda entities, similar to what has been highlighted by some authors about the process of searching for purity or more Africanized traits and practices (Silva, 1995; Capone, 2004), especially from the 1970s onwards, with Candomblé as the main disseminator. Under the conditions, as highlighted by Corrêa (2006), there seems to be batuque recognition as a modality with greater symbolic power. The eshu, therefore, does not gain settlements, provisions and sacrifices to become African as an attempt to “search for the origins”, but rather to acquire symbolic power and evolutionary potential through the principles already assumed by batuque. The same extends to the eguns, worshiped in Quimbanda not as a sign of Africanization, but as a function of displacements in relation to batuque.

In batuqueira cosmology, eguns are spirits of the dead, sources of potential disturbances for the living. For this reason, they receive treatment aimed at neutralizing their dangers. Quimbanda associates the eguns with the spirit of people who have lived through tragic situations, especially when this resulted from their deliberations. Nevertheless, it also provides ways of recovery, through the settlement of these entities. Although the settlement {assentamento} suggests an oncoming with the orixás, the Quimbanda maintain an important distinction between eshus/pombagiras and eguns. This distinction refers to the one that Umbanda builds between caboclos and pretos-velhos, on both sides, eshus. But it also – that's how it can be seen, to keep the short-circuit metaphor – it rework the status attributed to the eguns by batuque. For in Quimbanda is the configuration of the “eshu seated with the charge of eguns”. In other words, it is not just a matter of fixing (and isolating) the egum so that it works for the *terreiro*, but of associating it with something that, let's remember the “crossed eshu”, receives ritual dedication analogous to that given to an orixá.

The thick displacements in the notions of “high eshu” and “crossed eshu” have parallels with spatial arrangements that are standards of Quimbanda. Like the configuration demanded by the umbanda rituals (but not the batuque), the Quimbanda sessions take place in halls that keep separation between the mediums and the audience sides. After the ritual embody of the entities and their dancing to the sound of *pontos* [praise music], eshus and pombagiras (“evolved”) are available for discussion aimed at helping those who attend the sessions or receive gifts from them. However, if not improvised, the place where these sessions take place must provide spaces where the entities' settlements (“crossed”) are placed. The example



highlighted by Leistner (2014) is that of a *terreiro* that has separate houses for the eshus, for the barás and, themselves distinct, for the eguns of batuque and the eguns of Quimbanda. In general, the spatial configuration is simpler, without failing to state the distinction between internal and external spaces. Such distinction is not required in Umbanda houses, but it is expected in Batuque *terreiros* – with the difference that in Quimbanda the Eshu is not just outside.

The spatial dimension also offers the opportunity to return to the theme of Quimbanda's autonomy. When Leistner (2014) describes an eshus session as the basic point of what would be the “ritual code” of the Quimbanda (:235ff), the space where it takes place is actually a crossed line *terreiros*. There are priests and priestesses of Quimbanda whose names incorporate the main entities to which they are dedicated, but temples exclusively attributed to their rituals are rarer. Mãe Rita's *terreiro* in Pelotas would be an example, but Barbosa (2012) notes how the priestess was also initiated into Umbanda, whose activities she attends in a house whose the mãe got ready to batuque. The most usual is that Quimbanda sessions take place in spaces whose halls have three altars, one for the orixás, another for the caboclos and pretos-velhos, and another for eshus and pombagiras. In short, the Quimbanda, to be practiced, does not require its own and exclusive space, only requiring adaptations based on provisions established by umbanda and batuque.

Due to the above, we found reasons to claim that Quimbanda exists in a way that, for the time being, does not depend on or demand its autonomy. What defines it is the cult of entities known as eshus and pombagiras, supported by the eguns. We seek to show that this cult requires conditions that can be established when we observe the displacements operated from principles that characterize umbanda, on the one hand, and batuque, on the other. The figures of the “high Eshu” and the “crossed eshu” correspond to these displacements and open the way for us to understand how Eshus and Pombagiras can receive a specific cult. Specific does not mean autonomous. Because it seems to us that Quimbanda exists, presenting itself as something else, insofar as it depends on principles developed by the more established forms of the orixás cult in Rio Grande do Sul<sup>17</sup>.

### ESHUS, MEDIA AND SHOWING

The constitution of the “eshu quimbandeiro” involves a process by which this entity, through its “horses”, started to value the complementarity between evolution and showing. Manifesting oneself with pomp and royalty, in this logic, means validating oneself as an evolved eshu, condensing both the sense of strength and magic, as well as that of deserving. The eshu became vain and sought, also as part of its evolutionary process, to learn the best ways to expose itself. It is worth mentioning one of the cases in which this showing was presented to us by Quimbandas from Rio

<sup>17</sup> | It is worth reinforcing this observation with the finding of Leistner (2012: 283) when he notes that the bond of people with Quimbanda does not include a “process of a collective political identity”, as evidenced by the absence of the term “Quimbanda” in the name of several Afro-religious federations from Rio Grande do Sul.

Grande do Sul.

In Viamão, a city in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, the *terreiro* of the pai de santo Daniel of Xangô began, at around 8 pm on June 9, 2018, the call of the eshus who would participate in the great Quimbanda party for the Eshu King of the Seven Crossroads, an entity incorporated by Pai Daniel. The eshus who arrived at the *terreiro* at that time had been previously invited to compose the procession, a kind of “triumphal arrival” of the eshu owner of the party and its most special guests. The big party, which would be celebrated that night, would not take place in the *terreiro*, although it was a celebration of the eshu settlement date of Daniel, which had originally taken place 18 years earlier. A few blocks away, the headquarters of the Vila Isabel samba school, rented especially for the event, was already prepared to receive the Eshu King of the Seven Crossroads and its procession, as well as other guests, mediums, curious people and nearby residents.<sup>18</sup>

18 | As Leistner (2014: 158-9) found, events of this magnitude are not rare in the metropolitan region.

While the embody began in the *terreiro*, the team of alabés that would be responsible for conducting the music was already starting their melodies at the party site. As the points of eshu were chanted, more guests arrived. The team was seated on a stage set up at one end of the room, facing the main entrance. It was a platform covered with a black tissue and, on top of it, iron frames to settle light cannons of different colors and rotations, all to contribute to the arrangement of the place. Light games, silver rain, smoke jets and pompous decorations are elements that have become common in Quimbanda parties in Rio Grande do Sul.

Around 1am, the court of the Eshu King of the Seven Crossroads began to move from the *terreiro* to the party place. While the eshus walked through the streets of the neighborhood, the guests repositioned themselves in the great hall of Vila Isabel until two rows were formed on opposite sides, in order to compose a corridor that connected the main entrance to the stage where alabês and drums were located. The couples who made the court would fall into sequence, one pair after the other, and have their moment of dancing in front of the drums and admirers.

Mr. Sete, the last one to enter, dressed like a king. In front of the drums, after crossing the corridor full of admirers, the entity danced and, as it is commonly said in the Quimbandas of Porto Alegre, “made its magic”. Among the nearly a thousand people who watched the eshu's performance, employees from different hired media companies recorded in photo and video, in addition to live broadcasts on Facebook, on their respective “official pages”. The hiring of media companies with work exclusively dedicated to the customers of the *terreiros* became common as of 2010<sup>19</sup>, to a large extent encouraged by the growth of Quimbanda in Rio Grande do Sul and by the intensely expository behavior of eshus and pombagiras. These companies use resources such as photos posted on Facebook, live broadcasts, video clips production and documentaries, and other resources to compose, from the joint work of these ingredients, what is commonly called media coverage and thus extend the presence

19 | See Almeida (2019).

of these entities in addition to the rituals in the *terreiro*. In addition, the hiring of these companies is also understood as a deserving, a gift given to the entity for the work performed and the progress achieved.

The next moment of the party, after the procession, would be one of the most anticipated, when the host would allow photos with its guests in a carefully prepared space. Beside the stage, a royal set was set up (cf. photo below). It was possible to see a circular platform and, above it, a red carpet with black details. At the ends of the platform, carefully placed lights illuminated the golden and red-upholstered throne. It was possible to see a table with red flowers and a bottle of whiskey inside a metallic ice bucket, right in front of the throne where Mr. Sete would pose with its guests. Four photographers from media companies were positioned in front of the eshu in search of the best images and, beside it, a long line was formed by admirers waiting for a brief moment with royalty.

In the next moment, after the photos in the “scenario”, the party owner would join the other eshus and pombagiras in the hall to dance, talk to admirers and customers and also to take more photos with their friends. The host eshu “pulled the photographer by the arm”, asking him to take more pictures with its guests. He walked to the left, noticed the presence of an



Mr. Sete and his friends (entities) being photographed by media companies

eshu friend and said: “now here”. He turned and crossed the room: “take one here with Veludo”{entity name}. At each stop, there is a photo and a pose, a practice that has become recurrent among the eshus from Porto Alegre. It is common, therefore, that when looking for images of the same entity on the official pages and profiles of media companies on the internet, it is seen in different situations and parties, exposing itself from the same pose. Some eshus kneel down and raise their whiskey glass. Others lower their heads until the hat completely hides their eyes and lightly touch the brim with their fingertips. The poses became marks of showing of these entities and, as we seek to argue, signs of evolution.

Fernando<sup>20</sup>, owner of the company Afro Mídia, reaffirms that this need for eshus showing and their active participation in the media is only possible because the eshus have evolved.

Eshu that doesn't evolve, doesn't rotate anymore. The image enters into this evolution. The eshu came once a month, once a week. And it was all stuck in a corner, I only drank cachaça with ash. Not these days, have a good Red Label, have a beer. And photography comes into this evolution. He [the eshu] wants to record.

Based on an almost choreographed movement, the justification given by the religious for this “will to appear” of the eshus is almost always the same: “the eshus are the ones that come closest to us”, the living. This proximity, which manifests itself in different aspects of their behavior, also extends to the use of media. Pai Geison of Xangô said that the eshus “are from our world, as they are not from the forests like the caboclos, they are not from the Orum like the orixás. The eshus are from the streets and parties, they like our subjects and have gone through the challenges we went through. Being the closest to us, they like the media we like.”<sup>21</sup> Pai Geison, as well as Pai Daniel and others, says that the eshus feel, “in their spirituality”, their prestige and recognition being amplified by the actions of the media. The entities “learned that this is good” and sought to extend their presence virtually as well. Wherever they are seen, eshus want to get admirers and customers, show beauty, power and resourcefulness in their magical practices.

It is important to highlight that, in Rio Grande do Sul, there is a widely shared understanding that different deities (entities or orixás) express different relationships with the media. According to Alberto Flores, founder of the media company Grande Axé, Umbanda entities, mainly the caboclos, do not show interest in record their image and, in some cases, are “skittish”. The orixás, according to the batuque traditions, cannot be filmed or photographed after their arrival at the *terreiro*. Quimbanda, contrarily, is the ritual modality that took the most advantage of the uses of new media, as, Alberto says, “the eshu likes to appear”<sup>23</sup>. Rafael Luz, owner of the Planeta África Company, comments on the images production: “We don't even photograph the saint and the caboclo doesn't react so much to that, nor does it see us at the party. The other entities from Umbanda, Preto Velho, etc., come in together, they don't care. But the eshu, no, the eshu in the Quimbanda already interacts even with a photo, it asks us to take a picture.”<sup>23</sup>

In the case of the eshus quimbandeiros, unlike the orixás and the Umbanda entities, there is an image regime in which the entity's behavior is measured by the act of showing. Such regime manifests itself in the universe of performance, as a way of being constitutively expository. In this case, improving interaction with the media and devising ways to enhance showing are also signs of evolution. And here it is important to remember what Rabelo (2015) says about vision in Candomblé. The author highlights that Afro-Brazilian religions act from dynamics of seeing and hiding, often in processes in which the visible and the invisible are arranged in overlapping layers or distributed in different spaces. Resembling the orixás, the eshu seated from the gaúcha Quimbanda

20 | Interview, March 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

21 | Interview, September 2018, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

22 | Interview, March 2017, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

23 | Interview, August 2017, granted to Leonardo Almeida.

must be hidden in the "eshus' house", accessible only to a few, while, moving away from the African divinities, one of its other parts, the incorporated entity, must be exposed.

The point here is, in line with some theoretical debates that seek to consider the importance of aesthetics<sup>24</sup> for the study of religious materialities (Giumbelli, Rickli and Toniol, 2019; Morgan, 2011; Van de Port, 2016), is the refusal of distinction between form and content. In this sense, we consider that the "media", understood as an emic category, are not extrinsic to the evolution of the eshus. In other words, an image, for example, which can be understood as one of the constituent elements of the "media", is not just an intermediary between the evolved eshu and its showing. Nor is it just a mediator who transforms a message at the time of the meeting and then withdraws, externally evidencing a work done by it. In short, message and media become confused, because at each aesthetic increment, as in the case of an image brightened with the help of editing programs or when a performed pose takes the form of an official photograph, we observe an expression and one of the ways of materializing the strength and the eshus deservings. Evolution is not just a beautiful ballroom eshu dance; it is also the dance being exposed from the improvement of the relationship that the eshus have with the media (let's remember the poses) and that, in this way, are united in an inseparable way in an image. These are important components of distinction between the eshus/pombagiras and the entities worshiped in umbanda and batuque (caboclos, pretos-velhos orixás, etc.), whose presence in the media does not manifest itself from the same systems of relationship and evolution. This would explain, in part, the joint and interdependent growth of Quimbanda and media companies in Rio Grande do Sul, as well as the differentiated uses of media in religious modalities or ritual forms that make up the Afro-gaúcho field.

<sup>24</sup> | Aesthetics is considered here from the Aristotelian understanding of aisthesis, as a critique of the aesthetics notion linked to the idea of "beautiful", and refers to "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it" (Meyer and Verrips, 2008: 21).

## LEAVING OPEN PATHS

In this article, we seek to show the conditions that make the so-called Quimbanda possible in the context of the Afro-religious field in Rio Grande do Sul. In our argument, the entities worshiped by Quimbanda are constituted from shifts in principles that refer to two other more established modalities, umbanda and batuque. Therefore, the idea of the eshus evolution (and pombagiras) is principal, defined either by the marginal elevation or by the differentiated settlement. This allows eshus and pombagiras to be worshiped in specific rituals. Part of the dynamics of these rituals is a certain relationship between concealment and revelation. While the settlements – on which the Quimbanda entities also depend on – remain reserved, the manifestation of the eshus and pombagiras, especially on joyful events, depends on over showing. This mode of showing establishes a continuity between spiritual principles (especially "evolution") and material forms (what in the field of practices is called "media coverage").



Paying attention to the gaúcha Quimbanda is, in our understanding, a way to give visibility to ritual modalities that differ from the more established religious models—in the local context, batuque and umbanda. If we go back to the data resulting from the mapping of *terreiros* referred to at the beginning of this article (Brasil, 2011), we will notice a recurrence: along with terms that correspond to those more established models (umbanda, on the one hand, candomblé/nagô/xangô/ tambor de mina, on the other), there are always others with variable expression and locally specific. In Belém, we have “pena and maraca”, “mina of caboclo” and “pajelança”; in Recife, the “jurema”; in Belo Horizonte, “omolocô”. While the first four categories shows the presence of indigenous components, the last names a modality that, like Quimbanda, is generally described as a hybrid form. Our approach to Quimbanda bets on a perspective that not only refuses to see such modalities as anomalies, but is also not content to describe them as hybrids without due investigation of the processes that constitute them.

The case of Quimbanda shows how there are still ways to problematize the shapes taken by eshu. Since Carneiro (1950), on the Candomblé side, and since Ortiz (1978), on the Umbanda side, numerous works have invested in this. Mixed with movement, this orixá is also the key to understanding – using the expression of Barbosa (2012) – the continuous variations that characterize the multiple religious modalities that incorporate it. By following these multiplicities, we see that hybrid forms are revealing not because they are the synthesis of pure forms, but because they allow us to see how far one can go from what appears as a simple opposition. By privileging Quimbanda, we intend to show the dynamics that expand conceptions associated with umbanda (evolution) and batuque (“feitura” [making]). The path to this was eshu, being that, in its modes and places of action, undermines the linearity and purity of unique courses (Rufino, 2018) and is noted by its movement, flows and crossings, by the refusal of static identities. We believe that this procedure points out clues to understand other transformations that have its protagonist in this orixá.

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