

Voices of Africa in the symbolism of fiction: echoes of ethnic-religious prejudice in *Tent of Miracles*

Vozes da África nos simbolismos da ficção: ecos do preconceito étnico-religioso em *Tenda dos Milagres*

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Abstract *This text appropriates the symbolism of Afro-Brazilian religiosity in the miniseries *Tent of Miracles*, inspired by the work of Jorge Amado, to reflect on ethnic-religious prejudices. The episode fragments, the descriptions of the scenes, and interviews with practitioners contextualize the mythology of Candomblé, constituting spaces for the discussion of racial inequality and the resignification of African cultural practices in Brazilian society, especially in the state of Bahia.*

Key-words: TV Fiction; Candomblé; Ethnic-religious prejudice

Resumo *Este texto se apropria das simbologias da religiosidade afro-brasileira na minissérie *Tenda dos Milagres*, inspirada na obra de Jorge Amado, para refletir sobre os preconceitos étnico-religiosos. Os fragmentos dos capítulos, as descrições das cenas e as entrevistas com praticantes contextualizam a mitologia do candomblé, constituindo espaços de discussão das desigualdades raciais e da ressignificação das práticas culturais africanas na sociedade brasileira, especialmente na Bahia.*

Palavras-chave: Ficção televisiva; Candomblé; Preconceito étnico-religioso

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Introduction

If you are an atheist and had seen miracles as I have
 You know that the gods without God
 Don't stop from gushing forth, nor do they get tired of waiting
 It is the heart that is sovereign and that is Lord
 It doesn't fit in slavery... Ojuobá went there and saw it
 (“*Milagres do Povo*” (Miracles of the People)
 Caetano Veloso, theme song for *Tent of Miracles*)

This article proposes a reflection on the representations of *Candomblé* in the miniseries *Tent of Miracles*², based on the novel by Jorge Amado³, written in 1969, suggesting that television fiction can be understood as a space for enjoyment of expressions, differences, subjectivities, and sociability that permeates Afro-Brazilian beliefs. The main idea is derived from a survey⁴ of the main mystic/religious archetypes of this narrative in order to think about how African cultural practices were reconfigured in Bahia, a region considered by many academics to be the “Brazilian Africa” (NEGRÃO, 2009; PRANDI, 2001). The historicity of the depicted period (the 1930s) is marked by the combat against ethnic and cultural miscegenation and “mediated” by religious activism as a coping mechanism of slave expropriation, social hierarchies, color discrimination, and religious belief.

As Hamburger (2005) reported, we also observed that certain themes have been recurrent in media products regarding various religions, beyond “constructions of national representations, of gender and race relations as well as the redefinition of the contours of public and private

² Thirty chapter miniseries was broadcast on Rede Globo network in 1985, directed by Aguinaldo Silva and Regina Braga. It can be found in a four DVD box set from Globo Marcas.

³ The author was an *Ogã* of Candomblé in Salvador, a ritualistic function established only for socially prestigious males that can supply funds for the *terreiros* (sacred worship yards for the Candomblé religion). The *ogãs* are treated like “fathers” of the religious hierarchy, but don't need to be initiated into the religious creed.

⁴ From the Social Communication Course at UEPB/CNPq and completed in 2012. This text, derived from this investigation, does not discuss the theological traits of the Afro-Brazilian religiosity. A reduced version was presented at the 1st Brazil-Italy International Symposium at UEMA/MA in the *Religious Diversity in a Secular Society* working group, coordinated by Prof. Dr. Reginaldo Prandi (USP).

spaces”(HAMBURGER, 2005, p. 160). In this scenario of multiple variables, TV, specifically the fictional universe, builds intersections between fiction and reality, adding elements of journalistic, historic, or documentary language that alludes to Brazilian society. According to the author, these elements are linked to cultural information to ensure their similarity with the truth, turning the television drama into a legitimate space for interpretation and reinterpretation of a sense of identity and nationality.

In this environment of media convergences, it is pertinent to understand how the references to the symbols of Afro-Brazilian religion occur. However, it is necessary to clarify that in this text, the allusion to the symbolism does not concern the conceptual perspective of semiotics, the science that discusses the iconic or indication expressions regarding a particular sociolinguistic meaning. Nor does it refer to the Lacanian theoretical inspiration, although this school of thought advocates that the symbolic is connected to a chain of meaning regardless of similarities, which could be applied to images of *Candomblé* on television. However, we chose not to follow that direction, so we made reference to the communication mediation of fiction, considered in its “cultural identity” matrices (Hall, 2004) and flows of “symbolic circulation of ethnicity” (HALL, 2011), conditions we choose to consider the possibilities that the Afro-Brazilian idiosyncrasies suggest to the collective imagination. Therefore, our interest lies in how fiction can become a mediator of symbols that allude to probable identities linked to the beliefs of African origin.

Hall’s work (2011) allows us to understand that the socio-cultural symbols remain alive, but the actors give them new meaning, making the identity of a group an unstable and multiform concept that “sews position and context” (Hall, 2011, p. 16) . This articulation perspective seems helpful in thinking about black ethnicity, something that the author believes is worth fighting for, but does not simply result in the liberation from domination of one social sphere over another. Thus, the contribution of Stuart Hall lies in the fact that he emphasizes that ethnicity symbols should be thought of without reductionism, because

every conception of identity has a hybridized nature that needs to be considered, especially diasporic identities.

In dialogue with Hall (2011), we note that racial differences in the *Tent of Miracles* universe are problematized as “fixed facts,” since they originate from biological theories that preached the inferiority of blacks. The naturalization bias of this premise permeates most of the speeches, especially those given by the physician Nile Argolo (Oswaldo Loureiro). For the professor at the Bahia Medical School, the mestizos were “indolent beings, apathetic, impulsive - this inclined toward crime, and sexually perverse.” This conception did not allow a social or paradigm shift, since the sign of blackness was marked by their proximity to nature, a condition that linked them to ideas of laziness and indolence, as if they lacked intellectual or developmental capabilities. “This discursive reference to nature is something that racism against blacks shares with anti-Semitism and sexism (where biology is destiny for people)” (HALL, 2011, p. 17). In this sense, identity differences become visible and materialized in markers that feed prejudice: skin color, hair texture, and others linked to the human phenotype.

Rocha (2015), in his research on the mystical universe of *Candomblé*, analyzes the symbols with the concept of performance as the axis. The Afro-Brazilian variety involves depictions of deities that mobilize the various bodily senses of the practitioners. These are connected to a superhuman dimension dating back to the traditions, revealing the ritualistic character of the belief system in the midst of rhythms, words, and sounds. In *Candomblé*, there is a series of life experiences arising from their ancestry, which transfers narrative symbols to the disciples, who act within their groups in order to preserve them. “The apparent repetition inserts the past in the present and launches the deepening of this network of actors and symbols into the future” (ROCHA, 2015, p. 21). As behaviors that renew and reinvent themselves, since they cross generations, the parties, the images, the robes of saints, the drums, and the *Candomblé* words, create environments for identity reaffirmation and sociability.

Geertz (2000) reiterates this thought, saying that cultural symbols embody identities and performances, because the symbolic and ritualistic are not modifiable or substitutable categories, nor are they mere repetitions, but they express forms of reproducing or maintaining knowledge and traditions, expressing certain metaphors for social life that remain alive in the collective sphere.

Therefore, Cuche (2002) argues that an individual's identity is linked to the notion of belonging; a social system, a class, a religion, a nation, marking the place where sensibilities and rationalities of being originate, speak, and are perceived. The idea of identity emerges, therefore, from the socially shared experiences and the negotiations of the senses. In one scene, a *mãe de santo* (*Candomblé* priestess) echoes the words of the Manifesto of Bahian *Ialorixás* (Female *Candomblé* Priestesses), written in 1985, the year the miniseries aired, in support of the construction of an Afro-Brazilian identity: "That our grandchildren can be proud of belonging to the religion of their ancestors; that being black will bring them back to Africa, not slavery."

These arguments lead us to ask: how do *Candomblé* symbols reproduce African identities and how are they represented in the audiovisual scenario? What media references are adopted to narrate the stories/trajectories of this holy people in the midst of the struggles for identity legitimacy and ethnic-social affirmation?

From an etymological perspective, the term *Candomblé* results from joining the words *quimbundo candombe* (dance with drums) with *iorubá ilê* or *ilê* (house), meaning "house of dancing with drums". It is a religion derived from African animism that worships the *Orixás*, considered the deities of nature, using dancing, singing, offerings and sacrifices. In recent surveys, approximately 3 million Brazilians (1.5% of total population) declared themselves practitioners. Today, there are 2,230 *terreiros* registered with the Bahia Federation of Afro-Brazilian Cults and cataloged by the Center for Afro-Oriental Studies at UFBA (Federal University of Bahia) in the Mapping of *Candomblé Terreiros* in Salvador⁵.

⁵ More information on the website www.ufba.edu.br

However, Negrão (2009) postulates that these figures “do not tell all the facts,” inviting us to realize the silences and subjectivities that hide how much historical repression the Afro-Brazilian manifestations still suffer. “Who can ‘come out of the closet’ and admit to being a *Candomblé* practitioner, while so many others hide their beliefs under a superficial Catholic cover?” (NEGRÃO, 2009, p. 21). The author emphasizes that the preservation of African values is connected to the struggle for ethnic affirmation, both dependent on the expansion of the Afro-Brazilian faith, not only in Bahia, but nationwide. This process of Africanizing the practices is present in the interpretation of the miniseries when showing the commitment of Priestess Majé Bassan (Chica Xavier) to cultivate rituals and transmit them to her disciples, valuing the oral culture of the African tradition. Although it is a trance religion, with initiation, and without proselytism, *Candomblé* requires the surrender of the faithful: the mission that the protagonist Pedro Archanjo (Nelson Xavier) receives from Xangô illustrates the membership commitment. His identity construction begins to take shape through the struggle for the cultural values of his people. The name Archanjo means “Archangel” or, “angel of a higher order” and under this “divine” inspiration, it articulates the sensory and resilient qualities of a mestizo courageously facing his lack of knowledge in the search for theoretical basis to address the racist theories of the time.

In Amado’s book, injustice, racial differences, and symbols of faith are discussed in *Tent of Miracles*, a sort of “School of the People” which brought together blacks and subordinates, in a satire of the medical school, a “environment of confrontation” that gathered the white intellectuals of Bahia. Therefore, the title of the miniseries refers to this mystical and peculiar place, which is typography of the woodwork artisan Lidio Corro (Milton Gonçalves), still functioning as a residence and meeting place for the Bahian bohemians. It gathers objects that symbolize the miracles of saints, commissioned by Catholics who benefited from the graces they received, and images of *orixás* and stores the rotating printing machinery of Pedro Archanjo’s first pamphlets. The

syncretism of a sacred and profane place, metaphorically “miraculous and ancestral,” the stage of black stories, laughter, pain, confrontation, and achievement, forges the protagonist’s stubbornness.

We note that the *Candomblé* culture is associated with negative ideas of quackery, mysticism, and criminality, especially if its practitioners are black and belong to an economically disadvantaged social stratum, conditions mentioned by the interlocutors of this study, and that also emerge in the scenes from the miniseries. Thus, the cultural appropriation (ANDRADE, 2003) of fiction becomes visible, and is not only inserted into the structural plan of its narrative, but to a greater extent in the extra-textual plan, where indicators such as religion, class, gender, and access to historicity act as mediating categories of the representation process.

Discussing this possibility, the approach is structured into the following topics: brief remarks about the African continent in media products, episode fragments, and finally, a summary of the views of those interviewed about *Candomblé*.

Africa in the media culture: “globalized” representations and stigmas

The Brazilian territory was place of exile or escape for those who carried the stigma of “tainted races” (VILHENA, 2008). According to Goffman (1988), stigma is the situation of the individual who is incapable of full social acceptance. It is a deeply derogatory term, which denies the possibility of interaction and relationships. Prejudices, on the other hand, are derived from the stigmas that intersect with different social spheres, in contrast to qualities that show character, such as loyalty, commitment, and honesty, proposals that reaffirm extemporal values and ethical rules, generating social exclusion, violence, and discrimination, “that give rise to feelings of fear, shame, humiliation, impurity, and contamination among the excluded” (GOFFMAN, 1988, p. 14).

However, despite the torture and persecution, Colonial Brazil was also cultural harbor, as it retained the historical and spiritual heritage

of different peoples over time. If Catholic orthodoxy was established here, popular beliefs like the African religions also came, whose ancestry was lost over the centuries. To Vilhena (2008), thousands of slaves in slave ships, brought from different ethnic groups and African nations and dispossessed of material goods, arrived guarding in their minds and hearts their rich traditions, belief systems and dialects, pantheons of gods, heroes, and deities, whose symbolism preserves their memories and their identities. In this historical temporality, indigenous, European and African peoples mix, dispersing in the coastal regions, small villages, plantations, “adding, juxtaposing, crossing, and giving birth to the first Brazilian-Indians, Afro-Brazilian, Creoles, and mestizos among us in the flesh and in spirit “(VILHENA, 2008, p. 32).

The author believes that, over the first four centuries, between Colony, United Kingdom, and Empire, plenty of culture was lost by the imposition of a king, a law, a God or a language. This process of intolerance was executed with the competing powers of the whip, the sword, money, and the punishment of the ruling elites. However, many religious practices that were denied and fought in public spaces, survived in the private sector, maintained orally, through family contacts and the daily life of each individual, along with prejudices, and battles over class, color, ethnic origin, customs, entanglements and cultural hybrids. From this perspective, to talk about African-based religion is to make reference to cultural diversity, appropriation, mixtures, and crossings between people, deities, sociability, concepts, and thoughts.

Moreira (2011) notes that religion and culture are structured in a dynamic that involves, on the one hand, memory and conservation, and on the other hand, novelty and recreation. In this regard, the African religions do not remain the same, because they have adapted and resisted external pressures. According to the author, the mediatization of culture created religious mediatization by extension. The large media conglomerates such as movies, soap operas, news, entertainment and leisure programs are responsible for the diffusion/recreation of values, behaviors, and religious ideas, because they are symbolic forms that

reflect the experiences and worldviews for people regarding faith and its consequences. Religious culture comes or happens more and more 'in' and 'through' the media. Thus, "the cultural manifestations are only recognized by society as such, after being shown or incorporated by media vehicles" (MOREIRA, 2011, p. 22). According to this reasoning, stories, narratives, and characters become multifaceted cultural goods with a social reach. Thus, the media becomes production, dissemination, content, and cultural event. Consequently, their goods are commodified in society and the institutions that produce them act in a market of significant power and symbolic consumption.

The media culture generates rhetoric and symbolism derived from other significant repertoires, spreading their own speeches, spatiality, and ideas of identity and belonging into the social imagination. Regarding religion, we note that *Candomblé* as a ritual is composed of peripheral groups, whose subjective practices of faith get confused between the realms of magical and mystical, composing a resistance religion that did not deconstruct with the diaspora, even though the majority of those who admit that they belong to it live in social invisibility and carry in their soul the traces and pains of exclusion to this day. This perspective is reflected in media products, that with rare exceptions, usually show an Africa that is oppressed, subordinate, and marginalized through supporting representations in television drama, often associated with slavery.

In Chapter 5 of the miniseries, we realize this reality when Rosa de Oxalá⁶ (Dhu Moraes) consults with his priestess Majé Bassã (Chica Xavier) through the shells:

Majé Bassã: I see a man who is with you... It's weird Rosa, because the shadow has no face, no head... Rosa de Oxalá: It is my grandfather! He was a slave at the farm of Pedro Unhão, and he believed that when Negroes die their soul returns to Africa. That's true, isn't it mother? [And Majé Bassã, sadly, confirms]. He believed that... One day they put him in Pelourinho as a punishment. The punishment was so great, my grandfather

⁶ Deity associated with the creation of the world and of the human species. In Bahia, he is called Senhor do Bonfim, due to syncretism with the Catholic Church. In other states he is related to God.

decided to go back to Africa... He killed himself! His body went back to Africa, mother, but his head remained a slave in Bahia (...) Every day this shadow appears to tell me that freedom isn't possible (...).

Through this outburst, we see the discussion of the miniseries: the prejudice that plagues blacks, the lack of expectations and faith in the future transmitted to their offspring, as if they were allowed to have the dignity of human and social rights. Albuquerque (2012) points out that the arrival of blacks in Brazil, resulting from the diaspora, not only brought the cheap labor that powered the economy of the society, but also the indignation from the atrocities of slavery.

In the scene, we have our first contact with the game of *búzios* (sea shells), the most revered art of divination of the African traditions. There is a round table covered with a white towel, an armoire and a clay pot for water. A yellow candle is lit (in homage to Oxum⁷, who guides the readings), next to a rattle and a shallow stray sieve, where the priestess launches the shells. Both characters use white clothing, scarves, and earrings. The room is masonry, and one of the walls is made of bamboo. The trust relationship with the priestess that is shown reminds us of a sentiment of reverence that is well explained by Negrão (2009): “*Candomblé* is a religion of brotherhood, of affections, which values individuals, strengthens their identities, integrating them into a mystical family, which gives them warmth, love and filial protection” (NEGRÃO, 2009, p. 268).

In episode 12, Majé Bassã reveals the mission of Pedro Archanjo:

Majé Bassã: Son, you were graced with a divine gift! Of the people here, you are one of the few who can do something for your race (...) Xangô is speaking. He is ordering you to “see all, know all, write all.” You were chosen to the Ojuobá, the “eyes of Xangô!” You will be the light for your people, our eyes to see, our mouth to speak. You will be out courage and understanding! You will speak for our tomorrow! Pedro Archanjo: It is a great honor Majé Bassã. But... What if I fail? Majé Bassã: You know all

⁷ Female deity of fresh river water, symbolizing love, beauty, wealth, and vanity. In Bahia, she is associated with Nossa Senhora das Candeias (Our Lady of the Lamps).

too well that Xangô was once our king. Are you questioning the wisdom of a king, Pedro Archanjo? So, you think you are greater than he? Go home master Archanjo, Ojuobá of Xangô, and you may begin to fulfill your obligation, because it is time. We hear the music “Milagres do Povo” (Miracles of the People) by Caetano Veloso, whose fragment is quoted in the epigraph of this article.

In the African traditions, Xangô is the most revered deity. In Brazil he is the patron of *Candomblé* and a representative of social justice. According to Albuquerque (2012), his strength comes from fire. In this sense, Pedro Archanjo combines the inherent qualifications of his protector: the “digestive fire”, because he admires the culinary pleasures; the “sexual fire”, due to his notoriety as an insatiable seducer; and the “fire of justice.” In several cultures, especially in religious ones, justice is obtained by “fire”, as seen in the idea of the final judgment and the apocalypse.

The *terreiro*, on the other hand, is connected to the representation of African culture, creating a space of permanence and resistance for Afro-descendants. Here the African origins are affirmed by the rituals, the customs, the cuisine, and the musicality of the drums. Vinagre Silva (2007) emphasizes that *terreiros* are a niche for sociability and an escape from prejudice. Its cultural geography expresses a sociopolitical occupation, since the *Ilês* are religious buildings, but also spaces of ethnicity, housing, welcoming, and for the provision of community assistance services. For the author, the kindred relations - by blood and religion - articulated with gender, interethnic, and class relationships, model and regulate not only religious relationships, but also personal, economic, socio-cultural, and ethical-political relationships. This way, “the African practices are given new daily significance in these spaces, forming bonds between the present and the past, between the real contemporary world and the mythical world, bonds between the religious territory and social life” (VINAGRE SILVA, 2007, p. 5).

In episode 23, a group of *Candomblé* disciples are arrested by Officer Pedrito Gordo (Cláudio Mamberti), who tries to justify his act to the

press: “I am just a vigilante! It is the masters of Bahia who affirm the elevated danger of the Negroes. I just try to cut the evil by the root, keeping it from spreading!” The scene reflects the level of discrimination and police repression the religions of African origin have faced, based on a law that lasted until the 1970s, when the physical violence was curbed, the result of a victorious battle by the practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions for constitutional inclusion (ISAIA; MANOEL, 2012).

In chapter 26, Majé Bassã, asks the officer for permission to celebrate her 75th birthday with a party at the *terreiro*. But he answers: “It is of the interest of the Government, the Police, the families, that these barbarian, deceptive, and fetishist practices cease once and for all... In summary, this quackery you call a religion: *Candomblé*.”

Majé Bassã expresses sadness, but insists:

Are you a Christian, sir? Pedrito Gordo: [Raising his voice in disdain]. I’m a Catholic, Roman Apostolic, my lady! Majé Bassã: Jesus Christ came to earth to save you, sir, nineteen centuries ago, right? At that same time, Xangô came down to Africa to save me! Pedrito Gordo: What do I mean by that madam? Majé Bassã: That it is just one faith, sir. It can have various forms, but it’s just one. So why can your Jesus come down, but my Xangô can’t? [He laughs heartily]. Oh my God! The woman has gone crazy! Comparing the Catholic faith to witchcraft! Stop once and for all with this type of comparison! Your request is denied! If you insist on this you will go to jail!

Only in 1985, during the exhibition of the miniseries, the most important *Ialorixás* of Salvador, Mãe Stella do Axé Opô Afonjá, Mãe Menininha do Gantois, and Mãe Olga do Alaqueto reported in the national press, with effective support from the Bahia Negro Movement and the human rights groups, a document that stated that *Candomblé* was not a savage and primitive religion. This pronouncement in favor of the valuing of blacks and their beliefs, which also occurred at an international level, was reflected in Salvador, which led to several official measures seeking to preserve African culture in all of Brazil (NEGRÃO, 2009).

Prandi (2001) says that the worship of *orixás* was mixed with Catholic traditions to forge a syncretism that remains active, preserving the black origins and identities, beginning an Africanization process in Brazil. However, *Candomblé* is still considered a religion of blacks, due to the preservation of myths that configure its ontology. But, using the rationale of Africanization, the appearance of the priest in metropolitan society “can be seen as someone who is capable of overcoming an identity as someone who is from Bahia, poor, black, ignorant, and discriminated against” (PRANDI, 2001, p. 106).

Ortiz (2006) notes this “whitening” process of the religion. In order to reach acceptance and social mobility in the Brazilian context, blacks incorporated many white customs, which forged a syncretism of the practices and even a double religious membership, since several of the *Candomblé* participants also attend the Catholic church, as if it represented a tool for social inclusion. Also, the author remembers that, unlike Catholicism, the followers of *Candomblé* suffer from social intolerance and the demonization of their rituals.

Highlighting the power of fiction on the debate of these issues, Lopes (2004) mentions that this genre acquires strategic value with the creation and consolidation of new shared cultural identities, that makes up a popular national narrative. Thus, it becomes a privileged space of TV where a represented, and not only imagined, nation is announced. “Stories narrated by television are, first of all, important for their cultural significance, offering precious material to understand the culture and the society it expresses” (LOPES, 2004, p. 125).

The work of Jorge Amado was inspired by real people. Pedro Archanjo is the combination of two political activists: the Bahian writer Manuel Querino (abolitionist) and Obá Miguel Santana (*Candomblé* Priest), important defenders of religious liberty in Bahia. The physician and anthropologist Nina Rodrigues was the inspiration for Nilo Argolo (Oswaldo Loureiro). In the narrative, the non-fictional character is diluted among the imaginary creations, allowing the context to be reproduced.

Regarding fictional fruition, Martín-Barbero (2004) argues that it is through it that we understand the specific traditions of a people and the mestizo cultures in the countries that are portrayed. That is why television today is “the most sophisticated device for modeling and forming popular tastes, through one of the most expressive mediations of the original narratives in the world of pop-culture” (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2004, p. 24). Thus, it plays a strategic role in the daily culture of the majorities, the transformation of their sensibilities, and the construction of their identities.

The resonance of fiction

The analysis of the miniseries pointed out the need to observe the *Candomblé* universe. Thus, we took the *terreiros*⁸ of Campina Grande in Paraíba as our locus. Senhor do Bonfim is the oldest in town; in the others, Catholicism and expressions of *Umbanda* emerge, through the figures such as the *pretos-velhos* and *caboclo*, which can explain both the double membership and the mixture of religious practices that exist in the country.

Those interviewed⁹ had not finished Elementary School, with the exception of the Priestess, who had finished High School. However, according to Isaia and Manoel (2012) the participants of *Candomblé*, divided between practitioners and service inquirers, are formed by a majority of individuals with little education, perhaps contributing to the social prejudice. The interviewees (identified here by first name) declared that *Candomblé* is still considered “of the devil.” According to them, discrimination continues to exist because “most of society doesn’t know the religion” and consider it “a practice that doesn’t belong to

⁸ During the data collection stage, in July and August of 2012, the *terreiros* *Senhor do Bonfim*, *Terreiro José Pinheiro*, *Terreiro Filhos de Oxum* and *Terreiro Iansã*, were visited, where 30 practitioners were interviewed. Their words are summarized here, due to the broad scope of the research.

⁹ We use the term “followers” regarding those who admit their religious affiliation, but do not currently participate in the worship or have stepped away from these experiences; the expression “practitioners” is used regarding those individuals who are active both in the rituals as well as in relation to their declared faith in the religious information census.

God.” There is also ethnic and social prejudice: “*Candomblé* is seen as a religion of blacks and the poor.”

Joabi, 22 years old, upholstery professional, said that the miniseries shows the viewers that it is not an “evil practice.” When asked about the representations in the media, they said that the programs or soap operas that address them “don’t help clarify the myths.” The young man said he entered out of curiosity: “I suffered from spiritual disturbances.” Previously he was Protestant. He converted four years ago and is happy with his choice.

Alessandro, 35 years old, a painter, mentioned that *Candomblé* is a choice: “I entered fifteen years ago because I wanted to learn about the religion, and I liked it.” Before, I was Catholic. Kátia, 36 years old, a General Services Aid, has attended since she was five years old. The *terreiro* was next to my home.” She “attended the Catholic church and spiritism at the same time.”

João, 43 years old, hairdresser, joined for health reasons: “That was 34 years ago. I felt chills, dizziness, fainting, buzzing in my ears.” Of the practitioners, he is the only one who provides services in his home with *búzios* and casts “spells to help people.” Previously he was Catholic. Cleiton, 18 years old, butcher, has visions of spirits. But his friends from other religions said he “will go to hell and should quit this lifestyle.”

Regarding religious prejudice, everyone said it was “very sad.” “Most people hear comments that it is not a religion of God.” João said that his faith is considered “*macumba*” (voodoo) and that he hears insults and prejudices such as: “All ‘faggots’ are *macumbeiros*.” Joabi said: “They have told me that *Candomblé* is not from God.” Alessandro adds: “I have lost a lot of people because of my religion. Unfortunately, they are ignorant.” Kátia says that on the streets she is called a “*macumbeira*,” but that she believes this discrimination is due to “people’s ignorance.”

Joabi says that the media portrays his religion “in a discriminatory manner.” In his opinion, the television programs address *Candomblé* as “a place of *cachaça* and mayhem.” “Only *Tent of Miracles* showed respect for our religion, which came from Africa.” For Alessandro, the

media doesn't show the reality of the *terreiros*: "It would be nice if they reported the truth." João says. Kátia noted that the soap operas make have a reference, but the evangelical programs on TV are against the manifestations. "In fiction there is no opposition, but there is also no information. They show it with a comedic tone, there is always a funny and effeminate priest. But the evangelicals are critical, they are aggressive." Clayton reiterated: "there is a lot of discrimination. The media acts like we have no feelings. But *Tent of Miracles* showed the music, the clothing of the saints, the *terreiros*".

Among the leaders Tatalorixá¹⁰ Vicente Mariano, of the Terreiro Senhor do Bonfim, and Ialorixá¹¹ Ivonete Silva, from Terreiro do José Pimheiro. Priest Vicente said he has belonged to Candomblé for 68 years. "I entered due to disease. Every afternoon my forehead would swell and bleed, and nobody could cure it. Then I met Mr. João Honório, who sold charcoal and knew about the Candomblé people, and he said: 'Vicente, this isn't a medical issue, it's a spiritual issue.' So he took me to the *terreiro* and I stayed until this day..." When asked about prejudice we emphatically answered: "From the protestant believers, who are more concerned with other people's religion. Once there were some who came here disguised as students, saying they were doing research for the University, and began to insult us." Since he had not seen the miniserries, we showed it to him, and he was touched with Pedro Archanjo and Xangô: "I found it to be very beautiful and very true! The priestess seems like a real one." he said smiling.

Ivonete Silva entered thirty two years ago. "I was sick, in the ICU, and a friend came to visit me. Through him I discovered there was a priest who lived in Bahia. That is how I began the spiritual treatment. I was cured. I entered through pain, right?" Regarding social discrimination, she said unfortunately, it "happens daily." "There are people who see me on the street in my religious garb and act like they are seeing an alien. I

10 Highest level in the *Candomblé* hierarchy, reached after 25 years of initiation.

11 Synonym of "mãe de santo", which indicates the priestly role. Responsible for transmitting the teaching to continue the religion.

think all the practitioners suffer from this. I have even had people throw rocks at us during worship. They call us the Devil's spawn and other atrocities. All due to ignorance. This reduced, but it exists. Those who know our religion know that it is beautiful and that we seek to do good. But *Tent of Miracles* showed the persecution of the *terreiros*, so it showed the truth."

She believes that the media should deal with this topic more frequently: "I hardly ever see this on television, in movies, or on the news. When some soap opera or movie shows it, it is someone who claims to be a priest or priestess, but just deceives people. Priestesses that read palms and lie, as if we were gypsies. But when I saw the miniseries I was happy to see such a beautiful story, a romance that connects faith and love to the battle of the negroes."

Concluding Remarks

Expressing links with the literary work that inspired it, *Tent of Miracles* develops a historical and social problematization as it discusses the practice of *Candomblé* amid the difficulties of human relationships, such as the ethnic and religious prejudice. From this perspective, it portrays African culture in Brazil, forging a historical reflection regarding the social discrimination that permeates this religious practice.

Regarding the empirical step, we found a sense of dissatisfaction among practitioners regarding the superficial and/or distorted information that the media disseminates about Afro-Brazilian religiosity. In the opinion of the majority, soap operas and miniseries deal very little with this topic, and when they do, they adopt a tone of comedy or satire, highlighting any charlatanism. In comedy programs, the characters are linked to parodies of homosexuals, and made into a caricature (many remembered the Painho character, played by Chico Anísio) Therefore, in the opinion of the authors, there still lacks an approach to *Candomblé* that promotes positive visibility that values the precepts and rituals of their practices, as occurred in *Tent of Miracles*.

We think that when the television fiction discusses this theme, it allows there to be a type of reflection about the formation of the Brazilian people, and therefore promotes a necessary debate about ethnic issues that permeate the construction of our identity. Therefore, the messages of *Tent of Miracles* continue to be proactive, forging the resonance for the archetypes of a multifaceted religiosity.

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Date of submission: 22/07/2015

Date of acceptance: 21/10/2015