Transnational Migrants and Transnational Spirits: An African Religion in Lisbon

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Portugal, for long a country of emigration, has in recent decades become one of immigration. One of the largest groups of newcomers is constituted by Africans from the former Portuguese colonies. This paper focuses on how religion and ritual traditions from their home country are manipulated by people from Guinea-Bissau in order to recreate their identity in the urban world of Lisbon. Based on fieldwork conducted among the Pepel of Guinea-Bissau from 1997 to the present and on ongoing research on a Pepel religious healer in Lisbon, this paper specifically dwells on the issue of transnational spirits. It explores how such entities are constructed, and the rituals around them. This entails a complex and ceaseless relation between the world of the living and the world of the dead, as well as a constant flow of goods and symbols between the physical original grounds, in Guinea-Bissau, and Lisbon: people, money, goods, practices and ideas, as well as spirits, circulate and create bridges between Europe and Africa.

Keywords: Migration; Transnationalism; Spirits; Religion; Africa; Portugal

Introduction

Focusing on the African diaspora from Guinea-Bissau in Lisbon, this paper aims to demonstrate how transnational approaches to migration, in such areas as religious practices, may prove to be a means to a better understanding of some of the adaptation processes that migration entails. To this end, I will argue that religious performances, like funerals, are both an anthropological and economic subject, since they entail remittances and a constant flow of goods from one country to the other.
and back again: people, money, goods, practices and ideas circulate and create bridges between Europe and the African continent.

The paper is based on fieldwork conducted among the Pepel of Guinea-Bissau from 1997 to the present and on ongoing research on a case study of a Pepel religious healer in Lisbon. I focus specifically on the issue of transnational spirits, and on the process of construction and existence of such entities. I will argue (as many authors before, see Ariès 1989; Baudry 1999; Bloch and Parry 1982; Déchaux 2001; de Coppet 1992; Hertz 1960; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Pina-Cabral 1984; Saraiva 2004a, 2004b; Thomas 1985) that the concept of a ‘good death’ and the maintenance of a good relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead are the essential conditions for ancestors to become benevolent spirits that watch over the survivors.

When Guineans migrate to Portugal, so too do their religious performances, performers, and the spirits that operate to help people in their life crises; but the links with the original setting remain and are a means of empowerment for all those who intervene—clients, religious healers and spirits. They all become transnational characters in a complex set of relations originally established between the living and the dead in Africa. Transposed to the diaspora universe, such relations incorporate transnational circumstances in which African practices become mixed with European ones, or ‘translated’, in order to accommodate to a different context, and give rise to a continuous flow of people, spirits and goods that move back and forth between Guinea-Bissau and Portugal.

After some historical background on Guinean migration to Lisbon, I will explain what Pepel funerary rituals entail and how their completion is essential for the creation of the ancestors’ spirits that will watch over the survivors and help them in their life-crisis situations. If this is true in Africa, how does it work when the connection between these two worlds, the real and the supernatural one, becomes more complex through the process of migration and two other ‘real worlds’, the original setting in Guinea-Bissau and the host-country one, come into play? This raises the issue of the ‘double engagement’ in the formulation of the identities of both people and spiritual beings, displaced due to the diaspora movements and the creation of transnational networks based on religious and healing practices which are transposed from their original setting in Guinea-Bissau to Lisbon. Relating and articulating with Kristine Krause’s proposal (see the previous paper in this special issue) of the term ‘transnational therapeutic networks’, and following Capone’s idea of ‘transnational religions’ (Capone 2004), I would like to suggest the use of the term ‘transnational religious networks’, as an expression that portray the importance of the ties with the home grounds insofar as the re-creation of a Guinean identity in Lisbon is concerned.

Thus I argue, as Bordonaro and Pussetti have done (2006: 147), that the study of migration cannot be limited to the circulation of goods and people, but has to take into account the circulation of symbolic universes, including religion and the ritual practices that heal the states of affliction and commemorate the festive occasions.
People from Guinea-Bissau in Lisbon

After being for many centuries a nation of emigration, Portugal became, in the late 1970s and during the 1980s, a destination for immigrants. This changed the face of the country, which became the locus of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society on an unprecedented scale. This was due to several circumstances. For the African populations, amongst the most important was the 1974 Portuguese revolution, which triggered the independence of the former Portuguese overseas colonies (at the time, all of the remaining Portuguese possessions were in Africa, except for Macau and Timor). The phenomenon of African immigration to Portugal forms part of the wider movements of Sub-Saharan Africans towards the richer, European countries in the northern hemisphere, which have increased significantly in the last decades, justifying discussion about the social implications of the ‘new African diasporas’ (Koser 2003) in the old continent.

Much of the seminal work edited by Khalid Koser on the subject mentions the exuberance around the revitalisation of the diaspora concept, and the fact that diasporas are nowadays conceived as a ‘new social form characterized by special social relationships, political orientations and economic strategies’, but also as a phenomenon that demands an increased awareness of its multi-locality and its condition as a ‘novel mode of cultural production that interacts with globalization’ (Koser 2003: 9). It is indeed important to be aware of the multiple aspects of these recent forms of social and economic production; notably some apparently hidden aspects like the practical effects of religion and therapeutical practices (Capone 2004), as well as some other performances that fall into the realm of the symbolic and are the basis for religious constructs, namely the conceptualisation of the relations between the world of the dead and of the living (with visible implications for funerals and rituals of mourning). In Portugal, although some research has been done on the recent situation of the country as a host-nation for African-origin populations (Barreto 1995; Bastos 2000; Bastos and Bastos 1999; Garcia 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Gusmão 2004; Machado 2002; Pires 2003; Quintino 2004; Saint-Maurice 1997; Vala 1999), much remains to be done, especially as the numbers of immigrants continue to increase.

The largest concentration of Africans is in the Greater Lisbon area (including the Tagus valley and the southern district of Setúbal) and in the southern part of the country, in the Algarve. Guineans started coming to Portugal after 1974, subsequent to gaining independence, and especially from 1984 onwards, when Guinea-Bissau, following the end of Luís Cabral’s regime, opened up to the outside world and adopted a more Western economic and democratic model (Machado 2002; Quintino 2004). However, in spite of several development plans and international aid the country has never emerged from a situation of severe poverty. Many Guineans migrated to Senegal and France, while Portugal rapidly became a preferential destination, mainly due to existing ties with families or friends already in the country, as well as some knowledge of the language.
In 1996, the number of people from Guinea-Bissau in Portugal, taking into account both official and illegal immigrants, was estimated at around 23,000 (Machado 2002: 86). The 1998 political crisis and armed conflict, and the subsequent worsening of social and economic conditions, increased the number of people seeking refuge. In 2005, the official data listed 25,148 Guineans, but the real figure must be much higher, since many remain undocumented and without any legal status. Portugal appears as a symbolic paradise, where one can work and send remittances back home to the families; however, many struggle, investing considerable sums, to get the much-desired visa. As a consequence, almost all families in Guinea have one or more relatives residing in Portugal, and the constant flow of people and goods back and forth is an important reality, visible in the movement of people at Lisbon airport on days of flights to and from Bissau. The airport becomes a place where people gather to meet relatives or friends and to receive goods *di tiera* (from home), or to send things back, saying goodbye to those who leave, taking other ‘modern’ products with them.

Given the importance of the goods and materials from home, certain areas of Lisbon have been appropriated by Africans, and specifically by Guineans, as the locale for commercial exchanges. In the old, downtown part of Lisbon, a commercial centre (Mouraria) is known for its shops where one can find anything, from Indian to African food and artefacts. The same happens in a weekly street market (Feira do Relógio) and certain areas around train stations that serve the periphery of Lisbon where Guineans reside. Almost everything from Guinea-Bissau can be bought in such places—traditional cloths, artefacts, all sorts of food and medicinal products, even fresh fish and other sea products. But one of the most important sets of goods being traded has to do with the religious sphere and is constituted by all the objects, artefacts, herbs and portions of dirt from the original *tabanka* (village) necessary for these practices. Such is the case, for example, with the *mezinho*, the goat’s horns used for the lucky charms that the *djambakọs* prescribes and manufactures for the patients. The downtown area of Lisbon, around the Rossio and Praça da Figueira, is also the place where everyone meets, where news circulates, and where the contractors and sub-contractors engage workers. The degree of interaction is so high that even Guineans themselves talk about this area as an extension of *tchon Pepel*, the centre of Bissau, historically the territory of the Pepel group and therefore denominated ‘Pepel grounds’ (*tchon Pepel*), a name it retains.2

Guineans in the Greater Lisbon area recreate their identity through re-elaboration of the references and codes from home and by relating them to those from the host country. They create new networks and forms of interaction, institutions, symbols and cultural practices which allow for a recreation of the past and a construction of the present. They are engaged in a permanent negotiating process, within their own community and within the encompassing Portuguese society (Quintino 2004: 26), all of which is aimed at achieving a minimal well-being in the diaspora situation.

As with any group removed from its original setting, the Guinean community in Lisbon may be regarded as an invented community, thought of as an ensemble of
cultural symbols permanently reorganised and re-elaborated. Such symbols promote social cohesion, legitimate institutions, status and power relations, and act as factors of socialisation, providing the individuals with value systems, beliefs and behaviour patterns (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Quintino 2004). Quintino (2004: 35) adopts the concept of ‘trans-identity’ as an identity forged in a permanent relation between the migrants and the host society, as well as with the original community and the desire to ‘go back home one day’, which is frequently uncertain or never becomes a reality, and often detonates a constant back and forth movement between the original and the host countries. The desire to go back one day counteracts the idea of paradise and is symptomatic of the dépairement and feelings of non-integration that Guineans have.

Cutting across not only the different social and economic groups present in the diaspora, but also ethnic allegiance, is the tcho̓n (original grounds), which Quintino (2004: 263) describes as an important territorial and ethnic reference; its symbolic construction is based on language and a common past, rooted in the social organisation of the tabanka, and the duties one has towards the lineage and members of the moransa (extended family living together in a compound). An ‘ethnicity package’ is thus constructed, comprising several elements that are manipulated in the highly symbolic process of relating to their origins. There is a strong associational movement of Guineans in Portugal, with over 15 legalised non-profit organisations. Many play an important role in the organisation of the rites of passage and annual festivities, constituted by overlapping of Catholic practices with animist or Muslim ones, which are also moments of reunion and intense intra-ethnic sociability (Quintino 2004: 290–7). One of the most vital functions of these associations is economic support to enable people to go back home for certain ceremonies, such as the funerary rituals.

If these elements (territory, language, skin colour, dress codes, food, music, dance) are manipulated in order to construct one’s identity in relation to other Guineans and to the Portuguese, as a rule, the national origin overcomes ethnic divisions (Bordonaro and Pussetti 2006: 133), and reproduces the ethnic mélange and mobility that is a reality in the home country. Territory refers to the common origin in Guinean soil, expressed in Creole as parido na Guine (born in Guinea) or bibi iagu di Pidjiguiti (someone who drunk water from the Bissau harbour). In this reference, Bissau is a central symbol, since it is the place that congregates all the different ethnic, religious and age groups. Everyone who comes to Portugal has, at some point or other, spent some time in the capital, the ultimate departure or arrival point. Nevertheless, one of the outstanding elements which aligns Guineans according to their origins is religion and the related healing and therapeutic practices.

Guinea-Bissau is a small but diversified country, with a population of approximately 1.2 million and some 23 different ethnic groups (Einarsdottir 2000). This great variety may be organised according to religious affiliation: the Islamised groups in the interior and the so-called ‘animist’ groups mainly around the coastal area. However, religious affiliation does not entirely follow group allegiance (Jao 1995) and
many combine traditional African religions with Christianity (both Catholic and Protestant), specially within the animist groups.

As a whole, the duality between the Islamised groups and the coastal animists holds true also in the diaspora. The case study presented in this paper, centred on the Pepel group, actually portrays the religious world of the animist groups, which include Pepel, Manjako, Bidjagos and Mancanha, and thus illustrates how religion and therapeutic practices may help to overcome distress and suffering when away from home.

Becoming a Protective Spirit

If, when in Guinea, the desire is to come to Portugal, once in Portugal the objective of many is to save enough money to go back one day, if possible in a situation that guarantees a better economic and social status. Since this may take long to achieve, certain strategies of relating to the origins, minimising the nostalgia of being away and assuring the relationship with the home grounds, are put into practice, some of them falling into the realm of the symbolic.

As elsewhere in Africa, for the Pepel religion is the pillar of the collection of norms that rule the society: there is an infinity of small spirits which are called, in Creole, irás, and which are scattered all over, in the houses, trees or land, and may acquire the most varied forms. The practical and everyday side of religion is the vehicle for the permanent and constant relation that the living maintain with the world of the dead. The ancestors’ altars, named in Creole testos and firkidjas di alma, are placed both in the interior and exterior of the household, and, together with the different types of sanctuar, balobas, kansare’s, are the primordial loci where the relation with the supernatural is established and where the religious specialists, baloberos and djambakoses, operate. Besides rituals performed for specific purposes, or on special occasions, the relationship with the ancestors is present in everyday life and gestures: before starting a meal, rice and drinks are poured for the ancestors (an operation called in Creole darma, a derivation of the Portuguese derramar, to pour). In the same sense, no ceremony or rite is initiated without a previous consultation of their will. The most common form of oracle to consult the schemes of the ancestors or of the irás is the inspection of the gonads of the rooster, which is performed after the sacrifice of the bird: if the colour is white it means that ‘the path is free’, that what has been done so far was done correctly and that what is planned to follow is also right.

Religious beliefs and practices are intimately related to the realm of death and the other world; hence funerals are amongst the most important ceremonies of Pepel cultural and social life. The Pepel believe that the world of the dead constitutes a replica of the world of the living, duplicating the original social structure. When someone dies their soul undertakes a voyage to the beyond, where live the deceased that have ascended to the condition of ancestors. Funerals are thus extremely important: both the first funerary ceremonies (chur), which entail the cleaning of the corpse and its wrapping in cloths, for days, before inhumation; and the secondary
rituals (*toka chur*), signalled by the beating of the bombolom drum, the sacrifice and bleeding of animals, specific divinatory processes and wide commensality. All these rites are aimed at assuring the maintenance of a harmonic relation between the living and the dead, which is only possible if the deceased is correctly integrated in the sphere of the ancestors and, ultimately, becomes a good spirit that will watch over the living (Saraiva 1999, 2003, 2004a, 2004b).

Due to the constant and pressing relations between the two worlds, the deceased is thought of as a messenger who takes offerings for the ancestors who live in the other world, these offerings consisting basically of the cloths offered for the funeral. According to this logic, everyone attending a funeral wants to offer gifts of cloth to the dead person, not only to contribute to the success of the ceremony and for reasons of reciprocity, but also because all the households have ancestors in the other world, who would be terribly angry if they received no gifts from their descendants in this world (Saraiva 2004a, 2004b).

When the *toka chur* takes place, the sacrifice of the animals (cows, pigs, goats) is one of the most important features, together with the dancing, feasting, eating and drinking, to celebrate the entrance of an elder into the ancestral world. Hence, these two elements—cloth and cattle—are essential to understand the connection between funeral rites, the importance of the relations between the two worlds as a pillar of Pepel religion and the ‘construction’ of a transnational spirit. Cloth and cattle are the two main sources of wealth and prestige for the Pepel; the first is mainly feminine, the second, masculine.

**Transnational Goods and Transnational Spirits: Religion in Lisbon**

Looked upon in their totality, funerary rituals constitute systems of circulation of goods between the living and the dead, and contribute to the continuum between the two worlds (Saraiva 1999: 278; 2004a, 2004b): the dead do not become ancestors and protective spirits if these rites are not correctly performed.

What happens, then, with all these ritual goods and the performances they entail, once the actors move to another world, in this case a European city? If the completion of correct funerary rituals is essential for a dead person to become an ancestor, the exchange of goods between the two worlds is just as important. In Portugal, certain adaptations are made in the funeral and subsequent rituals: a funeral implies gathering and commensality but, for instance, as far as the wrapping of the corpse is concerned, some cloths are placed on the coffin, since it is not possible, according to Portuguese law, to wrap the bodies as is done in Guinea. It is estimated that one cloth in Portugal is worth 20 in Guinea. The sacrifice of animals is also restricted: the larger animals are killed in farms or houses with a garden and their meat is then brought to the place where the rituals take place, divided and consumed as usual.

Because of all these restrictions on performances with high symbolic significance, ceremonies are always considered more effective if performed in the primeval ground. This dictates that the *toka chur* should always take place in the original *tchon*, which
implies the return of the families for this specific purpose. As a result, a defunto (spirit of a dead person) can never reach the category of a transnational spirit unless his/her toka chur has been performed at home, and has conformed to the above-described sequences and ritual principles; this may therefore be considered the basis for the existence of a transnational religion.

Besides all the social performances aimed at keeping in mind the original territory and practices at home in Guinea-Bissau, the sacralisation of the new dwelling is of the utmost importance; in the case of the ‘animists’, the relation with the ancestors must be acknowledged through the placing of the altars for the forefathers (testos) and protective spirits (irãs), as well as all the magical-religious ceremonies that go along with such emplacements, of which the darma (to pour beverages and food for the ancestors) is the most significant, due to its direct symbolism of the connection with the ancestors in the other world.

Only after this ceremony of the consecration of the ancestors’ altars is completed can a ritual healer start his/her practice inside the house. It is in this room where the ancestors’ altars are kept that the djambakóss (mainly female) interacts with the spirits. Due to the sacred character of this compartment, no sexual intercourse is permitted and therefore only the djambakóss alone, or small children, are allowed to sleep there. Normally situated in a corner of the room, the sacred grounds are protected by a red cloth, since red is the colour associated with the religious sphere. Behind this cloth are kept the irãs (often consubstantiated in a short and bulky wooden stick) where the ancestor spirits and the spiritual forces are concentrated, and several receptacles with rum and other beverages, or with herbs and medicinal products (mezinho) and shells; a special gourd normally keeps water and mezinho to be used in the daily consultations. Attached to these irãs are, as in the original tabanka grounds, the ropes that tied the animals sacrificed in the ceremonies and some strips from the cloths offered by the patients. In this room there are also specific places for the ancestors’ altars, the testos, and no ceremony or consultation may begin without the darma over them.

The consultation may fall into three main categories: djubi sorte (consultation of the gods to know one’s luck and destiny); a consultation to treat problems or sicknesses already diagnosed; or a follow-up meeting between the healer and the patient. What happens most of the time is that these three types of consultation are combined to include djubi sorte, some sort of treatment, and conversations between healer and patient to figure out whether more consultations or treatments should take place. A normal consultation starts with an exchange of words between the patient and the djambakóss, to make the client feel at ease. The payment is then put on the ground and darma is performed. The djambakóss concentrates, invokes the supernatural beings, and, in direct connection with them, throws the shells on the ground, shakes the mezinho to read the message given by the correct positioning of the herbs on the calabash, or simply listens to their opinion about the problems that afflict the person. These actions may be repeated several times, until the ritualist is sure how to interpret the signs and is able to announce the diagnosis to the patient.
As mentioned before, one of the performances used by the Pepel *djambakóss* is the sacrifice of a rooster (brought by the client), and the inspection of the insides of the animal. The announcement of the problems that trouble the person (or an entire family) is a crucial moment, upon which the healer prescribes the treatment.

The treatment may be simple (such as drinking a beverage given or indicated by the ritualist), or elaborate. In the latter case, the *trabajó*—literally ‘work’—may then be performed by the patient, following the *djambakóss*’s instructions, or by the healer, in which case another consultation takes place. The treatment often comprises libations, ceremonies at crossroads and the protection of a lucky charm, which normally has both prophylactic and healing powers. The *zimola* (donation), widely practised by the Muslims, is also employed by animists as another essential element within the domain of counter-witchcraft, acting as a warranty of the efficiency of the treatment. In the follow-up consultations the confirmation of the success of the treatment is sought, and often the same divinatory procedures that had taken place in the first session are repeated.

**The Healer and the Spirit**

Celeste is a Pepel woman who migrated to Portugal in the late 1980s, in the wake of her second husband. She was a widow and had four children from her first marriage; these children stayed at home in Guinea-Bissau with relatives. The three children from her second marriage were all born in Lisbon, following a pattern of families divided between Guinea-Bissau and the host country quite usual in the diaspora.

Both Celeste and her husband were employed. However, some years after her arrival she started suffering from several and continuous diseases, bad luck, and hearing voices talking to her and her husband at home. When she was diagnosed as possessed by a spirit, she returned to Biombo, in Guinea, to undergo the first set of initiation ceremonies in order to become a religious ritualist. Upon her return she quit her job in Lisbon to dedicate herself entirely to her spirits, becoming, with time, a respected and well-known *djambakóss*.

The process of becoming a fully initiated *djambakóss* entails several periods of seclusion and initiation in the original grounds. I met Celeste in Guinea-Bissau in April 2004, when she went back to Biombo to perform the second set of initiation ceremonies. She stayed there for several months in order to complete all her obligations towards the ancestral spirits and thus come to Portugal with her powers strengthened. Becoming a healer implies that the chosen person has no free will; if a spirit decides someone is to be possessed it is because he wants to work ‘through’ her, and the person cannot refuse such a call, at the risk of dying or having someone in her family suffer severe retaliation. This brings me to the issue of the tyranny of the spirits, which determines who is to be possessed, how, and where.

Among the spirits who possess a healer there is always a set hierarchy: some are stronger and more important than others, and their strength and importance may come from several factors, including their social and economic status while alive. The
higher the status, the stronger they may be. One other condition that can determine their status is their previous position within the realm of relations with the other world. A *djambakóss* will certainly become a powerful spirit once deceased. Another essential characteristic is that all the spirits that operate in Portugal are, by essence, transnational spirits, who come from Guinea-Bissau to possess ritual specialists and work through them to interact with Guineans in the diaspora.

Amongst the several spirits that possess Celeste, the most important and recurrent one is a male named Antonio. Celeste emphasises his condition of having been someone highly educated (in the context of Guinea-Bissau, where illiteracy prevails), who held the position of teacher (*professor*) in Bolama, the ancient capital of Guinea. The fact that he was an educated person determined his decision to become a *defunto* here in Portugal. She therefore explains that Antonio decided to possess her in Lisbon in order to popularise and spread Pepel religion and the knowledge of the *balobas* and *irãs*:

He wants educated people, which is why he decided to come here to Portugal and not to Guinea. Antonio is a very smart and intelligent *defunto* and he knows how important these practices are and he wants them to become known and respected here in Portugal; he is also a very good person and wants to help people.

Antonio is attributed all the good qualities of a human being: he is respectable, educated and a ‘good defunto’: never does evil things (witchcraft), but desires only to help people. Also, he is extremely honest, and any money given to him is returned if he is not able to help. There is clearly an identification between the spirit and the healer, observable in the overlapping of the mutual discourses. The same way in which Celeste praises Antonio’s honourable qualities when she talks about him, so, several times when I dialogued with Antonio himself, during times when he possessed Celeste, he also stressed her good qualities, both as a woman (hard-working, honest) and as a healer (her good relations with him and all the spirits, her will to do good, to help people and to perform all the rituals in the best possible way).

**The Consultation**

As I explained, people seek help from a *djambakóss* to solve all sorts of problems, such as troubles concerning health, work, family quarrels, intimate and emotional life, worries related to their children’s success in school, and many problems resulting from their migrant condition, such as difficulties in obtaining official documents or work permits. At weekends it often happens that the large number of clients requires a continuous session (especially if people come from afar), in which Antonio possesses Celeste early in the morning and stays all day, as long as there are clients, normally until dawn. These consultations often incorporate the two sequences of divination and beginning of the treatment, and both the libations and the sacrifice of the animals take place.
The clients arrive bringing offerings for the ancestors and the irãs: roosters, cloths, drinks and parts of the larger, previously sacrificed animals; normally at the beginning, or half way through the session, these pieces of meat are cooked, presented as an offering to the spirit, and shared by everyone. In the middle of the living room people sit on the floor and all eat together, grabbing with their hands from the same pot, bianda (rice) and mafé (the meat or fish that accompany the rice). However, no one starts eating before the beverages and some rice are spilled on the ground, as an offering to the ancestors. Commensality, so important in any ceremony at home, helps in recreating the setting and the proper atmosphere for the follow-up rituals.

In the room where the consultations take place a cassette player continuously reproduces the sound of the ritual drums and traditional songs from Guinea. The setting is prepared with the darmar of beverages (all sorts of beverages are accepted, from soft drinks to schnapps, wine or beer) on the altar of the family ancestors (testos) and on the irá. Following this veneration of the ancestors, the healer, dressed in traditional djambakossé attire, with a predominance of white and red, specially on the cloths wrapped around her head, then sits still by the irá altar and awaits the coming of the spirit.

A normal consultation follows the pattern explained previously. After another set of darma, it begins with the presentation to the spirit of the goods brought as gifts, the beverages, cloths and the roosters for sacrifice. After payment, the client, barefoot (as in the sacred grounds in Guinea-Bissau) explains his/her problem and a dialogue is established between them and Antonio in order to clarify what the complaints are and the reasons that bring the person to ask for help. If the client can read and write, he or she is asked to write down his/her problems and secret wishes on a piece of paper, which is then sprinkled with rum and placed on the altar to remain there until the next consultation. Of the several djambakossé I observed, Celeste is the only one who places great importance on the writing on the paper, undoubtedly due to the specific condition of Antonio having been a professor, a fact which Celeste emphasises in every single consultation. His intellectual skills and higher social status are also the warranty of his capacities, goodness and good intentions.

Then follows, normally, the sacrifice of the rooster; the bigger ones are decapitated with the aid of a knife, the smaller ones simply with the hands. Its blood is poured over the testos and the irá. Immediately afterwards, its insides are opened and inspected. In one of the consultations I attended, the organs inspected were all white in colour, except the area corresponding to the journey that the client was about to undertake to Paris. Here, the intestines presented a dark colour, which was interpreted as a sign not to start the trip.

Upon interpretation of all these signs, the defunto prescribes the recipe. Commonly known in Creole as trabadjo, it consists of the treatment against witchcraft or maledictions. It thus congregates the forces of both good and evil, and it is crucial to clarify the use made of these forces. As a therapy system, trabadjo includes the mezinho and magical prophylactic charms, the sacrifice of animals, techniques of
recuperation and recession of the sorcery and the periodic communication between the ritualist and the supernatural (Quintino 2004: 281). The **trabajado** may include one or several actions. The performance of these actions, preferably done at a crossroads, may encompass different variations, for instance, wrapping a cloth around a piece of iron or rolling it in ashes and throwing it over one’s head in order to recover from and undo the spell (Quintino 2004: 282).

In one of the cases I followed closely, the patient, a young man brought to Celeste by his brother, was bewitched by a **badjuda** (young girl) who made him fall in love with her, but did not respect him and was known to fool around with other men. Despite his knowledge of her bad conduct, he was not able to leave her, since he was **amarrado** (tied). The treatment prescribed included placing a kilogram of salt, an egg and a candle at a crossroads so as to drive away the **badjuda** he was in love with, but who, it was proven, did not love him, and was therefore not suitable to be a good future spouse or someone in whom he should invest.

Often the treatment starts right away, performed with the assistance of the spirit itself, and includes specific libations (with water and salt or water with specific plants), long talks with the patient, the making and consecration of lucky charms and other practices. Much attention is paid to the elements brought to the healer to be handled, in order to transform them into protective lucky charms. The goods used in the consultation must be, for the most part, **di tera**, from Guinea-Bissau, although adaptations are made in cases where it is impossible to have goods from home; for instance, an African herb may be substituted with a Portuguese one.

But the identification of the source of trouble often results in the conclusion that it is caused by a spirit that is interfering and causing bad things to happen, in order to remind the living of their obligations towards him; for instance, an ancestor of the same lineage whose **toka chur** has not yet been performed and who thus demands its performance in **tchon** Pepel. As a result, and as a resolution to the problems that afflict the person, many are advised to go back home and perform the rituals. The preponderance of such diagnoses brings me back to the funeral rites and their importance in mediating communication between the two worlds.

In the final part of the consultation, the cloths brought by the clients come into play, when they are offered to the **defunto**, in a ceremony crucial to the success of the treatment. The patients kneel down, holding the cloth over their heads and simulate a fight with the spirit, who tries to pull the cloth and take it from them, while they repeat ‘It’s mine! It’s mine!’ Only at the third attempt are they supposed to let go. The meaning of this performance is that the spirit tries to take the bad things away from the person, but that he/she should hold on to it until the third time, when the spirit finally succeeds and the evil is left there, upon the **irã**, freeing the person from all badness. The cloths used may be either common European ones, such as table cloths, towels or sheets, or African, including both **panos di penti**, traditional cloths woven on the loom or **legósse**, or industrial cloths with multiple and colourful motifs. The colour and type of cloth that should be used, which influences the treatment, are indicated by the spirit.
The cloths offered are put in Antonio’s *mala* (trunk). When ceremonies happen back home (whether for funerals or for initiation) and Celeste attends them, she is supposed to take the cloths indicated by Antonio, and they therefore become his contribution to such performances. If the essential condition for a deceased to become a protective spirit is the fulfilment of his/her funerary rituals, once he/she becomes a spirit he/she must also contribute to enlarge the community of spirits in the other world, and ensure this by contributing cloths for the rituals. Wrapped around a dead person’s body, the cloths offered to this *defunto* in Lisbon become offerings to the lineage members in the other world: they thus return back home and back to the world of the ancestors.

**Two Worlds Meet: The Living and the Dead in a Transnational Setting**

Through the desire and need of Guineans to maintain contact with their spirit world, an intense communication and exchange of goods, both material and symbolic, as well as persons and ideas, is maintained between Guinea-Bissau and Portugal.

Performances, settings and material goods are transferred from Africa to Lisbon: the altars for the ancestors are recreated in apartments in Lisbon, where the ritualists operate. The *irã* altar is constructed using wood brought from the original *tchon*, and the goods that are used in the protective or healing practices are ideally supposed to come from Guinea. As much as possible, both the ritualist and the clients repeat the gestures and performances from home which are used to recreate an ethnic identity: the drums heard in the cassette player, the *darmar* of beverages offered to the *irã*, the taking off of shoes when in the grounds of the *irã*, the shared commensality, the divination using the roosters. At the same time, symbolic transactions take place: the blood of the sacrificed animals and the beverages and food poured for the ancestors are meant to reach the other world, and cross not only the spatial distance between Europe and Africa, but the division between the world of the living and the one of the dead.

Furthermore, there is an intense circulation of both persons and spirits: the healer goes back to the original grounds periodically to reinforce her powers; the clients go back to their villages to perform *toka chur* for their beloved ones. Goods also circulate with them: not only monetary, materially expressed through the money spent on the airline ticket and on the cost of the ceremonies, but also other kinds of goods. Because of their importance as primordial offerings to the ancestors, cloths are excellent mediators between the two worlds. The traditional hand-woven cloths, required by the spirit to be used in specific healing rituals, are brought from Guinea; but European cloths (such as silky sheets) are greatly appreciated and taken by Guineans who go back home for *toka chur* ceremonies. These elements are manipulated by both persons and spirits in order to adapt to a transnational setting, where one needs to accommodate the communication and circulation between the two real worlds of Africa and Europe, along with the two worlds of the living and the dead.
In concrete terms, Guineans in Lisbon organise themselves so as to be able to realise the luxury of maintaining transnational religious networks: the role of the associations is to economically help people when they need to go back home; the traffic of goods provides what is needed for the ceremonies or the good-luck charms. Participating and contributing to the toka chur of one's father is important to maintain one's position within the tabanka and moransa, as everyone back home expects relatives who migrated to be better-off and to contribute generously for the ceremonies; but it also essential to guarantee that one will be protected and helped by the ancestors, especially in the harsh and foreign environment of the diaspora context, where the use of the specific mézinho with herbs from home or the right offerings to the irá may make the difference in finding a good job or making sure one gets the residence permit.

As stated previously, for the Pepel, the world of the dead is a duplication of the world of the living. The defunto Antonio is a good example of this conceptualisation. Antonio came from Guinea, and claims to be a scholar. The fact that he was a professor in Bolama wins him prestige. He was not a poor person; as a spirit, he owns his private mala (literally, a trunk or suitcase, but generally meaning the collection of a person's valuable goods, such as cloths, gold and money, often kept in a trunk or box) and holds a high social and economic status. He is willing to help everyone and wants to spread the Pepel religion in Europe, where he says people are also educated and willing to learn, in order to bring them to an understanding of Pepel traditional ways as culturally valuable. With respect to the situation of Guineans resident in Portugal, he also explains that it is understandable that people seek other religions more widespread in Lisbon (referring to the Evangelical churches which attract many Africans), but that one should only frequent churches that allow one to continue with the uso, the traditional Pepel ways, beliefs and religious practices. In this way, the spirit enacts the ‘ethnicity package’ created by the Guinean community (Quintino 2004: 263): together with the emphasis on uso, there comes also, for instance, his use of the original languages, either Pepel or Creole, whenever he talks during the consultations. But, aware of the difficulties imposed by the diaspora situation, it also opens up to syncretism, as a strategy for people to achieve a minimum level of well-being.

The female ritualist manipulates these elements, such as Antonio’s erudition and his awareness of the need to recreate Pepel traditions in a transnational setting, to construct a positive image of her religious practices and enforce her authority and prestige among her Guinean patients; but she is also fully aware that they help her to gain a larger and more diversified clientele. Although her clients are all Africans or of African origin, one of her objectives is to have Portuguese patients, an excellent way to feel more at ease and integrated. An episode illustrating such a strategy is the way in which she insists on accompanying me, as a white Portuguese visitor, to the door, making it very visible to her ground-floor Portuguese neighbour that she has Portuguese friends.
The intense relationship and dependence of the living upon the dead is also transposed to the relations established between the healers and the spirits who possess them, as a correlate of the aforementioned tyranny of the spirits. For instance, for the time being, Antonio operates only with an irã, which Celeste keeps in the altar in her Lisbon apartment. But she continuously repeats that she is aware that, if by chance Antonio decides to settle in a baloba, since such sanctuary can only exist in the original grounds, in tchon Pepel, she will be obliged to go back to Biombo to live. This is one of the reasons she is so grateful that Antonio has decided that he wants the uso da tera to be known in Portugal, allowing her to stay in Lisbon with her husband and children.

If the migrant’s perception of the diaspora universe oscillates between an image of paradise and nostalgia, and a desire to go back, the world of the spirits somehow accompanies these contradictory and ambiguous relations, creating bridges that connect real and symbolic spaces, but simultaneously making people aware of their double condition, of someone who can no longer stay in Guinea, but dreams of going back one day. In a certain sense, the idea that ‘diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment’ (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1989: i, cited in Vertovec 1999: 451) holds true in this case, not only for the individuals, but also for all the desires and hopes they project onto the world of the spirits that accompanied them in the journey to a new land and cultural context.

Conclusion

We thus have a truly transnational religious system where spirits, people and goods circulate in two parallel sets of worlds: the physical, real worlds of the two contexts, the home country and the host country, and the two conceptualised universes of the living and of the ancestors. The characteristics of the elements in circulation adapt to the transnational circumstances in a more or in a less flexible way, depending on the circumstances and including the necessary adaptations, and show how religion and religious practices are examples of the idea of a processual ethnicity, more visible in the flexible frontiers of daily life, where identities are constantly re-negotiated and renewed (Barth 1969). Religion may, then, in fact, be a cultural dimension which better helps migrants re-organise sociabilities and identities that refer to the past in order to re-structure their lives in a new setting (Horowitz 1985; Quintino 2004; Wilson 1983).

Taken together, the basic elements of the religious system circulate between the two real worlds of Portugal and Guinea-Bissau and the two symbolic worlds of the living and of the dead. Antonio is a defunto who came from Guinea to work in Lisbon and help his fellow-countryfolk, and will eventually one day return home to settle in a baloba. Celeste is a ritualist who came from Guinea, where she returns periodically for ceremonies related to her capacity to communicate with the spirits, and who will also, if such will be the wish of her defunto, return to Biombo, to go on serving the spirit in
his baloba. In the meanwhile, they interact in Lisbon, in ways that bring Guinean practices and Pepel ancestors into play in a globalised urban world.

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Notes

[1] Fieldwork has been carried out since 1997 in the Biombo region, based on periodic stays of several months a year; the research in Lisbon started with contacts, previously acquired in Guinea-Bissau, of families and ritual specialists in the diaspora, and has included, in this case study, participation in the djambako’s consultations as well as extended interviews with her, the spirit and the clients.

[2] The Pepel were the owners of the grounds where the Portuguese founded, already in the seventeenth century, a fortress, and where the Portuguese were defeated by the Pepel in 1891; much later, in the twentieth century, Bissau became the capital of the colony, and this area, along with the connected Biombo region, remains to this date known as Pepel territory.

[3] As Celeste Quintino (2004: 281) points out, the term trabado means both witchcraft to cause trouble to someone, and the treatment to overcome the spell.

References


