

Religion, Migration and Gender Strategies: Brazilian (Catholic and Evangelical) Missionaries in Barcelona

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Abstract

This article reflects on gender strategies developed by Brazilian Pentecostal missionaries linked to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God/United Family, in the city of Barcelona, Spain. From a comparative study of the daily life of the missionaries, the paper discusses how 'feminized' and 'manly' character, respectively, define important boundaries between Catholic charismatic and Evangelical groups. The ethnographic data demonstrate how certain religious particularities of immigrants can act as a source of social differentiation that highlights opportunities and specific doctrinal strategies for women and men, in the context of diaspora.

Keywords

migration; Brazilian missionaries; gender; Pentecostalism; Barcelona.

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Introduction¹

The process of globalization and the massive transcontinental migratory flows of people are raising significant social, cultural, ethnic, religious, and identity changes in contemporary societies² and this new cultural pluralism also affects gender relations, which involve both immigrants and nationals.³

Religion becomes particularly more important in the unfavourable circumstances of immigrant diaspora. It plays a very important role in the process of maintaining the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of the immigrant groups.⁴ In addition to spiritual support in the diaspora context,⁵ religion adds positive value, more social integration, and a strong sense of worth; it contributes to the maintenance of identity, and develops pragmatic solidarity activities, such as housing, employment, education, and health. The religious institutions are places/meeting points where immigrants could meet people from the same home country and other immigrants in a similar economic and social situation. The worship places also host social and celebratory events, facilitating more social interaction.⁶

The phenomenon of Neo-Pentecostalism, both in the Protestant and Catholic context, arose in the United States in the 1960s and quickly spread to different parts of the world, especially Latin America and Brazil.⁷ As a result, Neo-Pentecostalism is now one of the greatest worldwide religious movements and Brazil is the second largest Protestant country, with the highest concentration of Pentecostal people in the world.⁸

Considering that Brazil is a big 'exporter' of religious movements to Europe,⁹ this paper analyses the evangelization endeavours and gender

¹ We are particularly grateful to Bruce Bird, Brenda Carranza, and Paul Freston for helpful comments and suggestions on this paper.

² F. Yang and H.R. Ebaugh, 'Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications' in *American Sociological Review* 66:2 (2001), 269–288.

Caroline Pluss, 'Migration and the Globalization of Religion' in P. Clarke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, 491–506.

³ L. Baldassar and D. Gabaccia (eds.), *Intimacy and Italian Migration: Gender and Domestic Lives in a Mobile World*, Fordham: Fordham University Press 2011.

⁴ G. Stanczak, 'Strategic Ethnicity: the Construction of Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic Religious Community' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29:5 (2006), 856–881.

⁵ According to James Clifford, diasporas are dispersed networks of people that share common and historical experiences of expropriation, displacement and cultural adaptation. Based on this definition, we understand the term 'diaspora' as a set of experiences that involve displacements, agenda, social inequalities, cultural hybridism and religious changes. J. Clifford, 'Diasporas' in *Cultural Anthropology* 9:3 (1994), 302–328.

⁶ Y.Y. Haddad, J. Smith, J.L. Esposito, *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish and Muslim Experiences in the United States*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press 2003.

⁷ S. Coleman, *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

⁸ According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, there are about 564 million evangelical and 305 million charismatic people around the world (Pew Forum, 2011).

⁹ O. Velho, 'Missionization in the Postcolonial World. A View from Brazil and Elsewhere' in T.J. Csordas (ed.), *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2009, 31–54.

strategies developed by two emblematic and differentiated groups of Brazilian Pentecostal missionaries in Barcelona, a region historically considered the most secular and anticlerical in Spain:¹⁰ the trans-nationalized evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), and the Catholic Charismatic group Raboni Ajaray. Such evangelization endeavours showed features that allow include them into the analytical perspective of 'reverse mission', mainly because these Brazilian (Catholic and evangelical) missionaries in Barcelona identify themselves as responsible by the 'divine mission' to 're-Christianize' the European continent.¹¹

The fieldwork in Barcelona was done from November 2011 to April 2012. In the more open charismatic group Raboni Ajaray, the people knew that we were ethnographers. However, due to difficulties in doing fieldwork among the UCKG's congregants, and especially with the leaders, we identified ourselves as Brazilian immigrants and visitors of the church. In both religious groups, the ethnographic method used was participant observation, in various religious and social events, and informal conversations with many followers and key-informants.¹²

Pentecostalism (Protestant and Catholic) in Spain

Spain, historically, was a typical emigrant country. However, in the last decades, it began to receive large flows of immigrants: increasing from 2 to over 11% (5 million) of the total population (46 million). As a consequence of transnational immigration, an expressive social transformation is occurring and Spain is becoming much more pluralistic, from an ethnic, cultural, and religious perspective. Spanish society is still predominantly Catholic (73.5%). However, less than half of the immigrants are Catholics and the number of evangelicals – around 1.5 million (2.7% of the total population), is increasing significantly.¹³

Protestant Pentecostalism arrived in Spain, in 1923, by Swedish missionaries.¹⁴ However, it grew very slowly due to the very Catholic Spanish population. More recently, from transnational immigration, present-day Spain has a large number of Pentecostal denominations (Catholic and Protestant), under the leadership of missionaries from Latin America and especially Brazil.¹⁵

¹⁰ E.P. López and M.S. Cortina, *El Anticlericalismo Español Contemporáneo*, Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva 1998.

¹¹ P. Freston, 'Reverse Mission: A Discourse in Search of Reality?' in *PentecoStudies* 9:2 (2010), 153–174.

¹² For the identification of all the people (followers, key-informants and pastors), mentioned in this article, we have used fictitious names, in order to protect their identities.

¹³ J. Santiago, 'La dimension conséquentielle et la nouvelle pluralité religieuse de l'Espagne actuelle' in *Social Compass* 57:1 (2010), 3–14. Alfonsa Pérez-Agote, 'Religious Change in Spain' in *Social Compass* 57:2 (2010), 224–234.

¹⁴ A. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004.

¹⁵ K. MacHarg, 'Spain's Awakening: is Revival Around the Corner for Spain?' in *Latin American Mission* (report) 2008.

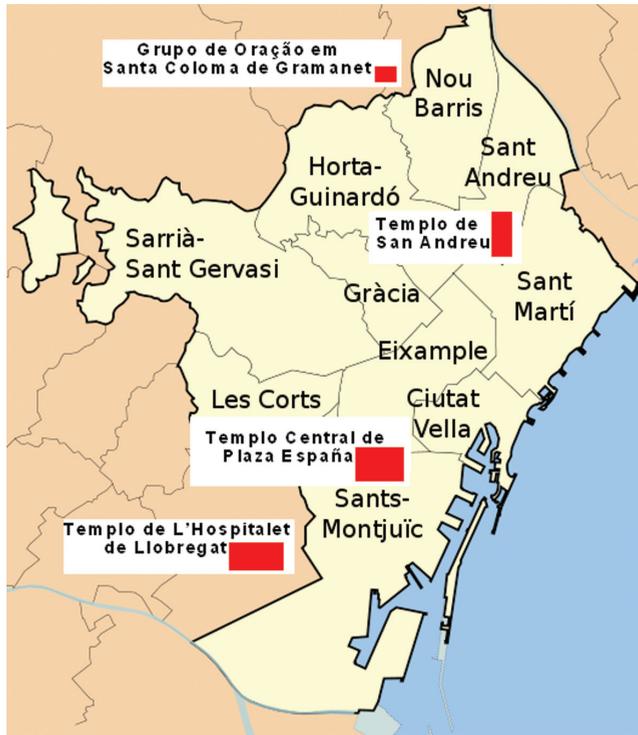


Figure 1: The spatial distribution of the Familia Unida in Barcelona.

Founded in 1977, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) is the most successful example of the Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal expansion. Today it is present on five continents and in more than 180 countries. In Spain it goes by the name 'Familia Unida'. In the city of Barcelona, during the period that we developed the ethnographic fieldwork, it has three temples and one prayer group.

Within this religious community there is a rotation of workers (*obreiros*), and the pastors also circulate among the three places of worship. While we were there the breakdown was largely as follows:¹⁶

Central Temple of Plaza España: Three pastors, who take turns conducting the religious ceremonies; fifteen workers: twelve women and three men.

Temple of San Andreu: Sergio is the Pastor in charge of the temple. Ten workers: nine women and one man.

¹⁶ Although the main focus of fieldwork was the 'Temple of San Andreu' and 'Central Temple of Plaza España', we also participated in two meetings of the Prayer Group of Santa Coloma de Gramanet. As well as L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Santa Coloma is a neighboring municipality that is part of the Province of Barcelona. This group began activity in February 2012 and intends to become a temple in the future. The meetings take place informally at a bakery and are attended by three missionaries: two men and one woman. All of them are congregants at the Temple of San Andreu.

Temple of Hospitalet de Llobregat: Pastor Danilo is in charge of the temple. Six workers: four women and two men.

As regards the division of labour between pastors and workers, it is noteworthy that only the pastors are employed exclusively by the church and receive remuneration. The 'obreiros' try to reconcile their paid jobs (women usually are maids, nannies or care for elderly people) with their volunteer-missionary service in Familia Unida.

The believers, and especially the workers, have activities every day in the three temples, in the form of meetings (in the Castilian language):

Monday	Economic Prosperity, at 7 am, 4 pm, and 8 pm.
Tuesday	Health Restoration, at 7 am, 4 pm, and 8 pm.
Wednesday	Receiving the Holy Spirit, at 7 am, 4 pm, and 8 pm.
Thursday	Evangelization in the streets.
Friday	Spiritual Session of Deliverance, at 7 am, 4 pm, and 8 pm.
Saturday	Therapy of Love, only in the Central Temple, at 6 pm.
Sunday	Meeting of Families, at 9:30 am. The 'clamour meetings', at 4 pm

Regarding the racial-ethnic composition, more than 90% of the believers in the three temple community of Barcelona are Latin-Americans (Spanish-speaking people), Brazilians, or black African immigrants. Based on research which we have also carried out in Portugal and Italy,¹⁸ it is our opinion that although the UCKG tries to project itself as a 'Universal', 'non-ethnic', and 'non-immigrant' church, its racial-ethnic composition corroborates that it has not achieved disassociation from the image of an 'ethnic church' – it is still a church *of and for* immigrants.

In contrast, the 'Catholic Charismatic Prayer Group Raboni Ajaray' is quite different. The great majority of the followers are Catalans and also some Spaniards (from outside of Catalonia); the immigrants are a small minority – comprising approximately 15%. The immigrant component is composed of ten people: four Brazilian couples and one Cuban couple. Although they identify themselves as missionaries, during the week everyone develops parallel work: engineers (three men), a sound technician (one man), hotel receptionists (two women and one man) and store attendants (three women). They dedicate their weekends and holidays to religious activities. The group meets twice a month at the Parish of San Juan Bautista (Santa Coloma de Gramanet) and once a month they animate the 'Encuentros de Alabanza, Adoración y Sanación' – EAAS (*Meetings*

¹⁷ We participated in four 'clamour meetings', entitled 'clamour of the distressed mothers', dedicated to solving problems, such as youth drug addiction, 'disobedience' (bad behaviour) and 'problematic' children, marriages in distress, etc.

¹⁸ D. Rodrigues, 'Ethnic and Religious Diversities in Portugal: the Case of Brazilian Evangelical Immigrants' in E. Pace, H. Vilaça, I. Furseth, P. Pettersson (eds.), *The Changing Soul of Europe: Religions and Migrations in Northern and Southern Europe*, London, Ashgate (forthcoming) 2013. D. Rodrigues and Marcos de Araújo Silva, 'Gesù Cristo è Il Signore: A Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus na Itália' in *Revista Etnográfica* 16:2 (2012), 387–403. D. Rodrigues and Marcos de Araújo Silva, 'Dinámicas del Pentecostalismo Católico Carismático Brasileño en Europa: reflexiones desde Portugal, Italia y España'. Paper presented at the *XIX Congreso Internacional de Antropología Iberoamericana*. Universidad de Salamanca, 2012, 8–10 May.

of Praise, Worship and Healing) that take place at the Parish of San Genís dels Agudells (Vall D'Hebron).

Considering the composition of the 'audiences' (believers), the gender dimension acquires a great importance: both religious groups can be considered 'feminized'; the presence of women is approximately 60% in the Raboni Ajaray, and 70% in the Família Unida.

Although very different from the religious points of view, these two Pentecostal groups (Protestant and Catholic) have some similarities:

- 1) The believers refer to the past, when they did not yet participate in religious activities of the group/church, with the expression – 'when I was of the world'. The term 'world' refers to everything that is not part of the Gospel and teachings of Jesus Christ, i.e., all worldly and sinful behaviour. Being 'in the world', but not 'of the world', is a good condition for social negotiation, in the context of the host society. According to the interlocutors, charismatics and evangelicals, these two religious groups provide for their needs, good things such as contacts and possibilities of employment, informal work, and business – that are 'efficacious' for them remaining 'pure' and 'uncontaminated' in a 'pagan city' like Barcelona.
- 2) About 40% of charismatics said that they once belonged or participated in the Afro-Brazilian religious rituals. On the other hand, among the evangelicals, the percentage rises to 80%; this aspect is anthropologically very relevant, because it helps understand how the (syncretic) liturgies of the UCKG can attract and convert a very heterogeneous audience.

The 'Feminized' Raboni Ajaray

In 2008, a small Catholic charismatic prayer group began informally with meetings at the homes of the 25 initial participants. Since February 2009, it has taken place, once a month, at the parish in central Barcelona. Named 'Mass Brazil', it is celebrated by the priest Renato Fraga. With the return of Father Renato to Brazil, the masses ended in December 2011. In June 2011, however, they received the 'blessing' and support of Father Jordi Espinar (Parish of San Juan Bautista, in Santa Coloma de Gramanet) and, since then, the group has been formally established under the name of Raboni Ajaray. They organize two meetings a month in this church, which is mostly frequented by Catalans, Spaniards, and immigrants.

Nanda is one of the founding leaders. Since 2004, she has lived with her husband in Barcelona. According to Nanda, the name 'Raboni Ajaray' symbolizes the message that God sent directly to her: 'Receive Me, through music and joy, wherever you are. I want everyone to receive My Spirit'. Therefore, the doctrinal and liturgical practices of charismatic Catholicism are focused on music, praise, worship, and the manifestation of Pentecost (Holy Spirit).

Since 2005, Father Espinar has helped immigrants. Before the current economic crisis, the Brazilian immigrant community in Santa Coloma was very large. Due to the fact that the most of them had worked in the construction sector (the most affected by the crisis), many have now returned to Brazil.

In September 2011, the priest Jaume Climent (Parish San Genís dels Agudells) visited a meeting of Raboni Ajaray, in Santa Coloma. 'Enchanted' with the

work of this charismatic group, he invited the ten members to participate in the 'Encuentros de Alabanza, Adoración y Sanación' (EAAS), which since 2007 had been taking place once a month in his parish. Thus, since November 2011, on the third Sunday of each month, with the active participation of the Raboni Ajaray, the charismatic meetings have attracted an average of 100 people; 80% are Catalans and Spaniards, and 60% are women. The other believers are: eight Brazilians, three Colombians, two Senegalese, and two Romanians.

In turn, the Raboni Ajaray's meetings at San Juan Bautista have, on average, a participation of twenty to thirty people, mostly Spaniards and Catalans. Therefore, in these meetings, the immigrants are a minority and the scenario is reversed: missionaries from Latin America (under the leadership of immigrant women) are 'animating', reviving spiritually the Catholicism of the native people.

The rituality consists of songs, praise, worship and Holy Spirit manifestation. The highlight of the Holy Eucharist takes place when the priest Climent, with deep spirituality, prays placing his hand on the heads of the believers. After receiving the blessing, many people often stay 'resting in the Spirit' (see Figure 2).

According to the believers, men and women, who had had the experience of 'resting in the Spirit', this is a moment of profound spirituality: it was described as 'sublime', 'mild' and 'maternal'. It consists of receiving the Holy Spirit and the feeling of being 'cured', 'touched by Him' or 'being with Him'.



Figure 2: Believer 'resting in the Spirit' (Parish San Genís Agudells, on February 26, 2012).

The religious experience of 'resting in the Spirit', in particular, is a substantial difference between the Catholic charismatic 'Encuentros de Alabanza, Adoración y Sanación' (EAAS) and the evangelical Familia Unida: while the features of the EAAS are seen by some believers as 'feminized' (light, sublime, maternal), in the Familia Unida, in contrast, the focus is on ardent 'clamours' for the Holy Spirit and vigorous exorcism sessions; 'iurdianas' (typically of UCKG) ritualities, perceived by the believers as a reflection of the 'strength', 'power' and 'virile' character of this 'manly' church.

A point to be noted is that the priest Climent is perceived to be a 'rebel' by other Catalan priests. This could be explained due to the fact that Catholicism in Catalonia is divided into two principal branches that, although some dialogue exists between them, differ substantially in doctrinal terms: the 'charismatic' and the 'neocatechumenal'. The religious and secular followers of the *Camino Neocatecumenal*,¹⁹ a movement with a 'masculine' and very 'hard' character, generally do not approve of the works of the charismatic branch. These internal divergences reflect in the gender strategies developed by the Raboni Ajaray, which is considered as 'feminized' and 'excessively festive'. In turn, the notion of 'religious otherness'²⁰ is perceived by the charismatics, not only in relation to evangelicals, which are also Pentecostals, but particularly in relation to the Catholic neo-catechumenal group.

It is pertinent to remark on the story of a believer, a member of Raboni Ajaray and participant of the EAAS at the San Genís. Hernandez 'did not find space' to practice the faith in the *Camino Neocatecumenal* and defends emphatically the Catholic charismatic movement. He considers this movement ecumenically 'light' and 'inclusive', which respects the ethnic and gender diversities of contemporary societies.

According to four Catholic believers who frequent the Raboni Ajaray's meetings at the San Gení, Father Climent has a very strong 'maternal manner' and the Brazilian missionaries are very 'warm and cheerful'. These two characteristics enable them to 'let go', to express their faith 'with joy' and, above all, to respect and build closeness with 'popular' Catalan Catholicism, where the figure of the Virgin Mary has a privileged position. The 'maternal' posture of Father Climent, the female leadership, with women directing, organizing the activities and leading the prayer group, allied to the perception that Brazilian culture is very 'open', are all factors that make the participants of the meetings feel they are treated with 'care and dedication', in a spiritual way that only women and mothers who receive Pentecost can do.

The figure of the Virgin Mary and its different manifestations – such as the 'Virgen de Guadalupe' (Mexico) and 'Nossa Senhora Aparecida' (the Catholic patroness of Brazil) – are crucial elements in influencing the perceptions of feminization surrounding the charismatic Raboni Ajaray. In the evangelical UCKG-Familia Unida, differently, absence of a strong Mariology is a source for the emphasis on 'God the Father' as a 'strong male' and, as a result, of the 'manly' character of this church.

¹⁹ R. Blázquez, *Las Comunidades Neocatecumenales*, Bilbao: Desclée 2009.

²⁰ J. Keaten and C. Soukup, 'Dialogue and Religious Otherness: Toward a Model of Pluralistic Interfaith Dialogue' in *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 2:2 (2009), 168–187.

In both religious movements (charismatic and evangelical), the members refer to their past lives with the expression 'when I was of the world'. The Catholic Lucinda, for instance, said that after receiving Pentecost in a Raboni Ajaray meeting, her life changed completely, including the way she sees herself as a Brazilian and as a woman. Lucinda has no children; however, in Spain she became the 'mother' of her younger sister. She thinks that the 'maternal manner' is inherent in her new identity as a 'Brazilian charismatic'. Thus, regardless of whether or not they are biological mothers, this 'maternal' character could be considered an intrinsic part of the charismatic woman's identity.

Due to the fact that she is pregnant and had to prepare the wedding ceremony, the leader Nanda transferred the coordination of the Raboni Ajaray to Solange Milera. Although Cuban, she speaks Portuguese fluently and defines herself – and is recognized by other members of the group – as a missionary with a 'Brazilian soul'.

There is an ethnic-social hierarchy among the Latin American immigrants and missionaries working in Barcelona. The Brazilians and Cubans occupy an 'intermediate' position: they do not suffer as much prejudice as the Ecuadorians and Bolivians (predominantly indigenous and mestizo), but they are less socially acceptable than the Argentines and Uruguayans, who are 'more acceptable' because they are predominantly white.²¹ The Brazilian and Cuban immigrants are not only considered more 'feminized', but also have a significant percentage of women working in prostitution²² – a factor that reinforces the social stigma²³ of these two ethnic minority groups.

Due to the social stigma, Brazilian and Cuban Catholic women missionaries need to be more 'assertive' and 'dedicated' in evangelization. The work of proselytization goes beyond the religious domain and reaches the social sphere; it enables an effective and powerful element for re-conceptualization, giving 'more morality' and a 'better image' of Brazilian and Cuban women.

Charismatic Catholicism has a 'feminized' manner and this characteristic successfully attracts the local population. The figure of the Virgin Mary is central in the way that most Catalans and Spaniards perceive themselves as Catholics and how they experience their spirituality. The 'feminized' or 'maternal'

²¹ Paul Freston emphasizes the problem that missionaries from Latin America and Africa have in evangelizing the 'native' Europeans and in making them remain faithful and feel 'at home' in the churches. According to Freston, the main differentiation factor between the foreign missionaries operating in Europe is their geographical origin. The experiences of racism are usually more present in the lives of the missionaries of African origin (black people) than in those from Latin America. Moreover, in many cases, the Brazilians are seen as 'racially close' (European descent) and 'culturally close' (with a high level of 'cultural proximity' with the Europeans). Thus, it is difficult for any missionary that comes from outside Europe to achieve their doctrinal objectives without the host society feeling some kind of 'racial-ethnic-cultural proximity' and without major changes by those missionaries such as the willingness to 'Europeanize' themselves. P. Freston. 2010. (op. cit.).

²² M.B. Souza, 'La Construcción del imaginario social de la mujer brasileña en España: análisis de la recepción mediática junto a estudiantes del 4º ESO de Barcelona, Sabadell y Sitges', PhD Thesis, Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2011.

²³ E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1963.

character linked to the religious sphere appears to be intrinsic to the Catholic Ibero-American culture and, therefore, necessary to make the national people feel 'at home' and 'comfortable' in a group led by immigrants. To charismatic women, 'becoming aware' of this cultural particularity and the use of it 'for the work of God' are strategies that differentiate substantially the Raboni Ajaray from the other Catholic prayer groups and also from the Brazilian evangelical churches. Nanda and Lucinda, for instance, both emphasized that the religious affiliation opened 'opportunities' for them, allowing them to travel more easily between Spain and Brazil and it gave them, as Brazilians and immigrants, 'more respect' from the nationals. This statement leads us to conclude that the spaces of *agency*²⁴ of Brazilian women were expanded due to their missionary work.²⁵ Therefore, in this context, the expansion of the spaces of *agency* in the lives of these women is circumscribed by religious reciprocities, which are linked to the notion of 'gift'.²⁶

Although it is a voluntary work, participation in the activities and the leadership of Raboni Ajaray gave to the ten missionaries some advantages, such as new business and job information and opportunities, a certain visibility and social respect, factors that provoked positive changes in their lives. As 'a grace of God', the changes resulted in new and better jobs with the improvement of their income, a consequent increase in purchasing power and a better social position in the host society. For instance, Nanda, when she talked about her life as a poor immigrant woman in Barcelona, established a clear association between the religious involvement – as a Catholic charismatic – and the acquisition of 'citizenship' through the sphere of consumption.²⁷

This aspect is very important in understanding the religious dynamics and gender strategies of Brazilian missionaries in Barcelona (and other European cities where we are doing fieldwork), not only with the Catholic charismatic Raboni Ajaray, but also with the evangelical UCKG-Familia Unida.

The 'Manly' UCKG-Familia Unida

Ethnographic fieldwork: Friday, January 20, 2012, 4 pm. Spiritual Session of Deliverance, Temple of San Andreu. Thirteen believers present: eleven women and two men. Pastor Sergio invited all congregants to the opening prayer at the altar. Then, he asked the people how they felt after the prayer. Norma was the only one that was still feeling 'a burden on her back'. The pastor said that the

²⁴ A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1984.

²⁵ The book edited by Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivianne Angeles, *Gender, Religion, and Migration* (2011), provides a major contemporary discussion on the connections between gender, religion, and the integration of immigrants from different ethnic origins. In the specific case of the intersections between religion, gender, and feminism, see: L. Scavone, 'Religiões, Gênero e Feminismo' in *REVER – Revista de Estudos da Religião* 8: (2008), 1–8.

²⁶ M. Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, London: Cohen & West 1966.

²⁷ G. Trumbull, *Consumer Capitalism: Politics, Product Markets and Firm Strategy in France and Germany*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2006.

'burden' is a sign that evil is acting on her life. Soon after receiving a pastor's prayer on her head, Norma expressed a violent state of demonic possession.

Pastor Sergio had flu and ordered the worker Suelen to perform the exorcism. Norma expresses a male entity, the 'Exu das Almas' (Exu of souls) and goes on to struggle in a very violent way on the ground. Suelen refuses help from a male worker, and continues the exorcism alone, showing great physical strength and 'treatment' to deal with possession, until she determines: 'It's over for you, Satan! You'll now be burned! In the name of Jesus!'; and Norma collapsed on the floor. On regaining consciousness, Norma especially thanked Suelen, whom she called 'a soldier of God' in this kind of spiritual battle. At the end, several people congratulated Suelen and commended her performance – 'acting like a male exorcist'. Norma said that in a moment of the possession she was semi-conscious and felt Suelen not as a woman but a 'man'.

In the specific situation of exorcism, the evangelical Suelen does not see it as a problem to be considered a 'man': 'I forget that I'm a woman. I act as an instrument of God, a soldier of God'. Therefore, although a woman, Suelen defines herself as a 'male soldier', a masculinized figure. The women workers must act 'as a male', not only in terms of discipline and physical strength, but especially with 'a male personality'. The women normally use military terms when they talk about their work as missionaries: 'I'm expecting an order from the Pastor'; 'tomorrow we'll have a training program to improve ourselves in spiritual warfare';²⁸ 'we're soldiers and the commander [Pastor] ordered us to arrive two hours before the cult on Sunday morning to clean up the temple' and 'do things'.

Marta – another missionary – said that the other Brazilian evangelical churches are 'weak' and 'inefficient', precisely because they do not have the 'force' and 'masculinity' that the UCKG has: 'In the church, we don't have sex, there are no male or female workers. There are only workers that are like faithful soldiers and ready to serve our Lord Jesus Christ here at His house and under the orders of the commander [Pastor]'.

Spaniard and Catalan followers in the UCKG-Familia Unida are very few. In the fieldwork we met only three 'natives', who frequented the liturgical activities with some regularity: Drica, and the couple Joan, and Paulina. In the beginning, Drica was a little afraid, but just in the first meeting, she was positively impressed with the organization of the church, with the technological resources, 'design' of the temple, cleanliness, punctuality and formal dress of the pastors and workers. According to Drica, who is a secretary in a Catalan company, this evangelical church impresses anyone who visits and emphasized its entrepreneurship, professionalism and organization like a company.²⁹

²⁸ The concept of *spiritual war* has been mentioned in many socio-anthropological studies on Pentecostalism. Ruuth and Rodrigues, for instance, argue that the liturgy of the UCKG was formulated on a new trinity: no longer centered on the classic Catholic trinity of 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit', but on the representation of 'God, Devil, and Man'. A. Ruuth and D. Rodrigues, *Deus, o Demônio e o Homem: O Fenômeno Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, Lisboa: Colibri 1999.

²⁹ Doing research on the UCKG in Portugal, Italy, and Spain, we observed various preparatory courses and continuous training program for workers and pastors. In his Master's Thesis – in Management – Resende comments that the UCKG is very professional and its organizational strategy is similar to public and private companies and these

Joan and Paulina came to Barcelona in 2009, because he was transferred to the Catalan office of a multinational company. According to Joan, the UCKG only converts a few Spanish people because of the exaggerated emphasis on offerings and on the tenet that the 'blessings' can only be achieved by believers through monetary donations, i.e., a kind of payment for salvation.³⁰ In addition, Joan commented that the 'manly' character of the pastors and women workers is very interesting in a country like Spain, where the 'plague of feminism' has destroyed the traditional family and the hierarchical gender relationship that 'had existed between men and women'. He ended the conversation by saying that Spanish women have been harmed by misconceptions of feminism and because of this situation they have become 'men without a phallus'.

The perceptions mentioned above by Drica and Joan (and by others key informants) refer to an important dimension of gender in the context of migration: the revaluation of internalized norms of behaviour and the questioning of social role models.³¹ In the specific case of Brazilian missionaries and immigrants, it refers also to the re-establishment of identity marks that characterize 'Brazilianness'.³²

It is important to understand if migration, gender, and religion have autonomy and their own dynamic, or if they are part of the same social system of differentiation. Another important issue is how these three domains are articulated in the social construction of gender, in the context of immigration and ethnic and religious groups.³³

In the specific context of Brazilian missionaries in Barcelona, this argument is quite relevant because it pays attention to the possible dissonances of power, cosmologies, and 'status', involving the missionaries amongst themselves and between them and the members-believers of the charismatic group Raboni Ajaray and the evangelical church Família Unida; relationships that are circumscribed by ideals of conversion, indoctrination, and intercultural dialogue.

Another important issue is that the missionaries of the Raboni Ajaray and Família Unida, especially women, develop transnational practices, through ongoing communications, and regular visits to their country of origin or through remittances of money, information, and material goods. According to Adriana Piscitelli, to understand these practices an analytical perspective is necessary that considers the different spaces of *agency* of these immigrants, which are present in different locations; therefore, in a logic of trans-locality.

factors could explain its financial success and growth in number of believers, in Brazil and around the world. P.J.P. Resende, *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus: Análise de um Caso de Sucesso de Estratégia por Diferenciação* (Master dissertation), Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas 2006.

³⁰ A. Ruuth and D. Rodrigues. (op.cit.).

³¹ Yvonne Rieker, 'Love Crossing Borders: Changing Patterns of Courtship and Gender Relations among Italian Migrants in Germany' in L. Baldassar and D. Gabaccia (eds.), *Intimacy and Italian Migration: Gender and Domestic Lives in a Mobile World*, Fordham: Fordham University Press 2011, 113–125.

³² A.G. Piscitelli, 'Tránsitos: circulación de brasileñas en el ámbito de la transnacionalización de los mercados sexual y matrimonial' in *Horizontes Antropológicos* 15:31 (2009) 101–137.

³³ Teresita de Barbieri, 'Sobre la Categoría de Género. Una introducción teórico-metodológica' in *Revista Interamericana de Sociología* 6:2 (1992), 147–178.

In our ethnographic fieldwork we collected testimonies talking about the new 'status' and the new 'agency' relations³⁴ that women have acquired with their missionary work, in the context of the diaspora. Emblematic is the testimony of the evangelical worker Suelen. After her arrival in Spain, and having 'transformed' her behaviour and achieved a 'specialized' attitude as a missionary of the UCKG-Familia Unida, two important changes happened in her life: a) she has been 'really heard' on issues involving her relatives; probably, according to her, due to regular money remittances that she sends to them; b) she is considered a 'healer', who has progressed to performing 'works of healing and deliverance from evil' for friends and family members. In this era of high-tech communication, the healings and spiritual liberations performed by Suelen have been transmitted – from Barcelona to a small village in Brazil – through phone calls and prayers mediated by computer screens.

Hence, it would be reductionist to reflect on the strategies of social organization, circumscribed by the gender dimension, in the lives of these Pentecostal people, considering only what has happened/changed in the context of diaspora. It is also important to consider the dynamics and changes promoted by women in their places of origin, from the new realities of their new lives and the new possibilities of *agency*³⁵ that was granted to them by the migration flows and respective transnational contacts and circulation of information. The regular remittances of money and material goods allow them a regular interference in the lives of the relatives who receive the 'aid', which causes an expansion of the spaces of influence and decision-making in their family in Brazil.³⁶

In conclusion, the regular remittance of money, information, and material goods, surpasses affectivity and acquires a political and economic dimension, because it extends significantly the spaces of *agency* of the Brazilian missionaries, men and in particular women. This reality reflects the dynamic and transnational character of the *gender strategies* involving missionaries. The different spaces of *agency* structured by these immigrants can be encouraged and enhanced by the religious sphere, both Protestant and Catholic.

'Rebel', 'Fickle' and 'Faithful Members' Religious Dynamics and Gender Strategies

To understand the dynamic strategies of social organization in both religious groups, the charismatic Raboni Ajaray and the evangelical Familia Unida, and the role that the gender dimension plays in these processes, it is relevant to discuss the three emic categories: 'rebels', 'fickle', and 'faithful members'. 'Rebels' refers to people that often criticize the doctrine of the group/church and, for this reason, participate sporadically in the religious meetings or only accompany the family members. 'Fickle' is an ambiguous term, because it may designate those who have definitively left the church/group, and those who only

³⁴ A. Giddens, (op. cit.).

³⁵ A. Giddens (op. cit.). Sherry Ortner, 'Poder e Projetos: reflexões sobre a agência' e 'Uma atualização da Teoria da Prática' in M. Grossi, C. Eckert and P. Fry (orgs.), *Conferências e diálogos: saberes e práticas antropológicas*, Blumenau: Nova Letra 2007, 45–80.

³⁶ A.G. Piscitelli, (op. cit.).

'occupy chairs' in the worship venues – they are physically present in the religious activities, but are 'fickle in the faith', 'spiritually distant from God', 'have not yet truly accepted Jesus', are not 'fully converted' members. The 'faithful members' are people that have 'received the Holy Spirit' and, despite the daily hardships and strong 'temptations of the devil', remain firm in their religious group.

Among the evangelical 'rebels' is a woman called Selma. At the first worship service that she attended in the Família Unida with her mother, she felt spiritually ill and received a private prayer from the pastor at the altar. During the prayer, she vomited 'comida macumbada' (bewitched food), expelling the evil. According to Selma, in Brazil, she and her family were followers of the syncretic Afro-Brazilian religion Umbanda.³⁷

Selma's mother, Lucia, 'remained firm in the faith'. However, encouraged by her daughter, Lucia became a 'rebel' and began to criticize the church, especially the exaggerated emphasis on extracting money from its followers. In March 2012, Lucia left the church and began to participate in the Pentecostal 'Renewed Baptist Church'. According to Lucia, in contrast to Família Unida, the pastors of the RBC are not mercenaries and the women have leadership positions (not only as workers, but as pastors also), 'without ceasing to be women'. She emphasizes that the term 'men in skirts' is perfect to describe the performances and postures of the women workers of the Família Unida. For her, Suelen and Marta, for instance, have shaped and transformed themselves in a way so suitable to the manly structure of this evangelical church that they have lost their 'feminine soul'.

Another 'rebel' congregant was Lucas. Being closer to one of the ethnographers, Lucas confided that he was gay. He tries, but fails to 'fasten himself' in the Família Unida, due to the contradictions of this church in relation to gender and sexuality. The pastors and workers are frequently talking about the importance of every believer being free in the 'family of Christ' (Christ loves everybody) and develop a 'rational faith'. Yet, they attribute spiritual reasons for any problem (physical, psychological or economic) and for any different sexual orientation, such as homosexuality, considered by them as 'malign', an 'evil behaviour'. He emphasizes that this contradictory position makes this church discursively 'unreasonable'. He is a 'confused' believer, without accepting his sexual orientation and is constantly interrogating if homosexuality is a disease or a manifestation of an evil spirit. Nevertheless, although questioning the UCKG doctrine, which makes him 'confused' and 'in doubt', Lucas is still a congregant of the Família Unida.

This case shows the contradictory character that underlies the cosmology of UCKG. Trying to be 'chameleonic', adaptive in its discourse and rituality, the church is too ambiguous in its doctrine, activities and religious orientation, and this is reflected significantly in the social construction of gender identities of the congregants.

In the temple of San Andreu, there were eleven 'fickle' congregants, seven women and four men: one of them was the evangelical Carmen. Her religious trajectory within the Família Unida shows clearly the dynamic character that

³⁷ A. Ruuth and D. Rodrigues (op. cit.).

A.P. Oro, 'O neopentecostalismo macumbeiro' in *Revista USP* 68 (2006), 319–332.

can circumscribe the three mentioned emic categories. She does not feel like an 'excluded' or 'inconsistent' believer, but the pastor and workers always insist on saying: 'she's a congregant, but she's not a true daughter of God; she's not faithful; doesn't pay the tithe; doesn't make the chains'³⁸ and, as a consequence, she had not received the Holy Spirit. In the UCKG, there is an action that 'materializes' the confirmation of the congregant as a 'faithful member': the inscription of his/her name in the 'Book of the Tithers' (see Figure 3).

Talking about her religious experience, Carmen in the beginning did not understand the liturgy and, therefore, considered the UCKG doctrine as 'manly', reinforcing the unequal roles between men and women. However, continuing to participate in the worship services and daily life of the church, she changed her opinion; she now recognizes and perceives 'strength and credibility', and 'positive things'. In addition, she met groups of Catholic charismatics that are 'spiritually weak'. According to Carmen, only a 'strong' and 'manly' church like UCKG can help her in the difficult process of 'change of mind', and liberation, physical and spiritual. That she needed from a church to face the difficulties of her immigrant life as a poor woman in Spain.

Carmen had an interesting religious experience: in five different worship services, she was possessed by the 'Exu of death'. After regaining consciousness, she always heard from Pastor Sergio that she was not still completely free of that demonic entity, because she is 'inconstant' and does not make a decision to become 'truly faithful': 'if you continue giving small offerings you'll receive from God only a small liberation. You must make a vow of faith and make a sacrifice next Sunday! Do this test of faith'.

Soon after a Friday meeting in February 2012 – a special day for exorcism and spiritual liberation – Carmen commented that the words of the pastor had given her courage to 'take an attitude of faith'; she went to the bank and withdrew



Figure 3: The Book of the Tithers (Temple of San Andreu).

³⁸ The liturgical calendar of the UCKG is composed by regular 'chains', consisting of special religious meetings, worship services, designed to operate in specific areas of the believer's life, trying to resolve problems such as: financial difficulties, unemployment, health problems, 'spiritual release', and affective or familiar conflicts.

all the money that she had saved. The next Sunday, Carmen made a 'vow of faith' with God and offered all that money at the altar of the church and after that she received the Holy Spirit. From then on, she was no longer considered 'fickle' and became a 'faithful member'. Also, in the gender relationship, she has ceased to be 'dominated' by her husband and sister, has more authority over her two children and faces the 'world' in a different way, not as a 'poor person' that accepts everything, but as a 'new and stronger woman'.

Carmen showed herself to be well aware of the commoditized character and 'religious consumption' promoted by the UCKG-Familia Unida. This evangelical church strongly encourages entrepreneurship, the idea of reciprocity between believers and God/the Church, and also the precept that the consumption of material goods by immigrants is an effective means to achieve 'citizenship' in Europe. Due to the desire for prosperity, which is 'good and divine', it is not a coincidence that Carmen has become a small entrepreneur (she is the owner of a micro-company selling cosmetics), and acquires material goods, associating her actual 'welfare' with the capacity to consume 'things of value'.

Soon before a meeting for economic prosperity (Temple of San Andreu, on January 23, 2012), the evangelical worker Suelen synthesized the concept of the neo-Pentecostal 'theology of prosperity',³⁹ to a new believer: 'God always wants the best for us, to have a good car, a nice house, money in the bank. This is citizenship, and no government, no politician will give it to us. Only He can give it to us [points to the name of Jesus on the altar of the temple]'.

Our ethnographic data demonstrates that the strategies of social organization and gender relations foster processes of creation of new forms of *agency* which are based on notions of reciprocity and linked to 'consumer capitalism',⁴⁰ a process clearly evident in the UCKG-Familia Unida, a religious institution that has a huge media apparatus and is very well structured as a professional company.

Conclusion

Following the extensive critiques of the (hetero)sexual division of labour carried out by feminism, gender studies, women's studies, and queer theories and particularly based on our ethnographic research, we can assume that the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos (Mother of Jesus) and, as a result, 'mother of all Catholics', is a key figure for the processes of 'feminization'. The Mariology epiphanies – such as the 'Virgen de Guadalupe' and 'Nossa Senhora Aparecida' – are crucial elements in influencing the perceptions of feminization among the charismatic Raboni Ajaray. With reference to Protestantism, in contrast, the absence of a strong Mariology is a source for the emphasis on 'God the Father' as a 'strong male'. Somehow, this is at the basis of the discourse and dogmatic corpus of the evangelical UCKG-Familia Unida.

Hence, these factors influence significantly in the way the immigrants, Latin-Americans (Spanish-speaking people) in general and Brazilians in particular,

³⁹ D. Rodrigues, 'Universal Church of the Kingdom of God' in P. Clarke (ed.), *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, New York: Routledge 2006, 593–595.

⁴⁰ G. Trumbull, (op. cit.).

perceive the gender relations circumscribed by the religious sphere and experience it differently in their specific migratory contexts. Brazilian missionaries, men and women, said that they had to 'reconfigure' what they thought was appropriate for a woman and a man in Brazil and adapt them to the new 'realities' in the host societies. In this sense, the 'feminized' character of the Raboni Ajaray and the 'manly' character of the Família Unida are gender emic categories, dynamically built by these missionaries.

In the case of the evangelical church, the 'manly' religious manners associated with the dynamic, polysemic, and 'chameleonic' character, which have positive social connotations, are crucial elements to explain the strong power of attraction of new believers, immigrant and also native people.

The 'maternal' manner and the 'feminized' character of the Raboni Ajaray constitute elements of cultural identification, which are crucial to understanding the national and ethnic composition of the charismatics, and also the legitimacy of the Brazilian missionaries among the believers of this Catholic prayer group. This legitimacy, to paraphrase Giddens,⁴¹ broadens the spaces of *agency* and the ability to interfere in the social structure and gender strategies of the immigrant population, in particular the women.

The life trajectories of these charismatic and evangelical women suggest that they feel themselves more empowered, particularly in some spheres of social life (labour, insertion into networks of trust and reciprocity, which grant them new economic opportunities) and psychologically, with the improvement in their self-esteem. This idea of empowerment is due to the feeling of 'communitas'⁴² and the construction of reciprocity is linked to the notion of 'gift',⁴³ both processes stimulated by religious ties to the charismatic Raboni Ajaray and to the evangelical Família Unida, in particular.

The ethnographic data demonstrated that for understanding the dynamic strategies of social organization, in both religious groups, it is relevant to consider three emic categories: 'rebels', 'fickle', and 'faithful members'. As we have seen, 'rebels' refers to people that criticize the doctrine of the group/church and because of this do not participate continuously in the worship services. 'Fickle', in turn, is an ambiguous term; it may designate people who have definitively left the church/group, and those that although they are physically present in the religious activities, are considered 'fickle in the faith', due to the fact that they have not 'truly accepted Jesus'. The 'faithful members' are people that remain firm in their religious group.

In regard to the social organizations and gender strategies, the daily work of these Brazilian missionaries is surrounded by dynamic processes that bring new subjectivities, based on specific forms of reciprocity, influenced by 'Consumer Capitalism'. In her study, Strathern⁴⁴ includes the dimension of gender to better understand the notion of 'gift', in the context of intercultural dialogue. This was quite evident in the Família Unida and Raboni Ajaray, where the

⁴¹ A. Giddens. (op. cit.).

⁴² V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago: Aldine 1969.

⁴³ M. Mauss, (op. cit.).

⁴⁴ M. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1988.

doctrines and ritualities reflect the process of social construction of gender identities among the congregants.

It is pertinent to emphasize that this comparative anthropological study – focused on migration, gender, and religion – was also carried out following the analytical perspective of ‘reverse mission’.⁴⁵ This viewpoint shows not only the gender strategies and the inter-culturality of the Brazilian charismatic prayer group and an evangelical church in the context of diaspora, but also the process of religious change in Europe. Previously an exporter of religious doctrines and institutions, the secularized Europe of today is a fertile ground for missionary work originating from Latin America and Brazil, in particular.

The religious revival of the ‘North’ (Europe), developed by missionaries from the ‘South’ (Latin America), is a dynamic and rapidly expanding process. Therefore, there is an enormous ethnographic field for sociologists and anthropologists to do research on different religious groups (Catholic and Protestant) and its active and diverse forms of cultural adaptation to the ‘host societies’, as a strategy of proselytization and conversion of native people and other immigrants.

⁴⁵ P. Freston, 2010. (op. cit.).