# Umbanda and Hybridity

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**Abstract**

Scholars of religion continue to talk of syncretism where their colleagues have moved on to talk of hybridity. This paper reviews critiques of the latter concept and argues that 'hybridity' can be a useful concept, but only if further specified. I follow Peter Wade in distinguishing between *hybridity of origin* (the combination of pre-existing forms), and *hybridity of encounter* (the result of diasporic movements). I propose a third type, *hybridity of refraction*, in order to highlight the manner in which religious or cultural phenomena refract social tensions within a specific nation or society, resulting in a spectrum of ritual, doctrinal and/or religious forms. The typology is not meant to be complete or mutually exclusive: it suggests the value of adopting distinct, potentially overlapping, perspectives on hybridization. I illustrate the heuristic value of this approach with the case of Umbanda, a twentieth-century Brazilian religion.

**Keywords**

hybridity, syncretism, Umbanda, Candomblé, Kardecism, Brazil

The interdisciplinarity of Religious Studies is a source of both strengths and weaknesses. The field draws fruitfully on concepts and theories from other disciplines, but it tends to do so late in the game and often uncritically. For a generation now, scholars of post-colonial and cultural studies, literary criticism, intellectual history, communications, qualitative sociology and other fields have used and critiqued the concept of "hybridity." Scholars of religion have covered some of the same ground in dealing with "syncretism," but the newer term offers distinct advantages and raises fresh problems. Given that "hybridity" appears poised to play a more prominent role in the study of religion—as scholars in the field increasingly research diasporic religion, draw on post-colonial theory, and so forth—this is an opportune moment to learn what lessons we can from the hybridity debates in other fields. "Hybridity" is valuable for four reasons: it reminds us that analyses of religious mixture must take into account broader cultural interactions, not just relations among those elements considered "religious"; it usefully highlights the prevalence, creativity and dynamism of cultural mixture, especially in our current global context; it reminds us that the study of contemporary religious phenomena requires attention to very specific historical, regional, and social contexts; and it reminds us to

be wary of reifying or attaching normative weight to the boundaries that are crossed and blurred during cultural mixture.

In this paper, I first support the claim that scholars of religion continue to talk of syncretism where their colleagues have moved on to talk of hybridity. I then review a number of critiques of the latter concept. This results in some practical points regarding the critical use of "hybridity." I then offer a brief overview of a specific case, Umbanda, a twentieth-century Brazilian religion. In analyzing this case I propose a threefold distinction between types of hybridity. This typology is proposed for its heuristic value, not because it is complete or mutually exclusive. I first draw on work by Peter Wade in order to distinguish two types of hybridity, which I rename *hybridity of origin* (the combination of two pre-existing forms), and *hybridity of encounter* (the result of diasporic movements). Based on my discussion of Umbanda, I argue that Wade's distinction can be usefully complemented by the addition of a third type, *hybridity of refraction*. In suggest the latter in order to underline that certain cases of cultural mixture must be analyzed in terms of social tensions within a specific nation or culture.

My conclusion is that the concept of hybridity usefully draws our attention to an important set of issues, but that this contribution of the concept remains at a very general level. The real work of analysis comes down, as always, to careful work with cases. In this work, general concepts like syncretism and hybridity are of little value except as flags of allegiance to a certain approach.

**Beyond "Syncretism"**

Scholars of religion have continued to talk "syncretism" for an entire academic generation during which most of their colleagues, in other areas of the humanities and social sciences, have moved on to talk of "hybridity." "Hybridity" came to prominence primarily in post-colonial theory, where, by a decade ago, it was "one of the most widely employed and disputed terms" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998: 118). The concept became influential in other fields, intersecting with a wide variety of related terms, both old and new: e.g., acculturation, articulation, bricolage, creolization, fusion, heterogeneity, in-betweenness, interstitiality, mélange, mestizaje, multiple identity, pastiche, polyphony, subalternity, third space, transculturation, etc. For better or for worse, Religious Studies has been curiously slow to jump on this terminological bandwagon.

A keyword search of research databases offers a useful measure of our field's provincialism on this issue.[1] Comparing the relative number of occurrences of syncretism-terms with hybridity-terms makes it clear that scholars of religion are unusual in their preference for the former. In the ATLA Religion with Serials database, heavily weighted toward Religious Studies publications, 5.5% of all references to either syncretism- or hybridity-terms were constituted by the latter. That is, publications in the database referred to syncretism seventeen times more often than they did to hybridity. In the Francis database, with solid but proportionately less Religious Studies representation, the numbers of occurrences were around equal. In SocINDEX, representing sociology with no weighting toward Religious Studies, "hybridity" references constituted 87% of the total. In Academic Search Premier, with its more general set of sources, 99.1% of the references were to "hybridity." Clearly, scholars of religion prefer the s-word where their colleagues do not.

The situation in Religious Studies is beginning to change. An increasing number of papers are being published that frame issues in terms of hybridity. However, even apparent attempts to privilege the newer terminology effectively treat "syncretism" and "hybridity" as synonyms: a special issue of *Social Compass* framed by the editors as "Rethinking Religious Hybridity" (McGuire and Maduro 2005) included three papers on "hybridity" and two on "syncretism."

There is, of course, a complex debate on the origin, history, allegiances, and value of the concept of syncretism (see Stewart 1999; Leopold and Jensen 2004; Martin and Leopold 2004). Many of the strengths and weaknesses of "syncretism" also apply in the case of "hybridity" (see Kraidy 2002; Hutnyk 2005). The most obvious criticism is that "syncretism

[1] Table 1. Relative occurrence of hybridity terms ('h') and syncretism terms ('s') in keyword searches of four research databases: ATLA Religion with Serials; Francis; SocINDEX; and Academic Search Premier. Search performed 18/04/07.

| | ATLA | Fran. | SocIN. | ASP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| hybridity | 19 | 137 | 525 | 762 |
| hybrid | 47 | 1143 | 1427 | 43154 |
| hybridized | - | 32 | 47 | 1867 |
| Total 'h' | 66 | 1312 | 1999 | 45783 |
| syncretism | 1017 | 1084 | 178 | 288 |
| syncretic | 54 | 69 | 96 | 117 |
| syncretistic | 74 | 21 | 26 | 32 |
| Total 's' | 1145 | 1174 | 300 | 437 |
| h/s | 0.1 | 1.1 | 6.7 | 104.8 |
| h/ h+s (%) | 5.5 | 52.8 | 87.0 | 99.1 |

essentializes too much, implying that there were once well-behaved pure breeds before the new religious mutts gnawed through their leashes" (Johnson 2002b: 302). However, it is possible to draw a broadly useful distinction between the two concepts: *syncretism is a mixture of religious elements; hybridity is a broader mixture of cultural elements*. This is less a rigorous definition than a pointer in the direction of hybridity's value as a more appropriate concept than syncretism for studying religion in an increasingly globalized age.

Syncretism is generally presented as a phenomenon internal to religion. Michael Pye defined it as "the temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern" (1971: 93). Charles Stewart offers "the broadest and most general definition of syncretism: the combination of elements from two or more different religious traditions within a specified frame" (2004: 282). Similarly, theorist of hybridity Nestor Garcia Canclini defines syncretism as "a combination of traditional religious practices" (Canclini 2006[2001]: xxviii).

Hybridity, on the other hand, more directly acknowledges the complex interactions between religions and their historical, political, social and cultural contexts. The distinction is not sharp; it points to two ends of a spectrum. Scholars of religion highlight religious elements in their analyses of hybrid forms, but, in general, a conceptual turn to "hybridity" highlights a broader range of cultural dimensions of religious change. In addition to focusing on cultural mixture more broadly, hybridity-talk emphasizes the normality, creativity, dynamism and political implications of such mixture. Ulf Hannerz for example, emphasizes the advantages of "a creolist point of view":

> It identifies diversity itself as a source of cultural vitality; it demands of us that we see complexity and fluidity as an intellectual challenge rather than as something to escape from. It should point us to ways of looking at systems of meaning which do not hide their connections with the facts of power and material life. (1987: 556)

A turn toward "hybridity," then, offers two immediate advantages for scholars of religion: it highlights religions' complex relations to other dimensions of their cultures and societies; and it opens doors to existing cross-disciplinary discussions of these broader issues. Of course, "hybridity" is not without its own weaknesses.

**Evaluating "Hybridity"**

The shift from "mixture" as a phenomenon internal to religion to one that reflects religions' complex interactions with their historical, political, social and cultural contexts is a valuable one. However, scholars of religion need not reinvent the wheel. Whether or not the actual term "hybridity" is deemed of value, scholars of religion should pay attention to the extensive debates over its strengths and weaknesses as they grapple with religions' places in local and global contexts of cultural mixture. The concept of hybridity has its problems. Several critiques have emerged in fields outside Religious Studies.

First, it has biased roots. As Robert Young has shown, "hybridity" is rooted in the racially loaded discourse of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory (Young 1995; Stross 1999). This led late twentieth-century scholars to be wary of metaphorical language that draws on these roots: e.g., species, combination, crossing and grafting. This politically correct reflexivity among anthropologists and cultural theorists cast a shadow on an entire vocabulary, given the implicit valorization of pure parents over impure offspring. Paul Gilroy laments "the lack of a means of adequately describing, let alone theorizing, intermixture, fusion and syncretism without suggesting the existence of anterior 'uncontaminated' purities" (Gilroy 2000: 250; cf. McGuire and Maduro 2005: 411).

We can discount this first problem to the extent that we question that concepts with dark pasts necessarily have dark futures. The issues of a word's origin may or may not be relevant to evaluating its current uses and functions. If we correct for biases of origin, there seems no need to throw out the concept. (For the same reason, there is no need to discard the concept of "religion" just because its use as a cross-cultural category has, in part, colonial origins.) Reflexive awareness of the normative dimensions of this focus on "pure" roots mollifies this first critique.

Scholars of religion are especially well positioned to adopt this reflexive stance. Writing in the context of Reformation history, Susan R. Boettcher suggests that, because scholars of religion "have no necessary ethical responsibility to take confessional sides," [they] can use the concept of hybridity's ability to blur the observer's understanding of power relationships "to plumb the depths of the frequent ambiguities of religious, cultural and political power at work" (2005: 450). On the one hand, we should not be too quick to assume that we are capable of some sort of "pure" objective, outsider stance. On the other hand, the study of religion has long had a very healthy debate over precisely these issues of reflexivity regarding

the people and cultures that we study.

A second critique focuses on the descriptive dimension of this focus on "pure" roots, noting that such roots tend to be mixtures themselves. [2] Hybridity offers little analytical purchase, because it is hard to specify what is not hybrid: "All cultures are hybrid. … Culture as an analytic concept is always hybrid … since it can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more or less coherent symbolic and social worlds" (Werbner 1997: 15).

Scholars of religion are especially aware of this: Anita Leopold reminds us that "The history of religion confirms that every religion is in 'essence' syncretistic—there are no pristine origins or essences" (Leopold 2004: 5). This again is only a problem if we imagine that our concepts must be absolute. There seems to be little difficulty if we use terms such as "syncretism" or "hybridity" in a relative sense, marking phenomena whose mixed nature is more prominent from a certain perspective, or in a contextual sense, using the terms as shorthand to highlight selected aspects of a given case. As Brian Stross puts it,

> One might say that there are no truly 'pure' forms, … completely homogeneous in composition (culturally) and perhaps never have been. Thus everything is a 'hybrid' of sorts. Yet the term has both utility and meaning for most of us. … Pure in this context means relatively more homogeneous in character …, having less internal variation. Hybrid … is of course more heterogeneous in character, having more internal variation. (1999: 258)

However, these uses of hybridity terms are weak. It is trivially correct but hardly helpful to note that purity and hybridity are relative terms. This offers little analytical leverage beyond highlighting mixture as a topic of interest, leaving the important work to a closer consideration of what is mixed, how, to what degree, under what circumstances, and with what effects. If, as scholars of religion have long recognized, hybridity and syncretism are the norm rather than the exception, what needs explaining is why so much importance is placed on allegedly pure precedents and progenitors: "what is problematic is not hybridity but the fetishism of boundaries that has marked so much of history" (Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 221); "Syncretism, acculturation, hybridity, and the creole are no longer the riddle to be solved. It is

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[2] This section draws on parts of Engler 2006.

rather zones of religious purity and stability that now seem most worthy of curiosity" (Johnson 2002b: 308).

A third critique of hybridity is that it overemphasizes diachronic differences, valuing historical origins/roots over hybrid actualities, or vice versa. This distinction has much in common with the distinction between "real" and invented traditions: both distinctions are misleading if overly sharp and especially when this descriptive distinction is given a normative dimension, e.g., overemphasizing the static nature of the "old" and the self-serving tactical innovations of the "new" (Engler 2005a; 2005b). Ideological appeals to invented traditions can be smuggled in along with the celebration of hybridity: "in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic" (Bhabha 1994: 35). Stuart Hall is more optimistic, "hybrids retain strong links to and identifications with the traditions and places of their 'origin.' But they are without the illusions of any return to the past" (Hall 1993: 363). Once again, the warning for scholars of religion tempted to work with the concept of hybridity is to pay explicit attention to the potential problems with the concept that scholars in other disciplines have already flagged.

Fourth, "hybridity" underemphasizes synchronic differences. According to John Hutnyk, the concept leads to a "flattening of difference [which] is secured at the very moment that celebrates difference and the creative productivity of new mixings" (Hutnyk 2005: 96). On this view, "hybridity" draws attention to superficial distinctions while erasing more important ones: it "is inauthentic, without roots, for the elite only, does not reflect social realities on the ground. It is multiculturalism lite, highlights superficial confetti culture and glosses over deep cleavages that exist on the ground"; above all, "hybridity" assumes equality, hiding issues of power (Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 221, 224).

Fifth, hybridity has become too glibly associated with a specific political agenda, sidestepping the detailed analyses needed to specify this relation more carefully. Hybridity is often celebrated precisely because hybridization is allegedly a politically significant process of resistance to, for example, the homogeneity of a global consumer culture: "Hybridity has today developed into a code word associated to a large extent with hegemonic politics" (Moreiras 1999: 388). As John Hutnyk notes, it is often the case that "assertions of identity and difference are celebrated too quickly as resistance, in either the nostalgic form of

'traditional survivals' or mixed in a 'new world of hybrid forms'" (Hutnyk 2005: 80). Hutnyk's ironic conclusion is that this allegedly political attention to hybridity fails precisely because its conception of politics is overly superficial. Talking "hybrids" is not a way of being political but rather of avoiding doing so; it offers a nod and a wink that substitute for the difficult work of getting down to cases: "syncretism and hybridity are academic conceptual tools providing an alibi for lack of attention to politics" (Hutnyk 2005: 92). These last two critiques, again, are more reminders to proceed with caution than reasons to abandon the concept.

Gilroy's often-cited rant against "anterior purities" offers a useful summary of these issues, in part despite its explicit thrust:

> Which culture is not … hybrid? The idea of 'hybridity,' of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities ... [T]here isn't any purity; there isn't any anterior purity…. I try not to use the word 'hybrid', because there are degrees of it, and there are different mixes... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails. What people call 'hybridity', I used to call 'syncretism'... I would prefer to stick with that—syncretism is the norm, but, that dry anthropological word does not have any poetic charge to it. There isn't any purity. Who the fuck wants purity? Where purity is called for, I get suspicious. (Gilroy 1994: 54-5)

Ironically, Gilroy's simile of the cocktail doesn't do what it is meant to do, but its failure sheds unintentional light on several dimensions of hybridity. Gilroy says, "Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails," but this simile fails spectacularly: the bottles on the shelf above a cocktail bar themselves contain mixtures. In cocktail mixing as well, there are no anterior purities: in that sense cultural production *is* like mixing cocktails. A Manhattan, for example, is made from Canadian rye whiskey, Italian or French sweet vermouth, and Trinidadian/Tobagan or Venezuelan Angostura bitters, garnished with Maraschino cherries. And, of course, these ingredients themselves are mixtures: for example, the cherries are made by soaking them in Maraschino, a liqueur, invented by sixteenth-century Dominican monks in Zadar, Croatia, which is fermented from Italian, Croatian or Slovenian Marasca cherries, selected herbs, and tropical cane syrup. The difference is not one of origin or nature but of perceptions or framing. Bottled cocktail ingredients are packaged, branded, and marketed as *distinct and unitary* products; cocktails are marketed as *mixtures* of these. Both commodities gain in value due to the perceived naturalness or legitimacy of the distinction between unitary originals and hybrid product. Where everything is a mixture, the question becomes when and

why certain mixtures are presented or perceived as pure.

Distilling Gilroy's cocktail simile draws attention to four characteristics of hybridity that serve to summarize a set of issues that scholars of religion need to pay attention to:

- The contrast between unitary originals and hybrid product is, to an important extent, a construct. The distinction between pure and unadulterated is a relative one.
- Asserting the pure/impure contrast is a common tactic, but only one of many, for projecting normative force on this artificial boundary.
- This boundary is often constructed in terms of a diachronic dimension, with further normative force drawing on the distinction between tradition (long-established ingredients) and innovation (new mixture).
- Once this boundary has been legitimized, reified or naturalized, eliding it can have further ideological effects.

This forces us to clarify exactly what relative and contextualized leverage we seek to gain by using "hybridity" or other terms to point to mixtures. Unless we problematize the concept adequately, talking about hybrididy is just as vague and unhelpful as much talk of syncretism has been in the field of Religious Studies. The concept is only useful if grounded:

> Hybridity becomes a floating signifier ripe for appropriation, precisely because we use the concept without rigorous theoretical grounding…. [A] nongrounded use of hybridity is detrimental to theorizing … because it encourages superficial uses of the concept. Such uses will tend to be descriptive rather than analytical, utilitarian rather than critical. (Kraidy 2002: 323)

Talk of hybridity too often simply points at difference; two further steps are required. First, we need to pay more attention to a close analysis of specific cases, examining the specific social, material and ideological contexts where these processes work themselves out. Second, we must go beyond the basic work of describing hybrid forms to ground the concept more firmly in theory. With greater attention to the specific details of what is mixed under what circumstances and with what recourse to discourses of purity, the concept can offer useful analytical leverage. The following section offers a brief overview of Umbanda, highlighting

those characteristics that will be drawn upon in the final analytical section.

**The Spectrum of Umbandas**

Umbanda is a distinctively Brazilian religion that reflects the course of urbanization in modern Brazil (Ortiz 1975: 89; 1999[1978]: 214). It formed in the 1920s and 1930s as a self-conscious mixture of two traditions that are themselves mixtures: Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian tradition that evolved as various West African beliefs and practices encountered early-modern Iberian Catholicism in the context of a colonial slavery system; and Kardecist Spiritism, a rationalized French version of American Spiritualism, with strong mesmerist and Christian influences.[3] Two other religious influences were also important: Catholicism, primarily indirectly through both Kardecism and Candomblé but also with some direct influences; and indigenous traditions, not directly but through the imagined and romanticized figure of the *caboclo* (Concone 2001), but also (perhaps more directly) in possession by the spirits of animals in some northeastern groups (Toop 1972: 73). Arthur Ramos, in a classic study, noted that "in Brazil, there are no longer pure African cults, in terms of their origin" and pointed to seven distinct degrees of mixture, "in order of increasing syncretism," including Yoruba and Bantu variants as well as Islamic, "caboclo," Kardecist and Catholic elements (2001[1934]: 138). Umbanda, the most recent major religious innovation to draw on Afro-Brazilian roots, incorporates a broad spectrum of these influences. In this context, Ortiz argues that Umbanda has moved past syncretism to synthesis: "If 'candomblé' and 'macumba' are African religions, the spiritism of Umbanda is, on the contrary, a—I would say *the*—national religion of Brazil" (1975: 96; original emphasis). Further clarification of Umbanda's hybridity is clearly in order. A fruitful place to begin is by noting that it is a hybrid of hybrids, and one that reflects the social and historical context of its emergence: "Umbanda is a religion

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[3] On Candomblé see Carneiro 1977[1948], Bastide 1960, Prandi 1991, Johnson 2002a, Harding 2005 and Silva 2005[1994]. On Kardecism see Kloppenburg 1964, Bastide 1967, Warren 1968, Camargo 1973, Aubrée and Laplantine 1990, Hess 1991, and Negrão 2005[1987]. On Umbanda see Montero 1985, Brown and Bick 1987, Brumana and Martinez 1989, Brown 1994[1986], Negrão 1996, and Ortiz 1999 [1978]. On Neo-Pentecostalism and its ritual focus (in exorcism) on these same spirits and *orixás* see Birman 1997, Campos 1999[1997], Mariano 1999, and Oro 2007. I use the word "tradition" to point to the dynamic tension between strategies of legitimation and authority offered by 'authentic' and 'invented' traditions (Engler 2005a; 2005b). All translations from Portuguese and French are mine.

of a new model of society, as Kardecism was previously" (Prandi 1991: 62; see Fry 1982).

These religions are relatively small. In the 2000 census, 2.2 million Brazilians self-identified as Kardecists and 397,000 as Umbandists. Candomblé, the largest of the Afro-Brazilian traditions, is much smaller, with only 118,000 Brazilians claiming this as their primary religious affiliation (Jacob et al. 2003: 101-105). More nuanced analyses report slightly higher numbers (Pierucci and Prandi 2000). Due to the fact that Umbanda is seen as a provider of physical and spiritual healing services, a much larger number of Brazilians participate regularly in the rituals of Umbanda, though they do not consider themselves members of the religion.[4]

The two main "roots" of Umbanda are quite distinct from each other. Especially significant in the emergence of Umbanda are factors of race and class in the mixture of these anterior impurities. Candomblé, one of a wide range of Afro-Brazilian religions, places fundamental emphasis on the possession of initiated members by *orixás* (divinities originating primarily in various West African cultures and, at times, associated with Christian saints). *Terreiros* (grounds) are organized as a *familia-de-santo* under the leadership of the *pai-de-santo*, or less commonly *mãe-de-santo* (saint father/mother). Key rituals include the *roda-de-santo* (saint wheel) in which initiated members dance counter-clockwise, to intensely syncopated drumming, until they enter into a trance state, becoming *cavalos* (horses) for the *orixás*, as well as initiation and divination. Candomblé has received especially intense academic scrutiny and, arguably, the influential studies of Edison Carneiro and Roger Bastide went beyond making this one among many Afro-Brazilian religion well known: "Bastide did not limit himself to studying Candomblé. He contributed greatly to its invention" (Motta 1996: 32; see Despland 2008).

There are a number of differences between Candomblé and Umbanda (see Silva 2005[1994]: 126-127): e.g., Umbanda has a larger and more doctrinally elaborated set of supernatural entities; it places more emphasis on mediumship as a source of service to clients; it places less emphasis on divination, and less emphasis on the *pai-de-santo* as central to ritual (often foregoing that term and role entirely); it places less or no emphasis on initiation, with the charismatic authority of mediumship playing a greater role than the

[4] For an exemplary study of the appeal of Afro-Brazilian religions' healing functions, resulting in multiple adherence among Catholics, see Oro 1989.

ranking of initiation and period of study in its institutional hierarchy; it maintains a greater role for sorcery (though less than the closely related religion Quimbanda); its texts and hymns make less use of African vocabulary and, at the "white" end of the spectrum of rituals forms, uses Christian elements (e.g., the "Our Father"). These differences are sufficient that, as Véronique Boyer suggests, "Candomblé and Umbanda form poles, tendencies that organize the religious universe with opposing and irreconcilable currents" (1996: 18).

Kardecism presents itself as science, philosophy and religion. Its beliefs include the possibility of communication with disembodied spirits, reincarnation, karma, the universal spiritual perfection of humankind, "obsession" caused by the interference of non-evolved spirits, a plurality of inhabited worlds, a transcendent God, and Jesus Christ as an exceptionally involved spirit. Key rituals include consultation with or reception of messages from spirits received by mediums, the *passe* (a form of blessing similar to New Age cleansing of the aura) and study sessions.

The origin of Umbanda and its ongoing social location are closely tied to issues of race and class. Three tendencies, reflecting the Brazilian "myth of three races" (indigenous, black and white [DaMatta 1987: 58-85])—were present in the formation of Umbanda. First, Spiritists looked to Afro-Brazilian traditions for a more intensely emotional and corporeally satisfying symbolism and ritual, leading to the *empretecimento* (blackening) of Kardecism (Ortiz 1999[1978]: 40-45):

> [Umbanda's founders] came to prefer the African and indigenous spirits and divinities present in 'Macumba,' considering them more competent than the highly evolved kardecist spirits in terms of the cure and treatment of a wide range of diseases and other problems. They found the rituals of 'Macumba' much more stimulating and dramatic than those of Kardecism, which seemed by comparison static and insipid. (Brown 1985: 11)

A second tendency was the late nineteenth-century *embranquecimento* (whitening) of Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian traditions, due to two factors, primarily in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo: the presence of increasing numbers of white members, often new immigrants; and the formation of a "low Spiritism" among the lower classes (Camargo 1961: 34-35; Ortiz 1999[1978]: 4-40). Edison Carneiro's study of Afro-Brazilian religions in Bahia in the 1930s, for example, found Spiritist ideas being absorbed into *candomblé de caboclo*, a tradition

already incorporating both African and indigenous elements: "it is notable that some of these cults have reduced themselves to the so-called *baixo espiritismo* ('low-spiritualism')" (Carneiro 1940: 276, original emphasis; cf. Leacock 1964a; Ortiz 1999[1978]: 36). The appropriation of kardecist elements was an important factor in this aspect of Umbanda's emergence: "'Cleaning up' the new religion of those elements most compromised by a secret and sacrificial initiation tradition was to take Kardecism as a model, one capable of expressing the ideas and values of the new republican society…" (Prandi 1991: 49).

The third factor involved the other of Brazil's three races. In the 1920s, a number of kardecist mediums began to receive the spirits of Brazilian Indians. The presence of these *caboclos* was rejected by mainstream Spiritism as impure and incompatible with universal human spiritual progress. (The term "*caboclo*," often used by outsiders to characterize residents of Amazonia, conveys racial mixture, but has negative connotations of rural backwardness and simplicity [Pace 1997].) In the years since, some Kardecists have been open to rapprochement with Umbanda, but a firm rejection has been more prominent; a statement from the Kardecist press is typical: "Any confusion between Spiritism and primitive forms of mediumship [or] manifestations of religious syncretism … are nothing more than a miscomprehension of Spiritist Doctrine and cannot be incorporated" (cited in Kloppenburg 1964: 55-57). The presence of *caboclos*—who function as spirits of nature, in structural opposition to the domestic spirits of *pretos-velhos* and children—continues to be a central characteristic of Umbanda (Concone 2001; Motta de Oliveira 2007). Their absence is a defining characteristic of Kardecism. *Caboclos* have been an element of some Afro-Brazilian traditions since the early twentieth century, especially Catimbó, Jurema, and Batuque (Boyer 1992; J.T. Santos 1992; Harding 2005: 122; Prandi 2005: 121-138).

These symmetrical tendencies can be interpreted in opposing ways. On the one hand, it is possible to portray the formation of Umbanda as one of harmonious mediation of tensions in Brazilian society. A recent introduction to Afro-Brazilian religions suggests that Umbanda's "development was marked by the search, initiated by white segments of the urban middle-class, for a model of religion that could legitimately integrate the contributions of the groups composing the national society" (Silva 2005[1994]: 15). On the other hand, these developments, especially the *embranquecimento* of Candomblé, were racist: "pioneering umbandists were anxious to situate the origins of Umbanda within the respectability of the world's great mystic traditions, and they envisioned their mission to be that of saving

Umbanda from the negative influences associated with its African past, and of purifying it of its African practices" (Brown 1977: 33). On the other hand, the racism that was a dominant factor in the emergence of Umbanda, the rejection of the spirits of departed black and indigenous people as unevolved, was inverted to some extent by the centrality of these spirits in Umbanda. According to an Umbanda practitioner's guide,

> The *pretos-velhos* and *caboclos* … were rejected, due to many [Kardecist] leaders' lack of comprehension. Some mediums disagreed with this discrimination, because the disembodied spirits that present themselves as '*pretos-velhos*' are, for the most part, highly evolved spirits, on a mission of charity. (Pinto and Freitas 1972: 29)

The fact that certain racialized doctrinal and ritual tensions led to the formation of a new religion in large part reflects the fact that the social sphere where Umbanda originated straddled racial and class boundaries: black/white; and lower-class/middle-class. This is not to suggest that there exist sharp and rigid boundaries between these groups in Brazil—racial and social distinctions are blurred—though the extremes of the spectra exhibit dramatic differences in economic and political power as well as in cultural status and capital. Rather, the diffusion of religious ideas and the adherence of new types of members led to a broader than usual mix of co-religionists. It is important to keep in mind that race in Brazil is a complex issue, with tensions less sharply defined than in other areas of Latin America [Lovell and Wood 1998; Hoffman and Centeno 2003; Fischer 2004]. As a result, even explicit talk of race sometimes masks, e.g., talk of class, and vice versa. One aspect of this complexity, and of Umbanda's reflecting social tensions, lies in the emergence of a new critical voice among the *preto velho* spirits in some (but certainly not all) *terreiros*, spirits that have radically shifted from wise house-slaves to incisive critics of racial, gender and other inequalities in Brazil (Hale 1997).

Given its historical development, Umbanda highlights several tensions in Brazilian society. This manifests itself in tensions internal to Umbanda itself. There is a spectrum between the "white" Umbanda, closer to Kardecism, and the popular Umbanda closer to Candomblé (Birman 1983: 80-94). The particular set of constitutive elements in a given Umbanda *terreiro* varies along a spectrum ranged between kardecist and Afro-Brazilian extremes: "There is not *one Umbanda* but *many Umbandas*, with a great diversity in beliefs and rituals" (Motta 2006

[1999]: 25; original emphasis). With relatively few institutionally imposed or maintained norms, individual Umbanda *terreiros* continue to manifest this spectrum of doctrinal and ritual characteristics, from Kardecist-like to Candomblé-like. The former is, to a greater extent, a middle-class phenomenon and the latter includes a greater proportion of lower-class members. (Bastide's early assertion [1960; 1967], later qualified [1974], that Umbanda was primarily and uniformly a lower-class religion has been soundly rejected [Ortiz 1999 {1978}; Negrão 1979; Brown 1994{1986}].)

This spectrum is also correlated, to some extent, with racial variation: Umbanda *branca* is "white" not only because it places more explicit emphasis on white magic. This spectrum is in turn correlated with different manners of foregrounding the issue of origins. White Umbanda tends to downplay Afro-Brazilian ritual form, though it preserves the *pretos-velhos* and sees Umbanda's internal fragmentation as degenerate. The point is not that Umbanda is race-blind, though this is asserted by umbandists: "Umbanda does not discriminate against blacks, has no prejudices, neither of class nor colour" (Matta e Silva 2004 [1969]: 33). Rather, it manifests a spectrum of beliefs and practices that reflects the social spectra of race and class in Brazil.

It is worth underlining this point in order to avoid a misreading. People of all classes and races participate in Candomble and Kardecism as well, but there is not the same spectrum of intra-religious phenomena varying in correlation with racial and socio-economic factors. It is not that *candomblecistas* are poor and black and *kardecistas* affluent and white, with *umbandistas* occyping a spectrum of demographically-determined position in between. Census data paint a much more nuanced picture (Jacob et al. 2003; 2006). However, the variables of (i) doctrinal elaboration, ritual form and institutional structures and (ii) race and socio-economic status track each other to a much greater extent in the case of Umbanda.

The spectrum of Umbanda also varies in terms of its attitudes toward sexuality. An important similarity between Umbanda, primarily at the Afro end of its spectrum, and Candomblé is their offering scope for the performance of alternative sexualities in a society governed by very conservative heterosexual gender roles (Landes 1947; Fry 1982; Birman 1985; 1995; Natividade and Oliveira 2007).

Umbanda has always manifested strong tensions between fragmenting and centralizing tendencies: tensions between variation of doctrine and practice depending on individual *terreiros* and the development of associations that have both emphasized doctrinal regularity, in order to make public claims that Umbanda is a "religion," and to lobby for religious freedom

in face of government oppression through most of mid-20th century. The centralizing tendencies attempted to impose a hierarchical structure and tended to emphasize the *embranquecimento* of Umbanda:

> The first attempt to create a religious hierarchy for the various umbandists occurred in 1937. It was accompanied by an ideological emphasis on the *embranquecimento* of worship forms of African origin. The Spiritist Union of Umbanda in Brazil … proposed a religion stripped of African symbols that, at the same time, placed value on a Gospel-based doctrinal orientation. (Birman 1983: 95)

Umbanda is also intermediary in terms of its range of institutional manifestations of internal divergence. Kardecism exhibits a high degree of uniformity, with some tensions between "religious" and "scientific" camps. Doctrine and practices are relatively explicit, with slight divergence between centres associated with different federations. Distinctions between the various Afro-Brazilian religions reflect historical and geographical differences (above all, differences, historical and constructed, between cultural groups of slaves). These various traditions manifest complex interrelations in terms of origins, beliefs and rituals, and they are generally associated with distinct regions: e.g., Batuque in Rio Grande do Sul; Cabula (historically) in Espírito Santo; Candomblé de Caboclo and Jurê in Bahia; Catimbó, Cura and Pajelança from Pernambuco through Amazônia; Canjerê in Minas Gerais; Macumba in Rio de Janeiro; Toré in Sergipe; Tambor de Mata [or Terecô] in Maranhão; Tambor de Mina in Maranhão and Pará; Babassuê in Pará; Xambá in Alagoas, Pernambuco and Paraíba; Xangô and Jurema in Pernambuco; and, of course, Candomblé in Bahia, later spreading to Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul. (Umbanda's relation to Candomblé reflects its origins in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.) The Afro-Brazilian religions manifest relatively little institutionalization, with each *terreiro* being largely independent. Umbanda occupies a middle ground, with intellectuals and federations arguing sharp lines at the "white" kardecist end of the spectrum and with Umbanda blurring into Afro-Brazilian traditions, with an emphasis on charismatic leadership within individual *terreiros*, at the other end of the spectrum. This institutional variation is also reflected in increased potential for internal struggles between those who emphasize traditional ritual skills and those who manifest organization and intellectual skills, a tension analyzed by Yvonne Maggie as one between "the code of the *santo*" and "the bureaucratic code" (2001[1977]).

Kardecism draws sharper boundaries than Afro-Brazilian traditions, with Umbanda in between with respect to this characteristic. At the white end of the umbandist spectrum, Umbanda has appropriated elements of Kardecism, but the reverse is not the case. At the Afro end of the spectrum, there is mutual admixture between Umbanda and Afro-Brazilian traditions, e.g., in "umbandized" Xangô and the strong presence of elements of Jurema in umbandist *terreiros* in the interior of Brazil's northeast (Motta 2006 [1999]: 27-30; Assunção 2001). The blurring of the Afro extreme of the Umbanda spectrum into Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian traditions is illustrated, for example, by Leacock's fieldwork in the 1960s, which discovered quite flexible insider labels: "Members do not call the cult 'Batuque,' but refer to it as either 'Nagô,' 'Mina,' or 'Umbanda,' depending on minor variations in belief and ritual" (1964b: 354 n.2). Similarly, many senior practitioners of Afro-Brazilian traditions in Minas Gerais distinguish between Umbanda and Canjerê while emphasizing their fundamental continuity (Tavares and Floriano 2003: 167-168).[5] The greater fluidity of boundaries at the Afro end of the Umbanda spectrum is also illustrated by the extent to which that sub-set of Umbandas has been "re-africanized" by Candomblé since the latter's growth in the urban centres of southeastern Brazil since the 1960s (Prandi 1991: 74; 2000: 644).

Umbanda is also intermediary in terms of the extent to which it is drawn upon by New Religious Movements, which are largely associated with middle- and upper-class urban religiosity. Kardecism has an historical relation to Mesmerism, and it manifested significant tensions in the late nineteenth century between scientific and esoteric tendencies (Monroe 2008). In Brazil, these characteristics inform its marked tendency to serve as an important element in a range of NRMs: e.g., Círculo Esotérico da Comunhão do Pensamento (1909), Ordem Mística Espiritualista Agla-Avid (1959), Ordem Espiritualista Cristã/Vale do Amanhecer (1969) and others (often with esoteric or Masonic influences). The "white" end of the Umbanda spectrum expresses this same tendency, though to a much lesser extent: it informs Umbandaime (an emerging current within Santo Daimé); and several groups have

[5] An example from my own fieldwork illustrates another dimension of these fluid boundaries. Informants took me to what they called a "Candomblé" in a small city in Minas Gerais. It was, in fact, a *terreiro* of Umbanda at the Afro end of its spectrum. This reflects the prominence of white Umbanda in their own experience of that religion and their primary concern with therapeutic services rather than insider or academic categories. Of course, this experience leads me to interrogate the "in fact" of my own categorizations.

adopted the label of Esoteric Umbanda (Guerriero 2006). Afro-Brazilian traditions have little presence in Brazilian NRMs.

The spectrum of Umbanda's ritual variants also reflects divergent processes of secularization and rationalization in Brazilian society. The spectrum between kardecist and Afro-Brazilian extremes of Umbanda represents varying degrees of rationalization of Afro-Brazilian traditions, or, according to Renato Ortiz, "levels of secularization" that allow us to study how "traditional magico-religious practices … cross class boundaries, penetrating both lower- and middle-classes" (1999[1978]: 214; see Motta 2006[1999]: 24). A prevalence of scientific metaphors (especially electro-magnetic terms) at the white end of the spectrum reflects the admixture of "scientific" and "philosophical" kardecist doctrines (reflected also in the themes of spiritual evolution/perfection and moralization of worldly activity) (Camargo 1961: 115-117; Ortiz 1999[1978]: 168-173).

These various characteristics of Umbanda all stand as variables along which the religion manifests a spectrum of religious, especially ritual, forms that are correlated with broader tensions in Brazilian society. In a classic study, Candido Procópio Ferreira de Camargo argued that Umbanda and Kardecism form extremes of a continuum of Brazilian religious practices of mediumship (1961). This is misleading, as Umbanda varies widely from ritual forms like Kardecism to those like Candomblé, where Kardecism itself varies relatively little. Renato Ortiz has suggested the more defensible idea of "a religious gradient between two poles: the more westernized and the less westernized" (1999: 97). Ortiz superposes two distinctions in suggesting "westernization" as the criterion of the spectrum of ritual Brazilian spirit-possession religions: traditional/modern and African/European. This is helpful, but it both begs the important question of invented traditions and does not go far enough in clarifying the complex negotiations of race and culture in the Brazilian landscape. Moreover, it fails to capture a crucial element: the relation between these religious dimensions and the social context.

**Three Types of Hybridity**

Discussions of hybridity usefully highlight issues of race, class, and power, though the above problems warn us to be critical in our use of the concept. An effective typology of hybridities should take account of different sorts of crossings of different boundaries in different contexts, and it should distinguish scholarly from insider perceptions of hybridity.

In this light, Peter Wade proposes a useful distinction between two types of hybridity:

> The first, which as a shorthand I will call roots-hybridity, depends on a simple syncretism of two anterior wholes to make a third new whole. In this teleological mode, roots and belonging are paramount and exclusive essentialisms can easily be reproduced. The second, which I will label routes-hybridity, depends on unpredictable diasporic movements, creating unstable complex networks, not reducible to teleological progressions, but moving to and fro erratically in time and space. In this mode, routes and movement are paramount and exclusivism gives way to more inclusive identities based, for example, on perception of common interests and goals, rather than common origins. (Wade 2005: 256-257)

On the one hand, roots-hybridity is the outdated essentialist view of syncretism, where recent theorists of hybridity see routes-hybridity "in some sense as a progression from or challenge to the former, if not as its simple opposite" (2005: 257). On the other hand, Wade makes two points that suggest the continued value of this distinction: "thinking in terms of roots and origins is not necessarily as essential and exclusivist as it might first seem"; and "the routes form of hybridity cannot escape from the roots form. The two are mutually implicated and co-dependent" (2005: 257). That is, in addition to being cautious in our scholarly use of these concepts, we need to recognize that the distinction points to something significant in insider perceptions of hybridity. Because Wade's visually catchy labels, "roots" and "routes," are homophones, I propose alternative terms: hybridities of "origin" and "encounter."

Several elements of analytic caution are crucial. First, the distinction between hybridities of origin and encounter does not presume that the roots of the former are pure nor that the parties that encounter in the latter are hybrid. Second, the distinction is not that between past and present, tradition and innovation: origins can be current developments and encounter historical ones; both scholarly "facts" and insider "inventions" are relevant to both. (In this light, Wade's emphasis on teleology is misleading, as it characterizes "roots-hybridity" from the critical perspective that he tries to move past.)

The distinction frames distinct perspectives, issues and sets of questions not distinct hybrid realities. "Hybridity of origin" marks (i) insider perceptions of the origin and character of distinct cultural forms, whether seen in essential and exclusivist terms or not, and (ii) limited scholarly attention to the "internal history" of doctrine, practice and institutional forms (including that of current developments). The scholar or insider's choice to invoke this

type of hybridity highlights the general issues of origins but leaves many complex questions open. For example, focusing on insider accounts of roots, Candomblé is an African religion, but the extent to which this origin is constructed, invented or imagined remains debated among scholars. Kardecism presents itself as largely independent of place, though its European roots are often associated with past and present status claims, and some works argue that its origin is (mythically) Brazilian. Umbandist texts, again manifesting a spectrum, sometimes point to roots in Africa, sometimes to India, Brazil, Atlantis, or other planets, and sometimes claim a universality free of geographic roots.

"Hybridity of encounter" marks the social context of cultural interaction, the strategies and tactics of mutual influence, the agency of participants. Both concepts are appropriate for talking of historical or contemporary developments. Both are useful for analyzing diasporic religions as well as the more constrained interactions of long-term coexistence within a given cultural context. (For example, Umbanda's emergence is not a diasporic mixing but a development internal to a well-established, albeit eminently hybrid and post-colonial, society: the encounter here is not that of diaspora but of urbanization.) As analytical tools, the two concepts are complementary. Hybridity of origin is not the self-conscious construct of novelty, a movement toward an end, but a reaction to specific historical, religious, and often political circumstances. It reflects the present as much as the past. Similarly, hybridity of encounter necessarily draws on its roots. It reflects the past as much as the present. Discussions of hybridity are useful when they foreground the struggles that draw, label, prioritize, naturalize, and sacralize boundaries; they are misleading when they take these boundaries and the significance of their crossing or blurring for granted.

Analyzing Umbanda in terms of Wade's two concepts of hybridity would miss one of the religion's defining characteristics. To draw this out, I propose a third type of hybridity: that of "refraction." Umbanda consists in a spectrum of individual groups that span the same racial and class divisions that sparked its emergence in the early twentieth century. It is not a diasporic religion (hybridity of encounter). It did indeed originate in the mixture of distinct religious roots, themselves hybrids (hybridity of origin). But to stop here would leave out a crucial dimension of the religion's hybridity: the way that it continues to manifest internally a series of tensions that were implicated in its hybrid roots and that continue to be constitutive of Brazilian society. The concept of hybridity of refraction refers to this way in which the social boundaries that are symbolically elided, inverted, or echoed within a system of religious

beliefs and practices reflect or refract homologous boundaries present in a given society.

Umbanda is a modern religion that spans, symbolically elides, yet ultimately reinforces important social boundaries in Brazilian society. It is an especially important case of the hybridity of refraction because its origin, trajectory, and status are so intimately tied with issues of race and class in Brazil and because it reflects these tensions in its doctrinal elaboration, ritual form, and institutionalization. Various scholars have noted the marked extent to which Umbanda reflects Brazilian society. Peter Fry argues that Umbanda reflects the social and political structures of Brazilian society (1982). Concone notes that the religion's various spirits "are obviously drawn from the national reality. …This is precisely the most interesting aspect of the umbandist religion: the fact that it dives so deeply into Brazilian reality, … transforming popular figures into symbols …" (2001: 282). (The symbolic work of Umbanda is a particularly dynamic aspect of its flexibility and mutability [Malandrino 2006].) Brumana and Martinez, in their invaluable study, analyze Umbanda as a "subaltern cult" that "elaborates symbolically the social condition of the client" (1989: 45). Ortiz argues that "umbandist ideology preserves and transforms Afro-Brazilian cultural elements within a modern society, [while, at the same time] manifesting rupture, forgetting, and reinterpretation of older, traditional values" (1999[1978]: 212). Patricia Birman underlines Umbanda's symbolic and ritual engagement with Brazilian social reality:

> Possession in Candomblé involves the state and audience in scenes that are more perfect the more they involve criteria irreducible to the civilized world—a world of alterity is recognized by this criterion, valorizing the Africanness that it presents. On the other hand, umbandist possession … is worthy of credit to the extent that it contextually invokes its relation with the world as experienced by its audience. (1995: 44-45)

What I add to this frequent recognition than Umbanda is especially responsive to the structures and tensions of Brazilian society is a more precise characterization of this responsiveness: this is not a relation between a uniform or generic type of Umbanda and Brazilian society; it is a relation between distinct variants of Umbanda and specific social tensions. That is, Umbanda manifests the hybridity of refraction.

Umbandist doctrine and ritual manifest both the positive and negative aspects of Brazil's myth of harmonious *mestiçagem* between three races: it celebrates a certain form of racial

inclusiveness, yet without challenging racism's material manifestations; and it does so within traditional hierarchical and largely patriarchal social forms. It also reflects a range of class positions, marked by geographical location of the *terreiros* within communities, by middle-class participation, and by varying degrees of intellectualization, emphasis on texts, and the prominence of semi-conscious rather than unconscious trance states. The spectrum of types of Umbanda, from kardecist to Afro-Brazilian, with their different stances regarding the religion's origin and fragmented nature, manifests this same ambiguity both eliding and reflecting social boundaries.

Umbanda is not unique in manifesting the hybridity of refraction. Kardecism manifests more elite and popular variants. Bastide distinguished between upper, middle and lower-class Spiritism; significantly, he defined the latter as "another type of spiritism, the spiritism of Umbanda," noting that "one finds between Kardecism and Umbanda a whole series of transitions" (1967: 9, 11). Candomblé also manifests the hybridity of refraction, albeit to a lesser degree than Umbanda. In the late twentieth century, Candomblé underwent what Paul Christopher Johnson calls a "social extension", moving from "traditional" to "public" forms, in part as a result of the increasing prominence of Afro-Brazilian elements in popular culture: "the religion that was ethnically specific is presented as universally available" (2002b: 313; see 2002a). Inseparable from this development are a series of recent movements within Afro-Brazilian traditions that aim at reclaiming the purity of perceived tradition through processes of "re-africanization," "de-syncretization," "de-catholicization" etc. (Caroso and Bacelar 1999). If this were a recent development, this would be the hybridity of encounter, not of refraction. However, a tension between traditional/African *terreiros* and those more open to a broader social spectrum has been prominent in Candomblé since at least the late nineteenth century (Harding 2000; Parés 2007: 132-138). This tension was amplified in the late twentieth century by immigration from the northeast to the large urban enters in the south (Prandi 1991; 2005). To a limited extent, then, Candomblé—less than Umbanda but much more than other Afro-Brazilian traditions—spans, in its limited ritual, doctrinal, and institutional variants, important social boundaries in Brazilian society: i.e., ethnic and racial distinctions with some correlated variation in class adherence.

The three types of hybridity that I have distinguished—those of origin, encounter, and refraction—are not mutually exclusive but represent different perspectives or emphases, as is illustrated by the parallel between Candomblé and Umbanda. Both religions began in a

context of religious mixture (hybridity of origin); both resulted from and reacted to the interaction of different religious and cultural currents, primarily diaspora and urbanization respectively (hybridity of encounter); and both have internal variations that reflect constitutive social tensions in their national context (hybridity of refraction). My claims are that Umbanda is distinct in terms of the degree of importance of the latter factor, and that the concept of hybridity of refraction helps to highlight some of the most important features of this new Brazilian religion.

A fuller analysis would take account of three important dimensions of Umbanda that manifest not a spectrum of positions between Afro-Brazilian traditions and Kardecism but distinct alternatives. First, Umbanda creates a space where ambiguous moral agency is prized: it demonstrates "the legitimacy of the rogue, the underhanded and the personal favour [*do malandro, da sacanagem e do favor*]" (Fry 1982: 13; see Concone 2001: 284-286). The power that mediumship gives in Umbanda is more ambivalent, capable of being used for good or bad ends: it is little constrained by an explicit moral system, as in Kardecism, or by the subsumption of individual agency through identification with the possessing supernatural entity, as in Candomblé (Brumana and Martinez 1989: 40-42). Second, Umbanda "positions itself as a religion that encourages social mobility, … [and] this mobility is open to all, without exception" (Prandi 1991: 58).[6] Third, Umbanda reflects, more explicitly than most manifestations of Brazilian religiosity, the centrality of patriarchal patron-client relations. The mediums are possessed by helpful spirits who act as patrons to their clients, many of whom return week after week to speak to the same *caboclo* or *preto-velho*. The *pai-de-santo* in an Umbanda *terreiro* is "the center of a network of distribution where magical services are exchanged for money with wealthy clients, celebrations are exchanged for recognition by the general public and the *filhos-de-santo* and money invested in the *terreiro* become symbols of success" (Fry 1982: 75).

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that Umbanda manifests a spectrum of beliefs, rituals and institutional forms that is correlated with broader tensions in Brazilian society, above all race and class.

[6] I argue elsewhere that specific characteristics of umbandist ritual function to orient the agency of participants in a manner consistent with this social mobility (Engler 2007; 2008; 2009).

Umbanda is not unique in this sense but (i) it is characterized by a particularly significant degree of this intra-religious variation, (ii) it is intermediate between Kardecism and Afro-Brazilian traditions in an especially wide variety of senses, and (iii) that these characteristics are uniquely implicated in Umbanda's origin. Again, it is not that Kardecism is white and upper-class, Candomblé black and lower-class, and Umbanda in the middle. All races and classes are involved in all three religions. Rather, variations in these social tensions are mapped onto variations in belief, practice, and institutionalization to a much greater extent in the case of Umbanda: the many Umbandas of Brazil are an especially clear case of the hybridity of refraction.

Reviewing the literature underlines the fact that the processes of mixing that concepts like "syncretism" and "hybridity" point to are complex: varying, for example, from internal elision of ideal-typical boundaries between religions to complex influences among diverse cultural forms in pluralistic, diasporic communities. Discussions of different forms of mixture rightly draw attention to the reorganization of social spaces in the face of modernization, globalization and diaspora, issues that the study of religion must address. But these concepts tend to take boundaries too much for granted in the attempt to theorize their crossing and elision. They are useful when they foreground the ideological forces that draw, label, prioritize, naturalize, and sacralize boundaries; they are misleading when they reify those boundaries.

The typology of hybridities proposed here offers one tool to help focus on specifics. The distinction between *hybridity of origin* and *hybridity of encounter* draws our attention to distinct modes of analysis: the former concept highlights characteristics of hybrid forms as permutations and combinations of other forms, and the second underlines the social context of the mixing process. The third type that I propose here, *hybridity of refraction*, highlights one relation between these two dimensions of analysis: the extent to which *variations* among religious or cultural phenomena reflect social tensions within a specific nation or culture.

Brazilian culture offers a useful case for rethinking religion's relation to race, class, syncretism and hybridity, given its rich religious landscape and complex history of racial and cultural mixing. More specifically, Umbanda contains within itself a spectrum of beliefs and practices that refract tensions of race and class in Brazil, and this is not the case, to anything like the same extent, with Afro-Brazilian traditions or Kardecism. Umbanda's *variation* reflects social tensions in Brazilian society, and it is this that justifies the term "hybridity of

refraction."

In its origins and beliefs, Umbanda incorporates key racial and class tensions prominent in Brazil, levelling or inverting elements that are hierarchically arranged in the broader society. DaMatta suggests that the *mestiçagem* present in Umbanda reveals yet displaces the hierarchical relations present in Brazilian society: "Umbanda and Carnaval … , along with their cousin, *futebol*, foster powerful ties of brotherhood, uniting the powerless by virtue of their magical and mystical powers" (1983[1987]: 137). Umbanda reframes social tensions in part by offering a symbolic resolution of their tensions in a manner distanced from material effects. However, this is not an illusory or merely compensatory relation. Umbanda allow millions of Brazilians to rehearse modes of ritual agency that both reflect and reframe the constraints that they experience in their society (Engler 2007; 2008; 2009). Its effectiveness in doing so is, in part, a function of the fact that its spectrum of ritual forms reflects the broader set of constraints that impact practitioners' experience as social agents.

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