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The Routledge Handbook of Language and the Global South/s

Edited by Sifree Makoni, Anna Kaiper-Marquez, and
Lorato Mokwena

The Routledge Handbook of Language and the Global South/s

This *Handbook* centers on language(s) in the Global South/s and the many ways in which both “language” and the “Global South” are conceptualized, theorized, practiced, and reshaped.

Drawing on 31 chapters situated in diverse geographical contexts, and four additional interviews with leading scholars, this text showcases:

- Issues of decolonization
- Promotion of Southern epistemologies and theories of the Global South/s
- A focus on social/applied linguistics
- An added focus on the academy
- A nuanced understanding of global language scholarship.

It is written for emerging and established scholars across the globe as it positions Southern epistemologies, language scholarship, and decolonial theories into scholarship surrounding multiple themes and global perspectives.

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and Lorato Mokwena*

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We dedicate this book to a dear colleague and friend, Átila Torres Calvente, who passed away in October 2021. His dedication to his work, his profound poetry, and his warmth of spirit highlighted how one can infuse theory and practice in truly beautiful and meaningful ways.

May his soul rest in peace.



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Language Practices in Afro-Brazilian Religions

On Legitimacy, Oral Tradition, and Racial Issues

Cristine G. Severo, Ana Cláudia F. Eltermann, and Sinfree Makoni

Introduction

Brazil was the destination of the highest number of enslaved Africans in the Americas, with a sum of 4.86 million people being brought to Brazil between 1501 and 1900 (Alencastro 2018). The slave trade was intensified in the 17th and 18th centuries and its official abolition date was signed as law only in 1888. Such statistics turned Brazil into the biggest diasporic destination of Africans outside Africa, which marked the country with a deep memory of slavery. This means that there is no way to refer to what counts as Brazil – and Brazilian languages – without Africa. Colonial multilingualisms were constitutive of language practices in Brazil paralleling the imposition of Portuguese as the language of colonial power. Drawing on the concept of Southern multilingualisms (Pennycook & Makoni 2020; Phipps 2019), this chapter explores the multilayered and intersemiotic concept of language in Afro-Brazilian religious practices in which the ideas of secrecy, Africanness, authenticity, and belonging work together with the role played by the drums, rituals, and non-human actors in the process of meaning making, language transmission, and modes of worship. We argue that if we want to comprehend how language and race have been historically constructed in Brazil, we must face the multiple aspects of power relations which include resistances, subversions, and creative practices (Alencastro 2018; Fabian 1992; Foucault 1980; Heller & McElhinny 2017).

Southern multilingualisms compel us to rethink the legacy of colonial narratives from the perspective of how meaning making and interpretive processes are deeply rooted in how individuals relate to each other and in their collective experiences with the world (Severo & Makoni in press). In this chapter our understanding of Southern multilingualisms draws on thereby the role languages play in African Brazilian religious practices and in shaping what counts as being Afro-Brazilian. Our point of departure is not language structure, but the way languages emerge from communicative and religious practices animated by religious experiences. We argue such experiences involve a complex entanglement (Pennycook 2018; Walsh 2018) of practices, symbolic meanings, and materialities operating in many different ways some of which are predictable and systematic but others unpredictable.

Although the most recent Brazilian Census (2010) represents Brazil as the country home to the highest number of Catholics in the world – while less than 1% of the population identified themselves as Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners – we know that such Afro-Brazilian religious practices have systematically been targets of prejudice, making people hide their religious practices (Leite & Alencar 2020). The act of hiding religious practice produced an effect on how African religious have been reshaped in Brazilian context: “Religion – or rather the Afro-Brazilian religions – had to seek out, in the social structures imposed upon them, ‘niches’ where they could establish themselves and develop [...] This called for radical transformations of religious life itself” (Bastide 1978: 58). In this chapter, we assume that the category of “religion” does not carry an essentialized meaning (Taira 2013), which means that the distinction between religion and non-religion is empty and arbitrary (Chidester 2003). Thus, what counts as religion is related to power relations, since it is embedded in disputes and struggles. One example is how colonial administrators used some definitions of religion to classify and control practices of the colonized people.

The chapter is divided into three sections: in the first section we present a brief history of Afro-Brazilian religious practices; in the second section we examine Afro-Brazilian religions and their language uses in relation to the concept of Southern multilingualisms (Pennycook & Makoni 2020); finally, we discuss the concepts of authenticity related to both religion and language.

A Brief History of Afro-Brazilian Religious Practices

In this chapter we analyze several examples of how words, expressions, and chants index meanings (Ochs 1990) related to ethical and religious modes of living and sharing. We argue that by combining religious experiences and language practices we can contribute toward an understanding of the pluri-versality of human experience (Mignolo 2018) and the multilayered concept of Southern multilingualisms.

In the colonial period, African religious practices emerged in several regions of Brazil, which were conventionally called *colonial calundu*, a term originated from the Kimbundu word *quilundo*, which was later renamed as *Candomblé* (Dias 2019). Such practices were deeply connected to how enslaved Africans struggled for religious and social existence that could somehow rescue them and create a sense of belonging, sharing and community. The idea of African tradition in Brazil is embedded in such religious practices. Also, such practices helped to shape new meanings of Africa in Brazil mainly because different African cultural and linguistic backgrounds were forcibly put together as a colonial strategy to disrupt mutual understandings among African peoples. The consequence was that these practices were therefore being continually recreated, gaining different names and expanding ritual forms (Bastide 1978). In the early twentieth century, for instance, a new Afro-Brazilian religion was established – the so-called *Umbanda*. This religion emerged in Southeastern Brazil as a product of a complex interaction between cultures and peoples, such as the combination of African religious practices, also known as *macumba*, with reinterpretations of Kardecist spiritism, Catholicism, and rituals of Indigenous origin.

Candomblé and *Umbanda* have become the most prominent references in Brazil when it comes to defining Afro-Brazilian religions. However, we cannot consider *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* as static and homogeneous practices, unified by a written dogma. Instead, several interpretations and symbolic appropriations define how each community and spiritual leader build their local Afro-Brazilian religious practices, rearticulating new nominations and ritual specificities. This means that individual and collective experiences, local leadership, autonomy, sense of local belonging, and oral practices play an important role in legitimizing such Afro-Brazilian religious

practices. Each worship house (*terreiro*) carries its own rules and principles which define their singularity and autonomy: “while every *terreiro*, and indeed every person, bears protected secrets, these cannot be called secrets of the religion as a whole since there is no agreement across *terreiros* as to what they are” (Johnson 2002: 33). In terms of the politics of local naming (Makoni et al. 2007), there is a predominance of *Xangô* in the State of Pernambuco, of *Batuque* in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, and of *Tambor de Mina* in the State of Maranhão, and so on. We are in line with other studies that identified the relation between language use and religious practices (Baker-Smemo & Bowie 2015; Castro 1976; Fishman & García 2012; Omoniyi 2006; Silva 2005; Spolsky 2003).

Rather than languages as abstract bounded entities, we argue that languages in such spaces are product of historical colonial practices (Makoni & Pennycook 2006; Pennycook & Makoni 2020; Severo & Makoni 2020) that carry out specific ethical and political meanings related to greetings, customs, ceremonies, ritualistic chants, sacred objects, foods, and places. One example is that many adepts of these religions believe that the use of “African sacred languages” in their religious rituals validate such practices as being authentic and efficient. Moreover, the religious experience is deeply connected to the proper use of such languages. In this chapter, we focus on how languages contribute to defining the ideas of legitimacy, tradition, and authenticity in such Afro-Brazilian practices. We consider that such concepts integrate the discursive struggles carried out by Afro-Brazilian people toward recognition and social dignity. More specifically, we aim to understand what makes Afro-languages a sign of “authenticity” or of “belonging” from the perspectives of those who share such religious practices. In attention to the scarce existence of discussion on the relation between language and the idea of Africanities/Africanness in Brazil (Castro 1981), this chapter also aims to contribute to this important debate by enhancing the creativity and agency of Africans and Afro-Brazilians in the ethical and political struggles against colonialism. Finally, we make a case against religious discrimination in Brazil, since Afro-religions have become the main target of racial discrimination in Brazil.

Languages in Afro-Brazilian Religions: Legitimacy and Colonial Voice

The main factor for social delegitimization of Afro-Brazilian religions is related to structural racism (Almeida 2019) in Brazilian society. The intrinsic relationship between Afro-Brazilian religions and Black-based identities (irrespective of the individual’s race or ethnicity) reinforces religious racism which leads many to consider these practices as non-religious, which means they are seen by most people as belief or superstition. Notice that white people who are leaders in such religions are also targets of racism (Leite & Alencar 2020). The history of devaluing religious practices of African origin dates back to the colonial period. During the Portuguese colonization in Brazil, all religious practices, except for Catholicism, were prohibited and punishable by the courts of the inquisition. Later on, in the 1891 Constitution of the Republic of Brazil, despite the official split between state and church, the Republican Penal Code defined the African religious practices as crimes of spiritism, magic, and healing. The de-legitimacy of these religions can even be observed in the country’s census surveys: the category “Afro-Brazilian religions” was included only in 1990, divided into two broad categories “Umbanda” and “Candomblé.”

These institutional discourses reveal the ways that such religions have historically been considered as part of the country’s religious practices. In relation to the agentive role played by Africans in Brazil, the Brazilian anthropologist Ilka Boaventura Leite (1996), who has been deeply engaged in Afro-Brazilian research, asserts that it is still necessary to highlight the different strategies used by Black populations to deal with invisibility, racism, and segregation in Brazil.

One example is the continuous and persistent reconstruction of a sense of tradition centered on kinship, religion, land, moral values, and language.

There are several cases of contemporary religious racism in Brazil. One example is that in the first half of 2019, there was an increase of more than 50% in official complaints concerning religious intolerance in Brazil. Most of these complaints were made by adepts of *Umbanda* and *Candomblé* to the Public Prosecutor's Office. Religious leaders have also reported the existence of an "institutional intolerance," which occurs through agents of the state, such as specific bodies of city halls or police. Institutional racism also includes the difficulties in bureaucracy faced by leaders to obtain regulatory documents for the religious houses. Most of the biased discourses use the ideas of noise and animal mistreatment to justify censorship. Dias (2019) shows how the notions of noise – due to the sound of drums at ceremonies – and hygiene – due to the rituals of offering and sacrifices – were used as justifications for campaigns against *Candomblé* and for religious persecution, as in the case of Pedrito Gordilho, a police officer from the city of Salvador that in the 1920s was the most violent persecutor of *Candomblé*, often incited by the press. This shows how Afro-Brazilian religions were never conceived as *de facto* religions in the social, scientific, and judicial imagery. Instead, they are seen as inferior, backward, primitive, destabilizing of order, or false.

The idea of African languages in Brazil is symbolically related to religious contexts. According to Castro (2001), although African languages – understood from a descriptive perspective – are no longer spoken in Brazil, the discursive memory of African voices remains in two strong contexts: the rural Black communities (known as *quilombos*; Severo & Makoni, 2020), and the Afro-Brazilian religions. In the religious context, Castro (2001) denominates as *língua-de-santo* (saint language) the set of lexical and semantic systems originated from ancient African languages spoken in Brazil for the purpose of religious practices. Afro-Brazilian religious houses – called *terreiros* – work as symbolic spaces where people experience a sense of community and belonging that still works as resistance against colonial memory. In terms of the idea of Africanness, such *terreiros* work as "a metonym for a lived engagement with Africa" (Sterling 2012: 16). We argue that through Southern multilingualisms we can analyze how the ideas of belonging and rootedness are semiotically constructed, transmitted, and retained.

In Brazil, religion is an important social force (Spolsky 2011) in people's lives, which means that it plays a fundamental role in defining language ideologies (Irvine & Gal 2000). In Afro-Brazilian religions, for example, there is an overlap between the ideas of religion and family, as with the concept of *família de santo* (saint family) to define a sense of belonging, where daily language practices help to share African-Brazilian repertoires among the members of the family. The practitioners of some of these religions call themselves as *filhos/filhas de santo* (sons/daughters of saints); their leaders are the *pais/mães de santo* (fathers/mothers of saints); and the other members are *família de santo* (saint family). Moreover, in many Afro-Brazilian religions, non-fraternal relationships among members of the same house are not allowed, because it is understood that they belong to the same family. In diasporic contexts, religion is one of the main institutions that help to preserve people's heritage language and a sense of belonging (Spolsky 2011). In Brazilian contexts, African languages have been used in the daily life of religious houses echoing a memory of resistance against enslavement. One example is the *preto velho* (old Black man) in *Umbanda*, a spirit that represents slavery in the sugar plantations, mines, or in the *senzalas* (slave quarters).

The *preto velhos* are generally related to ancient Africans in Brazil who were members of *quilombos* or healers. Notice that the *preto velhos* speak a mixture of rural Portuguese with typical words and expressions related to the context of slavery. According to Yeda de Castro (2001), the *preto velhos* are the symbol of a mythical Africa, mainly centered in Angola and Congo, named

as *Aruanda*; they speak a vernacular colonial Portuguese with fragments from a Bantu creole – a Bantu based language influenced by Portuguese during colonization – spoken in the slave quarters or the plantation. The *preto velho* uses slow pace, low tone, ideophones, typical expressions, and short constructions, mainly in affirmative or imperative forms. Lexical examples include the use of terms related to slavery, such as *mucama* (slave girl), *quilombo* (fugitive slave settlement), *cafua* (hiding place), *cacunda* (hunchback), and *macaia* (tobacco), among others (Castro 2001).

Another important strategy of resistance related to Afro-Brazilian practices is related to the idea of secret (Simas & Rufino 2020). One example is that access to several religious rituals and language practices requires that the individual be initiated into the religion (Leite et al. 2017). This means that linguists do not have easy access to that “language data” unless they share the same values and principles of the religious house. This also means that by describing ritual language practices, one cannot understand the deep religious meanings which underline such practices. The knowledge about religious linguistic repertoire and rituals is kept in secret by the elders who are also responsible for transmitting knowledge, maintaining a certain unity, and sense of cohesion. The secret knowledge, in *Candomblé*, is also articulated in Yorubá—an African language considered as source of authenticity and Africaness: “If they are spoken in their language of origin, this more closely joins them to Africa, to the authentic and ancestral” (Johnson 2002: 32). This example shows how Afro-Brazilian religions operate with the symbolic and political meanings of secrecy and publicity as marks of identity, protection, and resistance.

The elders are those who have a longer connection with the religion in terms of time, and are responsible for the religious training. This handing down of knowledge ensures the maintenance of identity and ancestry in the saint community. The delimitation of what can and cannot be apprehended, as well as the way to access such knowledge, is linked to the idea of hierarchy which is defined by internal rules. There are several stages – varying according to the religion, orientation, and specificity of each religious house – through which the adepts, or “son/daughter of saint,” must pass so that they can access the more restricted knowledge of religious houses. The hierarchical structure of Afro-religious practices subverts the social and racialized hierarchies of Brazilian institutions, in which the religious principle “[...] rests on creating and preserving an alternate hierarchy derived from African epistemological and ontological systems that resist the ‘enlightenment’ offered by Western hierarchization in its privileging of white over black [...]” (Sterling 2012: 237).

The knowledge transmission process is predominantly orally oriented, which means that oral tradition plays a relevant role in the religions’ language practices (Severo & Eltermann 2020). By assuming that “The oral word is essentially a call, a cry” (Ong 1988: 267), we can approximate it to the very meaning of *Candomblé*: the Bantu term *Kandombélé* is derived from the verb *kudomba*>*kuloma* which means the action of praying and asking for the intercession of the gods (Castro 2001). This means that communication also includes access to the language of the saints (Umbanda’s gods) and the *orixás* (*Candomblé*’s gods). The mastery of several languages characterizes Afro-Brazilian religious multilingualism. In this sense, “Syncretism, the mastery of multiple languages of the sacred, is not the exception but the norm” (Johnson 2002: 73). Notice that oral transmission and oral practices in such religions are not restricted to a representational function, as they include ethical and political issues (Vansina 2010). As such, adepts are encouraged to learn the linguistic repertoire as part of their religious process of conversion. Such language practices are seen as rites of African tradition and belonging. This shows how religious institutions carry out religious ideologies, which means that language use becomes a matter of sacredness (Spolsky 2011).

Learning to speak an African language in this context means knowing how to use certain lexical markers and expressions related to foods, customs, sacred objects, festive dates, greetings, and

names of deities for example. Besides that, the Afro-Brazilian religious linguistic repertoire also includes learning songs, narratives, and rites that index specific symbolic meaning. To know an African language in such religions means to be able to demonstrate the symbolic competence of the language rather than the communicative one (Castro 2001). It is more important, therefore, to know the right moment to sing a song than the literal meaning of each word or phrase. Thus, these languages are often not those spoken in Africa, either in the past or in the present, but are, on the contrary, languages that have changed over time and that work for the purpose of religious experience. We assert that the concept of experience is relevant for a Southern perspective of multilingualisms (Severo & Makoni forthcoming) since “Cultural change, cultural continuity, and cultural transmission all occur simultaneously in the experiences and expressions of social life” (Turner & Bruner 1986: 12).

Religious racism in Brazil transforms African religious soundscape into “noise,” using it to justify social order problems. Oral practices include chants, the use of musical instruments as drums, and the transmission of knowledge in meetings, rituals, or daily experience in the houses. The drums are constitutive of the communication between the mediums and the saints or *orixás* (Simas & Rufino 2020), which means that the idea of communication is expanded to include a connection with non-embodied entities: “typical ceremony uses drum rhythms and songs to call the spirits to descend (*baixar*) and mount their mediums, who then consult privately with participants in the stylized manner specific to their spiritual kind” (Johnson 2002: 53). The language of the drum includes different types of rhythm used to call the saint: while the African god *Oxalá*, for example, is connected to a calm rhythm, the god *Xangô* is linked to a hotter, more intense and speedy rhythm. This language is analysed by Simas (2019) from the perspective of a grammar of the drums (*gramática dos tambores*), where a polyphony (Bakhtin & Booth 1984) of voices and sounds mutually interact, by offering different and harmonical responses, as if the rhythmic pattern of sound and silence of the drum could dialogue with the *orixás*, the saints and the rhythm of people’s heart. Such complex multilingual and multimodal practices are an example of Southern multilingualisms, by showing how the meaning-making and interpretative processes related to Afro-Brazilian religious practices impact different ways in which production and comprehension can be understood. Clothing, musical instruments, oral performance, food, and landscape integrate the semiotic space of Afro-Brazilian religious practices:

Food production is to feed the orixas so that they will in turn circulate axe; drumming serves as the summons to which the orixas respond and descend; clothing is sewn for initiates to wear as they incarnate the gods in their very bodies; and the terreiro construction has offerings built literally into its foundation, which physically transmit, and are called, axe.

(Johnson 2002: 106)

The knowledge transmission ritual also includes an initiation process – a period of reclusion in which the novice experiences a series of rites, including ritual bathing, head shaving, the acquisition of religious knowledge and of a complex code of material symbols, such as plants and substances, as well as of a set of gestures and a specific linguistic repertoire (Castro 2001). Besides that, in some Afro-Brazilian religions, beliefs, worship modes, and language are structurally associated, which means that one of the criteria used for classifying the religions is the linguistic repertoire. In the case of *Candomblé*, this religion has been classified in terms of “nations,” according to different linguistic traditions: Yoruba, Fon, or Bantu tradition. Even though such meanings are locally produced, there has been an ongoing influence of academic knowledge in the process of language and culture (re)invention, which can be exemplified by

the Afro-Brazilian religious adepts' interest in academic courses of Yorubá and Bantu languages. We argue that such academic knowledge based on crystallized and named templates of languages is not able to apprehend the pluri-versality of the concept of Southern multilingualisms. In this sense, we understand that "pluriversality is not cultural relativism, but the entanglement of several cosmologies connected today in a power differential" (Migonolo 2018: X) inscribed in the logic of coloniality. In the next section we will explore the role played by the concept of authenticity considering the practitioners' perspective.

Resistance, Authenticity, and the Voice of the Community

Afro-Brazilian practices have been considered as a symbolic representation of an idea of Africa in Brazil. Africanness is embedded in how authenticity has been shaped in such religious discourses and practices. In this section we focus on the political and strategic uses of the idea of "authenticity" by the adepts of Afro-Brazilian religions, rather than assuming an essentialized, original, or self-identical meaning of culture and language. This means that "there is no whole, authentic, autonomous 'popular culture' which lies outside the field of force of the relations of cultural power and domination" (Hall & Morley 2019: 353). Such religious practices are contradictory and in constant tension with the dominant cultural and religious practices. What we notice is a kind of struggle of representation (Hall & Morley 2019) where language has played a major role in defining the ideas of Africanness in such religions in Brazil. We recognize that the idea of Afro-Brazilianness has to do with the evolving dynamics of cultural and political practices involving the historical relation between Brazil and Africa where racial and ethnic meanings play an important role.

Among the several Afro-Brazilian practices, *Candomblé* – together with the idea of Yoruba language – "had become the accepted marker for the authenticity of black cultural life" (Sterling 2012: 47). This is reinforced by several semiotic elements such as the use of words of African origin in daily life, the use of chants in African languages, the use of images of African gods, and the non-use of images of Catholic saints. On the other hand, *Umbanda* – which is historically connected to Bantu cultural and language practices – has been considered a product of syncretism and because of that may be considered as less African, mainly because of its mixture with Christian symbolism (Castro 2001). In the colonial era, the masking of African saints and *orixás* by Christian images produced an ambiguous concept of conversion, in which African songs and Christian liturgy would overlap, creating a double effect, of both domination and resistance. Such ambiguity relies on the idea of syncretizing understood as a "complex process of identifying practices that mediate disparate cultures" (Johnson 2002: 72).

The discourse that hierarchizes those practices considered as more authentic than the syncretized ones ends up creating disputes and tensions between religious groups. These modes of classification within Afro-Brazilian religions are the result of a process of violence operated over the centuries of colonization and enslavement. Since many Africans in colonial Brazil had to hide their beliefs, syncretism was used as a strategy of resistance. However, the very idea of syncretism is complicated because it presupposes that there are pure and non-syncretic practices. The term syncretism carries a double meaning, objectively referring to a mixture of religions, and subjectively meaning an evaluation of this mixture (Ferretti 1998). From the seventeenth century onwards in Brazil, the term was given a negative connotation as a symbol of impurity against a "pure" religion (Cappelli 2007).

One example of syncretism in Brazilian religions is *Lavagem do Bonfim* (Washing of the Bonfim Stairs), a public celebration that happens in the city of Salvador dedicated to honour the African god *Oxalá*. Such celebration involves washing the stairs of the Church of Bonfim in

Salvador by the *Baianas*, who are female Afro-Brazilian leaders. Due to the intense popularity of this celebration, it was recognized as a symbol of cultural practice by local government in 1976, and since then a long collective walk takes place once a year in January, culminating in the washing ritual. *Lavagem do Bonfim* is considered to be a cultural heritage in Brazil. In syncretism, *Oxalá* is considered Jesus Christ. This example reveals how institutional power and Black resistance were able to co-exist as a result of historical struggles: “The Lavagem can thus be seen as the ultimate engagement between Africanness/Blackness, transcendental power, and the political, institutional power found in Salvador” (Sterling 2012: 80). The idea of religious syncretism can be reinforced by linguist arguments. The mixture of Portuguese with African linguistic elements that characterizes Brazilian Portuguese is seen as a signal of loss of African elements, such as in *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*: while the former is considered by some as symbol of authenticity reinforced by the use of Yorubá, the latter would be considered as less African, reinforced by the use of Brazilian Portuguese.

The issue of authenticity can be related to both concepts of religion and language. Just as some religions are politically and culturally considered as more authentic than others, similarly we argue that languages are also classified hierarchically in terms of the ideas of perfection, complexity, truth-bearing, and so on. For example, syncretized religions are often classified as beliefs, folklore, or superstition, and mixed languages are seen as dialect, variety, or creole. The idea of syncretism may also have political effects when associated with the concept of miscegenation (*mestiçagem*) in Brazil. Such concept reinforced the myth of Brazil as a racial democracy (Nascimento 2019) which is based on the idea of a harmonic mixing of racial and cultural elements. In parallel to that, the idea of Brazilian Portuguese as a product of language harmonization reinforces a romanticized concept of language diversity that overshadows how languages have historically been racialized and used as instruments of dominance and control. This happens because harmonization projects “fail if communities do not participate actively in such projects” (Makoni 2016: 223).

In this chapter we prioritize a local concept of legitimation based on how each community organizes itself in terms of cultural, religious, and linguistic aspects. Nevertheless, defining what is or is not authentic is not always an easy task considering the diversity of existing religious practices and nominations derived from diverse African traditions. As an example, we mention the project “Territories of Axé” (<https://kadila.net.br/territorios-do-axe/>), carried out by the Federal University of Santa Catarina together with the National Institute for Historic and Artistic Heritage. This project aimed to map out the Afro-Brazilian religious houses in the region of Florianópolis, in 2016. The local leaders were asked about how they define and classify their religious houses. The result was a list with more than 70 categories, which included *Almas e Angola*, *Batuque Cabula*, *Candomblé Angola*, *Candomblé Angola Kassanje*, *Candomblé Fon (Ewe-Fon) Nação Cabinda*, *Nação Jejê*, and *Umbanda*, among others.

This example reveals how diversity is constitutive of Afro-Brazilian religious practices, which also includes a multitude of linguistic and semiotic repertoire. In terms of internal rules, each religious leader is the ultimate authority in the religion, establishing its principles and doctrines based on transmitted knowledge rather than a unified holy book. This shows how Southern multilingualisms (Pennycook & Makoni 2020) cannot be restricted to pluralization of individualities or harmonization of singularities. Rather, by considering Afro-Brazilian practices from the perspective of Southern multilingualisms we claim for the need “to capture the dynamic and evolving relationship between languages and other modalities. Meaning is an evolving art and drama because semiotic systems are constructed in context and are always in a state of becoming, inchoate, fragmented, and historically contingent” (Pennycook & Makoni 2020: 55).

Despite the evolving nature of Afro-Brazilian religious multilingualisms, the legitimation of a religious discourse depends more on modes of transmission – in which the saint or the *orixá* are the origin of such knowledge – than on institutionalized knowledge. Afro-Brazilian religious knowledge is not fixed, but continually reshaped according to the religious experience. Knowing the religious language means knowing the fundamentals of the religion itself.

In terms of language policy, we argue that the local ideas of legitimation, authenticity, and community are constitutive of how languages are locally promoted, recognized, and transmitted. If we consider that “religious institutions set up practices for those people who are observant; they ascribe values to varieties of language, and work to establish language policies” (Spolsky 2011: 77), then the religious experience should be understood from a deeper perspective that includes layers of signification inscribed in complex semiotic relations. We also notice that in the Afro-Brazilian contexts there is a process of linguistic reclamation (Leonard 2017) taking place, rather than linguistic revitalization. This means that reclamation is not based on linguistic work, but is a type of decolonization in line with the critical perspectives underpinning Southern perspectives of language. Revitalization, in this context, is the result of a commitment made by the community toward the claiming of its right to speak a language, which means that worldviews and religious experiences are fundamental. Recovering African languages in the Afro-Brazilian religious context is not a matter of objectification or of heritagization, but an act of resistance of those subjects who *experience* these languages and religions.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the role played by Afro-Brazilian religious practices in shaping the ideas of Africanness, Afro-Brazilianness, and African languages. By manipulating the concepts of authenticity and legitimation, the religious leaders have played an important role in (re)shaping, nurturing, and maintaining a political and ethical sense of belonging to an Afro-Brazilian community. Such religious leaders and adepts have also faced historical and institutionalized racism, which turns their practices into a continuous “struggle for representation” (Hall 2019) and recognition. The *terreiro* (house of worship) works as a complex locus of enunciation that interconnects past colonial meanings with present ethical and political demands, helping to build both modes of being and practices of resistance against racism.

Such religions politically matter because their adepts and leaders have “used religion to construct some narrative, however impoverished and impure, to connect the past and the present: where they came from with where they are and where they are going to, and why they are here” (Hall 2019: 237). By connecting past and present, such religions play an important role in keeping alive colonial memories and colonial voices that still help to shape moral and ethical values of resistance, dignity, and strength. We finally argue that Southern concepts of languages are products of historical practices and interconnect several elements, such as individual and collective experiences as social practices and complex meaning making and interpretative processes. Southern multilingualisms is a pertinent framework in an analysis of colonial narratives and sheds insights into contested meanings about what counts as language.

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