WHY AFRICANS DO WHAT THEY DO. ARGUMENTS, DISCUSSIONS AND RELIGIOUS TRANSMISSION IN ANGOLAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN LISBON

Ruy Llera Blanes
Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon
Leiden University

Mavengo, an Angolan evangelical pastor living in Lisbon is, in appearance, a discrete person. Not so tall in size, he looks younger than his actual age, perhaps due to his joyous and affable posture. One would not tell immediately that he has been leading a Christian congregation – the 'African Cult' of Lisbon[1] – for decades now. Yet, as he told me once when I interviewed him a few months ago, he also enjoys provoking a good *quid pro quo* among his fellow believers every now and then. For instance, in that occasion he described how he once upset his fellow believers with a seemingly 'odd behaviour': months earlier, he had arrived with his wife at a celebration party of a fellow Angolan's wedding. He told her to sit down at a table with her friends while he himself served her some food and drinks from the buffet. This behaviour was shunned by his Christian brothers, who told him they could not understand why he did not behave as a 'proper African', i.e., sit down himself and wait for his wife to serve him instead. This somehow (and apparently) seemed to undermine his authority as a man and simultaneously as a church leader.

Mavengo later gave me a thorough description of his personal migration experience – in many points similar to that of many other Angolan Christians in Lisbon – that brought him from the Congo to Luanda and Lisbon and its effects on his Christian beliefs, which ended up, as we will see, explaining that self-aware 'provocative atti-

1 'African Cult' (*culto africano*, 'AC' from here on) is the name commonly used by a group of African (predominantly Angolan and Congolese) Evangelical (Pentecostal) believers that meet every Sunday in the quarters of a Portuguese church, *Centro Cristão Vida Abundante* (CCVA, Christian Centre of Abundant Life) in Alvalade, Lisbon, to refer to themselves. My research on the broader topic of African Christianity and religious pluralism in Portugal has focused, in its first stage, on these movements in Lisbon, where most churches are located.

tude'. Son of a Christian family, he was educated in a Catholic school in Maquela do Zombo (Uíge province in Northern Angola) mission. Eventually, as a teenager, he had a revelation that took him into evangelical Christianity, joining a local Assembly of God church. He later moved on to Luanda and, in his late twenties, decided to 'take the jump'. The fear of being enrolled into arms (Angola was suffering a decade-long civil war by then) and the prospect of a better life motivated his decision. When he arrived, in 1990, he immediately searched for a local *Assembleia de Deus* (Assembly of God) where he could follow his faith. Yet, after some time, he and some fellow Angolans felt that somehow they should build their own 'African' congregation. This was a successful entrepreneurship, and today the African Cult has over seventy followers, and has branched into several other churches that, in the meantime, were born throughout the Lisbon metropolitan area.

The reasons that motivated this decision of creating an 'African cult' – as we will see later, mostly Angolan and Congolese – remained somewhat unclear. As Mavengo stated, they felt a need to 'do things their way', an African way, and to 'reach the Africans'. This African way (*à maneira dos africanos*) was not explicit nor supported by a theological or doctrinal excision from 'Portuguese' or 'European' religious practice, but was nevertheless meaningful in their quotidian and religious conceptions. In other words, attending the *Assembleia de Deus* in Lisbon was not the same thing as attending the *Assembleia de Deus* in Luanda. In this sense, Mavengo felt that many of the reactions to his posterior behaviour sprung from implicit conceptions on what was considered by his friends to be 'African' and 'not African', i.e., European.

Yet, as I was to find out later on, this implicitness has ways and moments for turning itself explicit. My main point in this paper is, first of all, to explain the processes through which the *implicit* becomes *explicit*; in consequence, I will try to show how religious experience is frequently mediated by these processes, in what we can describe as a constant process of 'epistemological and topographical definition'. Because, as Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke remind us, religious belief invariably implies a concern with meaning (2006: 1). Rather than discussing what are the traits of this 'Africa-ness' (ideas of ethnicity, masculinity, hierarchy, authority, tradition, and so on), I will talk about the empirical contexts and epistemological processes that provide specific (often competing) meanings to the concept and discover its complexities.

This proposal implies, therefore, discussing key concepts in recent developments within the anthropology of religion: transmission, learning and, ultimately, meaning. Obviously, there is a central history in the discipline regarding the issue of religious categories and meaning; one example is the debate regarding

religious ritual and meaning (see, for instance, Turner 1969; Geertz 1973; Asad 1993). However, recent approaches on religious transmission have varied from cognitive (see e.g. Whitehouse 2004) to historical (for example, Lambek 2002) or hermeneutic perspectives on this topic.[2] Bearing this in mind, my proposal here is to tackle this issue through the starting point of 'encounter', stressing the importance of historicity, on the one hand, and interaction, on the other. This implies a more holistic approach to religious experience by recognising that religious learning and transmission, as key processes in the determination of religious experiences, are manifold.

Recent monographs on Christian mission in Africa and Asia have focused on the ontological dynamics of confrontation of worldviews in the production of specific forms of Christianity (see Horton 1967, Pels 1997, Robins 2004 and Engelke 2007, among others). Here I will argue that encounter, as a 'confrontation of beliefs and worldviews', is a standpoint for the production of meaning and, in consequence, religious experience. This was obvious in such approaches to colonial and postcolonial contexts (and accounts on religious conversion), as is, I believe, for religious practice and expression in migration contexts. As we will see, it is the outcome of the 'encounter' – a process of reflection, discussion and argumentation among peers – that invokes an epistemology, i.e., a theory on religious knowledge. But the dialectical character of discussion and argumentation is also, from this point of view, a method for the production of a phenomenology of intuitions on space, place and materiality, as well as a psychology of religious belief. It also reminds us that memory and transmission are not only ´vertical' (i.e., intergenerational, from the top down) but also 'horizontal' (i.e. peered) processes (see Berliner 2005 and Sarró 2009 for interesting perspectives on this idea).

So I will start by outlining the context through which people such as Mavengo and his fellow believers have moved, namely the migratory and religious backgrounds that have shaped their experience up to date, in order to better understand the logics that motivate such reactions. After, I will jump into the centre of this debate, by introducing a vignette of a church sermon, in order to demonstrate the ideological and discursive complexities behind that 'epistemological definition', and finally attempt to explain what Africans like Mavengo and his church brothers *mean when they say they do what they do*…

2 Such approaches have been brilliantly reviewed and discussed in Berliner and Sarró (2007).

One. A migration of Christianity

Mavengo is but one of the thousands of Angolans that have migrated, over the last decades, to Portugal and Europe.[3] Together with the Capeverdeans, they are the largest African community in Portugal, in both cases sharing predominant Christian backgrounds.[4] In this context, both communities have helped shape a new panorama regarding Christianity in Portugal. This country has a long history of hegemonic Roman Catholicism, especially devoted to marianism in the twentieth century, and enjoying an 'official' status regarding state relationships, education and society in general. Yet this hegemonic status quo has been challenged by recent movements of pluralisation within Catholicism, Christianity and religious practice in general.

Of course, this new panorama is not only a by-product of African input. On the one hand, other migrant communities such as Brazilians or Eastern European have also introduced different Christian traditions (Pentecostal, Charismatic, Orthodox, etc.), inexistent in Portugal until the third quarter of the twentieth century. On the other hand, Roman Catholicism itself has experienced profound changes, not only incorporating internal renewal movements validated by the Vatican but also due to the dynamics of religious pluralisation promoted by the Portuguese democratic legislations since 1975, when the conservative dictatorial regime of the *Estado Novo* was overthrown.[5] A similar process also occurred within Portuguese Protestantism, which experienced a tremendous growth of the Evangelical branch in the latter half of the twentieth century (see Vilaça 2006).

Either way, being part of one of the largest migrant (and consequently, 'foreign' Christian) communities in Portugal, Angolans have been active participants in the process of reconfiguring senses of religious diversity and plurality. This sense of religious diversity is all the more evident in cities like Lisbon, where higher percentages of African (and other) migrants reside (see Malheiros 2000), and where most of the churches are located. These churches are gaining progressive visibility due

3 The African presence in Portugal is a by-product of this country's century-long colonial contact with Western and Southern Africa. Therefore, the majority of the migrants from this continent are from Portuguese speaking countries (Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Principe, Guinea Bissau), coming mostly after the processes of political independence in the second half of the twentieth century (see Bastos and Bastos 1999; Baganha, Ferrão and Malheiros 2002).

4 Migrants from Guinea Bissau and Mozambique, lesser in number, share a predominantly Islamic background.

5 Of course, one must be careful with the understanding of "pluralisation" offered here. Portugal has its own history of religious and Christian plurality (see e.g. Vilaça 2006). Here I am referring to the progressive legal and civic movements towards egalitarian frameworks regarding religious liberty, in its association with contemporary migration processes.

to their struggles for official recognition and networking – not only regarding the Portuguese state and their mainstream churches but also in terms of connections with other Angolan churches in the European territory. African migrants develop diverse strategies of participation (an outcome of encounter) in the Portuguese religious and Christian framework – in similar patterns as those described by Gerrie ter Haar for the Dutch case (2003). They do this by *association* to local churches (as is the case of the AC), *integration* within established communities (in the case of believers who attend local Universal Kingdom of the Church of God, Assembly of God or 7th Day Adventist churches, for example) and *inauguration* of church branches (as happened with the Kimbanguist, Tokoist and Nazarene movements) or independent churches (like the *Associação Cristã Templo de Deus*, etc.).

In the Evangelical branch, the African participation in Lisbon is a consequence of Mavengo and his friends' actions, when they decided to inaugurate the 'African cult'. Up to the early nineties, African Evangelicals either attended Portuguese churches or met in their homes in small prayer groups. It was after their initiative that the local religious scene incorporated the concept of 'African Evangelicals.' With newcomers from Angola and the Congo (where Evangelical Christianity was experiencing a tremendous growth), the group quickly grew to the hundreds of followers, some of which later left and created their own, independent churches. Today, we acknowledge the existence of around 5 African Evangelical congregations in Lisbon – in most cases, Angolan.

So as we can see from the Evangelical example, this is a very diversified setting for participation and integration that is itself connected to the migrants' previous histories of religious experience. In this sense, Angola also has its own long history of Christian faith. As part of the ancient Kingdom of the Kongo,[6] the country's contemporary northern regions shared one of the oldest histories of Christianity in the continent. The first exploratory contacts by Portuguese explorers were made in 1482 by an expedition led by Diogo Cão, who arrived in the Congo River basin and soon established economic exchange with the Kingdom then ruled by Nzinga-a-Nkuwu. Yet this exchange also implied a sudden and unexpected acceptance of Christian faith by the Kongolese rulers who immediately converted and consequently changed their names to João or Afonso, typical 'Portuguese' and 'Christian' names. By the sixteenth century, the Kingdom was officially Christian, belonging to the Portuguese 'parish' and developing direct contacts with the Vatican (see Gray 1983; Thornton 1983; Hastings 1994). Yet, throughout

6 Ranging from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Kongo grew around the Congo River basin and covered what is today Northern Angola and the Lower Congo.

the years, this form of African Christianity grew to be extensively contrasting from its metropolitan counterpart. By the eighteenth century, Christianity was also a form of political contestation and claim: several prophetic movements, such as Kimpa Vita's *antonianism* (see Thornton 1998) inaugurated century-long processes of anti-colonial and anti-white protests within religious manifestations and prophetic characters such as Kimbanguism (after Simon Kimbangu), Tokoism (after Simão Toko) and Mpadism or *L'Église des Noirs* (after Simon Mpadi), to mention the most notorious ones.

Also, the Angola and Congo regions were historically a preferential destination for many missions: from the early Capuchin and Jesuit missions to the nineteenth and twentieth century protestant missions that installed schools in what was to become, over the twentieth century, a Portuguese province of official Catholic profession (see Birmingham 1998; Péclard 1998). Finally, from the sixties on, after independence and the decade-long wars that shook the region (both in the Angolan and Congolese sides of the border), religion has assumed an active public role, both in terms of Christian revival and Charismatic faith, of progressive state policies regarding religious freedom and nationalisation (see Viegas 1997; Freston 2005). Today, Christianity has as much as 'boomed' in this country: as Fátima Viegas has reported, from 1987 to 2000, 84 churches were officially recognised, out of which 53 are Christian (Catholic or Protestant – Adventist, Evangelical, Anglican, Menonite, Mormon and Pentecostal); today, 730 other religious organisations await for their turn (Viegas 2007).

Thus, we can sense the *longue durée* of massified, pluralised and often contrasting / competing / scrambled Christianity that Angolans and Congolese such as Mavengo share before migrating into Europe. So the multiple expressions of 'African Christianity' in Lisbon reflect a specific sense of diversification that incorporates an *a priori* (Angolan, Congolese) plurality and an *ad hoc* plurality (Angolan, Congolese in the diaspora).

But this migration experience has changed the religious setting for both 'old' and 'new' homes, as well as for the migrant agent himself. Mavengo also explained to me how estranged he felt when he returned to Angola and visited his former church, and how puzzled his former church brothers felt with his reactions. In this sense, the interesting point here is that this plurality and heterogeneity – both in Portugal and in Angola or 'Africa' – somehow efface in the process, turning into wider scales of interpretation through specific categorisations of 'Africa' and 'Europe'. As we will see, it is in the process of turning the implicit explicit that this effacement takes place, a process motivated by the act of what we could term as a 'topographical adscription' provoked by movement, mobility and migration.

Two. Why we do what we do

The AC usually delivers services every Sunday afternoon. Its followers are all spread around the Lisbon Metropolitan area and, although many are related through family and friendship, Sundays represent the only chance for a get together and for ritual observance. In this sense, the church ministers often promote 'events', in order to pursue their goal of offering 'spiritual growth'. Biblical school and church choirs are but two examples. But perhaps the most powerful mechanism is what goes on within the service sessions – namely, the sermons that are delivered. As a 'public event', preachers use sermons to deliver specific content.

In January 2007 for example, Mavengo promoted a three-session 'seminar' in the AC on the topic of 'The Renewal of the Mind'. This seminar consisted in theme-oriented services with a special sermon (delivered by Mavengo himself) divided into three chapters, to be explained during three weeks. I attended the first session, where he delivered the main message that was to be discussed throughout the subsequent services. Mavengo started his sermon (performed in Portuguese, but with simultaneous translation to Kikongo) by reading verses 33 to 36 of the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 11[7] which invoked the sense that God's 'science' is unattainable. This kick-started the topic of 'Renewal of the Mind', and incorporated two issues that, coincidentally, Mavengo and I had previously talked about (telling me that this was not a random topic for him): first, the question of 'why we do what we do', i.e., the explanation behind the rituals and liturgies performed in church, as well as the believers' behaviour in general; second, the problem of 'culture shock' or in other words, how to deal with religious belief and practice in the context of migration.

He developed his idea with two examples: first, regarding differences between Africans and Europeans (for example eating habits, where ones eat with hands, the others eat with utensils); and second, regarding differences between Africans from different regions (in the Congo, for example, it is not impolite to close the door when someone is on the other side, but this would be unacceptable in Angola). These examples allowed Mavengo to argue that people are 'culturally formatted' (like a computer, for example), but those within Christian faith should be ready for a mental and spiritual renewal that will enable the diversity of expressions of faith, and not discriminate

7 Romans 11: "(33) Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (34)Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? (35) Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? (36) For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

what is and what isn't 'Christian'. Because, as Mavengo argues, "*no one owns the truth, not even the Americans*".

"(…) In this sense, the doctrine is the same for everyone, what changes is how we apply that doctrine. For instance: unlike Africans, Portuguese believers do not preach in trains". Mavengo recalled how once, a few months after he arrived to Lisbon, he attended a seminar in the city suburb. He left the seminar to catch the train back home, and felt so blessed that he decided to preach to his fellow train travellers about the marvels of Christ. Of course, the only response he got from his summons was from the ticket inspector, who discreetly informed him that he was bothering the commuters and that it would be better to keep quiet if Mavengo wished to keep travelling in that train.

Thus, in conclusion, he proposed a sort of 'third way' somewhere in between those who rejected heathen beliefs and those who ignored their own cultural tradition so as to adopt new, 'European' forms: "*we must learn to assimilate differences, verify (through the Bible) and live the Word, because the Word is above culture, and not the opposite*". In spiritual terms, one could not be in Europe and behave as an 'African', nor go back to Africa and be 'European'.

It is very common to find seminars such as this 'Renewal of the Mind' in Pentecostal churches such as the AC. Theme-oriented sermons are the basis of the religious pedagogy intended by church leaders, as the pulpit receives preachers who deliver specific messages, adequately mediated by biblical literature (see Coleman 2000; Crapanzano 2000). The pulpit is, in this sense, also a kind of blackboard where different topics are presented and discussed. Obviously, one cannot take this schooling analogy too far, in this line of thought that sermons are mainly one-way deliverances, with a preacher and an audience. Yet, one important characteristic of these sermons is that they build on prior contexts and pretexts, and are intended for posterior debates. They are, in this sense, what sets the Bible into motion.

Therefore, this specific seminar, as it turned out, was not *just another seminar*. My previous conversation with Mavengo, as well as the *quid pro quos* he had described to me, were just more elements added to a process of reflection and debate promoted by the leaders and brothers of the church. The seminar was, after all, a culmination of a series of episodes and discussions, of which Mavengo's *quid pro quo* at the wedding was but one. So the arguments and debates were developed, on Mavengo's behalf, with a clear pedagogical purpose.

In other words, this process involved what was perceived as a key issue: as an African church in the diaspora, how should it cope with the different backgrounds, sensibilities and points of view of the followers that met every Sunday at church? As suggested earlier, this church has a predominant Angolan and Congolese background. This also means that most of the followers are of Bakongo ethnicity, an identitary

enclave that bears a particular history, as we have seen, of complexified Christian expression. Also, just as Mavengo had come to Lisbon as an Assembly of God believer, many within his parish attended different churches before entering the African Cult in Lisbon. Finally, this church is also a "migrant church", meaning that it was built within different mobile contexts and within a network of intense Angolan-Congolese migration between these countries and Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, Netherlands, UK and so on. Thus, the church encounters many stances of "African Christianity" along the way, and found it necessary, at this point, to define those stances.

Therefore, this need for definition is inherent to the process of migration. At another Angolan Pentecostal church I attended in Lisbon around the same time, a Congolese musician/preacher living in France and visiting the congregation apologised to the audience because he could only speak in French, and said he should "learn to speak Portuguese in order to serve best". This idea of translation – a recurrent concept in the history of anthropology and, in particular, regarding the anthropology of religious mission (see e.g. Pels 1996) and conversion (see e.g. Hefner 1993) – as an important aspect of evangelisation is one of the standpoints of 'definition'. So Mavengo's seminar was, after all, an exercise in translation, an updated explanation on why they profess certain types of belief and not others.

But let me invoke yet another concept: that of topography. As a 'study of spatiality', topography relies on definition in order to build systematisation. In this sense, the effort of definition (be it through translation or discussion) is a form of production of (moral, spiritual) topography, a form of 'topographical adscription' (see Blanes 2008). And, we argue, this happens even more so in the context of migration. As we have seen, Mavengo and others, once in Lisbon (the place of 'encounter'), found new senses to the concepts of both 'Africa-ness' and 'Christianity', as they invoked stances of configuration of difference (like preaching in trains) and also discussed cultural values (like gender relationships in social settings such as weddings).

Three. Sermons, pedagogy, arguments

As I just mentioned in the previous section, church sermons are central (although not exclusive) mechanisms concerning religious learning, transmission and experience. In a church like the AC, where followers use its Sunday services as pretexts for reunion and interaction, they become central to the everyday religious practice of the believers; and more so if we take into account how, in Evangelical and Charismatic Christianity, language, rhetoric and discourse play decisive roles in building senses of faith and being in the world (see e.g. Stromberg 1993; Csordas 1997; Harding 2000).

Language has always been a key issue in anthropological approaches to religion (see Keane 1997). Several authors have combined diverse approaches to this topic, from symbolic (see Geertz 1973; Tambiah 1985, etc.) to more recent cognitivistic approaches that stress the importance of psychological processes in the definition of religious belief and practice (see Boyer 1993; Whitehouse 2004). I will focus here on the latter, namely on Whitehouse's proposal regarding the 'essence' of religious meaning, transmission and, ultimately, existence (2004). His theory of 'modes of religiosity', in a broad interpretation, relies on four principles: the material constriction of religious tradition; the selective character of religious phenomena; the context dependency of this selectiveness; and the explicitness of religious concepts that motivate transmission (2004: 15). This explicitness is, from this point of view, part of the process of acquisition of religious knowledge and meaning on behalf of the believers (as is, also, implicitness) within contexts of ritual indoctrination (2004: ch. 5). Regarding this argument, I would agree that doctrine, and its main ritual outcome, the sermon, are main channels for transmission and experience. Yet, on the other hand, this kind of approach presupposes that religious activity is confined to the ritual space and time of the liturgy – perceived as sole stances for the transmission (be it 'doctrinal' or 'episodic') or acquisition of religious knowledge. If it is true that the sermon (one of the cornerstones of religious liturgy and ritual, be it Evangelical, Christian or what not) is a key element in turning religious ideas and concepts explicit, it is also true that it demands previous presuppositions and posterior (extra-ritual) consequences. Maurice Bloch, for example, refers to 'deference' (2004) as the previous recognition of authority in ritual action; just as Tambiah had mentioned, following Austin, the idea of perlocutionary acts as forms of producing consequences through speech (1985); and Susan Harding stressed the importance of 'conviction' for the success of religious speech (2000). In the previous pages I have described how a specific communication act such as the sermon was preceded by certain events and inserted in a collective process of reflection and transmission. In this case, Mavengo used the pulpit as an open forum, in the sense that he gave a public context to somewhat private events. This forum incorporated, as we have seen, a pedagogical bias, where the effort of defining ("why we do what we do") is, in itself, a mode of religious transmission.

But Mavengo also embarked in a process of debate within the church in, so to speak, a 'conversational mode', i.e., instigating reactions by promoting 'dramas' (i.e., conflict, discussions, arguments, confrontations) as a method for internal debate.[8] John

8 The Turner/Gluckman approaches to ritual, conflict and schism (see Gluckman 1955; Turner 1996 [1957]), and the societal dynamics they incorporate, are not forgotten here.

and Jean Comaroff wrote about the importance of conversation in missionary encounters with the Tswana of South Africa, as a method for the 'objectification of difference' (1991: 243; see also Harding 1987). Here I want to take the metaphor a bit further, proposing that arguments and discussions, in contexts of 'encounter', are processes of epistemological definition (or re-definition) of religious belief through the recognition of difference.

A similar questioning could apply to one of the major critiques to the cognitive approach to the anthropology of religion: its demeaning of historicity or diachronicity, that are decisive factors in the process of religious and epistemological definition (see Asad 1993). As I have also shown here, the urge to discuss senses of 'Africa-ness' and 'European-ness' derive, from the participants' point of view, from a clear historical consciousness regarding their religious heritage as Angolans and Africans, and therefore incorporate more elements than just ritual interplay.

On the other hand, other cognitivists such as Lave and Wenger pointed out (following Bourdieu) the relational aspect of practice implies mutual constitution between the person and the world, and therefore *"(...) cognition and communication in, and with, the social world are situated in the historical development of ongoing activity"* (1991: 51). Thus, the ongoing debate between Mavengo and his church brothers incorporated both the situated character of group interaction (as a 'community of practice', in Lave and Wenger's terms) and the internalisation (and in the process, constitution) of religious concepts.

Conclusion: encounters and the topography of definition

You may have noticed that, considering the title of this paper, no explicit answer was offered to explain 'why Africans do what they do'. In fact, more than explaining 'what do they do', I set out to explain 'what do they mean when they say the do what they do'.

We have seen how a sense of 'Africa-ness' was set in motion, and discovered how it was affected by two processes: its effacement into a wider category in the context of transnational and transcontinental migration (that from Angola and Congo to Europe and Portugal); and its complexification due to the particular stances of Christianity in the religious backgrounds of those involved. I proposed a vignette of a particular church interaction (a sermon within a seminar), in order to describe particular instances of production of religious knowledge: debates and arguments as mechanisms for the configuration of theories of knowledge and experience, i.e., epistemologies and phenomenologies. In this sense, I invoked the ideas of translation, topographical

adscription, and pedagogy as examples of those mechanisms. Both these processes were mediated by the experience of encounter that feeds into that production of knowledge and that exemplifies the relational character of religious experience. As a result, this religious experience often incorporates cognitive processes such as the psychological incorporation of topographical concepts.

But we have also seen the potentialities and limits of the cognitive approach to religious experience: if we wish to discuss how "religious commitments are experienced, organized, transmitted, and politicized" (Whitehouse 2002), we cannot ignore that ritual activity – indeed, the core of the production of religious knowledge, at least in Christian terms – is configured in constant dialogue with the social contexts that bind it. Migration and the recognition of religious difference are but two elements that help in the binding.

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Abstract

In this article I intend to describe the processes through which senses and ideas of 'Africa-ness' are set in discussion within Pentecostal churches of Angolan frequency in Lisbon. I will show how ideas of 'Africa' – and, as referential, 'Europe' – are invoked in their local sermons in the context of a pedagogy of religious experience, ideological creativity and determination of "cultural memory". In doing so, I will debate current approaches to memory and religious experience (namely the cognitive approach), in order to describe the processes of transmission that build on those ideas of Africa and Europe, and also make a stance for the importance of 'arguments' and 'discussion' in processes of religious definition and experience. I will argue that, in contexts of migration and encounter, senses of religiosity are debated through methods such as 'topographical adscription', 'epistemological definition' or 'translation'.

Keywords: Religion; Pentecostalism; Lisbon; Angolan migration; meaning; transmission; ritual.