Maranhão – popular culture and folk religion
Maranhão

- located in the northeast Brazil
Maranhão

- population: 6.8 million people (est. for 2013)
- capital: São Luís (pop. 1 million)
- urban population 63%
- One of the poorest states in Brazil (20.9% illiterate)
- Very mixed population (european, indigenous, african origins)
- Most of the people are afro-descendants
Popular culture in Maranhão

• one of the brazilian states with the most extensive variety of cultural manifestations and a huge number of registered rhythms

• For example:
  * Tambor de crioula
  * Bumba-meu-boi
  * Festa do divino espírito santo
  * Baile de São Gonçalo
  * Farra de caixa
  * Cacuriá
  * Tambor de mina/Pajelança (afro religion)
Popular culture in Maranhão

• Some characteristics:
  – Interconnection between sacred and profane
  – Mixing of different religious beliefs (popular catholicism, tambor de mina, indigenous beliefs)
  – Festivities are usually organized as a votive gift
  – Extremely important socially and also economically in the society of Maranhão
Tambor de Mina (cura)

- Afro-Brazilian religion
- Basic characteristics are trance and possession
- Supernatural entities are called *encantados* (the enchanted ones) and the invisible ones (voduns, orixás, caboclos, boiadeiros)
- Takes different forms in different regions and also mixes for example with umbanda, spiritism or indigenous pajelança (shamanism)
Tambor de Mina (cura)
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Baile de São Gonçalo
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Baile de São Gonçalo
Tambor de crioula

- Informal dance of afro origin
- so called *umbigada* dance
- in 2007 it was considered as immaterial brazilian cultural heritage by IPHAN
- essential part of the cultural identity of the people of Maranhão
- São Benedito is the protector saint of tambor de crioula
- Usually organized as a votive gift
Tambor de crioula

• in tambor de crioula the people form a circle (*roda*)
• women dance (*coreira*) and the men (*coreiro*) play the drums and sing
• 3 drums together are called *parelha* formed by *meião, crivador* and *tambor grande*
• In the dance the most crucial moment is *punga* (belly bump) → represents fertility, matriarchal power and it’s connected with the beat of the big drum
Tambor de crioula
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Tambor de crioula
Tambor de crioula

• Many aspects:
  • Sometimes seen as a profane manifestation but at the same time it has a strong religious side
  • reflects sexual issues and the gender relationships in the community through the dialogue between women and men
  • at the same time it’s a ritual and a way to have fun
Bumba-meu-boi

• one of the biggest manifestations of popular culture in Maranhão
• huge street theater or performance telling a story of an ox (bull) through music, dance and costumes
• celebrated principally during St John’s at the end of June
• votive gift for St John or some other saints or enchanted ones (*encantados*)
• sacred and profane elements are extremely interconnected
Bumba-meu-boi

• principle figure is an ox (very important economically in brazilian society since the conquest)

• Other figures in the performance: Catirina, Francisco, cowboys, caboclos (civilized indians), indians and the main singer

• Many different styles (*sotaque*): they are different in rhythm, instruments, dance, clothing and accessories

• The festival cycle goes from abril/may (beginning of the rehearsals) to september/october (the death of the ox)
Bumba-meu-boi
Bumba-meu-boi
Bumba-meu-boi

• Some considerations:
  – Essential part of the cultural identity of the people
  – Strong religious side ("almost like a prayer")
  – Commercialization of the tradition (especially in São Luís) ➔ modifications in the dramaturgy and changes in the mentality of the people
Bumba-meu-boi
Bibliography