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Islam in Brazil or the Islam of Brazil?

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ABSTRACT
This article is about the Islam lived and practiced by Muslim communities in Brazil. It attempts to understand the identity that this religion is acquiring in the Brazilian religious field. It discusses the discrepancy between figures presented by the official census and Muslim sources and offers models to think about the emergence of Muslim communities and possible changes due to the entrance of "new Muslims" (converted Brazilians without Muslim origin). Based on empirical data, it discusses the difficulties found and strategies used by the communities. It suggests that Islam in Brazil is starting to put down roots and to have a profile of its own.

Key words: Islam, Muslim community, Brazilian Muslims.

RESUMO
Este artigo trata do islã vivido e praticado por comunidades muçulmanas dentro do Brasil, com o objetivo de compreender o tipo de identidade que esta religião está adquirindo no campo religioso brasileiro. Discute a discrepância entre os números do censo e àqueles das fontes muçulmanas, e apresenta modelos para pensar o surgimento das comunidades e as possíveis mudanças em conseqüência da entrada de "novos muçulmanos" (convertidos brasileiros sem ascendência muçulmana). A partir de material empírico, discute os obstáculos enfrentados e as estratégias utilizadas pela comunidade. Sua sugestão é que o islã, no Brasil, começa a fincar raízes e adquirir um perfil próprio.

Palavras-chave: islã, comunidade muçulmana, muçulmanos no Brasil.

Over its 14 centuries of history Islam has been capable of spreading, creating roots and bearing fruit in an enormous and differentiated territory throughout the world. Scholars of this religion recurringly emphasize the cultural force that allowed its opening to other cultures, both adapting them to a specific mode of feeling Islamic as well as adapting itself to local customs and integrating them to its practice (Geertz 2004:28-29; Pace 2005:237 -238). It is this dual challenge of remaining faithful to a universal standardization while adapting to a local culture that not only Islam, but any universal religion, confronts. The Islam lived in Indonesia, Morocco or in Pakistan, to cite only some countries, has both similarities and differences. It is for this reason that we understand that, to know if Islam effectively reached Brazil we need to investigate if in fact we can speak of a Brazilian Islam, which, as that lived in other countries, is both similar and different from the others.

The task that I propose is to try to understand the Islam among us, the Islam lived and practiced by communities within Brazil and which indicates that it is in some way adapting and also creating an

identity or identities and a form of feeling more specifically Muslim within the Brazilian religious field.

The various issues that I will raise in this article revolve around this fundamental question which I want to address. Naturally, it is an attempt, at first, because the space of an article is not broad enough to consider all the factors involved and required, and because there is very little research about this religion among us. Nevertheless, I believe that it is worth confronting the challenge and perhaps propitiating an initial sketch that allows us to continue researching the Muslim religion.

I will thus begin with numbers, that is, how many Muslims are there, when did they arrive in Brazil, how did this religion behave at the beginning, the recent presence of Brazilian converts and what changes began to be perceived that in some way signal a Brazilian Muslim identity. Upon discussing some of these items, I will need to turn to issues of Muslim doctrine and history, because otherwise it would be difficult to substantiate what I present. The fact that Islam is not well known in Brazil and that its history is not familiar to us requires this procedure. Our objective, therefore, will be to conduct an analysis of some sociological processes that this religion has experienced to adapt to the Brazilian religious field.

Before beginning, once again I emphasize that upon speaking of Islam I am not thinking of something singular, without variations and diversities in time and space. Muslims share some common definitions that denote their belonging to the religion, yet they also have singular experiences. The various Brazilian Muslim communities differ in some characteristics. While those who have converted and do not have Muslim ancestors share a common Islamic reference, they also bring their previous religious experiences.

I collected the empirical material[1] in visits to mosques in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais, and from other studies that are cited during the work conducted in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul. I will also use an initial study about the community in Maringá, Paraná, and data that I gathered in personal contacts[2], by Internet and telephone, with the communities of Fortaleza, Ceará and Manaus. Therefore, although the empiric material does not encompass all of the communities[3], which according to some Muslim sources include 52 communities, and to others 85, I believe to have data that helps to exemplify nearly all the regions of Brazil[4]. To review the size of the communities and their social, economic and cultural condition, I used the analysis of statistical data conducted by French scholars Philippe Waniez and Violete Brustlein (2001). I must also mention that

[1] I have often been accompanied by researcher Cecília Mariz, with whom I have written about Islam and who has been a constant interlocutor. It is important to mention that researchers are not well received in the mosques, and I personally would like to thank in particular the collaboration of the community in Rio de Janeiro and its president, sheik Abdelbagi Didahmed Osman, prof. Samir El Hayek, from the Santo Amaro mosque in São Paulo and prof. Helmi Nasr of the Brazil Mosque in São Paulo

[2] For the community in Maringá I used the research of Tatiane Damasceno (2004), a study-grant student of UEM (Universidade Estadual de Maringá); in Manaus, a professor helped me to collect data, in Fortaleza, a former member of the community granted me various Internet interviews.

[3] According to the Centro Islâmico de Foz de Iguaçu, cited by Waniez & Brustlein (2001), there were 52 Muslim institutions. The list includes benefit societies and also schools, hospitals etc. Sílvia Montenegro (2002a, p. 85), spoke in her article of 58 institutions. The imam of Rio, who is part of the Superior Council of Theologians and Islamic Affairs of Brazil reported this number of 85 in an interview in January 2006. I believe that the number of institutions may have increased a bit, because the community of Fortaleza, for example, began to operate at the end of 2001, and that of Juiz de Fora only recently founded a legal entity (neither appears in Montenegro's list). Nevertheless, there is still no single survey of the Muslim population in Brazil.

[4] I have little material about the community in Foz de Iguaçu on the triple frontier (which has acquired considerable visibility recently because of suspected links with international political Islam) and communities in the Midwest (Mato Grosso, Brasília, etc.). Concerning the triple frontier, in addition to the interview conducted by phone with a leader of that community, there is a recent article by Beliveau, Montenegro, Setton, (2005), which, while treating all of the religions, refers to the Muslim community, although in a restricted manner. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest that the community follows the endogenous models as do most of the Brazilian communities.

40% of the entire Brazilian Muslim population is found in the São Paulo metropolitan region. Based on this grouping, I will risk making some generalizations that allow considering the whole, or at least, which provide a model from which it is possible to evaluate similarities and differences.

1. The uncertainty of the numbers

There is an enormous discrepancy between the data about Muslims gathered by the official census and the numbers presented by Muslim entities.

According to the official 2000 census, there were 27,239 Muslims in Brazil, or less than 0.016% of the Brazilian population. Meanwhile, Muslim sources[5] speak of 500,000, 1,000,000 or 1,500,000, and say that the error is due to the classification of Muslims in "other categories". Sílvia Montenegro (2002b:145) discussed this question presenting data from international Muslim institutions that spoke of 380,000 Muslims in Brazil in 1986 according to The Institute of Muslim Minorities and 500,000 in 1992 according to the World Guide to Muslim Groups.

Waniez & Brustlein (2001:160), cited the 1991 census, which registered 22,449 Muslims, to discuss this question in his article and concluded that, even admitting a large error in calculation, the population, according to the census data, is no more than 50,000. Even so, upon considering the data from Muslim entities that speak of 1,000,000 and complain of a mistake in the census classification, the authors argue that researchers, considering the category "others" believe that the population could be around 200,000.

Whether the percentage of Muslims in Brazil is as low as 0.016% as the 2000 census determined or as high as 0.06% of the population as Muslim sources maintain, in any case the number of Muslims in Brazil is very modest.

To think of 27,239 or 200,000, or even 1 million does not mean to say that all those considered Muslims are practicing Muslims or go to a Mosque. In most of the mosques visited, a large discrepancy was found between the number of faithful reported by the entity and the number who go to Friday prayers. In Juiz de Fora, for example, of the 60 declared by the community, an average of only 15 people appeared at the Friday gatherings. In Belo Horizonte, of the 250 members reported by the mosque, the average attendance was some 50 people. In Rio de Janeiro, of the 350 reported by the President of the Muslim Benefit Society of Rio de Janeiro (SBMRJ) less than one third attended prayers, for which an average of 100- 110 people gathered. Thus, statistics may include those who are Muslim in name, or who say they are Muslim, but who do not participate or participate very little in the activities of the community.

There are two interesting factors here, one is more closely linked to the specific situation of this religion in Brazil and the other to questions of doctrine.

The Muslim communities[6] in Brazil were founded by Syrian-Lebanese immigrants (Truzzi 1991; Waniez & Brustlein 2001; Lesser 2001), who came to Brazil in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. At the beginning, most of these immigrants were Christian; then more Muslims began to arrive, due to the various historic and geographic changes in the Middle East that they left.

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[5] Even on the website of the mosque of Foz do Iguaçu, in the section "Compreenda o islam e os muçulmanos", there are two sub-items with different numbers. The sub-item "O islam no Brasil" reports that there are 1 million Muslims while the sub-item "Mundo islâmico" reports 500, 000.

[6] Islam reached Brazil between the late 18th and early 19th centuries with the Malê slaves (Reis 2003), but the contemporary communities were formed by the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. According to a native perspective, Muslims have been in Brazil since before European discovery (Montenegro 2002a: 65,85). This emphasis on a Muslim presence in the history of Brazil is also part of the discourse of the communities to emphasize the non-foreign character of this religion among us.

It is thus a religion of immigrants, an ethnic or nearly-ethnic religion as I argued in an earlier article (Peres & Mariz 2003). This ethnic or nearly ethnic character is due to the fact that Islam behaves as a religion for an ethnic group for which it is a bonding element in the community, that allows it to speak its native language and compose its specific ethnic identity. There was thus, at the beginning, no concern in opening the religion to a broader society. An elderly member of the São Paulo community, Helmi Nasr, who wrote about the history of the group in the Islamic newspaper *Al Urubat* (ano 67, n. 764, p.14-15, maio/jun. 2000), published by the Muslim Benefit Society of São Paulo, told me in an interview that the creation of this society was due to a concern of the immigrants, who realized that their children began to use increasingly less Arabic, in exchange for Portuguese, favored by the hospitable environment found in Brazil, which was leading them, he maintained, to a separation from their ethnic linguistic environment, since it was through the Arabic language that their fathers had passed on their religious and cultural heritage. This triggered "the dilution of the Muslim nucleus found here"[7] he said. For this reason, the country began to build mosques to congregate the families, and benefit societies and schools to support the community.[8]

The Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana de São Paulo {The Muslim Benefit Society of São Paulo (SBM)] , the first of Brazil, was founded in 1929 (Truzzi 1991:16), aimed at the interests of the group and as the result of concerns for the preservation of an ethnic-religious identity of origin. As part of this effort, land was purchased in 1935 for the construction of the Brazil Mosque, which had its cornerstone laid in 1940 and was inaugurated in 1956, as the first mosque in South America[9]. According to Nasr, "only after its construction, did the consciousness of a sense of a Muslim identity begin to be formed in Brazil" rising from the Benefit Societies in cities such as Curitiba, Paranaguá, Londrina, Campinas, Cuiabá, Barretos, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Santos, São Miguel, Jundiaí, and others. The Benefit Society of Rio de Janeiro was founded in 1951 and that of Belo Horizonte in 1962.

These Muslim Benefit Societies, founded after the 1960's in various cities of the country, had as their first goal to congregate their members and create a space for gathering so that they could maintain the ties that allow the preservation of their language, culture and religion, or that is, so that they could reproduce. This use of space of the SBMs for social activities[10] and for the congregation of the community still appears to be strong. In Rio de Janeiro, it was reported that attendance is greater at the Muslim festivals and social activities than at the religious activities. And a converted informant "a Brazilian Muslim"[11], from the Brazil Mosque, in São Paulo, told me that the "Arab Muslims" - Muslims by birth - participate more in the social activities of the community than in the religious

[7] This appears to be the standard of the largest communities of immigrants. In Belo Horizonte, where Edmar Avelar de Sena is conducting field research for his masters dissertation, the report is very similar. They also say that various Muslims married Catholics and their children did as well, thus seperating from the religion.

[8] I interviewed prof. Helmi Nasr in 2002, and at this time he gave me his article "A minoria muçulmana sírio-libanesa, no Brasil" (s/.d.), it is a type of evaluative document of the community with history, analysis and planning and suggestions for "conservation of its social-cultural-religious" identity. The suggestions presented included a census, data base, construction of schools, training of sheiks designated for Brazil, training of Brazilian sheiks, and promotion in existing channels and those to be created (radio, newspaper and TV) of the "habits of the Muslim people" and of "educational and entertainment programs to attract the Muslim public to its own culture". The document expresses extreme concern, coming to speak of the "irreversibility of the social dilution of the new minority generations, if nothing is done". I believe that this analytical document has been used to raise funds for the preservation of the religious identity of the community..

[9] Data from the magazine *Alvorada* about the Muslim Benefit Society of São Paulo in the issue commemorating the 70th anniversary of the entity (ano VI, n. 49, p. 14, set./out. 1999).

[10] There is, for example in Rio de Janeiro, the Alaovita Benefit Society (of the Shiite branch of Islam), which does not have a religious practice. It serves only as an institutional and social reference for the community (Montenegro 2002b:146). I have no current data about this community, but was informed that there is a masters student at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF) who is studying it.

[11] The expressions "Brazilian Muslim"as a form of referring to the converts with no Muslim ancestors and "Arab" or "Muslim Arab" to refer to the immigrants, Muslims by birth, are heard in some mosques. In this article I will principally use the expressions "new Muslim" for Brazilian converts and "Muslim by birth" for the immigrants and their descendents.

activities. Some "Muslims by birth" also express their alarm with the "New Muslims" who take religion so seriously. Religious nominalism is obviously part of the Muslim universe, for which reason attendance at the Mosque is not in keeping with the number of local Muslims.

It can thus be affirmed that until recently Islam has operated in the Brazilian religious field as an ethnic religion or a nearly ethnic religion despite the fact that it is a universal religion and that its followers manifest other types of behavior in other places and situations. This characteristic may help us consider the type of belonging and participation in the religious activities of many of the members of the Muslim communities. In parallel, it appears that more recently there has been a revival movement among some Muslims who had been distant from the community, which needs to be better studied.

The second factor, which can help us reflect on the issue of the numbers mentioned above, is related to religious issues. According to the President of the SMB of Rio de Janeiro, a Muslim is not required to go to Friday prayers if the mosque (or place of worship) is more than 10 km from where the Muslim lives or works. In addition, he explained that the requirement to pray at the mosque on Fridays is difficult to comply with in a non-Muslim country such as Brazil because Friday is a normal work day.

It is also important to remember that Muslims do not have an "ecclesiastic mechanism" (Pace 2005:134-135) that controls belonging to the faith. This control function is exercised in Muslim societies by the community of the faith, because Islam is more of an "orthopraxy"[12] than an orthodoxy. The practices that were established, such as the "five pillars", gradually respond to "two needs of unquestionable social importance: to institute spontaneous mechanisms for social-religious self-control; and to guarantee the order constituted through mass codification of religious behavior" (Pace 2005:124). These religious practices established at the historic beginning of Islam shaped the exterior and interior behavior of the believers, and in a Muslim society, allow them to be controlled by the broader group. The cycle of existence of a Muslim is marked by a series of codified and external behavior that is "immediately visible in the social plane" yet which is not felt by the Muslim as external coercion, and winds up exercising "a permanent reciprocal control" (Pace 2005:124).

This type of control is more difficult in a society in which Muslims are a minority and where external control is diluted or even absent. It is possible that this can lead to a relaxation of practices and can direct the believer to a more particular, subjective and even nominal Islam. In fact, it is necessary to remember that, in principle, the tie of the Muslim believer to God is not measured by an Ecclesiastical institution, but only by the Koranic revelation. The history of Muslim society demonstrated that, for this reason, there was an effort by the part of leaders of the nascent empire to create, within the Islamic religion, an apparatus of religious norms that would institutionalize the faith. These practices were then submitted to a careful process of normatization that wound up establishing a Muslim law (Pace 2005:119-120). Outside of a Muslim society, or where Muslims are a minority, it is difficult to establish both collective and legal control.

Since in Islam there are no sacraments or the requirement for a cleric, Muslim communities operate by grouping the faithful, where the leader of the religious activities (the imam[13]) is that believer who has the most knowledge of the religion. This function can be rotated among the members. For this reason, it is easy to perceive that the control of the faithful is quite limited. There is no "sacramented" authority that can exercise power over the entire community.

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[12] One of the first books written in Brazil about Islam is called "Islã, o credo é a conduta", and is an explicit reference to this type of orthopraxy. Talal Asad (1996:9), when he discusses this question of belief and practice, calls attention to the fact that it is not that the belief is irrelevant to the Islamic tradition, but it is the distancing between belief and practice, that occurs in modernity, which is strange. Belief as a purely internal, particular and private mental state, distanced therefore from daily practices, which is irrelevant to the Islamic tradition.

[13] The *Imam* in Sunni Islam, is the person at the front, who directs prayers. He may or may not be a sheik. In Shiite Islam, the meaning is different.

It is important to remember, however, that during the history of Islam, a class of specialists in sacred issues was formed, the sheiks, separate from the other believers. The sheiks became a type of clerical institution. Some of these specialists have a more judicial function, and both these as well as those dedicated to religious activities are, to a large degree, government employees. Muslim communities, principally those outside of Muslim countries, can operate without their presence, and that Muslim in the community most versed in religion becomes the *imam* and can conduct a conversion, a marriage, lead prayers, issue a sermon, etc. This is often the case among us.

Along with this situation, it is also common for Muslim governments (or their international institutions) to send to Muslim communities outside of these Muslim countries sheiks, who, because they have specific religious education (currently at a university level) can lead the religious activities of the community of believers and also are well versed in Shari'ah or Muslim law. The larger communities[14] in Brazil have received and some still receive these sheiks, normally from Middle Eastern countries, but there are also Sudanese, Moroccan and Mozambican sheiks – the latter, coming more recently, have the advantage that they speak Portuguese – and come in order to preserve religion in the community. They dedicate themselves to these religious activities, and the leadership of the societies is left to the local board. A small community can also finance, with its own resources, the transfer of a sheik, as took place in Juiz de Fora.

Although these sheiks have moral authority over the faithful, they do not control them[15], particularly in a non-Muslim society such as ours, which in general they do not know very well. A number of people interviewed said that "the sheik does not have command. He is certainly the leader with the most studies" (Muslim birth). And it is common for some of the sheiks who were interviewed to describe their role as one of "counseling".

In sum, to reflect on the uncertainty of the number of Muslim faithful in Brazil an analysis can be suggested of a number of factors such as the lack of control of the faithful by the communities, the presence of a nominal Islam, the integration of immigrants and their children in broader society and their consequent distancing from religion, the migratory movement from the Middle East[16], the recent and still timid revival and return to religion among the Muslims, and even its recent openness to Brazilian society. The latter is an issue that we believe is the most important for the Brazilian religious field and that we will address below.

2. Changes underway

What led the Islam lived in Brazil as an ethnic or nearly ethnic religion to become another option in the Brazilian religious field? We will analyze this question here.

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[14] According to one "converted" informant, the trend to inflate the number of practitioners is often due to the goal of achieving help from international Islamic entities, which is quite logical.

[15] This is principally true for the Sunni communities, which are nearly 90% of the Brazilian communities (Montenegro 2002a:65) and around 80% of the communities worldwide. In Shiite communities, the sheik has more authority and there is an hierarchy between him and the believer. Our study is about the Sunni communities.

[16] The sheik in Rio told me that many Palestinians who live in Rio de Janeiro (both in the capital city and in neighboring ones such as Volta Redonda, Rezende, Caxias, Nova Iguaçu and others) left the region in the 1970's both outside the country (to Canada for example) and to other places. It is also interesting to note that in her research about the community of Maringá, Tatiane Damasceno said that she was informed that the Muslim population (she does not mention the nationality) decreased by 1/5 since the 1990's. Denise Jardim, in her work about Palestinian immigration to far southern Brazil, also mentioned a more recent shift of the Palestinian population of more recent immigration. A drop was also registered in the size of the community in Foz de Iguaçu, by nearly 1/3 since the end of 2001.

Pierre Sanchis (2001:13), upon speaking of the historic Protestant universe in the regions of Swiss or German colonization and erroneous and outdated yet "commonplace representations" of it as a nearly ethnic religion to which only two routes were open – "to revive and 'renovate itself' or disappear" – led us to think of the case of Islam. This religion also has another alternative (Peres & Mariz 2003): to leave aside its ethnic identification, and look at its universal character and assume a more exclusively religious identity, presenting it in the religious market as another viable option for the Brazilian believer. We believe that this is what is taking place with Islam in Brazil.

Some of the facts that are leading to this change were not necessarily designed by its authors with this result in mind, but wound up leading to this route.

2.1 The new *sheiks*

As I mentioned above, the leaders of religious activities can be either those members of the community most versed in religion or sheiks sent from abroad by Muslim countries. One of the old members of the community of São Paulo told me that, in the case of the São Paulo communities that receive them, the fact that these sheiks speak only Arabic did not help in the task of attracting the children of immigrants who had strayed toward Brazilian society, because the language and the culture of those religious men created obstacles for fluid and open communication. A group in the São Paulo Muslim community decided it would be a good idea to educate sheiks who were born in Brazil and who are therefore "Brazilians" but who would study in Islamic religious universities. Knowledge of the language and the Brazilian culture would allow more effective approximation and communication with the new generations. This group organized itself, requesting help from international agencies and from the Islamic Center – a council formed of the ambassadors of the Islamic countries to Brazil – founded in 1985.

As a result of this initiative, in the 1980's some Brazilian students, children of immigrants, earned grants to study in Saudi Arabia in an Islamic university. According to what the Brazilian sheiks told us, many went abroad but returned due to the rigor and difficulties of study. But two of them graduated and became the first Brazilian born sheiks.

These sheiks live in São Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo, which is the Brazilian base for various international Muslim organizations such as the World Assembly of Youth (WAMY), the Union of Muslim Students of Brazil and the International Center for Promotion of Islam to Latin America (CDIAL), some of which are led by the sheiks. These institutions are financed by international Muslim organizations, principally from Saudi Arabia. The presence of these international entities, principally in the São Paulo city of São Bernardo, leads to stimulating business with Arab countries, which are organized by the leaders of that community. One business that they organize is the issuing of certificates for beef and chicken. There is an entity that administers these certificates and promotes courses in Halal butchering[17] aimed at Muslims, to teach inspection of the correct methods for slaughtering chicken and beef. After the course, some of these Muslims go live close to the large slaughterhouses that export meat to Muslim countries, according to my sources.

The São Paulo capital and some municipalities in the metropolitan region have the largest concentration of Muslims in the country (40%), an expressive number of Muslim institutions, many contacts with the Islamic world and access to capital to finance their activities, more so than most of the Brazilian communities. In addition, São Bernardo has two Brazilian sheiks, with considerable symbolic capital, and for this reason it is the base for the international Muslim organizations.

The role that these new sheiks will have in Brazilian Islam is still being determined, but in fact they already occupy a place of broad leadership and are a national reference in terms of promotion of printed material, promotion of national meetings and participation in international Muslim events such as, for example, the pilgramage or *hajj*.

[17] See the photo of the group formed by CDIAL and the inspection visit to Sadia, in the magazine *Alvorada*, ano VI, n. 49, p. 5 e 25, set./out. 1999.

Perhaps more than rescuing the children of Muslims who have drifted from the traditions – the primary objective of the initiative – these sheiks came to make Islam more Brazilian and show that it can in fact come to take root here. This is also the beginning of a process and it is important not to forget that these first sheiks are children of immigrants and that their education was conducted in Saudi Arabia, where Islam is linked to wahhabism[18], a quite "rigid and puritan" form of Islam.

Other communities also have their contacts with the Muslim world. Rio de Janeiro, which until recently had no outside financing, nor a foreign sheik[19], now has help from Kuwait, which allows the sheik and president of the Society, a Sudanese living in Brazil, and who speaks perfect Portuguese, to dedicate himself exclusively to both religious and administrative activities and to the promotion of Islam. He told me that, at this time, there are two people in the Rio de Janeiro community and one in the Juiz de Fora community who were sent by SBM/RJ to the Sudan to study Arabic and take a course at an Islamic Sciences Institute. They received international financing for the airfare and the Sudanese Institute supplied books, lodging and food. They also should receive a grant from an international organization (the grants are issued when they arrive there). Those sent are converts or "new Muslims".

This entire effort to prepare specialists in the Muslim religion who speak Portuguese, which began to reach the children of Muslims who were straying from the flock, and others who were too assimilated to Brazilian society, now appears to be increasingly considering the Brazilian population and its potential for conversion.

2.2 The formation and functioning of the Muslim Benefit Societies (SBM) in Brazil

To continue to speak about this issue, I will make a necessary interruption to explain how the Muslim communities function in Brazil.

Islam, as mentioned above, does not have a hierarchical ecclesiastical structure that controls the various mosques. This makes it closer to Protestantism than to Roman Catholicism. Each mosque is independent and in the Sunni world, there is nothing like a Pope who has the final word about an issue. There was a movement in this direction in Islamic history, because there was a large empire that needed to be controlled and the consequential creation of an apparatus with institutionally established religious norms, and the shari'ah, wound up becoming a true "paper pope" according to Italian Islamologist Alessandro Bausani (1988). It was through the determinations of these religious practices and their detailed regulation that a process of religious normatization of social life and the creation of a Muslim law with its Koranic jurisprudence took place.

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[18] Wahhabism is a puritan movement that arose in the 18th century in the region that is today Saudi Arabia. Its founder, Muhammad Ibn 'Abd el Wahhab (1703-1787), sought to purify Islam from all the changes since the third century after Hijra. The success of the movement was due at that time to an alliance between its founder and the political leader of the religion, Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud. The descendents of Sa'ud were able to reestablish their dynasty in 1901 and reconquer the territories of their ancestors in 1925. In 1935, the creation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia assured the triumph of the Wahhabi ideology in its territory. Wahhabism began to gain prominence in the last three decades, principally, according to some, because of the collapse of the Islamic institutions in post-colonialism and by the support from "Saudi petrodollars". Its rigor imposes the required assistance of prayer on Fridays, prohibits smoking and requires the use of a beard. It is also opposed to a more popular Islam that cultivates the saints and visits to their tombs and prohibits Sufi fraternities.

[19] In a previous text, Montenegro (2002a) emphasized that this community opted to break with the "Arabization" of the Muslim communities and called for an "Islamization". In fact, in a field study at this time, the imam of the mosque said that he did not have foreign help as an option. Today, however, in addition to being financed, it is also receiving help for the construction of a new mosque. I do not mean to say that they have abandoned what they previously defended, but the fact that they are receiving help from an Arab country denotes at least that the community opted in some way to re-establish contact with these countries, perhaps even in order to grow.

In the Muslim world, the mechanisms of social-religious control are codified behaviors that guarantee order and are part of the life of the believer. As Pace indicated (2005:120-124), discipline never seems to be imposed, since the practices are confined to the free individual initiative of the believer. These behaviors were codified in the shari'ah – the divine law - a set of norms that guides the religious and social life of the believer, and based on which were created legal procedural formulas that guide public acts such as divorce, marriage, inheritance as well as religious acts related to fasting, pilgrimage etc.. Legal-religious schools thus arose. In the Sunni world there are four schools – which vary somewhat among themselves – in relation, for example to requirements, permissiveness or punishment, even when the religious practices are the same, following a single form of standardization.

These practices are understood by the believer to be revelations of the Koran and thus divine orders. Many of them are only suggested in the Koran and through the *sunna* (or practice of the prophet Mohammed) and the hadiths (his sayings) that are then explained or were the fruit of a later interpretation during the process of institutionalization of the religion.

In a Muslim country, therefore, religious control takes place through the collective practice of mass religious behavior, fruit of personal observation of the established prayer and other rites, supervised by doctors of law who guarantee necessary compliance with these practices. For those questions about which there is doubt or disagreement, doctors of law meet and issue determinations (fatwas) based on Koranic jurisprudence established over the years and on past interpretations. According to some scholars, it can be said that, in the Sunni world, one very important reference are the doctors of law and theologians of the Al Azhar University in Cairo. Nevertheless, there is no single institutional order that can be taken as the maximum representative of all the Muslims. In most of the Islamic countries, the orthodoxy is determined by the government – the sheik of Al Azhar, for example, has been named by the President of Egypt since 1961 – from among doctors of law who are government employees.

In countries where Muslims are a minority, such as Brazil, there is no single reference and each mosque is independent. Normally, they are either linked to the region of origin of the majority of the immigrants, and or to the international financial entities, and or to the other Brazilian mosques as a form of maintaining and sharing the practice of Islam. There is a Federation that has the goal of uniting all the mosques, but which, according to the Muslims themselves, does not function; it is the League of Scholars, which encompasses the sheiks who are in Brazil.

The mosques are thus independent from one another and can resolve their own questions internally, using as a reference the institutionally established religious norms. This makes it difficult to create a national leadership, or a united representation of the various communities. There is no single authority that represents Islam in Brazil, which is recognized by the various communities. Leadership and power rise from the control of the various Muslim institutions such as the World Assembly of Youth, the Union of Muslim Students of Brazil and the International Center for Promotion of Islam of Latin America, which are financed by international entities; by the business conducted by Muslim countries with Brazil such as the Halal butchering and from symbolic capital represented by the knowledge of the sheiks, principally those who speak Portuguese. The São Paulo community thus has the greatest power. Even so, it is a relative power – more closely related to economic issues – and is not necessarily recognized by all.

The Rio de Janeiro community also recently began to seek these international contacts, possibly as a way of confronting the domination of the São Paulo group in these institutions, towards which there is some resentment.

In any case, each community seeks financing for its mosque, to bring a sheik, to send its members on pilgrimage or to study abroad. The various Muslim Benefit Societies are therefore autonomous entities, with a directory and a president who is not necessarily a sheik, because this religious specialist often comes from abroad and does not speak Portuguese.

The various examples found in the communities studied allow identifying two models of formation of the Muslim Benefit Societies. That which we call the endogenous model, the fruit of an internal dynamic of the community, or that in which the community of immigrants unites to establish the Muslim Benefit Society in order to maintain its culture and its religion. In general, it congregates a reasonably sized population of immigrants and is concerned with the distancing of the Muslims, and principally of their children, from their religion of origin. This appears to be the case of the first communities, such as those of São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro and others. Often, the founding of a society was, at first, more a point for social encounters, than a beginning of religious practices. The Porto Alegre community continues to follow this model, although it was founded later (1989) – it was only after 1996 that the Muslims used it for their religious practices (Pereira 2001).

The most exogenous model of formation, fruit of a dynamic external to the community, took place in locations where the number of immigrants and their descendents was lower, and where factors external to the community, such as the rise of a converted Brazilian or one seeking conversion, or the presence of other Muslims temporarily living in the country, led to the formation of a Muslim society. This model is more recent. It is the case of Juiz de Fora, which with its small number of Muslims, most of whom are Lebanese immigrants who arrived in the city in the 1960's, began in 1998 the process of creating the society and seeking a place for prayer with support from Muslim African students who came to study at a university in the city. There were also a few converts: one or two employees of Muslim merchants. In the small community of Fortaleza, it was the presence and the action of a convert who, seeking other Muslim immigrants spread through the city, led to the inauguration of a prayer room (2001) a *mussalah* and who even became the first imam.

It can be said that the endogenous model is the most common and that this second model, the exogenous one, is more recent. The latter, principally, when the stimulating element is a convert, appears to us to be the fruit of an internal dynamic of the Brazilian religious field.

2.3. The promoters and the "Brazilian" converts

2.3.1 The promoters

According to information from the president of the SBM of Rio de Janeiro, there are now 85 Islamic communities in Brazil and 50 promoters. A promoter is someone prepared to exercise the religious activities and also those to promote Islam. Normally, the promoter is a sheik who studied at an Islamic theological university or someone who prepared for this work in courses at Islamic institutes, even if they did not take a university theology course. A mosque that has a promoter is more apt to comply with its religious functions and also to expand, principally if this promoter speaks Portuguese, which is becoming more common. A mosque can have a sheik and a promotional team, as is the case of the São Bernardo mosque. In this case, a contributing factor is that the CDIAL also has an office in São Bernardo and some Muslims linked to the mosque work there. The Rio Mosque has its own sheik and a promotional team. Smaller associations do not have sheiks or promoters; in general their activities are limited to collective Friday prayers. If they are called to speak at a place such as schools, universities, etc, the most capable person goes, often the person who is leading the association, but there is no organized promotional work.

Thus, the work of the Muslim associations in Brazil was first aimed at distanced Muslims or at the children of Muslims who had given up the traditions, and the activity of promotion was primarily aimed at "clarifying misconceptions" among the broader Brazilian public. There was, however, no concern in converting Brazilians who have no Muslim ancestors. This was repeated in interviews with the sheiks of São Bernardo (Peres & Mariz 2003), in the discourse of the president of the CDIAL (Pereira 2001) and also by the sheik of Rio de Janeiro.

The leader in Rio de Janeiro told me that in a speech, the president of the CDIAL, Ahmad Ali Saif, said that there were nearly 400,000 Muslims in São Paulo, many of whom are assimilating to Brazilian

society and losing their roots, and that he can either direct a project to recover them or aim his work at the Brazilian population in general. He opted to focus on the Muslims. In the opinion of the leader from Rio de Janeiro, this was not a mistake, but maintained that it would be possible to do the two things with specialized groups for each task. He said that even the books published by the CDIAL in Portuguese are aimed at people with an Arabic mentality, they are not materials for people with a Western mentality. He said that this also occurs in other Latin American countries, but that in São Paulo in particular, a kind of "wall" was created that has impeded the religion from being seen as something different from that enclosured reality experienced in the region of origin. As Montenegro (2000, 2002a) previously discussed, the Rio de Janeiro community defends an ethnic break with Islam, with what is locally called "Arabization", but it is clear that criticizing this "Arabization" in fact recognizes its strong presence among us.

Even if the São Paulo community, principally through the work of CDIAL, also produced promotional material, with an intent to proselytize to the Brazilian public, this certainly is not – or has not been, because things can change – its priority.

Since 1993 the leadership of SBM of Rio de Janeiro, in contrast to the position in São Paulo, decided that efforts should be aimed at Brazilians. Primarily, they tried to conduct a census of the Muslims in Rio de Janeiro State and in this process discovered resistance in their own Muslim community. According to the leader, since then 80% of the efforts of their group are concentrated on the Brazilian population and 20% on the Muslim population, and in the latter process, the efforts are directed at the children of Muslims, since the older feel that "time has passed and there is no way to turn back" despite the fact that they want their children to receive a religious education. The exact proportion of the converts varies according to the different sources. The sheik said that the converts compose 80% of the members of the community – in 2005, they had converted 20 Brazilians – while another informant from the mosque said that 40% of the congregants were converts, 40% Arab immigrants and 20% immigrants from African and other countries. Montenegro (2002a:66,86) reported that at the time of his study 50% converts of the community were converts, 40% immigrants of Arab origin and 10% Muslims from various countries, principally Africans. It is very probable that the level of converts hovers around 50%, although it is true that the first time that I went to prayer, in 2000, there were 60 people and when I went in 2006 the number was approximately 110 people. There was a significant increase in the frequency registered (it nearly doubled) however, this does not necessarily indicate that this increase came only from converts. Even so, the "born Muslims" who speak Arabic are the leaders of the society and have a strong presence, denoting the importance not only of an ethnic community, but a linguistic one as well.

Recently, the SBM of Rio de Janeiro encouraged the publication of three books written by younger members of the society, children of immigrants, born in Brazil, therefore closer to the Brazilian mentality, and who have studied here and in Arab countries. They explained to me that the books are the fruit of studies of different sources, and the material is presented in a very accessible language that is easy for a non-Muslim population. Clearly, this is an effort to offer books to the Brazilian public different from those published by CDIAL. The Society in Rio de Janeiro is also mobilized and sent six "new Muslims" to the *hajj*, or pilgrimage. I met them at prayer after the trip, with an album of photos and presents for friends.

According to the Rio de Janeiro director, the Latin America population from the Caribbean to South America composes a new society with only 500 years of history and for this reason "does not have a truly firm ideological formation, despite the influence of the Catholic Church". People here are seeking religion. The interpretation that he makes of the religious movement characteristic of the Brazilian faithful is that the behavior denotes that the person is seeking a religion (and also does not have an *American dream* as in the United States) and does not have a solidified formation and this facilitates the work:

> "you always find a person who was Catholic, then Protestant, then Buddhist, then *candomblé*, because they have still not formed a standardized concept of religion. It is

> easy to reach this person because they are still looking, it is not that easy in Europe and the United States."

For what we have seen until now, it is possible to say that there is a group of Muslims more focused on its ethnic identity and not as concerned with the conversion of "Brazilians" as is the case of São Paulo, and another group farther from this pole that is concentrating an identity more focused on religion and which is concerned with this conversion. I discussed this question in a previous article (Peres & Mariz 2005a), in which I began with these two groups as ideal types to think of the reality of Islam in Brazil.

There is one more new element, which is the involvement of the converts in the promotion of the religion. Normally, the new converts want to attract more people, and one of the sociological motives is the need to form a community that reinforces the plausibility of their choice, as we will discuss below when we look at our interviews with converts. In São Paulo, a group of converts began to organize itself autonomously to produce material more suitable for promotion to Brazilians (Peres & Mariz 2006), and the São Bernardo mosque has an ex-evangelical pastor, currently studying in Syria, who is dedicated to this work. He is paid by CDIAL and explained that he converted to Islam through the Bible.

In addition, the media serves as a non-intentional promoter[20] through its constant references to the Muslim religion. Some converts said that they approached Islam to learn more after having read something in a newspaper or having seen something on TV. One convert even said that when Islam appeared more in the media he realized that it was a religion to which he could convert. That is, he had previously thought that Islam was only an ethnic religion and for this reason would not be open to conversion (Ramos 2003). One convert from Belo Horizonte told me in an interview that he sought Islam after reading a newspaper article that spoke of a suicide attempt. The Brazilian media recently reported the conversion of the athlete Jadel, who spoke of his new religion. Therefore, both negative and positive references may call the attention of a believer. Another very strong channel for promotion is the Internet, as we will see below.

2.3.2 The converts

Two previous articles discuss various aspects related to converts (Peres & Mariz 2005a, 2006), for this reason I will only discuss the issue in a general manner here.

If there are not many Muslims in Brazil, there are even fewer converts[21]. Muslim sources estimate that there are some 10,000 (Demant 2004), a low number when compared with the multitude of evangelicals. In most mosques, converts are still remembered by name and can be counted by hand. Normally, they arrive through a friend, from courses promoted by the Benefit Societies – in general these are courses on Arabic and religion that are promoted in newspapers - or because they heard something about Islam and wanted to learn more, attracted by the news media. Others, some black, are attracted by something they read or from the film Malcolm X and the black American Muslim movement or rap music. There are also some who come because they knew something about Sufi practices. Others are drawn through a marriage or other relationship with a Muslim. A few are moved by political inspiration critical of Western capitalism and there are others who arrive because they obtained information from the Internet, which appears to be a growing trend. The sheik in Rio de Janeiro told me that one day a woman from a city where there was no Muslim community converted over the Internet. After some Internet contacts with the sheik, she decided to convert and repeated the *shahada*[22] using Skype. She is a "Brazilian convert", she is in college and even though she is the only

[20] Montenegro (2002a) studied in his article the production of the discourses and counter discourses of Islam. It is interesting to note that even when the media presents a "negative" image of Islam, the constant presence of this religion in the media has functioned as non-intentional promotion.

[21] Or "reconverted" as they say, because according to Islam, everyone is born Muslim (interpreted also as submission to God) and for this reason there is no conversion, but a return to the religion.

[22] A religious declaration repeated by those who want to convert to Islam: "I affirm that there is no other God than God and Mohammed is his messenger."

Muslim in her city, she uses a veil. It seems that interested or curious people and even many converts access and get information through Muslim sites. There is even a marriage site and I was informed that in the mosque in Rio de Janeiro there have been some marriages arranged through this resource.

In the communities of São Paulo, it is common for the "new Muslims" to complain of the "Muslims by birth" who are mostly Arabs and do not make the converts feel welcome. It is very probable that the effort that these "new Muslims" make to promote Islam is partly caused because they do not feel part of a close community that gives them plausibility. The "new Muslims" women of Juiz de Fora said that the Lebanese women feel that they are more complete Muslims than the new converts. Ethnic conflicts appear to exist wherever there is an active community of immigrants.

The community in Rio de Janeiro, because it has a large number of converts[23], does not currently appear to have this problem. Nevertheless we noted that the organization of the Society is in the hands of the oldest members, most of them "Arabs who speak Arabic" although there is one or another "Brazilian" director and a "Brazilian" secretary.

Islam rose in Brazilian cities[24] as another religion to offer a new religious identity to believers who are in search of a more directed life with meaning, or of a more exotic religious life, or for those who in some way feel discriminated or excluded and who – as one old member of the Muslim community in Rio de Janeiro said with certain sadness and irony – imagine that Islam, because it is also marginalized, would be their proper place. It is good to remember once again that there are still a limited number of converts and it is not possible to say if Islam will grow or not among us.

Two facts perhaps help us to consider what type of profile the Brazilian Muslim, or at least that promoted by the current leaders, is seeking.

The first is related to some young blacks who in 2005 converted to Islam and inaugurated a *Mussalah* (prayer room) in downtown São Paulo, with a predominantly black administration[25] and a Mozambican sheik. One Muslim in Rio, said this was an initiative of the São Paulo community, which, in his opinion, is not the most suitable – we cannot forget that the Muslim communities are autonomous. This corroborates some criticisms made by a black member of the São Bernardo mosque, who when interviewed in 2000 said that the black movement did not want to practice Islam but use it ideologically. One leader from São Paulo told me it was "the people from São Bernardo" who financed the space since the members work in that region. He confirmed that the majority were black, that there were not many and that they follow different traditions.

The other development took place in Rio de Janeiro. On a city street I found a poster glued to a post saying: "Find out about Islam, go to the site Islamic jihad". I asked the president of the SBM about this, thinking it was their promotional material, and he told me that it was distributed by a former member of the Mosque, "a Brazilian convert" who had a "nationalist group". When he found out about the site, the director called him, advised him, warned him, and since he refused to listen, was asked to leave the community. The president told me that here in the "Western world" the imagination of the population connects jihad to terror and this can harm the activities of the society. He also said that the Koranic texts can be interpreted in a tendentious form and that this often is done by people

[23] In an interview that I conducted with a "convert from Rio de Janeiro" who is withdrawn from the mosque, the criticism that he made was that the Islam there was more concerned with "their issues" such as what is a true Muslim state, than with "more universal questions" of religion, and that this wound up tiring him and was one of the reasons for his separation. It is very probable that the discourse of the community of Rio (Montenegro 2000) has changed gradually and is becoming more interested in the local questions of its members, for, as we will see below, this appears to be a large concern at this time.

[24] The mosque at Mogi das Cruzes issues the call to prayer from outdoor loud speakers in its minarette, so that it is now possible, in that Brazilian city, in addition to seeing minarettes, to hear the call to prayer in Arabic while walking in the streets.

[25] The fact that there is a primarily black community is not common. Normally, blacks integrate to the communities, because Islam calls for non-discrimination.

who are revolted against society, who are seeking a basis for their anger in the sacred text, forgetting that the Koran also speaks of tolerance, the search for knowledge, etc..

When, two week after this conversation, I went to Friday prayer, the theme of the sermon was precisely the question of expulsion. The rejected member had gone to a community party and also appeared at the previous Friday meeting. The sheik criticized this behavior and said that all the members must be united in this decision and needed to isolate this person, not invite him to anything, or allow that he participate in any community meeting.

The SBM of Rio de Janeiro is involved in a process of integration in the broader society, participating in various commissions instituted on the municipal, state and federal level to discuss and suggest forms of combating religious discrimination. Muslim representatives from Rio de Janeiro went to Brasilia and are fighting for religious rights in the public sphere. This includes the following measures: adaptation of school and military uniforms for Muslim women; the right to use a veil in schools and work establishments; a leave of absence on Muslim holidays; two hours of lunch time on Friday so that Muslims can participate in community prayer and later discount this time from an hour bank and that they be notified of the menu in schools and military barracks 24 hours in advance, so that they can, if there is no suitable option, bring something to eat.

He also explained that the right to use religious apparel is already determined by federal law, but some service posts at times demand a document. In this case the Society sends a letter. The community is also, in conjunction with the Catholic Church, preparing its material for religious teaching in elementary and intermediary schools.

These are all indications that the community is seeking an insertion in Brazilian society. The "nationalist group" with its more radical discourse, certainly puts this process at risk. As the president said: "we are Brazilians living here in Brazil: our suggestions [to the government] were based on problems that we confront here in Brazil."[26]

According to his account, the people in São Paulo were also called by the government to participate in commissions about religious rights and discrimination, but they were more interested in discussing international political issues such as the question of Palestine, etc. The SBM of Recife was also present, but it was the Rio community that advanced the rights issue_and is now awaiting a vote in Congress for the measures suggested in proposed legislation. It is possible to risk assuming that the São Paulo community would also prefer to leave the black militant community more autonomous.

It is important to consider that the social-economic insertion and the educational level of the Muslim immigrants and their descendents in Brazil is above the national average. In an article that analyzes the census data, Waniez & Brustlein (2001:169) conclude that they compose "a particular social group, small in number, but quite active in the higher social layers of the population and in important places of economic power". For this reason, I believe that the trend of the profile of the Muslim in Brazil is not so much to direct themselves to the marginalized and excluded, or to be prone to a political or economic struggle to change the status quo here in the country. The political question that is of interest to this community is international and concerns the countries of the Middle East, which in general gave origin to and maintains, for historic and contemporary geopolitical reasons, a criticism of the United States and the West for its role in these conflicts and for what many believe to be discrimination against the Muslim religion. This interest, however, in my understanding, is not what

[26] This statement reinforces the religious practice that has been the concern of the community and its efforts to make the practice of Islam increasingly more possible within the country. For this reason, the attitude of SBMRJ about the site is not surprising because the site is quite radical and in some of its sections speaks of non-Islamic policies, criticizing the current and former Brazilian governments, the payment of the foreign debt, etc.. On the first page, a phrase constantly appears – "One who offers the present life for the future will win both. Who offers a future life for the present will lose both" – with the name of that ex-member, a name that is present on most of the articles, book reviews, etc.

characterizes the role of Islam in Brazil, which appears to me to be steered increasingly in direction of the religious world, emphasizing a moral and puritan message, principally in the communities where the converts begin to appear.

3. Some strategies and difficulties in the religious field

The history of the Brazilian religious field is permeated by what Sanchis (2001:29) calls "traditional flexibilizing *habitus*" in that a syncretism is possible that does not suppress differences. How does Islam deal with this porousness of identities of the Brazilian believer and their multiple ties?

Some responses can be identified. One of them concerns what was mentioned above about the authority of the sheik. Some converts said in interviews that they have respect for the sheik, but that they did not follow certain things - even if they recognize that he has greater knowledge of religion - because they did not feel obliged to agree or to follow what the sheikh said. Women are not required to attend Friday prayers – in São Bernardo, some of them do not – and for this reason tend to have less contacts and to be distant from the community. Since in Islam the community has a very strong role in social-religious control, it should be expected that a decrease in this religious control leads to a more relaxed or more particular practice among the believers. Internet sites are an option for some of the faithful, principally women, who seek interlocutors with whom they feel more at ease. One of the sites most frequented by Brazilian women is that of Maria Amoreira, a woman from Rio de Janeiro who converted to Islam and who lives in Egypt. The Rio de Janeiro SBM also has a virtual Orkut community. I believe that this often allows the converts to make their own syntheses and seek a more deterritorialized Islam, which appears to be present in these spaces.

The question of authority is complex and the incident at the Rio de Janeiro mosque mentioned above revealed that the board of a Society has the power to expel a member, but may have difficulty in preventing him from disobeying the decisions. It is this absence of a sacramented and definitive authority that can make possible a more particular religious experience, adapted to the life of each believer.

There are also different forms, among the mosques, of interpreting certain issues. For example, in the Santo Amaro mosque there was a winter festival (known in Brazil as a *festa Junina*) and men and women dressed in typical rural attire danced together. This was criticized by one of the São Bernardo sheiks who said that this was due to a lack of knowledge of the religion.[27] In São Paulo, where there are various mosques, the believers can change mosques, which allows a certain mobility. Disagreements about interpretations of issues of orthodoxy may at times lead to disagreements, changes of mosques or even a distancing. I interviewed three Muslims who said they no longer go to any specific mosque, but continue to consider themselves Muslim.

What I want to show with these examples is that Islam, as a lay religion, based on the principal of intimate conversion to the faith and of individual responsibility (Pace 2005:117), tends to leave space for the conscience of the convert, principally in a non-Muslim country, where institutionally established religious norms do not have a collective community practice in the broad society that gives them support and control, or where Muslims have a guaranteed right to practice. The absence of a centralized and single institutional authority allows some believers to feel that they have freedom to practice in their own manner.

In relation to dual faith, Islam calls for absolute adhesion, but the sheik of the Rio de Janeiro community explained to me that he can't deny everything at once. He said that the prophet taught that those who proselytize should do so in steps. For this reason, his strategy is to get to know the faithful who want to convert, to know their previous religion, to be able to communicate with him or her and not interfere with previous principles. Little by little, he teaches the religion and allows the new

[27] Reported by the researcher Francirosy Fereira in her presentation V RAM, in 2003.

convert to learn and be corrected. It is, as he explained to me, a "gradual psychology". Those who he converts, in general, are submit to a course about the religion on Saturdays, but even so take time to understand the new religion. For example, some converts consult astrology, something prohibited by Islam. Little by little he corrects this, he said, with a certain sadness and irony, and the believer winds up abandoning this habit. Even in the more serious issues such as alcohol, or "a relationship of open sex, without compromise, before marriage" he favors not prohibiting this immediately, or demanding that the person give up this behavior drastically. Some take six months to abandon them, others less time, and each time that the new believer learns more about the religion it is possible to demand greater commitment.

In relation to Christmas, some converts in São Paulo said in interviews that they no longer participate in the family holiday. In Rio, however, the sheik believes that it is very difficult for a new convert, who "for their whole life was accustomed to sit down at that Christmas dinner with the family" to not participate in the celebration, and that they can do so, and even take the chance to explain how Islam sees Jesus. Instead of saying "Merry Christmas" a Muslim can offer other greetings such as "good health" or "May God be with you" always in a cordial spirit. This is due to the fact that many converts live in families of mixed religion, and it is important to not create many conflicts. The believer is advised, however, to not participate in carnival; and the society organizes youth meetings outside of the city to facilitate this non-participation.

Since there are few studies of the converts, we still do not have many examples of people with dual faith, but some of them are quite illustrative. Two converts said they frequent *Espírita* centers and see no problem with this. Another convert said: "before completing one year as a convert, I did not dis-convert, but I did not assume Islam as my only religion ... I continue within Islam, within Christianity, I admire Buddhism and all the other religions, because I am a religious person". These examples, although they are few, show that for some Brazilian believers, it is easier to convert to a new religion, as different as it may be, than to give up a dual belief.

Concerning the itinerary of a believer who follows his or her own course, it is still not possible to determine if they leave one religion and go to another. The leaders say that it is rare for a convert to abandon Islam, however, this must still be verified by research. In a conversation with a convert in Rio de Janeiro, who is no longer participating, he said that he was sure that he would abandon the institution and would not frequent the community although he was not sure if he would also abandon the Islamic religion. A family from São Bernardo, converted and currently not participating, also said something similar in an interview.

The Rio Society recently established a new practice to respond to characteristics of the Brazilian believer. Despite various books offered by the mosque, it was observed that the new faithful read very little, and for this reason, before the Friday prayers, there is now a time when the sheik - or in his absence - an older member, responds to questions. In some sessions that I witnessed, the faithful questioned things related principally to the doctrine of the religion – the interpretation of a portion of the Koran or of a hadith – and some raised issues concerning their practice and related problems. For instance, one asked: "my wife is evangelical, she does not accept my conversion and thinks I became a Muslim to have many wives, what should I do?" The responses suggest tolerance and patience and encourage the believers to be model examples to be able to show what is Islam, comment on portions of the Koran and exemplify them with situations experienced by the Prophet. This space of time before the prayer and the sermon (*khutba*) is also an opportunity for the members of the community, in addition to the sheik, to participate and expose their own point of view about questions that are relevant to the community at that time.

It was perceived that there is an awareness in certain leaders that "what you can demand of a Muslim who lives in a Muslim country is different from what you can require of a Muslim who lives here in Brazil". This trend in the Rio de Janeiro community, which is more focused on Brazilian society and is more flexible, was discussed in my previous article (Peres & Mariz 2005a). In São Paulo, we perceive a more closed and less flexible trend by some of the leaders. But, as mentioned above, there is space

for the believer to respond in his own way, even if they are distanced from the community practice and living a more individualized Islam.
According to the leader in Rio de Janeiro, "in our vision, Islam is not adapting to a reality, Islam is flexible and any situation can fit within Islam ... the shari`ah" even has a role that says that the determinations change with the times, places and situations".[28]

One of the obstacles to be surpassed by the new convert, is without a doubt, the Arab language, the sacred language of the revelation of the Koran. At least the canonic prayers should be recited in Arabic, and certainly, knowledge of the language opens opportunities for those who want to learn it. It is possible see if a mosque is more or less open to converts by noting if the sermon is or is not in Arabic. In many mosques, for example those in São Paulo, the sermon is in Arabic and later a summarized translation of what was said is presented. In two São Paulo mosques, that of Brás and São Bernardo, headphones were recently installed for simultaneous translation of Arabic to Portuguese. In the Rio community, on the other hand, the sermon is in Portuguese and, if there are visitors who only speak Arabic, a summarized translation is made for them. It should be recalled that most of the sheiks speak Arabic. It is something very new among us to have those who also speak Portuguese. Only eight or 10 of the 50 promoters in Brazil – sheiks who lead the mosques - speak Portuguese. The use of Arabic in the sermon, for example, reveals how close or distant a community is from its ethnic identity and indicates a greater or lesser presence of converts. In any case, it is possible to say that knowledge of the Arabic language is also a source of power in the communities.

A strong sign that Islam is taking root among us appears to me to be the foundation, in 2005, of the Higher Council of the Theologians and Islamic Affairs of Brazil, based in São Paulo. The council includes all the *sheiks* and *imams*, or that is the religious directors of the various Brazilian communities (it should be remembered that the sheik is not always the president of the community, even if he is the religious director). Bylaws were created for the Council that are being registered.

This council will have a board that will include the *sheiks* that represent the international Muslim agencies located in Brazil (such as WAMY, CDIAL, etc.) and also an executive council to represent Islam in Brazil, for which will be chosen sheiks who speak Portuguese, which will allow easier communication with authorities. It will also include a permanent council of four sheiks that will issue *fatwas*[29], religious and legal decisions. These sheiks (from São Paulo, Paranaguá, Juiz de Fora and Paranavaí) represent Islam's four legal schools and will have the goal of unifying religious issues among the communities, such as the beginning and end of Ramadan, the time of prayer for each region and issues related to weddings, divorces, festivities and economic life such as banking and interest.

This permanent consultative council created to issue *fatwas* is the newest and most important component of this new Council. It will allow Islam in Brazil to resolve its own questions in a form that is legitimated before the community, without having to turn to decisions from other locations. None of the sheiks on the council is Brazilian – perhaps because of the absence of a specialization in jurisprudence – and it is not possible to forecast if the decisions will follow a more or less open line. There are differences among the schools, and since the four schools are represented on the Council, it is not yet known how consensus will be reached.

In any case, the foundation of a permanent consultation council is an important element for the establishment of Islam in Brazil. From now on, all sheiks who come to Brazil must study Portuguese

[28] It is important to emphasize that he said "in our perspective" or that is, he is aware that not all agree with this view.

[29] The fatwa is a type of communication of religious advice issued by a mufti (religious authority), that has been utilized in Muslim countries throughout history. The fatwa is an interface between legal theory and practice and is a social instrument that contributes to the reproduction of society in a daily form and at the margin of the courts, and assures the transmission and renovation, for the faithful, of the Islamic normative system of the shari'ah. (Caeiro 2005). Recently, a fatwa issued by one of the Muslim institutions in Paris, during the disturbances by young Muslims, raised many debates among intellectuals

according to one requirement of the Council. This new entity, in addition to establishing an "official" representation for Islam in Brazil, offers a permanent council for religious and legal consultations.

Another issue present in Islam in Brazil concerns the use of the veil or *hijab* by women. Its use is related to the history of the religion among us and reflects a movement in international Islam. Muslim women in our country recently have begun to use the veil more. In the past, various immigrant women, upon arriving in Brazil, stopped using the veil; some took up the practice at the end of the 1990's and the beginning of this decade. In Juiz de Fora, for example, women began to use it in 2003.

The veil is interpreted by many currents as a religious obligation. Some, however, understand that it is required in prayers, but that a woman can chose to use it or not in her daily life. Anthropologist Suzanne Brenner (1996) studied the use of the veil in Indonesia and emphasized that the question of choice makes a tremendous difference today. It is not that someone requires it, but that the woman chooses to use it, and it is this attitude that confers a modern characteristic to this vestment, Brenner maintains.

The use of the veil today is part of a phenomenon called "Islamic resurgence" that appeared at the end of the late 1970's in the Muslim world, and of which the veil became a symbol.

In non-Muslim European countries, this visible mark of a religious identity has invaded the public arena and created a polemic. Here in Brazil there has not been as much debate about the veil and its use is even permitted - as mentioned earlier – when a women takes a photo for her official identity card. This is not even permitted in Indonesia, even though it is a country with a Muslim majority (Brenner 1996).

In the mosques visited in Brazil, women are required[30] to use a veil only during prayers, but its use outside of the mosque is seen as ideal and the fruit of a greater knowledge of the religion. Converts often affirm that they use the veil as a public affirmation of their religious identity. There are few complaints of aggression and it is common for women to say that they feel more respected. Another element to be observed in the Brazilian communities is the way that the veil is used. At times it is accompanied by tight jeans and top, at others with long dresses, and other times in a composition of exotic and colorful clothes.

Some women interviewed emphasized the importance of the veil as a form of promotion for the religion. As one convert said, "a few centimeters of cloth provides more promotion than a number of billboards in the city". Some people said that the fact that that the TV drama *O Clone* presented a woman using a veil made its use less strange among us.[31]

The question of the veil, in my understanding, is not a great obstacle for a Brazilian believer[32], principally because its use is not necessarily required outside the mosque. There are still no studies about how Brazilians are experiencing the use of the veil, which would allow a deeper interpretation

[30] This is a polemical issue, even among Muslims. In the communities studied, the leaders say that the veil is mandatory and not a recommendation, but affirm that they cannot require women to use it, they can only be counseled to do so (we recall the issue of authority within Islam of which we spoke earlier), and expect that the believer will decide to do so and accept it. The Muslim community site of Foz do Iguaçu says that "it is expected that both men and women will use modest and dignifying clothes. The traditional clothes of women seen in some Muslim countries are always the expression of local customs."

[31] Montenegro (2004) tells us in his article about the Brazilian TV drama *O Clone* that the community in Rio de Janeiro refused to assist the director of the show and criticized it for many mistakes. Even so, in an interview that I conducted with the community leader in Rio de Janeiro, in 2006, he mentioned that the drama wound up familiarizing Brazilians with the use of the veil, which was a gain in his mind.

[32] Evangelicals also use different forms of dressing, and they may not be allowed to cut their hair, etc. and this has not been an impediment to conversion.

of the theme.[33] There are cases in which the "Brazilian converts" upon "choosing" to use a veil in their daily life, serve as an example for other Muslims. More than an obstacle, the veil has been transformed, in the Brazilian religious field, into an element that promotes the religion, even if women do not use it for this reason.

Conclusion

Islam in Brazil has been undergoing a slow but continuous transformation. There are various signs that indicate this change, some of which we discussed in this article.

The three translations of the Koran to Portuguese, the most recent published in 2005 – and two of which were conducted by members of the Muslim community of São Paulo - can be interpreted (Pace 2005:287) as a demonstration of the will and capacity of the Muslim community to establish roots in the country.

The practice of Muslim immigrants and their descendents is challenged in a new society in which they are a minority, and is experienced in a different form than in their country of origin. Brazil possibly presents for Islam, or its various communities, a new frontier that both challenges and is challenged by the Brazilian believers who seek to integrate it.

These Brazilian believers, in turn, profess the new faith in a particular form marked by questions characteristic of the religious field to which they belong. There is found, for example, in many believers, a type of religious experience that is more private and spiritual, part of their own religious itinerary and therefore, closer to a religious sensibility than is common among a certain mode of Brazilian faithful. This type of experience is even favored by a decentralization that is found within this religion.

An understanding of the issues of Islamic doctrine can help to better observe and understand the difficulties and facilities that this religion faces in its adaptation to the country, together with a detailed examination of how these institutions function and in what way they translate Islamic ideals into the social realm.

It appears that Brazilian society has been dealing with its Muslim community and the prejudice promoted in the media against Islam in a singular manner, without inciting differences or affirming unique identities. It is very probable that the economic and social situation that the community of immigrants has achieved over time and the fact that they are "physically indistinguishable from many other 'Brazilians'" (Lesser 2001:88) has helped in this aspect, and differentiated our Muslim community from those in European countries, where the practitioners of this religion are associated to immigrants who remain or are maintained at the margin of society. It is common for Muslim leaders and practitioners to affirm that they are very well received in our country and that there is religious freedom here to practice their faith.

A question that I did not deal with directly here, but that is important to be observed, is the transnational character of this religion and the movement of some of its members through Muslim countries. The traveling that is noticed, both in communities with a strong presence of recent immigration, in which there is constant travel of members to their country of origin (Jardim 2000, Beyer 1998), as well as in relation to a new movement of "converted Brazilians" who go on pilgrimage and receive study grants to Muslim countries, can have consequences for the social reality that this religion experiences among us.

[33] A study is underway about the use of the veil by women in Juiz de Fora, by Fawzia Cunha, for her masters dissertation at UFJF. For an interpretation of the use of the veil in a Muslim country and what it can mean, see the article by Brenner (1996).

The Muslim religion, as I said at the beginning, is not a single and substantial doctrine. Throughout history, it regularly had cultural resources and opportunities for practice that allowed it to spread to many different countries and far from its nation of origin. Most of the Muslim population today is found outside of the Middle East. Therefore it is not a surprise that it is also taking hold among us. Muslims do not form a single body, but each believer adapts the religion to his or her own way of life and manner of thinking, while supported by general rules.

It is probable that, once again, the economic and social profile of the Muslim community of immigrants, constituted principally by businessmen and professionals (Waniez & Brustlein 2001; Truzzi 1991) who are found in the middle and upper middle class, will emphasize a more religious and puritan character of this religion among us. If on one hand Islam was seen as a religion with a "warrior ethos" by Weber (Pierucci 2002), contemporary authors have been discussing this vision and have affirmed that within Islam there are elements and opportunities for another type of ethos that is more linked to work and to an intramundane askesis, capable of disciplining individual life in the light of sacred rules, without demanding an escape from the world (Pace 2005:125). It cannot be forgotten that the sacred text is not something singular and interpreted once and for all, it involves different and often paradoxical interpretations, adapting itself to new historic, economic and cultural contexts.

In communities dominated[34] by recent immigrants, many of whom are involved with the situation in their countries of origin, such as the Palestinians and Lebanese who came to Brazil in the 1960's, the involvement in international political issues linked to their native land is very strong and present. It is noted that with the arrival of converts, or when the population of immigrants reaches a second or third generation, these questions can be discussed, but are no longer a priority. There is greater concern for religious practice.[35] The flow of Muslims between the country where they are found and other Muslim countries, however, is a factor that cannot be forgotten and can bring to the surface and involve the community in political issues from the Muslim world.

The strong influence of international entities in the Brazilian communities is another element that tints the situation of this religion among us. Saudi Arabia and its more puritan influence (*Wahhabi*) is strongly present, principally in the São Paulo communities. Rio de Janeiro has begun to receive support from Kuwait. Other small communities have little outside help, but are working to acquire some, such as the community in Juiz de Fora, which recently requested help from Saudi Arabia to build a mosque. This influence can help to determine the type of Islam that will be more predominant among us, whether it would be a more "rigid" Islam such as Wahhabism, or a more moderate Islam. I believe, however, that the situation is even more complex, because there is also the presence of the Brazilian "converts" who do not have Muslim ancestors, and who have their own characteristics. There is also – and no less importantly – the trend found in many converts to frequent international Islamic sites on the Internet, which winds up presenting a more deterritorialized Islam. These two

[34] Among the communities cited in this article, the most extreme example or ideal, is the case of the Muslim community in Manaus, where it appears that there are no converts. One of its members, a Palestinian immigrant, maintained that its concern is more political (questions involving Palestine) and that in the community they meet more to discuss politics than to practice religion. Although he said that they would soon receive a sheik and build a mosque, perhaps going in the direction of a more religious and less ethnic identity.

[35] This appears to be the case in Juiz de Fora, Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro, where there is a strong presence of converts and greater concern with the religious practice; and in the case of this latter community, a struggle more aimed at issues of religious rights in relation to the government. In the Rio de Janeiro community, international issues from the Muslim world are discussed, but with less emphasis; the most common is that the leaders criticize the Muslim governments, which, according to them are not in fact Islamic, and defend the belief in a utopian Islamic state that would abolish nationalism, tribalism, etc. The São Paulo communities, with second and third generation immigrants, are also possibly concerned with more religious issues, however, covered with a more ethnic element, principally by the concern that its descendents are assimilated in broader Brazilian society. Because of this more ethnic character and the presence of the recent immigrants, as well as the flux of their travels or those of their children to Muslim countries, various communities still have a strong concern with the politics of the Middle East.

elements can counter balance or create nuances for this question, and generate influences on the type of Islam existing in the various communities.

"New Muslims" are currently the only possibility for real growth of this religion in Brazil, since immigration is declining. The increasing interest of the communities in promotion of the religion (*dawah*) appears to be heading in this direction. An "Islamization from below" movement may be beginning (Kepel 1991 *apud* Caro 2005), which is aimed at the non-Muslim population and is organized around the practice of religious precepts.

This article has presented some models that reveal how the Muslim communities were formed and how they are being formed in Brazil. This has allowed studying their relationship with the Brazilian religious field – a continuum between two poles: an ethnic and a religious identity. The task was to analyze the Muslim communities in Brazil, based on research material available until now. I believe it is possible to maintain, that Islam as practiced in Brazil is similar and different from Islam as practiced in other Muslim countries, and little by little is becoming an Islam of Brazil and no longer Islam in Brazil.

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