The Mind Possessed

The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2007

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Explaining Distributions of Spirit Concepts and Spirit Possession

Emma could open up a *terreiro* over there in Ireland, be a *mãe-de-santo*! Do you have *terreiros* over there?

A Emma pode abrir uma casa lá na Irlanda, né—ser mãe-de-santo! Vocês têm pra lá?

—*A filho, informal conversation*

I have suggested that the spread of spirit phenomena is in part explained by universal micromechanisms of cognition that generate predispositions and tendencies toward certain patterns of thinking and behavior. Basic cognitive processes involved in perception, representation, interpretation, explanation, and prediction are fundamental to our comprehending the world around us. Generating inferences about the way things in the world work is a basic human capacity, enabled by highly sophisticated mental tools such as the "object detection device," "agency detection device," Theory of Mind, "social exchange regulator," "intuitive morality," and so on (Barrett 2004). Because of the pressures under which these tools process the play-by-play of everyday movement, action, and interaction, many inferences, or mini-theories, and immediate conclusions are generated only as fleeting or oversimplistic heuristics. For example, I can recall a number of occasions on which I have been momentarily and mildly startled even at my desk by what has turned out to be the shadow of my pen as the desk lamp has caught and reflected its

movements. The agency detection device operates so rapidly and automatically that it often infers animacy where there is only movement. On reflection, one can take time to bring more evidence to bear on the false positives generated by one's implicit mental processing.

It is the universality of our mental tools and the automaticity with which they process information from the world around us that make them indispensable for the explanation of the form and spread of cross-culturally recurrent concepts and practices. The point of departure for the claims made in this book is that, all else being equal, concepts that diverge considerably from inferences generated by the tacit operations of the mind, that are conceptually "heavy," and that require effortful conscious reflection for mental representation, are less likely to be transmitted than concepts that fit with the inferences and intuitions generated nonreflectively and rapidly by regular mental mechanisms. Yet, if, as I have suggested, these universal mechanisms find such a natural output in the form of spirit phenomena, such as spirit sickness, possession, mediumship, sorcery, supernatural-agent causation for misfortune and fortune, and so on, why are these outputs more widespread in some societies than in others?

Why, for example, do we find that spirit phenomena are ubiquitous and everyday in certain sectors of some African societies (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), for example, in Southern Sudan ("Witchcraft is ubiquitous. It plays its part in every activity of Zande life"; Evans-Pritchard 1937: 63), while there is much less evidence that such phenomena are regarded seriously or become institutionalized in other parts of the world, for example, in North America and Northwestern Europe (Bourguignon 1968: 45, 160)? Why do women figure more prominently in spirit cult activities than men (Lewis 1971; Harris 1957; Messing 1958)? Why are superstitions, witchcraft beliefs, spirit possession, and mediumistic activity especially rife in conditions of political conflict and socioeconomic change (for South Africa, see Kohnert 2003; and for Kenya, see Dolan 2002)? If the mental mechanisms described here are constant across societies, then what other factors might account for the patterns of geographical and contextual variation in spirit possession, and spirit phenomena more broadly, that are so apparent in the anthropological literature? Bourguignon's (1968) survey identified 74 percent of 388 societies as having some form of institutionalized possession trance, but what of the other 26 percent?

Cognition has been described as "a nexus of relations between the mind at work and the world in which it works" (Lave 1988: 1). Cognitive capacities and predispositions must not, therefore, be mistaken for determining factors. Showing that all humans have the capacity to think readily about the

properties of spirits and the predisposition to invoke agentive-causal explanations for ambiguous events is not sufficient to explain the variable incidence of these notions across different societies. All people everywhere, for instance, have the capacity to acquire the structures of language required for verbal communication without explicit instruction, as well as the potential to learn how to record language in writing. Yet the presence of writing systems, and even simple writing technologies, is not ubiquitous across cultures. We must not confuse necessary with sufficient conditions in our predictions and explanations of cultural phenomena. Even if one demonstrates that regular mental architecture is something one must have to conceptualize spirit possession—a *necessary* condition—it does not follow that having this architecture is enough—a *sufficient* condition.

When generating hypotheses for cultural transmission from a cognitive perspective, we can begin by making predictions about the relative chance that an idea will have in cultural transmission, all else being equal. Consider the two scenarios of spirit possession described in chapter 6. All else being equal, the first scenario has a higher chance in cultural transmission than the second. It is unlikely that the more conceptually complex and inferentially impoverished spirit-possession scenario would enjoy success in cultural selection, but it is certainly not impossible. It is conceivable that with deliberate instruction, or with sufficient mental rehearsal, or by some other mnemonic means, such ideas could be remembered and subsequently transmitted intact across and between generations. A cognitive explanation for the transmission of such complex concepts would necessarily incorporate these contextual factors in accounting for memorability (e.g., Whitehouse 2004). Similarly, features of a particular situation could serve to enhance the relevance (and therefore the transmission) of the easy-to-grasp concepts of the first scenario (e.g., a spirit that can know people's secret thoughts and deeds). An appreciation of significant contextual factors that inhibit and encourage the spread of such concepts can only help to refine a theory's predictions, making clear what would count as counterevidence for the claims proposed. Ideally then, further significant factors in cultural transmission (e.g., specific ecological conditions), previously grouped under the "all else" heading, are distinguished from random, arbitrary features and incorporated into our increasingly precise and detailed predictions.

In this chapter, I suggest that certain correlations between institutionalized and endemic spirit phenomena (e.g., possession, magico-religious healing, etc.) and particular contextual and demographic conditions (as identified by extensive cross-cultural surveys) are causally significant. I focus on the correlation between spirit possession and suggested effects of social complexity,

such as political oppression, marginalization, and stress. I also propose a causal account for the unequal participation of men and women in certain forms of religious activity in general, and spirit-possession cults in particular. The claim that these well-attested correlations are causally significant is by no means novel. Explanations for the incidence of such phenomena have often taken for granted a chain of causation. Yet, we shall observe once again that few attempts to generate explanatory theories have succeeded in formulating hypotheses in such a way that the mechanisms that are suggested as accounting for pertinent patterns and correlations are specified precisely enough to allow for systematic testing and evaluation. I do not claim to describe all, or even the most significant, factors accounting for these cross-cultural patterns. I do, however, present a limited, but potentially testable, range of hypotheses that could contribute in some small way to more comprehensive and useful accounts of the spread of spirit possession and associated phenomena.

In their accounts of the incidence and prevalence of particular cultural phenomena, anthropologists, sociologists, social psychologists, historians, and other social scientists often exclusively select or prioritize features of local contexts (e.g., political, economic, etc.) that appear to encourage the public presence and standardization of ideas, attitudes, or practices within a group or society. These "population scale macro-phenomena" (Sperber 1996: 2) are often attributed some special power or "force" of their own which can bend and shape human culture into infinitely variable forms (see chapter 5). Of all the material constraints that are said to obtain in the selection and transmission of ideas, human cognition—in which ideas, or "culture," reside—has tended to be overlooked. We have seen, however, that some aspects of cognition are not as flexible as the standard social science model tends to assume. It, too, exerts its own "force," or, as Whitehouse more eloquently writes, "patterns of mental activity, rooted in the biology of brain functions and their developmental contexts, have direct effects on the elaboration of all domains of human culture" (2004: 16).

Taking as our point of departure the precisely described, regular machinery and capacities of the mind—specifically agency detection and Theory of Mind—I ask, what are the general factors that might further encourage or discourage the appearance and transmission of the kinds of concepts (e.g., supernatural agency, supernatural causation, etc.) generated by our mental tools? In posing the question this way, one finds that recent advances in the cognitive sciences may have significant relevance to long-running debates about the subtle variations in the transmission of spirit possession and spirit phenomena.

Ethnographic Survey Data: Where Do Spirit Beliefs Arise?

As a cognitively optimal—that is, largely intuitive, memorable, and easily transmittable—concept, spirit possession requires little by way of deliberate instruction or other special conditions for its transmission across cultures. It should transmit easily in the absence of any institutional framework, specialist expertise, authoritative instruction, elaborate technologies, and so on, all else being equal. Unsurprisingly, therefore, we find that spirit possession is widespread across the world. Indeed, it is likely that the concept of spirit possession is universal, but that specific environmental and historical factors further promote the generation, spread, institutionalization, and persistence of possession belief and practice within a society.

The extent of the incidence of possession belief and the identification of environmental factors contributing to its spread has been the focus of a number of cross-cultural surveys. Using a broad sample of societies[1] from all major regions of the world, Bourguignon reported that institutionalized possession could be found in 360 of the 488 societies surveyed. Figure 9.1 shows the distribution of possession belief[2] recorded by Bourguignon across the

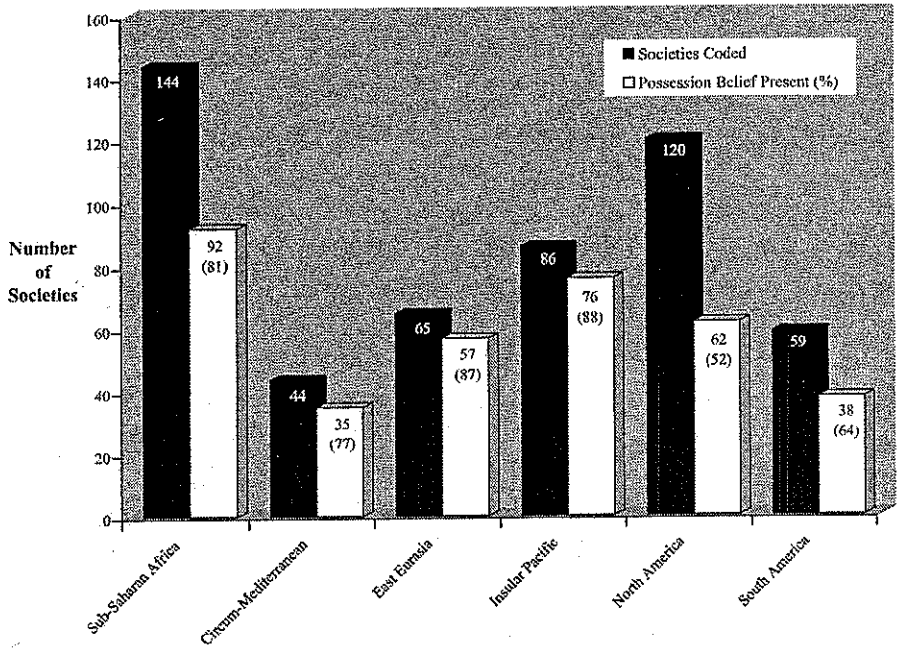

FIGURE 9.1. Distribution of Belief in Spirit Possession (Bouguignon, 1968)

sample of societies. A total of 74 percent of the societies were recorded as having possession belief (including both possession associated with trance and possession not associated with trance, in which trance is defined as involving "alterations or discontinuity in consciousness, awareness, personality, or other aspects of psychological functioning" [ibid.]), with the Insular Pacific region showing the highest incidence at 88 percent of societies sampled, closely followed by East Eurasia (87 percent) and sub-Saharan Africa (81 percent). One quarter (26 percent) of sample societies have no possession beliefs, an absence which is most marked in North America (48 percent).

Where the possession concept is invoked to account for the trance state, this is defined as possession trance (PT). 251 societies had some form of possession trance, making up 51% percent of the total sample. Again we find a large discrepancy in incidence between North America (25 percent) and sub-Saharan Africa (66 percent).[3] Bourguignon's survey registers coded measures of societal complexity in all societies sampled, and the final report includes discussion of correlations between these features and possession. Such features include indicators of socioeconomic inequality, such as class stratification, levels of jurisdictional hierarchy, and slavery.

Investigation of the possible factors contributing to the distributional pattern worldwide yielded significant correlations with a number of these societal complexity dimensions. The study reports significant positive relationships of possession trance to class stratification and jurisdictional hierarchy above the local level. Taking a sample of 114 societies from sub-Saharan Africa, Lenora Greenbaum (1973) also found that the presence of slavery (or recent slavery) and the presence of a system of stratification (more than one social class) were significantly related to the presence of possession trance. In a more recent survey of the incidence of possession in the training of shamanistic healers, Winkelman (1986) found a positive correlation between possession and all of the societal complexity variables from Murdock and Provost (1973). The strongest significant correlations were with political integration, population density, and social stratification.

Interpretations of the correlations between these societal variables and possession trance were framed largely within considerations of social change and cultural innovation. In a collection of papers bringing together qualitative and quantitative data on possession trance, Bourguignon writes, "What appears to emerge clearly from our discussions... is that altered states in general and, perhaps, possession trance in particular represent potentially important and dramatic instruments of social power and, thus, of social change" (1973: 338). In the same volume, Greenbaum investigated the specific role of "societal rigidity" in an attempt to develop a more precise understanding of

the specifically relevant correlates and features pertaining to the broad variable of complexity. Taking the degree of "role and structure differentiation" (Greenbaum 1973: 54) and "fixed internal social status distinctions" (ibid.: 50) as indications of societal rigidity, and arguing that such rigidity was more likely to be a characteristic of complex societies than of simpler, nonstratified ones, she predicted that, "where individuals have little opportunity for achievement and little control over their daily activities, possession trance is more likely to occur" (Bourguignon 1976: 31). The causal mechanism proposed was that possession trance represents a "safety valve," providing, as Bourguignon says, "some elbow room" (ibid.), and offers the medium some authority. This broad-spectrum hypothesis resonated with the findings of many anthropologists who subsequently employed and refined it, appropriating its generalizable claims to their explanatory and interpretive analyses of possession and race, class and gender inequality (see chapters 4 and 5).

As observed in chapter 5, however, Bourguignon's theory and accounts that were subsequently developed from its premises have not sufficiently described the mechanisms proposed to account for the correlations identified, much less suggested procedures for their systematic evaluation. How, for example, are "role and structure differentiation" and "fixed internal social status distinctions" to be defined? In what ways, if any, does the societal rigidity of complex societies share characteristics with the societal rigidity of simple societies? How can such rigidity be measured? How could one define and measure "opportunity for achievement" and "control over daily activities"? Could one definitively characterize the "degree of leeway" (Bourguignon 1976: 31) that possession trance is said to provide in order to confirm its significance? Scientific precision and rigor demands that such claims be unpacked, rendered testable, and ultimately put to the test before one may affirm their validity.

Psychologists, by adopting a more precise empirical approach, have made interesting discoveries and claims about the kinds of situations in which paranormal beliefs in general tend to be invoked. Drawing from studies ranging from Malinowski's (1954) description of Trobriand Islanders' fishing practices through to Padgett and Jorgenson's (1982) findings on superstition and economic threat in Germany from 1918 to 1940, psychologists have noted that superstitious and magical beliefs tend to increase during periods of ambiguity, uncertainty, or uncontrollability (see Dudley 1999: 1058). Eschewing imprecise predictions and unjustifiable assumptions that the domain of magical and paranormal activity is chiefly among primitive tribes (Frazer 1890, 1959; Malinowski 1954), young children (Freud 1919, 2003; Piaget 1929), or individuals suffering from mental health disorders (Klein 1946, 1987; Wilder

1975), these scholars have sought to identify the psychological factors that may be significant for the emergence and rise of religious, magical, and superstitious thinking (see Albas and Albas 1989; Dudley 1999; Gmelch and Felson 1980; Keinan 1994, 2002; Matute 1994, 1995; Rothbart and Snyder 1970; Vyse 1997).

Stress and Control

Psychologists have shown that the belief that one is in control of one's own fate is strongly associated with emotional well-being and mental health (James and Wells 2003; Thompson, et al. 1993; Thompson and Spacapan, 1991). Thompson, et al. discovered that in uncontrollable situations, for example, in the event of terminal illness, individuals use numerous strategies to maintain a sense of control, even if only over the consequences (e.g., emotional, relational) of the negative life stressor rather than over the stressor itself (Thompson, et al. 1993: 302). Indeed, control over one's environment may have had a functional evolutionary adaptive value for our ancestors. The pursuit of regularity and order through everything from agricultural tools, to hunting maps and weapons, to astronomy and science potentially, increases a sense of perceived control by rendering harsh, unstable, or unpredictable environments more hospitable and less uncertain (Denton 1999).

In some recent experimental studies, Giora Keinan (2002) found that exposure to stress correlated with an increase in the incidence of magical ritual behavior. In another study, Keinan showed that during the Gulf War, there were higher levels of superstitious and magical thinking among residents living in areas most likely to be hit by a missile than those living in low-stress areas (1994). Refining the mechanism suggested by Greenbaum concerning possession behavior in particular, and consistent with the findings of other experimental studies (e.g., Dudley 1999; Rothbart and Snyder 1970), the research also indicated a "tendency toward magical thinking and superstitious behavior in situations in which control is reduced or lacking" (Keinan 2002: 106). In these studies, variables such as stress and control were measured according to a Subjective Stress Scale and a Desirability of Control Scale (Burger and Cooper 1979). Keinan's results support an explanation in terms of desire for control that is commensurate with correlations and interpretations from Bourguignon and her successors. This explanation, he writes, "posits that stress undermines individuals' sense of control and that resorting to superstitious behavior may provide a means of regaining control" (2002: 106). This

explanation is also consistent with the ethnographic data and predi
presented in chapter 8 of this book.

These studies suggest that lack of perceived control and the des
regain control are precipitating factors in leading people to embrace rel
and magical and superstitious ideas and practices (James and Wells
Keinan 1994, 2002; Thompson, et al. 1993). Religious specialists the
over, such as healers, shamans, and mediums, offer techniques for rest
control to people whose lives are believed to be influenced by supern
powers. The techniques range in levels of sophistication, from praye
simple divination measures, through to elaborate rituals of fortificatio
protection.

In the *culto*, a large repertoire of ritual activities, including healin
stowing of positive energies, and receiving the powerful, fortifying fo
Axé, could restore equilibrium to imbalances (*desequilíbrio*) that affecte
ple's (control over) marriages, financial situations, health, and so on. Lik
baths of herbal infusions for protection (*banhos de proteção*), the weari
bead necklaces representing one's guardian angel, and the "closing
body" (*fechamento de corpo*) ritual were common means of protecting o
against the evil intent of sorcerers and malevolent spirits that could
physical, emotional, and financial harm. "*Fechamento de corpo,*" one
mant explained, "is like a vaccine . . . so that when a negative energy
her way, she is not fragile and weak. . . . She might feel something, but
going to be stronger and better prepared." (*Fechamento de corpo . . . é com
exemplo, você toma uma vacina . . . quando a carga negativa vem, ela po
sentir alguma coisa, mas ela vai tá mais forte, vai tá mais preparado pra a*
Such rituals were provided on a supply-on-demand basis. As another me
of the *terreiro* once said, "You don't get involved in a religion in order to
You do so out of necessity, in search of some help, some kind of help
problem of illness, or health, or a problem with love, or whatever. Yo
for a product . . . and that's it." (*Você não entra numa religião pra apr
Você entra por uma necessidade, a procura de alguma ajuda, ajuda de al
maneira—ou um problema de doença, de saúde, ou um problema amoroso,
Foi algum problema, tá, você vai pra pagar um produto . . . e acabou.*)
statement may not reflect the variable motivational aspects of involve
among all *culto* frequenters throughout ongoing and long-term particip
in *culto* activities. It does, however, resonate with the experience of most,
all, adult participants when they first enter the *terreiro* doors.

Practices such as prayer, sacrifice, and vaccination against sorcery de
from concepts that capitalize on ordinary cognitive processes and infere

The idea that powerful, knowing agencies exist, and that they can be petitioned for rewards in return for appeasing and pleasing actions is largely intuitive; it fits with a vast number of assumptions that our mental tools generate. As such, these ideas are easily remembered. Furthermore, it is the agents' minimal counterintuitiveness that makes them particularly attention grabbing. Just as important is their significant ability to generate explanations and predictions for events that have triggered a sense of nonunderstanding and uncertainty for the perceiver. But there are certain contexts in which these ideas, once present in an individual's mind, become even more compelling.[4] In the following section, I provide a more comprehensive description of our "agency detection device" (Barrett 2004) introduced in previous chapters. This tool is fundamental to the attribution of agent causality and intention to ambiguous events. Insofar as its sensitivity is encouraged by factors such as urgency and stress, I suggest that this device may be instrumental in explaining apparent variations among people and across populations in attributions of supernatural agency to events and happenings in their lives.

The Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device

Barrett coined the term "Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device" (HADD) to refer to the mental mechanism responsible for a tendency to (over)attribute agency to events in our environment. Developmental psychologists have shown that young infants can distinguish between agents and nonagents (Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl 1999; Premack 1990; Leslie 1996 [1995]; see Lawson 2001), indicating that this is an early-emerging, basic cognitive capacity. In studies of adults' perceptions of moving shapes on a screen, observers are reported to have described the objects' movements in terms of mental states and personalities (Heider and Simmel, 1944; Michotte 1963, in Barrett 2004: 32, 44f).

Once HADD is activated, it searches for a likely candidate agency. Unless an external agency can be detected and identified as acting upon the object, the apparently goal-directed movements are attributed to the object itself as agent (Barrett 2004: 32–33). Furthermore, as Barrett points out, there need not be an object present for HADD to detect agency. When HADD fails readily to identify human or animal agency responsible for an event, other kinds of known agents may make intuitive sense. This is where supernatural agents may become relevant. Agents with superpowers are particularly salient when explaining events that appear to be intentionally and purposefully caused,

but for which no visible or human agent fits well. Indeed, rather than their counterintuitiveness promote disbelief, it is this property that enables their perfect fit with the evidence to hand.

Consider the following portion of a *terreiro* member's life story. As a child, Fátima enjoyed hearing the stories from her friends about the *orixá* deities. The "enchanting" events of the legends kindled a desire to know more about the *orixás* and about their continued spiritual existence, if indeed it was real. She recalls, however, that at seven years of age, she first began to have particularly disturbing experiences. She recounts,

> I felt, I felt—I told my mother and she told me to close my mouth . . . "Mummy, this man is . . .". It was a footstep like that of a man, a really tired man, who used to hang around me. But I never saw him, I only listened—just a child. If, as an adult, you don't see the thing, just imagine what would go through your mind, because you can hear it. But you can't see it—the thing you will see is that which you imagine.
>
> *Eu sentia—eu sentia— eu dizia pra minha mãe, ela mandava eu calar a boca . . . "Mamãe, esse homem tá," era um passo como se fosse de um homem, um homem muito cansado que vivia ao meu redor, só que eu não via, só escutava—uma criança. Se você, adulto, não vê uma coisa, você imagina, imagina o quê que não passa pela tua cabeça, né, porque você não escuta mas você não vê—você vai, o que você vai ver é aquilo que você imagina.*

Fátima's mother refused to accept her stories and fears about the footsteps. Fátima could hear and feel them right beside her but never saw the person responsible for making them.

Some time later, she became ill to the point of losing the power in her legs. At the hospital, no conclusive diagnosis was reached. Finally, a domestic maid in the neighbor's house took her to a *terreiro*. The *pai-de-santo* called her mother for the diagnosis:

> Look, what she has is not for the attention of the doctor. You aren't going to cure this at the clinic. She has got *encosto* . . . someone is doing work [*fazendo um serviço*, i.e., doing sorcery, the consequences of which are generically referred to as "encosto"]. It was done for you [Fátima's mother], but she is the person who is receiving it. Everything they send to you, she gets it. She is the one who hears—she doesn't see, but she feels and hears.

Olhe, o que ela tem não é pra medico, que a senhora não vai curar no médico. Ela está com encosto, ta... Estão fazendo um serviço, foi feito um determinado serviço para a senhora e só quem está recebendo é ela. Tudo o que mandam para a senhora é ela que recebe e ela que escuta. Ela não vê mas é ela que sente e escuta.

In order to get Fátima back on her feet again, a "remedy," or potion, was massaged into her legs, prayers were said, and by the next day, the feeling had returned to her legs and she was walking again.

The next tragedy—a near-fatal swimming accident in the river—was readily accredited to evil intent. Fátima developed a simple theory for what was occurring: if someone sends something bad to another person, and yet another person "has a weaker and lesser spirit, without security"—a child, for example—the latter will be vulnerable to attack. As Fátima matured, she began to frequent *terreiros*, meet mediums, and converse with the *entidades* about her problems. One *entidade* in particular, Mariana, was instrumental in bringing her closer into the *terreiro* community: "Everything that she did for me at that time was a success, and I saw that things were really turning out right." (*Todo que ela fazia na época dava certo. Aí eu fui, realmente vi tá dando certo, né.*) Fátima is now one of the most loyal *filhas-de-santo* at Pai's *terreiro*.

This particular life path started with a startling and frightening event caused by the failure to match HADD to a candidate human agent. To Fátima's young mind, all evidence pointed toward there being a person with no body responsible for the noises that she readily identified as footsteps. The fact that, until then, her entire experience of persons indicated that the property of physicality was normal did not stop her from thinking that this person was factual. Indeed, since person-agency was so undeniable, only such a being *could* be responsible.

What doubtless caused most perturbation was the failure to discern the purpose of the person's actions. Being able to infer something about the intentions of others is an indispensable capacity because it helps one predict and explain their behavior. Much as in the case of diagnosis for a physical complaint, these underlying causes could highlight a legitimate cause for concern. They may guide subsequent action for the restoration of a sense of control over the situation. Reasoning about superhuman agents' ability to make things happen, and to do so for a reason, naturally leads to the *kinds* of responses described in chapter 8 and life stories like that of Fátima. The nuanced differences between specific responses may vary widely, but they naturally spring from a common source.

So, how do the commonalities in human mental architecture help one explain the variability, if not of the specific and nuanced forms that such responses take, then of their *incidence* cross-culturally? I predict that the HADD mechanism described above, with its sensitivity to particular features of the environment, is a relevant (but not the only) causal factor in these patterns of distribution. HADD, by definition as "hypersensitive" or "hyperactive," is always on the lookout for agency. But certain situations put it onto "high alert." Much as the anticipation of a visitor increases the likelihood for us to (mistakenly) think we hear a knock on the door, and as the information that a room is haunted heightens our attentiveness to every creak of the floorboards, so, too, agency detection for events can be particularly sensitive under situations of high stress. Stress is a psychological and physical response to a situation of pressure, known as the stressor. As such, it pertains to the individual and is measurable at the level of the individual. Yet, in that a stressor may be population wide (e.g., a natural disaster) and long-standing (e.g., a harsh political regime), its effects may be experienced at a collective level (i.e., by multiple individuals). One of these effects, I suggest, in high-stress situations, is the increased invocation of supernatural-agent causation and remedy for high-stress, low-control events. HADD for events is the mechanism that may potentially explain, in part, the correlation between stress/oppression/uncontrollability, on the one hand, and the high incidence of spirit phenomena and superstitious and paranormal beliefs, on the other hand.

HADD and Urgency

As yet little is known about the precise processes involved in agency detection, and much less about the contextual factors that might increase its sensitivity. Nevertheless, extant predictions are currently being considered for experimental evaluation. Barrett identifies individual background and dispositions as important variables acting on HADD's sensitivity: "People who believe in ghosts are more likely to see ghosts than non-believers. Being a believer—or merely open to believing—in a god makes one more sensitive to detecting the god's action or presence" (2004: 39). Another significant variable, he suggests, is the immediate context. To put it simply, situations in which one is particularly aware of the potential to become prey (e.g., walking in a dark alleyway), or in which one is deliberately tracking down potential prey (e.g., seeking an intruder), affect HADD so that it detects agency with minimal or even zero environmental cues. Its frequent coupling with situations of urgency is natural and develops very early in infancy.

Barrett thus associates contexts and situations of urgency and uncertainty with increased tendency to detect agents easily and rapidly. When agent causation fails to deliver a satisfactory explanation, then superhuman agency may be a salient and intuitive explanation, particularly where the perceiver is already a believer. This leads Barrett to conclude that, "in more traditional societies, such as those tied to subsistence hunting or farming, where life is filled with nonhuman dangers, life is also filled with forest spirits, ghosts, witches, and ancestor spirits constantly and obviously at work" (ibid.: 40).

Nevertheless, the literature reviewed above suggests that the degree to which one is surrounded by other humans is less relevant to the rate at which one may perceive nonhuman dangers than the degree of perceived danger and uncontrollability in general. We have noted that, even where people find plausible explanations for events in terms of human agency, a subjective state of nonunderstanding will often persist under certain circumstances. Nonunderstanding potentially threatens basic needs to predict, explain, and control critical situations (Malle and Knobe 1997). A further condition that needs to be satisfied for people to reason about the explanation for an event is its personal relevance, or its potential to threaten the positive outcome of a personal goal. When that goal is as crucial as survival, by means of a fertile crop or the avoidance of illness, for example, threats to the situation are likely to trigger agentive-causal thinking, with high frequency on only very modest information, and therefore further to support existing beliefs in spirits and gods. This prediction is consistent with findings from experimental psychology and anthropology (e.g., see Keinan 1994, 2002; Malinowski 1954; Padgett and Jorgenson 1982). Whether it is the effects of pestilence, flood, and drought, or of economic decline, gang warfare, and government corruption that one is trying to make sense of, all such situations potentially appeal to supernatural agency as the ultimate cause and cure, even if humans are known to be immediately involved and at least partly responsible.

Thus, on the assumption that HADD and environmental contextual conditions, such as survival and urgency concerns, are causally associated, I predict that, all else being equal, the incidence of phenomena that invoke the special powers of supernatural agents for explaining and predicting events increases under environmental pressures that threaten immediate survival and control. This prediction holds, first, that HADD is a panhuman tendency to invoke intentional agency for events for which the actor is in a perceived state of nonunderstanding, and that magical, superstitious, and much religious thinking capitalizes on this tendency. In that stress (whether caused by crop failure, ill health, unemployment anxiety, etc.) and uncontrollability may [illegible] one should expect to find higher

levels of institutionalized forms among individuals and populations in situations that contribute to such stress (e.g., lower-class/marginalized/unemployable/oppressed sectors of society). Second, one should detect in particular the rate of occurrence increasing at points of transition that threaten previously taken-for-granted survival and welfare. Third, practices that restore control or perceived control over these environmental "stressors" would tend to accompany these causal beliefs.

The possession concept is by no means representative of all kinds of spirit-related phenomena that a truly comprehensive survey would encompass for the naturalistic evaluation of the HADD prediction. However, it is hugely widespread across the world, probably universal. A range of environmental and historical factors are clearly correlated with the successful spread and institutionalization of possession beliefs and practices within a society. One of those factors, according to the HADD prediction, is environmental pressure on survival, whether man-made or otherwise. The evaluation of the above claims could be initiated in highly controlled studies, testing the predicted correlation between HADD and urgency in a laboratory setting or in a controlled study.[5]

However possession specifically is interpreted (e.g., as a safety valve, a means to claim power and authority, a form of resistance to man-made pressures outside one's control, etc.), its presence is potentially explainable, in part, by generalizable psychological factors. Stress related to survival at the level of populations, for example, through war, famine, socioeconomic inequality, and exploitation, may promote (in tandem with other factors) the emergence, increase and institutionalization of beliefs and practices associated with spirits and supernatural agents that are normally already present in the wider society. What the new cognitive science of religion contributes to this discussion is a description of the possible fundamental mechanisms of cognition that explain why, in particular, supernatural and magical agency become so germane in such contexts. These mechanisms evolved in our ancestral past, developing a survival system by which people automatically and intuitively arrive at certain conclusions about the world that surrounds them; even—or perhaps especially—when that world is uncertain, their place in it is vulnerable, and the threat of their own mortality is particularly vivid.

Women in Spirit-Possession Activity

Our description of the propensity of the mind to attribute events to the actions of agents would be unduly truncated if concluded at this point. Once agency is

detected, reasoning about the intentional states of the agent is automatic. We are more concerned about the reasons for people's actions than the actions per se (Gilbert 2002: 167). Description of the mechanisms that enable us to make inferences about what is going on in the minds of other people is the domain of increasingly sophisticated Theory of Mind (ToM) scholarship (see chapter 7). It is important to note that agency detection and ToM are mutually supporting, regardless of how distinct the mechanisms seem in the descriptions of their respective functions. Barrett explains it thus: "[I]f ToM can suggest the agent's desires and aims relevant to the event, it affirms to HADD that the event was goal directed, increasing HADD's confidence that agency has been discovered. Thus, HADD's work is not in isolation, and ToM's flexibility and readiness to explain subtle signs of agency encourage HADD's touchiness" (2004: 42). Following Barrett, I suggested in chapter 8 that, just as the ToM mechanism is employed in reasoning about the dispositions, motivations, and intentions of other people, it is also fundamental to reasoning about the intentional states of supernatural beings. I conclude this chapter with some tentative suggestions and considerations regarding the possible role of ToM in contributing to a further well-established demographic trend in the incidence of spirit possession.

The preponderance of women in possession cults is a widely acknowledged fact among anthropologists (Boddy 1989, 1994; Kapferer 1991; Lambek 1981, 1993; Landes 1947; Lerch 1980; Lewis et al. 1991; Ong 1987; Pressel 1980; Raybeck et al. 1989; Spring 1978; Wilson 1967). Undoubtedly, as with any complex and differentiated cultural phenomenon, there are many significant factors that come into play, giving rise to this demographic pattern. Different questions have been explored at different levels of analysis, generating various claims. Interpretivist accounts, for example, have looked to the local discursive processes and to common themes, idioms, and meanings, concerned, as Boddy says, "to trace the informal logic of everyday life... to find both the coherence and the indeterminacy in what villagers see as commonsensical, to uncover the intrinsic and the natural in quotidian interactions" (Boddy 1989: 7). This has been the endeavor and hallmark of modern ethnographic fieldwork for several decades. Ruth Landes was one of the first American students to gather data on the women-centered cult houses of Brazilian Candomblé through fieldwork methods that prioritized participant observation and involvement in the day-to-day lives of her research participants. In the now-celebrated ethnographic classic, *The City of Women*, (1947, reprinted in 1994), Landes describes how "the ritual life of the candomblés mirrored the economic and social autonomy of the women and the female-centeredness of Afro-Brazilian households in Bahia. Removed from political and economic representation in Bahian society, Afro-Brazilian women endowed their domestic lives with meaning through creative elaborations and modifications of the possession religion" (Cole 1994: xii).

Landes's unconventional approach to fieldwork and her apparent failure to frame the analysis within a broader historical context came in for heavy criticism from a seasoned Africanist, who argued, "The basic thesis is wrong... because of the misreading of an economic cause—that is, few men are initiates, in Bahia no less than in Africa, because they cannot afford the time it takes, because in Africa it is easier to support a woman in the cult-house than to withdraw a man from productive labor for months on end" (Herskovits 1948: 124). That such demands impinged on freedom to participate in cult activities was corroborated by Eduardo da Costa's contemporaneous descriptions of the demanding initiation rites in his classic *The Negro in Northern Brazil* (1948). He writes, "The West African period of complete seclusion for several months which is also found in the Bahian cult houses is here limited to eight days, and formal instruction is limited to a minimum.... [M]any of the women must make their own livings and fear to lose their jobs if they absent themselves during the period of seclusion" (1948: 75–76). Landes, however, operated within an alternative framework that characterized the Candomblé as a cultural expression that was vitally Brazilian and, more particularly, that appealed specifically to the women of the Bahian urban poor. Landes's perspective afforded an alternative to the focus on African survivals and integration into the New World society that predominated in studies of African-derived traditions in Brazil at the time.

Psychological explanations, meanwhile, that were proposed within anthropological scholarship on possession more widely, tended not to take women's widespread prominence in possession activities to be derivative of social differences and divisions. Rather, these explanations often leaned toward, or explicitly articulated, essentialist arguments premised on a "weaker sex" assumption. For Oesterreich, women (along with the lower classes, "primitives," and the uneducated) were more susceptible to "autosuggestion" (1930: 28) and therefore were more likely to believe in spirit entities that could possess people. In his functionalist interpretation of "demonic" or "unsolicited" forms of possession, even Lewis describes the healing cult as a "feminist sub-culture," which the "weaker sex enjoys as a religious drama" (1989: 80). In this "cult of feminine frailty," "women are, in effect, making a special virtue of adversity and affliction, and, quite often literally, capitalizing on their distress" (ibid.: 79). It was not long, however, until the unfounded "hysterical propensity of women, the mysterious powers of their yin-dark nature, and other magico-scientific explanations" (Kendall 1987: 24) were rejected as implausible and

unpromising causal accounts. Continuing scholarship attempted to provide answers to the question of elevated female participation by looking to the social domains, divisions, and differences of women's worlds.

Almost half a century after Landes's unconventional, fine-grained descriptions of women's everyday lives had scarcely found a publisher, meaning-centered approaches were now dominant in anthropological descriptions and analyses. Scholars returned their focus to the appeal and relevance that spirit-possession cult activities had for women, through fine-grained, local, and individual-level analyses. "An obvious approach," Boddy claimed, in her discussion of female participation in the *zar* cult in Northern Sudan, "is to ask whether the range of experience that possession constructs is more common to Hofriyati women than to men" (1989: 138). Boddy suggests that this indeed is the case because "possession is closely linked to fertility with which women are identified and for which they bear responsibility" (ibid.). Many anthropological studies showed how possession addresses and meets the needs pertinent to the social domains and activities for which women were traditionally and typically (though not exclusively) responsible, such as family health, "domestic religion" (Sered 1999), the reproduction of social communities, and the contestation of social injustices (Boddy 1994: 416; e.g., Alpers 1984; Brown 1987; Constantinides 1982; Lambek 1980; Lerch 1982).

There has also been continuing discussion within modern psychological scholarship on the possible causes of gender differences in religious involvement and commitment more generally. Indeed, the conclusion that women are more religious than men has been described as one of the best-attested findings in the psychology of religion (Francis and Wilcox 1996). Here we find two main groups of theories, approaching the problem in a similar vein to anthropologists over the years. In her review of empirical research on the issue of gender and religion, Leslie Francis categorizes them as follows: "The first group of theories concentrates on social or contextual influences which shape different responses to religion.... The second group of theories concentrates on personal or individual psychological characteristics which differentiate between men and women" (1997: 81–82).

In the first, gender differences in religiosity are predicted to have a sociological basis. It has been claimed, for example, that girls are socialized into religiousness more than boys (Mol 1985; Nelson and Potvin 1981). Factors that overlap significantly with those suggested in the discussions above have been predicted also; the family-centered position of women (Moberg 1962), the nature of the domestic division of labor (Azzi and Ehrenberg 1975), men's and women's unequal participation in the secularized world (Lenski 1953; Luckmann 1967; Martin 1967), and the social support offered by participation

in religion (Moberg 1962) have all been suggested as relevant factors to women's greater involvement in religious activities (see Francis 1997 for a comprehensive review).

Of the second group of theories, Francis shows that there has been mounting support for "gender orientation theories" in particular. These theories predict a positive relationship between psychological femininity (measurable by sex-role inventories, such as Bem [1981] or Antill, et al. [1981]) and religiosity. This is an emerging field of enquiry, for which little cross-cultural investigation has been carried out, and for which as yet no data are available on nonwestern societies. Findings from the United States and the United Kingdom, however, strongly suggest that the association between women and religiousness is a function of gender (i.e., femininity) rather than being female (Thompson 1991; Francis and Wilcox 1996). Yet, as Rodney Stark (2002) has pointed out, the fundamental source of these gender differences has been left unexamined. Considering highly significant results from a cross-cultural survey that compares religiousness in men and women in forty-nine nations, Stark claims that there "is only one other gender difference similar to the one involving religion" (2002: 501). He draws from evidence in the field of gender and criminality that point to fundamental physiological sources for men's heightened risk-taking behavior and proneness to violence and impulsive behaviors. He links this to Miller and Hoffman's (1995) findings that intragender measures of risk aversion correlate significantly with religiosity—those who score highly on risk aversion are more religious. Stark concludes his analysis, "If we assume with Miller and Hoffman that irreligiousness is simply another form of risky behavior to which certain kinds of men are given, then there seem to be grounds for proposing a link between physiology and faith" (ibid.: 504).

Stark claims that he looked to insights from physiology with a great deal of reluctance, and only after he found "every cultural and social alternative to be inadequate" (ibid.: 496). It is, however, somewhat premature to write off the predictions from these fields. The fluidity of the social contexts in which women's roles are played out complicates the application of generalizable models within populations, not to mention across time and across populations. Notwithstanding, these approaches have made interesting advances and are not bereft of serious predictions that, once substantiated, may provide a more economical answer to the question of gender differences and religiosity than Stark's proposed physiologically based association between risk-taking and irreligiosity. Furthermore, contrary to Stark's claim, there *is* at least one other significant psychological difference that is predicted as a causally significant dimension in differential behaviors of men and women.

A recent model advanced by Simon Baron-Cohen (Baron-Cohen, et al. 2003; Baron-Cohen 2004) proposes an alternative, though perhaps complementary, source for gender differences; namely, men's and women's variable performance in empathic and Theory of Mind skills. The importance of ToM for the generation and acquisition of religious concepts, particularly agent-concepts, has already been discussed. Recent research suggests that strongly attested sex differences in ToM are relevant to respective differences in behavioral tendencies and cognitive skills (ibid.). I suggest that this may be a fruitful place to further our inquiry into the differential ratio of men's and women's involvement in religious activities in general, and spirit possession in particular. Sociological, psychological, and anthropological approaches have contributed much to the discussion concerning women's religious involvement but have failed to elucidate the mechanisms whereby this cross-culturally recurrent pattern comes about. We need a generalizable, testable hypothesis—or set of hypotheses—that fits with the evidence on the ground, whether in urban New York or among the emancipated slave populations of northeastern Brazil. As with any widespread phenomenon, universal patterns are strongly suggestive of the presence of panhuman causal factors. Given the crucial importance of the ability to infer the intentional states of other agents to spirit and other (supernatural agent) phenomena worldwide, I suggest that we consider the explanatory potential of well-attested gender differences in cognitive abilities.

The Empathizing-Systemizing Theory

Baron-Cohen's central claim is that there are essential sex differences in the mind, for which systemizing and empathizing are the two major dimensions of relevance. It is by systemizing, on the one hand, that we most successfully understand and predict the behavior of a law-governed system, such as the relatively stable, inanimate world that surrounds us, including technical (e.g., a sundial), motoric (e.g., a tennis stroke), and abstract systems (e.g., mathematical), among others (Baron-Cohen 2003: 361–62). Empathizing, on the other hand, is our most powerful tool for analyzing and predicting the social world, that is, for making sense of other people's behavior. It is composed of both a cognitive and an affective component. The cognitive component is the ability, or drive, to infer other people's mental states from their behaviors (i.e., Theory of Mind). The affective component is the drive to respond to these inferred states with an appropriate emotion (Baron-Cohen 2004: 28). Through

2001, 2003) found that females tend to score higher on empathy measures than males (measured by the Empathy Quotient [EQ] questionnaire). Males, however, tend to score more highly on systemizing measures than females (measurable by the Systemizing Quotient [SQ] questionnaire). These results do not, however, indicate an absolute, essentialized difference between males and females. Rather, the poles are divided according to the "brain type" an individual has, whether male or female. Individuals who are average to high systemizers are defined as having a brain of Type S. Individuals who are average to high empathizers are referred to as Type E. These two dimensions are not mutually implicated (i.e., low EQ does not necessarily follow from high SQ), but the higher score will predict the brain type classification. Individuals who score equally on both quotients are referred to as Type B. As stated, there is evidence to support the claim that *more* males than females are Type S, and *more* females than males have a brain of Type E (Baron-Cohen 2004).

One important finding that has emerged from this application of cognitive and affective mechanisms to sex differences is the strongly significant correlation between individuals with a high-systemizing quotient/low-empathizing quotient—mainly males—and autism. This has led to an associated theory called the extreme male brain theory (EMB) of autism (see Baron-Cohen 1995, 2004; Baron-Cohen, et al. 1999, 2002, 2003). There has been somewhat less consideration of the potential applications of high-scoring EQ, low-scoring SQ individuals, a possible effect is that these individuals (mostly women) would have difficulty analyzing variables in a system and deriving underlying rules (see Baron-Cohen 2004, chapter 12). Their hyperempathetic tendencies could also drive them constantly to speculate about the mental states of others, but with a high degree of accuracy, perhaps resulting in seemingly uncannily precise insights into others' minds.

With regard to empathizing and systemizing differences between Type S and Type E individuals at the less extreme ranges of the scales, the crucial question is: are there any broader applications for the Empathizing-Systemizing theory to well-established, widespread, and generalizable gender differences in patterns of religious behavior (as well as perhaps criminal tendencies and other differential behavioral patterns)? I suggest that these findings are significant for explaining, in part, the demographic patterns found in religious involvement cross-culturally, with specific relevance to spirit-possession activity and the particular demands it places on empathizing abilities (as defined by Baron-Cohen). My argument is premised on two main claims.

First, as we have noted, HADD and ToM are fundamental mechanisms for the generation, acquisition, and spread of supernatural agent concepts that

populate our religious traditions and everyday worlds. Although I am not aware of evidence to suggest that there are any essential male-female differences in the operations of the HADD mechanism and its activation, Baron-Cohen's work suggests that ToM, with which HADD mutually interacts in affirming the goal-directedness of perceived agents, displays gendered (or male/female brain) differences in both the readiness with which it is activated and in the sophistication of interpretations and predictions it generates. Hence, as Barrett has suggested, since females more readily reason about the beliefs, desires, motivations, dispositions, and intentions of others, and use these ToM inferences to respond appropriately, negotiate social exchanges, and easily strike up social alliances, we would expect women more readily to explain and react to HADD's detections of agency, including supernatural agency (Barrett 2004: 43).

Indeed, this prediction is consistent with structural role predictions that correlate the female parent role with increased participation in religious activities. The source of both causal models may be found in the possible adaptive advantage that mothers had to "read the minds" of their infant children, establish social networks beyond the genetic group, and benefit from reciprocal relationships within stable communities. Baron-Cohen writes, "Anything that contributes to community stability can only increase the survival chances for both children and women. Since women are the sex that invests far more time and resources in parenting, one can argue that such benefits of reciprocal relationships will be more relevant to them" (2004: 127). From this perspective, socialization hypotheses, predicted social-role causes, and women's sociability factors may have identified important patterns, for which the adaptive advantages of empathizing tendencies and sophisticated ToM in females is a possible causal source. While parenting practices have changed dramatically in many societies in modern times, the mechanisms selected for survival in our evolutionary past persist as basic components of our mental architecture.

Thus, the general claim here is that differential levels of empathizing between males and females contribute to their differential levels of involvement in religious groups (and by extension, other social groups that contribute to community—and therefore—family stability). The prediction that has particular relevance to our understanding of the cognition of supernatural agent concepts, however, is that the ToM differences between males and females in their ability to understand and predict the behaviors of others is a causal factor in the high incidence of female sensitivity to the actions and intentions of supernatural agents. We should therefore find that, all else being equal, Type E individuals, of whom the majority are female, predominate in religious activities in which spirits, gods, and other supernatural agents also participate,

and with whom intimate relations are developed through prayer and devotion. The ethnographic data on women's participation in spirit-possession activity appears to attest to this claim. In order empirically to test the causal mechanism predicted, however, one would need to control for social effects predicted by the more general claim above (e.g., that women are more likely to participate in social group activities more generally). This would necessarily require experimental methods of investigation that can control for potential confounds that naturalistic environments would inevitably yield.

Second, a further suggestion for high rates of female participation in spirit-possession, particularly mediumistic, cults specifically draws again on the sex differences in the mind proposed by the E-S (Empathizing-Systemizing) theory. The evidence for the claim that more males than females have a brain of type E includes the finding that "women are better at decoding non-verbal communication, picking up subtle nuances from tone of voice or facial expression, or judging a person's character" (Baron-Cohen 2003: 362), suggesting that women are not only more accurate in their "mind-reading" capabilities, but also more likely to detect and decode social information, where men would fail to notice it. As described in chapter 7, perception and interpretation of a possessed host's behaviors are potentially complicated by numerous factors. One of the most significant factors is that the physical (and often the behavioral, e.g., voice, mannerisms, etc.) characteristics of the host continue into the possession episode. In this sense, the host both is and is not the actor in any possession episode. The ability to maintain a coherent perception of the agency present requires heightened sensitivity to the often subtle cues that confirm the presence of that agency, despite competing cues from physical appearance and other continuities with the host's normal behavior. More fundamentally, the ability to infer the intentional states of the spirit agency from behaviors that can only be expressed through the body of the host when in possession requires a highly sophisticated theory of mind. Undoubtedly, the majority of individuals, including males, would score sufficiently well on the EQ to be able to reason at some basic level about the intentional states, emotions, and motivations of a person while possessed. However, since women tend to score more highly on the EQ, they should more readily be able to infer the mental states of the possessing entities and to respond appropriately. Although neither accurate nor sophisticated inferences are a necessary condition for communication between possessed hosts and observers, it is more likely that Type E individuals will be more sensitive than Type S individuals to the perspectives, motivations, beliefs, and desires of the spirits that possess others as well as of the spirits that they themselves are host to, and will therefore enjoy more understanding and satisfying relationships

with these entities. The causal mechanism proposed here is potentially partly responsible, therefore, for women's participation in possession-cult activities, both as clients, or devotees, and as hosts to possessing spirits. For the purposes of evaluation, this two-pronged claim would need to be uncoupled and each prediction refined for independent testing.

Conclusion

We have now considered a range of factors that might explain some of the variation in the incidence of spirit phenomena cross-culturally. Could the sensitivity of our agency detection device in high-stress/low-control situations account for population-wide incidence of paranormal and religious beliefs? Could gendered differences in mind-reading abilities explain women's prominence in the kinds of spirit-cult practices described in this book and across the world? Are these real possibilities, or are they just fanciful speculations?

There are limitations on what we can say with confidence and on the claims that we make on these topics. First, our predictions must be consistent with the observable facts. Second, they must be commensurate with the hypotheses of neighboring disciplines that have been substantiated through scientific methods. And third, their predictive value must be ascertainable and ultimately put to the test. "The rate of the development of science," Feynman writes, "is not the rate at which you make observations alone but, much more important, the rate at which you create new things to test" (1998: 27). When things do not turn out as we predicted, then we are free to look in new directions for more powerful explanations.

The claims that I have tentatively advanced in this book are of little scientific interest if not appreciably uncertain and potentially testable. Testability demands precision and measurability. Surveys, statistical analyses, controlled laboratory experiments, naturalistic studies, and ethnographic data gathering are all indispensable to this potentially arduous and prolonged investigation. Rigorous, precise, scientific investigation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and varied methodologies are needed to assess the factors proposed for the variable incidence of spirit possession cross-culturally. Yet, how much more fulfilling it would be to say something about the transmission of spirit phenomena (and cultural transmission in general) with even a tiny measure of certainty than with none at all; to be able to hold to some provisional knowledge that something is the case (or that something isn't the case) than to seek refuge in some cherished hunch, fashionable vogue, or imaginative—but untestable—construct.

Appendix

Prioritizing exercise: *terreiro* activities.

PROCEDURE

Nineteen participants (twelve males, seven females) performed the exercise. Each participant was given ten strips of card on which the following statements were printed:

Prioritizing Exercise: *Terreiro* Activities

	Statements Given in Portuguese	Translation into English	Mean Ranking
A	Pagar obrigações aos orixás e entidades	Pay ritual obligations to the orixás and entidades	4
B	Cumprir responsabilidades ao egbe/família	Fulfill responsibilities to the community	5
C	Ler e aprender as lendas	Read and learn the stories (of the orixás)	8
D	Aprender a prática ritualistica—procedimento correto	Learn the rituals—correct procedures	3
E	Aprender os fundamentos dos orixás	Learn the fundamentos of the orixás	2
F	Lutar contra preconceito	Fight against prejudice	9
G	Respeitar e zelar para o pai-de-santo	Respect and attend to the pai-de-santo	1

(*continued*)

Prioritizing Exercise: *Terreiro* Activities (*continued*)

	Statements Given in Portuguese	Translation into English	Mean Ranking
H	Aprender a história da religião—entidades, personalidades, etc.	Learn the history of the religion—entidades, personalities, etc.	6
I	Aprender os cântigos, danças e lingua dos orixás	Learn the songs, dances, and language of the orixás	7
J	Transmitir a religião para outros ainda de fora	Transmit the religion to others	10

Participants were asked to place the cards one above the other, according to their subjective evaluation of the order of importance of the activity or behaviour inscribed. No time constraints were imposed, and participants performed the exercise in private.

The chart below demonstrates the mean ranking for each of the activities.

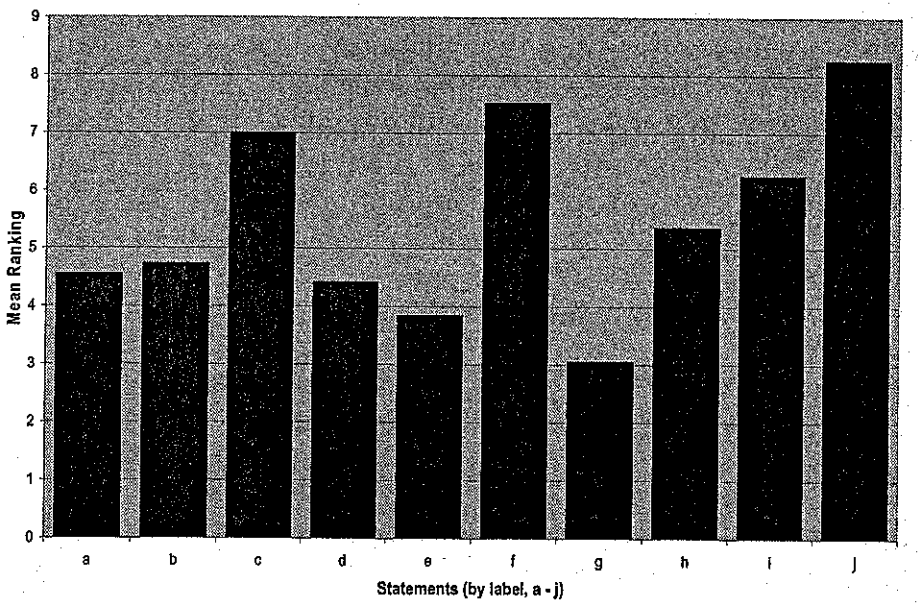

FIGURE A.1. Chart Showing the Mean Ranking of Each of Ten Statements Ordered according to Degree of Priority

Glossary

This glossary contains terms that may be used more than once in the text and that are not accompanied by a translation in each instance.

Babalorixá: The Yoruba term that translates literally to *pai-de-santo*, or father-of-saint. An initiated male is called Pai, or Babá, from the point at which he receives the right to initiate his own sons- and daughters-of-saint. (Female counterparts are known as *Iyalorixás*, or *mães-de-santo*.) Although the precise time at which an initiated member of the community should receive this right is widely disputed, it is generally considered to be at the seventh anniversary of initiation and is marked by a ceremony. In Pai's *terreiro*, no one had yet received this right despite there being initiated members of ten years and more. One of the reasons, according to Pai, was that they did not have the financial resources required to set up their own *terreiros;* and until such time, there was little point in performing the ceremony that would give them the right to do so. Nevertheless, they were still called "Pai" by the more junior members.

Banho: Literally translates as "bath" (or "shower" as in the phrase "to take a shower"). In the *culto*, it also refers to herbal infusions (of variable concentrations and ingredients) that are ritualistically prepared for the purposes of spiritual cleansing, strengthening, protection, attracting money and love, and so on. Baths for cleansing, for instance, are taken with these infusions in the *terreiro* before participation in

religious activities in order to eliminate any negative energies picked up outside the *terreiro*, or "on the street" (*na rua*). Baths for attraction (*banhos atrativos, banhos cheirosos*) may be taken at home and are sold in the *terreiro*. Mediums may take certain *banhos* to attract the spirits that possess them.

Boca à ouvido: "Mouth to ear" learning was said to be the means by which foundational knowledge (*fundamento*) of the *culto* is transmitted from spiritual father to son. The phrase connotes individual dedication to seek that knowledge from one's initiating *pai-de-santo*, secrecy in the method by which it is revealed, and the exclusivity or peculiarity of the knowledge to each individual and his or her needs.

Búzios: The *búzios* are cowry shells, or conches, used as an instrument of divination. The concave part of the shell is cut off, leaving a two-sided object that when cast may fall either "open" or "closed." The simple method by which four shells are thrown, for example, may yield the combination 1:3 (open: closed), in which the response is interpreted as negative. A more complicated method, using sixteen shells is also used to converse with the *orixás* and to determine to which *orixá* one belongs. Pai called the *jogo de búzios* (throw of the cowries) his "internet to the *orixás*."

Caboclo: *Caboclo* may be translated as "indigenous backwoodsman." As such, this term refers to native dwellers of the interior, for example, the Amazon region. Within the *culto*, the term is often used more broadly to refer not only to spirits of indigenous origin, but also to the collective of spirits that may have lived on earth once and who now come to possess mediums within the *culto*. People often refer to spirits of European origin as *caboclos*. The term is not interchangeable with *orixá*, however. The female form of the term is *cabocla*.

Cargo: Within the *culto*, positions of responsibility and hierarchical titles are referred to as *cargos*. Most of these are only open to initiated members and are allocated following consultation with the *orixás*. In Pai's *terreiro*, some people were appointed to their cargos by the *orixá* of the house (*orixá da casa*), Oxalá, while possessing Pai.

Casa: A general term for house, often used interchangeably with *terreiro*, or Afro-Brazilian religious center.

Culto Afro: This was the shorthand term for the *culto afro-brasileiro*. *Culto* may be translated into "cult," but I have chosen to leave it in the original Portuguese

as it has a less pejorative significance in Brazilian usage. Most members are content to describe their religious expression using this term, although some have recently campaigned for the *culto* to be regarded by outsiders as an acceptable religion like any other (e.g., Roman Catholicism, Assembly of God, etc.), thereby encouraging members and others to call their practices and faith a "religion."

Culto indígena: The strand of religious practice in the *terreiro* specifically dedicated to indigenous spirits, for example, spirits of the forest (*da floresta*).

Doutrina: A generic term for songs and verses sung during possession ceremonies, for example, to announce the arrival of a spirit, or family of spirits, and during ritual activities, for example, when the *pai-de-santo* applies a herbal infusion (*banho*) to a medium's head in order to facilitate his or her mediumistic development. The term *canticô* is more commonly used to refer to verses and song in the context of ceremonies and rites concerning the *orixás* and *voduns*.

Encantado: These are spirits that are said to have lived as human beings but who have passed through "the portal" into the dwelling place of the spirits, the *encantaria*, without undergoing physical death.

Entidade: A generic term for all spirit beings. Some people distinguished between *entidades* and *orixás* (and *voduns*), however. They would, for example, discuss their faith in the "*entidades* and *orixás*," apparently differentiating between the African spirit beings of Candomblé and all the other members of the spiritual pantheon.

Feitiço (feitiçeiro): In *culto* use, *feitiço* most commonly refers to an act of sorcery, in which a prescribed series of steps are followed—a ritual recipe—to cause misfortune in the life of another person. It also refers to the physical form that the sorcery takes in the body of the victim, which could be removed by a curer (*feitiçeiro*; *tirar feitico*, "to take out," *feitiço*).

Filho-de-santo (*feminine form: filha-de-santo*): Literally means "son-of-saint," or son of *orixá*. One becomes a *filho-de-santo* following initiation, in which a bond is established between the initiate and the *orixá* and the initiator. The term is often abbreviated to *filho* and as such may be used to refer to "sons of the house/*terreiro*" (*filhos da casa*) or sons of Pai X (*filhos do Pai X*, thereby iden-

unrestrictedly to refer to those people who frequent a house and who may also participate in the ritual activities of the house, but who have not yet been initiated.

Fundamento: *Fundamentos* are said to be deep truths about the *culto afro*, specifically about the *orixás* or *voduns* to whom one belongs, that are transmitted privately and incrementally from the *pai-de-santo* to the initiated cult members.

Incorporação: Literally meaning "incorporation," this is the term that corresponds with "possession." *Possessão* is not normally used other than to refer to possession by evil spirits (said to be an extremely rare phenomenon).

Linha: The different strands of religious practice in the *terreiro*, with their variable histories, origins, and theologies, are referred to as "lines." The same term is sometimes used similarly to "family" to refer to a group of spirits who are associated by origin, familiar relationships, or function within the cult.

Nação: The word *nation* is used to refer to different Candomblés, claimed to be traceable to various African origins (cities and regions). Candomblé Nagô, for example, is said to originate in Yoruba, now Nigeria, and Candomblé Angola in Angola, etc.

Obrigação: This refers to rites of many different kinds, ranging from simple cleansing and purification baths to the demanding series of rituals performed at initiation. Participants were keen to point out that although the term connotes obligation, they fulfilled their ritual responsibilities willingly.

Pai-de-santo (see also *babalorixá* above): Lit. "father of saint," or "father of *orixá*." The *pai-de-santo* is typically the leader of a *terreiro* community. He officiates at initiation ceremonies and determines the day-to-day activities and ritual calendar and practice of the *terreiro*. He liaises with the *orixás* to solicit their advice and will concerning these activities. He offers consultations and advice to *filhos* and clients and should be knowledgeable in *culto* history, ritual, and mythological traditions. He should also possess the *fundamentos* (see above) that enable *filhos* to develop in their faith and relationships with their *orixás* and other possessing spirit entities. The term *pai-de-santo* is often employed more broadly to signify anyone who receives clients for consultation (but who does not necessarily initiate) or to members who have received the right to initiate their own *filhos* (normally seven years after initiation).

Pajelança: This is an indigenous form of shamanistic healing that is frequently part of *terreiro* activities in the northern regions of Brazil. Curing spirits are often called *mestres* and are typically animals (e.g., river dolphins) although they generally appear to act as persons when possessing their hosts. In many *terreiros*, the methods and instruments of *pajelança* are used in healing rituals (e.g., the cigar and maraca), but *encantados* and *caboclo* spirits may perform the cure (*cura*).

Povo de santo: This term, meaning "people of the saint," is most frequently heard within the context of public rallies and campaigns tackling religious intolerance toward the *culto*. It refers to members, clients, and often supporters of the *culto afro* as a united collective.

Terreiro: The *terreiro* is the physical nucleus of a particular community of *culto afro* members (i.e., *filhos* and *pai/mãe*) and clients. The term is used interchangeably with *casa*, or house.