The temple of *O Vale do Amanhecer* [The Valley of Dawn] in Atlanta is located in a non-descript, grungy industrial park in the outskirts of Marietta, a town that until recently was best known for its ‘Gone With the Wind’ museum than for being a new destination for Latin American immigrants, including a large Brazilian community. On the outside, there is nothing to mark the presence of a sacred space – there is a parking lot scarred by potholes and bordered by a few pine trees that provide a thinning cover for a decrepit picnic table where workers from neighboring offices often have their lunch. However, immediately upon entering the temple one is struck by the cleanliness and tranquility of the place. In contrast to the hustle and bustle of nearby I-75, one of the major north-south highways that cut across Atlanta, one only hears the hushed voices of the clients, who have come to receive advice and healing from the spirits, and of the nymphs, the mediums in training, who are ushering people in. The air of solemnity, peace, and purity is enhanced by white walls, upon which the colorful portraits of various indigenous and Afro-Brazilian spirits hang, and by the white velvet and veil that make up the triangular *mesa evangélica*. Surrounding this table are benches, from where clients and temple frequenters, mostly Brazilians interspersed with a few Euro-Americans, observe female mediums incorporate spirits, while a male *doutrinador* ['doctriner'] stands behind them giving instructions and restraining potentially unruly spirits.

What accounts for the presence of The Valley of Dawn, a religion that originated in the interior of Brazil, in Atlanta? What do the temple’s practitioners and clients find in this ‘alternative spirituality’?¹ In this chapter, we

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¹ We use the term alternative spiritualities to describe new religious movements that “encompass a diversified constellation of teachings and practices that address metaphysical, therapeutic, psychological, and/or ecological concerns” (Carpenter 1999: 236). These spiritualities may borrow from Eastern traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and/or from indigenous religions (shamanism, divination, and animism), as well as from paganism, the occult, astrology, and popular psychology. Generally, these new religious
will show that the cosmology and ritual practices of The Valley of Dawn offers Brazilian immigrants a way to frame meaningfully the perils and contradictions of the process of immigration. In particular, the temple’s therapeutic practices and its mixing of traditional and modern symbols help Brazilians navigate the uncertainty and stress of a fast-paced life in Atlanta – the Los Angeles of the US. South – particularly at a time of widespread economic crisis and increasing hostility toward immigrants. Moreover, The Valley of Dawn’s principle of gender complementarity, which is central to the religious movement’s vision of successful mediumship and healing, plays an important role in helping Brazilian women mediate the conflict-ridden domestic relations they have with Brazilian and Euro-American men as their gender roles and status change with the process of migration.

The chapter begins with a brief characterization of the origin, cosmology, and ritual practices of The Valley of Dawn. We will then discuss the history and the dynamics of the Brazilian immigrant community in the Atlanta metropolitan region, focusing particularly in the challenges this new urban destination poses to immigrants. Drawing from in-depth interviews with the two leaders of the temple in Atlanta, we will then explore how The Valley addresses these challenges, highlighting its contributions to the process of integration into an American society that is deeply ambivalent about immigration, particularly undocumented immigration.

**Brasília: O Vale do Amanhecer and the Dialectics of Modernity and Tradition**

Like Umbanda, a religion from which it heavily borrows, The Valley of Dawn is an unabashedly syncretic religion. As Dawson (2007: 52) puts it:

> Perhaps nowhere are the hybridizing tendencies of neo-esoteric repertoires more evident than The Valley of Dawn. Cosmologically, architecturally, and practically, The Valley of Dawn is a unique blend of indigenous spirituality, ancient near-eastern and classical themes, traditional European esoterism, popular Catholic religiosity, Brazilian Spiritism, Afro-Brazilian practices, oriental concepts, and new age preoccupations.3

movements tend to be focused on the pragmatic and experimental improvement or cultivation of the self. See the volume’s introduction.

2 The research team conducted and tape-recorded interviews in Atlanta in August 2006 and 2007.

3 See also Pierini (2008).