

Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions: explaining the attacks on symbols of the African religious heritage in contemporary Brazil*

Vagner Gonçalves da Silva

Assistant professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of São Paulo. E-mail: <vagnergo@usp.br>

ABSTRACT

In this work, I analyze the relations of proximity and antagonism between neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions, and their consequences for the transformation of the Brazilian social imaginary constructed on the basis of values derived from these two fields.

Key words: Candomblé, Umbanda, Neo-Pentecostalism, Religious Conflict, African Symbols

Introduction

Neo-Pentecostalism, due to its belief in the need to eliminate the presence and action of the devil in the world, tends to classify other religious denominations as little engaged in this battle, or even as spaces rife with the action of demons, which 'disguise' themselves as the divinities worshiped in these systems. This is especially the case of Afro-Brazilian religions, whose gods, principally the exus and pombagiras, are seen to be manifestations of demons. Another aspect of this process is, paradoxically, the 'incorporation' of the Afro-Brazilian liturgy into the neo-Pentecostal practices of some churches. In this work, I intend to analyze the relations of proximity and antagonism existing between the neo-Pentecostal and Afro-Brazilian religions, and their consequences in terms of the transformation of a particular image of Brazil.

First of all, it should be observed that the neo-Pentecostal view of Afro-Brazilian religions can be traced to the development of the theological and doctrinal system of Pentecostalism, especially from the 1950s and 60s onwards, though it first arrived in Brazil at the start of the 20th century. During this period, the religious movement assumed new dimensions, expanding its base of churches, multiplying the number of denominations and acquiring greater visibility. Setting itself apart by the emphasis on the gift of the divine cure (leading to them being called 'healing churches') and by the strategies of mass proselytism and conversion, this second wave¹ of Pentecostalism preserved the basic features of the movement, which was already 40 years old,

such as the doctrine of the charismatic gifts (faith, prophecy, discerning of spirits, healing, speaking in tongues, etc.), sectarianism and asceticism (Mariano 1999:31).

The third phase of the Pentecostal movement, initiated in the 1970s and displaying rapid growth in the subsequent two decades, involved some important differences in terms of the profile of the churches that emerged and the practices adopted, leading to its classification as 'neo-Pentecostalism.' The addition of the Latin prefix 'neo' was intended to express some of the new emphases that these churches identified as part of this phase, differentiating them within the Pentecostal movement as a whole: the abandonment (or moderation) of asceticism, the valorization of pragmatism, the use of business management techniques in running churches, emphasis on the theology of prosperity, the use of the media for the work of mass proselytism and religious advertising (leading to the name 'electronic churches') and the centrality of the theology of the spiritual battle against other religious denominations, especially the Afro-Brazilian religions and spiritism.

But why choose the latter religions as their main target? Would a church as well organized and interested in mass conversion as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG),² the main representative of the neo-Pentecostal sector, really be bothered by religions (candomblé, umbanda and spiritism) that together, according to the IBGE's 2000 Demographic Census, add up to just 1.7 % of the population? Although we can consider this figure an underestimate due to the historical motives leading people to be adherents of both Afro-Brazilian religions and Catholicism, it is tempting to ask whether the Neo-Pentecostal attack is not a case of, as the Brazilian saying goes, "a lot of gunpowder for a handful of birds"? Or in other words, would the 'good fight' not be better waged against Catholicism, which, despite the fall in its number of followers over the last two decades, still represents 73.7 % of the population (according to IBGE)? But how to declare open war on this religious monopoly intimately connected with diverse spheres of Brazilian society? The 'kicking the saint' incident and its negative repercussions (Mariano 1999:81) are a good example of the difficulty of open confrontation.

The attack on Afro-Brazilian religions, rather than being a strategy for proselytizing among the country's low income populations, potential consumers of Afro-Brazilian and neo-Pentecostal religions, appears to stem from the role that magical practices and the experience of religious trance play in the very dynamic of the neo-Pentecostal system in its contact with the Afro-Brazilian repertoire. The recent development of charismatic Catholicism attests to the growing demand for these kind of practices in the mainstream religious sector too. In Brazil, while mainstream Christian sectors (Catholicism, traditional Protestantism, etc.) were heavily affected by the processes of secularization and rationalization, Pentecostalism emerged as an alternative; still timid in its first and second phases, but very strong in its third phase with the valorization of the experience of religious renewal. In neo-Pentecostalism, this characteristic is radicalized to the extent of transforming it into a religion in which renewal is experienced in the body itself – a feature traditionally monopolized by Afro-Brazilian religions and Kardecist spiritism. Combating these religions may be, therefore, less a proselytizing strategy designed to recruit converts from their congregations – though it indeed has this effect – and more a form of attracting believers eager for the experience of ecstatic religions with a strong magical appeal, combined with the advantage of the social legitimacy enjoyed by Christianity in general.

Although there are many differences, therefore, between neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions, this article looks to analyze the similarities between them. In other words, I think it is possible to understand various dimensions of Pentecostalism's antagonistic view of Afro-Brazilian denominations (very often expressed through symbolic and even physical violence) by analyzing the flow of certain 'terms' between the religious systems in conflict. This flow has been

subject to a number of recent studies, which I use here as a basis for systemizing my arguments, alongside data from field observation and the religious literature produced by the neo-Pentecostal media.

The ‘devil’ in the books

The demonic view of Afro-Brazilian religions propagated by neo-Pentecostalism was already present in earlier phases of the Pentecostal movement as one element of the theology of divine healing. The cure – one of the constitutive parts of the ritual of blessing the sick – served to show God’s victory over the devil, generally identified with umbanda and candomblé (Rolim 1990:49). During this period, though, the ‘armies of Christ’ were not urged to take to the streets and disrupt Afro-Brazilian rituals or to try to close down terreiros, as has occurred over the last two decades.

One of the signs of the intensification of this antagonism against Afro-Brazilian religions can be identified in the publication of the book *Mãe-de-santo* (1968), by the Canadian missionary Walter Robert McAlister, founder of the New Life Pentecostal Church in Rio de Janeiro in 1960. According to the book’s preface:

This is the incredible story of a Bahian woman whose knife scar on her right arm predestined her from birth to be a saint-mother [*mãe-de-santo*], serving the orixás and sacrificing to the exus since she was nine years old. In this re-edited fourth edition of the book, you will feel the repugnance experienced by Georgina Aragão dos Santos Franco on being imprisoned in a room fetid with the smell of dry blood, blood with which they had covered her entire body in ‘making the saint.’ You will later divine her overwhelming joy and euphoria when she finally discovered that her soul no longer belonged to the devil, since the blood of Jesus Christ became stronger and more powerful in her life than any offerings, trances or obligations. I am sure you will read this book many times, and that it will be passed on to friends, relatives or acquaintances who follow Afro-Brazilian sects. In fact, this is a book every Brazilian should read (1983 [1968]:5).³

Here the central themes of this antagonism are set out: 1. Identification of the divinities from the Afro-Brazilian pantheon with the devil; 2. Spiritual release through the (greater) power of the living blood of Jesus (in opposition to the ‘dry’ or ‘fetid’ blood of initiation or the offerings); 3. As a consequence of spiritual release, conversion. McAlister writes that on coming into contact in Brazil with ‘macumba,’ he initially thought it was no more than ‘folklore.’ Later, after curing a woman whose leg had been paralyzed ever since she had kicked a *despacho* (ritual offering), he realized the extent to which these ‘superstitions’ were real and harmful.

From then on, I began to have direct contact with the victims of Candomblé and Umbanda, who told me the terrible drama involved in submitting oneself to the influences of the exus and orixás. In this way I passed from a certain incredulity to an awareness that these narratives were not merely the result of imagination, and that despite the superstitious roots, their effects were very real (1983 [1968]:10).

This, then, was the fourth important characteristic of this ‘spiritual battle:’ rather than seeing the Afro-Brazilian religions as folklore, popular belief, ignorance or imagination, it was essential to recognize that their divinities ‘exist,’ although ‘in truth’ they are ‘demonic spirits’ that trick and threaten the Brazilian people.

I believe that Brazil must free itself from this evil that already dominates – according to some authorities – more than a third of the population, who bow down before saint-father and mothers and obey the laws and orders of the orixás. I dedicate this book, therefore, to the victims of the diabolical power of Candomblé and Umbanda (1983 [1968]:11).

As we can observe, the invitation to spiritual release is made at national level, another key feature of neo-Pentecostalism's evangelism.

I have no intention of examining McAlister's book in depth here. Suffice to say that the saint-mother Georgina can be seen as a Weberian ideal type insofar as through her we can perceive the profile of the development of candomblé in the Southeast region of Brazil. Georgina is black, born in Bahia, "the centre of this religion in Brazil," and predestined to belong to candomblé in the double function of heiress of her grandmother's orixás and a priestess. She moves to Rio de Janeiro, where she frequents candomblé and umbanda terreiros, attends a sermon given by Pastor McAlister and for a year shuttles between the church and the terreiro, revealing just how difficult it was for her to abandon her earlier religious practice. Finally, she accepts the 'Lord's supper' and dedicates herself to preaching the new truth to her former brothers and sisters from the 'spirit faith.' In describing Georgina's point of view, the book appears to reach a climax when the heroin, at the request of another recently converted saint-mother, impiously destroys the *peji* (altar) of her terreiro.

In this book, McAlister describes the sources of spiritism⁴ in Brazil and cites passages in the Bible that lend support to his condemnation. Curiously, he alleges that certain candomblé ceremonies – such as *ossé* (a rite involving purification by water) and the sacrifice of animals on a stone (*otá*) – were 'stolen' from the ancient laws of God found in Old Testament books such as Leviticus. These laws were, however, reformulated by Jesus Christ, whose final sacrifice signalled the salvation and purification of all those who believe in him. In the two central chapters of the book, the narration passes to Georgina herself, who reveals the rituals of her former religion to which she was submitted or which she conducted, such as initiation (rituals involving shaving her head for Oxum, including herbal baths mixed with blood), the 'trabalhos' (spells) undertaken in cemeteries, despachos using bull brains, dolls for love spells and so on. At the end of her account, she reveals that [...] the people of candomblé believe that the power of the 'trabalhos' resides in the secrets that the saint-mother learns through her vows to the orixás. Today I know perfectly well what these 'secrets' are and where they come from [...]: behind the bloody sacrifices, the offerings, foods and herbal baths; in sum, behind all the 'obligations' there is a malignant and diabolical power at work. The people believe that the orixás are gods, but do not understand that in reality they are forces of evil striving to enter their lives in order to control and later destroy them (1983 [1968]:93).

In this excerpt, Georgina, a kind of alter ego to McAlister, reproduces the logic of candomblé itself in which the ebômis (more long-term members of the cult) are the ones who possess the cult's secrets and slowly reveal them according to the seniority of their interlocutors and the power relations within the religious community itself. However, being a 'converted saint-mother,' the legitimacy of her radical revelation (the 'secret of the secrets') is simultaneously bolstered by two systems of legitimation: Afro-Brazilian and Pentecostal. Because of this, the book comprises a kind of dialogic overlapping of these two religious systems: in the central chapters, Georgina appears in her 'journey towards God' described in the first person; in the initial and final chapters, we read McAlister's account of his journey to the hideaways of the Devil (candomblé and umbanda) to condemn them and invite their practitioners to free themselves.

As well as a pioneer in this type of literary production,⁵ McAlister seems to have been the first to use the 'live' possession of believers during his evangelical sermons as a public confrontation of the demons supposedly originating from the Afro-Brazilian cults. According to Ricardo Mariano (1999:131), the pastor at the time "already forced the demons to reveal their presence in the church services, talked to them, discovered their names and identified them with the Afro-Brazilian and spiritist cults."

However, the impact of the practices of the New Life Church on the development of this antagonism against the Afro-Brazilian religions was limited. Despite using radio broadcasts and later being one of the frontrunners in the use of television to transmit its evangelical message, the Church never underwent any significant expansion and survived modestly after the death of its founder in 1993. Its biggest contribution was the training of prominent leaders, such as Edir Macedo and Romildo Ribeiro Soares, who later founded their own churches and gained fame by employing the premises of evangelization in relation to the Afro-Brazilian religions learnt from McAlister.

Edir Macedo, Catholic in background with later experience in umbanda, converted to the New Life Church with which he stayed for more than a decade (Freston 1994:131; Mariano 1999:54). As a dissident of this church, he later founded the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, in 1977, along with Romildo Soares and Roberto Lopes. However, internal power disputes led to the dissolution of the triumvirate, leaving the church under the exclusive command of Edir Macedo. In the following decades, combining an aggressive tactic of proselytism, investment in televisual media and the intensification of the spiritual war against rival denominations, the Universal Church became the neo-Pentecostal movements best known and most influential church. In the print media, the attack began from the Church's very first publications. As Ronaldo Almeida (1996:38) mentions:

The Universal Church's first publication was the magazine *Plenitude*, created shortly after the church's foundation and, since its first issue, the attacks on Umbanda and Candomblé have been prevalent among the main topics. The *Folha Universal*, which later replaced the magazine, every week includes reports on the harm caused by these religions.

Edir Macedo is also the author of the most widely known and hard-hitting book opposing Afro-Brazilian cults: *Orixás, caboclos & guias. Deuses ou demônios?* (Orixás, caboclos and guides. Gods or demons?).⁶ Published in 1988, this book, whose sales have already exceeded three million copies,⁷ was subject to a legal challenge before being "finally freed by the courts," as the cover declares. A summary of the author's profile and the book is provided in the preface by J. Cabral:

Through the media outlets and churches that have set up in the nooks and crannies of our homeland and abroad, Bishop Macedo has launched a full-scale holy war against all the devil's works. In this book he denounces the satanic manoeuvres behind Kardecism, Umbanda, Candomblé and other similar sects; he exposes the true intentions of the demons that disguise themselves as orixás, exus, erês, and teaches the formula for the possessed person to become free of their control (*apud* Macedo 1996 [1988]:20).

Orixás, caboclos & guias. Deuses ou demônios? reworks the structure and central themes of *Mãe-de-santo*. However, keen to ensure there is no doubt over the 'correct answer' to the title's question, it presents more detailed arguments in a much more aggressive tone of condemnation and warns of the dangers faced by those who worship the pantheon in question.

According to the biblical exegesis pursued in Macedo's book, demons exist and are creatures of God who, envious of their creator, fell into disgrace and have disputed the celestial throne ever since. As disembodied spirits, they try to take over people's bodies to inflict them with sickness and misfortune, and distance them from God. The fight of humans against demons is, therefore, a result of the war waged by these demons against God. In addition, for humans, any victory over the devil means recognizing the sacrifice made by Jesus in the name of all humanity – hence it is in his name (his sacrificial blood) that the victory over evil and the attainment of eternal salvation is invoked.

Macedo claims that it is especially easy for demons can take over humans when the latter frequent candomblé, umbanda and spiritist terreiros or perform magical practices (such as trabalhos and despachos); have, or once had, family members or close friends involved in such practices (in the case of relatives, the devil can attack their kin even after they are dead; in this case, people are said to possess a 'hereditary demon'); eat food offered to the orixás and, in sum, fail to accept Jesus fully into their hearts – that is, lack the Holy Spirit in their lives. However, even when these factors are absent, demonic possession can still occur simply through the "evilness of the demon itself." The 'evidence' that Afro-Brazilian religions are diabolical comes from their performance of animal sacrifices, the trances caused by spirit possession, worshipping of the dead, the use of magic to cause harm, etc.

Following the example of the book *Mãe-de-santo*, Macedo's work provides a supposedly 'objective' description of these religions, based on numerous testimonies from former members of Afro-Brazilian cults who converted to the UCKG,⁸ as well as on the experience of the author himself as a former participant of umbanda and on a handwritten notebook of 'fundamentals' ('secret knowledge') given to the author by a former saint-mother.⁹

Aside from the similarities existing between the books of McAlister and Macedo,¹⁰ what makes the publication of the latter more convincing in terms of its intended objectives is the use of abundant illustrations that exploit the rich aesthetic and ritualistic dimension of Afro-Brazilian religions in order to condemn them as demonic. On the cover, a photo of the orixá Oxalá (dressed in white) is reproduced on a red and black background (the colours of Exu),¹¹ with a statue of a caboclo and Saint George in front of him, with strings of beads, small jars and so on. At the centre, a skull is surrounded by a circle of lit candles. Obviously, it depicts an assembly of elements in the stylized form of a 'despacho' (ritual offering) and, for this very reason, produces a powerful and highly suggestive image, especially given the associations that it induces through its combination of the funereal (the skull), the threatening (the caboclo with his club raised ready for combat) and the mysterious (the liturgical elements).

Inside the book, the captions accompanying the photos claim to disclose their 'true meanings.' At the start of the book, for example, the reproduction of an invite to a candomblé festival, featuring a trident as an emblem, carries the following caption: "The devil's trident reveals the purpose of this ritual" (:27). A photo of an image of a pombagira is followed by the phrases: "In many women, the pombagira causes cancer of the uterus and ovaries, sexual frigidity and other diseases. Her actions are held responsible for behaviours linked to illicit sexual practices and other situations involving sinful sensuality" (:36).¹² But the biggest impact comes from the photographic reproduction of countless scenes of secret initiation rituals, such as the *orô* (the moment when the animal is sacrificed over the initiate's head). These scenes are, indeed, the 'Achilles heel' of the Afro-Brazilian cults, especially when taken out of context, looking to portray these religions as 'bloody,' 'savage' or 'primitive.' The photos of an animal sacrifice performed over the head of a female initiate and of followers kneeling before a *congá* (altar) bear

the following captions: “The making of the head! At this stage the follower has already made a pact with the demons. Only Jesus can free him” (Macedo 1996:77); “Graduation party, where the followers are presented with a legion of demons to work with them” (:65).

However, according to the book the biggest ‘evidence’ for the action of the devil resides in the murder of people in Afro-Brazilian rituals, reported by the press under headlines of the kind reproduced in the book: “They killed a young woman to make a despacho” (:46); “The police found brains and other human organs, among them a heart, at the site of the despacho” (:56); “Baby victim of Satanism” (:109); “Man knifed to death in umbanda ritual” (:109). Although these facts occurred as the reports attest, they are clearly not practices typical of Afro-Brazilian religious systems. Nonetheless, the book’s author is convinced that these religions are behind all these events, hence photos of people killed like animals in rituals (with their bodies covered in blood) are placed side-by-side with people lying down in an initiation room (with their bodies covered in the ritual blood of animals). The purpose of this sequence of images seems to be to express a logic prescribing that where animals are killed over humans, humans may be killed like animals.¹³

Captions to photos of children taking part in the rituals also reinforce the negative stereotype of the religion: “These children, having been involved with the orixás, are certain to receive poor grades at school and will become problem teenagers” (:50).

According to the book, the references to Afro-Brazilian religions found in public spaces also demonstrate the expansion of the devil’s action beyond the walls of the terreiros. Beneath the photo of the statue of Iemanjá, located on the São Paulo coast, we read: “Iemanjá, in Umbanda, is the same Virgin Mary of the Catholic religion. Many other saints are associated with demons” (:53). Photos of the nameplates of commercial establishments bearing the names of orixás (Gráfica Oxum, Restaurante Xangô etc.) or sculptures of orixás, very common in Salvador, are also subject to criticism (:80,153).

Following the path opened by *Mãe-de-santo*, as well as *Orixás, caboclos & guias. Deuses ou demônios?*, many other books written by neo-Pentecostal pastors have helped delimit an area of growing interest in the religious literature. Another such case is the book *Espiritismo, a magia do engano* (‘Spiritism, the magic of the swindle’), whose author, the missionary Romildo Ribeiro Soares (or R.R. Soares), severed ties with Edir Macedo and founded the International Church of the Grace of God, in 1980. From the pulpit of this church, he also roused the faithful to combat the ‘Afro-Brazilian devils,’ without, however, ever threatening to supplant the leading role played by Macedo in this area.¹⁴ The literature in question has also diversified and extended its focus of attack to other religions considered ‘heresies’ or ‘sects.’¹⁵

While the cited books provide an introduction to the promotional literature grounding the “theology of the spiritual battle,”¹⁶ it is primarily on the level of ritual acts that its message has been the most effective and has acquired greater visibility, both inside the Pentecostal churches and beyond. Below I examine some examples of Pentecostal actions against the presence of the devil associated with Afro-Brazilian religions.

The ‘devil’ in practice

For us to be able to gain a better understanding of the nature and extent of the instances of neo-Pentecostal attacks¹⁷ on Afro-Brazilian religions, I have collected information on these incidents published in the printed press and in the academic literature over the past few years and classified

them according to a number of criteria: 1. Attacks made within the space of neo-Pentecostal church services and through their channels of divulgation and proselytism; 2. Physical aggressions against terreiros and their members; 3. Attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies perpetrated in public locations or on symbols of these religions found in such spaces; 4. Attacks on other symbols of African heritage in Brazil that have some connection to Afro-Brazilian religions; 5. Attacks arising from alliances between Evangelical churches and politicians; and, finally, 6. Public responses (political and judicial) from the adherents of Afro-Brazilian religions. I turn to some representative cases from each group.

1. As we have seen above, the attacks made in the context of the ritual practices of neo-Pentecostal churches and their channels of divulgation and proselytism stem from a theology grounded in the idea that the cause of most of the world's ills can be attributed to the presence of the devil, who is generally associated with the gods of other religious denominations. According to this view, the faithful must continue the work of fighting these demons first begun by Jesus Christ: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The Afro-Brazilian pantheon in particular is a target of this attack, especially the category of *exu*, which was initially associated with the Christian devil and later accepted as such by a large portion of the *povo-de-santo*, especially adherents of umbanda.

Inside the Neo-Pentecostal churches, sessions are frequently held to exorcise (or 'unload,' in the UCKG's terminology) these entities, which are called upon to incorporate the person before being disqualified or expelled as a form of spiritual release of the believer. From the pulpits, this attack is extended to religious television programs (*Fala que eu te escuto*, *Ponto de luz*, *Pare de sofrer*, *Show da fé* etc.) transmitted by the Rede Record network (owned by the UCKG) and by other TV networks with time slots bought by the neo-Pentecostal churches. Many of these programs show "reconstructions of real cases" or dramatizations in which symbols and elements from Afro-Brazilian religions are depicted as spiritual means for obtaining malefic results only: the death of enemies, the spread of disease, the separation of couples or love tangles, family disagreements, etc. Such programs also commonly include testimonies of conversion from people claiming to be past frequenters of terreiros, who are interviewed by the pastor and 'confess' the harm they inflicted with the help of Afro-Brazilian entities (referred to as *encostos*, 'props,' 'supports'). The most heavily exploited testimonies are from those claiming to be former priests of Afro-Brazilian religions, called *ex-pais-de-encosto*, 'ex-prop-fathers,' who explain in detail how they made despachos and the malevolent intentions behind them.

The vast communication network developed by these churches also includes radio programs, internet sites and religious promotional material (books, newspapers, magazines and leaflets), such as the *Folha Universal* and the magazine *Plenitude*, both published by the UCKG. The best-sellers already mentioned, *Orixás, caboclos e guias. Deuses ou demônios* and *Espiritismo. A magia do engano*, are evidently among the most widely known.

2. Incited by this belief, members of neo-Pentecostal churches very often invade terreiros with the intent of destroying altars, smashing images and 'exorcising' their frequenters, actions which usually end in physical aggression. In the Abolição district of Rio de Janeiro, umbanda followers from the Frei da Luz Brothers Spiritist Centre were attacked with stones by members of an UCKG church located nearby.¹⁸ A follower of the Antônio de Angola Spiritist Tent, in the district of Irajá, was held captive for two days in an Evangelical church in Duque de Caxias, with the objective of getting her to renounce her belief and convert to Evangelism.¹⁹

In Salvador, described as the "capital of macumbaria" or the "Sodom and Gomorrah of black magic" by neo-Pentecostals, the house of a candomblé initiate in the Tancredo Neves district was

invaded by 30 followers of the International Church of the Grace of God, who hurled coarse salt and sulphur at the people gathered there for a religious ceremony.²⁰ These substances are also frequently thrown at cars with bead necklaces (*guias*) hanging from their rear-view mirrors.²¹

In São Luís, the capital of Maranhão state, leaders of the Terreiro do Justino, located in Vila Embratel, were accused by members of the local Assembly of God of kidnapping a baby, the child of a couple belonging to this church who lived nearby. They believed that the baby had been taken to be sacrificed during the terreiro's rites.²² They called the police, who, despite lacking a search warrant, rifled the temple's premises, including the sacred rooms barred to non-initiates. Even the house's fridge and the cars parked in the yard were subject to the police search. The investigation was only halted when the real kidnappers of the child were captured. The terreiro, founded in 1896, is one of the oldest in the city and has been facing pressure from Evangelicals in the district for it to be shut down and relocated elsewhere.²³ In fact, this is a strategy adopted by pastors who after setting up in the districts, identify the region's terreiros and establish deadlines for closing them.²⁴

In the Engenho Velho da Federação district of Salvador, where around 19 candomblé terreiros exist (famous for their tradition, such as Casa Branca and Gantois), the confrontations have been intensifying. In a demonstration of their strength, the Evangelical churches organized a march to intimidate the followers of 'demons' in the neighbourhood. In response, the 'povo-de-santo' (adherents of Afro-Brazilian religions) took to the streets dressed in white, a colour associated with peace and Oxalá, the orixá of creation within the candomblé cosmology.²⁵ Other examples of this kind of attack include disrupting the terreiros' ritual activities through a variety of means. A saint-mother from Cidade Tiradentes, in São Paulo, complained that a loudspeaker car, hired by a nearby neo-Pentecostal church, was circling endlessly and sometimes stopping in front of her terreiro to announce the 'unloading sessions' held at the church over its blaring loudspeakers.²⁶

3. When the religious activities (orixá festivals, offerings, processions, etc.) are performed in public places (beaches, forests, waterfalls, roads, squares and schools), the followers are more exposed to these attacks; these may range from the simple distribution of leaflets with propaganda against these cults to direct attempts to disrupt rituals. During a festival for Iemanjá on Leme beach, Rio de Janeiro, Neo-Pentecostals preached against this ceremony with the help of loudspeakers and destroyed the presents offered to this entity associated with the sea. The same happened during a festival of erês (child entities) held in Quinta da Boa Vista, when neo-Pentecostals smashed images and burnt candomblé clothing.²⁷

Symbols of Afro-Brazilian religions placed in public spaces may also be attacked. The revitalization of the Dique do Tororó artificial lake, including the installation of sculptures of orixás by the Salvador city council, provoked a wave of protest from Evangelical churches condemning this act of "exalting a diabolic religion," "associated with evil." From their viewpoint, the latter should be 'exorcised' rather than honoured by the local public authority. The latter justified its action by arguing that rather than being specific religious symbols, the images of the orixás comprise part of Bahian culture. In fact, sculptures and images depicting Afro-Brazilian gods are dispersed across many other parts of the Bahian capital, such as streets, squares and buildings, with their names being used, including officially, to identify some of these places and commercial and cultural establishments. There is strong opposition to this practice, though. The director of one school, in the Stella Maris district, had to order the removal of a picture of the orixá Ogum included on a mural at the school following pressure from Evangelical parents.²⁸

In São Paulo, defacements of the statue of Iemanjá in Praia Grande have been registered, including attempts to remove it (Mariano 1999:123). Religious intolerance may also be manifested in shared public spaces or transportation, as seen in the case of a woman who was expelled from a bus in the north zone of Rio de Janeiro for wearing a white turban typical of these religions.²⁹

4. Symbols of the African heritage in Brazil, even those which are not directly religious, but which allude to Afro-Brazilian religions in some form, are stigmatized and combated. In Rio de Janeiro, pressure from neo-Pentecostal churches caused the departure of many members of the child drum section of the 'Toca o Bonde – Usina de Gente,' a non-governmental organization that teaches music to needy children and teenagers from communities in the Santa Teresa region. Evangelical parents removed their children from this NGO, alleging that samba is linked to 'devil worshipping.' From this point of view, samba schools are 'schools of the devil.'³⁰

Another aspect of the disqualification of these symbols is, paradoxically, their 'incorporation' into Evangelical practices, though dissociated from Afro-Brazilian religions. An example is the emergence of the 'capoeira of Christ,' evangelical or gospel, whose lyrics omit any reference to the orixás or to Catholic saints. The 1st National Meeting of Evangelical Capoeiristas took place in 2005, in Goiânia, with the key theme of "God – the true ancestor of capoeira."³¹ Here we find a refutation of any contribution of African ancestry or spirituality to the development of capoeira, as can be seen in the mention of 'God' as the 'true ancestor' of this practice, which was originally closely related to candomblé. Another example is the 'acarajé of the Lord' made by Evangelical women wishing to dissociate this food from the Afro-Brazilian religions (acarajé is a food offered to Iansã) and the image of the Bahian women who traditionally sell the food dressed in white skirts and bead necklaces – clothing typical to the terreiros and famous nationally.

Following the recent decision of the Ministry of Education to include the theme "Afro-Brazilian History and Culture" in the official national school curriculum,³² textbooks covering this topic have started to be produced. Since the Afro-Brazilian religions are part of this history and culture, their specific characteristics have been treated in a non-sectarian or proselytizing form, as befits educational material designed for lay teaching based on humanist values and tolerance of cultural diversity. However, placing religions of African origin in school books side-by-side with hegemonic religions, such as Christianity, giving them the same space and legitimacy, has by itself generated protests. This is what happened with a collection of textbooks designed for primary education, launched by a São Paulo publisher. In the volume indicated for the second grade, in the chapter "Our African Roots," the author describes the development of Afro-Brazilian religions, including exercises encouraging children to research the history of the orixás. An evangelical director of studies from Belfort Roxo, Rio de Janeiro, complained to the publisher, alleging that the book was an apologia for Afro-Brazilian religions and stating that it would not be adopted in her school, where the majority of students and teachers, according to her, were evangelical. The same collection also generated protests in the city council of Pato Branco, Paraná, where a councillor – an evangelical pastor – called the work the 'book of the devil' and demanded the withdrawal of the collection.³³ It is worth remembering that the educational material in question was assessed and obtained a highly favourable report, with recommendation from the guide to the Textbook National Plan (PNLD-2004).³⁴

5. As we can ascertain from the previous case, the election of Evangelical candidates, or candidates allied to these churches, has seen the battle against other denominations extended to representative politics. Evangelical politicians have used their new found powers to coordinate actions to stifle the development of Afro-Brazilian religions. In Rio Grande do Sul, pressure from these politicians, combined with support from animal protection societies, has led to the State

Animal Protection Code being used to try to prevent ritual sacrifices in candomblé. A specific paragraph from this Code – eventually rejected after pressure from Afro-Brazilian religions – banned the performance of any religious ceremony involving the death of animals.³⁵ Even so, based on interpretations of this Code, judicial actions have been successfully brought against Afro-Brazilian priests, such as the case of the saint-mother Gissele Maria Monteiro da Silva, from Rio Grande, sentenced to 30 days imprisonment for performing animal sacrifices on her terreiro.³⁶

6. In the face of these attacks, the responses from Afro-Brazilian religions and their allies, which were negligible two decades ago, have grown. However, they are still some distance from constituting a unified movement capable of opposing the organization of the evangelical groups on equal terms, with the latter striving to consolidate its presence among the media and in the Legislature and Executive. Initially the response took the form of protests, such as that of the state deputy and umbandista Átila Nunes who, in 1981, asked the then Minister of Justice, Ibrahim Abi Ackel, to take action on the issue.³⁷ At the end of the 1980s, Edir Macedo was sued by the National Deliberative Council of Umbanda and Afro-Brazilian Cults for denigration of a religious cult, slander and libel, which led to a brief lull in the intensity of the attacks during this period.³⁸

The ceasefire was short-lived: by the mid 1990s, the attack on an image of Our Lady of Aparecida, made by a UCKG bishop during a television program – an incident that became infamous as the ‘kicking of the saint’ – provoked a strong reaction from diverse sectors of Brazilian society, placing this neo-Pentecostal church in a difficult situation.³⁹ The episode was exemplary in two ways. Firstly, it showed that when the UCKG’s attacks are directly targeted at the symbols of a majoritarian and hegemonic religion, such as Catholicism, their effectiveness is heavily curtailed. The same, though, does not apply to the attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions, which have generally proven to be effective, both in terms of converting followers and in tainting the public image of these religious traditions. Secondly, it showed the adherents of Afro-Brazilian religions the need to respond in a more organized form to try to preserve the relative degree of acceptance and legitimacy won from society so arduously.

As a result, over the last few years a number of movements in defence of Afro-Brazilian religions have been formed, and legal actions have been pursued by *babalorixás* and *ialorixás* (saint-fathers and mothers) against pastors and/or their churches. Bahia is currently the state with the highest number of recorded instances of this type of response. According to surveys published in a newspaper,⁴⁰ there have been almost 200 complaints and processes recorded over the last seven years, including legal actions for defamation against Evangelical priests and their followers (and against some Catholic priests) for publicly claiming that Afro-Brazilian religions are demonic, distributing leaflets containing these claims (generally at public festivals of orixás), presenting television programs denigrating symbols from these religions, or attacking terreiros and their members.

The Public Prosecutor’s Office has played an important role in this process, though the slowness of the lower criminal courts where the legal actions are processed tends to discourage systematic action on the part of victims. Additionally, the latter generally lack sufficient knowledge of the workings of the judicial system to be able to achieve more effective results. Aware of these difficulties and attempting to create forums for debate and quicker procedures for processing the legal actions, civil rights defence groups are proposing the creation of a specific court for cases involving racial and religious discrimination.⁴¹

Despite the problems, these legal actions are beginning to achieve favourable results for the adherents of Afro-Brazilian religions. The Evangelical churches responsible for programs considered offensive to Afro-Brazilian religions, and the television networks that broadcast them,

are being warned. In Bahia, there are numerous lawsuits under way, some of them with sentences already passed.⁴² Screening times for the program *Ponto de Luz*, produced by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), were altered (revising its age classification), with a ban on pejorative references to Afro-Brazilian religions.⁴³ In São Paulo, the television networks (Record, Rede Mulher and others) that present offensive programs (*Sessão Descarrego*, *Mistérios* etc.) were ordered to broadcast the right of response from representatives of Afro-Brazilian religions.⁴⁴

The most famous response to public attack is that of Mother Gilda (Gildásia dos Santos e Santos) from the Axé Abassá de Ogum, in Itapuã, Bahia, who took part in a protest in 1992 against the Collor government, having been photographed by the magazine *Veja* next to a despacho.⁴⁵ This image was later used in 1999 in an issue of the *Folha Universal* (published by the UCKG)⁴⁶ next to the headline “Charlatan macumbeiros hurt the purses and lives of their clients – The swindle market grows in Brazil, but Procon is watching.” This publication and the subsequent invasion of her terreiro by members of the God is Love Church, who tried to ‘exorcise her,’ led the ialorixá to take legal action against her attackers and slanderers. Mother Gilda died soon after, at the age of 65, from a massive heart attack – according to her family, a direct result of these events, which had left her deeply perturbed.⁴⁷ In 2004, the Courts ordered the Universal Church and its printing house to pay R\$ 1,372,000 in compensation to the family of the saint-mother for improper use of her image (R\$1.00 for each copy of the newspaper published with the story).⁴⁸ The emblematic nature of this case led the Salvador council that same year to turn the date of the ialorixá’s death, January 21st 2000, into “Municipal Day Against Religious Intolerance.”

The book *Orixás, caboclos e guias. Deuses ou demônios?* is another publication currently being questioned in the courts. In Bahia, the State Attorney’s Office sent the Attorney General’s Office a request to remove the book from circulation on the basis of considering it offensive to Afro-Brazilian religions.⁴⁹ In Rio de Janeiro in 2004, the courts ordered the UCKG and the Editora Gráfica Universal, responsible for publishing the book, to pay R\$ 120,000 for improper use of the image of the teenager Ricardo Navarro, who appears in a photo, four years old at the time, playing an atabaque drum at the terreiro of his grandmother, the ialorixá Palmira de Iansã, in Mesquita. According to the photo’s caption: “These children, having been involved with the orixás, are certain to receive poor grades at school and will become problem teenagers.” The ialorixá had already sued the publishing house ten years earlier for use of the image of three children at her terreiro, which appears in the book and was reprinted in the *Folha Universal* newspaper to illustrate a report entitled “Children of the devil.” The publishers were ordered to pay 20 minimum wages to the families of the three children. One of these children, today a teenager, recalls that she was the victim of school bullying around the time: “I was called a macumbeira, worshipping a religion of the devil.”⁵⁰

The followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, perceiving the need to defend themselves from these neo-Pentecostal attacks, have worked to coordinate their actions, overcoming the traditional divergences existing between the various religious denominations (candomblé and umbanda, for example) and between the different models of worship within each of them (Ketu and Angolan candomblé, and so on). Historically, these religions evolved much more through divergences than convergences around collective representative bodies. The federative organization developed by spiritist centres, for example, was adopted with some success by umbanda terreiros, but made little inroads among candomblé terreiros. Even so, some federative bodies have sought to establish dialogues with other agents from public authorities, the black movement, non-governmental organizations, and so on.

In Bahia, the Movement Against Religious Intolerance was founded in 2000 following the combined efforts of a number of these organizations, such as the Bahian Afro Cult Federation, the Centre of Afro-Oriental Studies (of the Federal University of Bahia), the Egbé – Black Territories Program (developed by Koinonia – Ecumenical Presence and Services), and has since been joined by other like institutions. In São Paulo, the Institute of Afro-Brazilian Tradition and Culture (Intecab) and the Commission of Afrodescendent Religious Affairs are also looking to organizing the religious community, coordinating demonstrations and protests against religious discrimination and alerting people to the need to elect politicians sympathetic to the interests of Afro-Brazilian religions.⁵¹

The Umbanda Senior Council of the State of São Paulo and the Union of Umbanda and Candomblé Tents of Brazil have been taking out legal actions against Evangelical pastors.⁵² In Rio Grande do Sul, the Afro-Brazilian Religion Defence Commission (CDRAB), set up in 2002, and the cult federations of the state capital are organizing to elect candidates from the religious community, and to respond to the action of Evangelical politicians, as in the case cited above involving the attempt to ban animal sacrifices in terreiros.

Another resistance strategy adopted by Afro-Brazilian groups has been to seek support within the ecumenical movement, bearing in mind that the neo-Pentecostal onslaught is also targeted at other religions, principally Catholicism. Aside from the abovementioned episode of the ‘kicking of the saint,’ public manifestations of Catholic faith are subject to attack, such as the tumults provoked by neo-Pentecostal believers during Catholic processions like the ‘Corpse of Jesus’ celebrated on Good Friday,⁵³ or popular pilgrimages, such as those of Father Cícero in Juazeiro do Norte.⁵⁴ To this we can add the fact that the pope himself is described as “the devil’s representative on Earth,” while priests and bishops are labelled as practitioners of paedophilia and homoeroticism (Mariano 1999:124). Through the ecumenical movement, the Afro-Brazilian cults can also encounter solidarity from Evangelical churches that disagree with and condemn the attacks perpetrated by the more intolerant neo-Pentecostal denominations.⁵⁵

Overall, the development of Afro-Brazilian religions was marked by the need to create strategies for survival and dialogue in the face of adverse conditions. These religions were persecuted by the Catholic church over four centuries; by the republican State, especially in the first half of the 20th century when the latter used agencies of police repression and social control, along with mental health services, to suppress the religions; and finally by social elites and their perennial mixture of disdain and fascination for the exoticism that has always been associated with the cultural manifestations of Africans and their descendents in Brazil.

However, at least since the 1960s when these religions won a degree of legitimacy in urban centres – the result of movements promoting cultural revival and political awareness, including alliances with members of the middle class, academics and artists, among other factors – there had been no examples of the emergence of antagonists so committed to the attempt to disqualify them. Although incipient, therefore, the alliance of Afro-Brazilian religious groups with the black movement, NGOs, academics, researchers, politicians, lawyers, public prosecutors and others, appear to reaffirm the capacity of these religions to resist and respond to a form of external harassment and aggression that is proportionally much more effective and – to judge by its current demographic growth – set to be long-lasting. Another question that these antagonisms suggest is the potential disappearance of a particular image of Brazil in which Afro-Brazilian religions were associated with a “Brazilian way of being” (in figures such as the *malandro*, ‘rascal,’ represented by Exu, or the “smart and sensual woman,” represented by pombagira), whose epithet is the much renowned ‘jeitinho,’ or ‘knack,’ a way of resolving problems or conflicts that mixes the spheres of the public and the private, the ‘favour’ and the ‘right.’ It is

worth examining how neo-Pentecostalism seems to add new twists to this interpretation of the Brazilian imaginary.

Neither *malandro*, nor *caxias* – ‘favour’ and ‘right’ as mediators

In their article “Duas respostas à aflição: umbanda e pentecostalismo” (Two responses to affliction: umbanda and Pentecostalism), Peter Fry and Gare Howe (1975) ask how the coexistence of these two religious movements was possible among a public with the same sociological profile (workers and urban immigrants), given their profound differences in terms of organization and cosmology. They concluded that each represented a distinct and opposed way of interpreting and dealing with the same afflictions of Brazilian society. Pentecostalism, a descendent of Wesleyan Methodism, is, they argue, more closely related to the world of order (or of the *caxias* [stickler, disciplinarian], to use the dichotomy proposed by Roberto DaMatta 1979), in which the renunciation of the diversions and pleasures of the body (drinks, sex etc.), in favour of a strict morality, created a clear separation between believers and non-believers. The world of Christ is not to be confused with the world of the Devil – the worshipping of the “spirits of the darkness” attributed to umbanda being the main criticism levelled by Pentecostals against this religion. In other words, the first movement finds a way of dealing with the disorder and inequality of social life in the ascetic order imposed by its belief system. The second, without denying the existence of this disorder, seeks out its own mediators in the attempt to manipulate the mundane world magically to one’s own profit.

On one hand (umbanda) we have the idea of the world as something manipulable, the world of the ‘broken branch’ and the ‘malandro’ (DaMatta 1973), where the individual negotiates a path through life based on the personal manipulation of social resources. On the other hand (Pentecostalism) we find a world perceived as essentially ‘rational,’ in the Weberian sense (Fry & Howe 1975:82).

For Peter Fry, in a later work in which he compares umbanda in São Paulo with the Methodism practiced in Manchester in the 19th century, the term ‘despacho’ (ritual offering) and its derivatives, used both in the context of umbanda and in official bureaucracy, provide an insight into understanding the form in which the social experience of groups lacking legitimate right of access to the State is reflected on the level of the religious imaginary: “The *despachantes* [makers of despachos] and local politicians mediate between the State and the common man, just as the spirits of umbanda mediate their relation with a distant and disinterested God.” Consequently, the ‘spirits of the darkness’ (principally Exu), whose favour one asks through the despacho, are just as fundamental in this system as the ‘spirits of the light:’ “Exu of midnight/ Exu of the crossroads/ The people of umbanda/ Without Exu manage nothing’.”(Fry 1982:40).

The new factor that has been transforming this setting, since it was first analyzed 30 years ago by these authors, is the development of neo-Pentecostalism, which by distancing itself from classical Pentecostalism and shifting closer to umbanda and other Afro-Brazilian religions – albeit only to negate them – has translated the ethos of magical and personal manipulation to its own system, but now *under new management*, replacing ‘favours’ with ‘rights.’ The sociological base shared by Pentecostals and umbanda adherents, which fed the ‘double response to affliction’ – opposite and distinct – as Fry and Howe pointed out, has very probably enabled the emergence of this “third response to affliction,” which appropriates the two previous possibilities in its own way. In other words, neo-Pentecostalism, by ‘softening’ its asceticism and the stereotype of the

'believer' of historical Protestantism, ended up valorizing earthly pleasures and encouraging the consumption of material goods as signs of salvation.

By opening itself up to the contemporary world and consumer society in particular (including the "consumption of the body"), neo-Pentecostalism achieved a highly productive mediation between the religious ethos of traditional Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian conceptions, historically marked by their opening to the world (in which the sacred assumes the appearance of the mundane, rather than the contrary). Symptomatically, this shift towards Afro-Brazilian religious cosmologies elected the figure of Exu (or of the "spirits of the darkness"), originally invoked in the umbanda sessions and now in the neo-Pentecostal sessions of exorcism or 'unloading,' as its key element of mediation and inversion. In neo-Pentecostalism, in contrast to the invocations found in umbanda, Exu is not called upon to act as a messenger or a 'subject of the favour.' His function now is to manifest in order to be expelled in the name of the healing and salvation of the possessed individual. No longer the dwelling-place of the malign, the released person "expels the favour" (which in the umbanda system always left him at the mercy of the despachos) and imposes his 'right' to divine grace, speaking directly with his or her celestial master par excellence. The neo-Pentecostal literature is filled with book titles alluding to the follower's need to assume the role of someone who "demands his rights," who "takes possession of the blessing."⁵⁶ Hence, while they fight 'witchcraft,' these churches do not discard the magic implicit in their liturgies and their use of lexical and symbolic elements from the Afro-Brazilian religions.⁵⁷

The rites for expelling the demon and healing (and many others) also represent the return to magical rituals as a crucial dimension of the practice of faith and of the mechanisms for obtaining salvation or grace. This dimension, which had been expelled from Methodism, reappears in a certain form in Pentecostalism (with the revival of the sacred in the baptism of the Holy Spirit), but is reintroduced on a large scale only in neo-Pentecostalism, moving this sector closer to the Afro-Brazilian religions, one of whose structuring elements is the routinization of rites (Silva 1995). However, since the use of a lexicon only makes sense within a community that shares its meanings – or, in Lévi-Straussian terms, when the 'ensorcelled,' 'sorcerer' and 'group' share the meanings of the symbols used –, the introduction of certain rites requires familiarity with their lexicon and grammar. By disseminating this grammar in the form of books, television programs, "interviews with the devil," and so on, neo-Pentecostalism succeeds in exploiting it effectively in its rites of healing and exorcism. As Fry & Howe (1975:90) emphasize:

[...] we can deduce that there is a greater likelihood of a 'miraculous' cure when the symbols employed possess meaning for the patient. We can argue, therefore, that one powerful motive for an individual to join a religious association may be the meaningfulness of the belief and ritual.

Indeed, books such as *Mãe-de-santo* and *Orixás, caboclos e guias*, among many others seem like 'sorcery manuals' that first present in detail the Afro-Brazilian and spiritist religious systems, with information taken preferentially from their former participants, and subsequently condemn them based on biblical scripture, finally teaching the converted reader to distance him or herself from these systems with the help of the pastors and their rites. The frequent exorcisms contribute hugely to this apprenticeship, since they interconnect these different belief systems. Edir Macedo (1996:121) himself recognizes that

If someone enters the church at the moment when people are being released, he might even imagine that he is in a macumba centre – and indeed that is what it looks like [...] Someone might think: "How can they 'bring down' these spirits in a church, in a House

of God?.” Above all, we must remember that the people in whom the infernal spirits manifest themselves did not encounter the latter in the church: they were already inside them.

For these spirits to enter the bodies of people as exus and leave as demons, an operation is required in which the meanings of the two reference systems (neo-Pentecostal and Afro-Brazilian) previously overlap and interpenetrate, one at the service of the symbolic efficacy of the other. If not, not only is it impossible to answer whether the orixás, caboclos and guides are gods or demons, the question itself makes no sense. Before the terms swap place from one system to another, equivalences need to be established between them on the basis of the positions that they occupy in their own systems and in the systems that receive them.⁵⁸

In sum, by combating the Afro-Brazilian terreiros – in the name of evangelization and spiritual release – the neo-Pentecostal churches forge a separation of these two religious fields. This separation stimulates the growth of these churches through the capture of followers and clients from the terreiros and the denigration of the latter’s public image. Inversely, though, there is an intermingling of these fields that bring them together, as has been shown by various authors writing on this topic.

This claim becomes tangible when we observe that the literary production, religious conceptions, uses of orality and trance, and cosmogonies, rites and liturgies making up the neo-Pentecostal theology provide a ‘pedagogy’ in which the lexicon and grammar of the system under attack are exploited to its own benefit. Making use of the magical-religious logic of the other is the first step towards ensuring the functional effectiveness of this logic when applied to its own system on the basis of other premises. The ‘inversion’ – also a ‘version’ – only makes sense when what is inverted is known. Ultimately, though, both of them, versions and inversions alike, depend on each other to extend their meanings and, through contrast, affirm their identities.

Bibliography

- ABIMBOLA, Wande. 1973. “The Yoruba concept of human personality.” In: *La notion de personne en Afrique Noire*. Colloques Internationales du C.N.R.S., 544:73-89.
- AMARAL, Rita. 2002. *Xirê! O modo de crer e de viver no candomblé*. Rio de Janeiro: Educ/Pallas.
- ALMEIDA, Ronaldo. 1996. A universalização do Reino de Deus. Master’s Dissertation in Social Anthropology, Unicamp, São Paulo.
- BIRMAN, Patrícia. 2001. “Conexões políticas e bricolagens: questões sobre pentecostalismo.” In: P. Sanchis (ed.), *Fiéis & cidadãos: percursos de sincretismo no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ. pp. 59-86.
- _____. 1994. “Cultos de possessão e pentecostalismo no Brasil: passagens.” *Religião e Sociedade*, 17(1/2):90-109.
- _____. 1997. “Males e malefícios no discurso neopentecostal” In: P. Birman; R. Novaes & S. Crespo (eds.), *O mal à brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ. pp. 62-80.

- BRUMANA, Fernando & MARTÍNEZ, Elda. 1991. *Marginália sagrada*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp.
- CAMARGO, Cândido Procópio de. 1961. *Kardecismo e umbanda*. São Paulo: Pioneira.
- CAVALCANTI, Maria Laura Viveiros de Castro. 1990. "Espiritismo." In: *Sinais dos tempos: diversidade religiosa no Brasil*. Cadernos do ISER, 23:147-155.
- DaMATTA, Roberto. 1979. *Carnavais, malandros e heróis: Para uma sociologia do dilema brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.
- FRESTON, Paul. 1994. "Breve história do pentecostalismo brasileiro." In: A. Antoniazzi et al. (eds.), *Nem anjos, nem demônios*. Petrópolis: Vozes. pp. 67-159.
- FRY, Peter H. 1982. "Manchester, século XIX, e São Paulo, século XX: dois movimentos religiosos." In: *Para inglês ver*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar. pp. 21-46.
- _____. 2005. *A persistência da raça*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- _____. & HOWE, Gire Nigel. 1975. "Duas respostas à aflição: umbanda e pentecostalismo." *Debate e Crítica*, 6:75-94.
- GEISLER, Geisler & RHODES, Ron. 2004. *Resposta às seitas. Um manual popular sobre as interpretações equivocadas das seitas*. Rio de Janeiro: Casa Publicadora da Assembléia de Deus.
- GIUMBELLI, Emerson. 2001. "Liberdade religiosa no Brasil contemporâneo: uma discussão a partir do caso da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus." In: R. Kant de Lima (ed.), *Antropologia e direitos humanos*. Niterói: EdUFF. pp. 75-96.
- _____. 2002. "Zélio de Moraes e as origens da umbanda." In: V. Gonçalves da Silva (ed.), *Caminhos da alma*. São Paulo: Selo Negro. pp. 183-218.
- GOLDMAN, Marcio. 1985. "A construção ritual da pessoa: a possessão no candomblé." *Religião e Sociedade*, 12(1):22-55.
- GOMES, Wilson S. 1994. "Nem anjos, nem demônios." In: A. Antoniazzi et al. (eds.), *Nem anjos, nem demônios*. Petrópolis: Vozes. pp. 225-270.
- JUNGBLUT, Airton. 2003. "Os domínios do maligno e seu combate: notas sobre algumas percepções evangélicas atuais acerca do mal." In: B. Lewgoy (ed.), *Debates do NER, IFCH/ UFRGS*, 4:35-42.
- JUSTINO, Mario. 1995. *Nos bastidores do reino: a vida secreta na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*. São Paulo: Geração Editorial.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. 1970. *Antropologia estrutural*. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro.
- LEWIS, Ion M. 1971. *Êxtase religioso*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- MACEDO, Edir. 1996 [1988]. *Orixás, caboclos e guias: deuses ou demônios?* Rio de Janeiro: Editora Universal.

_____. 2004. *O perfeito sacrifício*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Gráfica Universal.

MARIANO, Ricardo. 1996. "Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus: a magia institucionalizada." *Revista USP*, 31:120-131.

_____. 1999. *Neopentecostais: sociologia do novo pentecostalismo no Brasil*. São Paulo: Loyola.

_____. 2003. "Guerra espiritual: o protagonismo do diabo nos cultos neopentecostais." In: B. Lewgoy (ed.). *Debates do NER*, 4(4):21-34.

MARIZ, Cecília. 1994. "Libertação e ética. Uma análise do discurso de neopentecostal que se recuperaram do alcoolismo." In: A. Antoniazzi et al. *Nem anjos, nem demônios*. Petrópolis: Vozes. pp. 204-224.

_____. 1999. "A teologia da batalha espiritual: uma revisão da bibliografia." *Revista Brasileira de Informação Bibliográfica em Ciências Sociais*, 47(1):33-48.

_____. 2000. "O demônio e os pentecostais no Brasil." In: R. Cipriani; P. Eleta & A. Nesti (eds.). *Identidade e mudança na religiosidade latino-americana*. Petrópolis: Vozes. pp. 251-264.

MATORY, J. Lorand. 1988. "Homens montados: homossexualidade e simbolismo da possessão nas religiões afro-brasileiras." In: J. J. Reis. *Escravidão e invenção da liberdade*. São Paulo: Brasiliense. pp. 215-231.

MATTA E SILVA, W. W. 1960. *Umbanda de todos nós*. Rio de Janeiro: Freitas Bastos.

McALISTER, Robert. 1983 [1968]. *Mãe-de-santo*. 4th ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Carisma.

OLIVEIRA, Maria da Conceição C. 2004. *História paratodos*. 2nd series, Primary School. São Paulo: Scipione.

OLIVEIRA, Marco Davi. 2004. *A religião mais negra do Brasil*. São Paulo: Mundo Cristão.

OLIVEIRA, Raimundo de. 2004. *Seitas e heresias*. Rio de Janeiro: Casa Publicadora da Assembléia de Deus.

ORO, Ari Pedro. 1997. "Neopentecostais e afro-brasileiros: quem vencerá esta guerra?" *Debates do NER*, 1:10-37.

_____. 2001. "Neopentecostalismo: dinheiro e magia." *Ilha. Revista de Antropologia*, 3(1):71-86.

_____., CORTEN, André & DOZON, Jean-Pierre. 2003. *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus. Os novos conquistadores da fé*. São Paulo: Paulinas.

PIERUCCI, Antônio Flávio & PRANDI, Reginaldo. 1996. *A realidade social das religiões no Brasil*. São Paulo: Hucitec.

ROLIM, Francisco Cartaxo. 1990. "Igreja Pentecostal Deus é Amor" In: *Sinais dos tempos: diversidade religiosa no Brasil. Cadernos do ISER*, 23:59-63.

SAHLINS, Marshall. 1979. *Cultura e razão prática*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.

SANCHIS, Pierre. 2001. "Religiões, religião... alguns problemas do sincretismo no campo religioso brasileiro." In: *Fiéis & cidadãos: percursos de sincretismo no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ. pp. 9-57.

SILVA, Milton Vieira. 1999. *Conhecendo os cultos afros: umbanda, quimbanda, candomblé*. Curitiba: A. D. Santos Editora.

SILVA, Vagner Gonçalves da. 1995. *Orixás da metrópole*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

_____. 2005a. *Candomblé e umbanda*. São Paulo: Selo Negro.

_____. 2005b. "Concepções religiosas afro-brasileiras e neopentecostais: uma análise simbólica." *Revista USP*, 67:150-175.

SOARES, Mariza de Carvalho. 1990. "Guerra santa no país do sincretismo." In: *Sinais dos tempos: diversidade religiosa no Brasil. Cadernos do ISER*, 23:75-104.

SOARES, R. R. 1984. *Espiritismo: a magia do engano*. Rio de Janeiro: Graça Editorial.

_____. n/d. *Exija seus direitos*. Rio de Janeiro: Graça Editorial.

_____. n/d. *Como tomar posse das bênçãos*. Rio de Janeiro: Graça Editorial.

_____. n/d. *Os profetas das grandes religiões*. Rio de Janeiro: Graça Editorial.

TAUSSIG, Michael. 1987. "O batismo do dinheiro e o segredo do capital." *Religião e Sociedade*, 14(2):18-31.

THOMAS, Keith. 1991. *Religião e declínio da magia*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

TRINDADE, Liana. 1985. *Exu: poder e perigo*. São Paulo: Ícone.

Received on July 10th 2006

Approved on January 22nd 2007

Notes

* Preliminary versions of this text were presented in 2003 at the Conference on Human Rights (Brazilian Association of Anthropology – ABA and São Judas Tadeu University), at the 7th Congress of the Association of Brazilian Studies (BRASA) and at the 24th Meeting of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology, and in 2004 at the workshops "The religious field in Brazil: continuities and ruptures" (ISER/Assessoria) and "Race, racism and public policies: an

anthropological debate” (ABA-UFBA). I wish to thank my interlocutors on these occasions and the readers of the final version of this article for their criticisms and suggestions, especially Rita Amaral.

¹ The authors consulted typically divide the Pentecostal movement into three waves, phases or historical moments, either adopting a chronological-institutional classification relating to the period when the churches were founded, or emphasizing certain aspects of their theological or doctrinal corpus (see, among others, Freston 1994 and Mariano 1999).

² As has become standard practice among many scholars, I use the abbreviation ‘UCKG’ [IURD in Portuguese] to designate this church.

³ Having been unable to locate the first edition of this book, I have used its fourth edition for my observations.

⁴ A term by which the author classifies candomblé and umbanda.

⁵ In 1975, McAlister published *Crentes endemoniados: a nova heresia* (Possessed beliefs: the new heresy).

⁶ By naming these three entities, the author announces the three main religious systems to be examined over the course of his book: orixás (candomblé); caboclos (umbanda) and guides (spiritism).

⁷ The cover of the 13th edition, printed in 1996, states “2 million copies sold,” but various websites containing information on Gráfica Universal, the book’s publisher, provide more recent sales figures.

⁸ In contrast to McAlister’s book in which the testimony of the former saint-mother Georgina is central (including first person narration in some sections), Macedo’s work contains numerous accounts from former adherents of Afro-Brazilian cults narrated by the author himself (in the third person).

⁹ Candomblé religious specialists often keep ‘notebooks of fundamentals’ as a form of retaining the innumerable details of ritual knowledge (Silva 1995).

¹⁰ Like McAlister’s book, Macedo’s is also dedicated to saint-fathers and mothers and includes a chapter indicating the ‘steps’ to spiritual release (six in the former case, ten in the latter). One of the chapters of *Orixás, caboclos e guias...* has the same name as another of McAlister’s books: *Crentes endemoniados* (Possessed beliefs).

¹¹ In the mythic order of candomblé, everything begins with Exu and ends with Oxalá.

¹² The pombagira represents Exu’s female principle.

¹³ In Afro-Brazilian religions, the symbolism of the animal sacrifice represents the ‘death’ of the initiate’s previous life and his or her rebirth into a new life with and within the orixá. Through the death of the animal, people and gods come together.

¹⁴ Other examples exist, such as *Conhecendo os cultos afros: umbanda, quimbanda, candomblé*, by Milton Vieira da Silva, 1999.

¹⁵ In *Os profetas das grandes religiões*, R. R. Soares ‘condemns’ 19 founders of ‘false doctrines,’ such as Buddha, Confucius and Mohammed. Along the same lines, see (among others) *Seitas e heresias*, by Raimundo de Oliveira, 2004; and *Resposta às seitas, um manual popular sobre as interpretações equivocadas das seitas*, by Norman Geisler & Ron Rhodes, 2004.

¹⁶ Comparing the low (material and cultural) purchasing power of those sectors of the population that have proven to be the most receptive to the neo-Pentecostal message with the sales figures boasted for these works, often in the millions, we can see that its firepower is far from negligible. The production of a religious promotional literature, including books, magazines and newspapers, has become a significant feature of the neo-Pentecostal churches, many of which have set up their own publishing houses. As well as print production, the manufacture and sale of audiovisual material has also been heavily exploited by these churches.

¹⁷ The term ‘attack’ is used here in the sense of a public assault by one religious group against another. Undoubtedly the reasons for such attacks are justified, from the ‘assailant’s’ point of view, by religious convictions in which the term becomes a synonym for ‘evangelization,’ ‘release’ and so on. In fact, these ‘attacks’ form part of a ‘bellical’ lexicon featuring other terms such as ‘battle,’ ‘holy war,’ ‘soldier of Jesus’ and so on, used by neo-Pentecostal discourses to describe their actions against the devil and the religious systems that supposedly worship him. From the point of view of the Afro-Brazilian groups, of course, these attacks possess numerous other meanings, synonymous with ‘religious intolerance,’ ‘prejudice,’ ‘discrimination’ etc.

¹⁸ *O Globo*, 7/7/89. Many of the journalistic sources cited here were first used by Ricardo Mariano in *Neopentecostais. Sociologia do novo pentecostalismo no Brasil*, 1999.

¹⁹ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 28/6/1988.

²⁰ *A Tarde*, 16/4/2003.

²¹ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 14/12/2003. The use of coarse salt and sulphur (brimstone) to expel ‘demons’ is based on the Bible; in the latter, these elements appear as purifiers or redeemers of those who practice evil. God, for example, uses these substances to punish the inhabitants of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, making the soil of these cities infertile (Deuteronomy, 29:23).

²² Given these reports, it is important to remember that human sacrifice does not comprise part of the rites accepted by Afro-Brazilian religions; however, this does not prevent the fact that in some cases, as press reports emphasize (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 22/6/1999; *O Dia*, 17/8/2000, 21/9/2000, 2/2/2000), the perpetrators of this type of crime identify themselves as followers of such religions. In these cases, I stress, it is not the religious practice that determines the crime (although the latter may well involve certain features of the sacrificial rites of the Afro-Brazilian religions), but the criminal who, based on an idiosyncratic point of view, extracts justifications for the crime from the religious system in question. Reproductions of news reports on these crimes (with their sensationalist photos) proliferate in neo-Pentecostal publications, such as the book by Edir Macedo already cited above. Furthermore, use of the term ‘black magic’ to describe these incidents clearly compounds this religious prejudice with racial prejudice.

²³ *Boletim da Comissão Maranhense de Folclore*, Dec/2001. Personal report from the anthropologists Sergio and Mundicarmo Ferretti, present during this incident.

²⁴ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 3/10/2002. Also see the book by the former pastor Mario Justino (1995), *Nos bastidores do reino: a vida secreta na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, in which the author declares that it was common practice to smash Catholic images during the services and burn candomblé clothes and bead necklaces brought by converted saint-sons and daughters

²⁵ *A Tarde*, 27/12/2004 and 10/1/2005.

²⁶ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 14/12/2003.

²⁷ *O Globo*, 23/10/1988.

²⁸ *A Tarde*, 10/1/2005 and 21/2/2005.

²⁹ *Revista Veja*, 30/11/88.

³⁰ Information from Leandro Braga, the organization's lead conductor, provided on the Samba e Choro discussion list, 2004 (www.samba-choro.com.br).

³¹ www.capoeira.jex.com.br.

³² Law 10,639, approved on 9/1/2003, which alters the Law of National Education Guidelines and Bases (LDB). More information is available at: <http://www.mec.gov.br/cne/pdf/003.pdf>

³³ *Jornal de Pato Branco*, 6/6/2003.

³⁴ The series in question is the *História paratodos* collection, Primary Education, Editora Scipione, written by Maria da Conceição Carneiro de Oliveira, 2004.

³⁵ The draft text for Law 11,915, approved on May 21st 2003, includes the following paragraph which was later excluded: "Article II – It is prohibited: [...] Paragraph XII – To realize shows, sports, target practice, religious ceremonies, spells, cock-fights, or any other public or private acts that involve the abuse or death of animals, as well as fights between animals of the same species or race, whether of exotic or native origin, wild or domesticated, whatever their number" (my italics). Available at: <http://www.xapana.com.br/matriz.htm>.

³⁶ The sentence was passed by the judge on 30/4/2003: "Under the terms of Art. 77 of the Penal Code, judging unacceptable the substitution stipulated in Art. 44 of the Penal Code due to the intransigent personality of the defendant, I grant her, however, conditional suspension of a four-year custodial sentence on compliance with the following conditions: 1) she presents herself every two months at the registry office to inform her professional activity and provide an up-to-date record of her address; 2) limitation and cessation of the activities of the Oxum e Xangô Umbanda Society, which, on Saturdays, must cease any spiritual and festive activities after 24:00 hours and, on the other days of the week, after at latest 22:00 hours; 3) prohibition of sacrifices of large animals at the society's centre, based on its location in a central and residential zone, observing that the killing of animals in this type of location is expressly prohibited by public health regulations." On 31/10/2003, the courts partially accepted an appeal and revoked the previous sentence, imposing a R\$ 240 fine. Available at: <http://www.oxum.com.br/mobilizacao.asp>.

³⁷ *Jornal do Brasil*, 21/11/1988.

³⁸ *O Globo*, 1/8/1989; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 27/8/1992. Cf. Mariano, 1999:120.

³⁹ The author of the attack was condemned on the basis of Article 208 of the Penal Code (denigration of an object of religious worship and incitement to religious prejudice) to 2 years and 2 months imprisonment. *Folha de S. Paulo*, 1/5/1997.

⁴⁰ *A Tarde*, 10/1/2005.

⁴¹ These entities include Aganju (Afro Legal Alliance Office) and Anaas (Association of Afro-descendent Lawyers). *A Tarde*, 10/1/2005.

⁴² The majority of these legal actions have been filed by the prosecutor Livaldo Reaiche Raimundo Britto of the Salvador Citizen Justice Office, part of the Bahian State Public Prosecutor's Office. The latter has played an active role in the actions against religious intolerance in the state of Bahia (*A Tarde*, 21/2/2005).

⁴³ *A Tarde*, 10/1/2005.

⁴⁴ The lawsuit was filed by the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office and other entities (the National Institute of Afro-Brazilian Tradition and Culture – Intecab, and the Work Relations and Inequality Study Centre – CEERT). *Folha de S. Paulo*, 27/5/2005.

⁴⁵ *Veja*, 26/9/1992.

⁴⁶ *Folha Universal*, Year VII, n.390, Sep/Oct 1999.

⁴⁷ *A Tarde*, 7/7/2005.

⁴⁸ In 2005, the sentence was reduced on appeal to R\$ 960,000, the ceiling set by the State Court of Appeal (*A Tarde*, 12/1/2003; 7/7/2005).

⁴⁹ *A Tarde*, 10/1/2005.

⁵⁰ *O Dia*, 31/3/2004. As mentioned earlier, the attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions, even when not explicitly carried out with this objective, end up reinforcing prejudice and discrimination against the black population.

⁵¹ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 3/10/2002.

⁵² A lawsuit filed against two pastors from the Global Evangelical Mission (<http://www.meg.org.br/>) accused of disturbing the festivities in celebration of Iemanjá in Praia Grande.

⁵³ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 29/3/89.

⁵⁴ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 18/8/89.

⁵⁵ On this point, it is worth consulting the “Report produced by the Presbyterian Church of Brazil to explain to its members the faith and practice of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.” Available at: (<http://www.cacp.org.br/iurd.htm>).

⁵⁶ See, for example, the books *Exija seus direitos* and *Como tomar posse da benção* by R. R. Soares. On the sales site of the International Church of Grace, these works are announced as follows: “How to have, use and enjoy everything that Christ conquered is a challenge facing the Christian;” and “You decide what you will have or not. Learn to take possession of the marvels that God prepared for us.” Available at: <http://www.gracaeditorial.com.br/>. Cf. Mariano 1999:154.

⁵⁷ On this crossover of rites and cosmogonies, a phenomenon I have called ‘Afro-Pentecostal,’ see Silva 2005b.

⁵⁸ The work by Ronaldo Almeida (1996) contains an analysis of how this symmetrically opposite inversion occurs in the rites for expelling demons.

Translated by David Allan Rodgers

Translation from **Mana**, Rio de Janeiro, v.13 n.1, p. 207-236, Apr. 2007.