

RELIGIOUS EVOLUTION AND
CREATION:
THE AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULTS*

Since the end of the 19th century, Brazilian researchers have speculated about the phenomenon of ethnic coexistence they have witnessed in their country.¹ How may the mixed culture that is its obvious result be explained? Should it be attributed to some sociocultural syncretism, to an interpenetration of civilizations or, quite simply, to a synthesis?² Whatever the case, it is certain that cultural elements of very different origins became united in Brazil and that they have remained closely associated there in spite of their disparity. The best example of this “cultural conglomerate,” if we may call it that, is without a doubt that of the Afro-Brazilian religious cults and, although numerous studies

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¹ Pereira de Queiroz, 1979, b.

² Ortiz, 1975.

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have already been devoted to them, they have a richness of content and meaning, plus a capacity for renewal, that is far from being exhaustively investigated.

Introduced into the different regions of Brazil around the end of the 16th century,³ Afro-Brazilian cults have undergone inevitable changes with time, but they have nonetheless conserved the essence of their doctrine and ritual. The incessant flow of slaves from Africa to supply agricultural manpower—a traffic that lasted until 1850—certainly contributed to the maintenance of the cults in a state quite similar to what they were in their countries of origin. They were cults of possession having numerous divinities, and were endowed with a cycle of annual ceremonies celebrated by the “agents of the cult.” These agents were structured into a multi-leveled hierarchy, into which initiation rites progressively integrated the faithful. Not all had the ability to fall into a trance to become “*cheval de saint*,” but those who did not possess the indispensable gifts for that honor could still remain within the priestly hierarchy. There they performed less spectacular, but useful, functions and thus all the faithful found a place inside the temple.

Essentially, the cults rested on the African belief in a multiplicity of Vital Forces commanding the different parts of the universe. All that existed in nature and society was divided among these different Forces,⁴ and each of them was incarnated by a particular divinity. Well-defined categories of ceremonies, metals, plants, animals and individuals, as well as religious and social practices were associated at Oxala, for example, and others at Xangô or Yemanjá. The faithful owed obedience to these divinities and through scrupulous observation of ritual practices they could hope that the Beyond would give heed to their prayers. In this context, the notion of Good and Evil was, so to speak, nonexistent; all that counted was the “good execution” or the “bad execution” of the rites.

³ Goulart, 1975, pp. 96-97.

⁴ Bastide, 1953, 1955.

The echelons of the priestly hierarchy were organized around the “fathers” and “mothers” *de santo*.⁵ At first, each sect contained only the members of the same tribe, indeed, the same ethnic: Yoruba, Gege, Nago... but these tribal or ethnic implications were gradually lost, and in the 19th century the fact of belonging to the Nago cult, for example, did not necessarily mean that one issued from that particular tribe. After that period, the sects sought less to preserve their respective tribal characteristics than to enhance those of their common cultural attributes that could best bring out the specificity of the Africans with regard to the Whites. The loss of their ethnic implications conferred an exclusively religious character to the cults. They became an ensemble of beliefs and rites, corresponding to a certain view of the natural and super-natural world, to which the adepts adhered without distinction of origin.

The cults would not have been able to maintain themselves without the support of a hierarchical structure, and, from this point of view, towns and villages were much more advantageous than the great estates. On the estates, in fact, the white masters, conscious of the danger they incurred by being isolated in the middle of a large black work force, arranged to have slaves from different origins, belonging if possible to enemy tribes, and preferably not speaking the same language. “Divide and conquer,” was their password and, of course, that did not favor the assembling of the faithful. The situation was quite different in the towns and villages: some Blacks benefited there from their status as free men.⁶ As for the Blacks who were slaves, they exercised various trades and thus enjoyed a certain liberty of movement. Therefore, whether they were free or slave, the town Blacks had the possibility to organize their religious practices in places that offered the guarantees of security necessary for the perpetuation of their cults. This is no doubt the reason the sects succeeded in maintaining themselves in Brazilian towns,

⁵ Bastide, 1958, 1978.

⁶ We too often forget that there were free Blacks and mulattos in Brazil from the beginning of the colonial period; this circumstance played an important role in the maintenance of the cults, since the priesthood demanded a great amount of disposable time and, because of this, could only be exercised by free Blacks.

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whereas they were practically nonexistent on the great estates.

As Catholics, the white proprietors were obliged to assure the salvation of their slaves' souls. It was their duty, therefore, to convert them, and their first concern was to put an end to their barbaric practices: the African cults were thus forbidden. Once converted, however, the Africans were able to use Catholicism and its multitude of saints as a protective screen to shelter their own beliefs. All the gods in the pantheons of the Yoruba, Gege, Nago, Bantu and other groups found their respective correspondences among the Catholic divinities. In addition to its *pegi*, each temple had an altar decorated with the image of the preferred saints of the faithful. The ceremony of the mass itself was gradually integrated into the African ritual.

The coexistence of such different religious elements within the sects occurred without shock. In the beginning, it was much more a matter of a phenomenon of parallelism than of interpenetration, properly speaking, but this parallelism and the correspondences between saints and *orixàs* that ensued could not help but eventually bring with it changes at the level of doctrine and ritual—and that all the more because the correspondences had been established not by chance but with a certain coherence taking into account the symmetrical particularities of the saints and the *orixàs*. Afro-Brazilian cults thus became new religions with regard to what they had originally been. They lost their tribal character and no longer incarnated a kinship of race, blood, language and culture but simply the spiritual kinship uniting the faithful among themselves. This “spiritualization”⁷ reenforced the collective “memory” of the Blacks and preserved the particular view they had of the world, but it did not keep them from adhering to Catholicism, and gradually the philosophy of sin and the Manicheism of the Christians came to be associated with the African philosophy of cosmic forces. The best expression to describe the state of beliefs in Brazil during the 19th century is that of “religious dualism.” Most of the Blacks, as well as some Whites, participated as faithful in two totally different cults—without their

⁷ The “historical” aspect of the cults (long genealogies of kings and spirits) lost its importance; the essential thing was the division of the universe among the different divinities and the suppression of tribal limits in each cult.

faith being put into question or their being accused of duplicity and falsehood.⁸ This situation persisted throughout the colonial period up until the end of the empire.⁹ At that time, the numerous temples kept up only very slight relationships between each other. They were independent units of a purely local vocation, and their appellation varied from one town to another: “*candomblés*” at Salvador; “*xangôs*” at Recife; “*macumbas*” at Rio de Janeiro; “*batuques*” at Pôrto Alegre; “*vodus*” at São Luiz do Maranhão.

The abolition of slavery in 1888, followed by the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, broke this tranquillity. The republican authorities adopted very severe measures intended to restrict the activities of the cults, especially in Rio de Janeiro, the capital of the country. The *macumba* only survived the persecutions of which it was the object by taking refuge in an increased clandestinity that first of all brought about a considerable simplification of ritual and elicited the appearance of new elements within the doctrine. The “*chevaux de saints*” and the *mâis de terreiro* had to be contented with a shorter period of initiation, which had awkward repercussions on the transmission of religious elements. Finally, however, this lack of basic knowledge was in a way compensated for by the resources of imagination and sensitivity they were able to find within themselves. The simplification of the ritual was, paradoxically, accompanied by a proliferation of divinities that were not, this time, exclusively African or Catholic in origin, such as the spirits of *caboclos*, that is, Indians, and the *encantados*, from various sources, including European.

The functions of the *macumbas* were equally modified: “The priest had ceded his place to the healer and the faithful to the client; the cult took on the appearance of a simple consultation.”¹⁰ The number of African divinities diminished, and their role was limited to helping the faithful overcome the difficulties of existence. African mythology had not entirely disappeared, but the need for communion with the Beyond that had been primordial

⁸ Bastide, 1953, 1955; Pereira de Queiroz, 1979 a.

⁹ Colonial period: 16th century to 1822; imperial period: 1822-1889.

¹⁰ Teixeira Monteiro, 1977, p. 54.

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took second place. In addition, some Manichean concepts saw the light of day at this time: Exù, the god of intercession and overture in the old cults, took on a diabolical character and became the incarnation of Evil. Native practices, such as the important use made of tobacco during ceremonies, came to be added to African rituals.

The new cult reunited the faithful of all provenances and all nuances in skin color. It even happened that the priests were not descendants of Africans: "The *terreiro de Oxun* is directed by a young son of Italian immigrants, Fernando Copolillo, assisted by a "little mother" from Bahia; and a Lebanese woman, Judith Kallile, works under the orders of the *caboclo Jurema*¹¹ in a *terreiro* in the suburb of Ramos."¹² In the absence of the ties created by common traditions, the groups had lost their cohesion. The faithful no longer seemed drawn toward the cult because of a need for social or spiritual communion; they went there as to a simple consultation, to ask for the solution to their personal problems.¹³

After 1920 a third form of Afro-Brazilian cult made its appearance in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the two large cities of Brazil.¹⁴ Elements borrowed from the spiritism of Alan Kardec come to be mixed with religious elements of Catholic, native and African origin we have been examining, to form, under the name of *umbanda*, a new cult that gradually spread throughout the country and that, still today, continues to make progress in the different strata of urban Brazilian population. It is estimated (1978) that *umbanda* already counts nearly 20,000,000 adepts—for a population of... 110,000,000 inhabitants.¹⁵

Contrary to *macumba*, very fragmented, *umbanda* is organized into associations and federations, which does not prevent its having a much more fluid priestly hierarchy than that of the *candomblés*. Initiation into it is rapid—at times only a two

¹¹ *Caboclo Jurema*: a native divinity.

¹² Bastide, 1960, p. 403.

¹³ Bastide, 1960, p. 415.

¹⁴ This transformation of *macumba* was particularly felt in Rio de Janeiro; the old Afro-Brazilian cults also underwent modifications in other towns. At Salvador, however, they tended on the contrary to conserve their traditional form. See Bastide, 1960.

¹⁵ Fry, 1978, p. 30.

weeks' retreat in the temple—while for the *candomblé* it might last for months. Its doctrine and rites are, on the other hand, much more complex. Oxala, the supreme god, is surrounded by a court of secondary divinities, both Catholic and African, who correspond to the ancient divinities of the *candomblés*. Each secondary divinity has at his command spirits of lesser importance, grouped in “lines” or “phalanxes”: the line of Jesus Christ or Oxala; that of St. George or Ogum; of St. Sebastian or Oxossi; of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception or Oxum; that of Our Lady of Glory or Yémanjá; that of the twin saints Cosme and Damian or the Ibegi. The minor spirits may be masculine or feminine: the same is true for the more important spirits. Among them are found the “old Blacks” (former slaves), *caboclos* (Indians) and *ibejis* (children).

The spirits of first rank and the minor spirits protect the faithful and help them in all that concerns the “moral” domain; they are “good” in the Christian sense of the word. However, there are also spirits like the Exú (masculine) and the Pombagira (feminine) that are evil, amoral and greedy, and whose favors must be bought.¹⁶ Any ceremony must then begin with an offering intended to appease them and keep them away from the temple so that the ritual may take place in peace. Even though they are considered as negative forces, Exú and Pombagira are fully admitted by the “theologians” of *umbanda*, who consider them indispensable. Through an appropriate recompense, they help the faithful to solve their problems, especially by taking on themselves the magic “liquidation” of their enemies. If they do not receive their due, however, they turn their forces against their debtors.

The contradictory concepts of good and evil that are one of the fundamentals of Christian philosophy have thus been incorporated into *umbanda*, but by making of them the object of a new interpretation: “evil” is not irremediably condemned; it keeps in a way its quality of “cosmic force,” and the faithful person may thus domesticate it, make it serve his own purposes. However, those who have recourse to the “forces of evil” personified by Exú and Pombagira know that their reincarnation

¹⁶ Fry, 1978, pp. 31-32.

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runs the risk of suffering from it. They will not be immediately punished but will be in their future existence. That is how the idea of reincarnation borrowed from the spiritist doctrine of Alan Kardec becomes one of the strong points of *umbanda*. The prospect of having to answer for one's acts in another life has caused the awakening of a sense of his individual moral responsibility in the believer. The idea of sin, not present in the first Afro-Brazilian cults, has been introduced into the new cult through the subterfuge of a belief in reincarnation.

Today, an entire literature is devoted to the description and justification of *umbanda* by dint of "scientific" language. This newly-acquired character of "written" religion equally contributes to differentiate it from the old cults, whose transmission had always been oral. The passage from the spoken word to the book in addition brought about a veritable upheaval in the religious hierarchy. It has favored the advent of an "intellectual caste" specialized in the study of religious dogma and rites, and the reputation as *savants* they have drawn from this has given them a power of decision that is without precedent in the history of Afro-Brazilian cults.¹⁷

Having thus become "literate," *umbanda* then had the ambition to become a national religion. Since 1941, the Spiritist Federation of *Umbanda*, founded on the occasion of the first Brazilian Congress of Spiritism of *Umbanda*, has striven to make its ritual and doctrine uniform.¹⁸ The formation of federations and organizations of congresses supposed the introduction of writings into the cult, because it was otherwise impossible to give to these manifestations the indispensable institutional and administrative structures. In our day, books play "an extremely important role in the diffusion and codification of the Umbandist religion." We may say that the tendency to uniformity in the regional or national associations is in perfect contrast with the multiplicity of the old cults that were composed of independent local units.¹⁹ Thus, "everything is changing with the *umbanda*: in it African

¹⁷ Ortiz, 1979, p. 53.

¹⁸ Bastide, 1960, p. 444.

¹⁹ Bastide, 1960, and Ortiz, 1979: it is a matter of a process still in course, which Fry did not understand (1978).

religious thought cedes to Brazilian thought..."²⁰

The new religion is especially developed in the large cities of the South, notably Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where, since 1940, industrialization has been making great progress. Its success has gradually made it a political force which must from now on be reckoned with. The candidates in the different elections have quickly understood this and have begun to more and more openly curry the favor of the *pais* and *mâis de santo*. From this fact, *umbanda* has acquired the status of legal religion, which has placed it on the same level as the great Western and Asian religions. Even more, the same favor has been extended to the old Afro-Brazilian cults that had never before benefited from it. Today, certain particularly spectacular ceremonies of these cults have even become veritable tourist attractions that city authorities do not hesitate to promote.

The comparison of the three forms successively taken by Afro-Brazilian cults—*candomblé*, *macumba* and *umbanda*—clarifies the functions that these religions have filled and continue to fill. *Candomblé*, their oldest form, was first of all an instrument of solidarity for all the members of a race that, formerly independent, had been uprooted from its geographical and cultural area and that, from then on, counted only slaves in its ranks. In such a context, the *pai de santo* was the keeper of knowledge that permitted the peoples dispossessed of the fruit of their labor, and even of their own bodies, to command the cosmic forces and thus, in a roundabout way, to also dominate their white masters. Not only did the cult assure the ethnic and cultural continuity of the Africans and safeguard their collective "memory;" it was also the guarantee for them of the small amount of power that still remained to them.²¹

In *macumba*, as it was practiced in Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 19th century, the idea of ethnic group seems to have disappeared, since we find non-Africans among the *pais de santo*. These last were no longer necessarily the retainers of the "African memory," but they nevertheless continued to command the cosmic forces, and they knew the formulas that permitted the

²⁰ Ortiz, 1979, pp. 52,53. See also Ortiz, 1975.

²¹ Fry, 1978, pp. 31-32.

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adepts to solve their own personal problems. As for the believers, they acted on their own and no longer formed groups. It seems that it was no longer a need for social or spiritual communion that drew them to the temple but the simple need to better their personal existence.

Umbanda, appearing later, took up some of the old functions of the *candombé*, and the new cosmology it installed became in its turn the basis of a new configuration of believers. In bringing its own world view and an explanation that was both religious and experimental—thus scientific—of the universe, it differed from the *candomblé* that was itself of purely religious essence. It deviated just as completely at the level of doctrine, by introducing the idea of good and evil—a notion tempered, it is true, by the idea that the presence of evil is as necessary to the accomplishment of the ritual as that of the “spirits of light.” For it, there was no conflict between the two opposed forces. They coexist, and one does not exclude the other.²²

Much more complex in its philosophy than the two cults that preceded it, *umbanda* reunites the elements of both. From *macumba* it retains the magic aspect: the *pai de santo* is first of all a thaumaturge who gives the faithful practical formulas for their daily life. On the other hand, it is also close to *candomblé* in the sense that the world view it brings is at the origin of the formation of the group, and it thus becomes a factor of solidarity and union of the adepts among themselves and the adepts with the Hereafter. From this point of view, the action of *umbanda* has even gone beyond that of *candomblé*, since it desires to be “homogenizing” on the level of doctrine and national on that of groups.²³

In *umbanda*, the role of *pai de santo* has taken on a new dimension. If he is still the thaumaturge and the protector (he

²² To understand and analyze them in their parallelism, refer to the concepts of participation defined by Roger Bastide. See Bastide, 1953 and 1955; see also Pereira de Queiroz, 1979 a.

²³ The fact that homogenization is not yet entirely complete does not mean that the orientation does not exist. Bastide had already detected this in 1960: “Let us enter a *tent of umbanda*. Whatever it may be, the ceremonial nearly always follows the same schema.” (Bastide, 1960, p. 460). Ortiz also notices this (1979, pp. 51-52), but Fry does not take this fact into account, forgetting that it is a matter of a religion still in formation (Fry, 1978).

knows how to manipulate the spirits so as to render them favorable to the adepts); if he is still the head of a sacred community (he is able to regulate the inter-relationships of the faithful as well as those with Beyond according to precise divine laws); he is becoming more and more a political chief to the degree in which his activity goes beyond the framework of his group and in which he attempts to control the relationships other temples have with each other so as to form a larger religious ensemble. His new role as mediator thus considerably increases the power until then held by the “father of the saint.”

However, the place taken by the book in *umbanda* has given rise to a new type of leader in the person of the *savant* who presides over this umbandist literature. The *pai de santo* is no longer the only keeper of sacred knowledge; he shares this privilege with this new personage—and if his role has taken on greater importance and complexity, it has also lost a little of its substance.

The rapid success of *umbanda* within Brazilian society is all the more surprising since it has accompanied the accelerated economic and industrial developments of the country. Even more, it is in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the cities that constitute the two poles of this development, that *umbanda* has its greatest expansion. It would seem, then, that growth, whether industrial, economic or urban, does not necessarily bring with it a materialistic view or a secularization of daily life. In Brazil, in any case, it has not kept religious sects from flourishing.²⁴

As has often been remarked, the extraordinary development of *umbanda* has been accompanied by a progressive “whitening” of the adepts and the cult. The old *candomblés* had been frequented by a population that was not necessarily black but that nevertheless kept in touch with its country of origin, however distant. The cults had been the instruments that permitted this population to preserve its ties with Africa and also to mark its opposition with regard to a new society that it had not asked to enter and in which it found itself reduced to slavery. The ties with Africa were very much loosened in *macumba*, in which even Whites

²⁴ *Umbanda* is not the only cult to develop in a spectacular fashion in Brazilian cities. The Pentecostal sects have become its great rivals and are also experiencing rapid expansion. (Texeira Monteiro, 1977; Fry, 1978).

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had the possibility to accede to the priesthood. They completely disappeared in *umbanda*, where faithful and “agents of the cult” were recruited among individuals coming from the most diverse ethnic horizons. Furthermore, the doctrine itself underwent a very distinct “whitening” because of the growing influence of spiritist elements that were gradually being integrated into it.

In the 1950's, Roger Bastide pointed out the phenomenon apropos of the disappearance of important elements of the old Afro-Brazilian cults and the change in meaning of certain divinities, Exú in particular. All that could offend a non-African sensitivity—the bloody sacrifice of animals, for example—had disappeared from the ceremonies.²⁵ Nonetheless, some markedly African characteristics were preserved: rich and complicated festive ceremonies; the mystic trance, violent or pathetic; the initiational retreat in the temple—all things that were unknown in Catholicism and spiritism, and the *macumba* had lost.

Umbanda also ended by drawing away from the two other cults on the philosophical level. The fact of having made its own the notion of a responsibility determining the economic level of future reincarnation; the fact of giving priority to the “scientific” explanation of natural phenomena henceforth consigned to books, indicates not only the “whitening” of the doctrine but the abandonment of the African past. *Umbanda* thus becomes a religion wholly directed to the future, and it finds itself in perfect harmony with the global society that saw its birth.

For Roger Bastide, the passage from *candomblé* to *macumba* arose from the process of social disorganization in which “the exaggerated speed of the transformations in the country” had plunged both Blacks and poor Whites, whether they were Brazilians or immigrants. This period of upheaval, expressed in *macumba*, was followed by a period of socio-cultural reorganization that was manifested in the appearance of *umbanda*, a religion uniting elements and individuals of diverse origins into a new ensemble of a much greater complexity than the two preceding cults.²⁶

²⁵ Bastide, 1960, p. 462.

²⁶ Bastide, 1960, p. 421.

Brazilian sociologists, in their turn, have noted the spectacular progress of *umbanda* in the social hierarchy of the country. As Douglas Teixeira Monteiro puts it, "The use of the services of *umbanda* is intensely widespread, it seems, touching large sectors of the middle classes."²⁷ Peter Fry goes still farther and for him it is more and more difficult to associate *umbanda* with only the lower levels of the population. In effect, the faithful today come from nearly all classes, proportionately to the place they occupy in global Brazilian society.²⁸ Thus it is no longer just a question of "whitening" but of the "ascent" of the cult in the socioeconomic scale. The *candomblé* had been the religion of the poor people of the towns.²⁹ *Umbanda*, on the contrary, is marked by the general audience it has acquired and, what is even more, by the very openly expressed consensus of the entire society and power.³⁰ This veritable breakthrough of the new Afro-Brazilian cult has not failed to attract the attention of the specialists, but they have not yet succeeded in explaining it.

If it is impossible to provide a definitive solution for such a complex problem within the limits of a short essay such as this, we can nevertheless try to disengage some approaches to it. The abolition of slavery in 1888 brought about the complete recasting of the relationships, from the bottom to the top of the scale, between the different categories of Brazilian society. The relationship of dominant to dominated that under the cover of paternalism had become established between master and slave, disappeared. The overlords were no longer there as in the past to provide for the material or other needs of their Blacks, and the latter acquired, with a rediscovered power of decision, the sense of their responsibility. At the same time, the need for

²⁷ Teixeira Monteiro, 1977, p. 55.

²⁸ Fry, 1978, p. 30.

²⁹ Rich Whites belonged to the *candomblés* as *ogans*, that is, protectors and benefactors; they paid all or part of the expenses of costly festivals. But their number was small; they remained outside the priestly hierarchy. (Bastide, 1960, p. 187, 191, and others).

³⁰ Some Whites of the upper classes continued to frequent the *terreiros de macumba* even during the period of intense persecution of the Afro-Brazilian cults, but they did it secretly. According to a journalist of the time, their rapports with *macumba* were comparable to those of a married man keeping a mistress... (Joan de Rio, quoted by Fry, 1978, p. 29).

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manpower on the vast coffee plantations in the South, then in full expansion, brought an influx of immigrants. An extraordinary “brew” of races and cultures then ensued in the poor classes of the town population, especially in the coffee region, in which the development of industry and related services was in full swing.³¹ Slaves and freshly-landed immigrants shared the same desire to become integrated into a society that seemed to them to conceal inexhaustible possibilities of work and prosperity. It was a period of profound upheaval, whose repercussion the Afro-Brazilian cults were bound to feel: doctrines and ritual were simplified; that was the passage from *candomblé* to *macumba*.³² The faithful who could no longer count on “their Whites” to pay their initiation fees and festival expenses underwent a very distinct impoverishment. On the other hand, authoritarian measures taken by the government were intensified.³³ In full decadence, the cults could then have fallen to the level of simple magic practices. Nothing of the kind occurred, and they managed to survive. Much more, they recruited new adepts from the ranks of the immigrants and their families, and thus it was that *umbanda* made its appearance on the Brazilian scene.

We may consider that in this period of transition the Afro-Brazilian cults were the “meeting place” where the first contacts between slaves and immigrants took place. These latter, who had already more or less in their countries heard talk about occultist and magic practices had little difficulty in accepting the activities of *macumba*. They even largely contributed to its internal evolution by “whitening” it on the ethnic level—and also on the cultural level, if we think about the new elements borrowed either from Catholicism or spiritism that were introduced by them into the cults.

The situation of the Brazilian Blacks has already been the

³¹ For this period, see Monbeig, 1952; Moraze, 1954; Martin, 1966.

³² This upheaval was only violent in the southern part of the country. In the other, much poorer, regions, paternalism tended to be preserved, as well as *candomblé*.

³³ The taking of power by the Republicans in 1889 also had an influence on the intensification of persecution. The Republicans considered themselves scientific, rationalist; believers in positivism, they wanted to erase the “barbaric” traits from their society.

occasion for numerous studies. We know how, in spite of the color prejudice of which they had been victims in the different periods of their history, they were able to adapt and gradually become integrated into the society and economy of the country, to arrive at a very advanced level of mixtures.³⁴ On the other hand, we know practically nothing of the situation of the immigrants beginning with the end of the 19th century.³⁵ However, assimilation was an ordeal for them, also, even at times a harrowing experience. They were exposed to the prejudices of the already-existing population, and it was only through an uninterrupted series of marriages contracted within its ranks that they succeeded in being accepted by it and finally melting into the national mass.

Why should it be surprising, then, that placed in such unfavorable economic and social circumstances, the newcomers had recourse to the magic practices of a cult like *macumba*, that could help them overcome the obstacles they met in their way and facilitate their difficult insertion into the country itself? Was it not natural that some of them became *pais* and *mães de santo* in the hope that that would be the best way for them to rise in the social scale? However, the search for a supernatural aid permitting the surmounting of the separating stages of success corresponded to the needs of simple individuals—or isolated families—and was not a sufficient motive of inspiration to give birth to new groups. In fact, the *macumba* resembled much less a cult than a simple “consultation.”

However, if the immigrants also suffered in their new situation, their case was completely different from that of the Blacks, in the sense that their uprooting was the result of personal initiative, of deliberate choice. They had left one country where living conditions were not satisfactory for another in which they hoped to find better ones. For the Blacks, on the contrary, it had been a violent uprooting, bringing in its wake the loss of liberty, oppression, in a word, despair.

³⁴ The 110 million Brazilians (census of 1978) are roughly divided into 20% Whites, 10% Blacks and 70% mulattos and *métis*.

³⁵ In addition to immigrants from Europe and the Middle East, at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th Brazil received a certain number of Japanese.

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With the development of Brazil in the early years of this century, particularly with the enrichment of the South, we see the appearance of a whole series of new activities in the domain of industry, administration and business;³⁶ it was necessary to form workers of all types quickly—manual labor as well as white collar workers. The multiplication and diversification of jobs in the cities had necessarily brought about the same thing at socio-economic levels, and we see, in a society up until then much less complex, the sudden appearance of what Bastide calls the “intermediary classes.”³⁷ Functionaries and specialized workers came in serried ranks from the mass of foreigners and slaves that made up the poor population of the cities, and some, as a result of historic circumstances or particular economic conjunctures, even knew success.³⁸

It was in this climate of latent social ascension, which became a reality for only a small number but which kept up the hopes of all, that *umbanda* was born. With an attentive ear to the aspirations of the middle and lower levels of the southern population, its philosophy came to the aid of all those who wanted to rise socially and economically within a society whose internal dynamics was commanded by money and the taste for gain, in which wild capitalism and the thirst for ostentatious consumerism ruled unbridled. Now, after 1920, there was a succession of economic crises in Brazil that ended around 1960-70 in a process of galloping inflation that brought with it the progressive deterioration of the most modest budgets.

The extraordinary expansion of *umbanda* appears as the direct consequence of the imbalance between the deep desires of the Brazilian intermediate classes and the continually more improbable possibilities they had to realize them. It brought to the faithful the hope of a better life in a future world. It would cost them nothing but obedience to the injunctions of the divinities. By thus giving courage back to a population that saw gradually fading away, for itself and its children, any possibility of immediate success. *umbanda*, turned toward the future, was seen as a religion of hope.

³⁶ See Martin's excellent analysis, 1966.

³⁷ Bastide, 1954; Azevedo, 1953.

³⁸ Pereira de Queiroz, 1974.

The unifying function of *candomblé* was perpetuated in the *macumba*. But while the old cult was addressed only to those coming from the same culture, *umbanda* represented—for the mosaic of races that is, especially in the South, the Brazilian people—the center of spiritual convergence, the solid base around which diverse elements could associate to form an ensemble. It is truly the symbol of cultural integration of an entire people. The traditional cults had tried, at least in part, to assure the continuity of the old structures imported from Africa; they had acted as memory aids to fix a past on its way to being lost. *Umbanda* is far from desiring to readapt the past: beginning with the descendants of slaves and immigrants grouped within it, it functions as a center for the creation of entirely new religious structures and individual ties.

We have seen that at the time of successive waves of modernization of the southern cities made rich by coffee, a new type of relationship, of a contractual and impersonal character, was substituted for the former personal, direct and paternalistic ties of master to slave. If a certain form of paternalism—understood to be of a purely sacred nature—seems in spite of everything to survive in *umbanda*, it is attenuated, let us not forget, by the fact that the *pais* and the *mâis de santo* are not the only retainers of religious power and that they must from now on share this latter with the “*savants*,” dispensers of the umbandist literature. Religious authority thus acquires a new dimension, based on the study of religious dogma and rites, which is particularly suited to the society dominated by the idea of contract to which it is addressed. We have seen, on the other hand, that the power of the different chiefs of *terreiro* is now controlled by important centers of religious decision³⁹ that are made up of newly-created federations of administrative and bureaucratic nature. *Umbanda* thus furnishes to the individuals of the different echelons of the lower and intermediate classes a new framework of relationships, in which the paths to success do not only pass through the sacred but through study and administrative work. The creation of federations renders, in addition, a deep desire for national integration.

³⁹ Ortiz, 1979, pp. 52-53.

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Umbanda also bears the mark of the culturally composite society that gave it birth. In spite of the apparently contradictory elements that compose it, it has an internal logic that gives it its strength. On its spectacular side, in its explanation of the universe beginning with the philosophy of Vital Forces, it remains close to those who count African slaves among their ancestors. In its view turned toward the future, in the specific way it has of associating the idea of Good and Evil with that of reincarnation, it responds to the restless expectation of numerous immigrants—from Europe or elsewhere, but always from poor and backward areas⁴⁰—in search of immediate well-being. In the place it gives to study and the book, it is in harmony with a society in which knowledge and science are honored. It is the living symbol of the profoundly-felt need of economically, culturally and racially different individuals to form a global society.

We often hear it said that cultural syncretism is the trademark of Brazilian society and that the Afro-Brazilian cults are its best proof. However, it must be emphasized that in the term “syncretism” there is a notion of the forced mixture of disparate elements that cannot be uniformly applied to all these cults.⁴¹ It is no doubt suitable for the *candomblé*, which, while resolutely separating itself from Catholicism on many points, nonetheless makes a show of superficial agreement with it. The same term is not suitable when it is a matter of *umbanda*: through a phenomenon of fusion, it has transformed elements that had previously been given to it into something new—it has taken everything that made the specificity of its sources and justified their conservation to unite it into a perfectly integrated whole, more complex and more vast than the sum of its elements. We may truthfully say of it that it is a “synthesis.” As for *macumba*, it was not a creation, properly speaking; a debasement of *candomblé*, it marked a period of hesitation, a pause before the

⁴⁰ The adaptation of immigrants has been relatively little studied in Brazil. When it is a question of immigrants of European origin, there is a tendency to admit that they were much more “evolved” than the Brazilian population in the lower classes. We forget too easily that in the 19th century these migrants of rural origin were for the most part illiterate, from a culture also imbued with irrationality.

⁴¹ As Ortiz had already noted, 1975.

succeeding phase of reorganization that opened up on a new creation.

Two religions were thus born in Brazil, both corresponding to different periods, sociohistoric contexts and categories of adepts. Separated in time, they are even more separated by their philosophy, by the role they have played in the global society where they were born. The first marked its resistance to White society by means of its beliefs, the revindication of its difference and the importance it gave to the past. On the other hand, while preserving its independence, freedom of action and specific values, the second, in a converging movement that came from synergy, was directed toward a more and more strict integration into the society in which it developed. Emergence and integration, these are the key words to describe the two processes, never finished and always in movement, that give Brazil its particular character of a religion which looks to the future.

We might say that cultural coexistence has changed direction and resulted in religions that are different according to the historical periods and the groups that lived during them. Everything seems to indicate that the Afro-Brazilian religions went through the same vicissitudes as foreigners from everywhere who came to swell the ranks of the city populations at the end of the 19th century.⁴² However, many points of this evolution remain obscure, and many studies are still needed to understand the reasons that drove these men to transform themselves into adepts of cults that were so different from those they had brought with them from their countries of origin.

Whatever the case and even though, in its present state, the new religion is in perfect harmony with the values and fundamental processes of Brazilian society on the whole, it nevertheless contains the germ of not-to-be-neglected factors of differentiation. We are thinking for example of the contradictory position in which it found itself by adopting religious elements so opposed to Christian beliefs as the mystic trance and the pantheon of divinities inherited from the Vital Forces of the Africans. For the moment, it is a matter of a purely latent phenomenon that remains circumscribed within the religious domain. But will it

⁴² Azavedo, 1953; Bastide, 1960; Pereira de Queiroz, 1974.

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always be so? Will not Brazilian identity one day rely on this differentiating germ to mark its specificity with regard to Western civilization? These are important questions that could direct future research.

It results from our analysis that the phenomena of transformation and innovation that we have been able to observe at the levels of religious sects could not be attributed to any sort of "creative imagination," more or less dynamic and spontaneous, of individuals or groups, nor to their innate ability to exercise the powers of their mind and will. They were born from an encounter of races and cultures and closely follow the difficult insertion of these into the established economic and social hierarchy. Certain religious and cultural elements inherited from the past were not able to resist the brutal integration; others, on the contrary, survived, but they began to function in a different way; they gradually lost some of their particularities and gave birth to original structures. *Umbanda*, the most recent of these structures and one that is still developing before our eyes, has gone further still in the abandonment of original particularities. A rallying symbol for all races and all social classes, it blends them into a whole that is gradually identifying itself with the global society. Incarnating the desire of "Brazilianization" of disparate elements, of which one part at least has become voluntarily integrated into the new society, it wishes to be—and is—national.

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