

“*Terreiro* politics” against religious racism and “christofascist” politics

Ana Paula Mendes de Miranda¹

¹Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói/RJ, Brasil

Abstract

The present article discusses the processes of political and social mobilization of the Afro-religious in the face of the religious racism and “christofascist” politics deployed by groups with an Evangelical-Pentecostal profile. Based on ethnographic research conducted since 2008 in Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Aracaju and Maceió, the article analyzes how these mobilization strategies are constituted in a modality of “*terreiro* politics” as a means of “doing politics”, delimiting public identities, and debating accusations of increased and growing symbolic and concrete violations of Afro-based religions. The article also discusses how the categories intolerance, racism and genocide are part of a civic grammar that seeks to charge the State – most particularly the police and the judiciary – and push it to guarantee of rights in face the face of growing religious extremism characterized by narratives and actions aimed at building political agendas fueled by religious dogmas (“christofascism”), which result in violent acts against afroreligious *terreiros*.

Key words: religious racism, afro-religious mobilization, *terreiro* politics, “christofascist” politics, conflicts.

A “política dos terreiros” contra o racismo religioso e as políticas “cristofascistas”

Resumo

O artigo discute os processos de mobilização dos afroreligiosos em ações contra o racismo religioso e as políticas “cristofascistas”, desenvolvidas por grupos com religiosidade de perfil evangélico-pentecostal. Baseando-se em pesquisas etnográficas, realizadas desde 2008, no Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Aracaju e Maceió, pretende-se analisar como as estratégias de mobilização se constituem numa modalidade de política “dos terreiros” como um modo de se “fazer política”, que delimitam identidades públicas, trazendo para o debate as denúncias de acirramento e crescimento de violações das religiões de matrizes afro, no plano simbólico – a demonização de suas práticas – ou no plano concreto – a destruição dos terreiros e expulsão dos religiosos de suas casas. Discute-se também como as categorias intolerância, racismo e genocídio fazem parte de uma gramática cívica que busca cobrar do Estado, a partir principalmente das polícias e do judiciário, uma atuação de garantia de direitos, diante de um cenário de extremismo religioso, que se caracteriza por narrativas e ações com vistas à construção de agendas políticas, alimentada por dogmas religiosos – “cristofascismo”, que resultam em atos violentos contra os terreiros.

Palavras-chave: racismo religioso, mobilização dos afroreligiosos, política “dos terreiros”, políticas “cristofascistas”, conflitos.

“*Terreiro*¹ politics” against religious racism and “christofascist” politics

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Introduction

How does religious (in)tolerance affect the constitution of subjectivities of those who are (in)tolerated to the point of resistance? To what extent is a conflict between religious groups a tension that produces governmentality, when the contradictions of discourse are explicitly contrasted with the practices of state agents? These are some of the questions that have guided my research into complaints regarding violations of rights and demands for recognition involving the Afro-religious² in the current context of a “neoconservative” expansion that calls into question the democratic order in Brazil and the rights of *terreiros* and their members.

In the present article, I show how the relationship between religion and politics does not take place in a binary fashion, but results in different grades of (de)naturalization of conflicts and ethnic-racial difference involving African-rooted religiosities, particularly Candomblé. To this end, I show how mobilization strategies constitute a type of “*terreiro*” politics that arises in response to “christofascist”³ politics. Here, we will be thinking about how “politics are made” and identities are delimited, based on the construction of strategies that react to projects of eliminating Afro-rooted religiosities, whether symbolically (demonization) or concretely (destruction of *terreiros* and expulsion of members from their homes).

In 2008, I began my research aiming at understanding the dynamics of victimization of the Afro-religious in Rio de Janeiro. I looked at their strategies of making themselves visible and their demands known through complaints in the media, their demands on the public power structure (police and court records), and the institutional treatment and administration of these conflicts (Miranda 2010; 2012; 2014; 2015; 2018a; 2018b; 2019). I identified and analyzed forms of Afro-religious mobilization in public space in support of claims to rights, revealing different practices, discursive operations, and motivations that initially pointed towards the resurgence of “religious intolerance”. Over time it became evident to me that the phenomenon, once exclusively conceived of as a social problem (that is, a conflict in relation to values, beliefs, and customs) was also becoming a public problem (Cefaï 1996), demanding specialized treatment by public authorities, institutions, and social movements (Miranda, Corrêa and Pinto 2017; Miranda, Corrêa and Almeida 2019).

My research findings indicated that intolerance involving the Afro-religious should be understood as a category that involves experiences of victimization through prejudice and discrimination, rooted in belonging to an identity – both ethnic-racial and religious. These experiences were mainly caused by a growing number of conflicts involving religious groups with an Evangelical-Pentecostal profile⁴.

1 *Terreiro*: a religious sacred space in Afro-Brazilian religious tradition.

2 Referring to African-rooted religions, which are active in both social and political movements (Almeida 2015).

3 The term was created by Dorothee Sölle (1970), a German theologian, to describe those segments of Christianity that she considered to be totalitarian and imperialist. The term returned to usage in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to identify contemporary tendencies in public and social policies that, in the name of Christianity, exclude “non-traditional” subjects (Heyward 1999).

4 Considering the diversity of self-proclaimed “evangelicals”, Ronaldo Almeida (2009) defends the idea that analysis should not be via institutions (churches), but rather following an empirical cut that privileges contemporary Brazilian religiosity and, for this reason, he prefers to employ the term “Evangelical-Pentecostal profile”.

The worsening of these conflicts over the years has revealed how the Brazilian State asymmetrically treats the recognition of Afro-religious' rights in relation to those of Christian groups. Christian churches usually benefit from legal privileges in Brazil that do not apply, in practice, to minority religious groups (in this case, the Afro-religious). In many situations, furthermore, it is the State itself that causes discrimination.

We can already conclude that religious intolerance directed against the *terreiros* is a “national problem” due to its visibility, the centrality of its presence among groups with an Evangelical-Pentecostal profile (particularly in the public sphere), and the breadth of its reach (Miranda and Boniolo 2017; Miranda and Corrêa 2015; Miranda, Corrêa and Almeida 2017; Miranda and Silva 2017).

However, there are still those (usually religious people who are not involved in social movements) who deny that there is racial discrimination to this intolerance. They tend to represent the *terreiros* as spaces “congregating” people of different ethnic origins who are united by Afro-religiosities. This belief is manifest in the oft-heard phrase that the “*orixás* have no color”⁶. For these people, intolerance is the result of ignorance with regards to “spiritism”, and this can be remedied interreligious dialogue.

The resurgence of religious intolerance in the Brazilian public scene can be interpreted as a form of “civic discrimination” (Cardoso de Oliveira 2002), marked by the denial of rights to certain segments of the population. This occurs in Brazil because moral classification takes precedence over respect for formal rights, transforming the act of recognition into expressions of “consideration” and deference.

It is for this reason that the strategy of publicly presenting cases of religious intolerance has helped ensure that the Afro-religious, regardless of their color, are treated as full political subjects in the public sphere. This struggle has brought together Afro-religious groups, mainly from Umbanda and Candomblé, in collective groups struggling against discrimination, contradicting the idea that these religions do not unite.

Discussion of the tolerance paradox⁷ - intolerance cannot be tolerated - needs to be carried out from a postmodern point of view (Carre 2017). In this, tolerance functions as an instrument for recognizing differences between subjects. It operates through political-institutional interventions regarding the limits of citizenship and the ways of exercising this. In this sense, tolerance cannot be treated as an abstract principle, but must be seen as a process of social interaction that sets boundaries against violent expressions of racism in the religious field. In the case of “*terreiro* politics”, these borders are built through the incorporation of narratives proclaiming the equality of rights. They express expectations regarding the State’s actions in curbing those who are identified as oppressors. This is not a question of believing that the State - which has historically persecuted Afro-religions in Brazil - will magically change sides. Rather, it is a conscious manipulation of discourses and forms of oppression to build recognition as subjects (Butler 2004), particularly when one believes that others do not recognize oneself as such.

Thinking about the tolerance in this way overcomes the modernity expressed in Locke’s (1964 [1689]) liberalism, which argued that the political force of the State should only intervene in the regulation of religions when these acted against the people’s rights or the functions of society. Today’s conflicts show that we must not only pay attention to the physical security of people and property, but also to follow the discourses and

5 Afro-religious spiritual entities in the Yoruba tradition, generally deified ancestors.

6 The de-Africanization of Umbanda is a subject that lies beyond the scope of the present article. It is a fundamental theme for thinking about the “myth of racial democracy” that is still very much present in this religious field, however, and is especially obvious in the popular representations of Iemanjá, the *orixá* of the sea, as white. Another dimension that should be explored (but, again, is beyond the scope of the present work) are the racial conflicts within *terreiros*, which demonstrate the limits of ‘racial harmony within these spaces.

7 This paradox was analyzed by Karl Popper (1974: 289), who claimed that tolerance can only work in Western society when liberty is not understood to be absolute. The idea that the intolerant must not be tolerated is not a form of aggression, but a higher form of freedom of expression that is always limited by “rational arguments kept under control by public opinion”.

opinions of subjects involved in conflicts. We must problematize the belief that overcoming oppression is not simply a matter of guaranteeing self-affirmation and self-expression. We must also ask to what extent the opinions expressed cause pain to others. If they do, it is necessary to look for ways to transform the situation.

“The People of the Saints Occupy Brasília”

On June 10th, 2014, I followed the first national public demonstration promoted by the Afro-religious in the *Praça dos Três Poderes*⁸ in Brasília. Some one hundred people⁹ gathered there denounce the systematic violation of the rights of Afro-Brazilian religions. The group then proceeded to the National Congress, where they delivered the “Violence against the *terreiros*” dossier, documenting the depredations, physical attacks, and murders directed against the Afro-religious across Brazil.

This mobilization drew on dissatisfaction with the decision by the judge in charge of the 17th Circuit Federal Court of Rio de Janeiro, who denied a request mad by the Federal Public Ministry (MPF). The request was based on a complaint from the National Association of Afro-Media (ANMA), which called for Google Brasil Internet Ltda. To remove videos posted by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) on its YouTube channel that contained “messages of intolerance against Afro-Brazilian religions”. In his argument denying the request, the judge cited the of right to freedom of expression and the non-recognition of Afro-religious traditions as religions.¹⁰

I will never forget the reactions of astonishment expressed in the eyes of the people observing the Afro-religious walking through the halls of Congress dressed in their beads and ritual costumes, rich in African lace, embroidery and cloth¹¹. Some spectators made the sign of the cross and asked why “they were there that day? After all it wasn’t the 20th of November¹²”. Then there were those who turned their heads and proclaimed “I am protected by the name of Jesus”. Silently or not, the onlookers expressed the view that the Afro-religious did not belong in that public space; that they did not conform to its protocols.

The demonstration ended at the headquarters of the Ministry of Justice, with an audience with Minister José Eduardo Cardozo and the National Secretary of Public Security, Regina Miki. The demonstrators demanded “responses” to the attacks on the “people of the *terreiros*”. It was the first year of the second term of President Dilma Rousseff, whose first of thirteen campaign points was “the expansion and strengthening of democracy”, including the “unrestricted guarantee of freedom of the press, expression and religion”¹³.

8 Brasília’s analogue to Washington D.C.’s National Mall or Moscow’s Red Square.

9 The demonstration was organized by the *O Povo de Santo Ocupa Brasília* (The People of the Saints Occupy Brasília) movement under the coordination to the *Coletivo de Entidades Negras* (Black Entities Collective), an organization of the Black Social Movement that works to guarantee the civil rights of Brazil’s Black populations. At the demonstration, there were representatives of groups from Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, Maranhão, Goiás, Rio Grande do Sul and Amazonas (Almeida 2019; Venâncio 2015). The first public demonstration in the National Congress took place in 2009, when members of the *Fórum Permanente das Religiões de Matríz Africana e Afro-brasileiras do Distrito Federal e Entorno* (Permanent Forum of African and African-Brazilian Rooted Religions of the Federal District and Adjacencies) washed down the ramp of the Congressional building in protest against religious intolerance and in defense pf public policies that favored the group. See: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2009/09/23/comunidades-de-terreiro-lavam-rampado-congresso-em-protesto-contraintolerancia-religiosa>, accessed on 27/04/2020.

10 The repercussions of this case were so big that the judge changed his earlier arguments “to register the belief of this Court that the Afro-Brazilian beliefs are religions” without, however, changing his decision. See: <https://www.jfrj.jus.br/conteudo/jfrj-reconhece-cultos-afro-brasileiros-como-religiao>, accessed on 03/03/2015. The videos were only removed on 13/06/2014, when a higher court determined that Google should remove 14 videos, establishing a fine of R\$50,000 for every day in which they continued up. See: <https://www.oabrj.org.br/noticias/videos-ofensivos-religoes-afro-terao-ser-retirados-web>, Accessed on 16/06/2014.

11 The vestments reveal the hierarchies, functions, and seniority of the Afro-religious, as well as the division of daily activities in the *terreiro*’s public life.

12 Since the 1960s the Black Movement has celebrated this date in commemoration of Black resistance to slavery, symbolized by the death of Zumbi dos Palmares. In 2003, this date was officially consecrated as a national school holiday, becoming a general holiday in many places in Brazil.

13 See: http://deputados-democratas.org.br/pdf/Compromissos_Programaticos_Dilma_13%20Pontos_.pdf . Accessed on 02/05/2020. The theme did not appear, however, in the 2014 Platform of the Dilma Rousseff government, See: <https://pt.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Prog-de-Governo-Dilma-2014-INTERNET1.pdf> . Accessed on 02/05/2020.

Roussef's administration was the third of three consecutive Workers' Party (PT) governments that stimulated experiments in institutional democratic participation. These followed the principle that public policy is a deliberative process formed in stages, usually beginning with the definition of an agenda built through dialogue with society.

The "answer" of the Executive Branch authorities was the creation of the "Working Group Against Religious Violence"¹⁴. This refused to use the term "intolerance" because it considered the word inappropriate in describing the conflicts the *terreiros* faced. The group aimed to "study and propose measures and actions necessary to combat this problem in Brazilian society". Two meetings took place, but these did not have subsequent governmental developments due to the departure of José Eduardo Cardozo¹⁵ from the Ministry of Justice and his subsequent assumption of the office of the Federal Advocate General.

The decision of the head judge of the 17th Circuit Court not to classify Afro- traditions as religions was interpreted by the Afro-religious as a "political attack". By refusing these traditions recognition as a religion, judicial authorities were denying them access to a set of public policies produced by the State, which enshrined "traditionality" as an essential part of the formation of Brazilian culture. This therefore represented a negation of "Afro-descendant rights", conquered by the struggles of Brazil's Black movements in the face of the myths of "racial democracy" and "black passivity" (Moura 1972; Nascimento 1978; Gonzalez 1984).

Another relevant aspect of this decision is that the judge's opinion about the meaning of religious freedom was the equivalent of the defense of a markedly evangelical Christian paradigm, (Giumbelli 2018). According to this view, the IURD could post its videos because their content was protected by the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of conscience and creed, which was immune to State intervention. This employment of a concept of religious freedom guided by the ideological references of classical liberalism may be present in legal discourses, but it contradicts itself in the face of the political agenda of the "Christian right" (Pierucci 1996). This began to emerge more strongly in Brazil beginning with the Constituent Assembly of 1988, when one began to hear mentions of an "Evangelical Caucus"¹⁶ with a "conservative", "fundamentalist", "moralistic", and "traditionalist" profile, concerned with sexual morality, demonic forces, and the "return" of the communists. In this context, the "boundless freedom of religious belief" began to be exercised in the form of proselytizing speeches attack different groups in the name of Jesus, violating the rights of many minority groups.

Ronaldo de Almeida (2017) draws attention to the fact that these terms function as accusatory categories, confusing a broad spectrum of conjuncturally common political values and interests. Brazilian Evangelicals have never declared themselves to be "fundamentalists" unlike the New Christian Right in the U.S., which has publicly recognized as such since the 1980s and which has used various tactics to influence the political process: media campaigns, lobbying, public support for certain presidential candidates, and even civil disobedience (Midgley 1990).

The representation of religious freedom as a right that cannot be limited by external pressures, as proposed by the 17th Circuit court judge, was interpreted by the Afro-religious as a way of legally marginalizing the peoples of the *terreiros*, particularly when coupled with the disqualification of Afro-based religions.

14 This was implemented by Portaria Conjunta n. 01, 08/01/2015, of the Secretaria de Assuntos Legislativos e da Secretaria Nacional de Segurança Pública (the Secretariat for Legislative Affairs of the National Public Security Secretariat), with 13 sitting members: Adailton Moreira Costa (RJ), Firmino Inácio Fonseca Neto (CE), Jocenilda Barbosa Bispo (BA), Jersonita Euede Sinha de Azevedo Brandão (BA), Jane Maria Silva Diogo (PA), Elias Pontes de Cerqueira (SP), Luiz Fernando Martins da Silva (RJ), Marcos Antônio Pinto Xavier (RJ), Marcos Fábio Rezende Correia (BA), Roberto dos Santos Rodrigues (BA), Rosiane Rodrigues de Almeida (RJ), Joselito Crispim dos Santos (DF), Josemundo Dario Queiroz (RN).

15 The Minister was the target of much criticism, including from his own party, regarding the way he conducted his Ministry's policies. This was one of the forerunners of the political crisis that would lead to the impeachment of President Dilma Roussef.

16 It is important to emphasize that this "conservative Christian political activism" (Machado 2017) is constructed in partnership with the Catholic caucus in Congress, as well as other movements and associations such as the Fórum Evangélico Nacional de Ação Social e Política (FENASP), and the Associação Nacional de Juristas Evangélicos (ANAJURE) among others (Vital da Cunha and Lopes 2013).

These groups had already experienced legal discrimination under the 1890 and 1942 Penal Codes¹⁷, which criminalized manifestations of Afro-religiosities. The specter of renewed “illegality” was interpreted as the denial of the right to question judicial decisions (Sampaio 2014, 2019) and thus a means of reviving practices that denied rights to Afro-descendants. This hierarchical way of treating religious freedom in Brazil illustrates how the State deals and has dealt with guarantees of freedom of expression, contrasts sharply with the provisions of several international treaties to which Brazil is a signatory.

For the judge in question, “freedom” was defined, semantically, as “a space of action free of state and third party interventions” (Sampaio 2014: 57). The IURD was thus understood to be exercising its “fundamental right to freedom”, because it met the requirements of what was understood to be a religion in the understanding of the court. This understanding, in turn, presupposed the existence of “a basic sacred text”, a hierarchical structure, and an overarching (and monotheistic) “God”.

According to those who worked on the case, what was under discussion was not the classification of Afro-Brazilian traditions as religions (these, of course, are quite varied and complex), but rather how guarantees to the right to freedom of opinion and expression are interpreted. These should be understood in light of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)¹⁸ and Brazil’s Racial Equality Statute (Law No. 12,288 / 2010), which -- in its Chapter III -- regulates the right to freedom of conscience and belief and the free exercise of religious groups of African origin. This interpretation ended up being expressed in a legal appeal to a higher court, that resulted in the final condemnation of the IURD’s videos. The document produced by that decision affirmed that religious freedom is a modality of freedom of expression and conscience and includes the freedom to have no religion. It also stated that this freedom “is *subject to limitations* regarding the exercise of other fundamental rights” (emphasis added). In the case of conflict, consideration should be given to the interests involved¹⁹.

This controversy over the meanings of religious freedom explains the asymmetry of State treatment to Christian and Afro-Brazilian religious beliefs. This has been a characteristic of the Brazilian secularization process, been marked since the beginning of the Republic by disputes in the political, legal, and social fields (Montero 2015). In the past, demands for the State to arbitrate religious conflicts tended to be made by Brazil’s Protestant religions. Today, however, the plaintiffs are the Afro-Brazilian religious who are trying to defend their rights in the public sphere as part of a strategy of the “*terreiro* politics”. This links together the power to act with a responsibility in choosing which paths need to be followed, because everything that is done in the Afro-Brazilian religious field has consequences in terms of relationships between individuals, the community and Axé²⁰. This is a re-enchantment of politics that reconfigures the boundaries between the private and the public. The power of the divinities is activated in the songs for Exu and Xangô sung in Congress, but – in traditional fashion – it is good, old secular politics that allowed the protestor to schedule a meeting with the Minister.

17 This theme has been extensively explored in the Brazilian academy (Maggie 1992; Giumbelli 1997; Schritzmeyer 2004; Couceiro 2008).

18 This decrees that signatory States should reject any activities inspired by ideas based upon the belief in the superiority of a race, color, or ethnic group, as well as activities that seek to justify or encourage any form of racial hatred or discrimination.

19 See:

https://www10.trf2.jus.br/portal?movimento=cache&q=cache:wYqIMtkfkocf:ementas.trf2.jus.br/apolo/databucket/idx%3Fprocesso%3D201400001010430%26coddoc%3D40280%26datapublic%3D2014-09-16%26pagdj%3D667/688+videos&site=v2_jurisprudencia&client=v2_index&proxystylesheet=v2_index&lr=lang_pt&ie=UTF-8&output=xml_no_dtd&access=p&oe=UTF-8, acesso em 25/05/2020.

20 The spiritual energy that imbues everything with real material effects.

The demonstration in the *Praça dos Três Poderes* also serves as an introduction for us to discuss the contemporary meanings of “religious intolerance”. While the “attacks” on Afro-Brazilian religions are not a recent phenomenon in Brazil, one can certainly describe differences that have been generated by what is called the “new conservative wave”²¹. These have implications for the democratic political order and the plural manifestation of religiosities.

Religious freedom for whom?

The demonstration was one of several that I have followed since 2009 -- in Aracaju, Brasília, Maceió and Rio de Janeiro -- when I started researching the ethnic-religious and racial conflicts in Brazil that commonly understood as “religious intolerance”. The emergence of these cases on our public scene is directly related to the processes of Afro-religious social and political mobilization, as well as the institutional forms of administration of these conflicts through the police and the courts.

But what was special about this particular demonstration? In the first place, it showed how the Afro-religious have nationally organized themselves to publicly present the “violence” to which they are subjected, in opposition to the idea that the “people of the saints” are not politically organized²². It also allows us to analyze how this mobilization is connected to a public sphere that discusses “coping strategies”, which are quite different from the submission of demands to the Judiciary in the form of lawsuits.

Religious intolerance is not codified in Brazil’s penal code. Instead, it is folded into a more general law regarding discrimination in its multiple aspects (racial crimes), qualified as a bail-less crime (Law No. 7.716 / 89). This allows us to analyze how ethnic-religious and racial conflicts (generally considered to be within the scope of private relations) become transformed into crimes that are registered with the police and forwarded to the judiciary. This, in turn, allows us to unravel forms of institutionalized conflict management that disqualify plaintiffs, as is also observed in gender conflicts (Lima and Silva 2015). Disqualification results in the re-privatization of these conflicts, reinforcing humiliating situations for the victims (Sarti 2014)²³ whose presence in public space is only made possible through their being “involved” with a crime (Cecchetto, Muniz and Monteiro 2018).

It is necessary to register that the “victims” do not seek justice with the expectation of seeing “their problem” resolved. Interest in criminalizing “cases of intolerance” is mainly a political act of rights recognition, based on the State’s mandate to tackle discrimination (Miranda 2014). Police are held responsible for their past invasions of the *terreiros* and changes are demanded with regards to the ways in which institutions should assist the Afro-religious. In this situation, the role of “victim” is taken on as a form of social recognition of suffering, which it is only possible by incorporating the notion of rights (Sarti 2011). When assuming the role of victim, Afro-religious people reveal themselves as immersed in scenarios of political violence, making it evident that their struggles are difficult, but necessary. In doing so, they set aside the “alleged passivity” caused

21 The use of the term “wave” is associated with a representation of relatively rigid historical contexts, as if we could envision time in a static fashion. According to this sort of narrative, after the “wave” has passed, it will be possible to return to what is considered to be “normal”. This way of looking at things hides the dialectic processes inherent in historical events. The “wave” becomes seen as an interruption that perturbs a given, idealized social order, without identifying—let alone analyzing—the movements and transformations taking place in social life.

22 This representation is present in the *terreiros* and also in many anthropological works. I do not agree with this premise, which takes as its basis of comparison “traditional” Brazilian religious groups, which are obviously guided by different interests and, consequently, have resources and strategies to maintain the status quo.

23 According to Mezarobba (2010: 12), the first time that the republican Brazilian State “admitted, outside of the context of a court decision, the State’s objective responsibility for the unlawful performance of its security agents” was when Law no. 9.140 / 1995 (known as the Law of the Missing) was passed. It is in the same decade that bills began to appear in the National Congress from black organizations, asking the Brazilian federal government for financial reparations for the descendants of slaves. Public demonstrations around this cause also began to take place around the same time (Domingues 2018).

by repression while creating commotions as a strategy for “transforming mourning into struggle”²⁴. All this in a context that some call the Brazilian latter 20th Century “holy war”.

The boundaries of subjectification instituted by discourses that model, classify, and hierarchize the Afro-religious result in a “framing” (Butler 2015) of political-religious conflicts as something that occurs between Afro-Brazilians and Evangelicals, revealing polarizations and the naturalization of identities and ultimately reducing the diversity antagonisms in play. In this context, the State presents itself as ambivalent, playing the dual role both the initiator of violence (through omission or open discrimination) and as the protector and guarantor of rights. One of the consequences of this process is that the recognition of subjects triggers representations of an eternal present of violations, which can be seen in the footage of the destruction of *terreiros* that became viral on social media beginning in 2017. These images remain in the public memory as if the victimization never stopped.

Religious intolerance and religious racism: the two faces of a social and public problem

On December 27, 2007, the Brazilian federal government instituted the National Day of Combating Religious Intolerance (January 21) through Law No. 11,635 as part of the Brazil’s official commemorations. The bill was authored by Congressman Daniel de Almeida (PCdoB-BA) and was the result of the mobilization of the Movement Against Religious Intolerance organized in the state of Bahia. This mobilization took place following the publication, by the *Folha Universal* in 1999, of a photo of Yalorixá Gildásia dos Santos (known as Mãe Gilda) in a report entitled “charlatan *macumbeiros*²⁵ damage the pocketbook and lives of their customers”. In the photo, Mother Gilda had a black stripe over her eyes and was dressed as priestess, with an offering at her feet. Later, her *terreiro* was invaded by another religious group (the Assembly of God) and the Yalorixá and her husband were verbally and physically assaulted. Mother Gilda had a heart attack and died as a result of these attacks. Her daughter, Yalorixá Jaciara Ribeiro dos Santos, initiated a lawsuit and a movement to claim and protect the rights of the Afro-religious in Bahia. This led to a series of struggles, ending with the condemnation of *Folha Universal*, the creation of the National Day of Combating Religious Intolerance, and -- in 2016 -- the inauguration of a bust erected in memory of Mãe Gilda in the neighborhood of Itapuã. This bust has subsequently been the target of constant desecration.

The first book dealing with the theme of religious intolerance in Brazil analyzed cases in São Paulo (Silva 2007), labeling as “attacks” against Afro-Brazilian religions aggressions that took place during the worship in neo-Pentecostal churches as well as in the media. It also detailed physical attacks on the Afro-religious and offenses carried out against Afro-Brazilian religious rites in public spaces.

The academic debate around the use of “intolerance” as a category has shown that the idea of religious freedom as something that cannot be restricted is the result of neo-Pentecostal Protestant interpretations that can lead people to violate the freedoms of others, putting the very idea of freedom at risk.

As politics takes place through consensus and dissent, the public debate ended up exhausting the utility of the expression “religious intolerance”, which has now been left behind by the Afro-religious. Researchers and activists began to demand the use of “religious racism” due to the worsening of the conflicts involving African-rooted *terreiros* across Brazil.

24 Adailton Moreira, babalorixá of the Ilê Omiojuáro *Terreiro*, son of Mãe Beata de Iemanjá, launched the “I mourn in the fight against religious racism” campaign, which was inspired by a sign with the slogan “This city belongs to Lor Jesus” that was placed at the entrance to Nova Iguaçu in the Baixada Fluminense. The *terreiro* was in mourning due to the death of its matriarch, but in the face of the attacks directed against other *terreiros* and this violation of religious neutrality on the part of the city government, the *terreiro* did not completely close, continuing with its political struggles. See <https://extra.globo.com/noticias/rio/placa-na-baixada-diz-que-cidade-pertence-ao-senhor-jesus-vira-alvo-de-criticas-22951395.html>, accessed on 06/08/2018.

25 The word is used sometimes as a pejorative meaning to refer to any ritual or religion of Afro-Brazilian origin, referring to all kinds of “superstitions”. Among its practitioners it is not seen negatively.

“Religious racism” therefore appeared as a political counterpoint to “religious intolerance”. This latter term is not considered to be adequate by the afro-religious political activists because it is associated with a liberal conception of rights based upon a Christian foundation, which serves to camouflage the already “invisibilized” Brazilian forms of racism (Cardoso de Oliveira 2004)²⁶. This invisibility is understood to be a tactic of structural racism (Almeida 2018) that denies the existence of discrimination: even when there are a high-infinite number of complaints and even with laws and institutions in place to combat this sort of violence, almost nothing is done to stop the violations or transform the relationships that produce them.

In his analysis of cases in Bahia, Ordep Serra is one of the primary defenders of the idea that religious intolerance is, in fact, “racism’s warhorse”²⁷. His reconfiguration gives visibility to the links between neo-Pentecostal churches and politicians and public agents in the Brazilian National Congress in their fomentation of what he calls a “war of religions, directed at the *terreiros* and the people of the saints, particularly in the poor neighborhoods of Salvador. Unfortunately, the term is not be useful to explain how these manifestations of structural racism actually work.

Wanderson Flor do Nascimento (2016; 2017) has highlighted the “insufficiency” of the term “religious intolerance”. He claims that it does not account for the “violence” directed at *terreiros* and people, believing that it is necessary to value the resistance of the “people of saints”. Nascimento also claims that it is necessary to understand that “combating” a religion necessarily attacks processes of identity constitution. In this particular case, when the “religions” in question are primarily made up of black and brown people and formed by African and indigenous elements, such attacks reveal a hidden face of racism in Brazilian society.

This category of religious racism was inspired by American black movements’ discussions of institutional racism, which explain how racism has been a structuring foundation for social relations. In this view, racism of “systematic form of discrimination that has race as its foundation, which manifests itself through conscious or unconscious practices culminating in disadvantages or privileges, depending on the racial group to which people belong” (Almeida 2018: 25). This concept has been widely disseminated in Brazil through a national network of mobilizations of *terreiros* in defense of their freedom of worship and which also works to discuss the formulation of public policies.

This classificatory transformation reveals the processes of learning a civic grammar that underlies the struggle for rights. The main distinction of this struggle has been the inclusion of religion as an important factor, in opposition to the Marxist approaches that had for years influenced Brazil’s black movements and which delegitimized religion (and gender) as an essential component of public debate (Domingues 2007).

A reorganization has thus taken place in the collective mobilization of the Afro-religious, who are defending their civil rights at the national level. This has resulted in yet another change, this time in relation to the black movements that, up until then, were the main political actors in building an anti-discrimination agenda in Brazil (Almeida 2015, 2019). The participation of Afro-religious in the construction of public policies breaks with a polarized approach to secularism that has always assumed that public space in Brazil is religious, but exclusively dominated by the Christian traditions.

This polarization between the categories “religious intolerance” and “religious racism” is therefore part of the political mobilization of the afro-religious. It reveals the tensions inherent in explaining conflicts in the public sphere – tensions that originated in past struggles in the legal field. This is how the classification of “hate crimes” (which are not even discussed in Brazilian law) began to be identified as collective attacks on

26 It is worth mentioning here the expansion of advocacy actions aimed at racism, in particular the case of Extraordinary Appeal 494601 to the Supreme Federal Court (STF), in which the state law 12.131 / 2004 (RS) prohibiting animal sacrifice in religious rites was overturned as unconstitutional. Even though the term “racism” was not expressly mentioned by the Supreme Court Justices, the decision was considered a historic strike against the violence directed against Afro-religions as one of the facets of structural racism (Hoshino, Bueno 2019).

27 Testimony of Ordep Serra in the documentary “Intolerância Religiosa – A ameaça à paz”, 2004, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AabbL3Wl0o>, accessed on 21/07/2020.

human dignity, in accordance with an international model. Under this definition, however, it must be proven that criminal motivation was due to prejudice or hatred against victims who belonged to a group protected as a “social minority”. The incorporation of this sort of terminology conflicts with institutionalized practices for disqualifying conflicts regarding the manifestation of prejudices and discrimination in Brazil, considered to be “less offensive crime”, disqualifying the seriousness of their moral offenses.

The judicial disqualification of these cases ends creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: the intensification of conflicts following upon the widespread circulation in 2017²⁸ of the two videos showing the destruction of *terreiros*. Another controversy then erupted involving the emergence of the so-called “new conservative wave”, which has been termed “religious fundamentalism”, but which I prefer to call “religious extremism”, for reasons I will describe below.

The emergence of the terms “religious intolerance” and “religious racism” has therefore been the result of a political debate between different subjects (the Afro-religious, political activists, researchers, etc.) about what is the best way to describe, in the legal-political and religious fields, the multiplying cases of murders, destruction, threats, and intimidation involving supporters and leaders of Afro-religions. However, we must also pay attention to another face of these aggressions, often seen in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which is associated with the expansion of armed control (Miranda and Muniz 2018) over illegal markets (particularly drugs). Here, the expansionist projects of Evangelical-Pentecostal profile churches are guided by a two different growth strategies. On the one hand, they focus on converting criminals (especially drug dealers) in favelas and/or prisons, giving rise to a new actor who identifies themselves as an “evangelical drug dealer” or “*traficrente*”²⁹. These people tend to adopt a belligerent stance against the *terreiros*, conducting violent attacks against them and spreading fear through the filming of their activities and the reproduction of these on social networks. This results in the closure of many of the *terreiros* so targeted. On the other hand, the churches also act in criminal “money laundering” scheme, according to information provided by the Federal Police and the Federal Attorney General’s Office. One indication that territories are being occupied by these Christianized criminal groups is graffiti with religious symbols (Christian or referring to Israel), biblical passages, phrases that clarify who dominates the region I question (“Jesus owns the place”), followed by signatures of the various criminal factions.

Violence against the *terreiros* as a form of “religious extremism”

On May 13, 2019, I participated in a public hearing organized by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro’s (Alerj) Commission for Combating Discrimination. The hearing was chaired by the President of the Commission, State Congressman Carlos Minc (PSB), and it debated public policies combating religious intolerance. Three victims of religious discrimination took the floor, along with other parliamentarians and executive branch authorities, including the chief of the police precinct specialized in combating discrimination.

28 One case occurred in Nova Iguaçu in the Baixada Fluminense; the other in Ilha do Governador in the city of Rio de Janeiro. In both cases, religious leaders were forced to destroy their own *terreiros* “in the name of Jesus”. The aggressors’ discourses mixed narratives of evangelical preaching with the “*esculachos*” (public degradation) characteristic of criminal groups operating in the favelas and who threaten the afro-religious with weapons.

29 Journalist Cecília Oliveira also refers to the existence of “*milicrentes*”. One comment made on Twitter, on 17/07/2019, references reports that talked about contacts between the boss of the militia in Muzema (an unofficial favela in Rio’s West Zone) and the son of the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Marcelo Crivella. The goal of these dialogues was supposedly cancel the demolition of irregular constructions in the favela, which were one of the sources of the militia’s finances. See: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2019/07/miliciano-cita-conversa-com-filho-de-crivella-e-tentativas-de-contato-com-prefeito.shtml>, accessed on 17/07/2019.

Members of the judiciary also participated, including representatives from the State Attorney General's Office and the Public Defender's Office. Compliance with Federal Law 12,288/10 (which ensures the free exercise of religious services and guarantees protection to places of worship and worshippers) and State Law No. 7,855 / 18 (which determines that the reports of religious intolerance must be typified as such) were discussed.

The three victims invited to speak -- two Babalorixás and one Yalorixá -- reported the persecution they had been suffering and complained about the failure of the public institutions in dealing with the cases. I did not notice anything new in the course of this, the fourth public hearing on the topic in which I had participated in less than a year. What drew my attention was how the cases (which up to then had been called "religious intolerance") were now being designated by some of the witnesses as "religious racism" and "religious genocide against black people".

The adoption of the expression "religious genocide against black people" by the Afro-religious is a way of making racial discrimination visible and denouncing racist violence and its lethality, particularly against black youth³⁰. It is important to highlight the influence here of the work of Abdias Nascimento, who -- speaking of black genocide in Brazil -- criticized the actions of the Catholic Church and State authorities for their oppressive practices against Candomblé and other Afro-religions. Nascimento qualified this as a form of systematic persecution, on-going since colonial times, directed against African culture as part of a policy of white supremacy that hid its true face behind the myth of racial democracy.

Genocide is a crime under international law, directly related to the socio-political phenomenon of the elimination of social groups in modern societies. It became codified as such when the UN defined it as a punishable crime under United Nations General Assembly Resolution #96-I, 1946. This was the first international document to mention "genocide", defining it as the "denial of the right of existence of entire human groups". It was in the debates regarding the Convention for the Prevention and Suppression of the Crime of Genocide (1948) that Article 6 defined that the power to try this offense could reside in the hands of "the competent courts of the State in whose territory the act was committed, or by the court international criminal law".

When it comes to guaranteeing the rights of traditional communities -- so-called ethnic rights -- there is no lack of national (Federal Constitution; Law 7.716 / 1989) or international laws (Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization), nor of organizations focused on the development of public policies for the protection of said groups. The difficulties in "materializing rights and repairing damages" in this case lie in the ways in which the judicial system emerges "as a new protagonist responsible for analyzing and judging these new social demands" (Oliveira 2014).

The conflicts reported in the hearing described above point to a new scenario. It was previously common to report situations involving close relationships (neighbors, relatives, co-workers). Now, the "executioners" were drug dealers and/or militia members, as well as the pastors of neo-Pentecostal churches. The reports (which included an ambush, with shots fired at the car of one of the victims) clearly signaled an aggravation of these conflicts, making the term "religious intolerance" (which the government is now only beginning to discuss inserting in police databases) insufficient to account for the events suffered by the victims.

Throughout 2019, I received some ten reports involving *terreiros* in the Baixada Fluminense whose religious leaders had been forced at gunpoint to destroy their *terreiro* and its sacred objects. Some of the cases reached the media, which did not, however, cover the result of these cases. As was the case in 2008, with the expulsion of the *terreiros* from the Morro do Dendê, Rio de Janeiro led the way in cases of violence against *terreiros*. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has not been restricted to that state.

³⁰ The black movements have also employed "genocide" to denounce the Brazilian State as responsible for the murders of young black men, which they believe to be a part of state policy.

The effort to understand the relationship between criminals and the neo-Pentecostal religions emerged at the end of the 1990s in Rio de Janeiro, with the appearance of the “Theology of Dominion” and the concept of a “Spiritual Battle” (Vital da Cunha 2014; Silva 2007). Studies revealed the conversion of drug traffickers in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, associating this with the growing phenomenon of attacks on the Umbanda and Candomblé *terreiros*. In the spiritual narratives produced by these religious ideologies the devil and demons are associated with African origin spiritual entities. It is in this context that the categories “evangelical drug dealer” (Vital da Cunha 2014), “ex-bandit” (Teixeira 2009, 2011), and “evangelized drug dealer” (Silva 2016, 2019) emerge in the specialized literature, seeking to describe the self- and the hetero-identification of these actors. This literature also highlighted how attacks on the *terreiros* are part of the process of the conversion of these individuals to neo-Pentecostalism (which does not imply the abandonment of their ties to drug trafficking or other criminal practices).

We can see this same phenomenon in the Universal Church’s “Gladiators of the Altar” evangelization campaign, which emerged in the form of a paramilitary group that published the following text on the internet:

We will destroy all false religions until they disappear from our country! These pagan religions with African and Asian or Muslim origins will not be tolerated in our country! Nor will Homosexuality [sic]! We will do the job that the government is not capable of doing! Join us!³¹

In 2017, an investigation was requested to establish responsibility for crimes against national security and religious discrimination/religious intolerance at the Police Precinct for Racial and Intolerance Crimes in the State of São Paulo. After that, the IURD released a note condemning the Altar Gladiators’ words and removed several videos from social networks.

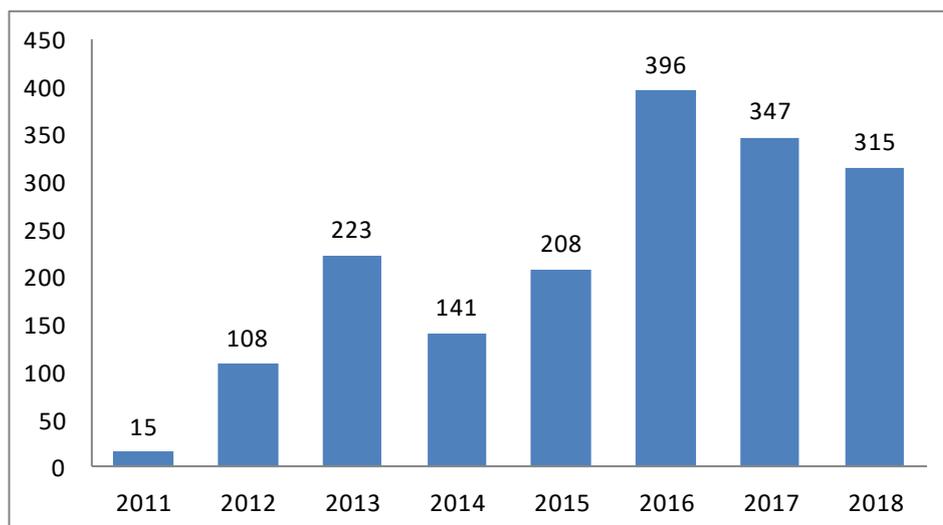
Rosiane Rodrigues de Almeida (2019) analyzed the performance of the “Bonde de Jesus”, which allegedly closed down the *terreiros* in Duque de Caxias³². She presents a hypothesis, based on documentation produced by the Federal Attorney General’s Office, that these persecutions of *terreiros* were localized actions, involving the interests of churches in “laundering money” from illegal activities taking place in the region. Almeida points out that the closing of *terreiros* in the Baixada Fluminense, based on strategies of spreading fear through with filming members and diffusing these through social networks, has the consequence of closing down all Afro-religious activities. This is what she feels happened in Parque Paulista, where six *terreiros* were attacked, but all the others shut down as well.

The diversity of actors involved in these attacks does not allow us to affirm (at least at the present time) that the aggressions directed against Afro-religions are orchestrated actions or the result of a common agenda among Evangelical-Pentecostal groups, which have more than 40 million members in Brazil. No one-dimensional analysis can be constructed when it comes to these expressions of religious violence, but the challenge of understanding the growth in the number of cases lies before us. Although little official data is available, it can already be said that cases of “religious intolerance” grew in Brazil, based on data from the Dial 100 denunciation hotline (Dial Human Rights).

31 The original text was removed from Facebook, but can be found at <https://umbandaead.blog.br/2017/01/12/5051/>, accessed on 01/07/2020.

32 See: <https://g1.globo.com/tj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2019/08/15/com-lider-pastor-facciao-tem-quartel-general-em-condominio-em-duque-de-caxias-rj.ghtml>, accessed on 10/10/2019.

Graph 1: Number of registered denunciations of religious discrimination (2011-2018)³³



Source: Disque Cem (data consolidated by the author)

Another source that shows the growing problem in Brazil is the Pew Research Center, which conducts surveys monitoring religious conflicts throughout the world. According to its report on government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion between 2007 and 2017³⁴, Brazil can be classified as a country with a low level of “government restrictions on religion” but a high level of “social hostilities involving religion”, with rates ranging from 3.5 to 7.0 on a scale of 10. The Pew report highlights that there was of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim in Brazil hostilities in 2017, as well as incidents related to Afro-Brazilian religions.

It has been common to use the terms “religious fundamentalism” and “religious extremism” to account for the worsening of these conflicts. It is necessary, however, to understand the different interpretations, beliefs, and attitudes involved in these conflicts in order to understand if we are facing extremist religious activities. Any religious group can be extreme in some dimensions and moderate in others, of course. To understand these conflicts we must analyze their dynamics in different dimensions, namely both the theological-ritual (which characterizes ways of dealing with religious representations and experiences), and the political/social (Wibisono, Louis, Jetten 2019). It is this latter axis of analysis that interests us in the present article, for it reveals how an agenda that affects (directly or indirectly) intergroup relations (both religious and non-) is constructed. It also shows the situations experienced within a given group that and their impact upon the rules regarding how the group how interacts with others. Conflicts can be considered “extreme” when we can identify an expansionist proposal that results in mythical-political narratives that can both correspond to denial and glorification of a nation. This narrative also has effects on the construction of a reactionary agenda in terms of customs, with emphasis on systematic discrimination against women. Another characteristic of extremism is a hostile view towards other religions and the refusal to accept strategies that promote interreligious dialogue, which are considered a threat to the faith.

In common sense, the use of the term “religious extremism” is associated with terrorism and ends up generating/reproducing negative stereotypes in relation to religious groups. This has consequences on the formulation of public policies, which is not the objective of the present article. My objective here is to understand under what circumstances extremism encompasses narratives and actions that build a political

³³ Available at <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2019/junho/balanco-anual-disque-100-registra-mais-de-500-casos-de-discriminacao-religiosa>, accessed on 02/07/2020.

³⁴ Available at <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/07/15/a-closer-look-at-how-religious-restrictions-have-risen-around-the-world/>, accessed on 02/07/2020.

agenda fueled by religious dogmas that result in activism in which individuals will intentionally commit violence in the name of their beliefs. This effort to promote a classification of conflicts from a multidimensional perspective is necessary for us to consider how the social and political dimensions of religion are interrelated. It is also absolutely fundamental to any attempt to understand the nuances involving conflicts in the face of groups that seek to impose their points of view through force.

The scenario currently found in Rio de Janeiro greatly complicates the analyses that have so far been developed. One can no longer think that we are simply facing the mere conversion of “bandits” to neo-Pentecostalism as part of a proselytizing action in a “holy war”. We need to understand what political roles these churches play in their interactions with armed groups (traffickers/militias/police), either in the consolidation of an “armed dominance” (Miranda and Muniz 2018) over a given territory or in the confection of “extremist actions” (Vital da Cunha, Lopes and Lui 2017). We need to identify which practices are adopted to punish those who are at odds with biblical interpretations of reality/ These involve religious and political narratives that reinforce stereotypes about the Afro-religious that are present in the Eurocentric Christian imaginary, situating those who follow Afro-religions as devil worshipers. This, in turn, has direct consequences upon the aggravation of prejudices in relation to the moralities, knowledges, and practices of peoples of African descent.

In the cases identified up to the present moment, we can see:

- Grave levels of aggression (physical, psychological, moral, and against property) directed against Afro-religions;
- The use of communication technologies and, in particular, social media, as well as traditional media (radio, newspapers, T.V.) to spread ideas and divulge violent acts;
- The impossibility of predicting such attacks, given that they have occurred in different regions, dominated by different criminal factions. In this sense, although each criminal faction has repressed *terreiros*, such repression has also occurred in places where they groups are not active and in places where militia are active. In the same way, a large number of different Evangelical tendencies have been involved in these attacks;
- The aggressions occur in areas of economic exclusion where there is little opportunity for social mobility through labor. This is an important variable because there is often land speculation occurring in the regions where the attacks take place and the invasions of *terreiros* are often connected to religious groups with financial interests in real estate speculation;
- Political exclusion and the reduction of civic space in the territories dominated by armed factions is associated with the inability of the Brazilian State to provide security to all, which is furthermore characterized by inequalities, injustices, and violation of human rights directed at black populations .

On the other hand, the fragmentary nature of these actions leads me believe that we cannot say that Brazil is facing religious extremism, at least in comparison to international levels of such. I consider it more appropriate to speak (at the moment at least) of a process of radicalization of racial ideologies that have been present in the national imagination since the 19th century. These served to justify the enslavement of blacks and indigenous peoples and continue to function today as narratives legitimizing the inferiorization of these same groups. Furthermore, they have been influenced by a resurgence of racist movements in the USA and Europe inspired by white supremacist ideologies (Fitzgerald 2020). What is new in Brazil is the association of these narratives with the religious discourse of the Theology of Prosperity³⁵ (Campos 1997). Begun in the 1970s, this theology understands that the faithful are divinely favored with good health and financial prosperity.

35 First appearing in the United States, this theology spread to Brazil, headed by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, rejecting traditional Pentecostal practices. Other churches that follow this trend are the International Church of the Grace of God, the Evangelical Community Sara Nossa Terra and the Renascer em Cristo Apostolic Church. The context of the emergence and expansion of the prosperity gospel in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s took place against a backdrop of labor informality and job insecurity. The spread of the idea of ‘entrepreneurism’, and of being one’s own boss was an important element of this religious discourse, which is a theology that privileges the immediate.

This theological perspective holds that it is the action of the Holy Spirit that produces divine healing, but it can also be employed in spiritual warfare against the activities of the devil³⁶. Ill health, financial failure, and unhappiness are thus understood to be closely related to supposed demonic action and this, in turn, is used as an as an argument for attacks on the Afro-religious.

From a political point of view, it is necessary to remember that the strategy of the Catholic Church and the State in relation to African-based religions has always been marked by persecutions of freedom of expression. This inequality of forces continues to be observed in the attacks now undertaken by Evangelical-Pentecostal profile groups, I thus do not think it is possible to say that we are facing a “holy war of Pentecostals against Afro-Brazilians”, as Luiz Eduardo Soares claims (1993: 31), which supposedly functions as a democratic reordering the Brazilian religious field. To the contrary: research data highlights the fact that, once again, Afro- traditions are under attack from a Christian and racist ideological worldview.

It is in this sense that we can conclude that the meanings attributed to religious intolerance are politically distinguished from the use of the terms “religious racism” and “black genocide”. The latter terms emerged in public controversies (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991) pointing to a reconfiguration of the established order. If, on the one hand, there has been an increase in attacks on Afro-religions motivated by “christofascist” politics, on the other, there has been the emergence of “*terreiro*” politics. This has encouraged “the people of the saints” to reflect and act in line with their interests, allowing an expansion of the discussion about the dissimulation of discriminatory practices in Brazil, in order to make demands of public bodies that can no longer be silent in the face of these increasingly serious cases. The destruction of the *terreiros* and expulsion of the Afro-religious leaves no doubt that ethnic-racial-religious discrimination has become a visible phenomenon across Brazil.

The increasing forms of mobilization of the *terreiros* around collective political agendas in pursuit of rights have expanded the lexicon of categories -- intolerance, racism and genocide -- as part of strategies for interacting with State practices that continue to deny the right to ethnic-religious identity. Today’s *terreiro* politics have emerged in a confrontation with a historic denial of rights. This is not exactly a new phenomenon: the history of religious resistance in Brazil spans centuries. Today, however, this struggle has become more explicit. This new version of old politics was built upon alliances forged between the Afro-religious (guided by their initiatic lineages), who then sought partnerships with public organizations and/or social movements. It is structured around the struggle for recognition of ethnic-racial-religious diversity and the socio-political belonging of marginalized subjects. It constitutes a specific religious activism that is not concerned with the insertion of their religious beliefs and values in legal normativity or in public policies. Instead, it demands from the State its right to exist and denounces the fact that aggressors’ motivations are directly related to their prejudices, which are amplified by the intensification of ideologies that glorify the supremacy of a specific group (“whites”), and which seem to resurface with for the colonial past, fortunately long behind us.

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Translated by Thaddeus Blanchette

³⁶ Although Native Brazilians and Africans did not have a representation of personified evil their pantheons, like the Christian Devil, the historical process of demonizing these religious practices resulted in associations between Native/African deities and the devil.

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Ana Paula Mendes de Miranda

Federal Fluminense University (UFF), Department of Anthropology, Professor

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1007-6714>

Email: anapaulamiranda@id.uff.br