

## Original article

## Umbanda in the kardecist spiritualist novels

DOI: 10.3395/reciis.v4i3.385en

**Maria Helena Villas Boas Concone**

Head-Professor at the Departamento de Antropologia, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo – PUC-SP, Advisor at the Post-Graduation Programs in Gerontology and in Social Sciences at PUC-SP, member of the Douglas Teixeira Monteiro Religion Studies Center (CER), member of the Health Research Ethics Committee, researcher in the fields of Anthropology of Religion and the Health/Disease with emphasis on Umbanda, religion, health, embodiment and aging. São Paulo, Brazil.  
trconcone@yahoo.com.br

**Eliane Garcia Rezende**

MSc in Epidemiology, Professor at the Universidade Federal de Alfenas – UNIFAL (Federal University of Alfenas), student in the Doctorate Course in Anthropology at the Post-Graduation Program in Social Sciences at PUC/SP, focusing Institutions, Ideologies and Religions. Alfenas, Minas Gerais, Brazil.  
eliane.rezende@unifal-mg.edu.br

**Abstract**

In anthropology, religion can be seen as a cultural system that encompasses a whole range of symbols and signification, where meaning relations regarding life are built; as stated by Geertz, religion produces an ethos and a worldview. This study aimed to analyze Umbanda (a Brazilian spiritualist religion) as it appears in spiritist novels, in search of moral and cognitive aspects that inform them, in this case, seeking the spiritist view of Umbanda, positivity or negativity attributed to it and the arguments which were used to justify such ratings. The chosen texts allowed the examination between descriptions and excerpts from these novels and descriptions and excerpts with reference to Umbanda produced by the academic literature. This strategy allowed us to deepen our analysis and, going a little beyond the novels, to introduce a more critical consideration. With the purpose of reading and analyzing the texts, we previously set some markers: birth of Umbanda, obsession or encosto (*a discarnate to incarnate relation that works as a jinx*); syncretism; and health-disease process. The explicability offered by Spiritualism shows all its strength to those going through mishaps (death, loss, illness, etc.); and descriptions of Umbanda performances and Spiritism are also seen in this context as a sum of individual actions in benefit of the incarnated and discarnated individuals.

**Keywords**

religion; Umbanda; Kardecism; interpretative anthropology; novels

Umbanda, which was designed in Brazil by that name in the first decades of the twentieth century, may have represented, according to some scholars, a field of competition to the Kardecist Spiritism (LEWGOY, 2001). From another perspective, however, one can say that these two religious fields have established a dialogue, although not always in a two-way fashion. We have already noted that Umbanda has been built in the of social and religious legitimacy-seeking process, and such search is subject to internal and external pressures. Since adopting the current name (which covers a very different field internally) Umbanda moved between sociocultural and political pressures. Amidst these legitimization efforts, the presence of Spiritism in Brazil since the mid-nineteenth century offered the umbandists, and other supporters of African-Brazilian cults, both an easy

re-translation repertoire and a great defensive umbrella, Umbanda is a possession-trance religion, or a mediumistic religion, as its supporters often prefer to name it. In spite of the dialogue - made of adjustments and resignifications - amongst the ideas coming from Spiritism and Umbanda and the importance given by both to mediums, we can say that, since the period of its "birth" in Brazil until the 2000s, Umbanda has had, in general, an extremely shy acceptance among Kardecists. As Lewgoy (2001) pointed out, Spiritualism in Brazil is a literate and rational religion, which "is adopted by elite segments of the Pre-Republican period in Brazil". The access of African cults among us, however, indicated an opposite story to that. Even though some of the Kardecism pioneers participated in such causes as abolitionism and republicanism, as recaps Lewgoy (2001), Spiritualism

has become popular “not by heroism or prophecy, but by offering healing services. According to this author, this popular movement will lead to internal fragmentation exerted by competition with other spiritual religions, as in its relation to Umbanda. In his work on “Chico Xavier and Brazilian culture,” Lewgoy states that the “spiritualism exposed in life and work of Chico Xavier’s,” the relationship with Umbanda and other issues are summarized in three points. He primarily situates the syncretism of Umbanda as primitive; he sees the mixture of religion and politics of positivism as promiscuous and, finally, considers the spiritualist synthesis “religion, philosophy and science as desirable, rational and spiritually evolved.” These considerations show some pejorative aspects of the Brazilian Spiritist view on Umbanda. Bairrão *et al* (2003) point out that Umbanda is usually seen as a kind of “ideological byproduct.”

As mentioned above, this religion has always moved between sociocultural and political pressures, such as the class bias, the prejudice of mark, the devaluation of African origins, specifically the devaluation of Bantu origin, the condemnation of practices etc. Its structure, flexible to new influences, has been built among the possibilities’ axes, desires and creativity of its practitioners. In its religious practice, it is possible to observe the composition of the vast universe of symbolism and rituals that are the synthesis of cultural elements, from different sources, which is held by its authors – *Pais e Mães de Santo* (saint-father and saint-mother) - that re-translate their own religious influences. From our perspective, even the adoption of the name Umbanda, to baptize a Macumba, (tinged with diverse influences) viewed with suspicion and prejudice, was part of that legitimacy movement. Moreover, from the standpoint of social acceptance, as we said, we can point out that the access of Kardecism in Brazil was basically the opposite of the African religions access, which came by the hands of African slaves and culture and were viewed as “primitive,” while Kardecism came by the hands of free men, scholars and intellectuals coming from Europe. Thus, defining itself as “spiritualist” Umbanda forced a chasm of social acceptance. On the other hand, sharing, or believing to share with the Kardecism, the same belief in spirits and the communicability between the worlds of the living and the dead (the visible and invisible, spirits and men), translations and re-meanings were easily accomplished by umbandists. The reverse did not occur with the same force, the identification was not immediate or calm by society and the Kardecists. The newspaper of the beginning of the last century and the end of the previous make clear the distinction between “low spiritism” (Macumba/Umbanda) and “high spiritism”

(Kardecism). Testimonials from graduates of Umbanda spiritism clarify the need to abandon the spiritual centers to form Umbanda houses where their Guides – *Pretos* and *Caboclos* (Blacks and Indians) - “could work”. This explains the above mentioned Kardecist Spiritism’s “shy” acceptance of the Umbanda .

In the relations between Umbanda and Spiritism, we must not forget that in its resignifying processes, Umbanda’s cosmology incorporates elements of spiritist cosmology. It is also important to consider that African matrix religions in Brazil, the Inter-African religious syncretism was always present; nor can fail to consider the merger and re-signification of elements from other religious realities especially the first incorporation of Christian elements by means of Catholicism dominant at the time of slavery. Finally, we cannot leave the Spiritism out of the exchange and re-signification field, which is why some people now talk about the so-called Brazilian Spiritism (like some people talk about the so-called Brazilian Catholicism).

### In the guise of a development

In the perspective of accomplishing an analysis on Umbanda, described by spiritualist writers, we searched in Geertz (1989) the strategy of “thick description.” Remembering Geertz’s view that each approach is an improvement over the one(s) that preceded it, we conducted an effort to describe the view of Umbanda in Kardecist Spiritism’s psychographed novels. We are therefore performing successive readings of the same event, producing a kind of deepening of our analysis . In the analysis of spiritualist novels, we can accept Geertz’s statement that we are doing interpretations of “third hand”, at least; in fact, in the texts we focus in this article – those of Robson Pinheiro - we can think of “fourth hand” interpretations. The first interpretation belongs to a disembodied spirit (Sérvulo), who recounts the facts “as they occurred” for a second spirit (Angelo Inácio), who then will perform the second interpretation and narrate new facts as experienced by him. Finally, this second disembodied spirit, acting as mentor, will pass the information and thoughts to the medium (Robson Pinheiro) who psychograph them. The texts we have chosen “materialize” the interference of the third descriptor (the medium), justifying that our work is, therefore, the fourth interpretative reading of events. The description keeps gaining new interpretations consistent with the anthropology tradition that directed us, which positions itself as an interpretative science searching for meanings - in our case, not only religious. As Geertz would say, this is an “interpretation of fourth hand” seeking for consolidation, thanks to the enlargement of repertoire caused by each preceding interpretation.

It is in this perspective that we seek to answer: how Umbanda is described in Spiritist novels? Is there a difference between the description given in the “Kardecist” literature and the reports of academic studies on Umbanda? A priori, this last question can be answered positively, for our final reading, as so many anthropological studies, will not be compromised with the believer or supporter’s standpoint. We tried to keep balancedly detachment, refraining from an accomplicity dipping into this religious, social and cultural reality. Keeping a critical perspective is, after all, an duty’s obligation.

In this perspective we define this study’s main objective: the analysis of Umbanda as it appears in spiritist novels, highlighting the positivity or negativity attached to that religion and the arguments used in each case to justify such evaluation. The chosen texts, specifically for this study, allow the comparison between descriptions and approaches made in these novels and descriptions and approaches of Umbanda produced by the academic literature.

Geertz’s Interpretive Anthropology (1989) proposes a semiotic conceptualization of culture that would consist of webs of meaning constructed by men and involving them. The anthropologist’s mission, he says, is to unravel those webs and come to a thick description of them. More or less specific contexts, systems that show a sort of bindings’ logic, characterize particular cultures and the niches within them. Our proposal is to take spiritist novels as a loophole that allows entering one of those niches, trying to describe, in the thickest possible way, the webs of meaning there that involve both umbandist religion and the social context, referring to religious principles that the authors explain.

The spiritist literature is vast, and with respect to publications and sales, thousands of books are made available to readers with a variety of authors represented by their mediums. The psychography, the flagship to this publishing world, has numerous works dictated by “disembodied spirits” and reveal significant figures, such as more than 25 million books sold by Chico Xavier, more than 7.5 million by Divaldo Franco and over 5 million by Zíbia Gasparetto (STOLL, 2005). In this universe, the books that deal with the action of Umbanda, taking it as a central theme, are not that numerous and a medium named Robson Pinheiro is a pioneer in this work. This duty, he said, is an arid land because it faces the enormous prejudice of Spiritism followers who treat Umbanda as “low Spiritism”. Even before this stigma, Pinheiro’s 1998 book - *Tambores de Angola*, reached significant figures: over 130.000 copies sold until April 2009. In this study we have chosen, for pioneering the approach to Umbanda in spiritualist novels, his psychographic works: *Aruanda, Legião e Tambores de Angola*.

In fact, this is our second foray into spiritualist novels, for we previously made the reading of a part of Zíbia Gasparetto’s production. In Gasparetto, we searched the issue of health and disease and the topic allows verifying the background iterations, common to the Spiritist books, when addressing diseases, suffering and death: there is always in all of them an effort to find explanations for such events, or at least - as Geertz would say - not to lose their ‘explicability’. Suffering and disease are due to the sufferer’s responsibility and thereby reinstated in his biography, which, as mentioned in another article, does not end within one lifetime only. Regarding the view of Umbanda, however, we could check the differences between Zíbia’s and Robson Pinheiro’s approaches. In the novel *“Ninguém é de ninguém” (Nobody is nobody’s)*, Zíbia addressed activities that rise negative connotations (with slight nuances), when ignorant or wicked *pais de santo* (saint-fathers) put the characters in wrong paths, producing *“trabalhos”* (witchcrafts) that aim at someone’s harm. Envy, jealousy, revenge, suspicion, possessiveness, among others, - translated or not into *“coisa feita”*, or magically produced processes -, are the roads to suffering, not to the spirit improvement. Robson does not deny the “action and reaction” law, nor the evil effect of misusing the needs and desires for the embodied and disembodied individuals. However, as we shall see, his view of Umbanda is not negative. He lends this religion an important place in the process of chiseling the spirit. To do so, he must define the “true Umbanda”, reconstruct its history and show the spirits of light that act in its circle.

From a review of some important academic works in the area, it was possible to deepen our analysis of the complex interrelationship between the characteristics described for the performance of Umbanda in our society, contrasting them with those described in Spiritist novels. For this purpose, markers were previously established, which are: the birth of Umbanda; the obsession or *encosto*; syncretism; the health-disease process.

### Aspects of Spiritualist literature

In Spiritism, communicating with spirits is very present, and the narratives range from simple events and messages from dead relatives, to the most complex stories. The authors (spirits) naturally report the life in the world of the disembodied (world beyond) and all the dynamics of spirits’ life interfering in the material or corporeal world. It is through this type of narrative that the contents take over the “aura of factuality” (GEERTZ, 1989), a “religious factuality” that

narrates the spiritist phenomena. Few spiritist narratives, in this context of psychographics, deal with the history and performance of Umbanda. Robson Pinheiro's psychographed novels place themselves as a proposal for Umbanda and work of Pretos-Velhos (Old Blacks), *Exus e Caboclos* to be seen - in the words of the author - with less prejudice by Kardecist Spiritism's followers. The publisher proposes himself as a contributor to break taboos relating to those roles that Umbanda agents play in the structure of society, including the spiritist circle, both in its incarnate and discarnate "plans".

Inspired by Godoy (2009), we observe the 'Religion Geography' established in the spiritualist phenomenon and we try to understand the "spatiality through their narratives" in the novels. For Godoy (2009) the narrative spatiality embraces the relations between the spiritual and religious grounds in the world. In this context, the novelists Zíbia Gasparetto and Robson Pinheiro psychograph the dramas of life, distinctively described and staged. In the novels by Robson Pinheiro the facts take place in the discarnates' environment (the spiritual space – Beyond, where the storytellers, the spirits, call "the world on this side") while in Zíbia's stories - dramas – take place in the incarnates' environment (material spatiality). Naming each of the spaces as "here" and "there" or "beyond" (Zíbia) and "world from here" and "world from there", or the Crust (Robson), contrasting the nearest and the farthest, indicates the place where the authors talk from. In brief, the signals are relative, depending on the place where the narrator is and on the events they narrate. From the perspective of the "religion geography", one can already point out that the discarnates' spaces in Robson are quite numerous and diverse: there are several areas inhabited by different groups of spirits and the most evolved ones can transit among them. In these astral spaces, there are reception points for newly discarnated spirits in need of help might receive it in "hospitals" (or rescue chambers) from evolved spirits whose mission is to support them. Pinheiro also speaks of a sort of *limbo* (our term) made of dense energies, situated between higher, subtler energies spheres and the incarnates' world. This desolated place, shown in dark colors, made of some kind of "astral mud" in which suffering spirits are immersed, also counts on "help Oasis", where high and abnegated spirits work (PINHEIRO, 2004).

As for the way Umbanda is regarded, in Zíbia's we have a description of a *terreiro* where activities are carried out, such as orders and work performed by the individual who was called to be the executor of a spirit's will, i.e., a mentor. The mentor directs tasks to meet the immediate desires of men and does not worry about the consequences of doings in

the long term. He uses discarnate entities to cause incarnates bad feelings and to stimulate attitudes that might correspond to immediate wishes of one client's *despacho* (a witchcraft to be delivered somewhere, as a dispatch). The description of the *terreiro* (yard) is simple, but it refers to the perception of activities that are generally condemned by the Kardecist Spiritist doctrine, corroborating the view that the Umbanda movement would be a "low spiritism", something that does not represent, or does not allow, a moral "evolution", leading to take actions compromising the health of individuals, whether in terms of incarnate or discarnate ones.

In the novels by Robson Pinheiro, on the contrary, the descriptions of Umbanda's terreiros are detailed and there is distinction between the temples of Umbanda and other *barracões* (sheds) or *terreiros* (yards) that refer to Quimbanda or Candomble activities. In the novel called "Aruanda", we will find a conceptual approach and the characteristics of what would be "a true umbandist": "Umbanda mediums wear white clothing, as characteristic of simplicity, and do not sing ritual songs in languages other than Portuguese, abolishing also the use of drums" (PINHEIRO, 2004). In the three analyzed novels, the approach tends to establish that the activities of Umbanda along with saint-father or saint-mother roles are valuable, although different from Kardecist Spiritism's activities. These differences relate to performance in distinct energy plans, being the "denser" intended for Umbandists and the "subtler" for the Kardecist spiritualist's intervention.

When facing the challenge of taking to the Kardecist spiritualists, among which includes Robson Pinheiro, a prejudice-free vision of Umbanda, the spirit Angelo Inácio himself justifies the initiative and defends the medium. Angelo Inácio sings the preface of Aruanda and introduced himself as a journalist and writer in his words:

*This is not a book intended to comment on Umbanda's doctrine. It is just another work that values the labor of spirits that, under the fluidic guise of old saint-fathers and Caboclos, help both incarnate and discarnate humanity. Maybe, it is a cry against religious, racial, spiritual prejudice, showing the much developed spirits work far beyond appearances* (PINHEIRO, 2004, Foreword).

Later, on the body of the book the author spirit points out:

*One of the things that entertained us here in our community was to observe the "logic" of many spiritualist fellows before our recorded observations in the book Tambores de Angola. For them, if the medium wrote something about Umbanda, it is because he has*

*become an umbandist. (...) If a poor boy psychographs a book by a given disembodied author, our brothers' logic says that the boy was that spirit's son in another incarnation (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

Finally, he writes:

*Once again, my intention is to write about the people from Aruanda, show their color, their way, their taste in performing the kindness (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

It is seen that the author's task is not easy and requires courage. We do not want to extend on these points, but it can be noted, to the best opinion, that despite the effort to restore the Umbanda from prejudice, in many instances the mode of referring to the embodied or disembodied spirits, it plays a large extent, in another light, many of the prejudices that it wants to fight. In Aruanda, the chapter called "Região de Transição" (Transition Region) brings passages that justify this interpretation. This applies to the changing appearance of the spirits when they come to that region: *Euzália's features transfigured little by little [...] the clear appearance of the European nature, took the features of a black woman, but without losing the delicacy in her eyes and simplicity of the noble spirit.* Later in the same chapter, the author speaks of the appeal heard from "someone in intense pain": *Help me, help me! Why us? Help me; I need to leave this hell. "*

As we can see, both of the writers anticipate our interpretation that there is a disguised reinforcement of prejudice in their texts, justifying that the Umbanda - and their Black Children and Caboclos - in fact, would be necessary for the spiritualist, set out in classical language, to be able to reach the least educated population. This path leads to the establishment of a line between the "true" and "false" Umbanda.

*However, Allan Kardec's spiritism, which had arrived from France in the second half of the XIX century, was way too intellectual to be reasoned in the Candomblé tends. It served at the time, only the wishes of the most cultured layer of the population, accustomed to the European language and the dialogues of classical philosophy. Someone then proposes, at the developed spirits assembly: "How about a new religion, which satisfies both kind of knowledge, bringing spirituality to the popular cult?" Ascends then the Aumbandhã, or Umbanda - the union of two groups (PINHEIRO, 2004)*

## On the Markers

### *The birth of Umbanda*

The emergence of Umbanda still mobilizes various discussions involving the question of its origins, a very fertile field for reflection on a phenomenon that represents the legitimacy of religious movement. It is the search for a beginning to compose the story of a movement that tries to establish its place in society, and needs a kind of "memory" to materialize itself- a "historical founder movement" as Rohde stated (2009). Before society, this founder movement needs to represent some functional relevance, and constitute itself as a merited social commons, as a product of changes in the social and cultural context. Speaking of birth refers to the approach of an event that requires a well-defined time and space; we need to show the physical space, geographic space, identity space, the chronological time and the mythical time for the religious movement. For Umbanda, both scholars as adepts have always sought to describe these variabilities. We have observed that the history of the origins, psychographed by Robson Pinheiro in his novels, adheres to one of the scholarly lines of interpretation. It precisely adheres to a line that meets the requirements above, for one must find the historical movement founder to give concreteness to a memory. A processual perspective that avoids pointing a precise and dated origin would not meet the identity mark's construction needs.

As we can see from the remarks mentioned below, the spiritist novels spirit bring several statements about Umbanda's historical founder process, confirming the so-called "origin myth" (ROHDE, 2009) reported in African-Brazilian religion researchers' studies. The author welcomes and celebrates Zélio de Moraes as a "founding father", Niterói as place of birth and 1908 as the stage of true Umbanda's "prehistory", in which the mentor is, by excellence, the spirit named *Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas*.

*One day, when Zélio was in the middle of one of his "attacks", his completely terrified family decides to seek the spiritual center as a last resort. It was the Niterói Kardecist Federation. They arrived with the boy on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1908, and the president Mr. José de Souza was exactly who received them (PINHEIRO, 2004, p.22).*

*[...] I am the Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas, because to me there are no closed paths. I bring Umbanda, a*

*religion that will harmonize the families and unite our hearts; it will speak to the simple ones and last until the end of centuries. [...] The new religion will come, and soon will it speak to the simplest hearts in a language devoid of prejudice. A new song will be sung among the people from the hills, the slums, the streets and the ghettos. The people shall receive from their ancestors the spiritual teaching in the form of simple parables, straight from the mouths of [the spirits of] pais-velhos (old fathers) and Caboclos (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

*And thus, Zélio de Moraes' commitment with Aumbandhã, or just Umbanda, was born. A typical Brazilian religion, regarding the psychological type to which there are venerable entities that have made the Umbanda a source of light and wisdom to the people who tune in to their truths (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

The need for a historical demarcation of a new religion's birth is accompanied by the restoration of Kardecist Spiritism's explicability. The relevance of the new religion follows the teachings of the action-reaction process and is seen as a way to rescue or regenerate people who, during the previous reincarnation processes were carried away by the excesses in the fields of materialism and morally unappreciated behaviors, especially the production of the so-called "black magic".

*The black magic should be combated and its destructive effects would be purged in order to transform the centers of degrading worship activities into places that radiate love and charity, the only way to change such a somber panorama. There came the need for enlightened spirits to manifest themselves to undertake such commitment. And so, one by one those enlightened entities that were to change their perispiritual ways showed themselves, to assume the conformation of pretos velhos and Caboclos and spread the charity message through Umbanda, which initial goal would be to undo the negative charge that fell upon the hearts of men in Brazil. Umbanda would be the liaison with the Most High; it would gradually penetrate the refuges of black magic or the Candomble Yards, which were still wrong about the laws of love and charity, so that the people's feelings would be transformed by the words of a preto velho, or the Caboclo's warnings (PINHEIRO, 1998).*

According to these texts, in an effort to create a new religion, rituals were established in order to allow it to cross the threshold among the less affluent and less educated

social groups, precisely those who have adhered to rituals and beliefs in Orishas and other energies of nature; so the new religion would seek to obtain support and acceptability in these groups, adopting the same elements of worship. The explanation seems crystal clear on the expressed logic: the aim of the Umbanda formation, explained in these spiritist novels - would be then to address the imbalances of some Candomble yards, and it was aiming at this goal that Umbanda set up its structure with rituals and myths where is also possible to witness belief in the Orishas. A few questions remain in the air: does Umbanda adopt the rituals and the existence of the Orishas as a way of approaching black magic supporters? Why would Umbanda adopt the rituals of Orishas and not other expressions of Christian belief, since it assumes an extensive religious syncretism? Could this explanation of the foundation purpose, expressed in the spiritist novels, also assist in the interpretation of the complex system of ritual elements of its worship, putting syncretically elements of Christianity, Macumba, Kardecism and the other rituals together?

It is clear that the answers cannot be sought only in the range of texts written by adepts, whether novels or not. It is undeniable, however, that the logic of Kardecist Spiritism, as understood by the authors, will always be a powerful mechanism to explain the religious and social reality and, at least until now, it seems not to have exhausted its ability to respond. Actually, we could remember that the umbandist pantheon arranged in rows and phalanges, which reserve a place for the leading Souls, Saints and Orishas and we could actually add here another socio-anthropological issue: wouldn't the spiritists who believe in their Guides or Mentors and also in the Orishas actual believers, some of which brought to themselves the difficult task of "Umbanda codification" without losing sight of the desire for reconciliation? The processes of syncretism or synthesis, as some prefer to call it, create as many problems as they solve. The exus figure is a very clear example of the difficulty of reconciling contradictory images taken at different repertoires, but shall keep the proposal of reading and analyzing spiritist texts about Umbanda. We will see that these texts also reserve a space for discussion of syncretism.

During our analysis, we have been able to identify that the Umbanda concept in those novels refers to the so-called "White Umbanda"; various text excerpts can confirm this and also show that this as the "True Umbanda." In these novels, other ritual practices involving Orishas, such as Candomble, or the activities of Quimbanda are conceptualized as less

evolved, as deviations from Umbanda. Both in the novel “Tambores de Angola” and “Aruanda” it is possible to notice the distinction of different umbandists.

*[...] Umbanda is a religion that keeps many ritual elements, specific of its cult, its mediums dressing in white clothes as uniforms, necklaces and, in some cases, herbal baths, smokers and an instrumental set up to channel the psychic energies in their work (PINHEIRO, 1998).*

*Many saint-fathers, mediums and yard leaders have tried to keep people in ignorance, misusing certain initiated knowledge while feeding untrue stories about Guides and Orishas (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

The use of many forms of witchcraft in the yards and sheds (terreiros e barracões), which differ also in the number of Orishas and types of Orishas summoned to act in each case, is discussed in the novels as psychic deviations of the sacred teachings of Umbanda. To deal with the deviations, the novels include numerous recommendations for resuming the principles established in the foundation history – the “origin myth” - or refraining from certain types of activities some yards develop.

*The complications that we sometimes find do not refer to Umbanda as a religion, but to people’s misinformation, to mysticism and to the lack of preparation of many leaders, which we incidentally found in houses that follow the Kardecist guidance (PINHEIRO, 1998).*

*– This is not an Umbanda temple. The leaders of this tenda (tent), having no further clarification on the laws of Umbanda, adopted its sacred name and call themselves umbandists. [...] It is worth noting that in this yard, the mediums worship the Orishas, resembling Candomblé. In Umbanda, it is different. Only seven Orishas are recognized, and we respect them as vibrations of nature powers (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

*We urge to rescue in the tendas of Umbanda the sacred teachings given in the beginning of the movement by the Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas, thus restoring the true meaning of the unpretentious charity, which does not allow charging for the “works” in Umbanda. We also need to stimulate knowledge through the study of books of Umbanda masters, which are serious and high standard as those that contain the teachings brought by the venerable Matta e Silva, and his initiated followers (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

From this perspective, Umbanda has to fulfill a role. The role of rescuing those who should be helped and, so to speak, purified to ensure their spiritual evolution - “It is the only way to transform the activities of degrading cults, to change the somber panorama” would be through clarified spirits, illuminated entities, who, on account of their charitable detachment and boundless love, though rational and realistic, are willing to change their perispiritual outfit assuming those of pretos velhos e caboclos. It is exactly the way we mentioned above that the emergence of Umbanda is explained within the logic of Spiritualism.

### **About Syncretism**

Rohde (2009) in his reflections on the “Umbanda, a religion that was not born: [...]” mentions it as a result of a rearrangement among the Macumba, indigenous practice elements and Catholic values with increases of Kardecism. This religion is organized, therefore, by the union of several elements of various faiths, presenting additions and changes that pervade the cultural values of its saint-fathers and saint-mothers (VILLAS BOAS CONCONE, 2003). It is from this synthesis capacity of various religious elements that the highly syncretic practice of Umbanda is accomplished. Perhaps Giglio-Jacquemot (2006) is who best expresses this syncretic behavior, by stating that since its origin, Umbanda shows its prodigious ability to ingest and digest cultural materials of all kinds and all provenances.

The spiritist novels psychographed by Robson Pinheiro will address the practice of syncretism of Umbanda very clearly, especially with regard to Catholic saints. But these references, as we see in the expressions below, bring an explanation of the phenomenon as a way to communicate with their supporters who have migrated from other religious practices, or as a means for being accepted by the society and the authorities, trying to survive the possible political pressure. The syncretism is expressed as a strategy to legitimize itself in order to achieve its goals of creating, so it might add practices and rituals from other faiths, merging or reelaborating a new conception of religion.

*[...] As primordial vibration and energy, the Orishas hold characteristics resembling those of certain saints of the Catholic cult. From there, the so-called syncretism makes perfect sense, a very striking and interesting aspect of Brazilian culture. But it does not mean that the Orishas are such saints, absolutely. They are active, non-incarnating principles, , and perhaps the Umbanda*

uses images of Catholic saints to symbolize the Orishas, which is just to establish a mental connection between the people and the truths of Umbanda, through popular belief (PINHEIRO, 2004).

There is another well-known worshiped Orisha in Candomble. He is called Omulu, which in syncretism, corresponds to St. Lazarus (PINHEIRO, 2004).

[...] And so, today, this merger survives in the yards, which was the Most High's goal. Adopting the syncretism between the Orishas and Catholic saints, which had long developed, and the assumed mediumistic trance, which did not exist in the sheds of Candomble, Umbanda had been slowly penetrating the refuges of black magic. [...] If religious or political pressure became too strong, there was also a saint in the temple's name. In a Catholic country, with conservative sectors in society, Spiritist Umbanda *Tent Nossa Senhora do Rosario* would sound better than simply *Pai Oxalá* or *Caboco Rompe-Mato* (PINHEIRO, 2004).

– Umbanda respects the richness of the African cult, represented in Candomble, but the reference to the umbandists works are only the seven major original *Vibration-Orishas*, which represent also the seven vibrational universal planes, the seven chakras and the seven spiritual bodies (PINHEIRO, 2004).

Under the spiritist novels' perspective, Umbanda brings the wealth of African descent cults, plus many other elements and religious practices in order to "speak the people's language." In this sense, it assumes a comprehensive understanding of mankind in his midst, admitting the Kardecism Spiritism explicability and adding it to other concepts, including Eastern cultures, such as energy systems called "chakras."

We want to raise an interesting counterpoint in these explanations: the academic texts and the religious discourse express with great frequency that the identification, at the slavery time, among saints and African gods, would correspond to masquerading as a defense strategy against the powerful ones; as presented here, we would have an almost reverse situation for Umbanda,, as that would be a strategy to conquest the less fortunate (spiritually and culturally speaking).

### **Obsession or Encosto**

In the mediumistic novels, we find reference to obsession seen in two ways: simple and complex ones (PINHEIRO, 2006). The simple obsession cases were seen as similar to the classification of encosto

(a discarnate to incarnate relation that works as a jinx) to the terreiros of Umbanda and other African cults. The complex obsession processes are those involving "the use of technologies developed in the spiritual plane, used with the intention of changing the behavior of the individual by the insertion of "parasites equipment" using "magnetic and ectoplasmic energy". These insertions are always due to the wish of causing evil, in order to "harm the incarnate brothers in many ways."

*Many difficulties concerning the physio-astral logical constitution of the human being are beyond the simple obsession cases, fascination and subjugation, appointed by Kardec and known in the Spiritualist movement in general* (PINHEIRO, 2004).

*So, what we see here can also be classified as magic, if we consider that in the complex obsession process, that is, with the use of parasites devices black magic's typical magnetic and ectoplasmic manipulation also happens. Thus, one can say that the difference is in the exterior form, in the method, as the goals and principles applied here are just the same* (PINHEIRO, 2004).

In Zibia Gasparetto, the obsessive processes are described without regard to their complexity level. She attributes the interference over the incarnate individual as a way to generate some damage for him, even to his physical health.

*Gabriela was pale, incapable, like a robot driven without any reaction. [...] It is an obsession case. I see a couple being vampirized. She hypnotized, unrealistically. He made a pact with a dangerous entity to meet his goals* (GASPARETTO, 2008).

*Roque was penalized. He glimpsed the dark forms of disturbing spirits related to the unexpected visitor, pasted as reflections of his own movements, demonstrating significant symbiosis. [...] What happened has happened to many people. Spirits, enemies from his past incarnations and unforgiving, want to take revenge with their own hands today, forgetting that justice belongs to God, Who established laws that treat each individual accordingly to his own life and work* (GASPARETTO, 2003).

In the cure proposal for the obsessive process described by Zibia, attending the spirist centers service, that provide guidance to incarnate and discarnate individuals, will be effective to achieve a cure. The obsessing spirits are seen as ignorant discarnate people who assume the position of oppressors, as they present inharmonies to their victims due

to their relationships built in past lives. But as in Pinheiro, the descriptions of obsessions and their healing processes go beyond the indoctrination of torturers and their victims, because it proposes a unification of disobsession activities of various religious fronts, especially Umbanda and Kardecist Spiritism.

*[...] It is clear that the methodology used in the Spiritualist movement works for different types of obsession. Also, we cannot underestimate the umbandists or esoteric procedures with their sacred rituals, symbols and axes. However, to solve the problems of the ones affected by the coming of obsessions complex syndromes, such as parasites devices or vibrating-effect spells and bewitchment performed in the remote past, as well as to confront the destructive action of elemental energies, used by magicians of darkness, the consecrated methodology is ineffective (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

### **On the Health-Disease Process**

The entire culture encompasses a whole range of codes, symbols and practices, and in that fertile soil social representations are constructed, setting the basis for relations of meaning and allowing them to be updated in each situation. Our search for the interpretation of symbolic spiritist systems should be guided by acts (GEERTZ, 1989); the health-disease field of action fits this search.

This symbolic universe that constitutes the culture, whether it concerns one entire society or any community, can bring, and usually brings, within it religiosity as an important tool to cope with dynamic reorganization of one's self and its everyday life, against a condition that makes individuals victims of the world's disorder. Berger (1985), Luckman, and Geertz point out the capacity of religions to rescue the men's world from *cáos* by assigning the *nomos*. Seeking the religious environment represents to recreate meanings facing the problems that everyday life places and to allow motivations for improving the situation towards explicability. One of the reasons for questing for a certain religion is the search for the cure of diseases. Often, those who are looking for it are usually people who visited the typical medicinal standard and found no solution, but more importantly than that, they found no explanation for their suffering. This dual entry of search for healing and search for meaning allows coexistence (especially by the clientele) between scientific and religious medicine. From the standpoint of one who seeks relief for himself or for others, these ways are merely complementary. In fact, the responses of science do not impoverish the need to attribute

meaning. In the universe of mediumistic religions, both of the healing processes, the profane and the sacred, often coexist in the same spaces. In the novels we worked, the body and the spirit healing as well as the weakening of the spirit and physical illness are basically part of the same reality, and therefore, the body and mind doctors' contest is crucial.

Religion, however, represents an awakening of the individual to the sacred and can be a meaning producer, seeking explanations in their philosophical basis for the inharmonies that life imposes, whether moral, spiritual or material (GEERTZ, 1989). Faced with a pathology to which our traditional medicine does not present prospects of cure, in our society, the search of solace often takes refuge in the religious field.

In the examined novels, the aspects of the disorders presented in the characters' lives are explained by the paradigm of reincarnation as a basic principle, preceding the spirit's life in a geographic area of the "world beyond". It shows death as a gateway to the spiritual life, which is eternal, being life on earth only a very finite redemption stage of mistaken attitudes from previous lives. From this point of view, the reincarnations are opportunities for learning and developing the spirit, or perhaps putting in another way, many lives are presented as possibilities for the evolutionary process of being. The illnesses are nothing but situations created by the world of spirits on the "World Beyond" plane with embodied individuals who disharmonize by awareness of the mistakes they made or by actions of vindictive spirits. In the novels we analyzed, psychographed by Robson Pinheiro, the perspective is always the action of spirits on the embodied or on the ways in which pride, vanity and selfishness undermine the men's emotional and physical health.

*- Our brother is someone who is immensely committed to the laws of life. Mental field opened and came in line with the destructive forces of black magicians. These diabolical minds led to the collapse of our brother's nervous system, which was unable to resist the mental irradiation of wizards from darkness, slipping into a coma after clinical manifestations of difficult solution for medicinal treatment. Today he is detached from the body, lying in a hospital bed, where he has been hospitalized for several days (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

The activities that were performed meant for health recovery and healing process are described as the sum of the forces of the work accomplished by spirits on the astral plane – the world beyond - with the activities developed by our medicine in the space field.

*We left the hospital, leaving the boy, who was already better, to the team responsible for the spiritual environment. There were many cases which special attention was deserved, but that we would leave over the other teams there that were providing spiritual aid (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

*For now – said Grandma Catherine - our protected boy will be resting here while his physical body remains in coma in the hospital. Tomorrow, during mediumistic work, we'll see what can be done for our brother (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

*[...] they can tune with the unobserved mind of Erasmio's, with his past and his insistence on keeping the same mental patterns of his persecutors. He must wake up to the urgency of the inner change, raising his vibration pattern in order to be disconnected from this harmful influenciation. And to do so, the Umbanda, with its own rituals and methods, will be an excellent tool for awakening our brother. He is found with solidified thoughts in his own conceptions of life and, as you can see, he is not sensitive to more subtle appeals of Spiritualism, which, at the right time, should show him the reason. Moreover, the family keeps certain tendencies to mediumship demonstrations, as it is given in Umbanda, and we ought not to harm our brothers (PINHEIRO, 1998).*

The healing process of diseases can occur when the Umbanda intervention complements the Kardecist spiritualists' and other beings activities who act in the astral world to benefit mankind. These aids are not perceived by the embodied individuals working in hospitals and they may cause surprise or be interpreted as miracles.

*[...] Physically, our friend will have an improvement, i.e. an appreciable response to medical treatment, but his perispirit is still involved in another field, created by the evil entities that used him. We will only be able to disable this type of energetic field, which holds the spiritual body of our brother within it, during a mediumistic meeting tomorrow. The incarnate individuals' energies are required in association with our resources in order to destroy the field that surrounds him. Although still in coma, the boy will present visible improvement from the physical point of view, as we have mentioned. However, only after the disintegration of the retention field, in the mediumistic meeting, he shall wake up. Anyway, you can notice how the current response, even*

*unexplained, is enough for the hospital staff to cheer up (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

*A nurse approached the bed, looked at the instruments, measured the boy's blood pressure and quickly left in search of her colleagues. Three doctors came soon after, along with two nurses. [...] From now on, they will be busy developing scientific theories and speculations to explain our brother's improvement. Tomorrow, when we finish the job and he wakes up from the deep coma, his case will go to the records as one of those unexplained "miracles" by medicine (PINHEIRO, 2004).*

Relationships and interactions in society involve all aspects of the cultural practice of the group to which the individual belongs. These aspects include a whole set of codes and symbols, knowledge and old and new teachings creating the repertoire of social representations; constructed in the social and cultural field, the representations establish meaning relations and instantiate actions in a dialectical movement. Religious representations are powerful engines for meaning construction. Religion and religiosity can provide, and almost always provide, a way of understanding the reality, which seeks to relieve the suffering. In this perspective, the explanation of the facts of life, in the boundary where our traditional science cannot answer, can be found in alternative response systems of magical or religious character. The explicability provided by Spiritism shows all its strength when people are confronted with misfortune. The understanding and resulting acceptance of misfortune by means of the "cause and effect law" introduces a higher level of rationalization and moral self-responsibility in order to explain diseases and personal afflictions, providing an alternative at both personal and social levels to restore welfare for life. What the Umbanda approach adds up to the spiritist viewpoint may be a proposal that can generate new ways of relationships among the devotees of those religions.

## Final Thoughts

The mediumistic novels by Robson Pinheiro have the explicit proposal to report on activities undertaken by Umbanda in the astral plane showing the work of pretos-velhos, Exus and Caboclos as necessary and beneficial. The main goal is to eliminate the Kardecist Spiritism devotees' prejudice in relation to it. The aspects that were developed in the novels favor the understanding of the relevance of Umbanda activities, both in the ground and astral plane - the World Beyond - and seek to show, within the explicability of Kardecist Spiritism, how these actions are meritorious to society. Paraphrasing Geertz,

we are able to say that for the “foreign” or “visitor”, a religious manifestation may have aesthetic or research value, but for the believer, it is materialization, interpretation, performance, not only as a model to what they believe in but as a model for belief itself (GEERTZ, 1989). The moral and aesthetic aspects (ethos) and the cognitive aspects (worldview) of such “White Umbanda” appear clearly in the chosen novels: *karma*, the communicability between the worlds and the saga of the moral elevation of the spirit are the key elements. Through them, eventually everything can be explained, even those challenging facts that generate pain. Belief and ritual are confirmed and present the “model of what is believed and model of belief.”

The descriptions given in the spiritualists novels, when collated with the academic literature, show that much of the reality seen by scholars of Umbanda is included therein, especially in regard to the question of the emergence of Umbanda in Brazil. However, the Umbanda scholars have never been willing to distinguish the “Real” and “False” Umbanda, although it is possible for us to draw some parallels: some of the earliest Umbanda scholars (Bastide, for example) saw it as a kind of “spurious product,” more similar to magic instead of religion because of related to its consulting, problem-solving action. The Bantu religious heritage was also seen as culturally poorer than the Sudanese heritage in Brazil (for Arthur Ramos, for example) and, in this sense, the Candomble Gêge-Nago was also seen as a superior example of true religion. Finally, we must remember that the discussion of purity has been a persistent theme in studies of Candomble in the past decades; Umbanda, on the other hand, was always seen as a product of multiple syncretisms and thereby its purity was not a subject of academic controversy.

The religion foundation myth and the aspects concerning the so-called *White Umbanda* are described and explained by the Kardecist spiritist perspective in order to sum up actions in benefit of incarnate and discarnate individuals. The very choice of a construction line of Umbanda history in Brazil appears as one of the most significant points in the works we analyzed, since we found here a genuine process of “traditions’ invention”, which holds high significance both for scholars and believers of these religions.

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