



Revista del CESLA
ISSN: 1641-4713
ISSN: 2081-1160
revistadelcesla@uw.edu.pl
Uniwersytet Warszawski
Polonia

Causes and Sources of Millenarian Messianism of the Brazilian Sertões

Jag#owski[, Mieczys#aw

Causes and Sources of Millenarian Messianism of the Brazilian Sertões

Revista del CESLA, no. 20, 2017

Uniwersytet Warszawski, Polonia

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=243354741020>



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

Causes and Sources of Millenarian Messianism of the Brazilian Sertões

Causas y fuentes del milenarismo mesiánico de los sertões de
Brasil

Mieczysław Jagłowski [1] mjag@uwm.edu.pl
Universidad de Warmia y Mazury de Olsztyn, Polonia

Abstract: In the article, we ask about the reasons and sources of the religious-social revival that appeared on the Brazilian backlands (*sertões*) at the turn of the 19th century in the form of numerous millenarian and messianic movements and communities. There were different responses given on the questions of the reasons for the phenomenon. In the first section, we follow their evolution. In the next we consider that question from the perspective of the encounter of European culture with the cultures of the New World, understood as the process of the mutual interpenetration and the creation of a new religious mentality. In the final remarks, we make an attempt to determine the nature and extent of the relations in which the contents coming from different sources were constituting the religious and mental groundwork of the phenomenon discussed.

Keywords: Brazilian religious movements, messianism, millenarianism, encounter of cultures, cultural translation, new symbolic universe, “confusion of the gods”.

Resumen: En el artículo preguntamos sobre las causas y fuentes del renacimiento religioso-social que tuvo lugar en los *sertões* brasileños en el cambio de los siglos XIX y XX, en forma de los numerosos movimientos y comunidades milenaristas y mesiánicas. Sobre la cuestión de las razones de este fenómeno se dieron diferentes respuestas. En el primer párrafo seguimos la evolución de las mismas. En la próxima consideramos esta cuestión en la perspectiva del encuentro de la cultura europea con las culturas del Nuevo Mundo, entendido como el proceso de la interpenetración mutua y la creación de una nueva mentalidad religiosa. En las observaciones finales tratamos de determinar la naturaleza y extensión de las relaciones entre los contenidos provenientes de las diferentes fuentes, constituidos el fundamento religioso y mental de los fenómenos discutidos.

Palabras clave: movimientos religiosos brasileños, mesianismo, milenarismo, encuentro de culturas, traducción cultural, nuevo universo simbólico, “interpenetración de los dioses”.

At the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries in many parts of the Brazilian backlands (*sertões*) there were unorthodox millenarian and messianic Christian religious communities formed[2]. The ideological foundation of those movements was the conviction that the world is sinful and unjust, present life runs in times of cosmic and social crisis, which were evidenced by conflicts, deprivation, hunger and epidemics, time was coming to an end, and it requires divine intervention. And indeed, these visions were accompanied by eschatological hope for the possibility of salvation.

Revista del CESLA, no. 20, 2017

Uniwersytet Warszawski, Polonia

Received: 01 October 2016

Accepted: 02 November 2017

Redalyc: [https://www.redalyc.org/
articulo.oa?id=243354741020](https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=243354741020)

This set of beliefs ensured the New Kingdom only for the pious, who will be separated from the ungodly in the day of the Final Judgment and from those who don't believe in the word of the Savior by refusing to follow Him. The end of the time that foretells the coming of the Final Judgment, will be announced by the signs that will be recognized and read for them, to whom he is sent, only by the God's Emissary, which is fulfilling the mission of proclaim the eschaton and of the ensure the salvation to those who perform it (Silva Queiroz, 2005: 138).

The messianic mentality was manifested especially clear in the times of severe crises, in the form of "movements of hope", which were seeking ways to return to the lost paradise (Lima Rodrigues, 2015: 138; Silveira Campos, 2016: 131). The eschatological dimension of expectation was usually linked with the hope of regaining of the values of the past, now lost, and of the establishing a new social order in the future, as a result of the transformation of the social relationships, particularly in the sphere of the power and hierarchy. The new order was established under the leadership of the charismatic persons, perceived by these communities as the incarnations of saints (they were called *beatos*, blessed) and biblical personages (Siuda-Ambroziak, 2017). The main rule introduced to regulate the social life in such communities was the principle of social equality in the form of the fraternity of its members. There were no such social relationships as the patron – the employee, the exploiter – the exploited, the holder – the deprived of the property. Everyone was fraternally involved in the production, according to their specialization and gender, health and age, and, at the level of distribution and consumption, everyone received according to their needs (Cavalcanti Barros, 1988: 157-158). The designations of most of these movements and communities are derived from the names of the locations of their centers. The most significant of these, with the largest number of participants, were (chronologically) Revolt of the Muckers (1869-1874), Canudos (1893-1897), Contestado (1912-1916), Juazeiro do Norte (1914), Caldeirão de Santa Cruz do Deserto (1926-1937), Pau de Colher (1934-1938) and Soledade (1935-1938). The religious and political authorities of Brazil perceived these forms of religiousness as a threatening social and religious order, therefore they combated them by the means available in their domains – their leaders were excommunicated, they were subjected to the police repression; military expeditions were also directed against them, sometimes bringing thousands of victims. Although this kind of religious and social liveliness expired at the end of the 1930s, its presence is also manifested in less intense forms also manifests in the culture of present-day Brazil (Domingues, 2005; Vanderlinde, 2009: 155).

In the article, we ask about the reasons and sources of this unique religious-social revival that appeared in Brazil's *sertões*, in this, and not the other time in which we asked to take place. The question of the causes of this unusual phenomenon was often put and the answers given to them varied. In the first section we follow their evolution, and in the next section we consider that question from the perspective of the encounter of the European culture with the cultures of the New World, understood as the process of the mutual interpenetration and the creation

of a new religious mentality, which the particular expression of that has been the movements of Brazilian millenarian messianism. Trying to answer this question, we take into account those circumstances and factors that we believe have influenced the shaping of the messianic-millenarian mentality of the inhabitants of the Brazilian backlands, such as the natural and social conditions of their life, some features of their original, pre-colonial religiosity, and the ways of Christianization for them. In the final remarks we make an attempt to determine the nature and extent of the relations in which the contents coming from different sources were, constituting the religious and mental groundwork of the discussed movements.

Whence millenarianism and messianism in the Brazilian backlands? An evolution of answers

The appearance of the wave of the Brazilian folk messianism has been interpreted in several ways. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was a common practice (both among scholars and all of Brazilian society) to perceive the participants of these movements as fanatics who rejected the advances of modernity and civilization, cultivating barbaric fetishism and wild, extravagant mysticism, and sertões were pointed to as a refuge of backwardness, opposed to the progressive, civilized coastal areas of Brazil (Nogueira Negrão, 2009: 40). These phenomena were also interpreted in terms belonging to the medicine, to the anthropology and the geography of the population and to its economy and politics. Sometimes the poverty and illiteracy were indicated as a source of these beliefs and practices (Menezes, 1937: 181); however, until the 1960s, bio-psychological interpretations dominated. For example, Waldemar Valente (1963) tried to show that the personality that he termed a “leptosomal schizoid type” was dominant among populations of the interior of Brazil, which would be predisposed to negative mysticism, particularly in the conditions of geographical isolation. Josué de Castro (1967) linked the fanaticism of the inhabitants of sertões with hunger and with their specific diet, which, according to him, was responsible for the severe neurological disorders that revealed in the form of the frequent occurrence of the blessed and bandits. Nevertheless, in the 1950s, such interpretations, in which it became evident that the specific religiousness of the interior of Brazil was the result of the overlap of the indigenous, Indian mythology and evangelical Catholicism began to appear. The penitentiary and apocalyptic contents dominated in these explications (Bastide 1964). The development of this idea, as well as the orientation of the research and interpretations in the perspective marked by it, occurred in the 1960s. A decisive shift in this direction was made under the impact of publications of Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz (1965). This researcher, seeking to formulate the basis of the general sociology of messianism, which would include all its historical and social manifestations, covered these phenomena in the category of folk messianism (*messianismo rústico*), pointing to its social and

political meaning and internal dynamics. According to her, these kinds of movements were aimed at preserving the social order, threatened by anomie due to the ongoing conflict between the landowners and the representatives of local political authorities. Under the influence of that scholar, such pejorative terms, like “fanaticism”, which prejudged their socially pathological character, definitively disappeared from the language of the description and interpretations of discussed phenomena.

Studies in this period were dominated by interpretations interested almost exclusively in the social meaning of these phenomena, while their religious (symbolic and eschatological) aspects were omitted as irrelevant, as being merely the external form of social and political matters. Brazilian messianisms were also interpreted as the archaic, pre-political manifestations of social revolution. From the Marxist perspective, they were perceived as forms of false consciousness that reflected the economic structure of society in a distorted way. In such attacks, the essence of these movements was reduced to the unsuccessful rebellions attempting to change the economic and social structure of the collective life (Facó, 1965; Vinhas de Queiroz, 1977), or to the forms of political struggle against the state and power (Clastres, 1975; Silva Queiroz, 2005: 141-144; Araújo Gomes, 2013: 116). Such interpretations were close to the ideas of Eric Hobsbawm, who in works published between 1959 and 1969 recognized them as primitive forms of anti-capitalistic social revolution, characteristic for the traditional rural communities (Domingues, 2005: 46-47; Löwy, 2010).

The interpretations of these anthropologists and sociologists, who in the 1960s acknowledged their researches as the carrier of the ethical and political attitudes in relation to decolonization were also biased. An example of this kind of interpretation may be the work of the Italian ethnologist Vittorio Lanternari (1960). The author perceived discussed phenomena as “the cults of the liberation”, aimed at social and political emancipation. In addition, he assumed that these 19th and 20th-century Brazilian religious movements were based on the pre-Columbian corps of soteriological and messianic ideas of Tupi and Guarani tribes, untouched by the changes, which this culture was subjected to in the context of colonization. A similar presupposition was also assumed by the French scholar H el ene Clastres (1975).

Apriorism (sometimes ideological) in that interpretations to a great extent was due to the fact that until the mid-1970s little attention was paid to the historiography. The pioneers of research, in which the historical method played an important role, were Duglas Teixeira de Monteiro (1974), Janaína Amado (1978) and Francisco R egis Lopes Ramos (1991). In later studies this aspect was overlooked definitely less often. It is now the prevailing conviction that, regardless of the adopted theoretical-methodological framework (sociology, anthropology, etc.), the historical perspective is fundamental to a good understanding of this kind of phenomena (Gomes Filho, 2013: 187).

In the 1970s research on Brazilian folk religiosity was still dominated by the methodologies and interpretations that reduced it to the political

and social content. At this time, for some researchers, they have already been unsatisfactory. Some of them noticed that they overlooked important, perhaps even essential, aspects of religious movements. One of them was Alba Zaluar, who advocated to the development of a research method that would incorporate the expressions of the folk religiousness in its symbolic layer that, as she claimed, is the universal order on which the social order is based (Zaluar, 1979). The methodological suggestions of Teixeira Monteiro were led in the same direction as the methodological suggestions of Teixeira Monteiro (1974), according to which the religious ideas of the folk Catholicism should be treated not as an epiphenomenon of social and political phenomena but as an objectively existing semantic universe, which gives meaning to the social world. From this perspective, the religious symbolic universe is considered an important structure of the folk religiousness and its “logical basis”.

For the few last decades, the most promising interpretative perspective for the discussed phenomena has been developing, which draw attention to their essential aspect: to their religious content, understood as a symbolic universe, their driving force, also when they occur in the form of social, political or economic movements (Gomes Filho, 2013: 194; Lima Rodrigues, 2015: 140). This approach is based on the concept of the encounter European Catholicism had with the cultures and religions of the indigenous people of Brazil and describes this event in the terms of “cultural translation” and “symbolic negotiation”[3]. These categories seem to aptly describe the relationships between the two symbolic systems that were met (or collided) and interacted with each other for over four hundred years.

Constant movement of change and mutual adaptation of the symbolic systems of both sides were done in this way so that they can continue to make sense in a world that is no longer the same as this in which that systems have been shaped. This mutual translation referred primarily to redefining the time and space categories of Indians. However, it created a new space, new time and a new way of being for the missionaries and the indigenous people of Brazil. Some authors claimed that the result of this interpretation was also a new religion, not only of the Indians, but also of all Brazilian ethnic groups, including white colonizers. “From the beginning of the 19th to the mid-20th centuries, this religiousness was the language in which certain groups of villagers (camponeses) expressed their will to destroy the unjust world and rebuild it in a different way” (Pompa, 2004: 71).

Sertões and caboclos: the place and the people

Let us now look at these processes of the “cultural translation” and “symbolic negotiation” in order to better define their conditions and the circumstances in which they occurred. In these processes and circumstances in which they ran, we expect to find an answer to the question about the causes and sources of the Brazilian messianic and millenarian revival.

Sertões are one of the largest semi-arid areas in Latin America. They cover an area of the northeastern Brazil (states of Minas Gerais, Bahia, Sergipe, Alagoas, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Piauí, Maranhão, Goiás, Tocantins, Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul). Their surface area is about 800,000 km² (for comparison: the surface of Poland is 312,679 km²), occupying about 1/10 of Brazil territory. This area is covered with bushy vegetation called caatinga. The word is derived from the Tupi language and is translated as “white forest”, “white vegetation”. They have a tropical climate, with two seasons: one very dry, the other moderately rainy. There may be periods of long-lasting drought, as well as periods of torrential rains that cause catastrophic floods. Agriculture is developing on the damp zones that occur there in the form of the enclaves scattered among the dry territories. In the period which is the subject of our interest, when the sertões underwent a wave of religious awakening, these lands were mainly used for growing cotton and raising cattle.

However, in the context of the discussed issue, the cultural (referring to the symbolic space) distinction of the sertões is of more importance: not because of their climate, vegetation or the manner of the soil cultivation, but because of its imaginary remoteness from the sea and the coast. This name is derived from the word *sartaão* or *certão*, which was used by the Portuguese sailors to name the interior of Africa and Brazil. It meant a place which is distant, uninhabited, isolated, unfriendly, unknown, wild, uncivilized, and delayed in development. “As a result of this symbolization of the space the imaginary geography is created, in which sertão is an indeterminate, mysterious space, where is mixed what the historical and the transcendent, the infinite and the limited, the abstract and the concrete” (Turchi, 2006: 122).

The inhabitants of Brazil sertões are often called *caboclos*. Some researchers derive this word from the Tupi Indian language, the tribe inhabiting the coastal areas, in which it means their enemies, the inhabitants of the interior. The formation of these communities was associated with migration and crossbreeding, which also affected the formation of their mentality. In the 19th century, scholars explained the provenance of *caboclos* in the crossbreeding of the white and Indian races, however ethnic roots of the population living on the Brazilian sertões are manifold. After the dissolution of the Society of Jesus (1759) and expulsion of them from Brazil, the settlements (“reductions”) that it founded to lead the catechesis and to protect the local population from the enslavement and exploitation by the colonizers fell down, and their inhabitants were diffused among the rest of the population. This was the beginning of the formation of the population known as the *caboclo* and its specific culture (*cultura cabocla*).

Although ethnicity was important in understanding the word *caboclo*, more important was the association of the people named by this word with the rural world (Rodrigues, 2006: 123). In colloquial terms, this word means a person originating from the rural areas, uneducated, uncivilized and unproductive, contrasted with the white inhabitants

of the city, a representative of civilization. Therefore, this term was a category of the colloquial social classification, the expression of the segregation and discrimination (Magalhães Lima, 1999: 5). Caboclos began to be perceived better in the 70s of the previous century. The Brazilian intelligentsia idealized this social group then. In the next decade, this tendency has been strengthened by the ecological movements that presented the caboclos as endowed with extraordinary, almost mysterious, natural knowledge, useful and even privileged, in a manner desired by that movement's direction of social development. At that time, some romantic fetishization of caboclos occurred, which fashioned them as a "chosen people" (Pace, 2006).

In the discussed period, the administrative and political institutions were represented there merely by the so called *homens bons* ("good people"), who were almost exclusively great landowners. It is they who were the dominant political force in these areas. This system is known as the *coronelismo* (from the Portuguese word *coronel* – the colonel). Originally, colonels commanded the National Guard; subsequently this term was used for naming all landowners and rich persons, who held an informal, but real, political power in the region (Symanski, 2008: 75).

In the context of the previously discussed social and religious movements, the proclamation of the Land Law (*Lei de Terras*) by the Brazilian Government in 1850 was significant. Under this law large groups of inhabitants of *sertões* were deprived of land and forced to seek other forms of livelihood. Until the proclamation of this act, there were lands without specified owners (without a document confirming the right of ownership), so the access to free lands, which was the main source of livelihoods (often even of the survival) for many families, was not difficult. The Brazilian authorities, foreseeing that slavery would be abolished soon, were preparing for the influx of the immigrants, who, as planned, would be able to occupy the place of the slaves on the plantations. *Lei de Terras* was to prevent the occupying of free lands by the immigrants, because if it happened, it would not be possible, as intended, to use their work in the great estates. Under this act, the free lands became the property of respective states, controlled by the regional oligarchies, which then handed them over to the owners of the great estates. This status was lawfully authorized by the 1891 Constitution. In the dry lands of north-eastern Brazil, there usually lived more people than production required (the natural increment in this region is still the largest in the Americas), which caused the mass unemployment of those who did not possess cultivated land. For those deprived of lands, the Republic has become synonymous with misery, hunger and death (Domingues, 2005: 38-39).

Encounter of the religions as a translation: The third symbolic universe

Studied communities and religious movements functioned at the turn of the 19th century, in a society that earlier was an object of the conquest of Portuguese conquerors, of the colonization and Christianization, the

scene of migrations and ethnic and cultural mixing, and under these influences underwent a significant metamorphosis. Brazilian society in its religious aspects was shaped by the factors deriving from three sources, which were the Portuguese folk religiosity, religions of indigenous people and African religions (Pereira de Queiroz, 1968: 107; Gonçalves Brame, 2011: 95). These factors have formed a peculiar Brazilian folk Catholicism.

The missionary activity of the Christian religious orders, which led to the evangelization of the local people of Brazil can be understood as the interpretation and translation (transfer) of the Christian beliefs onto the languages of the local people. In 1549-1759, mainly the Society of Jesus led the evangelization of the local peoples of Brazil. One of the evangelization strategies of this religious order was the catechesis in the local languages. When the Jesuits arrived in Brazil, hundreds of languages were spoken there, but in the area of their missionary activity dominated a language, which they then called the *Língua Brasília*, presently known as the old (or “classical”) Tupi (Almeida Navarro, 2016: 25). For catechetical purposes, they translated into that language the Roman catechism, sermons, the Loyola’s “The Spiritual Exercises”, religious songs, Gospels, missals, instructions, handbooks of penance, the religious poetry and published numerous works dedicated to the grammar of that language and its dictionaries. The problem of translation was complex because, besides the fact that those indigenous languages in many respects were distinct from European ones, they contained a load of ethnic notions that did not necessarily correspond to their meanings in Western cultures. The situation of catechesis in the local language was such that the Jesuits, speaking to the Indians in their own tongue, used such grammatical, rhetorical, theological, political and metaphysical terms, which did not exist in that language[4]. Under the influence of those translations, the Catholic theological matter underwent significant changes, just as the language, into which it was translated, as well as the mentality of those who used it. This language has been created over centuries in the process of symbolic negotiation, in which some elements were absorbed and processed, because they could give meaning to the world, others were rejected because they did not have signification in the reality of *sertão* (Pompa, 2004: 88). “For three centuries, the Indians, the Mestizos, the Black and the Portuguese exchanged experiences and goods in that language fixed as the supraethnic tongue, widely spread by missionaries through the catechesis” (Bessa Freire, 2009: 321). The new representation of the sacrum thus produced was no longer either Christian theology or the Tupi beliefs, but some third symbolic sphere, some kind of the parallel mythology, which was only made possible by the colonial situation (Bosi, 1992: 65).

The religiousness of the inhabitants of *sertão* is likewise the result of the rather weak presence of the Catholic clergy among the inhabitants of this area, especially after the removal of the Jesuits from Brazil. There were few priests and monks, the parishes were extensive, and the religious teaching was not carried out systematically, reduced only for the children

from higher social spheres and lasted several months preceding the first communion. The religious instruction of children of the lower layers of society was led by the parents, a majority of whom were illiterate, who received religious knowledge in the same way, so the vast majority of Brazilian Catholics inherited it without real knowledge of the doctrine (Pereira de Queiroz, 1968: 105; Siuda-Ambroziak, 2012: 101-102).

The folk religiosity of caboclos was pluralistic, fluid, dynamic, with a strong propensity for autonomy, which caused tensions with institutional Catholicism in various aspects, such as prayer, singing, the manner of the celebrate the rites, the cult of saints and double (domestic and ecclesiastical) baptism. It was the religiousness without institutional framework, coordinated by secular leaders, the religiosity which appreciated the persons and groups socially excluded, discarded the values unfamiliar to the local culture, and was respectful for such values as honor, solidarity, reciprocity, justice and freedom (Welter, Martins, 2007: 119-120). The representatives of this popular vision of Christianity and the Christian life were the “blessed”. They were the persons advocated the most fervently for the moral and religious values of folk Catholicism, most definitely turned away from the vision of the centralized, bureaucratic and hierarchical Christianity advocated by the Catholic Church.

What was the source of the messianic and millenarian ideas that belonged to this form of Brazilian religiosity? They had a double origin: Christian and indigenous. Christian messianism was an important message, transmitted to the people of America in the process of their evangelization. It was inscribed in the work of the conquest, playing the important role of its legitimacy as the fulfillment of the prediction of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth, among the pristine peoples. That conviction is brightly visible, for example, in Christopher Columbus, whose mentality was influenced by the Iberian Franciscan thought, strongly saturated by the millenarian and prophetic visions (first of all, of Joachim of Fiore), but also in the first missionaries of America, who were Franciscans. In the 16th and 17th centuries, these ideas had a resounding effect throughout Europe, but in the Iberian Peninsula they gained a particular reinforcement emanating from the geographical discoveries that allowed individuals to have hope for the universalization of Christianity on a global scale.

As mentioned above, the evangelization of the indigenous population of Brazil was led mainly by the Jesuits (including Portuguese ones), so it is worth noticing that likewise there were present components of the millenarianism and messianisms in their imaginarium – for example, in the specific version of the Sebastianism, widespread in the Portuguese folk Catholicism[5] but also preached by António Vieira (1608-1697), who, as a missionary, spent many years in this country. Millenarian visions of Vieira were developed in 18th century by Pedro de Rates Henequim (1680-1744), the author of the theological system, who propagated them among the inhabitants of the region of Minas Gerais. The first collective manifestation of the Sebastianism in Brazil was the movement of Serra do

Rodeador (Hermann, 2001: 135). In 1817, in Recife (the city in north-eastern Brazil, now the capital of the State of Pernambuco) Cidade do Paraíso Terrestre (City of the Worldly Paradise) was established. The movement was crushed militarily in 1820. Maués (2005: 264-265) makes mention of the legend of King Sebastian, which in several versions is narrated nowadays in the Salgado region (Paraná).

These ideas coincided with the messianic and millenarian beliefs of the indigenous people of Brazil. In the context of that issue, there is often a reference made to the cosmological-eschatological myth called the “Land without Evil” (in the Portuguese language *Terra sem Mal*), present in the culture of the indigenous people belonging to the Tupinamba tribe family. As we can read in various publications, this tribe, in the face of the harsh conditions of life, in the 15th and 16th centuries, allegedly realized the hike to this mythical “Land”. The Swiss scholar Alfred Métraux acknowledged that the most important fruit of these early peregrinations of the Indian tribes were the millennial-messianic Brazilian movements of the turn of the 19th century (Métraux, 1927). Although he failed in the substantiation of that thesis (or rather hypothesis) by the source data, many researchers took it as justified, using this to interpret the newer Brazilian movements and religious communities. Given this fact, Pompa stated that it is one of the biggest “founding myths” of research on the Brazilian religions (Pompa, 2003: 105-106). Métraux made a mistake: the Tupinamba’s newer culture is not the same as the former one. In addition, although the chroniclers who wrote about the first wanderings of this tribe indicate their religious motives, they cannot be attributed to later migrations, because they have been undertaken to search for the new, more fertile lands, and also to free themselves from Portuguese oppression. Moreover, the analysis of the written sources shows that the tribe in question originally did not give a religious, but an ecological and economic meaning to the term “Land without Evil”. The evolution towards the religious meanings of this myth (“deep semantic transformation” of the tale) was done by the collision of the culture of that people with colonization and evangelization (Pompa, 2004a: 167), and at the turn of the 19th century it has become an important component of the religious mentality of the discussed communities. In a situation of threat of oppression, permanent in the colonial reality, as well in the first decades of the post-colonial situation, which turned out to be more cruel to some groups of Brazilian society than the colonialism, messianism has become central to the symbolic universe of the rustic Brazilian communities.

Final remarks: How to (rightly) name it?

An overview of the answers given to the question about the sources and causes of the messianic-millenarian revival of the Brazilian *sertões* at the turn of the 19th century, and of the reflection on the circumstances of its emergence, indicate that its origin cannot be explained by pointing to only one chosen field of facts, because this kind of approach always leads

to far-reaching simplifications. Of course, the answers to this question cannot include those which treat this phenomenon as an expression of religious fanaticism, the product of a peculiar diet of groups that proclaim messianic and millenarian ideas, or of the dominant pathological type of the personality of their adherents. These explanations have already been discredited as conceptions ignoring facts, devoid of reliable justifications, as being merely an expression of prejudice and colloquial stereotypes, discriminating certain groups from society. There were also unilateral interpretations which only saw the social and political dimension of the causes of these movements, ignoring their religious aspect, recognizing this feature merely as a form of expression (an irrelevant surface) of the important social contents. The deeper insight into these phenomena and facts, manifested in the sphere of social life, reveals that the religious substratum of these movements held an important position in the mentality of the communities living on sertão.

Another erroneous assumption, rooted in an unilateral and simplistic perspective, is the notion that this religious aspect of life for the Brazilian backlands inhabitants is the only source of their millenarian and messianic expectations, aspirations, attitudes and activities. Therefore, trying to answer the question about their sources and causes we attempted to take into account both the natural, cultural and socio-political circumstances in which they were shaped, in particular highlighting the situation of the encounter of cultures and religions (the European and the Indian), which we presented in terms of the “cultural translation” and the “symbolic negotiation”. We have pointed out that the result of these processes has been the specific synthesis of contents of both sources, the third symbolic sphere, the parallel mythology, which one (but not the only) expression was the extraordinary folk religiousness of the cabolcos community with its distinctive, central component of the millenarian and messianic beliefs.

The extent of the mutual interferences of both cultures in the process of the “symbolic negotiation” of meanings and of their place in their product, i.e. in the mentioned third symbolic sphere, is obviously difficult to define. However, such attempts have been made for a long time, provoking discussions and serious controversies, starting with the dispute about the proper name of the character of the meeting of these cultures (encounter, collision, assault, subalternation...). Although these controversies refer to a general category of culture, they have a direct reference to this domain of it, which is the religion. In other words, the nature of the relationships between Christianity and the indigenous religions of America can be (and is) perceived in similar categories as the essence of the relationship between European culture and the native cultures of America. In other words, the nature of the relationships between Christianity and the indigenous religions of America can be (and is) perceived in the same categories as the essence of the relationships between European culture and the native cultures of America. These include such categories as acculturation, cultural shock, syncretism,

hybridization, mestization, the colonization of imaginarium and several others.

For quite a long period (the 1950s and 1960s) the dominating attitudes, where that the encounter of the European, Christian culture and the cultures of the local people of the Americas explained in terms of “acculturation” and of “cultural shock”. As a result, it was supposed that the cultural imposition of European conquerors on the indigenous populations and local cultures would lose what was their core, and at the same time, their weakest (because archaic) element, and their place would be filled with alien contents. However, the concept of the acculturation was almost completely removed from research and interpretation in this area (nevertheless, it still remains in post-colonial studies, which some followers, strongly attached to their own aprioristic ideological assumptions, seem resistant to arguments and reluctant to accept the facts that undermine their assumptions and theses).

Some scholars also reject the term “syncretism” because they perceive its connections with colonial domination (which, they say, is still ongoing), as a mask of that domination, a euphemism, which hides “the shock and the destruction of the American world, in which European culture reigned” (Durán, 2016: 117). Others reject this category because, on the contrary, they do not claim that the phenomenon occurred. For example, Gutiérrez Estévez claims that:

Christian tradition in South American societies is not mixed with the “pagan” tradition, but they are differentiated and perform different functions in the marking of the world. (...) the specific logic of monotheism did not penetrate the consciousness of the people of South America; they last in their pagan logic, which did not perceive anything wrong in accepting beliefs and practices from any source.

Referring to this form of religiousness, sometimes named as the syncretic, the author argues that:

both sets of elements, coming from outside, whether from native sources, “Christian” or “pagan”, are equally important and none peripheral – in such a way, that it can be said that Indian cultures are rather twofold than syncretic (Gutiérrez Estévez, 2014: 135).

Furthermore, certain scholars argue that the use of the syncretism category leads to far-reaching simplifications in relation to the complex, multi-faceted process of shaping the new symbolic reality that has arisen as a result of the relations between Catholicism and the cultures of Brazilian indigenous people. They prefer to talk about the hybridization of cultures, asserting that this is a much more appropriate category for the description and interpretation of the discussed phenomena than the category of syncretism. However, the difference between syncretism and hybridism is rather difficult to grasp. As Gatti notes, almost to the last decades of the 20th century, the syncretistic phenomena were seen as signs of lateness and rudeness (Gatti, 2016: 76-77), so the use of that term in the social sciences and humanities became problematic. There are also attitudes according to which the concept of syncretism is useless because every religion is syncretic. However, some authors note that there

is also a category of the hybridity in the same situation, since each culture is the result of the processes of hybridization (Burke 2009). Therefore, although the category of syncretism has been rejected by many scholars as deceptive and inadequate, many others still perceive the analytical utility of it (Rudolph, 2005; Ferretti, 2014: 15).

On the basis of the considerations carried out in the article, the extent of the mutual influences of both religious universes cannot be determined unambiguously in the terms of the syncretism or of the hybridism. As mentioned above, they are ambiguous and objectionable, and although it is not excluded that they accurately describe both the process of the synthesizing religious contents originating from two different sources and its result in the form of a third, common, negotiated symbolic reality, nonetheless they do not help to outline precisely the ranges of the mutual influences. It seems that the delimitation of these ranges will always be difficult, if at all possible. Taking it into account and recognizing that – as rightly noted Siuda Ambroziak – in Brazilian religiosity the doctrinal symbiosis and advanced eclecticism than the “war of the gods” can be much more easily found (Siuda-Ambroziak, 2012: 112), the relationship among contents originating from two religions, which resulted in the explosion of the millenarian and messianic movements, we call it by the term derived from the conception of Hans Jonas (2001: 20): the “theocracy”, the fertile “confusion of the gods”.

Bibliography

- Almeida Navarro, E. de (2016). Breve história da língua tupi. *Revista Metalinguagens*, (5), 25-35.
- Amado, J. (1978). *Conflito social no Brasil: a revolta dos “Mucker”*. São Paulo: Símbolo.
- Araújo Gomes, A.M. de (2013). As fontes dos messianismos na literatura luso brasileira. *Revista Lusófona de Ciência das Religiões*, (18-19), 115-131.
- Bastide, R. (1964). *Brasil terra de contrastes*, São Paulo: Difusão Europeia do Livro.
- Bessa Freire, J.R. (2009). Tradução e interculturalidade: o passarinho, a gaiola e o cesto. *Alea*, 11 (2), 321-338.
- Bosi, A. (1992). *Dialética da colonização*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Burke, P. (2009). *Cultural Hybridity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cavalcanti Barros, L.O. (1988). *A terra da mãe de Deus: um estudo do movimento religioso de Juazeiro do Norte*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves.
- Castro, J. de (1967). *Geografia da fome*. São Paulo: Brasiliense.
- Clastres, H. (1975). *La Terre sans Mal. Le prophétisme tupi-guarani*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Domingues, E. (2005). Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Contestado e Canudos: algumas reflexões sobre a religiosidade. *Memorandum*, (8), 38-51.
- Durán, R.A.N. (2016). *La evangelización de Mesoamérica en el siglo XVI: una aproximación crítica*. *Historia y Grafía*, (47), 115-143.

- Facó, R. (1965). *Cangaceiros e fanáticos*, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Ferretti, S.F. (2014). Sincretismo e hibridismo na cultura popular. *Revista Pós Ciências Sociais*, 11 (21), 15-33.
- Gatti, J. (2016). Dialogism and Syncretism: (Re)Definitions/Dialogismo e sincretismo: (re)definições. *Bakhtiniana*, 11 (3), 62-81.
- Gomes Filho, R. (2013). Da “Terra Sem Mal” ao “Paraíso Perdido”: Perspectivas teórico-metodológicas acerca do messianismo/milenarismo. *Revista Expedições: Teoria da História & Historiografia*, 4 (1), 178-196.
- Gonçalves Brame, F.R. (2011). Catolicismo popular: utopia cristã? *Perspectiva Sociológica*, (6, 7), 88-106.
- Gutiérrez Estévez, M. (2014). Otra vez sobre sincretismo. *Éndoxa: Series Filosóficas*, (33), 119-141.
- Hermann, J. (2001). Sebastianismo e sedição: os rebeldes do Rodeador na “Cidade do Paraíso Terrestre”, Pernambuco – 1817-1820. *Tempo*, 6 (11), 131-142.
- Hernández, E. (2013). Aspectos metodológicos de la investigación en lingüística misionera hispánica. In: M. del P. Máynez (ed.), *El mundo indígena desde la perspectiva actual. Perspectiva multidisciplinaria*. México: Editorial Grupo Destiempos, 223-247.
- Jonas, H. (2001). *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lanternari, V. (1960). *Movimenti religiosi di libertà e di salvezza dei popoli oppressi*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Lima Rodrigues, C.C. (2015). A religiosidade popular brasileira. *Relegens Thréskeia. Estudos e Pesquisa em Religião*, 4 (1), 132-147.
- Lopes Ramos, F.R. (1991). *Caldeirão*, Fortaleza: Eduece.
- Löwy, M. (2010). Eric Hobsbawm, sociólogo do milenarismo campestre. *Estudos Avançados*, 24 (69), 105-118.
- Magalhães Lima, D. de (1999). A construção histórica do termo caboclo sobre estruturas e representações sociais no meio rural amazônico. *Novos Cadernos NAEA*, 2 (2), 5-32.
- Maués, R.H. (2005). Um aspecto da diversidade cultural do caboclo amazônico: a religião. *Estudos Avançados*, 19 (53), 259-274.
- Menezes, D. (1937). *O outro Nordeste*. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Jose Olympio.
- Métraux, A. (1927). Migrations historiques des Tupi-Guarani. *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, (19), 1-45.
- Nogueira Negrão, L. (2009). Sobre os messianismos e milenarismos brasileiros. *Revista USP*, (82), 32-45.
- Pace, R. (2006). Abuso científico do termo “caboclo”? Dúvidas de representação e autoridade. *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 1 (3), 79-92.
- Pereira de Queiroz, M.I. (1968). O catolicismo rústico no Brasil. *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, (5), 104-123.
- Pereira de Queiroz, M.I. (1965). *O messianismo no Brasil e no mundo*. São Paulo: Dominus.
- Pinto Monteiro, F. (2010). Messianismo, Milenarismo e Catolicismo (Popular) no Discurso Intelectual das Ciências Humanas e Sociais: Apontamentos

- Preliminares para uma Questão Conceitual. *Revista de Teoria da História*, (4), 84-116.
- Pompa, C. (2004). Leituras do «fanatismo religioso» no sertão brasileiro. *Novos Estudos Cebrap*, (69), 71-88.
- Pompa, C. (2004a). O profetismo Tupi-Guarani: a construção de um objeto antropológico. *Revista de Indias* 64 (230), 141-174.
- Pompa, C. (2003). *Religião como tradução: missionários, Tupi e Tapuia no Brasil colonial*. Bauru: Edusc.
- Posern-Zieliński, A. (1971). Antropologiczna interpretacja ruchów społeczno-religijnych Trzeciego Świata. Oceny i propozycje. *Lud*, (55), 83-113.
- Rodrigues, C.I. (2006). Caboclos na Amazônia: a identidade na diferença. *Novos Cadernos NAEA*, 9 (1), 119-130.
- Rudolph, K. (2005). Syncretism: from Theological Invective to a Concept in the Study of Religion. In: A.M. Leopold, J. Sinding Jensen (eds.), *Syncretism in Religion: a Reader*. New York: Routledge, 68-85.
- Silva Queiroz, R. da (2005). Mobilizações socioreligiosas no Brasil: os surtos messiânico-milenaristas. *Revista USP*, (67), 132-149.
- Silveira Campos, L. (2016). Movimentos messiânico-milenaristas: modos de transformação do desespero em esperança. *Revista USP*, (108), 129-139.
- Siuda-Ambroziak, R. (2012). Katolicyzm kolonialny w Brazylii i jego dziedzictwo. *Przegląd Polsko-Polonijny*, 4 (1), 91-113.
- Siuda-Ambroziak, R. (2015). *Religia w Brazylii: uwarunkowania społeczno-kulturowe*. Kraków: Nomos.
- Siuda-Ambroziak, R. (2017). Religious and Political Leadership in Brazil at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries – the Case of Father Cícero. *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões*, 9 (27), 9-20.
- Symanski, L.C.P (2008). Práticas econômicas e sociais no sertão cearense no século XIX: um olhar sobre a cultura material de grupos domésticos sertanejos. *Revista de Arqueologia*, 21 (2), 73-96.
- Teixeira Monteiro, D. (1974). *Os errantes do novo século*. São Paulo: Duas Cidades.
- Turchi, M.Z. (2006). Jagunço e jaguncismo: história e mito no sertão brasileiro. *O público e o privado*, (7), 121-132.
- Valente, W. (1963). *Misticismo e região: aspectos do sebastianismo nordestino*. Recife: Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais, Ministerio da Educação e Cultura.
- Vanderlinde, T. (2009). Fronteira e religiosidade: a celebração messiânica pelos territórios perdidos. *Estudos Teológicos*, 49 (1), 153-169.
- Vinhas de Queiroz, M. (1977). *Messianismo e conflito social (A guerra sertaneja do Contestado, 1912-1916)*, São Paulo: Ática.
- Welter, T., Martins P. (2007). Religiosidad y estrategias identitarias en la cultura cabocla del sur de Brasil, *Iztapalapa*. *Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, (62-63), 117-133.
- Zaluar, A.G. (1979). Os movimentos «messiânicos» brasileiros: uma leitura, *Boletim Informativo Bibliográfico – BIB*, (6), 9-21.
- Zwartjes, O. (2002). The Description of the Indigenous Languages of Portuguese America by the Jesuits during the Colonial Period: The Impact

of the Latin Grammar of Manuel Álvares. *Historiographia Linguistica*, 29 (1), 19-70.

Zwartjes, O. (2012). The Historiography of Missionary Linguistics. Present State and Further Research opportunities. *Historiographia Linguistica*, 39 (2-3), 185-242.

Notes

- [2] Messianism and millenarianism, the terms we use here, are not synonymous. Messianism is associated with the proclamation of the establishment of the trans-historical Kingdom of God and collective salvation, while millenarianism is the announcement of the establishment of such a kingdom within the temporal world and its thousand-years persistence. Messianism and millenarianism are closely related in many socio-religious movements, and their distinction is not easy to parse (Posern-Zieliński, 1971: 107-108; Pinto Monteiro, 2010: 97-99); therefore, with regard to the movements discussed here, this double nomenclature was adopted.
- [3] This research perspective, in the literal, linguistic sense, was adopted, among others, by the Missionary Linguistics, which has been developing since the beginning of the current century as an innovative, interdisciplinary field of study, in which collaborate the linguists of various specialties, as well as the historians and anthropologists. The subject matter of their study are all kinds of writings authored by the missionaries of the colonial era (the collection of these documents is huge), especially in languages others than the Indo-European, written for communication with those subjected to the catechization (Zwartjes, 2012: 185-186; Hernández, 2013: 225-226).
- [4] According to this “linguistic policy”, three general languages were developed for Brazil: the southern language (língua geral meridional), the Amazonian language (língua geral amazônica), and the language of the nheengatu, spoken in Bahia (Zwartjes, 2002: 27; lmeida Navarro, 2016: 29). In 1758, the use of the “general language” was banned in Brazil. The same ordinance introduced the obligation to use the Portuguese language.
- [5] For a long time, prophetism was a phenomenon which characteristic in Portuguese culture, expressing the hope for the arrival of the Messiah, the great leader, who will ensure that Portugal the triumph over the world. Its name - “Sebastianism” - derives from the name of the hero of the legend, which was created after the death of King Sebastian at Alcácer Quibir (Ksar el Kebir near Tanger) in 1578 in battle against the Sultan of Morocco. The rumor that King Sebastian is alive and awaiting for his return were widespread, mostly among the lower social strata. In the 17th and 18th, centuries there was rampant speculation s intellectually supporting the expectations of the folk Sebastianism. The rebirth of this myth took place in the 19th century, and in the 20th century it gained a symbolic expression in the work of the eminent modernist poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935).

Author notes

- [1] Mieczysław Jagłowski, Doctor habilitado en Filosofía, Profesor titular en Humanidades, Vicedecano de la Facultad de Humanidades de la Universidad de Warmia y Mazury de Olsztyn (Polonia). E-mail: mjag@uwm.edu.pl.