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

African Diaspora and its Religious Heritage: a view from the Triple Border (Brazil/Paraguay/Argentina)

Fernando da Silva, Anaxsuell
African Diaspora and its Religious Heritage: a view from the Triple Border (Brazil/Paraguay/Argentina)
Revista del CESLA, vol. 26, 2020
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Polonia
Available in: https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=243364810020
DOI: https://doi.org/10.36551/2081-1160.2020.26.347-376

Debate

African Diaspora and its Religious Heritage: a view from the Triple Border (Brazil/Paraguay/Argentina)

La diaspora africana y sus huellas religiosas: una mirada desde la Triple Frontera (Brasil/Paraguay/Argentina)

Anaxsuell Fernando da Silva anaxsuell@gmail.com
Universidad Federal de la Integración Latinoamericana, Brasil
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8830-0064

Revista del CESLA, vol. 26, 2020

Uniwersytet Warszawski, Polonia

Received: 06 May 2020
Accepted: 22 October 2020

DOI: https://doi.org/10.36551/2081-1160.2020.26.347-376

Redalyc: https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=243364810020

Abstract: Abstract: The religious diversity of Latin America is a phenomenon that has gathered the attention of researchers from different fields. Along with the expressions of belief and feeling related to Catholics and Protestants, who are still the majority, there are diverse religious practices. In this article, we will focus on the analysis of practices and beliefs arising from the Afro-descendant presence in the continent in general as well as in the region known as the Triple Frontier, in a particular way. The strong socio-cultural interrelationships feedback on the intense flow of people and material/symbolic goods, complex religious matrices, reframing beliefs and resisting colonial violence. Our reflection is based on long fieldwork at the border towns Ciudad del Este (Paraguay), Puerto Iguaçu (Argentina) and Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil), with an ethnographic approach, documents, and bibliographic review. In this direction, this article seeks to discuss the way in which Afro-descendants have been organized and maintained in this dynamic and multiform religious scenario. Throughout this path, our intention is to characterize the specificities of the different manifestations of belief/devotion/practices of/in the region originating or re-signified by the African diaspora on the continent, at the same time that we will seek to configure the socio-historical context of the emergence of the referred religious groups. And we expect to have, in the end, an ethnographic and analytical picture of the religious effects of the African presence on the south of the Latin American continent.

Keywords: African diaspora, Latin American studies, religion, border studies.

Resumen: La diversidad religiosa de América Latina es un fenómeno que viene ganando atención de investigadores de diferentes áreas. Al lado de las expresiones del creer y del sentir relacionadas a católicos y evangélicos, aún mayoritarios, figuran diversificadas prácticas religiosas, en este artículo privilegiamos el análisis de las prácticas y creencias oriundas de la presencia afrodescendiente en el continente de manera general y en la región conocida como Triple Frontera, de manera particular. Las fuertes interrelaciones socioculturales se retroalimentan del flujo intenso de personas y bienes materiales/simbólicos, volviendo aún más complejos los matices religiosos, resignificando creencias y resistiendo a la violencia colonial. Nuestra reflexión está sostenida en un largo trabajo de campo, de naturaleza etnográfica, documentos y revisión bibliográfica. En esta dirección, este artículo busca discutir el modo como los afrodescendientes vienen organizándose y manteniéndose en ese escenario religioso dinámico y multiforme. A lo largo de esa trayectoria pretendemos caracterizar las especificidades de las distintas manifestaciones de creencia/devoción/prácticas de la/en la región oriundas o resignificadas por la diáspora africana en el continente, simultáneamente, se buscará configurar el contexto sociohistórico de surgimiento de los referidos grupos religiosos. Al fin, se espera que esté disponible un cuadro tanto etnográfico como analítico de los efectos religiosos de la presencia africana en el continente.

Palabras clave: diáspora africana, América Latina, religión, frontera.

> Et voici ceux qui ne se consolent point de n'être pas faits à la ressemblance de Dieu mais du diable, ceux qui considèrent que l'on est nègre comme commis de seconde classe : en attendant mieux et avec possibilité de monter plus haut; ceux qui battent la chamade devant soi-même, ceux qui vivent dans un cul de basse fosse de soi-même; ceux qui se drapent de pseudomorphose fière; ceux qui disent à l'Europe: «Voyez, je sais comme vous faire des courbettes, comme vous présenter mes hommages, en somme, je ne suis pas différent de vous; ne faites pas attention à ma peau noire : c'est le soleil qui m'a brûlé».[1]
>
> Aimé Cesaire, 1938 (1969, p. 58)

The construction of the International Friendship Bridge (known as *Ponte da Amizade* in Portuguese), in the 1960s, responsible for connecting the South of Brazil to the East of Paraguay, as well as the International Bridge of the Fraternity (*Ponte da Fraternidade*), [2] inaugurated 20 years after the aforementioned, and which connects the Northeast of Argentina with Brazilian territory, are considered milestones of contemporary Latin American integration. Both were built on the confluence of two of the most important rivers in South America: the Paraná and Iguaçu. From its vertices, the national borders of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina were outlined.

Long before that, this territory belonged to the Guarani and other autochthonous peoples. However, we know that, in order to establish itself, Latin America was both producer and product of an extensive process of violence, especially regarding our original peoples. These first inhabitants of the place known today as the Triple Frontier used to move freely in their territory, their understanding of space did not admit physical borders, common to the advent of Western modernity. Their socio-cultural dynamics implied a coexistence with the rivers that allowed them to move between banks, currently considered border traffic as they are different countries. The existence of rivers, therefore, motivated the first settlements in the region and, simultaneously, constituted the source of life for these communities and the condition of a naturally open border. Spontaneous settlements distributed at the three ends of the river and the outlining of the border are an effect of such a process.

At the end of the 19th century, the region that comprises Southwest Brazil was considered economically unimportant for the province of Paraná and, therefore, for the Brazilian state. The original population that survived the first attacks of colonizing violence also had to deal, on the other side of the Iguaçu River, with the Argentine exploitation of wood and yerba mate, products desired in the Platine market.

As a way of guaranteeing the integrity of the territory (Ritt, 2011), ensuring the nationalization of the region and, at the same time, containing a possible attempt by Argentina to expand its border lines, the Brazilian Army encouraged the appropriation of space and restocking the region through the creation of the Iguaçu Military Colony. [3]

Thus, in 1888, from the infrastructure provided by the military posts in Brazil and Argentina, two of the modern cities in this region emerged – Foz do Iguaçu and Puerto Iguazu. This occupation process is also, and we

cannot lose sight of this, a response of these two countries to the Guerra de la Triple Alianza [4] looking at the establishing outposts that would allow both countries to operate on the confluence of the Paraná and Iguaçu rivers.

The region would be considered strategic in geopolitical terms due to the relevance of both rivers for communicability and transportation throughout the territory. Until the aforementioned decade when the bridges were built, the region had been considered of little importance for continental economic interests. Given the change in status, from the 1960s, the population would grow. This period, considered in the urban historiography of the region as developmental, imposed – especially on the Avá-Guarani people, the first inhabitants of the territory – many episodes of violence and semi-slavery exploitation.

Therefore, Guaraní peoples had their workforce explored in an imposing way from the end of the 19th Century until the beginning of the 20th; with the removals resulting from the creation of the Iguaçu National Park, in the 1930s/40s, and, finally, in the 1970s, with the start of construction of the dam and the binational hydroelectric plant of Itaipu. [5]

The sharp population growth, associated with migratory flows, further strengthened this region in the Latin American context. Today, the three border [6] cities Ciudad del Este (Paraguay), Puerto Iguazu (Argentina) and Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil), each on its riverside, amass 700,000 inhabitants and make up the most densely populated triple frontier in terms of population in Latin America. Dreyfus (2007) argued that the region we are referring to forms an international urban system that is very peculiar in relation to other border regions in South America, because it is not simply about areas bordering a border line. The areas are also contiguous regarding economic, cultural, geographical and security aspects. In this sense, this constitutes a particular transnational economic dynamic and a strategic point of global dispute (Ceceña, 2006).

Despite Social Science efforts, a significant part of the consolidated interpretations regarding the Triple Frontier comes from articles published by the international media, especially the North American and European press. These pieces foster a perspective of a border conceived as a space in which drugs, arms and people trafficking are common, in other words, a place where all kinds of illegal practices are incapable of being controlled by national states.

Research works dedicated to social dynamics in the triple Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay border region have shown how these spaces of transnational contact function as a stimulating laboratory for socio-anthropological exercise (Silva & Procópio, 2019b). This happens, on the one hand, because from this region it is possible to understand the national and international historical movements that allowed the formation of these regions as a meeting point for the dividing landmarks, and on the other hand, when observing the particular

processes established from those regions where different nations meet and communicate.

It is by taking the frontier in its analytical potentiality that, in this article, we face the processes by which religious phenomena are engendered in the Triple Frontier. It is the boundary condition that marks the way in which religious social groups present themselves in this region (Silva, 2018). Here, we will dedicate ourselves to reflect on the religious beliefs and practices common to the peoples of the Afro-Latin American diaspora.

1. The Afro-Latin American diaspora in the Triple Border region

It is not a novelty that the colonization process in Latin America comprised the occupation/exploitation of the territories and the subjection both of the original peoples that inhabited the region, and of those brought from afar to act as a work force in these regions, the latter group mostly composed of enslaved Africans. This historical landmark introduced the experience of the diaspora in the places where these people were inserted.

Today, within the scope of Social Sciences, we do not understand the diaspora only in its strict and literal sense, that is, as a mere physical displacement in a geographical meaning. Nor do we consider it only as a metaphor for displacements and/or deterritorializations – which meant an expansion of the very notion of geographical distance. In recent years, the notion of diaspora has also come to characterize a type of awareness, experience and cultural production that calls into question fixed models of cultural identity (Hall, 1994).

Overcoming the understanding of the territory as something that can be reduced to a fixed substrate, located on any part of the earth's surface, implied the admission of a framework of the bond between subject and its more subjective, more complex, symbolic territoriality. It was a question of conceiving it as a space in which the subject inaugurates an affective bond, builds its History, and establishes its social relations and artifacts. In this sense, the diaspora presupposes an experience of extraterritoriality and, therefore, expresses the idea of a life outside the "motherland" territory.

In the Latin American and Caribbean context, we take the African Diaspora as a perspective to think about the cultural and religious movement of people of African descent, to understand the flow and dynamics of ancestral beliefs and knowledge that crossed the great Atlantic (Glissant, 1997), constituted themselves as spaces of memory or subjective reception and gathered experiences and religious practices in different areas of our continent.

Looking at these religious practices allows not only for the understanding of such beliefs, knowledge and devotions as social phenomena, but also makes it possible to emphasize the racial and gender inequalities to which the enslaved African peoples brought to

the Americas were (and still are) subjected, that express themselves in a religious format.

In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the concrete effect of racism as a structuring ideology of power is located in the naturalization of asymmetric social relations. [7] In terms of a socio-anthropology of religion, this implies that certain analyses unfold in practices of exercising power and cooperate in the destruction of subjectivities constituted within the framework of these cultural experiences. [8]

In terms of comprehensiveness, if we consider the most recent census data available, we will notice that Afro-descendants in Latin America total something around 30% of the total population, i.e., close to 180 million people. Obviously, it is necessary to consider that the data we have is not accurate, because in some countries of the continent underreporting occurs, while in others this is not a census issue.

We must not lose sight of the national whitening policies [9] responsible for creating migratory policies with the objective of making the population clearer, through the continuous attempt to erase any epistemic, aesthetic and cultural traces of the peoples in the diaspora. As Du Bois pointed out, this is a fundamental understanding key to interpreting the continent's inequality.

> In South America we have long pretended to see a possible solution in the gradual amalgamation of whites, Indians and Blacks. But this amalgamation does not envisage any decrease of power and prestige among whites as compared with Indians, Negroes, and mixed bloods; but rather an inclusion within the so-called white group of a considerable infiltration of dark blood, while at the same time maintaining the social bar, economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement of dark blood as such... And despite facts, neither Brazilians nor Venezuelans dare boast of their black fathers. Thus, racial amalgamation in Latin-America does not always or even usually carry with it social uplift and planned effort to raise the mulatto and mestizoes to freedom in a democratic polity. (Du Bois, 1942)

The geographic space known as the Latin American Triple Frontier, a region that we analytically observe in this work, is a microcosm of the continuing relationship of violence perpetrated in the three countries that compose it. This violence, initiated by colonization, had historical continuity with despotic governments, and is expressed singularly in the tyrannical treatment given to social movements and demands for equality and social justice.

In other works, I have argued that socio-religious dynamics in the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay border region can be understood as a privileged laboratory for religious mutations in Latin America, which occur in a multifaceted, rhizomatic and pluriform way (Silva, 2018). Religious identities arise from clarity and obscurity. Under the inspiration of Glissant (1997) – a Caribbean poet, ethnologist and philosopher who built a very original reflection on creolization –, [10] I understand that the roots of the border are centers of irradiation, spatialities with decentralized interconnections. Any border

is an invitation to thoughts on identity in the relationship. It implies taking on the multiple forms or expressions that are outlined in the midst of conflicts, tensions and that are engendered in exile, in the midst of migratory flow or in wandering. The triple-border is a meeting place and, at the same time, a crossing point at the crossroads of the Latin American continent.

On the Brazilian side, we find a country with the largest black population outside of Africa. However, we cannot miss the fact that the formation of primitive capital in Brazil was engendered by the exploitation of the enslavement of Africans. It is no coincidence that this was the last nation in the Western Hemisphere to formally abolish slavery, in 1888, two years after Cuba. Later, the country embraced the "racial democracy" thesis and with the endorsement of the military dictatorship, suppressed the debate on race and racism in Brazil for many years.

In any case, due to its enormous territorial extension, Brazil cannot be understood monolithically. There are regional peculiarities that emerge even for travelers. When telling his experience in Brazilian territory, Gates [11] describes Brazil as "genetically brown, although there are some areas of the country, such as Porto Alegre, [12] that are overwhelmingly white" (2011, p. 15). In fact, it is possible to say that the South of Brazil is the space in which the ideology of whitening operationalized by migratory policies was successful. However, we cannot fail to make visible the expressive Afro-descendant population of this region of the country, obliterated by a constant political-epistemic effort to present Southern Brazil as a white and developed region.

Paraná, a region in the South of Brazil that borders, on the east, with Paraguay and Argentina, object of our analysis here in this article, had in the first half of the 19th century a population of 40% of enslaved black people (Gomes et al., 2008). They worked alongside the free workers, and were fundamentally working on the harvest, transport and commercialization of yerba mate. The development of the productive forces produced changes. The drilling machine was replaced by the hydraulic one, and the latter, by the steam engine; thus, the workforce of the enslaved became incompatible with technological innovations.

We should bear in mind that most of the enslaved people had communication barriers between themselves, as a result of the constant divisions produced in the groups of origin since their forced shipments in Africa, bringing together black people from different linguistic groups to avoid their political organization. In this context, resistance should occur through subterfuge created from everyday gathering opportunities – which, in general, occurred under devotion practices. Hence, other ways of resisting the violence of enslavement were articulated, whether pretending indisposition to do chores, negotiating, murdering overseers, practicing suicide or trying to escape and consequently building what was conventionally called *quilombo*. In other words, the space for political

organization was also the space for religious worship, the space for maintaining subjectivity, for humanization.

On the Paraguayan side, the bibliography on people of African descent is not abundant, which contributes to the little knowledge we have in this regard. The presence of Africans in Paraguay has never been more significant than in Brazil, although at the end of the colonial period Afro-descendants totaled about 11% of the national population, concentrated largely in the city of Asunción. Today, according to Telesca (2005, 2008), being of African descent in Paraguay implies living excluded from one's nationality, since intense cultural discrimination is ongoing. This obliteration process is not new. Pla (1972) wrote the first work that attempted to cover all facets of slavery in Paraguay, entitled *Hermano Negro*. She compiled, from the sources available in the National Archives of Asunción, a set of documents from the colonial period until the War against the Triple Alliance. Although Pla (1974) succeeds in carrying out a valuable panoramic analysis of Paraguay's Afro-descent, she cannot be exempted by her insistence on characterizing the coexistence of Paraguayan black people and other segments of society as being harmonious.

For her, the "actitudes sórdidas y crueles" that were documented in her own work "constituyen la excepción". From an analytical point of view, Pla corroborates the myth of the happy slave (Cf. Levaggi, 1973; Pla, 1972), whose precursor was de Azara (1969). Although his bibliographic production is very important, we cannot fail to show that he was a pioneer in softening slavery and its effects in Paraguay. De Azara referred to people of African descent as 'people of color' and praised "the moral qualities of mulattoes and mulatas", among which he highlighted the "aptitudes spirituales".

According to official data, in Ciudad del Este, a city that borders Brazil, 2% of people are black. Unfortunately, there is no affirmative black identity policy in Paraguay. In this sense, there is an evident underreporting. Before the 2007 census, the scenario was bad, as the existence of Afro-descendants in the country was completely ignored. This census was carried out by the Asociación Afro Paraguayan Kamba Cuá and made it possible to quantify the diasporic presence in this country a little better.

Puerto Iguazu is the Argentine border city in the region, and it does not offer a very different scenario from the ones in Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil) and Ciudad del Este (Paraguay). The Argentine city also leads the phenomenon of invisibility suffered by the Afro-descendant population in Latin America (Andrews, 2007). The expedition through which Africans entered Argentina was the same infamous traffic that occurred mainly from West Africa to colonial, Hispanic and Portuguese America, along the well-known routes of the Atlantic Ocean. Buenos Aires and Montevideo were among the most important ports in the South Atlantic (Gomes, 2002). In Argentina, slavery would be officially abolished in 1853, but only in the inland part of the country. In Buenos Aires, it lasted

for another seven years; however, many slaves were not effectively freed until 1905.

Even today, in the social imaginary, the black population is described as a social group partly wiped out in the wars for independence and the rest of it was killed by epidemic outbreaks such as yellow fever. This perception reinforces the image, historically constructed, of a white and European Argentina in which its development and formation take place in spite of the presence of the African and his descendants, the Afro-Argentines.

Wars and epidemics are insufficient to explain this phenomenon, which is why Argentine researchers speak of an "artificial disappearance", which is a consequence of the obliteration of the black presence in cultural life, in the media and in education. Evidence of this is that during the government of Juan Manuel de Rosas, [13] the black community of Buenos Aires consisted of about 30% of the total population. The governor himself, together with his family, attended Candomblé celebrations which, at this time, were one of the few public demonstrations possible and acceptable to Afro-Argentines.

Therefore, something common to the numerous contingents of people of African descent in Latin America, and in our particular case on the Triple Frontier, is its genesis in forced migration. [14] In this sense, Gilroy (2002) argues that the black identities of the diaspora are generated not only from the memory of the original trauma of slavery and the subsequent experience of racial violence, but also from radical experiences of uprooting and cultural metamorphoses.

This region, known as the Triple Frontier, has developed greatly over the past four decades, due to the effect of the impacts of social, economic, political and cultural changes. The cultural plan on which it is based is diverse, which will resonate over the local religious panorama. This implies reshaping the ritual practices of the different manifestations of devotion.

2. Afro-diasporic beliefs and devotions in a Latin American context

This Afro-Latin American diasporic experience is expressed in various experiments of political resistance, of which we highlight here in this text the socio-cultural reorganizations, expressed in organizations that foster belief, devotion or religious practices.

With information from the Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, [15] we can now know that 70% of Brazilian Afro-descendants came from Angola, and that a large part of the *terreiro* [16] religions, also named Afro-Brazilian, come from two sources: the Yoruba people from western Nigeria and Benin, and what historians Linda Heywood and John Thornton call "Angolan Catholicism," rooted in Angola and brought to Brazil by the enslaved. When they arrived in Latin America, many Africans from other parts of the continent converted to Catholicism,

not in the way that religion was practiced in Portugal, but as it was practiced in Angola; in fact, many were catechized, formally or informally, by Angolans (Cf. Gates, 2011).

These religious practices can be thought of in the order of cosmological reconstructions that reconnected the people in diaspora with the traditions of African origin. Especially when referring to the Candomblé experiences, but without losing sight of the successive layers of resemantizations of European religious complexes – which many scholars of Brazilian religions, moved by a colonial episteme, imprecisely refer to as religious syncretism.

The Triple Frontier is an important and stimulating place to reflect on the processes that include the religious phenomenon. The trinational contact point highlights the emergence of a field that simultaneously reflects the dynamics related to each of the national religious fields and is shaped as a space for interreligious contact which will produce, due to the different nature of contact, a particular religious field with new modalities of conflict and combinations.

On the one hand, these religions are microcosms of the way the religious phenomenon presents itself in each country, developing similar characteristics and behaving as an extension. On the other hand, insofar as they form spaces of contact between different national states, they are not only points of arrival for national socio-religious processes, but also for crossing these processes. The religious dynamics on one side of the border will seek to expand and/or communicate their action to the neighboring side which, in turn, will react to this intent, assimilating, circumventing, and/or returning the engineered procedure. This process ends up diversifying the way the fields in contact are organized and moved, since their composition is stimulated by the permanent friction between devices that circulate from one side to the other.

In the context of Catholicism, festivals and religious pilgrimages cross national boundaries and make it possible to incorporate foreign elements into the beliefs and values of individual faith practices. Consequently, this flow impacts the religious calendar of the parishes or dioceses of origin, which are flexible to meet the demand of the devotees. Thus, the religious dynamic is configured in a space of transnational and cross-border cooperation.

Early in January, the Paraguayan media announced the traditional Kamba Kua party, [17] which would take place on the 11th of the first month of the year. The event in question has been organized annually since 1991 and San Baltazar, the holy patron of Afro-descendants in this country, is celebrated there. In 2020, the celebration was considered special because it recalls the bicentenary of the arrival of the ancestors to Paraguayan territory, in 1820 – at that time, a group of 250 men and women arrived to accompany the Uruguayan warlord José Gervasio Artigas in exile after the defeat in the Battle of Tacuarembó.

Although the Afro-Paraguayan community has been organized around three main communities, [18] which were the Paraguayan Network of

People of African Descent and are closer geographically to the federal capital of the country than to the triple-border region, the intense flow of beliefs and devotions existing in this this space allows for the recurring presence of a group of Kuamba Kua people performing with their bodies and instruments simultaneously in several cities in the border region, especially on the week commemorating the day of Afro-Paraguayan culture,[19] but also on the Brazilian side in the celebrations referring to the day of the black conscience of the country.[20]

As for the religious celebration, it is important to point out that, in the current format, it originated in Paraguayan lands with a group called La Sociedad de Tamboriles Purgación Culera. The schedule of the festivities begins on January 6 with a mass in a chapel, novenas and a procession that makes up the Catholic ritual, which is followed by a festivity for all the children in the community. The central public act takes place days later. In 2020, for example, it took place on the 11th, with a music and dance festival. In this, all participating groups are dressed in red and yellow clothes, which are colors identified with San Baltazar, the black saint of the three wise men. The night before this festival a group of Candomblé members played at Parque República. Alexandro Sellanes, member of the group of percussionists, explains in an interview with the newspaper El Territorio, from the Misiones region:

> El sentido de la fiesta es la de hermanarnos en el tambor, más allá de la cuestión económica y social de las personas. El ritual de fuego - que se enciende para afinar el cuero de los instrumentos - va templando el espíritu del tamborero. (Tambores para el santo negro, 2009)

On the Argentine side of the river, it is not much different. The cult to San Baltazar is considered, by the anthropologist Norberto Pablo Cirio (2000, 2002), the greatest Afro-Argentine expression, both in extension and in number of devotees. The belief extends from the province of Corrientes, north of Santa Fe, through the region of Argentine's Chaco, Formosa, reaching the province of Misiones, covering much of the border area with Paraguay and Brazil. Being a paraliturgical devotion, the cult has as a point of convergence the houses that have an image of the saint on a private altar. According to recent research (Agostino et al., 2014), the Catholic Church is timidly involved – for example, it celebrates Mass on the day reserved for the saint, January 6, but does not get involved in the festivities resulting from this celebration. There are an estimated 150 places of devotion in this region, which remain open throughout the year, but which gather hundreds of people from more distant provinces during the festive period.

Two other aspects must be considered in this Argentine religious expression. First of all, the hallmarks of this party are musicality and dances. Although we consider that Catholic festivals, in general, celebrate popular religiosity, those related to this cult give special relevance to the expressions of joy related to this saint. Secondly, San Baltazar devotees explicitly acknowledge the African heritage in worship. Commenting on this aspect, Cirio states that:

> (...) antepasados – "negros candombes" – veneraban al santo siguiendo patrones religiosos más propios del África que católicos, situación que se invirtió con el paso generacional y el emblanquecimiento de su familia, pues ya su generación tiene tez trigueña (piel oscura que no indica necesariamente ascendencia afro). (Cirio, 2014)

This strong link between religious practice incorporated into the Catholic calendar, with a cult of ancestrality and history, allows us to think about the spaces for displacement of the deconstructed/constituted meanings of the dominant discourse. It occurs despite the notion that black people would be the holders of a past tied to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneration, unable to produce a history of civil progress, and a dismembered and displaced present that violates not only their political but also their human condition, theme developed by Fanon (1973).

This process can be understood as a movement to recolonize believing and feeling. The rupture, albeit temporary, of the white, hegemonic historical-religious narrative takes place, and an appropriation of the colonizer's religious structure in the service of a devotion of the subordinates is established, even in an asymmetrical context of domination and exploitation. Regarding this double religious relationship, folklorist Osvaldo Sosa Cordero wrote a poem: "Festeja em 6 de janeiro sua função San Baltasar, o santo mais candombeiro que se possa imaginar. Por ser os desse santinho a função dos cambá, já armaram o bailinho do bairro Camba Cuá" [21] (Barreiro, 2017).

The fact that these religious manifestations act in transnational contexts, in a border area, and differentiate themselves for not having a fixed territoriality, adjusts a defined temporality, enables the release of the inalterability of identities, since the models, as normative particular activities are diluted or displaced from their original context, along the same lines developed by Costa (2006).

3. Africans religions and povo de santo of the border

The establishment of a *povo de santo* (lit. "people of saints") on the Triple Frontier began during the 1970s with the founding of the first *terreiros* in Foz do Iguaçu. Candomblé is one of the religious practices that can be considered of African or Afro-Brazilian origin. This devotion was constituted in different regions of Brazil, with different local rites and names from different African traditions. In the socio-anthropological research of religion, we will find these practices under the name of Candomblé in Bahia (Rodrigues, 1977), Xangô in Pernambuco and Alagoas (Motta, 1982), Tambor de mina in Maranhão and Pará (Ferretti, 1986), Batuque Rio Grande do Sul (Oro, 1994) and Macumba in Rio de Janeiro (Bastide, 1975).

Regarding rites, Candomblé covers different cultural aspects, which practitioners name as nations. In general terms, the African cultures that were constituted as main cultural collections came from the Bantu region – an area in which Angola, Congo, Gabon, Zaire and Mozambique are

today – as well as from the Sudanese region of the Gulf of Guinea, which bequeathed to religion, the Yoruba; another strand, the Ewê-Fons, today coincides with the territories of Nigeria and Benin. Practitioners of religions of African origin are called *povo de santo*, regardless of the strands that we have pointed out above. When we mention that there is a cult of the saint-people, we refer to devotions aimed at African gods, the Orixás [22], mythical deified ancestors who present themselves as elements of nature. The Orixás are the providers of *axé*, which is the vital force and energy of Afro-Brazilian religions (Prandi, 1991).

In the famous book *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and tradition in Candomblé*, Stefania Capone (2010) analyzes the policy of building legitimacy and the idealization of purity in the cults of religions of the African matrix. The French author, with extensive fieldwork in Brazil and Latin America, explores the idea that a so-called Afro-Brazilian religion is actually conceived by a series of articulations through which modalities such as Umbanda and Candomblé, traditionally imagined in separate, identified itself in a single continuum. It is worth highlighting here the approach regarding its deconstruction of the cosmological and ritual relationship articulated through the analysis of the Orisha Exu (messenger of the gods, owner of the paths and the movement), in its different ontological and personal manifestations. Another important contribution by Capone concerns his debate around the effects of the re-Africanization movement, which she identified in Brazil and in Central America. This process concerns something that, paradoxically, would no longer truly reproduce Africa. As Palmié (2008) rightly pointed out, even Africa is not an ontological existence.

The first Afro-descendant practitioners of this religion who migrated to the Triple Frontier in search of economic improvements in their lives were attracted by the construction of the Itaipu Hydroelectric Plant and the opportunities for work and income resulting from it. The *terreiros* of Foz do Iguaçu would, over time, give rise to other *terreiros* in the border cities of Ciudad del Este and Puerto Iguazu in Argentina. *Terreiro* is a word derived from land that refers to the notion of home, or family worship space. A *terreiro* can be an area in the native vegetation set aside for religious service, the underbrush is cleaned and swept so that your feet can hit the ground and feel connected with nature and the deities associated with it. In Candomblé, the *terreiro* is a fixed point, the source of *axé*, a reference that underlies and territorializes the practices of the people-of-saint.

In Foz do Iguaçu, on the Brazilian side of the border, we found 42 houses of worship of these Afro-Brazilian religions. Each house is independent and although there is a cooperative relationship between them, there is no hierarchy. However, the older houses are more respected by the *terreiro* community itself. Each of these houses is led by a leader, who can be a Babalorixá [23] or an Iyalorixá [24]. *Babá* means father and *Ya .iyá*) can be translated as mother. So, this designation means Orixá's mother and father. Here is another important explanation, both

are called Father or Mother of the Saint because they care for and serve the purposes of the holy entities, the saints. Frequent participants in the rituals of a *terreiro* will be called children of the father or mother of a saint corresponding to the *terreiro*.

Some research [25] has pointed out that the presence of religions of African origin in the Mercosur countries, represents, in fact, a return of these devotions to the public space. This is due to the fact that meetings of people of African descent to dance the saint occur in a context of silencing the Candomblé drums as a result of the violent reduction and socio-religious erasure of the population of African origin.

This knowledge of Candomblé about spaces, also expressed in the border region, concerns knowledge of ancestral tradition, which survives before the colonial conceptions of space/national territory. On the contrary, it acts in a network of people, senses, material and non-material goods. These religions of African origin, therefore, propose epistemic ways to think and rethink the spatiality of the existence of historically subordinated peoples.

In this flow of beliefs, symbolic religious goods and people, a singular aspect related to the people-of-saint of Puerto Iguazu can be highlighted: their house, or, to put it another way, their *terreiros*, are on the other side of the bridge, in Foz do Iguaçu. This religious territoriality covers an interesting geopolitical aspect; even though residing in Puerto Iguazu, there is a deliberate option to fulfill religious duties in Foz do Iguaçu. Dos Santos (2016), commenting on this particularity of the triple frontier, points out that Argentine supporters consider that Brazilian *terreiros* have more *axé* [26] than *terreiros* in their own country, and consider Brazil as the place of "essence" of African-based religions.

The perception that makes them reach this conclusion is the greater presence of black people in the *terreiros* as a booster of the *axé* intensity. Thus, Afro-Brazilian ancestry marks agency in the local religious dynamics, creating a transnational flow of *povo de santo*. In his work, referring to the dynamics of another frontier with Argentina, Oro demonstrated that several "younger Argentine leaders still have Brazilians as spirit guides, and if they do not, they see them as better eyes than their older compatriots. Veteran Argentine religious are no longer so easily impressed by their neighbors' religious diplomas" (1999, p. 95).

On the Paraguayan side, in Ciudad del Este, our research [27] identified two Umbanda *terreiros*. One of them has existed since 2000 and brings together people in the Dona Blanca neighborhood; the second, formed three years later has ties of familiarity with other houses in Assunción since the 1990s. A distinctive aspect is related to the entities that appear in the Paraguayan *terreiros*, among them the Caboclo de Pena, [28] an entity that communicates in Guarani language, being a Paraguayan native. And, in Guarani, this Caboclo tends to those interested, dedicating spiritual guidance and prescribing medicines for bodily ills. The cult of this indigenous entity brings together practitioners of religions of African origin in the region, producing empathy since the indigenous figure is a

national symbol. But we cannot lose sight of the aspect related to hybrid religious practices due to the Avá-Guarani heritage in daily life in the region.

4. Pentecostalism: liturgical aspects and political struggles

The social sciences of religion have focused on Christianity in the Latin American context and have indicated that Catholicism has suffered a notable drop in its number of adherents in the last census surveys in different countries, at the same time that the Evangelical denominations increase quantitatively with each new data collection regarding the population's religious adherence. It is a phenomenon that is easily perceived in the large urban centers of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, but also verifiable in other urban areas of the Latin American continent.

Specifically, in the region in which we dedicate ourselves here, the Christian hegemony found on the continental level prevails. In Foz do Iguaçu, for example, Brazilian census data from 2010 shows 58.56% of the population as Catholic and 35% as Protestant [29] (IBGE, 2012). On the Argentine side, there is not much difference when compared to the Brazilian religious landscape. The central spaces of the city are occupied by the Catholic Church and, as it moves to the periphery, there are different Pentecostal denominations - here, one cannot lose sight of the flow of churches from Brazil, such as: Church God is Love, Evangelical Church Assembly of God and Universal Kingdom of God.

In a mapping of spaces of Protestants' religious practice, carried out throughout 2016, [30] we found the presence of 323 churches in the city of Foz do Iguaçu, with an expressive majority of Pentecostals. Due to the different ways in which the Protestant segment manages its ecclesiological spaces, this number may be even greater. This is due to some denominations not taking into account congregations or small places of worship based in homes (as in the case of churches that work in the "cell" model) or in structurally precarious spaces in peripheral regions.

The great capillarity of Evangelicals draws attention. When placed on a map, it is clear that there are churches in every neighborhood in the city, with a greater concentration in peripheral and impoverished regions. An important detail is that large denominations, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, do not have, in Foz do Iguaçu, the same quantitative strength as in other Brazilian cities. Instead, there are small churches, coming from internal divisions and functioning in the model of religious communities. Here we have another characteristic of frontier Evangelicalism: the great fragmentation.

The capillarity of Evangelical growth does not consider national or border limits as impediments to religious transit. The Christian congregation of Brazil, for example, has five temples in Ciudad del Este and three temples in Puerto Iguazu. Churches born on Brazilian contexts also thrive in neighboring cities – the Assembly of God has 72 temples on the Brazilian side and about 30 on the Paraguayan side.

Many historians of Christianity, as well as anthropologists and sociologists inside and outside Latin America, have considered it unimportant or negligible that Pentecostalism had a strong participation of black people in its genesis. This group, since the beginning of the movement, has been instrumental in spreading this popular way of experiencing Protestantism. The participation of Afro-descendants is evident, both in the USA where the movement would have started according to current historical sources, and in Latin America where it spread and in less than a hundred years has won millions of adherents from Northern Mexico to Southern Chile.

Pentecostalism comes from what is commonly called the revivalist movement, which emerged in the context of the already consolidated denominations of historical Protestantism in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. The first groups demarcated their differences by rejecting theology and the practice of formalist faith, and elitism of these denominations. The idea of these groups of believers would be to seek a spirituality based not only on the rationally apprehensible religious discourse, but also and mainly on the experience that was manifested in the body.

The characteristic I want to emphasize here is that Pentecostalism has been, since the beginning of the 20th century, a movement that has brought together minoritized social groups, including migrants, in different parts of the world. However, over time, the different groups became institutionalized around churches, and showed – with different intensity – the social and ethnic issues of the society in which they were inserted. White and black members of the Pentecostal movement agreed on aspects related to religious experience in Pentecostal theology, such as baptism in the Holy Spirit and the admissibility of spiritual gifts today, but differed in the church's performance in the public sphere, that is, in the political implications and social aspects of the practice of faith. In this regard, Francisco Rolim (1985) stated:

> no movimento pentecostal dos negros a religiosidade de santificação se aliava e continua se associando à luta política, carregando para seu seio tanto um potencial de resistência à dominação econômica como a força da cultura negra com seus símbolos, canções e ritmos (...). Numa linha inteiramente diferente, mesmo oposta, o grupo pentecostal dos brancos estadunidenses deu particular ênfase ao batismo do Espírito Santo (...) Não se cantava a libertação do oprimido. Antes louvava-se o poder do Espírito (...) A visão que os crentes brancos tinham de Cristo e do Espírito Santo ia se tornando diferente da dos negros pentecostais. (p. 70)

In other words, while white Pentecostalism launched itself towards a spirituality aimed at the sacred-immaterial and one claimed participation in a kingdom that is not of this world, black people led their music and preaching to an expression of cultural and political resistance to society based on white supremacism. In Latin America, this dichotomy is not expressed in the same way. Understanding this process is essential to deal with the advancement of this religious group and to understand the social agendas fed by them.

The arrival of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America, at the beginning of the 20th century, coincides with the arrival of two denominations in Brazil – the Christian Congregation, in 1910, and the Assembly of God, in 1911 – installed and consolidated by adopting a model of religious life typical of North American white Pentecostals. This is due to the fact that its founders were European migrants in the USA and had contact with the revivalist movement started in Los Angeles.

While one of these denominations, the Christian Congregation, would dedicate its religious activity exclusively to immigrants and descendants of Italians concentrated in the Brazilian states of São Paulo and Paraná, the Assembly of God is organized and has expanded from the North and Northeast of the country, to reach all states of the federation in less than twenty years and in another 50 years it has reached all countries in Latin America.

The robustness of the growth of the Assembly of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world, is due to its proposal to follow the route of northeastern immigrants, leaving their states of origin and heading towards southeastern Brazil, in search of better economic conditions. It is a form of popular Protestantism, marked by intimacy, an emotional nod and a subjective spirituality – with a strong rejection of the elitist literacy of historical Protestantism. For this reason, Pentecostalism, both from the Assembly of God and from other similar denominations, finds the majority of its audience in the most impoverished, abandoned social strata, thirsty for social justice.

Obviously, this part of the population consists predominantly of people of African descent. It is worth recalling here that the post-abolition scenario forced the migration of newly freed coffee farmers towards urban centers and condemned them to a precarious life in peripheral regions, in search of jobs in which they would not be properly paid. Added to this contingent, the freedmen roaming the streets and avenues of the cities in search of survival.

In Brazil, urban reforms carried out in the late 19th and early 20th centuries expelled the entire mass of residents who had occupied the abandoned tenements and mansions, forcing them to move to the hills and peripheries of the city. Thus, the majority of the impoverished population that lived in the city, but in deteriorated regions, when facing modern re-urbanization and beautification works had to move to the hills adjacent to the center, to the suburbs or peripheries of the city. The vast majority of the inhabitants of these regions were black women and men, of rural or urban origin.

Slavery's marks were not only on their bodies. Scars of colonial violence are sculpted in the urban design of Latin American cities, whether large or small. Thus, race, class and gender simultaneously have the effect of imposing the sociopolitical place of the black person. A close look at urban life will allow us to identify the expression of conflicts and inequalities in the production of space. This was already noticeable in the 19th century genesis of urbanism, whose hygienist perspective

marginalized and stigmatized populations under the false premise of the neutrality of the technique.

In the cities of Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad del Este and Puerto Iguazu this process is repeated, although it has been going on since the middle of the 20th century. Cities, concerned with the aesthetic and commercial dimension of urban life, expelled the Afro-descendant population to regions where there is no tourist circulation, lacking basic public services, (re)producing a context of uneven geographic development and conflicting globalization.

Therefore, Latin American Pentecostalism has as its scenario the deepening of socio-spatial segregation, which is also ethnic-racial, that has intensified throughout the century. Most socio-anthropological research on Pentecostalism, blatantly Eurocentric, has ignored the impact of racism in the main analysis regarding the genesis of this social group.

It is in these peripheral areas, in these suburbs, that Pentecostal leadership is most successful at attracting new adherents, and this reception of the Pentecostal message among people of African descent is generally conducted based on the experience of segregation and marginalization as an enabler for religious experience. Therefore, this results in the removal of the instances of rationalized religious mediation, so basic to historical Protestantism. This panorama is certainly not discussed largely in Pentecostal studies nowadays.

Regarding the form of worship peculiar to Pentecostals, aspects such as body expressions, the use of regional instruments, lively and participative songs, make it possible to identify black culture with this form of popular Protestantism. Marco de Oliveira, in his book *A religião mais negra do Brasil* ("The Blackest Religion in Brazil"), when referring to the forms of black spirituality, identifies three aspects contemplated in Pentecostalism: spontaneity, expansiveness and selflessness (2004).

Still, de Oliveira (2005), now referring to a Brazilian religious framework based on data from the IBGE, states that Afro-descendants in Pentecostal Evangelical churches add up to more than eight million adherents. The Assembly of God, the denomination we refer to in this text, has a large part of the Afro-descendants of the region among its followers (de Oliveira, 2004). However, a relevant and perceptible fact in the protestant leaders' meetings that I attended as part of the fieldwork in this research is that in the Triple Frontier, in general, there are very few black leaders within the Pentecostal church community. It means that Pentecostal churches repeat prejudices conceived and assimilated by Latin America as a whole, but also especially in the countries that make up the Triple Frontier.

Far from having a separation between white and black churches as it happened and still does in the USA, in Latin America – especially in Brazil – the Pentecostal movement managed to gather a significant number of Afro-descendant members, offered them space, but at the same time assimilated the inequalities latent in our society. It incorporated the hierarchical dynamics of interracial relations, including in the constitution of its leadership.

Generally speaking, Pentecostalism on the Tri-Border, as in all of Latin America, has only rescued liturgical aspects of the United States' black Pentecostalism, but not its political struggles. It established aesthetic and ritual approaches to *terreiro* religions but took on the struggle to destroy forms of culture, religion and politics that are not white and European.

5. Muslims, Triple Frontier and the African diaspora

The religious landscape of the Triple Frontier region is easily identifiable as diverse. It is enough to walk through the streets of any of the three border cities to come across the various commercial establishments and restaurants belonging to international migrants who brought their religious practice with them. In the daily life of the region, it became common to live with people dressed in the characteristic clothing of Islam, men and women wearing tunics, *shayla* [31] , *hijab* or *chador.* [32]

The composition of Islam in the border religious field is pluriform. This allows us to perceive it as a heterogeneous movement. Muslims with Sunni roots share city life with Shias, Christians with Maronite roots, Orthodox, Copts and other less expressive groups, quantitatively more equally present on the Triple Frontier. In this context, migratory flows played a fundamental role in the consolidation and diversification of these religious practices in the region. [33]

In Ciudad del Este, the first Arab families arrived in the 1960s, coming from other Paraguayan cities, being responsible for establishing the first shops and galleries in the city – a process followed by a second wave of Lebanese migrants in the 1980s, most of them from outside the country.

Sunnis and Shias, unlike the first movement in which they established institutions of an ethnic nature, began to establish in the 1980s several institutions of religious confessional character in the region. Today there are three mosques, the last being Alkhaulafa Al-Rashdeen inaugurated in late 2015 in Ciudad del Este. In Foz do Iguaçu the Omar Ibn Al-Khatab mosque was recently incorporated into several tourist routes. According to IBGE's 2010 figures, the Muslim community of Foz do Iguaçu is the second in absolute numbers in Brazil and has highest percentage share among all cities in the country.

This social group produces a strong public impact on its social, cultural, and religious characteristics. And they do so by occupying the spaces made available from the economic results of their activities in the region. This leads them to invest in socio-educational or communication equipment. For example, we confirmed the existence of 14 institutions of Muslim influence in the Triple Border region, of religious, ethical, commercial etc. nature. 10 of them were located in Foz do Iguaçu: Arab Palestinian Association Brazil of Foz do Iguaçu, Arab Beneficent Association Brazil, Syrian Lebanese Cultural Association, Islamic Beneficent Cultural Center of Foz do Iguaçu, Arab Brazilian Educational Activities Center, Arab Union Club, Brazilian Lebanese School of Foz do Iguaçu, Arab

Evangelical Church of Foz do Iguaçu, Home of the Brazilian Drusos, and the Islamic Beneficent Society.

It is not by chance that Foz do Iguaçu was the first Brazilian city to allow the use of the veil in photographs of official documents of personal recognition. The decision of the Paraná Identification Institute was announced in 2013, the day after a public hearing held at the city's City Council, which discussed the legal prohibition and its implications for the religious life of migrants. The media announced the decision as an achievement for the religious community of women and emphasized that the measure also benefits religious nuns. The understanding of the State Attorney General's Office is that Muslim women and religious women can take a photo with the veil, with the habit or any religious garment, provided that all parts of their face are visible.

The expressive majority of this Muslim migrant population in the region is characterized by having white skin, which, in the local context of social and racial hierarchy, gives them greater acceptance when compared to dark-skinned migrant groups, even when they are also Muslims.

Here, a brief digression is needed. In the history of the Muslim presence in Latin America, we will find migratory flows to the region in two distinct periods. The first one is related to the forced migration of enslaved Africans brought to the region between the 16th and 19th centuries, in which part of them came from West African regions, where Islam was strong. Subsequently, Muslim Arabs arrived, fleeing from repeated conflicts and political and economic destabilization in the Middle East, in successive migratory movements, which settled in Latin America since the middle of the 19th century. The presence of Islam on the Triple Frontier is, and could not be otherwise, the result of such historical and migratory processes. If we want to refer exclusively to the consolidation of Islam in the Latin American religious landscape and/or the Triple Frontier, we will need to incorporate into the analysis the phenomena that occurred since the end of the 20th century, with an increasing conversion of native Latin Americans to Islam (Cf. Ribeiro, 2011, 2012).

Thus, African Muslims and Arab Muslims went through different processes of assimilation in Latin American culture. Africans, in response to the colonial slavery, which oppressed their cultural and religious practices different from those allowed –belonging to hegemonic Catholicism–, articulated several actions of resistance. For this reason, and in this context, several rebellions in which Islamic practices were present served as mechanisms for the recognition, organization and unification of the black community. [34] The strong repression and different expressions of religious racism characteristic of this period culminated in the gradual and nebulous disappearance of black Islam, both in Latin America, in the Triple Frontier, and in Brazil.

Khalil (2018) demonstrated in his research [35] that conflicts of different natures in Africa and Asia have provoked a new migratory stream of Muslims to Brazil. In their majority, they have concentrated in large urban centers, like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and later have

migrated to smaller cities in southern Brazil, where they work in poultry slaughterhouses performing halal [36] slaughter. Some of them have settled in cities close to the border strip that we are analyzing in this article.

The growth of the halal poultry food sector in southern Brazil, in particular in the southwestern regions of Paraná, in Brazilian municipalities close to the border, gradually fostered a migratory wave of Muslims to this region. According to Khalil (2018), these workers come from different African countries, such as Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, and Somalia, in order to work in this industry. This flow of people unfolded in the formation of new Muslim communities in Francisco Beltrão and Toledo, cities near Foz do Iguaçu, in which, until recently, there was no presence of this religious group.

The emergence of multi-ethnic Muslim communities, or, in other words, the detachment of Muslim identity from an ethnic identity, [37] is perhaps a Latin American peculiarity, in contrast to what commonly occurs in Muslim migrant communities in the United States and Europe, fundamentally based on ethnic-national identities (Demant, 2013).

It is not worth discussing here how this sector of the economy takes advantage of the vulnerable situation of foreigners and subjects them to demeaning work conditions, demonstrating the racism and xenophobia expressed in the social relations of attracting the workforce – since no light-skinned Muslim was found, in our research, in these precarious jobs. The role of the subordinates in the world economy is not the object of this article, but I cannot fail to mention the ethnic-racial violence of this group. This fact is evidence of the inevitability of struggles for rights to incorporate the multiple inequalities and injustices of the social situation, unifying different agendas in the struggle for social justice under the fragile label of human rights. However, it is worth mentioning the persistence of racial violence. The change is in the agents of this violence, of this racism, often expressed in religious form, that is, under rejection of religious practices. Romero (2017) discusses the difficulty that these Muslim groups from Africa encounter to perform their rites and prayers in spaces defined as public.

6. Final considerations

The Triple Frontier has been portrayed by the world press as a dangerous territorial space, with little control by state agencies. On the one hand, an image was created that it is an appropriate place to be a "terrorist hideout"; [38] on the other hand, however, as a reaction to this negatively forged image, and in an autonomous way, information began to spread about the celebration of the cultural and religious diversity present in the Triple Frontier which, in theory, would live in full peace and harmony.

In this article, we present different modalities of belief and devotion for people of African descent. Throughout it, we argue that some non-hegemonic religious expressions have been, throughout history, preferential targets of invalidation, disqualification and subordination

mechanisms – facts that put them in a condition of inequality, not of social recognition. In a general context of diversification of beliefs, knowledge and ways of feeling, this social mechanism of contempt and demerit of these practices results in forms of violence and religious racism.

The different types of violence, under religious guise, suffered by people of African descent in the border region have been called religious intolerance, a phenomenon that is also repeated throughout Latin America. From the discursive orientation options of media coverage to the theoretical options of specialized researchers and legal framework techniques for law enforcement operators, this softened expression became commonplace as the only possible way to typify this violence.

We cannot fail to recognize what form of referral has been able to mobilize many positive actions aimed at combating violence of different orders against people of African descent, often enabling more specific treatment. Despite this, simplifying opposition tolerance/intolerance describes and qualifies actions within a racialized scenario. In other words, they slip into insufficient assemblages to deal with the violence suffered by black people of mostly white religions or by people of religions immediately identifiable as linked to the African heritage (Da Silva, 2013). In everyday life, several aspects of such violence are being made invisible because it is an approach that remains in shallow waters. In this sense, to classify this violence as religious racism implies considering the deepest motivations supported by the specificity of how racial relations are expressed in the Tri-Border religiosity.

These movements are part of what Sibai (2016), a political scientist and specialist in democratic theory, defines as the "coloniality of religion". Analytical category used by the Muslim thinker to refer to the different forms of epistemological, spiritual, and conceptual violence applied to groups considered marginal since the ecclesiocentric concept of religion. [39] It is worth remembering that this concept has been allegedly mobilized by the specialized literature of Social Sciences as being of universal heuristic value (Cf. Silva, 2019). In turn, based on shallow comparative analysis procedures, it equates experiences, knowledge, worldviews and different ways of being in the world, producing invisibilities, erasures or inferiorities of believing, knowing and feeling. From a religious perspective, this notion was the foundation of the dichotomies between religion and paganism. In conceptual terms, we should consider the inadequacy of this category to understand cultural practices or social groups that were configured according to epistemes, models, and structural patterns different from those that forged this concept.

Finally, it is worth remembering that our widespread ignorance of the religious practices, beliefs and devotions of people of African descent is the result of the white monopoly rooted in our narrative of history. This naturalizes inequalities and contributes to the permanence of a framework of social asymmetry, domination, and exploitation.

References

Agostino, H. N., Cruz, E. N., & Hormaeche, L. (2014). *La Argentina profunda. Estudios sobre la realidad moderna y contemporánea de Argentina en América*. Purmamarka.

Andrews, G. R. (2007). *Afro-Latinoamericanos 1800-2000*. Iberoamericana. https://doi.org/10.31819/9783954872695

Asad, T. (2003) *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804783095

Barreiro, R. (2017, January 8). Onde estão os negros da Argentina? *El Pais*. https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/01/07/internacional/1483795840_886159.html

Bastide, R. (1975). *As religiões africanas no Brasil*. Pioneira.

Bhabha, H. K. (2013). *Nuevas minorías, nuevos derechos: Notas sobre cosmopolitismos vernáculos*. Siglo XXI.

Capone, S. (2010). *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and Tradition in Candomblé*. Duke University Press.

Ceceña, A. E. (2006). Verbete Tríplice-Fronteira. In E. Sader & I. Jinkings (Eds.), *Enciclopédia latino-americana* (p. 654). Boitempo.

Cesaire, A. (1969). *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* Présence Africaine.

Cirio, N. P. (2000). Antecedentes históricos del culto a San Baltazar en la Argentina: La Cofradía de San Baltazar y Animas (1772–1856). *Latin American Music Review, 21*(2), 190–214. https://doi.org/10.2307/780452

Cirio, N. P. (2002). Prácticas musicales de procedencia afro en el culto a San Baltazar: La "charanda" de Empedrado (provincia de Corrientes, Argentina). *Revista Musical Chilena, 56*(197), 9–38. https://doi.org/10.4067/S0716-27902002019700002

Cirio, N. P. (2014). Historia y etnohistoria del culto a san Baltazar en la Argentina en perspectiva musical. In H. N. Agostino, E. N. Cruz & L. Hormaeche (Eds.), *La Argentina profunda. Estudios sobre la realidad moderna y contemporánea de Argentina en América* (pp. 183–209). Purmamarka.

Costa, S. (2006) *Dois Atlânticos. Teoria social, anti-racismo, cosmopolitismo*. UFMG.

Da Silva, V. G. (2013). Exu do Brasil: tropos de uma identidade afrobrasileira nos trópicos. *Revista de Antropologia, 55*(2), 1085–1114.

de Azara, F. (1969). *Viajes por la América Meridional*. Espasa Calpe.

de Oliveira, M. (2004). *A Religião mais negra do Brasil*. Mundo Cristão.

de Oliveira, M. (2005). Espiritualidade, Identidade e Cultura. In N. Bomilcar (Ed.), *O melhor da Espiritualidade Brasileira* (pp. 239–254). Mundo Cristão.

Demant, P. (2013). *O mundo muçulmano* (3rd ed.). Contexto.

Dos Santos, M. (2016). *Espaços Sagrados: uma etnofotografia do Candomblé da Tríplice Fronteira entre Brasil, Paraguai e Argentina* [End of course paper, Federal University for Latin American Integration]. Repositório Institucional da Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-

Americana. https://dspace.unila.edu.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/4913/tcc_normalizado.pdf

Dreyfus, P. (2007). La Triple Frontera: zona de encuentros y desencuentros. In W. Hofmeister, F. Rojas, & J. G. Solis (Eds.), *La percepción de Brasil en el contexto internacional: perspectivas y desafíos* (pp. 105–134). Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung,

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1942). *Color and Democracy: colonies and peace*. Harcourt.

Eltis, D., & Richardson, D. (2010). Atlas of the transatlantic slave trade. Yale University Press.

Fanon, F. (1973). The wretched of the earth: The handbook of the third-world revolution. Ballantine Books.

Ferretti, S. F. (1986). *Querebentan de Zomadonu: etnografia da Casa das Minas*. Editora da Universidade Federal do Maranhão.

Frigerio, A. (2000). *Cultura negra en el Cono Sur: Representaciones en conflicto*. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Económicas, UCA.

Fry, P. (2004). Espíritos brasileiros no Mercosul: a expansão da religião nos países do prata. *Anuário Antropológico, 28*(1), 427–432.

Gates, H. L., Jr. (2011). *Black in Latin American*. New York University Press.

Gilroy, P. (2002). *O Atlântico negro: Modernidade e dupla consciência*. Editora 34; UCAM.

Gomes, J., Jr., Silva, G. L., & Costa, P. B. (2008). *Paraná Negro*. UFPR; PROEC.

Gomes, M. V. (2002). La presencia negroafricana en la Argentina. Pasado y permanencia. *Bibliopress, 5*(9), 2–18.

Glissant, E. (1997). *Poetics of relation*. The University of Michigan Press. https ://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10257

Hall, S. (1994). Cultural identity and diaspora. In P. Williams, L. Chrisman (Eds.). *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: a reader* (pp. 392–403). Columbia University Press.

IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística). (2012). *Censo Demográfico 2010. Características da população e dos domicílios: resultados do universo*. IBGE.

Khalil, R. S. (2018). *Em nome de Alá: Produção de carne halal, migrações transnacionais e direitos humanos* [End of course paper, Federal University for Latin American Integration].

Kolinski, C. (2018). El grupo tradicional Kamba Cuá: música y danza en la formación del movimiento político-identitario afro-paraguayo. *Suplemento Antropológico*, (53), pp. 199–284.

Levaggi, A. (1973). La condición jurídica del esclavo en la época hispánica. *Revista de Historia del Derecho*, (1), 83–175.

Mercosul se une contra terrorismo. (2001, September 29). *Jornal do Brasil – Caderno Brasil*.

Mota, L. T. (2005). *História do Paraná. ocupação humana e relações interculturais* (pp. 3-12). Eduem.

Motta, R. (1982). Renda. Bandeira de Alairá: A festa de Xangô-São João e problemas sincretismo. In C. E. M. de Moura (Ed.), *Bandeira de Alairá: Outros escritos sobre a religião dos orixás* (pp. 3–12). Nobel.

Montenegro, S. (2002). Identidades muçulmanas no Brasil: entre o arabismo e a islamização. *Lusotopie*, (9), 59–79.

Montenegro, S. (2015). Institutionalizing Islam in Argentina: Comparing Community and Identity Configurations. In M. d. M. Logroño Narbona, P. G. Pinto & J. T. Karam (Eds.), *Crescent over Another Horizon* (pp. 85–106). University of Texas Press.

Oro, A. P. (1994). *As religiões afro-brasileiras no Rio Grande do Sul*. UFRGS.

Oro, A. P. (1999). *Axé Mercosul: As religiões afro-brasileiras nos países do Prata*. Vozes.

Palmié, S (2008). *Africa of the Americas: Beyond the Search of the Origins*. Brill Academic Publishers.

Pinto, P. G. (2009). De la inmigración a la diáspora: los árabes en Brasil. In K. Hauser, D. Gil (Eds.), *Contribuciones árabes a las identidades latinoamericanas* (pp. 191–210). Casa Árabe.

Pla, J. (1972). *Hermano Negro. La esclavitud en el Paraguay*. Paraninfo.

Pla, J. (1974). La esclavitud en el Paraguay. El rescate del esclavo. *Revista Paraguaya de Sociología*, (31), 29–49.

Prandi, R. (1991). *Os Candomblés de São Paulo: a velha magia na metrópole nova*. Hucitec; Edusp.

Rabossi, F. (2013). Dinámicas económicas en la Triple Frontera (Brasil, Paraguay y Argentina). In F. Carrión (Ed.), *Seguridad, Planificación y Desarrollo en las Regiones Transfronterizas* (pp. 167–193). FLACSO; IDRC-CRDI.

Ribeiro, L. M. P. (2011). Negros Islâmicos no Brasil escravocrata. *Cadernos CERU, 22*(1), 287–304. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9036.v0i91p139-153

Ribeiro, L. M. P. (2012). A implantação e o crescimento do islã no Brasil. *Estudos de Religião, 26*(43), 106–135. https://doi.org/10.15603/2176-1078/er.v26n43p106-135

Ritt, E. (2011). *A Colônia Militar de Foz do Iguaçu/PR: um projeto de consolidação de uma fronteira*. [Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade Estadual de Londrina]. Biblioteca Digital da Produção Científica, Tecnológica, Artística e Cultural da Universidade Estadual de Londrina. http://www.bibliotecadigital.uel.br/document/?down=vtls000170758

Rodrigues, N. (1977). *Os africanos no Brasil* (Rev. Ed.). Nacional.

Rolim, F. C. (1985). *Pentecostais no Brasil: Uma interpretação sócio-religiosa*. Vozes.

Romero, F. L. (2017). Diáspora religiosa Mouridiyya: aproximações etnográficas no contexto de imigrantes senegaleses muçulmanos no Sul do Brasil. In F. Baggio, P. Parise, & W. Lopes Sanchez (Eds.), *Diásporas Africanas e Processos sociorreligiosos* (pp. 139–158). Paulus.

Schucman, L. V. (2014). *Entre o Encardido o Branco e o Branquissimo. Branquitude Hierarquia e Poder na Cidade de São Paulo*. Annablume.

Segato, R. L. (2005). Oracle, destiny and personality in Afro-Brazilian cosmologies. In T. Schabert (Ed.), *Prophets and prophecies* (pp. 175–196). Königshausen & Neumann.

Sibai, S. A. (2016). *La cárcel del feminismo. Hacia un pensamiento islámico decolonial*. Akal; InterPares.

Silva, A. F. (2018). Social Dynamics, Transnational Flows and Public Incidence of Religion in the Frontier in Latin America. *Religions, 9*(5), 152. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9050152

Silva, A. F., & Procópio, C. E. P. (2019a). Colonialidades do crer, do saber e do sentir: apontamentos para um debate epistemológico a partir do Sul e com o Sul. *Revista de Ciências Sociais*, (50), 15–30.

Silva, A. F. & Procópio, C. E. P. (2019b). Cristianismos em Região de Fronteira: Trânsitos, Tensões e Reconfigurações Religiosas. *Revista TOMO*, (34), 159–188.

Skidmore, T. (1993). *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (3rd ed.). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822381761

Tambores para el santo negro. (2009, January 7). *El Territorio*. https://www.elterritorio.com.ar/tambores-para-el-santo-negro-9243766883598112-et

Telesca, I. (2005). La población parda en Asunción a fines de la colonia. *Estudios Paraguayos, 22/23*(1-2), 29–50.

Telesca, I. (2008). La historiografía paraguaya y los afrodescendientes. In M. J. Becerra (Ed.), Los estudios afroamericanos y africanos en América Latina: herencia, presencia y visiones del outro (pp. 165–186). CLACSO, Centro de Estudios Avanzados, Programa de Estudios Africanos.

Notes

[1]And there are those who will never get over not being made in the likeness of God but of the devil, those who believe that being a nigger is like being a second-class clerk: waiting for a better deal and upward mobility; those who bang the chamade before themselves, those who live in a corner of their own deep pit; those who drape themselves in proud pseudomorphosis; those who say to Europe: "You see I *can* bow and scrape, like you I pay my respects, in short I am not different from you; pay no attention to my black skin: the sun scorched me."

[2]Although it is best known by this name on both sides of the border, the official name is Ponte Tancredo Neves, in reference to the Brazilian politician, elected president in the period of redemocratization, but who died without being able to take on the highest position in the country, in April 1985 – seven months before the inauguration of the bridge.

[3]During the 19th century, several colonies with similar objectives were created in the Brazilian territory. In the 1880s, for example, the military colonies of Chopin and Chapecó already existed, both in the space that currently belongs to the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina, as did Alto Uruguai in Rio Grande do Sul and the colonies of Santa Thereza and Jatahy in the state of Paraná. Regarding reoccupation in the territory of Paraná, it is worth consulting Mota (2005).

[4]Largest international war conflict that occurred in South America, which opposed Paraguay and the Triple Alliance, composed of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. The war lasted from December 1864 to March 1870.

[5]In the Supreme Federal Court (STF) of Brazil, an original civil action (ACO 3300) is being sought demanding the responsibility of the Brazilian State and the reparation for the damages caused to the Avá-Guarani indigenous people, due to the construction of the Itaipu plant. The lawsuit is based on extensive documentation and bibliographic research, the product of two reports on due diligence in Western Paraná. This information is gathered in the publication *Avá-Guarani: the construction of Itaipu and territorial rights*, prepared by the Superior School of the Public Ministry of the Union (ESMPU).

[**6**]Although there are other regions in Latin American territory where three cities from different countries are located, the convergence zone of the cities to which we are referring has become better known for the attention received by the international community (Rabossi, 2013; Silva, 2018; Silva & Procópio, 2019b).

[**7**]I refer to the approach that minorized social groups are not read from the perspective of conflicts of power, but are reducible to their material nature and, therefore, limited in their capacity for historical-cultural production (Bhabha, 2013).

[**8**]This epistemological reflection of the Social Sciences of Religion was the subject of another essay, "Colonialities of belief, knowledge and feeling notes for an epistemological debate from the South and as a South" (Silva & Procópio, 2019a).

[**9**]For more details on the whitening ideology, see Schucman (2014) and Skidmore (1993).

[**10**]Creole, etymologically, means creating, producing, from the encounter. It is a term coined in the 16th century that had as a backdrop the great expansion of Europe's commercial and maritime power towards the colonies in the Americas, Africa, India, and Asia. In Glissant's (1997) thought, creolization is expressed in language, but this is not its only channel of expression. It refers to a disruptive power that resists, disorganizes and breaks the codes and hierarchies of power. For the Caribbean thinker, the concept of creolization is an analytical resource mobilized not to oppose universalization or identification.

[**11**]Henry Louis Gates Jr., Professor at Harvard University, where he directs the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research.

[**12**]Largest city in Southern Brazil.

[**13**]Argentine military officer, governor of Buenos Aires between 1829 and 1832.

[**14**]The estimate from the Electronic Slave Trade Database Project is that, over 350 years, 12.5 million people have been removed from Africa, in one of the largest forced migrations in history.

[**15**]Organized by historians David Eltis, from Emory University, United States, and David Richardson, from Hull University, England and published in October 2010 by Yale University, this database brought together, for the first time, 200 maps on trade transatlantic slave trade (Eltis, Richardson, 2010).

[**16**] *Terreiro*: Both the house of worship and the community of initiates.

[**17**]The Guarani expression *Kamba Kuá* can be literally translated as "black hole" (*kamba*, a person with black or dark skin and *kuá*, hole). In Guarani, hu is used to characterize a Negro, so some researchers suggest that *Kamba* comes from *Kambá*, an ethnic group from Angola of which, probably, the first Africans and Afro-descendants in Paraguay were part.

[**18**]Kamba Kokué, Paraguari and Pardos Libres in the Emboscada region. We will also find other Afro-Paraguayan communities that are not recognized by the State, for example in San Roque González de Santa Cruz, Tavapy, Concepción y Areguá (Kolinski, 2018).

[**19**]September 23, date recognized by law 5464/15.

[**20**]Throughout Brazil, November 20 is the Day of Black Awareness resulting from Law 12,519, in reference to the anniversary date of the death of Zumbi dos Palmares.

[**21**]This poetry by folklorist Osvaldo Sosa Cordero, who died in 1986, is still today the official music of a bohemian neighborhood in the Argentine city of Corrientes.

[**22**]Also called Santo.

[**23**]From the Yoruba *babalóòrlì#à* (*baba níòrì#à*: father of the *orixá*).

[**24**]From the Yoruba *ìyálóòrì#à* (*ìyá ní òrì#à*: mother of the *orixá*).

[**25**]I refer, in particular, to the considerations of Frigerio (2000), Fry (2004), Oro (1999) and Segato (2005).

[**26**]The sacred force concentrated in objects and initiates. *Axé* is also a religious tradition transmitted via spiritual kin. From the Yoruba *à#ẹ* (order, command, authority).

[**27**]The data presented throughout this article is the result of research developed under the project "Migration, human rights and public incidence of religion on the triple frontier (Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil)", a research coordinated by me with the Federal University of Latin American Integration in the years 2014–2019.

[**28**]Caboclo is an Indigenous spirit, revered in Umbanda, as well as in Candomblé, and even in the most traditional *terreiros*.

[**29**]We use here the term "Evangelical" in a generic way, to designate the religious groups that inherited the Christian schism of the 16th century, when the Catholic Church's authority over Christianity was challenged in Western Europe.

[**30**]This mapping was part of *Evangélicos na tríplice-fronteira: diversidade, fluxos e transnacionalização religios*, a research project that took place at the Federal University of Latin American Integration.

[**31**]Scarf used on the heads of Muslim women, which covers the hair and the lap as a sign of modesty and obedience to Allāh but does not hide the face.

[**32**]Traditional clothing often used in regions of Shiite majority. It is a veil that covers the head and body, but not the face.

[**33**]In this regard, compare Montenegro (2015) and Pinto (2009).

[**34**]At this point, it is worth mentioning the Brazilian case of the Malês Revolt, which occurred in 1835 and took control of several locations in the city of Salvador.

[**35**]This research took place within the scope of a Scientific Initiation project linked to the project previously culminated in a monograph work at the end of the course.

[**36**]It concerns foods and processed products prepared according to the guidelines of Islamic law, the so-called halal (sacred). The sector generates US $ 2.1 trillion in the world (US $ 1 billion in Brazil alone, according to the Federation of Muslim Associations); about 300 companies in Brazil already exported, in 2015, with the *halal* seal.

[**37**]The tension between Muslim identity and Arab identity at the Tri-Border is a theme worked on by Montenegro (2002).

[**38**]An example is the article entitled *Mercosul se une contra terrorismo* (Mercosul unites against terrorism) (2001).

[**39**]Asad (2003), when proposing a genealogy of the concept of Religion, argued that the very classification of any practice as being "religious" constitutes an act inextricably at the service of pre-existing power configurations.