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THE CASE OF UMBANDA

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## Religion and Cultural Identity: The Case of Umbanda\*

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*Umbanda, a twentieth century religious movement in Brazil, appeals to its adherents in terms of national identity. Its focus on cultural roots may be seen as lending support to such a claim. In the above context major items of belief and ritual are examined and their underlying syncretism highlighted with reference to the religions of the African slaves, the Amerindians, the colonizers and the Kardecist variety of Spiritualism. When combined, these components blend to give Umbanda a unique indigenous flavor. Finally the discussion turns on Umbanda as a reformative movement.*

### Introduction

With an increasing emphasis on individual religiosity and anti-institutionalism (Luckmann, 1967), pluralism in the Judeo-Christianized West has become a fact of life for the sociologist of religion (Wilson, 1966). By contrast, the social cohesion theory of Durkheim (1966) is generally limited to specific religious or ethnic groups operating *within* a given culture. Whether or not we accept the hypothesis of secularization, rarely do we encounter analyses today of modern societies which bestow on religion a property of quasi-total acculturation.

However, for lesser developed societies the situation is somewhat different. The effect of religion on social structure in India is well known (Bottomore, 1962), as are also the implications of Islam for those areas of the world which embrace it as their official way of life. There the presecularized institutions of law and politics are barely distinguishable from the religious, thus tending to make the latter 'a blueprint of the social order' (Gellner, 1968). In other, predominantly Latin, quarters an underpinning cultural "Catholicismo" has the possibility of providing a rallying point of symbolic unity (Willems, 1965).

This essay examines the force of contemporary religion in Brazil, a society approximately half way between the above two stages, one which has adopted a Western model of development. More specifically, a look is taken at a twentieth century movement known as Umbanda and its pursuit of cultural identity in a modern urban setting. Since the Second World War, Umbanda has registered a dramatic increase in membership (Bastide, 1960), particularly in the industrial regions (Willems, 1966). It has been claimed (Da Matta e Silva, 1969), for instance, that there are over 100,000 Umbandan "terreiros" (temples) in Brazil, and that as many as 60% of Catholics in that country practice some variety of Umbanda for all but "seasonal" (Le Bras, 1956) religious occasions.

One likely reason for the popularity of Umbanda lies in its syncretic components (Schurtz, 1964), which, taken together, allegedly enhance national con-

\*Gratitude is expressed to the University of the West Indies in making available research and travel funds for this project.

sciousness (Da Matta e Silva, 1969; Teixeira, 1967). Umbanda incorporates elements of the Yoruba religion (Bascom, 1969), thus supplying the African link with slave forefathers. It contains a multiform Tupí component (Métraux, 1963), the indigenous Amerindian connection. Additionally Umbanda borrows from the folk Catholicism of the colonizers (Freyre, 1970; Kiemen, 1954) and plantation workers, and the popular modifications found in the "senzala"<sup>1</sup> and "aldeia."<sup>2</sup> Finally there are elements taken from the Kardecist<sup>3</sup> variety of Spiritualism, especially its emphasis on reincarnation (Teixeira, 1967). Although the last mentioned of the four components is comparatively recent, if Martin (1970) is correct, the similarities between Spiritualism and shamanism should facilitate rather than hinder syncretism. Thus the appeal of Umbanda may be seen to reside in its overall focus on the cultural roots of Brazilian identity, one which, for those of humble origin at least, appears to be inadequately supplied by alternative means.

This paper seeks to examine the Umbandan claim in more detail by briefly investigating its three principal belief items and major aspects of its ritual. Some concluding considerations are offered which relate to Umbanda as a movement.

### 1. Central Belief Items of Umbanda

#### A. The Pantheon

Umbanda is essentially monotheistic. There is one supreme being, *olôrun* (or *Olôrum*), creator and controller of the universe. His powers are represented by seven special divine intermediaries known as "orixás." Each "orixá," denoting a given planet, is a cosmic vibratory line of the godhead. "Orixás" are further manifested in separate sevenfold vibrations at the levels of legions, phalanges, sub-phalanges, guides and protectors. The resulting picture is complicated as the various levels comprise several million spiritual beings. Here attention focuses on the original seven "orixás" themselves.

The chief "orixá" is known as *Orixalá* or *Oxalá*. He represents the principle of light. Umbandistas sometimes speak of Oxalá as the cosmic Christ to emphasize the relationship of sonship to *Olôrun*. The planet of Oxalá is the sun. His ritual color is white and his special day is Sunday.

*Yemanjá* is a female "orixá," the principle of fertility and procreation. *Yemanjá* is the lady of the waters. Her planet is the moon, her ritual color yellow and special day Monday.

*Xangô* is the lord of justice symbolizing the natural force of lightning. Thursday is set aside for *Xangô*. His ritual color is green and he acts under the sign of Jupiter.

*Ogum* or *Ogun* is the emissary of war. *Ogum* is honored on Tuesdays. His ritual color is orange and his planet is Mars.

<sup>1</sup>Slave quarters of the "casa grande" (plantation house).

<sup>2</sup>Special reservation on which the Amerindians received catechetical instruction from the Jesuits.

<sup>3</sup>Named after Allan Kardec (Léon Denisart Rivail). Largely through the efforts of Francisco Candido Xavier, by 1873, only 16 years after its original codification, a society of Spiritualist studies became established in Rio. Willems (1965) feels that its success lies in its emphasis on healing and social welfare, thereby giving the working class the opportunity to come to terms with rapid social change.

210 SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Oxóssi, lord of the hunt, falls under the sign of Venus. His ritual color is blue and his day of dedication is Friday.

Thus far there is some measure of agreement among authorities (Da Matta e Silva, 1969; Pierson, 1967; Teixeira, 1967). The same titles are also encountered in Candomblé<sup>4</sup> with some variation in days and colors.

Commentators differ, however, over the names of the last two of the seven "orixás." Da Matta e Silva (1969) refers to them as *Yori* and *Yorimá*. The former represents the power of the godhead, has vermillion as his ritual color and is venerated on Wednesdays. His planet is Mercury. The latter is the legal principle coming under the sign of Saturn. Yorimá is honored on Saturdays. His ritual color is violet. On the other hand, Teixeira (1967) alludes to the former as the "orixá" of the East and the latter as the "orixá" of Africa. The discrepancy is largely terminological, for the topographical distinction ultimately refers to type of spirit represented by the original "orixá" (cf. following sub-section).

The pantheon of Umbanda reflects its syncretic origins. O-1(i)-orum (lit. "one who owns the sky"), as creator and principle of destiny, is found among the Yoruba, as also Orixalá, Xangô, Ogum and the term "orixá" for secondary divinity or culture hero personifying natural forces (Bascom, 1969; Pierre, 1977). The tradition was followed by the early candomblés<sup>4</sup> imported into Bahia. Rodrigues (1932) quotes the inscription 'Kosi oba Kan afi Olôrun' (there is no God but Olôrun) in support of this claim (Pierson, 1967). A similar situation is found among the Tupi,<sup>5</sup> although the names vary from tribe to tribe (Métraux, 1963). The transference of Catholic saints' names to slave deities is further evidence for the existence of the latter.<sup>6</sup> Only in Spiritualism is there ranking of perfection without explicit and systematic personification. However, when all four components are taken together, the Umbandan pantheon clearly reinforces the cultural identity of the movement. The supremacy of Olôrun and the identification of the seven major "orixás" with natural forces represents an ordered conception of the universe otherwise lacking in the modern urban Brazilian setting. The chaos associated with rapid social change can be alleviated for the umbandista by belief in the stability of the perennial pantheon.

B. The Spirit World

We have seen that the immense spirit world of Umbanda is contained in the "orixá" pantheon. Here its hierarchical ranking is examined. Umbandistas

<sup>4</sup>The word is of African origin and literally means a dance. When applied religiously it signifies a dance to the "orixás," those of the Nagôs (Yoruba) slaves, whose tradition, after contact with Catholicism, was followed in the region of Salvador. The many varieties of Candomblé (candomblés) are derived from the different points of slave origin. Candomblé, though similar in many respects to Umbanda, is thus much earlier. (cf. Da Costa, 1974)

<sup>5</sup>For instance Tupã was recognized as God by the Tupinamba, Tupi Guarani, Pan and Mbya, and manifested in Guaracy, Yacy and Ruda. However, for the Apapocuva Tupã was a secondary divinity, the son of Nanderuvucu and Nandecy (Métraux, 1963).

<sup>6</sup>Oxalá became identified with Jesus. Xangô found his counterpart in St. Jerome, and Ogum with St. Anthony or St. George (depending on the region). Oxóssi became identified with St. Sebastian. Yemanjá assumed the syncretic titles of the Virgin Mary and the Immaculate Conception, (cf. Da Matta e Silva, 1969, quoting Jesuit sources).

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profess three orders of spirits. The supreme order encompasses pure spirits: angels, archangels, the Cherubim and Seraphim. These have reached the peak of evolutionary perfection. The second order comprises good spirits, including superior, magical, wise and benevolent spirits. The first two orders are termed "missionaries of good." The third order, that of impure spirits, constitutes the emissaries of evil (Teixeira, 1967), sometimes referred to as "exus" (De Alva, 1973).

Umbandistas claim to come into contact with and to be possessed by the second order of spirits. This represents their hope of increasing in spiritual perfection. Included among this order are the guides and protectors of "orixás." More generally, the second order of spirits ("eguns") comprises three types, namely: "caboclos," "prêtos-velhos" and "crianças."

"Caboclos" refer to the spirits of the ancient Amerindians and signify the virtue of simplicity. Spirits derived from the vibratory lines of the first five "orixás" are classified as "caboclos" by umbandistas, even though their actual names are African in origin.

"Prêtos-velhos" or "negros velhos" mean literally "old black men" and refer to the spiritual ancestors of the Africans (eg. Pai Joaquim, Pai Benedito, Pai Tomé, etc.) We can now appreciate Teixeira's (1967) calling Yorimá the African "orixá." "Prêtos-velhos" symbolize the virtue of humility. Today in Brazil it is not uncommon to see wayside shrines containing the statue of a white haired and bearded black man with candles and offerings before it.

Finally "crianças," or child spirits, comprise the line of Yori, characterized by the virtue of purity.

Contact with the world of good spirits is established through mediums. Here the "caboclos," "prêtos-velhos" and crianças" manifest themselves in the "filho" or "filha."<sup>7</sup> Where this occurs, they are, as in Vodun, referred to colloquially as "cavalos" (horses). Umbanda offers all its adherents the possibility of mediumship. However, the training is both rigorous and time consuming. Additionally, a severe code of ethical conduct is to be followed, which includes dietary prescriptions, avoidance of bad company and litigation with other mediums, purification of motives (especially with regard to money and sex), and, before ceremonies, abstinence from alcohol and sexual intercourse.

The principal difference between Umbanda and its African and Amerindian antecedents lies in the Yoruba and Tupi emphasis on avoidance of evil (third order) spirits, typically personified as demons (eg. Yurupari) or as ghosts in the form of animals, birds or natural forces. Even in Catholicism and Spiritualism there is a degree of uncertainty over the benevolent nature of spirits contacted, one which prompts the former to limit communication with the departed to the canonized. Nevertheless, method of contact in all syncretic components bar Catholicism is identical, namely through trance and/or possession. The two terms, as Bourguignon (1965) points out, are not synonymous. The former refers to the means adopted by the medium in order to achieve the entry of spirits into the head, and not merely communication (as in Spiritualism). In

<sup>7</sup>Literally son or daughter. In Umbanda, however, they refer to the status of medium after initiation. It is paralleled in the Christian baptism terminology of "son of God."

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The concept of justice, made possible through "karma" is a distinctive belief for the umbandista. Where there is current social and racial discrimination, he can seek solace in the promise of a better hereafter. Politically, his positive identification with the spirit of his mistreated forefathers provides a sense of symbolic justice, where he, as an Afro-Brazilian-Brazilian, can witness the overthrow of the neo-colonialists of Cabral (Wilson, 1983). The umbandista's belief in purification provides a mechanism through which cultural and individual...

summary of the syncretism in Umbandan belief.

212 SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Umbanda both trance and spirit possession are highly valued techniques, which, as in the religion of Yoruba (Verger, 1957) permit the medium to develop secondary personality characteristics of the "orixa," and in that sense to identify with his astrologically determined spirit.

Nevertheless spirit possession in Umbanda is not a skill which is acquired quickly. It must always be preceded by a deep knowledge and awareness of the spirit world. Ordinarily such a learning process in the case of a "babala" takes seven years or more, roughly equivalent to the period required for the training of a Christian minister of religion. During his instruction the medium comes to see his identity in terms of his "caboclo," "prêto-velho" or "criança," together with his corresponding social obligations. Spirit possession signifies the full activation of this knowledge in communion with the "orixa." Hence, whatever the meaningfulness of his surrounding society, at least the umbandista has established norms of behavior for the conduct of his personal life, norms which relate not only to his own identity, but which simultaneously link him also with the eternal cultural world of his ancestors. Access to such a spiritual world (Swanson, 1960) contrasts with the otherwise powerlessness of urbanized man.

C. Reincarnation

Umbanda is not simply a reform movement. It is also dedicated to the interior spiritual well-being of its followers and the practice of charity as a means to such an end (Da Matta e Silva, 1969). Paradoxically, Umbanda recognizes on the one hand that each human being is subject to the eternal law of "karma" or destiny, and on the other that the purificatory procedure by which a person evolves to higher levels in the spirit world (Teixeira, 1967) is brought about through successive reincarnations based on individual merit. Moreover, it supplies a curiously Catholic answer to the dilemma of predestination and the free-will-versus-grace debate. Umbanda's insistence on the practice of a good life establishes the concepts of reward and punishment in a corresponding reincarnation. Nevertheless, while individual destiny may be eternally decreed, this knowledge is not seen as detracting from the exercise of free will in achieving this anticipated end.

Central to the Umbandan notion of "karama" is the "orixa." When a "filho" becomes officially dedicated to an "orixa," in correspondence with the "babala's" interpretation of the initiate's zodiacal characteristics, at the same time his obligations become known in terms of destiny. On the performance of such duties, ie. the way the "filho" conducts his life, rests the fate of the umbandista.

Acceptance of reincarnation is clearly established for Umbanda's African and Amerindian components, even though such beliefs are predicated on the possession of an ancestral soul (Bascom, 1969; Métraux, 1963). Ascent of astral planes after death (Wilson, 1972) is more specifically derived from Spiritualism (Teixeira, 1967). The notion of merit is common to all four syncretic components of Umbanda.

\*The general term for the Umbandan cult leader. It is derived from the Yoruba diviner and sacrificing priest "baba-li-awao," literally "father has secrets," (cf. Bascom, 1969).

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As a conclusion to this sub-section, the following table is provided as a summary of the syncretism in Umbandan belief.

TABLE 1  
SYNCRETISM IN UMBANDAN BELIEF  
RELIGIOUS TRADITION

Belief	UMBANDA	YORUBA	TUPI	CATHOLIC	SPIRITUALIST
Supreme Being	Olórun	Olórun	Monan, Maira-Monan, Mairata, varies by tribe	God	God
Creator	Olórun	Olórun, Oxalá (God of witness)	Monan, Tupá, Guaracy, varies by tribe	God (Father)	God
Chief Intermediary	Oxalá (light)	Ifá (divination)	Sume (medicine law) Tupá (thunder)	God (Son)	
Other Intermediary	Yemanjá (water, fertility) Xangô (lightning) Ogum (war)	Yemanjá Xangô Ogum	Yacy (moon) Tupá (thunder)	Our Lady St. Jerome St. Anthony George St. Sebastian	Unidentified Spirits
	Oxossi (hunt) Yori (power) Yorimá (law)	Oxossi	Exú (messenger) Dada (vegetation) Okê (mountains)	Nandey (wife of Nanderuvucu) Ruda (love) St. Bartholomew Holy Spirit	
Order of Spirits	Pure Good Evil	Forces of Nature Exus	Demons (Yurupari, Añan) Ghosts	Pure Saints	Uncertain status of spirits of recently departed.
Reincarnation	Karma in line of orixá	For ancestral soul of just	Soul of ancestor (acigya)		Kardec branch ascent of astral planes

2. Major Aspects of Umbandan Ritual

A. Magic as the Linchpin Between Belief and Ritual

The central beliefs of the pantheon, the spirit world and reincarnation are logically interconnected. Moreover, they hinge on the second of the three items, for the first is but a subset of the spirit world and reincarnation is the individual identification with its evolutionary process.

*[Faint, mostly illegible text from the reverse side of the page, appearing as bleed-through.]*

*[Faint, mostly illegible text at the bottom of the page, likely a reference or note.]*

The concept of magic, which involves the use of supernatural forces for the attainment of a desired end, is a complex phenomenon. It is not a simple matter of good and evil, but rather a complex interplay of forces. The concept of magic is often used to describe the use of supernatural forces to achieve a desired end. This is often done through the use of rituals, spells, and other magical practices. The concept of magic is often used to describe the use of supernatural forces to achieve a desired end. This is often done through the use of rituals, spells, and other magical practices.

As a result of the above, the following table is provided as a summary of the results of the study.

TABLE 1  
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
1. Age	35.2	12.5	
2. Education	12.8	3.2	
3. Income	150.0	50.0	
4. Religion	Catholic		
5. Occupation	Unemployed		
6. Marital Status	Married		
7. Duration of Practice	10 years		
8. Frequency of Practice	Daily		
9. Type of Magic	Black Magic		
10. Effectiveness	High		

The results of the study show that the majority of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 45, with a mean age of 35.2. Most respondents are Catholic, and many are unemployed. The study also found that respondents practice magic daily, and that black magic is the most common type of magic practiced. Finally, the study found that respondents believe that magic is highly effective.

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214 SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

However, it is one matter to believe in the existence of good spirits and quite another to be certain of contacting precisely those entities. Furthermore, the invocation of a higher being can also pose difficulties in terms of control of that power. Magic is regarded as a solution to the above Umbandan dilemmas. In the first place, it is perceived as capable of driving away "exus" and other undesirable forces conjured up by those "candombles" dabbling in black magic. Secondly, it provides the opportunity to manipulate benevolent powers. For the umbandista magic is particularly useful where it puts him in touch with the occult wisdom of those ancestral spirits with whom he hopes to establish contact.

Magic as a manipulative, protective and therapeutic device, (comprising potions, charms, lustral herbal baths, etc.), is found among the Yoruba (Bascom, 1969). "Orixás" were ritually invoked by a special set of drums known as "rum," "rumpi" and "lé" (Pierson, 1967), the preparation of which was conducted at the appropriate phase of the moon (Da Matta e Silva, 1969). Similarly the "pay" (shaman) of the Tupi was looked upon as a magician and healer who controlled the powers of evil (Métraux, 1963). To this end he prepared himself by learning the occult wisdom of "tuyabaé-cuaá," revealed by Sumé, the Tupi messiah (Da Matta e Silva, 1969). The use of the "maracá" (sacred rattle), of eucalyptus, sunflower and incense, and the wearing of talismans and amulets in Umbanda are likely to be derived directly from Tupi tribes (Da Matta e Silva, 1969; Kiemen, 1954). The practice of obtaining favours or "graces" (Büntig, 1970) and the use of exorcism in folk Catholicism (Freyre, 1970) also provides a syncretic basis for magic in Umbanda. By contrast Spiritualism contributes little to Umbandan magic or ritual beyond the simple format of hymn singing, inter-subject contact, trance, and the seeking of favours from the recently departed (Martin, 1970). For this reason the component is deleted from ulterior consideration.

In his discussion of magic, Swanson (1960) makes the distinction between two types of spiritual forces. The first we have encountered already, namely belief in spirits, personified supernatural beings with their own intentionality and power. The other, "mana," which depends on the intention of the individual, is described as an object conferring supernatural skills for the self or group. The distinction is felt necessary for an understanding of magic, defined as the infusion of "mana" with individual purpose, the altering of the natural either by changing the supernatural or by spirits themselves who can modify nature. In Umbanda the practice of magic is readily acknowledged and contains both the manipulation of "mana" and the spirit world (Da Matta e Silva, 1969). The "filho" dedicated to an "orixá" attempts to ameliorate his spiritual position by concentrating in himself the power of a "caboclo," "prêto-velho" or "criança." Ritual is the means by which such manipulation is effected.

In the Brazilian context of urban powerlessness, the possibility of magical power can be understood as possessing a certain appeal for the umbandista. As a protective device, magic is regarded as having the potential to thwart his enemies (sacred or secular) and to remedy the current imbalance of social injustice. At the collective level, magic may be considered as contributing to umbandista in-group solidarity and of reinforcing its opposition to rival religious bodies. This is analogous to the integrative function of magic described by anthropologists

(Malinowski, 1948; Radcliffe Brown, 1922). However, the more overarching Durkheimian (1966) social cohesion hypothesis appears rather out of place in the context of Umbandan magic, for many adherents see it as a means to an end in preference to an explanation for the origin of the supernatural in terms of collective experience (Swanson, 1960).

*B. Locale and Preparatory Ritual (Da Matta e Silva, 1969)*

As a rule umbandistas assemble in a "terreiro" (temple), although certain rites may be conducted out of doors—by a stream, on the seashore, in a forest or by a meadow, etc., according to the nature of the favor being sought. Final choice of locale is left to the "babalaô." His decision rests on his perception of the appropriateness of the place for spirits and its suitability for magic and mediumship.

It is important that the center of worship face the East, as this direction is considered the most conducive to the current of astral forces (Wilson, 1972). On the main table (90 cms. high) are placed various pictures and statuettes suggestive of the spirits to be invoked. In order that a "terreiro" be protected from the forces of evil it is necessary that the "pegi" (sanctuary) contain a large circular steel disc, three steel needles, seven polished stones and a glass goblet. The "babalaô" of his delegate must also collect a quantity of sand in sea water by night, some pieces of coal by day, and a number of herbs at specified times. All these are arranged in the sanctuary according to the rubrics. For three days the "babalaô" calls upon his guides to protect the temple from the forces of evil.

Much of the success of Umbandan ritual depends on the prowess of the "babalaô." During his training he comes to appreciate that magical powers are determined in their efficacy by his zodiacal sign and particular "orixá" affiliation. Consequently, he prepares the "terreiro" for ceremonies according to optimum astral conditions. For instance, the "babalaô" knows that herbs are to be collected on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays if his sign is masculine (ie. Aries, Gemini, Leo, Libra, Sagittarius or Aquarius) and on other days if feminine (comprising the remaining six signs). The former include solar herbs and flowers (eg. eucalyptus, orange leaves, jasmine and sunflower), while the latter are lunar (eg. roses, dahlias and violets). Solar plants are culled by day, lunar varieties phases of the moon. In the new phase they are gathered for magical and therapeutic reasons. Preparatory ceremonies are also conducted during this period. In the crescent phase rites for material needs are carried out, talismans prepared and "terreiros" dedicated. In Umbanda nothing takes place in the third and fourth phases of the moon. These are considered the dubious prerogative of black magic cults.

The preparatory ceremony assumes the following general format. On the table are placed flower petals, vessels containing salt, coal and sea water, and seven wax candles.\* Seven minutes before noon of the correctly established day three candles are lit and special prayers recited—one to Oxalá, one to the remaining six "orixás," and one to the astral protector of the "babalaô" himself. At midday the "babalaô" purifies the "terreiro" and its images by burning

\*An odd number is used for spiritual requirements, an even number for material needs.

The hierarchical distinction between the "babalaô" and ordinary members of the community is emphasized in the early stages of the ritual. This is understood in the light of a similar structuring of the Umbanda pantheon. For the "babalaô" is not only the highest of the spirits but also the most powerful. The "orixás" are the spirits who are invoked in the ritual. The "terreiro" is the place where the spirits are invoked. The "babalaô" is the one who is in contact with the spirits. The "orixás" are the spirits who are invoked in the ritual. The "terreiro" is the place where the spirits are invoked. The "babalaô" is the one who is in contact with the spirits.

\*The same book is mentioned in the text as being published in 1975. Umbanda when every day there is something else in your head and in your heart. It is intended as a guide to the world and beyond of spirits in the Umbanda tradition.

...the use of small herbs, flowers, etc., although magical, is nevertheless not in symbolic context. Familiarity with items of natural produce (many of which were either cultivated by the descendants or imported by the slaves) made the individuals in contact not only with the spiritual ancestors but also with the cosmic possibilities representing the forces of nature.

C. The Preparatory Rite

...the preparatory rite is performed for a cross (made of wood or paper) which is placed in the center of the circle.

The assembled "filhos" are called in alternation by the "babalão." They form a circle around the cross, and the "babalão" prays to the "orixás" and the "filhos."

216 SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

incense. Three hours later a second incensing takes place. Finally at 6 p.m. all the "filhos" are brought together. They stand in a circle, permitting spiritual forces to pass from one to another. The "babalaô," with one hand raised, then prays to Jesus for the consecration of the "terreiro" to the "orixás" of Umbanda. He sprinkles the petals over the statuettes and "filhos," saying seven times 'Salve o Sahany' (a Tupi invocation). This is followed by prayers to the guides and protectors of the "filhos." Then the "crossing" of the "terreiro" takes place. With the "filhos" once more in a circle, the "babalaô" traces the line of Oxalá in the shape of the Umbandan cross.<sup>10</sup>

The establishment of "terreiros" in Umbanda signifies a syncretic development over time. Although the Yoruba had temples, many of which still exist today (Pierre, 1977), the early slaves honored their "orixás" by river banks or on the seashore, adapting the locale to suit the natural force in question. Eventually they set up "seitas" (cult centers) in and around Bahia (Pierson, 1967). Among the Tupi, even though there was a place set aside for sacred masks, the shaman generally practised his magic either in the tribal compound or on a hut to hut basis (Métraux, 1963). Thus the gradual emergence of a building for worship, the inclusion of a temple table and the "crossing" of the "terreiro" in Umbanda seems to be more closely mirrored in the evolution of the Catholic basilica, the accompanying altar and the corresponding consecration of a church (Schmidt, 1962).

Several points are worth noting with respect to the preparatory ritual in the Brazilian context. The first relates to the "terreiro" itself. Although the requirement for a ritual center is not mandatory in Umbanda, and varies according to occasion, nevertheless the importance of physically coming together as an "assembleia de Deus" is a feature rarely overlooked by the Pentecostalist groups in Brazil (Willems, 1965). The vibrancy of their ceremonies contrasts markedly with the more casual approach to "a-seasonal" (Le Bras, 1956) participation in the many museum-like Catholic churches. The significance of the "temple," (despite the dilapidated condition of some of the actual properties) is also much richer in connotation than a "church," particularly where the former implies the oriental notion of indwelling and communion with the supernatural. Rejection of "igreja" is thus not simply an anti-establishment protest, but also stresses a certain spiritual élitism of Umbanda.

The hierarchical distinction between the "babalaô" and ordinary membership tends to be emphasized at this early stage of the ritual. This is understandable in the light of a similar structuring of the Umbanda pantheon. For the umbandista spiritual knowledge and its ethical consequences are judged to be more important than ritual manifestation of belief. In this connection, Wilson (1963) probably would not hesitate in classifying Umbanda as a gnostic or manipulatory sect. The label would be given in the context of the Umbandan quest for national identity, a response altogether different from one of withdrawal implied by the terminology.

<sup>10</sup>The cross itself is interesting and is similar to that found in Vodun (Desmangles, 1977). Umbandistas often carry with them something akin to rosary beads and a cross. It is intended to symbolize the ascent and descent of spirits in the process of karmic evolution.

Finally, the use of ritual herbs, flowers, etc., although magical, is nevertheless rich in symbolic content. Familiarity with items of natural produce (many of which were either cultivated by the Amerindians or imported by the slaves) places the umbandista in contact not only with his spiritual ancestors but also with the cosmic pantheon representing the forces of nature.

C. The Post Preparatory Rite

A suitable time and place for the Umbandan post preparatory rite is decided upon by the "babalaô" according to previously discussed criteria. The ceremony either immediately follows the preparatory rite or is postponed for a more fitting occasion.

First the assembled "filhos" are called to attention by the "babalaô." They form themselves into a circle or ellipse, standing about 30cms. to 40cms. apart with arms folded. This is the first of three liturgical positions designed to place the participants in psychic harmony with superior vibrations and to drive out any negative thoughts they may be entertaining at the time. Each "filho" then stands at ease while he is incensed. Meanwhile "pontos" (hymns) of the spiritual guides of the "terreiro" are chanted, after which the "filhos" resume their original positions. Once more they are called to attention and asked to take up the stance of the vibration of Oxalá. This is a genuflection with head lowered and arms extended in an attitude of supplication. It is accompanied by a hymn to Oxalá which is sung three times. Those who are disposed to the reception of spirits and requesting favors thereupon assume various liturgical positions consonant with their own "orixás." Through spirit possession they attempt to carry out the personal tasks demanded of them. The rite thus alternates between prayers, hymns, incensing, the assumption of liturgical positions and spirit possession.

Additionally, offerings are prepared for the spirits. In Umbanda these consist of items, such as fruit, coconut milk and rice, which are intended to sustain the astral forces of "caboclos," "prêtos-velhos" and "crianças" through the vibratory powers believed to emanate from them. The nature of the offering varies according to type of spirit invoked. In no sense do the offerings constitute food or sacrifice. Nor are they supplied as propitiation to "orixás," who, being elevated spirits, have no such need requirement.

Offerings and sacrifice can be found in Yoruba ritual (Bascom, 1969) and are paralleled in the Tupinamba gifts of food before sacred representations and both the ritual execution and devouring of captives (Métraux, 1963). The Catholic mass again contains the twin elements, though to a more developed degree. It is important to note that Umbanda as a reform movement wishes to disassociate itself from the sacrificial aspects of ritual, leaving those to its candomblé rivals (Costa, 1974).

Essentially this part of the ritual is meant to place the umbandista in the correct disposition for spirit possession. Stanner's (1958) phrase is 'identification with mythical beings.' He further notes that such ritual is normally devoid of sacrificial content, particularly where offerings are made with a view to communion with the supernatural. Both he and Bellah (1964) relate such a position to an early stage of religious evolution. If they are correct, then the simplicity of the post preparatory ritual may be indicative of the Umbandan quest for a cultural

Finally, the use of ritual herbs, flowers, etc., although useful in strengthening the individual's connection with the spiritual world, is not essential to the process of initiation. The herbs are used to purify the subject and to protect him from the influence of evil spirits. The herbs are used in the form of a bath or as incense.

C. The Terreiroiro

A terreiroiro is a room set apart for the Umbandan cult. It is usually a simple room with a table and chairs. The terreiroiro is used for the initiation of new members and for the performance of other rituals.

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218 SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

identity which considerably antedates the sixteenth century introduction of slavery (by which time both Yoruba and Amerindian rites were at a more advanced stage of development). There is no parallel of such simplicity in Catholic ritual.

D. Initiation Rites

The form and content of Umbandan initiation rites vary from "terreiroiro" to "terreiroiro." Generally, however, there are five rites separating the initiate from the fully fledged "filho-de-santo": crossing, baptism, washing of the head, confirmation and crowning (Da Matta e Silva, 1969). The first two are administered to new members, the last three to trained mediums. Here just the barest outline of each is given.

The "cruzamento" (crossing ceremony), as in the remaining four cases, is conducted by the "babalaô." The initiate has the sign of the cross made over him seven times: on his head to encourage noble thoughts, on his neck so that he may be able to attract spirits, over his heart to banish evil desires, once on the sole of each foot so that he may be able to walk in the path of righteousness, and once on each hand that his actions may be meritorious. The significance of the number seven in Umbanda is appreciated in relation to the pantheon. Its appearance here is hardly coincidental.

Baptism often takes place in the presence of godparents, who, where the candidate is below age, assume responsibility for imparting to him the secret knowledge of Umbanda. Usually they are selected on the basis of spiritual affiliation to the initiate. In this ceremony Olôrun is addressed directly in prayer, a point of departure from much of Umbandan ritual, which, as we have noted, focuses on the vibratory spirits of "caboclos," "prêtos-velhos" and "crianças" within the seven cosmic "orixás." The baptism itself is in the name of Olôrun, Oxalá and the seven "orixás." It is followed by a sevenfold incensing of the subject.

After the "cruzamento" and baptism the umbandista receives his formal training. In many "terreiroiros" there is a room called a "camarinha" set apart for such a purpose. An advisor (often female) reveals to the baptised: laws, secret knowledge and ritual, and at the same time looks for signs of spiritual affiliation to an "orixá." In other words, the preparation of a "filho" takes place over a period when the spiritual disposition of the subject is awakened and developed. At the end of the process the candidate is examined. If his knowledge and practice of the faith are deemed sufficient, he is permitted to become a medium.

The "feitura de medium" (the making of a medium), sometimes referred to as "the making of a saint" or receiving "the gift of the head" (Pierson, 1967), is prescribed by a threefold ritual.

The first ceremony, the washing of the head, as the name implies, comprises a cleansing of the subject by pouring over him a specially prepared juice of herbs, culled in accordance with the astral sign of the candidate. The washing acts both as a protection against "exus" (evil spirits) and as an attraction to possession by "eguns" (good spirits).

Confirmation signifies the confirming of the new "filho" in his correct astral

line. Hymns to the various "orixás" are sung, and the one to which he responds by spirit manifestation is judged to be his own.

Finally there is the *crowning ceremony*. The "babalaô" places a crown of twigs (taken from the same plant as the ritual herbs) upon the subject's head, while the following verse is chanted by the assembly:

"Coroa, coroa este filho de Umbanda  
Coroa, coroa!  
Coroa, coroa na lei de Umbanda  
Coroa, coroa!  
Coroa, coroa para vencer Demanda  
Coroa, coroa!"

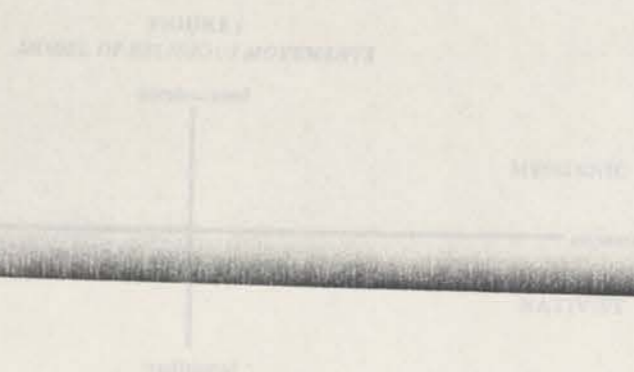
This rite completed, the medium is now a full member of Umbanda. After seven years practicing as a "filho," the umbandista can theoretically become a "babalaô" in charge of his own "terreiro."

The initiation ceremonies closely imitate the Catholic component of Umbanda. Crossing, baptism and washing of the head form part of the same Roman rite, just as confirmation once did. The presence of godparents and the formula of triple dedication is also analogous. Similarly there is a parallel between the "camarinha" and the retreat house or catechumenate, abbreviated today in the Lenten liturgy (Schmidt, 1962). Crowning is possibly aligned to the application of chrism after baptism. In the Yoruba and Tupi components there is a similar dedication to "orixás" (Bascom, 1969) and the vibratory spirits of ancestors divined by the Tupi "pay." Among the Apapocuva Amerindians the post puberty rite of lip piercing, following the segregation of male initiates in a sacred hut ("baito") and females in hammocks, can be seen as corresponding to the Umbandan "camarinha" (Métraux, 1963).

In contrast to the post preparatory rite, Umbandan initiation ceremonies mark a much later stage of religious development. Interestingly enough, these Umbandan rites follow very closely those of Vodun (Bourguignon, 1965; Pierre, 1977) inspired by the slaves after their parallel contact with Catholicism (Desmangles, 1977; Verger, 1957). It seems likely that the rites signify an attempt to make Umbanda appear respectable to outsiders (Willems, 1965). Such an interpretation is given further weight with the realization that post initiation masses are often celebrated for umbandistas in Catholic churches (particularly those bearing syncretic titles). The cultural linkage of Brazilian and Catholic is too strong to be ignored even by "filhos de Umbanda." The mixture of this with the indigenous is aptly summarized by Freyre (1970:278):

Every Brazilian, even the light-skinned fair-haired one, carries about with him on his soul, when not on his soul and body alike—for there are many in Brazil with the mongrel mark of the gennipap—the shadow, or at least the birthmark, of the aborigine, of the negro . . . In our affections, our excessive mimicry, our Catholicism which so delights the senses, our mind, our gait, our speech, our cradle songs, in everything that is a similar expression of our lives, we almost all of us bear the mark of that influence.

The full picture of syncretism in Umbandan ritual is given as follows.



220 SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

TABLE 2  
SYNCRETISM IN UMBANDAN RITUAL

RITUAL	RELIGIOUS TRADITION				
	UMBANDA	YORUBA	TUPI	CATHOLIC	SPIRITUALIST
Use of Magic	protective therapeutic manipulative	protective therapeutic manipulative	protective therapeutic manipulative	quasi: "graces" exorcism	quasi: requests of spirits
Locale	out of doors terreiro camarinha	out of doors temple	out of doors hut to hut baito	shrine church retreat house	meeting house
Preparation	table pegi crossing herbs offerings	table sanctuary	crossing herbs offerings	altar sanctuary consecration status offertory	
Post Preparatory Rite	hymns prayers possession	chants prayers possession sacrifice	chants prayers possession sacrifice	litanies collect consecration	hymns prayers trance
Initiation	crossing baptism washing confirmation crowning	dedication washing possession	divination ritual bath possession lip piercing	sign of cross baptism sprinkling confirmation chrism	

Conclusion: Some Considerations of Umbanda as a Movement

It has been suggested already that Umbanda should be understood as a reform movement seeking to incorporate the most appropriate elements from its syncretic roots in order to provide a sense of national identity not supplied by available alternatives. Such a statement requires further comment.

To the modern Brazilian seeking indigenous roots, while at the same time wishing to reverse symbolically the injustice suffered by his Afro-Indian forefathers, Umbanda appears more than a satisfactory vehicle for the achievement of such a purpose. His response, at first apparently religious, may thus be seen to embrace also the sacred realm of national identity, one perceived to have been lost in the drama of rapid industrialization.

In this connection Fernandez' (1964) discussion of African religious movements is quite timely. Basing himself on Zessner (1961) and Spiro (1962), he proposes a four quadrant model of such movements, circumscribed by a vertical axis of type of symbolism (acculturated or traditional), and a left to right horizontal continuum comprising the instrumental or expressive (Parsons, 1951) manipulation of symbolism. The model is as follows:

Briefly, the separatist category contains movements with the organizational qualities of a church. While the practices of the parent body are allegedly rejected, nevertheless there is continued close adherence to them where they are seen as







and a number of publishing houses which exclusively produce their works for a similar audience. The denigration of rival animistic sects, combined with charges of illiteracy, racketeering and charlatanism, form part and parcel of these writers' efforts to render Umbanda respectable to members of the upper class as well.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of a parallel relative absence of the agricultural worker in the movement it is interesting to speculate how exclusion of the latter can promote the Umbandan cause of heightening national consciousness. We should remember, however, that in Brazil the North East is generally reckoned to be the region of traditionalism and extremes of wealth. Typically in this and other predominantly rural areas the land laborers themselves are the carriers of regional culture. By contrast, a lower-middle, middle and upper class concentration in the modern industrialized centers, where Umbanda has a greater hold, is seen more advantageous in furthering national identity (Willems, 1965). To this end Umbanda astutely declares itself to be apolitical<sup>12</sup> and against paternalistic divisions based on class or color.<sup>13</sup> Within Brazil at least its laws are universal, its spirits are accessible to all. Each and every member has the opportunity to progress in perfection, thus transcending the rigid hierarchy of Catholicism and the élitism of Spiritualism. The common ground uniting all believers is the intricate interfacing of the more indigenous cultural elements of the above two syncretic components together with a shared Afro-Indian heritage.

However, at this stage of the movement's brief history, it is difficult to predict with any accuracy whether Umbanda will survive or whether it will succeed in achieving its long term objectives. Umbanda has not yet fallen into the established pattern set by other typical national religions. It has not reached the point where religious and political loyalties are congruent, or where we can speak of an identification of secular and religious interests. We cannot satisfactorily compare Umbanda with ancient Hebrew, Egyptian, Persian or Greek religions. Nor is a convincing parallel drawn between Umbanda and a more modern religion such as Shinto. Although there is a "Confederação Nacional Umbandista e dos Cultos Afro Brasileiros," so sharp are the differences between rival participants that the few joint exercises undertaken can hardly be described as normative. There is little effective central organization. Nor is there an agreed standard text, codified relief or ritual procedure. Instead they tend to vary according to the whims of the local "batalão." The movement is still officially unrecognized in Brazil. Police action has been taken against a number of "terreiros" and attempts have been made to ridicule Umbanda through the media. Even with a recent (1979) change in the presidency, there is so far no clear indication that the current politico-religious situation will change in the immediate future.

On the other hand, one cannot argue from a state of initial indifference to one of total rejection. As Wach (1964:309) reminds us: "all major cults have started as minority faiths." Even Christianity itself was treated indifferently by the Roman state, prior to persecution and eventual adoption. Parallels of varying forms of

<sup>11</sup>The success of such endeavors may be gauged from the appearance of well known family names in the preface section of some Umbandan literature.

<sup>12</sup>Federação Umbandista Brasileira, Exstatutos (projeto), cap. 1, Art. 5 (Teixeira, 1967:201-212).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. cap. 3 art. 15.

224 SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

assimilation can be found in the official attitudes towards Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Confucianism, attitudes which differed from country to country. Umbanda appears to be at the crossroads. Either it will disintegrate in the fashion of popular sectarian movements<sup>14</sup> or else it will consolidate its initial position continually and increasingly catering to the human and cultural needs so far unsatisfied by alternative institutional means. Only time will show which of the two possibilities prevails.

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<sup>14</sup>In this connection, Willems (1965) gives as examples the Fanatics Rebellion of Canudos and the 'Holy War' of Catarina, and agrees with the commentator de Queiroz that the demise of such movements was largely due to their messianic and revolutionary character, one not tolerated by the federal army. The situation of Umbanda, however, appears different in that its political qualities are less manifest. As a reformative movement, its accentuation of the traditional may seem less threatening to the authorities. These two factors possibly explain Umbanda's capacity for survival.

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