



Diálogos

ISSN

2177-2940



Amerindian Perspectivism in the Mythicized Discourses of Popular Catholicism in the Amazon


<https://doi.org/10.4025/dialogos.v24i2.53663>

Marcos Vinicius Freitas Reis


<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0380-3007>

Universidade Federal do Amapá, Brasil. E-mail: marcosvinicius5@yahoo.com.br

Marcos Paulo Torres Pereira


<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7769-7940>

Universidade Federal do Amapá, Brasil. E-mail: marcosptorres1@gmail.com

Amerindian Perspectivism in the Mythicized Discourses of Popular Catholicism in the Amazon

Abstract: This article aims to problematize, through the theoretical contributions of the post-colonial studies, the catholic church's colonization project towards the Amapaense Amazon's popular catholicism - such as the Myth of Cobra Grande - constituted as a project evolved around eurocentric and judeo-christian assumptions to the detriment of afro-amerindian cultural, identity and religious expressions, of catholic communities in the urban and rural areas of the Brazilian Amazon. The amazonian population develops strategies of resistance and re-existence in order to maintain their religious traditions around festa dos santos (festival of saints), pilgrimages, festivities, rosaries, quermesses, and other activities as forms of origins establishment or origins return for the foundation of a narrative identity.

Key words: Popular Catholicism; Religions and Religiosities in the Amapaense Amazon; Narrative Identity; Post-colonialism.

Perspectivismo Ameríndio nos Discursos Mitificados do Catolicismo Popular na Amazônia

Resumo: O presente artigo tem por objetivo problematizar, mediante os aportes teóricos dos estudos pós-coloniais, o projeto colonizador da Igreja Católica para com expressões do catolicismo popular da Amazônia Amapaense, a exemplo do Mito da Cobra Grande, constituído como projeto centrado em pressupostos eurocêntricos e judaico-cristãos em detrimentos das expressões afro-ameríndias identitárias, cultural e religiosamente, das comunidades católicas da zona urbana e rural da Amazônia brasileira. A população amazônica desenvolve estratégias de resistência e reexistência com o intuito de manutenção das suas tradições religiosas em torno da festa dos santos, romarias, festejos, terços, quermesses, e outras atividades como fundação de origem ou retorno às origens para a instauração de identidade narrativa.

Palavras-chave: Catolicismo Popular; Religiões e Religiosidades na Amazônia Amapaense; Identidade Narrativa; Pós-colonialismo.

Perspectivismo ameríndio en los discursos míticos del catolicismo popular en la Amazonía

Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo problematizar, a través de las contribuciones teóricas de los estudios poscoloniales, el proyecto de colonización de la iglesia católica hacia el catolicismo popular amapaense de la Amazonía, como el Mito de la Cobra Grande, constituido como un proyecto desarrollado alrededor del eurocentrismo y el judeocristiano. supuestos en detrimento de las expresiones culturales, de identidad y religiosas afro-ameríndias, de las comunidades católicas en las zonas urbanas y rurales de la Amazonía brasileña. La población amazónica desarrolla estrategias de resistencia y re-existencia con el fin de mantener sus tradiciones religiosas en torno a la fiesta de los santos, peregrinaciones, festividades, rosarios, quermesses y otras actividades como formas de establecimiento de orígenes u orígenes que regresan a la fundación. de una identidad narrativa. Amapá se encuentra en la región de Plato das Guianas.

Palabras clave: Catolicismo popular; Religiones y religiosidades en la Amazonía amapaense; Identidad narrativa; Postcolonialismo.

Recebido em: 13/05/2020

Aprovado em: 22/07/2020

Yet already a century later the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was or did, but in what it said: a day came when truth was displaced from the ritualized, efficacious and just act of enunciation, towards the utterance itself, its meaning, its form, its object, its relation to its reference. (Michel Foucault)

The religious and cultural aspects in the Amazon context are complex, plural and split. Since the beginning of the europeans' presence in the Amazon, catholicism was important for the implementation of a colonizing project endorsed by the great maritime powers in the 15th and 16th centuries, such as Portugal and Spain, which begat a variety of experienced and shared identity expressions that were syncretic by hybridizations and miscegenations, that show us a very different conception of the world than that dictated by europeans, caucasians, christians and westerners.

The religious and cultural aspects defended by the catholic church, however, were important to justify the imposition of a model of society brought to the Amazon by europeans, through a project that rejected the cultural values of indigenous peoples and, later, the traditional values of the black culture.

The catholic church's objective in the Amazon was to turn the region into a christian region in the shapes thought by the catholic hierarchy... in the performance of jesuit, benedictine, franciscan and tridentine priests, polygamy, shamanism, venator rituals, polytheistic beliefs and practices, the clothing and other habits subsequent to the amerindian, black and ribeirinhos (river dwellers) mentality and identity were repudiated. Through catechization, they would taught the pillars of the catholic faith, the need to believe and live sacramental values (baptism, marriage, priesthood, confession), the division of labour between men and women and, mostly, the belief in the one God as defended by judeo-christian values.

There were many deaths, arrests, censorship, persecution, inquisition to fight the values considered as *devil worship and barbarian* by priests... those arising from african and indigenous aspects that we call afro-amerindians. However, popular amazonian catholicism is nuanced by a residual mentality that reinterpreted the identity signs of these ethnicities in the *ethos* of its practitioners, generating a polyphonic, heteroglossic discourse, in which these believers' voices echo the voices of social and historical resonant forces, that explains the regular moments in popular celebrations of catholic communities that have the presence of elements such as derrubada do mastro (falling of a tree), cortejo, food, music, dances, prayers, benzedores, religious counseling, incorporation of spirits, alcoholic drinks, enchanted, myths (boto, curupira, cobra grande, among others), community experiences, etc.

Naturally, the conflict was established in the implantation of catholicism's religious discourse, because its true means of enunciation would be the confrontation between colonial

practices and beliefs and traditional practices and beliefs of the colonized, between social and historical voices in this relational universe of dialogical enunciation, in the attempts to impose romanized catholicism on catholic communities in the Amazon were shocked by the resistance in maintaining the traditional values experienced by these peoples. On the one hand, the priests rigidly defended the liturgical values of the christian mass, they tried to easily offer access to the sacraments among the indigenous, black and ribeirinho people, through theater, songs and sermons. Otherwise, the amazonian communities, whether as a strategy of resistance or of re-existence, assimilate catholic teachings and associate them with their traditions, not allowing the erasure of their cultural values.

This article aims to problematize the discourses of sectors of the catholic hierarchy, that argue vigorously for their values, their dogmas, their worldview based on judeo-christian foundations, in contrast to the residual discourses of syncretic religious aspects of amazonian culture, in the *tópos* of its popular catholicism in which the myth of Cobra Grande¹ - and its derivations - becomes resignified from fabled material into belief... The veracity's report of the existence of the "Cobra Grande" is shared by many, exempting it from the dictional fiction characteristic, mainly in rural communities and in small cities in the interior of the amazonian states, as in Pará and Amapá. The State of Amapá is the Brazilian region in the far north of Brazil. We have approximately 800 thousand inhabitants and 16 municipalities. This region is part of the Plato de Guianas.

As Bakhtin stated (2010, p. 106), all the constituent forms of this amazonian popular catholic discourse, in which Cobra Grande becomes a participant, are from social and historical voices that give it certain concrete meanings that organize themselves in a harmonious belief system - because they are assimilated, because they are syncretic - expressing its socio-ideological position, which differ from that colonizer catholicism and those beliefs of the amerindian, black and riverside of the colonized, because it is no longer one discourse with its origins, but a new religious discourse different from those that originated it, even if it keeps similarities with them.

We rely on post-colonial authors, such as Stuart Hall (1996; 2003), Albert Memmi (1996), Homi K. Bhabha (1998) and Agenor Sarraf Pacheco (2013), to help us reflect how these religious values and cultural residuals have become identity signs of resistance and the re-existence of amazonian religiosity. We also used some references from theorists of the religious phenomenon in the Amazon, such as Eduardo Galvão (1976) and Raimundo Heraldo Maués (1995), among other

¹ Present in the popular imagination, the story of Cobra Grande (Big Snake) gave rise to films, songs, dances, poems and horror stories. Raul Bopp was one of those who took this theme to the writing of his epical and mythological narrative poem *Cobra Norato* (1931), whose corollary of amerindian and ribeirinho primitivism had been damaged by anthropophagic chords in the search for national identity.

theorists, trying to understand how power markers struggled for the preservation of the myth² of Cobra Grande in the syncretic religious discourse of popular amazonian catholicism, through a theoretical and methodological reflection that, based on the religious experience around this myth in the amapaense (related to Amapá, a state in the northern region of Brazil) Amazon, questions the imposition of religiosity brought by catholic priests.

If “cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (HALL, 1996, p. 70), then the resistance to adhere to the belief practices and to the catholic rite consists in refusing to discredit, to forget, to erase the particularities that the amapaense amazonian communities attribute to themselves as belonging to a sphere of representation that distinguishes them as individuals and as a group.

The discourses of the colonizer and of the colonized, under the symbology of Cobra Grande, constitute a new discourse arising from an interculturality that revives the mentality of the subjects participating in the enunciation, therefore, the concept of identity adopted in this study will take place as a self-narrative (BHABHA, 1998; RICOEUR, 1991), because as a practical category identity is always a matter of narrating oneself, a work constituted through the hermeneutics of oneself, by means of a change of perspective from reflection to analysis, through the understanding that the “individualizing perspective of narrative identity seeks to designate who makes the discourse and the action, making oneself as another identify, in a range of particular things of the same type, the one about they were willing to narrate about, mobilizing operators of individualization” (PEREIRA, 2019, p. 150).

When we talk about cultural and religious aspects of the amapaense Amazon, the strong influence of the catholic church on people's daily lives is natural. Their way of speaking, their actions, economic and political activities, sociability with other people, beliefs, customs, mentality, in many other situations are inspired by the judeo-christian values (PIMENTEL, 2015).

According to Reis and Carmo (2015), data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2010 shows that the amapaense society is mostly catholic, because around 64% of the population identifies with christian catholic values. In absolute terms, we can say that the state of Amapá is a majority of catholics and not a catholical hegemonic, as it was until the 1970s,

² “The myth is an interpretation of nature, a preliminary phase of philosophy as it seeks an explanation - knowledge - of the world. As the myth is the answer to an implicit question, this answer apprehends the elements about what is questioned and assembles them together in an event - which has an allegorical function. The characters of this report-answer, being allegorical, whether they are human beings, animals, plants, objects, or natural phenomena, do not represent caricatures or aspects of a psyche, but representations of a third phenomenon, which is being explained. The jump from the events of the report-answer to the explanation of the phenomenon - generally natural - takes place by analogy, making the report itself have a metaphorical function”. (SPERBER, 2009, p. 266)

when more than 90% of the population was essentially catholic (REIS & CARMO, 2015, p. 180). Every decade, there is an increase of evangelicals and non-religionists. Spiritists, umbandistas, atheists, gnostics, santo daime, judaism grow timidly, demonstrating that Amapá has a wide religious and cultural diversity (REIS & CARMO, 2015, p.181).

Conforming to Mafra (2013, p. 20), IBGE data show us a “radiography” of the profile of the amazonian religious field throughout history, however, there are flaws: the data cannot measure the double or triple belonging of people, it cannot identify issues concerning to religious syncretism, as well as it fails to capture how legends, myths, tales and popular beliefs affect amazonians’ lives. Even though the catholic church is the largest religious institution in the Amazon regarding to number of supporters, it does not necessarily maintain the same influence on society as it did in the middle of the 20th century (MAFRA, 2013, p. 34). Afro-Amerindian aspects associated with catholic habits show the religious and cultural characteristics of the Amazon caboclo (a person whose parents are indigenous and white people) (MAUÉS 1995, p. 56). Considering these data collected by IBGE as exponents of identity markers serves us as an instrument of problematization of the concept of identity, as it explains its changing character in time and in space regarding to the religious aspect of the amapaense Amazon, in a convergence movement of the difference coming from this discursive device.

Identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time. Nor is it that 'collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed "selves" which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common' and which can stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging 'oneness' or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences... They are subject to a radical historicization. (HALL, 2000, p. 108)

According to Maués (1999, p. 73), popular catholicism is one of the trademarks of the catholic church in the Amazon... devotion to saints, pilgrimages, rosaries, quermesses, novenas, festivities, promises, litanies, processions - markers of this identity - are elements that cannot be missing from catholic celebrations in urban and rural communities. The priests, in a search for controlling the discourse to homogeneity, try to control the praying practices, the organization of the celebrations and other elements justifying that catholic activities cannot adopt profane elements (MAUÉS, 1995, p. 60), however, in the popular festivities, the elements of catholic spirituality, even though highlighted, coexist with traditional practices and beliefs of the communities, demarcating in masses, baptisms, weddings, parties and catechesis the residual, revived and resignified afro-amerindian elements.

Pacheco (2013) explains that the Amazon, throughout its historical and sociocultural formation, incorporated aspects of indigenous and african culture in their cultural and religious aspects. In other words: since the colonial period, with the arrival of the portuguese and black people brought from Africa in the process of hybridization and miscegenation with the local indigenous population, cultural manifestations and syncretic religions were produced. It is not uncommon that in moments of popular festivities individuals resort to shamanism, pajelança, derrubada do mastro, incorporations, orixás (orishas), forest enchanted, songs, legends told from the oral tradition with forest characters endowed with magical abilities, search for cures for the most various illnesses made by curandeiros (healers), use of herbs and teas, alcoholic beverages made with plant essence, among other examples (PACHECO, 2013, p. 483). As the author exemplified:

In dialogue with a ribeirinho inhabitant of the Buiussú river, in Melgaço, an expert puxador de coluna (vertebral column puller), who inherited from his mother the art of healing bodies with muscle sprain or “muscle stiffness”, we became aware that among the natural oils used to work stiffed or displaced regions of the body, there is the “tacacá” of the sloth - a kind of liquid found between the bony joints of the animal that, in the afro-indigenous cosmological understanding, does not suffer from these problems. According to the puller, the animal tacacá is the best oil he knows for working massages in inflexible and painful parts of the body, because the sloth performs with mastery and skill the biggest “jugglings” by carrying a powerful lubricant in its joints. The explanation for the use of “sloth’s tacacá” as a powerful medicine for solving spine problems rests on the deep relationship of the man with the Marajoara fauna and flora. Expert in the codes and rules of the forest and animal life, the ribeirinho puller demonstrates harmony with the dynamics of the ribeirinho culture and understanding of their potential to guarantee their existence of their traditions. (PACHECO, 2013, p. 484)

Another important aspect of amazonian religiosity is the enchanted. According to Figueiredo (2009), several regions of the Amazon are called cities of enchanted, like some regions of Pará and Amapá. The enchanted are defined as magical beings who live in the forest and use their powers to perform various actions and who get in contact with people who have mediumship (pai de santo or pajé) to help people of the physical plane in what they wish (FIGUEIREDO, 2009, p 90). Silva (2003) tells us that the enchanted are very common in meetings of pajelança or in the terreiros de tambor de mina... The enchanted is not someone or something who/that died, it is a being that “enchanted”, that disappeared from the common experience and that became invisible or became an animal, stones, plants or mythological beings, like boto (the dolphin), cobra grande, curupira and mermaids. They usually live in the water, under rocks or in trees (SILVA, 2003, p 12).

For Ferreti (1995, p. 67) the presence of the enchanted, which he defines as african, caboclo entities or magical beings from indigenous traditions, is one of the most important characteristics of religious syncretism in the Amazon, participants in terreiros, indigenous festivals, some catholic communities and among the ribeirinhos, through the mixture of african, indigenous and catholic

elements, mixed in identity. Activities developed from these elements aim to offer explanations of life, healings and miracles, and to offer answers to amazonian peoples for their common daily dilemmas (FERRETI, 1995, P. 80).

The catholic church, as we insist, does not accept other cultural and religious elements that do not come from its dogmas. According to Reis and Carvalho, the catholicism tries to consolidate itself in the Amazon as the only institution carrying the universal truth (REIS & CARVALHO, 2016, p 160). Everything that deviates from judeo-christian-catholics values is, of course, demonized and pathologized. Such stigmas are used by the catholic hierarchy to justify the attempt to eliminate the “deviants”, and, thus, monopolize their colonizing project (PIMENTEL, 2015, p 45).

Albert Memmi's writings explain this church's performance on Amazon land, when analyzing the representation of that colonizer who, even if refusing to assume the role of dominance over another, when in contact with the colonized who was previously the distant, the exotic, and who now is “living and suffering humanity”, comes to rescue them. For the catholic church, the characterizer of “living and suffering humanity” would perfectly apply to amazonian communities, because would not this be the evangelizing north of its doctrine... taking God to those who need Him? But, for the author, at the same time that this colonizer understands the other as belonging to humanity, he “has another civilization before him, customs differing from his own, men whose reactions often surprise him, with whom he does not feel deep affinity”. And he adds: the colonizer “cannot help judging those people and that civilization. How can one deny that they are under-developed, that their customs are oddly changeable and their culture outdated? (1977, p. 37). In the same way, we repeat: for the catholic church, “everything that departs from their values are, of course, demonized and pathologized”.

In the same tone, Viveiros de Castro (2017, p. 189) wrote about the evangelizing process of the church to the amerindians, to the Tupinambás, explaining how totally different perceptions of the world made it impossible to fully grasp the enunciation imposed on them by the colonizer:

Thus it is seen that the three constitutive absences of the brazilian gentile were causally linked: they had no faith because they had no law, they had no law because they had no king. Their language didn't even have the sound (f's, l's and r's), nor the sense. True belief assumes regular submission to the rule, and this it assumes the exercise of coercion by a sovereign. Because they had no king, they believed in priests; for the same reason, because they didn't have it, they discredited. The State's refusal (...) was not only manifested, or mainly, in a prophetic discourse that denies the social order (...); it was already embedded in the relationship with every discourse, as an order of reasons with totalizing pretension, and this included the word of the *karaiba*. The Tupinambás did everything they were told by prophets and priests - except what they didn't want to.

In the 19th century, bishop Dom Antônio Macedo, at the head of the diocese of Belém, used various intolerant and prejudiced attitudes towards religious and cultural initiatives distinct from catholicism. According to Martins (2007), such bishop, jointly with priests, threw stones, insulted or even articulated with political authorities places to arrest pastors, pajés, “wizards”, witchers, with the justification of being charlatans or healers (MARTINS, 2007, p 80).

The author points out that the printed “Estrela da Manhã” newspaper was created in that capital with the eagerness to criticize the advance of protestantism and the urban and rural mentality of people who no longer followed catholic values, also to defend the elimination of “barbarian” customs that happened between black people, ribeirinho people and indigenous people (customs that were religious activities related to pajelança, tambor, shamanism, or other healing rituals). The publication reinforced the idea of a christian Brazil and that the Amazon’s identity should be linked to catholic truths (MARTINS, 2007, p 104).

At the beginning of the 20th century, catholic missionaries of the Holy Family order arrived in Amapá’s territory... by this time, Tucuju lands were managed by the political authorities of Pará. The objective of these priests was to christianize the caboclos of the Amazon who had animalistic and primitive customs (REIS & CARVALHO, 2016, p 170). Such customs came from indigenous and african cultural influence. They criticized polytheism, cannibalism and other customs subsequent to these cosmogonies. From 1943 the territory of Amapá emancipated itself from the state of Pará, becoming a federal territory. In 1948, the priests of the PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions), arrived in Cabo Norte, and continued the colonizing project. The initial concern of priests was to increase the population's access to the sacraments and to combat all that did not match the catholic faith. According to Lobato (2013), parishes, cinemas, soccer schools, newspaper, printing, schools, health posts, festivities of catholic saints, quermesses, and radio stations were created. The idea was to transform Amapá into a totally christian society (LOBATO, 2013, p 234).

The persecutions of the Catholic Church within the black community of Amapá are pointed out by researcher Alysson Antero. This author points out that black people in the 1940s suffered institutional racism and religious intolerance by the catholic church: its leaders prevented the greatest expression of Amapá’s black culture, the Marabaixo, from entering Saint Joseph’s cathedral, claiming to be a pagan and rowdy party (ANTERO, 2015, p 22). In 2019, the priest of the Parish Church Jesus de Nazaré, in Macapá-Amapá, also prevented marabaixeiros from entering the Church, claiming that the celebration is not considered in accordance with the Catholic values.

The prohibition of the speech of the other exercised by the catholic hierarchy in search of a homogeneous speech in the amapaense Amazon region could not succeed, if we consider Stuart Hall’s words (2000, p. 110), because the internal homogeneity of identity “is not a natural, but a

constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it 'lacks'". This way, it becomes possible to understand the process of assimilation of the colonization by traditional amazonian ribeirinho communities and, on the other hand, the "eyes shut" and/or the acceptance of certain afro-amerindian traditions by the church - at least those that do not clash directly with their dogmas, such as the assimilation of historical events of the communities reinterpreted in the festivities of quermesse.

These reinterpreted events/memories at religious festivals are created by traditional communities as a strategy of resistance and re-existence, because, even in another statement maintained by the colonizer's discourse, they manifest themselves as origins establishment or origins return for the foundation of a narrative identity, as well as that of their members.

The Crystallization of the Cobra Grande symbolism in the popular Amazon catholicism's discourse is a reverse signal of this discourse. Even if present in several places in the Amazon, the narrative is not accepted by the catholic hierarchy and it is frequently defined as demoniac and wrong, for not accepting the manifestation of the different, of the other in their enunciation. The colonizer, then, starts to claim that the colonized is a weak one who needs the protection of the church against the beliefs of tradition... this notion of protectorate validates the colonizer's behavior and belief that his action is in defense of the colonized against himself, defense of the church's values and dogmas against the actions of the "enemy", hidden in the traditions of a proclaimed primitivism.

In the municipality of Macapá, state of Amapá, the narrative about Cobra Grande takes place in one of the main tourist spots in the city, Pedra do Guindaste, located 300 meters from the Amazon River, next to the Trapiche Eliezer Levy, in the commercial and touristic area, where, throughout the year, several tourists take photos and touch the stone in order to learn more about the myth.

On it, Pedra do Guindaste, is the image of São José, the one whose elected as patron and protector of Amapá through the discourse of the Catholic Church, made by portuguese sculptor Antônio Ferreira da Costa. In the middle of the 20th century, this monument was used as a target for the firing exercises of soldiers linked to the former Federal Territory, as the structure is located next to the São José Fortress, in the edge of the Municipality of Macapá.

According to the participants of this research, mainly older residents of the Perpetuo Socorro neighborhood, in Macapá, which was formerly known as Praia street and women's Igarapé, there is under the Pedra do Guindaste a large snake with imaginable dimensions that, when the tide is low, leaves the rock to drink water. As the snake returns with the high tide, the water never covered the stone because its presence would elevate the monument. The syncretic symbolic of this

representation produces an image of heteronomic protection: the greatest protection did not come from public power, but it did from the protection offered by the symbolic mark... on Pedra do Guindaste rests the catholic image of the protector and patron, São José; under the Stone, the Cobra Grande.

Still for the participants, if someone dares to remove the stone from its place, the Amazonas River would increase its water volume and the whole city of Macapá would sink, enchanted. In addition to this collected version during the research, another one presented itself to the origin of Pedra do Guindaste: it is said that the first inhabitants of the coast of Macapá would have been the Tucujús indigenous tribe. A very beautiful indian of that ethnicity fell in love with an indian who harvested food in that region every day. They started a relationship and every day the couple repeated the same things: the man went out to collect the food and the woman accompanied him to the beach, staying until the sunset in Lagoa dos Índios. In the late afternoon, they both returned to their homes. One day, the couple went down to the river to get supplies and the woman, as usual, was waiting for him. However, that day he did not return. As her beloved did not return, the indian squat and cried. For days and nights, her weeping repeated until her death. In the same place where she had stayed, a mysterious stone shaped like a woman's body appeared.

In the 1970s, as Reis & Carvalho (2016, p 160) point out, the catholic church was concerned about the rise of other religious groups in the state of Amapá, such as the protestants, and with religious practices linked to afro-amerindian aspects. To reinforce the image that Macapá was officially catholic, bishop Dom José Maritano had articulated with the governor of Amapá, General Ivanhoé Gonçalves Martins, the construction of the São José monument on Pedra do Guindaste. In 1969 the image started to be manufactured, being inaugurated in 1973.

São José's image was worked in the 20th century as a great symbol of catholicism in Amapá, during the period in which the state had been prelature, until the decade of 1980, and later, with the creation of the Macapá Diocese, when it was raised to the patron saint. The catholic church tried to elevate the symbolic religious character through rosaries, masses, pilgrimages, popular celebrations, processions, cultural and media events which centrality evoked this representation of the patron, reinforcing the idea that São José would be the one who would help people finding a cure for their health and emotional problems, would decrease the unemployment, defend against robberies and thefts and provide the best for the political, economic and social development for the population.

The colonizing project of the catholic church seeks to erase all religious and cultural values that did not agree with the worldview and religiosity defined by the Holy See. However, following our line thought, the residual crystallization of enchantment stories of Cobra Grande by popular

amapaense Amazon catholicism is constituted, we insist, in a resumption of tradition, in a way of rescuing what would be a narrative identity marker for the people from the North of Brazil, as it resignifies within the dominant discourse of the catholic religion what remains of the tradition, seizing a perspectivist comprehension of the world that embraces in the same cosmogony the real and the enchanted, the forest and the urban life, the new and the tradition, in an apprehension that goes beyond the meaning of the ego to understanding and feeling that is that of all humans, of all beings endowed with conscience not because they thought but because they were thought... Perspectivist because it is not a single point of view, that of official catholicism, but that of different points of view constituents of a parental community made up of people, animals, spirits, plants and everything else imagined as a subject, distinct from each other not by essence - that everything is human! - but by corporealities. Câmara Cascudo presented us the myth:

Between the Amazon River and the Trombetas River a woman felt pregnant when bathing in the river. The children were born and it was a pair of twins who came into the world in the form of two dark snakes: Maria Caninana and Honorato. As they could not live on the land, the mother threw them in the paran do Cachoeri. Honorato was strong and good and from time to time he came to visit his mother. At night he would drag his huge body along the creaky sand. Left the monstrous snake skin, turning into a handsome boy, all dressed in white. At dawn, Honorato went down the bank and got inside the snake and plunged into the waters of paran. He saved a lot of people from drowning, won big and ferocious fish, like the river piraba piranha that fought him for three days. Maria Caninana was violent and bad. It flooded the boats, killed the castaways, attacked the fishermen. Cobra Norato killed his sister and became alone in the streams. When there were parties in the villages, he used to go up disenchanted, all dressed in white to dance with the girls. At dawn Honorato was going to fulfill his destiny. Its biggest desire was to be disenchanted by someone who had the courage to drip his mouth open three drops of woman's milk and give an iron cut virgin on the snake's head stretched out on the beach. In Camet, Norato became friends with a soldier who disenchanted him as needed. Norato even helped burning the body of the big snake where he had lived so many years and started to live as a man in that same city. (CASCUDO, 2000, p. 39)

Norato's metamorphosis - from snake to man, from man to snake - is not moral change, but a physical and symbolic one, because his humanity existed independently of the nature of the body he wore. According to Cmara Cascudo, it was a transformation nuanced by the body as clothing, as costuming, as instrument, in a condition of being momentarily snake or human, and not of being eternally snake or human, through a immanent perspectivist comprehension to the enunciation of the myth.

Norato's body becomes a combination of social meanings and object of social significance, since in his body orbits meanings that evoke the cause and the instrument of designation and transformations in the scope of identity, continuously apparatus to discursive action that articulates

sociocultural and cosmological meanings - young man in white whose snake skin had left to participate in festivities; snake that abandoned white men's clothes to fulfill his desire in the river.

The veracity report of the existence of “Cobra Grande” is shared by many people, mainly in rural communities or small towns in the interior states, transforming what the catholic hierarchy defined as fiction into diction. To traditional amazonian communities, however, in a residual perspectivist apprehension, the report is a truth of faith, because there is no distinction and distances between the human and the divine, between the physical and the metaphysical, because the human is not perfect in *being for a moment*, but in *being eternally* in a certain condition of nature, culturally modeled in a notion on which the epithet of alterity is subordinated. In this statement, the Myth must not be understood as

a false explanation by means of images and fables, but a traditional narration which relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of men of today, and, in a general manner, establishing all the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself in his world. (RICOEUR, 2013, p. 21)

It is also worth noticing the distinction that followed the serpent of the catholic discourse of traditional amazonian... while in the first the snake evokes evil, for being the seductress in Eden, the one who had alienated humanity from God; in the second, the snake is participant in common living, present in rivers and forests and also in traditional Amazo cosmogony. It is common for each region to have its own representation of myth, some centering their discourse on the figure of Norato, when looking for a manifestation of humanity in the symbolic of the Cobra; in other regions, however, when one seeks in myth the manifestation of a death drive³, Maria Caninana or even the Cobra Sofia. In traditional narratives, Cobra Grande has magical abilities, being able to eliminate breaches, protect a certain person or town, become human, it could also kill people or reveal secrets of human existence... Totally different characteristics from those of the christian deity, or the catholic saints or the virginity of Mary Most Holy defended by the catholic church.

The character of Cobra Grande, residual in the enunciation of popular Amazon catholicism, represents urban or rural communities: under the statue of São José, in Macapá, there is the Cobra Grande; Santana, in the interior of the state of Amapá, at the city's port Cobra Sofia is asleep; in Afuá, also inland from Amapá, Cobra Grande is asleep under the community church; in Porto Grande, it can be seen on moonlit nights; In Bailinqui, Norato dresses in white and parties at

³ The “myth gives a holistic explanation of the world” (SPERBER, 2009, p. 281), serving the community as coordinates of human life in society that regulate the relationship with oneself and with others. Sperber (2009) explains that the myth is revived in enunciation as it defines the limits of human action in society, for presenting a narrative in which an individual is punished for violate Community rules / rules. It is a form of teaching instituted through a Notice.

festivities... Through contact with the “divinity”, many individuals get advice for their lives, sacrifice animals or plants to achieve certain goals, get cures from their illnesses and protection for their families and properties. Attesting the social role of myths, Cobra Grande becomes a thermometer for many communities of what is right or wrong in their experience.

This contact with Cobra is made through elements of nature. In devotions, prayers, rituals or celebrations, such as practices of invoking enchanted or as shamanic practices, it is natural to have water, fire, earth, herbs and/or other elements that belong to the Amazon Forest, that Cobra, as belonging to the cosmogony of the forest, in addition to knowing its secrets deeply, requires the evokers the communion with the forest so that they can receive what is offered by the Enchanted One, the science aiming to help or even punish for something wrong or some disobedience, or even mistreatment of the environment.

The apprehension - and the experience! - of this myth in the enunciation of popular Amazon catholicism expresses different levels of knowledge, not only marked, but also formulated from cosmogonic emotions and perceptions of the world. Following the writings of Bhabha (1998), the speech that evokes the presence of Cobra Grande, Norato, Sofia and/or Maria Caninana would become performativity, because it would resume the ethnic-cultural discourse in a task of discursive erasure of the colonial to the identity foundation of oneself, because, we repeat, the discourse that revives Cobra would not be fiction, but a diction for the amazonian populations. Far from being grounded in imagery recovery from the past, Cobra is alive, creates contexts of action and relationship, projects experiences and interacts with her own.

Even the colonial discourse having combated the discourse of the colonized in all possible forms (censorship, persecutions, prisons, inquisitions and deaths), in Amazon communities, what would be, to the colonizer, demoniac and barbarian, would be resignified and redive in the enunciation of popular catholicism, sharpening the common living, the *ethos* of its practitioners, because this was identity, accessible and common, because it was a cosmogonic and traditional experience, because the forest context inserted them and protected them much more than that of distant origin imposed on them.

The configurations of meaning immanent to the symbolic of the Cobra Grande, emanate the demarcation of an essence, a truth to the *ethos* of the amapaense Amazons, indeed!, however, they still emanate a decolonial positioning of resistance and re-existence between the subject who positions himself and the positioned subject, to the resumption of a leading role in his experience whose corollary resignifies the communitarian experience of resistance to erasure and silencing that would be imposed on him... So the Cobra hisses, the Cobra wakes up, the Cobra sheds its skin,

drinks gengibirra and she dances... Cobra is alive and among those who can see her enchantment. In this regard, resistance is made.

Final considerations

The Catholic Church has always tried to be hegemony in the Amazon from its religious proposal. With the arrival of diocesan orders, creation of parishes, creation of prelacies, bishoprics and missionaries, the objective was to combat the influence of indigenous and african religion and culture, so it repudiated any identity signs of the traditional amazonian communities that did not commune with their worldview.

Its colonizing project consisted of erasing what it considered as enemies of the faith, so, throughout history, it faced in many ways the advancement of protestants in Amapá... it burned bibles, arrested pastors, threw stones and slandered. African-based religions and indigenous traditions, in turn, have always been associated with demoniac practices by the religious discursive statement of discursive religious homogeneity.

The construction of the image of São José in the Trapiche Eliezer Levy on the edge of Macapá had become an exhibitor of this objective of erasing traditional culture, for through the insertion of a discursive power exhibitor resignifying catholicism to a mark, Pedra do Guindaste, which traditionally was an ethnic identity sign.

The religious image sought to erase the myth of Cobra Grande from the amapaense mentality through the action of power - and the location of the mark in Macapá's tourist and commercial area would maximize this representation, because it added even more power to the imaginary construction that Macapá was a christian city. Even with all these actions, the church's intent had not been realized because the amapaense Amazon is marked by cultural and religious diversity since its genesis. To accept tax discourses would be to submit to the colonizer, therefore the strategy of resistance and re-existence: assimilating the colonizer's discourse, but making it syncretic, amalgamated with popular religiosity, experienced not only in the belief of the enchanted ones of the forest and the orixás, but resignified in the dialogue with the catholic saints, with dogmatic questions, whence a new residual statement emerged, crystallized by its origin, but new in its nature... the popular amazonian catholicism.

As exhibitors of this other *ethos* in the statement that constitutes the potentiation of otherness, the teachings propagated from the Cobra myth show the face of the amazonian caboclo culture, thus becoming a marker of identity the meaning of life, its relation to death and mourning,

the meaning of ones forms of survival, of their political and social organization... coming from that perspective that the afro-amerindian cosmogonic view resignifies.

The 3 meter high image of São José at Pedra do Guindaste did not succeed in destroying Cobra Grande's performance of the mentality of the amapaenses... on the contrary, the participants of this identity performance of which the image is a milestone seem to believe that São José accepted the traditional beliefs and accepted that the magical powers of Cobra Grande would also help the people from Macapá, protecting them, securing them from all evils. If, before, destroying the monument would mean provoking the anger of Cobra Grande and not having her help in valuing life, in the discourse of popular catholicism, São José would also take their pains, because in the belief of these people the two would be allies. If provoking one's anger would already be unadvisable, perhaps now that they are together it is even more.

References

- ALVES, Isidoro. *O carnaval devoto* – um estudo sobre a festa de Nazaré, em Belém. Petrópolis, Vozes, 1980
- ANTERO, Alysson Brabo. Negras Guerreiras do Ciclo do Marabaixo. In: Daniela Cordovil. (Org.) *Religião, gênero e poder: estudos Amazônicos*. 1ed. São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2015.
- BHABHA, Homi K. *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- BAKHTIN, Mikhail. O discurso no romance. In: *Questões de literatura e de estética: A teoria do romance*. Trad. Aurora F. Bernardini et alii. 6 ed. São Paulo: Hucitec, 2010.
- CASCUDO, Luís da Câmara. *Contos Tradicionais do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, 2001.
- FERRETTI, Sergio. *Repensando o Sincretismo*. São Paulo/ São Luís: EDUSP/ FAPEMA, 1995.
- FIGUEIREDO, Aldrin Moura. *A cidade dos encantados: pajelanças, feitiçarias e religiões afro-brasileiras na Amazônia (1870-1950)*. Belém: EDUFPA, 2009.
- GALVÃO, Eduardo. *Santos e Visagens*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1976.
- HALL, Stuart. Identidade cultural e diáspora. In: *Revista do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*. Rio de Janeiro, IPHAN, 1996, p. 68-75.
- _____. Quem precisa de identidade? In: SILVA, Tomas Tadeu (Org.). *Identidade e diferença: a perspectiva dos estudos culturais*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2000.
- _____. *Da Diáspora*. Identidades e Mediações culturais. Belo Horizonte: UFMG/Brasília, 2003.
- LOBATO, Sidney da S. *A cidade dos trabalhadores: Insegurança Estrutural e táticas de sobrevivência em Macapá (1944-1964)*. Tese de Doutorado apresentada ao Departamento de História da FFLCH\USP: São Paulo, 2013.

MAFRA, Clara. Números e Narrativas. In.: *Debates do NER*, Porto Alegre, ano 14, n. 24, p. 13-25, jul./dez. 2013.

MARTINS, Karla D. Civilização católica: Dom Macedo e o desenvolvimento da Amazônia na segunda metade do século XIX. In: *Revista de História Regional*, 2007.

MAUÉS, Raymundo Heraldo. *Padres, pajés, santos e festas: catolicismo popular e controle eclesiástico*. Belém: Cejup, 1995.

_____. *Uma outra invenção da Amazônia*. Belém: Cejup, 1999.

MEMMI, Albert. *The colonizer and the colonized*. London, Earthscan, 2003.

PACHECO, Agenor Sarraf. Religiosidade afroindígena e natureza na Amazônia. *Horizonte*, Belo Horizonte, v. 11, n. 30, p. 476-508, abr./jun. 2013.

PEREIRA, Marcos Paulo Torres. Tramas de Anansi: Identidade Narrativa em O Vendedor De Passados. In.: PEREIRA, Marcos Paulo Torres & LIMA, Francisco Wellington Rodrigues. *Olhos d'África: Pós-colonialismo e literatura africana*. Macapá: UNIFAP, 2019.

PIMENTEL, Walbi S. *A igreja dos pobres: origem e desenvolvimento das CEBs no Amapá (1966-1983)*. Monografia apresentada ao Programa de Especialização em História e Historiografia da Amazônia da Universidade Federal do Amapá: Macapá, 2015.

REIS, Marcos Vinicius de Freitas; CARMO, Arielson Texeira. “O Campo Religioso Amapaense: Uma análise a partir do Censo do IBGE de 2000 e 2010”. In: *Revista Observatório da Religião*. Belém: UEPA, v. 2, n. 2, p. 176-197, 2015.

REIS, Marcos Vinicius de Freitas; CARVALHO, Joel Pacheco. A Igreja Católica na Amazônia: Diversidade religiosa e intolerância. *O Observatório da Religião*. V. 3, N. 1, P 157-172 (2016).

RICOEUR, Paul. *O si-mesmo como um outro*. Trad. Lucy Moreira Cesar. Campinas, SP: Papirus, 1991.

_____. *The symbolism of evil*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

SILVA, Anaíza Vergolino e. Os cultos afros no Pará. In: FONTES, Edilza (Org.). *Coleção contando a história do Pará: diálogos entre antropologia e história*. Belém: E-Motions, 2003. p. 01-20.

SPERBER, Suzi Frankl. *Ficção e Razão: uma retomada das formas simples*. São Paulo: Aderaldo & Rothschild: Fapesp, 2009.

VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. *A inconstância da alma selvagem – e outros ensaios de antropologia*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2017.