

SARAKATSANI REFLECTIONS ON THE BRAZILIAN DEVIL

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The Devil does it in a brutish manner; God, however, is treacherous.

—Guimarães Rosa

This paper deals with the Devil in Brazil, both the way in which the demonic trope operates as a central unifying aspect of Brazilian daily experience and the major role that it plays in Brazilian discourses of national identity. The paper is inspired, in a contrastive fashion, by John Campbell's famous essay on the Devil among the Sarakatsani shepherds of Greece. There is, however, no systematic attempt to compare the two: it would seem foolish to place side by side the worldview of small transhumant shepherd communities with Brazilian national culture seen in the long-term historical perspective. The scales of analysis are completely different and the two contexts are immersed in widely divergent historical settings.

Rather, I chose to be inspired by the way in which John Campbell approached the issue—both in his *Honour, Family, and Patronage* (1964) and in the more widely read article on "Honour and the Devil" that is part of the time-setting volume edited by J.G. Peristiany on *Honour and Shame* (1966). These passages are worth remembering in the context of anthropological history for the way in which they inaugurated a wholly new way of dealing with issues that were previously addressed only by historians and theologians. Without rejecting the influence of classical scholars (e.g. Onians 1951), John Campbell studies matters of belief in the context of lived experience as observed through ethnographic fieldwork.

In these pages, as indeed in much of what the British Mediterraneanists were writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, one can detect a strong influence of the German sociological school and its preoccupation with person, value and religion.¹ To my mind, rather than any sort of contemplation of "honour and shame" as a culture trait, it is this aspect of those texts that is apt to inspire us today (cf. Pina-Cabral and Campbell 1992). The recent discussions of the Greek Devil that have been carried out by colleagues such as Charles Stewart (1991) show what a rich trend John Campbell's work inaugurated.

In his essay, Campbell is concerned to demonstrate how religious experience moulds daily practice, interacting intensely with it in the way people produce themselves as social actors. He identifies a contradiction between the values of social life (the code of personal worth which guides relations both between males and females and between shepherd families) and the values of religion (the simple, but deeply held forms of Orthodox Christianity to which these people adhered). The two sets of values are mediated tensely by the rhythms of daily life and of the life cycle. He does not argue that the two aspects fit nicely together to form some sort of sociocentric notion of "culture". Rather, he shows how social life is pervaded by a moral tension that ultimately cannot be resolved, leading to a dynamic sense of ethical incompleteness. Few ethnographers since then have managed to examine so thoroughly the way in which personal construction, gender differentiation and religious experience operate conjointly and tensely in social experience. In my analysis of Brazilian demonology, I was inspired by Campbell's unwillingness to resolve ethical dilemma into neatly formulated cultural constructions.

The Sarakatsani lived on the margins of the State and the institutionalized Church. Theirs was a world of considerable personal independence which was not marked by the experience of violently enforced hierarchy and captivity that is such a central part of the Brazilian historical legacy. The discussion that follows will show how, contrary to the Sarakatsani's essentially rural view of their world, largely unmarked by the modern utopia, Brazilian experiences were branded from the onset by the utopian outlook of the Modern Era. The Brazilian Devil is, oddly as it may sound today when speaking of the 16th century, a modern devil.

1 In their biographical note to the posthumous edition of Franz B. Steiner's work, Adler and Fardon show how his lectures on Simmel in Oxford in the post-war period were far more influential than had been known up till then, and explain how Steiner actually visited Pitt-Rivers while this one was in the field (1999: 86-100, esp. 97).

Eden and Hades²

A few months ago, I was giving a lift in my car to a lady friend. As we started off from the small town of Valença on our way back to Salvador (the capital of the state of Bahia) the following conversation took place:

João – So, here we go.

C. – With God before us.

J. – And the Devil behind?

C. – No, no; 'cause God is good and the Devil is not evil.

J. – If he's not evil, what is he?

C. – If you treat him well, he works; if not, he breaks it all up, he destroys.

J. – And how do you treat him well?

C. – As a matter of fact, you give him his *ebó*, his rum. ("*Ebó*" is the word for the food, drink and tobacco sacrifice one offers to Afro-Brazilian gods)

I immediately stopped the car and wrote down this dialogue in my notepad, as it seemed to echo perfectly what I was reading just then: Laura de Mello e Souza's famous study *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross* (1993). In that historical treatise concerning the work of the Inquisition in Brazil, it is clearly demonstrated that all this demonology finds its origins in the exact moment of "discovery", being reflected in the drama that is constituted by the very process of having to find a name for this "new" land. This is the way the issue was perceived by the Portuguese Crown (as voiced by the influential 16th century chronicler and royal chancellor João de Barros):

And thus, as in this earth I have no further way of avenging myself of the devil, I admonish all of you who read these words in the name of the cross of Jesus Christ to give this land the name which it so solemnly received [Land of the Holy Cross], for fear that same cross, which will be present before us in the final day, accuse you of being more devoted to Brazil wood than to it. (in Mello e Souza 1993: 29-34)

As it happens, his wager was lost and the name Terra da Santa Cruz was indeed supplanted by the name for Brazil wood, from which a red dye was extracted that played such an important role in European clothing habits in the 16th century. Thus, like the cross, the new name was also stained in red, but not with the blessed blood of Jesus: rather, with the vile smell of profiteering. In the very name of the "new" land, therefore, a tension was inscribed that

2 This paper is a sequel to Pina-Cabral 2007, where I explore Roberto DaMatta's famous analysis of the notion of "Brazilian dilemma", in light of a critique of the relation between the binomials person/individual and tradition/modernity (DaMatta 1979). These pages were written in Bahia, where I have been carrying out fieldwork intermittently since 2004. Life around me in Bahia constantly confirmed the intrinsic link between daily ethical confrontations and the demonic trope as inscribed in Brazilian literary and academic traditions.

carried with itself from the start a utopian dimension; a wager with the Devil that, as it happens, was promptly lost.

The New World appeared to the Europeans of the Modern Era as potentially Edenic, so that the evil elements that they subsequently discovered there assumed a surprising nastiness. In the words of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, the initial "vision of Paradise" brings with itself as a corollary a propensity for a subsequent demonization (1996 [1959]). The polarization of value between Eden and Hades—place of desire versus place of horror, place of fulfilment versus place of falsehood—never abandoned the Land of the Holy Cross. There the possibilities were immense, the dangers tremendous. That is the "dream of Brazil", the fascinating tropical wager that has been leading Portuguese people of all social classes, for centuries, to risk their lives in that far off land.

Oswald de Andrade notes that there is something extraordinarily apposite in the notion that Thomas More's original *Utopia* was based on the description by one of Amerigo Vespucci's sailors of the island of Fernando Noronha, off the coast of Brazil. This "nowhere land" that is at the same time a "perfect land" is a dream, yes, but a practically oriented dream; that is, one that transports an ethical appeal for a change of the world. "The geography of the Utopias is placed in America. [...] Except for the *Republic of Plato*, which is an invented state, all of the *Utopias* which appear in the horizon of the modern world twenty centuries later and which leave a deep impression on it, are bred of the discovery of America. Brazil left quite an imprint in the social conquests of the Renaissance." (Andrade 1990 [1966]: 164) Historians such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Laura de Mello e Souza have shown how the historical origin of the demonic identification at the beginning of the Modern Era, in the 16th century, was born of a reaction to the tropical utopia.

This relation between the demonic trope and the ethical dilemma that is born of the utopian drive has not simply faded away five centuries later. As Lúcia Nagib has cogently argued in her study of Glauber Rocha's film *God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun*, the image of the interior drylands (*sertão*) turning into a sea that pervades Brazilian 20th century cinema is "the wrenching emotion of an utopian country that might have come into existence, yet was fated to remain unrealized since the discovery." (2006:33)

As a matter of fact, Brazil has been characterized, throughout its history, on the one hand by the persistence of its demonic appearance and on the other by the intense domestication of the demonic trope in everyday life. This is present to this day, both in the religious practices and beliefs whose finality is to seduce the Devil—in the Afro-Brazilian tradition—and in those that aim to dominate or destroy him and her: that is, the Pentecostal version that each day becomes

more prevalent throughout the country. Today's outside observer, five centuries later, is confronted with an uncanny sense of continuity.

I was surprised by the insidiousness of the trope in a number of events that surrounded the very production of this paper. A few months ago, as I was giving a postgraduate course in Bahia, I suggested to a student that she should write a critical analysis of an earlier version of this very paper. When the time came for handing in the essays, I received an email declaring that she felt herself obliged to change to another one of the topics I had suggested, even although she had already started researching this one and was fascinated by it. According to her, ever since she had started doing so, all sort of nasty events had started occurring and she felt she could not afford to continue. Although she confirmed that she does not "believe in" the Devil, the latter is such an intrinsic part of the world she lives in that she found it impossible to escape his and her agency.

Demonology is a heterology, tells us Laura de Mello e Souza; "the fascination with the Devil responds to a desire to speak of the other, both external and internal." (1993: 25, 195) And there is nothing surprising about the need for a heterology in colonial Brazil, a place where one was faced with vast numbers of Gentiles and imperfectly converted Christians (Amerindian, African and Jewish), particularly in the light of the old Eusebian theological tradition, which interprets Gentile belief as corresponding to actually existing—demonic—powers (Pina-Cabral 1992). As Cristina Pompa shows, in Brazil, "all the interpretations of the savages' 'religion' by the [17th century] missionaries were formulated in terms of a 'devilish counterfact' in which the Devil, God's mome, constructs the infernal counterpoint to divinity." (2003: 27)

Confronted with this pervasive otherness as well as with the unexpected physical hardship of living in a terrain that had initially seemed so bounteous, the utopian disposition to create a new and better world was temporarily dashed at the same time as the perceived urgency for it was further confirmed. The frustration of the expectations produced by tropical Edenism caused incongruence in the world. Lived experience acquired, thus, a kind of infernal perversity.

The incongruence between the Edenic and the Hadean aspects of the New World might have remained a simple curiosity for Europe, were it not for the constructivism of the human condition. This, however, means that at the very moment human beings come to *live* this incongruence, they end up being formed by it. Thus, incongruence becomes constituent of these men and women. There, then, what was only a game of lights suddenly becomes a game of shadows with sinister implications concerning the life and death of the people involved. As is clearly patent in the missionary correspondence studied by Cristina Pompa or in the Inquisitional reports that Laura de Mello e Souza examines, very early on the "Brazilians" were no longer the "savages"—good or

bad—but were all of those who, in the meantime, were being constituted by this new and incongruous land. The reification of identities started even before the collective names that they later assumed were fully consolidated, as we have seen. These reifications accumulate and consolidate.

In short, the game of Eden and Hades is not inconsequential, as human desire is invested in it—the desire for good, for happiness, for strength, for power, for prosperity ... Now, in a context of internal polarization, the dynamic of desire potentiates the impact of its satisfaction and its frustration—in what we might call a “fridge effect”. Each new satisfaction places the integrity of the subject in further jeopardy and, therefore, appeals to a frustration. Great goods bring great evils. The Brazil of easy gold, easy sex, abundance is also the Brazil of misery, hunger, slavery and plague.

Once the dualizing game of Brazilian Edenism is set in motion, the incongruence of the land inevitably becomes the incongruence of its people. Thus, the latter are confronted with a social dilemma of being. The demonic aspect of this land, then, is not due to the fact that it also includes destitution—the Devil was also afoot among the Sarakatsani; it is the Edenic and not the Hadean side of Brazil that appeals to a special presence of the Devil. The Edenic appearance creates a dynamic of intensification of desire that can never really be fully satisfied and that gives rise, as a consequence, to a demonic alert, an awareness of perversity.

The demonic game of Brazilian tropicalism is directly connected to the perversions of desire, as Gilberto Freyre turns out to have demonstrated (2003 [1933]). Tropicalism is demonic because it sits on an initially utopian proposition: that we will be able to fabricate a New World where our desires will be satisfied. What produces the demonic alert is the utopianism of those who see a “new” world and want to fashion it into a “better” world—this applies equally to the initial efforts of the Jesuits, the lords of souls; to the boundless greed of the slave owners, the lords of bodies; but also to the erotic and financial mismanagement of the ordinary settler. In short, the dilemmatic condition of this land is not something that is in Brazil, but it is something that is produced there.

In the end, as all worlds are human worlds—and all of them are constitutive of the humans that inhabit them—there are no new and better worlds, there are no final solutions: there are only human worlds. I suppose it is easy for us now, five centuries later, to mistrust modern utopianism in the face of its repeated collapse, and even then there are still many of us that continue to hope.

Faith or idolatry

As to the religious aspect, Laura de Mello e Souza demonstrates how, from the very first known description of a colonial Afro-Brazilian cult (*candomblé*), the demonic condition integrated a number of strains with diverse origins (1993: 145)—Brazilian religious experience has always involved forms of multilateralism. However, in her impressive study, the author makes abundantly clear that, already then, this was a different Devil from that of erudite Europe, which is the Devil of an increasingly monotheistic God.

‘Without devils, there is no God’, [...] The existence of the devil was the primary proof of the existence of God, as was appropriately observed by a number of English thinkers of the seventeenth century. The devil has been historically associated to monotheism; the first Hebrews felt no need to personify the malign principle; they attributed its influence to rival divinities. With the triumph of monotheism, in the meantime, it became necessary to explain the presence of evil in the world, as God was so good: [And here she quotes Keith Thomas,] ‘Thus, the devil helps to sustain the idea of a divinity which is absolutely perfect’. (1993:249)

Now, the influence that Keith Thomas identifies also works in the contrary direction. As Derrida puts it, the devil too can serve as an “excuse” for God: “radical evil can be of service, infinite destruction can be reinvested in a theodicy, the devil can also serve to justify.” (1998: 13) The image of the devil as an absolutely evil being evolves concomitantly with the monotheistic ideal. The evolving conceptions of the devil reflect the change in posture towards God. The Counter-Reformation drive that the Inquisition and the Jesuits espoused involved a wish to stress further the monotheistic conception of God by relation to earlier medieval Catholic popular notions. However, once God is seen as absolute (“He is all things”, as Father António Vieira used to say in his sermons, e.g. 1959: X, 210), He has to be absolutely good and He cannot be visually represented. This affects attitudes towards the Devil as, if God is all and is good, evil is of necessity a problem—since evil has to be good in the last instance, as it is a divine creation.

For the Catholics of the Modern Era, dualism was as much a necessity as an impossibility. This was the problem that had confronted the Church throughout the Late Middle Ages under the guise of the various dualist heresies. We must not forget that the Church that was trying to convert Brazil in the 16th century had been struggling for three centuries to eradicate Catharism from Europe (Lambert 1998) and, earlier still, to eradicate Arianism from the margins of what had once been the Roman Empire. The problem lies at the root of Christianity and the various rational attempts to go round it have proved, in

the last instance, to be unsatisfactory, as is present again from the Pope's recent ditherings concerning Hell's actual existence.

The problem that confronts us today, however, is that most authors who study these matters (both historians and anthropologists) place themselves in the position of one who knows what it is to have "faith" in a "God", one immanent God, even when they do not necessarily "believe in" Him. In other words, conceptual precedence is silently granted to a prototype of divinity of the "God" type with whom a "believer" is related through "faith" (an intellectual disposition), the manipulation of icons becoming secondary. As Malcolm Ruel has famously argued, however, such a posture can hardly be taken as a universal of the human condition, which means that these dispositions end up working as what he called "shadow fallacies" (2002 [1982]: 110).

Cristina Pompa develops a similar argument concerning the relationship between Catholic missionaries and Indians in 17th century Brazil: "The concepts of Faith and Belief are born of the Christian choice, for which the 'profession of faith' is an inseparable mark; [...] it is religion (Christian, as it happens) that constructs historically the faith; it is not the faith that identifies the religion." (2003: 349) Thus monotheistic, fideistic (as our Italian colleagues call it) and anti-idolatric predispositions are intimately connected. In the face of such a complex, postulating a figure such as the Devil is a logical necessity. The demonic concept is, thus, silently universalized.

The very history of this monotheistic and fideistic prejudice comes to be inscribed in the modernist theologies produced for themselves by the world religions that do not originate in the Judaic tradition. These are religions that have to face the hegemony of the monotheistic prejudice and who become dependent on the interpretations that missionaries, historians, sociologists and anthropologists have made of them in the past. Speaking of the very first writers who described the Tupinambá of coastal Brazil, Cristina Pompa notes that "These Indians seemed not to believe in anything, being adverse to the current notions of what it was to be a pagan. At the same time, however, in order to justify evangelization, Tupi culture was presented as bearing, in bas-relief, the possibility of a monotheistic religion." (2003: 41; see also pp. 44-5) For the Europeans, in those days, "It was, in fact, the Devil, the king of lies who falsified and degraded the pure images of faith in order to be able to conquer the soul of Indians." (ibid.: 49) We must not be surprised, therefore, to find contemporary interpreters of *candomblé* stating that, deep down and all things considered, theirs too is a monotheistic religion.

Faced with this, however, it becomes necessary to state that there is no universalistic necessity in the formulation of an absolutely evil figure such as the Sarakatsani Devil that John Campbell described. Olavo Bilac, a Brazilian poet

and thinker of the early 20th century, starts his famous essay on the Brazilian Devil by alerting us to that precise fact (1912: 133). Both the monotheistic God and the Devil are functions of a polarization of Good and Evil that is part of the Christian tradition and has always been a source of problems for it. Again, as the various medieval heresies demonstrate, it has always been particularly difficult for Catholicism to contain the theological dangers that would derive from falling into excessive dualism.

As it happens, the evidence we have from most of the religious forms that emerged over the centuries from Brazilian popular religious experience is that they respond to a contrary dynamic. One should note that what is at stake is not the disappearance of an image of evil or of its vehicles. Rather, what we observe in popular Brazil is that the dissolution of the image of God as omnipotent, absolute and immanent accompanies a corresponding change in the image of the Devil. There appears to be no drive towards dualist solutions.

Let us hear what Édison Carneiro has to say concerning *Êxu*, a central figure of the *candomblés* of Bahia:

Exu [...] has been ill understood. His reign is all the crossroads, all the hidden and dangerous places of this world, so it was not easy to find a simile for him in the image of the Christian Devil. [...] the invocation of *Êxu* by the sorcerers, whenever they wish to make yet one more victim, has helped to give him the character of a evil *ôrixá*, contrary to man, representing the occult forces of Evil.

As it happens, however, *Êxu* is not an *ôrixá* – he is the servant of the *ôrixás*, an intermediary between men and the *ôrixás*. If we want something from *Xangô*, for example, we must *despachar* *Êxu* [lit. send him off], so that his influence may help us gain that thing more easily. It does not matter the quality of the favour – *Êxu* will do what we ask for so long as we give him the things he likes: palm oil, goat meat, water or rum, tobacco smoke. If we forget about him, not only will we fail to receive our favour, but he will also unleash all the forces of Evil against us; those forces that, as an intermediary, he holds in his hands. [...] *Êxu* is like the ambassador of the mortals. His aim is to carry out the wishes of men – good or evil [...] Thus, he can intercede with the *ôrixás* for evil, quite as much as for good. It depends on who is asking. (1991 [1948]: 68-9)

The long quote seems justified for what the passage reveals of how undevilish this Devil that emerges from colonial Brazil turns out to be. Once again, there is nothing new to the conclusion that, when the referent is no longer a monotheistic, immanent model of divinity but a more polytheistic and less fideistic model, a structural adjustment necessarily occurs concerning the image of the Devil. The conception of the Devil depended on the nature of the conception of the divinity—the two go together. Once Good stops being absolute, Evil does too—so the two alterations occur concomitantly. Evil is no longer something one can keep away, it becomes part of the everyday world and it becomes comprehensible within it.

The problem lies in the difficulty that contemporary authors have in accepting such a notion. A good example emerges from the work of Édison Carneiro himself, perhaps the most noted early ethnographer of *candomblé*. The author spends the whole of four pages trying to refute the idea that Bahian *candomblé* should be seen as polytheistic and idolatrous (1991 [1948]: 22-4). Why would he need to carry out this extensive demonstration, if not because there would be something wrong with *candomblé* if these “accusations”, as he calls them, were to apply?

Following on Alfred Gell’s suggestion, it seems necessary to deconstruct actively this modernist conception both of idolatry and of polytheism (1998: 115). This dilemmatic condition, the ambiguity or the “syncretism” of these practices, conceptions and customs of Brazilian popular life, is caused by the very prejudices that we impose upon them. According to Carneiro, the cult figures that we find portrayed all over Brazil “do not represent directly the divinities, but the humans that are possessed by them.” (1991: 24) He argues that their true representations are the *moradias* (residences) and their insignia. But if we follow, once again, Alfred Gell’s opinion, the distinction can only be seen as spurious.

In fact, it is almost immediately denied by Carneiro himself when he is forced to admit that Exú is the exception: “Exú, however, is not properly speaking a divinity, but their messenger and, in Africa, as the protector of villages, cult houses and homes, it would be natural that he would find a more direct representation than the remaining celestial beings.” (ibid.: 24) Now, where would that “naturalness” come from? And why would it be more directly related to Africa than all other aspects of *candomblé*? We are here confronted, once again, with the way in which the deep roots of modernist prejudice undermine self-representations—the so-called “Brazilian dilemma” (DaMatta 1979, Pina Cabral 2007). Conditions are created for a primitivizing othering of self that soon turns against the very subject of the analysis, undermining his or her own self image.

As one reads the literature on these topics, one is repeatedly surprised by the way in which the directionality between polytheism and monotheism—the former necessarily leading to the latter—is implicitly accepted and repeatedly studied, observed and elaborated. The contrary movement, however, would seem to be considered as an impossibility—as going against the movement of history, the necessary history of progress. To pass from monotheism to polytheism: when such a thing happens in history it is always treated as recidivism, a re-emergence of telluric forces insufficiently repressed. How can one agree to pass from “faith” to “superstition”? Such is the puzzle motivating modernist prejudice.

This modernist model of history is so pervasive that the very authors who analyze critically the emergence of a modernist ideology are, in the end, guided

by the silences it produces. What is at stake here, therefore, is to contemplate the possibility that Édison Carneiro need not have felt ashamed of polytheism, of idolatry or of the un-dualistic nature of this religion that held him in such lifelong fascination. Faith, and faith in a unique and immanent God, need not be an inexorable future; it might well turn out to be a historical detour like many others, containing quite as many mind traps as any other such detour.

Thus we must turn the direction of our argument around. We have been shown by numerous historians how the Brazilian colonial subjects (Portuguese, Jewish, Amerindian or African) were violently subjugated by a Church and State apparatus in order to ensure that they sustained beliefs (a “faith”, in the sense of “to believe in”) that they did not necessarily always hold (“to believe that”). But now we must make space to understand how the colonial space, in fact, opened up pockets of relative freedom that allowed those subjects to entertain beliefs of a non-monotheistic nature that, elsewhere, would have been literally unthinkable. Let us not forget that colonial subjects—and slaves in particular—were treated almost as if they were not human and very little effort was spent on humanizing them. Left to their own devices they started thinking in ways that were structurally compatible with the world they lived in: that is, polytheistically and idolatrously. Later still, when slavery came to an end at the end of the 19th century, they were abandoned to their luck in the cities. As Édison Carneiro argues, they constructed there a religion (*candomblé*) that was compatible with their marginal ways of living.

There is an unexpected twist in this process: that is, the realization that the extremes of domination produce margins for the very system of domination (cf. Pina Cabral 1997). In colonial Brazil there were large areas of space that remained unchristianized, bureaucratically ambivalent and administratively marginal. When we read the Inquisition records we are surprised at how deep into the jungle the *capitães-do-mato* (the Inquisition police) managed to reach and how people, sooner or later, ended up having to account for their religious vagaries. But we must also have in mind the other side of the coin: in Brazil it has been possible for many centuries to find spaces of escape from ideological domination that, in Europe and in Portugal in particular, simply never existed.

In short, the tendency for polytheism and idolatry that we register in Brazilian popular religions need not be seen as a form of recidivism, primitivism or collapse into something anterior—recidivistic European “paganism” or the idealized Africa that constantly re-emerges from the accounts of *candomblé* by its learned protectors (Nina Rodrigues originally, Carneiro himself, Roger Bastide, Pierre Verger, etc.). We must experiment with the notion that there is nothing ineluctable or necessary about the notion of a unique God, the notion of “faith” or the rejection of idolatry. Once we realize that such notions

are associated to a State and Church apparatus without which they would not be sustainable, we then understand that they may well fade out in spaces of marginality such as colonial and 19th century popular Brazil.

The non-fideistic and non-monotheistic dispositions that emerged in Brazilian popular religion—as practiced in *candomblé*, in *umbanda*, in spiritism, as manifested in the inconstancy of Indians or still in the contemporary tendency for a free and recurrent movement of individuals between different churches and faiths—can now be seen as an acquisition, a historical gain to freedom, something that is better adjusted to these people's daily experience of mobility. This being the case, the presence of the Devil in that daily interchange must also be understood in a different manner.

This does not mean that we must stop thinking of good or evil, of desire and fear, of social enhancement or social destruction; it does not mean either that a figure that personifies the dangers in the world ceases to make sense. All it means is that we need no longer search for a figure (somehow divine or, at least, spiritual) that serves as a counterpoint to the monotheistic faith, countering divine compassion with absolute, irredeemable evil. We must accept that, in such a world, the essences interpenetrate.

One interesting aspect of such an exercise is that it reveals how our interpretations of history are marked by the contrary thesis. This is how Laura de Mello e Souza concludes her work:

Much like the worldview of the European discoverer or the popular religiosity of which it was a part, colonial sorcery was multiple and heterogeneous, constituted basically of two parts that were integrated into one whole: a baseline of magical practices characteristic of primitive cultures (African and indigenous) and another one of the magical practices characteristic of European populations, deeply intermeshed with the secular paganism that pulsed still under the recent and 'imperfect' Christianization. (1993: 375)

This formulation carries a number of submerged presuppositions; let us try to identify some of them. First, the author says "two parts": but, surely, there are at least four parts if we look at it from the point of view of historical anthropology—the Amerindian part, the African part brought by the slaves, the popular European part and Roman Catholic theology, and it is the author herself who distinguishes the latter two. Secondly, she finds a dichotomy between "primitive cultures" and European culture, and there we have to stop again, as anthropologists have long ceased to recognize a category of *primitive* to which any specific characteristic might be associated which would have allowed us to unite against Europeans both the Amerindians (who were themselves of more than one cultural strain) and the Africans (again from two very distinct cultural areas, West Africa and Angola). Thirdly, why would the baseline be European—why would we claim that the element that integrates all of these

imports is not Brazil itself but is one of the imports? And finally, why "paganism"? As a matter of fact the author responds to this question by claiming that Christianization in Portugal had been recent and "imperfect"; but can we be really sure of that. Does that statement not itself presume a series of modernist historical presuppositions?

We must remember that a similar debate is still going on in Europe concerning supposed "pagan survivals" (cf. Pina-Cabral 1992) and, indeed, it is to this very debate that Laura Mello e Souza is implicitly referring. Notwithstanding, it seems worthwhile to remember that, at least in Portugal, Christianization occurred at the time the Roman Empire assumed Christianity as its state religion. The Roman Catholic faith, in particular, has been absolutely dominant since the 6th century—when the Swabian kings were converted to Catholicism near Braga by Saint Martin of Dume. And, contrary to what is often thought, it was never pushed aside by the Islamic presence in the Peninsula—neither north of the Mondego River, where Christian hegemony was never challenged, nor south of it, in the lands that the northerners reconquered a few centuries later and where, during the Moorish Period, there remained a strong Mozarabic Christian population. Thus we must conclude that, by the time the Portuguese started their attempt to police the minds of the Brazilians in the 16th century, over a millennium had passed since the onset of Roman Catholicism in Portugal. Surely that is time enough for consolidation of any faith.

What is at stake, however, is hardly the nature of Iberian Catholicism (itself far less monotheistic than the Sarakatsani version of Orthodoxy), but rather how to avoid the secret operation of modernist prejudice in our historical and anthropological reconstructions. It is not enough to withdraw these presuppositions, since the very empirical material on which we rely as historians and anthropologists was collected with such notions in mind and, to top it all, applies to historical circumstances where those very presuppositions were hegemonic.

In short, my proposal is that we should look at the Brazilian Devil not as a *survival* but as an *emergent phenomenon*: something that is specific to the Brazilian context and to the structuring factors that operate in a land where marginality by relation to constituted power is constantly re-emerging. I concur here with arguments by Roger Sansi-Roca and his colleagues concerning the way in which the Lusophone Atlantic can no longer be approached as dilemmatically split in binary fashion between African primordality and European colonial violence. The argument for a Creole creativity and its historically emergent specificity must finally be taken more seriously by academics outside Brazil (Sanci-Roca 2007).

The “captive” Brazil that Otávio Velho identifies in the figure of the *Besta-Fera* (1995) and the Brazil *pactário*³ that Guimarães Rosa exemplifies in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (2001 [1956]) come together with Exú and his wife Maria Padilha (Meyer 1993) in such a way as to form a complex that originally might well have been syncretic, but today has long ceased to be so. Recently, the growing number of Pentecostal Evangelicals has undertaken a decided fight against the “demons” that they identify with Brazilian popular religion. Their main liturgical practices surround the exorcism of such Devils. As their popular designation makes clear (they are called literally “believers”, *crentes*), Brazilian Pentecostals fight quite as much for monotheism as for fideism. Their struggle is, after all, not very different from that of the Inquisition in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, or that which the bourgeois legal apparatus directed against *candomblé* in the 19th and 20th centuries (see Schritzmeyer 2004).

Their common enemy is the same plural religiosity that Brazilian marginality produces and perpetuates and the diffuse notions of good and evil that emerge with it. The police persecution of *candomblés*, in the sinister but puerile ways that Édison Carneiro reports for the 1940s, was also part of the same process of modernist purification. Both that policing and the constant references to aliogenic origins (“pagan”, “primitive”, “African”) manifested by the erudite supporters of *candomblé* are part of the symbolical work that goes into making Brazilian popular religions “syncretic”—when, in fact, historically, they are no less syncretic than most other religious traditions, Islam and Christianity included.

Such idolatrous, non-fideistic and non-monotheistic conceptions worry those who persecute them as much as they excite those who support them. There is good cause for this, as they are deeply counter-hegemonic to the extent that they manage to bypass and short-circuit the dominant theological and legal apparatuses. The presently emerging consumer society and the new service class that is coming into existence in Brazil are as worried about the counter-hegemonic potential of these forms of popular religiosity as were, in their days, the colonial elite and the bourgeois elite. Note, however, that in these new Pentecostal churches there is no question of abandonment of the centrality of the demonic trope; rather, what one sees there is a new negotiation of its meaning.

A plurality of demons

Let us now jump from the Modern Era which moulded Brazil to the turn of the 20th century, when the formulations of Brazilian national identity were finally consolidated into a self-consciously “modernist” discourse. As we do so,

3 *Pactário* is a word that refers to someone who has signed a pact with the Devil.

we continue to observe the pervasiveness and pertinence of the demonic trope and the role it plays in discourses of self-identity, both on the part of those who, while believing that the Devil exists, want to put him and her to practical use by means either of seduction or of exorcism, and on the part of those who, while not believing in the Devil’s actual existence, see the Eden/Hades polarity as the central interpretative clue to understanding Brazil. The latter idea, after all, lies behind the Devil that emerges from the works of major literary figures such as Olavo Bilac, Guimarães Rosa or Ariano Suassuna. This Devil is also the devil of the *Paulista* modernists, made famous in Oswald de Andrade’s famous cry: “Only anthropophagy unites us.” (1990[1928]: 47) This is no longer the Catholic Devil of the Modern Era but the sociologized Devil of Modernism.

The “Brazilian cannibal utopia” that emerges in 20th century art, argues Lúcia Nagib, is driven by the founding images of nationality (2006: 98-99). These formulations of identity reflect a sense of dilaceration between the primitive elements and the European conquering ideal. Furthermore, the confrontation with political and ethical failure does not seem to lead to abandonment of the utopian terms, but rather towards a form of dystopianism. In Nagib’s words, “The anthropophagous utopia fails miserably in the same way as, in 1960’s Brazil, the revolutionary hopes that brought together intellectuals, workers and peasants were dashed to pieces by the military coup.” (2006: 110) In the work of these artists and academics, we witness a dystopian disposition towards the two central moments (the time of “discovery” and the time of the “nation”).

Thus, like the Inquisitioners’ Devil, this modernist Devil of Brazilian 20th century academic and artistic discourse is also an *other*; yet it is no longer an exterior other, a menacingly exotic one. Rather, to adopt Ariano Suassuna’s phrase (2007 [1971]), the “divino-diabolical divinities” that operate as the referents of Brazilian contemporary literature and social analysis are essentially internal devils—they are an inextricable factor of the “Brazilian nation”, the “Brazilian people”. They are marks of the sense of incompleteness that characterizes this national identity: the dilemmatic condition that Roberto DaMatta theorizes in the 1970s.

Nagib’s film analysis comes handy again here, exemplifying a far more pervasive process—one that also affects our own anthropological practice in a curious “loop effect” from which the present essay cannot surely be excluded. Speaking of fully contemporary films, such as *Central Brasil*, she argues, “As they speak of a class different from their own, film directors are transformed into guilty ethnographers that search redemption by representing an other in a benevolent and idealized manner.” (2006: 72)⁴

4 Note that Esther Hamburger has argued that yet more recent films about urban slums (e.g. *Cidade de Deus*) use demonic violence in a new way, attributing to it

The Devil whose *despacho* (sacrificial offering, lit. "to send off") I come across at a crossroads in Maragojipe, for example, does indeed configure an *inversion* of the world in which I live. The pact I sign with him or her opens the doors of my world to unpredictability, disorder. But it must be understood that that very same Devil whom I meet at a crossroads tonight always had already seduced me: I have always been its captive. My world always had within itself the source of that disorder and only exists as a reaction to the potential of its very inversion. The Brazil of modernist anthropophagy, to use Andrade's metaphor again, confronts the interior and recidivist alterity of "savagery" quite as much as the exterior and futuristic alterity of "civilization". But that savagery now is no longer represented by the Indians, having been re-semanticized by the generation of anthropologists like Roberto DaMatta and film directors such as Walter Salles into an urban dystopia—but the dilemmatic nature of the reformulation continues both in academic discourse (cf. Pina-Cabral 2007) and in artistic discourse (cf. Nagib 2006: 70⁵).

The dilemmatic condition is caused by the utopian disposition; that is, by the adherence to the modern programme of "critical purification" (cf. Latour 1994). In the process of distancing itself from both of those referents—that is, in wanting to be another—Brazil and its intellectuals both trust themselves to a phantasmagoria of modernity and attribute to their world a phantasmagorical appearance (the demonic illusion). The diabolical representation, therefore, is a factor of the social, cultural, and economic dependence in which Brazil and its elites have been living during the past two centuries. Otávio Velho calls this dilemmatic condition "our ambiguous social currency" (1995: 162-7).

The contrast between, on the one hand, this dependence (this Third Worldliness) and, on the other hand, the certainty of Brazil's own Europeaness/Westernness is the spring of the dynamics of dilemma. Antônio Cândido starts his master work, the *Introdução à Literatura Brasileira*, with the following sentence: "Brazilian literature is part of the literatures of Western Europe." (2007: 11) I do not doubt the historical validity of the identification for the majority of the writers that he has in mind; I merely want to call attention to the fact that, once one assumes such a posture, the confrontation with the inevitable realization that Brazil is *also* an "other" sets in motion a dilemmatic (diaboli-

a new creative twist. It would seem that they alter the previous relation between artist (upper class) and subject (popular) by negotiating with local subjects the making of the actual process of making the film (2007).

5 Concerning *Central Brasil*, the author insightfully argues, "Now naturalized through a documentarist appeal, fiction transforms the central station into the very savage and adverse nature that encompasses the villain named Pedrão, murderer of street kids and member of a gang of traffickers of human organs." (Nagib 2007: 70)

cal) dynamic in the national project. Such a confrontation is important as this literature is the mainstay and one of the main means of formulation of the national project itself.

In the late 19th century, Euclides da Cunha drafted his major work *Os Sertões* as a response to the pain caused in him by the brutality of the confrontation with Brazil's interior diversity—that "tragedy of the clash of cultures," as Antônio Candido called it. The book reflects the violent challenge to the author's identity resulting from his encounter with profound inhumanity. Being a confirmed Republican, Euclides da Cunha considered the religious leader Antônio Conselheiro and his followers a menace to the new political order. Hence he publicly argued in favour of the military campaign to repress the movement. As the events unfolded, however, he was personally confronted with the violent physical destruction and systematic murder by the military of these "others". In the process, these others came to reveal themselves to be "brothers" and the writer was assaulted by deep feelings of co-responsibility that so tortured him that he undertook the task of attempting to make sense of what was at stake. He wrote what remains perhaps the most extraordinary feat of Lusophone anthropological literature: *Os Sertões* (1933 [1902]).

Willi Bolle argues that half a century later, the central problem that Guimarães Rosa addresses in Brazil's most famous novel—*Grande Sertão: Veredas*—is essentially the same (2004: 26-7). For Euclides da Cunha, the dilemma was lived in flesh and blood; Guimarães Rosa, however, wisely transports it to the realm of fiction by means of the demonic trope. However, what he describes through his Brazilian rendering of the Faustian bargain is no less true or ethically challenging.

To this day, Brazil's religious kaleidoscope is integrated by the fear of the Devil. "The Devil," the anthropologist Ronaldo de Almeida tells us, "is the figure of the Christian universe within which are framed all the divinities of other religions. Thus, he becomes paradoxically the articulator of the continuity between the beliefs and of the circulation of people through all that Catholic-Afro-Spiritist-Pentecostal pool of religiousness." (2000: 199) The Devil pervades the tropical utopia and is constantly being evoked by fiction and by the mass culture, not with the terrific moralistic implications that he or she would have in an North American Protestant context, for example, but with an eye to a playful and workaday relationship. This is clearly exemplified in the Bahian public's enthusiastic response to long running plays such as *Vixe Maria: Deus e o Diabo na Bahia*, where Bahian life is described through the gaze of a long-suffering Devil. In such performances we witness the emergence, with almost clinical precision, of the three supposed "defects" which the central character

of Ariano Suassuna's novel *Romance d'A Pedra do Reino* attributes to himself: "historical deviation", "obscene deviation" and "demonic derision".

As he puts it, his proneness to laughter "is not a matter of despair: it is only that I constantly see the Damned one in all of her aspects!" (2007: 540) Faced with that vision, he confesses, he had to become truly "*um safado galopeiro e galhofeiro*" ("a riding and deriding bastard" – *ibid.*: 539). Seriousness and belief dissolve when faced with the aptness of the demonic metaphor to describe such a world. In a similar vein, Olavo Bilac declares at the conclusion of his essay on the Devil, "But let us not waste any more time with this horror! Let us rather laugh a little at the Devil's expense, for whose fault so many people have suffered, cried and died in this world." (1912: 155) The oxymoronic tragedy of the sentence is, I believe, a marvellous manifestation of how the demonic trope comes to condense Brazil's sense of itself as dilemmatic.

A nation of pactários

According to Willi Bolle, Guimarães Rosa's masterwork is centrally integrated by the argument that, like the novel's main character, Riobaldo, Brazil is a nation of *pactários*, that is of people who signed a pact with the Devil. There, the sense of jeopardy is so intense that all possible wellbeing comes to depend on some sort of compromise with the forces of evil that surround one. Willi Bolle's argument in *Grandesertão.br* is convincing but we are still left with the question of knowing what kind of Devil we are talking about. For not all Devils are alike and it makes a difference what sort of Devil is at stake—as becomes apparent by contrast to the Sarakatsani Devil.

As a matter of fact, the Devil presents him/herself in different guises: in the words of Olavo Bilac, "you may be sure that any man imagines the Devil according to their own temperament ..." (1912: 161). The very same perky black dog, written about by Goethe or by Ariano Suassuna (2007: 520), ends up looking like a pack of hounds, becoming plural. The theological context in which this polythetic sequence of images is reflected largely determines its meaning as well as the powers that are attributed to it and, further still, the implications of attempting to put those powers to use. In Brazil itself, the notion shatters into a plurality of representations *Diabo /Demônio /Belzebú /Satanás /Capeta /Sacy /Capóra /Bode-Velho /Besta-Fera /Exú /Maria Padilha/ Pomba-gira /Ogun-Xerokê*, etc. One does, of course, distinguish each one of these, but one also knows for sure that one is talking about the same entity—Édison Carneiro's problems with the relation between Exú and the Devil are a function of his condition as an intellectual, not in any way a reflection of his Bahian subjects' opinion. The range of definitional overlap between all of these demons is considerable, prob-

ably as large as the divergence between them. As Donald Davidson might have argued (2004), we are fooled by our common language both if we think that all those demons are the same *and* if we fail to recognize the considerable overlap of similarities. Parts of their common history are alike, others differ. The Devil's plurality is an intrinsic part of his and her essential deviousness.

Capeta or *Bode-Velho*—demonic invocations much in use in the interior drylands (*sertão*)—appear as principles of death, but it has to be acknowledged that such a death is seldom distant from a sardonic restatement of life. Forms of predatory, demonic alliance are inscribed into the very *fantasias galhofeiras* (derisive fantasies) that identify the *sertão*, being redolent with a transgressive kind of sexuality. The demonic dog of Suassuna does not limit himself to provoking laughter in his victims, as in Goethe's *Dr. Faustus*. There is no denying that Suassuna's Paraíba version of the Devil's dog also produces laughter. But, instead of merely wagging his tail, he does it by fouling up the most prim and proper lady of the town ("fucking her", as her senile husband comes to admit).⁶

The demonic sexual bivalence that Laura de Mello e Souza encounters in the sexual fantasies of the Inquisitors—reflected in the confessions they extract under torture—are still present in figures such as the *Exú Duas Cabeças*, the two-headed hermaphrodite version of Exú, that one encounters for sale in Salvador's markets. Thus, in Brazil, we meet up with an explicit discourse and a complex imagistic elaboration of the Devil's sexual ambivalence—which points less towards a gender issue, in the anthropological definition of the term, then towards a discourse on desire and sexuality and the way they pervade everyday relations.

Conclusion

Back at the turn of the 20th century, Olavo Bilac explained to us that there were two polar positions that structure the Devil's plurality in Brazil: "I was speaking to you of the sorcery of the blacks in the *sanzalas*, at the time of captivity. Now note, in the legends of the *sertão*, a tradition of the Shabbat is also to be found." (1912: 150) Indeed, the *Capeta* of the drylands, typified in the figure of the Old Goat (*Bode Velho*), approximates a more dualist world in which the principle of Evil can be identified when faced with God's goodness. In contrast, the coastal *Exú*, bisexual and ambivalent, immanent to all divinities, is far from effecting a clear differentiation with the divinity of the type that John Campbell identified among the Sarakatsani.

Contrary to the Sarakatsani, however, both of the Brazilian Devils have to be approached through some form of compromise. The former, more easily

⁶ In the Globo film version of *A Pedra do Reino* the dog is transmuted into a Devil and the copulation is explicit.

othered, reaches out paradigmatically to the principle of the "pact"; the latter, immanent and less perceptibly external, reaches out syntagmatically to the principle of the "captivity". Between the two extremes and in the superimposition of both, a field of demonic variation is constituted, the main matrix of which is the impossibility of formulating oneself. This referential bipolarity when faced with the impossibility of formulating the lived world is expressed in Brazilian literature through all these processes of fantastic demonic mediation that we have been identifying.

Again—and, as it would seem, contrary to the Greek case—if I stress that, in the Brazilian Devil's sexual ambivalence, the issue of gender is less important than that of actual sexuality, it is because this eroticization is explicitly used both by contemporary literature and by popular culture as a means to formulate a national self-image in which love and violence not only coexist but embrace each other. This embrace between *love* (as in passion, sexual pleasure and the sharing of identity) and *violence* (pain, destruction, death) is properly speaking the adobe that keeps together this dilemmatic Brazil—as so many writers have noted before me. The terms used by Bilac to end his essay point in the same direction. He has recourse to the metaphor of Carnival in order to explain that "the Wisdom of our civilized epoch" no longer fears to walk arm in arm with the Devil, "as it knows he is nothing but an invention" (1912: 165-6). If it were otherwise, Bilac tells us, he would not be able to afford to finish his paper with the following supposition: "Let us, then, imagine that Satan had truly existed, and still exists today." If he did, then clearly he would be responsible for two of the most important inventions of "our era": "the woman's kiss" and "Science"! And so he closes off the essay: "If he is indeed the author of all that is imputed to him, it has to be confessed that men owe him an enormous debt of gratitude." (1912: 168-9)

To close off myself, I return to the wisdom of my lady friend, with which I started this paper; much like Olavo Bilac, she too could see in the Devil a series of salvific elements that are indispensable if we are to live well in this ambiguous and dangerous world ... a world that, to the extent that it is permeated by the Devil, is identical to many other human worlds but which, in the Brazilian case, and unlike the Sarakatsani, is profoundly dilemmatized by an internal polarization that attributes to it a characteristically demonic appearance.

All attempts to exorcise the Devil based on a monotheistic outlook will ultimately reinforce the categories that produce Brazil's dilemmaticity and, thus, reproduce the conditions for the Devil's reappearance. The pervasiveness of the Devil in the form of the various "compromises" that characterize Brazilian popular religion suggests that a documentation of internal altering can only be achieved if the original utopian drive that created their land through "discov-

ery" and "captivity" is set aside in favour of a historicist conception of Brazilian society as an emergent phenomenon in its own right.