

Religious syncretism and circulation of transcultural objects: translative processes between oral and written expression. */Sincretismo religioso e circulação de objetos transculturais: processos translatórios entre oralidade e escrita*

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ABSTRACT

In the first section of this article, we will discuss some data about the Brazilian religious diversity, extracted from the latest Demographic Census in Brazil (IBGE, 2010), and the relationship between the statistics and the ethnic belonging of the adepts of different religions. In the second section, information will be presented on the trafficking and enslavement of Africans during Brazil's Colonial Period, aiming to emphasize the development of the Afro-Brazilian religious syncretism (VERGER, 1997) regarding the circulation of cultural objects (ESPAGNE, 2013). In the third section, some samples of the French translation of specific terms of Afro-Brazilian religions, found in three novels by Jorge Amado, will be addressed. First, we intend to highlight the complexity of the circulation and transference of cultural images, oral texts, cultic objects, etc. during the formation process of the religious syncretism that produced an intersection of many cultural histories; secondly, we want to point out the problematic of the French translation of some terms originated through the Afro-Brazilian syncretism.

KEYWORDS: Religious syncretism; Afro-Brazilian cults; Translation; Cultural transfers.

RESUMO

Na primeira parte deste artigo serão abordados alguns dados sobre a diversidade religiosa brasileira, extraídos do último Censo Demográfico (IBGE, 2010), e a relação entre as estatísticas e o pertencimento étnico dos adeptos das diferentes religiões. Na segunda parte serão apresentadas informações sobre o tráfico e a escravização de africanos durante o Período Colonial, enfatizando-se o desenvolvimento do sincretismo religioso afro-brasileiro (VERGER, 1997) no que se refere à circulação de objetos culturais (ESPAGNE, 2013). Na terceira parte serão comentados exemplos da tradução francesa de termos específicos de religiões afro-brasileiras encontrados em três romances de Jorge Amado. Pretende-se, por um lado, realçar a complexidade da circulação e transferência de imagens, textos orais, objetos cultícos etc. no processo de formação do sincretismo religioso que fez com que muitas histórias culturais se entrecruzassem; por outro lado, pretende-se destacar a problemática da tradução francesa de alguns termos oriundos desse mesmo sincretismo afro-brasileiro.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Sincretismo religioso; Cultos afro-brasileiros; Tradução; Transferências culturais.

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The rupture of the crossing made Yemojá what she has become today in the Americas. Her name itself has changed to Iemanjá in Brazil, Yemayá in Cuba and Yemendja in Haiti.¹

(Isabelle Boudet & Marion Aubrée)

1 Introduction

Thanks to the various contributions received from other nations, Brazil is nowadays a country characterized by a strong ethnic miscegenation, with great cultural, and religious variety. According to data from the 2010 Demographic Census, conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in recent years there has been greater religious diversification in Brazil, which has been generated by a gradually shrinking Catholic population, and the concomitant increase in adherents of other religions:

The results of the 2010 Demographic Census show the growth of the diversity among the religious groups in Brazil. The proportion of Catholics followed the downward trend observed in previous decades, although it remained still overwhelming. Simultaneously, the growth of the evangelical population was consolidated, rising from 15.4% in 2000 to 22% in 2010. Of those who declared themselves evangelical, 60.0% were of Pentecostal origin, 18.5% belonged to the so-called Evangelical Mission churches and 21.8% were classified as undetermined Evangelicals. The research also indicates an increase in the total number of Spiritists, as well as of those who declare themselves to be without religion, although at a slower pace than in the previous decade, and last, but not least, the group belonging to other religions. (IBGE, 2010)²

In this article, we will address aspects related to the circulation and transfer of cultural objects (ESPAGNE, 2013, p. 2), images, oral texts and ritual contexts specific to the Afro-Brazilian religiosity. In this sense, the term “Spiritist” mentioned above deserves special attention.

¹ « La rupture de la traversée a fait de Yemojá ce qu'elle est devenue aujourd'hui dans les Amériques. Son nom lui-même s'est transformé en Iemanjá au Brésil, Yemayá à Cuba et Yemendja en Haïti. »

² “Os resultados do Censo Demográfico 2010 mostram o crescimento da diversidade dos grupos religiosos no Brasil. A proporção de católicos seguiu a tendência de redução observada nas décadas anteriores, embora tenha permanecido majoritária. Em paralelo, consolidou-se o crescimento da população evangélica, que passou de 15,4% em 2000 para 22% em 2010. Dos que se declararam evangélicos, 60,0% eram de origem pentecostal, 18,5%, evangélicos de missão e 21,8%, evangélicos não determinados. A pesquisa indica também o aumento do total de espíritas, dos que se declaram sem religião, ainda que em ritmo inferior ao da década anterior, e do conjunto pertencente às outras religiosidades.” Retrieved from: <https://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/noticias-censo?id=3&idnoticia=2170&view=noticia> (2018, November 20).

After all, although Spiritism in Brazil has developed according to the teachings of Alan Kardec ³, it can be stated, based on Prandi (2012)⁴, that many followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, fearing discrimination, declare themselves Spiritists or Catholics. Furthermore, according to the 2010 Demographic Census, “adepts of *Umbanda* and *Candomblé* remained at 0.3% in 2010”.⁵ The analysis of these numbers soon reminds us of the permanent historiographical uncertainty about the real number of Africans kidnapped and brought to Brazil during the Colonial Era, as the numbers below reveal:

Up to this date, it has not been possible to establish, with relative safety and a small margin of error, the number of imported slaves during the period of human trafficking, that in fact ended after 1850. [...] According to Afonso d’E. Taunay’s assessment, the number of Africans brought to Brazil reached 3,600,000, while Roberto Simonsen estimates this number at 3,300,000. The respected Brazilian economic historian Caio Prado Jr., for example, wrote that even before the massive imports of the 19th century, at least five or six million slaves had entered Brazil. Renato Mendonça minimizes this traffic, estimating it at a total of 6,830,000, and Afonso Bandeira de Mello calculated the number of Africans entering Brazil at 2,716,159 over only 93 years. Pedro Calmon extends this number to eight million, thus approaching Rocha Pombo, who estimates it at ten million.⁶ (MOURA, 2004, p. 290-291.)

The 2010 Demographic Census data allows us to see the relationship between the ethnic origin of individuals and their current religious affiliation. It is worth remembering that Spiritism was first established mainly in the South and Southeast of Brazil, where there is a greater predominance of people of the “white race”. In the very beginning, the Afro-Brazilian cults were

³ His real name was Hyppolyte Léon Denizard Rivail; cf. KARDEC, [1825] 2005, p. 9.

⁴ “Sociologists of religion who use census data have long known that most Afro-Brazilians are hidden in the rubrics ‘Catholic’ and ‘Spiritist’ (Camargo, 1961). It was hoped, however, that the new climate of religious freedom, which is breathed more and more among us, and a probable increase in the level of awareness, resulting from movements of desynchronization of Afro-Brazilian religions, would contribute to solving this question of ill-defined identity”. [Original excerpt: “Há muito, os sociólogos da religião que usam dados dos censos sabem que boa parte dos afro-brasileiros está escondida nas rubricas “católico” e “espírita” (Camargo, 1961). Esperava-se, contudo, que o novo clima de liberdade religiosa, que se respira cada vez mais entre nós, e um provável aumento no nível de conscientização, resultante de movimentos de dessincretização das religiões afro-brasileiras, contribuíssem no sentido de resolver essa questão de identidade mal definida.”] (PRANDI, 2012, p. 99)

⁵ Retrieved from: <https://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/noticias-censo?id=3&idnoticia=2170&view=noticia> (2018, November 20).

⁶ “Até hoje não foi possível estabelecer, com relativa segurança e pequena margem de erro, o número de escravos importados durante o período em que durou o tráfico, extinto realmente depois de 1850. [...] Na avaliação de Afonso d’E. Taunay, chegou a 3.600.000 o número de africanos entrados, enquanto Roberto Simonsen estima uma quantidade de 3.300.000. O respeitado historiador econômico brasileiro Caio Prado Jr., por exemplo, escreveu que mesmo antes da maciça importação do século XIX pelo menos cinco ou seis milhões de escravos haviam entrado no Brasil. Renato Mendonça minimiza esse tráfico, estimando-o em um total de 6.830.000, e Afonso Bandeira de Mello calculou o número de africanos entrados em 2.716.159 somente num período de 93 anos. Pedro Calmon estende este número para oito milhões, aproximando-se, assim, de Rocha Pombo, que o calcula em dez milhões.”

formed in the Northeast of the country, where there is a greater ethnic composition with a marked presence of people of black or indigenous origin. On religion and color, says the IBGE:

In terms of color or race, the proportions of Catholics follow an approximate distribution to the population as a whole: 48.8% of them declare themselves white, 43.0%, brown, 6.8%, black, 1.0%, yellow and 0.3%, indigenous. Among Spiritists, 68.7% were white, a percentage much higher than the participation of this color or race group in the total population (47.5%). Among the Evangelicals, the highest proportion was brown (45.7%). The highest proportion of blacks was found in *umbanda* and *candomblé* (21.1%). In the group of those without religion, the most mentioned skin color was also brown (47.1%).⁷ (IBGE, 2010)⁸

The above data reveal a close relationship between “pretos” (“blacks”) and their attachment, as followers, to religions of African origin (e.g. *candomblé* and *umbanda*). It should be noted that the IBGE does not use the term “negros” (“negroes”) and, in defining the “color and race” aspects, it also resorts to the category “brown”, which includes “people who declared themselves to be *mulato*, *caboclo*, *cafuzo*, *mameluco* or colored black with someone of another color or race”; the category “indigenous” includes those who declared themselves to be “indigenous or *índio*” (IBGE, 1999)⁹. Whether or not the IBGE uses the term “black”, it is certain that its surveys on the representativeness of the black population in relation to the religions professed in Brazil cannot be dissociated from a sad historical fact: the trafficking – and the consequent enslavement – of Africans from the most different nations, cultures, languages and religions. Hereafter, we will list some aspects related to the circulation of cultic images and rituals, oral religious texts and other cultural objects, against the background of the evolution of Afro-Brazilian religious syncretism, indelibly marked by cultural transfers and transpositions.

2 Religious syncretism, circulation and transfer of cultural objects

⁷ “No que tange ao recorte por cor ou raça, as proporções de católicos seguem uma distribuição aproximada à do conjunto da população: 48,8% deles se declaram brancos, 43,0%, pardos, 6,8%, pretos, 1,0%, amarelos e 0,3%, indígenas. Entre os espíritas, 68,7% eram brancos, percentual bem mais elevado que a participação deste grupo de cor ou raça no total da população (47,5%). Entre os evangélicos, a maior proporção era de pardos (45,7%). A maior representatividade de pretos foi verificada na umbanda e candomblé (21,1%). No grupo dos sem religião, a declaração de cor mais presente também foi parda (47,1%).”

⁸ Retrieved from: <https://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/noticias-censo?id=3&idnoticia=2170&view=noticia> (2018, November 20).

⁹ On this special issue, we refer to the terms used by IBGE that can be found in the following link: <https://ww2.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/trabalhoerendimento/pnad99/metodologia99.shtm> (2018, November 21). In a more recent text on the ethnic-racial characteristics of the Brazilian population, the IBGE used the same terms: “In 2000, there are again the five categories currently used in the surveys, in the order in which they appear in the questionnaire – white, black, yellow, brown and indigenous – which also appear in the 2010 Demographic Census” (PETRUCCELLI; SABOIA, 2013).

After Brazil was *discovered*¹⁰, the Portuguese Crown put into practice the trafficking of Africans to enslave them. As soon as he assumed the Portuguese throne in 1481, King John II set about designating Diogo de Azambuja to build the Fortress of São Jorge da Mina in lands where today Ghana is located. “Azambuja reached this strategic point, where the entire trade network between Arab and Black Africa would converge in December 1481, and he obtained the agreement (and conversion) of the local king named Caramansa”¹¹ (BUENO, 1998, p. 80). With their Christian religiosity, the colonizers mixed hypocrisy and perversity. Verger¹² (1997, p. 24) reviewed the names of the slave ships (the so-called “*tumbeiros*”) mentioned in various documents until the year 1800 and verified that they all were “under the protection of the Virgin Mary, Christ, the saints and even the souls”¹³. Still according to the French scholar, “corvettes, galleys and vessels had beautiful names, such as: Our Lady of the Conception and Hope – Our Mother of God, Mother of Men, Saint Andrew of the Poor and Our Soul and Lady of Help, Saint Anthony of the Souls”¹⁴ (VERGER, 1997, p. 24).

In colonial Brazil, Africans were initially condemned to live in culturally and linguistically heterogeneous groups, which must have forced them to first engender a kind of temporary “hybrid language(s)” or, until they could find a standard language to communicate with each other and with their “owners”. Oral communication efforts certainly had to expand in order to embrace the social and religious contexts. Each ethnic group had brought its own images, oralities and other cultural objects that had to be intertwined in a complex process of cultural transfers. In this sense, we share this notion of M. Espagne:

Whenever a cultural object passes from one context to another, there occurs, consequently, a transformation of its meaning, a dynamic of *ressemantization*, which can only be fully recognized if the historical vectors of this passage are taken into account. Therefore, it can be said beforehand that research on cultural transfers concerns most of the humanities, even if it has been developed from several defined points of support. Transferring is not

¹⁰ In the Letter of Caminha to King Manuel, the chief clerk of the fleet uses the term *finding* (or its derivatives), as the passage shows: “Since the chief captain of this fleet of yours and thus the other captains write to Your Highness the new of the finding of this new land of yours [...]” (CAMINHA, 2000, p. 155).

¹¹ “Azambuja chegou a esse ponto estratégico, para onde convergiria toda a rede de comércio entre a África árabe e a África negra, em dezembro de 1481 e obteve a concordância (e a conversão) do rei local, Caramansa”.

¹² About Verger, says Prandi (2001, p. 27): “Brazil counted on a tireless promoter of the *orixás* religion, the French photographer and ethnologist Pierre Verger, who adopted *candomblé* as his religion and Brazil as his homeland, having started as a *babalaô* in Africa, when they began to call him Pierre Fatumbi Verger”.

¹³ “(...) sob a proteção da Virgem Maria, de Cristo, dos santos e, até mesmo, das almas”.

¹⁴ “(...) corvetas, galeras e sumacas tinham belos nomes, como: Nossa Senhora da Conceição e Esperança – Nossa May de Deus, May dos Homens, Santo André dos Pobres e Alma-Nossa Senhora da Ajuda, Santo Antônio e Almas”

transporting, but rather metamorphosing, and the term is not reduced, in any case, to the poorly circumscribed and very banal issue of cultural exchanges. It is less the circulation of cultural goods than their interpretation that is at stake. (ESPAGNE, 2013, p. 1)¹⁵

By relying on Espagne's words, we sense that during the colonial period Africans were able to achieve, by means of orality¹⁶, a complex metamorphosis of the most diverse religious manifestations gathered in the Brazilian space. Thus, the different images represented by the myths and divinities of Africa were submitted to a synthesis that remains inconclusive, and in constant development. Thanks to its complexity, this evolution has not been reduced to mere cultural exchanges, but it has been developed into a permanent process of (re)interpretations and re-significations of the transferred contents. According to Prandi (2001), recently a wealthier social layer that practices *candomblé*, "with adepts not necessarily of black origin", has driven social changes such as the search to combine religious practice with writing, thus trying to find explanations in myths. They discover that "the myth is impregnated in the ritual objects, in the songs, in the colors and drawings of the clothes and necklaces, in the secret rituals of initiation, in the dances and in the architecture of the temples (...)" (PRANDI, 2001, p. 19).

Initially, the interactions between different religions that took place in colonial Brazil gave rise to the religious manifestations most closely linked to African roots, among which include *candomblé*;¹⁷ at a later stage, the establishment of a more intimate dialogue with the Catholic

¹⁵Our translation of this excerpt: « Tout passage d'un objet culturel d'un contexte dans un autre a pour conséquence une transformation de son sens, une dynamique de resémantisation, qu'on ne peut pleinement reconnaître qu'en tenant compte des vecteurs historiques du passage. On peut donc dire d'emblée que la recherche sur les transferts culturels concerne la plupart des sciences humaines même si elle s'est développée à partir d'un certain nombre de points d'ancrage précis. [...] Transférer, ce n'est pas transporter, mais plutôt métamorphoser, et le terme ne se réduit en aucun cas à la question mal circonscrite et très banale des échanges culturels. C'est moins la circulation des biens culturels que leur réinterprétation qui est en jeu ». (ESPAGNE, 2013, p. 1)

¹⁶Prandi (2001, p. 25) stresses the "existence of notebooks kept secret by *candomblé* adepts as a means of preserving and passing on the mythical, magical and ritual knowledge cultivated in Brazilian *terreiros*", but adds that "this is rare and recent", since "most of the leaders of the *terreiros* and other initiates were illiterate".

¹⁷"Place where the ceremonies of certain African cults more connected to African traditions take place // Afro-Brazilian cult that includes the following nations: a) Sudanese - Jeje (Dahomeyans), Nago (Yoruba) – comprising Keto, Ijesha, Nago and Oyo rituals – and their derivations; b) Bantu: Angola, Kongo and their derivations; c) with indigenous influence – the so-called *candomblé de caboclo*. The Yoruba gods (aka. *orishas*) and rituals predominated and influenced the others. // In Uruguay and Argentina, where the term 'candombe' came from, it meant profane black dances. // Currently applied, generically and wrongly, by laity, to any cult with African influence. Probably derived from 'candombe' and Yoruba *ilê*". [Original excerpt: "Local onde se realizam as cerimônias de certos cultos africanos mais ligados às tradições africanas. // Culto afro-brasileiro que abrange as seguintes nações: a) sudaneses – jeje (daomeanos), nagô (iorubá) – compreendendo os rituais keto, ijexá, nagô, oyó – e compostos; b) bantos – angola, congo e compostos; c) com influência indígena – candomblé de caboclo. Os deuses (orixás) e rituais dos ioruba (nagô) predominaram e influíram sobre os outros. // No Uruguai e na Argentina, de onde veio o termo 'candombe', significava danças profanas de negros. // Atualmente aplicado, de forma genérica e erradamente, por leigos, a qualquer terreiro de qualquer culto com influência africana. F[ormação]. p[rovável]. de 'candombe' e ior[ubá]. 'ilê'"]. (CACCIATORE, 1988, p. 78).

religion and the indigenous cults was inevitable, giving origin to *umbanda*¹⁸, recognized as a Brazilian religion. In *candomblé* there is the category of “nation”, applied to the ethnic origin attributed to each trafficked ethnic group. Each nation also designates religious rituals, chants and different kinds of drums and drums beats according to each ethnic origin. In consonance with Cacciatore (1988, p. 178), the best known nations are: “Nago (Sudanese, from Nigeria and part of the ancient Kingdom of Dahomey) and their Keto, Ijesha, Oyo deities; Jeje (Ewe: Dahomeyan black people); Mina (Fanti-Ashanti, from the Gold Coast); Muçurumin (Malian); Angola, Kongo, Cabinda, Cassange, Mozambique etc.¹⁹ According to each nation²⁰, Afro-Brazilian pantheon deities may be designated as *orishas*, *vodun* or *inquices*²¹. *Orisha*, a Yoruba term formed from *ori* (head) and *şa* (guardian), means *guardian of the head*, a kind of guardian angel. *Vodum*, in turn, is a term of Ewe origin corresponding to the Yoruba term *orisha*. In Angola-Kongo *candomblés*, the term *inquice* is used with the same sense of *orisha* or *vodum*.

For Verger (1997, p. 25.), the moments when blacks gathered to perform their *batuques* (traditional ritual drumming) in the 18th century could not yet be understood as a kind of syncretism, because, at that time, “the characteristics of African deities were still unknown to the

¹⁸ Cacciatore (1988, p. 242) states about the *umbanda*: “Religion formed in Brazil (although some believers deny it) by a selection of doctrinal values and rituals, made from the fusion of the Kongo-Angola African cults, already influenced by Yoruba influences, mixed with the indigenous *pajelança* (giving birth to a first type of *candomblé de caboclo*), and still suffering from the influences of Islamized males, Catholicism and Spiritism (currently there is a ritual line, in certain centers of *umbanda*, with a table and mediumistic reception of ordinary dead spirits, very close to Kardecism) and, subsequently, of occultism”. [Original excerpt: “Religião formada no Brasil (apesar de o negarem alguns crentes) por uma seleção de valores doutrinários e rituais, feitos a partir da fusão dos cultos africanos congo-angola, já influenciados pelo nagô, com a pajelança (dando um primeiro tipo de *candomblé de caboclo*), sofrendo ainda influências dos malês islamizados, do catolicismo e do espiritismo (atualmente há uma linha ritual, em certos centros de *umbanda*, com mesa e recepção mediúnicamente de espíritos de mortos comuns, muito próxima do Kardecismo) e, posteriormente, do ocultismo”].

¹⁹ According to the author, Males were found mainly in Bahia, Pernambuco and Maranhão, while blacks from Angola, Congo, Cabinda, Cassange and Mozambique were found mainly in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais. (CACCIATORE, 1988, p. 178)

²⁰ “*Candomblés* belong to different ‘nations’ and therefore perpetuate different traditions: Angola, Kongo, Jeje (i.e. Ewe), Nago (the term used by the French to designate all Yoruba speaking blacks on the Coast of Slaves), Keto, Ijesha. It is possible to distinguish these ‘nations’ from each other by the way they play the drums (either with the hand or with the sticks), by the music, by the language of the songs, by the liturgical garments, sometimes by the names of the deities, and finally by certain traits of their rituals. However, the influence of the Yoruba dominates without dispute the set of African sects, imposing their gods, the structure of their ceremonies and their metaphysics on the Daomeyans, the Bantu”. [Original excerpt: “Os *candomblés* pertencem a ‘nações’ diversas e perpetuam, portanto, tradições diferentes: angola, congo, jeje (isto é, euê), nagô (termo com que os franceses designavam todos os negros de fala ioruba, da Costa dos Escravos), queto, ijexá. É possível distinguir essas “nações” umas das outras pela maneira de tocar o tambor (seja com a mão, seja com as varetas), pela música, pelo idioma dos cânticos, pelas vestes litúrgicas, algumas vezes pelos nomes das divindades, e enfim por certos traços do ritual. Todavia, a influência dos iorubás domina sem contestação o conjunto das seitas africanas, impondo seus deuses, a estrutura de suas cerimônias e sua metafísica aos daomeanos, aos bantos.”] (BASTIDE, 2001, p. 29)

²¹ Cacciatore (1988) writes *inkice*, Verger *inkissi* (1997), and the Brazilian Houaiss Dictionary (2001) *inquice*, with this definition: “in the *candomblés* of the Angolan and Kongo rites, each one of the deities equivalent to the orishas of the Nagos”.

Portuguese masters and clergy, while the slaves could not also know the details of the life of saints”. As time went by, cultural assimilation of the black community was intensified and, simultaneously, came closer, even if forcibly, to Portuguese Catholicism. In order to secretly worship their gods, they gradually discovered that they could use the names of Catholic saints; in doing so they were able to praise their ancestral divinities. Surely it is not easy to determine precisely when and how the process of religious syncretism began, but “it seems to have been based, in a general way, on details of religious prints that could recall certain characteristics of the African gods” (VERGER, 1997, p. 26). Verger lists some of the details of this both translative and trans-religious process of transferring cultural, cultic and ritual objects:

It may seem strange, at first glance, that Shango, god of thunder, violent and virile, has been compared to St. Jerome, represented by a bald elder bent over old books, but who is often accompanied, in his images, by a lion docilely lying at his feet. And since the lion is one of the symbols of kingship among the Yoruba, St. Jerome was compared to Shango, the third sovereign of this nation. The approach between Obaluaye and St. Lazarus is more evident, for the former is the god of smallpox, and the body of the latter is represented covered with wounds and abscesses.

Iemanjá, mother of many other orishas, was syncretized with Our Lady of the Conception, and Nanan Buruku, the oldest of the divinities of the waters, was compared to St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary. Oya-Iansã, Shango's first wife, linked to storms and lightning, was identified with Saint Barbara. According to legend, the father of this saint sacrificed her because of her conversion to Christianity, and soon after, he himself was struck by lightning and reduced to ashes. The relationship between the Lord of Bonfim and Oshala, divinity of creation, is more difficult to explain, except for the immense respect and love that both inspire.²² (VERGER, 1997, p. 26)

In general terms, it can be said that the transmission of oral contents managed to generate, within an intricate linguistic-cultural and multi-religious babel, an amalgam of experiences, which shared many similarities with a translative process: each African deity was transferred – or “translated” – in the form of a Catholic saint, while contexts and objects from different African cultures were adapted, digested, assuming new hybrid forms. Hence, a process

²² “Pode parecer estranho, à primeira vista, que Xangô, deus do trovão, violento e viril, tenha sido comparado a São Jerônimo, representado por um ancião calvo e inclinado sobre velhos livros, mas que é frequentemente acompanhado, em suas imagens, por um leão docilmente deitado a seus pés. E como o leão é um dos símbolos de realeza entre os iorubás, São Jerônimo foi comparado a Xangô, o terceiro soberano dessa nação. A aproximação entre Obaluáê e São Lázaro é mais evidente, pois o primeiro é o deus da varíola, e o corpo do segundo é representado coberto de feridas e abscessos. Iemanjá, mãe de numerosos outros orixás, foi sincretizada com Nossa Senhora da Conceição, e Nanã Buruku, a mais idosa das divindades das águas, foi comparada a Sant’Ana, mãe da Virgem Maria. Oiá-Iansã, primeira mulher de Xangô, ligada às tempestades e aos relâmpagos, foi identificada com Santa Bárbara. Segundo a lenda, o pai dessa santa sacrificou-a devido à sua conversão ao cristianismo, sendo ele próprio, logo em seguida, atingido por um raio e reduzido a cinzas. A relação entre o Senhor do Bonfim e Oxalá, divindade da criação, é mais dificilmente explicável, a não ser pelo imenso respeito e amor que ambos inspiram.”

of intercultural anthropophagy was formed even before the advent of the 1920s' Anthropophagic Manifest in Brazilian Literature.

Turning our gaze to the contemporary world, we will analyze some examples of French translations for Afro-Brazilian religious terms extracted from three novels by Jorge Amado. While dealing with these examples, we will address some contents extracted from the exuberant material engendered in full Afro-Brazilian oral syncretism, now manifested through the printed form.

3 The complex act of “translating” Afro-Brazilian religious terms

The considerations made above certainly allow us to reflect more firmly on the high degree of complexity in which the circulation of multiple theogonies and African religious practices took place, considering that these were intertwined in the South American territory colonized by the Portuguese. Relying on the conceptions of Espagne (2013), to which we have already referred previously, we believe it is necessary to delimit who are the “vectors” that are responsible for the cultural transfers of Afro-Brazilian religious syncretism in recent times and/or in the present moment:

All social groups likely to move from one national or linguistic, ethnic or religious space to another can be vectors of cultural transfers. By transporting goods, traders have also always conveyed representations or knowledge. Translators, teachers specialized in a certain foreign cultural area, political, economic or religious emigrants, artists in response to orders they received, and last, but not least mercenaries constitute innumerable transfer vectors, and it is therefore appropriate to take into account their different mediations. (ESPAGNE, 2013, p. 2).²³

There is no doubt that Jorge Amado, concerning the Afro-Brazilian syncretism, was an important – if not the most important – vector, since, by publishing his novels, he allowed the circulation – first in Brazil – of a countless number of images and cultural contexts transferred by Africans over centuries on Brazilian soil. Here, the objects and contents of the religious legacy left by multiple sub-Saharan ethnic groups deserve special emphasis. Thanks to the repercussion of

²³ Our translation of this excerpt: « Tous les groupes sociaux susceptibles de passer d'un espace national ou linguistique ethnique ou religieux à l'autre peuvent être vecteurs de transferts culturels. Les commerçants transportant des marchandises ont toujours véhiculé également des représentations ou des savoirs. Les traducteurs, les enseignants spécialistes d'une aire culturelle étrangère, les émigrés politiques, économiques ou religieux, les artistes répondant à des commandes, les mercenaires, constituent autant de vecteurs de transferts, et il convient de tenir compte de leurs différentes médiations » (ESPAGNE, 2013, p. 2).

his works abroad, particularly in France, his translators themselves also became vectors that allowed the dissemination of the information contained in his novels. Turning our attention to the translation of three of Amado's novels into French, we will address the strategy found by French translators in order to make explicit, through lists of vocabularies ("glossaries"), complex terms coming from Afro-Brazilian religions. We will try to verify in what way the explanations contained in these glossaries can – or cannot – translate/explain in the French language the result of a complex synthesis of intercultural, inter-religious and trans-linguistic interrelationships. Our analysis is based on the following works translated into French: *Tereza Batista*²⁴ (1974, p. 439-441; henceforth TT1²⁵), *Gabriela, girofle et cannelle*²⁶ (1986, p. 569-573; TT2) and *Bahia de tous les saints*²⁷ (1981, p. 371-373; TT3). Our focus is on terms directly linked to *candomblé*, including some of the Bahian cuisine (which in general derives from the same religious cults) and resulting from the circulation of cultural knowledge in general – and trans-religious knowledge in particular – of various African peoples. In the three translations, the lists are named, respectively, as: a) *Lexique* b) *Glossaire* and c) *Glossaire*; in these lists one can find typically Bahian and/or Afro-Brazilian terms that were maintained in Portuguese by translators, perhaps to preserve their exoticism. Below, we will present and comment on some of these terms²⁸.

In TT1, next to the term *abará*²⁹, it says: "cake made of black bean flour, ground dried shrimp, pepper, cooked in palm oil and served wrapped in banana leaves"³⁰. And this is how *abará* is explained in TT2: "cookies made of bean paste with the addition of pepper and fried in palm oil. They are served in the form of little balls wrapped in banana leaves."³¹ In TT3, we have: "bean croquette that is first cooked in coconut milk and then shrimps are added, then it is fried in oil, after being wrapped in banana leaves."³² The three translators try to make it clear that this is a cake, cookie or bean dough croquette. However, it must be made clear that the dough is made with cowpea. In TT2, we see this explanation for *acarajé*: "cookies which are of the same genre

²⁴ "Tereza Batista home from the wars".

²⁵ The letters "TT" stand for "Target Text".

²⁶ "Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon".

²⁷ "Bahia of all-saints".

²⁸ All parts of the original glossaries in French have been translated by the author of this article. The original excerpts will be presented in footnotes.

²⁹ *Abará* [àbàlá]: steamed crushed cowpea dumpling (PRANDI, 2001, p. 563).

³⁰ « *Abara* : gâteau fait de farine de haricots noirs, crevettes sèches hachées, piments, cuit dans l'huile de palme et servi enroulé dans des feuilles de bananier ».

³¹ « *Abara* : beignets faits de pâte de haricot additionnée de piment et frits dans l'huile de *dendê*. On les sert sous forme de boulettes enveloppées dans des feuilles de bananier ».

³² « *Abara* : croquette de haricot qu'on cuit d'abord dans du lait de coco, puis à laquelle on ajoute des crevettes et qu'on fait frire dans l'huile après l'avoir enveloppée de feuilles de bananier. »

as the *abarás*³³. In TT3, it says: “*acarajé*: white bean croquette, using the so-called cowpea, cooked in palm oil”³⁴. These are imprecise definitions, because *acarajés* are fried, and not cooked in palm oil.

With regard to Angola, one of the remaining nations in Brazil, we find this explanation in TT1: “Blacks of Angolan origin and, by extension, a sect of the *candomblé* and its members”³⁵. This shows that in the translation it was necessary to clarify that the term does not necessarily refer to the country known as Angola. Regarding an object of worship, the *atabaques*, TT1 defines them as follows: “ritual drums; they are played with the palms of their hands”³⁶. Bastide (2001, p. 29) explains that the way the drum is played varies according to the nation, that is, they can be played either “with the hands” or “with the sticks”. In the glossary, the style of playing the drums used by the Angolan nation is generalized: with the palm of the hands.

In TT1, the term *candomblé* is described as follows: “religion of the blacks of Bahia with complex rituals and sumptuous ceremonies. This same word also designates the ceremonies and sanctuaries where they take place”. If this explanation tries to cover the two main meanings of the term, TT2 presents, in turn, this rather vague explanation: “*Candomblé*: ceremony of an Afro-Brazilian religion of Yoruba origin”.³⁷ In TT3, we also find an imprecise definition: “*Candomblé*: synonym of *macumba* (cf. below)³⁸”. As the TT3 refers to the word *macumba*, let us see what is said about it: “ritual ceremony of witchcraft, of African origin”³⁹. In this case, we deal with a mistaken definition that ignores the theogony and the complex pantheon of the divinities of Yoruba, Ewe and/or Bantu origin etc. The TT1 also defines *macumba* in an unclear way: “*Macumba*: fetishist ceremony of African origin that is not codified as the *candomblé* – *macumbeiros*, their adepts”⁴⁰. In TT2 we find an explanation taken from Bastide: “*Macumba*: syncretic religion consisting of a ‘mixture of African religion, indigenous religion, popular Catholicism and Spiritism, in which Spiritism is increasingly dominating to the detriment of the African heritage (Roger Bastide)’”.⁴¹ In this context, we should note the definition of *terreiro* in

³³ « *Acarajés*: beignets du même genre que les *abarás* ».

³⁴ « *Acarajé*: croquette de haricot blanc dit « fradinho » cuite à l’huile de dendé.

³⁵ « *Angola*: Noirs d’origine angola et, par extension, une secte du *candomblé* et ses membres ».

³⁶ « *Atabaques*: tambours rituels. On en joue en les frappant de la paume des mains ».

³⁷ « *Candomblé*: cérémonie d’une religion afro-brésilienne d’origine Yoruba ».

³⁸ « *Candomblé*: synonyme de *macumba* (cf. plus loin) ».

³⁹ « *Macumba*: cérémonie rituelle de sorcellerie, d’origine africaine ».

⁴⁰ « *Macumba*: cérémonie fétichiste d’origine africaine qui n’est pas codifiée comme le *candomblé* – *macumbeiros*, ses adeptes ».

⁴¹ « *Macumba*: religion syncrétique constituée par ‘un mélange de religion africaine, de religion indienne, de catholicisme populaire et de spiritisme, où le spiritisme domine de plus en plus au détriment de l’héritage africain (Roger Bastide)’ ».

TT1: “another name to designate the *candomblé* and concomitantly the enclosure that is reserved for it”.⁴² In TT2, it says: “*Terreiro*: place where the cult of *candomblé* is celebrated”⁴³.

In *candomblé*, another key term is *babalorisha*, which Cacciatore (1988, p. 60) defines as the “head of a *terreiro*”. In TT1, we have: “*Babalorisha*: cult chief in the Northeast of Brazil.”⁴⁴ In this case, we should make at least one comment: this term is not only restricted to Northeastern *candomblés*, but it is also legitimate to use it in other Brazilian regions. Certainly, there are still other competing denominations, including the female forms corresponding to *babalorisha*, also partly listed in the translations analyzed. In TT1, we find: “*Mãe-de-santo* or *pai-de-santo*: popular name of the female or male *ialorisha* [sic], great priestess of *candomblé*”⁴⁵. The translator is mistaken in applying both genders to the term *ialorisha*. The list also contains this explanation: “*ialorisha* – supreme priestess of a *candomblé*”⁴⁶. Still regarding the hierarchy of *candomblé*, TT1 explains *mãe-pequena*: “female adept situated between the female head of the *terreiro* and the initiates”⁴⁷. This definition establishes a relationship between *mãe-pequena*, *mãe-de-santo* (a female head of the *terreiro*) and *filha-de-santo* (a female initiate), although the last concept doesn’t appear in the French glossary. According to Cacciatore (1988, p. 167), *mãe-pequena* is the same as *kekerê* or *jibonã*, terms of Yoruban origin, that is, “the female function of the *mãe-de-santo*’s helper; [...] she accompanies the *filhas-de-santo* in their initiation, takes them food, teaches them, punishes them if they fail and supervises the initiates (*yaos*) as well as the development of public and private ceremonies” (CACCIATORE, 1988, p. 154). In TT1, *yao* is not related as a term, but it appears in TT2: *yao*: “wife of the gods” in the religion of *candomblé*”⁴⁸. It is an explanation based on the Yoruban origin of the word (*iyawó* = young wife), but it needs to be defined in a more restricted way within *candomblé*: “daughter or son of a saint; lower degree of the initiatic career of those who enter into an *orisha* trance” (PRANDI, 2001, p. 566). TT1 registers the term *ogan*: “civil protector of *candomblé*”⁴⁹. Prandi (2001, p. 567) adds: “in Africa, someone who occupies a superior position, a master; in Brazil, a male *candomblé* priestly position, including the *tocador* (the one who plays the drums), the sacrificer [of animals] and men of prestige affectionately linked to cult groups.

⁴² « *Terreiro* : autre nom pour désigner le *candomblé* en même temps que l’enceinte qui lui est réservée.

⁴³ « *Terreiro* : lieu où l’on célèbre le culte du *candomblé* ».

⁴⁴ « *Babalorishá*: chef de culte dans le Nord-Est du Brésil ».

⁴⁵ « *Mère-de-saint* ou *père de saint* : nom populaire de la, ou du *yalorisha*, grande prêtresse du *candomblé* ».

⁴⁶ « *Yalorisha* : prêtresse suprême d’un *candomblé* ».

⁴⁷ « *Mère-petite*: fidèle située entre la mère-de-saint et la fille-de-saint ».

⁴⁸ « *laô*: épouse des dieux » dans la religion du *candomblé*».

⁴⁹ « *Ogan*: protecteur civil du *candomblé*».

In TT1, the key concept *orisha* is defined as “saint or spirit, divinity of *candomblé*”⁵⁰, an explanation that is enough for French-speaking readers to understand, in a superficial way, the context treated. In the same glossary, the *orisha* named Ogun is presented as “the *orisha* of metals and also of war”⁵¹. In TT2, Ogun is described as the “Yoruba god of war, patron saint of blacksmiths”⁵². In both definitions, we see aspects of the archetype of Ogun. In TT1, Obaluaye appears as an “Afro-Brazilian deity syncretized with Saint Roch”,⁵³ referring there also to the specific rhythm of this *orisha*: “*Opanije*: in *candomblé*, the rhythm consecrated to Obaluaye”⁵⁴. TT1 also offers an explanation about Omulu: “*orisha* of smallpox and diseases in general, syncretized with Saint Lazarus”⁵⁵. In TT2, the glossary lists only Omulu: “Yoruba god often identified with Saint Lazarus. As an offering, they give him popcorn, of which he apparently is a great enjoyer.”⁵⁶ Obaluaye is a young form of Omulu; this *orisha*, also called Sha[m]panan (Yoruba) or Sapata (Fon version, according to Verger, 1997, p. 213), is the lord of cemeteries, for having dominion over fatal diseases. Verger (1997, 216) also reports: “It is syncretized with Saint Lazarus and Saint Roch in Bahia and Cuba, and with Saint Sebastian in Recife and Rio de Janeiro”. Concerning popcorn offerings, Boudet & Aubrée (p. 126) state: “He is celebrated on Tuesdays, the day on which they prepare popcorn, whose burnt grains are the metaphor of the pustules of smallpox”.⁵⁷ Oya or Iansan, is “the divinity of the winds, storms and the Niger River” (VERGER, 1997, p. 168), syncretized in Brazil with Saint Barbara and, in Cuba, with Our Lady of Candelaria”. Iansan is “the only *orisha* capable of facing and dominating the Eguns [souls of the dead]” (VERGER, 1997, p. 168). In TT1, Iansan is described as the “goddess of *candomblé*” (VERGER, 1997, p. 168)⁵⁸, a solely vague information, because in *candomblé* there are other female deities, each one with specific functions and archetypes. There is also a brief – but sufficient – explanation about Iansan’s husband: “Shango, god of thunder, one of the most powerful *orishas*”⁵⁹; this explanation is corroborated in TT2 by this definition: “Yoruba god of

⁵⁰ « *Orishá*: saint ou esprit, divinité du *candomblé*. »

⁵¹ « *Ogun*, ou Ogum, *orishá* des métaux et aussi de la guerre. »

⁵² « *Ogun* : dieu Yoruba de la guerre, patron des forgerons. »

⁵³ « *Obaluaé* : divinité afro-brésilienne syncrétisée avec saint Roch. »

⁵⁴ « *Opanigé* : dans le *candomblé*, rythme consacré à *Obaluaé*. »

⁵⁵ « *Omólú* : *orisha* de la variole et des maladies en générale syncrétisé avec Saint Lazare. »

⁵⁶ « *Omulu* : dieu Yoruba souvent identifié à saint Lazare. On lui donne en offrande du pop-corn (*pipocas*) dont il est, paraît-il, très friand. »

⁵⁷ Our translation of this excerpt: « Il est fêté le mardi, jour où on lui prépare du pop-corn, *pipoca* en portugais, et dont les grains soufflés sont la métaphore des pustules de la variole ».

⁵⁸ « Déesse du *candomblé*. »

⁵⁹ « *Shangô*: dieu du tonnerre, un des *orishas* les plus puissants. »

lightning, often identified with St. Jerome⁶⁰. In TT1, Oshala, also known as Obatala, is described; he has an old form, Oshalufan, and a young one, Oshaguián (CACCIATORE, 1988, 200): “Oshala: the supreme among all *orishas*, the master”⁶¹. In TT2, we find an allusion to his syncretism: “Oshala: the supreme deity of the Yoruban pantheon, often identified with Jesus Christ”⁶². In TT3, there are supplementary data about these deities: “Oshala and Oshalufan: characters of *macumba* and gods invoked during this ceremony.”⁶³

Final considerations

In our understanding, the *orishas* are divinities whose very mythological nature already inspires the capacity for transference of individual archetypes from themselves to their “children”, being, therefore, carriers of great (self-)translative potential. Verger (1997, p. 34) quotes Gisèle Cossard, a Frenchwoman who began in *candomblé* in the 1960s, later establishing herself as a *mãe-de-santo* in Brazil, where she died in 2016: “If we examine the initiated adepts, grouping them by *orishas*, we notice that they generally have common traits, both in biotype and psychological characteristics”. From the beginning of human trafficking from Africa to Brazil, through slavery until the present day, the many interactions that have arisen during the course of countless *histoires croisées*⁶⁴ produced cultural transfers – that is, “translations” – of images, objects, contexts, words contained in prayers, legends and chants, rematerialized and re-signified cult objects, among many other cultural items that managed to (af)firm themselves unequivocally through religious syncretism.

Certainly, this aspect of Brazilian religiosity will be perpetuated and continue to preserve with it a wide range of influences that go beyond its inter-religious and trans-religious character, having even helped to shape models of conduct and social actions that also include history, cuisine, fashion, slang, dance, architecture, music, literature, etc. Given its complexity and capillarity within the heterogeneous Brazilian society, we know how difficult it is, for Brazilians or for foreigners established in Brazil, to master so many subtleties and particularities of meanings. That said, we understand, finally, how arduous is the task of translators, especially those who translated in the pre-digital era, when they were obliged to embrace – without enough and

⁶⁰ « *Xangô* : dieu Yoruba de la foudre souvent identifié à saint Jérôme. »

⁶¹ « *Oshalá* : le plus grand des orishás, le maître. »

⁶² « *Oxalá* : divinité suprême dans le panthéon Yoruba, souvent identifiée à Jésus-Christ. »

⁶³ « *Oxala* & *Oxalufá* : personnages de Macumba et dieux invoqués au cours de celle-ci. »

⁶⁴ Cf. WERNER & ZIMMERMANN, 2004, p. 15.

appropriate searching facilities – the art of translating, explaining, adapting etc. in another language and/or culture the Afro-Brazilian legacy formed by multiple African pantheons.

Apart from prejudiced attitudes that still exist in Brazil concerning these matters, one could easily relate this inheritance, in order to better understand it and disseminate it, to other theogonies and/or to other pantheons, such as those of Germanic, Greek or Roman deities, which also within it archetypal characteristics that are easily identifiable with human paradigms.

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