The mixing of races that began during Portugal's colonization of Brazil in the year 1500 has continued to be characteristic of the Brazilian population. The fact that Brazil is a multiethnic society has spawned a belief that racial prejudice does not exist there. This belief expresses itself as the ideology that Brazil has a "racial democracy." Umbanda, a religion that originated in the southeast of Brazil in the 1920s, has been praised as an expression of this ideology. However, Umbanda has also been seen as one of the manifestations of white supremacy. This article will examine how prejudices against the black Brazilian population were expressed through the de-Africanization of Umbanda and the religious discourse that accompanied that process. It then goes on to examine the recent shift to a re-Africanization of the Afro-Brazilian religions.¹

THE AFRO-BRAZILIAN RELIGIONS

It is estimated that a total of 3,600,000 slaves were transported from Africa to Brazil between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries (Bastide 1978: 35), making Brazil the second-largest slave importer in the New World. During this period, the black slave population was actually larger than the ruling white minority. The slaves came mainly from Nigeria, Dahomey (Benin), Angola, Congo, and Mozambique. Although the institution of slavery split up families and spread these ethnic groups throughout the country, the slaves managed to maintain some links with their ethnic heritage. This was due to the fact, among other things, that the Portuguese minority used their policy of divide-and-rule to separate the slaves into different nações. The term nação (nation) refers to an ethnic group's local geographical area and their cultural traditions (for example, the Yoruba-speaking nations of Nigeria are the Nagô, Ketu, Ijeja, Egba, etc.). The unexpected conse-
quence of this division was that the concept of nação came to play an important role for the maintenance of the various African ethnic identities, and for the transmission of cultural and religious traditions.

The African slaves were banned from practicing their various native religions. The Roman Catholic church issued orders that the slaves should be baptized, and that they should take part in Mass and in the sacraments. In spite of the institutions of slavery and the Roman Catholic church, however, it remained possible for the slaves to communicate, transmit, and develop their cultural and religious traditions. There were various factors that helped them to maintain this continuity: the various ethnic groups continued to speak their mother tongues; there were a certain number of religious leaders among the slaves; and the link to Africa was constantly maintained through the arrival of new slaves.

Among the African religious traditions that came to influence the Afro-Brazilian religion, the cults of the orixás and voduns became particularly important. Orixás and voduns are deities of Yoruba and Jeje-speaking groups in Nigeria and Benin. In Africa, each of the deities presided over an aspect of nature, and at the same time over one family. In Brazil, as slavery split families, they came to preside over individuals. Central to the African religions as they developed in Brazil were the feasts for the orixás and voduns, which involved spirit possession and animal sacrifices.

The Afro-Brazilian religions constitute a relatively recent phenomenon in Brazilian religious history. For example, the first Candomblé terreiro, or house of Candomblé (literally: “a piece of land”), which is situated in the northeastern state of Bahia, is generally dated to 1830. These new religions first appeared in and around Brazil’s urban areas, as the slaves there had greater freedom of movement, and were able to organize themselves into nações. They eventually spread all across the country and took on names such as Catimbó, Tambor das Minas, Xangó, Candomblé, Macumba, and Batuques. The most traditional and purely African of these religions, such as Candomblé, originated in the northeast of Brazil. Candomblé comes from the state of Bahia, and has long been synonymous with Afro-Brazilian religious traditions in general. From the beginning, the pais-de-santos (Candomblé leaders) sought to re-Africanize the religion. This was possible in part because the boats traveling between Nigeria and Bahia kept the African connection alive. This continued even after the abolition of slavery in 1888. Freed slaves would travel to Yoruba areas, become initiated into the cult of the orixás, and then return to Brazil where they would found terreiros and revitalize the religious practice. As the Afro-Brazilian religions began to appear, the concept of nação was reinforced in signifi-
cance, partly as a symbol of the transmission of local religious traditions, and partly as an ethnic identity marker.3

Re-Africanized or not, the Afro-Brazilian religions still bear the effects of their interactions with other religious traditions, especially Catholicism. The orixás and voduns were juxtaposed with Catholic saints,4 and the interior of the terreiros possessed numerous Catholic elements, including altars and statuettes of saints, while the African religious objects were hidden away. The Afro-Brazilian religions were prohibited, and the terreiros were often raided by the police, so the practitioners obviously must have been attempting to increase the Catholic appearance of both the orixás and the terreiros. The syncretization with Catholicism can thus be seen as a survival strategy. Even though the abolition of slavery in 1888, the ratification of the constitution of the Brazilian Republic in 1889, and the separation of church and state in 1890 were all characterized by the same liberal spirit, the Republic still banned o espiritismo (spiritism). This ban was directed particularly against the Afro-Brazilian religions, which were denounced as baixo espiritismo (low spiritism). Implicit in this designation is a social prejudice directed against the members of these religions, who belonged to the lowest sectors of Brazilian society.

The black Brazilians did not fit into the Republic's approach to modernization. Inspired by European and North American “scientific” racial theories, the white ruling elite viewed the black population as a disgrace to the Brazilian national character (Skidmore 1974: 29). The “problem” of skin color required some sort of a solution, and the answer propounded among intellectuals and the elite in general was embranquecimento (whitening). The idea was that a continuous miscegenation would eventually lead to an overall whitening of the Brazilian population. It was further held that this whitening process would accelerate with the opening up of Brazil, especially to European immigrants.5

THE WHITE SPIRITISM

While the Afro-Brazilian religions were centered in the northeast of Brazil, the religious currents in the southeast came to be of decisive importance for the foundation of Umbanda, a new Brazilian religion. To the white intellectual bourgeoisie of the southeast, France was the exponent of the newest cultural and spiritual currents. Thus, the spiritism of Allan Kardec, which was first practiced in Paris around 1855 by the Frenchman Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804-69), soon spread to the southeast of Brazil. This new brand of spiritism mixed philosophy, science and religion. Kardec's ideas about the immortality of the soul and communication with spirits were combined with
social evolutionism, the positivism of Comte, magnetism, Hindu concepts of
reincarnation and karma, and the Christian teaching of charity.

Kardecism was embraced primarily by the white middle class. This
included European immigrants, particularly doctors, lawyers, intellectu­
als, and army officers. Espíritas (Kardecist spiritists) were persecuted by
the Catholic Church, but the separation of church and state in 1890 made
it possible for Kardecist spiritism to gain ground. The republican govern­
ment continued to persecute spiritist organizations because of their illegal
medical practice, but in spite of this, many governors were themselves
involved in the Kardecist movement, which was less stigmatized than the
Afro-Brazilian spirit religions. A distinction was introduced between
baixo espiritismo, which was related to the Afro-Brazilian religions and
the black population from the lower sector, and alto espiritismo (high
spiritism), which was related to Kardecist spiritism and the white popula­
ton from the upper sectors (Negrão 1993: 23).

In Brazilian Kardecist spiritism, Kardec’s notion of evolution combines
with concepts of reincarnation and karma. In this particular brand of
cultural evolutionism, the spirits of peoples such as the Aztecs, Chinese,
and Egyptians are seen as representing highly developed civilizations,
while the spirits of Africans and Brazilian Indians are viewed as inferior
and belonging to inferior cultures. These inferior spirits are refused admis­
tance to spiritist sessions. The majority of the spirits attending spiritist
sessions are deceased renowned scientists, especially doctors, including
those who were once practitioners of Brazilian Kardecist spiritism.

From the very beginning, Brazilian Kardecist spiritist centers offered
health services to the sick and poor. There was, however, no recruit­
ment among the lower sectors. On the contrary, the social distance
between rich and poor was firmly maintained (Brown 1994: 24).

MACUMBA

Besides Kardecist spiritism, Umbanda has an important predecessor in
Macumba. The term Macumba refers to the various mixtures of Afro-
Brazilian and other religions that originated in southeast Brazil, especially in
Rio de Janeiro. Macumba is also a derogatory term for baixo espiritismo. It
is generally assumed that Macumba originated in and around Rio de
Janeiro, where the former slave population was by and large from Congo,
Angola, and Mozambique, and was grouped according to nações.

Macumba in Rio de Janeiro was characterized by a distinct religious
eclecticism, and the fact that it diffused among ethnic groups from almost
all social sectors. Among the various religious traditions that enter into
Macumba are Candomblé, Caboclo cults, and Kardecist spiritism. With
Macumba appeared two new spirit archetypes: *O Caboclo* (the Brazilian Indian) and *O Preto Velho* (the Old Black, a slave spirit), both of whom would assume great importance in the later foundation of Umbanda.

João do Rio, a journalist who described the religious eclecticism as it unfolded in Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the century, refers to numerous religious specialists who were representatives of the black population from the lower sectors. These specialists were consulted by clients, mostly from the middle sector and the elite. They practiced alongside religious specialists from the higher sectors of the population, and their clients paid well to rescue themselves from critical situations involving sickness, love, money, power, etc. (Rio 1976 [1904]).

The ethnic and social heterogeneity of both core members and clients within Macumba made it a religion that could mediate between the two antagonistic religious traditions, *baixo espiritismo* (low spiritism; Afro-Brazilian) and *alto espiritismo* (high spiritism; Kardecist). In this way Macumba anticipates Umbanda.

### A Religious Innovation

Umbanda has often been regarded as a great synthesis of Afro-Brazilian and Amerindian religious traditions, Kardecist spiritism, and Catholicism. Because of its syncretic and eclectic character, Umbanda has been seen as a religion that joins together Brazil's various ethnic groups and their cultural and religious traditions and thus reflects the miscegenation that makes up Brazilian society. Umbanda has in fact been regarded as an attempt to formulate a national religion, to create a democratic religion that would unite Brazil's various ethnic groups and social classes.

While Umbanda has often been referred to as an Afro-Brazilian religion, Brazilian scholars of today dispute this. The original tendency to regard Umbanda as an Afro-Brazilian religion seems to reflect a general prejudice against Afro-Brazilian religious traditions, and an inclination to folklorize them. There are still many disagreements and confusions about Umbanda among scholars. It has variously been interpreted as a religion of the black Brazilians, of the oppressed, of the European immigrants, and of the middle class. Actually, all these positions regarding Umbanda may in fact be true. Brazilian scholars today generally agree that it is a uniquely Brazilian religion, i.e., a religion that makes up a bricolage, a coherent ensemble, of almost all existing religious traditions in Brazil, and which expresses a certain "Brazilianess" (Ortiz 1980: 107-08). Just as Umbanda is seen as being mediative, inclusive, and fusionist, so is the culture and society which it reflects (Da Matta 1995). Scholars have seen Umbanda as a religion created by
the middle-class, and at the same time as a religion that unites the white middle-class and the colored lower classes. By reinterpreting and distancing itself from the other Afro-Brazilian traditions through de-Africanization, whitening, and Brazilianization, Umbanda conforms with the dominant "racial democracy" ideology of Brazilian society (Ortiz 1991).

The Founding of Umbanda

The founder of Umbanda is often identified as a man called Zélio de Moraes from Rio de Janeiro. Zélio was white, middle-class, and the son of a Kardecist spiritist. He claimed that in 1920 the spirit of a Jesuit priest revealed itself to him and told him that he was going to be the founder of a new, genuinely Brazilian religion that would be dedicated to the two Brazilian spirits: O Caboclo and O Preto Velho. These were precisely the two Macumba spirit types that had been rejected as inferior by the Kardecist spiritists. In the mid-1920s, Zélio founded his first Umbanda center in Niterói, and in the following years several more Umbanda centers were founded by people initiated there.

Like Zélio, the first founders of Umbanda centers were former Kardecists from the white middle class. They had found Kardecist spiritism to be inadequate, and had therefore begun to frequent the Macumba terreiros in the slums of Rio de Janeiro. There they acquired a taste for the African and Brazilian Indian Macumba spirits, whom they found far more competent and efficient than the Kardecist spirits in dealing with illnesses and other problems. Besides, the Macumba rituals were considered far more exciting when compared with the minimally ritualized sessions of Kardecist spiritism. If the Kardecists were inspired by certain aspects of Macumba, however, they were repelled by others, such as the animal sacrifices, the "demonic" spirits, the often coarse ritual conduct, and the lower social ambiance of the Macumba centers (Brown 1994: 38-41).

Umbanda's De-Africanization of Afro-Brazilian Religious Traditions

Umbanda can be considered a synthesis of the different, and often antagonistic, religious traditions represented by Brazil's various ethnic and social groups. However, Umbandists have often held an ambiguous attitude towards the Afro-Brazilian religious traditions. This reflects the dominant sociocultural tendencies of Brazilian society.

Umbanda originated in a politically turbulent period that witnessed, among other phenomena, the emergence of nationalist and fascist movements. This political development culminated in 1937 with the rise
of a dictatorship, *Estado Novo* (the New State). It was during those highly nationalist years that the ideology of the Brazilian racial democracy came into existence. According to this ideology, which was based on racial egalitarianism, the country’s various ethnic groups had all been equally important in the formation of Brazilian civilization. This ideology thus gave an impetus to the general belief that racial prejudice did not exist in Brazil. The effects of this had already begun to be felt toward the end of the 1920s with the nationalization and institutionalization of Afro-Brazilian culture. Cultural practices like the carnival and samba schools, which had been relegated to a low status because of their association with the black social classes, were now officially acknowledged as important components of the national culture (Brown 1994: 206). Brazilian scholars also began taking a serious interest in Afro-Brazilian culture, which, from the outset, was studied from a folkloristic point of view. At the same time the dictatorship abolished black movements that were fighting against racial discrimination, which continued to be deeply ingrained in the social reality.

*O espiritismo*, especially the “low” spiritism represented by the Afro-Brazilian religions, was still prohibited by law. During the period of the dictatorship, which also represented the formative years of Umbanda, persecution of persons involved in spiritism intensified. In all likelihood, it was the persecution of people involved in *baixo espiritismo* (e.g., the Afro-Brazilian religions) that caused the first Umbandists to identify themselves as *espiritas* (the term used by Kardecist spiritists to refer to themselves). By choosing this self-identity, Umbandists associated themselves with Kardecism and “high” spiritism. *Espírito* appears to have been a cover name that served to dissociate practitioners of the new religion from its Afro-Brazilian background, a gesture that is reminiscent of the Catholic masking of the Afro-Brazilian religions that had been going on for some time.

As mentioned, the ideology of the Brazilian democracy was, and is, manifested as a white hegemony. This state of affairs revealed itself in the first attempts to legitimize Umbanda as a religion. The legitimization involved a de-Africanization and whitening of Umbanda. In 1939 some of the founders of the original Umbanda centers in Rio de Janeiro, including Zélio de Moraes, established the first Umbanda federation, *União Espírita da Umbanda do Brasil* (UEUB) (the Spiritist Union of Umbanda in Brazil). The federation was established in order to organize Umbanda as a coherent and homogeneous religion so as to obtain social legitimation. In 1941 the UEUB held its first conference on Umbanda spiritism which was an attempt to define and codify Umbanda as a reli-
igion in its own right, and as a religion that unites all religions, races, and nationalities. Still, the conference is also known for promoting further dissociation from the Afro-Brazilian religious traditions. The participants agreed to make the works of Allan Kardec the doctrinary foundation of Umbanda, while dissociating it from Macumba and other Afro-Brazilian religious traditions. Yet, the founding spirits of Umbanda, the Caboclos and Pretos Velhos, were still maintained as highly evolved spirits. Generally speaking, the participants endeavored to legitimize Umbanda as a highly evolved religion. For instance, it was stated that Umbanda had existed as an organized religion for billions of years, and was thus ahead of all other religions.

In these endeavors to legitimize Umbanda as an original and highly evolved religion, the participants sought to cut it off from its Afro-Brazilian and African roots. The origin of Umbanda was traced to the Orient, from whence it was said to have spread to Lemuria (a “lost continent”) and subsequently to Africa. In Africa, the story continued, Umbanda had degenerated into fetishism. In this form, it was brought to Brazil by the black slaves (Federação Espírita de Umbanda 1942: 44-47). The African influence on Umbanda was thus not denied, but it was regarded as a corruption of the original religious tradition, as a backward phase in its evolution. Umbanda had been exposed to African barbarianism in the shape of vulgar customs, practiced by a people with “rude costumes and ethnic and psychologic defects” (Ibid.: 116; my translation). Other ways of handling the African character of Umbanda were expressed in the acknowledgement that it originated in Africa, but in Africa oriental (Egypt), and thus in the more occidental and “civilized” part of the African continent (Ibid.: 114).

One of the goals of the conference was thus to trace the “genuine” roots of Umbanda to the Orient. The invention of the Oriental roots—along with the denial of the African ones—was reflected in the definition of the term umbanda, which is otherwise generally believed to be derived from a Bantu language. It was declared that umbanda came from the Sanskrit words aum and bhanda, terms that were translated as “the limit in the unlimited,” “Divine Principle, radiant light, the source of eternal life, constant evolution” (Ibid.: 21-22). The participants generally endeavored to associate Umbanda with things like the European esoteric religious traditions and the new religious currents from India, represented by Vivekananda.

The African influence on Umbanda was acknowledged as a necessary evil that merely served to explain its arrival and development in Brazil. Candomblé, centered in the northeast of Brazil, was regarded as an
earlier stage of Umbanda, which had developed in the southeast; Candomblé was still characterized by barbarian African rituals, and was thus associated with magia negra (black magic). The whitewashing of Umbanda's origin was expressed in terms like umbanda pura (pure Umbanda), umbanda limpa (clean Umbanda), umbanda branca (white Umbanda), and umbanda da linha branca (Umbanda of the white line), in the sense of "white magic". These terms were contrasted with magia negra (black magic) and linha negra (black line), which were associated with evil. Furthermore a division of spirits was established that drew a line between those da direita (from the right; good), represented by Umbanda, and spirits da esquerda (from the left; evil), represented by black magic. The only instances of positive identification with the African influence on Umbanda had to do with Pretos Velhos (which were seen as humble and simple, yet highly evolved, spirits), and with Africa as a suffering and heroic continent.

The participants' attitudes towards the African religious heritage were thus characterized by ambiguity. There were both positive and negative identifications, ranging from their marked attempt to dissociate themselves from the African religious traditions, to their distinctly paternalistic attitude towards Africans, whom they typified with the image of a humble slave. The black Brazilians were accepted since, after all, they had white souls.

DE-AFRICANIZATION IN UMBANDA COSMOLOGY

The Umbandistic cosmos is divided into three levels: the astral world, the earth, and the underworld. The astral world is presided over by deus (god), who is followed by various linhas (lines). Every line is guided by an orixá, who often corresponds to a Catholic saint. The astral world is home to a hierarchy in which the various religious figures are ranked according to their levels of spiritual evolution. Lowest ranking are the spiritual founders of Umbanda: Caboclos and Pretos Velhos. The earth constitutes a platform for spirits that experience their human incarnations at different levels of spiritual evolution. The earth is visited by spirits from the astral world, who are incorporated by the mediums in Umbanda centers, thereby helping the human beings. The underworld, which is often called quimbanda, is the domain of black magic. It represents an antistructure of Umbanda. The underworld is inhabited by spirits that lived their earlier incarnations as doubtful characters (e.g., crooks, prostitutes, etc.). They are regarded as evil because of their lack of spiritual evolution. These spirits may also ascend to the earth, causing damage that the spirits from the astral world must then descend to undo.
Scholars focusing on the de-Africanization of Umbanda have sought to show how African and Afro-Brazilian religious traditions are reinterpreted in its cosmology. In Umbanda the Afro-Brazilian orixás have been marginalized and given less importance than in Candomblé, where the entire ceremony is centered around the orixás, who are incorporated by the filhos-de-santo. In Umbanda ceremonies, on the other hand, the orixás are peripheral. Due to their high position in the hierarchy, they remain in the astral spheres, and are therefore hardly ever incorporated by the mediums. It seems that the less evolved and more down-to-earth spirits, the Caboclos and Pretos Velhos, have taken up the position that the orixás traditionally occupy in Candomblé.

Since the nineteenth century, there has been both an oral and a written tradition concerning these two figures. The Caboclo is generally depicted as a representative of the unacculturated, savage, and proud indigenous population, and has become a symbol of the bygone golden age of Brazil; the Preto Velho has been depicted as a humble and faithful Uncle Tom-like slave. It has been emphasized that in spite of the differences between these two spirit types, they are both marked by the processes of acculturation and civilization, and share a common historical experience in having been enslaved. The replacement of the orixás with the Pretos Velhos has been interpreted as an expression of the foreign (Africa) being replaced by the national (Brazil). This replacement of the free and proud orixás with Pretos Velhos, the slaves, has furthermore been interpreted as symbolic of the transformation of the African, from being a free man in Africa to becoming a slave in Brazil. This replacement has thus been seen as an instance of the acculturation, domestication, and whitening of the African identity in its transformation into an Afro-Brazilian and national Brazilian identity (Brown 1994: 37-78).

The trickster, Exu, who, among other things, represents the messenger of the orixás in Candomblé, is another African and Afro-Brazilian religious figure who has been reinterpreted and marginalized in Umbanda. Exu was already associated with the devil prior to the founding of Umbanda. Within that religion, however, the devilish picture is completed. Exu comes to represent evil, danger, and immorality. Because of these characteristics, it seems that the early Umbandists associated Exu with Africans and the rebellious slaves. Exu was therefore segregated from Umbanda, and turned into the ruler of quimbanda, the underworld.

Another Umbandistic reinterpretation places Exu in the evolutionary order of precedence according to the Kardecist model; he is reduced to a less evolved spirit who nevertheless has the potential to evolve and become a good spirit. Some Umbandists distinguish between o Exu
pagão (the pagan Exu) and o Exu bautizado (the baptized Exu), who has submitted to doutrinação (i.e., has learned the doctrines) and thus finds himself on the right road up the ladder of evolution. This distinction reflects some of the original ambivalent character of Exu, although the baptismal rite of passage that defines the distinction is, of course, new. Again, this baptism of the pagan Exu has been interpreted as an expression of the acculturation and domestication of the evil, dangerous, and immoral African Exu (Ortiz 1991: 137-144).

**Incipient Re-Africanization**

The breakdown of the authoritarian regime in 1945 cleared the way for democratization. This also meant that the systematic persecution of Umbandists stopped. Among Umbandists, this triggered a shift away from a common identification with the Kardecist spiritism, and opened up the possibility for several other identifications and definitions of Umbanda. This new development may be interpreted as an incipient re-Africanization of Umbanda. As an alternative to umbanda branca (white Umbanda), there appeared umbanda africana (African Umbanda). It traced its origin back to Africa, not to India, and it praised its African heritage.

The change towards democratization enabled Umbanda to become more widespread and visible in southeastern Brazil through radio programs, journals, and the foundation of several Umbanda federations. In the early 1960s, despite the end of government persecution, the Catholic church led a crusade against Umbanda. Under orders from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), however, the Catholic church in Brazil was forced to stop the persecutions, and to enter into a dialogue with non-Christian religions. In Brazil, this resolution caused many Catholic priests to realize that the future of Catholicism in the country depended on their ability to syncretize with the Afro-Brazilian religions (Boff 1977). The Brazilian Catholic church started to adopt a liturgical pluralism by incorporating elements from Afro-Brazilian religions at certain Masses. Further, the Church started to officially acknowledge Umbanda as a religion. This change within the Brazilian Church meant that Umbanda and the other Afro-Brazilian religions could now gain a more powerful position within the overall religious field.

During the military dictatorship (1964-1985) Umbanda obtained official recognition and legitimization. This may have been connected with the dictatorship’s nationalistic project. Presumably, the military supported the white, Brazilian, racial-democracy interpretation of Umbanda. The regime directly supported Umbanda and used it to manipulate the masses, causing those who were in opposition to the
government to despise the religion. It is very likely that the regime also used Umbanda against members of the Brazilian Catholic church, especially against clergy who opposed it.

In the 1960s, during the repressive era of the military regime, the counterculture reached Brazil from Europe and North America. Countercultural movements spread to the urban centers of southeast Brazil and were embraced by the white middle class, particularly intellectuals, students, and scholars. Left-wing movements of protest arose in sympathy for the marginalized, the poor, and the blacks. As in Europe and North America, the counterculture of the 1960s involved a search for alternatives to Western rationality. The white middle class of southeast Brazil increasingly turned to the Oriental, the mystical, and the occult in search of the origins of Brazilian culture. Their attention focused on Bahia in northeast Brazil, the cradle of Candomblé. The cultural and religious ambiance of Afro-Brazilian Bahia came to represent the last authentic remains of a true tradition in Brazil. Soon Brazilian popular culture embraced Bahia and its Afro-Brazilian cultural and religious traditions. The lyrics of popular music began to appeal to the mysteries of Candomblé, the greatest mães-de-santos, and the orixás (Prandi 1991: 71-72).

During the decade of the 1960s Afro-Brazilian culture and religion thus became increasingly less stigmatized by the white middle class from southeast Brazil. As a consequence, Candomblé started to become visible in that area.

**The Spread and Africanization of Candomblé in Southeast Brazil**

During the 1970s the hard line of the military regime underwent a relaxation, and the ban against the worship of Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions was finally lifted in 1977. The number of registered Candomblé centers began to increase considerably. Many new Candomblé federations were constituted, and many Umbanda federations were reorganized so as to include Candomblé centers. This development reflected Umbanda's structural Africanization and rapprochement with Afro-Brazilian religions. One of the consequences of the new recognition of Candomblé, and its structural adaptation by the Umbanda federations, was that the pais-de-santos of the Umbanda centers incorporated and, to a great extent, practiced Candomblé. Furthermore, Umbandist pais-de-santos began to travel to Bahia to be initiated in Candomblé centers. To “be made” in Candomblé became a legitimization of the religious competence of Umbandist leaders. The incorporation of Candomblé into Umbanda, a synthesis which was referred to as
“umbandomble” and “candombanda,” was noted with surprise by scholars, who became aware of the fact that Umbanda not only represented a distinct religious practice, but also a combination of traditions ranging from Kardecist spiritism to Candomblé (Negrão 1993: 64-66).

By 1987 the number of registered Candomblé centers in the southeastern state of São Paulo had risen to 2,500, while the number of Umbanda centers had only increased slightly after the breakdown of the military dictatorship. Those behind the spread of Candomblé in southeast Brazil were mainly Umbandist pais-de-santos who transformed their Umbanda centers into Candomblé centers, and who were, in many cases, followed by both core members as well as clients. Many Umbanda centers are thus in a period of transition to Candomblé and are saving up for the transformation (as Candomblé is a far more costly religion than Umbanda). While Umbandists once recruited many members from Candomblé, the tide of recruitment is now going in the opposite direction.

Another factor contributing to the spread of Candomblé in southeast Brazil is the wave of migration from the northeast, which has been increasing since the 1960s. Among the migrants have been pais-de-santos, who brought along their Candomblé centers or opened branches of their centers in the southeast. This transplantation and spread of Candomblé in the southeast is itself a new phenomenon. But the composition of the Candomblé followers is also new, since the black lower classes and the white middle class are about equally represented. Among white and black pais-de-santos the concept of nação has been revitalized and forms part of their religious self-images. Pais-de-santos trace their religious identities back to local geographic areas and cultural traditions in Africa, whereby they legitimize the purity and authenticity of their religious practices. For these new pais-de-santos religious genealogy is closely tied up with legitimization. In marketing a Candomblé center, it is of great importance to be able to trace one’s religious career within Candomblé back to the oldest, most prestigious, and traditional Candomblé houses in Bahia.

It appears that many former Umbandist pais-de-santos regard Umbanda as a stage on their way to Candomblé. They consider Candomblé a more pure and aesthetic religion with strong cultural roots and traditions. Candomblé is also considered to be more magically efficacious and mais forte (stronger). Last, but not least, in giving their reasons for switching to Candomblé, pais-de-santos often state that it is no longer a stigmatized and persecuted religion (Prandi 1991: 77-90).

In the wake of the recent spread of Afro-Brazilian religions in the southeast of Brazil, there is also a process of re-Africanization going on within these religions. The endeavor to purify Candomblé of the
syncretistic elements like the Caboclos and Pretos Velhos represents a reversal of the process of de-Africanization and syncretization that took place within Umbanda. Accordingly, Candomblé centers are beginning to celebrate farewell feasts in honor of the Umbandistic Caboclos and Pretos Velhos. Furthermore, there are endeavors to purify Candomblé of its Catholic elements in order to return to the “genuine” traditions of Nigeria and Benin. A salient expression of the Africanization of Candomblé is the cultivation of Nigerian cultural and religious traditions through the study of the Yoruba language and the mythology of the orixás, and through pilgrimages to Nigeria. Some of the re-Africanized pais-de-santos even dissociate themselves from Candomblé as an Afro-Brazilian product. Instead, they choose to name their religions tradição do orisa (orixa tradition) or culto do orisa (orixa cult).

Generally, it seems that the Afro-Brazilian religions have become more visible in the society of southeast Brazil. Pais-de-santos appear in the media with their own magazines and their own television and radio programs. They even appear as characters in soap operas and as fortune tellers making prognostications about events of political and social importance. Candomblé has also become a target of commercialism. The increasing number of advertisements for ritual objects and package trips to the original sacred sites of the orixás in Nigeria is mostly due to profane commercial interests. Their existence, however, is evidence of the interest in Candomblé. Since the 1970s Nigerian immigrants, who originally went to Brazil as exchange students, have settled down in southeast Brazil and make their living by importing and selling ritual objects from Nigeria. The first Mercado dos orixás (orixa supermarket) was established in São Paulo in 1996. Additionally, developments in the field of education reflect the growing interest in Afro-Brazilian culture and religion, and in African cultural roots. Since 1977 visiting scholars from Nigeria have offered courses in Yoruba language and culture at the state university of São Paulo. Courses like these have attracted both students, scholars, and practitioners of Candomblé. Since the end of the 1970s other educational institutions in São Paulo have also begun offering courses in Yoruba language and religion (including mythology, dance, and music for the orixás). These institutions function somewhat like hatcheries for the Candomblé centers (Goncalves da Silva 1995: 261-71).

The Meanings of Re-Africanization

Scholars researching Umbanda or Candomblé currently discuss whether Candomblé is outcompeting Umbanda (i.e., whether a general shift from Umbanda to Candomblé is taking place). Although in general Umbanda is
still far more widespread than Candomblé, and although its members continue to look upon Candomblé with a prejudiced attitude, Candomblé seems to be growing in the southeast of Brazil at the expense of Umbanda. Candomblé is also spreading to all sectors of Brazilian society.

Although research into the spread and re-Africanization of Afro-Brazilian religion in southeast Brazil is still incipient, divergent interpretations of this phenomena have already been advanced. The Brazilian sociologist Reginaldo Prandi has argued that a shift from Umbanda to Candomblé is taking place, and that this shift is reflective of certain social changes (Prandi 1991: 62). For Prandi, Umbanda is a religion whose social ideology reflects the society of yesterday (e.g., the modern class society that appeared in the 1920s, and was characterized by a belief in nationalism, equality, and social mobility). This type of society did not succeed. Due to the political crises and the profound social changes that occurred during the late military regime, people lost their sense of security and their belief in society and social mobility. In Prandi’s view, Candomblé is more in tune with contemporary society. He characterizes Candomblé as a nonethical religion that values worldly things and focuses on the individual. Thus, Candomblé fits the hedonistic, narcissistic, postethical (in short, the postmodern) society of today (Ibid.: 186).

Another hypothesis that Prandi defends is that Candomblé, as it is being transplanted from the northeast to the southeast of Brazil, has undergone a change from an ethnic to a universal religion. Prandi assumes that the popularization of Candomblé, which has been going on through music and the mass media since the 1960s, has prepared the way for a widespread acknowledgement of Afro-Brazilian and African culture and religion. This rediscovery of Africa has attracted the white middle class to the Candomblé centers, something that has contributed to the legitimization and popularization of Candomblé. According to Prandi, Africanization has nothing to do with black skin color or Afro-Brazilian identity. Afro-Brazilian culture and religion have lost almost any ethnic identity and connection to the history of the Afro-Brazilian population. Instead, Prandi sees Africanization as a kind of intellectualized invention of traditions in which the return to African roots represents a search for origins and authenticity (Ibid.: 118). Prandi’s arguments are indirectly supported by other arguments, which, for example, claim that Candomblé has achieved general acceptance by the dominant white sector of Brazilian society partly as a result of its having been marketed as an authentic and pure religion (Bacelar 1989: 87).

Prandi’s point of view regarding Africanization represents Candomblé as an expression of culturalism. Cultural elements appear as freely float-
ing and have lost any relation to a particular socioeconomic or political stratum of society or ethnohistorical category. Other scholars have taken an opposite road and have related the spread and Africanization of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions directly to ethnic and political issues. Thus, the North American anthropologist Diana Brown connects the growth of Candomblé in southeast Brazil with an increasing racial consciousness among Brazilians of African ancestry. Brown calls attention to the fact that the growth of Candomblé, with respect to both time and place, coincides with the appearance of cultural and political interests in African identity among black Brazilians (e.g., with the racial consciousness movements that started in the late 1960s) (Brown 1994: xxii). But Brown denies that there are clear and unambiguous explanations for the spread of Candomblé in southeast Brazil. She argues, in particular, that one has to be aware of the differences between how the white middle class and the black lower class identify with Candomblé.

The different points of view discussed here represent two interpretations of the recent growth and re-Africanization of Candomblé in southeast Brazil. One appeals to the universality and culturalism of Candomblé, the other focuses on ethnicity and politics. Under the first interpretation, Candomblé is part of a symbolic repertoire and represents but one among many cultural and religious identities in the multicultural, multireligious supermarket of modern society in which each individual is free to choose and combine the various and multifarious religious identities. The other point of view considers Candomblé to be connected with an ethnic and political consciousness and the struggle against discrimination, which has been increasing among the Afro-Brazilian population since the 1970s. Here Candomblé appears as a resource in a political struggle where the reinvention of African religious traditions may be used as a means of ethnic mobilization, and a way to raise people's consciousness and build an ethnic identity. The two points of view are not, of course, mutually exclusive. It is likely that in the eyes of the white middle class Candomblé is no longer an expression of Afro-Brazilian identity, while, at the same time, it may very well constitute a potential source of ethnic consciousness and mobilization in the Afro-Brazilian population.

During my own research on the Africanization of Candomblé in southeast Brazil, I observed that there are strong differences between the black and white Brazilians involved in Afro-Brazilian religions. Among blacks and whites there are now serious controversies over the definitions of Candomblé, Africanhood, and blackness. The most Africanized (e.g. those who study Yoruba and orixá mythology and go on pilgrimages to Africa) tend to be white Brazilians from the middle class.
They generally try to dissociate themselves from Candomblé, which they consider an “impure” Afro-Brazilian syncretistic religion. Instead, they prefer to define their religion as “Afro-descendant,” naming it *tradição do orixa* (orixá tradition) and *culto do orixa* (orixá cult). There is only a small representation of black Brazilians in the religious centers of these “Afro-descendent” practitioners.

Black Brazilians, however, seem to predominate in the traditional Afro-Brazilian Candomblé centers, which also include a strong representation of participants in the Black Movement. These participants link their religious involvement to their racial consciousness and struggle against discrimination. They dissociate themselves from the more Africanized religious movements of white Brazilians, reproaching them for ignoring the social reality that black Brazilians face and for worshipping Africa alone, rather than that which connects Africa and Brazil. They point out that African culture (in a sense, Africa itself) exists within Brazil, and that the syncretized Candomblé is part of the social history and identity of black Brazilians. Despite the controversies between black and white, they do unite in federations and organizations as practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions.

In interpreting the growth and Africanization of Afro-Brazilian religion, the culturalist and ethnic/political standpoints are not either-or, but rather a both-and reality. Both standpoints can work together. The challenge lies in acknowledging that Candomblé can no longer be viewed as an unambiguous dimension. From having been regarded as a kind of “cultural ghetto,” as a cultural phenomenon mainly restricted to northeast Brazil, Afro-Brazilian religion has now spread across the country, and has been adopted by a wide range of ethnic and social groups, each of whom interpret it in their own way. One of the challenges in studying Afro-Brazilian religions today seems to lie in exploring the various meanings they have taken on in the intercultural society of southeast Brazil, where race-related issues are marked by unmatched complexity and ambiguity.

In his work *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, the anthropologist Jonathan Friedman argues that when a hegemonic center begins to decline, the dominant identity becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. A crisis for the larger society leads to a weakening of the power and identity of the dominant groups that carries with it the opportunity for formerly repressed groups to strengthen their cultural identities (Friedmann 1994: 189). As modern identity fails, emergent cultural identities and ethnifications will appear as alternatives, including indigenous movements and fundamentalist religious movements. Such movements represent the emergence of a
new primitivism, a search for primordial meanings (Ibid.: 79).

In explaining the turn from a de-Africanization to a re-Africanization of Afro-Brazilian religion, it makes sense to apply Friedman's theory, together with Prandi's hypothesis regarding the shift from Umbanda to Candomblé as an expression of social changes. Umbanda originated together with the modern Brazilian society as the Brazilian religion, bringing together the various ethnic groups of Brazil and synthesizing their beliefs. In the assimilative process of de-Africanizing and whitening, of making the Afro-Brazilian Brazilian, Umbanda conformed with the dominant ideology of this modern society. It experienced its heyday during the nationalistic military dictatorship. When the belief in the nation and in values of modern society failed during the military regime, however, alternative political, cultural, and religious identities began to appear. Simultaneously, there was a gradual relaxation of the repressive policies of the dictatorship. After the military regime finally ended in 1985, the growth in the number of Umbanda centers stagnated, while other cultural identities began to emerge. After having been repressed, Afro-Brazilian cultural and religious identity has now become an object for new forms of identity-making in an intercultural society where identity is a matter of free choice. Identification with Afro-Brazilian religion now seems to range from the white Brazilians' search for primitivism and cultural roots to the black Brazilians' claim to racial consciousness.

NOTES

1 Research for the article was made possible financially by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities.

2 The terms for male and female Candomblé leaders are pai-de-santo and mãe-de-santo (father and mother of the saint or holy one). The initiated is called filho/filha-de-santo (son/daughter of the saint or holy one).

3 The Candomblé terreiros are divided along nations like Nagô, Ketu, etc. A person who has been initiated into a Candomblé terreiro of one nation, is not allowed to practice in other terreiros belonging to other nations.

4 This phenomenon is found among all the Catholic countries of the New World to which African slaves were brought (Herskovits 1937).

5 Immigrants of black skin color were barred (Skidmore 1974: 29).

6 The Caboclo cults originated in Maranhão in northeast Brazil as a mixture of Amerindian, Catholic, and African religions.

7 One of the people behind this ideology was Gilberto Freyre. The ideology is expressed in his work Casa Grande e Senzala (1933) (translated into English as The Masters and The Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization).
8 It is very likely that the majority of the Umbanda centers existed under cover of Kardecist spiritist centers. From 1929 to 1944 a total of forty-two umbanda centers, 651 Kardecist spiritist centers, and no Candomblé centers were registered in the southeastern state of São Paulo (Negrao 1993: 30).

9 The foundation of these Umbanda federations is clearly an expression of the need to legitimize Umbanda. The federations face several problems, however, one of them being the fact that all attempts to codify and standardize Umbanda as a homogeneous and coherent religion have failed. Each Umbanda center formulates its own doctrines and rituals and chooses eclectically from other religious traditions.

10 The nationalization of Umbanda started in 1964, when Umbanda was first included in census statistics, and when Umbandistic feasts entered the official national and local calendars, as well as tourist guides. Simultaneously, an enormous popular literature on Umbanda began to circulate.

11 From 1974 to 1976, 357 Candomblé centers were registered in São Paulo. During the same period, 2,844 Umbanda centers and 69 Kardecist spiritist centers were registered (Negrao 1993: 31).

12 Ser feito (“to be made”) refers to fazer a cabeça (“to make the head”), a designation for the initiation rite in Candomblé, which involves the tonsure of the initiate.

13 The founding spirits of Umbanda, the Caboclos and Pretos Velhos, appear in certain types of Afro-Brazilian religion.

14 At the Second World Conference on Orixá Tradition and Culture, held in Salvador, Bahia, in 1983, some of the leading mães-de-santos from Salvador issued an official statement about the de-syncretization of Candomblé.

REFERENCES


