Pursuing Racial Order and Social Progress: Violence, Afrophobia and "Religious Racism" in Brazil

Rachel Cantave

Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, US
Email: rcantave@skidmore.edu

Abstract

This article explores "religious racism," or discrimination against devotees of African-derived religions in Brazil, as a broader pattern of structural racism rooted in racialized religious alterity, Afrophobia, and the epistemic divide between religion and nonreligion. The term *religious racism* has been proposed by some devotees and anti-racist activists to emphasize that Afro-Brazilian religions are uniquely targeted in ways other non-Christian religions are not. Unlike *religious intolerance*, the term *religious racism* explicitly connects discrimination against Afro-Brazilian religions to colonization, color or racial hierarchy, and anti-Black prejudice. This article clarifies the ideological groundings of religious racism that encourage Neo-Pentecostal extremists to pursue "order and progress," as the national motto suggests, through physical violence.

Keywords: Brazil; religion; Afrophobia; religious racism; religious intolerance

Resumo

Este artigo procura explorar o "racismo religioso", ou discriminação contra os povos de santo das religiões de matrizes Africana, como um padrão mais amplo de racismo estrutural enraizado na alteridade religiosa racializada, na afrofobia e na divisão epistêmica ente religião/não-religião. O termo *racismo religioso* foi proposto por algumas pessoas que cultuam orixás e ativistas antirracismo, para enfatizar que as religiões afro-brasileiras são os maiores alvos de ataques e de uma forma que outras religiões não são. Ao contrário da *intolerância religiosa*, o *racismo religioso* liga explicitamente a discriminação contra as religiões afro-brasileiras à colonização, à hierarquia de cor ou raça e ao preconceito contra negros. Este artigo pretende esclarecer os fundamentos ideológicos do racismo religioso que encoraja os extremistas Neo-Pentecostais a perseguir a "ordem e o progresso", como sugere o lema nacional, através da violência física.

Palavras-chave: Brasil; religião; afrofobia; racismo religioso; intolerância religiosa

The abiding western dominology can with religion sanction identify anything dark, profound, or fluid with a revolting chaos, an evil to be mastered, a nothing to be ignored. "God had made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He [*sic*] has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples." From the vantage point of the

colonizing episteme, the evil is always disorder rather than unjust order; anarchy rather than control, darkness rather than pallor. To plead otherwise is to write "carte blanche for chaos."

—Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*

In 1999, an Afro-Brazilian *iyalorixa* (Candomblé priestess) named Mãe Gilda was the target of two attacks. First, members of an Assemblies of God Pentecostal church forcibly entered her *terreiro* (temple) and physically and verbally assaulted her to exorcise her of demons. Shortly after, Mãe Gilda's picture was published in a Neo-Pentecostal newspaper alongside the headline "Charlatan Witch Doctors Damage Their Customers' Pockets and Lives."[1] The traumatic attacks and the resulting defamation lawsuit aggravated heart complications that ultimately led to her untimely death.[2]

Three short years later, in 2002, state assemblyman Manoel Maria also targeted Afro-Brazilian religions when he penned the State Code of Animal Protection bill prohibiting "sorcery" and the use of animals in "religious ceremonies" (Boaz 2019, 3). Although activists pressured Maria into removing all offending language, the stance that African-derived religions contribute to animal harm is a robust argument that continues to threaten Afro-Brazilian religious freedom (Boaz 2019).

In both cases, Afro-Brazilian religions were targeted and accused of causing harm to people, to animals, and to economic well-being. In response, devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions and anti-racism activists have proposed the use of the term *religious racism* over *religious intolerance* to refer to increases in prejudice and violence against Afro-Brazilian religions (Flor do Nascimento 2017). For some, *religious racism* emphasizes how increases in violent Christian nationalism target Afro-Brazilian religions in ways other non-Christian religions do not experience (Fernandes 2021, 52).

Unlike *religious intolerance*, the term *religious racism* explicitly connects religious discrimination against Afro-Brazilian religions to colonization, color or racial hierarchy, and anti-Black prejudice (Fernandes 2021; Flor do Nascimento 2017). Acts of religious racism are not unique to Brazil. Religious racism affects many African Diasporic religions, including Rastafari, Cuban Santería or Lucumí, and Haitian Vodou, and "mirrors and works in conjunction with broader patterns of racism in legal, social, and justice systems of the Western world" (Boaz 2021, 2). This intervention clarifies the ideological groundings of religious racism that encourage physical violence and force to pursue social and moral order and progress.

Religious racism versus religious intolerance

This article was inspired by the resistance I encountered when using the term *religious racism* to describe acts of spiritual warfare and religious competition between Neo-Pentecostals and devotees of Candomblé. Skepticism toward *religious racism* seemed to stem from the perception that my use of the term was informed by (my own) North American political ideologies, which do not fit the *mestiçagem* of Latin America.[3] Racial

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[1] The article was published in the Neo-Pentecostal Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus's (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God's) weekly newspaper *Folha Universal*.

[2] "Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus é condenada por intolerância religiosa," *Jornal Correio*, https://www.correio24horas.com.br/noticia/nid/igreja-universal-do-reino-de-deus-e-condenada-por-intolerancia-religiosa/.

[3] *Mestiçagem* refers to mixed-raceness due to miscegenation, or the processes of interracial sexual contact that have historically produced a large mixed-race population in Brazil. Regarding the racist national myth of *mestiçagem*, see Theodore W. Cohen, "Race, Racism and Antiracism in Brazil and Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 57, no. 3 (2022): 719–729. http://doi:10.1017/lar.2022.28; Peter Wade, "Racism and Race Mixture in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 3 (2017): 477–485. http://doi.org/10.25222/larr.124.

discrimination works differently in Brazil, or so I have been told. I was asked whether using the term *religious racism* to describe Neo-Pentecostal antagonism toward Candomblé devotees is oversimplified because Afro-Brazilian religions have historically attracted people with a range of skin colors, including priestesses and priests of Euro-Brazilian descent, and the majority of converts to Neo-Pentecostalism are Afro-Brazilian. Not only have devotees of Afro-Brazilian religion whitened over time (both phenotypically and through the inclusion of middle-class Euro-Brazilians),[4] but some scholars argue that certain sects of Afro-Brazilian religion (e.g., Umbanda) have undergone such intense syncretism with Catholicism, Spiritism, and New Age religions, that they are transcultural Brazilian religions and no longer considered African (Gonçalves da Silva 2014; Ortiz 1995).[5]

The term and definition of *religious racism* are Brazilian, not North American. Brazilian scholars have argued that religious racism applies to discrimination against all religions of African origin (*religiões de matrizes Africana*), notwithstanding syncretism (Marinho 2022; Fernandes 2021; Flor do Nascimento 2017). The "racism" of *religious racism* refers to the fact that enslaved Africans brought traditional African religions to Brazil, and their spiritual practices have since been exoticized and demonized for their non-Christian and non-European worldviews and their Afro-Indigenous elements. Flor do Nascimento (2017) argues that Afro-Brazilian religions are targeted because they promote an African or Black worldview. Therefore, it does not matter who currently practices Afro-Brazilian religions, how practitioners are racialized, or the degree to which Afro-Brazilian religions are syncretized. Afro-Brazilian religions, established from Black resistance to evangelization and enslavement, continue to be defined and discriminated against through a racist colonial lens (Marinho 2022; Fernandes 2021, 62; Flor do Nascimento 2017, 52–54).

This article looks to amplify and build on the work of Brazilian scholars, bringing attention to ongoing processes of structural racism and Christian supremacy from the colonial period to the present day. To use *religious racism* over *religious intolerance* is a reminder that prejudice and violence against Afro-Brazilian religions is historical and not a new phenomenon brought about by the rise of Evangelicalism in Latin America (Fernandes 2021; Flor do Nascimento 2017, 52). This article, however, explores prejudice against devotees of African-derived religions in Brazil as a precolonial phenomenon and an extension of broader patterns of structural racism rooted in racialized religious alterity, the religion-nonreligion divide, and Afrophobia. In fact, examining religious racism through the lens of precolonial religious alterity and Afrophobia foregrounds that racism and religious intolerance have never been separate social phenomena in the Black Atlantic. This perspective is crucial to current debates concerning judicial responses to racism and religious racism in Brazil (see Hartikainen 2021; Machado, Silva, and Santos 2019) and integral to any sincere effort to decolonize Latin America and the Caribbean.

Religious alterity

In response to white Christian nationalism, the religious studies scholar Dianne M. Stewart writes that empire, imperialism, and violent conquest are justifiable according to Abrahamic theological texts, which have historically been used to target worshippers of

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[4] Imprecise phenotypic observations of skin color, hair texture, nose, lip, eye shape and size are used to codify human difference and assess the "race" and color of others. However, phenotype alone does not neccesarily inform how individuals self-identify. For example, while a devotee may be considered "whiter" (i.e., have a lighter skin tone and straighter hair texture), they may not self-identify as Euro-Brazilian. This distinction is sometimes described as social identification versus self-identification.

[5] Fernando Ortiz used the term *transculturation* to describe the convergence of two or more cultural influences resulting in new cultural productions unique to postcolonial and Latin American societies.

non-Abrahamic religions and their gods (Stewart 2023). The ideological basis for stigmatizing African-derived religions therefore preceded the colonial encounter and may have developed along with the violent rise and spread of Christianity and Islam. However, it was not until the medieval period when Christian standardization and supremacy began to frame "others" according to essentialized human difference that racism, as we currently know it, was first articulated.

Scholars of race have cited the 1449 Iberian *limpieza de sangre*, or blood purity laws, as a critical period in which social divisions (previously oriented around differences in ethnic groups' customs; culture; language; land; histories; and caste) moved toward a more classificatory differentiation based on supposedly inherent biological traits such as blood and lineage (Bethencourt 2013; Sweet 1997). Religious justification for essentialized difference, or racialized religious alterity, was conveyed through powerful metaphors of blood and family. During the Catholic Reconquista, blood as a symbol extended beyond the unifying life force between family members and began to signify the biological lineage of the proverbial Christian family (Nissimi 2004). "True" Christians were supposedly united by the literal blood shed by Christ, the symbolic blood of Christ imbibed through the Eucharist, and through familial bloodlines. The sanguine-racial hierarchy organized religious groups according to "blood purity." The hierarchy placed the sullied blood of *judeoconversos* (formerly Jewish converts to Christianity) and *moriscos* (Muslims) below the "pure-blooded" Christians of the Iberian Peninsula with little space for recourse or reorganization—how can one cleanse a tainted bloodline?[6] The blood purity laws had lasting implications on how we currently understand race. They also mark a period in which notions of racial and religious difference overlapped and transcended mere social or rhetorical constructions. Racialized religious alterity became essentialized and then legitimized through law (Burk 2010; Nissimi 2004).

Social stratification and inequality were intensified by Medieval Christian authorities' "attempts to achieve a coherence in doctrines and practices, rules and regulations" resulting in religious subordination and racial inferiority of not only Muslim and Jewish people but of so-called "heathens, pagans, idolaters, or sometimes polytheists" as well (Asad 1993, 29; Brown [1971] 1989; Masuzawa 2005, xi). Christian predominance would later inform modern European political and social institutions, including epistemologies of "real" religion (Abrahamic religions) in relation to nonreligions (witchcraft and African-derived religions).

The religion-nonreligion divide

Where racialized notions of blood purity provide one foundational aspect of religious racism, dichotomous moral discourses concerning the defining aspects of religion provide another. Contemporary understandings of religion have been shaped by a Christian colonial worldview that has informed "scientific" knowledge and categorization of religion in relation to nonreligion (Paton and Forde 2012; Crosson 2020). The roots of the distinction between what is considered "real" versus fake or nonreligion (sometimes referred to as "cults") can be traced back to medieval Christian intolerance toward pagans. The term *pagan* was initially used to describe people living in rural areas who, from a Christian perspective, worshipped false idols and gods (Fletcher 2007, 38). Christian polities looking to conquer, dominate, and evangelize so-called heretics targeted and

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[6] One avenue was through royal decree and increasing one's social status. This provides an interesting historical contextualization to the Latin American racial discourse that "money whitens."

marginalized all non-Christians (Jews, Muslims, and pagans alike) through religious-legal ordinance or canon law: "Canon law grouped Jews together with other peoples, especially pagans and heretics, with whom contact was discouraged . . . . Medieval canon law included precepts excluding these outsiders from the rights held by Christians in courts of law" (Cohen 2008, 115). In addition, "The distinction between saved and damned was also materially instituted by means of Canon 68, which required that Jews and Saracens (a thirteenth-century synonym for Muslims) differentiate themselves in public from Christians by means of their attire" (Topolski 2018, 61). The convergence of religious and political power sought to otherize and disenfranchise all non-Christians in Christian territories.

During the period in which essentialized racial and religious difference hinged on proverbial blood purity and canon law disenfranchised all non-Christians, concerns over the "occult" or hidden and secretive supernatural acts were also articulated (Sansi 2011). In 1385, Portugal's King João I outlawed spells and sorcery (*feitiçeria*) in his kingdom as magic, ambiguity, and the occult were considered problematic barriers to religious standardization. The king forbade his subjects to "work spells or bonds, or invoke the devil (*obrar fetiços ou ligamentos, ou chamar diabos*)" and subjects supposedly engaged in *feitiçeria*, unorthodox and non-Abrahamic spiritual practices, were punished (Pietz 1987 quoted in Sansi 2011, 21). Scholars of magic have argued that acts thought to be sorcerous were perceived to be in opposition to monotheistic orthopraxy. In other words, acts thought to be "false, an artifice, a trick" or not "real" were problematic in that they were viewed as acts of religious and political dissent (Sansi 2011, 21). According to Roger Sansi (2011), "What was socially described as *feitiçaria* . . . was more a loose body of beliefs and practices related to fear and desire . . . that [would] . . . incorporate many forms of ritual practices, objects and people from the more disparaged origins" (23). Power and struggle, rather than empirical science, shaped the religion-magic divide we so often take for granted.

Scholars of Black Atlantic religions have long critiqued the "religion" category, which posits sorcery and magic as a separate social-spiritual category tangentially related to religion (Stewart 2005; Paton and Forde 2012; Crosson 2020). This is because African-derived religions are not considered "real religion" nor are they included in the ubiquitous "world religions" category. Before the nineteenth century, Europeans differentiated religions according to "Christians, Jews, Mohammedans (as Muslims were commonly called then), and the rest" (Masuzawa 2005, xi). By the twentieth century, a new system of religious categorization appeared called "world religions." The supposed logic informing the new system of classification was "articulated from the point of view of the European West, which is in all known cases historically aligned or conflated, though not without some ambiguity, with Christendom" (Masuzawa 2005, 3). "World religions" articulated a new hierarchy that continued to privilege Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism and Islam, as well as acknowledged the importance of some "Eastern" religions such as Confucianism and Hinduism. Excluded from the "world religions" category are Indigenous African, African-derived, Native American, Aboriginal Australian, and "other" religions, which have historically been and continue to be referred to as "'animist,' 'primitive,' 'primal,' 'preliterate,' 'tribal,' or even 'basic'" (i.e., nonreligions) (Masuzawa 2005, 4). Masuzawa (2005) contends that the "world religions" category is presumed to be empirically informed by progressive Enlightenment-era science, when in fact, the "world religions" versus "basic religions" dichotomy (e.g., Buddhism versus shamanism) was formed in relation to modern shifts in European identity toward supposedly universalist values. Nevertheless, the "world religions" system continues to privilege Eurocentric ideals such as that the real and "great religions of the world" have written systems (e.g., Jainism, Hinduism), whereas primitive religions are illiterate and consist of only oral traditions (e.g., Brazilian Candomblé, Haitian Vodou) (Masuzawa 2005, 2–4).

The "world religions" category and its moralistic assumptions about "real religion" are rarely scrutinized, even academically (Masuzawa 2005, 6–7). In 1993, Talal Asad famously critiqued the anthropology of religion for its Eurocentric, Christian bias. Nevertheless, contemporary studies of religion continued to refer to "world religions" uncritically and reiterate the troublesome religion-nonreligion divide. Few in religious studies examine and acknowledge the depths of the "intrinsic moral flaw" in their epistemic assumptions and the extent to which their definitions and observations of "real" religion are influenced by Christian supremacy (Stewart 2005, 6). Instead, academics and the greater public often reiterate the assumption that true religions are devotional and community oriented, whereas nonreligions are instrumental and individualized; that real religions are governed by tradition and organized to facilitate collective meaning making, whereas nonreligions or magic are oriented around individualized wanton power and coercive attempts to achieve it; that orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and literacy are features of "real" religions that pseudo religions lack; and, most detrimentally, that real religions have a complex moral system, whereas nonreligions are immoral or amoral at best (Crosson 2020, 100–103).

These unexamined assumptions continue to be influential and animate religious racism today. As evidence, look no further than in 2014, when a Brazilian judge ruled that Afro-Brazilian spiritual practices do not constitute real religion because their "religious events do not contain [the] necessary traits of a religion *such as a basic text* (e.g., Koran, Bible), a hierarchical structure, and a God to be worshipped" (my translation).[7] As this example demonstrates, the systematic classification of certain beliefs and practices as more or less religious also carries semiveiled dichotomous moral connotation distinguishing true from false, right from wrong, saved from damned, and sacred from cursed. These subtle connotations, present in even academic circles, obscure that the distinction between religion and nonreligion or magic has been shaped by religious supremacy and theologies of power meant to deter potential acts of hegemonic resistance. For instance, during the colonial period in the Americas, Christian colonial authorities outlawed Afro-Indigenous religious practices because they were perceived as dangerous for their potential incitement of rebellions (Johnson 2001, 13). However, fear and suspicion toward African Diasporic religions was rarely framed according to political dissent and social upheaval; instead, restrictions on African-derived religious beliefs and practices were expressed through Afrophobic stereotypes and concerns about moral decay and progress (Stewart 2005; Johnson 2001).

Afrophobia

Afrophobia refers to the widespread hatred and fear of things and people associated with Africa (Stewart 2005, 43). Afrophobic ideas originated in Europe and have since been internalized by many people around the world, including persons of African descent (Stewart 2005, 43). Afrophobic ideas can easily be found in the texts and laws of the colonial period; however, according to Stewart (2005), Afrophobic ideas predate colonialism. European literature propagated Afrophobic imagery and anti-Black sentiment long before the transatlantic slave trade.

Afrophobic stereotypes can be found in texts as early as the Greco-Roman period, in Jewish and Christian literature, and throughout the medieval period. The literary tropes reinforce three stereotypes: Africans as monstrous, Africans as cursed, and Africans as animal-like. According to Stewart (2005, 70), "During this [Greco-Roman] period, the subhuman characterization of Africans was accomplished through two descriptive motifs.

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[7] Jornal Nacional, "Juiz não reconhece manifestações afro-brasileiras como religiões," Globo.com., http://g1.globo.com/jornal-nacional/noticia/2014/05/juiz-nao-reconhece-manifestacoes-afro-brasileiras-como-religioes.html.

On the one hand, the animalization of Africans allowed for slippages in cross-cultural comparison, as Africans instead were compared with dogs and other wild beasts. On the other hand, the equation of Africans with the dreaded monsters one would expect to encounter in Homers' epic journeys frame the African Other as authentic man's quintessential antagonist." Stewart's (2005, 72) work also highlights "the demeaning signification of blackness and darkness in their [Westerners'] language symbol system," a precursor to discrimination based on skin color or colorism. In Judaic literature, the Shulamite woman from Song of Solomon (1:6; NIV) provides a rich example of precolonial metaphors depicting dark skin (or black skin, depending on the translation) as undesirable and cursed:[8]

> Do not stare at me because I am dark
>
>> because I am darkened by the sun.
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> My mother's sons were angry with me
>
>> and made me take care of the vineyards;
>
>> my own vineyard I had to neglect.

According to Stewart (2005, 72), even the African-born Origen of Alexandria living in the second century described Solomon's bride as "darkened with exceedingly great and many sins and … stained with the inky dye of wickedness, has been rendered black and dark." The conflation of dark with sins and wickedness is a typical Afrophobic trope, as is depicting Africans "as savage, intellectually inferior, physically grotesque, sexually promiscuous, and morally depraved" (Stewart 2005, 69).

Some contend that Afrophobia is a consequence of European insecurity and anxiety toward the precarity of European civilization (Stewart 2005; Achebe 2016). In other words, Afrophobia is a by-product of a European identity crisis, whereby writers, readers, and philosophers seek constant self-assurance through comparison. For example, "If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate" (Achebe 2016, 25). When appropriately scrutinized, it becomes clear that fear and hatred of things associated with Africa was, and in many ways continues to be, a "unifying ideology enabling [Christian] European nationalism and imperialism" (Stewart 2005, 70).

An obvious example of Afrophobia is the Euro-American imaginary and invention of "voodoo," which Western media has monetized, commodified, and exported worldwide. Hollywood's voodoo is a distorted manipulation of real African Diasporic religions, Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo which are derived from traditional West African religions centered on healing, spirit worship, and ancestor veneration (see Daniels 2023; McGee 2012).[9] In New Orleans, "initiates practice Vodou within a social context that has mass commercialized what Adam McGee identifies as 'voodoo kitsch' [2012] to attract tourists and practitioners … such factors have resulted in Vodou's outrageous exploitation," or what Kyrah Daniels (2023, 87) refers to as the "voodoo industrial complex." The voodoo industrial complex and its kitsch, such as the use of voodoo dolls and the ability to turn

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[8] The New International Version (presented here) reads, "Do not stare at me because I am dark" (Song of Sol. 1:6). The King James Version reads, "Look not upon me, because I am black."

[9] There is also New Orleans Hoodoo. However, Afrophobic, commercialized "voodoo" has little to do with Haitian or New Orleans religious devotees' actual beliefs and practices.

enemies into zombies, are fueled by Afrophobic, xenophobic, and anti-Black racism against primarily Brown and Black devotees (Bartkowski 1998; Armitage 2015). Western media often dismisses voodoo as foolish, superstition, and trickery (as in the phrase "voodoo economics") and maligns Vodou as a pseudoreligious cult that performs human sacrifice (Boaz 2023; Bartkowski 1998). Ironically, Western media presents voodoo as both inept and foolish to believe in and as a serious threat to public well-being (Bartkowski 1998). Western media capitalizes on the "racist, nationalist, and xenophobic fears incited by [these] typification[s]" by making unsubstantiated and alarmist claims such as that Manuel Noriega and other murderous drug criminals are worshippers of Vodou (Bartkowski 1998, 568). Political accusations intentionally associate Vodou with criminality to stoke Afrophobic fears and bolster public support for national security and racial profiling, mirroring the discourses of fear, danger, and security used by the colonial and planter class to outlaw African-derived religions and maintain control over racial and religious minorities in the colonial Americas (Boaz 2021; Stewart 2005).

Afrophobic attitudes are one of the most potent and ubiquitous articulations of religious racism that affect devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions. In Brazil, it is common to hear Afro-Brazilian religions pejoratively regarded as *macumba* (witchcraft or black magic) and *voodoo*. For example, in 2014 while I was conducting fieldwork, I met a self-described *morena clara* (a Euro-Brazilian woman with light skin and straight brown hair) who had moved to Salvador to begin initiation rites at a Candomblé *terreiro*. She confided in me that she was shocked by the reactions of people around her to her religious conversion. She explained that her coworkers began treating her differently when she wore all-white clothing and the beaded necklaces associated with Candomblé. Specifically, she remarked that people began joking about practicing *macumba* in her presence. She also noticed people on the street and in stores staring at her in ways that made her uncomfortable, and she often felt as if people avoided getting too close to her in public. "I began to understand a little of how it must feel to be Black," she said. While shocking, it was not surprising to hear a Brazilian woman of Italian descent equate her experience of religious intolerance with the discrimination she knows *pretos* (Black people) in Brazil experience. She "feels Black" in that the discrimination she experienced due to her religious affiliation is racist, Afrophobic, and upheld by a Christian-colonial worldview that maintains a distorted and disparaging view of Africa as well as African people and cultures.

Similarly, xenophobic and anti-Black tropes appear alongside witchcraft accusations in Vedic texts of Hinduism. According to the anthropologist Aisha Khan (2009), "In the *Rg* [*sic*] *Veda*, the earliest of the Vedic texts (circa 1500 BCE), references to the *Dasa* or *Dasyu*, the local tribes conquered by Aryan speakers who viewed them as barbaric, are compared with demons, have black skin and flat noses, practice 'black magic,' are treacherous, do not perform expected sacrifices, and speak an alien language" (104). Not only do references to the *Dasa* reflect colorist ideals and Afrophobic stereotypes (Black skinned, flat nosed, barbarous monsters), but the text also demonstrates that concerns over magic are, even outside of Christian polities, influenced by power over and conquest of marginalized Others.

Anthropological poverty and progress

Scholars attribute contemporary racist stereotypes and beliefs to Euro-American scientists and proponents of social Darwinism who claimed that through the scientific method, they could classify distinct races from inferior (primitive) to superior (advanced) (Cravens 2010, 300). Scientific racism was not only used to justify colonization of the "lower races"; it also contributed to the denigration of the "lower races'" cultures and belief systems. These "enlightened" sciences and systems of classification would, by the twentieth

century, be "transformed into tools of hierarchy, exclusion, and privilege … that [led] to the biological racism of Nazi anti-Semitism" (Topolski 2018, 60).[10]

Outside of Europe, the social and scientific discipline of anthropology was instrumental in perpetuating racist views of non-Western people and cultures and contributing to Afrophobia and religious racism. The evolution of *feitiço* to fetishism exemplifies how Christian supremacy, colonialism, and anthropology have shaped religious racism. Fetish and fetishism come from the Portuguese word *feitiço*, meaning artifice, artificial, or sorcery (from *façer* or to make). The negative connotations of *feitiço* (as previously described) later informed colonial anthropologists' documentation of fetishism or the false, compulsive worship of inanimate objects believed to have magical powers among so-called primitive people and pagans. The anthropology of fetishism was applied to objects and practices in Africa religiously, so much so that the language of the "African fetish," or atavistic and superstitious beliefs attributed to objects, continues to be used in ethnographic research, the field of art history, and museums to date. Primitivity defined African fetishism and was evidence, according to early anthropologists, that Africans were underdeveloped and required European colonization and Christianity to progress and achieve civilization. In other words, Europeans "invoked materially embodied African gods—so called fetishes—as the universal counterexamples of proper reasoning, commerce, governance, and sexuality" (Matory 2018, xvi).

Anthropologists contributed significantly to the proliferation of the African fetish, which has, alongside Afrophobia, dehumanized the African continent, its people, and their spirituality (Mveng 1983; Stewart 2005). The dehumanization of Africans is another axiom (alongside racialized religious alterity, the religion-nonreligion divide, and Afrophobia) upholding religious racism. Centuries of presenting Africa as a primitive foil to progressive Europe have resulted in seeing the continent as "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity" (Achebe 2016, 21). The Cameroonian theologian Engelbert Mveng (1983, 217) referred to this phenomenon as anthropological poverty: "[We have] despoil[ed] human beings … of everything that constitutes their being and essence—their identity, history, ethnic roots, language, culture, faith, creativity, dignity, pride, ambitions, right to speak," and so on. The Eurocentric worldview that produced both anthropological poverty and Afrophobia has sustained the continuous oppression of African descendants worldwide.

At present, Afro-Brazilian religions must contend with anthropological poverty even as they are incorporated into the Brazilian tourism economy. African heritage or "roots" tourism often includes viewings of Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies meant to encourage tourists to experience a relic of traditional Africa in modern Brazil (Gonçalves da Silva 2014; Pinho 2010). Roots tourism has destigmatized Afro-Brazilian religion by taking devotees, beliefs, and practices out of the shadows. In fact, it is not uncommon to see and hear references to Afro-Brazilian religious symbols and *orixas* in contemporary art, music, and popular culture.

However, while roots tourism in Brazil has partially validated previously stigmatized Afro-Brazilian religious practices and beliefs, it has also reinforced (perhaps unwittingly) a view of Afro-Brazilian religion based on fetishism and anthropological poverty. Afro-Brazilian religious tourism generates consistent tourism revenue and garners international recognition for Brazilian heritage sites and folk festivals; however, tours of

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[10] Anya Topolski (2018) describes the connection and coconstitution of racism and religious discrimination in Europe as the "race-religion constellation," which she argues undergirds historical and contemporary forms of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. While Topolski's "race-religion constellation" is specific to Europe, there are interesting connection points between the "race-religion constellation" and "religious racism," such as the convergence of philology and Christian hegemony in contributing to the racialization of European "Aryanism" in opposition to Semites as internal (Jewish) and external (Muslims, Arabs, and colonized people) Others.

Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies uphold and rely on colonial notions of African-derived religions as exotic, atavistic, and primordial to sell "authentic" Africanness to domestic and international tourists, much like the exploitative "voodoo industrial complex" Daniels (2013) describes in New Orleans (Gonçalves da Silva 2014; Pinho 2010). Ultimately, Afrophobia and anthropological poverty continue to position Afro-Brazilian religions and their devotees as antithetical to Western notions of progress and development.

Historically, order and progress were pursued through state-sanctioned erasure and control over the Afro-Brazilian population and their culture. Postemancipation fear of black degeneracy was widespread across the Americas; however, Afro-Brazilian religion presented the political elites of the newly independent republic with a difficult conundrum —whether to uphold Western values of secularism and religious freedom or stifle the "fetishist cults" that might "blacken" the population and negatively affect their reputation. The Brazilian national motto, "Order and progress," was adapted from the positivist Auguste Comte's "l'amour pour principe, l'ordre pour base, et le progrès pour but," or a rationally ordered society progressing toward civilization (Nachman 1977).[11] Brazilian positivists, like Raimundo Teixeira Mendes, supported the separation of the state from the Catholic Church and the abolition of slavery. However, many political figures also expressed concern over the large, newly emancipated (1888) Afro-Brazilian population, hoping that by encouraging miscegenation, Brazil could lessen its Black demographic. In 1893, a "propagandist of the early republic" famously stated: "Fortunately there is no race prejudice in Brazil and one sees colored men marrying white women and vice versa, with the result that the black population is declining extraordinarily. Within fifty years it [Blacks] will have become very rare in Brazil" (Skidmore 1992, 129). Racist immigration policies reinforced political aims to decrease the Black population. In 1890, Brazil passed Decree 528, which prohibited Africans and Asians from entering the country without special congressional approval. Meanwhile, European immigration was aggressively encouraged through land tenure and compensation for the cost of their passage (Johnson 2001, 18). By 1913, US president Theodore Roosevelt wrote in *Outlook Magazine*, "In Brazil, on the contrary [to the United States], the idea looked forward to is the disappearance of the Negro question through the disappearance of the Negro himself—that is, through his gradual absorption into the white race."[12]

The national motto, "Order and progress," was adopted just one year before Articles 156–158 were added to the 1890 Penal Code. The articles prohibited Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian healing practices. Making Afro-Indigenous healing techniques illegal and illegitimate proved a succinct continuation of previous colonial bylaws prohibiting witchcraft and sorcery (Johnson 2001, 19; Gonçalves da Silva 2014, 212). Defining Articles 156–158 as "public health violations" also reinforced the "progressive" republic's Western values and benevolence in its aim to protect its citizens from harm. Outwardly, legal prohibitions against Afro-Brazilian alternative modes of healing were enacted to protect the state's evolving public health and medical institutions rather than for religious or race-based reasons. However, Articles 156–158 relied on a familiar trope of religious racism: the scapegoating of African-derived religions as harmful to the state, its moral integrity, and its citizens (Johnson 2001). Racist concerns for the future of the nation justified state control of Afro-Brazilian religions (Johnson 2001; Gonçalves da Silva 2014). Fast-forward to the twenty-first century, when acts of religious racism, like the examples at the beginning

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[11] Translated as "love as principle, order as basis, progress as end." See Michel Bourdeau, "Auguste Comte," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023), ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/comte/.

[12] *Brazil and the Negro*, February 21, 1914, Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University, https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o279297.

of this article, are still justified by the belief that to protect the public from harm, Afro-Brazilian religions must be controlled and eradicated.

Christian nationalism

Governmental and nongovernmental agencies in Brazil have confirmed that violent religious intolerance toward Afro-Brazilian religions has increased since the early 2000s, peaking in 2017 (Boaz 2021, 25). Work discrimination, custody battles, defamation, and harassment are just some types of religious racism on the rise in Brazil. More worrisome are the increases in eviction at gunpoint, arson, and bombing of Afro-Brazilian temples. Some argue that extremist Neo-Pentecostal groups like *milicrentes* and *traficrentes* (a combination of the words *military* and *believer*, and *drug trafficker* and *believer*, respectively) reflect a historically "violent Brazilian society that does not shy away from acting violently against anyone or thing identified as a source of evil, especially if that something or someone has previously been stigmatized, such as Afro-Brazilian religions" (Marinho 2022, 493, my translation). From a legal perspective, Boaz (2021, 24) warns that extremist Evangelical drug traffickers displacing and physically attacking devotees and destroying places of worship are the "greatest threat to Afro-Brazilian religious freedom in the twenty-first century." Many Neo-Pentecostal perpetrators of violence consider their actions morally "right" and protective of their community and nation. However, there is not and has never been evidence of a connection between African-derived religions and excessive risk or harm to the public. There is, however, a discursive connection between Afrophobic religious racism and concern for the morality, safety, and progress of the nation. "Historically, the concept of public order is also central to the regulation of minority religions in Brazil.... [T]hese concepts [religious freedom, religious and racial discrimination] and the ways in which they are defined by the legal system remain linked to national racial and religious imaginaries" (Hartikainen 2021, 110, my translation). As Flor do Nascimento (2017) points out, contemporary Christian discourses of moral violence toward Afro-Brazilian religions position Afro-Brazilian devotees as enemies of the state. Christian intolerance has led to extreme Christian nationalism that since the early 2000s has "search[ed] for ascendancy in the political field" (Castro Marinho 2022, 493, my translation). The increase in Neo-Pentecostal political leaders, including several national members of Congress, has coincided with the increase in violent forms of religious racism.

Conclusion

While most perpetrators of violent religious racism in present times are Neo-Pentecostal, it is essential to remember that acts of religious racism today are connected to acts of religious racism previously orchestrated by colonial authorities and the State, whether through laws prohibiting Afro-Brazilian sacred healing or state-sanctioned police raids on *terreiros* (Johnson 2001; Selka 2005; Wadsworth 2006; Gonçalves da Silva 2014). However, rather than treating religious racism as a long-standing systemic form of racist religious prejudice, state officials often treat violence against Afro-Brazilian religions as a series of isolated incidents of religious intolerance. Although the state no longer targets Afro-Brazilian religions, it's unclear stance on whether religious freedom should protect Afro-Brazilian religions from rhetorical attacks or protect Neo-Pentecostals' freedom of speech has shown tacit complicity in the rise in violent religious racism (Hartikainen 2021). According to Paula Márcia de Castro Marinho (2022), the evangelicalization of Brazilian politics has produced "a certain fearlessness of the civil and criminal implications of these acts [violent forms of religious racism]" (497, my translation). The use of *religious racism* as a politicized discourse over *religious intolerance* is a reminder that prejudice and

violence against Afro-Brazilian religions in present times is one example of structural violence among others, including higher rates of Black mortality from insufficient healthcare and COVID-19, Black and Indigenous land dispossession, and police brutality (Nascimento 2016; Barreto 2020; Milanez and Vida 2020). And although the Brazilian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, violence and discrimination against Afro-Brazilian religions are not declining. On the contrary, they have appeared with renewed intensity, as seen in the examples at the beginning of this article, and the Brazilian government has done little to protect Afro-Brazilian religious devotees (Marinho 2022; Miranda et al. 2022; Hartikainen 2021).

This article has examined the apparent yet underappreciated aspects of racialized religious alterity, the epistemic religion-nonreligion divide, and Afrophobic discrimination. The structural components of religious racism have been enacted through Portuguese colonization, modern nation-building, and renewed forms of Christian nationalism; religious racism continues to uphold Black erasure and subjugation in Brazil. Unlike religious intolerance, religious racism is not an individualized discriminatory occurrence but a systematic process. Adopting *religious racism* over *religious intolerance* highlights the fact that racism and religious intolerance are mutually constitutive and that racism cannot be redressed without acknowledging and dealing with religious racism as well. I have highlighted a mere thread of this otherwise expansive and troubling phenomenon.[13]

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[13] You can find more information including specific examples of religious racism in Brazil at "Home | International Commission to Combat Religious Racism," International Commission to Combat Religious Racism, https://www.religiousracism.org.

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Rachel Cantave is Assistant Professor in international affairs at Skidmore College. She holds a PhD in anthropology from American University and is a producer of the documentary film *Chèche Lavi*. Her research and teaching focus on comparative religion, colorism, and identity politics of Latin America and the Caribbean.