

The articulation between evolutionism and creationism in New Religious Movements: Two South American case studies¹

La articulación entre evolucionismo y creacionismo en los Nuevos Movimientos Religiosos: dos estudios de caso sudamericanos

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how certain religious perspectives present nuances between the concepts of creation and evolution. Public debate characterizes them as polarized concepts. Yet, contemporary religious movements resignify them and create arrangements in which biological evolution and creation by the intervention of higher beings are presented in a continuum. It begins with a brief introduction on the relations and reframing of scientific concepts in the New Religious Movements and New Age thinking. Then we have two case studies which allow us to analyze this evolution-creation synthesis. First, I will present a South American New Religious Movement that promotes *bricolage* between the New Age, Roman Catholicism and contacts with extraterrestrials. Then, I will analyze the thoughts of a Brazilian medium who spreads videos of your channeling of an ET on the internet. This material mixes elements of ufology and cosmologies of Brazilian religions such as Kardecist Spiritism and Umbanda. These two examples share the idea of the intervention of extraterrestrial or superior beings in human evolution, thus, articulating the concepts of evolution and creation. Therefore, in these arrangements it is possible to observe an inseparability between spiritual and material, evolution and creation or biological and spiritual evolution.

Keywords: evolutionism, creationism, New Religious Movements, New Age, ufology, Spiritism.

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Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar cómo determinadas perspectivas religiosas presentan matices entre los conceptos de creación y evolución. Si bien el debate público los presente como conceptos polarizados, es importante comprender cómo los movimientos religiosos contemporáneos les dan un nuevo sentido, creando combinaciones en las cuales la evolución biológica y la creación mediante intervención de seres superiores se presentan continuamente. Comienzo con una introducción sobre las relaciones y replanteamientos de conceptos de las ciencias en los Nuevos Movimientos Religiosos y en la Nueva Era. A continuación, se exponen dos estudios de caso que permiten un análisis de esa síntesis evolución-creación. En un primer momento, presento un Nuevo Movimiento Religioso sudamericano que promueve un bricolaje entre elementos inspirados en el movimiento Nueva Era, el catolicismo romano y contactos con extraterrestres. A continuación, analizo el pensamiento de una médium brasileña que ofrece ponencias y canalizaciones de extraterrestres en internet, y que mezcla elementos de la ufología con las cosmologías de religiones brasileñas como es el espiritismo kardecista y umbanda. Ambos ejemplos tienen en común la idea de intervención de seres extraterrestres o superiores en la evolución humana, estableciendo relaciones entre los conceptos de evolución y creación. Por lo tanto, en estas combinaciones, más allá de la polarización de los conceptos, se observa una inseparabilidad entre lo espiritual/material, la evolución/creación o la evolución biológica/evolución espiritual.

Palabras clave: evolucionismo, creacionismo, Nuevos Movimientos Religiosos, Nueva Era, ufología, espiritismo.

INTRODUCTION

The debate concerning the relationship between creationism and evolutionism usually goes around the clash between the two positions. Traditionally, there are two ideas. The first is the proposition of a biological evolution, supported by the theory of natural selection. The second idea is the perspective of a divine creation of the universe, existing not only in the Christian context, but also in several religions and spiritualities. Evidently, these two ideas, presented in this reductionist way, are on totally opposite poles. However, new ways of understanding and experiencing religiosity present gradations between these different perspectives. Both ideas concerning new arguments and proposals challenge the researchers regarding the approach taken to analyze the phenomenon in all its complexity.

In this context, religious changes and the emergence of New Religious Movements (NRMs) should not be disregarded. Constant *bricolage* and recombination unravel content from its original traditions to give them new meanings within new cosmologies. It happens not only with religious content. Practices and concepts from the scientific lexicon are also mobilized to reaffirm spiritual assumptions. It is common in these new movements to affirm an alliance between science and religiosity. However, it is argued that science should change and become more spiritual. There is also the idea that the current sciences only rediscovered what religious wisdom already knew.

These principles which are well known by religious studies researchers are demonstrated in the first part of the article. In the final part, I use the deductive method to demonstrate how the theory could be observed in particular cases (Marconi & Lakatos, 2010, p. 88). The objective is to analyze how these recombination processes affect the concepts of evolution and creation in some NRMs. The analysis focuses on two South American case studies which were selected for their religious innovations and the exploration of some gaps from my previous research, mainly in the first case. Specifically, the interest here is how they articulate UFO themes and traditional religious elements. If these movements advocate a reconciliation between science and religion, what articulations are made to place evolutionary and creationist perspectives not in opposition, but on a continuum? It is also necessary to point out that the concepts of science and religion are a matter of wide debate and the intention is not a deep exploration regarding the academic propositions about them. The focus will be on what these religious movements understand by science and religion – and how their view of these concepts is capable of articulating them. The first case study is an institutionalized NRM that mixes New Age, Catholic and ufological elements. The second being an expression of diffused spirituality, as in New Age spirituality, which bricolates between thoughts from Spiritism, Umbanda and also from the UFO field. Both case studies share a common point which is the belief, in different nuances, in the intervention of extraterrestrials in the process of human evolution.

NRMS AND SCIENCE

The challenges of research on the topic of NRMs start with a conceptual question. NRM is usually the preferred term used by academics when dealing with relatively recent religiosities especially for smaller groups. It arises from the counterculture and the advent of what is conventionally called the New Age movement. After all, what are these new religions and are they really new? As Guerriero (2006, p. 36-37) points out, even academics who deal with the subject differ over its historical period. Some of them view these movements as aligned with the counterculture – especially during the period after the Second World War and also during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Other scholars propose that even religions that emerged in the early 19th century could fit in with the NRMs. An alternative, therefore, is to understand the term “new” not so much in relation to its period of emergence, but according to the innovations they bring to a given religious context. The concept of NRMs is also an alternative to the concepts of

sect or cult, sometimes culturally stigmatized in a negative way. “In popular culture, 'sect' is invariably associated with terms like invasion, destruction, satanic cults, fanaticism, risk, danger, perversity, brainwashing, etc. Stigmatization is enough to legitimize behavior, in relation to sectarians, that would not be accepted in other human beings” (Carozzi, 1994, p. 71, our translation).

There is no rigidity in NRMs standards as with New Age spiritualities. Evidently, the individual can relate to a certain religious movement in the New Age style, that is, without exclusive belonging and aiming only at self-improvement. Even so, NRMs in some ways have more identifiable contours than scattered New Age practices. Historian of religion Wouter Hanegraaff (1999b) presents a useful differentiation in this regard. According to this author, religion and spirituality are related to maintaining contact with a meta-empirical framework of meaning. This concept presents itself as an alternative to terms such as “sacred”, which according to the author, is an emic perspective of contemporary secular spiritualities (Hanegraaff, 1999a). In the same way, the concept becomes useful in the study of New Age and NRMs, where the reality beyond the human everyday world can be transcendent or immanent. Thus, Hanegraaff defines religion in three different concepts. The first one is a general concept, which states that a religion is “any symbolic system which influences human action by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning” (Hanegraaff, 1999b, p. 122). However, when this system turns into a social institution, we have the second type that is a specific religion. Lastly, an individual could maintain contact with this more general meta-empirical framework of meaning without an institutional mediation by manipulating symbolic systems. This is what the author classifies as spirituality (Hanegraaff, 1999b, p. 123). According to this perspective, New Age could be classified as a religion, in the general class. However, it could be considered spirituality as well when an individual manipulates common practices in the New Age movement. If some NRM creates a formalized structure – even using New Age lexicon or practices – it can be considered a specific religion, that is, the second type in Hanegraaff classification. However, it is important to reaffirm that these boundaries are not always clear to followers. Many of them do not even consider themselves members of a religion, often classifying their participation and their religious movements as a lifestyle. It is also common for these individuals to consider their participation in the movements as a way to increase their human potential, although they are active participants in the institution.

Another fundamental point for the development of this reflection is the relationship between the NRMs and science. Both the New Age movement and the NRMs are known for reinterpreting scientific concepts under a mythical-religious interpretation key. These ideas act as symbols that contribute to the preservation of the religious identity. These are also connected to the more general meta-empirical framework of meaning. Especially in the context of New Age and NRMs, quantum physics is a relevant example of such:

On the popular level, for example, few people have not even a rudimentary understanding of Cartesian philosophy or Newtonian science; but they immediately recognize the image of the “world as a machine”. Likewise, the problem of the interpretation of quantum mechanics is a highly technical subject involving subtle philosophical problems; but the popular image of a subatomic particle which – paradoxically – is a wave appears to be so exciting to the imagination that one encounters it everywhere on the popular level, sometimes in highly surprising places. In fact, this latter image has become a supreme symbol of dissent: to invoke it is to criticize the symbolism of an earlier, mechanistic worldview. Nevertheless, it remains a scientific symbol, not a religious one. And moving from symbol to myth, we find the same thing. Few people will be able to explain the differences between the philosophical, scientific and the mystical evolutionary theories of the following German Idealists, Darwin, Lamarck, Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo, Ilya Prigogine, or Ken Wilber, just to mention a few. Not that it matters. What does matter is that the biblical story of creation has been replaced in their minds by another and better story, which satisfies the imagination of the people who were brought up to respect the ultimate authority of science (Hanegraaff, 1999b, p. 124).

In such movements, this mythology of sciences – both quantum physics and in other scientific themes – coexists with religious or esoteric elements along with the concepts, such as chakras, reincarnation and spiritual energies. For New Age thinking and even some more institutionalized religions, the official science and the scientific method is seen as dogmatic. From this point of view, sciences need to open up to spiritual realities. However, when scientific concepts are mythologized, science and religion are seen as complementary. From the perspective of the New Age and the NRMs, there are not clear boundaries between them. A “spiritualized science” or para-scientific disciplines, such as parapsychology, chiromancy, astrology, and others, could prove meta-empirical realities. These disciplines, rejected by official science, search for legitimation and claim a scientific status as well (Chevalier, 1986). Therefore, there is a double movement of criticism, both in the alleged dogmatism of science and the religious dogmatism of traditional religions. Nevertheless, in the same way, secularizing scientific and totalizing religious perspectives are unified and synthesized. These new arguments give rise to new totalizing cosmologies (D’Andrea, 2000, p. 80). In short, “the particular and innovative aspect of this ‘scientific-religious syncretism’ is that, through it, *tout court* religions are extracted from their privileged field and

inserted in a secular record, maintained and transformed in their initial sense” (Camurça, 2011, p. 160, our translation). It is in this context that, according to the cases presented below, there is an articulation between evolutionism and creationism.

PARA-SCIENCE, EVOLUTION AND CREATION IN A SOUTH AMERICAN NRM

The first interesting example of the insertion of para-scientific arguments in an NRM is the case of Grace Mercy Order (*Ordem Graça Misericórdia*). It was founded in 2009 by the Brazilian José Trigueirinho Netto and the Uruguayans Mother Shimani and Friar Elias. This order mixes elements and practices inspired by Roman Catholicism and the New Age movement. It is necessary to briefly understand the trajectory and the thought of the Brazilian spiritualist to comprehend the group's cosmological base. In the 1980s Trigueirinho Netto became well known in Brazilian ufology when he published books that reported his alleged contacts with spaceships and extraterrestrial beings. His works had a strong presence of a scientific lexicon, as in the following excerpt, which describes the functioning of an interplanetary ship:

When materialized, [the spaceships] create a magnetic-gravitational field that lasts for a more or less prolonged time and responds to laws other than those in force on Earth. It takes some preparation and adaptation of the individual's human magnetism for him to physically approach this field. The luminosity of a spaceship is generated by a propulsion system based on stellar energy. This energy spins around it vertiginously and produces the ionization of the surrounding atmospheric elements, which are illuminated by the strong friction. When the ship is stopped, its structures can be perceived clearly. As it starts to spin and the speed increases, the ship is covered with an aura of increasing brightness, passing through the color scale: red, yellow, orange, intense blue and white (Trigueirinho Netto, 2010, p. 301, our translation).

The spiritualist's books still express a strong millenarian appeal based on the idea of saving humanity through spaceships. This is a recurring argument in religious movements related to UFOs. In these groups, extraterrestrials are seen as “older brothers” of humans, guaranteeing assistance and rescue in case of cataclysms:

The Intergalactic Confederation decided to allow the planet to what could be called a transition, thus eliminating the possibility of an extermination war. In a transition process, the general purification of the surface and the withdrawal of recoverable beings is foreseen [...]. If the extermination war (between surface terrestrial men) begins to materialize on the physical plane, this rescue operation will be streamlined, as it is ready to start at any time (Trigueirinho Netto, 2004, p. 54, our translation).

This idea emerged in the 1950s, the period when the first alleged people contacted by beings from other planets came into view. George Van Tassel, an American engineer, was one of these pioneers. Van Tassel claimed to have been

contacted telepathically by an intergalactic commander. The being, who introduced itself as Ashtar, claimed that its fleet had just arrived in the solar system. Its mission, according to the contactee, was to warn the nations of Earth about the harmful consequences of testing nuclear weapons. Another idea initially propagated by the engineer is that extraterrestrials have visited the planet since ancient times and that some biblical passages actually report these contacts (Helland, 2003). As it is known, this perspective would become widespread both in ufology and in the UFO NRMs.

In 1987, Trigueirinho Netto founded an alternative community in the southern part of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. As well as other similar communities, the Light-Community of Figueira (*Comunidade-Luz Figueira*) was based on imagery and typically New Age representations. The activities were based on ethical and ecological concerns, such as environmental preservation, vegetarianism, animal protection, soil care, and the use of renewable energy (Borges, 2011, p. 73). The spiritualist continued with his publications, which added elements of Theosophy and Christianity. However, an ufological basis was maintained. In a reflection similar to Erich von Danikem's best seller "Chariots of the Gods?" and other UFO NRMs, Trigueirinho Netto affirmed the coexistence of extraterrestrials and humans in the distant past. However, in addition to this tutoring, humanity would be subject to genetic interventions made by ETs. The spiritualist claims (Trigueirinho Netto, 2008, p. 76) that extraterrestrials, which he calls Hierarchies, have been implanting a new genetic code named "GNA" in some human beings. Unlike the previous one, the DNA, the GNA would not be a chemical substance, but an electromagnetic field. The intervention would be beneficial and would only reach those prepared and receptive. This GNA would be responsible for unlocking human potential, creating a "New Man". This new human would lose aggressiveness, sexual reproduction, intrauterine pregnancy, and heredity. According to Trigueirinho Netto (2010) the process of genetic improvement occurs in different stages of human evolution:

In the distant past, at the beginning of the formation of the bodies of man, the genetic code was composed by the ruling consciences of the evolution of the Races. Those were symbolically called Space Gardeners and used a substance of a certain amphibious dinosaur, that has undergone a series of mutations, incorporating genes of extraplanetary origin. Over the millions of successive years, there have been four other incorporations of cosmic genes. They produced what today is reflected in human types of yellow, red (indigenous), black and white skin. Now, there is the fifth incorporation, the "copper-colored race". The differences between them are due to the origin, since they come from different planets and respond to different universal laws. During past cycles, individuals

incarnated in these various human groups, passing from one to another in order to acquire the experience that they could provide (Trigueirinho Netto, 2010, p. 317, our translation).

It is interesting to note in the above excerpt how the use of scientific language is mixed with religious content, in a synthesis that guarantees a certain plausibility structure. According to Netto, in fact, there was biological evolution, but this derives from a creative interference of powerful and non-human beings. Although not exactly gods, they fulfill a role of divine intervention and creation. Therefore, there is evolution and creation at the same time, without contradiction – at least within the arrangement created by the spiritualist. It is an idea which in a way is similar to Raelian cosmology. For this movement, created by Claude Vorilhon, human beings were created by extraterrestrial scientists also in a distant past. The different races would be the result of different experiences, giving rise to the creationist narratives of the Bible (Machado, 2010). However, there is a considerable difference: Raelianism operates on a materialist logic that privileges scientific discourse. Life after death and reincarnation, fundamental themes in different religions, are seen by Raelians as a result of technical and scientific evolution. Eternal life would be conquered with the mastery of cloning techniques. In these new bodies, an individual consciousness would be transferred, thus living indefinitely. Then, the idea of spiritual evolution via reincarnation is not decisive, and biological evolution is mediated by scientifically superior beings. In the case of Trigueirinho Netto, both factors are combined: extraterrestrials act as intermediaries in the evolutionary process, but the concepts of matter transcendence, spiritual evolution and reincarnation are equally important.

In 2008, Trigueirinho received two Uruguayans who would later be known as Mother Shimani and Friar Elias in the Community-Light of Figueira. Both said they were seers in frequent contact with the Virgin Mary. Jesus's mother would have guided them to look for Trigueirinho in their alternative community, in Brazil, where they would live. There the group claims to have witnessed the apparitions of Catholic saints along with Mary. They claim to have received the task of creating an ecumenical monastic order, Grace Mercy Order, from them. This institution would support the apparitions that were previously restricted only to seers and from that moment on would be revealed to the public. According to Weber (2004, p. 327), the leadership that aims to answer necessities beyond the ordinary ones is given by specific physical or spiritual gifts. In this case, the charismatic legitimation is conferred by the visions, that is, the direct contact with the spiritual beings. As a result, Trigueirinho, Mother Shimani and Friar Elias created an NRM, based in the Community-Light of Figueira. This site undergoes a Catho-

lic-inspired reorientation with the creation of monasteries devoted to Mary. Similar communities are also being built in other countries in South America, such as Uruguay and Argentina. The order's practices and rituals are also strongly influenced by Catholicism, although there is no formal connection with the Roman Catholic Church. There is the ordination of mothers and friars, including the use of habits similar to those of Catholic orders; they take vows like those of chastity, obedience, silence, etc. and participate in reframed rites of Communion, Worship and Foot Wash.

However, all these changes do not contradict the work of Trigueirinho Netto. Rather, they reinforce the contents, blending the New Age and UFO elements with the incorporations of the Catholic imagery. The apparitions of Mary, Joseph and even Jesus are now open to the public, drawing media attention. Faithful supporters of the movement participate in these celebrations, which are transmitted live by an institutional website. The summit of this ritual is the moment when the seer says he observes the entity present in the apparition. He starts to dictate Mary's message to those present, phrase by phrase.² The excerpt below, attributed to an apparition of Mary, demonstrates the persistence of concepts from the scientific lexicon and the articulation between evolution and creation:

This race, in the beginning, was designed by God to obey and follow a single Purpose. But since My adversary, in antiquity, aroused temptation and free will in the surface man, the original Project has been distorted, leaving the path of the Divine Will. It was there that duality, free choice and disobedience to all the higher Laws that would later govern humanity, entered humanity's primitive consciousness, until it was a sacred humanity. From the moment when Adam and Eve were tempted in Eden to decide on their own life and thus separate themselves from the Hand of the Creator, what we call their own will has entered into the essence of human beings. This will, lacking in spiritual principles and impregnated with codes of corruption, was the action that led the new humanity out of the way. At first, the first race was the wise Project of a new humanity to the surface. From the moment when the first Adam decided to survive on the planet by transgressing the natural Laws and, on the other hand, Eve awoke the first signs of capital sins. My opponent achieved what he aspired to: making this humanity an inert humanity and without self-awareness. [...] Later, when Christ was present, the entire race, which was already in the abyss of its perdition, was diverted from its own hell through the Passion of Jesus. The coming of the Messiah of Israel was delicately prepared by the Creator Fathers, by the Holy Archangels. [...] From the moment that Adam and Eve spontaneously activated their own will in themselves, human spiritual genetics was affected to this day by this energy of terrestrial power, of appropriation and domination of all things. Only those consciences that through time have been able to open themselves to discover Christ within themselves, have been confronted with renouncing and banishing this old human code

² According to the group, both the creation of the order and the process of media dissemination of apparitions were guided by the Virgin Mary. She would even have specified the need to create the institutional website. For more information on this facet and a complete ethnography of an online appearance ritual (see: Camurça & Campanha, 2018).

that diverts millions of souls from the Purpose until today. [...] Although Christ gave his life and died for all also with the purpose of deactivating the old corrupt code of his own will, after all the events and facts that Master Jesus generated in the conscience of those who heard him, the another part of humanity has strengthened the precarious link with self-will; this was like a ten-horned beast recreated by all the involutive actions of the human race. [...] Christ was and is an extraordinary example of life and truth for all who accept to return to the moment of the previous Plan, when Adam committed the so-called original sin, a sin from which all creatures are born with the code self-will and free will. In order to be able to change this frequency, the determination and effort that are stimulated by prayer will make it possible to defuse the contrary impulses that self-will brings. [...] But we know that today's humanity does not want to follow in obedience and adherence to what the higher Universes are emitting. This leads to an increase in spiritual perdition of consciences; it leads to plunge into all possible mistakes; leads to losing the path that has come to be taken. Therefore, God sends His Messenger again to warn everyone and the whole world that they are still living their own will, and this will not stop planetary suffering, but will gradually increase it. I invite you, children, to do the exercise of cutting the chain of your own will; thus, you will have the inner strength to be able to Christify your lives and prepare for the glorious coming of Christ into the world. Be smart and do not allow your own will to lead you away from the path of your redemption forever. The times announce great changes for everyone. I thank you for losing your own will and for giving birth to the Eternal Will of God! Drive them to inner purification, His Mother Mary, Rose of Peace³ (Grace Mercy Order, 2016).

Although the above excerpt uses common concepts in Catholicism, a closer look will allow us to identify some important reframings. Adam and Eve are presented as beings of an ancient race, the “first race” created by “Creator Parents”, in the plural. Their error in deviating from the higher planes would have damaged human “spiritual genetics” and later generations. Original sin here gains a sense of pathology transmitted hereditarily, a kind of congenital defect of spiritual origin. Christ, in turn, would have died “to disable the old corrupt code of self-will”. Prayer would be necessary to change this “frequency”, a usual term in the imagery of the New Age and NRMs. It is also noted that the human beings to whom the message is addressed are the “humanity of the surface”, that is, there would also be beings that live inside the Earth and the hierarchies outside the planet. These ideas are in line with the thinking of Trigueirinho Netto which was demonstrated earlier. The message attributed to Mary therefore corroborates the hypothesis of an articulation between the concepts of evolution and creation, re-interpreted and synthesized freely by the thoughts of Trigueirinho Netto and the Grace Mercy Order.

³ Message attributed to an apparition of Mary on August 24, 2016 in Paysandu, Uruguay. Due to the size of the text, some passages have been suppressed. Full message available at: <https://www.mensajerosdivinos.org/en/mensaje-de-maria/wednesday-august-24-2016>.

GENETICS AND SPIRITUALITY: BETWEEN NEW AND TRADITIONAL BRAZILIAN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The second case study concerning the articulation between evolutionism and creationism is not found within a specific cosmology or institutionally established group, such as the Grace Mercy Order. Even so, the idea shares similarities with the one presented previously, also involving extraterrestrial beings and terms related to science. This theme is recurrent in the lectures by Mônica Medeiros, a Brazilian doctor who works as a medium at *Casa do Consolador*, which is a religious center based in the city of São Paulo. This is yet another interesting example of the interpretation of entities from other planets not only as space visitors, but as spiritual mentors or protectors of humanity. In addition to having a YouTube channel where she offers video lectures, Medeiros usually attends events on spirituality and also meetings that are aimed at ufologists. In one of the latter, the First World Forum of Contactees (*I Fórum Mundial de Contatados*)⁴, the doctor says that her first contact with extraterrestrials occurred when she was only five years old. She had woken up to find a person similar to Casper the Friendly Ghost sitting on her bed. The apparition, according to the speaker, would be a way for the extraterrestrial to get in touch using her childhood imagination. The child's frequent reports motivated her parents to take her to a spiritual treatment, which would have caused the contacts to cease. Only in adulthood would the medium restart contact with extraterrestrials. In an interview published in 2014 in *Superinteressante* magazine, Medeiros claims to have a chip installed behind her ear. The device would allow her to keep in touch with two ETs. The first is Zilok, who had shown himself as Casper in her childhood. The other one is Shellyana, a "Pleiadian" ET. This term is recognized among ufologists as referring to extraterrestrials supposedly from the Pleiades star system. In general, the contactees describe them as beautiful, tall and "Nordic" looking beings (Roth, 2005, p. 52). They are seen as benevolent ETs, usually bringing ethical advice to help humanity, being strongly related to the UFO NRMs.

What makes Mônica Medeiros's biography relevant to this analysis is how Shellyana gains new meanings related to elements of Brazilian religiosity. Contactees who claim to receive messages from aliens, such as Adamsky, in the 1950s (Helland, 2000) and Meier, in the 1970s (Clark, 2000) interpret them according to key concepts of New Age style religiosity. However, in this Brazilian

⁴ The First World Forum of Contactees took place in Florianópolis, in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil. The event was promoted by *Revista UFO*, the main Brazilian publication on ufology.

case it is possible to identify some relations with Kardecist Spiritism and Umbanda. The very presence of beings from other planets operates at *Casa do Consolador* in a structurally similar way to these two religions, although there are still references to other New Age practices. This is how the activity of these entities is described on the official website of the religious center:

They [the ETs] come in astral projection, overwhelmingly often and are easily found on the spiritual plane, working alongside Spirits of Light, whose commitment is to save the Earth. But, equally, they come in physical bodies, in their ships, which are visualized more and more frequently. They landed at *Casa do Consolador* in 2003 and have been working with us on various procedures since then. Energy is used to activate devitalized molecular fields that generate diseases in the physical body of plants, animals and humans, without distinction. They also work in Shamanism, Reiki and Umbanda, where several Mentors are extraterrestrials who present themselves as *caboclos* or *preto-velhos* (*Casa do Consolador*, n.d., our translation).

In their study of the New Age in Brazil, Amaral and Heelas identify that certain themes from this religious context tend to blend with the cultural trajectories of the places where they are inserted (Amaral & Heelas, 1994). This tendency towards indigenization is clear in the above section, especially regarding two highlights. The first is the performance of extraterrestrial beings who present themselves as Umbanda mentors⁵, a case of reframing that calls attention and deserves further study. Secondly, I would like to point to the “work alongside Spirits of Light”, an important theme in Kardecist Spiritism. The latter concepts are frequently used in Medeiros's lectures available on the internet. Once a year, the medium gives a lecture by Shellyana, at *Casa do Consolador*. The ET speaks through the channeled speaker, a process similar to telepathy widespread in New Age spiritualities (D'Andrea, 2000, p. 95). At the meetings, Shellyana presents herself as an inhabitant of a “planet of regeneration”, a classification made by Spiritism. According to this cosmology, spiritual and moral evolution would not be exclusive to living beings, occurring also with planets. Each world would then evolve according to its inhabitants, from the most primitive to elevated ones. Those below the scale, such as the Earth, would be places of trial and expiation. In these planets, the spirits would be reincarnated for readjustments, according to laws of cause and effect. Hence the existence of evil and suffering (Cavalcanti, 2008, p. 56). According to Kardecist Spiritism, the world of regeneration would be the next evolutionary stage that the Earth would go through, where the good

⁵ Umbanda entities, also called *santos* or *orixás*, are spirits with stereotypes representative of Brazilian social types, such as indigenous people, *boiadeiros* (Brazilian cowboys), slaves, prostitutes, among others (Negrão 1996, 82). The presence of extraterrestrials or the belief that they can pose as some of these types to provide spiritual treatments is, in fact, a noteworthy innovation.

begins to predominate. The ETs that Mônica Medeiros claims to channel would come from this type of planet.

A lecture by the medium is particularly relevant for the purpose of this article. At an event that brought spiritualists and ufologists together⁶, Medeiros talks about how the process of biological evolution of the human being has suffered interference from extraterrestrial beings. She starts by exposing the principle of biological evolution in the conventional scientific molds, beginning from the geological formation of the Earth and the appearance of single-celled organisms. From then on, spiritual evolution would also have started. “Newly created sparks” would have been brought in from outside the planet to initiate their evolutionary process. The most drastic extraterrestrial interventions would begin with the appearance of the first hominids, influencing the different steps of evolution. The lecture mixes elements of the theories inspired by Erich von Däniken’s “astronaut gods” and spiritist works: on one hand, malicious aliens who sought to loot Earth’s natural resources would have made some genetic modifications in primitive humans to use then as manpower. On the other hand, Jesus would have invited beings from more evolved planets to reincarnate on Earth, assisting in the spiritual and biological evolution of humankind. All of this would have occurred in lost continents, such as Lemuria and Atlantis (Círculo, 2019). Hence, according to Medeiros’s lecture, current human beings would be the result of both biological evolution and genetic or spiritual intervention of other beings, in a model in which a creationist logic underlies.

CONCLUSION

The presence of extraterrestrial beings in the New Age movement and the NRMs is nothing new. It emerged during the 1950s and was strengthened by counterculture movements in the later decades. The growing importance of science in society has not only guaranteed a strengthening of secularization processes. It has also provided elements for the emergence of a scientific mythology.

⁶ It is an event that took place in 2019 in celebration of the arrival of the “Deadline”, a moment from which humanity would evolve intensively. This idea was widely disseminated in the documentary “Deadline according to Chico Xavier”, available on YouTube. The production is based on an alleged confidence made by Chico Xavier, the best known Brazilian spiritist medium, to the spiritist speaker Geraldo Lemos Neto. According to Neto, Xavier would have informed him that the planet would enter into a new era of spiritual and material evolution 50 years after the lunar landing. However, the condition would be that humanity could not enter a new world war within this time. With this prerequisite fulfilled, the documentary explores the expectation about the near future (Círculo, 2014).

These reframings of science concepts were a breeding ground for beings from other worlds, spaceships and their supposedly high science – impossible to be understood by humans. Energies, atoms, molecules, genetic code and other concepts are mobilized from their current stage to future possibilities, reinforcing the plausibility of the contactees' reports.

Another point to note is how the messages attributed to extraterrestrials have changed over time, according to the scientific changes. In the 1950s and 1960s, the alerts revolved around nuclear tests and their destructive potential for the planet. From the 1990s onwards the focus shifted to concepts related to genetic engineering and DNA. Quantum physics has recently been reinterpreted as the possibility of a reunion between science and spirituality. This perspective has also excited contactees, ufologists, new agers and members of some NRMs.

More or less explicitly, all these elements can be found in the two cases presented here. The emphasis, however, is on genetics, represented by the presumed intervention of extraterrestrials in the evolutionary process of human beings. The articulation between science – or a mythology of sciences – and spirituality, appears in these case studies as an articulation between creationism and evolutionism. These concepts are often seen as opposites in traditional religions; however, they are likewise synthesized and even interpreted as complementary in New Age and NRMs arrangements. In these groups, as introduced earlier, there is no dichotomy between spiritual and material or evolution and creation (intervention by higher beings). Even the ideas of biological evolution and spiritual evolution go hand in hand, in a complementary and inseparable way.

This type of thinking is not exclusive to the NRMs, nor to the adherents of diffuse New Age religiosity. It is dispersed in contemporary society, becoming essential for an analysis of the concepts of evolution and creation and how different actors give different meanings to these concepts. In addition to absolute opposition, there are nuances that must be considered and can serve as a reflection about the relationship between science and religion today.

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