

# International Journal of Human Sciences Research

## CHICO XAVIER IN THE LITERATURE OF BRAZILIAN UMBANDA

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This text is the result of research funded by the Research  
Productivity Grant from the National Council for Scientific  
and Technological Development. (CNPq)

**Abstract:** This work aims to go through the interdiscursive paths in which Umbanda literature sought cohabitation with Chico Xavier. The medium from Minas Gerais is seen as a recurrence of authority, as a search for a symbolic good, not only of Brazilian Spiritism, but also inter-confessional. On the other hand, the recurrence of Umbanda to Chico Xavier cannot be studied without paying attention to the constitutive presence of Spiritism in the project of the identity of the new religion. Thus, the project towards a “Umbanda Spiritism” related a good part of Umbanda intellectuals in the search for discursive cohabitation, both with 19th century French Spiritism, as well as its symbolic identity markers, such as psychography. The presence of Chico Xavier in Umbanda literature is seen in two ways, both as a direct presence and in the search to share an interdiscourse, bringing themes and apprehensions typical of his work.

**Keywords:** Spiritism; memory; Umbanda; Chico Xavier.

## INTRODUCTION

From the second quarter of the 20th century, Umbanda gained visibility in the Brazilian urban environment. This mediumistic religion worships spirits familiar to the affective and cognitive universe of Brazilians, such as the indigenous (in the figure of Caboclos), of the blacks (in the figure of the Pretos Velhos), in addition to a diverse pantheon, which celebrates from childhood innocence to transgressive aspects. As time passes, Umbanda cult figures diversify, and even mentors and mediums of Brazilian Spiritism may appear in the present, as is the case of Chico Xavier and his protective spirits. On the other hand, Brazilian Umbanda developed a specific literature, in which doctrinal and fictional works stand out. The frequency with which some Umbanda intellectuals looked directly or indirectly to Chico Xavier shows

his importance as a source of legitimation that goes beyond Spiritism and the Brazilian Spiritist Federation (FEB). In the works of Umbanda intellectuals and currently in the blogs dedicated to Umbanda, which populate cyberspace, we can find Chico Xavier as an evidential presence of the project to bring her closer to a symbolic universe not framed by interests strictly centered on Brazilian Kardecian Spiritism.

## CHICO XAVIER, UMBANDA LITERATURE AND HISTORY OF BRAZIL

I believe that talking about the presence of Chico Xavier in Umbanda literature involves discussions about cultural kinship, the existing affinities between this literature and the vision of the history of Brazil existing in the work of the medium from Minas Gerais. In fact, the mythical narrative of a “Brazil, heart of the world, homeland of the Gospel” appears recurrently in Umbanda literature, showing Chico Xavier as a presence, which, although not always announced or explicit, presents itself as inseparable from the work of many people. intellectuals who thought Umbanda. These men and women who embarked on the task of bringing literacy, a characteristic characteristic of Spiritism codified by Allan Kardec, to the new religion that wanted to be national, representing themselves as authentically Brazilian, also brought a narrative of Brazilian history, highly dependent on two main strands. The first, the triadic reading of the social formation of the Brazilian people present in the work of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (IHGB) (Isaia, 2012a) and the second, precisely the narrative espoused in the psychography of Chico Xavier and attributed by the spiritists to Humberto de Campos. These two readings are intertwined, that of Chico Xavier’s psychography insistently brings the vision of

the IHGB as a metanarrative, in which the idea of the meeting of the three “races”, of the praise of Portuguese as a civilizing element, corroborates a harmonious, inter-relative history, which shows, on the other hand, institutional markers that are extremely dear to that institution and publicized for a long time in history textbooks. The triadic notion of Brazilian historical formation appears prominently in Varnhagen, evidencing a narrative marked by the ideas of encounter, conciliation, harmony and, by the defense of a necessary political centralization, embodied in the praise of the constitutional monarchy. On the other hand, the work of spiritist codification already brought a historical conception in which the “divine laws” beckoned, both for individual and social evolutionary progress. The law of continuous progress reached not only the individual destiny of man, but presided over historical teleology itself, beckoning to a radiant future, closely related to the social utopias of the 19th century and the positivist reading of history. Reading the coding work as an important historical source, we can see a chain that gives intelligibility to the historical process, making it similar to modern macro-explanatory schemes. However, the praise of the revolution, typical of the 19th century, capable of speeding up the teleological course of history, did not appear in the spiritist discourse. The spiritist codification work espoused a harmonious solution to social conflicts and clearly tended to preserve the bourgeois status quo. The spiritist discourse of the 19th century approached the Promethean praise of progress, assured by continuous human evolution. To the class struggle and to the revolutionism preached by socialism, the spiritist discourse responded with the praise of charity, the cornerstone of the spiritist discourse of the 19th century. These intrinsic characteristics of the spiritist coding

work appear in Chico Xavier’s psychography, confirming the teleological and conciliatory vision of the coding work. This view would be endorsed, in the future, by Umbanda literature (Isaia, 2012b) that gained momentum in the first half of the 19th century. This teleological, providential and complimentary conception of social cooperation, the psychography of Chico Xavier manifests itself, above all, in two works: **Brasil, coração do mundo e pátria do evangelho** (Xavier, 2013) and “**A caminho da Luz**” (Xavier, 1998).

In “**Brasil, Coração do mundo e pátria do evangelho**”, Chico Xavier’s psychography develops the representation of a territory chosen by Jesus to make the Gospel good news flourish. The story is told in the form of an epic, with divine providence dictating the course of events (Silva, 2005). The beginning of the book already announces the extraordinary events that characterize the epic, with the narrator announcing:

Brazilian reserves are not limited to the world of steel of material progress, which strongly impressed Humboldt’s spirit, but extend infinitely to the world of the gold of hearts, where the country will write its epic of moral achievements in favor of the world (Xavier, 2013, p. 08)

The narrator explains with these words the divine plan for a “new Palestine” in Brazilian territory, which would serve as a cradle for the evangelization of the world and the spread of Spiritism, considered the “third revelation”.

Jesus transplanted from Palestine to the Cruzeiro region the magnanimous tree of his Gospel, so that its delicate shoots would bloom again, bearing fruit in works of love for all creatures. (Xavier, 2013, p.10)

Chico Xavier’s psychography, closely linked to the work of spiritist codification, also praised the achievements of the 18th century and the Enlightenment. Clearly, there is praise for the supremacy of the republic as a more

rational form of government and a product of social and human evolution. In this detail, the proclamation of the republic is presented as emancipation, the true “coming of age” of the Brazilian people. The performance of Ismael, the guardian angel of Brazil, would be favored by the advent of the republic and by the condition of citizenship conquered by the Brazilian people. Empirical evidence of the conciliatory and harmonic vision characteristic of Chico Xavier’s work appears in the praise given to D. Pedro II, despite the aforementioned affiliation to the republic.

The republican idea was increasingly consolidated in the spirit of the entire nationality. The kind Emperor had never cut off his prodigious flights in the hearts of the popular masses; indeed, he fed them with his exalted examples of democracy. In the spaces, Ismael and his phalanges sought to guide the republican and abolitionist movements, with high serenity and enlightened prudence, in order to avoid the abominable bloodshed by fratricidal frenzies. (Xavier, 2013, p. 161)

This conciliatory and harmonic vision, the praise for a republic and the end of slavery that took place without revolutionary episodes, present in the work of Chico Xavier, will slide into Umbanda literature produced in the 20th century. In this sense, Diamantino Trindade, an Umbanda intellectual, will present the same version for the advent of the republic and the abolition of slavery:

The end of the 19th century is marked in Brazil by a great social balance due to the liberation of slaves and the establishment of the Republic, a fairer form of government that began its pilgrimage in Brazil. The Astral Current of Umbanda takes advantage of this social upheaval and, around 1889, launches the word Umbanda in various parts of the country. (Trindade, 1991, p. 54)

In keeping with the French revolutionary tradition and the spiritist codification, the work of Chico Xavier considers the republic

the pinnacle of political coexistence. The proclamation of the republic would be the last event in which divine intervention would appear directly in the history of Brazil. This is another discursive component shared between Umbanda literature and the work of Chico Xavier. It is quite symptomatic that a good part of Umbanda literature chooses the 15th of November as one of the most important institutional markers (Isaia, 1999): the foundation or the announcement of Umbanda. The origin myth of Umbanda proposed by Brown (1985) refers to Zélio Fernandino de Moraes, who in a spiritist session in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, would have served as a medium to Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas, a spirit considered by most of Umbanda as the entity that brought Umbanda.

The interdiscursive presence of Chico Xavier appears in the work of another important Umbanda intellectual of the first half of the 20th century: Lourenço Braga. For this author, the emergence of Umbanda in Brazil was part of divine designs to mobilize high spirits to act in the directions that national history would take. It is necessary to clarify that Lourenço Braga’s position was quite refractory to the African past, which perhaps can be understood by his gravitation around prejudiced values that permeated social horizons, in a conjuncture in which the abolition of slavery was recent.. For Lourenço Braga, the black Africans who came to Brazil brought a magical heritage, destined, above all, to harm their fellow man. The divine designs, then, appear in Lourenço Braga’s narrative, allowing the emergence of a new religion, Umbanda, capable of “redeeming” the African magical past, providing it with an ethical substrate, approaching Christianity reinterpreted by the Spiritism of the XIX century.

In order to get closer to the brothers who

are used to evil, within the environments constituted by them, the brothers who make up the legions of good decided to divide themselves into groups or phalanges, by affinity and take the humble forms of caboclos, Africans, mermaids, etc., in order to act better and more efficiently, however, without humiliating those misguided brothers. Such practices are called white magic or “Umbanda Law.” (Braga, [n.d], p. 06)

Matta e Silva is another Umbanda intellectual in which it is possible to find the interdiscursive coexistence with Chico Xavier. This coexistence is also based on a position that is quite refractory to the Afro-indigenous practices that preceded Umbanda. In this case, the author refers to “the most confusing practices” that involved “macumba, candomblé, low-spiritism, black magic... (Silva, 2012, p. 54). For Matta e Silva, these practices led to a movement capable of purifying them and calling them to doctrinal and ethical experience. Now, Umbanda would be, for Matta e Silva, precisely this “movement of light”, from where “the phalanges of Caboclos and Pretos Velhos began to emerge... Silva, 2012, p. 55). The idea of the epic narrated in Chico Xavier’s psychographics is ratified with Brazil being chosen by Jesus as the cradle of an “Original Religion”, of a “Mother Science”, of a “Generating Magic”, for Matta e Silva synthesized in Umbanda. For Matta e Silva, Umbanda would be the heir of Eastern Initiatic knowledge, “created, vibrated and ordered to act under the skies of Brazil” (Silva, 2007, p. 157). Thus, what Matta e Silva calls the “Hidden Government of the World”, under the orders of Jesus, would have favored the emergence of Umbanda, to fulfill a civilizing mission from Brazil.

Brothers – the Astral Current of Umbanda emerged as a providence of the Superior Astral, that is, of the mentors of Planet Earth, at the opportune time, over all this mass that qualified as practitioners of the Afro-

Brazilian sects, nowadays already classified, with more property, as an Umbanda community. And for you to understand this well, we are going to elucidate certain angles related to a High Astral Power, defined in certain currents as “The Hidden Government of the World”, so that the said Umbanda Current and its mission over Brazil enter into its juxtaposition. (Silva, 2007, p.75)

In another work by Matta e Silva, **Doutrina Secreta da Umbanda**, the discursive cohabitation with Chico Xavier is more evident, the author practically paraphrasing the work of the medium from Minas Gerais in the title of one of the chapters: “Brazil, cradle of light, guardian of the sacred mysteries of the Cross”:

In this chapter, we will lift another veil and confirm, through the hidden meaning of our doctrine, why Brazil was called, quite rightly, “Heart of the World - Homeland of the Gospel” and that our Umbanda Astral Current defined as “Cradle of Light, Guardian of the Sacred Mysteries of the Cross – Homeland vibrated by the Southern Cross, Cosmogonic Sign of the Christic Hierarchy.” (Silva, 2011)

## **THE RECURRENCE TO CHICO XAVIER IN UMBANDA LITERATURE: THE RECOGNIZED AUTHORITY**

On the other hand, as Chico Xavier imposed himself as a symbolic asset that extrapolated the spiritist confessional domain, mainly through the notoriety achieved through the publishing market, his presence in Umbanda doctrinal literature was also made through those considered to be his spiritual mentors. The presence of André Luiz and Emmanuel, mainly, appeared in the works of some Umbanda intellectuals, as a legitimizing way and capable of bringing symbolic dividends. An example can be found at: **Kardec e a Umbanda**, by Hilda Roxo. In this work,



Emmanuel appeared “recommending” that, completing the Spiritist Pentateuch, this work must be included in the codification of Spiritism (Roxo, 1949). Not only Chico Xavier and his mentors were sought out as symbolic support by Umbanda intellectuals. The Spiritism coder himself, Allan Kardec, as we have seen, was also one, in addition to prominent figures in the Brazilian Spiritist movement, such as Bezerra de Menezes. Thus, Emanuel Zespo also defended that Umbanda would complete the work of spiritist codification, and his book was dedicated: “**O que é a Umbanda**”, to the memory of Bezerra de Menezes, qualified as “father of Spiritism in Brazil, the giant of the pen and of the word who fought the most for the fraternization of the Spiritist family”. (Zesp, 1953, p. 9). The strategy, both of Roxo and Zespo, was, therefore, to establish an “Umbanda Spiritism”, as appears in the title of the First Congress of the new religion held in Rio de Janeiro, in 1941: First Congress of Umbanda Spiritism.

Another writer who will indirectly approach Chico Xavier is Florisbela Maria de Souza, in a work entitled: “**Umbanda para Médiuns**”. This book was “prefaced” by André Luiz, in a clear operation in the sense of sharing the symbolic dividends enjoyed by the psychography of the medium from Minas Gerais. The work was “dictated” by the spirit of Paraguaçu and narrated in an “autobiographical” way the redemption of his karmic debts, when he was sent to the Grupo Espírita Unidos por Amor de Jesus. In the Preface by André Luiz, the endorsement of the narrative of the help to Paraguaçu, carried out by entities of the Umbanda pantheon, is highlighted, explicitly indicating the search for the endorsement of an important symbolic asset of Brazilian Spiritism to Umbanda:

When Paraguaçu disincarnated, in the despair in which he lived his last years, disbelieving in God and in men, he was

dragged by the exus to the crossroads as one of their commanders, to perform works of black magic. It remained like this for some time until, due to the addition of divine mercy, one of his victims knocked on the doors of the “Spiritist Group: “Unidos pelo Amor de Jesus”, thus fulfilling one of the articles of the Umbanda Law: supporting the victim and helping the criminal... Conducted by Mãe Sereia to receive the first baths of spiritual cleansing, it was then delivered to the phalanx of Oxosse (São Sebastião). For his own good it was necessary for him to forget his personality. This is the reason why this point is often heard sung in the good terreiros of Umbanda: He’s a caboclo, he’s a flecheiro, He uses so much vine, in the woods where he was born It’s only Indian forest. (SOUZA, s.d) (no excerpt was highlighted in the original document)

In a more current work, Jota Alves de Oliveira is another Umbanda writer who approached Chico Xavier and those considered to be his spiritual mentors as a resource of authority. This is clear, for example, in the work: “**Umbanda Cristã e Brasileira**”, in which the author dedicates two chapters to Chico Xavier and his psychography. Chapter 12 refers directly to the narrative attributed to Umberto de Campos, starting with the title: “The Gospel Tree”. Chapter 13, dedicated to Chico’s biography, is completely laudatory and apologetic: “The medium Chico Xavier, his trials and his glory” (Oliveira, s.d).

One of the most important characteristics of Umbanda literature produced from the first half of the 20th century onwards was the attempt to endow magical practices, assumed mainly from the Afro-Indian heritage, with an exegesis, articulating them to the doctrinal effort and reconciling them. with religious discourse (Isaia 2013a). For in this case, in addition to the European occult authors, cited as a way of showing off “erudition”, Chico Xavier and his considered mentors also appeared, integrating the aforementioned conciliation between magic and religion. For

example, Jotas Alves de Oliveira, in *Magias da Umbanda*, proposed a “comparative study of positive and negative magic, animal sacrifices condemned by the Bible and mediumship in Umbanda in the face of Spiritism, Religion and the Gospel of Jesus (Oliveira, 1970, p. 01). In this work, the author refers to Chico Xavier as a “dear Messenger, from whom we have collected much in the infinite learning... in his books, mirrors of his soul and of his refined intelligence and wisdom” (Oliveira, 1970, p. 167). Chico Xavier appeared as endorsement for the doctrinal effort of Jota Alves de Oliveira, in the sense of bringing Umbanda practices closer to the codification of Spiritism and the spiritist re-signification of the Gospel:

For all that was researched by the magnificent writer from Maranhão, now in greater spirituality in contacts that the spiritual direction of this world and the information gathered about the strength and destination of the Master's Spirit, by his responsible emissaries, we suppose to be enough to convince our Umbanda brothers to meditate on the invitation we have been making to them since the publication of our first message – The Gospel of Umbanda – so that the codification of the mediumistic religion of Umbanda is doctrinally cemented in the lessons of the Gospel of Jesus. (Oliveira, s.d., p. 106)

In the same Jota Alves de Oliveira, André Luiz appears as an authoritative resource to describe Aruanda, the place where the Umbanda tradition refers to the abode of the Orixás and Entidades (Guimarães & Lima, 1993). Using the authority of André Luiz in *Nosso Lar*, Jota Alves de Oliveira describes Aruanda as a fraternalist colony, a school or college of spirituality” in which the spirits of the Umbanda pantheon learn to subordinate magical knowledge to the “*Evangelho de Jesus*” (Oliveira, 1970), p. 167).

Chico Xavier and André Luiz appear, on the other hand, as legitimate sources

of the so-called “flushing baths”, quite common as resources of a magical nature, in the everyday practices of Umbanda. In this regard, a message attributed to André Luiz circulates in cyberspace, in which he recommends this practice as a “divine magic within reach of our hands” (*O Magnetismo do Banho*, 2014). Of course, I do not intend to discuss the authorship of the message. It is only mentioned here as another discursive resource capable of bringing Chico Xavier and his mentors to the Umbanda universe. In this case, the resignifications are evident, the appropriations capable of transforming the symbolic zeal of Spiritism and the FEB into a guarantor of Umbanda's magical practices.

### **CHICO XAVIER AS A CULT FIGURE IN UMBANDA**

In a recent publication, on a blog dedicated to Umbanda, Chico Xavier appears in an unusual way, showing the importance he has come to have in the Umbanda movement. In the month of July 2009, the aforementioned blog chose to transcribe a page psychographed by the medium, instead of honoring the Orixá Nanã and the cult figures of the cowboys (*Homenagem*, 2014).

On the other hand, the presence of Chico Xavier with the attributes of Catholic sanctity appears in Umbanda literature in a work by Pai Juruá, which refers the medium from Minas to the quality of a semiromba. The semirombas would be, in Pai Juruá's view, spirits who “devoted their lives to evangelization and contemplative prayers and prayers” (Pai Juruá, 2011, p. 233). Thus, from São Francisco de Assis to Buda, passing through Bezerra de Menezes and Chico Xavier, semirombas are worshiped with the attributes of holiness. The presence of Chico Xavier among the Umbanda semirombas is symptomatic, reinforcing, in this identification, the hagiographic characteristics of the medium's

biography, studied by Sandra Stoll, marking his proximity to the values of Catholic sanctity such as chastity, renunciation, suffering. (Stoll, 2003). The hagiographic attributes (Stoll, op.cit.) of Chico Xavier's biography are seen as capable of "humanizing", in Brazilian lands, the scientific and experimental character of 19th century French Spiritism. At the same time, the comfortable situation of practically symbolic unanimity enjoyed by his figure made Umbanda literature even today seek a bridge between the annunciation or foundation of Umbanda and its figure. In a recent Umbanda periodical publication, Chico Xavier and Zélio de Moraes appear as complementary figures, reinforcing the figure of the medium from Minas Gerais as a symbolic reference for an interesting approach. Caboclo Sete's message appears as psychographed by the medium Francisco Sá:

Chico Xavier brought the practice of humanism to spiritism, which initially appeared in France as a more scientific doctrine in the spiritual field, mainly to organize our relations with the astral. Zélio de Moraes brought the religious practice of nature worship, expanding the notion of access to spirituality to all, in a structured way on the physical and astral planes. They are complementary religious concepts, where one teaches a lot of practices to the other. (Sá, 2012, p. 05)

## CONCLUSION

The presence of Chico Xavier in Umbanda literature is a phenomenon that attests to the enormous capacity developed by the Minas Gerais medium in order to add expectations and desires of a large part of the Brazilian population and, at the same time, to embody values very dear to this same people. Pierre Bourdieu thought that existence, social valorization depended largely on the act of being perceived as different, not reducible to the common, to the commonplace. Hence the

unequal symbolic accumulation among men, which also brings with it an unequal fiduciary investment, an unequal social recognition of both. The Umbanda intellectuals' search for Chico Xavier, his quest to share his intimacy, his values and accomplishments can be read precisely as an attempt to approach something different, which, however, is not another. The relationship between the two is far from being guided by alterity. On the contrary! The Umbanda intellectuals studied here sought in Chico someone whose social performance strength came from the experience and incarnation of extremely expensive and rare values. An axiological rarity that, before separating him, made Chico a familiar figure in the horizon of values worshiped by a large part of the Brazilian population. That's why the quest to bring him to the familiarity of Umbanda, hence this quest to even integrate him into its pantheon.



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