

*Relational Dialectics,
Interspecific Interactions,
and Religious Animus in
Jorge Amado's 'The War
of the Saints –
A Postcolonial Critique*

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Introduction

The reciprocity of colonisation process and anti-colonial representations in Jorge Amado's *The War of the Saints* lends the text to postcolonial reading. The interplay recapitulates colonialist and anti-colonialist polemics on the discourse of imbalance and/or dominant influence

of colonial powers over their erstwhile colonies. The neo-colonial debate which narrates “all forms of control of the ex-colonies after political independence” (Ashcroft et al 2000, 146) by their erstwhile colonial masters is central to this discourse. Equally important is the understanding of nature of control, influence and power relations in post-independence African, Asian or South American nations. Considering the subtle or the most vicious form of political, cultural, religious and intellectual controls that ex-colonial powers wield over their former colonies, an insight can be said to have been gained into the on-going attempts by the West to (re)construct or perpetuate vestiges of colonialist ideologies and conditions in their ex-colonies. These conditions have also been met with stiff resistance from anti-colonialist elements in the concerned nations. To better appreciate the import of this dialectics, it is imperative to examine the moral foundation or justification often adduced by the colonial West to legitimise colonialism/imperialism vis-à-vis the ideological counterpoise of anti-colonialist forces. The anti-colonial elements contend that the rationalisation of colonialism/imperialism is a proof of the colonialists’ imperviousness; hence the swingeing attacks against colonial hegemony by the anti-colonialist forces. Ashcroft has, for instance, identified the “smoke-screen of civilizing ‘task’, paternalistic ‘development’ and ‘aid’” (2007, 54) as possible factors often put forward by the colonial West to rationalise colonialism/imperialism. However, anti-colonialist elements believe

these factors run contrary to reasoning in view of the epistemic violence and disruption that colonialism (has) unleashed on colonised spaces. Apart from its thingification garble (Cesaire 1955, 6), colonial structures were enthroned to depersonalise and zombify the subaltern.

The aim of this article is to contribute to the colonialist/anti-colonialist discourse by examining the representation of dialectical relations between the metropolitan powers and the subaltern population during and after colonial occupation of colonised spaces in the tri-continent of Africa, Asia, and South America. This examination is underpinned by the postcolonial self-delusional claim of metropolitan civilisation, technological sophistication, and “cultural ghettoization” (Alam and Purakayastha 2019, 16) of the subaltern. It specifically draws on colonial subjectivities and the weaponisation of colonialist ideological structures to *otherise* non-European population. This otherisation, as analysed in this article, takes the insidious covering of religion (Catholicism) (Tyson 2006, 419; Bulhan 2015, 241) to deepen the alterity of the subaltern. The article leverages on the Manichean imagination underscoring self-other tensions to indicate relational dialectics between colonialist and anti-colonialist elements in Brazil, as portrayed in Amado’s *The War of the Saints*. The article is not an attempt to study Brazilian prose literature or any other national literature; it is rather a critical assessment offering a palimpsest of past and present in postcolonial literature.

Rather than doing a holistic study of current postcolonial literary themes, it uses a text produced in a postcolonial space to validate dominant rancorous practices and contradictions that define a conquered population by another. In this regard, Brazil's colonial experience serves as a correlate of Senegal's, just as India's colonial conditions parallel Cuba's, Myanmar's or Togo's conditions. Any literary text could as well be chosen from these conquered spaces to expound the prevailing dialectical relations between the conquerors and the conquered.

The choice of Amado's text for the article is manifold. First, it provides a succinct portrayal of human oppression in any postcolonial space. Second, the text reveals the relational dialectics between European Catholicism and Yorùbá (African) religions, as well as their faithful. Third, it helps to contextualise the current (re)positioning of Brazil by Jair Bolsonaro-led administration which has been accused variously of embarking on "minority witch-hunting" (Alam and Purakayastha 2019, 16) and introducing controversial policies targeted at the vulnerable, especially Blacks and indigenous Brazilians, in the South American most populous country (Lum 2019, par. 5). Consequently, Bolsonaro's Brazil is viewed as a correlate of Amado's Brazil. Though one is textual and the other real, the struggle for power relations between the colonisers and the colonised, white Brazilians and Afro-Brazilians or indigenous Brazilians has thrown the

country into a vortex of wars. The wars are an epic battle that similarly resonates in almost all the postcolonial nations of the world. While major-minor dichotomy prevails in India, especially among the Indian Hindu majority against Muslim minority, this tension also reverberates in Iraq, Syria, or Egypt where minority non-Moslems are persecuted and/or prevented from sharing their faith openly. The same is noticed in Africa and South America where religious, racial, ethnic, ideological cross-currents have escalated postcolonial wars. Amado's text then offers a symbolic signification for reading and interpreting avalanche of tensions or relational issues that predominate in nations that were once colonies of European superpowers. The rhetoric of transculturation in the text also makes it unique as it provides a literary platform for the mapping of continental triangulation in transatlantic slavery scholarship and the convergence of cultural interactions across three continents (Europe, Africa, and South America). The article, therefore, projects *The War of the Saints* as a simulacrum of Sartre's literature engagée to validate the recognition of Amado as a foremost Brazilian writer who believes that "the great social and political questions of our time should be the concern of every member of society" (Whiting 1948, 84). The text further proves his commitment towards discussing post-colonial tensions in Brazil's rainbow cultural space.

Preserving Colonialists' Vestiges in Brazil

Brazil, just like any other postcolonial countries in the Americas, was once under the colonial sway of Euro-

pean superpowers. Colonized by Portugal in the 15th century, Brazil – before eventually securing political independence – was, at one time or the other, invaded by Spain, the Netherlands, France and England (Meade 2010, 23-24). Each of these superpowers attempted to bring the country under their respective control. With the political independence of Brazil in 1822 from Portugal, the Portuguese preserved their colonial vestiges in the country and utilised the relics as a tool of influence over social, religious, political and economic decisions in the country. One of the institutions that serve as the vestige of the colonial West in Brazil is the Catholic Church (Schmidt 2016, 3). The Portuguese colonialists/imperialists employed the religious institution to control Brazilians prior to the political independence of the country. The Catholic Church has had a prolonged influence in Brazil. It started with the support and papal bulls issued to the Portuguese kings by successive Popes to propagate true faith, Christianise the whole world after the success of the Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula (Adeniyi 2017, 55-83). Bruneau states that the “discovery and settlement of Brazil was a joint venture of the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church. With the sword went the cross, and in fact the colony was originally called the land of the true cross, Vera Cruz. Expansion in the colonial period by the Iberian powers was based on a combination of economic, political and religious motives” (1974, 12). Gilberto Freyre also reveals that “It is impossible to deny that the economic imperialism of Spain and Portugal was bound up in the most intimate fashion with the Church and the reli-

gious [...] [because the] conquest of markets, lands, and slaves [equals] the conquest of souls” (Bruneau 1974, 249). It is also believed that Western powers still use the institution of the church as a tool of control in Brazil and the rest of Latin America, even though the rise of Evangélicos is dwindling the influence of Catholicism in the country (Schmidt 2016, 3). Though the tenor and character of the institution has undergone transformation considering the fusion of its practices with Yorùbá *òrìsà* worship, the colonial West is even confronted with a daunting task of pruning one of their important weapons of control on their erstwhile colony of its paganism and demonic influences. This appears to be the case with folk Catholicism which Bettina Schmidt notes is the predominant form of Christianity traditionally practised in which elements of African religions are syncretised with medieval Portuguese Christianity and indigenous beliefs (2016, 2).

The foregoing underlies the thematic concern of Jorge Amado’s *The War of the Saints*. The text reveals the interest of the Vatican, represented by the levy of Catholic priests, to restore true Catholic faith in Bahia and strip it of heathenish practices. Amado’s text enacts an outcome of virtue over vice, victory of the oppressed over their oppressors, and a comeuppance or just deserts for those who attempt to muffle the cultural expression of the oppressed (Afro-Brazilians). Set in Bahia, the novel narrates the deep involvement of the pantheon of

Yorùbá deities in the lives of Bahians as well as the syncretism of Yorùbá *òrìsà* worship with Catholic faith in the country. The narrative is woven around the power of Oya Yansan, the Yorùbá goddess of the sea and wife of Sàngó, to dispense justice and secure freedom for her devotees in Bahia. It also narrates the swift intervention of the goddess in thwarting the destruction of *òrìsà* worship as well as the relics of slavery by Catholic faithful. Oya Yansan, who has been syncretised with Saint Barbara of the Thunder in folk Catholicism, possesses the statue of her alter ego considered to be a priceless relic of Afro-Brazilians. Housed in the main church of Santo Amaro da Purificacao, it is released unwillingly by the hot-headed vicar of Santo Amaro, Father Teofilo Lopes de Santana. The statue is on its way to Bahia for a religious art exhibition in Bahia. Carried by *Sailor Without a Port*, the saint/statue disembarks on her own at the dock and disappears into the town visiting *iles or terreiro de Candomblé* (Houses of Candomblé). Her main intention for visiting Bahia is to secure the release of Manela interned at a convent by Adalgisa for participating in the Bomfim Thursday and planning to elope with her lover. The Bomfim Thursday is the most important festival in Bahia when Bahians wash the Cathedral with waters of Oxala. On the other hand, Adalgisa is a daughter of a Spaniard and a Black woman. Brought up by her godmother as a puritanical Catholic, she hates anti-Catholic practices. She sees Candomblé as a centre of perdition where the devil ensnares the souls of Christians. As an

abícun whose mother dies after a “swap of heads” sacrifice, Adalgisa refuses to embrace the religion of her forbears. Abícun is the Atlantic Yorùbá word for àbíkú – a child born several times but dies each time s/he is born. The “Swap of head” sacrifice implies that Dolores will die in place of her daughter, Adalgisa. Being an abícun, it is her fate to die and be born again. However, her death can be averted if anyone accepts to take her place. Having reached 21, Dolores decides to lay down her life for Adalgisa so that her first child can live. The child is, therefore, expected to be owned by Oya Yansan. She is also expected to serve the Yorùbá water goddess for the rest of her life.

Oya Yansan secures the release of Manela from the Lapa convent supernaturally. The goddess possesses Manela in front of the convent and eventually leads her to Candomblé do Gantois for initiation. In company of her confessor, Father Jose Antonio, Adalgisa secures another court order to arrest Manela and return her to the convent. Accompanied by two bailiffs and Father Antonio, Adalgisa is possessed on her way to Candomblé do Gantois by Oya Yansan chaperoned by other Yorùbá deities (Exu Male, Oxossi and Xango). Oxossi and Xango possess the bailiffs and they (bailiffs) begin to perform *saraband*, a dance indicating proper greetings to Exu, on the road. Father Antonio is humiliated by the gods. He is stripped naked, beaten, and later runs away. Adalgisa becomes unconscious and is carried by Exu Male on

his strange-looking donkey to the *caruru*, a feast in honour of Oya Yansan or any other Yorùbá gods in Bahia, of Jacira do Odo Oya where she is (re)presented as a daughter of Oya Yansan.

War between Catholicism and African Deities

Catholicism, in essence, serves as a representation of colonial influence in Brazil. It is a sad reminder of the Western misinterpretation of religion to justify the equation of Christianity with civilization, and equation of African religious practices with paganism or savagery (Césaire 1955). Catholicism, therefore, becomes one of the debating issues that pitch advocates or representatives of neo-colonial/imperial Brazil against those who stand against neo-colonialism/imperialism. This debate is even germane when contextualised within the oppressive military juntas and their anti-masses policies in most of the postcolonial nations around the globe. Other noticeable colonialist and anti-colonialist debates in Amado's *The War of the Saints* include cultural assimilation/acculturation issue, or the Europeanisation and Africanisation of Blacks and Whites respectively. Others include syncretism, hegemonic tendencies (the Aryan race theory, racism, separationism, race/culture stereotypes), and the Manichean categories of good/evil, black/white.

In the text, two opposing forces are at war with each other – the Catholic Church with its retinue of priests,

laymen or the feudal bourgeoisie/neo-colonialists and anti-syncretic individuals, on the one hand. On the other hand are the tribunes of the landless, defenders of plebeians, the advocates of Candomblé, or the defenders of the “Church of the Poor”. The latter group also comprises pro-syncretic elements within Catholic faith who believe that the strength of Bahia (Brazil) lies in its miscegenation. While the Catholic Church is divided against itself, as some of its priests side with Candomblé and use their pastoral calling to denounce exploitation of the poor, arrogance of the feudalists, and military junta in Brazil; all Afro-Brazilians are united in their resolve to preserve their African identity. Besides, they join forces together to fight off attempts by the reactionary West to denounce and end tinctures of age-long transcultural elements which their enslaved ancestors carefully preserved in and through Catholic faith. However, few exceptions are noticed in the characterisation of Adalgisa, for instance. She deliberately distances herself from her mother’s African side, downplays her African features and denies her identity as abicun. War is foregrounded in the text to indicate the resonance of disruption brought about by the oppositionality of two mutually exclusive faiths. While war manifests at interfaith level, its microcosmic intra-faith operation exhumes ingrained dissensions and schisms within Catholicism. In fact, the schism may be the fallout of affective polarisation and ideological distinctions that have shaped the institution of Catholicism in the last few years. These distinctions

may have also been premised on a number of factors, including the supportive or oppositional relationship of the church with the state, the failure of the Church to cater to the needs of the vulnerable, the manipulation of the Church by the elite bourgeois to defend their self-interests, and the opposition or support given to syncretic practices within Catholicism.

With regard to the text, the war within the Catholic Church begins with the open criticism of Candomblé and claim of bastardisation of Catholic principles by Catholic priests. This criticism to some of these priests and Afro-Brazilians, who are supportive of the marriage between Catholicism and Candomblé, is merely gratuitous. The primate of the archdiocese of Brazil, Dom Rudolph, accuses some clerics of endorsing evil worship among Catholic faithful, rather than condemning it. What Rudolph interprets as Catholic principles are those tendencies that perpetuate colonialist ideologies of subjugation, hegemony, arrogance and oppression. However, the parish priest of Piacava, Father Aberlado Galvao, believes otherwise. He holds the view that the essence of Christianity is to save the lost, help the needy, and not to abuse or denounce the poor and those who wish to syncretise their indigenous culture/religion with Catholic faith. Amado captures the war between the priests when Dom Rudolph summons father Aberlado Galvao to Bahia to explain his involvement in the attack of Santa Eliodora plantation owned by Colonel

Joaozinho Costa:

Between the auxiliary bishop [...] and the obscure parish priest from Piacava, the Army of Christ stood drawn up in battle formation [...] Each was quite different from the other, the bishop's and the vicar's: on opposite sides, they were enemies. Dom Rudolph had no doubt whatever, and he would affirm it in an authoritative way: Christ's army had a centuries-old mission to uphold over five continents the property rights of the ruling classes. [...] Father. Father Aberlado, on the contrary, considered that the Church required submission and blind obedience of its faithful, in the service of the rich and powerful – to the rich went the goods of this world, to the poor, the hope of the kingdom of heaven. (Amado 1993, 116-117)

The comment by Dom Rudolph that “Christ's army had a centuries-old mission to uphold over five continents the property rights of the ruling classes” is absolutist (Amado 1993, 116-117). The statement further ingeminates the Christianising mission of the Vatican as encapsulated in the papal bull of 1452 (Adeniyi 2018). The decree is an instance of anti-relativism which essentialises a given religion, but demonises the others. This sentiment clearly underlies colonialist discourse. The success of subjugating a given population by another is built on the otherisation of the epistemology and cultural practices of the conquered. Besides, the Marxist

tone underlying Father Galvao's belief, like some other anti-military, anti-colonialist clerics, accounts for his perception as a communist sponsored by Russiato destabilise Brazil. Father Galvao's perception is false; it is a web of lie spun by White supremacist priests to smear his good image which is in contrast to Dom Rudolph's. Dom Rudolph is noted for his hatred of syncretism, his belief in White supremacy and racial/Aryan purity disposition. He advocates stereotyping of Blacks and half-breeds in Brazil, and openly canvasses for non-mixture of race. Dom Rudolph may be regarded as the textual representation of Jair Bolsonaro whose avowed "positions against affirmative action, against Black people, their alleged crimes and religions, and Black nations" (Alves and Vargas 2018, par. 10) fundamentally confirm anti-blackness spirit in Brazil. He hates cultural assimilation and denounces the postcolonial category which Ashcroft et al call "Going Native" – that is "the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs" (2007, 106). In his theological opus, he advocates racial purity and condemns, "race-mixing and religious syncretism, defending the rigorous purity of the faith and the exactness of dogma" (Amado 1993, 66). As portrayed by Amado, Dom Rudolph believes that Bahia was:

inhabited by idolatrous heathens and halfbreeds, the majority of them black, ignorant of the hegemonomies of race and culture – that is, the Aryan race

and Western culture – who broke the law, disobeyed the gospels, conjoined all the colors of the rainbow, and in illicit beds of love, mingled their blood and their gods [...] it was most urgent [...] to separate the wheat from the chaff, good from evil, and white from black, to impose limits, to draw boundaries. (Amado 1993, 67)

While Father Aberladois supported by the vicar of Santo Amaro (Dom Maximiliano von Gruden), the abbot of the Abbey of Saint Benedict (Father Teofilo Lopez de Santana), and Dom Timoteo Amoroso; the reactionary and conservative elements who crave the recreation of colonialist structures in post-independence Bahia (Brazil) include Dom Rudolph, also known as “auxiliary bishop”. Other right-wingers include: Father Jose Antonio Hernandez, Adalgisa, the Chief Juvenile Judge for the District of Salvador (Dr Liberato Mendes Prado d’Avila), military apologists, and feudalists. The thread of Jorge Amado’s narrative connects these two opposing forces and locks them up in an eternal feud. Branded as communists, the military and their Catholic conservatives – who similarly serve as swastikas in the text – use legal system, political power and deliberate stereotyping of their opponents to annihilate them. Ze do Liro, for instance, is hired to murder the supposed communists. Being a notorious hired assassin on the payroll of Colonel Joaozinho Costa, he believes that “If someone was willing to pay him to dispatch a living soul [...] there had to be a good reason for it – nobody threw away money”

(Amado 1993, 271). As a proof of their brutality, Colonel Joaozinho Costa pays assassins to murder Father Aberlado Galvao, just as Father Henrique Pereira is killed in Pernambuco by constables of the military junta. Worse still, the spiritual forbear of Father Pereira, Frei Caneca, is also shot on the “Campo da Polvora, in the heart of the city of Bahia, to serve as an example” (Amado 1993, 265) to the dissenting voices. In an attempt to destroy legacies of slavery in Bahia, wipe out Candomblé from the city and its people, as well as realise the Vatican’s mandate of ending the waning influence of Catholicism among heathens in the city and restoring true Catholicism in Brazil, Father Jose Antonio Hernandez builds a “New Church of Sant’Ana in Rio Vermelho” (Amado 1993, 175), which he calls “A splendid victory!” (Amado 1993, 175). According to the novel’s omniscient narrator, the cleric:

succeeded in building the large, imposing church dedicated to Mary’s mother, whose worship had hitherto been reduced to a miserable chapel traditionally connected to street festivals and Candomblé ceremonies [...] Even so, the victory wasn’t complete, however, because father Jose Antonio had wanted to erect the new church on the ruins of a popular syncretic chapel located in the middle of Largo de Sant’Ana [...] The majestic new Church of Sant’Ana [...] had been built instead in between the Largo de Sant’Ana and Largo da Mariquita, right next to Colonia de Pescadores, the fishermen’s colony. This site was also ap-

propriate, for as tall and broad as the church was, it would smother – that was how the priest had imagined it – the Peji de Yemanja, the queen of the sea. (Amado 1993, 175-176)

Father Antonio is also involved in the plan to extinguish the “Engenho Velho Candomblé, the Ile Iya Nasso, the most ancient and venerable fetishist temple in Bahia” (Amado 1993, 176) which dates back to 1830. He goes about this whipping up sentiment of Catholic faithful, feudalists and business owners in Bahia against Candomblé. For instance, he “Appealed to the interests and greed of the property owners and real estate magnates” (Amado 1993, 177), and draws their attention to the White House on the top of a hill. The house is a Candomblé temple, and places of worship for other African-based religions in Bahia. The Black people of Bahia who are advocates of syncretism and culture preservation, however, react against Father Antonio’s moves. They mobilise one another to counter his plan to obliterate their cultural patrimony. To spite the Catholic Church and neo-colonial apologists in Bahia, Jorge Amado writes that “the common people, the black masses, led by Flaviano, the president of the Colonia de Pescadores” (Amado 1993, 176) “had assembled to the sound of drums and Yoruba songs to dedicate a statue of Yemanja erected between the church and the Casa do Peso, the work of Manual do Bomfim, a sculptor in the area” (Amado 1993, 176). On learning about the effron-

tery of Candomblé people in Bahia, Father Jose Antonio “burning with anger, inveighed against sacrilege and barbarism” (Amado 1993, 176) in his homily, and denounces their action, which he describes as “unheard-of, a bit of insolence, frightful!” (Amado 1993, 176).

The preternatural involvement of Oya Yansan in the intractable feud saves Father Aberlado Galvao from being shot by Ze do Lirio. Patricia da Silva Vaalserberg has offered a sacrifice of blood to Oya at Axe of Alaketu on behalf of Father Galvao, because she is deeply in love with him and does not want anything untoward to happen to him. Oya preternaturally prevents Father Galvao’s arrest by the combination of federal and state police at the heat of the disappearance of the statue of Saint Barbara the Thunder. Exu Mae, who is summoned by Oya to help in the fight against anti-òrisà forces in Bahia, appears as “a fellow Pernambucan, a halfbreed” (Amado 1993, 298) on a donkey. He prevents the murder of Father Galvao during an improvised Candomblé carnival organised for Antenne Deux, a film production for the French audience in Paris. Ze do Lirio, who never misses his target, is confronted with an unimaginable situation as all his efforts to have his bullets hit his target fail:

Father Aberlado had come down from the music truck holding a tambourine and Patricia put her arm around his waist. Ze do Lirio came forward, aimed

his revolver at the back of the doomed man's neck from a yard away, and pulled the trigger. But someone bumped his arm – it leaped like a broken spring – and the bullet sped off toward the horizon. Ze do Lirio turned around, ready to liquidate the brazen person who had dared to push his elbow. But he saw no one except the dozing man and the donkey, who was busy chewing the printed paper, tasty and nutritious as it was. The couple was still dancing a Carnival step, and Ze do Lirio had no time to figure out what had happened. He forced his way through the crowds and took aim at the head of the lewd priest [...] but once more his arm shook, and the bullet disappeared into the thin air. The same thing happened on his third, fourth, and fifth tries, until there was only one bullet left in the revolver. Ze do Lirio was going slightly crazy. (Amado 1993, 299)

Apart from Catholicism, the Convent of Immaculate Conception is another Portuguese colonial vestige in Bahia. As a synecdochic reference to the anachronism pervading Catholic faith in Brazil, the convent is also indicative of brutality of colonialism and its enduring structures that confine, intern and restrict in order to correct errors, teach morality and possibly ensure spiritual wholeness of inmates. On hearing that Manela has been interned at the convent, the swift dispatch with which Bahians attempt to ventilate their angst against the convent and its workforce speaks volumes about their hatred of the colonial/Catholic vestige. Even the Moth-

er Leonor de Lima, the head of the convent, expresses surprise on learning that a young girl is to be kept in the custody of the convent: “The mother superior was startled by the request. It’s been years since we took in the last one – a girl from the Baixo Sao Francisco [...] Her father brought a letter of recommendation from the bishop of Barra. She died here, poor thing, from tuberculosis. Or from melancholy – only God knows” (Amado 1993, 236). Father Jose Antonio’s response to the superior mother is revealing. It indicates the uncanny disposition of an average colonialist or colonial apologist whom Césaire believes has a Hitler inside him (1955, 3). He seeks to apply colonialist procedures to the abjected Afro-Brazilians, and refuses to be moved by their plight, their chequered history or their fate as colonial or postcolonial subjects. Their liminality, in-between essor the state of confusion and demoralisation that confronts them (the colonised) is of no concern to the colonialists/imperialists. The same mind-set drove slave merchants and their African compradors who ignored the unimaginable suffering and plight of their victims while transatlantic slave trade lasted (Adeniyi 2017). Father Antonio has simply replied to superior mother’s comment, saying, “This house of God was founded by those who came before us to protect virtue and punish sin – don’t forget that, Mother. You should celebrate the chance, Mother, to fulfil the order of the Lord when the occasion arises” (Amado 1993, 237).

The internment of Manela in Lapa convent parodies the pathetic story of Saint Barbara who lived in the Syrian city of Heliopolis in the 3rd century. Upon losing his wife, Dioscorus – Saint Barbara’s pagan father and a wealthy nobleman – was said to have devoted himself to his daughter and built a tower to protect and prevent her from becoming a Christian. In this context, one should refer to Michael Jordan’s article, “Saint Barbara the Martyr”. The only difference between the two narratives is that Barbara died in defence of her faith; Manela, however, lives and gets initiated into Candomblé. In the light of the foregoing, *The War of the Saints* can be read as the war of ideological distinctions and the vaunted ego that fuelled slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and racism. The ego is reinforced by superior-inferior category in the collective unconscious of the colonialists/imperialists. Just as Frantz Fanon puts it, “Inferiorization is the native correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority” (1952, 73); besides, “it is the racist who creates the inferiorized” (1952, 73), and determines the superior person using his own measurements.

Towards Dismantling Colonialist Structures

In Jorge Amado’s *The War of the Saints*, Oya clearly performs her new role as a dispenser of justice and a goddess who seeks the freedom of her children from oppressive tendencies that subjugate them in post-slavery Brazil. Among the continental (African) Yorùbá, Oya

(Yansan) is the favourite wife of Sàngó – a primordial African god associated with thunder and lightning (Pessoa de Barros, 2008). Apart from serving as the tribune of the poor and defender of the rights of her own people, the goddess also exercises her powers to dismantle vestiges of Portuguese/Spanish imperialism. She achieves this by preventing imperialists and their representatives from erasing relics of slavery in Bahia. Upon her disappearance as the statue of Saint Barbara of the Thunder, the goddess mingles with Bahians and gathers up along her way to the barracão, a large room or hall where Candomblé ceremonies take place, “injustices and evil deeds, carrying them in a bundle under her left arm, while in her right hand were thunder and lightning” (Amado 1993, 16). Even at the barracão, she lies at the feet of “[a]n *iyalorixa*, a *mae de santo*, a priestess, [...] large enough to gather in her lap of hills and valleys all the complaints, torments, and entreaties of her sons and daughters, the people of Bahia” (Amado 1993, 17). To foreground her justice-seeking mission and her quest to redress injustice, the first act she performs in Bahia is to throw an impostor out of the house and bring about restoration:

Why did Oba Are sit on the edge of an ordinary bench set out for visitors and not in one of the wicker chairs reserved for guests of honor? Wherever he sat, that was where the throne was, the *ogan-da-sala* said, trying to explain. Oya agreed with that no-

tion, but she didn't accept it as an excuse for such inexcusable presumption. Sketching a gesture in the air, she dumped the insolent pretender out of the chair he'd dared to occupy. The Africanologist found himself violently shaken by Oya, with a gale force that uproots trees and flings them far away. Lifted up and thrown onto the ground, he felt a punch in the chest and another in the pit of his stomach, along with a couple of slaps on his face. He got up, groggy, gasping for breath, and rounded up his troop of nit-wits – he was a tour guide – and beat a hasty retreat. (Amado 1993, 17-18)

Her main assignment, which set her and other Yorùbá gods against Catholic/European reactionary forces, is to “free a young woman named Manela from captivity and to teach her aunt Adalgisa what it means to have to wear a packsaddle [...] to teach her tolerance and joy and the goodness of life” (Amado 1993, 19). Manela is a symbol of the oppressed in the narrative. She represents the voiceless, the downtrodden, the subaltern. Her predicament at the hands of her aunt, Adalgisa, is reminiscent of trans-Atlantic slavery that uprooted millions of Africans from their homeland and sent them into forced labour in the New World. In the novel, there are two opposing forces and two contending faiths. Similarly, there are binary oppositions of African/European cultural dichotomy, Catholicism/Candomblé rift, and old/new orders. While one (European/Catholic order) subjugates the other; the victims/the subjugated seek freedom from

their captivity which they are incapable of securing by themselves, hence the involvement of the gods to deliver the abjected Afro-Brazilians from oppressive, restrictive tendencies that stymie their aspirations and cultural expressions. The major leitmotif in *The War of the Saints* is how to secure liberty for the voiceless. This motif is central to the anti-colonialist campaign mounted against European superpowers in many English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch colonies. The gods secure freedom for the oppressed from their oppressors: the Catholic Church (the Vatican), Adalgisa, Europeans, and equally other forces that attempt to abrogate *òrìsà* worship in Bahia, Brazil. The pursuit of freedom and justice in the text can also be bifurcated into Oya Yansan's quest for emancipation of her people, especially Manela and Adalgisa, and the quest by the anti-military Catholic priests and faithful for a responsive and non-conservative, non-restrictive Catholic faith in Bahia.

While the contending issue between the two Catholic opposing forces borders on the sacred status of the Catholic Church in Brazil, Bahians – most of whom are products of miscegenation – oppose the claim. To some priests and laymen, the Catholic Church has been greatly polluted owing to its fusion with Yorùbá *òrìsà* worship. To Bahians, the glory of Bahia lies in its mixed blood status, and Candomblé helps to protect the African heritage in Brazil. Manela is a victim of puritanical Catholic orthodoxy. She needs the intervention of a Yorùbá god-

ness to secure her freedom from internment and inhibiting forces that frustrate the expression of her cultural heritage as well as her aspiration to toe the path of her mother who dies a Candomblé devotee. Manela's African side prevails over her European features. Adalgisa, an abicun, needs the healing of *òrìsà* for her to be cured of her migraine, rotten moods, and hatred for sexual intimacy with her husband, Danilo. She distances herself from her African side and remains "loyal to the Catholicism of [her] father, Don Francisco Romero Perez y Perez [...] [and] followed the path of the Spanish colony and Holy Mother Church with no deviation" (Amado 1993, 46).

The anti-military priests advocate a Catholic faith or "Church of the Poor" that will cater for the needy, allocate land to the landless, and limit the powers of feudalists and supporters of oppressive military junta in Brazil. They see nothing wrong in having *òrìsà* worship in the church. The priests, therefore, need preternatural powers that will protect them from hired assassins who have sent many of their colleagues to their early graves. The coming of Oya Yansan to Bahia is then timely, considering her assignment to free her children and redress injustice which the church and the representatives of the Vatican have been unable to fix. Oya Yansan, for instance, indicates her interest to set free. Manela's possession by Oya in front of the convent – a symbol of Catholic faith and vestige of European imperialism – and the dances

performed by Manela in front of the convent also portray the victory of justice over injustice:

[S]he came out dancing along the sidewalk by the convent, went down to the square – Master Pastinha couldn't see, but he could guess what was happening. He raised his hands and lowered his head as is obligatory and greeted the *orixa*: “Eparrei, Oya!” The people repeated as a chorus, the palms of their hands at face level turned toward the enchanted one: “*Eparrei*, Yansan, mother of thunder! *Eparrei*, Oya!” Manela's face glowed, her body loose in the novice's habit, in the swirl of the dance, more beautiful than Miro had ever seen her. (Amado 1993, 245-246)

The encounter between the two contending forces on Avenida Cardeal da Silva – the way that leads to Candomblé do Gantois, where Manela is to be initiated into the religion of her mother – perhaps accounts for the origin of the novel's title. The encounter creates a public scenario where the Yorùbá gods and their reactionary Catholic opponents test their might. Father Jose Antonio who represents the West (the swastika), Adalgisa, and two bailiffs are on their way to forcefully arrest Manela and return her to the Lapa convent, only to be confronted by Exu Male, Xango and Oxossi at the behest of Oya Yansan. The outcome of the encounter sees the gods having an upper hand over the Catholic faith, and the victory of justice over injustice:

Fighting on the side of obscurantism was Father Jose Antonio Hernandez, the Falangist, the swastika guts, the anathema mouth, the atomic balls. Fighting on the side of humanism were the three orixas from Africa, Oxossi, Xango, and Esu Male [...] Adalgisa fell to her knees, her hands outstretched, her arms lifted up to heaven. Above all, she didn't want to cease being a lady. Gripping the vermeil Christ, Father Jose Antonio hastened to exorcise her: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Satan didn't get behind him – on the contrary – he didn't obey the command at all. Seven leaps, the migrant man, swiftly fell onto the exorcist, accompanied by his donkey. The stocky man brandished the leather strap that he'd taken off the harness, as the jackass danced to the rhythm of a pasodoble, farting, [shitting], and kicking. In his attempt to escape the whip, Father Jose Antonio received a poorly shod hoof on his rear end [...] the priest was stretched out in the shrubbery on the avenue's divider. Up ahead, Adalgisa lay prostrate, her exhausted body stretched out, her head bursting with the headache that was about to leave her forever [...] Father Jose Antonio [...] raised his arms in surrender at the approach of the three demons, who no doubt were to put an end to him. (Amado 1993, 307)

From the encounter, the Catholic priest surrenders to the overwhelming powers of Yorùbá gods who are hell bent to deal with Western colonial forces that seek to wipe out the legacies of relentless battles fought against slavery by Africans in Bahia. Oya Yansan's appearance in Bahia and the ambush laid by the African gods for swas-

tikas who, out of wounded pride, want to reverse the irreversible, is probably an age-long vengeance that the gods have probably been seeking against the imperialists and their descendants. The involvement of the goddess and other Yorùbá gods is premised on their constant worship. Rather than seeing Catholicism as a religion with eclectic doctrines, the Vatican prefers to prune the faith of its pagan practices and restore its puritanical rigidity. However, Bahians enjoy the omnibus status of the religion and want no religious faith that denies the expression of their selfhood and preservation of their indigenous African culture.

Conclusion

Amado's text presents the relational dialectics that characterises the interspecific interactions between the colonialists and the colonised. The relationship is predatory and fraught with power struggle, racial and religion animus, and stereotyping. The novel narrates the contentions between swastikas (the Western powers) who through their religious logic want a perpetuation of colonialist structures and Afro-Brazilians (Bahians) who put up a stiff resistance against structures of oppression and exploitation. Amado's subtle message is that, if united, the oppressed always carry the day in any confrontation with their oppressors. This concern is chimerical and quixotic, since happenings in many postcolonial nations in Africa, Asia, and South America prove otherwise.

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