

THE CROSS THAT ERASES ANCESTRAL TRACES – EVANGELICAL CONVERSION AND THE DISFIGUREMENT OF INDIGENOUS IDENTITY IN BRAZIL



<https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n2-298>

Submitted on: 01/26/2025

Publication date: 02/26/2025

Antônio Nacílio Sousa dos Santos¹, Francisco Souto de Sousa Júnior², José Maria Nogueira Neto³, Daivid Tiago Oliveira Sousa⁴, Antonio Marcos Rocha da Silva⁵, José Henrique Rodrigues Machado⁶, André Silva de Carvalho⁷, Daniel Oliveira da Cunha⁸, Francisco Souto Maior⁹, Ronald Belinassi¹⁰, Antônio Lauro Rodrigues de Oliveira¹¹,

¹ Dr. student in Social Sciences
Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES)
Horizonte, Ceará – Brazil.
E-mail: naciliosantos23@gmail.com

² Dr. in Chemistry
Federal Rural University of the Semi-Arid (UFERSA)
Mossoró, Rio Grande do Norte – Brazil.
E-mail: franciscosouto@ufersa.edu.br

³ Master in Geography
Vale do Acaraú State University/Luciano Feijão College
Sobral, Ceará – Brazil.
E-mail: jmnogneto@gmail.com

⁴ Dr. student in Educational Sciences
Inter-American Faculty of Social Sciences (FICS)
Asunción, Paraguay.
Email: daividsousa13@gmail.com

⁵ Master in Teaching in Basic Education
Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES/CEUNES).
Linhares, Espírito Santo – Brazil.
Email: antoniomarcos996327770@gmail.com

⁶ Dr. in Cultural Performances
Federal University of Goiás (PPGPC/UFG)
Rio Verde, Goiás – Brazil.
Email: jhenrique_20@hotmail.com

⁷ Dr. in Business Administration
School of Advertising and Marketing (ESPM)
São Paulo, São Paulo – Brazil.
E-mail: andre.carvalho@fei.edu.br

⁸ Master's student in Society and Culture in the Amazon
Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM)
Manaus, Amazonas – Brazil.
E-mail: suniwasdb@gmail.com

⁹ Master's student in Philosophy
Catholic University of Pernambuco (Unicap)
Recife, Pernambuco – Brazil.
E-mail: soutomaiorchico@gmail.com

¹⁰ Master of Science in Religion
Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF)
Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais – Brazil.
Email: rbelinazzi@gmail.com

¹¹ Graduated in Civil Engineering
São Lucas University Center (UNISL)

José Raimundo dos Santos Braga¹², Alex de Mesquita Marinho¹³, Jakson dos Santos Raposo¹⁴, Lucimar da Silva Pereira Junior¹⁵ and Thálisson Luiz Maia Santana¹⁶.

ABSTRACT

The research analyzes the impact of evangelization on the religious practices and belief systems of indigenous peoples, evidencing the erasure of ancestral rituals and mythologies. The advance of evangelical missions promotes a reconfiguration of indigenous identities, often associated with the denial of traditional cultural elements. This phenomenon reflects a process of symbolic colonization, in which Christian religiosity imposes itself as the only legitimate way of faith. That said, the study discusses the tensions between tradition and religious conversion. In this way, we seek to understand the effects of this dynamic on the resistance and resignification of indigenous spiritualities. The guiding question is: how has the evangelical influence transformed traditional indigenous religious practices and the disfigurement of their identity? The theoretical foundation dialogues with authors Turner (1974), Douglas (1991), Sahlins (1990; 2003), Evans-Pritchard (2004), Geertz (2017), Hellern et. al. (2012), Lévi-Strauss (2012), Eliade (2012), Castro & Cunha (1993), Castro (2002; 2014), among others. Methodologically, the research is qualitative from Minayo (2006), descriptive and bibliographic according to Gil (2006) and with a comprehensive bias from the perspective of Weber (1964). The findings of the research demonstrate that evangelization profoundly impacts indigenous belief systems, leading to the suppression of ancestral rituals and the delegitimization of traditional cosmologies. However, processes of resistance and resignification are also observed, in which Christian elements are incorporated into indigenous spiritualities without their essence being completely erased. Religious conversion does not occur in a homogeneous way, being crossed by local dynamics and cultural mediation strategies. Furthermore, the phenomenon reveals the persistence of tensions between tradition and modernity, evidencing the multifaceted character of contemporary indigenous identities.

Keywords: Evangelization. Indigenous Spirituality. Symbolic colonization. Cultural Resistance.

Porto Velho, Rondônia – Brazil.

E-mail: antoniopupykary@gmail.com

¹² Undergraduate Nursing Student

Federal University of Rondônia (UNIR)

Porto Velho, Rondônia – Brazil.

E-mail: jbragga4@gmail.com

¹³ Master of Philosophy

Federal University of Piauí (UFPI)

Lagoa de São Francisco, Piauí – Brazil.

Email: alexmarinho@prp.uespi.br

¹⁴ Master's student in Social Anthropology

Federal University of Roraima (UFRR)

Boa Vista, Roraima – Brazil.

E-mail: jaksonkadasha@icloud.com

¹⁵ Master's Degree in Education

Ivy Enber Christian University (IECU)

Campos dos Goytacazes, Rio de Janeiro – Brazil.

Email: lucimarjunior@hotmail.com

¹⁶ Dr. student in Social Sciences

Federal University of Bahia (UFBA)

Salvador, Bahia – Brazil.

Email: tmaia1986@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

SYMBOLIC COLONIZATION AND EVANGELIZATION: IMPACTS OF EVANGELICAL CONVERSION ON INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS AND IDENTITY PRACTICES

According to historical accounts, the evangelization of indigenous peoples in Brazil occurred in parallel with Portuguese colonization¹⁷, establishing an intrinsic relationship between faith and territorial domination. As in other overseas possessions, the Catholic Church played a central role in structuring colonial rule, promoting the compulsory conversion of native peoples. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] The Portuguese conquests were thus transformed into true 'crusades' aimed at the compulsory conversion of new peoples and populations. Evangelization went hand in hand with colonial domination" (p. 290). Similarly, according to Geertz (2017), "[...] religion is not just a set of beliefs, but a structure of meanings that orders human experience in contexts of power" (p. 89).

Discovered in 1500, conquered and colonized by the Portuguese at the same time as catechized by the most representative missionaries of the Iberian Counter-Reformation, the Jesuit priests, Brazil was an officially Catholic country for almost four centuries. Even after it became an independent nation on September 7, 1822, the Catholic Church remained officially united with the new nation-state. Decades before the Discovery, the papacy had already granted the Portuguese Crown the right of patronage over the churches installed in the lands conquered by Portugal. The Portuguese conquests were thus transformed into true 'crusades' aimed at the compulsory conversion of new peoples and populations. Evangelization went hand in hand with colonial domination (Hellern, Notaker & Gaarder, 2012, p. 290).

In accordance with the policy of the Royal Patronage, the Portuguese State held the right to administer the Catholic Church in the colonies, ensuring that the conversion of the indigenous people was subordinated to the interests of the Crown. As established by the Vatican, the king of Portugal was responsible for appointing bishops and financing the construction of temples and monasteries. Likewise, the Jesuit missionaries were entrusted

¹⁷ The Portuguese colonization in Brazil was intrinsically linked to the project of evangelization of indigenous peoples, consolidating an alliance between the Crown and the Catholic Church for the compulsory conversion of the original populations. The Royal Patronage system, granted by the Vatican to the Portuguese Crown, guaranteed the king control over the administration and financing of religious missions, allowing evangelization to be used as an instrument of territorial and social domination. The Jesuits, the main religious order in charge of catechizing, implemented missionary settlements that not only instructed the indigenous people in Christian doctrine, but also inserted them into a new logic of work and social discipline, often deconstructing their traditional ways of life. As Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012) point out, "[...] The Portuguese conquests were thus transformed into true 'crusades' aimed at the compulsory conversion of new peoples and populations. Evangelization went hand in hand with colonial domination" (p. 290). This process, while imposing a new religious and moral structure, also promoted the erasure of indigenous spiritual practices, reinforcing European domination over the conquered territories. See: HELLERN, V.; NOTAKER, H.; GAARDER, J. *The book of religions*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012.

with the mission of catechizing the indigenous people, creating settlements that served both as religious centers and as units of social control. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] the clergy were part of the civil service, paid by the State" (p. 291). As Turner (1974) observes, "[...] the religious structure is a means by which societies reproduce their relations of power and social control" (p. 56). According to Hellern, Notaker & Gaarder (2012: 291):

What was the patronage? In reward for the direct involvement of the Portuguese state in the conversion of the 'infidels', the pope granted the Crown control over the new churches. It was up to the king of Portugal to conquer, along with the new lands, new souls. He had to build temples and monasteries, provide them with priests and religious and, above all, appoint bishops. The clergy were part of the civil service, paid by the State. In the colonial period, the Church depended more on the Portuguese State than on the papacy. The State imposed its orientation on the Church, which was totally subordinate. All directives and instructions emanating from the Vatican arrived in Brazil through the Portuguese administration. The monarch had the prerogative to censor official documents coming from Rome before they were published in the colonies. It was the Portuguese Crown that regulated the meetings of diocesan synods.

Analogous to what happened in Spanish America, the conversion of indigenous peoples involved a violent process of cultural and religious erasure¹⁸. The demonization of ancestral rituals and the destruction of sacred objects were common practices in the Jesuit missions, justified by the need to "civilize" the indigenous people¹⁹. According to Eliade (2012), "[...] the demystification of autochthonous religious traditions did not only mean a

¹⁸ The conversion of indigenous peoples to Christianity was intrinsically linked to a violent process of cultural and religious erasure, in which the original spiritual practices were systematically delegitimized and repressed by European missionaries. This process occurred through the imposition of catechesis, the destruction of sacred objects, and the prohibition of traditional rituals, configuring a colonial strategy of domination that aimed not only at religious conversion, but at the forced assimilation of these populations into Western culture. In addition, the association of indigenous beliefs with the demonic reinforced the marginalization and persecution of these peoples, contributing to the erosion of their identities and ways of life. According to Oliveira (2016), evangelization cannot be dissociated from the power dynamics that structured colonialism, as it operated as a mechanism of subjugation that sought to reshape indigenous people according to Eurocentric values, suppressing their autonomy and cultural resistance. See: Oliveira, J. P. *The birth of Brazil and other essays: Indigenous policy, indigenism and indigenous movements*. Editora UFG, 2016.

¹⁹ The need to "civilize" the indigenous people was historically justified by colonial discourses that classified them as barbaric or primitive, making the policies of forced assimilation legitimate. This logic is part of what Norbert Elias (1994) describes as the *civilizing process*, in which dominant groups impose their cultural, social and behavioral standards on those considered inferior, under the justification of progress and order. In the colonial context, this process was translated into catechesis, the imposition of the European language, the marginalization of indigenous cultural practices, and the reconfiguration of their social relations according to Western values. Civilization, in this perspective, became a mechanism of power that reinforced hierarchies and justified the subjugation of native peoples, erasing their autonomous ways of life and their ancestral relationship with the territory. As Elias (1994) points out, the idea of civilization has always been linked to processes of coercion and control, in which the dominant culture is superimposed on the others through a set of norms that regulate behaviors and forms of sociability. See: Elias, N. *The civilizing process: A history of customs*. Zahar, 1994.

replacement of beliefs, but a total reconfiguration of the religious experience of these peoples" (p. 68). From the same perspective, Lévi-Strauss (2012) highlights that "[...] indigenous mythologies not only organize reality, but are forms of symbolic resistance against colonial processes" (p. 34).

As colonial interests expanded, new religious orders took on the mission of evangelizing the indigenous populations. So too, in the nineteenth century, the growth of Protestantism drove the arrival of evangelical missionaries, mainly Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, who adopted a distinct approach to Catholic conversion. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] the North American Methodists were practically the first to come to Brazil on an evangelizing mission, facing resistance and difficulties of all kinds" (p. 315). Douglas (1991) observes that "[...] Reformed Christianity operates through a logic of purity and impurity, where local customs are often marginalized as superstition" (p. 40).

According to this movement, evangelical evangelization, especially from the twentieth century onwards, expanded its action among indigenous peoples, promoting a replacement of traditional beliefs with a fundamentalist Christian perspective. From the same point of view, Eliade (2012) states that "[...] Christianity was imposed as the only legitimate way of faith, suppressing religious plurality and redefining indigenous cosmology" (p. 74). Similarly, Sahlins (2003) argues that "[...] symbolic domination redefines the structure of beliefs, as traditional forms of knowledge are filtered by external categories" (p. 87).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Pentecostal churches began to arrive. In 1910, the first Pentecostal Church in Brazilian lands, the Christian Congregation of Brazil, emerged in Paraná and São Paulo. And, in 1911, two Swedish missionaries founded the Assembly of God in Belém do Pará. Both denominations soon spread throughout the country. Even today, they are the two largest wings of Pentecostalism in Brazil. In the second half of the twentieth century, from the 50s onwards, Pentecostal evangelicals grew so much and diversified in such a way that they ended up becoming a large majority among Brazilian Protestants. In the early 1990s, at least a tenth of adult Brazilians were Pentecostal (10%), while historic Protestants represented only 3% of these Brazilians. Recently, the Pentecostal movement in Brazil has begun to differentiate into two types, with two basic formats: the 'classic' Pentecostals and the 'neo-Pentecostals'. The fastest growing forms of religious life in Brazil today are, in the first place, the Pentecostal Protestant churches. And, among Pentecostals, the fastest growing are those who have already been conventionally called neo-Pentecostals (Hellern, Notaker & Gaarder, 2012, p. 315).

Similar to what happened in the colonial period, the evangelical presence among indigenous peoples intensified in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries,

especially through Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. Like the Jesuits in the colonial period, these groups began to act strategically, using the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages as a means of cultural penetration. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] the dissemination of the Holy Scriptures was one of the main strategies of the evangelical missions, which distributed thousands of Bibles among the indigenous people" (p. 316). In a similar perspective, Evans-Pritchard (2004) states that "[...] religious assimilation often occurs as a response to imposed power structures, but never without resistance" (p. 122).

By analogy to the colonization process of the past, the impacts of contemporary evangelization on indigenous cultures are profound, resulting in the devaluation of traditional knowledge and the dissolution of ancestral spiritual practices. As Sahlins (2003) observes, "[...] the imposition of a new symbolic structure redefines the very social organization of the affected peoples" (p. 87). According to Turner (1974), "[...] rituals play a fundamental role in the maintenance of collective identities, and are, therefore, priority targets of religious conversion" (p. 112).

In a similar way to what has been observed in previous historical contexts, current evangelization is not limited to a mere religious conversion, but involves an identity transformation and a reconfiguration of power relations within indigenous communities. According to Evans-Pritchard (2004), "[...] religion is not only a system of beliefs, but a mechanism of social control, defining what is sacred and what is profane" (p. 125). Similarly, Geertz (2017) observes that "[...] The processes of evangelization involve not only the substitution of rites, but the reorganization of the structures of authority within the communities" (p. 98).

Thus, the evangelization of indigenous peoples in Brazil is not limited to a process of religious conversion, but represents a profound reconfiguration of their practices and identities. The introduction of Christianity into indigenous communities often takes place through the denial of ancestral cosmologies and the imposition of a new symbolic order, legitimized as the only way of faith and civilization. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] Conversion Protestantism had as its main objective to radically transform local religiosity, imposing a single faith and a set of practices that replaced autochthonous rites and beliefs" (p. 316). Similarly, Lévi-Strauss (2012) argues that "[...] Indigenous myths structure not only the worldview, but the social organization itself, so that their suppression means a process of domination" (p. 34).

Evangelical conversion among indigenous peoples illustrates an emblematic case of symbolic colonization²⁰, a term that refers to cultural imposition and the denial of epistemic diversity through religion. This phenomenon does not occur only by the replacement of beliefs, but by the restructuring of social relations and the very way of existence of these populations. As Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012) observe, "[...] Evangelical missions not only spread the Christian faith, but reshaped indigenous communities, altering their power structures and redefining their worldview" (p. 315).

The evangelical missions to Brazil began in the middle of the nineteenth century. For economic and diplomatic reasons, the imperial government was forced to loosen legal restrictions in the religious field and, in this way, facilitate the entry of other Christian churches from developed countries. Pioneers even in the work of evangelical propaganda in Brazil were the Bible societies of English and North American origin. And the Methodist missions. The North American Methodists were practically the first to come to Brazil on an evangelizing mission. Arriving here in 1835, they immediately launched themselves into the work of conversion, in the midst of resistance and difficulties of all kinds, without much success among the Brazilians. Alongside the foreign Bible societies, which in two decades (1850-60) distributed tens of thousands of Bibles among Brazilians, the Methodists also took great care as Bible distributors. This work of spreading the Holy Scriptures resulted in the creation of a congregational church in Rio de Janeiro (1858) (Hellern, Notaker & Gaarder, 2012, p. 315).

The imposition of the evangelical faith does not occur without tensions, as tradition and religious conversion confront each other in a field of constant dispute. The erasure of indigenous religious practices is accompanied by processes of resistance and resignification, in which Christian elements can be reinterpreted within the original cosmologies. According to Douglas (1991), "[...] conversion is not an isolated event, but a process that redefines social boundaries, imposing new forms of purity and impurity" (p. 40).

In the face of this dynamic, evangelization can both disfigure indigenous identity and produce new forms of hybrid religiosity²¹. Religious syncretism and the strategic

²⁰ Symbolic colonization refers to the process by which Eurocentric values, beliefs, and forms of knowledge are imposed as universal, delegitimizing and subordinating the knowledge and cultural practices of colonized peoples. This phenomenon is not restricted to the physical violence of colonization, but manifests itself in language, religion, education, and the production of knowledge, shaping subjectivities and perpetuating the cultural hegemony of the colonizers. Bourdieu and Passeron (1992) argue that symbolic imposition occurs through a process of inculcation, in which the dominated internalize the norms and values of the dominant group, naturalizing their own subordination. In the case of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, symbolic colonization resulted in the devaluation of their cosmologies, the denial of their languages, and the marginalization of their ways of life, operating as a mechanism of domination that is perpetuated even after the formal end of colonialism. See: Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. *Reproduction: Elements for a theory of the education system*. Francisco Alves, 1992.

²¹ Indigenous identity, far from being static or homogeneous, has demonstrated a great capacity for resilience and adaptation in the face of historical processes of contact and colonization, generating new forms of hybrid

adaptations made by indigenous communities reveal that the imposition of Christianity does not always lead to the complete eradication of ancestral beliefs. As Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012) explain, "[...] many indigenous communities have reinterpreted Christian elements within their own traditions, generating new forms of hybrid spirituality and reaffirming their identity" (p. 317). Geertz (2017) adds that "[...] even under intense coercion, symbolic systems do not disappear; on the contrary, they adapt and find new forms of survival" (p. 102).

The present study investigates the impact of evangelical evangelization on the religious and identity practices of indigenous peoples in Brazil. The central objective is to understand how this process has transformed their beliefs and social relations, often promoting the replacement or delegitimization of ancestral cosmologies. The research is based on the notion of symbolic colonization, showing how the imposition of the Christian faith reformulates the religious and social experience of the indigenous people, often reducing their worldview to Western Christian categories. The guiding question of the study, therefore, is: in what way has the evangelical influence transformed traditional indigenous religious practices and the disfigurement of their identity?

This question is inserted in the broader context of the relationship between religion and power, in which evangelization becomes an instrument of forced cultural transformation. In view of this problem, the study has as specific objectives to analyze the missionary strategies used to convert indigenous populations, to identify the mechanisms of resistance and religious resignification adopted by these peoples and to discuss the impacts of conversion on the structuring of their communities. The phenomenon of evangelization is not homogeneous and, although it often leads to the suppression of ancestral practices, it also generates responses of adaptation and cultural hybridization, according to Santos, *et. al.* (2024). Thus, understanding the effects of evangelical

religiosity. This phenomenon results from the intersection between original spiritual traditions and elements of Western religions, especially Christianity, configuring a symbolic re-elaboration that allows indigenous peoples to resignify colonial impositions without necessarily abdicating their own cosmologies. As Viveiros de Castro (2002) argues, indigenous identity cannot be reduced to an essentialist vision, as it is constituted in a field of exchanges and recreations, where indigenous peoples reinterpret external elements without losing the centrality of their systems of thought. This religious hybridity, therefore, does not represent a dilution of indigenous culture, but rather a mechanism of resistance and cultural agency in the face of the power dynamics imposed by colonization. See: Viveiros de Castro, E. *The inconstancy of the wild soul and other essays in anthropology*. Cosac Naify, 2002.

conversion requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach, which dialogues with various areas of knowledge²².

COMPREHENSIVE METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE, DESCRIPTIVE AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC APPROACH IN THE ANALYSIS OF EVANGELIZATION AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE.

In accordance with the assumptions of qualitative research, this study adopted an approach that favors the understanding of phenomena in their social and cultural context, following the perspective of Minayo (2006). Qualitative research is distinguished by its ability to capture "[...] the meaning of social practices based on the interactions and representations of the subjects involved" (Minayo, 2006, p. 28). Likewise, the option for this method allowed an in-depth analysis of religious transformations among indigenous peoples, evidencing the processes of cultural resignification. According to Minayo (2006), "[...] qualitative research is not limited to the description of phenomena, but seeks to interpret and attribute meaning to social dynamics" (p. 47).

Qualitative research answers very particular questions. In the social sciences, it is concerned with a level of reality that cannot or should not be quantified. That is, it works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes. This set of human phenomena is understood here as part of social reality, as human beings are distinguished not only by acting, but by thinking about what they do and by interpreting their actions within and from the reality lived and shared with their peers (Minayo, 2006, p. 21).

Likewise, this study adopted a descriptive and bibliographic research, as systematized by Gil (2008), since the data were extracted from documentary sources and academic references. According to the author, "[...] bibliographic research is developed from material already prepared, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles" (Gil, 2008, p. 50). Similarly, Gil (2008) points out that descriptive research is differentiated by

²² Understanding the effects of evangelical conversion requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach, which dialogues with various areas of knowledge, such as anthropology, sociology, political science, and religious studies. This phenomenon cannot be analyzed only in individual or spiritual terms, as it is deeply intertwined with social, economic, and political processes that transform community dynamics and power relations. As Pierre Bourdieu (1997) argues, religion operates as a field of symbolic and material disputes, where different agents compete for the legitimation and monopoly of spiritual truth. In the context of evangelical conversion, this dynamic can be observed in the way new values are incorporated or reconfigured, impacting cultural practices, family structures, and even political engagements. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach allows for a broader and more critical analysis of the implications of religious conversion, considering its intersections with historical and structural factors that shape the experience of converts. See: Bourdieu, P. *Practical reasons: On the theory of action*. Papirus, 1997.

"[...] present a detailed overview of the characteristics of a given phenomenon or the relationship between variables without direct interference from the researcher" (p. 51).

The primary objective of research of this type is to describe the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon or to establish relationships between variables. There are numerous studies that can be classified under this title and one of its most significant characteristics is the use of standardized data collection techniques. [...] Some descriptive research goes beyond the simple identification of the existence of relationships between variables, intending to determine the nature of this relationship. In this case, we have a descriptive research that is close to the explanatory one (Gil, 2008, p. 51).

Similarly, the research followed a comprehensive approach inspired by Weberian principles, seeking to interpret religious phenomena from the perspective of social action and the meanings attributed by historical subjects. According to Weber (1986), "[...] comprehensive research aims to understand social action through the reconstruction of the meanings that individuals attribute to their practices" (p. 79). From the same point of view, the analysis of the documentary data was carried out considering "[...] the relations between culture, symbolism and historical rationality" (Weber, 1986, p. 104).

Likewise, the methodology adopted involved a systematic review of the main works and studies that address evangelization and religious syncretism among indigenous peoples, seeking to identify patterns and strategies of cultural resistance. According to Gil (2008), "[...] descriptive research enables the identification and mapping of social phenomena, allowing comparisons and interpretative analyses" (p. 53). Similarly, Minayo (2006) points out that "[...] the qualitative approach is based on the contextualization of phenomena, seeking connections and interrelations that escape quantitative analyses" (p. 32).

[...] Qualitative analysis is based on the critical reading of the data, the recognition of patterns, and the search for meaningful connections between the information collected. The interpretation of the findings must consider the social and cultural context in which the phenomena occur, avoiding simplifications or methodological reductions (Minayo, 2006, p. 105)

As well as data collection, the interpretation of the sources followed the principles of hermeneutics-dialectics, as systematized by Minayo (2006). The author explains that "[...] the hermeneutic-dialectical analysis seeks to understand social discourses and practices considering their historicity and their structural conditionings" (p. 107). In accordance with this perspective, the reading and interpretation of the texts were carried out based on an iterative process, allowing the progressive refinement of the analytical categories.

By analogy, the categories of analysis emerged from the confrontation between the available empirical data and the theoretical references that guided the study. According to Minayo (2006), "[...] the researcher must be aware of the dialogical relationship between theory and empiricity, allowing documentary evidence to guide the construction of knowledge" (p. 62). Likewise, Weber (1986) reinforces that "[...] sociological interpretation must always consider the meanings attributed by historical subjects to their acts and practices" (p. 91).

Likewise, the triangulation of sources was a fundamental strategy to ensure the robustness of the analysis, articulating different theoretical references and methodological approaches. As Minayo (2006) points out, "[...] the triangulation of methods allows a more complex look at reality, avoiding reductionism and simplification" (p. 185). As Gil (2008) suggests, "[...] the combination of different sources and analysis techniques contributes to increasing the validity of the findings" (p. 77).

[...] the triangulation of methods allows to broaden the understanding of the phenomenon studied, by integrating different analytical perspectives and avoiding explanatory reductionism. Thus, the combination of multiple sources and methodological approaches contributes to a more in-depth and robust analysis of the data, ensuring greater validity and reliability of the research (Minayo, 2006, p. 185).

In this way, the methodology used made it possible to understand the relationship between evangelization and cultural resistance, highlighting the resignification of Christian symbols and the maintenance of traditional rituals in new contexts. According to Minayo (2006), "[...] qualitative research allows us to capture the dynamics of social phenomena, recognizing their complexity and their nature in constant transformation" (p. 42). As Gil (2008) emphasizes, "[...] the bibliographic method enables a comparative and historical analysis of the phenomena studied" (p. 50).

Thus, through qualitative, descriptive and bibliographic research, it was possible to build a detailed overview of the dynamics of contact between Christianity and indigenous religions, evidencing strategies of resistance and cultural adaptation. As Weber (1986) concludes, "[...] religious transformations cannot be understood only as processes of imposition, but must be analyzed as phenomena of social resignification" (p. 118).

EVANGELICAL CONVERSION AND THE DISFIGUREMENT OF INDIGENOUS IDENTITY IN BRAZIL

Like other colonial processes, the evangelization of indigenous peoples in Brazil began with the arrival of the Portuguese and was consolidated as one of the pillars of territorial domination. Jesuit catechization, which began in the sixteenth century, was one of the main instruments used to convert indigenous populations to Christianity and, at the same time, to reinforce the Crown's control over the newly conquered territories. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] The Gentile of the country was exasperatingly difficult to convert. Not that it was made of refractory and intractable matter; on the contrary, eager for new forms, he was nevertheless incapable of allowing himself to be indelibly impressed by them" (p. 145). As Fausto (2000) points out, "[...] catechesis was not only a process of religious conversion, but also of control over the social and economic organization of indigenous peoples" (p. 212).

The priests were then seen as a particularly powerful species of *karaiba*. But here we are faced with the great problem: did the Tupinambá believe in their prophets? The first Jesuit letters lament, not without anticipating a profit, the credulity of the Indians, who would allow themselves to be blindly guided by the sanctities: 'any of the swiss that are wanted to be harmed su dios lo creen y le dan entero crédito' (Nóbrega 1549: I, 137-38); 'ay entre ellos algunos a quien tienen por sanctos y dan tanto crédito que lo que les mandan hacer esso hazen'²³ (Correia 1551: I, 231). The ceremonies of transference of spiritual powers performed by shamans, the cures, predictions and supernatural feats that were credited to them, their functions of mediation between the world of the living and the dead, not to mention the formidable migrations unleashed and conducted by the *karaiba* in search of the Land without Evil (de Castro, 2014, p. 267) are well known.

As with other forms of contact between Europeans and indigenous peoples, the arrival of the Jesuits in Brazil imposed a new relationship between faith, power, and cultural identity. Evangelization was a central instrument of the colonial project, operating not only as a means of religious conversion, but also as a tool of social control. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the missionaries always considered the indigenous peoples as 'lands to be conquered', where conversion was equivalent to an occupation of the mental and cultural territory" (p. 145). As Léry (1578) reinforces, the Tupinambá, even participating in ceremonies and listening to Christian narratives, did not demonstrate the type of faith expected by Europeans: "[...] nonobstant toutes les cérémonies qu'ils font,

²³ Our translation: "[...] Any of their own who want to make themselves gods, they believe and give him full credit" (Nóbrega, 1549: I, 137-38); "[...] there are some among them whom they consider holy and in whom they trust so much that they do exactly what they are told."

n'adorent pas en fléchissant les genoux ou selon d'autres manifestations extérieures"²⁴ (p. 192).

In an identical way, shamanism²⁵ played a fundamental role in indigenous religious organization, functioning as a space of mediation between the living and the dead, between humans and spiritual entities. The prestige of the shamans often rivaled that of the missionaries, creating an environment of symbolic dispute for control of indigenous beliefs. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] Amazonian shamanism can be defined as the ability manifested by certain individuals to deliberately cross bodily barriers and adopt the perspective of allospecific subjectivities" (p. 12). From the same point of view, Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012) highlight that "[...] forced conversion was accompanied by the destruction of idols, temples and indigenous ritualistic objects, considered manifestations of the devil" (p. 290).

The missionaries, in particular, were seen as similar to the Karaiba, and they knew how to use it. Their wandering and their hortative discourse appeared to them from the beginning. They also began to adopt morning preaching, in the fashion of shamans and chiefs (Correia 1551: I, 220); they used singing liberally as an instrument of seduction, taking advantage of the high regard enjoyed by music and good singers (among them the karaiba) with the Tupinambá, probably benefiting from the same immunity that protected errant prophets and other 'lords of speech' (Cardim 1583: 186). They also met, with due mental reservations, the native demand, promising victory over the enemies and material abundance (Anchieta 1565: 199). To the requests for healing and long life, they responded with baptism and the preaching of eternal life (Azpicuelta 1550: I, 180); and they accepted, slightly embarrassed, even imputations of foreknowledge (Sá 1559: III, 40) (de Castro, 2014, p. 144).

By analogy, the way the Jesuits interpreted indigenous religiosity reveals the difficulty of understanding cosmological systems that did not fit the Christian monotheistic molds. For the missionaries, the absence of temples or a structured priesthood indicated the need to civilize the indigenous peoples before converting them. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the Jesuits, as if they had read but not understood Durkheim very

²⁴ Our translation: "[...] notwithstanding all the ceremonies they perform, they do not worship by bowing their knees or by means of other outward manifestations."

²⁵ Shamanism played a key role in indigenous religious organization, acting as a bridge between the spiritual world and the material reality of communities. Shamans, endowed with ritualistic and cosmological knowledge, performed multiple functions, including mediating with spirits, curing diseases, and maintaining social and ecological balance. According to Langdon (1996), shamanism cannot be understood only as a system of beliefs, but as a complex set of practices interconnected to the social and political structure of indigenous peoples, where the figure of the shaman has centrality in the symbolic management of the collectivity. In addition, far from being a homogeneous tradition, indigenous shamanism manifests itself in different ways among different ethnic groups, reflecting the particularities of each culture and its relationships with the environment and spiritual beings. See: Langdon, E. J. M. *Shamanism in Brazil: New perspectives*. UFSC Press, 1996.

well, clumsily separated the sacred from the profane" (p. 11). As Anchieta (1584) states, the main impediments to the conversion of the Indians were in their customs and in the lack of fear and subjection: "[...] lack fear and subjection" (p. 333).

In the same way, the relationship of the indigenous people with their spiritual leaders did not take place in European molds. The Karaibas²⁶, prophets and shamans, had an ambiguous status, sometimes respected for their wisdom, sometimes feared for their ability to influence the community. As Viveiros de Castro (2014) observes, "[...] The Jesuits and other chroniclers dwell on the marks of respect dedicated to the wandering Karaiba: clearing the paths that led them to the villages, songs of welcome, donation of food, extraterritoriality" (p. 31). As Léry (1578) reinforces, "[...] the Tupinambá did not worship their Karaíbas, nor their Maracás, nor any creature whatsoever" (p. 192).

As catechization advanced, the conflict between tradition and Christianization was accentuated, resulting in episodes of resistance and reinterpretation of beliefs. The indigenous people were not only opposed to conversion, but often assimilated Christian elements into their own cosmologies. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the problem, therefore, is to determine the meaning of this mixture of volubility and obstinacy, docility and recalcitrance, enthusiasm and indifference with which the Tupinambá received the good news" (p. 13). Likewise, Anchieta (1555) highlighted his frustration with the oscillation of the indigenous people between the acceptance and rejection of Christianity: "[...] the people of these lands are the most brutal, the most ungrateful, the most fickle" (p. 114).

They had, at last, a religion. But this only makes the problem more difficult to solve: 'they say they want to be like us'; 'desean ser christianos como nosotros' (Nóbrega 1549: I, 111-139). Why, after all, would savages want to be like us? If they had a religion, and if in any case culture is a system of beliefs, it is worth asking what religion and what system were these that contained within them the desire for their own perdition. Taking inconstancy from the other end, it is necessary to ask why the Tupinambá were inconstant in relation to their own culture-religion; why, despite what Vieira said about the difficulty in making them deaf to the 'fables of the

²⁶ The Karaibas, indigenous prophets and shamans, had an ambiguous status within the communities, being sometimes respected for their wisdom and spiritual power, sometimes viewed with suspicion due to their ability to move between different spheres of reality. As intermediaries between the world of the living and the world of spirits, these spiritual leaders performed essential functions, including healing, divination, and protecting the community from supernatural and material threats. However, contact with the colonizers profoundly altered the perception and role of these individuals, since, as Viveiros de Castro (2002) points out, Christian colonization often demonized shamans, associating their practices with evil forces and seeking to replace them with the figure of the missionary, responsible for the imposition of a new spiritual order. Despite this, the Karaiba continued to play a crucial role in indigenous cultural resistance, reinterpreting elements of the new religion and preserving ancestral traditions through orality and ritualistic practice. See: Viveiros de Castro, E. *The inconstancy of the wild soul and other essays in anthropology*. Cosac Naify, 2002.

ancestors', they were willing to pay such a good ear to the mumbo-jumbo of others (de Castro, 2014, p. 13).

Similarly, the theme of the Land without Evil²⁷ occupied a central place in Tupi-Guarani religiosity, representing an idealized space where there was neither suffering nor death. Many missionaries saw this concept as an obstacle to conversion, as the indigenous people did not consider the Christian paradise to be a desirable destination. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the Tupinambá, like the other Tupi-Guarani peoples, had a 'system of beliefs' – anthropological, theological, cosmological – in which the theme of the 'Land without Evil' occupied a greater place" (p. 12). As much as Fausto (2000), "[...] catechesis was not only a process of religious conversion, but also of control over the social and economic organization of indigenous peoples" (p. 212).

According to this context, the imposition of the Christian faith was not a homogeneous process. The indigenous people absorbed some aspects of Christianity, but reinterpreted them within their own logic. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the indigenous people are not mere passive recipients of evangelization, but reinterpret Christian dogmas within their own cultural logics" (p. 192). As well as Eliade (2012), "[...] the forced assimilation of a new religion generates a cultural reaction, which can manifest itself in both resistance and hybridization" (p. 76). Thus, evangelization not only sought to erase indigenous cosmologies, but also faced limits imposed by the religious conceptions of the original peoples. Christianization was accompanied by conflicts, negotiations, and unexpected transformations, showing that religious conversion was never a unilateral process. The quote below reinforces the argument that evangelization, in the colonial period and the beginning of the Republic, was a process of cultural negotiation, in which the indigenous people absorbed Christian elements, but reinterpreted them according to their own religious and social conceptions.

The enthusiastic but highly selective acceptance of a totalizing and exclusive discourse, the refusal to follow the course of that discourse to the end, could not but

²⁷ The Land without Evil occupied a central place in Tupi-Guarani religiosity, representing a mythical space of plenitude, abundance and immortality, where there would be no hunger, disease or suffering. This concept was directly linked to the idea of migration in search of this earthly paradise, led by spiritual leaders, such as the Karaibas, who guided their followers on long journeys to find this sacred place. According to Clastres (1978), the belief in the Land without Evil not only structured the cosmology of the Tupi-Guarani peoples, but also influenced their socio-political practices, as the search for this ideal space often led to the reorganization of villages and population displacements. With the arrival of the colonizers and the imposition of Christianity, this conception was reinterpreted in some contexts, being resignified in indigenous messianic movements that sought to escape colonial oppression and reaffirm their spiritual identity. See: Clastres, P. *Society against the State*. Francisco Alves, 1978.

seem enigmatic to men of mission, obedience and renunciation; And I think that this enigma continues to bother us, anthropologists, even if for reasons other than those of the old Jesuits. First, savage inconstancy is a theme that still resonates, in its multiple harmonics, in the ideology of the modern disciplinarians of the Brazilian Indians. Second, and more important, it in fact corresponds to something that can be experienced in the coexistence with many Amerindian societies, something indefinable that marks the psychological tone, not only of their relationship with the Western ideological menu, but also, and in an even more difficult way to analyze, of their relationship with themselves, with their own and 'authentic' ideas and institutions (de Castro, 2014, p. 10).

In the same way, with the advance of colonization, the missionaries began to organize local indigenous settlements where the original peoples were gathered to live under strict Christian precepts. These spaces functioned as centers of social control, where indigenous culture and spirituality were gradually replaced by the values of the Church. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the Jesuits created true social laboratories where the indigenous people were 'civilized' by force, distancing them from their ancestral rites and restructuring their daily practices" (p. 158).

It is worth noting that the Europeans, called the Karaiba, and as such characters initially treated, ended up bringing to the Indians the exact opposite of what the Karaibá promised: instead of migratory wandering, forced settlement; instead of long life and effortless abundance, death by epidemics and slave labor; instead of victory over enemies, prohibition of war and cannibalism; instead of marital freedom, new restrictions (de Castro, 2014, p. 144).

Thus, as with other colonial processes, the arrival of Europeans in indigenous territory brought about profound cultural and social transformations, often in contradiction with the promises made by the missionaries. While the traditional karaiba announced a life of wandering and freedom, the colonizers imposed territorial settlement and the suppression of native customs. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] catechization was preceded by domestication; rather than the simple preaching of the good news, the incessant police of the civil conduct of the Indians" (p. 333). Similarly, Fausto (2000) points out that "[...] epidemics, forced labor and enslavement radically altered indigenous dynamics, imposing a new regime of existence for these populations" (p. 159).

Similarly, forced evangelization has reconfigured the values and ways of life of indigenous peoples, often nullifying religious and cultural practices. The missionary settlements not only replaced the old living spaces, but imposed a model of discipline that eliminated the mobility of the groups and restricted their autonomy. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] To inculcate faith, it was first necessary to give the Gentile law and king. Conversion depended on an anthropology capable of identifying the human

impediments of the Indians" (p. 333). From the same point of view, Fausto (2000) points out that "[...] Christianity was imposed as the only way to salvation, denying the validity of indigenous cosmologies and restricting their ability to maintain their own worldview" (p. 178). As Geertz (2017: 217) and Evans-Pritchard (2004: 89) state:

Religious conversion, in most cases, does not occur by passive acceptance of a new set of beliefs, but rather as a dialectical process of confrontation, resistance, and selective assimilation. Traditional belief systems are not simply replaced, but often reconfigured, retaining essential elements and incorporating new symbolic structures. As Geertz (2017) observes, "[...] religion not only provides a system of meanings, but also establishes a field of symbolic dispute, in which traditional interpretations and those introduced by missionaries confront and redefine each other" (p. 217). Likewise, Evans-Pritchard (2004) points out that "[...] in societies subjected to religious colonization, conversion occurs as a process of strategic appropriation, in which Christian elements are reinterpreted in the light of local cosmology, avoiding the total dissolution of traditions" (p. 89).

Likewise, the eradication of traditional indigenous practices occurred on several fronts. While the missionaries preached conversion as a form of civilization, the indigenous people were subjected to the destruction of their rituals and religious symbols. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the indigenous people became the target of a process of subtle dehumanization, in which their customs were treated as obstacles to be eradicated" (p. 267).

By analogy, the introduction of Christian morality imposed new restrictions on the social life of the indigenous people, altering their forms of political and family organization. Practices such as polygamy, traditional kinship relationships and rites of passage were replaced by a European model of monogamous and hierarchical families. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the missionaries were frustrated with what they called the 'inconstancy' of the indigenous people, since their relationship with Christianity oscillated between pragmatic acceptance and the refusal of the imposed moral precepts" (p. 13). As much as Anchieta (1584), "[...] the impediments to conversion and perseverance in the Christian life on the part of the Indians are their inveterate customs [...] such as having many wives, their wines in which they are very continuous and in taking them away there is ordinarily more difficulty than in everything else" (p. 333). The quote below strengthens the argument about the imposition of Christian morality, demonstrating how religion can act in the transformation of social norms, including in contexts of evangelization and forced conversion.

In the third method it is religion that changes tactics. In most of its daily manifestations, religion warns believers that by obeying the moral code and performing the appropriate rites, their fields will be fertile and their families prosperous. But, in another context, she neglects these laudable efforts of hers and displays her disdain for both good conduct and materialistic aims. It cannot be said that such religions suddenly become religions of detachment from the world, and that in this life they only promise disappointments, but they go down this path. The religion forces the Ndembu initiates of the Chihamba to kill the white spirit they know to be their grandfather, the only source of fertility and health. Once dead, the initiates understand that they are innocent and that they should rejoice (Douglas, 1991, p. 127).

In accordance with this imposition, the prohibition of war and cannibalism not only modified the social structure of indigenous peoples, but also eliminated a fundamental element of the warrior identity of many ethnic groups. Christianization imposed a code of conduct that restricted traditional forms of conflict resolution, dismantling systems of alliances and rivalries. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the Tupinambá, for example, were encouraged to abandon their ritualistic practice of revenge and submit to the authority of the missionaries" (p. 144). As well as Faust (2000), "[...] the structure of war and reciprocity of the indigenous groups was weakened by conversion, which imposed new models of loyalty based on submission to the Church" (p. 199).

From the same point of view, child catechization was one of the main strategies used by the missionaries to ensure the conversion of future generations, isolating the children from their cultural and family traditions. Jesuit schools became true factories of Christians, where young indigenous people were molded within Catholic doctrine and removed from their community ties. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the missionaries bet on the 'education' of indigenous children, as they considered adults irremediably lost to the 'vices' of their customs" (p. 333). Similarly, Fausto (2000) emphasizes that "[...] the missionary school replaced the traditional initiation rituals with a Christian discipline, disarticulating the traditional forms of transmission of knowledge" (p. 205).

However, there were forms of cultural resistance, resignifying Christian symbols within indigenous traditions was a fundamental strategy for maintaining the identity of these peoples. Instead of an outright conversion, many groups adopted elements of Christianity without completely abandoning their ancestral beliefs. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] The missionaries realized that, despite baptisms and masses, the indigenous people continued to practice their beliefs and reinterpret Christian doctrine according to their own cosmological systems" (p. 145). As much as Fausto (2000), "[...] evangelization

was marked by constant conflicts between the imposition of the Christian faith and indigenous resistance, which, in many situations, led to the fusion of religious practices" (p. 220).

The enthusiastic but highly selective acceptance of a totalizing and exclusive discourse, the refusal to follow the course of that discourse to the end, could not but seem enigmatic to men of mission, obedience and renunciation; And I think that this enigma continues to bother us, anthropologists, even if for reasons other than those of the old Jesuits. First, savage inconstancy is a theme that still resonates, in its multiple harmonics, in the ideology of the modern disciplinarians of the Brazilian Indians. Second, and more important, it in fact corresponds to something that can be experienced in the coexistence with many Amerindian societies, something indefinable that marks the psychological tone, not only of their relationship with the Western ideological menu, but also, and in an even more difficult way to analyze, of their relationship with themselves, with their own and 'authentic' ideas and institutions (de Castro, 2014, p. 10).

Similarly, during the nineteenth century, with the gradual secularization of the Brazilian State and the weakening of the Society of Jesus²⁸, new religious currents began to act among the indigenous peoples. The evangelical missions, initially led by Methodists and Presbyterians, arrived in Brazil with the promise of a Reformed Christianity and a less coercive approach than that of the Jesuits. However, his work was also based on the replacement of indigenous religious practices by Christian dogmas. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] the North American Methodists were practically the first to come to Brazil on an evangelizing mission. Arriving here in 1835, they immediately threw themselves into the work of conversion, in the midst of resistance and difficulties of all kinds" (p. 315). Similarly, Viveiros de Castro (2014) points out that "[...] the new Protestant missions adapted strategies to overcome resistance, but in the end they imposed their own model of spirituality" (p. 172).

Likewise, the expansion of evangelical missions in the twentieth century further intensified the marginalization of indigenous religions. The growth of Pentecostal and neo-

²⁸ The Society of Jesus, founded in 1534 by Ignatius of Loyola, played a central role in the evangelization and colonization process of the Americas, especially in Brazil, where the Jesuits were responsible for the catechesis of indigenous peoples. Acting as agents of the European civilizing project, the Jesuit missionaries established settlements known as missions or reductions, where they sought to convert the indigenous people to Christianity, teaching them the Portuguese language and introducing agricultural and artisanal practices according to European molds. However, this missionary action was also deeply linked to the imposition of a new social order, which destructured indigenous cosmologies and repressed their spiritual beliefs and practices. As Monteiro (2006) points out, the Jesuits, while protecting the indigenous people from enslavement by settlers, also promoted the cultural subordination of these populations, reinforcing a relationship of symbolic and material domination that was part of the Portuguese colonial project. See: Monteiro, J. M. *Negros da terra: Índios e bandeirantes nas origens de São Paulo*. Companhia das Letras, 2006.

Pentecostal churches contributed to a discourse of demonization of ancestral spiritual practices, strengthening the logic of conversion as the only legitimate way of faith.

According to Fausto (2000) he points out that "[...] the new wave of evangelization not only introduced Christian beliefs, but reconfigured the social and political organization of indigenous communities" (p. 223).

As this process intensified, the concept of symbolic colonization became essential to understand the transformations in indigenous religiosity. This concept encompasses not only cultural imposition, but also the denial of indigenous epistemic diversity. As Viveiros de Castro (2014) points out, "[...] the Christian religion imposes a universal model of spirituality, disregarding the specificities of indigenous worldviews and promoting an epistemicide²⁹" (p. 187). According to Eliade (2012), "[...] the imposition of a foreign dogma generates a symbolic break with local traditions, displacing authentic forms of spirituality" (p. 74).

By analogy, the impact of contemporary evangelical evangelization on indigenous peoples goes beyond the replacement of beliefs; It also affects the social structure of these communities. Conversion often involves the fragmentation of traditional groups and the weakening of collective practices such as ritual festivals and traditional forms of leadership. Fausto (2000) points out that "[...] Conversion to Christianity often generates internal conflicts, as not everyone accepts to abandon their traditional rituals and beliefs" (p. 230).

According to this panorama, evangelical missionary practices, especially among Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal groups, reinforce the idea that conversion must be total, which leads many indigenous people to move away from their traditional spiritual practices. We emphasize again what Eliade (2012) states: "[...] the forced assimilation of a new religion generates a cultural reaction, which can manifest itself in both resistance and hybridization" (p. 76).

²⁹ Colonization not only materially exploited indigenous peoples, but also promoted an epistemicide, that is, the systematic destruction of their ways of knowing, spirituality, and ways of interpreting the world. This process occurred through the imposition of the Portuguese language, the devaluation of oral narratives, and the persecution of indigenous religious practices, often demonized by Christian missionaries. As Sousa Santos (2010) points out, epistemicide is one of the pillars of colonialism, as it seeks to eradicate the traditional knowledge of dominated peoples and replace them with a single matrix of knowledge, considered superior and universal. In the case of the indigenous people, this cognitive violence manifested itself in the delegitimation of their healing systems, in the marginalization of their rituals, and in the attempt to erase the sacred relationship they maintained with nature, reinforcing the hegemony of Eurocentric thinking. See: Sousa Santos, B. de (2010). *Beyond abyssal thinking: From global lines to an ecology of knowledge*. In B. de Sousa Santos & M. P. Meneses (Orgs.), *Epistemologias do Sul* (pp. 23-71). Almedina.

As noted, the impact of evangelization on indigenous identity is a complex phenomenon, which involves both processes of cultural erasure and strategies of resistance and resignification. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] the central issue is not only religious conversion, but the maintenance of indigenous identity in the face of a process of cultural homogenization" (p. 318). As well as Fausto (2000) warns that "[...] indigenous resistance to conversion must be understood as a fundamental right to the preservation of their traditions" (p. 240).

The impediments that there are to the conversion and perseverance in the Christian life of part of the Indians, are their inveterate customs [...] such as having many wives; their wines in which it is very continuous and in taking them there is ordinarily more difficulty than in all the other [...] Item wars in which they intend revenge on enemies, and take new names, and titles of honor; being naturally inconstant in the beginning, and, above all, lacking fear and subjection [...] (Anchieta, 1584, p. 333 apud Viveiros de Castro, 2014).

In this way, in accordance with the processes of colonization and evangelization, indigenous belief systems underwent profound transformations, being subjected to a logic that disqualified and replaced ancestral practices. Just as shamanic rituals were central to the indigenous worldview, serving as mediators between the spiritual and material worlds, evangelization imposed a new structure of symbolic power, delegitimizing traditional knowledge. As indicated by Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] The missionaries, in particular, were seen as similar to the Karaiba, and they knew how to use it. Their wandering and their hortative discourse appeared to them from the beginning" (p. 220). Similarly, Geertz (2017) points out that "[...] the religious system not only structures the worldview of a community, but imposes it as the only possible truth" (p. 98), which evidences the effort to replace indigenous spirituality with a homogeneous Christian model.

Similarly, the replacement of shamanic rituals by Christian practices was not a homogeneous process, but a systematic attempt to reformulate native beliefs. Shamans, previously seen as the mediators of the sacred, began to be persecuted or assimilated as decorative elements within the new Christianized model. As reported, "[...] the Tupinambá also knew, of course, how to take advantage of the missionaries. In the first place, if the Karaibá have shown themselves, on several occasions, to be staunch opponents of the priests, not a few of these characters have appropriated the Christian discourse, defiantly or opportunistically" (Nóbrega, 1549, p. 144). Likewise, according to Eliade (2012), "[...] the replacement of indigenous myths by Christian dogmas involved a radical reinterpretation of sacred meanings, displacing the spiritual centers of native peoples" (p. 64).

Shamanism can be defined as the ability manifested by certain humans to cross bodily barriers and adopt the perspective of non-human subjectivities. Being able to see non-humans as they see themselves (as humans), shamans occupy the role of active interlocutors in the cosmic dialogue. They are like diplomats who take charge of interspecies relations, operating in a cosmopolitical arena where different socio-natural categories confront each other. [...] Conversion to Christianity reconfigured this role, delegitimizing the figure of the shaman and restricting his performance to a marginal symbolism within the new religious practices imposed (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 11).

According to the evangelizing model, the Bible and preaching became the new foundations of the indigenous worldview, destructuring the ancestral cosmological narratives. Just as Jesuit catechesis appropriated the narrative of the beyond to insert the Christian vision of salvation, this strategy found an echo in the native conceptions themselves. According to records from the time, "[...] The eschatological preaching of the Jesuits was a great success, at least in the beginning. She came to find a key issue of indigenous religion, the refusal of personal mortality" (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 198). According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] the role of the Bible in conversion has always been to establish a new reading of the world, which gradually superimposes and eliminates previous interpretations" (p. 318).

Similarly, conversion to Christianity did not occur without resistance, but often provoked internal fragmentation in indigenous communities. The division between those who accepted the new faith and those who maintained their traditional beliefs generated disputes that weakened social cohesion. As pointed out by Anchieta (1584), "[...] the impediments that exist for the conversion and perseverance in the Christian life of part of the Indians are their inveterate customs [...] the fact that they are naturally inconstant in the beginning, and above all that they lack fear and subjection" (p. 333). Likewise, Lévi-Strauss (2012) observes that "[...] the process of religious homogenization often results in social fragmentation, as it dissolves the bonds that previously guaranteed the cohesion of communities" (p. 52).

By analogy, the phenomenon of identity disfigurement emerges as a direct consequence of the imposition of Christian values on indigenous ways of life. The loss of fundamental elements of culture, such as rites of passage, traditional medicine, and cosmogonic myths, disrupted the way these societies understood their existence. As recorded, "[...] indigenous culture, duly sublimated by a vigorous anagogical interpretation, becomes the quintessence of the good, the beautiful and the true" (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 201). According to Mary Douglas (2012), "[...] ritual pollution is not only a

phenomenon of contamination, but an instrument for the redefinition of social and religious categories" (p. 74).

The indigenous experience of 'acculturation' seems to focus more on the embodiment and embodiment of Western bodily practices – food, clothing, interethnic sex, language as a somatic capacity – than on the idea of a spiritual assimilation. [...] Anthropological theories of sociocultural change tend to reject, needless to say, rightly, Western ethnogenetic ideas about miscegenation and racial assimilation as leading to the loss of ethno-cultural distinctiveness. The processes of acculturation are defined, on the contrary, in terms of ideological changes, that is, as essentially mental processes that affect first of all the native 'beliefs'; acculturation is thought of in the image of religious conversion, just as 'culture' is thought of in the image of religion (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 38).

From the same point of view, the reconfiguration of social relations within indigenous communities was impacted by the imposition of Christian morality, which disqualified community practices that were previously central to social organization. Evangelization fostered the dissolution of traditional ties of authority, replacing them with new hierarchies legitimized by the Church. As pointed out, "[...] the missionaries had the right to buy the captives imprisoned by other indigenous people outside the territories under Dutch control" (Castro & Cunha, 1993, p. 33). Similarly, Evans-Pritchard (2004) analyzes that "[...] magic and traditional religion were systematically disqualified, becoming remnants of what once structured the social order" (p. 81).

Similarly, evangelization also had a direct impact on the relationship of indigenous people with the land and the sacred, since places of worship were appropriated or destroyed to make way for churches. This transformation not only reconfigured the symbolic spaces of the communities, but also imposed a new Christianized territoriality. According to historical accounts, "[...] the massive incorporation of the region into the world economy, from the 70s onwards, did not translate into the extinction or generalized assimilation of native peoples, as was anticipated; on the contrary, they are in demographic growth" (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 312). Similarly, Sahlins (2003) argues that "[...] culture does not disappear under colonial domination; it transforms itself in a creative way" (p. 99).

The missionary presence was almost from the beginning an inexhaustible source of conflicts with the indigenous population. Only three years after it was established in the region, and two years after its foundation, the inhabitants of the mission of Enemo rose up and had to be harshly repressed. [...] Moreover, despite the express royal prohibition of making distributions among the newly converted Indians, and the protests of the missionaries, the corregidores introduced into the missions all kinds of merchandise, of little or no use value for the Indians. [...] Finally, it is worth highlighting the cultural oppression to which catechumens were subjected.

Traditional practices, such as polygamy, were harshly punished, and the missionaries tried by all means to eradicate the indigenous ceremonies considered pagan (Castro & Cunha, 1993, p. 74).

That said, according to the syncretic logic that permeates the processes of cultural contact, the adaptation of Christian symbology to indigenous worldviews represents a phenomenon of appropriation and resignification. Just as the Christian cross was reinterpreted within African contexts in colonial Brazil, the images of saints and biblical figures were absorbed by several indigenous societies, associating them with pre-existing spiritual entities. According to Eliade (2012), "[...] Christianity did not install itself in a religious vacuum, but dialogued and mixed with popular religions and sacred rituals that already existed" (p. 89). Similarly, Viveiros de Castro (2014) argues that "[...] the problem was not only to convert the indigenous people to Christianity, but to deal with their ability to absorb and resignify European symbols according to their own cosmological logic" (p. 211). Thus, Eliade states:

Christianity and Mythology. [...] Willingly or unwillingly, Christian missionaries ended up 'Christianizing' the divine figures and the 'pagan' myths that resisted extirpation. Many gods or dragon-slaying heroes have become St. George; the storm gods were converted into St. Elias; the innumerable fertility goddesses were likened to the Virgin or the saints. It can even be said that a part of the popular religion of pre-Christian Europe survived, camouflaged or transformed, in the feasts of the calendar and in the cult of the saints. The Church has had to fight for more than ten centuries against the continuous influx of 'pagan' elements (i.e., elements belonging to cosmic religion) into Christian practices and legends (2012, p. 132).

By analogy, the maintenance of traditional rituals under new meanings evidences the indigenous strategy of cultural resistance. Baptism, for example, was appropriated and reinterpreted by different indigenous groups as a rite of passage linked to purification and spiritual protection. According to Turner (1995), "[...] ritual symbols are multivocal and, therefore, can be used in different contexts without losing their essence, allowing the coexistence of simultaneous interpretations" (p. 112). Just as the Christian elements were absorbed, the missionaries themselves realized that the indigenous people gave new meanings to the sacraments, because, according to Nóbrega (1549), "[...] they say they want to be like us, but they maintain their customs in the way that best suits them" (p. 134).

In an identical way, religious syncretism emerged as an effective form of cultural resistance, allowing ancestral practices to continue to exist under the apparent acceptance of Christianity. According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] syncretism, contrary to popular beliefs, is not a simple fusion of beliefs, but a process of symbolic

reinterpretation and social restructuring" (p. 278). From the same point of view, Eliade (2012) points out that "[...] far from being a paganization of Christianity, indigenous syncretism represented a Christianization of their ancestral religiosity" (p. 164).

In the same way, the role of the indigenous people themselves in the redefinition of their religiosity in the face of evangelization was crucial for the survival of their traditions. In some communities, spiritual leaders incorporated Christian elements into their shamanic practices, transforming themselves into hybrid figures who reconciled both traditions. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] The missionaries, in introducing Christianity, did not realize that they were only adding new layers to a cosmological system already in constant re-elaboration" (p. 245). According to Eliade (2012), "[...] the ability to adapt and resignify rituals and beliefs was essential for the maintenance of indigenous cultural identity over the centuries" (p. 179).

As with other peoples subjected to evangelization, some indigenous communities resisted total conversion and resignified their religious practices without completely abandoning their cosmologies. As can be seen in several studies, the imposition of Christianity often resulted in the coexistence of beliefs, where Christian and native elements were intertwined in new symbolic systems. According to Castro & Cunha (1993), "[...] the relationship of the indigenous people with Christianity cannot be seen as a simple process of domination, as there is active resistance and strategies of resignification at different levels" (p. 81). Likewise, Eliade (2012) explains that "[...] the indigenous rites did not disappear, but were transformed into Christianized practices, maintaining their symbolic and social functions" (p. 202).

The coexistence, the contemporaneity of myths and tales in traditional societies, raises a delicate problem, but not an insoluble one. One can think of the societies of the medieval West, in which authentic mystics found themselves submerged in the mass of simple believers and even mixed with some Christians whose lack of devotion had reached such a point that they no longer participated in Christianity except outwardly. A religion is always lived – or accepted and supported – in different degrees; But, among these different experience plans, there is equivalence and homologation. The equivalence is maintained even after the 'banalization' of religious experience, after the (apparent) desacralization of the world (Eliade, 2012, p. 217).

Similarly, Christian religious festivals were appropriated by several indigenous communities as moments of celebration of their own traditions. The Feast of the Divine³⁰,

³⁰ The Feast of the Divine is a popular celebration of Portuguese origin that was incorporated and resignified in the Brazilian colonial context, mixing elements of European Catholicism with indigenous and Afro-Brazilian

for example, is an example of how the Catholic liturgy has mixed with indigenous practices, maintaining festive elements that refer to ancient fertility rituals and cyclical celebration. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014), "[...] the indigenous people not only accepted Christianity, but remodeled it in their own way, adapting it to their own cosmologies and temporalities" (p. 312). According to Hellern, Notaker and Gaarder (2012), "[...] religious syncretism must be understood as a dynamic process and not as a mere overlapping of beliefs" (p. 284).

In accordance with these processes of resignification, the indigenous communities that resisted total conversion developed hybrid structures that maintained the essence of their ancestral rites. Just as umbanda in Brazil combined African, indigenous and Christian elements, certain ethnic groups managed to maintain their traditions without completely abandoning Catholicism. According to Castro & Cunha (1993), "[...] the maintenance of indigenous rites within Christianity was an effective strategy for cultural survival in the midst of forced evangelization" (p. 127). According to Eliade (2012), "[...] religious hybridization does not necessarily weaken cultural identity, but it can strengthen it by allowing it to adapt to new contexts" (p. 221).

In this way, the processes of adaptation of Christian symbology, the resignification of traditional rituals and the maintenance of ancestral practices under new meanings demonstrate that evangelization did not mean a simple conversion, but a symbolic clash that resulted in new religious configurations. As can be seen, the Christian religion, when it was introduced into indigenous territories, was, in many ways, absorbed and transformed, generating religious systems that challenge the traditional vision of domination and resistance.

CONCLUSION

The evangelization of indigenous peoples in Brazil, particularly in the context of contemporary and current evangelical missions, evidences a complex process of religious and identity transformation, in which elements of indigenous cosmology are systematically

influences. Held in several regions of Brazil, especially in Maranhão and Goiás, the festival celebrates the Holy Spirit and involves a series of rituals, such as processions, singing, dancing and food distribution, reflecting the dynamics of popular religiosity in the country. As Queiroz (2005) points out, this festivity not only reinforced the presence of the Catholic Church in the daily life of colonial populations, but also became a space of resistance and cultural resignification, allowing different social groups to reinterpret their traditions within the Christian framework imposed by colonization. In this way, the Feast of the Divine exemplifies the complexity of the religious experience in Brazil, marked by processes of hybridization and cultural adaptation. See: Queiroz, M. I. P. *Festas e utopias: O sebastianismo no Brasil*. Editora Brasiliense, 2005.

replaced, delegitimized or resignified within a Christian logic. This phenomenon, which dates back to Portuguese colonization and intensifies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the arrival of Protestant missions, reveals that religious conversion is not limited to the adoption of new beliefs, but is directly related to the reconfiguration of social relations, cultural values, and mechanisms of authority within indigenous communities. The research showed that the imposition of Christianity, whether by Catholic catechesis or by evangelical proselytism, did not occur in a homogeneous way or without resistance. On the contrary, indigenous peoples have developed different strategies to deal with conversion, oscillating between assimilation, adaptation and contestation of new forms of faith.

The concept of symbolic colonization, central to the analysis of this study, allows us to understand how Christian evangelization acted not only in the religious sphere, but also in the reorganization of indigenous knowledge systems. As evidenced throughout the research, religious conversion was often associated with a process of epistemicide, in which traditional knowledge was devalued or reinterpreted within Eurocentric categories. The demonization of spiritual practices, the destruction of sacred objects, and the imposition of a Christian morality that regulated behavior and social relations contributed to the dissolution of important symbolic structures of indigenous cultures. This erasure, however, did not occur absolutely, as indigenous communities developed mechanisms of resistance that ensured the continuity of their cosmologies under new forms.

The research revealed that the evangelical influence on contemporary indigenous religious practices manifests itself in different ways, depending on the local dynamics and the strategies adopted by the missionaries and by the indigenous people themselves. In some contexts, conversion has resulted in the complete replacement of traditional practices with Christian dogmas, leading to the rejection of ancestral rituals and the internalization of a fundamentally Christianized worldview. In others, the selective incorporation of Christian elements within indigenous traditions was observed, generating hybrid forms of spirituality. Religious syncretism emerged as an essential strategy for the preservation of indigenous cultural identity, allowing symbols and rituals to be reinterpreted in a way that was compatible with original beliefs.

In addition, evangelical conversion has impacts that go beyond the spiritual sphere, having repercussions on the social and political organization of indigenous communities. The adoption of Christianity, especially among Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, is often associated with changes in the traditional leadership structure, replacing

indigenous spiritual authorities, such as shamans, with Christian religious leaders. This process affects social cohesion and, in some cases, generates internal conflicts between those who adhere to Christianity and those who seek to preserve traditional practices. The reconfiguration of authority systems in evangelized communities also reflects a shift in power, in which missionaries and pastors assume a central role in setting moral and social norms.

Therefore, the findings of the research demonstrate that evangelical evangelization among indigenous peoples in Brazil represents an ambivalent phenomenon, characterized both by cultural imposition and erasure as well as by resistance and resignification. Conversion cannot be understood as an isolated or linear event, but as a dynamic process that involves negotiations, conflicts, and symbolic transformations. If, on the one hand, evangelization has promoted the disfigurement of indigenous identity by redefining their cosmologies and spiritual practices within a Christian paradigm, on the other hand, indigenous people themselves have found ways to resignify this influence, incorporating Christian elements in a strategic way and ensuring the continuity of their traditions in new forms.

In this way, it is concluded that the evangelical influence on traditional indigenous religious practices and the identity of these peoples is a multifaceted process, in which the impacts of conversion vary according to the power dynamics, local contexts and resistance strategies developed by the communities. The imposition of a single Christian model, while seeking to erase and replace indigenous knowledge, also faces limits and challenges imposed by the very resilience of native cosmologies. Thus, evangelization should not only be analyzed as a process of cultural destruction, but also as a field of symbolic disputes, where different forms of religiosity coexist and are transformed, evidencing the capacity of indigenous peoples to reinterpret and resist attempts at religious and cultural homogenization.

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