

# The Devil and the Exu God Syncretism and the Alterity Archetype<sup>1</sup>

## A Study of Jungian Symbolic Psychology<sup>2</sup>

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The phenomenon of syncretism was abundantly practiced by Negro slaves in Latin America. Differently from North America, where protestant ministers dedicated themselves intensively to convert the slaves, the Roman Catholic Church mostly forbade their religion, and this led them to continue worshipping their own gods, disguised with the names of Catholic Saints. Slaves from the Yoruba Nago culture, mostly come from Western Africa (mainly Nigeria and Daome), adopted the word “saint” for Orixá (God), Saint George for Ogum, Christ for Oxalá, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Peter and Saint Paul for Xangô, Saint Sebastian for Oxossi, Saint Barbara for Iansã, St. Lazarus for Obaluaê, Our Lady Aparecida (the Patron Saint of Brazil) and Our Lady of Conception for Iemanjá, and many others. With Exu, however, it was quite different, because it was the colonizer who identified Him with the Devil.

Jung used to say that projections usually are attracted by a hook. In the case of Exu, what could be the content of this projection and, also, the nature of its hook?

The symbolism involved here is so intensely archetypal that we must elaborate it through **comparative anthropology**. To do so, I have amplified Jung’s concept of the **individual self** to encompass the collective dimension, that I name **cultural self**. I have also separated the concept of the self, defined by Jung as the sum total of psychic phenomena, from that of the main archetype, which I call the central archetype, following Jung (1912) and Perry (1966). By comparative anthropology, I do not mean amplification only, but also the comparison between the meaning of normal and defensive expression of symbols, complexes and archetypes in the self of different cultures. Needless to say, this method requires a religious approach to carefully consider the dimension of the holy and a scientific exemption to avoid ethnocentrism. In this perspective, everything in the psyche is symbolic and archetypal. The concepts of symbol and functions are here amplified to

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include all polarities, such as subjective and objective, personal and collective, conscious and unconscious. Through symbolic elaboration, structuring symbols and functions express the individuation process described by Jung and the process of humanization of matter, conceived by Teilhard de Chardin (1956), to form individual and collective consciousness (Byington, 2004).

Jung (1950) defined the shadow as a part of the self that is antagonistic to conscious values and contains symbols of the same gender as the ego. I have enlarged his concept to include symbols or complexes of both genders. Borrowing the concepts of fixation and defense from psychoanalysis, I have described shadow formation through the fixation of symbols, functions and complexes in the repressed unconscious. However, I employ the concept of defense only for pathology, which makes the shadow always defensive, i.e., pathological and evil (Byington, 2006).

I consider Exu and the Devil to be symbols of the alterity archetype, due to their intermediation between human and divine, good and evil and mainly, life and death, which explains their syncretism. However, they express completely different structuring symbols and functions in the cultural self of the Yoruba Nago and of Western culture. Exu, like Christ, expresses the normal structuring function of sacrifice, whereas the Devil expresses in the Western cultural self the shadow of the mediator.

The Devil is the heir of Satan in Christianity, representing temptation, sin, hell and everything evil, in direct opposition to the virtues of Christ. The idea of the Devil coincides with the concept of the shadow here formulated as fixation and defensive expression of symbols, because its essence is to separate them from normal consciousness. The etymology of the word symbol comes from *syn-ballein*, to throw together, and of the word devil, *diabolos*, the slanderer, from *dia-ballein*, to throw across, i.e., to separate (Webster Dictionary).

As the Inquisition increased repression of sin in the name of Christ, the Devil became more and more malignant and powerful, to the point of acquiring the importance of being named the Anti-Christ, equivalent of Christ's shadow. The Church cultivated the figure of Jesus nailed to the cross, bleeding and suffering, or dead, as a symbol of powerlessness. Meanwhile, the figure of the Devil grew in power, shrewdness, magic, seduction and immense creativity to tempt people into sin, which justified the confiscation of property, imprisonment, torture and even the death penalty to fight Him.

If we approach the European cultural self of the Middle Ages from a systemic perspective, it is difficult not to see that it was the very repressive attitude of the Church which strengthened the symbolic cathexis of the figure of the Devil. Projection and

identification go hand in hand and, therefore, the more Christianity projected evil unto the figure of the Devil, the more it became diabolical. This devilishness was massively acted out against Indian (Gambini, 2000) and Negro cultures in the New World.

According to my definition of shadow, we may say that the Devil accumulated more and more characteristics of the symbols of Christ, which were fixated and expressed defensively. As I described in my book *Creative Envy*, the seven capital sins represent normal structuring functions, which were fixated and became distorted and evil (Byington, 2002). Two great structuring functions of this shadow, which call our attention, in contrast to the innocence and powerlessness of the crucified Christ, are aggression and sexuality, both of which are prominent features of the Devil. Exactly these two characteristics are exuberantly and normally present in Exu, which clearly explains the contents of the projection of the Devil as the shadow of Christ on Exu.

I have amplified the concept of archetype to encompass besides the collective unconscious, also **five archetypal positions of the relationship of the ego to the other in consciousness** through a ruling archetypal quaternio, which elaborates symbols coordinated by the central archetype. This quaternio is formed by the matriarchal, the patriarchal, the alterity and the totality archetypes.

Continuing the research of Bachofen (1861) and Neumann (1949), I have described the matriarchal archetype not as the exclusively feminine great mother, but as the archetype of sensuality, including both genders, and the patriarchal archetype, as the archetype of organization also present in the psyche of man and woman. The matriarchal archetype articulates the relationship of the ego with the other in an **insular position** of great intimacy, which Jung, following Levy-Brühl, often referred to as “participation mystique”. The intimacy of ego and other in these islands propitiates a highly sensuous pattern of consciousness, which favors the fusion and interchange of subject and object in magic, and of conscious and unconscious contents in unconscious identification. On the other hand, the patriarchal archetype articulates the ego with the other in a **polarized position** capable of great abstraction and organization, which can be articulated with many polarities and form systems. This Cartesian separation of ego and other in a strictly polarized position forming systems enhances the power principle to perform control over inner and outer reality with great efficiency.

I have named the third regent archetype the alterity archetype. It includes the anima and the animus archetypes and articulates the ego and the other and all polarities including the matriarchal-patriarchal polarity through a dialectical pattern of relationship. In this **dialectical position**, through the principle of synchronicity, consciousness becomes

capable of relating the ego and the other and all opposites with equal rights to express their differences. This pattern of relationship is so creative that it allows us to see the varying degrees of opposition present in polarities, including even their equality, such as is formulated in the Emerald Tablet, in alchemy.

The fourth regent archetype is the archetype of totality. It coordinates the ego and the other in the **contemplative position**, which propitiates the systemic and holistic worldview.

Through the transcendent function, these four regent archetypes articulate consciousness with the collective unconscious during the process of symbolic elaboration in the symbolic axis (Neumann's ego-self axis). The dialectic position of the alterity archetype affords the psyche its greatest possible productivity in symbolic elaboration, and for this reason consciousness can strive for the Christian ideal of loving one's neighbor as oneself, which corresponds to the Buddhist attitude of compassion and the search for the middle-path, as well as Exu's sacrificial presence in all transformations of life.

Exu is a god of the crossroads, and like Christ, Buddha, and Hermes, He intermediates the Aye, which is the here-and-now, and the Orum, the transcendent dimension of gods, archetypes and spirits (the *Egun*) in the beyond.

Myth taught the Nago that Exu was ordered by the Almighty **God Olorum** to go around the world and collect important stories, which affected humans and gods. He collected 301 stories, a number that to the Nago means endless, and transmitted them to **God Erunmilá** or **Ifá**, whose followers became the *babalawos*, priests of the oracle. These stories were collected in **sixteen chapters**, each one subdivided in **sixteen parts**, all learned by heart by the *babalawo* who had no written language. When the *babalawo* consults the oracle of Ifá, an **Odu** reveals a part of a myth that describes the person's problem and recommends its treatment, which includes determined rituals and sacrificial offerings to the Orixas. These myths organize beliefs, customs and rituals in the whole Nago social life. Every human descends from a god, and the oracle reveals which (Elbein dos Santos, 1975).

Exu, also called Legba, Bará and Elegbara, is a part of all humans and gods, and without Him life cannot exist. Movement, change, growth, business and sex, all depend on Him. He was chosen the leading god by the great God Olorum (Olodumare) because he was the one who best cared for Ebo offerings. Thus, He became the god of sacrifice (Exuolobe) and of offerings (Exu Elebo). He has trickster aspects and is full of wrath when frustrated. His typical hair representation is the knife phallus, which expresses fertility and sacrifice. He especially punishes those who disrespect offering rites.

Olorum, the Almighty, expresses archetypal general life and Exu, the development process of all beings and things. Each person has an individual Exu, which opens itself for development and differentiation. The **okotó** is the spiral image within the snail, which represents Exu and the process of development, which is simultaneously varied and unique. Exu is a unity multiplied into infinity and therefore He is related to the number one. He is so powerful that He must not enter any ritual of possession, being represented by Ogum, the eldest son of the Orixas, while Exu is their universal son. As described here it is almost impossible not to associate the function of Exu in the Yoruba Nago cultural self with the image of Christ, in Their meanings of Son of God, *anima mundi* and sacrificial and transcendent functions. Exu as archetypal image is an exuberant example of the extension of my concept of symbol to encompass all polarities, including inner and outer world.

### **Ifá, Exu and the Oracular System**

Most of Yoruba Nago mythology is told through stories collected by Exu and given to Orunmilá, his father and owner of the oracle. They are kept by the *babalawo* priests, who “read” their constellation in the oracle. Its structure is astonishingly similar to the *I Ching*, which suggests their common synchronistic relationship to the quaternary dimension of the central archetype. The oracle reveals to the *babalawo* the *odu* pertinent to each consultation through two methods. One results from casting sixteen dendê seeds (*ikin Ifá*) or cowries, and the other from casting a belt (*opele Ifá*) from which hang eight seeds (*Schrebera Arborea*). The castings form two vertical parallel columns combining four times one or two lines, which correspond to the straight or broken lines of the *I Ching*. There are sixteen possible combinations for each column and each one has a name. Together they form 256 *odus*, which are the Ifá Oracle.

Their oracular revelation subordinated to numeric combinations practiced within the principle of synchronicity of inner (psychological reality) and outer (the ritual) expresses the richness of the dialectical relationship of opposites characteristic of the alterity archetype.

### **The Axexe or Death Ritual**

An extraordinary example of the dialectical relationship between the opposites of life and death (*aye* and *orum*), coordinated by the alterity archetype in the Yoruba Nago society, is the *axexe* or death ritual. It lasts seven days during which the *axe* or energy of

the dead is transferred from this world, the *aye*, to the other world, the *orum*, and becomes a spirit, an *egun*. The egungun forms a society which can be invoked to guide the living.

After death, the body disintegrates and becomes part of cosmic elements, represented by the colors white, red and black. A few days after burial, the *axexe* is carried out in the community, which participates in sacrificial offering and prayers. In the same way that the beginning of life meant a loss of energy (*axe*) from the generating substance to individualize it, death means the destruction of this individuality and its reposition in the beyond. For this reparation, many belongings of the dead are ritually destroyed and offerings and sacrifices are made which Exu Elebó will carry and secure *axe* transference to the beyond. In this manner, the individual life cycle is completed and integrated into cosmic existence.

### **Exu as the Son and the Alterity Archetype**

Exu, Christ and Buddha express the principle of the son who comes to redeem the world from the attachments that limited the world parents (Neumann, 1949) and bring salvation and enlightenment. In this respect, the story *Atorum d'Orum Exu* from the *Odu ogbe-Hunle* is very precious. It describes the birth and propagation of Exu as being in the *Aye* and the nine spaces of *Orum*, the beyond.

In the origins of things, the Almighty Olodumaré and Obatalá began creating beings and created Exu, who showed Himself stronger than His creators. Thus, Olodumaré sent Exu to live with Obatalá, who placed Him at the entrance door and sent Him for daily work. Now, Orunmilá (Ifá) needed a son and came to Obatalá. He saw Exu and wanted Him, but Obatalá refused. Orunmilá insisted and Obatalá finally told Him just to touch Exu and to have intercourse with His wife, Yebiiru, when returning home. Twelve months later Exu Elegbara (the Lord of Power) was born and was very hungry. Pampered by His mother, He ate all animals but continued hungry. His mother continued pampering Him and He finally ate Her up as well. Next, He also wanted to eat His father but Orunmilá held His sword and cut Exu in two hundred pieces, which are the *Yangi* (pieces of laterite) used to people the nine spaces of *Orum* (the beyond). Exu and Orunmilá finally made peace. Exu gave back His mother and agreed that all the *Yangui* would be representatives of Orunmilá and obey Him as sons (Elbein dos Santos, 1975).

Juana Elbein dos Santos (1975), from whose book *The Nago and Death* I have borrowed most of my information on Exu, emphasizes the importance of associating Exu Elebo, the transporter of offerings and sacrifices, with the whole functioning cultural self of

the Yoruba Nago. Exu Ogise Ebo (the transporter of Ebo) is the third element, the principle of the son, who as Exu Yangi gives back to creation all that He has devoured. This separation is carried out by all those who relate to the divine. Symbolically, this means that each one of us has devoured biologically a genetic inheritance, which must be given back existentially through sacrifice (Ebo), i.e., through symbolic elaboration. Offerings and sacrifices practiced in ritual reproduce in culture what happens with everyone during life. These customs are integrated into the persona and enhance symbolic elaboration to form consciousness in individuation and in cultural humanization.

### **The Sacrifice of Christ, Communion, Exu's Ebo and Buri**

The central ritual of sacrifice in Christianity is the sacrifice of the adult son fully conscious of His heroic messianic mission. Since this sacrifice, the Father and the Son are intermediated by the Holy Ghost, who expresses the symbolism of the transcendent function operating in the dialectic position of alterity. The main difference I see with the Yoruba Nago rituals of sacrifice through Exu Elebo is that many Yangi present in animals are sacrificed and reintegrated into creation to maintain harmony between the Aye and the Orum, in the life process. Human beings must undergo initiation ceremonies of *buri* to open and transform the head in order to integrate Exu Bara and the dialectical relationship which they will carry from then on with their Orixá (Eledá) through the Ebo and in the ritual of possession. Initiation interrelates the individual Exu Bara Aié, which is in the body with Exu Bara-Arum in the beyond. This is the symbolic equivalent of the Catholic Mass, whose culmination is the synchronistic miracle of the Eucharist and holy communion with Christ. This propitiates the same necessary opening of the mind, a true revelation, to participate in the sacrifice of Christ and in the dialectical relationship between the Father and the Son in the mystery of the Trinity (Jung, 1940-1941).

The plurality of animal sacrifice of the Yoruba Nago corresponds to their polytheistic dominance, whereas the crucifixion of Christ expresses the sacrifice of the Son in a dominant monotheistic tradition. Both express the alterity archetype in the relationship of the human and the divine.

## **The Intermediation of the World Parents through the Son**

Our central hypothesis in the structuring of consciousness is that the matriarchal and the patriarchal archetypes have been relating since the beginning of civilization through different ways, represented in the mythology of each culture.

Due to pregnancy, breast feeding and general child and home care, the matriarchal archetype and its sensuality were mostly projected onto the feminine and women during the development of civilization. This led many researchers to identify and name the sensuality of this archetype as the great mother. This is, however, a unilateral view of the sensuality archetype which excludes its presence in man and in the masculine as well. Indeed, besides the fertility of the mother goddesses in mythology, we find also the fertility of the father gods abundantly expressed as for instance in the case of Ouranos and Cronus, two famous agriculture gods, and of many other fertility gods in many cultures. In Yoruba Nago culture, the father god Obatala, who creates mankind, has been from the beginning, linked to fertility and wine, and his companion Odudua, who creates the earth is sometimes represented as a man, sometimes as woman and is also bisexual (Verger, 1981).

On the other hand, the patriarchal archetype, which is the archetype of organization, was projected mostly on man and the masculine due to man's greater physical strength and his incapacity for pregnancy and breast feeding. However, there are also many exceptions to this dominance throughout history. Hera, for instance, queen of the Olympus is a defender of the law of fidelity in marriage, a clear patriarchal requisite for the organization of the family institution, while Zeus, indisputable father and ruler of the Olympian Gods is the exuberant expression of the fertilizer, the essential characteristic of matriarchal sensuality.

Jung's conception of the individuation process clearly describes, through anima and animus, the presence of the feminine in man and the masculine in woman, which I have extended to also encompass the matriarchal and the patriarchal archetypes. This is very useful for the individuation process of man and woman as well as for the understanding their family and social roles. In this respect, I have described an archetypal typology, which complements Jung's typology of the functions of consciousness, where we find matriarchal or patriarchal typological dominance in the individual and cultural self. From this perspective, men with matriarchal dominance are very capable of child and home care and have many abilities traditionally attributed to women such as decoration, dancing, cooking, hairdressing, fashion and many others. On the other hand, women with patriarchal

dominance in their typology have a natural inclination for science, administration and many professions traditionally exercised by men, such as military occupations, fighting and dangerous sports and management positions.

### **Polytheism and Monotheism**

The matriarchal archetype, essentially expressed by sensuality, and the patriarchal archetype, by mental organization, are the pillars of the process of symbolic elaboration to structure consciousness in the individual and cultural self. From time immemorial, these two archetypes have combined in different ways, which are expressed by myths, customs and institutions in all ethnological groups.

Because of the nomadic way of life of hunting-gathering groups of ancient society depended greatly on the forces of nature, there was probably a greater tendency for the dominance of the matriarchal and its characteristic insular consciousness where the ego and the other relate intimately in participation mystique. This dominant matriarchal ego-other intimacy is accompanied by animism and polytheism in various degrees and by a magical mythic mentality. We find it throughout history in different tribal societies, and in various degrees also in modern ethnological groups and in many individuals independently of their culture and education.

The agricultural revolution allowed for food storage and the development of human settlements. The organization of society based on the family unit, social classes and private property reached a most extraordinary activation of mental organization and the patriarchal archetype became dominant in many ethnic groups, cultures and nations.

Bachofen (1861) discovered the exuberance of the matriarchal archetype in ancient cultures, but reduced it to women and to a sociological family pattern, which inaugurated the evolutionary concepts of matriarchy and patriarchy. Erich Neumann (1949, 1970) developed these ideas in the archetypal dimension and described the phenomenology of the great mother archetype and the father archetype reduced respectively to the feminine and the masculine. He continued to relate them in an evolutionary way in the collective dimension and later in individual psychological development.

When we consider the archetypal nature of the matriarchal and patriarchal patterns of relationship, we should not consider them in an evolutionary way as did Freud, with the phases of libido (oral, anal and genital) and Bachofen and Neumann with matriarchy and patriarchy. Archetypes are present in the elaboration of symbols throughout individual and

collective development, which prevents us from treating them hierarchically. We can at best describe their dominant roles in different phases of development.

In this sense, we can relate animism and polytheism to matriarchal dominance and monotheism to patriarchal dominance in culture. However, due to the fact that the matriarchal-patriarchal polarity is the basic psychic polarity of the development of consciousness, we must see this prevalence dynamically, because the dominated archetype is always there and manifests itself one way or another through compensation. This relationship is coordinated by the alterity archetype, which favors the interaction of polarities.

The increasing manifestation of the archetype of alterity throughout time has led me to formulate an archetypal theory of history, which describes the progressive matriarchal-patriarchal interaction towards alterity. Hegel (1830-31) described this process through his thesis of the progressive incarnation of the world spirit. During this historical millenary process, we find many cultures, such as the Greek and Indian, which present various characteristics of polytheism, but which have integrated many aspects of alterity and therefore have much symbolic elaboration also operating patriarchally. Consequently, we cannot refer to any culture in the past and even more so today simply as polytheistic, because any culture with intense matriarchal exuberance always presents symbols, which are elaborated patriarchally. In the same way, monotheistic cultures with intense patriarchal dominance always present many symbols coordinated by the alterity archetype, which necessarily include matriarchal symbolism, frequently as part of their shadow.

### **The Defensive Patriarchalization of Christianity**

The sacrifice of the Son in the dominantly patriarchal and monotheistic worldview of the Old Testament became a messianic dialectical myth within the dominance of the alterity archetype. The integration of monotheism and polytheism was expressed in the Trinity dogma and in the community of saints. The dogma of the Assumption of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church reinforced this polytheistic component of alterity. It was exactly this polytheistic aspect of the saints in Christianity which propitiated the syncretism with the Orixas.

The historical institutionalization of the Christian Myth through the dominantly patriarchal model of the Roman Empire deformed Christianity greatly through defensive patriarchalization. In the name of Christ and His message of compassion, the Holy Office instituted the Inquisition, which severely repressed the creative elaboration of the Myth as

heresies. This repression of the transforming power of the symbol of Christ resulted in its fixation and shadow formation of the Devil as the Anti-Christ. This fixation was expressed in the defensive cultivation of the crucified Christ in detriment of the glory of the Resurrection. The major structuring functions repressed in this defensive usage of the crucifixion were aggression and sensuality (which includes sense of humor), both of them essential for the great transformation proposed by the sacrifice of the Son. This shadow was acted out throughout the history of Christianity and was a central characteristic in the religious attitude of the colonizers of Latin America.

When I was about to finish this paper for our congress, I went to consult the Nigerian *babalawo* Otumba Odekunle, who lives in São Paulo, and brought with me a statue of Exu. He consulted Ifá through the *Ikin* oracle. Exu manifested twice, followed by Obatala and Oxum. He interpreted the *Odu* and named with remarkable accuracy the central meaning of my individuation process, to which I have devoted a lifelong elaboration. Ending my consultation, he pointed to the statue of Exu and remarked “- Exu presents Himself naked to shock, frighten, and expose His extraordinary exuberance.” It was most probably the transforming sacrificial numinosity of Exu expressed through these characteristics that became the hook for the defensive syncretism with the Devil as representative of the repressed vitality of Christ.

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