

Luto na Luta!
Austin, TX Chapter
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Over the past few years, violence against African-based religions and practitioners increased drastically in Brazil due to neo-Pentecostal discourses and ideology. The persecution of these religions by the state and members of other religions throughout the history has been both systematic and structural. However, the current wave of invasion and depredation of Candomblé and Umbanda temples as well as physical and psychological aggressions towards its practitioners by evangelical extremists is part of a larger political project that is quickly advancing.

According to the Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance in Rio de Janeiro (CCIR) there were 1,014 cases of religious crimes registered between 2012 and 2015. Among all these cases, 70% were against Afro-Brazilian religions and their practitioners, especially against Candomblé and Umbanda houses and members. In 2015, several houses were burned down and had their sacred objects destroyed in the states of Goiás and Distrito Federal. Religious leader Babazinho de Oxalá's house, for example, was attacked three consecutive times, resulting in the complete devastation of the space and its sacred objects. In the same period, in the state of Bahia, Mãe Dedé de Iansã died of a heart attack after members of an evangelical church spent the whole night outside her door, calling her names such as "devil worshipper." The most recent cases that occurred between June and September 2017 in Nova Iguaçu, Rio de Janeiro, called attention to evangelical extremists' connections with criminal organizations. In two months, 8 violent abuses were reported. Although all these cases had been reported to municipal, state, and federal authorities, none of the crimes were punished and not one preventive measure was effectively adopted.

In more than 500 years of African presence in Brazil, Candomblé and Umbanda temples have served not only as places of worship, but also spaces of political resistance, where Black people but other minorities were able to find support and tools for empowerment. The violation of sacred Candomblé and Umbanda spaces in Brazil represents not only the violation of physical temples but also an act of anti-black racism, misogyny, and queerphobia through the violation of Black, queer, and female bodies that are represented in those spaces. Concomitant to these acts, evangelical leaders are empowering themselves while growing economically and politically. Alongside the expansion of physical territory and increase in the number of members in evangelical congregations, the main leaders, who are in their majority white heterosexual males, own TV channels, journalistic outlets, and have a significant number of representatives within political parties. State and religious leaders have become close allies on the same project.

Since the Brazilian state and its politicians have no interest in giving this horrible situation the attention and visibility it deserves, several initiatives are working to give visibility to the violent

attacks against Afro-Brazilian religions in Brazil. Luto na Luta! is a movement created at the Ile Omiojuaro in Rio de Janeiro, with an international branch in Austin, Texas. The representatives of the movement in the U.S. are currently inviting/recruiting support and solidarity from U.S. academics, faculty, staff, and community organizations and members to help us create strategies to bring international visibility to this violence in Brazil and, eventually, overcome this situation. After an opening meeting in Austin, several ways of supporting and helping this cause were identified, such as:

1. To establish connections with the struggles of other traditional religions that are facing similar situations regarding the advancement of extremist evangelical discourses, ideologies, and actions in countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria.
2. To connect with liberal Christians in the U.S. and ask them to express their positionality in relation to these cases of violence against Candomblé and Umbanda temples and practitioners
3. To challenge the Brazilian state before international courts, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.
4. To publicize extremist evangelical actions in the US media
5. To create the means to bring Afro-Brazilian religious leaders to U.S. universities and cultural organizations, as well as to Latin-American and Caribbean countries, to denounce the cases of violence and the lack of action by the Brazilian state.

Please contact us if there is any way you can help us to confront this serious problem which has been growing at a transnational level: lutonaluta.tx@gmail.com

Sincerely,

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