



**Summary report on the activities of the Ilê Axé Omi Ogun siwajú in the context of  
the project to Combat Religious Racism and Reduce Violence against Afro-  
descendant Populations**

**Presentation**

This report is based on a survey and registration of cases carried out within the scope of two different projects: the first one had as its main researcher Dr. Danielle Boaz, who, in partnership with Ilê Axé Omi Ogun siwajú, built a database with 500 cases of religious racism that took place in Brazil. These data, as well as a report in English and Portuguese, are available at <https://www.religiousracism.org/brazil>. In another stage, with the support of the Instituto Raça e Igualdade and in partnership with Criola and Ilê Ax'Omiojuaro, we were able to deepen our knowledge of the cases that took place in Bahia and, also, we were able to have close contact with some of the terreiro communities of the Recôncavo Baiano, making it possible to identify some more persistent aspects of the violations of the rights of the terreiro communities in this region, as we will address later.

It is our objective to provide an overview of the cases of religious racism that have been taking place in the State of Bahia. As our activity is more concentrated in the Recôncavo Baiano, we will dedicate special attention to issues related to this area of the state of Bahia, drawing attention to the fact that business groups have been violating spaces considered sacred by some terreiro communities in the region, which has led us to realize the importance of dealing with religious racism in the Recôncavo Baiano in intersection with other themes of great relevance in the fight against structural inequalities in Brazil, especially with regard to the need to advance policies for land regularization in the region, with respect to traditional communities, among which we highlight the terreiro communities.



We also present two annexes that served as a basis for the considerations made in this report. The first annex brings a table with eighty-seven different cases of religious racism in Bahia. These data are part of the research carried out by the International Commission to Combat Religious Racism/ICCR, currently composed by Dr. Danielle Boaz, professor in the department of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and by Dr. Omi Ogun siwajú, located in the rural area of the city of São Félix, in the Recôncavo Baiano. Some of these cases coincide with what we recorded during the project supported by the Instituto Raça e Igualdade, in addition to others that we found in this last year of work in the Recôncavo Baiano. The second annex brings four articles, three of which were written by leaders or representatives of terreiro communities in Bahia. In these articles, the authors narrate episodes of religious racism to which they were subjected. The texts are all in English because they are part of a section (roundtable) published in the Journal of Africana Religions, from Pennsylvania University, United States, in 2021. We think it is important to include these articles because they privilege the narrative constructed by those who went through some of the situations to be that we allude to in this report.

We hope that this report, while succinct, can give clues to how persistent and systemic religious racism is in the Recôncavo Baiano and how it expresses a particular facet of structural racism in Brazil. Still, we yearn for the understanding of religious racism to be able to perceive the invasive and often less spectacular ways in which the full existence of traditional black communities in Brazil has been undermined.

### **Context - Religious Racism in Bahia and the Recôncavo Baiano**

The Recôncavo Baiano region comprises twenty-six municipalities, including the state capital, which are located around the Baía de Todos os Santos, an area historically



important for the culture and economy of the State of Bahia. Of these, twelve municipalities bring greater projection in the historical and economic sense, among which are the municipalities of São Félix, Cachoeira and Santo Amaro, which are part of the main focus of our actions in this project, in addition to the city of Muritiba, which also receives attention of our actions due to its proximity to the rural area of São Félix, where the Ilê Axé Omi Ogun siwajú is located. We have also established contact with religious leaders in Salvador, although it is not in our plans to deepen actions in this place, since several other organizations already work there.

The Recôncavo Baiano concentrates a large number of Candomblé terreiros from different nations, some with great importance and intense activity. Many of these terreiros are located in urban areas, while some are located in rural areas, as is the case of Ilê Axé Omi Ogun siwajú, in the municipality of São Félix. The initial survey of cases of threat to the rights of these communities reveals a historical situation of violations related to the territory where some of these terreiros are located. It is public knowledge, for example, of the long legal battle between the terreiro community Zòògodò Bogun Malè Seja Hùnde and Kwé Seja Hùnde, also known as Roça do Ventura, located in the municipality of Cachoeira, to protect themselves from violations committed by representatives of the Altamira Farm against the territory and areas adjacent to this community. There is also public knowledge of the conflict between the terreiro community Ilê Axé Icimimó Aganju Didé and representatives of Empresa Penha de Papel e Celulose, which declares itself the owner of a large area of the municipality of Cachoeira known as Terra Vermelha. This area encompasses more than five terreiro communities, in addition to private areas, which have been prevented from fully enjoying their territories. In addition, in urban areas, situations were reported in which disorderly growth resulted in the inaccessibility of natural resources relevant to the cult of the orixás, as reported by the babalorixá Dinho de Oxossi, from the city of Muritiba.



Because of the above, we have focused our attention on cases that involve the violation of the territories of traditional communities of African origin, as this is the form of violation that has occurred systematically in this region of Bahia, causing sometimes irreparable damage due to the loss of sacred spaces and settlements.

Although our area of concentration is the Recôncavo Baiano, in Annex 1 we made a point of presenting cases of religious racism that have occurred in other areas of the state of Bahia, in order to demonstrate the persistence of these violations throughout the state over the years. It is important to note that, in the aforementioned annex, we have eighty-seven cases listed, which occurred in Bahia, which were extracted from a database of five hundred cases covering the entire national territory. In other words, almost twenty percent of the cases of religious racism registered in the database available on the ICCRR website refer to violations that occurred in a single state of a federation composed of twenty-seven states.

### **About property and territory**

When we talk about territory, we are not referring only to property, but to different spaces related to the cultural and religious practice of terreiro communities. It is not intended here to suggest that Afro-Brazilian religions are the owners - or owners - of these territories. Nor is it intended to defend exclusivity in terms of access to these spaces. What we want to say here is that, in many cases, disrespect or aggression towards Afro-Brazilian religions occurs in the sense of restricting access to or the Afro-descendant religious practice in certain spaces. Still, the practice of religious racism is perceived when there is the depredation of symbols and monuments built in these spaces in recognition of their historical connection with the religious practice of African origin, or even when there are



proposals - sometimes issued by the public power - so that there is the insertion of symbols from other religious aspects in spaces traditionally related to the Afro-Brazilian religious tradition.

An example of what is argued here is seen in a certain "symbolic fight" that takes place at Dique do Tororó, in Salvador, a place historically related to Afro-Brazilian cults and which has a set of statues made in honor of the orixás. As can be seen in Annex 1, on two occasions (2011 and 2015), a state deputy and a councilor sent proposals to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Bahia and the City Council, respectively, for a monument in the form of a bible to be built in the Dique do Tororó. Although the proposals are based on discourses of equal treatment of different religious aspects, what is seen is a direct affront to the historical and cultural aspects of that space, a territory of practices related to Afro-descendant religions. It is worth noting that the city of Salvador has a large number of monuments and spaces dedicated to the Judeo-Christian tradition, with the Dique do Tororó being one of the few spaces to house monuments explicitly dedicated to honoring the cult of the orixás.

A similar fact has taken place this year 2022 in Lagoa do Abaeté, also in Salvador. Recently, there was a proposal in the City Council of Salvador to change the name of that space to Monte Santo Deus Proverá, in an explicit allusion to evangelical religious, disregarding the historic frequency of traditional Afro-descendant communities, among others, in the place. Although the proposal for the name change was withdrawn, works were started for an alleged qualification of the site, which includes the construction of an allegedly ecumenical temple, among other improvements, without taking into account the environmental impact and without listening to the local community. Although the case is being monitored by the State Public Ministry, the works continue, which has generated insecurity for the populations of the surrounding terreiro communities.



In addition to these cases, we have seen profound problems where the territories coincide with the places of residence and worship of the terreiro communities. For example, some conflicts that took place in the municipality of Cachoeira, in the region known as Terra Vermelha, involving real estate developments and industries, were widely publicized by the press. In these cases, although a positive action on the part of the State in defense of traditional communities is perceived, it is, in our view, insufficient. We say this because such actions, at least so far, have not considered that the cases that are individually brought to the Judiciary represent a broader problem related to the territories occupied by traditional communities in the Recôncavo Baiano, namely the urgency of proceeding with a land regularization policy in the Recôncavo Baiano, and that such policy considers historical and cultural factors of occupation of these spaces, guaranteeing to traditional communities not only the ownership of the spaces they occupy, but also the preservation of natural spaces and the autonomy of these communities to interact with those places. Still, it is important to consider that the situation seen in Cachoeira - from some conflicts that became public from the engagement of the communities and due to the dissemination in the press and in social networks, affects several other territories in the Recôncavo Baiano, both in both rural and urban areas. We have information that real estate transactions involving different territories have been carried out without considering the existence of those who actually occupy and protect these spaces.

Finally, we emphasize that this discussion about territory, and its distinction in relation to the idea of property - even though the two notions maintain a dialogic relationship - needs to be deepened since this can have consequences in terms of international measures for the protection of rights humans, especially in its precautionary dimension. As we have observed, even if a property can be rebuilt, or the owners can be compensated, the territory, and all the symbolic and material importance it carries, can be violated in a way



that cannot be returned, as pollution of natural sources, burying ponds, destruction of native plants, soil contamination with industrial waste, among others. Therefore, we consider that precautionary measures at the international level also need to expand their reach to protect territories occupied by terreiro communities.

### **Summary of actions developed by Ilê Axé Omi Ogun siwajú in the context of the Project to Combat Religious Racism and Reduce Violence against Afro-descendant Populations**

Below, we briefly report some actions developed by Ilê Axé Omi Ogun siwajú in these first months of activities in this project.

In the first stage, we focused on structuring our organization to implement the activities foreseen in the project, including: hiring professionals; participation in planning meetings and training courses; internal trainings with members of our own community; meetings with local religious leaders to inform about the content of the activities of this project; formulation of a communication plan for the dissemination of actions; deepening partnerships with other organizations in the Recôncavo Baiano, such as the Union of Rural Workers of the Recôncavo Baiano and the CULTURAL ASSOCIATION of FAMILY FARMERS from the QUILOMBOLAS COMMUNITIES of SANTO ANTONIO and VIDAL.

In the second stage, we implemented the communication plan, expanded contacts and meetings with religious leaders from Muritiba, São Félix and Cachoeira, signed partnerships with local radio and community web radio communicators to disseminate the project's



actions and initial contacts with local representations, and Santo Amaro, from the Public Defender's Office of the State of Bahia.

In the third stage, we were able to: consolidate the record of eighty-seven cases of religious racism that occurred in Bahia (shown in annex 1); establish dialogue with representatives of six entities (Federal University of Bahia, Sepromi, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, ICCRR, Public Defender's Office of the State of Bahia and Koinonia) in order to establish partnerships that increase access for terreiro communities in the Recôncavo Baiano training services and legal monitoring of possible violations of their rights; carry out two trainings to face religious racism, held at Ilê Axé Omi Ogun siwajú on July 23, 2022.

### **Challenges**

The main challenge that we have encountered in the sense of registering and reporting some cases of religious racism, especially those involving territorial issues in the Recôncavo Baiano, is the vulnerability in which the communities involved find themselves. There is constant fear about physical integrity and even life. Several details pertinent to the cases listed in Annex 1 could not be reported here due to requests from the communities themselves. For ethical consistency, we focus on what has been reported in the press. Still, there are cases that could not be reported because the communities either explicitly disallowed it or did not explicitly authorize it. These cases, as they were not publicized by the press, having as their only sources the reports of the communities involved, which did not authorize their inclusion in this report, had to be excluded.

The strategy that we have been thinking, together with the terreiro communities that are victims of religious racism - when the circumstances involve threats to the life and physical integrity of their members - is to deal with cases of religious racism in a collective way,





avoiding individualized complaints. Therefore, one of the next steps designed to make possible the detailed recording of cases and possible reports to the international courts for the protection of human rights is to mobilize more terreiro communities that occupy and/or enjoy the same territory in order to promote collective actions, instead of individualized actions that would facilitate the identification of perpetrators and potential reprisals.

### **From the organization of annex 1 (case record)**

A fundamental part of this report, annex 1 brings the record we made of cases that occurred in the state of Bahia. The variety of attacks on Afro-descendant religions in Brazil is visible, by means that range from direct offense - manifested in person from one person to another - to cases involving stoning, invasion of property, vandalism, fraud and even murder.

As we said earlier, Annex 1 is based on the database on the website of ICCRR, a partner organization, and whose report and database we helped to build. The bilingual version was only published on the site a few weeks ago. However, we have made some changes to the way the information is originally laid out in the spreadsheet found on the website. We removed the descriptions in English and kept only Portuguese, which is the language we are using in this report. Also, we omitted some columns to ensure a better view and grouped the cases into categories as shown below. Finally, we group the cases into some categories defined based on the characteristics of the violations. It is important to consider, however, that the reading of the cases should be done, as much as possible, in an integrated way, since one category does not exclude another, that is, it is plausible that a case that is under the Harassment category, for example, also falls into the category of Attacks on rites, and vice versa.



Attacks on rites: in this category, we gather cases that interfere, or seek to interfere, in the performance of celebrations or their preparatory acts. Thus, this includes cases in which terreiro communities are denounced for disobedience to the Law of Silence, as well as attempts to prohibit the slaughter of animals for religious purposes.

Attacks on physical integrity and/or life: here are reported cases of aggression, murder and, sometimes, some cases of harassment that brought harm to the victims' health.

Embarrassment and attacks on honor: here are reported cases of defamation (many practiced via social networks) in addition to situations of harassment, including embarrassment for the use of clothing or accessories of a religious nature.

Vandalism: In this category we have gathered cases in which attacks are aimed at damaging religious spaces, as well as symbols, statues and monuments.

Attacks on territory and property: although many of the previous categories are related to the debate we have raised about property and territory of terreiro communities, here we have more direct and evident cases related to this theme, including cases of invasion of terreiros by agents of the state, such as police forces. This also includes demolition cases ordered by the government.

Others: this category includes less frequent cases that do not fit into the other proposed categories.

## **Conclusion**

The work to combat religious racism presents many challenges, but it also points to great possibilities, especially in the intersection of these cases with other forms of structuring violence in Brazilian society. We hope to be able to move forward, based on the data collected and organized here, towards actions of political incidence and international



incidence that can lead to structural changes in the discriminatory, anti-black and heteropatriarchal model on which Brazilian society is based. In addition to some strategies previously mentioned in this report, we are working for financial resources that allow us to expand our actions in the Recôncavo Baiano in order to encourage the autonomy of terreiro communities. One of these actions is a course on Popular Legal Education for Terreiro Communities. If we manage to obtain the necessary funding, we intend to implement it in the near future.

Sao Felix, July 30, 2022

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