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UFO Religions in Latin America



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Definition

According to Christopher Partridge (2003), UFO religions are those institutions whose creation was directly influenced by alleged contacts with extraterrestrial beings and which take them as their fundamental motive or those “which have been informed by a belief in the existence of UFOs and the intervention of extraterrestrial life” (Partridge 2003: 4).

The referred contacts are normally established by a leader, who is transformed by the interactions with extraterrestrials and accept the task of spreading their messages to the earthlings. Such is the case of Mrs. Keech, the contactee studied by the group lead by Leon Festinger et al. (1956) who held prophecies pointing to the end of the world. It is also the foundation narrative told by the Claude Vorilhon, later named Raël, of his contact with the

Elohim, who revealed to him that humans were created by extraterrestrials (Battaglia 2005).

John Saliba (2006) points to a crucial element of most UFO religions: “[a] stress on the need for human beings to make preparations for the public arrival of the aliens” (Saliba 2006: 106).

Extending and Problematizing the Definition

Brenda Denzler’s “The lure of the edge” (2001) helps to extend this definition to socialities formed under UFO contacts. In line with her, even fields that are not usually defined as a religious, such as different branches of UFOlogy, very frequently deploy “religious motives” (Denzler 2001: 103). Moreover, it is not uncommon that several conference talks on UFOs and UFO\–related material try to uncover in religious sacred texts such as the Bible and others, tracks for metaphorical references to extraterrestrials.

However, anthropologists who have produced detailed ethnographies on UFOlogists, such as Almeida (2015), points to the fact that describing UFO groups as “UFO religions” since the perspective of the ufologist is a paradox. By one side, many UFOlogists insist to distance their practice from the label of religion, as science is considered as the model for the search and study of UFOs and E.Ts. On the other hand, innumerable UFO groups share with religious movements important characteristics, such as medium channelings, direct

contact with extraterrestrials, and an elaborated eschatology.

UFO Religious, Controversies, and the Media

Carly Machado (2010), basing on the work of Beckford, points to the connection between New Religious Movements and the public controversies in which they are involved. According to her, such is the case of the Raélians: “It is possible to observe that different ideas and behaviors that are defended and proclaimed by the Raëlian are established and gain strength in the direct controversy between it and the other groups that are against it” (Machado 2010: 150).

In this regard, Battaglia (2005) describes how they created a great public debate after announcing for the media in 2002 the first human cloning, the so-called baby “Eve.” But the cloning controversy was not the only one which would render Raélians visible. Raélians would later cause after using a swastika combined with as David Star as their symbol.

Also, UFO religions and other millenarist New Religious Movements were object of public attention after the 1997 mass suicide of the members of Heaven’s Gate, led by Marshall Applewhite, who informed his followers that after taking their lives, they would be transported to a spaceship that would save them.

Projeto Portal

Projeto Portal is a Brazilian UFO group founded by Urandir Fernandes de Oliveira, an alleged paranormal who became very popular in T.V shows during the 1990s for presenting his special powers and abilities, particularly the capacity of bending forks telepathically. The group, based in Corguinhos – Mato Grosso do Sul, has cells in the main Brazilian capitals. According to Martins (2016), who did not identified the group in his study, but whose ethnography lead us to suspect that what he describes was Projeto Portal, claims that the process to become a member involve

attending local courses which end with a visit to a farm in Corguinhos, where members have the opportunity of see extraterrestrial lights and even talk with an alleged E.T. The groups’s doctrine, according to Martins (2016), is based on a suspicion of science and of “the occult government” (2016). The group, through an alliance with “benevolent extraterrestrials” (Martins 2016), aims to help their members to “transmutate” (Martins 2016).

Projeto Alvorada

According to Ferreira Neto (1984), the Projeto Alvorada was a ufological group created in Brasília in 1982 by the architect Luiz Scortecchi de Paula. The Projeto Alvorada aimed to create bases in different parts of the country aiming to preserve its members from a catastrophicall planetary transition.

Comunidade Figueira

In his thesis, Campanha (2016) claims that the Comunidade Figueira was founded in the 1980s by José Trigueirinho Neto and is based in Carmo do Cachoeira, Brazil. Campanha observes that Trigueirinho, who became famous as movie director, created the community after contacting an extraterrestrial called “Sarumah” (Campanha 2016). The Comunidade Figueira understanding of the extraterrestrial is similar to what has been described for the other two groups: according to Campanha, the extraterrestrials and intraterrestrials would help humans dealing with a general catastrophe.

Cultura Racional

According to Medeiros (2014), Cultura Racional was founded on 1935 by the medium, musician and exemployee of the Brazilian Foreign Affairs Ministry, Manoel Jacinto Coelho. The author points that after a contact with the “Racional Superior,” the medium published several books

under the title “Universo em Desencanto” that, in line with Medeiros, aims to help its followers to reach the “Rational Immunization”, that is, the salvation. In consonance with Silva (2013) “in the Cultura Racional what ufology defines as a UFO [...] is the result of the materialization of the Rational Beings” (Silva 2013: 89).

Groups Formed Around Contactees

Besides these groups, several others were formed around the figure of one or more contactees. Among them, we must list Bianca, famous for being abducted with her husband Hermínio by an extraterrestrial called Karran. Bianca later founded a group called “Técnica Física para a Conquista da Autoconsciência,” based in Federal District. Also, Mônica Medeiros, a physician and abductee, integrate a community called “Casa do Consolador,” which is based in São Paulo and is known for extraterrestrial channelings and spiritual cures.

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