

## A Brazilian Reading of Belzen's *Towards Cultural Psychology of Religion*

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**Abstract** This article presents a Brazilian reading of the ideas proposed by Dr. Jacob A. Belzen in his book *Towards Cultural Psychology of Religion* (2010a). Dr. Edênio Valle was the Portuguese translator of this book and saw almost immediately the possibility of applying Belzen's theoretical principles and methodological suggestions to his religiously multicultural home country, Brazil. Inspired by the examples described and analyzed by Belzen from the Netherlands, Valle attempts to reread a well-studied case of diabolical possession that happened in Brazil in the 1950s among a small group of rural Afro-Brazilian Catholics after they had gotten in touch with a millenarian, closed-minded Brazilian church called Adventist of the Promise.

**Keywords** Cultural psychology · Brazilian new religions · Diabolical possession · Millenarianism · Cultural shock · Religious pathology

In the letter inviting me to write an essay review of *Towards Cultural Psychology of Religion* (Belzen 2010a), Dr. Lewis Rambo instructed me not to write “a typical book review” but “to engage the ideas of the author on a serious level according to [my] own point of view.” Reflecting on this recommendation of the editor of *Pastoral Psychology*, I decided to concentrate on some of the points among the many that caught my attention.

I would like to start with two personal comments. As a person who lives in Brazil, a country with great cultural and religious diversity, what really impressed me while translating, with Dr. José Luiz Cazarotto, Dr. Belzen's book (see Belzen 2010b) was his well-articulated argument for the field of psychology to be, as a whole, more sensitive to the cultural dimension of religion. According to Belzen, culture is a constitutive dimension of psychological focus of any aspect of the human psyche and should be taken as such, especially by a psychologist who studies the religious experience and behavior of people, either individual or collective. The psychology of religion, moreover should not value the culture just as intercultural, taking it only as a designation for the comparative study of the way culture, psyche, and religion are

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associated in each cultural setting. On the jacket of the English edition of the book, the following assertion is made:

Cultural patterns of acting, thinking and experiencing are created, adopted and promulgated by a number of individuals jointly. As human subjectivity is different in different cultures, cultural psychology is not interested in comparatively investigating how experiences and behavior, attitudes and social relationships present themselves within different cultural conditions. (Belzen 2010a, book cover)

From my earlier contact with Belzen's thought, I already knew some of the concepts he has advocated for many years in the field of psychology of religion. I had my first contact with Belzen's thought in 1998 while writing an introduction to the book *Psychology of Religion* (Valle 1998a, b) for Brazilian psychologists. In this book I intended to offer to Brazilian readers some synthesized information about what had been done in other countries in the same field. Researching deeper the state of the art in the Netherlands and Sweden—two mines of knowledge little known and hardly explored in my country—I noticed that Belzen is a leading figure in this area of studies. From that point I became acquainted with his other books and also other authors mentioned by him, such as the ones put together in the stimulating journal, *Culture and Psychology*.<sup>1</sup> I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Belzen at the 2006 meeting of the International Society of Psychology of Religion in Prague, Czech Republic. On that occasion he was leaving the chairmanship of the Society. I invited him to come to Brazil, and in 2008 he participated in an intensive symposium on "Psychology of Religion Today."<sup>2</sup> Belzen's talks were followed by debates with some of the most famous psychologists of religion in Brazil. Belzen's emphasis on a *cultural* psychology of religion became more clear and compelling. His position was exciting in particular to the group of researchers of Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo who were already moving in a similar direction. It was at this same time that he told us of his intention to write something more substantial about what he meant by a *cultural* psychology of religion. I think the result of that promise is the book I am commenting on here.

Something that surprised me in the pages where Belzen speaks of the dialogical self (Chapter 8) was the space he gave to Wilhelm Wundt (Belzen 2010a, pp. 105–129), a scientist who is remembered in Brazil almost exclusively for being the founder of the first laboratory of experimental psychology at the University of Leipzig in 1879. Belzen presents him as someone who, more than other pioneers of scientific psychology, saw the urgency of a foundational connection between religion and culture. This was why, even without the proper empirical basis, Wundt ventured to lay the groundwork for what he called *Völkerpsychologie*, an empirical approach that was capable of investigating "the psychic processes upon which rely the general development of human communities as well as the origin of common mental products of general value in such a way as to provide a psychological analysis of the phenomena resulting from the mental interaction of a multiplicity of individuals" (Belzen 2010a, p. 120).

Wundt's ideas, although not always clear, opened up the space to see social life from the perspective of a genuine appreciation of culture. The *Völkerpsychologie* approach that he outlined had, however, a very limited influence on the field of psychology of religion, whether in the United States or in Europe. This probably is due to the epistemological design of the theories that eventually set up the main aspects of the new science, judging a priori that culture "was not deemed an object for psychological research and if it were it would be treated as an object to which psychological insights could be applied" (Belzen 2010a, p. 124).

<sup>1</sup> *Culture and Psychology*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications (edited by J. Valsiner).

<sup>2</sup> See the December 2009 issue of *REVER, Revista de Estudos da Religião*, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo.

Belzen, however, does not stop for long to introduce and comment on Wundt's work; he takes off from the author. One gets the impression that his interest is to show the reader that some of the insights of Wundt, the founder of the field of psychology of religion, have been accepted and borne fruit in the great masters of the University of Nijmegen–Roels (1918); Rutten (1937), Fortmann (1971), and later, Hermans and Kempen (1993) (Belzen 2010a: pp. 138–143)—some of whom were teachers or colleagues with whom Belzen interacted intellectually and professionally. It is as if Belzen wants to show that one of the most central aspects of the proposal of Wundt fell on fertile ground in The Netherlands, thus bringing to the psychology of religion impulses and directions that should not be forgotten. This is how Belzen summarizes this view:

Wundt's plea for a cultural psychology of religion seems particularly relevant. . . . Expressed in contemporary terms: all conditions and determinants of psychic functioning, either limitative (such as psychophysical makeup or social and geographical conditions), operative (such as acquired, learned activities), or normative (such as rules and norms), are always cultural-historically variable and therefore all 'higher psychic functions' are constituted, facilitated and regulated by cultural processes. (Belzen 2010a, p. 124)

As in The Netherlands, in Brazil we have always had social scientists and psychologists sensitive to the needs of taking seriously the dimensions of culture as an unavoidable and foundational component for the study of religion. I will not enumerate them in this essay. I emphasize only that these Brazilian researchers often based their work on American, French, German, Belgian, and even Russian authors and theories, but always in an original way. They had, however, little information about the work of Dutch psychologists in The Netherlands. Belgian authors such as Joseph Nuttin and Antoine Vergote were better known among Brazilian psychologists. The reason is simple. Just as in 1932 a "French Mission," led by Roger Bastide, helped to found the University of São Paulo, Brazil's most prestigious university, so the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) had in 1946 some Belgian teachers from Louvain in its Faculty of Psychology, which allowed a greater exchange of ideas between the two university settings. The PUC-SP was one of the first Brazilian universities to have its psychology department officially recognized by the government of Brazil. Thereby, it became a privileged space for dialogue between religion and psychology. I mention this because I find the detailed information Belzen provides about pioneers of psychology of religion in the Netherlands valuable for the psychology of religion in Brazil, precisely at the same time it was developing among the sophisticated academic circles of Brazil. Belzen undoubtedly expands our horizons significantly, and his input may bear good fruit. This is what I expect.

In the first part of the book (pp. 3–22, 37–68), the author is explicit about why he inserted the words "towards" and "cultural" in the title of the work. For Belzen, it is clear that the two terms are not at all casual or rhetorical. What he means by these terms is that the psychology of religion is challenged to articulate a systematic way to approach religion and culture, two fields that some psychologists of religion tend to just put side by side. With this basic goal in mind, Belzen discusses in Part II (pp. 69–128) the specific methodological aspects of the approach that he deems necessary and urgent. Then (pp. 129–140) he goes on to clarify the theoretical and methodological paths trodden by an impressive lineup of authors that led me and some of my other colleagues to the conviction that it was time to try to overcome the gap that Belzen pointed out as existing between Wilhelm Wundt and the present psychology of religion:

As with so many challenging approaches, cultural psychology is still working on its own identity and it is easier to indicate what it is opposed to (or what it is not) than to say what it positively stands for (that is, what it is). But let me attempt a preliminary circumscription

and mention a few of its elements. Stated rather simply, cultural psychology does not search inside the human being to investigate belief, feeling, reasoning and behavior, but rather tries to understand how the specific form of life the person is embedded in, constitutes and constructs feelings, thoughts and conduct. Cultural psychologists try to counterbalance the prevailing bias in psychology according to which psychological phenomena have their origin in intra-individual processes. They stress that psychological phenomena—such as attitudes, emotions, motives, perceptual outlook, forms of reasoning, memory, and so on—are not just shaped by the surrounding culture, but are constituted by and rooted in particular cultural interactions. (Belzen 2010a, pp. 60–61)

When I read passages like this, I became keenly aware of the proximity of my efforts and those of Belzen (pp. 147–238). What convinced me of this were the three cases that he carefully described and analyzed, all with strong religious connotations. The first is from a group connected to a community in the *Bevindelijke* tradition (pp. 147–164), the second is the case of Doetje (pp. 181–214), and the third is his interesting reading of the psychohistorical motives behind the political phenomenon known as “pillarization,” which is only understandable in light of the history of Dutch Calvinism (pp. 215–238). In these three cases Belzen masterfully exemplifies what he means when he says that a cultural psychology of religion should build bridges between history and anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, and social psychiatry (pp. 207–211).

I will summarize the three main points that interested me most in Belzen’s way of seeing the psychology of religion. First of all, I was interested in the suggestive title of the opening chapter of the book, “Building Bridges” (pp. 3–22). Building bridges between the psychology of religion, general psychology, and psychology of culture corresponds to a concern in my work since at least the 1970s (see Valle 1976a, b; Valle & Queiroz 1982; Valle 1998a, b, 1999, 2001). That is when I started a series of surveys and case studies about the diversity of cultures present in the Brazilian religions, including Catholicism. This realization has facilitated my understanding of the interdisciplinary, hermeneutical approach that Belzen associates with human subjectivity in the double perspective of the cultural construction and the historical unfolding (see pp. 23–68). His vision of psychological research as empirical psychology and as a necessary basis to assess qualitative research (see pp. 73–79) is for me quite convincing, showing clearly that this is really an intrinsic need of the psychological study and understanding of religion.

Second, the reading of other texts by Belzen increased my certainty that his proposal in the present book can help the psychology of religion to escape from a series of unnecessary debates that cripple our discipline. At the same time, it provides us with clues for the exploration of issues of direct interest and responsibility in our field of work such as spirituality (see pp. 83–142), conversion to religion (pp. 181–214), and altered states of consciousness, etc. (see pp. 165–180). The latter corresponds to a typical cultural trait of the three great religious traditions present among the Brazilian people—the indigenous, the African, and the Portuguese—that since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century have been enriched by the arrival of millions of immigrants coming from various parts of the world, including the Middle East and Asia.

Third, I want to stress that my main interest is focused on the cases in which the religious is in some way mingled with unhealthy religiosities. For several years I have been managing a psychotherapeutic institute<sup>3</sup> specializing in psychotherapeutic care for priests and religious men and women of the Catholic Church. The cases described and analyzed by Belzen showed me that his way of relating the diagnostic and therapeutic aspects of each case with the *cultural patterns* that influence the religious behaviors under study (see pp. 147–214) offers advantages over some heuristic methods I embraced as a social and also a clinical psychologist interested

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Terapêutico Acolher- ITA. See the institute’s website at <http://institutoacolher.org.br>.

in the spiritual development of the institute's clients. For me, the greatest virtues of Belzen's proposal are apparent in these cases. I think that this methodology can also be applied *mutatis mutandis* in clinical service to priests and religious people who show psychological inconsistencies and mental disorders. Instead of forcing the behaviors of patients to enter the strait-jacket of theories and methods that have little to do with the real situation of the individuals being assisted, the observation and listening method proposed by Belzen allow us to stay as close as possible to the world and reference groups in which people really live. I learned to see this especially in the clever use he makes of narrative psychology in studying the group belonging to the *bevindelijke* tradition (see pp. 149–165) and of the Dialogical Self Theory of Hermans and Kempen (1993) and of the psychoanalytical ideas of Heinz Kohut that Belzen explores in his analysis of the religious autobiography of Doetje (see pp. 191–215).

Discussing these issues with my PhD students and students from other graduate programs of the Catholic University of São Paulo, it is not difficult to associate the theories, teachings, and methods on which Belzen based his work with those that we have been adopting, based mainly on the interpretative anthropology of Geertz (1973, 1997) and on authors such as Sarbin (1986), Bruner (1990), McAdams (1993), Winnicott (1975), Gergen (1999), and many others that enable us to overcome the limits of the reductionist view of some psychologists in my country. What we are trying to do is well summarized by Eliana Massih, one of the psychotherapists from my research group on Psychotherapy and Religion: Selected Aspects:

Our main objective was to demonstrate that Self and Culture are strongly associated in the psychological development of persons to whom spirituality is a central value in their lives. We take specially the Dialogical Self Theory as a guide in our psychotherapeutic listening to narratives (dreams, vocational doubts, religious ideals, biblical representations, relations with authorities, etc.) of Catholic priests, seminarians under treatment, stimulating their intra and interpersonal dialogue with some significant others, including God, specially trying to explore their hidden or lost cultural childhood's "*I positions*". In doing this we use the ideas of Hermans & Kempen in order to establish an exchange between this theory and some psycho-cultural insights of ourselves and of many other authors . . . hoping to build a new cognitive and emotional bridge between the different voices coming from their native culture and from the individual personal spirituality actually lived by them. Finally, on another level, we hope in the near future to help in the improvement of the Cultural Psychology of Religion in Brazil (Massih 2010, p. 1)

There is also another small but important point to stress. Belzen does not intend to solve all the problems that the construction of a Cultural Psychology of Religion raises. I would like to make two observations on this topic. Significantly, the title of his book begins with the word "Towards," as I mentioned above. This marks movement in the direction of a not-yet-achieved goal. In addition, the bridges Belzen indicates seem to refer to research and studies written between 1999 and 2009 (see pp. v–vi), i.e., to ideas and insights arising from a relatively recent time. Therefore, the reader does not have in his or her hands a complete treatise on cultural psychology of religion. What the reader can find in this book is a kind of roadmap for a future enterprise of the psychology of religion. It is Belzen himself who puts this well, in the preface: "paradoxically, the aims pursued by this volume will be achieved if readers put it aside as insufficient and not good enough, asking for more and for better, and are consequently inspired to come up with such themselves" (p. ix).

Thus, following the advice of Belzen stated above, I will try to show my colleagues who are not Brazilians a concrete example of how psychologists of religion in Brazil seek to involve the dimension(s) of culture(s) in the understanding of certain religious phenomena that

cut across the religious history of our country and are acquiring new forms today. One of these recurrent events is what sociologists of religion call Millenarianism and/or Messianism (Queiroz 1977). I myself studied a relatively recent episode that illustrates the sense in which the ideas of Belzen can bring new light for those of us who work in a multicultural country whose religious field is in constant and rapid change. This concrete case has to do with a study done shortly before the year 2000. If I had been familiar then with the analysis provided by Part III of Belzen's book, I could have done a much more accurate reading of a dramatic religious episode that occurred in a tiny village in the interior of the far east of the state of Minas Gerais, called Catulé.

In that place, almost entirely isolated from the new Brazil that emerged with the economic boom of the 1950s, a group of people with Afro-Brazilian origins lived according to their own traditional Catholic beliefs and familiar rituals. Their religiosity was the main pillar of their group's strong cohesion and social organization. All lived at the same standard of living and work. Suddenly a North American branch of Adventism, known for its radical interpretation of Christ's return and the end of the world, arrived in the small village. The new religion came through a member of the local community, causing an unprecedented cultural shock in the quiet lives of the peasants.

This occurred in 1954. At that time, Catulé did not have electricity, radios, machines, or motor vehicles. The villagers lived as in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to an economy of family subsistence. Their way of life, customs, festivals, and beliefs had no models other than the community itself. The strong religiosity of the people was that of popular Catholicism, with traces of African and Indian origin.

A Catholic priest visited the village very rarely, and he performed weddings and baptisms, heard confessions, celebrated Mass, and tried to bring to the children and families some Catholic religious formation. In fact, a lay leader named Manuel, a man in his 50s, highly respected by all, conducted the religious life of the village. He was a kind of guardian of the traditions and values that sustained the community. The arrival of the new religion with its aggressive preaching to the population represented a radical reversal of religious beliefs and lifestyles. The preaching of the new religion posed a fundamental challenge to the population. At the same time, sociologically speaking, the formidable cultural change the community experienced was irrefutable evidence that the modernization experienced by the industrialized urban centers had made its victorious entry into Catulé. The channel used was religion. I wonder if another way might be possible.

This brief contextualization is sufficient to show how important the socio-historical description is for a correct interpretation of the religious changes in the life conditions of the participants. This point is well stressed by Belzen, who repeatedly insists on the need for a careful psychological analysis of the historical elements, particularly when religion is at stake. Psychological constructs prepared in a given cultural context of time and space do not realize what goes on with people in other contexts. Human acts and activities, emotions, and expectations acquire their true psychosocial meaning only when placed within each particular context and when read from an interdisciplinary hermeneutical viewpoint.

Let me narrate briefly what happened in Catulé.<sup>4</sup> Two young men from the community, named Onofre and Joaquim, decided to look for a job in the prosperous State of São Paulo. After 3 years of great difficulty, having lost the support of their community of origin, they were converted to a branch of Adventism marked by fanatic millennial expectations. Their conversion helped them to feel better in São Paulo, thanks to the pietistic environment found in the new group to which they belonged, which was constituted mainly of recently converted migrants like themselves. They

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed account, see Cataldi (2008) and Queiroz (2009).

probably felt that they had succeeded in establishing a bridge between their old rural culture and the polymorphous reality of the booming city of Presidente Prudente, where they lived and worked. Driven by the proselytizing fervor of the group, they decided to return to Catulé to announce to their families and friends the faith they were enthusiastic about. Their mother and two sisters as well as the natural leader of Catulé, Manuel, who was their relative, also joined the new faith. A certain number of others in Catulé did not follow the same path, dividing the population and creating an ambiguous and uncertain religious setting in the small village. Almost all the people living in Catulé were linked by direct kinship, including cronyism, and therefore they all were strongly influenced by the passionate preaching and enthusiastic cults of the community. The members of this group soon almost entirely abandoned their former customs and lifestyles. They became intolerant and menacing as they preached “their” truth. They did not encounter any organized resistance on the part of the remaining ten or twelve families who lived in the neighbourhood, but they felt a tacit resistance, even from some of the converts. Some typical religious Pentecostal phenomena deeply impressed the neo-converts. One of the most frightening was the explicit action of the devil (the anti-Christ) and the presence of visible signs that the end of the world was imminent.

Inside the Adventist in-group there probably was a strengthening of ties of belonging, but without the conditions needed to consolidate a secure sense of group identity. The enthusiastic sharing of religious emotions offered by the new religion was experienced by the converts, but different psycho-religious maps were still very alive in them, in addition to the new maps that differentiated the whole group. Although they strove to differentiate themselves from “the others,” they kept some elements of the deeper religious roots they all had in common. The same voices—or *I positions*, in the language of Hermans and Kempen (1993)—of their common past experiences were still active in all of them.

A Brazilian anthropologist, Rodrigues (1981), who was in Catulé shortly after the events that will be described below, concluded that the psychological experience lived by all in the village was probably rooted

in a kind of association [that] has a lot to do with the specific content of both conscious actions, such as the unconscious fantasies of that group at that particular moment (its evolution). Likewise, the leadership that emerges is the one that can capture and hold the ‘mind of the group.’ (Rodrigues 1981, p. 25)

Like this anthropologist, I also believe that the common historical background of the group before the changes brought by Onofre and Joaquim have everything to do with the conversion (or resistance to conversion) of the population and with the increasing exacerbation of expectations that culminated in an almost psychotic emotional crisis that affected all the inhabitants of Catulé in one way or another. The apparently easy and sudden conversion of the population, according to Brazilian authors inspired by Marxist assumptions, represented a symbolic *protest* against the *exclusion* of that group from the progress of São Paulo of which the two brothers had brought a notice confirmed by their conversion to a new religion. Behind the religious individual aspect of their conversion was a desire *to reverse the political order*, something quite common in times of economic and cultural change. Arakcy seems to go in this direction but stresses that

people in situations of sudden exacerbation . . . do not send global messages on their fate: they are giving small messages that refer to something here and now, and it must be understood within the group’s history, with its determinations and trajectories of individuals. (Rodrigues 1981, p. 25)

The success achieved by Onofre and Joaquim caught the attention of the leaders of the Adventist Church of the Promise in São Paulo, which decided to send one or two pastors to

Catulé. The sense of worth and the self-esteem of the neo-converts were enriched by this act of appreciation coming from the main church. The group was motivated to bring the new faith to a nearby village called Tabocal. As is not uncommon in rural areas, there were quarrels and differences between the two villages. People from Tabocal did not appreciate people from Catulé. For this reason, some of the converts resisted the idea of this very risky mission. When the two pastors went back to São Paulo, Joaquim took over the leadership of the group, although he had no special mandate from the Church of São Paulo. Joaquim was a psychologically disturbed person and created a heavy atmosphere in the community. This was probably one of the factors that favored the emergence of unconscious fears and inconsistencies that had been latent before. Between Joaquim and Manuel, the most prestigious member in the community, differences soon emerged. They were two contrasting voices that cannot be explained on the level of a mere difference of personalities or intentions.

To understand what happened it is necessary to describe, although briefly, what happened in the days before the mission in Tabocal, which was fanatically defended by Joaquim but no longer had the mediating approval of Manuel. Joaquim organized a week of vigils, fasts, and penitential prayers in preparation for going to Tabocal. Manuel started keeping some distance from the group. At the level of what some social psychologists call a *hidden agenda*, something new was happening, announcing a battle between dissonant voices and appeals. To Joaquim, Tabocal represented a clear sign of the new blessings and possibilities that Adventism had brought to these families without a penny. This belief was a millenarian fantasy of grandeur and an attempt to control the hidden insecurity of the whole community. Manuel, however, was more conscious of the real emotional feelings of the group, and for that reason his opinion found resonance particularly among those who were afraid to go to Tabocal.

In the days that preceded the missionary trip to the next village, about 20 converts participated regularly in the services focused more and more on the final rapture to heaven. Significantly, when Manuel publicly stated his disagreement with respect to this hope he found approval among some of the inhabitants of Catulé. As the moment of departure to Tabocal approached, the tension reached its limit. Joaquim realized that what bothered and disturbed the community was the influence of Manuel. The night before the tragedy, he attempted a reconciliation with Manuel, but at the end of a long discussion Manuel was offended and was punched by Joaquim. This conflict caused an increased aggressiveness within the group and opened a new cycle of religious hallucinations and disturbances of all kinds. A sister of Joaquim, seeing that a child was sleeping during a vigil, declared that the child was possessed by the devil. Joaquim battered the child in public to confront the hidden enemy. The presence of the devil was perceived and noted in many places, objects, and animals, and especially in children. The exorcisms and scenes of violence increased. The demon was seen in Joaquim's house and even in his own bed. There arose a frightening increase in physical violence that alternated with haunting prayers, speaking in tongues, and direct manifestations of the tempter. The missionary trip to Tabocal showed itself at every moment as more and more problematic and practically unworkable. Joaquim perceived this and, speaking in tongues, in a clumsy attempt to capture the unconscious sense of the group, confessed himself a sinner. He said, however, that he was able to cleanse the sins of all of them and his own weaknesses through prayer, penance, and exorcisms to ward off the demons that threatened everyone. His attempts to shake off the fears and fuel the sense of salvation of the community did not bring results. At this time, Manuel proclaimed that the planned trip to Tabocal would not take place. This attitude, which was the common sense, released the inner demons of Joaquim and brought him to new uncontrolled reactions. In the middle of the outbreak, he screamed that the end time had



arrived and that he was able to show the path that would lead the group to final salvation and rapture. Here is a sample of the hallucinated language he employed:

I know how to go up to heaven; I know how to do it that only I know, accompanied by a whistle that only I know to make, and make that whistle and making that leap this way I know, I'll go to heaven. (Rodrigues 1981, p. 24)

From that time on, the entire group took progressively the same destructive pathological attitude that was initially manifested in Joaquim and in two or three others of his followers. It was not necessary for the crazed preacher to encourage the community to resist the devil, because the devil seemed to be present everywhere. The murders began. The first to be executed was a child of 5 years. A woman whose daughter was spanked to death was back in the place of worship just half an hour after her child's death. Another woman who knew that her baby was possessed by the devil refused to breastfeed her baby because she did not want to feed the devil. An obsessive certainty was established that there was no escape from the fury of the ubiquitous evil. Everybody obeyed all orders of Joaquim without questions. Three other children were killed in a violent way. In psychoanalytical terms, I would say that this obedient response to the killing orders of Joaquim resulted from an unconscious *pairing* and *splitting* process that was unconsciously sought to preserve the group from the unbearable anguish that came over everyone. What mattered to all members at this point was to preserve the powerful not entirely conscious fantasy that dominated them of the advent of the Lord. Joaquim seemed to forget about the trip to Tabocal. What was important to him at that point was the journey to heaven. The prayers and purification rituals he invented were justified as a step in that direction. Joaquim's madness took yet another direction, indicating the sexual repression of his affections. He ordered everyone to undress and get in a pond near the village for a final purificatory bath. At this point, someone called the police from the nearby town of Malacheta. The police had to resort to brute force upon their arrival. Joaquim and Onofre were killed in the shootout. The nightmare ceased immediately, but a painful wound remained, bringing suffering and confusion to everyone.

Should we search for the deep motivation of these destructive behaviors in the psychological problems of the main players of this tragedy, or should we look for the elements for a psychological explanation in the changing contexts of the cultural story of the whole group? Do the too-broad categories that the social psychology offers us in similar cases take into account the complexity of the psycho-cultural roots of what happened in Catulé? Were the categories I used more than 10 years ago to understand what happened in Catulé (see Valle 1998a, b, 1999) able to get to the root of what occurs in outbreaks of religious fanaticism like this? I have no doubt that they throw some light on many aspects of the problem, but they don't reach them in some essential aspects. Many cultural aspects were no doubt present in my analysis of 10 years ago, but something was missing. My reading of the facts did not reach the real experiences of the people involved in the drama, maybe because I was not able to show how and why the social transition brought by the Adventism weakened but did not destroy the feelings, expectations, and many traditional voices still alive in the community.

This is exactly where the psychological paths suggested by Belzen seem to me to open a valuable interpretative perspective of what happened in Catulé. Reading, for example, Belzen's description of the episode of Betuwe (pp. 168–181) and the use he makes of the Dialogical Self Theory Self in the case of Doetje (pp. 191–215), I became convinced that his psycho-historic-cultural approach would help me to hear all the voices and I positions present in people like Manoel, Joaquim, and Onofre. If I had had knowledge of such an approach at the time I studied the drama of Catulé my reading of that episode would have been more appropriate and the end result probably much better. In the future I intend to resume once more my analysis of Catulé, using the stories that some researchers and I myself, together with

Dr. Mauro Baptista of the PUC-SP, collected some years ago from people who lived in Catulé and Malacacheta during the tragic days I briefly described in these pages. Perhaps it is still possible to interview some of the survivors about their experience, using Belzen's suggestions. This would be a good opportunity to test more rigorously the validity in Brazil of the methods so successfully used by Belzen in his native Netherlands.

Much of what I learned by reading Belzen's book closely reminds me of a vivid phrase of Valsiner (2007) on subjectivity as socially driven by culture. The phrase below seems to synthesize one of the most fundamental insights of Jacob A. Belzen and can help us to understand better what happened in Catulé more than 50 years ago:

Human beings . . . from birth to death . . . are operating “under the influence” of the highly heterogeneous and redundantly semiotically encoded field of social suggestion. They are not passive recipients of these suggestions, but active participants of the reconstruction of the social orders. Much social orders are in an unfinished state, and as a result, some people are making them in one form, while others are attempting to resist or to demolish these emerging forms . . . . By constantly working on the social orders, persons, by assuming their different social roles, actually transform these orders. They make distinctions, attach values to the distinctions made—through their semiotic making and act on the basis of such added values as if it were not set up by themselves.” (p. 24)

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