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Afro-Brazilian Religions, Visual Culture and Iconoclasm

Iconoclasm has often accompanied the reception of the visual culture related to the so-called Afro-Brazilian religions, i. e. the African religions that in Brazil were syncretized with other beliefs, such as Indigenous religions, Catholicism and Spiritism. Although this phenomenon can be traced back to the Brazilian Colonial period, it has gained a wider visibility since the 1980s, when a new kind of persecution gained momentum. Both in the academic literature and in the news publicized by mass media, the more recent attacks have been attributed to Christians, especially the followers of Neo-Pentecostalism. In this paper, through a presentation of a series of recent incidents, our aim is to discuss why and how the visual culture related to Afro-Brazilian religions have been persecuted and destroyed. In so doing, we will strive to draw attention to a modern kind of religious iconoclasm that is in conflict with the freedom of religion which, by law, should characterize contemporary Brazilian society.