THE “DEVIL’S EGG”: FOOTBALL PLAYERS AS NEW MISSIONARIES OF THE DIASPORA OF BRAZILIAN RELIGIONS

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Enter my house
Enter my life
Change my constitution
Heal all the wounds
Teach me to be holy
I want to love only You
Because the Lord is my greater good
Make a Miracle in me.

– Regis Danese

Among the many remarkable tourist attractions in Munich's central square, the ‘Brazilian' Evangelical church\(^1\) is worthy of note.\(^2\) The quotation marks around Brazilian are justified. In fact, this is one of hundreds of churches in the Pentecostal movement, which originated in the US and introduced into Brazil in 1910 with the formation of Congregação Cristã [Christian Congregation] and Assembleia de Deus [Assemblies of God, 1911]. The movement became indigenized in the 1950s, with the emergence of the Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular [Church of Foursquare Gospel, 1953], O Brasil para Cristo [Brazil for Christ, 1955], Deus é Amor [God is Love, 1962], which had a meteoric rise in the country, coinciding with the growth in urban population (Fry 1978). In the mid-1970s, Brazilian pastors created

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\(^1\) I use Evangelical to refer both to historic Protestantism as well as Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism. The players refer to themselves as Evangelicals and not Neo-Pentecostals. Brazilian scholars refer to various Evangelical congregations, whether traditional or more recently created ones, as the "Evangelical field." Within this field, they define Pentecostal congregations as being the denominations that "share the belief in a second and imminent coming of Christ and that believe they have access, in daily life, to the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit" (Novaes 1998: 7). Meanwhile, the Neo-Pentecostals are denominations that are characterized by: an "emphasis on war against the Devil and his entourage of fallen angels, seen mainly as part of the Afro-Brazilian and Spiritist cults; the preaching and promotion of the theology of prosperity; and greater flexibility in using visible stereotyped practices and habits of saintliness, which until recently served as symbols of conversion to Pentecostalism" (Mariano 1995: 28).

\(^2\) I thank fellow anthropologist Maria Amélia Dickie for calling my attention to this monument.
what became known as Neo-Pentecostal congregations: Sara nossa Terra [Heal our Land, 1976], Igreja Universal do Reino do Senhor [Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, 1977], Internacional da Graça de Deus [International Grace of God, 1980], Renascer em Cristo [Reborn in Christ, 1986], Bola de Neve (Snowball) in 2000 and others. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), one in every five Brazilians is now ‘Evangelical,’ representing 42.3 million people or 22.2% of the population (IBGE 2010).

The church that has hitherto gained the most notoriety is the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, also known as IURD [UCKG]. In the 1980s, the UCKG began “the internationalization of its proselytizing, thus inverting the North-South direction of the missionary flow and Brazil's former condition as a destination for European and US missions” (Mariano 2010). The first country in which UCKG was established outside Brazil was the US (1986), followed by Uruguay (1989), Portugal (1989), and Argentina (1990). The expansion abroad went hand-in-hand with the growing emigration of nearly four million Brazilians. At the same time, other Neo-Pentecostal churches (Reborn in Christ, God is Love), directed by Brazilian pastors and bishops, also went global and are now located in some 180 countries.3 They all share the belief that intimate contact with the Holy Spirit allows them access to Jesus, a contact that is interpreted as being the ‘possession of the Spirit.’ The churches share the mission of converting the world to the Evangelical faith, and in order to accomplish this, they are managed as businesses and make extensive use of the mass media.

There is, however, something unique about the church in the Munich square: it was created by a football player, Jorginho, who has played a major role in the popularity of Evangelicalism among the players in the German Bundesliga. In addition to the predictable company of fellow Brazilians, including the leading striker Cacau, German players have also adhered to the Evangelical movement. Jorginho's church was initially one among many prayer groups created by players around the world. I found a similar group in Spain among the players of Celta de Vigo during ethnographic

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3 In 2000, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God already had “franchises” in 172 countries. Its penetration is greater in Portuguese-speaking countries. In others, its temples are located within communities of Brazilian immigrants. It has confronted considerable resistance upon entering Asia (except in Japan where there are 300 thousand Brazilians), the Middle East, and Africa, where non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam are hegemonic (Mariano 2010).