

# *Ghosts and Domestic Politics in Brazil: Some Parallels between Spirit Possession and Spirit Infestation*

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To date, the ethnological study of ghosts in Western societies has been dominated by folklorists (e.g., Davidson and Russell 1981; Jacob 1977; Jones 1983), most of whom have focused on recording ghost stories and the popular lore of techniques for laying (exorcising) ghosts rather than determining the extent to which ghostlore reflects lived experiences, social action, and practiced rituals.<sup>1</sup> This essay argues that the theoretical frameworks which have been developed in anthropology for the study of nonceremonial spirit possession will bring a new level of richness to the ethnological study of ghosts, and also that, at least in the Brazilian case, this important form of religious experience and popular illness shares several features in common with nonceremonial spirit possession.

Although the word “ghosts” is more common, I have suggested elsewhere that the older term “spirit infestation” might be more ap-

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appropriate because it encompasses a broader scope of beliefs and social action (Hess 1989a). "Spirit infestation" will be used here to describe both the belief that spirits or spiritual forces are upsetting the tranquility of a home or workplace and the social action that accompanies this belief. Spirit infestation does not itself include spirit possession, although both processes may occur simultaneously. Examples of spirit infestation include reports of recurrent apparitions and imitative noises typical of haunted houses, as well as reported physical disturbances (e.g., object movements and breakages, fires, raps and poundings), which are often described as the work of poltergeists ("noisy ghosts"). From the point of view of an outside scientific observer, reports of spirit infestation may have a variety of this-worldly explanations (e.g., pranks, dissociated behavior, imagination, hallucinations), but from the point of view of the afflicted they generally have a supernatural or paranormal cause: ghosts, demons and other nonhuman spirits, or the spiritual/psychic forces of the living.<sup>2</sup>

In order to explore the possible parallels between spirit infestation and nonceremonial spirit possession, it is first necessary to specify the way the latter term is being used and which currents in the literature are relevant. The term "nonceremonial spirit possession" will be understood here to mean episodes of apparently "spontaneous" or "uncontrolled" spirit possession, that is, cases outside of institutionalized "spirit mediumship" or "ceremonial spirit possession."<sup>3</sup> In the past, the anthropological literature has approached nonceremonial spirit possession either from a psychological viewpoint or a social-instrumentalist perspective. The former includes classifications of nonceremonial spirit possession according to the DSM-III framework (e.g., Freed and Freed 1985:205) or, more broadly, as "regression under the control of the environment" (Obeyesekere 1970), whereas the latter views this ailment as a device for persons of lower status, principally women, to accrue attention and material possessions (e.g., Lewis 1971, 1986).<sup>4</sup>

An alternative to these approaches emerged in Vincent Crapanzano's introduction to *Case Studies in Spirit Possession* (1977a), and several studies in this volume focused more on interpreting the meaning of the spirit possession episode to the persons involved rather than on psychological or social-instrumentalist questions. This newer, "interpretive" approach shows how spirit possession

can help lead to a redefinition of self (e.g., Boddy 1988; for multiple personality, Kenny 1986) or of the domestic unit (Crapanzano 1977b; Kessler 1977; Lambek 1980, 1981; Siegel 1978), and such an approach informs the interpretive framework of the present study.

This essay presents the results of three interviews, completed during a field trip to Brazil in June and July of 1988, with persons who were afflicted by spirit infestation. Although these interviews represent only a preliminary step in the study of spirit infestation, enough material was obtained to allow some discussion of the possible similarities between spirit infestation and spirit possession. Since reports by anthropologists on spirit infestation are almost nonexistent—one exception is Wedenoja's report (1978) of a *duppy* case in Jamaica—it is hoped that the preliminary discussion provided here will stimulate further research and provide the beginnings of a theoretical framework for such research.

Two methodological caveats should be kept in mind. First, like Crapanzano's case study of spirit possession (1977b), the material presented here is biographical and based on the afflicted persons' memories of the events rather than on observation. Unless one has the good fortune, as did Wedenoja, to be doing fieldwork in a neighborhood where such a case takes place, this appears to be the only method for developing such case histories. Second, in writing up the much more limited, interview-based materials presented here, I have been influenced somewhat by the recent discussions of ethnographic experimentation (e.g., Clifford 1988). Hence, I attempt both to discuss, in a limited way appropriate to this type of article, my place in the stories and to give some room to the voices of the informants. Likewise, the recounting of the case follows, in abbreviated and edited form, the order of the interviews and the order in which the informants presented the material in the interviews. Although this leads to a different format in the presentation of each case, it is hoped that the increased accuracy of such a method of presentation makes up for the lack of narrative consistency.

In all three cases, I have left the geographical location vague and used pseudonyms for the members of the afflicted families. In the first case, that of "Cristina," there was so much press coverage that it would not be hard to discover the real identity of the person, but the use of a pseudonym will make such identification possible only

for a serious researcher. In all three cases, the persons interviewed gave me permission to report the results for scientific purposes.

### THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

As part of the African diaspora, Brazil is characterized by a widespread belief in spirits, even among the middle classes of European descent. As a result, cases of spirit infestation are greeted with a degree of credibility that is often lacking in the United States: Brazilians tend to take spirit infestation seriously.

It is difficult to estimate the number of cases that occur each year in Brazil, but a Kardecian Spiritist intellectual, Hernani Guimarães Andrade, informed me that during the last couple of decades he has collected reports of over one hundred such cases, mainly journalistic accounts, and there are probably many more nonreported cases. A collection by a Jesuit priest (Friderichs 1980) includes over thirty cases culled from firsthand investigation and newspaper reports. Likewise, Wedenoja (1978:411) estimates that in Jamaica, a much smaller country but like Brazil part of the African diaspora, there are probably about forty cases per year. Together, these sources suggest that spirit infestation is by no means a rare occurrence.

In Brazil, cases of spirit infestation often involve several sectors of the religious system, with their competing interpretations and remedies (see Hess 1987a, 1987b). As a first (but only rough) approximation, one can distinguish in the cases that follow four major categories of religious actors and perspectives. Pentecostalists and some Catholic healers outside the realm of the official church interpret spirit infestation as the work of the devil, and as a result they provide exorcism rituals. In contrast, Catholic priests tend to follow the teachings of Jesuit intellectuals and view spirit infestation as the product of hallucinations and/or paranormal phenomena generated by the psychic powers of the living, and their remedy of choice is psychotherapy.

A third important category is Spiritism ("Kardecism"), the predominantly white, middle-class religious-philosophical movement associated with the doctrine of Allan Kardec (see Hess 1987c), who argued for the scientific reality of spirit mediumship, reincarnation, and the existence of the *perispirit* (roughly, an astral body). Spiritists view themselves as scientific and reject the existence of demons; instead, they interpret spirit infestation as the work of deceased hu-

man spirit(s) and they provide a kind of exorcism séance called “dis-obsession” (*desobsessão*, see Hess 1989b).

A fourth position is occupied by Umbanda, a Brazilian religion which emerged in Rio, São Paulo, and southern Brazil in the early 20th century (see Brown 1986). Unlike Candomblé, which is more faithful to its Yoruba origins, Umbanda is influenced by both Bantu and Yoruba religions as well as European (Kardecian) Spiritism. Its mediums receive the spirits of Amerindians and old black slaves as well as Exús (Yoruba trickster spirits) and Pomba Giras (female Exús, noted for their promiscuity). Umbandists in one of the cases presented here interpreted spirit infestation as the work of trickster-like Exú spirits and/or sorcery, but they may also attribute it to deceased human spirits, and their remedies include counter-sorcery rituals, sacrifices, and exorcisms.

All of these groups also admit the possibility of alternative, “natural” explanations—such as fraud, hoaxes, tricks, animal infestations, faulty electric wiring, group hallucinations, malingering, or the dissociated behavior of one of the family members—and each group may choose these “natural” explanations over those of their rivals in the religious system. Although the different positions in the religious system are activated in the cases that follow, the primary focus of the analysis is to interpret the meaning that the spirit infestation has for the afflicted. Doing so will make possible some comparisons between spirit infestation and nonceremonial spirit possession, which will follow a discussion of the three cases.

### CRISTINA

In April 1988, a 13-year-old farmer’s daughter from the interior of the southernmost Brazilian state began to receive nationwide media attention as the “paranormal girl”: she was the focus of spirit infestation that included rappings on the walls, object movements, and mysterious apparitions. Several newspapers, not to mention the television program “Fantásticos,” ran the story, and most of these accounts described the treatment Cristina was receiving from Padre Edvino Friderichs, S. J., a resident of the Colégio Anchieta of Porto Alegre.

Since Brazil works through personal relationships, I decided that it would be best to establish a tie with Padre Edvino first and then see if he might facilitate an introduction to Cristina’s family. After

calling him and arranging for an interview, I traveled to Porto Alegre, the capital city of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where the Colégio Anchieta (a Jesuit high school where Padre Edvino lived and worked) was located. On Tuesday, June 19, 1987, I met and talked with Padre Edvino, who informed me that Cristina's family was, by coincidence, traveling to Porto Alegre the next day for another treatment from him. As I later learned from Cristina's mother, their house had been quiet for over a month after the padre's first treatments in late April, but after little more than a month's respite the family was now suffering from a new and more violent outbreak. As a result, the mayor of the town had dispatched a driver to take the family to Porto Alegre to have another session with Padre Edvino.

This development was a setback for the padre, and to a certain extent his reputation was on the line. Although he scoffed at the press and all the publicity it had given him, he was also concerned that a failure in such a highly publicized case would reflect poorly on his efforts to enlighten the people and turn them away from their superstitions. Like his teacher—Oscar González Quevedo—Padre Edvino was a Jesuit parapsychologist who believed that spirit infestation was not simply a product of hallucinations or active imaginations, but that instead it could be explained by "telergy," an unknown biological energy generated by the body of living persons, frequently adolescents (see Friderichs 1979, 1980). Basing his treatment on the telergic theory, Padre Edvino tried to help the afflicted person to be more relaxed so that the body would not emit this psychic energy. In general, he did this by providing his clients with one or more half-hour sessions of guided relaxation, during which he gave them suggestions that they would feel relaxed and happy, and, in the case of infestations, that their unconscious would no longer produce the phenomena.

The padre led me to his office, where he pulled out Cristina's record, which included her address, age (13), school (primary), telephone number (none), and religion (Protestant). Then he read a list of the events that had plagued the family during the last week: (1) chairs moved; (2) a bucket of water rose up, turned over, and spilled; (3) first a knife fell on her chest, then a pair of scissors flew and fell on her chest; (4) the following night, a table knife also fell, and there were also scratchings and blows on the wall; (5) the next

night, a pair of scissors and a knife fell beside her on top of the mattress (to her left), making a cross shape; (6) the following night there were no events. Like a doctor discussing a patient's symptoms, the padre told me that the phenomena were considerably more violent this time than they had been before his successful session with Cristina in April.

I met Cristina and her parents on the next afternoon, Wednesday, June 20. Although she was only thirteen, her height, lipstick and nail polish, fashionable blue jeans and sandals, and somewhat bored, somewhat defiant eyes indicated that she saw herself not as a child but as a young woman. Cristina's appearance contrasted sharply with that of her parents, poverty-stricken farmers who had spent their whole lives on or near their farm near the Argentine border. My first impression was that there was more than a generation gap between them. By her clothing, Cristina appeared to identify with and to want to belong to the world of modern Brazil, a Brazil which she probably only dimly understood. In contrast, her parents belonged to a traditional rural world that had its roots in the peasant world of rural Germany, where their forebears came from, and they later told me they had never been to Porto Alegre before, nor had they ever seen a city of this size.

After our greetings, we went inside the Jesuit dormitory and sat at a table in the lobby. The family waited nervously for 1:30 p.m. to arrive, which was the time when the padre planned to begin his session. I asked the family what had been happening recently, and Cristina's mother was soon talking in an animated fashion about the same series of events that the Padre had described to me the day before. As her mother spoke, Cristina laughed somewhat uncontrollably, as if it were all very funny to hear, and her mother laughed a little as well. The padre later told me he thought this indicated that the teenage girl was somewhat hysterical.

At 1:30, we all went to the padre's office, where he began the session by placing Cristina in a big armchair and giving her a series of instructions: she should eat slowly, eat more fruits and vegetables, breathe deeply, do exercises to help the blood flow, and ask for God's help. Cristina was smiling during these instructions, and he told her it was not funny, especially for her parents and the mayor of her town. He then continued with his instructions: he made Cristina promise that it would not happen again, he instructed her par-

ents not to allow any exorcists or mediums to visit, nor to allow visitors who speak about Exús (Afro-Brazilian trickster spirits), and he told Cristina to help her mother at home, to cultivate positive thoughts, and to love God, “who will make the phenomena go away.” “After all,” he said, “she’s afraid.” “Yes,” her mother said.

Padre Edvino then told Cristina to breathe deeply and relax, to feel herself in a pleasant place, on top of a mountain with flowers and a palm tree, the symbol of the nobility of the soul. After giving her more guided imagery, he told her that from now on she would be calmer, happier, and better. He told her to help her mother at home, to enjoy working. He then said, “The chairs will no longer move themselves,” and so on for each of the events that had plagued the family, ending with the authoritative-sounding suggestion that “things will not repeat themselves.”

Cristina’s head was turned and she appeared to be asleep, but then she “woke up.” The padre went on; he was not finished. He told her to close her eyes, and he gave her more suggestions. Then he counted back from ten, interspersing the counting with suggestions that everything will work better: circulation, digestion, respiration, and so on. He then told her, “If you follow my instructions, you will be cured.”

After the session, we learned that several reporters had managed to find their way to the dormitory, despite Padre Edvino’s request that the porter not let any reporters pass through the main gate of the campus. I did not want to be interviewed, so I withdrew to the dormitory library, but later the padre told me that Cristina seemed to enjoy the press coverage and all of the attention.

After the interview, Cristina and her mother retired to their room on the top floor of the Jesuit dormitory, and I went for a walk with Cristina’s father, whose confidence I felt was important to win first.<sup>5</sup> I asked him what he thought of “the phenomena,” and he told me that he had never heard of this sort of thing before, but now he realized that it was fairly common. He went on to say that his pastor and the local priest give a parapsychology class together (as a means of combating *espiritismo*), and his pastor recommended that they see Padre Edvino. However, before seeking out Padre Edvino, Cristina’s father first exhausted local resources. He tried a Kardecian Spiritist center in their own town, but the mediums said that the case was “too strong” for them, and upon their advice, the family



visited a bigger center in a larger city. However, the trip was long and very expensive, and the Spiritists' "disobsession" session (a kind of exorcism) did not provide any relief. Likewise, a pastor from the Assembly of God had also tried to exorcise the house, but this did not work either.

Cristina's father then decided that he "couldn't be a monkey going from branch to branch," so he decided to stick with his own pastor's advice and seek out Padre Edvino. "Really, only Padre Edvino was able to help," he told me. After the padre's visit, Cristina's father went on to say, everything was quiet for about a month, when three psychology students visited their town and asked if they could interview the family for a class project. Cristina's father consented, and during the night after the interview, the infestation began again.

Regarding the initial onset, Cristina's father told me that the infestation began in November 1987, and it was confined almost entirely to raps, object movements, and breakages inside their house. At this time, Cristina was in the fifth grade (*quinta série*), which she failed after her exams in November and was currently repeating. Her father said that she was not a good student, despite what she may say. She failed math the year before, and he believed that the infestation, which began at the same time as her finals, distracted her from her studies. He also added that Cristina wanted to go to a middle school/high school in the town, farther away from home than her present school, but this would only be possible if she did well in school, which was not the case at present.

Cristina's father was convinced that his daughter could not have tricked him and his wife; he gave several examples to support his opinion and explained that he had other theories. His first theory was that the infestation was the ghost of his aunt (FBW), who had died before she told anyone where she had left her buried gold, so in December or January—shortly after the disturbances began—he asked Cristina to contact her. Cristina saw the ghost, but at first she was so frightened that she ran out of the room. When her father saw how frightened she was, he told her to stop, but she went back in. The ghost told her where the gold was buried, but when the father dug a two-meter hole at the location, he did not find any gold. After other unsuccessful attempts, he gave up completely.

Cristina's father believed that his daughter was healthy in all respects. She had had only two serious childhood illnesses and had

begun menstruating at age 11. He also believed that she had no sexual or romantic encounters, a point with which Cristina's mother later agreed. However, *he* had been thrown off center because of the spirit infestation, which he confessed to me made him feel powerless in his own home, especially when the journalists came. When I asked, he noted that Cristina liked the attention of the press. He added that she liked to watch television (the padre had noted to me earlier that Cristina "never misses the *novelas*," the prime-time soap operas that are the hallmark of Brazilian television), and the television was one of the few objects in the household that had not suffered any injuries during the infestation.

On the next morning, I interviewed Cristina's mother, who related to me in some detail the circumstances surrounding the initial events in November. She said Cristina first heard the sound of a piece of paper ripping under her bed, but when she got up to look, it was not there. The next night there was the same sound coming from under the bed, and then on a subsequent night the raps began, which Cristina's parents and neighbors all witnessed.

Cristina's mother then told how they attempted to communicate with the spirit and how they decided it was the father's aunt, who had died 13 years earlier and left the buried gold. After this episode, "it started carrying things . . . it took the sink out of the bathroom, carried the broom, and broke china, glass cups, and plates. It broke everything in the house. Things flew from the table, but we never saw them leave their spot, only when they landed."

We returned to the subject of the gold, and I asked how Cristina felt. The mother answered: "I think she was fascinated and wanted to see if there was really gold, because she did not understand what kind of gold it was. She wanted to find out if it was medals or what. One said one thing; others said something else; so she wanted to know. And after everything, they [the neighbors] said that it wasn't gold, and then they [the spirits] grabbed her [Cristina's] feet, her hands, her head, and ripped the foam of her mattress, messed with her hair. So then she realized that it wasn't gold. So we took her to a Spiritist center."

The Spiritists in the larger city said that the ghost was not the spirit of the aunt, but instead of a man. "They said it was a different entity . . . a man with a beard who didn't say what he wanted." Neither the Spiritists nor the Protestant groups could help, and things

grew worse. "Things flew more and more and broke more and more. We couldn't even sit at the table and drink coffee or eat lunch. The table plates would leave. The teapot with hot water fell below the stove. But nothing ever hurt anyone. Things always fell and never hurt anyone. And so it went, and in the end she couldn't even eat lunch anymore. If she picked up something to eat with, it flew off and went away. . . ."

"And how was Cristina at this time?"

"She was irritated [*chateada*] because she couldn't eat; she couldn't eat anything."

"Was she upset [*nervosa*]?"

"Yes, she was upset. In the end we wondered how we were going to enter in the house to do the housework. So we sent her to the neighbors to play with the children in order for me to do the housework. . . . [The kitchen] was all dirty and all I could do was clean up, and when she was not there, I cooked. After everything I sat at the table, and she ate. We could eat, but only me with her . . . but if I took my eyes off her or turned around, then everything would start." This last comment, together with the father's comment that he did not yell at Cristina anymore, suggest that the spirit infestation was related to a conflict between Cristina and her father, which was also the pattern in the other two cases.

The mother then explained to me that recent events had taken a violent turn, with knives and scissors appearing in menacing positions: a knife on Cristina's breast, a pair of scissors on her throat, two knives in the shape of a cross, and so on. The change in the attack from disrupting the household to menacing Cristina may have in part reflected her and her parents' acceptance of Padre Edvino's theory that she was causing the attack, and as a result she may have felt guilty about it at some level. The night before they left for Porto Alegre, there were no disturbances, and the night before (while they stayed in the Jesuit dormitory), everything was quiet.

I interviewed Cristina next, but she was not very talkative. She appeared to be shy rather than intimidated, and she mumbled short answers in a tiny voice that made it hard to understand her. It is possible that my association with the padre and my prior conversations with her parents identified me in her mind with their generation, and it is also likely that a woman might have had better rapport with her. Cristina's version of the infestation agreed in

broad terms with those of her parents, but she seemed not to remember individual incidents or the chronology as clearly. She said that when the ghost first appeared, “I asked her what she wanted, and if she would leave me in peace, and she said no.” After her father’s prodding, she then asked it about the gold. Cristina now seemed to accept the interpretation that she was causing the object movements, and she said that sometimes she believed she could make an object move by willing it to do so, but “sometimes I don’t even think about it and it happens.”

I tried to get her to discuss how she felt about the infestation, but she was very reticent. In order to try to get a better understanding of what the ghost meant to her, I asked Cristina what her dream was, what she would be if she could be anything in the world, and she said she would like to be an *artista*, like the movie stars of the television *novelas*. We talked about what she would have to study to become a movie star (fortunately not math, which was her weak field and the one that caused her to be held back in school).

Given Cristina’s reticence to talk and the short time I had to interview her alone—her mother seemed somewhat suspicious of my being alone with her, and she interrupted the interview—an interpretation of the meaning of the spirit infestation to Cristina can only be highly preliminary. If Cristina dreamed of becoming a movie star, she was frustrated by living in a rural area outside a town that did not have a theater. The closest theater, as she told me, was in the bigger city where they had gone to the Spiritist center, a prohibitively long and expensive journey. Still, if she could not go to the theater, she had, in a way, managed to bring the theater to her. The comments of both her father and the padre that Cristina seemed to enjoy all of the attention from the reporters began to take on a new meaning: maybe it was her way of making her dream come true. At the very minimum, the press coverage gave Cristina new prestige in school—it made her a star among her peers—since she told me that her classmates came up to her and wanted to know how they could do it, too.

Intended or not, Cristina’s ghost opened up a bigger world and brought her in contact with it. Like the ghost, this bigger world—which included perhaps some of her teachers and classmates at school, certainly the television *novelas* from Rio and São Paulo and the dubbed movies from America and Europe, the Jesuit priests and

psychology students from Porto Alegre, the buried gold left by a great aunt who had been born in Germany, and even now an anthropologist from New York—this world probably intimidated her as much as it intrigued her. Her nail polish, stylish leather sandals, and blue jeans indicated that she saw herself as, in some sense, already part of this world that she only dimly understood. Cristina may have belonged to the world of the German peasant farmers to which her parents belonged, but she also seemed to have had a dream of finding a way out of it.

Support for this interpretation comes from some of the statements her father made to me. As stated above, her father pointed out that the television set was one of the few objects in their home that was never broken or moved, and this fact takes on a new meaning in light of Cristina's admission of her dream to become a movie star. The television set was Cristina's one link with the world of movie stars, a fairy-tale world that her ghost managed to bring literally into her home. Likewise, as her father pointed out to me, Cristina hated to do housework, because, as Cristina told him, she believed that "one day I'm going to be famous." He admitted that he no longer yelled at her, because when he did, "the phenomena get worse."

Cristina's ghost therefore may have served, in a largely unconscious and highly tentative way, as an "idiom" through which she could discover and articulate a new part of herself, much as Michael Kenny (1986) argues that multiple personalities are means of creative identity reconstruction (see especially his discussion of the Mary Reynolds case). At the same time, the spirit infestation shifted domestic power, since in disputes with her parents over housework, Cristina was able to have her way more readily than before. Of course, to Cristina the infestation was not an "idiom" for personal identity reconstruction or domestic politics; it was some kind of power, first a ghost and then maybe a demon, and then finally, after Padre Edvino entered the scene, some kind of psychic power she had hidden within her. If this psychic power meant to her at some level that she was special and that she had a future, it was to some extent a tragedy that her parents and the padre asked her to remove it, and indeed this might explain why she seemed to be resisting his treatment.

That afternoon, Cristina went through another session of therapy with the padre. She appeared to be cooperating, but in the middle

of the session she failed his arm test for hypnotic depth. He said to me later a phrase he had constantly repeated: "This girl doesn't want to be cured." He told me and the family that he had done everything he could, and Cristina's father decided that they would return the next morning. There had been no disturbances while they were staying in the Jesuit dormitory, and Cristina's parents felt reassured. I said good-bye to the padre, Cristina, and her parents, and then I left.

One might argue that I should have followed the family back to their town, and it is true that it would have been interesting to interview Cristina's teachers, her fellow students, the family pastor, and the neighbors. However, it is also possible that, like the visit from the psychology students, my presence and attention might have provoked a return of the infestation, and the presence of an American in a small town almost certainly would have generated more gossip and press coverage. Unfortunately, since the family did not have a telephone, I could not call them, and Cristina's parents were illiterate. I did call Padre Edvino a few times in July to attempt to follow up the story, but he said he had not heard from the family again. "No news is good news," he said, "but then I also told them that if the phenomena return, I don't want to treat her anymore."

For the purposes of this article, however, the information garnered from the interviews with Cristina, her parents, and the padre is sufficient to gain a rough sense of some of the meanings the spirit infestation served to dramatize and articulate: the hope of finding buried treasure, squabbles over domestic duties, and a fairy-tale dream of becoming a movie star. Cristina's father no longer yelled at her when he wanted her to do housework, and Cristina had managed to become, at least temporarily, the movie star she had dreamed of being: a Brazilian Cinderella. These patterns already suggest a parallel with the literature on nonceremonial spirit possession, in which young women frequently employ the idiom of possession to alter domestic power relations and to articulate alternative notions of selfhood. Although these patterns are only suggested in the Cristina case, in the next two cases they appear with much more clarity.

### LOLA

Cristina might have enjoyed meeting Lola, about whose ghost I first heard while I was attending the wedding of a friend's brother.

When the subject of my research came up, their cousin told me about a friend of hers who had lived with a ghost for nearly a year. “You will think she’s crazy,” the cousin told me, “but she’s not. I believe her. I was there. I saw the curtains billowing.”

Lola agreed to be interviewed, and on July 20, 1988, I arrived at her apartment in a fashionable neighborhood of a large city in southeastern Brazil. The interior decor of her apartment marked it as part of the urban counterculture: a pastiche of punk and sixties themes. Stenciled on the wall in the living room was a day-glow, spray-painted figure of Christ the Redeemer, the giant statue on top of Corcovado Mountain, a national and even international symbol of the land of the Southern Cross, the postcard-famous figure of the Redeemer with his arms outstretched, constantly pardoning the constantly sinning multitudes of the city below. Lola’s stenciled wall-Christ was the same as the famous statue, with one exception: hanging from his shoulders was an electric guitar. She offered me a beer and we began the interview.

Like Madonna of the American movie *Desperately Seeking Susan*, which played successfully in Rio in 1985, Lola wore black: a black mini-skirt, black leotards, and black go-go booties. She was a free spirit, and, as she told me right away, both a left-hander and a Pisces. “I don’t have any children—people know I’m a *louca* [crazy]—I don’t keep regular hours . . . I work when I want.” Among her *métiers*, which included working in a rock band, Lola was a sometime journalist—she showed me an article on “voodoo” which she had written for a Brazilian skin magazine—and as a result she was quite at ease with the tape recorder and very open in the interview situation. Articulate, dramatic, and in control (she gave me three pseudonyms to choose from—Lola, Pitty, and Elvira—complete with last names), I only had to listen as the charming haunted woman told her story. We were interrupted several times—a steady stream of friends dropped by—but she continued her story through all the interruptions. She began with her brother, Daniel, who was one year older than she and had left to live abroad in August 1986, that is, roughly two years earlier.

Unlike Lola, who was always going out, Daniel was a homebody who did not approve of his sister’s behavior. The two never got along, yet they continued to be housemates: “I live here with my brother, and my brother is always getting mad at me. He doesn’t like it that I go out with lots of people. He’s a little jealous of my

boyfriends. He doesn't like it when I come home with men. Ever since we were little, he picked on me. We never got along."<sup>6</sup>

A few days after Daniel left the country, "the figure began to show up. The figure lived in my brother's room. The room was closed, but he always lived there. My interpretation is that someone came in Daniel's place to take care of me, but there's another interpretation. There's a story in my family—my family came from Scotland—there was a relative who killed himself. I always had a connection with this story. Who was this boy? I looked at photos of him. I sometimes thought that it was this boy who came to take care of me."

"So when Daniel left, I heard things like doors banging—you know how it is when there's someone in the house? And his voice reminded me of some people. One time I was with a couple [of friends]. They were here at home in the house watching TV with me. It was the first time they were here. All of the sudden there was the biggest racket in the bathroom, but only the girl perceived it. She said to me, 'There's someone here in the house.' I heard it, too, and told her he was always here. Her boyfriend didn't hear anything and said, 'You're nuts, girls.'

"After this, I was here with two musician friends of mine. They were always here. I went to take a nap, and when I passed by this part of the room, the figure passed by: dark, tall, and with hair down to here.

"In December [1986], I rented out Daniel's room to a friend of mine, João. Whenever he was here, the figure was quiet, because João is a very good friend of mine, and he takes care of me. When João was gone, the figure showed up. João knew about the story, but he never saw it. I think one time he saw it, but he didn't admit it.

"Then there was the time I was here with your friend's cousin. We were doing pirate television [an illegal broadcast from a truck that drives around the city]. We were watching the TV, but it was full of static, like in the movie 'Poltergeist.' Then he started in the bedroom, tapping. He started slamming the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. I saw him. He knocked all the silverware off the kitchen table. So we left. We went to her house. It was the only time. I came back pissed off at him. I came back swearing at [the ghost], saying, 'Don't you ever do this again!' Then João came to live with me, and



things were calmer, but whenever João wasn't at home, he showed up. Then João left, my brother came back, and he disappeared."

"When did your brother come back?"

"In December of last year [1987]."

"And everything's been quiet since then?"

"Yes. But I know he's here. I know he's always with me."

We then turned to the subject of her family. She talked about the relative who had lived in Scotland and whom she had seen in photos. "He was very good looking—*lindo, lindo*—he looked like a prince. He fell in love with an older woman, around forty years old, and then he killed himself." Her father told her this story, and since she was young she had always looked at this picture.

At first, Lola lived in the apartment with her sister and brother, but then her sister left for Europe, so Lola remained alone with Daniel. The housing situation began a few years ago, when her father—the son of a British grandfather but born in Brazil—told the three of them that they were now adults and it was time for them to leave the house. Although this might not seem unusual from the point of view of Anglo-Saxon culture, it is a much harsher statement in Brazil, where unmarried children frequently live with their parents until they are well into their 20s. At this time, Lola was only 19 or 20. Her father promised to pay the rent for six months, but after this they were on their own.

According to Lola, her father was very rigid and strict, and when she was a child, he failed to defend her against her brother. Whenever she complained to her father that Daniel had beaten her, her father beat both of them. Her mother, a strict Catholic but not very strong-willed, never intervened. She went on to tell me that one time when Daniel beat both her and her sister, together they were able to restrain him and beat him. Lola told me he was "completely crazy," but she added: "Now he's calmer. There was a time when the entire building heard, and they yelled, 'Come here, Lola. Come stay with me.'"

When I asked her if the ghost looked like Daniel, she said no, but he reminded her of an Englishman who had stayed in the apartment for a while: the ghost was thin, whereas Daniel was strong. I then raised the possibility that the ghost might be related to her conflict with her brother and her father. Daniel represented a continuation of the rigid, puritanical, Anglo-Saxon upbringing against which she

was defining herself, and when he went away to the United States, the authority figure disappeared from her life.

She answered, "Yes, I might have even called him. I don't know, unconsciously."

If the ghost was a substitute for her brother (and her father), he was not identical to them. Physically, he looked like the Englishman who had been her housemate and substitute for her brother, and earlier in the interview she had suggested a connection between the ghost and the picture of the boy from Scotland, which links the ghost implicitly to her father. The ghost therefore appears to be a brother/father figure with a difference: unlike with Daniel and her father, Lola could order this ghost around, and she saw it as protective even if somewhat disruptive. She was not at all afraid of her ghost, and he behaved in a rather civilized manner: unlike Cristina's ghost, Lola's ghost did not break anything.

Our conversation then returned to Daniel. Lola said that she found out much later that her father arrived at the decision to put the children on their own after Daniel had beaten both of his parents. When he goes into his crises, Lola has to take refuge with her friends. One of the friends who had joined us told me that she had harbored Lola for five days. Lola added that Daniel has refused psychiatric treatment or any kind of medication. Once he went to a psychiatrist, but to no avail: "He's very smart, and the psychiatrist arrived at the conclusion that our parents were crazy and he was normal. The psychiatrist then called me and wanted to talk with me. He thought I was crazy! He's [Daniel's] very smart."

I asked the friend who had joined us if she thought Daniel was crazy. "Crazy, no," she answered. "But he's not very normal."

Lola never told her parents or her brother about the ghost. She said that if she did, her family might think she was crazy, even though she knows she's not. This was why it was important to her that some of her friends have also shared her ghostly experience; furthermore, she knew other friends who had had ghosts of their own. We chatted for a while longer about these other ghosts, and after a while her friends decided to leave. We opened another beer and talked for a while longer before I left.

Lola had said more than once that the ghost was there to take care of her, and yet he sometimes acted up and even once forced her out of her house. This was similar to the role that her father and brother

played, who in theory were supposed to take care of her but in fact did not and even blocked her attempts to develop her persona as a modern, free spirit: a Lola. The ghost therefore appeared to be a substitute for these male figures who stood in the way of her becoming herself. At the same time, Lola was not afraid of the ghost and was sometimes even able to boss him around, so she had considerably more power over him than over her brother and father. In this sense, she was able to dramatize her domestic conflicts in a way that empowered her, both in terms of her relations with male relatives and in terms of her attempts to develop the identity she wanted.

About a week after the interview, Lola called me to ask if she could interview me about my research for her magazine. I consented and also promised to put her in touch with another anthropologist who was researching astrology, but Lola did not call back before I returned to New York.

### THE THREE SISTERS

The theme of domestic violence appeared much more overtly in the third case, which involved a family of father, mother, and four daughters. I first heard of this case through André Percia de Carvalho, a psychology student and friend of the daughter of a friend of mine who is an Umbanda medium. André also works part time for the Institute for Applied Psychology, the president of which is the daughter of a man who was, when alive, a good friend of Padre Edvino. As a result, it is not surprising that André rejects the Spiritist interpretation of ghosts and instead follows that of the Jesuits and most American and European parapsychologists.

On Sunday, July 24, 1988, I visited the afflicted family at their home in a city roughly located in the destitute North Zone of suburban Rio de Janeiro. The neighborhood was certainly not a place for an American to wander about alone, and I was fortunate to be accompanied by André and his friend Roberto, both of whom interviewed members of the family with me. The mother (age 42) of the family was a maid, and the father (age 60) was a bricklayer. The oldest of the children, Romana (age 14), was the mother's daughter from a previous marriage, and the mother also had two sons from the previous marriage, neither of whom lived with the family. The other three daughters—Rozilda (age 13), Rachel (age 11), and Rosa (age 8)—were all children of the present marriage. For more than

six months, the family had been plagued by stones and bricks that fell on the roof, cups and plates that flew and broke inside the house, and outbreaks of fires. They also claimed that two bicycles had been thrown on top of their roof.

According to a newspaper report published that week, on Wednesday a three-hour Umbanda ritual had been held at the house in order to cleanse it. The spirit guide of the *pai-de-santo* (an Umbanda priest), Gypsy Guarapari, manifested through the medium and told the family that obsessing spirits were operating through the mother, who was an incipient medium. To exorcise these spirits, one of the assisting Umbanda mediums touched the mother on her forehead and absorbed her obsessing spirit. The spirit was an “Exú das trevas” (Exú of the darkness), a trickster spirit from the Yoruba pantheon which in Brazil is sometimes identified with the Christian devil.

The medium who had incorporated the Exú was then tied to a tree in the yard, and through the medium the Exú said to the *pai-de-santo*, “The old lady who lived here owed me a debt.” This referred to the father’s mother, who had died of cancer in the house 14 years previously. The *pai-de-santo* then convinced the Exú to leave the family in peace, and, in exchange for some rum, cigars, and seven white candles, the spirit agreed to leave the family in peace. The Exú also demanded a black chicken, and—again, according to the newspaper report, but by no means unheard of—the Exú then killed the chicken with its teeth and drank its blood. The *pai-de-santo* also explained that a neighbor had performed a work of black magic against the family.

The newspaper report added that a member of the Messianic church had also come to the house on Tuesday to pray for the family. However, the mother told us that neither the Messianic church people nor the Umbandists managed to end the infestation. On Saturday, the family sent out an urgent request over an Umbandist radio station, calling for help. On the same day, the people from the Messianic church came back, but their prayers did not help. On Sunday morning, a Protestant minister had come to exorcise the house, but his work did not seem to help either.

When I arrived with André and his friend on Sunday afternoon, the father was in the back lot chopping wood, and the mother and her children were gathered with some of the neighbors out on the

front porch. Everyone talked at once about what had happened. Although the infestation had first started in November, they had not sought any help until that week, when a friend of theirs, a journalist, had sought out the *pai-de-santo* and written up the dramatic story about the exorcism ritual. The mother belonged to a Protestant denomination called the Universal church, and she had expected to get help from her church. However, she said, “They have abandoned us.”

“They abandoned you?”

“Yes, since they don’t come here anymore. When they pray, then more things fall from above. And I’m the one who pays.”

They then told us about the voice of a man they had heard, who said, “I don’t want anyone here.” It was hard to get a clear chronology of the events, but at one point the mother told us: “It started with fires. After the fires, it went to stones falling on top of the house. Then it started to knock on the doors and the windows, and the doors opened, the faucet turned on, and all of this confusion outside started. Then it started inside my house, and it’s been going on like this for four months. . . .”

“If I go to the market—I don’t even go anymore—I go to the market, me and Romana, and put things on the table. When I look—where’s the chicken? The package disappears. It takes eggs and throws them at people who are here. It throws everything. It grabs tomatoes and throws them on the street. Everything disappears. It takes oranges and throws them in other people’s houses. It’s like this, you know. We live here without hope, not knowing what else to do. . . . Before it hid our clothes. . . . We found them outside, with different pieces in different places.”

We chatted with the family and visitors for about a half hour and listened to their grievances, and then the three of us split up for different interviews. I interviewed Romana, the 14-year-old from the previous marriage; André interviewed Rozilda, the 13-year-old; and Roberto talked with Rachel, the 11-year-old. I also talked with the 8-year-old, Rosa, but she was shy and reticent. Her mother said that Rosa seems to bear the brunt of the activities: “The little one always gets the blows. . . . It beats her and socks her in the face.” When I asked them if they ever had problems like this in school, they said they did not go to school.

I asked Romana if she had tried to communicate with her grandmother, and she answered, "In my opinion, no dead person's bothering anybody." When I asked about black magic, she said she suspected a neighbor, who was apparently jealous of the family because of their relative wealth. Because Spiritist intellectual Hernani Guimarães Andrade had told me that in Brazil outbreaks of fires in cases of spirit infestation are usually associated with sorcery or black magic, I asked Romana if they had found any packages of chicken feet or rosemary around the house, that is, packages indicative of black magic. She answered that she had found a package of rose petals on the roof, and she went on to say that her father believed that the spirit infestation was the result of black magic, but her mother disagreed.

However, Romana drew attention to herself, explaining that she "knows about the things before they happened," whereas her sister Rozilda does not. According to her mother, Romana does not like to do housework, and she fights with both of her parents. She also fights a lot with her sister Rozilda (age 13), and when they fight, "more things fall." Furthermore, Romana told me that she fights with her 19-year-old boyfriend, whom she persuaded to stop drinking. However, she likes the animals in the yard, and she claims to have healed the dog once and even to have healed one of her sisters.

No one has told Romana that many people believe the powers she believes she has do not exist, so she calmly described her feats to me: "One day I was in a friend's house. . . . I wanted my mother to be with me . . . because if the lamps broke, she would have to come get me. The lamps broke. They broke here, there, in the room, here inside. So she went running to get me."

"So you're doing it yourself?"

"You think? Maybe it's my sister."

"Which one?"

"Rachel."

"Why her?"

"Because she's very angry, like me."

"Why not both of you?"

"I think both of us."

Later, she told me that she does not hate her sisters and her mother. "It's only at times when I get irritated. Sometimes they want me to do something, and I don't want to do it."

After I finished interviewing Romana, I talked with André, who was convinced from his conversation with Rozilda that *she*, not Romana, was the focus of the poltergeist attack. Rozilda told André that she sometimes fights with her sister Romana, and when her mother tells them to stop arguing and one of them wants to continue, then the incidents occur. Rozilda also fights with her father: he tells Rozilda what to do, and she does not like to be bossed around. Sometimes she feels like hitting him, and according to the other sisters, Rozilda sometimes throws objects at her father but says she does not remember doing so. Rozilda admitted that she frequently faints, sometimes after she fights.

We then talked with the mother alone, who said that she did not think this was the work of a demon. "If it was, the *pai-de-santo* would have gotten rid of it." Instead, she said that the three daughters "form a very strong chain," of which Rozilda was the strongest link. She added that the incidents occur less when the three fight among themselves than when they fight with their father.

According to Rozilda, the infestation began in November, after a fight between her and her parents. She wanted to break up with her 20-year-old boyfriend, and they did not want her to. "On this day," the mother said, "the fourteenth of November [1987], Rozilda had gone out with a friend. The friend disappeared and we didn't know where she was. Then Rozilda disappeared. We called out for her and only heard her voice, but when we got closer, she wasn't there. . . . When her father got home, he was very angry, and the fight started. He beat you, didn't he, Rozilda?"

"Yes," Rozilda answered.

"He let her have it," her mother added. "Where did he beat you? I don't remember. She was very upset. . . . On this day, the beating on the doors and windows started."

Rozilda also said that she heard a man's voice say, "I'm going to take away everyone." She felt a headache when the voice spoke, and according to her mother, Rozilda was born very small and she was not sure her daughter would live. She always told herself, "This child won't make it." Rozilda and Romana did not suffer from any major childhood diseases, but the 11-year-old, Rachel, had suffered from pneumonia, and she also claimed that she felt a headache and dizziness after the outbreaks.

During his interview with Rozilda, André asked her to draw a picture of their house and to describe it, and she said she did not like it. She also told him that the father sleeps in his own room and in the middle of the night he sometimes yells out “Mother! Mother!” Rozilda said that her father’s mother was not very nice, and sometimes she sees her ghost. Rozilda was apparently never very happy in the home, and even as a child, she was prone to temper tantrums in which she broke things. Like Romana, Rozilda now believed she could cure plants and animals, and she also believed that when she was angry, plants dried up and died.

We also interviewed the father, who was hard of hearing and seemed not to be able to understand our questions, nor were his responses easy to understand. He mentioned how the “daughter of anger [perhaps a Pomba Gira spirit, a female Exú] had caught their girl,” but he mainly talked about how much they had lost and suffered. He pulled out a case with his glasses in it and said that his glasses had broken while they were in the case.

I had hoped to be able to return and do a follow-up interview, but illness prevented both me and André from making a second trip before I had to return to the United States. André made two other return trips to this town, but each time the family was not there, and of course they do not have a telephone. Again, despite the lack of follow-up, which would be a problem for other purposes, our interviews yielded enough information to be able to make some preliminary interpretive comments.

The approach adopted here brackets the question of the mechanisms that could explain the various incidents: children’s pranks, neighbors’ attacks, dissociated behavior, exaggerated reporting, telegergy, psychokinesis, spirits, and so on. Whatever the mechanisms, the family members’ discussion of the case reveals how in their minds it is linked up with domestic conflicts, and these conflicts are somewhat similar to the ones discussed in the other two cases. Despite the class and educational differences between this family and Lola, in both cases the spirit infestation is related to the violent treatment of younger women by more powerful men. In Cristina’s case, I have no evidence that suggests her father beat her, but it is also true that it did not occur to me to ask Cristina, since this was the first of the three cases I investigated, and neither she nor her mother volunteered the information. However, it is also true that



there was a conflict between the girl and her father, and he admitted that he did not yell at her anymore because of the infestation. Thus, the three cases share some possible common denominators that warrant the consideration of a few comments—albeit preliminary and tentative—of a more general nature.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The interviews discussed here raise several questions, which only future research will be able to answer. One question involves the extent to which the cases presented here are representative of Brazilian spirit infestation in general or even spirit infestation in a wider, cross-cultural context. These were the only three cases for which I was able to acquire, during my summer visit in 1988, sufficiently detailed and firsthand information to allow a preliminary interpretation of the meaning of the spirit to the afflicted family members. It may be a coincidence that all three cases involved young women, but it is also true that Wedenoja's case study (1978) of a duppy attack in Jamaica also involved a young woman, and the two other detailed case studies of spirit infestation in Brazil (Andrade 1989) also involve young women (aged 13 and 21, respectively).

The preponderance of young women is also suggested by two sources of survey-like information for Brazil. Andrade (1989:228–119) has collected information on 20 cases of spirit infestation, for which he found a central focus person or victim in 13 of the 20 cases. In two of the 13 cases, the focus person was male, whereas the remaining 11 were female, and of the females, six were under 20, five were aged 21 to 25, and one was 43 years old. Likewise, a collection of anecdotal case histories by Padre Edvino (Friderichs 1980) provides another source of survey-like information, although many of his case histories are based on newspaper accounts and lack key details. Tallying Friderichs' collection reveals that of the 36 cases he reports for Brazil (some of which may overlap with Andrade's collection), 18 involved females as the central person, whereas only five involved males, four of whom were young boys. In 13 cases there was insufficient information or, in a few cases, a possibility that the infestation focused on persons of both sexes. Similarly, for Gauld and Cornell's primarily European and North American data base (1979:226; see Andrade 1989:228), of 197 cases with an identified

focus person, 27 percent were male and 73 percent female, and of the 194 cases with an identified age, 78 percent were less than 20 years old and 22 percent more than 20 years old. Although further research is necessary to confirm the cross-cultural variability or stability of these patterns, the three cases discussed here, two of which involved young or adolescent girls and the other a woman in her early 20s, are consistent with at least one aspect of what may be a broader pattern.

A second question that one might ask is why the idiom of spirit infestation is chosen or hit upon as opposed to other options. It is highly unlikely that all cases of spirit infestation can be reduced to a universal "etiology" or a core sequence of events. Nevertheless, one might conceptualize the problem in terms of ideal typical sequences or scenarios. The second and third of the three cases presented here suggest that one scenario might include domestic violence as a key factor. This connection appears most clearly in the third case, where the mother explicitly related the onset to a child-beating episode.

In this type of case, we might imagine the following scenario: an older and more powerful adult or older sibling beats or abuses a less powerful person or child, such as a father who abuses a daughter. For various reasons, other adults or authority figures cannot protect the victim, and in a country like Brazil, turning to outside authority figures such as the police is not an option, since this has a completely unpredictable outcome that may involve even worse abuse. Likewise, direct violent retribution against their victimizer could have disastrous results, and taking on a sick role (which might include spirit possession), while representing one option, would not express the rage that a victim feels as well as a desire for direct, violent retribution. In contrast, if there is a belief in spirits and spirit attack, then spirit infestation has the double advantage not only of returning violence with violence but also of avoiding the blame and consequences of such violent retribution. On this point it is relevant to point out that in cases of poltergeists in the United States and western Europe, there is frequently a missing generation in the families. The dull hearing and sight of members of an older generation may make them prime candidates for spirit tricksters, and in the third case presented here, the father's age and his hearing problems made

it easier for the girls to stage their attacks—either consciously or in a state of dissociation—without being caught.

Of course, this remains only one scenario, what could be considered as one of the elementary forms of spirit infestation, a structure that includes some or all of the following elements: domestic violence, fear of police and absence of other authority figures to whom the victims might turn for help, a generation or values gap (which may also involve concerns with alternative notions of selfhood), possible hearing or sight impairment in the older generation, and belief in and fear of spirit infestation or sorcery. Some support for this scenario emerges when one considers the following: if one accepts that at least some of the events of spirit infestation episodes are the result of dissociated behavior, as in the case of Rozilda, then one might recall that a similar illness/idiom of distress—multiple personality—has in many cases been linked to child abuse. On this point, Kenny notes, “Dissociation in response to such abuse is becoming the dominant paradigm in explaining the origin of multiple personality” (1986:176). It is possible then that child-beating may provoke dissociation, which in turn leads to action that, given the proper conjuncture of beliefs and circumstances described above, is interpreted as spirit infestation.

Nevertheless, one might also imagine other elementary forms of spirit infestation for which the other cases discussed here might provide alternative scenarios. For example, in the case of Lola, the spirit infestation episode did not have the direct compensatory quality that it had for the three sisters, since the ghost appeared after the violent men in her life had left. Instead, Lola’s ghost appeared to dramatize and rehearse her relations with men, which were largely violent relations, and they provided her with an idiom in which she explores a new, more confident and assertive personality. Likewise, in Cristina’s case, the motivations and causes appeared to be related to her dream of becoming a star as much as to conflicts with her father over housework.

Only further research will be able to address the question of why some families hit upon spirit infestation as opposed to other idioms that could also express and alter intrapsychic and interpersonal meanings and conflicts. Given the likely variation of sequences and causes of spirit infestation, one must judiciously resist constructing a universal psychological “etiology,” a danger that Kenny warns

against for similar popular illnesses/idioms of distress, convincingly in the case of *latah* (1983), although less so for multiple personality (see Hess 1987d). The sequences of events and circumstances leading to a case of spirit infestation, as with nonceremonial spirit possession, are likely to vary widely not only across cultures but also across cases within any given culture. Ultimately, the question of delineating necessary and sufficient factors for the occurrence of spirit infestation may not be answerable, or only answerable in culture-specific terms, or, as I have suggested, best approached by typological formulas. More easily answered is the question with which this essay is concerned—when spirit infestation *does* occur, how does it dramatize domestic conflicts and personal meanings?—a problem that requires a case-by-case interpretation.

A third question that emerges from this discussion involves the extent to which one can draw a parallel between spirit infestation and nonceremonial spirit possession. Spirit infestation and spirit possession appear to be similar enough that it makes sense to consider the cases of spirit infestation discussed here as part of the broader literature on nonceremonial spirit possession, especially the new approaches developed in the wake of I. M. Lewis's (1971) work. Lewis emphasized how women can use spirit possession to accrue attention and goods as well as to enhance their status by joining peripheral possession cults. More recent interpretations (e.g., Lambek 1980; Kessler 1977) have shown how spirit possession can restructure the domestic unit and alter power relations within it, and the three case studies discussed here show a similar process at work. For Cristina and the three sisters, the supernatural power of the spirit infestation translated into domestic power with respect to the adult males in their lives (and to the extent that they were aligned with the men, the adult females as well). Likewise, Lola was able to express control and independence with respect to her male ghost in ways that she was not able to with her father and brother, and this in turn may have helped her build her self-confidence with respect to them. In short, these cases show how supernatural power may be transformed into domestic power in ways that are potentially more permanent and less trivial than accruing attention, status, and wealth.

A second line of post-Lewis analyses—represented by the work of Boddy (1988), Kenny (1986), and Siegel (1978)—shows how mul-

multiple personality and spirit possession serve as idioms for restructuring personal identity and questioning given cultural orders, particularly questions of gender. Although this possibility is more difficult to assess in the case of the three sisters, both Cristina's and Lola's ghosts appear to be linked to conflicts they had between the modern, cosmopolitan world to which they were drawn and the rigid, relatively traditional world of their parents, especially of their fathers. By becoming haunted women, they were able to establish themselves as different from their families, and this space of psychic power provided them with the power to carve out a new identity, or at least to explore its possibility: a starlet or a Lola. That these intrapsychic/cultural conflicts were closely aligned with the interpersonal/domestic political ones discussed in the previous paragraph shows how closely related these two strands of post-Lewis interpretations in fact are.

Not only does the framework of the anthropological literature on spirit possession help elucidate cases of spirit infestation, but the latter also add a dimension that is not discussed much in the anthropological literature on spirit possession, nor for that matter in the parapsychological case histories of poltergeists: the problem of domestic violence. It is puzzling that in the many case histories of poltergeists recorded by parapsychologists, the theme of "repressed hostility" and interpersonal conflicts appears frequently, but domestic violence is rarely if ever mentioned. One exception is Andrade (1989:36), who notes in passing that the 13-year-old girl in his case from Suzano, São Paulo, had been "hit on several occasions by her father."<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in the anthropological literature on spirit possession, this issue receives relatively scant attention. One exception is the earlier analysis of Harper (1963:172), who notes that in India spirit possession provides one option—among which he rather dryly includes suicide attempts—of "stress reduction" for young married women, who are frequently harassed and sometimes beaten. Given the paucity of references to violence against women and children in both the poltergeist and spirit possession literature, together with the limited number of case studies presented here, it would be brash to make any claims here, and, again, universal claims on this issue are to be resisted. Nevertheless, the link suggested by the materials presented in this article (as well as in Andrade's Suzano case) may be more than a coincidence, and it may

turn out to be rather commonplace in a large number of cases. At the minimum, the problem of domestic violence deserves to be flagged for the attention of future researchers of *both* nonceremonial spirit possession and spirit infestation.

Many years ago, in response to criticism from Andrew Lang, the skeptic Frank Podmore dismissed the psychical researchers' work on poltergeists by arguing that this type of ghost was merely the handiwork of "naughty little girls" (Podmore 1898–99:135). Unlike both Lang and Podmore, I have bracketed the unresolved question of whether or not paranormal phenomena occur in cases of spirit infestation. For the purposes here, it is enough to say that to the people who live in haunted houses, the phenomena are indeed paranormal if not other-worldly. Nevertheless, like Lang I am troubled by Podmore's comment, although for a different reason: Podmore's formula appears to blame the victim. It may be time to take this formula, which increasingly appears to have been standing on its head, and put it rightside up: if spirits of the type discussed here are the work of "naughty little girls," the preliminary results of the interviews discussed here point the finger beyond them to the role of "naughty big boys."<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>The articles by Russell and by Brown in Davidson and Russell (1981) are exceptions to this general pattern, but these studies both rely on historical documents rather than firsthand interviews.

<sup>2</sup>Since some scientists accept the category of "psychic forces of the living" (i.e., "recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis") as a this-worldly, scientific explanation, my classification of it along with ghosts and demons may be problematic; however, since the paranormal is far from a universally accepted explanation among scientists, this paper will consider it an "emic" explanation.

<sup>3</sup>These definitions are somewhat different from those of Lewis (1971:55–65), but at least for the purposes of this essay they have the advantage of coming closer to the distinction in Brazilian culture between possession (*possessão*, a variant of which is obsession, or *obsessão*) and mediumship (*mediunidade*).

<sup>4</sup>In distinguishing psychological and instrumental approaches from interpretive/cultural ones, I follow Holmberg (1983:41). Also see the critical literature review by Csordas (1987).

<sup>5</sup>I did not tape-record this conversation, since I was not sure if the tape recorder would have inhibited him from talking. I took detailed notes as soon as I arrived in my hotel room that evening. The next day, when I interviewed Cristina and her mother, I used a tape re-

order. This did not seem to inhibit the mother, but it may have contributed to Cristina's reticence. Anthropologist Neila Soares graciously helped me transcribe the two interviews.

<sup>6</sup>In this interview and only this interview, I have not placed ellipses where I have cut material (including interruptions and my own questions) or where the tape was unintelligible. As a result, the quotations here should be interpreted as a summary rather than a transcription of the interview.

<sup>7</sup>Along the same lines, Nasser Bandeira, a Pentecostalist minister whom I interviewed in Porto Alegre on June 20, also told me about a case of possession that he had "cured." He had attempted to exorcise a possessed girl in front of his congregation, but she continued to act possessed, so after the ceremony he took her to his office, switched to a day-to-day Portuguese, and told her he knew she was not possessed and that she could trust him and tell him what was really the problem. She then confessed that she was afraid she was pregnant, and if her father found out, he would kill her. The pastor then recommended that the girl go to a doctor, and if she was pregnant, have a friend go and talk to the parents. Fortunately, she turned out not to be pregnant.

<sup>8</sup>As this article was going to press, I received a letter from André Percia de Carvalho stating that he had since researched five other similar cases in Brazil. When I asked if he found any sign of domestic violence in these cases, he replied that he did in all five cases. Regarding the case of the three sisters, he added that a psychologist, who looked at drawings Carvalho asked Rozilda to make, found suggestions of aggressivity, epilepsy, and family conflicts. I do not know to what extent Carvalho and the psychologist discussed the case prior to the assessment. The family has since abandoned the house.

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