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Religion in Latin America

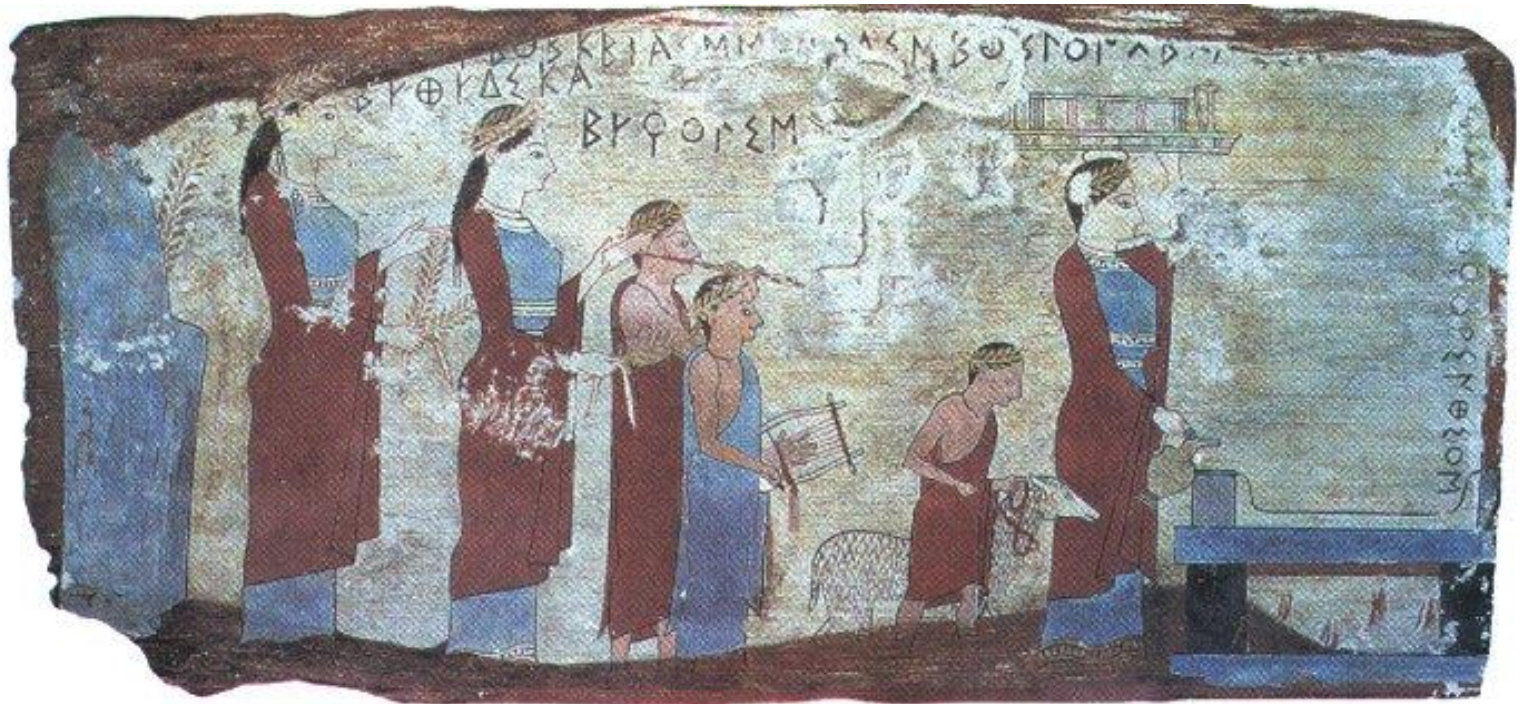
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Offering as core practice in many religions and focus of conflict



Religious Diversity in Brazil

- 64.6 % Roman Catholicism
- 22.2% Protestantism, with the majority belonging to Pentecostalism
- 2.0 % Spiritism/Kardecism
- 0.3 % Afro-Brazilian religions
- 8.0 % Agnostics and Atheists

(numbers from the national census 2010)

Afro-Brazilian Religions

- e.g., Candomblé, Xangô and Tambor da Minha
- Derived from African religions (e.g., Yoruba) due to trans-Atlantic slave trade
- Focus on African deities called orishas



Candomblé



- app. 15-20% of Brazilians practise regularly one of the many Afro-Brazilian religions or Spiritism (Chesnutt 2003)
- Common elements in Brazilian popular religions
 - Mediumship, the communication between humans and spiritual beings
 - Offerings to the deities (sacrifices)

Ebó (among Yoruba)

- *ebó* = term derived from the West African Yoruba language
- Meaning: sacrifice (within a religious context)
- It is conducted “to establish, renew and maintain communication with the supernatural beings and to share and enjoy communion with them” (Awolalu, p. 82)

Sacrifice as exchange of gifts

- Contains obligation for both sides, deities and humans
- => establishes a contractual relationship between the sacrifice and the recipient, those who give and those who receive

- *Ebó* signifies all kinds of sacrifice, irrespective of the material used.
- The crucial aspect of *ebó* is the sincerity of intention, the giving itself.
- 'If a man is poor he will sacrifice a goat, or even a cucumber, in the place of an ox, and God will accept it'. (Evans-Pritchard, p. 27).

Afro-Brazilian religions



Types of Offerings in Brazil

- candles, fruits, candy, or any number of items or actions that may be appreciated by the deities
 - Deities may ask for a favourite fruit or dish,
 - At times they may ask that a person give up drinking or a specific dish
- They may request a person to wear certain jewellery, receive initiations or any number of other things
- Or they may request an animal, usually a chicken or a dove, called blood sacrifice

Feeding of the deities

- When the sacrifice is conducted successfully, the requests and desires of the devotees will be met.
- But to be understood in a symbolic way as the deities do not actually eat the flesh but feed off the energy

ashé

- *ashé* – term derived from Yoruba
- 'a mystic force that is present in some places, objects or certain parts of the animal body, such as the heart, liver, lungs, genitals, riverbeds, stones, seeds and sacred fruits' (Neto/Brooks/Alves, p. 3.)

Sacrificial meal

- The most common animals are chickens, pigeons, guinea fowls and goats.
- Parts of the animal (e.g. the head) are presented to the deities on altars.
- Other parts are used to prepare a meal for the members of the community.

- The communal meal “reinforces the interconnectedness of the community of adherents, and therefore plays a significant role in the maintenance of the Candomblé religion” (Neto/Brooks/Alves, p. 4.)

Struggle for religious freedom



Holy War against Afro-Brazilian religions

- Though the practice of Afro-Brazilian religions is legalised in Brazil, Neo-Pentecostal churches attack Afro-Brazilian religious communities
- Focus on two points: spirit possession and animal sacrifice

Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (UCKG)

- founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1977 by Edir Macedo Bezerra
- Today one of the most important new churches in the so-called developing world

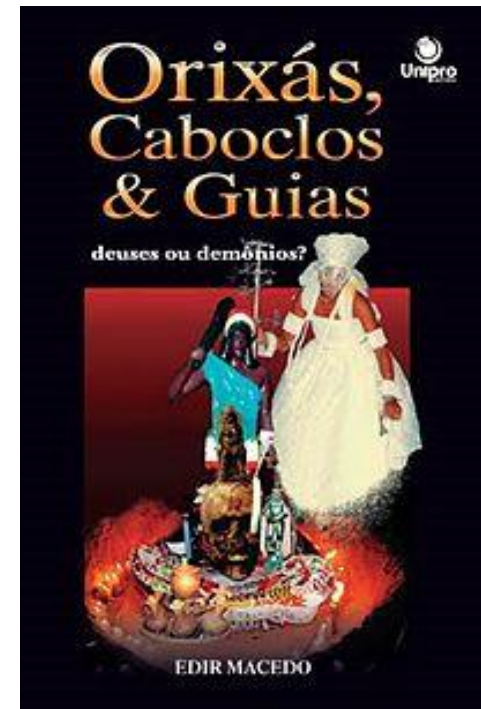


UCKG theology

- Liberation ceremonies: Satan and the demons are responsible for all the misery and evil in the world
- Afro-Brazilian religions are responsible for bringing demons into this world
- Solution: Liberation ceremony (exorcism of African deities)

Preparation for Holy War

- *Orixás, caboclos & guías:*
deuses ou demônios?
by Edir Macedo (1988)



Holy War

- in 1994/1995, the UCKG declared the Holy War against macumba, a bit later against all Afro-Brazilian religions and Spiritism
- Confrontations, sometimes violent



Counter-strategies

- Public campaigns to increase visibility
 - Including demonstrations, joint federations, court cases
 - Move away from blood sacrifice



Conclusion

- Offering of blood to mark membership to community
- Marker of identity and belonging
- However, also target for hatred and discrimination
- Animal sacrifice causes anxiety among outsiders