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Religion in Latin America

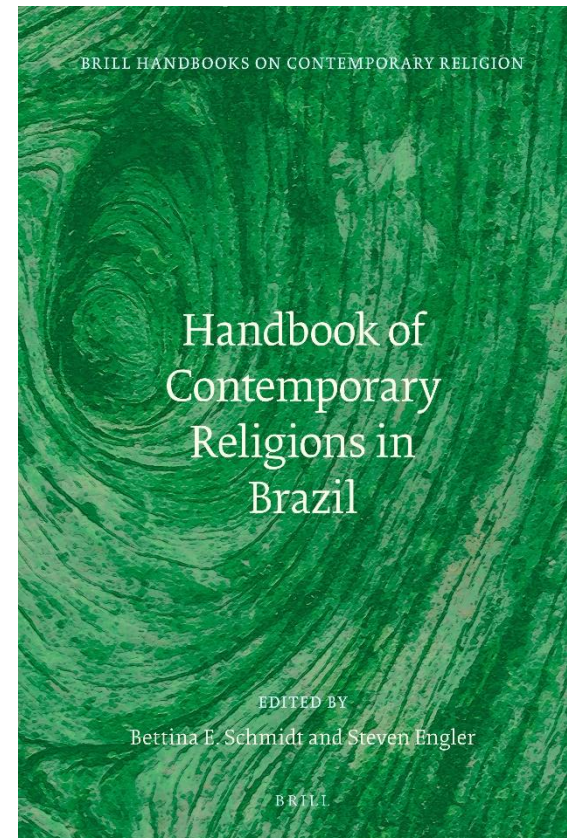
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Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Case study: Brazil





Some data

- the fifth largest country in the world
- population of over 200 million
- a largely mono-lingual nation (Portuguese)
 - But with several distinct cultural regions
- Hundreds of indigenous cultures, from several language groups, maintain and innovate their traditions

- Brazil's colonial period began in 1500
- It was a slave-holding colony, then nation
 - More African slaves were brought to Brazil than to any other nation
 - it was the last western nation to abolish slavery (in 1888).
- Catholic Portuguese colony but came under rule by the Portuguese court in exile from 1808
 - declared an independent Empire in 1822
 - became a republic in 1889
- alternated between democracy and dictatorship over the twentieth century

Religious data

- Until 1891 Roman Catholicism was the only official religion.
- Still a predominately Christian country today but more diverse
- Though 64.6% of the population still identified themselves as Roman Catholic, this figure represents a significant drop from 73.6% in 2000 and 90% in 1970.
- At the same time the number of Protestants—*evangélicos*—grew (22.2% in 2010 up from 15.4% in 2000).

Among the 22.2% *evangélicos*...(in 2010)

- 60.0% self-identified as *evangélicas de origem Pentecostal* (Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal),
- 18.5% as *evangélicas de Missão* (e.g., Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists),
- and 21.8% were classified as being of unspecified origin (*evangélicas de origem não determinada*).

Census figures

	1980	1991	2000	2010
Catholic	89.2	83.3	73.7	64.6
Traditional Protestant	3.4	3.0	3.9	3.7
Pentecostal	3.2	6.0	11.5	18.5
Spiritist	0.7	1.1	1.3	2.0
Afro-Brazilian	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.3
Other	1.3	1.4	1.8	2.9
No religion	1.9	5.1	7.6	8.9

But ...

- Despite growing diversity (including 'no religion') Christian self-identification remains a strong denominator of national identity.
- Christianity, and particularly folk Catholicism with its worship of the Virgin Mary and the Saints, is still regarded as one of the core aspects of Brazilian culture and identity even for people that present themselves as agnostic or atheist.

Unique religions

- indigenous and indigenous-influences traditions
- Umbanda
- the many Afro-Brazilian traditions
- ayahuasca traditions
- New Religious Movements
- As well as Kardecist Spiritism with distinct Brazilian characteristics
- Many of these religions have since spread abroad.

'Brazilian religious matrix'

- emerged from the encounters between indigenous, Iberian Catholic, and West and Central African cultures
- -> characterized by syncretism, hybridization and the capacity to accommodate a variety of potentially conflicting beliefs
- an emphasis on ecstatic experiences, associated with a belief in spirits and their impact on humans

Other characteristics of religions in Brazil

- tensions and interactions between 'popular' and 'elite' manifestations of religion
 - e.g., folk Catholicism and mainstream Catholicism
 - But also a growing tension between African derived traditions and Pentecostalism

Link to healing

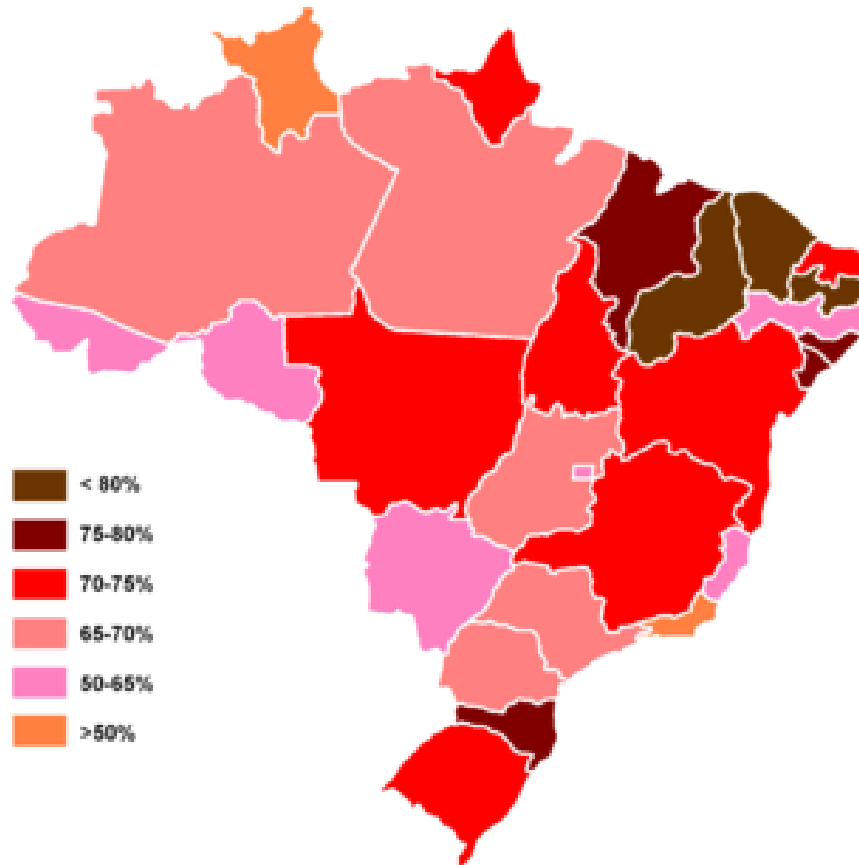
- a focus on this-worldly benefits of rituals and on the healing powers of certain people
- belief in harmful 'magic' and in the power of rituals and spiritually-charged material objects to ward off such evil forces

Religious marketplace

- 'clients' seek services beyond the bounds of their 'own' religions
- For example, many Brazilians who self-identify as 'Catholic' for the purpose of the census participate regularly in the rituals of other religions—especially Spiritism, Umbanda and Afro-Brazilian traditions—in a search for healing and other worldly assistance.

Overview

- Catholic Church in Brazil



Indigenous religions

- versatile character of orally transmitted myths and the remarkable flexibility of religious beliefs
- ability to adapt to changing situations and to address current problems
- Including move to Christianity

Guaraní

- Focus on 'word' and its essential role in understanding cosmology
- the relationship between human beings and both natural and divine creatures beings
- conceptualization of evil and the fight against it
- -> new religious experiences in indigenous communities with the Protestant churches (i.e., Pentecostalism) which led to the creation of 'indigenous churches'

Christianities

- traditional popular Catholicism (folk tradition)
- Roman Catholic Church
- Charismatic Christianity (the Holy Spirit takes centre stage in services)
- traditional Protestantism (e.g., Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists)
- Pentecostalism
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church)

Other religions

- Such as Afro-Brazilian and indigenous-influenced religions
- smaller in numerical terms but vitally important as forces in Brazilian culture
- providers of religious services to millions of Brazilians

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

- based on the West African Yoruba tradition
- Different local traditions in Brazil, connected to ethnic or pseudo-ethnic categories such as jeje, ketu, or fon
- Core belief in orixás (= African deities that represent forces of nature)
- Orixás can take possession of a human body during ceremonies

Candomblé



Kardecist Spiritism

- Often called 'Espiritismo'
- Linked to the teachings of the French spiritist Allan Kardec (1804-1869)
- Focus on mediumship (feeling, seeing, hearing the presence of spirits or delivering messages by automatic writing)



Umbanda

- developed in urban Brazil in the 1920s/30s
- a mixture of Espiritismo and Candomblé, with elements of Christianity
- Today a wide-spread Brazilian spirit-possession religion
- Pantheon of different spiritual entities such as caboclos (indigenous spirits), pretos velhos (spirits of old black slaves), boiadeiros (cowboys), ciganos (gypsies), marinheiros (sailers), exús/pombagiras as well as orixás

Umbanda



Vale do Amanhecer

- has a global character
- evokes elements of different religions, such as Christianity, Spiritism, Amerindian and Afro-Brazilian religions, Eastern Religions and cosmologies from ancient civilization

ayahuasca religions

- *a Barquinha* (the Little Boat)
- *Santo Daime* (Holy Daime)
- *União do Vegetal* (the Vegetable Union)

Minority religions

- Judaism
- Islam
- Buddhism, Shintoism and Japanese New Religious Movements
- Hare Krishna movement (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness [ISKON])

- “National census figures occlude the vibrant presence of popular or vernacular religious traditions and the prominence of trans-religious searches for religious services.” (Engler/Schmidt 2016: 20)