



# Spirits and Bodies as an Interdependent Network of Relations and Approach to the Study of Religion in Brazil

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## Abstract

In the ever-evolving religious landscape of Brazil, researchers who study contemporary phenomena of religions face a complex and often contradictory reality. The practical application of theoretical categories and concepts in this domain is an endeavor that continues to challenge researchers. Brazil's religious landscape is characterized by an impressive diversity of beliefs, practices, and convictions that often merge and overlap across different boundaries. This complex reality poses a serious challenge to religious studies, which strives to classify, analyze, and compare phenomena in historical and contemporary dimensions. The problems begin with the basic categories, which are often blurred in their applicability and meaning. Therefore, the focus of this article is to argue that the rapid change and impermanence of categories used in religious studies are due to the deep-rooted contradictions in Brazilian religious reality, which (e)merge, transform, and respond to social, cultural, and political changes in a constant state of flux. These changes cause defined categories that may have made sense at certain times. This article argues, however, that a phenomenological perspective is needed to conceptualize the centrality of spiritual entities to comparative religion. The omnipresence of spirits pervades the entire religious field of Pentecostalism, traditional Christianity, indigenous religions and Shamanism, as well as African-derived religions, which will be exemplified in terms of their references and striking parallels when it comes to the concept of spirits while manifested in human bodies and practices.

**Keywords** Spirits · Theory · Religious Studies · Research Concepts · Brazilian Religions

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## Introduction

The sociology of religion designed by Max Weber already revolves around an economy of salvation, especially where modern capitalism's foundation is set in motion and maintained via psychological gratifications (Weber 1963). Also, William James interpreted religion as a feeling and explicated it as an epiphenomenon of the human psyche, characterized at its core by basic anthropological neediness (James 1902) and Habermas suggested the motivational foundations of modern socialization be found in religion (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006). One need not expect much contradiction in European research when religion in modernity is conceived primarily as an individual or collective socio-psychological phenomenon. These definitions are often fed by functionalist determinations of religion, in that religion offers answers to basic questions of life for meaning and significance (Holyer 1985; Krok 2015). Religion can trigger powerful emotional experiences, such as happiness, peace, awe, or transcendence (Inglehart 2009, Emerson et al. 2011). Furthermore, in sociological terms, religious communities foster social support, social bonds, and a sense of belonging (van der Hoek 2022a) or well-being and health (Zwingmann et al. 2011). The correlation between religion and the psychological or sociological dimensions repeatedly suggested that religion has always and in every place been a phenomenon that has to do with the body (Vilaça 2005). The body is an important dimension in religious studies since religious meanings are ascribed by material beings. It differentiates between actual bodies in religious contexts and the symbolic use of the body, like in anthropomorphism where supernatural elements are given bodily properties (Vilaça 2005). Religion, people, and physical objects thus appear as a central social field in which forms of coupling and interdependence between the human being and society can be observed as a way of interacting with metaphysical worlds. These interdependencies prove to be a stirring task to take up religious phenomena from a comparative perspective across the religious landscape of Brazil and challenge established concepts of Religions (Schilbrack 2022). Studying the different belief systems, world views, and lifestyles in Brazil allows for a unique comparison of metaphysical and spiritual entities across various faiths. The omnipresence of spiritual beliefs in Brazil offers a rich field for investigation. Rodrigues therefore describes three main theoretical-methodological approaches, the phenomenological, functionalist, and what I will call a performative-holistic approach, to investigate the spiritual experiences of followers of a particular religious movement (Rodrigues 2023). In contrast, despite the diversity of approaches, a thematic one-sidedness is identified by Engler and Schmidt noting that two areas of Brazilian religious geography have received a disproportionate amount of attention. These include anthropological studies of selected African-influenced traditions and sociological studies of evangelical and/or Pentecostal groups (2016, p. 1). Based on the findings of Rodrigues and the observations of Engler and Schmidt, this research paper will explore the complex mosaic of "Brazilian Spiritology", focussing on the comparison of the different approaches and their underlying ideas about the spirits manifested in bodies to break down current perspectives

and one-sided perceptions on particular research objects and contemporary phenomena. This endeavor requires an interdisciplinary approach, merging the phenomenological, functional, and holistic perspectives to create a comprehensive understanding of Brazil's religious dynamism and calls for a spiritual turn in the study of religions in Brazil. This exploration will involve an in-depth analysis of how individual believers and communities experience and interpret the spiritual realm. Special attention will be given to the syncretic nature of Brazilian spiritual traditions, where African, Asian, Indigenous, and European influences merge, creating unique religious experiences and beliefs.

By comparing these different spiritual approaches, this paper seeks to illuminate the diversity and complexity of Brazilian spirituality to provide further exploration of how religious beliefs intersect with and influence broader societal issues such as politics, education, and health. In discussing the vast and diverse religious traditions of Brazil, it is important to acknowledge that any attempt to encapsulate this richness can only be a rough simplification. The tapestry of Brazilian spirituality encompasses a wide array of beliefs and practices. While it is fascinating to explore how different diasporic communities, including Muslim and Jewish, understand and interact with the concept of spirit and its epistemologies in Brazil, it is a challenging endeavor to comprehensively represent all these perspectives in a single article. Each tradition offers a unique lens, contributing to the overall understanding of spirituality in Brazil. However, through the comparative analysis of different Spiritologies and their interactions with bodies, this article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Religions in contemporary Brazil. Therefore, in the [“Spirits and Spirituality in the Daily Life of Brazilian Society”](#) section, I will describe the notion of Spirits and spirituality in everyday life in Brazilian society, and in the “Life Governed by Spirits” section, I will present the results of the literature review from a comparative religious perspective along with the question of the interdependencies of spirit and body, in the concluding review. In the conclusion, I will tie the findings back to the state of research and the conceptual discussion and briefly discuss the scope and limits of this approach.

## **Spirits and Spirituality in the Daily Life of Brazilian Society**

The belief in spirits and their tangible presence profoundly influences the daily lives of many Brazilians, extending beyond organized religion into everyday life. This is evident even among the growing number of people who identify as “non-religious” and lack formal religious affiliation with any institution (Maraldi et al. 2021). In Belém do Pará, historical figures like Josephina Conte (1915–1931) and Cláudio Ronaldo (1970–1990) exemplify how spirits can influence secular lives and identities. Posthumous appearances of Josephina and Claudio are deeply intertwined in the folkloric narratives of Catholics, Protestants, Umbanda followers, and “Nones” in Belém's popular culture (Silva and Tadaiesky 2014). This belief underscores the significance of cemeteries and apparition sites in the city's geography, seen as cultural and spiritual bridges (Maraldi et al. 2021). To understand Brazil's folkloric local culture, researchers often refer to the history of Brazil's colonization.

Initially, the Roman Catholic Church, backed by an agreement between the Church in Rome and the Portuguese kings, held exclusivity in Brazil but showed little interest in educating the masses in Catholic theological teachings (Chesnut 2003; Fernandes 2018). After independence, Catholicism remained the state religion with limited tolerance and some freedom for alternative beliefs (Chesnut 2003). The 1889 separation of church and state, heavily influenced by Positivism, led to a certain pluralization of Christianity and the religious landscape in general (Pierucci and Prandi 2000; Selka 2012). Throughout the twentieth century, there was a greater diversification of religions (Giumbelli 2008; Rodrigues 2023). In modern Brazil, religious affiliation is increasingly seen as a self-assembled, fluid identity rather than a heritage (Maraldi et al. 2021). Belief in spirits, deities, and ancestors is a central part of Brazilian culture and is pragmatically integrated into daily life (Mello and Oliveira 2013; Velho 2003; Oosterbaan 2017). Researchers highlight this through various studies on physical activities, rituals, and emotions (Bahia and Vieira Dantas 2018; Pussetti 2013; Saravia 2021). Contrary to secularization theories applicable in Western Europe, religion in Brazil largely remains a vibrant phenomenon, with subjective interpretations and individual appropriation of a spirit-influenced worldview often shaping responses to life's challenges and prevailing over dogmatic teachings in religious organizations (Baumann and Nagel 2023; Oosterbaan 2017; Chesnut 2003). Historically, the Catholic Church's failure to instruct the population in the Christian faith led to religious ignorance or illiteracy and syncretism (Fernandes 2018; Sanchis 1995; Rodrigues 2021), maintaining interest in spirits and deities. Brazilian natives and African slaves incorporated Catholic rites into their religious practices, reinterpreting them in light of their own experiences and knowledge (van der Hoek 2022b, 2023).

Such appropriation of knowledge and the reproduction of a vibrant belief in spirits is a phenomenon particularly prevalent in Brazil and should be applied in the study of various religious traditions. The following will illustrate this through selected examples.

## Indigenous Shamanism

Before the arrival of Europeans, shamanistic and animistic religions played a central role among the indigenous population of Brazil in the South American lowlands (Eliada 1991). About a century ago, field research among indigenous groups like the Guaraní in the surroundings of São Paulo and in the state of Paraná provided particularly relevant insights into the spirit world, thanks to the German-Brazilian ethnologist Nimuendajú (Nimuendajú 1914; see also van der Hoek 2022b, 2023). Of special interest for current religious studies are the river islands in the Amazon Delta, where the islands have created unique sanctuaries for indigenous religious beliefs and discourses (Maués 2005). In many shamanistic cultures, including Marajó, despite significant differences, it is believed that the world is inhabited by spirits, gods, and other supernatural beings. These beings can influence the daily lives of people, whether through healing, protection, guidance, or warnings. Experts, such as shamans, act as intermediaries between the different worlds and have the

ability to communicate with these spirits and ask for their help (Eliada 1991). Shamanistic practices can take various forms, including healing rituals, summoning spirits, trance, and spiritual journeys. During such practices, shamans can contact spirits to obtain information or harness spiritual energy to achieve healing or other desired outcomes (Maués 2005).

Another well-known example of shamanistic practices in Brazil is Ayahuasca, practiced by various indigenous groups. Ayahuasca, originally a psychoactive plant mixture, is consumed as tea in ritual ceremonies to promote healing and, importantly, to establish contact with the spirit world (Miranda 2022). These ceremonies are often led by shamans or spiritual leaders. Spiritual leaders are experts in the laws of the physical and metaphysical dimensions, researching, codifying, predicting, and controlling their interactions. The simultaneous diversity of life dimensions requires coexistence with animals, plants, and stones on a level of mutual equality. The consumption of Ayahuasca is often seen as a means of connecting with the spiritual world (Savoldi et al. 2023). During the ceremonies, participants enter an altered state of consciousness, allowing them to communicate with spirits, ancestors, and other supernatural beings, where the role of the body can vary (Savoldi et al. 2023). Spirits are often seen as guides, healers, and advisors, aiding in a deeper understanding of the world, oneself, and overcoming personal problems and illnesses. Spirits are thus invoked in various indigenous traditions for protection and assistance, shielding participants from negative influences or dangers in their immediate environment.

The view of indigenous shamanism reveals a pattern of thought that can also be found as an axiom in other religious traditions. I would like to refer to this axiom as inner-mythic rationality, which differs from technically mathematically determined rationality, as well as from historically determined rationality, by placing a stronger focus on the recurrence of certain experiences and the cyclical determination of life in general.

## **Spiritism**

The axiom of internal-mythical rationality can also be particularly found in Spiritism. Widely prevalent in Brazil, Spiritism's numerous variants cannot be adequately represented (da Silva Gordo Lang 2008; Stoll 2002; Prandi 2012). However, it is crucial to emphasize that Spiritism originally emerged as a (more scientific) complement to an individual's existing religion, not as an independent religion, and thus without claiming exclusivity in any particular form of salvation (de Castro Cavalcanti 2004; Giumbelli 1997; Lewgoy 2006). Since the teachings of Spiritism, codified by Allan Kardec, heavily rely on parts of the New Testament and reference elements of Christianity, it's clear that for many Christians, coexisting with Spiritism's teachings or practices does not contradict, but rather complements their Christian way of life. Spiritism can also be seen as a counter-movement or protest against the technical-mathematical and historically determined rationality of nineteenth-century European Scholasticism, finding fertile ground in Brazil. Besides its intellectual appeal to modern scientificity, Spiritism has three other attractions, especially appealing to parts of the educated middle class. Firstly, it offers the

possibility of contacting the deceased through a medium, often providing solace to the bereaved. Another attraction is the commandment of charity: Spiritists are expected to help others and actively do so in healthcare, education, and other areas where state provision fails many (Siedlak 2023). Spirits of the deceased descend temporarily through a medium to offer their knowledge, experience, or even concrete assistance. This help ranges from advice to surgical interventions (Rocha 2017). According to Spiritism, the human spirit exists beyond this world or current life. It must prove itself during its physical presence on Earth to evolve spiritually through constant progress. Everything a person does influences this spirit's perfection process, for better or worse (Schultz 2012). The immediate interdependence of spirit and body is thus evident. Unlike in Shamanism, spirits in Spiritism are not divine beings but rather human spirits on an evolutionary path.

### African-Derived Religions

The transatlantic forced resettlement, officially lasting until 1888, brought millions of people from Africa to Brazil. They and their descendants were officially 'Christianized' and baptized Catholic (Matory 2005). However, this did not stop them from secretly continuing their traditional religions and finding various forms of freedom. These individuals came from different parts of Africa and thus followed diverse cultural and religious traditions, including various Yoruba religions and Islam. Mandatory participation in Christian rites could not suppress the desire to continue their traditions in secret. Ultimately, this coexistence, overlap, and interaction led to syncretistic mixtures, cited by scholars of religion as examples of Butinage (Gez et al. 2021). Simplifying somewhat, today we can speak of two major religions of African origin: Umbanda and Candomblé (Siedlak 2023). Although both are described as African-derived, this does not exclude non-African descendants. Particularly, Umbanda has also attracted descendants of European immigrants and with Zélio Fernandino de Moraes, does not even have a purely Afro-Brazilian founding figure, managing to blend elements of Spiritism with African-derived religions (Murguía 2011). Both religions have preserved the legacy of slaves, but as predominantly orally based and maintaining ancient rituals, they are internally very diverse, necessitating a detailed look at the major traditions and their spiritual connections.

#### Umbanda

Die Umbanda wird in ihrer Selbstbeschreibung oft als synkretistische Religion beschrieben, die ihren Ursprung in Rio de Janeiro und anderen Regionen gegen Ende der 1920er Jahre hat und sich rasch ausbreitete (Siedlak 2023). Die Art und Weise, wie Umbanda mit Konflikten umgeht, hat ihr den Ruf von "Hexerei" sowie öffentliche Verfolgung eingebracht - und sie führt immer noch ein Nischendasein, gleichwohl sie vielerorts praktiziert wird (Bahia and Nogueira 2023). In ihrer Genese greift Umbanda auf Spiritismus, Katholizismus und indianische Religionen zurück und vermischt diese mit afrikanischen Elementen (Barros 2004; Droogers 1985). Um ihre Akzeptanz zu fördern, verzichtete sie auf bestimmte afrikanische

Elemente wie Blutopfer und kultivierte neue Formen von Opfergaben. Ihre starke Betonung von Altruismus und Nächstenliebe als Tugenden übernahm sie vom Spiritismus; viele Rituale hingegen stammten aus dem Volkskatholizismus, der zu diesem Zeitpunkt bereits afrikanische und indianische Rituale mit christlichen Festen kombiniert hatte (Siedlak 2023). In ihr herrscht eine grundsätzliche duale Haltung vor, die insbesondere in der Beziehung zum jeweiligen Wesen oder Geist steht. Da die Welt ein Ort des Konflikts und der Konfrontation ist, muss sich der Gläubige darum bemühen, dass seine Beziehung zur Entität richtig ist und ihn im Gegenzug beschützt. Im Gegensatz zum Spiritismus, indem es um eine Weiterentwicklung geht und auch im Gegensatz zu schamanistischen Religionen und deren zyklischen Vorstellungen ist die Umbanda von einem ständigen Wechsel positiver und negativer Geister bestimmt. Dieser Dualismus ist auch in Quimbanda vorzufinden (Giumbelli and Almeida 2021), der aus der Verschmelzung zweier eigenständiger afrikanischer Kultformen entstanden (de Sá Junior 2005).

In den rituellen und körperlich betonenden Trancezuständen der Umbanda offenbaren sich die Geister verstorbener Persönlichkeiten, darunter Caboclos und Pretos Velhos. Sie geben Ratschläge und heilen. Wie im Spiritualismus gibt es auch bei den Umbanda gelegentlich eine Kommunikation mit den Verstorbenen, um die Suchenden zu trösten. Menschen, die von Geistern besessen werden, ermöglichen es zudem, mit Verstorbenen in Kontakt zu treten und Leiden durch Wohltaten zu lindern. Körper und Geist können hier somit auch postum eine Symbiose eingehen und Interdependenzen erzeugen. In dem Zentrum der Verehrung stehen jedoch die Orixá. Sie gelten als Geister entfernter Vorfahren, die bei den Zeremonien herabsteigen. Zu diesem Zweck bedienen sie sich eines Teilnehmers, in dessen Körper sie sich manifestieren. Neben den vielen Ritualen mit obligatorischer Musik und Tanz gibt es auch eine besondere Form von Opfergaben. Speisen, Getränke, aber auch Schmuck werden abends an Straßenkreuzungen abgelegt. Sie gehören zur Pflege der Beziehung zum jeweiligen Schutzgeist und der Inhalt der Opfergabe richtet sich nach dessen Vorlieben.

## Candomblé

Candomblé, in contrast to Umbanda, is more closely connected to original African traditions (Goldman 1990, 2007; Hayes 2008). It is a religious practice often involving extensive initiation rituals and significant costs. Unlike Umbanda and Quimbanda, the Orixás in Candomblé are deities, not spirits (Prandi 2001), originating from ancient ancestors or nature gods. While many Orixás from Africa are known, only about twenty are actively incorporated in Brazilian Candomblé. Despite its strict rules, its followers perceive Candomblé as a religion of joy. Many costly obligations involve offerings, which are consumed communally for pleasure and social purposes (Gonçalves 1999; Léo Neto et al. 2009). Candomblé does not impose commandments on its followers. However, it believes that every person belongs to an Orixá, whether they know it or not. A spiritual leader's task — also the owner of the Terreiro — is to reveal this affiliation. Once a person's god is known, their daily interactions align with what pleases their respective Orixá, including relationships



with people associated with conflicting Orixás. Conflicts and affections between gods directly affect human relations, giving the metaphysical dimension a significant social impact.

Candomblé services mainly offer spiritual revelations through shell-throwing rituals, directly impacting individuals' lives by revealing their god's will. The services, unlike many Brazilian religions, are not open to the public and involve celebrations, communal eating, and mandatory animal sacrifices (van de Port 2011). They form the spiritual home for those dedicated to a specific Orixá and belonging to that Terreiro's family. Services offered to visitors can also be intended for others. Whether services include invoking "dark spirits" for both good and evil, as in Quimbanda, remains controversial (van de Port 2011), sometimes referred to as "black magic" (Bahia and Nogueira 2023).

Analyzing Candomblé in the context of body and spirit in Brazilian religion is crucial due to its unique integration of physical expression and spiritual experience, distinct from Umbanda and Shamanism. Candomblé integrates corporeality into its rituals and practices, such as dance, music, and possession states, allowing practitioners to connect deeply with the Orixás. These practices make the body a conduit for spiritual experiences and insights, highlighting the inseparable link between body and spirit in Brazilian religious practice. Candomblé thus demonstrates how physical expressions and ritual practices are central to Brazilian religiosity to achieve spiritual states and interpret social conflicts.

## Spirits and Pentecostalism in Brazil

The growing diversity of Christian communities in Brazil, ranging from small local churches to international megachurches, emphasizes the role of the Spirit in various ways. The Spirit and spirits play a central role in these churches, symbolizing their transcendent and metaphysical nature. Besides Pentecostal churches, this includes charismatic Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, post-denominational or x-communities, and individuals who derive their identity from the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet, these groups significantly differ in their understanding of the Spirit's essence, actions, and certainty of its presence. These churches, if at all, see themselves as only minimally related. Paul Freston has used the term 'Pentecostal movement' as a collective term for evangelical churches in Brazil (Freston 2005), indicating that these categories are influenced by academic implications and don't necessarily correlate with international categories or represent the self-designation of the people concerned. Since the last decades, the term 'Evangélico' has increasingly been used, also acquiring a political connotation (Trevisan 2013, Prandi and dos Santos 2017). Given their internal diversity and loose connections, it is initially sensible to view the Pentecostal movement as a movement rather than a single church or denomination. In the established historiography of the Pentecostal movement in Brazil, scholars often divide its expansion into three waves (Freston 1995, de Oliveira Sousa 2015, Mariano 2011). I now aim to determine the place of the Holy Spirit and other



spirits along the religious studies categorization of the Brazilian Pentecostal movement and integrate it into the overall context of this article.

### **First Protestant Parishes in Brazil**

The widespread Pentecostal movement in Brazil is often linked to its origins in the USA. John Wesley and his Methodist Church emphasized the need for Christians to lead sanctified, God-filled lives post-conversion. Similar sentiments were echoed by Menno Simons and other eighteenth and nineteenth-century preachers. In this context, the believer's liberation from sin through sanctification was seen as a second act of grace. The Holiness movement, emerging from the Methodist Church, introduced a third grace act: the baptism of fire, adopted by Benjamin Hardin Irwin and John William Fletcher. This led to the formation of a highly inspired congregation in Topeka, Kansas, and later at 312 Azuza Street in Los Angeles considered the early church of the Pentecostal movement. The pioneers of the first two Pentecostal churches in Brazil emerged from this US movement.

However, this global perspective can be misleading at the local level for studying Pentecostalism in Brazil. Academic narratives often suggest Brazilian Pentecostalism as a US export without fundamental scrutiny. Despite acknowledging the movement's doctrinal and spiritual diversity, it is categorized into different phases, with elements like the Prosperity Gospel or Spiritual Warfare as core to Neo-Pentecostalism. These categorizations often overlook Brazil's unique spirituality in favor of an international narrative. The emergence of new Baptist congregations and non-denominational churches in Brazil, adopting Pentecostal practices but defying usual categories, calls for deconstructing established categories from the 1990s and focusing on the common reference to the Spirit as a religious studies concept.

The emphasis on the Spirit is evident in the founding of Brazil's first Pentecostal churches, undergoing significant transformations not solely due to North American missionary influence. For instance, the *Congregação Cristã do Brasil*, a radically communal church without formal offices, was founded by Francescon, an Italian-born Roman Catholic who converted to Presbyterianism, then to the Holiness Church, and finally to Pentecostalism. After a revelation, he preached across the USA, Argentina, and Brazil, leading to the church's founding. The second Pentecostal church in Brazil, *Assembleia de Deus*, originated from a split in a Baptist congregation following a divine revelation. These early churches distanced themselves from politics and lacked professional pastors or theological training facilities. Their theology remained connected to their Protestant roots, differing in biblical interpretation, strict moral lifestyles, and pneumatology, particularly emphasizing Spirit baptism and glossolalia.

Past research often misunderstood these groups, associating charismatic experiences with lower social classes forming homogeneous social movements. However, recent studies show a diverse audience for Pentecostalism in Brazil, including prominent public figures.

## The Extension of Spiritual Gifts

Although the movements require more nuanced consideration, connections to the Azusa Street Movement cannot be ignored. These connections still influence perspectives on the second wave of the Pentecostal movement. Scholars note that in 1923, Aimee Semple McPherson founded the Church of the Four-Square Gospel in Los Angeles (Martínez 2011) and established a new movement, that was introduced in Brazil by the American missionary Harold Williams (Passos 2014). The ‘four squares’ referred to in the name symbolize the cross for redemption, the dove for the Holy Spirit, the chalice for divine healing, and the crown for the second coming of Jesus Christ. This church spread in Brazil due to dedicated individuals and marked the beginning of the second wave. A key characteristic of the Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular is its focus on divine healing as a central message (Lopes 2014). Theological differences include shifting focus from sin and hell to the good news of physical and psychological salvation in response to believers’ prayers and allowing women to take on more authoritative roles in the church. The US ‘mother church’ guided the Brazilian church until the 1980s, leading to tensions and eventual splits. The first church schism occurred in 1955, giving rise to the first indigenous Brazilian Pentecostal churches not directly emerging from international missions, such as O Brasil para Cristo (1955), Deus é Amor (1962), and Casa da Bênção (1964) (de Moura Paegle 2019). Significantly, the founder of O Brasil para Cristo claimed a direct divine revelation as the initial impetus, where he had a spiritual vision of Jesus Christ instructing him to start a movement of spiritual revival, evangelization, and divine healing in Brazil. Even the movement’s name, O Brasil para Cristo (Brazil for Christ), was revealed to him at this time (de Oliveira 2021). These splits indicate that this wave was not as homogeneous as one might assume. Particularly from the 1950s to the 1970s, there was a detachment from the American mother church, suggesting the uniqueness of the Brazilian spirit conception. In the Deus é Amor church, features typical of the subsequent Pentecostal wave first appeared, such as uniformed staff, exorcism as a central part of preaching the Gospel, including dialogues with demons, following the New Testament, like the Gospel of Mark (Mariano 1999). In churches belonging to these first two waves of the Pentecostal movement, baptism with the Spirit is a central experience, often seen as a sign of conversion and an invitation to a sanctified life. Additionally, visible miracles are sometimes interpreted as the work of the Spirit or signs of Jesus’ power (Mafra 2001, 2002, Monteiro 2010).

## The Neopentecostals and the Spirit of Materialism

Towards the end of the 1970s, a new form of religious practice emerged within the Pentecostal movement, often referred to in literature as the Neo-Pentecostal movement or Neo-Pentecostal churches (Mariano 1999). This form differs significantly from its predecessors, particularly in the relationship between humans and spirits. During its inception, Brazil was undergoing an authoritarian modernization and urbanization process under military dictatorship, leading to over a third of the population migrating from rural areas to cities, often settling in precarious outskirts

(Mafra 2001). Additionally, a new wave of missionaries from the USA arrived in Brazil, spreading the Prosperity Theology (Oosterbaan 2017), which centralizes material wealth as its key message. This theology does not bind its followers to traditions and community as much as its predecessors, with current research perspectives suggesting that worldly success becomes a measure of faith. Failures and defeats are interpreted within this theology as part of a spiritual war between good and evil. The message of Prosperity Theology essentially focuses on this conflict, emphasizing spirit manifestation and giving greater emphasis to exorcism (Chesnut 2003; Oosterbaan 2017). Within Neopentecostalism, countless further splinterings led to a vast number of communities in Brazil, with demons becoming increasingly personalized. Moreover, sacred spaces are reevaluated in ways not seen in other global Pentecostal movements, as God is generally understood as omnipresent, and His Holy Spirit dwelling within believers. In Brazilian Neopentecostalism, space is considered from the relative arrangement of furniture in the temple to the conceptualization of spatial order and its volumetric distribution. Spoken or written words in these spaces are believed to have the power to change the world, invoke divine aid, ward off the devil, and harness the invisible forces governing life and the universe for personal needs and problems (Abumanssur 2004). Many pastors of Neopentecostal churches in Brazil and Brazilian missionaries abroad were formerly members of African-origin religions, and thus many demons are addressed by the name of a spirit or deity from these religions during exorcism rituals (Chesnut 2003). Parallels between African-derived religions and Neopentecostal churches become strikingly apparent in the juxtaposition of concepts of spirit, body, and space. Similar to Candomblé, the equivalent duality dictates the worldview of those predominantly following the sermons of Neopentecostal organizations. The two poles are the power of Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit, and on the other hand, the power of the devil and his demons (Carneiro 2021; Mariano 2003). In Brazil, where the blending of religious elements is a particularly visible part of many people's lives (da Silva 2016), it's unsurprising to scholars of religion that a religion with Christian origins would adopt extensive syncretic characteristics.

## Life Governed by Spirits

At the start of this article, I pointed out the asymmetry in research perspectives between religious studies literature on the body and research approaches and subsequently discussed the many similarities and differences in references to spirit and body in Brazilian religions. The common conception of an all-encompassing diversity of life dimensions, considering both body and spirit as a unified entity, provides a suitable foundation for religious studies to design a research program. This program would examine whether the contents of one logic can be translated into the language of another. For this translation to occur, future research must further define and determine how Brazilian religions fit into a continuum of pluralistic logic worlds, distinct from Western European and North American scholasticism. The concept of a parallel spirit in Brazilian religions is a primary basis for such a program. Besides the communicative globalization of our social world horizon, a

completely new situation has arisen for the diversity of religions. Therefore, in the context of Brazil, it would be advisable to speak not of plural theologies or religions but rather of “Spiritologies” to better focus on the holistic dimensions of spirits, including those without religious affiliation. As Brazilians increasingly tend not to bind themselves to a specific religious institution but to move from one to another, many elements migrate between religions, a phenomenon Gez et al. (2021) call “Butinage” and Da Silva (2022) refer to as religious multi-affiliation being common in Brazil. Due to generally low religious education, these spiritually wandering individuals easily craft their religiosity by projecting completely different elements of one religion as perfect functional equivalents into another (Benedito 2006). In this context, the need for a new perspective in religious studies becomes evident. Instead of viewing religions through traditional theological or institutional lenses, focusing on “Spiritologies” could offer a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. This would allow a better understanding of the diversity and complexity of spiritual experiences in Brazil, especially regarding the dynamic interaction between body and spirit. Moreover, such an approach could help transcend the limitations of Western European and North American perspectives by focusing more on the diverse logics and worldviews present in Brazilian religions. In this way, we can develop a deeper understanding of how religious ideas and practices function in different cultural contexts.

In summary, analyzing the Brazilian religious landscape offers a unique opportunity to expand our understanding of religion as a dynamic, multi-layered, and continuously evolving phenomenon. By recognizing the diversity of spiritual expressions and practices and the fluid boundaries between different belief systems, religious studies can explore new ways to understand and interpret the complex nature of religious experiences in the modern world.

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