

## SPIRITUALISM, AFRICAN DEITIES, AND SACRED PLANTS

*Brazilian Religiosity and Multifaceted Syncretism*

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The book aims to explore how religious syncretism and multifaceted Brazilian spirituality represent an attempt at unifying Brazil's heterogeneous population and cultures and, at the same, a global trend in modernity and post-modernity. Because of historical processes and contemporary dynamics (New Age, globalization), Brazil is an essentially syncretistic nation.

Historically, Afro-Catholicism syncretism has been a way for African diaspora's conquered cultures to preserve their religious identity by incorporating elements of the dominant religion; nowadays the Afro religious universe has become a universal religious proposal, irrespective of nation, ethnicity, race, or color.

Intertwined with Kardecism, a late comer in Brazil, Afro religious beliefs and practices have led to the emergence of new religious expressions as the Umbanda. Originated in France, Kardecist spiritualism has become fundamental in shaping Brazilian religious culture. More recent expressions of Brazilian religious syncretism are the "ayahuasca" religions (Santo Daime, Barquinha, União do Vegetal), whose spiritual experiences blend demands coming from various segments of social groups -from rural workers to intellectuals and artists – and indigenous rituals. In the last forty years, New Age spirituality, "ayahuasca" religions and neo-shamanism have developed along blurred borders, expanding outside Brazil, while the indigenous traditions have reemerged through processes of ethnic revitalization.

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