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Spirit Possession in Brazil

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Background information about Brazil (data from the national census 2010):

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

But app. 15-20% of Brazilians practise regularly Umbanda or one of the other Afro-Brazilian religions (according to Andrew Chesnut 2003).

Most important Afro-Brazilian religions are Umbanda and Candomblé.

Candomblé:

- based largely on the West African Yoruba tradition
- under the umbrella term exist a range of local traditions, connected to ethnic or pseudo-ethnic categories such as jeje, ketu, or fon
- core belief: veneration of *orixás* (= deities of African origin)
- *orixás* can take possession of a human body during ceremonies

Umbanda:

- developed in urban Brazil in the 1920s/30s
- though the *orixás* are also central in Umbanda, the majority of Umbanda rituals are designated for the encounter with other spiritual entities called guides (*guías*) that can take possession of human bodies
- among the pantheon of spiritual guides are for instance caboclos (indigenous spirits), pretos velhos (spirits of old black slaves), boiadeiros (cowboys), ciganos (gypsies), marinheiros (sailers), exús (male trickster entities, regarded as messengers between humans and the *orixás*) and pomba giras (female)

Spiritism:

- Based largely on teachings of French spiritist Allan Kardec (1804-1869)
- Core belief in the existence of spirits and the ability to communicate with them via mediumship (feeling, seeing, hearing the presence of spirits or delivering messages by automatic writing)
- Most important Brazilian medium was Chico Xavier (1910-2002)