

Anthony d'Andrea. *Reflexive Religion: The New Age in Brazil and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. vii + 175 pp. ISBN: 978-90-04-37819-3. €119.00 / \$143.00

The most recent volume in Brill's *Religion in the Americas* series continues to mark out a space for presenting the latest research in the study of Latin American religions. The series takes the pluralization of the Americas seriously, expanding far beyond the USA. This volume continues that important concern, providing a thorough account of New Age religion in Brazil. It is a useful companion to *New Age in Latin America* from the same series, as it focuses solely on Brazil and also includes gestures towards the globalization of New Age at sites like Machu Picchu and Goa.

Speaking to the literature and theoretical traditions of the sociology of religion, Anthony d'Andrea constructs his account of New Age in Brazil around Anthony Giddens's concept of reflexivity. A fundamental component of modern societies, reflexivity refers to the routine incorporation and subsequent reconstitution of new information. Combined with the concept of invisible religion from Thomas Luckmann, and Robert Bellah's concern for increasing individualization, d'Andrea addresses the well-known and much discussed sociological theory of secularization. His argument revolves around the assertion that the core of New Age is the perfectible self through which reflexive religious individualism accrues meaning (21).

*Reflexive Religion* is an account of Latin American syncretism, with worthwhile content concerning globalization, nomadism, and tourism. There is an astute linking of New Age beliefs to Silicon Valley-style techno-utopianism. Standout chapters on psychology and popular New Age author Paulo Coelho are worth reading. There's an interesting discussion on New Age music and soundscapes which touches on a prevalent dimension of spiritual practice that rarely makes it into academic accounts. Perhaps New Age music is seen as too ephemeral by many scholars to be noteworthy, and even here it adds little to d'Andrea's core argument and is more of an aside in the introductory chapter. Generally

speaking, while the content of *Reflexive Religion* is thorough and well-researched, it does not connect in a consistent way with the core argument about reflexive religious individualism.

D'Andrea's book is clearly based on a deep and long-term association with New Age currents in Brazil and in other areas of the world. With material on Spiritism beyond Kardecism, little-studied groups such as Projectiology, and Brazilian parascience research, it makes a contribution to the growing English-language literature on New Age in Latin America. Theoretically, the orientation around the concept of the self is not new and reproduces the work of Paul Heelas without pushing the analysis any further. The conclusion that New Age appeals to middle-class secularized people who want to view themselves as "modern", "global" individuals who do not like boring old religion anymore is also commonplace in the field at this point. It adds no further clarification to the question of what the New Age "is", and does little to evaluate whether this is really the most interesting question in the field.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework is seriously lacking, undermining the value of the content. The use of terminology is consistently problematic. D'Andrea says he understands that "New Agers" do not identify as New Agers, then he says it is a heuristic and carries on using the term. If a heuristic is rejected by those it refers to, it deserves more than a sentence of acknowledgement. Ideally it should prompt a thorough re-examination of the terminology used by academics. There are further terminological lapses that accumulate gratingly on the reader. Santo Daime is called a "cult". Scientology is included in New Age. New Age is labelled as mysticism. People who engage in New Age are called "spiritualists". The effect of these lapses is to give the impression that the author is unfamiliar with the wider landscape of the study of new religious movements and spirituality.

D'Andrea also coins the neologism "new agerization" which refers to the appropriative dimension of New Age. Definitions like this are used in a consistently problematic way. Another glaring example is that d'Andrea asserts

there is an objective difference between religion and spirituality but does not substantiate this contentious claim. He also sketches a general theory of New Age based on the particular Brazilian case (20–22). While he claims this theory covers the New Age in general, no evidence beyond Brazil is presented to substantiate this claim. This conveys the idea that New Age is an easily identifiable thing to which certain practices can be unproblematically assigned. For example, assigning Scientology to New Age seems to be based on the fact that it fits his general theory and not on the extensive scholarship on Scientology undertaken for the last thirty years. Additionally, the style of the text suffers from poor editing, with numerous typographical errors. This undermines the complex use of language that often renders substantial theoretical terms unwieldy and overwhelming.

This book will be of use to those who work in the field of New Age studies and want to familiarize themselves with the content of Brazilian practices. It is likely to be more appealing to sociologists of religion than those in religious studies, simply because of the theoretical standpoints and use of literature.

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