

Constructing hope. The role of secular saints in Mexico

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Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the search for positive aspects in religious diversity and to link the impact of religion and faith with urban contexts.

To this aim, the paper will shed light on the veneration of popular figures as one possible facet of religious diversity, as this particular religious practice oscillates between being exerted as a religion itself and being practised as a peculiarity of the Catholic faith. The geographical focus is on Mexico, a multilayered society and transitory zone for migrants between the poorer Central American countries and the United States, as well as an expelling area for undocumented Mexican migrants who head North in search of a better life and wages paid in dollars.

The examples drawn upon are Holy Death and Jesús Malverde, both saints that are not formally accepted by the Catholic Church. It will be outlined how these saints developed, the purposes for which they are worshipped, who the followers are, and what consequences adherence to them implies for both the followers and their social environment. As they have to be seen in their specific context, this presentation will be embedded in the framework of general observations regarding the religious field in Mexico and a brief overview of some of the currently most predominant social and political phenomena.

Full paper available upon request.