

Article

The Brazilian Hymnological Melting Pot: Investigating Ethnoracial Discourses in the Compilation of the Lutheran Hymnal *Livro de Canto* (2017)

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Abstract: In 1926, a New York Times article described the cultural and ethnic flows in south Brazil as a “Melting Pot”. The report predicted that German Brazilians, tied to their ethnoracial origin, would soon be *Brazilianized*. The study of congregational song practices offers insight into the relationship between migration, race, culture, and ethnicity. Moreover, investigating Brazilian Lutheran singing practices helps us understand how the New York Times’ prediction unfolded on the ground. This paper examines the Brazilian Lutheran hymnal *Livro de Canto*, published in 2017, and displays how Brazil’s ethnoracial diversity is manifested and negotiated in the Lutheran context, both musically and theologically. By interviewing members of the hymnal committee and investigating how they dealt with Brazil’s ethnoraciality in the context of the hymnal compilation, this paper demonstrates ways denominations and churchgoers negotiate theological, cultural, musical, and ethnoracial identities through congregational singing. More importantly, it showcases how Brazilian Lutheran church music practices inform broader social conversations around racism, nationalism, Blackness, and Brazilianness.

Keywords: sacred music; hymnology; ethnoraciality; race in music; church music publishing; Lutheranism; worship; Brazilianness



Citation: Berwig Silva, Fernando. 2024. The Brazilian Hymnological Melting Pot: Investigating Ethnoracial Discourses in the Compilation of the Lutheran Hymnal *Livro de Canto* (2017). *Religions* 15: 620. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050620>

Academic Editors: Danielle Boaz and Gustavo Melo Cerqueira

Received: 31 March 2024

Revised: 11 May 2024

Accepted: 15 May 2024

Published: 17 May 2024



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1. Introduction

In 1926, a New York Times article described the cultural and ethnic flows in South Brazil as a melting pot. The report predicted that “Brazilians of German descent, proud of their racial origin” would soon be *Brazilianized*: “In due time they will be so intermarried with the native Brazilians that [...] they [would] have no racial ties with European groups, but kinship with many” (Armstrong 1926, p. 20). The study of congregational song practices offers insight into the relationship between migration, race, culture, and ethnicity. Investigating Brazilian Lutheran singing practices—a tradition built by German descendants—helps us understand how the New York Times’ prediction unfolded on the ground. This article examines the Brazilian Lutheran hymnal *Livro de Canto* (LdC), published in 2017, and displays how Brazil’s ethnoracial diversity is manifested in the Lutheran context, both musically and theologically. By interviewing members of the hymnal committee and investigating how they approached Brazil’s ethnoraciality, this paper demonstrates ways denominations and Brazilians negotiate religious, cultural, musical, and ethnoracial identities through congregational singing. More importantly, it showcases how Brazilian Lutheran church music practices inform broader social conversations around racism, nationalism, Blackness, and Brazilianness.

Marcell Silva Steuernagel, a member of the LdC committee, explains that hymnological analyses of a specific tradition “help paint a portrait of the life of the Church in a given time and place” (Silva Steuernagel 2016, p. 182). Werner Ewald, another committee member, argues that “German Brazilian musical practice provides [...] unique insights into the cultural, religious and social order of this societal group, past and present”

(Ewald 2004, p. 15). Diving into the process of LdC's publication gives us clues about what it means to be a Brazilian Lutheran today. This article investigates some of the forces guiding the collection-building processes that the LdC hymnal committee underwent in trying to represent Lutheran notions of ethnoracial diversity (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 1). Inspired by Katie Graber's and Anneli Loepp Thiessen's critical analysis of the Mennonite hymnal *Voices Together*, this article fosters conversations around the Brazilian and Latine ethnoracial landscape while acknowledging the region's cultural and social diversity.¹ Through this study, I reaffirm the importance of diversity for Christian communities and theologies in Latin America. Furthermore, I join a broader ecology of Christian congregational song scholars, who, attached to the continuous work of LdC committee members, Brazilian Lutheran musicians, and local practitioners, contribute to the ongoing transformation of congregational Christian music into a diverse, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary field of study (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 2).

This article is organized into four sections. First, I provide North American readers with context around Brazil's unique and multilayered ethnoracial reality. I also explain my preference for the term "ethnoracial". The second section accounts for the rise of the Brazilian Lutheran denomination that produced the LdC, *Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil* (IECLB), focusing on its historical ethnoracial entanglements. The third section explores how the IECLB interacted with broader Christian theological and societal frameworks that put ethnoracial discourses at the forefront of its hymnological and liturgical goals. The fourth section focuses on interviews with the committee members, exploring how they interacted with ethnoracial issues through musical, theological, and aesthetic ideas. By utilizing a multi-modal and interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion, this essay provides glimpses into the complex Brazilian religious world. Moreover, my article invites religion and ethnomusicology scholars to further engage in the Brazilian hymnological and ethnoracial melting pot. Ultimately, I provide Christian congregational music studies with an introduction to an alternative epistemological, cosmological, and sonic world, hoping it will sponsor more comprehensive, cross-cultural, transnational, and interdisciplinary investigations around the potential roles of race, ethnicity, and nationalism in religious music-making in Brazil.

Through 30-min semi-structured interviews with members of the hymnal committee responsible for the compilation, edition, and publication of the LdC, I demonstrate how Brazil's ethnoracial reality played a role in the committee's theological, musical, and cultural conversations. Moreover, Brazil's multicultural and diverse ethnoracial identity was at the forefront of the committee's discussions. More than the publication of an updated hymnal, interviews show that the LdC's committee members' concern was understanding what it means to be a Brazilian Lutheran in Brazil's cultural, musical, and ethnoracial melting pot.

My interest in the audible, theological, and cultural arrangements of Brazilian Lutheranism arises from experience: I am a southern Brazilian Lutheran scholar living in the United States. Not only was I one of the score editors of the LdC, but its publication was a welcomed resource in my role as a worship director in a diverse Lutheran congregation in Brazil. The LdC and the discussions around its use instigated a critical reflection on my position as a white Brazilian. This article, therefore, aims to connect this personal experience to a larger body of Christian congregational music, religious appropriation, and cultural studies scholarship that historically disregarded the Latin American multilayered experiences of migration, coloniality, race, and ethnicity. Furthermore, it invites other Brazilian church musicians to rethink the role of music in perpetuating racist tropes and structures present in our hymnological resources and worship practices.

2. Brazil, a So-Called "(Ethno)Racial Oasis"

Investigating Brazil's intersection of race, ethnicity, and religious music requires readers to engage in the country's ethnoracial debates with context. Essentialist views of Brazil have historically portrayed the country as an oasis of racial tolerance (Silva Steuernagel 2024a, p. 150). Depictions of Brazil as a racially hospitable place fail to

acknowledge the resounding reverberations of Brazil's colonial history (Silva Steuernagel 2024a, p. 151). Silva Steuernagel reveals that ambivalent perceptions of Brazil as both a non-racial place and a cultural melting pot circulate among scholars and Brazilians today. In his work, Silva Steuernagel exposes quite clearly the uniqueness of the southern Brazilian Lutheran perspective—churchgoers of that tradition “portray a Brazil that is, if not non-racial, at least multi-racial in ways hospitable to [different ethnoracial identities], even in the context of a denomination significantly shaped by German immigrant ethnicity” (Silva Steuernagel 2024a, p. 164).

Protestant missionaries have historically engaged in—and sponsored—similar perspectives that portray Brazil as a racial paradise. José Carlos Barbosa notes that even though Brazil's society was “deeply rooted in racial difference”, European and North American missionaries in the early nineteenth century looked at the Brazilian and United States slavery systems differently. For them, Brazil's melting pot had, arguably, not sponsored “color prejudices because contact between races had, from the beginning of colonization, produced a mixed population [...]”. Thomas D. Smith, a Scottish missionary, “spoke of Brazil as ‘the paradise of miscegenation, and the fruit is a woeful deterioration, physically, mentally, and morally’” (Barbosa 2008, p. 81).

Although both Brazil and the United States were central actors in the slave trade, conversations around ethnicity, race, and nationalism evolved differently in each country.² Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson remind us that Brazil held the largest concentration of enslaved populations and the most diverse economic usage of it (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 75). When the first batch of German immigrants arrived on Brazilian shores in the early 1800s, the country had a population of around a million enslaved Africans. Similar to other Latin American and Caribbean realities, Brazil's cultural, ethnic, and racial context sponsored miscegenated and *mestizo* identities that do not adequately align with contemporary North American notions of race (Millán and Rosen Velásquez 2011, p. 275).

Philosophers of race have continuously shown the entanglement between notions of ethnicity, nationalism, race, and identity in Latin America (Gracia 2011; Millán and Rosen Velásquez 2011; Alcoff 2006; Corlett 2018). More importantly, they have continuously argued for alternative conceptual frameworks that better translate Latin American multilayered social ontologies. On the one hand, as Edward Eric Telles emphasizes, North American constructs of race worked as “a social cleave throughout the history of the Americas”, disregarding the mishmashes of nationalistic, ethnic, and racial discourses (Telles 2014, p. 24; Gracia 2011, pp. 7–8). On the other hand, many of these Latin American nationalistic projects, like *mestizaje*, portrayed Latin America as a racial oasis based on white supremacist notions of miscegenation. The result was often the suppression of cultural expressions connected to African heritage despite the existence of large black populations throughout Latin America (Adams 2007, pp. 214–15).³ Subordinating issues of racial difference to nationalizing political agendas—and its colonial overtones—leads to a distorted understanding of Latin America's hybrid and racialized context (Adams 2007, p. 245).⁴

In light of that, I argue that “ethnoraciality” is a term that better attends to the fluidity and ambiguity of the constructs “ethnicity” and “race” within scholarly and popular narrations of the Brazilian ethnic and racial melting pot (Telles 2014, p. 21; Silva Steuernagel 2024a, p. 151). Furthermore, I utilize this terminology, contending that it better encompasses the experience of Brazilian Lutherans, especially in the south of Brazil, where German ethnicities are constantly racialized.⁵ I subscribe to Alcoff's ethnoracial approach to investigating Latino/a identities, agreeing that “it enlarges the way we understand identification-by-others, and it brings into play the authority of various personal and impersonal structural sources of identification [...]” (Millán and Rosen Velásquez 2011, p. 292). Ultimately, I believe that “Ethnoraciality”, in its conceptual framework, provides glimpses of how contemporary Lutheran church communities utilize their German ancestry both in troubling and liberating ways.

Additionally, this article's terminology seeks to demystify historical accounts that erased the contribution of black enslaved populations in the context of the Brazilian south,

where the Lutheran church initially settled at the beginning of the nineteenth century. While popular discourses in Brazil tend to emphasize the contributions and presence of European free laborers and immigrants, Klein and Vinson account that, in most of the southern Brazilian towns of the late 18th and early 19th century, enslaved peoples “formed the largest single element in the workforce”. These enslaved populations “were also crucial in supplying the labor for the large internal transport network that brought southern goods into the *Mineiro* centers” (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 70). Although the Brazilian northeast coast was the center of African diasporic culture in Brazil—and likely in the continent—the south was never free of the African diasporic heritage.⁶

By placing Lutheran Brazilian ritual practices within a broader ecology of “social activities” that simultaneously reproduce and manipulate contextual grounds (Bell 2009, p. 9), this paper emphasizes how the relationship between embodied rituals, ritual environments, and textualities generates, maintains, manipulates, and rearranges existing cultural, ethnoracial, and power schemes. Through the investigation of the localized Lutheran tradition in Brazil, I seek not to homogenize Brazilian ethnoracial experiences in church music nor compare it to the North American racialized context. Instead, this essay emphasizes Brazil’s complex ethnoracial reality and points to the significance of church music practices in embodying and negotiating religious, cultural, and ethnoracial discourses.

3. Protestantism and the *Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil* (IECLB) in the Brazilian Ethnoracial Melting-Pot

Understanding the rise of the Brazilian Lutheran denomination that published the *LdC*, *Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil* (IECLB), and its ties to Brazilian colonial and slavery politics is fundamental in analyzing the hymnal’s place in contemporary ethnoracial negotiations. Conceding to geopolitical pressures, the Brazilian empire abolished slavery in 1888 and started a long-lasting process of “whitening” its population. Policies and bills were passed to encourage the arrival of European white immigrants to replace working hands and assure a biological, moral, and ethical improvement of the country (Silva Steuernagel 2024a, p. 155).⁷ European populations, regarded as honest and law-abiding, quickly took the Brazilian invitation as a life-changing opportunity. Immigrants arrived in Brazil throughout the 19th century with a promise of land, seeds, animals, and implements.⁸

European immigrants were not the only social demographic undergoing processes of integration and marginalization within Brazilian society at the time; formerly enslaved people were also disputing their role in the country’s new political organization (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 243).⁹ In their first interactions with the Brazilian context, Protestant missionaries who were part of these European migrating groups expressed a “total disinterest in the common humanity of blacks and the conviction that they were merely disposable objects” (Barbosa 2008, p. 117). Moreover, Barbosa showcases that many imprinted the ideas of laziness and uncouth behavior on Brazilian populations as fruits of black heritage (Barbosa 2008, p. 117).

Broadly speaking, from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, European immigrants were given opportunities for social and economic integration over and against the Native and freed Black populations, and their workforce dominated the country’s leading marketplaces such as São Paulo and spread South (Paixão and Silva 2014, p. 177). Black and mixed people, on the other hand, were pushed out of the workforce and constricted to less socially valued roles, spreading North and Northeast where Europeans were less present. (Silva Steuernagel 2024b, p. 155)

Mostly formed by German missionaries and immigrants who arrived in subtropical southern parts of Brazil during the second half of the 19th century, IECLB has been, for most of its history, a Germanic and close-knit religious community defined by its opposition to the Catholic establishment (Silva Steuernagel 2016, p. 195). Beyond ethnoracial disputes, the Brazilian Catholic-dominated environment led German Lutheran communities toward isolated religious and social practices. Politically tied to the Catholic Church, the Portuguese

crown actively and systematically undermined the establishment of Protestantism in the country (Barbosa 2008, p. 1). Religious Protestant practices inherited the same opposing stance that the Portuguese crown, the Brazilian Empire, and early republic governments had toward them.

Freed enslaved populations found Catholic Christianity a more hospitable and solidary faith tradition. Even before the late abolitionist Brazilian movement, Catholic American churches constantly mediated and intervened in master–slave relations. On many occasions, the Church advocated on behalf of the enslaved community, especially on matters related to vital parts of the Catholic faith. Not only did the Church politically force masters to allow enslaved communities to participate in worship, they also ensured enslaved persons had the right to receive sacraments (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 168).¹⁰ Thanks to Catholic political efforts, by the time German migration took place in the south of Brazil, most enslaved communities were Catholic and had their religious holidays, including Sundays, protected.¹¹

In contrast, early Protestant communities in Brazil had little interest in interacting with enslaved communities. The Catholic-dominated religious scenario prompted a different priority: proselytism. Protestants focused on power displays by building institutional infrastructures (temples, cathedrals, schools, and hospitals) and by developing educational and theological frameworks as a way to Christianly educate “an idolatrous and ignorant Brazilian population” (Barbosa 2008, p. xx).¹² Blinded by the search for religious space, Protestant communities developed a “counter-culture” attitude based on work ethics that constantly demeaned enslaved communities for their supposedly “laziness and uncouth behavior” (Barbosa 2008, p. 117). Even though many Protestants shared an anti-slavery theological standpoint and, at the same time, a belligerent ecumenical rhetoric, they were unwilling to tackle the political and societal problems of their time.¹³

Catholics and Protestants within the German diasporic communities shared the same tendency but with slightly more significant ethnoracial reverberations. Luebke states that, for German Catholics of Brazil, it was clear that the church came first and ethnicity second” (Luebke 1987, p. 39). For Lutheran parishes, though, churches “had always been closely identified with the pursuit of ethnocultural ideals” (Luebke 1987, p. 43). Congregations from all over the south of Brazil sponsored ethnoracial chauvinistic attitudes through institutional connections with Prussian churches and later German representatives. Parishes were not places of worship but small and informal consulates that kept the racial, ethnic, and political ties with the homeland (Luebke 1987, p. 43).

Local IECLB churches became safe spaces from the “Brazilianization” described earlier in the New York Times report. There, German-Brazilians could perform their ancestral culture and religion.¹⁴ Music was vital in how these communities performed their Germanness (Silva Steuernagel 2021). The Lutheran hymnal served as a Lutheran identification card that attested to the ecclesial origins of families (Behs 2001, p. 50).¹⁵ Lutheran institutions, especially in isolated and rural areas, played social roles crucial to the community’s life (Luebke 1987, pp. 35–36).¹⁶ Despite the diverse German and Prussian Lutheran ecclesiological backgrounds of many congregants, the Lutheran church in Brazil, throughout the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, materialized the German unification that would only be seen in Europe in 1871.

A German national—and ethnoracial—pride was visible in the religious practices of Brazilian Lutherans throughout the end of the 19th century and, increasingly, in the first decades of the 20th century. Parishes throughout the German diaspora in Brazil celebrated Germany’s unification in 1871 with festive liturgies and gatherings (Behs 2001, p. 72). Preachers would constantly lean on notions of Germanness to articulate a cultural superiority among other Brazilian immigrants and natives (Behs 2001, p. 78), commonly incorporating the saying “*Luthertum ist Deutschtum*”, Lutheranism is Germanness, in sermons (Behs 2001, p. 81). Polity-wise, many Protestant Churches—Lutherans included—not only accepted and expected to be governed by foreign missionaries but also appreciated it

as a way to preserve cultural, ethnic, and theological ties with their imagined “motherland” (Chaves 2022, p. 79).

The World Wars further isolated German-Brazilian communities (Silva Steuernagel 2016, p. 185). The decline of white imperialism and the growth of cultural relativism represented in the Wars provided Latin American thinkers an opportunity to question and negotiate their national identities and international status. Nationalistic political movements bloomed throughout the region.¹⁷ These new nationalistic projects leaned on pro-Afro-Indigenous-American ideologies and were embodied as political opposition to white-lashing imperialistic foreign projects, and they were often supported by local governments (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 275; Chaves 2022, p. 80).

The rise of Nazism and the Brazilian decision to join the Allies in the 1940s further escalated the nationalistic project. The Vargas administration promoted policies and bills that enforced naturalization. The government prohibited the speaking of foreign languages in public gatherings. Although the push-back against transnational imperialistic enterprises, the promotion of essentialized notions of indigeneity, and the search for a national soul marginally helped black and indigenous populations in their integration into modern Brazilian society (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 275), Brazilian-German populations constantly struggled with xenophobic tendencies. The persecution afflicted Lutheran Brazilian congregations in localized ways; churches were policed, ensuring German was not being spoken, pastors were prevented from officially joining the denomination, and institutional ties between the Brazilian and the German Lutheran churches were forcefully cut (Behs 2001, p. 107).

The nationalizing state apparatus of the Vargas government forced Lutherans to profoundly question their “theology of ethnicity” [*Volkstum*], interrupting a well-established flow between theology and Germanness (Behs 2001, p. 107). The hardship that congregations and ecclesial Lutheran leaders underwent throughout the beginning of the 20th century provided the space for the process of *Brazilianization* that the New York Times predicted in its article (Armstrong 1926). When pastor Niemöller, director of the external relations of the Lutheran Church in Germany, visited the Brazilian church to formalize its filiation to the World Council of Churches, a new theological and ethnoracial chapter had started in IECLB: theological, cultural, and ethnoracial diversity became an institutional goal.

4. Toward Inculturation, Acculturation, and Musical Localization in the IECLB Context

4.1. The Influence of Broader Theological and Ecclesiological Frameworks

The 1960s marked a shift in IECLB’s theological and ecclesiological trajectory: U.S. Lutheran missionaries arrived at Brazilian Lutheran churches with a pietist and charismatic agenda that, summed to the ongoing “Brazilianization” political process, sponsored new theological and cultural paradigms.¹⁸ Church-music-wise, and within the Lutheran context, these interactions rarely resulted in practices that utilized “typical folk sonorities of Brazilian music, such as African rhythms or native Indian scales” (Silva Steuernagel 2016, p. 195). Instead, these ecclesial and cultural flows had their theological and liturgical impact realized in the assimilation of Anglo and German hymns and their translation into Portuguese. The language had changed, but the aesthetic remained one of Western descent. As Barbosa notes, Protestant-missionary theologies mirrored North American and European ideologies (Barbosa 2008, p. 30).¹⁹ Silva Steuernagel agrees:

Even in cases when the original stance towards the cultural landscape ‘on the ground’ has been more generous than suspicious, the implicit teleological aims of the missionary effort frequently worked towards some type of replication of the Euro-American model. (Silva Steuernagel 2020, p. 28)

Werner Ewald highlights the role of broader ecclesial networks of the 1960s. Ecu-
menical movements, crystallized both in the liturgical reformations of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and in the theological resolutions of the first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) (1948), created a hymnological vacuum that would be

gradually filled with autochthonous musical practices like Folk Masses (the 1960s) and Praise music repertoire (1970s, 80s, and 90s) (Ewald 2010, p. 183). Church music scholars have documented the effervescence of interdenominational, nationalistic, and ecumenical liturgical and musical projects that started in the 1960s (Hawn 2003a; Silva Steuernagel 2024c; Elias 2021). Most trace the influences of the liturgical innovations of the 1960s, promoted especially in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, to theological frameworks articulated by Latin American liberation theologians (Elias 2021). Cathy Ann Elias underscores that the interaction between liberation theology and the Second Vatican Council—and its subsequent papal encyclicals—“opened up an important space for the oppressed” to sing (Elias 2021).²⁰

Overall, the ecumenical wave of the 1960s developed new theological and ecclesial standards that incorporated and validated a diverse set of worship practices previously condemned within Christian doctrine. Although the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the premise of tradition and Gregorian chant, it marked the promotion of alternative liturgical practices that Catholic parishes around the globe were already engaging in progressively. By fostering liturgical participation as the prominent role of music in worship, the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’s resolutions worked as organizing principles for denominations and theological traditions interested in understanding how to liturgically respond to challenging and diverse cultural, musical, and ethnoracial settings.

4.2. *Hinos do Povo de Deus*, Vol. 1

By the 1980s, IECLB struggled to respond to a younger, less-Germanized Lutheran generation (Silva Steuernagel 2016, pp. 196–97). The committee responsible for the compilation of the *Hinos do Povo de Deus*, vol. 1 (HPD1), an IECLB hymnal released in 1981, engaged in and advocated for multicultural, transnational, nationalistic, and ecumenical theological agendas (Silva Steuernagel 2016, pp. 196–97). Still, the official hymnological resource produced by the committee featured, almost entirely, the same strophic choral sixteenth-century hymnody that had pervaded most of IECLB’s singing history—but now, at least, in Portuguese (Silva Steuernagel 2016, p. 196).²¹

The HPD1 failed to respond to broader Brazilian theological and social contexts of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Moreover, its publication overlooks local practices, parishes’ “Brazilianization” processes, and other ecclesiological connections. Despite its committee’s intention to diversify Lutheran music, the hymnal was an institutional publication that solidified a historical hymnological trajectory with little connection to an emerging Brazilian Lutheran generation engaged in ecumenical liberation theology and charismatic agendas. Beyond the need for new hymnals and songs, HPD1’s gaps sponsored broader denominational conversations about the role of music and liturgy in an increasingly multiethnic, multi-racial, Brazilianized church. Between HPD1’s and LdC’s publications, Brazilian Lutheran churchgoers and musicians dived into a process of reflection that led to many of the theological assumptions and underpinned the LdC’s committee work.²²

4.3. *Inculturation, Acculturation, and Musical Localization*

If one wants to engage in the messiness of the ethnoracial issues of Brazilian Christian worship practices—or more specifically in the Brazilian Lutheran context—one needs to be aware of concepts that brewed significant theological and ideological outcomes. Frank C. Senn notes that “when missionaries bring their faith and practice to a new country, it is first necessary to ‘adapt’ this faith and practice to local forms of cultural expression” (Senn 1997, p. 676). Although Lutheran interviewees from the LdC’s committee utilized terms such as “inculturation”, “acculturation”, and “contextualization” interchangeably, I argue that investigating their conceptual genealogy and meaning might provide significant insights into how the LdC committee members articulated notions of ethnoracial diversity in their work of putting a hymnal together. Additionally, I contend that the term “musical localization”, as defined by Ingalls et al. (2018), helps in understanding how the intentions

of the committee to portray the multi-layered Brazilian ethnoracial gain form through the publication of the LdC.

IECLB's history provides a glimpse into broader Christian congregational music-making realities in the Global South. Throughout colonized Christianity, missionary networks—Catholic or Protestant—had a similar *modus operandi* concerning the introduction of congregational music practices. In most of the colonial circles, Christianity arrived and imposed its practices, sometimes through violent means, and “by way of proselytization, local believers [were] inducted into the missionaries’ ways of worship and music making” (Lim 2019, p. 140). From this encounter, epistemological and cosmological worlds collided, spawning new theological negotiations that pervade Christian communities today. Missionaries’ faiths and practices, rooted in Western assumptions of high culture, could not simply be replicated; they, instead, had to be adapted (Senn 1997, p. 676).²³

Christian Congregational Music scholars have constantly displayed how this “adaptation” is contemporarily realized, both in diasporic and Christian communities in the Global South (Hawn 2003b; Hawn and Abbington 2013; Ingalls et al. 2018; Lim 2019). Furthermore, decolonial scholarship emphatically critiques how this process embodies the colonial epistemological genocidal project, a project that resists the test of time (Whitla 2018, 2020; Silva Steuernagel 2020, 2024b). By providing the reader with an overview of the conceptual framework in which discussions and narrations of this musical, cultural, and theological “adaptation” happened, I hope to provide a more comprehensive insight into the ethnoracial discussions of the IECLB’s context and the LdC’s committee. Not only did ideas of inculturation, contextualization, and adaptation play a role in past hymnological and liturgical negotiations within IECLB, they also reverberate in the LdC committee’s discourses around their choices for the hymnal launched in 2017.

“Inculturation”, specifically, is still a vital theological framework in which Brazilian Lutheran church musicians articulate their cross-cultural and ethnoracial diversity. Jeffers Engelhardt explains that liturgical inculturation is the “adaptation or transformation of Christian liturgical expressions and the gospel message under new or changing cultural conditions” (Engelhardt 2006, p. 1). As a direct result of the Second Vatican Council’s doctrinal articulations, “inculturation” has a special prominence among other theological concepts, especially in liturgical and church music studies (Gerhards 2017, p. 83). Anscar J. Chupungco adds to the definition:

Liturgical inculturation [...] may be defined as the process of inserting the texts and rites of the liturgy into the framework of the local culture. As a result, the texts and rites assimilate the people’s thoughts, language, values, rituals, symbols, and artistic patterns. Liturgical inculturation is basically the assimilation by the liturgy of local cultural patterns. (Chupungco 1992, p. 30)

Differently than “inculturation”, words like “syncretism”, “acculturation”, and “contextualization” come as concepts developed in anthropological theories to answer to the “tensions between a universal belief and local meaning-making” (de Theije and Mariz 2008, p. 51). “Acculturation” was first incorporated into cultural worship studies in the work of Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Shorter 1988). Chupungco summarizes Shorter’s definition of acculturation as the encounter of one culture with another, where communication between the two cultures comes about on the footing of tolerance:

Acculturation, which is a juxtaposition of two cultures, operates according to the dynamic of interaction. [...] However, they do not go beyond external forum or enter into the process of mutual assimilation. They do not affect each other’s inner structure and organism. Acculturation may be described as the conjunction of three leading factors: juxtaposition, which is merely external; the dynamic of interaction; and the absence of mutual assimilation. (Chupungco 1992, p. 27)

On the other hand, “contextualization” in cultural Christian worship scholarship is assumed to be less of a theological concept and more of a political/ecclesiological agenda. Chupungco explains that the WCC introduced the term to broader theological discussions

in 1972, in response and synced with other ecumenical movements, inviting churches to promptly engage in the secular resolution of the “human aspirations of freedom and progress and to give full support to those who struggle justly to achieve” these aspirations (Chupungco 1992, pp. 19–20).

Is “inculturation” even possible as a theological and liturgical enterprise? Albert Gerhards argues that, although inculturation, acculturation, and contextualization were desired outcomes of the ecumenical movements, “it is only in Europe that Christianity can be said to be truly inculturated” (Gerhards 2017, p. 83). More importantly, in light of post-colonial and decolonial scholarship that unveiled the epistemological and ethnoracial violence underlying these processes, is inculturation ethical?

I argue that “musical localization” might be a conceptual framework that better encapsulates the intentionality of the LdC’s committee in their goal towards new, enriching, and liberating worship practices. In *Making Congregational Music Local in Christian Communities Worldwide*, Monique Ingalls, Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg, and Zoe C. Sherinian showcase the term’s potential, as it serves as an “umbrella category to describe [...] processes by which Christian communities worldwide adapt, adopt, create, perform, and share congregational music” (Ingalls et al. 2018, p. 3). More importantly, “musical localization” underscores the role of music in current theological, cultural, and ethnoracial negotiations; the LdC’s publication becomes a symbol of how Lutheran churches position themselves in relation to other denominational histories (Ingalls 2018, p. 112). Ultimately, the IECLB’s context gives us clues as to how Brazilian Lutherans understand and sing their ethnoracialized history.

5. Interviews

5.1. Caveats

Before diving into the interviews and conclusions, some caveats. All interviewees knew me—if not in person, they knew about me because I worked as one of the score editors for the publication. In my role as a worship director at a local IECLB church, I promoted and engaged with the LdC, sometimes highlighting its pluricultural character and advocating for its incorporation into the hymnological life of the congregation. From practice, my assessment is that the hymnal publication questioned and disregarded prominent Germanic tropes of earlier IECLB hymnological publications. Furthermore, I recognize that, in conjunction with the work of its committee, the LdC publication provided vital musical and theological assets to communities interested in connecting their German heritage to broader Brazilian cultural and ethnoracial realities. Despite the implications of the committee’s discourses around ethnoracial identities in the Brazilian Lutheran churches outlined later in the article, I acknowledge the fundamental role these musicians, scholars, and theologians have in steering denominational debates toward more inclusive and diverse music practices.

The committee was coordinated by the Lutheran pastor Cláudio Kupka and former IECLB National Music Coordinator Soraya Eberle. Marcell Silva Steuernagel, Werner Ewald, Cladis Steuernagel, Cleonir G. Zimmerman, Delmar Dickel, and Oziel de Campos Oliveira Júnior completed the committee.²⁴ All, apart from Oliveira Jr., Zimmerman, and Dickel, agreed to be interviewed.²⁵ I conducted all interviews in Portuguese and translated the transcriptions quoted in this article.²⁶

5.2. About the Committee

All interviews remarked that the LdC, published in 2017, is the fruit of long years of work and reflection, not only as a committee but as a denomination. Initially formed in 2010, the committee was formed after a denominational commission that sought to respond to theological and hymnological gaps from previous publications. Eberle accounts that previous denominational hymnals were poorly received and that both the church and the committee understood its publication as a “disservice to the denomination” (Eberle 2023).

After LdC's denominational commission, Kupka and Eberle were entitled to form the rest of the committee and report the team's advancements to the church. Silva Steuernagel explains that although Kupka and Eberle had institutional responsibilities, the committee "had a very horizontal organization" and that collaboration was the hallmark of the process (Silva Steuernagel 2024a). The committee seemed to share a perception that its formation privileged capacity and diversity—Kupka says that "the people that were selected to the committee were the best musicians in the church" (Kupka 2023); Silva Steuernagel says that each was able to bring "its own unique IECLB perspective" (Silva Steuernagel 2024a). Cladis Steuernagel discloses that the initial and most challenging work of the committee was trying to "develop a common language for [...] discussion" that allowed the multiple traditions represented in the committee to "sing together" (Steuernagel 2023). Cladis adds that she understood the committee to be "very diverse. Everyone came from different times, places, and [theological] lineages in the church." Eberle also emphasized the denominational diversity within the committee as illustrative of the denomination. In fact, all interviewees seem to share Eberle's perception; for them, the committee successfully embodied IECLB's theological and musical diversity. Cladis, who entitled herself as the "traditional guardian" of the committee, described her role as a mediator of differences between committee members.

5.3. *An Updated, but Lutheran, Ethnoracially Diverse Hymnal*

Although the committee appeared to be diverse, especially within its Brazilian Lutheran denominational reality, ethnoracially, it was not. All have German ascendancy, and most are from the southern parts of Brazil.²⁷ Interviews highlighted the ambivalence inherent to musical localization in the LdC's making. Not only were committee members trying to "offer a hymnological resource tuned to contemporary times, connected to the notion of a Brazilian twentieth-first century community", but, Ewald remarks, they were also "honoring the hymnological tradition of the Lutheran church [...]" (Ewald 2023). The committee coordinator, Kupka, emphasized that "having the launch of the hymnal during the festivities of the 500th anniversary of Lutheranism meant that this hymnal was a celebration of [Lutheran] heritage:

[Our goal] was to do a hymnal that represented our Lutheran identity in a contemporary context. [...] We tried to go as far as we could in this idea of a songbook that represented our tradition and the Latin American, Brazilian, and ecumenical traditions. [...] We were doing a historical reading of our time." (Kupka 2023)

Despite Cladis Steuernagel's tradition-apologetic stance, Kupka argued against the need for "tradition" to have representation in the committee. He contends that a "traditional [music culture] was so solidly put in the denominational life that we actually did not need someone in the group" (Kupka 2023). Ewald and Kupka's description of LdC's goal also encompassed this privileging place for a Lutheran tradition in the hymnal. While referring to his earlier comment, Ewald clarifies that "respecting tradition" for him means complying with theological and musicological ideas that have pervaded "within and around Lutheranism throughout time" (Ewald 2023). Ewald nuances the argument that tradition would only refer to the creation of the past. Instead, he argues that Luther's theological frame and agendas encouraged the committee to get the hymn texts close to the people's hearts so they could understand what they are singing. More importantly, Kupka emphasizes that the IECLB has become progressively more Brazilian in recent decades. "We managed to do it", he says. "It was a kid's dream. In my time, the church was so [theologically] traditional. [...] I always have, even as a seminary student, pursued the goal of living a Brazilian Lutheranism" (Kupka 2023). Silva Steuernagel emphasizes LdC's theological contribution to the church, as it is "also proposing [new] theologies within the denomination. Much of what the committee has done was re-translate hymns, some *Germanisms* from HPD1 songs, and other linguistic and theological problems" (Silva Steuernagel 2024a).

Although all interviewees articulated tradition through Lutheran theology, Kupka and Cladis Steuernagel located tradition in the aesthetic realm; tradition is a familiar song for them. Cladis, the guardian of tradition, mentions a sub-committee that oversaw the “proper” reharmonization of old hymns. She said that although “youngsters did some beautiful arrangements [to old hymns], [...] they were all ‘rereadings’ of the thing”, and they needed to be tuned to back tradition; they should be guided by what people “were used to hearing” (Steuernagel 2023). For her, “a hymnal makes you committed to something, to a tradition, to a way of making music. [The hymnal] is also a historical resource. People go, people die, but the hymnal lives” (Steuernagel 2023).

During interviews, contemporary worship music, either from Brazilian *gospel* tradition or translations of North American Praise and Worship songs, was rarely mentioned. Although scholars had already noted the prevalence of these genres within the contemporary Brazilian *evangélico* and Lutheran religious environments (Mendonça 2014; Silva Steuernagel 2019; de Paula 2012; Silva et al. 2014), most of the LdC committee only mentions these practices when pointing out their inadequacy, either aesthetically or theologically. Silva Steuernagel, in opposition to his committee colleague and aunt, Cladis Steuernagel, claimed to be “by far, the one with more experience with charismatic movements, with Contemporary worship, with Evangelical Youth movements”, an exception in the committee (Silva Steuernagel 2024a). According to him, his contribution to the hymnal had three main agendas: “first was bringing the Brazilian idiomaticity, then, bringing a more modern, contemporary worship sound, and [third,] combating *simplism*” (Silva Steuernagel 2024a).

The absence of contemporary worship practices and the emphasis on tradition makes me wonder if two of the three agendas Silva Steuernagel claims to have—namely Brazilian idiomaticity and contemporary worship practices—are connected to ethnoracial discourses. Are ideas of Germanness behind the committee’s skepticism toward contemporary worship music? Graber’s and Loepp Thiessen’s article “Publishing Privileges the Published: An Analysis of Gender, Class, and Race in the Hymnological Feedback Loop”, while explicitly addressing a North American Mennonite reality, may provide some insights. They argue that contemporary worship music is usually understood as “a loss of culture (which sounds curiously like a new way to say ‘uncultured’)” (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 17). Graber and Loepp Thiessen warn that colonizing ways of thinking might be behind assumptions that judge contemporary worship music to be aesthetic, culturally, and morally demeaning; “in some criticisms of the global flow of contemporary worship music, we can hear the patronizing implication that people cannot or should not choose their own music” (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 17).

Although the “rhetoric of balance” between tradition and contemporaneity pervaded among committee members, their answers significantly tilted toward traditional practices. The committee’s theologically and ecclesologically diverse background seems not to have translated into a diversity of discourses within the goals of the LdC. More importantly, the inclusion of musics from different Brazilian ethnoracial and cultural traditions was never mentioned as a way to achieve diversity, an explicit goal of the committee. Through articulating their sonic, musicological, and theological ideas of “traditional versus contemporary”, the committee sometimes seems more connected to its denominational past and worried about the survival of its German traditions, musics, and historical practices. Even though these discussions of cultural preservation are not plainly articulated through ethnoracialized discourses, the idea that “*Luthertum ist Deutschum*, Lutheranism is Germanness” seems to underlie the LdC’s compilation (Behs 2001, p. 81).

5.4. Brazilian Lutheran Notions of Cultural Superiority

Eberle argued that “more than an archive, the hymnal should serve all and represent, to some extent, all the different theological lineages present within the denomination” (Eberle 2023). For her, the publication should represent the Lutheran pews throughout Brazil; it should embody the song-traditions of churches from *Vale do Taquari* (in the south

of Brazil) and churches from São Luís do Maranhão (in the northeast of Brazil). Moreover, Eberle argues that the LdC “should look out for those who would sing [the hymnal], those who are within IECLB today [...]” (Eberle 2023). Ewald adds to that, stating that the committee “had a great preoccupation with localizing historically everything that was put into the hymnal. [...] [We] sought to bring more Latino composers, Brazilian composers, and women composers as [we] found these songs”. Ewald summarizes, stating that “[the committee was] searching for a more contemporary language, compatible to a Portuguese [language] of the twentieth-first century” (Ewald 2023).

Eberle’s and Ewald’s concerns with localized practices reveal more than an endeavor for LdC’s contemporary denominational usage. Geographical remarks, such as the one Eberle makes, put ethnoracial ideas of Africanness, Blackness, and Brazilianness in the center of the debate. While the south—which Eberle refers to in her quote as *Vale do Taquari*—is vastly white-dominated, wealthier, and culturally influenced by the European immigrations of the 19th century, the northern and coastal parts of Brazil—earlier exemplified by Eberle as *São Luís, Maranhão*—are commonly understood as the “center of African diasporic culture in Brazil and the Americas” (Díaz 2021, p. 17). As Juan Diego Díaz points out in his essay *Africanness in Action: Essentialism and Musical Imaginations of Africa in Brazil*, the northeast of Brazil “is, without doubt, the result of the culture developed by Africans and their descendants through their trajectory from slavery, abolition, marginalization, and struggle for social inclusion” (Díaz 2021, p. 17).

The challenge of the “South and North divide” was acknowledged by all interviewees. Eberle states that “ethnicity-wise, [the LdC does not] represent what Brazil is”. Although the committee agrees that the LdC successfully represented the Brazilian Lutheran theological and cultural diversity, they are suspicious of its embodiment of Brazil’s broader ethnoracial realities. Brazil’s ethnoracial reality is almost always used as an analogy to the smaller and restricted Lutheran reality. Ewald reveals that the committee “thought and discussed this issue [of the Brazilian multiculturalism]” with the evident assumption that IECLB had never had a single musical scenario (Ewald 2023). Ewald states that “IECLB is spread throughout Brazil, and Brazil is very diverse. Inside Brazilian Lutheranism, too, we are diverse” (Ewald 2023).²⁸

The committee also seemed to work around, and sometimes even engage in, southern Brazilian fabricated notions of what it means to be “Germanic” and make German music— notions usually articulated through imagined Lutheran theological frameworks. Interviews underscored knowledge and music understanding as the key to the aesthetic success of the hymnal.²⁹ Such an idea becomes even more problematic when Eberle states that the LdC committee—comprised mostly of white and southern Brazilians—instead of choosing hymns based on the ethnoracial representation, chose them in terms of aesthetic quality: “We choose only good music” (Eberle 2023).³⁰

We have [in the south] a ‘Cultural Elite’ that still understands our traditional hymns and wants that. It is not going to happen. Our [Lutheran] people do not like it too much. [...] Then a question remains: ‘How much more contextualized can we get?’ Then I think we have a problem because everything [from these contextualizations] is so poor. [...] We do not see any popularization of an interesting, musically speaking, initiative [of contextualized songs]. (Eberle 2023)³¹

Ewald echoes Eberle, describing that “in the southern part of Brazil, because of its access to musical [formal] education, you will see more traditional approaches to music. Not the same will happen in places like Rondônia, in the country’s north and northeast, or more rural communities” (Ewald 2023).³² Cladis Steuernagel proposes an alternative, but also an exclusionary, defining rule for including hymns: “‘Can congregations sing it?’ [The committee] received lots of beautiful and good materials, but most not appropriate to congregational singing.” Ewald also located the idea of congregational singing as a work requirement and connected it to a Lutheran theology of music (Ewald 2023):

The matters were never musically minded only. They were always liturgical and community-oriented. From there, musical decisions were made. [...] The LdC is based on congregational singing, not solo singing. [...] We always respected the theological issue; we tried to check always if songs were inside the Lutheran theological framework. (Ewald 2023)

For the committee, aesthetic and theological ideas appear to be ethnoracially neutral or at least unbiased. From interviews, it is hard to understand if the committee perceives that the aesthetic, musicological, and theological principles championed through and in most of their “traditional” congregational song repertoires reinforce Western, white, colonizing, and imperialistic tropes. Scholars in Christian congregational studies invite us to rethink hymnology; instead of treating it as a set of songs that carry theological messages, practitioners should understand hymnology as a lens through which we perceive the world (Silva Steuernagel 2020; Lim 2019). The committee’s hyper-focus on text and aesthetic normativeness opposes their wish for a more diverse church and music. By sponsoring hymnody as a reflection of “superior classical music”, by denying popular musics the capacity to embody deep and meaningful theological ideas, and by connecting ideas of excellence to a particular way of making music, the committee leaves the Brazilian complex ethnoracial context out of its consideration (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 16; Silva Steuernagel 2020, p. 32). Furthermore, their connections between Lutheranism, Germanness, and music elevate the “white European men [and composers] as the ‘great masters’” of Lutheran music in Brazil (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 17).

Committee members emphasized the pragmatic nature of a hymnal committee. Silva Steuernagel states that “any project that comes from an institution will work for this institution to work” (Silva Steuernagel 2024a). Kupka anticipated some of the critiques and acknowledged that the resulting work of the committee, concerning the issue of ethnoracial and political representation, “portrays the committee as conservative” (Kupka 2023). Pragmatically, he states: “Music has to come first” (Kupka 2023). Silva Steuernagel puts it bluntly: ethnoracial diversity was not a founding goal of LdC’s compilation.

[Representing diversity] is not the only agenda of an institutional hymnal. I think that to analyze a hymnal only from its diverse representation creates a parallax, a distortion. [...] You analyze the whole through the lens of one. We made an effort to be attentive to diversity. Nevertheless, we recognize other pressures; some are connected to a Lutheran Germanic identity, and others are not. Some were related to space in the hymnal and the number of pages. Some repertoire might be representative [of diversity] but is not actually sung. [...] I do not think that the hymnal must adhere to projections of diversity that are not pertinent to its history and/or its contemporary reality. (Silva Steuernagel 2024a)

6. Concluding Remarks

The committee agreed, though, that the LdC began a journey towards more representative publications of Brazil’s ethnoracial and cultural reality. Ewald highlights that the committee’s work joins a crowd of other works promoting healthier confrontation of ethnoracial differences. For him, publications embody intentions and nothing more (Ewald 2023). I agree; they better embody an intention toward a representation of Brazil’s ethnoracial diversity. While the committee sometimes operates under problematic ethnoracial notions, the LdC pushes the diversity agenda one step ahead. More importantly, committee members seem aware of the multilayered reality of Brazil’s Lutheran church.

Kupka emphasizes that, although published in 2017, the LdC is already dated (Kupka 2023). Cladis Steuernagel highlights that seeking to represent the ethnoracial dynamics of a contemporary church through a hymnal publication is an impossible task; if the committee wants to represent the cultural richness of Brazil’s ethnoracial diversity, it “would need three books the size of [the LdC]” (Steuernagel 2023). Ewald agrees, stating that “every hymnal is an ideal product” and that he does not believe any hymnal would be able to “represent a hundred percent, the totality of any culture” (Ewald 2023).

While I acknowledge that the committee was obliged to attend to other denominational and institutional expectations, I am inclined to agree with Graber and Loepp Thiessen when they say that “hymnal collection building is”, historically, “influenced by factors well beyond the logistics that previously published songs are simply easier to find”. In other words, despite “hymnal committees, choir directors, and other gatekeepers”’ intents, “our unconscious biases lead us toward compositions that fit comfortably” normative ideas (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 18). In the case of the LdC, they fit Brazilian Lutheran ethnoracial historical assumptions of musical, theological, and ethnic superiority comfortably.

Ultimately, in similar lines to Silva Steuernagel’s reflection question on “Towards a New Hymnology: Decolonizing Church Music Studies” (Silva Steuernagel 2020), I question, is it possible to conceive an ethnoracial representative and diverse Lutheran Brazilian hymnal? I believe the LdC committee ambiguously responds to this while they simultaneously acknowledge and are stricken by the imbricatedness of ethnoracial constructs and church music-making. Sometimes, the committee describes the impossibility of erasing “all these historical, theological, ecclesiastical, political, social, and cultural ties” between coloniality and hymnology (Silva Steuernagel 2020, p. 26). Other times, the committee’s ideas of diversity narrated in the interviews sponsor Western classical music as adequate, sophisticated, and more beautiful for Brazilian Lutheran congregations to sing (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023, p. 16).

Additionally, one could ask whether a *Brazilianized* Lutheran hymnal is even possible. In his interview, Silva Steuernagel points out the risk of essentialization: “In the end, Brazilian-Germans are Brazilians, too” (Silva Steuernagel 2024a). The comment exposes the multi-faceted Brazilian ethnoracial and music context. Moreover, it reminds us of the danger of essentializing Brazilian theological, cultural, and religious experiences through music.³³ By expecting the LdC to incorporate essentialized tropes of Brazilianness, we might contribute to colonizing and nationalistic political agendas that standardize and suppress, rather than diversify, local musical practices. Brazilian-German Lutheran music practices are parts that belong within the Brazilian ethnoracial, cultural, and musical melting pot.

Committee members, though, seem aware of the localized nature of their created hymnological product. Moreover, they seem to agree with Ingalls: local churches are, in fact, the ones who ultimately will decide whether to incorporate or not the songs present in the LdC. Monique Ingalls further explains that churches do not simply adopt or reject repertoires; instead, through the exercise of choosing songs weekly, churches are navigating their place within broader regional and national theological, cultural, and ethnoracial networks (Ingalls 2018, p. 119):

From the 70s and 80s, some Brazilian rhythms were incorporated into songs. [...] It is not in the music or the hymn that this issue [of musical diversity] takes place. It is in how the music is played. Varies from place to place. You can write a Baião, a Bossa Nova, but some can still play it like a march or even as a Canção Sertanejo. You can do the contrary, take something from the reformation times and dress it differently, in the harmonies and rhythms of the Brazilian culture. Musically, it varies where these songs are played and what instruments are utilized. [Musical diversity] has little to do with the music itself but more with the people playing it. In that sense, the Lutheran church is very diverse. (Ewald 2023)

As of now, Eberle understands that the committee’s main task is to show congregations that the LdC “is not a canonical work”. Instead, she proposes that the LdC was “paving the way for future publications. [...] Publications with more professional processes than” the LdC (Eberle 2023).³⁴ Similarly, Silva Steuernagel states that a hymnal committee never ends its job; the job is, in fact, to be “always playing catch up” (Silva Steuernagel 2024a). Cladis Steuernagel suggests that the LdC slowly entered and continues to enter Brazilian Lutheran churches as a new resource within a broader ecology of hymnological publications. “It is, in fact, a new step within denominational repertoires negotiations” (Silva Steuernagel 2024a).

Many other academic undertakings are needed to better assess the impact of LdC in localized realities. Ethnographical investigations might provide a crucial understanding of how IECLB and Brazilians negotiate religious authority. More importantly, how Brazilian Lutherans utilize music to establish, maintain, or challenge Brazilian ethnoracial schemes (Ingalls 2018, p. 111). As it enters localized musical realities, the LdC will join other hymnological publications in the Brazilian melting pot that the New York Times was early to notice in 1926. The LdC showcases how the New York Times prophecy was correct: German descendants indeed got “Brazilianized”. They are now part of a broader constellation of traditions, cultures, and ethnoracial identities. The discomfort with this process, though, remains. The LdC embodies such discomfort while promoting ideas of Lutheranism, which are constantly negotiated through the articulation of ethnoracial discourses.

More than proving C. Michael Hawn’s argument that liturgical plurality is inherent to worship (Hawn 2003a, p. 13), the LdC’s committee work showcases that Brazil’s multicultural and diverse ethnoracial identity was at the forefront of the committee’s discussions. Interviews show that the LdC is much more than an updated hymnal; I argue that its principal objective was to portray what it means to be a Brazilian Lutheran in Brazil’s contemporary cultural and ethnoracial melting pot. Their work confirms that new hymnological enterprises usually arise from the need to respond to new cultural, ecclesial, and theological challenges. Ultimately, LdC’s publication illuminates how the intersection of religious studies, Christian congregational music studies, and ethnomusicology can ethically inform theological, cultural, and ethnoracial denominational debates, stirring localized Lutheran Brazilian realities toward more diverse, inclusive, and cross-cultural liturgical practices.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Southern Methodist University (protocol code 24-006, approved on 17 January 2024).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request.

Acknowledgments: I would like to acknowledge and thank the IECLB *Livro de Canto* committee. They have been nothing but kind and helpful in my academic pursuits. Working as one of the score editors for the project taught me a lot about faith and music. More importantly, about my own biases. Beyond the interviews featured in this article, their scholarship, and compositions, their contribution to local Brazilian Lutheran congregations is the true embodiment of their diversifying denominational goals.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ See “Publishing Privileges the Published: An Analysis of Gender, Class, and Race in the Hymnological Feedback Loop” (Graber and Loepp Thiessen 2023).
- ² Although I focus on the African diaspora and its uniqueness in the Brazilian context, it is essential to acknowledge the absence of Brazilian indigenous voices in the ethnoracial debates of this paper; both interviewees and the bibliography engaged in and articulated ideas of ethnoracial diversity chiefly through Brazil’s African diasporic history. Second, I attend to Luebke’s warning that comparisons between the German diaspora to Brazil and the United States should be taken cautiously, especially regarding ethnoracial and social impacts. Luebke himself disclaims that “before [he] could draw any meaningful contrasts”, he had first to understand the historical information about German immigrants in Brazil and their place in Brazilian society (Luebke 1987, p. 4).
- ³ In Brazil, the ideology of Racial Democracy, sponsored by the sociologist Gilberto Freyre in his work *Casa-Grande & Senzala*, had a similar role to that of *Mestizaje* in broader Latin American circles (see Freyre and Maybury-Lewis 1987). Both instances of nationalistic projects have undergone heavy critique. Díaz showcases that in his research, most of the Black musicians he interacted with were “critical of the notion of racial democracy”. Moreover, they preferred to “use African tropes in their music to articulate” their anti-racist agendas (Díaz 2021, p. 24).

- 4 The issue around Latin American notions of race, ethnicity, and nationalism becomes increasingly complex within diasporic communities, especially within the racialized United States context. Millán and Velasquez point to the connection between these two Latin American realities in their search for an authentic identity through the exploration of racial and ethnic roots. “Whether in Latin America or in the United States, [ethnoracial discussions are] ultimately part of the search for unity that Bolívar realized was so crucial to nation building” (Millán and Rosen Velásquez 2011, p. 295). Exploring the Brazilian ethnoracial realities—and other localized Latin American realities—might provide essential insights into the Latinx struggle in the United States today.
- 5 I need to remind the reader of my position as a researcher: I am a white Brazilian church music scholar raised in a Brazilian-German Lutheran context, currently residing in the United States while pursuing my Ph.D. My interest in this topic arises from the experience of being Brazilian and dealing with the North American racialized context daily. Inspired by the phenomenological approaches of other Latin American scholars, such as the feminist Mariana Ortega, I seek to highlight the metaphorical and existential border—in-betweenness—of diasporic peoples and how their experiences shape and inform ethnoracial, theological, and aesthetical projects (Ortega 2016). I join a long-standing tradition of Latin American scholars who advocate for new methodological and epistemological frameworks that question normative ideas of music, race, spirituality, national identity, and academic research. This essay’s terminology, then, subscribes to Adam’s call for alternative spaces that enable communities to narrate their stories while encouraging researchers to develop senses and intuitions to perceive nuances particular to the Latin American cultural flows (Adam 2019).
- 6 Klein and Vinson account for *Quilombo* activities in the Brazilian South. Though the majority of these resistance communities of runaway slaves were found in the northeast of the country, Quilombos were present “as far south as Santa Catarina”, the second-most southern state of the country (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 177).
- 7 “Whitening” policies are connected to the apogee of the evolutionary-scientific paradigm and eugenicist discourses that dominated European and Brazilian elites in the nineteenth century. Stepan, in the book *The Hour of Eugenics*, highlights the infiltration of eugenicist discourses in Brazilian institutions and patriotic political enterprises; in that period, “science was increasingly allied to racism” (Stepan 2018, p. 45).
- 8 Non-Catholics among them, “so long as their houses of worship did not bear the standard insignia of churches-crosses, spires, and the like” (Luebke 1987, p. 9).
- 9 As Klein and Vinson disclaim, formerly enslaved people had no support from the Brazilian state. “In most cases, whether or not land was secured, ex-slaves found themselves still living in the areas of the old plantation regimes and mostly at the lowest level of their respective socioeconomic systems” (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 243).
- 10 The advocacy of the Catholic Church towards marriages for enslaved peoples brought interesting political reverberations. Klein and Vinson narrate that, during the colonial period, “in all societies where the sacrament of marriage was performed, it was required that both the Church and state could intervene to guarantee the sexual, moral, and even physical integrity of the slave family” (Klein and Vinson 2007, p. 168).
- 11 I do not aim to portray the Catholic church as a liberating space for black-enslaved populations in Brazil. Barbosa rightly reminds us that Protestants and Catholics “colluded with the conquistadors and were protected by their weapons and favors, pretending that they were presenting the radical Jesus of Nazareth to the inhabitants of the Land of the Holy Cross but turned a deaf ear to the pitiful appeals of the blacks [...]: *Vassum Crisso!*” (Barbosa 2008, p. xix).
- 12 Most Protestant communities would later join abolitionist movements, but only after they became prominent throughout the country and politically unavoidable (Barbosa 2008, p. xx).
- 13 Barbosa argues that Protestant missionaries were not particularly worried about black emancipation. Conversion meant, instead, a moral regeneration that could be connected to ideas of whiteness (Barbosa 2008, p. 136).
- 14 Language was the primary marker and embodiment of this imagined German identity. Behs highlights that much more than racial purity, the German language was, between the early 1920s and throughout the 1940s, the principal marker of ethnic belonging within the *Vale do Itajaí* Lutheran populations. Behs also notes that the German language seemed to be a form of resistance unique to the Lutheran context since Catholic Brazilian-German pastors did not share the same enthusiasm for its usage in liturgical and institutional settings (Behs 2001, p. 100).
- 15 The author provides a translation of this Portuguese source and all other sources written in Portuguese.
- 16 In the early 19th century, before Germany’s unification, Lutheran churches were scattered throughout different counties and principalities. According to Behs, “the hymnals found in Brazil, brought by the immigrants, attested to this diversity” (Behs 2001, p. 47). In Brazil, Lutherans found a way to extrapolate European geopolitical borders, generating a unique theological and institutional environment within Lutheranism.
- 17 Scholars have located this pan-Latino political trend in *Indigenismo*, a political ideology that pervaded Latin America in the early to mid-1900s and utilized essentialized notions of indigeneity to sponsor nationalistic projects (see Nielsen 2020). Few scholars have considered whether *indigenismo* played a role in the theological and musical debates that led to the diversification of ethnoracial church music practices in Latin America after the 1960s, as I will later outline in this article. Rios explains that “throughout Latin America, elite and middle-class interest in regionally distinctive music-dance expressions reached new heights in the early decades of the 20th century, as part of a quest among a varied cast of politicians, writers, and artists for local traditions that unmistakably demonstrated the nation’s cultural uniqueness” (Rios 2020, p. 23). *Indigenismo*, he argues, was the

central representation and manifestation of this phenomenon in the musics and politics of Peru, Mexico, Bolivia, and Argentina (Rios 2020, p. 23), and, I argue, most likely cross-pollinated in ethnoracial debates in Latin American contexts.

18 Cladis Steuernagel, one of the interviewees, narrates this process: “Before the 70s, the church was not that diverse. Before that, we were Germanic Brazilians. After this period, we had a high influence from the United States in our denomination. [...] It was a clash [...] how to work within the church. Looking back, I think it was good. It opened our church to the different. In the 80s, our own internal movements became too strong. [...] And they started to cause division in the IECLB, and the congregations started to have some problems. It was a conflicting time” (Steuernagel 2023).

19 João B. Chaves (2022) gifts scholarship a thorough account of how southern U.S. missionaries impacted the ethnoracial Brazilian reality with their racialized views of the world, specifically within the Baptist Brazilian context. Chaves accounts that, during most of the first half of the 20th century, U.S. Baptist “institutional leaders and intellectuals were avid defenders of their segregationist agendas that saw racial intermingling—especially sexual contact—as an aberration and disgrace” (Chaves 2022, p. 86). Although scholarship around race and ethnicity in the U.S. missionary movements that impacted IECLB is scant, I imagine that similar narratives circulated between Baptist and Lutheran missionaries in Brazil. These racialized and segregationist ideas are possible reasons, too, why church music repertoires in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s did not encompass “Brazilianized” music genres.

20 Guera Rojas (2014) and Scruggs (2005) recorded the influence, particularly in the genre of folk masses. According to them, at first, Latin American folk masses were basic translations; later, these masses became “a product of the Liberation Theology movement and went beyond the translation” (Scruggs 2005, pp. 99–100). Silva Steuernagel, while investigating the rise of Latin American Protest Music (LAPM), claims that the projects of liberation theologians sponsored the creation of repertoire that bore the marks of the Latin American experience: “expressing suffering and finding hope through the song” (Silva Steuernagel 2024c).

21 Silva Steuernagel’s remark attends to Senn’s observation that the Protestant churches [around the world] have not been as excited to move toward inculturation as the Roman Catholic Church” (Senn 1997, p. 678).

22 Behs notes early critiques toward HPD1’s Germanized character. In his essay, Behs narrates a Brazilian Lutheran pastor who believes that, although HPD1 “holds a great [theological] content [...], it became a little demotivating. The Brazilian is used to more light stuff, to more groove, musically speaking. Theologically, [the HPD1] is excellent. Melodically, it is complicated; it does not belong to the Brazilian soul” (Behs 2001, p. 61).

23 Silva Steuernagel makes an interesting comment about Senn’s quote: perhaps unintentionally, Senn reveals this implied bias when he says that traces of a particular culture “cannot simply be replicated in the new location”, almost recognizing that, if missionaries on the ground possessed the power to do so, their ideal might be to replicate their cultural perspectives and practices in this new location (Silva Steuernagel 2020, p. 29).

24 Oliveira Jr., unfortunately, passed away before the interviews took place. All interviewees mentioned his historical contribution to the IECLB in its process of diversification. A prolific composer, Oliveira Jr. contributed more than fifteen songs to the hymnal—almost all engaged in some sort of Brazilian identity, either theologically or musically. Oliveira Jr. was also part of the HPD1 hymnal committee and a strong advocate and critic of its absence of Brazilianness.

25 To avoid confusion regarding authors, I address Marcell Silva Steuernagel as “Silva Steuernagel” and Cladis Steuernagel as only “Steuernagel”.

26 These questions loosely organized the interviews: (1) What is your trajectory in the Lutheran Denomination? (2) How did you become part of the LdC committee? (3) Can you describe your role and contributions to the committee? (4) What was the main goal pursued by the committee when putting together the LdC? Did you manage to fulfill it? (5) Do you think the LdC did a good job of painting a portrait of the life of the Lutheran Church in Brazil? How so? (6) How different is LdC in comparison to past denominational hymnal publications? (7) Do you think the Lutheran church in the South is racially and ethnically diverse? Why? (8) How would you describe the ECLCB’s southern Brazilian churches ethnically and racially? (9) Do you feel LdC has been well received in ECLCB’s congregations in southern Brazil? (10) Do you think ECLCB churches in south Brazil think critically about issues of race and ethnicity?

27 Ewald is from a southeast area of Brazil, also populated by German immigrants in the nineteenth century. He has been living in south Brazil for more than 30 years.

28 I hope this instigates further ethnographic investigations of northeastern Brazilian Lutheran congregations and their engagement with the German heritage of the denomination. From experience and accounts from other Lutheran missionaries and clergies, Lutheran parishes of that area rarely engage in “traditional” Lutheran church music practices; congregants rely heavily on ecumenical Brazilian *gospel* repertoires (see Mendonça 2014; Silva Steuernagel 2019; de Paula 2012). These practices can reveal important ethnoracial dynamics in Lutheran missionary enterprises and the broader Brazilian religious landscape.

29 It seems vital to emphasize that committee members, almost in their entirety, were musically trained in Western/Continental schools of Music. Eberle has a bachelor’s degree in music from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (URGS), a master’s, and a Ph.D. in Theology from *Faculdades EST*, a Lutheran theological seminary in Brazil. Ewald is one of the principal scholars in the church music practices of southern Brazilian Lutheran congregations in Brazil; he holds a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from the University of Chicago. Delmar Dickel and Cleonir G. Zimmerman, both not interviewed for this article, also have musical training: Dickel has a bachelor’s in conducting from URGS and a specialization in Sacred Music from *Faculdades EST*,

and Zimmerman holds a master's in sacred music from *Faculdades EST*. Silva Steuernagel holds a bachelor's in composition and conducting from the Paraná School of Music and Fine Arts (EMBAF), a master's in composition from the Paraná Federal University (UFPR), and a Ph.D. in Church Music from Baylor University. Cladis Steuernagel has a bachelor's in musical pedagogy from the *Faculdade de Artes do Paraná* (FAP) and a master's in theology from *Faculdades EST*. The only exceptions in the committee are the coordinator, Kupka, and Oliveira Jr., who were both IECLB clergies and underwent informal musical training. Notions of good music, articulated by the committee, can be connected with their formal training, primarily because of the Eurocentric models of music training established in Brazil after the 19th century.

30 Although Eberle engages in this epistemological and musicological 'Germanized' world, she is conscious of its pitfalls. She says that, in Germany, this Brazilian Lutheran hymnological would not be perceived as German. "If [Brazilians] went to Germany [and sang] the "mainstream" southern Brazilian Lutheran in Germany with that [repertoire], Germans would make fun of them" (Silva Steuernagel 2020, p. 29).

31 In his interview, Silva Steuernagel proposes a helpful alternative perspective on the word "excellence", often used to convey racialized judgments over other musics that do not adhere to the Western aesthetic preferences: "I prefer the word 'care,' even though I have used the word 'excellence' a lot in the past. [Excellence] does not necessarily mean complexity—it means taking care of something. Sometimes the 'excellent' thing to do is to simplify, not complexify" (Silva Steuernagel 2024a).

32 It is unclear if Ewald is referring specifically to the Lutheran context or to the broader Brazilian context.

33 In the context of Brazilian popular music studies, Vianna notes that the ideology of a *mestiço* Brazil converted the genre of *samba* into an agent of internal colonization, eventually excluding actual diversity in the name of *Brazilianized* orthodoxy (Vianna 1999, p. 118). Within ethnoracial discussions, Diaz reminds us that most Afro-Bahian cultural expressions that are now part of a Brazilian national consciousness were essentialized, folklorized, and politically weaponized during Getúlio Vargas' government (Díaz 2021, p. 26). The result is a distanced practice that stereotypes Brazilian—chiefly, black and indigenous Brazilian—identities.

34 I believe Eberle would agree when I say that the LdC also paves way for new more ethnoracial and musical diverse publications.

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