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Religion, Secularity and Cultural Memory in Brazil

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This article is devoted to issues of religion, secularity and cultural memory and the ways they are connected and determined by power relations and power structures. These connections and determinations are illustrated by the colonial history of Brazil and the postcolonial power structures this history gave rise to. The article explores several paradoxes of the contemporary Brazilian religious Gestalt and interprets them in relation to power and status hierarchies of the colonial and postcolonial periods. Special attention is devoted to the rise of Pentecostalism (since the 1970s) and the concomitant breaking of the long-standing “cultural agreement” that the Catholic Church would preside (benignly) over a harmonious religious arena.

Keywords: religion, secularity, cultural memory, Brazil, Latin America, power structures.

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IN his recent revisionist history, *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe*, R.I. Moore remarks that it had taken many decades for historians to correct the story of the “war” on heresy between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries because “[t]here has been a long tradition of separation between the study of secular and religious history” (Moore 2012: 334). This separation of scholarly disciplines is one institutional aspect of the taken-for-granted distinction in the West between “religious” and “secular.” Moore argues church historians had steered clear of the methodological and theoretical developments in secular history and secular historians had avoided tackling issues of personal faith except to “accept religious belief, individual or collective, as sufficient explanation for actions—mass murder or mass suicide, for example—that might otherwise seem to call for further investigation” (Moore 2012: 334). This judgment has an instructively contemporary ring in spite of its medieval referents. The revision of the history of crusades against heresy had to put together the dissociated evidence from two scholarly fields about the operation of power, by monarchs and competing local elites, on the one hand, and on the other its interaction—cooperative, competitive or violent—with ecclesiastical, papal, monastic and popular “religious” constellations of power, which were often also in conflict with each other. Once the choreography of power was assembled and clerical accounts of heresy trials were located within that power play, it became clear that heresy accusations “were regularly aligned to long-standing political divisions and factional rivalries” (Moore 2012: 296) in the context of attempts by both monarchs and papacy to centralize their own power in a period of fast economic change, the growth of towns with new urban elites and novel extremes of wealth and poverty. It also revealed that “Cathars,” “Manichaeans” and “Albigensians,” as cohesive, dualist heretical movements, were at best dubious constructs extrapolated from the standard rhetorical tropes of the Paris schoolmen, and at worst the nightmare fantasies of highly placed ecclesiastics and leaders of monastic orders. “Heresy” codes and occludes underlying tensions and rivalries.

There are lessons here for social scientists of religion, not least a reminder to “situate” the accounts of intellectuals rather than assuming they are disinterested (most of the accounts of the medieval heretics come either from their prosecutors and accusers or from clerical apologists for the church) and to pay close attention to the dimension of power. Most of us have now got the message that “religion” and the “secular” are culturally and historically constructed categories rath-

er than universal entities, with the power relations of the colonial encounter as the primary source of their modern usage. Yet the vocabulary of the social sciences continues to deploy the terms. Indeed, they are central to many of the metrics, such as survey and official census data, on which cross-societal comparisons and theory construction depend, though quite what is being measured and compared always raises issues of interpretation, as will be seen below in the Brazilian data. Both the critique of “religion” and “secularity” as historically contingent constructs, and the revision of the story of the medieval “war on heresy,” emphasize the salience of the power dimension *in* ecclesiastical structures, as well as *between* them and “secular” powers, if we want to understand what the categories conceal. The colonial history of Brazil, and the postcolonial power structures it gave rise to, are crucial to understanding Brazil’s “religious arena” today and the apparently very limited role of “secularism” in it, notwithstanding the fact that Brazil has been a “secular state” for a century and a quarter.

Let me begin from a puzzle about the nature of that Brazilian “religious arena” that David Martin and I confronted when we were researching Pentecostalism in Brazil in 1990. We interviewed Catholic and Protestant social scientists of religion and found a—to us—curious consensus that the rise of Pentecostalism, especially the recent appearance of neo-Pentecostal churches preaching a prosperity gospel, violated a long-standing “cultural agreement” that the Catholic Church would preside (benignly) over a harmonious religious arena in which African and indigenous “spirituality” found expression through folk Catholicism and a minority of Afro-Brazilian “religions” tolerated and semi-legitimated by the educated classes. The new Pentecostals were doing something entirely new in aggressively attacking the Catholic faith and even mainstream Protestantism. The researchers we spoke to deplored this as “un-Brazilian.” Some of them repeated the popular media view that Pentecostalism was a foreign import, an instrument of “American cultural imperialism” and global capitalism, though a few had recognized that the movement was in fact thoroughly indigenized. Its supposed “foreign” origin, finance and control were conjured to explain Pentecostalism’s “un-Brazilian” tendencies. The research institute of the mainstream Protestant churches (CEDI, Centro Ecumênico de Documentação) proudly showed us dossiers and videos designed for popular education which represented Pentecostalism, notably its mass healing spectaculars, not only as alien but as a form of propaganda akin to the Nürnberg rallies of the Nazis. Our informants also deplored Pentecostalism, especially the Uni-

versal Church of the Kingdom of God, as uniquely “racist” in a culture they believed was distinguished by non-racist “mixing.” Pentecostalism made trouble by condemning the Afro-Brazilian *orixas* as “demons,” and members of the Universal Church noisily exorcised them, even on the beach in Rio during the Afro-Brazilian New Year ceremonies for “Our Lady of the Sea.”

Assessments of this kind were repeated in the account of Brazilian religion David Lehmann published in 1996, *Struggle for the Spirit*. Lehmann “went native” in re-presenting the opinions of what, following Carlos Rodriguez Brandão, he termed “the erudite elite” (those who are *culto* or “cultivated”). Lehmann went beyond Brandão’s notion of a fluid flow of dialectical exchanges (*trocas*) between the “popular” and the “erudite,” where popular religion, including evangelical and Pentecostal elements, is a form of resistance (Brandão 1980). Lehmann rejected Brandão’s characterization of Pentecostalism as grassroots resistance or response to social dislocation, and insisted it was a “cultural onslaught” by which intransigent leaders were attempting to transform the whole field of popular religion. Yet he concluded Pentecostalism had genuinely broken open the religious arena by refusing the sponsorship of “erudite” patrons and persisting in its own offensive “bad taste.” Lehmann agreed with some Brazilian scholars that “blackness” or “Africanness” had become a desirable, even fashionable quality in Brazil, affecting every status level. He also insisted that, although Pentecostal churches were full of black and indigenous people they could not be regarded as “black churches” because they did not have an explicit project (that is, an ideology or politics) of black (or indigenous) “emancipation” like the “black churches” of the USA (Lehmann 1996: 158–59). While Lehmann voiced no suspicion that “erudite opinion” might, perhaps, be “constructed” or *partipris*, he regarded Pentecostal claims about the faith’s beneficent effect on marriage and family life as an obviously “idealized petit-bourgeois lifestyle” which had generated a parallel female discourse of empowerment in which, “be it only in fantasy,” women could “force men to shoulder responsibilities” (Lehmann 1996: 225).

We were dubious about some of these interpretations, given the hard evidence that Brazilians themselves were the effective evangelists for Pentecostalism, that the movement only took off once it was indigenized and that it had a particular appeal for women and for ethnic and marginalized groups as well as the poor in general. A paper for the World Council of Churches in 2000 by Otávio Velho, professor of Social Anthropology of the Federal University of Rio de Ja-

neiro, describes the ideas we encountered in 1990, and which David Lehmann largely endorsed, as part of “a hegemonic national ideology (both popular and erudite) which considers ‘mixture’ in general as typically Brazilian, contrasting it favourably with ideologies of racial and/or cultural purity prevalent in other parts of the world” (Velho 2000). Protestants had historically been excluded from this complex as “immigrants” and Velho comments that the view of Pentecostalism as an American import “is no longer sustainable.” Deconstructing or at least recontextualizing this “hegemonic national ideology” is one object of this paper.

Assuming for the moment that we can broadly accept the metrics, the current composition of Brazil’s “religious arena” gives little obvious support to the classical European theory of secularization as the inevitable accompaniment to modernity. Brazil looks more like one of Shmuel Eisenstadt’s “multiple modernities.” The status of Brazil as a BRIC economy, with growth rates most “modern” states in Europe and North America might envy, indicates that *economic* modernity is not in question. But the relation of “religion” and “secularity” looks very unlike Western Europe, not much like the USA, and, except for their common experience of recent Pentecostal growth, significantly different from the postcolonial societies of Africa and Asia that furnished much of the evidence for the critique of “religion” and the “secular” as constituents of the secularization hypothesis (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and Van Antwerpen 2011). Brazil’s contemporary religious arena exhibits a good deal of what Peter Berger calls “furious belief” with precious little explicit atheism; it appears to be a still “enchanted” culture interwoven with Brazil’s economic and technological modernity. Though all the countries that emerged in the nineteenth century as independent states out of the two Iberian Empires share important features, there is a higher level and more diversity of religious adherence in Brazil than in the rest of Latin America. In the 2010 population census of Brazil, 64.6% of the population was Roman Catholic (down from 90% in 1970 when the startling rise of the *evangélicos*, over 60% of them Pentecostals, was first being widely felt). Evangelical Protestants were 22.2% (up from 15.4% in 2000). Other religions were 5.2%, with the Afro-Brazilian complex of movements—Spiritism, Umbanda, Kardecism and Candomblé—most prominent, but also including Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and a variety of new religious movements. In 2010 the No Religion category (Sem Religião) covered some 5.3 million persons out of the almost 191 million Brazilians, or 8% of the population (up from 7.4%

in 2000), with men substantially outnumbering women. Yet 81% of the No Religion category believed in God with only 2.5% claiming to be atheist (less than 0.2% of the total population), though this is an increase since 1980 when the number of atheists was negligible. What the No Religion category mainly seems to point to is a pattern of de-institutionalization, a free-and-easy approach to church doctrine and discipline without an outright repudiation of identity, rather than a definitive rejection of a “transcendent” dimension of life. Overall, 97% of the Brazilian population believes in God (IBGE Censos 2010).

Despite these apparently decisive metrics, several respected observers suggest current developments point to an increasing convergence with the Western European pattern of secularization, particularly the slow but steady growth of the No Religion category and the rise of agnosticism and atheism, especially among younger generations. Philip Jenkins believes a triangular development is occurring between “secularists,” Catholics and Pentecostals (Jenkins 2013). Both Andrew Chesnut (cited in Romero 2013) and Jenkins argue that the true figure for the No Religion category may well be higher than 8%—Chesnut surmises nearer 15%—taking into account how many nominal Catholics, especially men, are effectively de-institutionalized already: six out of ten Catholics regard themselves as “not very practicing” or “not practicing at all.” Fernando Altmeyer, a theologian at the Catholic University of São Paulo, believes Latin America is beginning to resemble the Western world in losing its homogeneity of faith, less through the growth of Pentecostalism than through Catholics, notably among the young, dropping out of the Church and becoming agnostic (Brooks 2011; *Independent Online* 14-03-2013). Marcelo Côrtes Neri, director of the Social Policy Unit of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation in Rio and author of a report on the recent growth of the middle classes in Brazil, also comments on the increasing number of women leaving the Catholic Church and the rejection of the Church’s reproductive morality by those who stay (Neri 2011). The Catholic Church is losing adherents faster than the Pentecostal churches are gaining them, though Paul Freston estimates one in two Catholic drop-outs still join Pentecostal groups, even though the rate of conversion has slowed (Freston 2013). There is also a rise in the number of religions that, in Velho’s phrase, have “a mythological indigenous origin,” such as Santo Daíme or Unio do Vegetal, both, like Umbanda, founded in the 1920s with “erudite class” participation, incorporating elements of the late nineteenth-century “erudite” spiritism of Kardecism, and centered on the use of the hallucinogenic drug ayahuasca (Velho 2000). These religions have

developed transnational missions in recent years (Groisman 2009; Cohen 2009). There is a growing interest in neo-shamanism and eclectic movements combining elements from different spiritual traditions, many of them with an interracial following. Velho relates this growth to the increasing visibility and political engagement of indigenous peoples, of which there are at least 200 separate groups in modern Brazil (Velho 2000). It may also represent seepage from nominal Catholicism since indigenous, black and mixed-race people traditionally tended to combine attendance at Afro-Brazilian and spiritist cults with official Catholicism. Some of it may also be a reaction against the promotion of the larger Afro-Brazilian cults, especially Candomblé, as part of a “heritage industry” put on display for tourist consumption. At all events, this development, though small, is distinct from the Western or the Eastern European patterns of “secularity.”

Paul Freston predicts that within two or three decades the Protestant population will meet its ceiling at no more than 35%, restricted by the effect of the scandals and disappointments the Pentecostal movement has produced particularly through its incursion into politics, while he believes the Catholic Church is unlikely to sink below 40%, given its long cultural hegemony (Freston 2013). Freston, however, sees little evidence of the spread of serious “secularism” and does not envisage a “secular” pillar paralleling the Catholic and Evangelical ones as Jenkins does. Freston believes Pentecostalism has radically transformed the Brazilian religious field “from below” in a culture traditionally organized “from above” through patron-client networks, turning what was “hierarchical syncretism” into “competitive pluralism.” Chesnut and Jenkins may well have over-interpreted the significance of detachment from institutional churches, made too little of the exiguousness of explicit atheism, and underestimated the continuing salience of an exuberantly enspirited cultural tradition, but their predictions about the route of travel cannot be dismissed out of hand. Yet it is important to place any snapshot of the pattern of religious attachment within a historically formed cultural *Gestalt* rather than simply focusing on isolated “variables” and extrapolating from them. The paradoxes of the current *Gestalt* are startling and call for further explanation.

The first of these paradoxes is that Brazil is more religious and more religiously diverse than the rest of the Latin American-Caribbean world, yet it displays far more liberal moral attitudes, especially in the field of interpersonal relations, than that might imply, especially in view of the historic hegemony of the Catholic Church and the more

recent rise of morally rigorous Pentecostalism. Although the Catholic Church, sometimes in concert with leaders of the *evangélicos*, has engaged in political struggles with the secular state in recent years over issues such as abortion, reproductive medicine and the civil rights of homosexuals, it has won unequivocal legal victories in few of these areas, though it has been in a position to impede certain aspects of the delivery of welfare. Divorce was legalized as long ago as 1977 and same-sex unions were legally recognized in 2004. As Marcelo Neri observes, social attitudes do not follow official Catholic teachings very closely despite two-thirds of the society regarding themselves as Catholics. Between 1970 and 2010 the number of children born to the average woman declined from 5 to 1.82, below replacement rate, though Catholic rejection of contraception has not softened (Pentecostals are opposed to abortion but some accept contraception). This certainly mirrors most of the Catholic societies of Europe, other than Malta, which have followed the same trajectory and now have below replacement birth rates. In 2007 the Pew Foundation found that though 83% of Brazilians believed it was necessary to believe in God to be moral, 65% accepted homosexuality and only 30% did not. Philip Jenkins interprets the growth of liberal attitudes to personal morality as an index of the weakening hold of the institutional church in Brazil. Yet Paul Freston notes: “every day in Brazil morally and socially more flexible churches are created” (Freston 2013: 69), and two years ago I heard a conference paper about burgeoning homosexual Pentecostal churches in Rio (Alves 2011). We should not take as self-evident a tight association of religious identities with conservative moral attitudes or assume their divergence is an automatic index of weakening “religion.” It calls for further exploration.

The second paradox is that Brazil sees itself, and is widely regarded elsewhere, as a “naturally” Catholic society, eliding the fact that Brazilian Catholicism was imposed by conquest on indigenous Amerindian peoples and black slaves shipped in from Africa who had their own beliefs and ritual practices, and has been sustained by colonial and postcolonial power elites in a dialectic of alliance and competition with the papacy. The image of Brazil as immemorially Catholic lies behind the widespread dismay that greeted the rise of Brazilian Pentecostalism and the unwillingness to believe the figures, which we were still encountering in the early 1990s when the movement had already been growing fast for three to four decades. It also underlay the reluctance among the research population as well as popular Brazilian media opinion to believe Pentecostalism was successfully outbidding

Liberation Theology and drawing the poor out of the base communities in the 1980s and 90s. Today there are probably more Pentecostals than Catholics in church in Rio and São Paulo on any day of the week. Otávio Velho recognizes the paradox in the image of Brazil as immemorially Catholic. He coined the term “productive anachronism” for his insight that the emergence of “colonial missionization” might be seen as the historical mirror image of contemporary globalization and, reciprocally, postcolonial globalization might be seen in terms of “missionization” (Velho 2009).

The third paradox is the coexistence of a cultural myth of Brazil as a uniquely non-racist society that celebrates harmonious “mixing,” with a stratification system which is certainly closely correlated to skin color and is arguably close to being a racial caste system: although no single boundary marks white from non-white, status is minutely coded in a vocabulary that specifies variations of skin color (Loveman, Muniz and Bailey 2011). Until the last few decades when the inequalities have been somewhat softened, Brazil had one of the most extreme distributions of wealth in the world, and even today, while the rich are mostly white, the poor are disproportionately black or mixed race. The richest income group earns 42 times more than the poorest, and wealth is even more unequally distributed: average earnings for black and mixed-race people are 2.4 times lower than for whites and people of Far Eastern origin; among the richest 10% of the population only 20% are black while 73% of the black population are in the lowest 10% of the income scale; and nearly three-quarters of those in extreme poverty are black. Further, although white and black in the lowest income brackets are equally poor, the small minority of blacks in the top income sectors have incomes substantially lower than those of the whites in the same bracket (Barbosa et al. 2012). While the illiteracy rate for the whole population is now down to 8.6% of those over the age of 15 (down from 13.6% in 2000), twice as many black and mixed-race people as whites are illiterate (IBGE Notícias 2011; IBGE Censos 2010). There is a clear ladder of employment opportunity that traditionally tended to consign black, indigenous and mixed-race people to manual work or jobs in the service sector and commerce that are out of the public eye, and qualifications do not entirely offset color status in the competition for professional positions even today. “The Real Brazil,” a report of research by CEBRAP (Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento) for Christian Aid, shows that, while strongly correlated with other indices of inequality, color status operates as a variable in its own right. As the report summarizes baldly, “[r]acial

inequality is one of the principal characteristics of Brazilian society” (Barbosa 2012: 56).

Slavery was not abolished until 1888, just before the fall of the monarchy, amid a flurry of slave revolts. Brazil had imported slaves from the beginning of the sixteenth century and slavery was accepted throughout the colonial period and the first 66 years of independence. The Church owned many slaves itself, though with increasing unease by the nineteenth century—the Benedictines freed all children henceforth born to the order’s 2,000 female slaves in 1866, for example, and the Rio Branco Law of 1871 freed all the slaves of the Carmelite and Benedictine orders. Through the whole period of the Portuguese Empire some 3.5 million Africans were taken to Brazil. By the start of the sixteenth century there were 20,000 Africans and the numbers increased by around 8,000 a year. In 1822, the year Brazil became an independent state, a census found that two-thirds of the population had some African descent, though only 20% of these were slaves (Geipel 1997; Lynch 2012). In the 2010 census 50.7% of the population described themselves as “black” or “mixed race,” a figure that had risen from 44.7% in 2000. It is widely believed that this recent rise reflects the increased social acceptability of “black” identity in recent years. The combination of widespread genetic mixing with the maintenance of white status superiority is the third historical irony calling for further exploration.

The patterns underlying these three paradoxes were laid down in the power and status hierarchies of the colonial and postcolonial period, notably the power relations between the Catholic Church and the monarchy and court, and among Church, court, the white elites and the conquered indigenous peoples and the enslaved African blacks. From the conquest at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Portuguese monarchy controlled the church, including the right to appoint the posts at the top of the Church hierarchy, which throughout the period of the Empire were reserved for Portuguese- rather than Brazilian-born whites. The seminaries in which priests were trained were under the control of the state, as were the activities of the monastic orders. Men of indigenous origins were eventually permitted to become priests but usually assigned to rural areas, while white priests served in the cities. Blacks and mulattoes were excluded from the priesthood and the religious orders (Lorea 2009; Lynch 2012).

The state became independent in 1822 when the Portuguese monarch fled to Brazil after Napoleon invaded Portugal, and when the Portuguese monarchy was restored, Brazil still remained a monarchy of the Portuguese royal house until 1889 when its second king, Pedro

II, was ousted with minimal armed struggle and the state became a republic. The republic took over all the monarchical powers over the Church, notably the power of appointments to the upper echelons of the Church, and a new breed of “political priests” became in effect government servants furnished with sinecures. The Church has retained an influential role in the secular state even though it was disestablished in 1891. In that year a strict separation of state and church was enacted, state financing of the clergy was withdrawn, secular marriage was introduced, religious education was removed from the public schools, the practice of religions other than Roman Catholicism was legalized and areas previously under church oversight, such as cemeteries, were secularized. In practice the state soon found it impossible to perform all the roles it had officially taken over from the Church, partly because it could not afford the cost, so after a short secular hiatus the Church informally resumed many of its traditional roles. In 1931, at the beginning of the *Estado Novo* period under Getúlio Vargas, religious education was officially reintroduced into the public schools. Public religious holidays and Church involvement in the armed forces were recognized. Religious symbols as part of most public buildings have long been taken for granted, and this was legally challenged for the first time only in 2007. The 1988 Constitution, introduced when Brazil returned to formal democracy after the fall of the military junta, declared the nation “under the protection of God,” inscribed the phrase “God be praised” on the currency and made religious education a part of the curriculum of all public elementary schools, though attendance became optional. The state continues to subsidize religious activities, particularly pastoral campaigns for the Catholic Church, especially in the field of health and education, which means that health and reproductive issues, notably sexual health, unwanted pregnancy and infertility, tend to be approached in terms of what the Church will countenance, as President Lula sometimes found to his embarrassment. The Brazilian state under Lula largely financed the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to São Paulo in 2007 and entered into a compact with the Vatican over restricting abortion that had not been agreed in Parliament (Lorea 2009).

Over the period from independence to the present, more particularly during the Vargas dictatorship and the *Estado Novo* between 1930 and 1954, Church and state cooperated to hold back democratic tendencies, particularly from the political Left. The involvement of parts of the Church in Liberation Theology after Vatican II and especially in the 1980s under the military Junta was a new departure for a

national church that until this point had been the partner of the state in support of the traditional privileges of elites and a generally politically conservative force in politics and society.

Nevertheless, historically both state and Church have been weak institutions. Throughout the colonial period and in much of the almost two centuries since independence, the state's writ did not run much beyond the major cities. The rural hinterland was controlled by, and in the interests of, the great landowners, and most towns and cities by, and in the interests of, the white urban elites, from the 1890s including the mining and industrial business elite. Miguel Angel Centeno argues that the state has been "far less able to impose itself on its societ[y] than its European counterparts," in particular it taxed a much smaller proportion of wealth and never managed to extract a significant surplus from the rich to finance the state (Centeno 2002: 11). Centeno argues, following Tilly, that the institutional weakness of the state, which is a common feature of Latin American societies, is both cause and consequence of the virtual absence of inter-societal wars on the continent—he points out that the boundaries of Latin American states hardly altered from the point of independence to today. International wars in the modern era have had certain common consequences. They require the state to extend its tentacles into civic life, legitimated as part of the patriotic war effort, and to extract surplus as taxes from everyone, including the wealthy and powerful. They also induce the state to foster nationalism and a sense of patriotic citizenship, above all willingness to make sacrifices for the nation on the part of the people who will pay for the conflict both in privation and with the lives of their young men. In the absence of war, states do not have to develop institutional mechanisms for controlling in detail the lives of the population and the distribution of resources. In colonial and postcolonial Brazil the state had had little need for such mechanisms or for organizational means of ensuring the efficient use of resources to deliver particular policies. In particular, the Church was largely left to deal with welfare, such as it was, including education. The resources the state did control tended to be used for the private enrichment and influence of top state functionaries in the tug of competition and cooperation with non-state elites. For that reason postcolonial Brazil fostered an ever-expanding state, as government office with its entitlement to salary was one of the "resources" the state had to bargain with (Owensby 1999). This produced bloated state employment combined with ineffectiveness, even after the belated introduction of competitive examinations in 1938, which only supplemented

rather than supplanted the ubiquitous dependence on clientelism. Frequent bouts of inflation tended to erode the value of government salaries, alienating public employees and forcing them to take supplementary jobs, also dependent on securing the recommendation of higher status patrons. The state was both inflated and weak.

In most Latin American societies independence was only gained through armed struggle, a process that tended to make the military a powerful power center. In Brazil, by contrast, the transition from monarchy to republic was so smooth and involved so little violence that its elites never needed to become deeply involved in a war of independence as they did, for example, in Mexico. This contributed to the weakness of the military as an arm of the state (with a chronic tendency elsewhere to act in its own rather than in the state's interest). It also helps to account for the failure in Brazil to develop a common sense of national identity or a widespread distribution of the liberal Enlightenment ideas associated in Europe with liberation struggles and democratic aspirations. Until the early twentieth century there was little patriotic sentiment among the peasant population and the urban poor: Lynch comments that the rural laborers in the nineteenth century had little sense of identity with the Brazilian Republic and in the often brutal stratification system of the landed estates and plantations; the Church was the only institution that attracted any sense of belonging. Patriotic sentiment was eventually developed as a result of deliberate policy, especially under Vargas, as a part of attempts to undercut the appeal of organized labor and leftist politics in the twentieth century. We will come back to that below.

Centeno argues that, until recent decades, the Latin American state never asserted a real "monopoly of violence" (one of the characteristics that most Western political science routinely uses to define the state), because there were so many private militias, often better trained and equipped than the national armed forces. For most of the colonial and postcolonial period, although the elites did not regard the military as a desirable profession for themselves, they tended to keep their own militias. Soldiering was a form of manual work which was seen as the metier of black slaves and indigenous people and disdained by whites. For much of colonial and postcolonial history the military was recruited from the "offscourings" of society, sometimes even from coerced convict populations, rather than being a disciplined and trained force.

Despite the absence of significant wars there was no shortage of organized violence in Latin American societies, usually deployed either in inter-elite rivalries or, more significantly, as Centeno stresses,

to suppress the “internal enemies” of the state, that is, the chronically rebellious indigenous poor and the black slaves who staged frequent insurrections and, as runaways, might join communities of outlaws. The last of these Brazilian messianic communities in Bahia was wiped out only in 1897. Ironically the state military responsible for carrying out such suppressions and massacres was mainly recruited from those very same subaltern populations for whom a military career was one of the few avenues of mobility open to them.

The Church, too, was in important ways always a weak institution, even though its upper echelons were privileged, wealthy and individually powerful, and all priests had certain privileges: for a long time they enjoyed immunity from certain state laws including taxation. The Church was always undermanned—in 1891 when it was disestablished after a series of scandals about Masonic infiltration, the Brazilian Church had only 12 dioceses. Throughout the colonial period Brazil had only 700 secular priests to serve 14 million people, and in the mid-nineteenth century after independence the religious orders, which had evangelized the indigenous and black population, largely the Jesuits and Franciscans, were on the point of extinction because of republican opposition (Lynch 2012). Disestablishment in 1891, though unwelcome, stimulated the Brazilian Church to reform itself. Between 1891 and 1930 the church looked to Rome and received a new supply of foreign, mainly European, priests appointed on papal rather than republican authority, to strengthen the undermanned parish system in the increased number of dioceses. The Church curbed its own laxity and began to use its own resources to found new dioceses, recruit and train more Brazilian priests and to encourage and deploy the religious orders in evangelism and the delivery of education and welfare. It continued to court political influence in the secular state, which found its resources too meager to monopolize “secular” functions such as the delivery of welfare. The Church was often successful in acquiring political clout, especially in the Vargas period after 1930 when, as we saw above, it was officially reinserted into public education and a number of other areas the First Republic had attempted to secularize.

Apart from the first few years of the First Republic, the state depended on the Church not only to Christianize the population as the basis of national cultural discipline, but also to educate them. As late as 1920 when literacy was still a requirement for voting, 75% of the Brazilian population remained illiterate. In the rural areas literacy was rare outside the elite and even in the cities the development of a sizable literate white-collar and professional middle class mainly oc-

curred between the 1890s and the early decades of the twentieth century: in Rio and São Paulo the literacy rate rose from 50% to 75% between 1887 and 1920 when it was only 25% in the rest of the country (Owensby 1999: 28). This has significant corollaries. Access to Enlightenment ideas was confined within a small, literate, white elite even in the early nineteenth century when ideals of national independence were spreading, and in the opinion of John Lynch liberal political notions may well have been disseminated by Catholic thinkers as much as by secular sources. Comteanism had something of a vogue at the end of the nineteenth century, less for its championship of secularist rationalism than for its ideal of government by “experts,” which mirrored the aspirations of a section of the republican state functionaries. The Masonic movement also had a following among the elite, including the ecclesiastical one which furnished most of the incumbents of high Masonic office. What did not happen was a wide dissemination of secularist ideas to the mass of the population through the schools. The carriers of secularist perspectives in Europe were the elites controlling education and the media of communication, whereas in Brazil the gatekeeper of education and communication was the Catholic Church until the second half of the twentieth century. The lower status parts of the population, especially in the rural areas, have remained overwhelmingly unlettered until very recently, and no elite group has taken pains to induct them into the secularism of the European Enlightenment. There has been a Communist element in the labor movement which affected a proportion of urban manual workers, though not a majority. The exiguous role of atheism in the Brazilian religious arena is not entirely surprising.

Insofar as the indigenous and black colonial population was “Christianized,” it was the work of the Catholic Church. The indigenous and the blacks were never subject to the Inquisition and, beyond requiring baptism and attendance at mass, the Church did little to ensure or monitor their orthodoxy. Some bishops expected slave owners or employing families, rather than the Church, to teach the catechism or see it was taught. The Church allowed mixed-race and black peoples to develop a largely autonomous arena in which their rituals, especially healing cults and spiritual practices, could be exercised under a Catholic “sacred canopy.” Fiestas, often imported from Portuguese Catholic culture, were hospitable to indigenous and Afro-Brazilian practices, and Brazil’s ecclesiastical museums often display images that are simultaneously pagan spirits and Christian figures. A depiction of the Trinity displayed in the Paraty museum would have been taken in pro-

cession in the fiesta of a slave church, Our Lady of the Rosary, on the coast between Rio and São Paulo: it is a platform on a staff holding two tiny statues of the Father and the Son among bushes, dwarfed by a Holy Ghost in the form of a dove at least three times their size. The dove was, not coincidentally, the image of an important spirit in the local African pantheon, and is now the logo of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, founded in Rio in the 1980s. Indigenous and black people also had their own confraternities that needed the services of a priest perhaps once in the year to say mass at the fiesta. The black brotherhoods, in particular, tended to operate as funeral associations, welfare organizations and sources of credit as well as organizing the fiesta (Myers and Hopkins 1988). The folk Catholicism that emerged in colonial Brazil was thus intimately intertwined with African and indigenous elements.

Indigenous and black cultures did not practice voluntary celibacy as a sacred status, and tended to assume that, of course, a Catholic priest would have a woman. The moral laxity of many of the colonial clergy in this respect was no scandal to the people, merely normal. John Lynch quotes rural priests in the eighteenth century reporting during pastoral visits that their people were devout but not moral (Lynch 2012). (Many rural priests themselves came from indigenous cultures.) The moral teachings of the Catholic Church were never fully internalized by the poor even if the reformed Romanized Church from the later nineteenth century did begin to work on the moral formation of its white flock. Deviation from official moral orthodoxy, especially in sexual behavior, therefore has a long history in Brazil.

This is also relevant to the coexistence of a celebration of racial “mixing” with the maintenance of a caste-like system of racial/color stratification. The large proportion of the population claiming black ancestry is clearly evidence of extensive interbreeding, but whether it represents a history of exuberant sexual congress between races, as the “hegemony ideology” holds, or a history of sexual predation of the powerful at the expense of indigenous, black, and mixed-race women, is a very moot point. A sentimental Brazilian, myth of irresistible mutual sexual attraction, across color/race boundaries seems to have a long history. In the nineteenth century mixed-race people were called *gentes de cor*, “people of the heart,” or what the English language used to refer to as “love children.” The myth got its definitive expression in a book published in 1933 by Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-Grande e Senzala (The Masters and the Slaves)*, and was popularized, for instance, through the novels of the celebrated Brazilian novelist, and

(for a time) Communist intellectual, Jorge Amado, especially *Tenda dos Milagres* (*The Tent of Miracles*). It was also disseminated in much modernist high art and popular culture, especially at the instigation of the Estado Novo from the mid-1930s, prominently including the Rio carnival, and, crucially, football, which from the 1920s steadily lost its elite white character as an English import and became an arena for hungry black players from the urban slums (Goldblatt 2014). Freyre's account of irresistible sexual attraction across lines of race as the secret of Brazil's uniquely harmonious racial mix was discredited by social scientists and historians at the time, but the idealization has persisted, despite evidence of the sexual exploitation of women from low caste groups by white men from the very start of the colonial era when few of the post-conquest Portuguese initially brought wives or families to settle. Ann Twinam (1999) has documented for the whole Latin American continent the use of legal fictions by which interracial "love children" could acquire "proof" of their pure white descent and the honorific titles that went with it, provided they could "pass" for white. The pattern which the colonial period set up was for white men to take wives from among their own social and racial equals but to form secondary liaisons with lower status women of color. Sometimes men took illegitimate offspring to be raised with their legitimate children, and in lucky cases, furnished with legal fictions of white ancestry. The fate of the mothers is seldom a story of effortless social and status mobility, however, and this pattern of multiple sexual liaisons and secondary families formed with lower status women underlies the whole gender culture of Latin America. The single mother and her children is a family form among the poor familiar in Latin America from the conquest onward, and even today families headed by lone women still account for 16.4% of all families with children (according to the 2010 Brazilian census). Interracial marriage, as distinct from irregular liaisons, stood at almost 30% of all marriages in the 2000 census.

What, then, apart from the interests of elite white males, explains the prevalence of the myth of racial harmony when the dissatisfaction of blacks and indigenous peoples with their low social position has been so often expressed in rebellion and revolt? The colonial and early independent state had no incentive to develop a common sense of citizenship and patriotism among the non-elite. That changed from the late nineteenth century when the republican state began to encourage industrial development. One of the factors inhibiting development was the disdain of the white population not only for manual work but for commerce, and in the 1890s and again in the 1920s and 30s, the state,

particularly during the Vargas dictatorship, encouraged the immigration of Europeans, valuing Protestants as a source of enterprising commercial labor and a Weberian “work ethic.” At the same time the state and the emerging political parties had to face a restless electorate, opposition from a small middle-class political Left and from the labor movement, including a Communist sector that had been growing among the manual workers since the start of the twentieth century. In the Vargas years the curriculum of the public schools and of courses for teachers, social workers and other welfare and health professionals were explicitly designed to inculcate ideals of racial and class harmony (Owensby 1999: 213–14). Belatedly, the state began to promote a sense of common Brazilian citizenship even among the poor, to be delivered by a growing middle- and lower-middle-class cadre of education and welfare professionals. The myth of harmonious interracial sexual attraction was swept up into the wider message of interracial harmony as Brazil’s special glory. The new middle classes were compensated for their relatively powerless position by the flattery of being represented as the pivotal class on whom the state depended to prevent social disorder; their unions and professional associations responded by declaring their partnership with the government (Owensby 1999: 32–33).

Until this juncture the “social imaginary” had, in Charles Taylor’s terms, been overwhelmingly based on “vertical” rather than “horizontal” ties of solidarity. The object of the Vargas policy was to construct the image of horizontal national solidarity without radically disrupting the (racial) hierarchy of wealth and status. This was a delicate task that required the indigenous and black poor to accept their position at the bottom of the heap and subsumed them into an image of the nation formed in the interests of the white elite (Gat 2013: 280–85).

Aleida and Jan Assmann suggest cultural memory is strongly related to power structures (A. Assmann 2011; J. Assmann 2006). The dominant elite defines the “canon,” the ideal images of history that enshrine their own interests, and consign the images and memories of subaltern groups to invisibility, to “the garbage heap.” The Assmanns also argue that before writing began to preserve memories on a kind of palimpsest, memory was inscribed on the body and in the oral traditions of a group. For most of Brazilian history the cultural memory of indigenous and black people has fallen largely outside the “canon” constructed by white elites, preserved mainly in bodies, oral traditions and rituals of subordinated peoples who remained essentially unlettered until at least the 1920s. These cultural memories sheltered under

the “sacred canopy” of the Catholic Church until the religious arena was broken open by the appearance of a new wave of Pentecostalism from the 1960s onward which refused to humble itself before the “canon” of the “erudite.” After Vatican II a new generation of Catholic priests, many of them from Europe, embarked on a process of reform and purification which distanced the church from magical thinking and introduced a new minimalist aesthetic into the church buildings and liturgies. The traditional healing cults were abandoned, the *fiesta* was reformed and modernized and churches were swept clear of the “tat” that cluttered them, especially the folk images and statues of saints, many of which were instantly snapped up by the local *terreros*, unless they were “museum quality.” Rowan Ireland gives a sad, comic account of the clash of this new aesthetic with the traditional expectations of the local congregation in a church in Bahia where the new foreign priest reformed the *fiesta* in what he believed was a style attuned to the folk culture of “the people” (Ireland 1991). The indigenous and black Brazilians must have experienced the repositories of their cultural memory as quite literally a “garbage heap,” and they flocked to the new Pentecostal churches whose healing rituals had the same shape as the hybrid cults the Catholic Church had cleaned out. The indigenous and black spirits, together with the cosmos they inhabited, were preserved as “demons” whose power was subdued and subsumed by the superior spiritual power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising that Pentecostalism disproportionately attracted converts from the indigenous and black population.

Brazil has a cultural *Gestalt* radically different from the pattern of secularization exemplified by Western Europe. The religious arena has never been seriously “disenchanted,” although it is possible that globalization is currently introducing a measure of “disenchantment,” particularly among younger generations, which will spread in the coming years, though as yet it has not gone very far. The “sacred canopy” of the Catholic Church has been tattered by the defection of so many of the subaltern classes, but increasingly also by segments of the new middle classes in the knowledge and communications professions who look to a global community of peers above the heads of the entrenched traditional white elite and the clientelist system over which they still preside. Many of these have joined the *evangélicos*, particularly their prosperous, new megachurches. It is important to recognize, too, that the lowest social sectors had always been politically voiceless and faceless except when they rioted or rebelled, and have only been effectively included in the substantive establishment of political de-

mocracy in, perhaps, the last two decades. Their involvement, especially in Belo Horizonte, alongside the educated middle class protesters in the demonstrations in Brazil's cities in June–July 2013 against the government's giving priority to spending on prestige public events, notably the Football World Cup in 2014, rather than welfare and educational projects, shows them demanding the right to influence important democratic decisions.

The increasing visibility and political engagement of indigenous and black Brazilians to which Otávio Velho draws attention, and the flow into Pentecostalism of just those social sectors, are pointers to the ongoing changes in, and dilemmas of, the Brazilian religious, cultural and political arenas. Since at least the early 1990s social scientists of religion have pointed out the exchange of elements between Pentecostal and Catholic styles of worship, and indeed between Pentecostalism and all other mainstream Christian churches. This is most marked in areas of the world where they are serious rivals in a newly competitive religious market, such as Latin America (Levine 2004). The adoption of charismatic healing rituals by Catholic charismatics is one of the most striking examples, but the neo-Pentecostal reintroduction of ritual “magic,” for example in cults of miraculously efficacious material objects such as the clothing or even the sweat of charismatic healers, sees borrowing flowing the other way in “materializing” rituals such as classical Pentecostalism condemns as “superstitious” (Csordas 1994; Wiegele 2005). Thomas Csordas suggests we are not seeing “re-enchantment” but rather are recognizing “the same age-old waters of religion as they fill the newly constructed channels that flow between the local and the global” (Csordas 2009: 9). Charles Taylor argues that all this may be part of a global change in which the constituent elements of religious traditions are beginning to float free and recombine into ever-new packages in the old “confessional states,” “unbundling” and “rebundling” in a bewildering range of mixtures which include fusions of secularist and transcendent perspectives and mixtures of “religion” and “magic” (Taylor 2013). Something of this kind is clearly happening in the Brazilian religious arena.

The Assmann's analysis of stratified cultural memory suggests the new cultural self-consciousness of indigenous and black peoples may by no means have yet run its course. Given the increased transnational reach of religious traditions, these fragmenting developments raise questions about the traditional (Durkheimian) role of religion in national and cultural identity (Csordas 2009). In the case of Brazil, a national identity is rather recent and only shallowly rooted among many

of the subaltern sectors, particularly the indigenous and black Brazilians. Insofar as their sense of Brazilian identity was historically anchored it was in the Catholic Church more than in the state, and, with exceptions among the indigenous peoples, in the Portuguese language. There are still observers who believe that what Velho called a “hegemonic national ideology” of interracial “mixing” did effectively perform its mythic magic even among the poor. In a recent book on nationalism, Anwar Gat writes:

The extreme class and wealth differences in Brazil closely correspond to race. Still, the reason why Brazilians of all descents view themselves as one people and nation is the distinctive culture, including a common language, they share and the salience of ‘mixed-blood.’ (Gat 2013: 285)

Perhaps Gat is right. Yet David Goldblatt (2014) argues that although football has been a successful vehicle for multi-racial national identity when the country’s national and top league teams are winning, when the national team fails, (as it did in the 2014 World Cup Final) the undertow of racism in the society and in the sport quickly makes itself felt: “Brazilian football has been a conduit for the mental and emotional pathologies of a still brutalized society” (Goldblatt 2013: 221). Moreover, the surging self-consciousness of black and indigenous Brazilians and the continuing flight from the Catholic Church suggests the Church’s role as overarching symbol of Brazilian cultural identity no longer operates for a considerable proportion of the population outside the old white elite. The question is whether anything else has taken, or will take, its place in a nation whose religious arena is now irrevocably pluralist.

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