

**RELIGION AND SCIENTIFICISM IN BRAZIL**  
**TOWARDS A REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF KNOWLEDGE**  
**A GEOGRAPHICAL ESSAY**

Wolf-Dietrich Sahr<sup>1</sup>

*In 1998, devastating fires threatened several indigenous territories of the Yanomami Indians in the Roraima State of Northern Brazil. Those fires usually occur in the end of the dry season and are mainly caused by uncontrolled deforestation actions. Initially, when the fires appeared, the government did not pay much attention to them. However, the increasing advance of the fire front, which finally covered more than 10% of the State's territory, led to a military action. But it was already too late - all attempts of the Brazilian army and air force failed to counter a catastrophe that threatened the home of 30.000 Yanomamis.*

*Desperately, the leaders of the Yanomami tribe tried to prevent the worst. Emissionaries were sent to other indigenous groups to invite their pajé as relig-*

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<sup>1</sup> Dept. of Geography, Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil.

*ious experts to present ritual dances that call for rain. Two Nambikwara Indians from Northern Mato Grosso performed a several days long ritual and the rain started already in the same night. The message was sent to press journalists who accompanied the Roraima disaster and was welcomed with surprise in all national journals and television stations. It seemed that Western technology and military rationality had failed, and traditional and religious knowledge was rehabilitated.*

### **On the graben of meaning and matter**

The Roraima case shows that the relation between knowing and environmental transformation is essentially geographical and takes place at the contact zone between meaning and matter<sup>2</sup>. Meaning emerges from an intersubjective world of signification where the intellectual competence of different actors is disputing the production and reproduction of sense. Matter can be interpreted, in this context, as a condition and result of the human performance of actions, as an outside/inside texture framed by the material world of materiality. Thus, a dialogic relation binds the polarity between meaning and matter<sup>3</sup>.

The contact zone between the mental signification system and the material recursive world is socially disputed. Zierhofer denominates this zone a relational "Weltbild" between subjects and objects.<sup>4</sup> Its relation is culturally constructed and depends on the difference of the respective ideologies in use. The Brazilian example referred to above is very clear in this sense. It demonstrates that the ideological dispute between the tech-

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<sup>2</sup> ZIERHOFER, Wolfgang. Geographie der Hybriden. **Erdkunde**, Berlin, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 1, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> GOTTDIENER, Mark. **Postmodern Semiotics: a material culture and the forms of modern life**. Oxford: Cambridge, Blackwell, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ZIERHOFER, Wolfgang. Grundlagen für eine Humangeographie des relationalen Weltbildes. **Erdkunde**, Berlin, Vol. 51, No. 2, p. 82, 1997.

nicist government on one hand and the religion-based indigenous culture on the other has serious social and environmental implications. It disputes a problematic zone on the edges of both forms of knowledge and, as such, resembles a geological graben.

The Philosopher Ernst Cassirer has put space into the midst of this graben. Space emerges, in his understanding, in between of the mental world as forms of ordering (Ordnungsbegriff) and the objective world as forms of being (Seinsbegriff)<sup>5</sup>. He refers to different types of knowledge, which are ordering the physical space through “symbolic forms” like, for example, language, mythology, religion, art, science, but also technology and ethics<sup>6</sup>.

Also G. Deleuze describes knowledge with a spatial metaphor. This author interprets space as a correspondence between the perceivable and the speakable world<sup>7</sup>. According to him, knowledge cannot be reduced neither to its material nor to its semiotic aspects but crops up as a transversal force between corporal experience and mental construction, where the perceivable can transgress into the direction of the speakable, but also the speakable can return to the perceivable. As such, knowledge is a spatio-semiotic expression on the divergence between the mental and the corporal element denoted as social technologies, some concrete and related to the objective world like houses, prisons, and hospitals, and others as abstract as the ideas of individuality and identity<sup>8</sup>.

The example of Roraima demonstrates the socio-cultural variability in positioning knowledge as a space between material conditions and ideologies. Whereas the technological attitude of the Brazilian government tries to resolve the problem via an engineering (and military) ideology, the indigenous local population opted for a religious-mythological interpretation of space. Therefore, we have to ask what kind of geographical network of symbolic relations defines the ideological

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<sup>5</sup> CASSIRER, Ernst. Mythischer, ästhetischer und theoretischer Raum. In: CASSIRER, Ernst. **Symbol, Technik, Sprache**. Hamburg: Meiner, p. 93-95, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> The Philosophy of symbolic forms, developed by Ernst Cassirer, encompasses several fields of cultural expressions. For language, religion and science, see: CASSIRER, Ernst. **Philosophie der symbolischen Formen**. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Vol. 1-3, 1994. For arts (but also including the aforementioned fields), see: CASSIRER, Ernst. **Ensaio sobre o Homem. Introdução a uma filosofia da cultura humana**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1994. For technology, see: CASSIRER, Ernst. Form und Technik. In: CASSIRER, Ernst. **Symbol Technik, Sprache**. Hamburg: Meiner, p. 68, 1995. For ethics, see GRÄSER, Andreas. **Ernst Cassirer**. München: Beck, 1994, 108 ff.

<sup>7</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Foucault**. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1992, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

field of Brazil, assuming that there exists a regional geography of thoughts, beyond the traditional positivist regional geography<sup>9</sup>.

### **Brazil - a magmatic country of scientificism and religions**

Brazil is a country where different ideological traditions are melting and/or diverging but are relate themselves to the same physical configuration of space. This takes place in a post-colonial context where occidental forms of knowledge are confronted with other forms of understanding the world, a common characteristic of nearly all former colonies<sup>10</sup>. This is usually based on the problematic assumption of the superiority of Western knowledge in a multicultural context.

Brazil was founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century on the ideological basis of the Counter-Reform, and the country has, in spite of all attempts for modernization, maintained its baroque roots in a lot of different aspects. Therefore, it is not surprising when Darcy Ribeiro, one of the great Brazilian intellectuals, says that the country resembles a tropical Roman empire<sup>11</sup>. This Romanity encompasses various components: a strong link with religion and imaginary symbolism in the forms of knowledge, a high grade of hierarchical homogeneity in the political system coupled with a strong utilitarian philosophy, and an impressive diversification of local and ethnic cultures resulting in a high number of social and perceptive conflicts.

The existence of the profound divergence between popular cultures and elitist culture contrasts clearly with the official attempts to paint a picture of a culturally diverse Brazil but which has a homogeneous national identity. The high variety of different cultures, they maybe indigenous, African, European, or, more recently, Asian, often frustrates the ideal configuration of a "baroque" unitarian state. The recent clashes of the Brazilian police force with the Pataxó Indians and the popular Movement of the Landless (*Movimento sem Terra*) during the official

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<sup>9</sup> THRIFT, Nigel. For a new regional geography. **Progress in Human Geography**, Vol. 14, 1990, pp. 272-279.

<sup>10</sup> see for ex. SAHR, Wolf-Dietrich. **Ville und Countryside. Land-Stadt-Verflechtungen im ländlichen St. Lucia. Ein Beitrag zu postmodernen Sozialgeographie der Karibik**. Hamburg: Wayasbah, 1997; BHABHA, Homi. **The location of culture**. London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> RIBEIRO, Darcy. **O povo brasileiro. A formação e o sentido do Brasil**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995, p. 435.

festivities for the 500<sup>th</sup> “anniversary” of Brazil brought this to physical clearness.

In fact, Brazil is living at the edge of various forms of knowledge, in a complicated network of differentiating “differAnces”<sup>12</sup>, mainly configured by the dispute between the “popular” and the “official” perspective. Various Brazilian authors have tried to understand the country on the basis of this structural dualism. Gilberto Freyre, sociologist and descendent of a large land owner, had once welcomed the melting process as essential for the creation of a national *brasilianidade*<sup>13</sup>. This was during the 1930ies when Brazil passed the dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas who tried to create a new and modern Brazilian “Nation” by force. Also Darcy Ribeiro, anthropologist, educator and late Vice Governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro, has, in more recent times, referred to a “new model of structuration” of the Brazilian society on the basis of an ethnic-national unity - not necessarily based on cultural homogeneity<sup>14</sup>.

However, other intellectuals have criticized the relation between the State and the people of Brazil. For example, the anthropologist Roberto DaMatta, lecturing in Rio de Janeiro and the United States, speaks of a “Brazilian dilemma” where official culture and popular culture are clearly opposed<sup>15</sup>. Also Alfredo Bosi, literary critic of excellence, focuses in his book “Dialectics of colonization” on the difference between the modernizing culture of official Brazil and the country's popular traditions<sup>16</sup>.

Religion is plainly involved in these textures; it appears on one hand as a unitarian approach of Roman Catholicism disputing with illuminist rationality, but on the other hand consists of a high variety of popular religions. Usually, religion was not very visible in the country's analysis, but recently its social function has received considerable attention by authors critical to the amalgamation thesis. Various proponents

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<sup>12</sup> The term “differAnce” was artificially created by Jaques DERRIDA to define processes of signification, when differences are permanently reproduced through human intellectual activity by changing their meanings, see DERRIDA, Jacques. **Randgänge der Philosophie**. Wien: Passagen, 1988, pp. 29ff.; also SAHR, op. cit., 1997, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> FREYRE, Gilberto. **Casa Grande & Senzala**. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1999 (orig. 1930)

<sup>14</sup> RIBEIRO, Darcy. Op. cit., p. 19-21.

<sup>15</sup> DAMATTA, Roberto. **Carnavais, malandros e heróis. Para uma sociologia do dilemma brasileiro**. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1997 (orig. 1978).

<sup>16</sup> BOSI, Alfredo. **Dialética da Colonização**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992, p. 11ff.

have pointed to the fact that religion gains more and more space (and recognition) as a constructive force in the formation of Brazil<sup>17</sup>.

With such a socio-political texture, which interweaves popular cultures and elitist culture as well as scientificism/technicism and religion, Brazil and other countries of Latin America participate in a continental drifting process of decolonisation from Europe. In Brazil, modernity and science have assumed very different social functions from those in Europe. Latin America appears to be much more a rhizomatic product<sup>18</sup> of para- and post-modernity where popular and modernist cultures live together in an intricate network of diversity. To understand the “geological” fundaments of these constructions, we have to venture into visiting both the Continent of Modernity and the vast Ocean of Religion, the latter usually not very familiar to members of the scientific community.

### The Continent of Modernity

The Continent of Modernity can be interpreted metaphorically as an on-going and reflexive process of knowing the world, a process that is traced neatly by authors like E. Cassirer and S. Toulmin<sup>19</sup>. Its knowledge content is usually seen from 3 different angles, the objective, the inter-subjective and the subjective world<sup>20</sup>.

- On the *objective level*, modern knowledge is systematic, coherent, easily codifiable and universal. This leads to certain preferences for unitarian systems of thought like mathematics and abstract thinking, pragmatic technologies, the restructuration of the economic world system by one currency (the US-Dollar), and the prevalence of a reductionist language like technical English.

<sup>17</sup> Two excellent and comprehensive studies on the religious continuum of Brazil are PIERUCCI, A.F. & PRANDI, Reginaldo. **A realidade social das religiões no Brasil**. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1996 and MONTES, Maria Lucia. As figuras do sagrado: entre o público e o privado. In SCHWARCZ, Lilian Moritz (org.). **História da vida privada brasileira. Vol. IV – Contrastes da intimidade contemporânea**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998, pp. 63-172.

<sup>18</sup> The term *rhizome* was introduced into the history of philosophical thinking in the 1970s by DELEUZE, Gilles & GUATTARI, Felix. **Mil Platôs. Capitalismo e Esquizofrenia**. Vol. I. Rio de Janeiro: ED. 34.

<sup>19</sup> CASSIRER, Ernst. **Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit**. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 4 Vols., 1994. TOULMIN, Stephen. **Kosmopolis: die unerkannten Aufgaben der Moderne**. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1994.

<sup>20</sup> This differentiation derives from HABERMAS, Jürgen. **Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns**. Erster Band. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, p. 149.

- On the *intersubjective level*, modern knowledge is socially developed and universally transferable. Modern education systems part from the idea, that everybody must have access to knowledgeable information, principally for his professional achievement. This coincides with the assumption that there are general human behaviours and values which can and must be shared by all citizens of the world and which have to be learned by nearly everybody.

- On the *subjective level*, modern knowledge must be provable and reflexive, certain and universally understandable<sup>21</sup>. This characteristic is a result of the enlightenment dream that all human beings are equal and, therefore, act on the basis of the same discursive conditions. Reason and reasoning is evaluated as the only possibility to understand each other in a space without domination, where the strength of arguments goes beyond the strength of physical violence.

From such a picture, the modern world seems to be a continent of contingency. However, the fact that even A. Giddens wonders why religion and tradition do not disappear shows that something is wrong in this modernist view. The example of Brazil demonstrates clearly, that these aspects of modernity do not necessarily transform a society in its fundamental sociological structure.

### **Geological layers of modernism in Brazil**

The roots of modernity lie in Europe, in the end of the Middle Ages, beginning with the amalgamation process of scholastic thought which integrated Christian-Judaic messianism, classical Greek thinking, Roman political technology and Islamic sensitivity. This had initiated a political and epistemological expansion process that, since then, has not come to a halt. The scholastic ideas eroded in Renaissance time to Eastern Europe, to the colonial areas in the Afro-Asian continents, and to the so-called "New World". Consequently, the European ideological sediments were transported to the world's periphery.

In Brazil, "modern" history started with the introduction of medieval forms of territoriality. The Knights' Order of Christ, the Portu-

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<sup>21</sup> Probably the most prominent proponent of the concept of individualization of the subject in modern times is Anthony GIDDENS' **The consequences of modernity**. Oxford, Polity Press, 1990.

guese successor of the Templar's Order, organized the exploration of the country. Though the division of the Brazilian territory was made by implanting geometric forms on the local map, dividing the land in *capitanias* and *sesmarias*<sup>22</sup> and, as such, following the rational-mathematical principle of modernity, its ideological representation was thought in religious terms of the Middle Ages. Every inch of land pertained to God and his saints, and all taxes had to be paid to religious institutions<sup>23</sup>. Up to today, this religious heritage is omnipresent in Brazil. Town names like São Paulo, São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, São Luis and Belém are linguistic testimonies for this official Christian attitude.

However, the newly introduced exploration system was linked to the modern myth of technology. It worked like a machine based on new techniques and mercantile principles, using sugar cane, ships and slaves as technological means. The Brazilian poet Gregorio de Matos speaks of a “*machina mercante*” when he describes the poetic geography of the country's first capital Salvador amidst of cane fields. Originally, these *machinas* were the commercial ships transporting sugar from the New to the Old World, but in baroque terms *machina* also denotes invention and engine, symbols of technological advance<sup>24</sup>.

The Jesuits are probably the most striking example of how technological modernity and conservative Christian belief were combined in Brazil. Aside of the large plantations (*engenhos*), it was mainly the Jesuitical idea of the *reduções*, these relatively huge settlements of Amerindians under Jesuitical dominance, which transformed the Brazilian environment by a mixture of the ideology of Catholic Christianity, missionary eclecticism (the teaching of Christianity was performed in Tupi-Guarani), a technically advanced modernist agriculture and even internal democracy in the reductions<sup>25</sup>. In the South of Brazil and in the Amazon region, the Jesuits controlled large areas of the country. They probably represent the most “modern”, if not “post-modern” idea of Bra-

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<sup>22</sup> For the role of *capitanias* and *sesmarias* in Brazilain territorial development: ANDRADE, Mario Corrêa de. **A questão do território no Brasil**. São Paulo:Hucitec, 1995 and ABREU, Mauricio de Almeida. A apropriação do território no Brasil colonial. In: Casto, Ina de et al. (eds.). **Explorações geográficas**. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> MARX, Murilo. **Cidade no Brasil – terra de quem ?** São Paulo: Nobel, 1991. ABEU, Maurício de Aleida, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> MATOS, Gregório de. **Obra poética**, Vol. 1, Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1992, p. 333; see also BOSI, Alfredo. Op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> LUGON, Clovis. **A república "comunista" cristã dos guaranis**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1977.

zil at that time, as their territorial configuration even includes a comprehensive schooling system with basic and academic institutions<sup>26</sup>.

The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1759 and the “reform process” initiated by an illuminist Portuguese minister, the Marquês de Pombal, can be seen in the context of a policy, which tried to initiate technological advance through a conservative modernization of the commercial system. This attempt was accompanied by an absolutist progressive attitude of equity that resulted in the oppression of most of the local Brazilian cultures<sup>27</sup>. At a time, when countries like the United States and France initiated a philosophical-educational modernization process that formed individual and thoughtful citizens and their identity, the colonial government of Brazil neglected the educational formation of its local population and excluded any idea of autonomous individuality in the colonies. In the eyes of the governors of those times, Brazil was a productive engine in the world system, and its “citizens” appeared mainly as pieces of machinery. Knowledge about the local space of to Brasil only existed in an informal way among the popular cultures, and much of this knowledge was interrelated with religion, the basic social element in the country. The Portuguese brain trust of that time, the University of Coimbra, disposed of relatively little information in its archives about Brazil, and this information was often limited to the economic and Catholic perspective.

It is a curious fact that the technological idea of baroque modernity (the myth of the engine) had come to Brazil without the other side of modernity, the construction of an autonomous and individual subject. The philosophical revolution of modernity, the Renaissance discovery of “Man as the Centre of the World” based on Protestant and humanist ideology, and the illuminist project of “Ratio and Individuality” only found a few and rapidly aborted revolutionary reflections in Pernambuco and Minas Gerais.

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<sup>26</sup> PAIVA, José Maria. Educação jesuítica no Brasil colonial. In: LOPES, Eliae Maria Teixeira et al. (eds.): **500 anos de educação no Brasil**. Belo Horizonte: Autentica, 2000, p. 43-60.

<sup>27</sup> For the political dimension, see: MAXWELL, Kenneth. **Marquês de Pombal. Paradoxo do iluminismo**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1997. For the educational aspect, see: AZEVEDO, Fernando de. **A cultura brasileira. Introdução ao estudo da cultura no Brasil**. Brasília, Rio de Janeiro: UnB, UFRJ, 6. edição, 1996, p. 531.

### The flood of scientificism

The arrival of the Portuguese court in 1808, which had escaped the Napoleonic invasion in Portugal, and the proclamation of an independent Empire of Brazil in 1822 changed completely the ideological situation of the country. The Portuguese king, somehow lost in a country without “culture”, invited several European scientific missions to Brazil. From 1815-1817, the expedition of Maximilian von Wied-Neuwied passed through the mountains of Rio de Janeiro, Espirito Santo, Minas Gerais and Bahia. The French Artistic Mission from 1816-1824, probably the most dominant foreign influence, introduced a neoclassical vision of tropical Brazil via its painters and architects J.F. Debret, N.A. Taunay, and G. Montigny. An Austrian Mission arrived in 1817 and stayed until 1821, with naturalist painters like T. Ender and scientists like C.F.P. von Martius and J.B. von Spix, who were mainly travelling the interior of the country and were very much interested in ethnography and natural sciences. The expedition of G. H. von Langsdorff, a German naturalist working for the Russian Government, also visited the interior of Central Brazil from 1822 to 1829.<sup>28</sup> Other official excursions and numerous *viajantes* (=travellers) passed through the country leaving us documents of an incredible scrutiny describing - with European eyes - the Brazil of that time. Using an academic “cool” style in their iconographic and literary descriptions, they painted an official picture of Brazil based on artistic philosophical and artistic attitudes developed in Europe.

But though, or perhaps because, these researchers and artists were foreign, they are the first ones to perceive the various existing popular cultures of the country in a more or less neutral way: the hard life of the lower Portuguese classes, the survival culture of the *caboclo* or *sertanejo*, indigenous civilizations and the strong African element in the cities. The contribution of the *viajantes* is purely naturalistic and empiricist in epistemological terms, however, its motivation derives from an enthusiastic romantic impetus to show an exotic country in its beauty and diversity. As such, the “modern” scientific description of Brazil started with the view of the rising natural sciences and ended up with a strong European “bourgeois” romanticism under the auspices of the Brazilian government.

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<sup>28</sup> A formidable impression of the results of the naturalists' incursions to Brazil gives BELLUZO, Ana Maria de Morães. **O Brasil dos viajantes**. São Paulo: Metalivros, Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 1999.

The dependence of science on the Brazilian government continues when the Imperial Court installs in 1838 the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* (IHGB), in cooperation with the economic and literary elite of Rio de Janeiro. The institute rapidly turns out to be one of the most influential intellectual centres of Brazil. Since 1840, its meetings are permanently presided by the Emperor D. Pedro II, who favours the evolution of an ideological national romanticism to forge a unitarian Brazilian idea.<sup>29</sup> D. Pedro II is equally interested in technological advance, introduces telephone and photography to Brazil, and makes the country participate in nearly all World Exhibitions (from 1862 in London to 1889 in Paris). He proclaims himself an absolutist scientific emperor: “I am the science”<sup>30</sup>. However, his intellectual elite, enclosed in Rio de Janeiro, shows little interest for local cultures in its own country, cultures that are usually dismissed as uncivilized and uneducated<sup>31</sup>. And, in fact, the “scientific advance” of the court and the small elite did not tangle large portions of the population. Therefore, the Emperor had to maintain a religious image of his government to reach out closer to the Brazilian people. He did this by organizing processions, church services, and numerous popular festivities of religious-laic character<sup>32</sup>. As such, the scientific civilization and its ideology had only superficially touched the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1889, one year after the abolition of slavery, a “revolution”, which could be better described as a military coup, is performed by the army and unsatisfied landowners from São Paulo, and removes the Imperial system. The new Republican order is modelled after the III Republic of France and refers itself to the ideals of the French Revolution. Its main ideology is based on the philosophy of positivism of August Comte<sup>33</sup>. Its influence is so dominant, that until today the Brazilian flag carries a positivist phrase of Comte: “Order and progress”. The military and intellectual elite introduces a strong technician and engineering vision of Brazil on a very low-profile systematic understanding of the natural sciences

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<sup>29</sup> SCHWARCZ, Lilian Moritz. **As barbas do Imperador. Dom Pedro II, um monarca nos trópicos**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999, pp. 126ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>31</sup> AZEVEDO, op. cit., p. 383.

<sup>32</sup> ABREU, Márcia. **O império divino: festas religiosas e cultura popular no Rio de Janeiro**. 1830-1900. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronetira, São Paulo: FAPESP, 1999; TINHORÃO, José Ramos. **As festas no Brasil colonial**. São Paulo: Editora.

<sup>33</sup> LINS, I. **História do positivismo no Brasil**. São Paulo: Nacional, 1974.

and leaves behind the romantic attitudes of the Empire<sup>34</sup>. From their point of view, the country is an object, a resource for economic exploitation. And the Brazilian people becomes a target of the ideological domination of positivism<sup>35</sup>.

Again, the new elite develops various scientific institutions to promote a better exploration of the country: The Geological and Mineral Service in Rio de Janeiro, the Cabinet for Resistant Materials of the Polytechnical School in São Paulo, and the Agronomic Institute in Campinas<sup>36</sup>. But probably the most influential effect of the so-called Old Republic is the project of a general, laic and free public fundamental education. It represents the official rupture with the Catholic belief and a new attempt to penetrate the profound religious sediment of the Brazilian population. However, its success is very limited: in 1912, there are only 26 secondary schools in the whole of Brazil, and by 1930 only 30 % of the relevant Brazilian population goes to school<sup>37</sup>. Consequently, the positivist ideal penetrates only a small section of the population, leaving behind the major part of Brazilians and their popular cultures.

Again, a strange fact, but not surprising - the self-representation of the Old Republic is more closely linked to religious elements than its ideology permits. The Republic selects a national hero: the army sergeant Tiradentes from Minas Gerais who, 100 years before, had participated in an insurrection against the Portuguese regime. After his rebellion was squashed, he was condemned to death in Rio de Janeiro. 100 years later it is him who becomes a kind of a "national Jesus Christ" and since then his monument can be found in nearly every Brazilian town. In a clear historical falsification, these monuments present a man with long hair and beard, wrapped in a long and simple gown, bare footed. Tiradentes had passed a Golgata of his own on his last way from the former Brazilian parliament in Rio de Janeiro (with the adjoined prison) to the Praça Tiradentes, where he was executed and cut into four pieces. The example of Tiradentes shows, however, how alienated the social understanding of the Brazilian elite was of its own country's history. It seems to be curious that the Republican government had to refer to a long-time ago story to justify

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<sup>34</sup> BOSI, Alfredo. Op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> CARVALHO, José Murilo de. **A formação das almas. O imaginário da República no Brasil**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1990, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> VARGAS, Milton. O início da pesquisa tecnológica do Brasil. In: VARGAS, Milton (ed.). **História da técnica e da tecnologia no Brasil**. São Paulo: UNESP, 1994, p. 214.

<sup>37</sup> RIBEIRO, Maria Luisa Santos. **História da educação brasileira. A organização escolar**. Campinas: Autores associados, 2000, p. 84 & 87.

a “revolution”<sup>38</sup>. But what appears even more strange in this respect is the complete lack of a symbol related to the Brazilian people and its cultural diversity.

The rise of the dictatorial state of Getúlio Vargas in 1930 reinforces the positivist and technological thinking in the country’s development. However, Vargas intensifies considerably the penetration of the technicist ideology into the Brazilian population. The national development model, based on import-substitution and industrialization via the attempt to form a modern class society, requires technological expertise, impossible to achieve with the existing inadequate, out-fashioned and weak schooling system. Therefore, education gains a major importance in the 1934 constitution. This coincides with the foundation of several scientific institutions to improve the economic and educational conditions of the country, among them the *Instituto Nacional de Estudos Pedagógicos* (founded 1937), the *Instituto Nacional do Livro* (1937), the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (1938), the statal mining company *Companhia Vale do Rio Doce* (1942), the *Instituto de Física Teórica* (1950), the *Instituto Brasileiro de Café* (1952), and the statal oil company *Petrobras* (1953). All these institutions are linked to scientific research.

The most decisive measure of the Vargas time is the installation of a modern university system. Though the first Brazilian university was founded in 1912 in Curitiba, but soon aborted, it is only in 1931, when the University of Rio de Janeiro is transformed into the University of Brazil (UnB), and in 1934, when the University of São Paulo (USP) begins to operate. Only then we can speak of a modern university system according to the Humboldt ideal. From then on the Brazilian system follows mainly the French academic organizational forms<sup>39</sup> and serves with its three pillars - education, research and extension - the promotion of scientific knowledge for a wider part of the population.

But again, science is seen principally as natural and engineering science, in service of the patriotic formation of a people (order) and technological advance (progress), however limiting the political and ideological dispute among the population. Between 1950 and 1964, a more open discursive atmosphere arises at the Brazilian universities, but soon will be silenced again by the military regime. A profound change in the discursive

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<sup>38</sup> CARVALHO, José Murilo de, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> JACOB, Günter. Universitäten, Wissenschaft und Forschung in Brasilien. In: BRIESEMESTER, Dietrich et al. (eds.). **Brasilien heute: Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur**. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1994, p. 406.

sive attitudes can only be observed in the end of the 1970ies when, under a strong influence of intellectuals which returned from their exile, a mainly francophone and structural Marxism is introduced by researchers like Florestan Fernandes, Octavio Ianni, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Milton Santos and others, opening a vivid debate about the role of the university in the society. The focus of this discussion is the question whether the university (and the schooling system) should be a place of critical knowledge or an instrument to promote national development by technological advance. This coincides with a certain rupture within the university, where social sciences mainly adhere the first position, and natural and technological sciences predominantly the second.

More recently, however, a wider range of approaches like phenomenology and post-structuralism in the social sciences and philosophy as well as chaos-theoretic and complexity-oriented tendencies in the natural sciences have gained space among Brazilian intellectuals. Consequently, now the universities live a strong, multi-faceted and open scientific dialogue. This contradicts, to a certain degree, the still prevailing technological and unitarian politics of the Federal and State governments based on the old engineering and positivistic approach. What is common sense, however, between both the intellectual and political elite is the opinion that scientific thought is crucial for Brazil's future evolution. But this intellectual attitude is, on the other hand, still very distant from the mental processes which are characteristic for a large portion of the Brazilian population, though it seems that this gap is diminishing.

The history of the Brazilian intellectual development demonstrates that science, in itself, has a strong ideological connotation in a specific historical context that is clearly divided between elite and people. In Brazil, scientific thought is not only science but also ideology. This has repercussions on the geographical construction of the country. The flood of scientificism, which only superficially touched Brazil in the 19<sup>th</sup> century via the Imperial elite, and trickled down into a certain part of the population via positivist and technological elements during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only now starts to irrigate the soil of the Brazilian people with a reflexive ideology, introducing finally the subjective side of modernity. Consequently, numerous intellectual flowers begin to bloom even outside the university and, again, the country changes its face.

### **The Ocean of the Unknown: Religion and its sedimentation**

It may be contradicting, but one of the first sociological objects, which appears as a subject of the new and plural intellectual discussion in Brazil, is the discovery of the religious elements in the Brazilian society.<sup>40</sup> Up to today, religion is the prevailing symbolic form of thinking among large portions of the Brazilian population<sup>41</sup>. It seems, that this tendency is even increasing. Therefore, it is worth to reflect a little more carefully on how the symbolic form of religion acts in the geography of thought in Brazil.

Religion, as a symbolic form in all its variations, is closely linked to the construction of the world. It participates directly in the formation of social relations and the reproduction of social knowledge via a symbolic understanding of the geographical environment.<sup>42</sup> As such, it is positioned like science in the graben between meaning and matter, represents equally a semiotic-spatial form of knowledge and has a coherent and systematic view on the social and environmental relations.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to the modernist perspective that parts from the assumption that theoretically everything is knowledgeable, religion goes beyond that idea and also tackles the Unknown. As such it is a form of knowledge, which resembles an Ocean that only precariously can be travelled by the human mind. What is higher than our comprehension is God, Yahweh, Allah, Olodumare - the sacred and untouchable. Rudolf Otto has called this the *numinous* element in religion, which is mysterious, fascinating, terrifying and simply irrational.<sup>44</sup>

The access to this irrational and unlimited world can only be achieved by religious experience that is very different from scientific knowledge, under the condition of our limited human reality,<sup>45</sup> In religion, the perception of the world transcends the real world via the dialogue

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<sup>40</sup> One example for this recently enforced attitude is the excellent analysis of Brazilian cultural philosophy of CHAUI, Marilene. **Brasil. Mito fundador e sociedade autoritária**. São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> PIERUCCI, Antônio Flávio; PRANDI, Reginaldo. Op. cit. and MONTES, Maria Lúcia. Op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> BERGER, Peter L. **The Sacred Canopy: elements of a sociological theory of religion**. New York: Doubleday, 1969.

<sup>43</sup> see GEERTZ, Clifford. **A interpretação das culturas**. Rio de Janeiro: LTC, 1989.

<sup>44</sup> OTTO, Rudolf. **Das Heilige: über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen**. München: Beck, 1979.

<sup>45</sup> MESLIN, Michel. **L'expérience humain du divin**. Paris: Ed. Du Cerf, 1988.

with supernatural and sacred forces, maybe in the form of individual prayers, maybe in public and private rituals. As such, religion is a perfect example for a phenomenological process of experiencing the world.<sup>46</sup> It is mainly integrated into human action, and less theoretical than it seems. In consequence, religion happens through communion, while science, under the conditions of critical thought, is based on contesting. This gives science a certain disadvantage in a society where the constructive elements are still precariously consolidated. Under the Brazilian conditions, scientific modern thought represents a limited perception of the world, only based on empirical results from experiments, organized observations and intellectual reflections defined by rational rules and, typical for Brazil, controlled by a dominating class. In consequence, from an agency aspect religious experience is far ahead of scientific practice as a social propulsion force in the Brazilian society.

To understand the theoretical categories of religion in a more comprehensive form, we have to refer again to the three levels of social construction mentioned above:

- On the *objective level*, religion is transcendental and, therefore, highly symbolic. The religious experience cannot keep itself within its hermeneutic concept; it always has to overcome the limits of its cultural constructions. Imagination, fantasy, suspicion transcend the actual world. In religion, the vision of the real world is a result of the visionary character bridging the gap between the body, the house and the cosmos.<sup>47</sup>
- On the *intersubjective level*, nearly all religions point to the communion character, which avoids a strong separation between earthly and unearthly forces but also within the social community. Therefore, in religious knowledge the scientific categorical system is socially rejected and most activities are based on a "mixed" corporal and intellectual perception of the world, where the empirical and the transcendental aspects are intermingled.<sup>48</sup> This mixture between social practice and intellectual interpretation probably explains the highly syncretic character of most religions.

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<sup>46</sup> BELLO, Angela Ales. **Culturas e religiões. Uma leitura fenomenológica.** Bauru: EDUSC, 1998.

<sup>47</sup> ELIADE, Mircea. **O sagrado e o profano. A essência das religiões.** São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1992.

<sup>48</sup> CASSIRER, Ernst. **Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Zweiter Teil: Der Mythos.** Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994, p. 95.

- On the *subjective level*, it is again communion that plays a key role. In contrast to the social principle of the intersubjective level, communion now means the individual experience of the Superior via a coherent symbolic system, an ethical universe and certain solidarity with nature.<sup>49</sup> This opens the space of religion for emotions and reflections. It is a fundamental religious discovery that this symbolic form is the basis of inspiration (=thought) and aspiration (=motivation for practice) of the individual within the mundane world.<sup>50</sup>

The reflections above demonstrate that religious knowledge cannot be evaluated simply by sociological or rationalistic methods. Without the acknowledgement that religious experience is communion, and as such socially more profound than science, a scientific view on religion can only superficially touch the surface of the religious sentiments of the population.

### **Brazil - an archipelago of religions**

The Roraima case above shows that Brazil is a continent where various religions and ideologies are interacting in a dense network. The vividness and colour of this scene is impressive. The religious field is characterized by a strong competition for a better understanding of the world and for an improved mastering of its problems by symbols, practices, rites, values, beliefs and behavioural rules.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, its description cannot follow the same historic linearity as used for the description of the modernization process via science in Brazil. The idea of religious time is not so much linked to a timely sequence, but much more to condensation.

In the colonial period, the religious construction of Christian Brazil was mainly performed by the Roman Catholic Church, divided into three different aspects: the official Episcopal hierarchical structure with archdioceses, dioceses and parishes were invested to govern the church (secular clerics), the missionary activities of religious orders, mainly the Franciscans, the Benedictines, the Carmelites, the Jesuits and the Capuchins (regular clerics) and the laic associations of tertiary orders and fraternity societies (*irmandades*), which guaranteed the ritual performance

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>51</sup> MONTES, Maria Lucia. Op. cit., p. 71; PIERUCCI, Antônio Flávio; PRANDI, Reginaldo. Op. cit., p. 275 ff.

and traditions by maintaining chapels and churches.<sup>52</sup> These elements were submitted to the dictate of Rome and have resulted in a complicated network of sacralizations and territorial devotions around the country.<sup>53</sup> Aside, and without approval of the papal administration, there were thousands of popular beliefs covering like a wide range of legends of Church Saints, rituals without ecclesiastical benign, informal health treatments, and often even the secret veneration of non-catholic Saints. As such, the spatial structure of Brazil was nearly completely submitted to ideas of Roman Catholicism, however, in differentiated forms.

Aside of the official Catholic religious structure, there exists an Ocean of other religious elements in Brazil. Countless native Amerindian beliefs, for example, are scattered around the country. In general, they express the Amerindian understanding of the world and motivate the agency of these ethnical groups by mythological traditions, which vary from interpretations of natural phenomenon, whose structural rules have been marvellously described by C. Levy-Strauss<sup>54</sup> to messianic histories as, for example, the famous search for the “land without evil” of the Guarani.<sup>55</sup> The Amerindian mythological idea of space and its territorial practice is not determined by fixed spaces as in the Catholic idea, but depends highly on reduced, flexible and dispersed areas of cultural practices.

Another important section of the religious field of Brazil is the region of African elements, described carefully in its geographical distribution by R. Bastide.<sup>56</sup> The Pajelança and Catimbó of North eastern and Central western Brazil and the Amazon region represent beliefs of mixed Amerindian and African contents. The Maranhão area is characterized by the survival of Dahomean religious elements of the Fon - the *voudou* religion.<sup>57</sup> The *candomblé*, mainly of Yoruba origin, dominates the old

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<sup>52</sup> HOORNAERT, Eduardo et al. **História da Igreja no Brasil – primeira época**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1992.

<sup>53</sup> MARX, Murilo. Op. cit.; ROSENDAHL, Zeny. **Hierópolis. O sagrado e o profano**. Rio de Janeiro: UERJ, 1999.

<sup>54</sup> LEVY-STRAUSS, Claude. **Mythologica: das Rohe und das Gekochte**. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971.

<sup>55</sup> CLASTRES, Henri. **La terre sans mal: le prophète tupi-guarani**. Paris: Seuil, 1975.

<sup>56</sup> BASTIDE, Roger. **The African Religions of Brazil. Towards a sociology of the interpenetration of civilizations**. Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

<sup>57</sup> FERRETTI, Sergio Figueireido. **Repensando o sincretismo: estudo sobre a Casa das Minas**. São Paulo: EDUSP; São Luis: FAPEMA, 1995

capital of Salvador (Bahia) and, to a lesser degree, Pernambuco.<sup>58</sup> Rio de Janeiro was originally heavily influenced by Bantu religions, but the migration movement of ex-slaves from North eastern Brazil to the then capital has transformed its Afro-Brazilian scene into an area of Yoruba beliefs which, since the 1930ies is expanding continuously to São Paulo.<sup>59</sup>

Such a geographical map demonstrates that also African elements are still very vivid among the Brazilian population and have to be recognized in its sociological function to understand the regionalization of thought. The mundane spatial aspect of these religions is, similar to Amerindian ideas, not homogeneous but full of differentiated forces of spiritual entities. In Yoruba, these forces are called *orixás*. They descend from the world of beyond (= *orun*) and are incorporated into this world (= *aiyé*) through rituals of trance. This takes place at defined spatial units, the *terreiros* that are sacred places mainly in houses within the peri-urban and urban space at the peripheries of the Brazilian cities.<sup>60</sup> As such, their spatial configuration is highly flexible, polymorphous and not continuously defined like the organization of the Catholic Church. It is much more a rhizomatic network of independent institutions and its functioning depends mainly on its practice (agency), less on its territorial formation.

The third non-catholic contribution to the religious field of Brazil is the influence of Protestant and evangelical traditions. Despite of several aborted attempts to introduce Protestantism in the 16th century, like the foundation of a Calvinist colony in the Bay of Guanabara and the Dutch interlude in North eastern Brazil in the 17th century, this religious attitude began to expand with the immigration of Lutheran Germans to Southern Brazil and Espirito Santo in the 19th century, and the introduction of British and North American churches (Wesleyans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, and Baptists). By the beginning of the 20th century, Brazil received missionary groups of Pentecostal beliefs from different Protestant countries, which reinforced their activities after the Second World War.<sup>61</sup> In the 1970ies, under a strong North American influence, a high number of new Pentecostal churches arose which started

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<sup>58</sup> VERGER, Pierre. **Orixás. Deuses iorubás na Africa e no Novo Mundo.** São Paulo: Corrupio, 1985; BERKENBROCK, Volney J. **A experiência dos orixás. Um estudo sobre a experiência religiosa no candomblé.** Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998.

<sup>59</sup> PRANDI, Reginaldo. **Os candomblés de São Paulo. A velha magia na metrópole nova.** São Paulo: HUCITEC 1991.

<sup>60</sup> BENISTE, José. **Orun, Aiyé: o encontro de dois mundos: o sistema de relacionamento nagó-yorubá entre o céu e a terra.** Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1997.

<sup>61</sup> MONTES, Maria Lucia. Op. cit., p. 81-82.

their activities mainly in the peripheral areas of the large cities and only recently proliferated throughout the entire Brazil via an intensive use of the mass media and a sophisticated participation on the political scene.<sup>62</sup> The contribution of these Protestant and Pentecostal churches lies principally in a new understanding of the active role of man in the construction of his environment. The believer is seen as a responsible agent in the socio-cultural and political world, governed by ethical rules of the bible. This results in a certain neglect of a territorialization of the church organization, and a major dedication to the individual exercise of the religion. Though the more traditional Protestant churches maintain a hierarchical structure, a great number of the evangelical communities exercises a strong autonomy in their religious practices and focus on the individual life-world of the believer. This enables these churches to respond rapidly to different social and religious necessities of their members.

The high variety of religions makes it impossible to evaluate the religious field of Brazil as a whole geographical construction. However, it shows that the traditional assumption that the country is predominantly Catholic and on its way to occidental modernization has to be questioned. To the contrary, the multiplicity of religious ideologies discussing the relation between symbolic belief, human agency and the material world demonstrates that Brazil is far away from being a unitarian social entity. The different religious ideologies result in varied territorial forms, which range from strong hierarchical structures (Catholic Church) to amorphous networks (evangelical churches), scattered independent units (*candomblé*) and isolated areas of Amerindian beliefs. Therefore, we have to observe more carefully, in an ultimate step, how the Brazilian population copes with such a variety and have to investigate how the processes of ideological convergence and conflict are performed within the national space.

### **Religious conflict and confusion in Brazil**

The question of religious convergence is scientifically discussed in Brazil since 1935, when Nina Rodrigues highlighted the equivalence between African spiritual entities (*orixás*) and Catholic saints in the Afro-Brazilian religions, interpreting such a situation as a result of the socio-cultural superiority of Catholicism and its submissive African response.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See PIERRUCCI, Antônio Flávio; PRANDI, Reginaldo. Op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> RODRIGUES, Nina. **O animismo fetichista dos negros bahianos**. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1935.

Roger Bastide questions this perspective and tries to show that syncretism in Afro-Brazilian religion is an analogical form of thinking which avoids the cultural marginalization of the mainly black population.<sup>64</sup> Recently, a more purist position arose among some members of the *candomblé terreiros* in Bahia<sup>65</sup>, and also some younger academic researchers took a more radical stance highlighting the resistance force of the African element in the *candomblé*.<sup>66</sup> Such a position is confirmed by the sociological observation of a symbolic reaffricanization, which is actually taking place in the *terreiros* of São Paulo.<sup>67</sup> These few indications, drawn from an ample scientific discussion<sup>68</sup>, demonstrate that the question of syncretism cannot be separated from the political positioning of the African element in the Brazilian society. It also shows, that this is closely linked to the relation between cultural practice and ideological configuration, between corporal matter (rite) and cultural meaning (ideology). And it seems, that the religious social practice has a more decisive influence in the *terreiros* than the question of intellectual purity, exposed by scientific intellectuals.

Syncretism does not necessarily mean a peaceful sociability of religions. This can be demonstrated by the role of the messianic element in Brazilian Catholicism. M. Chaui proposes that the original Brazilian discourse was mainly influenced by Jesuit *padres* like Antônio Vieira and José de Anchieta who used the messianic thinking of Jesaiah, Ezekiel and the Apocalypse of St. John to show that Brazil was a “promised land” formed by God's providence.<sup>69</sup> Coincidentally or not, the Jesuits found a similar ideological messianic disposition among several Amerindian societies who searched for the “land without evil”.<sup>70</sup> The Guarani in Southern Brazil, for example, had so-called *kara'í*, prophets who motivated

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<sup>64</sup> BASTIDE, Roger. Op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> FERRETTI, Sergio Figueireido. Op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>66</sup> For example DANTAS, B.G. **Vovó Nagô e Papai Branco. Usos e abusos da África no Brasil.** Rio de Janeiro: Graal.

<sup>67</sup> PRANDI, Reginaldo. Op. cit. p. 61ff.

<sup>68</sup> See FERRETTI, Sergio Figueireido. Op. cit., p. 41-74 and CAROSO, Carlos; BACELAR, Jeferson (eds.). **Faces da tradição afro-brasileira. Religiosidade, sincretismo, anti-sincretismo, reaffricanização, práticas terapêuticas. Etnobotânica e comida.** Rio de Janeiro: Pallas; Salvador: CEAO, 1999, p. 69-210.

<sup>69</sup> CHAUI, Marilene. Op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>70</sup> SCHADEN, Egon. **A mitologia heróica de tribos indígenas do Brasil.** São Paulo: EDUSP, 1989.

<sup>71</sup> MONTEIRO, John Manuel. Os Guaraní e a história do Brasil Meridional. Séculos XVI-XVIII. In: Cunha, M.C. da (ed.): **História dos índios no Brasil.** São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, FAPESP, p. 475-500.

messianic migrations among the indigenous population in search of Paradise. Though some authors question this messianic character<sup>72</sup>, it seems to be clear that the similarities between the Guarani and the Jesuitical ideology soon started to be intermingled, facilitating the creation of indigenous reductions on the basis of a common systematic religious thinking.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the Jesuitical salvation ideology was confounded with Franciscan and Capuchin mysticism, popular among the poorer population of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, who was waiting for the return of D. Sebastian to the Portuguese homeland. In 1578, this Portuguese king had died under mysterious circumstances in a battle against the pagan moors in Morocco and was supposed to come back as a saviour in difficult times.

The agglutination of messianic expectations increased in the 17th century when a new socio-cultural formation of subsistence-oriented peasants arose in the interior of the country, at the margins of official Brazil. This socio-economic formation encompasses a considerable number of Brazilians who are called *caboclos*, *caipiras* or *sertanejos*<sup>74</sup> and have been neglected by the official historiography of Brazil for a long time. The *caboclos* are practicing the so-called “popular Catholicism” which often contradicts the position of the official Catholic Church by its devotional rites.<sup>75</sup>

The advent of the Old Republic and its scientificism represents a turning point in the relation of the State and popular Catholicism. After 1889, in a time of profound social transformations after the abolition of slavery and the introduction of capitalism, several messianic prophets congregated large numbers of followers in the interior of Brazil. They revived the Salvationist mystic dreams referring to “monarchist” ideologies, which were in fact millenarian expectations for the return of a sacred kingdom. This was in sharp contrast to the dominant positivist ideology of the government and the Romanised and anti-popular ideology of the Catholic Church. One of these prophets was Antônio Conselheiro, who gathered within a few years tens of thousands of followers in Northern Bahia: ex-slaves, peasants, artisans, and small merchants from the Interior. From 1890 on, they begin to live together in the town of Canudos in a kind of utopian communal enterprise under his rule. Though

<sup>72</sup> For example, CLASTRE, Henri. Op. cit.

<sup>73</sup> MONTEIRO, John Manuel. Op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> RIBEIRO, Darcy. Op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> A wide range of popular catholic practices is presented by AZZI, Rolando. **O catolicismo popular no Brasil. Aspectos históricos.** Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978.

politically conservative, Conselheiro tries to modernize the *caboclo* culture in its labour organization and installs nearly a socialist experiment.<sup>76</sup> It seems that the dream of a *caboclo* Empire becomes true via the formation of an urbanized rural Jerusalem. This provokes a violent reaction of the Brazilian Republican government that, in 1897, exterminates nearly 30.000 inhabitants of the *sertão* of Bahia<sup>77</sup> - probably the most tragic event of the “modernizing process” in Brazil. But, contradictorily, the brutality of the army turns the *sertaneja* culture politically visible and exposes the long time forgotten marginal and highly religious population to the ruling classes of Brazil.

An event of similar effect is the insurrection of the Contestado from 1912 to 1916 in Southern Brazil. This revolt was targeted against the intrusion of an American Railway company into the forest of Santa Catarina and Paraná where a considerable portion of *caboclos* was living. The revolt is ideologically based on religious sermons of several so-called “monjes”, prophets who had been wandering around the region during the 19<sup>th</sup> century preaching apocalyptic visions combined with a new romantic ideology of millenarian narratives which included Portuguese Sebastianism, the myths of Charlemagne fighting the Islamic invasion and the medieval tales of Roland and King Arthur. The *caboclos* gather in so-called *redutos* which were interpreted, according to a medieval ideology, as a representation of the “New Jerusalem”. But like in Canudos, soon the rebellion was completely squashed by the Brazilian army.<sup>78</sup>

However, again the millenarian thinking survived. Today, it reappears with a strong mystic influence of Franciscan theology among the *Movimento sem Terra* (=Movement of the Landless). The members of this political movement that started in the 1960ies in Nonoai (Rio Grande do Sul) in an area of strong Amerindian influence (Kaingang) are searching for *terra*, the productive agricultural land, and are constantly organizing political manifestations and occupations of idle land. Today, the movement represents more than 400.000 persons and is nationally acknowledged. This population, victims of the modernization process in the Brazilian agriculture and expelled from their lands during the 70ies

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<sup>76</sup> This is the interpretation of HOORNAERT, Eduardo. **Os anjos de Canudos. Uma revisão histórica.** Petrópolis: Vozes.

<sup>77</sup> VILLA, M. A. **Canudos, o povo da terra.** São Paulo: Ática, 1995

<sup>78</sup> see, for example, GALLO, Ivone Cecília D'Avila. **O contestado. O sonho do milênio igualitário.** Campinas: Unicamp, 1999; AURAS, Marli. **Guerra do contestado. A organização da irmandade cabocla.** Florianópolis: UFSC, 2001, 4a. edição.

and the 80ies, are the legitimate successors of the *caboclo* culture and are trying to gain their “promised land” with the support of the liberation theology with its syncretistic mixture of Marxism and mystic elements.<sup>79</sup> In their *assentamentos* (settlements), they construct among themselves an interactive space of religious-political communication (communion), which helps to install a defensive space within of the Brazilian society against the exclusive technological modernization process.<sup>80</sup> The space of the *assentamentos* resembles, not by accident, the syncretistic *reduções* of the Jesuits or the *redutos* of Canudos and Contestado. Again, it is a practice of social configuration that uses intellectual syncretism as a symbolic form of resistance.

Elements of the millenarian ideology have even become part of the discourse of evangelical churches. These churches are promising salvation from the evil by an attack on the traditional religious forces, like *candomblé*, Catholicism and indigenous beliefs. What counts for them, is the purity of the sacred Word, a veneration of the Hellenistic logic. As such, the imaginary and devotional symbols (they may be *orixás*, saints, or messianic expectations) are replaced by a pragmatic activity-oriented discourse to improve the social environment. Such a religion seems to be closer to scientificism than to popular Catholicism. The Catholic and syncretistic approach refers principally to the social group as a public entity, the evangelical attitude is related to the individual and private person.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, it is not strange that the evangelical churches find a stronger support in the urban areas. And as such, this symbolic form is opening the door for a reflexive modernization project of urban individualization, contesting the baroque communitarian solidarity within the traditional Brazilian society. However, this struggle is long from being won, as the first signs of syncretization are already appearing inside the evangelical churches.

This broad, but still superficial picture of the religious scenery in Brazil is highly political. Via its practical aspect, religion is more effective in the transformation of the country's society than science. Even today, the intellectuals and their scientificism represent only a minority, an island in the Ocean of Religion. “Experience demonstrates that there is a power at the edge of the established society, the power of imagination, of

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example: BOFF, Leonardo. **Ecologia. Grito da terra, grito dos pobres**. São Paulo: Ática.

<sup>80</sup> FERNBANDES, Bernardo Mangano. **MST - Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais sem terra: formação e territorialização em São Paulo**. São Paulo: HUCITEC, 1999.

<sup>81</sup> MONTES, Maria Lucia. Op. cit., p. 90

belief, of capacity and sagacity. The power of religion, finally. The emotional logic of religion is stronger than the mere rational logic of the constitutive powers.”<sup>82</sup>

### **New geological movements - another continental drift**

In the geography of knowledge, “knowledge” is mostly referred to as technological and economic skills and deeply linked to the modernization project and the proliferation of science and reflexivity. Rarely, other forms of knowledge are considered. Principally the social aspects of knowledge that are related to individual life-worlds, concepts of personality, its political function, and the social value of world visions, are often neglected by researchers. The case of Brazil has demonstrated, that the regional construction of a country, its geography is deeply interwoven with its dominant forms of knowledge. It could be shown how an intricate network of symbolic forms creates discursive spaces within the society. These are symbolic appropriations according to Benno Werlens geography of everyday regionalizations<sup>83</sup>, a regional geography of thought between meaning and matter<sup>84</sup>, the spatial production of a symbolic form according to Cassirer.

It is significant that especially in those regions of the world where the modernization project was more successful in economic terms, and less successful in social terms, a strong resistance against scientific thought can be observed among large portions of the population. And whereas the elitist governments, technocrats, engineers and scientists, usually educated in occidental ideologies, are still continuing to research the country with the limited means of scientific knowledge as they always did, the popular cultures adhere to knowledge forms which are integrated into the unlimited fields of religion. In a multi-cultural country like Brazil, science has mainly failed to create a universal political and social entity. However, the multiplicity of the religious world has born a viable culture of tolerance and ethnic variety. Making geography in Brazil signifies simply playing diversity. This aspect is more important for the construction of the society than the political attempts of modernization and

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<sup>82</sup> HOORNAERT, Eduardo. Op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>83</sup> An approach of a geographical theory based on social theory has recently presented by several younger German geographers, among them WERLEN, Benno. **Sozialgeographie alltäglicher Regionalisierungen. Band 2: Globalisierung, region und Regionalisierung.** Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997, p. 401ff.

<sup>84</sup> ZIERHOFER, Wolfgang. Op. cit., p. 1-2.

homogenisation. New continental grabens appear, this time separating the multiplicity of religion and everyday culture from the unitarian scientific tradition of empiricist Neopositivism and ideological Critical Theory. It is scientificism lost, and religion gained. Therefore, Brazil represents another form of the regional geography of thought than occidental Europe.

Maybe that one day the scientific community remains a religious group restricted to its own initiation rites, its own language and ideology, and its own systemic structure. The substitution of trust into God by trust into technology and reflexivity is probably not the first step but the last step into a new religious scientific age. The myth of reflexivity, mythically described by Ovid in the 'Metamorphoses' in the story of Pyramos and Thesbe, seems to prevent mankind from the insight into the other side of the mirror. Scientific knowledge alone remains a reflection, an illusion, a science fiction of the world. It maybe a reflexive island in the Ocean of Religion, another view of how we experience our everyday-life; however, it is not the decisive force. A large part of the Brazilian population seems to have made this intellectual experience by political experience.

The fires in the Northern Amazon State of Roraima are extinguished. The incapacity of (occidental and scientific) man to adapt himself to strange environmental conditions is proved. Only the two Nambikwara "pajé" have demonstrated how bush fires in the Amazon can be effectively defeated. For sure, modern scientists will continue to contest the Amerindian's efficiency, as the supernatural world is completely excluded from their world's vision. But such a scientific axiomatic contestation proves exactly what is commonly denied in science: scientific knowledge also has its taboos and, for this reason, can be described as the property of just another tribal community.

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## RESUMO

**Religião e cientificismo no Brasil**  
**Para uma geografia regional do conhecimento**  
**Um ensaio geográfico**

A Geografia do Saber trata das relações entre as transformações do ambiente concreto e as suas interpretações ideológicas, diferenciando o espaço conforme atitudes filosóficas e religiosas. O exemplo do Brasil ilustra a disputa conflituosa entre a ideologia modernizadora, principalmente ligada às elites políticas e intelectuais, e as interpretações religiosas, enquanto expressões culturais prevaletentes entre a maior parte da população brasileira. O modernismo, como ideologia, surgiu a partir de elementos escolásticos da Igreja medieval, do empreendimento jesuítico, das transformações do Marquês de Pombal na época absolutista e da idéia romântica e naturalista de "Nação" durante o Império. Tomou a sua expressão mais recente no avanço tecnológico e educacional desde a Velha Republica e do Estado Novo até hoje. Existe no Brasil, entretanto, no decorrer de toda sua história, um campo de saber paralelo que é extremamente diferenciado: as interpretações religiosas do espaço como, por exemplo, a idéia hierárquica da Igreja Católica, o espaço sincrético da cultura cabocla, a focalização no mundo vivido do indivíduo nas igrejas protestantes, a estrutura rizomática das religiões afro-brasileiras e o espaço fluido das religiões indígenas. Todos estes se relacionam com a ideologia oficial da modernização e com as suas expressões modernizadoras de uma forma dialógica ou conflituosa.

**Palavras-chave:** Geografia cultural; cientificismo; religião; espaço religioso; Brasil.

## ABSTRACT

**Religion and Scientificism in Brazil**  
**Towards a regional geography of knowledge**  
**A geographical essay**

The geography of knowledge deals with the relation between transformations of the physical environment and its ideological interpretations, differentiating space according to philosophical and religious attitudes. Brazil is used as an example to demonstrate how the dispute between modernist ideology, mainly represented by the Brazilian political and intellectual elite, and religious interpretations, which are the predominant forms of cultural expression among large portions of the Brazilian population, are intermingled in the geography of

knowledge of this country. It could be shown, that modernism found its way through scholastic elements of the official Catholic Church, the Jesuitical enterprise, the absolutist transformations introduced by the Marquês de Pombal, the romantic idea of Nationality of the Empire, and the propulsion of technological advance and education throughout the Old Republic, the Estado Novo and the newer Republics. On the other hand, a large and very differentiated field of religious interpretations of space, like the hierarchical space of the Catholic church, the syncretistic space of caboclo culture, the life-world approach of protestant churches, the rhizomatic space of Afro-Brazilian religions and the fluid space of Amerindians religions enter into a dialogical and often conflictive relationship with official, modern ideology and its spatial expressions.

**Key words:** Cultural geography; scientificism; religio; religious space; Brazil.