

# Local protest and transnational Catholicism in Brazil

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*Abstract:* Based on research in Brazil, the author discusses three local situations of conflict and social protest, using a transnational perspective. She concentrates on the use of universal claims of Catholicism in local negotiations of religious change under the influence of different cultural campaigns. The clashes in question are divided into those involving local political problems and those concerning the religious domain itself. The analysis shows that in each of the cases—albeit with different intensity and outcome—the interconnection between translocal processes and the meaning and experience of locality has a significant role in the power plays and the formulations of religious or social protest in the local context.

*Keywords:* Brazil, Catholicism, local, protest, transnational

Religion has long been recognized as a field of social conflict, an ideological resource in protest, and the generator of local power struggles. In Roman Catholicism it is exactly the transnational discourse, the symbolism, and the ritual formulation of the religious social field, which makes it so appropriate a means in the building of protest in local situations. Religious repertoires constructed in transnational relations turn into building blocks of local conflict and dissent. For individuals and groups acting in local situations, transnational contacts, networks, and discourses are important as a resource for framing, formulating, and organizing protests and disputes. Furthermore, the transnational character of Catholicism itself frequently causes conflict, and fosters local protest. Therefore, as a transnational social field and discursive space Catholicism is not only a resource to articulate, organize,

and structure local protest, but also to shape experiences of locality and conflict (Glick Schiller, introduction to this special section). The clashes may concern local social problems, or they may concern the religious domain itself, but from a transnational perspective they are expressions of the interconnection between translocal processes and the experience of locality.

In Brazil and elsewhere Catholicism is characterized by many different practices evolved under the influence of ideologies and customs rooted in a particular context. The history of Brazilian society is intertwined with the history of Brazilian Catholicism. The country was colonized in the name of Rome, and ever since Brazilian political, social, and cultural life has been connected to religion. In different episodes, Catholicism has performed significant roles in the formation of Brazil and Brazilian culture, for

example, when Pope Pius XI declared Our Lady Aparecida the patron saint of Brazil in 1930, so as to show the new president, Vargas, the power of Catholicism (R.C. Fernandes 1985)—or when liberationist theologians and pastoral workers developed new experiments to involve poor, illiterate people in the church and society and chose the ‘option for the poor’ during the political oppression of the 1960s and 1970s (Theije 1999, 2002). In contemporary Brazil, Catholicism is the prevailing religion, although the church is losing its domination in relative numbers. The census of 2000 revealed a decrease in adherence to Catholicism from 83.8 percent in 1990 to 73.8 percent, a proportional loss mainly attributed to the growth of Pentecostalism and Brazilians who declare they have ‘no religion’ (Antoniazzi 2003; Jacob, Hees, Waniez, and Brustlein 2003; Mariz forthcoming; Pierucci 2004).<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the downward trend shown in the statistics, in absolute numbers adherence to Catholicism, however, grew from 121.8 million in 1991 to 125.5 million in 2000, an increase that easily outnumbers the followers of a large Pentecostal denomination, as Pierucci (2004) correctly observed. Furthermore, there are signs that the proportionate decline in Catholicism is accompanied by a revival in the form of an intensification of practices such as attendance at Mass and a diversification of forms of worship, such as new apparitions of Mary and the charismatic movement in Catholicism (Mariz forthcoming).

Brazilian Catholicism is part and parcel of the ‘universal church’ as Roman Catholicism ideologically phrases its identity, and the local church has to relate to the translocal and transnational organizationally, for instance concerning personnel and patrimony, but also ideologically and politically. The form and content of local Catholicism in different historical periods can be understood as the result of actors carrying out cultural campaigns, engendered by the cultural politics of the time. Cultural campaigning consists of organized actions undertaken by different actors—often, but not exclusively, clergy or intellectuals—with the objective of modifying the dominant representations of reality and

changing the existing religious order by introducing specific interpretations, arrangements, and expressions, often in accordance with the policies of the national and universal church (Ortner 1989a, 1989b; Theije 1999, 2002, 2004). For example, in the colonial period the cultural campaigns materialized in missionary activity explicitly addressed the need to establish ‘Christian universalism’, instituting the Church in countries that were not yet reached by the ‘word of God’ (Montero 2004).

The ideology of universalism was in practice accompanied by the transnationalism of the processes of power and meaning forming the social field in which the Church operated. Catholicism has been part of a translocal, transcultural, and transnational project and in the local practice it has had to deal with the contradictory relation between its ideology of universality and the cultural, social, and political structures in which it interfered in order to establish itself as the representative of Christian ethics and authority. The resulting tension was a constitutive element in many processes of religious change and development. In relation to religion, the adjective transnational generally refers to the ways in which world religions create a transnational civil society which challenges the nation (Haynes 2001; Hepner 2003; Levitt 2001; Rudolph and Piscatori 1997), or appears in connection to migration, underscoring the power of religion in the formation of secure communities, both connected to the world of God and the gods in the here and now of the local group. In the case of migrant populations, the communities formed religiously easily include transnational links. In this context, several authors also have addressed the pluralization of religion in relation to globalizing relations between peoples (Brettell 2003; Peterson, Vásquez, and Williams 2001; Vertovec 2000). These processes are, however, far from new or limited to contemporary situations of migration and the dislocation of populations. Religious beliefs have traveled around the world for the past centuries and have shown that adaptations to local cultures are inevitable. The resulting tendencies toward localization and

‘universalization’ have generated conflicts in local parishes and communities, while at the same time local, transnational, and universal resources have become available for local purposes.

In Catholicism, the connection between the Roman center and local or national churches has traditionally been perceived in terms of hierarchy and domination, as a relation between an institutionalized elite and illiterate followers of ‘popular religion’ or people who do not know the word of God and need to be converted. Then the formation of specific forms of local religion is a part of (transnational) religions, resulting from the struggle between the elite religion and popular religiosity (Ortiz 2001). A transnational perspective on the local reconsiders this perceived opposition, because it emphasizes the interrelation between the places and allows us to conceive Brazilian Catholicism within a broader, transnational discursive space, in which adaptation to local places is a logic and inherent process of constructing not only religious meaning, but also the experience of locality. Furthermore, it offers us a view on the meaning transnational relations assume in the perception and experience of locality.

I will concentrate on the use of the universal claims of religion in local situations of conflict and protest, thereby reconsidering three such instances in Catholic settings I have come across in Brazil. I shall analyze these by taking a transnational perspective on the local. The protests which actors produce in local settings, today and in the past, the protests that Catholicism generates in the three cases here, are different each time but can be roughly categorized into two types. The first concerns struggles within the church, between people defending different cultural campaigns, between lay people and the clergy, or the elites and less powerful believers. The second type of protest is that in which Catholic resources produced in the transnational field become the tools or inspiration which local members use to act outside the church, organizing criticisms, protests, and claims vis-à-vis the Brazilian state and its local representatives. Both forms of local protest may be intercon-

nected, and reinforce each other, or occur simultaneously but independently.

### The universal rights of local rituals

At the end of the 1960s, the laity of the Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi (*Ordem Terceira de São Francisco de Assis*), one of the many lay confraternities<sup>2</sup> in São João del-Rei, in the state of Minas Gerais in the southeast of Brazil, became involved in a severe conflict with some members of the clergy. It was the time of the cultural campaign of the Second Vatican Council which introduced a modernized form of the liturgy and opened the church for participation by the laity, through the use of vernacular language, popular music, and the repositioning of the altar in order for the people to see the rituals performed in the Mass. The participation of lay people in church matters proposed by the clergy entailed a specific form of participation, and—as it turned out—in practice did not conform to the expectations of the members of the Third Order. The measures of the clergy generated a large degree of dissatisfaction and led to straightforward sabotage of arrangements in the church, underscoring the material locus of the events, the locality over which both parties wanted to have power: the most beautiful church of town, a typical baroque building constructed in the eighteenth century and decorated by the famous sculptor Aleijadinho, built two centuries ago by the Third Order. The events also demonstrate the importance of local history and how actors experience this in relation to ‘universal Catholicism’.

The Third Order has a long history in São João del-Rei. In the early times of Catholicism in Brazil, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the laity organized various forms of communal religion, of which the brotherhoods were the most visible. A brotherhood was an association of lay people devoted to the worship of a specific saint, committed to the organization of celebrations for patron saints. It also took care of the burial of its members and, where possible,

built its own churches and even hospitals. The brotherhoods were in some respects a continuation of the medieval Catholicism of the Iberian Peninsula and often related to certain professional groups, like the guilds in most other countries, adapted to the new social situation in the colonies, through the introduction of ethnicity and class as criteria for admission for example. Colonial towns such as São João del-Rei had a brotherhood for slaves, another for ex-slaves, for *mulatos*, for different categories of whites, and so on. In the organization of local Catholicism, the laity took all responsibility. The brotherhoods paid the priests to provide religious services in their churches. Hence, they maintained control of local religious events in a situation in which the institutional Roman church could hardly make itself present in the country, and lacked funds and organizational power to cover the formation of a strong local institutional presence, hindered by the *padroado* agreement between the Portuguese state and the Roman Seat (Bruneau 1982; Hoornaert 1983).<sup>3</sup> The lay brotherhoods filled the void resulting from the organizational weakness of the Roman Church, and became a religious organizational necessity and the pillars of socio-cultural life in the towns in the mining region (Barbosa 1979; Boschi 1986; Scarano 1978; Theije 1989, 1990).

The religious brotherhoods which were formed in the past centuries continue to exist in many Brazilian towns. Although subsequent cultural campaigns carried out by the clergy to change local Catholicism have deprived the brotherhoods of their absolute sovereignty in local religious life, they have not undergone such substantial changes that they have disappeared (Groot 1996; Oliveira 1985; Scarano 1978).<sup>4</sup> In the last quarter of the twentieth century, fourteen *irmandades*, *confrarias*, and *ordens terceiras* existed in the town of São João del-Rei, and together they structured the annual calendar of religious festivities. With each brotherhood organizing at least one procession a year, adding to the customary Catholic feasts, the 75,000 inhabitants of the town witnessed a big Catholic celebration on average every two weeks. In the 1990s, however, the institutional Church was no

longer absent as the town had become the seat of a diocese in 1960 and the lack of clergy had since long been resolved, helped by the arrival of foreign missionaries since the beginning of the twentieth century. The need for the lay solidarities to provide the religious organization of the local population had disappeared. For several reasons, the groups remain important to the people of São João del-Rei, however. Not the least of these is that the town became an important destination for national and international tourism. Its colonial churches maintained by the brotherhoods and the extensive calendar of religious feasts, especially the *Semana Santa* processions and Masses, became major attractions. With their religious practices undergoing a process of commercialization, the religious symbolism of the associations acquired new meaning (Theije 1990).

The members of the Third Order are mostly upper-class white men and membership is a prestigious matter.<sup>5</sup> As their religious practices were attacked, the cultural campaign of the friars to bring about the liturgical changes touched on the core of the brotherhoods' identity. Although the innovations in Catholic pastoral and theological practice emphasized the equality of all before the church of God, and the importance of the role of laymen within that church, the innovation nevertheless, in a curious twist of roles and meanings within the transnational Catholic discursive field, became the center of an important difference of opinion between the clergy and the lay organizations in São João del-Rei. The lay members of the Third Order and the Franciscan friars disagreed profoundly about the right way to implement the new guidelines of the universal Church. The position of the altar and the music played during the Mass became two foci in the conflict between the clergy and the lay brotherhood in the second half of the 1960s.

New liturgy was to replace the old one, but in the opinion of the friar in charge this could only be achieved through the renovation of the eighteenth-century church, as the altar was too far away from the people. The friars placed a new altar in the middle of the *capela mor* (chancel)

instead of against its back wall, to be nearer to the people, and to be turned toward the congregation during the Mass, “as the ecclesial rules prescribe.”<sup>6</sup> However, the consequence of this new altar was that the members of the Third Order, who had their seats in the *capela mor*, now sat behind the altar. The problem, in the eyes of the laity, was that in doing so, he “turned his back on the Order, as an undeniable demonstration of disregard of the brothers.”<sup>7</sup> In the discussion with the clergy, the members of the Third Order referred time and again to their historical roots and the fact that the church building was theirs, a matter which was contested by the contemporary clerical authorities. When talking did not lead to a solution, the members of the Third Order sabotaged the replacement, and simply moved the new altar to the back. The disagreement degenerated into an outright fight when the priest put it in the middle of the church again.

With respect to the music to be used during the Mass, the arguments referred even more clearly to the interpretation of the universal church by the laity. São João del-Rei is known for its two large amateur orchestras, which during Masses and on the occasions of religious festivals play sacred music composed by local musicians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The traditional music by the Orchestra Ribeiro Bastos, active in the town since the eighteenth century, is played every Sunday during Mass. The traditional and locally produced music of the Orchestra of Ribeiro Bastos was to play a less important role. As a matter of fact, one of the ways to enhance the people’s involvement in the Mass was to let them sing along with the songs that would be translated into Portuguese for this purpose, accompanied by a guitar. According to the members of the Third Order, the introduction of guitar music, replacing the authentic religious music of São João del-Rei, as proposed by the clergy, was absolutely out of the question in a monument dating from the eighteenth century. In their defense, they resorted to an interesting comparison: that ‘the people in Africa’ were also allowed to use their own instruments, and that therefore it was only logical that the brotherhoods should be allowed to continue

with their orchestral music in the church. This argument shows that the sources were not only local; quite the contrary, it was exactly because of its universal claims that the Catholic church had the obligation to make room for such local practices of worship as those in São João del-Rei, just as Catholics elsewhere in the world are allowed to use their local music. In short, the friars used the universal character of transnational Catholicism to endorse the standardization of the ritual, and the brotherhood drew on (the same) transnational religious repertoire to underwrite the right to local singularity.

The local church that the members of the Third Order defended is a Catholic congregation, which was historically formed with the consent of the authorities in Rome. This makes it as universal as the post-Vatican II Catholicism that the bishop and the Franciscan friars defend. However, it developed in its own peculiar way and now, according to the laity, ought to be allowed to maintain its own traditional way of being Catholic. For the friars, the traditional ceremonies are superficial outward appearances, which stand in the way of the implementation of universal liturgical innovations and do not contribute to real faith. For the brotherhoods, the traditions are the very essence of being a Catholic, their identity, and history, something that the European Franciscan friars in particular seemed to forget. The very notion of locality is expressed through an evocation of historical values of Roman Catholicism that are rooted in the church of Saint Francis, the Third Order, and its traditions, and bestow authenticity on the religious group, its symbols, and rituals. As one of the members of the brotherhood wrote in a letter to the priests:

“I believe that this disregard of the traditional ceremonies of the Third Order can be explained by the fact that the Most Reverend Father and some of his confreres have hardly any idea about the state of affairs in an old town like São João del-Rei, whose religious life largely manifests itself in a traditional and peculiar way, through festivities which are typical of the old miners’ villages.”<sup>8</sup>

The heart of the matter was therefore not only the religious form to be used, but also the identity of the local parish and its transnational connections, as it was expressed through its religious groups and rituals. The notion of locally rooted authenticity was reinforced by two additional factors. Firstly, the clerical actors in the conflict were in part foreign, European missionaries who consequently did not share the historical bond with the local traditions, or as it was phrased in the letter cited above “have hardly any idea.” Secondly, the local religious traditions of São João del-Rei became recognized by the media as a national spectacle and many tourists came to visit the town, especially during Holy Week. This reinforced the severity of the battle to maintain the traditions. Both the laity and the priests refer to universal Catholicism, but the latter seem to be losing the battle because they are seen to lack the ‘rootedness’ or ‘authenticity’ of the local religious traditions.

### **The church of the Brazilian poor**

The cultural campaigns carried out by the clergy in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council in Rome had other very far-reaching consequences for Brazilian Catholicism. A new form of progressive and participatory Catholicism developed, based on what is known as liberation theology, or liberationist Catholicism. Whereas the case of the brotherhoods exemplified a fight within the church itself, the liberationist campaign draws attention primarily to protest and conflict in the wider society—although this cultural campaign caused many conflicts within the church too. Progressive Catholicism can be seen as a locally centered social protest movement based on religious foundations and justified through its connection with a universal church. The local here refers to the nation, or a large part of the nation, and the protest in this context is formulated against national and international elites. According to the Brazilian historians of religion, these religious foundations were inspired by the immense poverty in Brazil, especially in the northeast of the country (Aze-

vedo 1987). One of the pillars of liberationist Catholicism was the conviction that the poor are the chosen people, who are especially gifted with true belief because they are not spoiled by wealth. The local poor people then, became the preferred flock to address in theology and pastoral practice, the ‘germ of faith, hope, and charity’ (Lehmann 1990).

There was a huge ideological turnaround involved, as the ‘option for the poor’ entailed a political choice for the marginalized population, and liberationist-inspired pastoral practice explicitly addressed the social problems in Brazilian society, the structural causes of inequality, and the ways to modify the life situation of the poor. Both cause and solution were identified as being political, and the ensuing theology and pastoral practice saw political ‘consciousness raising’ as the main objective of religious practice. Once their consciousness was raised, the poor were assumed to go about setting up social movements and developing a political practice that eventually would bring about a just society, God’s kingdom on earth. This political stance adopted by some leaders of Brazilian Catholicism meant an important shift from an alliance with the upper and middle classes to the lower classes and from charity to alleviate the suffering of the poor to political action for changing the structures causing poverty. This cultural campaign earned the Brazilian Catholic Church the name of being a very progressive church, adorned with famous theologians such as Leonardo Boff and frei Betto, and bishops with global repute such as Dom Paulo Arns (São Paulo) and Dom Hélder Câmara (Recife and Olinda).

Liberationist Catholicism was very much meant to be a grassroots movement, since at the local level the base ecclesial communities (*comunidades eclesiais de base/CEBs*) embodied liberationist ideology. Much of contemporary Brazilian Catholicism at the local level is shaped through these CEBs, which were promoted from the 1960s as a concrete form of the ‘option for the poor’ in local parishes. Dioceses developed a pastoral practice of evangelization that encouraged lay people to participate and increasingly pastoral activity concentrated on the formation

of CEBs and the founding and guidance of base communities became the most important pastoral goal of this era (Adriance 1986; Bruneau 1982; Burdick 1993; Hewitt 1991; Lehmann 1996; Mainwaring 1986; Mariz 1994; Theije 1999). The CEBs are small groups, with usually not more than ten to fifteen people, who all live near each other and meet once a week in the house of one member. One or two laypersons direct the group, and most of the time they use a meeting manual provided by a diocesan coordination team, in which texts from the Bible are printed, with examples of discussion topics and suggestions for appropriate prayers. The 'option for the poor' envisaged a clear political engagement. Therefore, the discussion topics are directed to consciousness raising in terms of political awareness and social movement activism, which made the CEBs into a form of protest against poverty and injustice by local religious groups against local and national figures of political authority. Typically Bible texts are used to compare with actual situations in which the participants find themselves (interpreting the Bible 'from the perspective of those who read it'), prompting them to organize and fight for changing these situations (Theije 1999, 2002).

The political and social engagement to which the teachings are geared, stresses the relevance of the integration of biblical knowledge with the actual life circumstances of the assembly of believers, in the here and now. This necessarily includes not only a localization of the ideology, but also skills to translate abstract political discourse into concrete social action, which in practice proved to be beyond the capabilities of many poor Catholics in Brazil. In the parish of Saint Vincent, in Garanhuns, Pernambuco, the northeast of the country, decades of liberationist teachings did not bring the revolutionary Catholicism some had hoped for. For many participants in the local groups even imagining a better world was still difficult, and the discourse of taking fate in their own hands proved to be infeasible to them. One woman said it was no use to try to change something "because the governments are far away." Others, however, did take over the imagery and vocabu-

lary propagated by the liberationist clergy and activists, although this did not lead naturally to an involvement in social action, as subversive activism is difficult where people's everyday subsistence depends on those in power. Occasionally a manifestation could be organized, but only seldom did this lead to a more durable and concerted action and this was always under the leadership of clergy or other 'professional' activists. Only activities with a less explicit political content, such as the communitarian construction of a water-supply system in a rural hamlet, could count on a stable and dedicated group of participants (Theije 1999, 2002).

Liberationist Catholicism not only values the local group as a unity of religious organization, but also explicitly promotes the local foundations of it. This central idea of local community, as a social, religious, and political unit, is expressed by a song (sometimes accompanied by a guitar) to be heard in almost all CEB meetings in northeast Brazil, called "I am happy in the community." One line goes: "Community in the northeast / Struggle for liberation / To form a chain / To break the oppression," emphasizing the roots of the religious protest in the communitarian project of local protest. The music to which these lines are set is clearly recognizable as popular regional, northeastern music, which helped to emphasize even more the authentication of the liberationist ideology in the local culture, re-elaborating localized cultural traditions and practices. In this struggle for liberation, however, the local community does not stand alone, since the local community is part of the global Catholic Church defending a universal faith.

This is not the complete story of the transnational inspiration of local religious protest against social inequality. Indeed Brazilian liberationist Catholicism is not a movement that sprang from the poor, or developed solely in the context of Brazil. Liberationist theologians were cosmopolitans, as Lehmann (1990: 119) asserted, many of whom were educated in Europe. The intellectuals of the campaign endorse a political reading of the religious beliefs in protest against inequality and the exploitation of the poor in Brazil,

but—also according to Lehmann—they have been universalistic even in their nationalism. In the formulation of the goals and methods of the cultural campaign, transnational contacts were very important, for example, through the intellectual contacts of individual priests who studied in Europe. S.R.A. Fernandes (2000) found that more foreign missionaries affiliated with international religious orders than (Brazilian) diocesan priests were involved in the liberationist church. In fact, European missionaries were the most numerous and apparently the most motivated by the campaign, although liberationist Catholicism is known for its ‘genuinely Latin American roots’. Liberationist Catholicism builds extensively on worldwide circulating political ideologies and furnished these with ethic and moral justifications. International Marxism heavily influenced liberation theology and the leaders of liberationist Catholicism have equally endorsed global discourses on Human Rights and economic dependency theories. Furthermore, the many foreign-born Brazilian priests and nuns maintain intensive contacts with their home countries, and mobilized Catholic communities in other nations to support the Brazilian poor. Paradoxically, the promotion of the liberationist theology, an ideology that highly values the local, is to a large degree the work of non-Brazilian religious actors.

The process of reinforcing the local while simultaneously changing it through the introduction of new universal or transnational elements can be illustrated by the song cited above, in which we find the combination of a specific locality with a generalized political goal. Hence, the project of giving voice to local social protest draws on transnational and universalizing elements, through its references to values, ideas, and principles that are standardized and of all places, and its main protagonists, the liberationist clergy. The importance of these transnational contacts and ideological inputs became most clear when the movement started to lose importance in Brazilian Catholicism. The explanation typically offered for the decline of the influence of the liberationist campaign since the beginning of the 1990s is the collapse of social-

ism, exemplified by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the turn to the East that international agencies subsequently made, resulting in less attention to and financial support for Brazilian social movements. Many other causes contributed to the relative decline of popularity of liberationist Catholicism in the last decade of the twentieth century, including the incomprehensibility, inconvenience, and unfeasibility of the liberationist project for large part of the population for which it was meant (Theije 1999, 2002). Interestingly, one of the main causes of the failure of the cultural campaign has however been identified as its dependence on the transnational social field, following from its interconnection with transnational political thought.

### **The locality of the Holy Spirit**

A third instance of the creation of locality within the transnational social field of Catholicism can be found with another lay movement in Garanhuns, the *Movimento de Renovação Carismática Católica* (MRCC; Charismatic Renewal Movement). MRCC is one of the most recent results of Catholic campaigning in Brazil, and a form of Catholicism which emphasizes the personal experience of the divine and presents itself as a universal or global discourse. The MRCC originates from the United States, where it was founded during the second half of the 1960s, and became a significant element in Brazilian Catholicism in the 1980s (Carranza Davila 2000; Prandi 1997). It combines Catholic liturgy and sacramental forms with elements usually associated with Pentecostalism, such as baptism in the Holy Spirit, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues. Another vital element in the practice of Charismatic Catholicism is the veneration of Mary—which sets the movement clearly apart from Pentecostal Christianity which has the Holy Spirit exclusively as the core of its doctrine. Prayer, to praise God and Mary, to ask for help, and to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is the main activity of the Charismatic group, and outside the direct religious realm the members of the group undertake all kinds of forms of charity.

At the local level, MRCC organizes prayer groups directed toward the spiritual growth of the members of the group. To achieve this goal, they also organize seminars, in which new members are initiated into the teachings of charismatic Catholicism, and learn how to manage the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. MRCC is a predominantly lay organization, with a relatively important role in the rituals for lay people compared to the more usual forms of Catholicism. As the Holy Spirit acts through the faithful and endows the followers with powers to heal, or to perseverance in faith, or other gifts, lay people can gain considerable influence. Initially this aspect created tensions between the people of MRCC and the institutional church, both in Rome and in national and local settings, because the idea of gifts received directly from the Holy Spirit implicitly threatens the monopoly on spiritual power traditionally held by the clergy (Lehmann 1996: 42). In its relation with the authorities of the church, MRCC did not seek the confrontational way, since one of its main teachings is obedience to the universal Church of Rome and those who represent it, the clergy. This has contributed to the fact that MRCC has found support with bishops and other church authorities who opposed the liberationist campaign, since MRCC was seen as a conservative movement. In places such as Garanhuns, where the dominant Catholicism was organized according to the liberationist teachings, MRCC was certainly not welcomed with much enthusiasm, because 'they only pray'.

The guiding orientation in the rituals and discourse of MRCC is universal Catholicism, rather than a localized, Brazilian, or Latin American Catholicism. There is little or no reference to specific local or regional questions, and with respect to its attitude toward wider society, MRCC takes a 'neutral' stance. Debates on the political aspects of Brazilian poverty, for example, seem to be an absolute non-issue (cf. Pierucci and Prandi 1996). Therefore, contrary to the brotherhood's allusion to localized historical traditions, or the liberationists' reaffirmation of regional Brazilian or Latin American roots, the Charismatic movement presents itself as universal, of

all places, or of no place at all in the contemporary globalized world. The principal orientation is transnational, with many foreign religious people involved in the Brazilian MRCC, and with contacts all over the Catholic world. It is very popular for Brazilian charismatic Catholics to make the pilgrimage to Medjugorje in Bosnia, where Mary appeared to give messages to local seers (Mariz 2002; Steil 2001). The transnational attitude is also reflected in the music used in the prayer meetings and other meetings of the movement, which could best be described as an international pop sound, very different from the regional popular music of the liberationist Catholics or the orchestral pieces of the Orquestra Ribeiro Bastos in São João del-Rei.

Notwithstanding this attitude of drawing on resources far beyond the local, and avoiding critical stances or involvement in politics, in the routine of the local groups, the practice of charity performed by MRCC can draw the members into acts of social protest. Inputs from the transnational social field help to shape and change the contents and forms of local disagreement and dissatisfaction, albeit sometimes in unexpected manner. In Garanhuns members of MRCC founded a day-care center for street children, because they had encountered many children with problems during their visits to families in the neighborhood, and children wandering in the streets of the town center from early morning till late at night without going to school. They felt they had to do something about this and organized a group of volunteers to put up a crèche with the donations from local businesses. This act of charity can also be interpreted as a political deed because it was a comment on Brazilian society and the local politicians who did nothing for street children. Acts of charity by MRCC may turn into plain protest against the local political elite too. On one occasion, the street sweepers went on strike because they had not received their salaries for several months. The strikers set up camp on the main avenue of Garanhuns and planned to stay there until they received their payment. Meanwhile, they lived in a state of extreme exigency, no longer able to even afford their daily meals. Help came from

an unexpected source, not the syndicate, a political party, or the liberationist church came to support the street sweepers, but the people from the MRCC in the town. At first, the women in the prayer groups launched a campaign to collect food and clothes for the strikers, which could be labeled a charitable action in line with the habitual action of the movement. However, out of solidarity they also began to sit with the strikers in the camp in the center of town. Here, their actions assumed a more overt political meaning, as protest against the injustice committed by the municipal authorities and politicians.

This example shows that religious charitable action of a transnational anti-political movement may serve as a vehicle for local protest, albeit in a very modest way, almost incidentally. In this case, however, the transnational contacts as such seem to play a far less important role compared to the other two cases I have discussed here. Here transnational contact consists merely of generalized reference to universal Catholicism and the global community of believers, instead of specific political ideas or organized and identifiable groups elsewhere. The transnational discursive space of Charismatic Catholicism serves nevertheless as the ideological underpinning for the local adaptation that leads to the actions of these Catholics.

## Conclusion

The transnational aspect of religion is often either a cause or an asset in the playing out of conflict at the local level. Three occasions of protest and conflict in which the interconnectedness of universal Catholicism and locality play a significant role have been analyzed. The transnational perspective pursued in the analysis has shown how men and women in different historical periods created local Catholicisms in social fields that extend far beyond the local. In their protest against the abolition of their traditional, locally specific ways of worshipping pursued by the clergy in order to introduce new liturgical forms in line with the Roman Catholic norm, the members of the Third Order of Saint Francis resorted

to notions of authenticity to underscore the meaning of locality for their beliefs and religious practices. In liberationist Catholicism the protest was directed against perceived injustices in society rather than restricted to the religious realm. It explicitly connected the local situation of poverty and injustice to transnational or global structures of inequality. Concrete transnational networks of people involved in the development of the ideology and support groups were very important to the formation of this campaign of religious local protest. In many respects MRCC is the opposite of the other two examples, because its discourse does not contain any allusions to the local or national whatsoever. The emphasis is on the charismatic experience of belief through a claim on the universal character of the Holy Spirit. Although it is generally assumed that the shift to personal, individual, and emotional belief discards the social and political protest potential of Brazilian Catholicism, the practical outcome of the charismatic campaign in Garanhuns has shown how in a roundabout way charismatic personal experience came to serve also as a resource for localized (religious) protest. In its localized practice, Charismatic Catholicism became an asset in a political conflict, without wanting it.

Besides the particular forms of transnational fields that are in play, all three instances discussed here also allude to a tradition, in the sense of memory and identity, which exemplifies the connection with the universal community of Catholics. In this process of religious identification, however, they appeal to different parts of both the Catholic tradition and the local roots. Cogently, the degree of reflection about what should be the tradition and the role of the religious community in the elaboration of it differs. While the members of the brotherhoods in São João del-Rei have found justification in age-old contracts with the church in Rome and their continued right for their own rituals, the leaders of liberationist Catholicism argue for the need to part from the social and political roots of the people in Brazil and the Charismatic Catholics emphasize universality of creed. All three, however, rely on the transnational characteristics of

the community of Catholics in the elaboration and formulation of local protests. The modality in which the transnational emerges in the local setting is to a large extent set by local parameters.

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### Notes

1. The proportional loss of followers is a process that is visible in the censuses since 1940, when 95.2 percent of the Brazilian population declared themselves to be Catholic. But since 1980, when almost 90 percent were still declaring themselves Catholic, it became more significant. In these past two decades evangelicalism has grown from 6.6 percent to 15.4. In contrast, the Afro-Brazilian religions Candomblé and Umbanda which are often represented as the authentically Brazilian religions and considered important features of Brazilianness, seem to bind only a fraction of the population, consisting of a mere 0.34 percent, declining from 0.57 in 1980. The number of Brazilians declaring they have 'no

religion' increased from 1.6 percent in 1980 to 7.3 percent in 2000 (Pierucci 2004).

2. The three types of lay association, *irmandades*, *confrarias*, and *ordens terceiras*, have slightly different canonical statuses. I use the term brotherhood as a generic word for them. The Third Orders are historically linked to a monastic order. The indication 'Third' refers to the internal hierarchy of the orders, the male order is the First, the Second Order is the female, and lay people (non-celibate) are the Third. Among the lay socialities the Third Order is the most prestigious, then come the *confrarias* and then the *irmandades*, a hierarchy that is visible in the place of the groups in processions (the more prestigious, the closer to the clergy under the canopy).
3. In the early eighteenth century, shortly after the first gold was found in the region that is now known as the federal state of Minas Gerais, the Portuguese crown expelled all regular clergy because some religious figures were suspected of smuggling (Scarano 1978:17).
4. The most important cultural campaign to affect the autonomy of the brotherhoods in Minas Gerais and elsewhere in Brazil was the reform movement at the end of the nineteenth century which is usually named Romanization (Oliveira 1985) or the Ultramontane Reform (Groot 1996).
5. A famous member was the late President Tancredo Neves, in 1985 the first civilian president of Brazil after more than twenty years of dictatorship, who died before he could assume his office and was—as a lifelong member of the Third Order—buried in the graveyard next to the church.
6. Arquivo do Convento de Nossa Senhora de Lurdes: Carta 11 May 1969.
7. Arquivo do Convento de Nossa Senhora de Lurdes: Estado de Minas 15 November 1969.
8. Arquivo do Convento de Nossa Senhora de Lurdes: Carta 29 October 1965.

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