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CATHOLIC BASE COMMUNITIES, SPIRITIST GROUPS,
AND THE DEEPENING OF DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL

Rowan Ireland
La Trobe University
Bundoora, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Catholic Base Communities, Spiritist Groups, and the Deepening of Democracy in Brazil

Despite abertura and the elections of November 15, 1982, there must be doubts about the depth of democracy in Brazil. Over the last 50 years, whether in authoritarian or populist democratic periods, the Brazilian State has firmly dominated civil society. Civil society will become relatively stronger, in part, when and if intermediate groups develop at the grassroots. Intermediate groups are groups in which values, needs, and aspirations are rehearsed and articulated independently of State agencies and the hegemony of the ruling elites.

But where are such groups to be found at the grassroots in Brazil? This paper examines two types of religious groups which probably account for the majority of grassroots aggregations for which a *prima facie* case might be made for their being intermediate groups. These grassroots aggregations are the CEBs--the grassroots ecclesial communities of the Catholic Church--and the various Afro-Brazilian cults. The paper assesses the evidence concerning the functioning of these aggregations. That evidence is drawn from case studies, including the author's own case study of the religions encountered in a town of northeast Brazil. On the basis of the evidence, it is concluded that some CEBs do indeed function as intermediate groups, although they are fragile. The Afro-Brazilian cults are found to differ remarkably among themselves. Some function as instruments of ruling-elite hegemony; but others, probably a minority, possess the features of intermediate groups.

CATHOLIC BASE COMMUNITIES, SPIRITIST GROUPS,
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Rowan Ireland
La Trobe University
Bundoora, Australia

Introduction: The Shallowness of Brazilian Democracy

The Brazilian elections of November 1982 confirmed the reality of abertura, the opening up of the authoritarian military regime to democratic influences. In some ways, the degree of abertura represented by the elections was slight: they were rigged with rules prejudicing the opposition, and despite the variety of positions contested, the regime's centralized executive power was not at immediate issue, given the severe limitations on legislative power compared to the executive and on state governments and agencies compared to the federal apparatus. But elections were held, electoral debate was vigorous and free, voter turnout was high, and the many results which did not go the government's way were allowed to stand. If the elections were not a clear victory for either government or opposition, perhaps they can be counted a victory for democracy.

But doubts must persist about the depth of democracy in Brazil. One source of doubt is historically informed. For some political historians, the present abertura may be just another swing of a pendulum that has oscillated between authoritarianism and populist democracy for the last 50 years, without ever including the lower classes except on terms manipulated from above. Drawing convincingly on data concerning the state of Pernambuco, Aspasia Alcantara de Camargo has argued that the pendulum tends to swing toward populist democracy when elites whose power depends on a strong central state seek a new equilibrium because conflicts among the upper-class groups supporting authoritarian rule have become irreconcilable.¹ She considers that "the State's duplicity, accomplice of decadent elites and fortuitous ally of popular movements, reveals its supremacy over civil society."²

Simon Schwartzman, in the conclusion of a study focussing on São Paulo, paints a similar picture.³ He analyzes the shallowness of democracy in what he characterizes as two alternating political systems in Brazil: the liberal system and the authoritarian system. With interpellations of my own, let me present an overview of his conclusions. The liberal political system in Brazil, as elsewhere, has been grounded in the economics of private capitalism. The centralized authoritarian political system is conditioned by the need for a strong State to mediate between disunited capitalist interests and to promote the national growth that the private sector, relatively weak and dependent in the international economy, is unable to achieve.

The liberal political system is most obviously characterized by representation as its major form of political participation. The claim of its champions is that it guarantees participation of ever widening sectors of the society in politics and, through that participation, an increasingly just distribution of resources. There is historical justification for the first part of the claim but also ample grounds on which to challenge the second part.⁴ Representative politics in Brazil has often, perhaps mainly, functioned to guarantee established interests over and against sectors of society, especially the rural poor, less able to articulate their own interests or back them with political resources. I would not have needed political historians or educated radicals to tell me that--over and over again, that is the theme of stories used by the citizens of Campo Alegre, the town where I conducted my fieldwork, to justify their cynicism with regard to representative politics. For many Campo Alegrenses, elections are mere interludes in rule by one or another group of "them," when "they" pay the short-term costs of democracy for the long-term spoils of office.

The centralized political system revolves around bureaucracy.⁵ When citizens are not merely called on to comply with bureaucratic expertise, as in the more authoritarian phases of the system (e.g., 1969-1975), they participate as coopted members of a vast and pervasive patrimonial bureaucracy (e.g., throughout most of the period in which official unions were set up by the government). The claim of the champions of the centralized political system--explicit in the declarations of Getúlio Vargas during the Estado Novo (1937-1945) and in military justifications of the 1964 coup--departs from the recognized defects of the liberal political system. The centralized political system, it is said, guarantees that the general will and the national interest prevail over minority, sectional interests. When a desperately poor municipal street cleaner in Campo Alegre, trying to provide for a family of six on \$110 per month, defends military rule, he backs this claim. He adds that only the military have sufficient muscle to ensure that his wages arrive on time and intact; and that his few rights can be protected against the institutionalized avarice of the local rich only when they have cause to fear the State. But when, in the next moment, he laments the way things are going in Brazil, he states the radical critique of the modern centralized political system: that it limits the distribution of the social product to the restricted groups identified as the necessary and sufficient producers and consumers of national growth.

Schwartzman hopes that State and society might develop in such a way that the virtues of each system might be realized and the vices attenuated. This would be "to de-bureaucratize, for the action of the State to become less authoritarian and clientelistic, for representative politics to become less oriented to private interest and less conservative."⁶ But those changes, he understands, cannot be engineered into existence through manipulations of political institutions; they imply profound socioeconomic and cultural changes. In particular, if political change is to eventuate, it will be:

... in proportion as society develops the capacity for participation by citizens in a variety of different areas; effectively re-establishing the link, lost and hidden by the liberal tradition, between State and society; that link in which the electoral system can... establish its rationale as the visible and structured manifestation of social values.⁷

I would like to extend that argument and suggest the role of religious groups in the formation of a Brazilian polity that is at once representative and equitable.

Schwartzman, it seems to me, is arguing that the development of what have sometimes been called intermediate groups at the grassroots level are a necessary condition for the deepening of democracy in Brazil. Unrepresentative representative politics and bureaucratic authoritarian politics that are only very narrowly representative, escape challenge and succeed one another for as long as lower-class and marginalized interests and values are not effectively articulated. But effective articulation requires lower-class collectivities where private troubles may be seen to be public issues, where lower-class identity, values, and visions can be lived and rehearsed. Intermediate groups are not just any grassroots groups. They must be autonomous groups--unlike the official unions granted the working classes by Getúlio Vargas that incorporate while extending State control; unlike the local religious brotherhood, incorporating the poor in the patronage of local landed or commercial or clerical elites in return for a respectable burial. Their members must be engaged in articulation of grassroots identifications, values, and interests, rather than in the transmission of hegemonic ideas from the State and the dominant culture. They must operate as inclusive communities rather than as closed hierarchies or expert-client relationships which reflect and reproduce the dominant society.⁸

A pessimistic view of Brazilian society, easily adopted if one views that society too exclusively from the top down or from the perspective of an economic determinist, might conclude at this point that there was no hope for intermediate groups. After all, shallow democratic political systems do work for the upper classes and can be worked by the lower classes. Working or being worked, they tend to destroy the bases for their overcoming; in particular they tend to destroy intermediate groups. It is not easy to persuade a worker of the unsecured virtue of democracy when he knows the destitution that awaits him outside the umbrella of the corporatist union. Articulation of the values of the poor seems to promise little to those who see that chances for the good life improve through assimilation to the values of the rich. Community seems elusive to the uprooted in occupationally diverse neighborhoods where my neighbor is my rival for land or for a job in the "informal sector." The economic achievements of authoritarian Brazil seem inexorably to undermine intermediate groups as they uproot the rural poor and create urban neighborhoods of extraordinary heterogeneity. The political achievements of populist Brazil preclude intermediate groups as they massify and coopt.

It would be possible in contemplating these processes to indulge in the pessimism of overdetermination--to conclude that the pendulum will go on swinging, that the deepening of democracy in Brazil is a pipe dream because "the system" is so solid, as the successfully controlled abertura further demonstrates. I want, in the rest of this paper, to argue that if we look from the grassroots and at the unexpected, there are grounds for dismissing pessimism. As I look at a variety of grassroots religious groups in Brazil, I am not going to argue that all is well for democratic deepening through them. In fact, I want to draw out ambiguities and pinpoint the fragility of religious groups as intermediate groups. But I want also to point to the religiously informed creativity that generates intermediate groups at the grassroots. Going beyond my data though not against it, I could argue on theoretical grounds that it is precisely because the groups are primarily religious rather than political that they have the long-term potential to transform Brazilian politics. Short of that, and well within my data, I will argue that some base church communities (the CEBs) of the Catholic Church and some Afro-Brazilian spiritist groups constitute intermediate groups.

The Potential of the CEBs

For those familiar with the ways in which the Catholic Church in Latin America has traditionally served the status quo, it might come as a surprise that grassroots intermediate groups might emerge from the Brazilian Church. But there is no doubt that the Church has changed profoundly over the last two decades, and the outstanding product of that change, the CEBs, do promise to function as intermediate groups despite the hostile environment and internal problems of the Church.

The Brazilian National Conference of Bishops (CNBB) has adopted a "preferential option for the poor," spelling this out to imply that the Church should assume a new identity as promoter of the liberation of the poor. Analyzing why the Church should have adopted this option, some have seen its quest for institutional maintenance and influence as the prime motivation.⁹ By the late 1950s, and thereafter at an accelerating pace, the attempt to maintain influence by institutional alliances with the State and through concentrating resources and personnel on the urban middle classes was failing. A marginalized Church, in this view, turned to the people at the margins of society for its new constituency--the uprooted peasants, the new urban masses. And a shortage of clergy (about one priest for every 9,000 people) called forth new methods, such as the creation of the CEBs run by lay leaders, to exert influence. One implication of this explanation of change in the Church is that the CEBs themselves might, after all, be just a new mode of grassroots aggregation initiated by elites for the ends of what remains an upper-class institution. Some of the ambiguous rhetoric in Church documents and some accounts of CEBs as "coopting" agencies support this position.¹⁰

On the other hand, ideas and not the quest for influence have persuaded many clergy and laity that the building of CEBs is what the Church should be doing--even at the cost of influence as usually conceived. And these ideas anticipate that the CEBs, although essentially

religious and certainly not political-party groups, should develop as intermediate groups. Those members of the Church who have actually practiced the "preferential option for the poor" seem, from what they say about what they do, to be motivated by religious ideas which they and a majority of bishops consider faithful to recent Papal teaching, the Vatican Council, and the declarations of the Latin American bishops assembled at Medellin, Colombia in 1968 and Puebla, Mexico in 1979. Those ideas include the definition of the Church's mission as being to the whole person, not just to some separated spiritual part--hence the concern with issues of justice and equity. Salvation is conceived not so much in individual terms as in social terms: it is believed to involve the individual in participating in the transformation of society so that human potential revealed and called for in the Bible might be better achieved. Further, there is the belief that social transformation of the poor cannot be achieved by elites but only through the building, by the poor themselves, of communities, the CEBs, in which new understanding of the Bible informs action to change society, and vice versa. New ministries performed by laity from the lower classes are considered not simply to be filling in for the lack of priests, as would be consistent with the institutional-influence approach, but expressing a new understanding of the Church as "the people of God."¹¹

If plans and vision could be translated into reality without any problems, the estimated 80,000 CEBs, composed mainly of rural and urban poor, would certainly qualify as intermediate groups. What is intended of the CEBs by episcopal authorities and by Church clergy and laity in the field is outlined in a great number of documents and reports going back to the early 1960s and the setting up of the groups associated with the Basic Education Movement (MEB). I will cite here from one of them, an official report commissioned by the Brazilian National Conference of Bishops (CNBB) and presented to the Conference by Bishop Jose Freire Falcao in 1979.¹²

The new communities are expected to be autonomous in several senses. They are expected not just to be recipients of religious messages but articulators and transmitters to the Church as a whole of an understanding of the Gospel that only the poor, it is believed, can have:

The more oppressed class, of the factory worker, the small farmer, the Indian, becomes the privileged location of the message [of God]--because it is a class more sensitive to the need for union and more open to give welcome to the Gospel's message of liberation. It is notable that in the middle class the process is more difficult; there the message is often received and applied only in the solution of isolated, individual or family problems and never arrives at the community level to become a dedication to the transformation of the whole environment in which one lives.¹³

They are to be autonomous too in the sense that they will not duplicate and reproduce the hierarchical relationships of the dominant society. Involvement in CEBs converts individual members to think and act communally:

The change, or the conversion, transforms relationships. No longer is it the relationship of the expert who teaches that the student might learn; of the rich who pay that the poor might receive; of the patron who commands the passive obedience of the employee. Instead it is a relationship between brothers, sharing among themselves their own material and spiritual goods and recognizing only one Master, before whom all are studentsLacking power, expertise, and riches, the communities are a challenge to the world and to the social system that dominates in our continent.¹⁴

The life of the communities is expected to be directed outward:

Discovering the grandeur of life, the communities set out to restore dignity to it, uniting members, therefore, to struggle against everything that degrades and oppresses man. From the community's living of the Gospel values, members draw energy, courage, and inspiration, and, in the environment in which they live, they join with others with whom they might transform the world, in accordance with the will of God.¹⁵

These hopes for the CEBs from on high are shared by at least some of their ordinary members. Claudio Perani quotes a member of a CEB in Pernambuco defining as its purpose "that the people might see with their own eyes, think with their own heads, speak with their own mouths, and walk with their own feet."¹⁶ That asserts clearly enough the intent of autonomy and critical articulation of experience.

Reports compiled by CEB members suggest, further, that at least some CEBs actually function as intermediate groups.¹⁷ Some groups are founded and encouraged along in earlier stages by laity from established CEBs. Many groups conduct their own liturgies and Bible discussion groups. Nearly all report the effort to articulate local values and experiences in the light of what is learned from the Bible discussions. Many report a variety of CEB-organized activities in their neighborhoods: housing projects for the destitute, the setting up of mothers' clubs and health stations, the compiling of information on a local problem.¹⁸ Often, these activities involve members in clashes with the authorities--e.g., representatives from the 44 rural CEBs in the diocese of Barreirinhas who appeared "en masse to select the board of directors of the rural union, despite the organization of a terrorizing police apparatus."¹⁹

These reports deserve more careful analysis than I can give them here. Not only their explicit content but their authorship (cleric or lay member?), theological assumptions, omissions, and other features must be assessed before they can be used as data in determining the extent to which CEBs actually function as intermediate groups. My provisional conclusion is that well over half of the CEBs reported on do function as intermediate groups--but it should be noted that there are published reports for only a very small proportion of the 80,000 said to exist. Data from Thomas Bruneau's survey of eight dioceses in different regions of Brazil suggest considerable disagreement among

dioceses about what might be said to constitute a CEB--in some dioceses it would seem likely that very traditional clerically-controlled devotional groups might be counted as CEBs.²⁰

Analysis of the small number of reports in Barreiro's book suggests the fragility of many CEBs as intermediate groups. Quotations from the report on CEBs in the extremely poor area of Tacaimbó, Pernambuco leaves little doubt that, for the moment, these are genuine intermediate groups. But their continued existence, let alone any impact in their immediate environment, is threatened by the effects of worsening absolute poverty:

The poor do not believe that they can emerge from this situation in which they are living. They cannot believe in improvement. They can only believe in worse conditions until the end.... People are now observing the poor uniting, but it remains to be seen whether the unity is merely a pretense. The poor person does not have a chance in the local society. The society is made for those who have prestige, those who have a name, an education, or money. The little people have no place in it. A better society for the poor has yet to appear. It will occur when a poor person gets along well with others, and, together, they become associated with one another.²¹

The report from the Barreirinhas CEBs underlines the same vulnerability.²²

Other reports point to another source of vulnerability that will probably have occurred to the reader of the quotations from the report to the CNBB cited earlier. That is the vulnerability of local lay groups before clerical good intentions. Some of the language of the plans and the reports written by clergy suggests that some clergy know exactly what values and perceptions the CEBs should be heading toward; and as they impose their knowledge they undermine the potential of their CEBs to become intermediate groups.

My study of Catholicism in the town of Campo Alegre may help us grasp the interaction and depth of these problems which stand in the way of easy realization of ideals for CEBs as intermediate groups. On the other hand, the appreciation of those difficulties in our case does not amount to a dismissal of CEBs as intermediate groups. Indeed, the full story--of persistence, of transformations in individual lives, and of the slow development of grassroots lay leadership in and through Campo Alegre's fragile CEBs--might encourage interest in the potential of CEBs even in situations where all of the odds would seem to be stacked against their functioning as intended.

But the problems are very real. One set of them arises from elements in the folk Catholicism of the area--a Catholicism that has itself been shaped by the clericalism of the past, by the struggles of the poor to make a succession of political economies work for them, and by the attempts of generations to find meaning and hope in the hard life.²³ Folk Catholicism in Campo Alegre is not all of a piece,

any more than it is in the whole of Brazil.²⁴ One stream of folk Catholicism, still manifest in festas and pilgrimages and protested from the heart by many of my interviewees, predisposes those who profess it to patronal attachments. Another stream, more "privatized," orients toward a highly individualistic definition of problems and solutions. Both streams, however, through different logics of myth and symbol, tend to preclude interest in CEBs.

A second set of problems arises from the Church itself--its buildings, which at the town's center still proclaim the Church's centrality in an institutional matrix pervaded by patronage;²⁵ its patrimonial holdings, which made the priest appear a landowner, whether he liked it or not; its recruitment and training of clergy, which gave the town a young priest who, despite his intentions, spoke and acted as a man from a cultural world very different from that of the poor of Campo Alegre. These aspects of the Church in Campo Alegre made it difficult for the priest to be understood when he urged the need for CEBs.²⁶

The convergence of these two sets of problems undermined several of the priest's attempts to establish the sorts of CEBs that might qualify as intermediate groups, at least in the short run. The priest, Fr. Bruno, hoped that if he could get a group of farmers together as a CEB, it might develop to the point where the farmers themselves would organize their own challenge to a local landowner who was expelling small farmers from land they rented on his property without the compensation required by law. If only the farmers could define their problem clearly enough for themselves, and draw sufficient motivation to unite and act from their shared faith, then the political and economic forces ranged against them might be defeated. An extract from my wife's description of one of this group's few meetings suggests some of the reasons for the failure of this vision to be realized. The meeting was held in a shed used for processing manioc and which was owned and managed by one of the tenants, Manoel Daví, who had received a quit notice:

Inside, the manioc house was surprisingly re-ordered and strangely subdued. Long benches had been brought in and drawn up in a rough semi-circle. At the head, near the spot where one of the groups of women usually scraped the manioc root, stood a wooden chair, a table covered with a neat cloth and a vase containing two paper flowers. Some thirty or forty people sat expectantly awaiting the arrival of the priest. There were more younger women than old, and more older men than young. Dress was simple, but tidy. The women, like Rita, had donned their best dresses, carefully combed their hair and perfumed their necks, and wore thongs or sandals. But Rita's dress was longer than most, carefully covering shoulders and knees. The men generally wore ill-fitting trousers, but their painstakingly laundered short-sleeved shirts and the Sunday hats placed respectfully on their laps testified to the formality of the occasion....

Eventually, the priest drove up in his car. He too wore long trousers and a short-sleeved shirt, but of better quality and fit than the men around him. He addressed the meeting, sitting formally on the chair, earnestly developing the text for the day--the importance of sharing this world's goods with one another, especially the needy; the great promise that the poor would inherit the earth, so clearly prefigured in Christ's washing of his disciples' feet. This feast would be celebrated during the coming week, the priest reminded his listeners, and he personally planned to wash the feet of six farmers and six fishermen at the local ceremony. Now and then the priest elaborated his lesson, coaxing his audience to suggest examples from their own lives which paralleled the gospel story. For most of the time the audience was silent, now and then shuffling their feet. Occasionally, one of the men would mutter a comment or suggest an example, his eyes hardly leaving the ground in front of his feet. Often the priest's questions remained rhetorical. The restrained conduct of the audience and their halting speech contrasted oddly with the animated debates about prices, wages, and bosses, the jokes about manioc roots and marriage, and the incessant bustle that normally took place in this space.²⁷

The portents of the group's short-term failure as a CEB may be easily discerned in this description. The group is waiting for a leader and is reduced to inarticulateness on his arrival. Fr. Bruno feels forced, awkwardly because he had hoped it would be otherwise, to draw the lessons from the Gospel story. Deference to him has defeated the autonomy and communality which he believes the Gospel should elicit.

In another attempted CEB, subversion of intent occurred in a different way. This CEB was led not by Fr. Bruno but by a man named Carlos. It did not fold early but had been meeting for five years when I first attended. While I was in Campo Alegre, on most Sunday afternoons a group of from 10 to 30 would gather in a private house or in the local non-Church primary school where Carlos was a sort of voluntary caretaker. At these meetings, which Fr. Bruno did not attend and at which up to half of those present did not go to Mass, Carlos dominated. He would always summarize, usually quite accurately, Fr. Bruno's sermon of that morning and attempt to lead a discussion on it. He spoke all the time and without Fr. Bruno's characteristic hesitance. In these discussions and in the meeting as a whole, it appeared to me that only some aspects of Fr. Bruno's message had taken hold in Carlos' consciousness. At first I had a general, puzzled feeling that this was so. But after participation in a number of congregation meetings, some basic thematic differences became clearer.

First, Fr. Bruno's moral values become, with Carlos and in the congregation, a moralism. Moral judgments about social and public issues which were intended to evoke social action for change became

moral judgments applied against individuals (e.g., the landowner) who were singled out for condemnation. The concern in the congregation was with clarifying right from wrong, with distinguishing wrongdoers from victims of wrongdoing. And two reactions were evoked. The congregation must right wrongs by assisting its members who were among the victims. Individual members must also, in their own lives, strive to be innocent of whatever was being condemned.

Second, the congregation was still operating with the notion of the Church as law rather than Fr. Bruno's notions of the Church as liberator. Carlos and the congregation were much more concerned than Fr. Bruno about the Pill, the errors of Protestantism (false law), and so on.

Third--and as I interpret things, underlying the previous two differences--the congregation operated with a basically different image of Jesus than the one held by Fr. Bruno. His image was of Jesus the liberator, the model of liberation who calls us forth to battle oppression. The congregation's image was of Jesus the lawgiver, the judge who orients us in our quest for salvation.

One interesting aspect of these meetings, then, was the mistranslation of Fr. Bruno's message, and I have analyzed that process elsewhere.²⁸ Here, though, my interest is on the nature of the group. It seems to me that as Fr. Bruno had withdrawn, Carlos had re-entered as a very clerical figure. Speaking for the priest, the sheer volume of his contributions, in the form of leading questions and then very long replies to his own questions, tended to drown out other contributions. And at that point his message becomes of interest again. As a new sort of Church authority (Fr. Bruno placed great hopes in his leadership and encouraged it) he preached old moralisms and activated old symbols which prejudiced any new Gospel-inspired articulation of values and perceptions which other members of the group might have brought forward.²⁹

This is not all there is to tell about the CEBs of Campo Alegre.³⁰ When I returned last year, I interviewed three people who had been in both of the groups sketched here. Each of the three had remained at the center of resistance to the expulsions from the land. Each insisted on the importance of the groups in providing the initial motivation, energy, and information that led to their resistance. Two of the three continued in yet a third CEB composed of ex-farmers. All three insist on união--which on probing turns out to be engagement by a greater number of ex-farmers in a CEB, if advance is to be made on the land question. None thinks it is the job of the priest to enlarge the CEB or get others going--although all praised the help now given by a nun and a seminary student.

In the longer haul, some of the problems of the Campo Alegre CEBs seem to have been overcome. But not even the clergy involved consider that all is rosy. Four years after my first encounter with them, Fr. Bruno and the nun who works with the fishing-women's CEB worried about what they saw as small progress. The nun, in particular, was worried about continued dependence on her as leader. The Campo

Alegre cases illustrate some of the problems that stand in the way of CEBs functioning as intermediate groups, even when the priest initiating them attempts to be nonmanipulative.

Under less difficult circumstances than those prevailing in the Northeast in such places as Tacaimbó and Campo Alegre, the prospects would seem to be better. The famous Catholic commentator Alceu de Amoroso Lima, in a column in the Jornal do Brasil, argued that, at the national level, one indicator of the success of the CEBs is the fear and opposition they elicit from agencies of national security and conservative groups in society. He begins his article by asking "Why is there so much fear, such distrust and such concern with the famous CEBs?" And his answer, basically, is that it is because they actually work as non-party but politically effective alternatives to structures of privilege in Brazil.³¹

In the search for intermediate groups at the grassroots, it is obvious that an assessment of the CEBs must be made. They have received national and international attention--and not only as a religious phenomenon. No less an authority than General Golbery e Couto has affirmed, from his different perspective, the long-term political importance of the CEBs as part of a wider Movimento Popular. In a 1980 lecture at the Superior War College, General Golbery observed of the new groups that comprise the Movimento that:

The real active forces (os verdadeiros agentes) in the political field have become these conglomerates, much more than the one party [presumably the PMDB] of the opposition. And in these conglomerates, because of their traditional prestige and the protection they can offer, the religious and para-religious organizations have assumed an outstanding, almost hegemonic, position.³²

It seems less obvious that the Afro-Brazilian spiritist cults should be assessed in the same framework. They have not attracted the same sort of attention as the CEBs for their transformative role. And their leaders do not claim a long-term transformative role for their groups in Brazilian society as do the protagonists for the CEBs. Nevertheless, my fieldwork in Campo Alegre and some of the available case-study material prompts me to raise the question of whether Afro-Brazilian cults can also be considered potential intermediate groups.

Afro-Brazilian Cults: The Debate

Do the Afro-Brazilian cults, which in one way or another may involve as many as 30 million Brazilians, function politically as the CEBs are supposed to function? There would seem to be some basis for an affirmative response. Although there are various federations of Umbanda and other Afro-Brazilian groups, the small local group does seem to be the basic unit of analysis. Insofar as the cults represent a continuity with the African past, they keep alive a history and a set of identifications which might provide a basis for resistance to pressures for ideological conformity organized for political purposes

by the ruling elites of both the representative and authoritarian systems. As voluntary organizations with grassroots leadership, they might constitute groups intermediate between the isolated individual and the State. In other words, there would seem to be a prima facie case for an affirmative response to the question.

But the response of many recent studies of Afro-Brazilian cults among the poor has been a resounding negative. Renato Ortiz, justly one of the most influential scholars of the cults, argues that the family of Umbanda cults possesses an ideology formulated largely by whites that functions to extend the hegemony of white elites. Umbanda is the largest, regionally most extensive, and fastest-growing of the cults. Ortiz argues that in ritual, organization, and mythology, Umbanda achieves "the white death of the black shaman."³³ In terms of the categories I have been using, Umbanda groups are not autonomous but manipulable, and dependent--ultimately--on the resources and direction of dominant elites. Umbanda ideology does not encourage the articulation of critical awareness and values among the lower classes, but expresses--through its scientism and its placing of African spirits and practices at the bottom of an evolutionary scale--white, upper-class hegemony. As it expresses, so does it socialize: its members enter modern society, not as members of a grassroots community but as individuals competing for often illusory upward mobility.

At the end of his book, Ortiz speculates further that the State, no longer finding Catholicism congenial as a legitimating power, might turn to Umbanda:

The State would be able to choose...in the religious market a religion which would suit it better in the implantation of a given socioeconomic order. In proportion as the present orientation of the Church (the National Council of Bishops, CNBB) enters into conflict with the dominant ideology, the Umbanda religion becomes an important reserve weapon, well able to inculcate values of submission to the established order.³⁴

Other studies suggest ways in which Afro-Brazilian cults, and especially Umbanda, short of becoming an official legitimating religion, may yet serve either or both the patronal-representative and bureaucratic-authoritarian political economies rather than provide a grassroots base for an alternative politics. Diana Brown has shown in her case studies how Umbanda may restore broken lines of patronage in urban areas, helping to incorporate submissive lower-class members in systems of economic and political exchange that maintain domination by elites.³⁵ Patricia Birman, in a brief analysis of language, ritual, and organization in an Umbanda cult group, traces how Umbandistas rehearse and adopt the norms and practice of power as it is wielded in the dominant society: to practice Umbanda--to submit, for example, to the demands of the medium possessed by the master spirit Seu Boiadeiro--is to accept submission to centralized bureaucratic power conceived as normal in both the material and spiritual planes.³⁶ Leni Silverstein widens our focus from Umbanda to the supposedly more African Candomblé cult of Bahia.³⁷ Examining modes of survival in Candomblé

groups, Silverstein brings out the religiously masked dependence of cult groups on white upper-class resources: the religious relationship between the cult leader (female, black, and poor--the mãe de santo) and the participant patron (male, white, and wealthy--the ogã) hides a system of lower-class survival through incorporation into an upper-class patronage system. Such a system, we may presume, works for the poor as it effectively elicits resources from the rich. But the price paid for security by the poor is precisely the sacrifice of what I have been calling autonomy, articulation, and independent community.

Other studies, and my own research in Campo Alegre, do not allow me to agree that these cases reveal the whole of the political story of the Afro-Brazilian cults. In fact, the diversity to be found among them allows for no simple political equations concerning their contributions to Brazilian politics. It cannot be assumed that continuing syncretism equals syncretism simply on the terms of the dominant political-economic elites. It seems not to be the case that the decline of explicit African-ness is the same as the loss of cultural and structural bases for the articulation of evolving critical awareness and evaluation in viable communities. The facts, while they might prompt us to abandon a certain foreigner's romanticism in the great Roger Bastide's interpretations of the Afro-Brazilian cults, still demand respect for his observation about the creativity, religious and political, to be found in them:

It is always easy enough to see through hindsight how economic or social systems are reflected in religion, but one forgets that there was a factor of creative freedom, that substructural aspects are determinative but not compelling, and that the people confronted with them can either reject the old values that no longer seem to fit the new social situations or invent new meanings for the old symbols they do not wish to reject completely and thus be forced to find an original solution.³⁸

The diversity cannot be avoided; the difficulty is to typologize it validly and with thematic relevance. With Bastide's observation and the concerns of this paper in mind, I suggest that the typology presented in Diagram 1 might be helpful. It brings out the association between various class situations and distinctive types of Afro-Brazilian spiritism. It also suggests how each of the types of spiritism involves the formation of groups which vary markedly on the dimensions of autonomy, articulation, and communalism.³⁹

I cannot here unfold all of this diagram--it is presented to summarize a longer discussion. But several observations need to be made of it and drawn from it. First, on the nature of the typology. Each column and, indeed, each box represents an exercise in ideal typification. That is, the entries represent deliberate dramatic exaggerations of trends noted in case studies. The case studies also show that reality is more complex than the typifications suggest. The characteristics of the slave-type groups persist in groups that were established well after the demise of slavery. Many groups,

Diagram 1

TYPOLOGY OF AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULT GROUPS

Characteristics of Group	Construction for/by Which Group:				
	Slaves	Old sub-proletariat	New sub-proletariat	New urban isolates and upward mobiles	Protesting intelligentsia
Form & content of syncretism:	African content in white Christian forms	White patronal content in Afro forms	Constant variations on Afro-Brazilian forms & themes	White hegemony in Afro-caboclo-mestre disguise	Restored Afro mythology & celebration of diaspora experience in Brazilian forms (e.g., Milton Nascimento & Dom Pedro Casaldáliga co-operating on Missa dos Quilombos)
Ritual features:	Afro language Blood sacrifices	Afro & Portuguese Blood sacrifices	Portuguese only Blood sacrifices rare	Portuguese Sacrifices for individual clients	Portuguese with special Afro vocabulary emphasized
Autonomy-structural:	Discontinuity with patronage hierarchy in dominant society. Internal hierarchy according to blood lineage & relationship to Orixás	Continuity with patronage hierarchy in dominant society. Internal hierarchy reproduces hierarchy in dominant society	Discontinuity with dominant patronage structures. Internal egalitarianism	Continuities with patronage and bureaucratic structures. Expert-client relationship predominates	Protests against dominant patronage & bureaucratic structures

Diagram 1 (continued)

Characteristics of Group:	Construction for/by Which Group:				
	Slaves	Old sub-proletariat	New sub-proletariat	New urban isolates and upward mobiles	Protesting intelligentsia
Autonomy-ideological:	Careful preservation of African identification and mythology. Group-controlled syncretism	Acceptance of racial/class harmony myths. Frozen syncretism for acceptability	Rejection of harmony myths. Development of Afro & other folk myths	Acceptance of Brazilian national-security myths	Rejection of harmony & national-security myths
Articulation of developing perspectives & values:	Articulation to preserve separate identity, history, & power	Articulation to conserve a space reserved: no interest in critical perceptions & values	Articulation of critical perceptions & values	Articulation of received ideologies vs. articulation of critical perceptions & values	Articulation of critical perceptions & values at one remove
Communalism vs. individualism &/or bureaucratic relationships:	Concern to construct and maintain alternative community	Concern to construct & maintain sub-group within accepted structure	Concern to construct & maintain alternative community	Concern for advancement of individual clients & maintenance of medium's prestige	Concern of some to call others to construct alternative community

although predominantly classifiable in one column, display some characteristics listed in other columns.⁴⁰ These ambiguities should be well appreciated by the time I have referred my own cases from Campo Alegre, themselves grossly simplified here, to the categories of the diagram.

Second, on the content of the diagram. Columns 2-4 are the focus of interest in this paper. The distinction between types 2 and 3 emerges with great clarity in Colin Henfrey's comparisons of cult groups in Salvador, Bahia.⁴¹ In certain areas of Salvador, the descendants of slaves are still engaged in traditional occupations such as domestic service, servicing the households of the bourgeoisie. It is these people who join the traditional Candomblé cult groups, beloved of tourists and tourist agencies. These groups, like their members, serve the upper classes in a variety of ways and have upper-class patrons as paying participants. They compete for rewards provided by patrons and the Department of Tourism, and rewards are proportional to success in exemplifying the tradition as it is hallowed by the patronizing classes. The result, expressed in my terms, is summarized in column 2. The groups are low on structural and ideological autonomy. They are, for their members, environments which structure experience in ways that duplicate the wider structuring of life in the society at large.⁴² They are environments which rehearse a set of myths and values which freeze the past for the reward of an assured niche in the dominant society. In a sense, despite their exotic Afro experiences, they are kept groups, almost the opposite of intermediate groups on all criteria.

In great contrast are the cult groups which Henfrey studied in the bairro of Liberdade. The characteristics of these and similar groups are sketched in column 3. Liberdade is, in terms of its location, history, and the "informal-sector" occupations of its inhabitants, much less integrated into bourgeois society. The cults, as well as samba groups, reflect and maintain the distance. On all dimensions, as environments structuring experience and as groups preoccupied with the creative conservation of a counter-culture, they seem to function as intermediate groups. Like some of the CEBs with similar features, their concern with autonomous community-building seems easily to lead members into political activities against the status quo.

Column 4 seeks to encompass features of the Umbanda groups studied by Renato Ortiz, Diana Brown, and others. These groups, as the previous discussion of the literature made clear, can in no way be considered intermediate groups. On the contrary, they contribute to the reproduction of both patronage and bureaucratic authoritarian Brazil. But the point of presenting Diagram 1 was to make something of a case for the claim that these sorts of Afro-Brazilian cult groups are only one among other types.

Afro-Brazilian Cults: The Campo Alegre Cases

The range in Afro-Brazilian spiritism that emerges from a survey of the literature is reflected in the 14 different cult groups found in Campo Alegre. In the remainder of this paper, I will highlight

their diversity and examine the relationship between type of cult and potential of the cult to generate intermediate groups.

The issues of autonomy and articulation of lower-class values and perspectives will be treated through an examination of the extent to which the cults accept or reject hegemonic values and perceptions. But the criteria are not only ideological. Of each group selected here for brief examination, I raise the question: how does the life of the group structure the everyday experience of participants, vis-a-vis the structuring entailed by the political, social, and economic realities of everyday life in Campo Alegre?

All citizens of Campo Alegre--even with the relative ideological pluralism of abertura--are enjoined, in a variety of ways, to see and evaluate reality in terms of a code that I will call the Brazilian national security code.⁴³ The code is enjoined upon Brazilians in a variety of ways--most directly in explicit propaganda and the rhetoric of public occasions; most effectively in the hidden curricula of educational institutions and the everyday functioning of the political economy.

Key provisions of the national security code as it is received at the grassroots of Brazilian society may be defined on the basis of careful analysis of explicit messages received and message-laden occasions experienced. That analysis warrants at least another paper; but the provisions drawn out in such an analysis would include:

- (1) the image of the good citizen as one who accepts and obeys rational bureaucratic authority and understands the necessity of a system of status and rewards grossly favoring those with formal qualifications over those with few qualifications in the modern urban sectors of the economy;
- (2) the equation of the State, the nation, and the society as being but different names for the same organic entity proceeding from one pure stream of history toward the single destiny of the successful national security State;
- (3) the belief that loyal citizens and legitimate groups will identify above all with the nation state and only secondarily or not at all with class or region or ethnicity;
- (4) the belief in formal, instrumental education as the source of all worthwhile wisdom and the means for progress away from individual and collective ignorance and poverty;
- (5) the belief that civilization and Brazil's destiny as a world power can be achieved through the triumph of whiteness, European-ness, and hygiene over darkness, Indian-ness, African-ness, and dirtiness; through the triumph of science and modern technology over emotionality and ignorance; through the taming and tapping of nature, above all Brazil's wild, unused jungles;

- (6) the conception of Brazilian history as essentially in accord with the history textbooks in which the remembered heroes are great military commanders, conquerors of the hinterland, modernizers, and defenders of order.

The question, then, is the extent to which the cults of Campo Alegre adopt and rehearse these encodings of Brazilian reality. To what extent are the cults exactly as the hegemonic interpretation of Afro-Brazilian spiritism claims them to be? To what extent do they function as intermediate groups resisting hegemony and rehearsing, in viable community, the perceptions and evaluations of alternative Brazils?

Pai Fuló, 79 years old and known as the pai de santo (literally "the father of the saint"), is the leader of a Xangô cult. Xangô is the name of an African spirit brought to Brazil, Cuba, and other places in the Americas by West African slaves. Fuló's home is the center for the cult, and fixed to the rendered mud outer wall is a sign telling passersby that this is a:

terreiro dos cultos
africanos anagô
são joão
batista

"the place of the African Nagô cults, St. John the Baptist." The naming encapsulates a great deal about Fuló and his cult. Fuló is insistent on the African-ness of the cult. He is himself clearly of African ancestry, as are many although by no means all of his cult members. The Nagô cults are Yoruba in origin, and Fuló stresses the point: the ritual chants of his house are in Nagô rather than Portuguese, because Nagô is the language to which the great African spirits respond. As a guardian and communicator of myth and ritual--the role that he considers central and most important--Fuló passes on to his followers, preferably while they are very young, enough Yoruba language and lore so that they will be able to bear their spirits into the world.

But note that this is the place of the African cults called St. John the Baptist. Fuló celebrates and recreates African-ness, but uses the nomenclature of Christianity. In my first conversations with him, he identified himself as a member of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church--each adjective carefully enunciated so that the correct formula might banish doubt. He pointed out to me that each of the spirits whose image resides in the peji room of his house has both an African and a Catholic saint's name: Yemanjá, the spirit of the waters and mother of many of the other great spirits, is Our Lady, Mary, the mother of Jesus. Xangô, whose name is popularly given to the whole cult, is represented by symbols of lightning and kingship, but his character as dispenser of justice is emphasized in his identification as Saint Jerónimo.

In the naming of the house as in the naming and representation of the spirits, Fuló's Xangô adopts outward forms and labels from appropriated aspects of the dominant religious culture. But the character

of the spirits and the concerns of the house in relationship to them remain, in the eyes of the group, essentially African. Fuló explains that he is not of the cultura alta, the high culture, even when, in my first conversations with him, he protested his good standing within it. He and his sons and daughters in the saint (filhos e filhas de santo) identify themselves with Brasil selvagem, savage Brazil, but they do not reject Brasil selvagem nor do they accept the valuation placed by the cultura alta on it.

They are continuing an old tradition, investigated by Roger Bastide,⁴⁴ in which the Catholic saints become masks for the orixás or African spirits--and in doing so, the orixás and the ways of life integrated around them may avoid suppression.⁴⁵ But it is the orixás who rule and the mode of life which they require that persuades in Fuló's group. Reinterpretation of the Christian saints and of the cultura alta in general has been accomplished in terms of the values, cognitions, and modes of relationship between man and nature and between man and man, distinctive of Brasil selvagem.

Indeed, if not in word, then in ritual action and symbol, Fuló and his "family" construct alternatives to much of the cultura alta. Their lives bear the stamp of poverty, but although they do not politically attack "the system" head on, they reject its judgments of them and assert an alternative identity for the poor. The Portuguese language itself is denied its superiority in the Nagô chants--and it is noteworthy that Nagô is used and taught by Fuló not as a priestly language for mystery and the arcane but for the acquisition of a counterculture: Fuló's Nagô does not mirror but exactly negates the function of the traditional priests' Latin. The group's blood sacrifices ignore modern urban Brazil's rules of hygiene and separation from raw nature--and for this alone members of other Afro-Brazilian cults label followers of Xangô ignorant and uneducated. But sacrifice, Fuló explains, is one of the things that the spirits demand if they are to infuse their followers with their diverse strengths and protect them from harm.

Fuló and his group are even more profoundly countercultural in their social relations. In a society where, even at the local level, authority claims legitimation through formal qualifications and expertise, Fuló exercises traditional authority--authority based on wisdom passed on through the generations in deep personal relationships. Fuló does not intend, nor is he expected, to hoard his wisdom as an expert for specific functions; rather his standing relies on his transposing his wisdom from his life to as many other lives as he can. His proudest boast to me was that he has left communities of filhos and filhas de santo all over Brazil--he has fulfilled his roles as "ambassador of the spirits" and zelador (watchman) of the wisdom of Africa and Brasil selvagem.

I do not want to suggest that Fuló's group is an antithesis of modern Brazilian society, or that its encodings of reality exactly negate the national security code. Fuló, as we have seen, and members of his family in even greater degree, are ambivalent towards a cultura alta that is itself multivalent. Fuló, I would say, is

teacher/father in a counterculture--but counter to what? If entirely counter to rational-bureaucratic authority, then for some members only an alternative locus wherein to realize the continuing motif of patrimonialism in the cultura alta. Counter to the exclusive pretensions of those who accept white, specific, rationalist Brazil lock, stock, and barrel, Fuló's Xangô does not yet arm for resistance, unless it is with a potent sense of independence and confident apartness grounded in ritually nurtured alternative history. But it is precisely that sense, evident in interviews with Fuló and a core of cult members, which would lead me to rate the group high on the dimensions of autonomy and articulation.

In addition to interview materials, the design and use of ritual space by the group helps define its anti-hegemonic elements. We can read this use of space through consideration of Diagram 2, which is a sketch of the terreiro of the cult, Fuló's house. In Diagram 2 the first thing to note is that the ritual space, the salão, is located in a home: to receive the wisdom and strength of the spirits one has to become a member of a household. In the salão itself, everything is moveable: it is a space for learning through community-in-motion rather than through the raised expert commanding, or pouring specific chunks of knowledge into empty vessels. The pejé is a place apart, but not for individual therapy: when a member of the group is performing his or her obligation to his spirit--which is also an obligation to the group involving provision of a high-protein meal for all participants--that member is secluded for a time in the special place of the spirits. But the obligation is fulfilled only when the member emerges from the pejé, bearing his spirit in trance out into the group to move, and move with, the others.

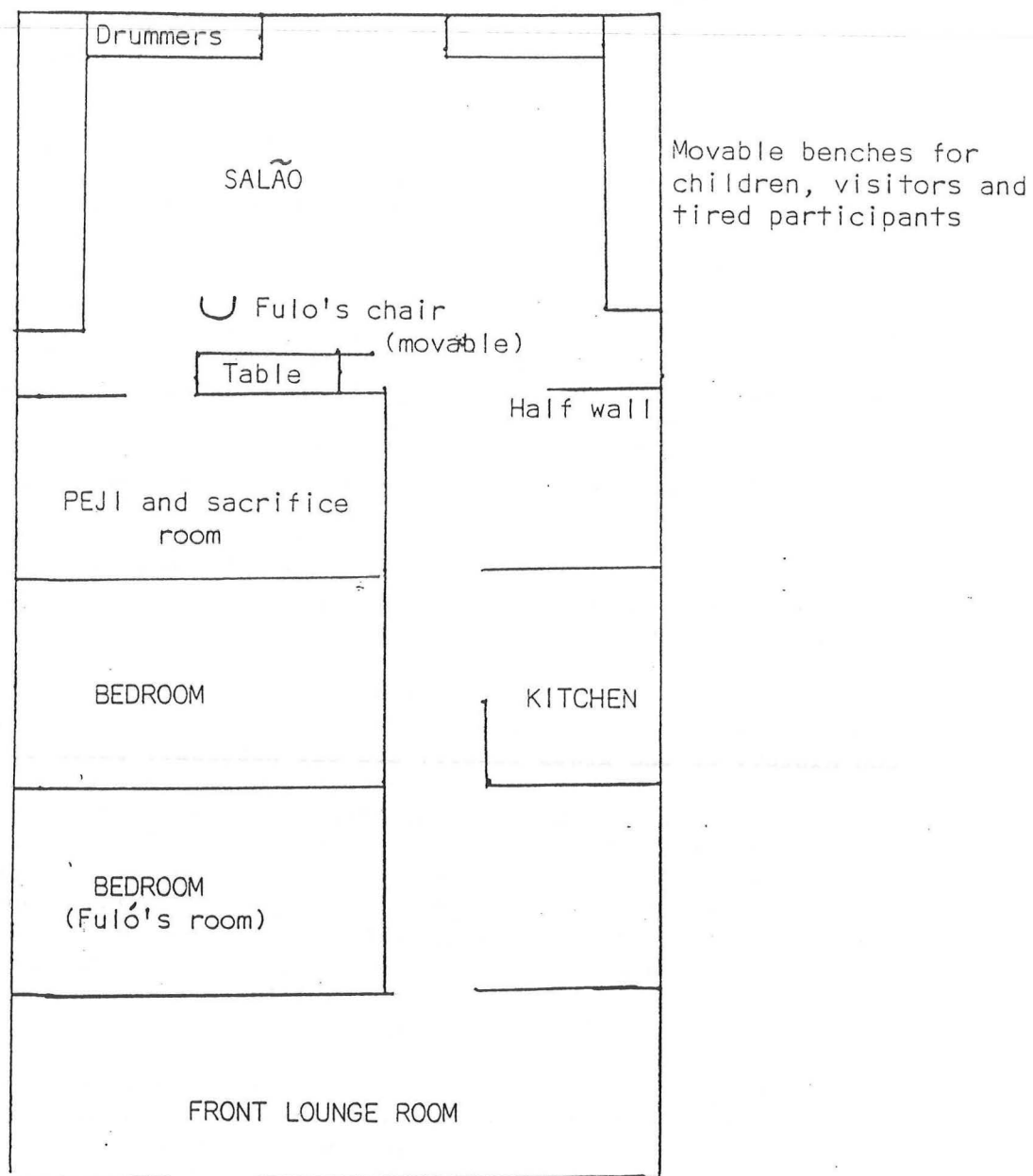
The case is not complete. A detailed consideration of biographies of members, of the form of relationships between Fuló and members and the history of the group itself, are all necessary parts of a full assessment of the cult as an intermediate group. In fact, the story of the group over the last five years suggests that it is as vulnerable as the CEBs of Tacaimbó to the corrosions of absolute poverty in the context of the prevailing political economy. But it persists, and the lives of core members of the group do suggest a carrying out into the world of a critical stance toward the national security code. In dealings with neighbors, the bureaucrats, the rich, and the powerful, they show a coolness borne of partly willful marginality and a resilience borne of confident identity.

In Diagram 3 we can read a very different sort of group and a very different sort of leader in Dona Rosária. Dona Rosária comes to her spiritist center from the state capital, 30 kilometers away. She brings from her upper-class suburb a message to the poor. In the center, she dispenses enlightenment, therapy, and goods to the needy. Her center was originally a large barn that was made available to her by the local prison authorities. She has transformed it to her purposes.

Note several of its features. Two thirds of the center are arranged as a classroom or lecture hall of the traditional kind. The first third is set apart for what Fuló would call the cultura alta,

Diagram 2

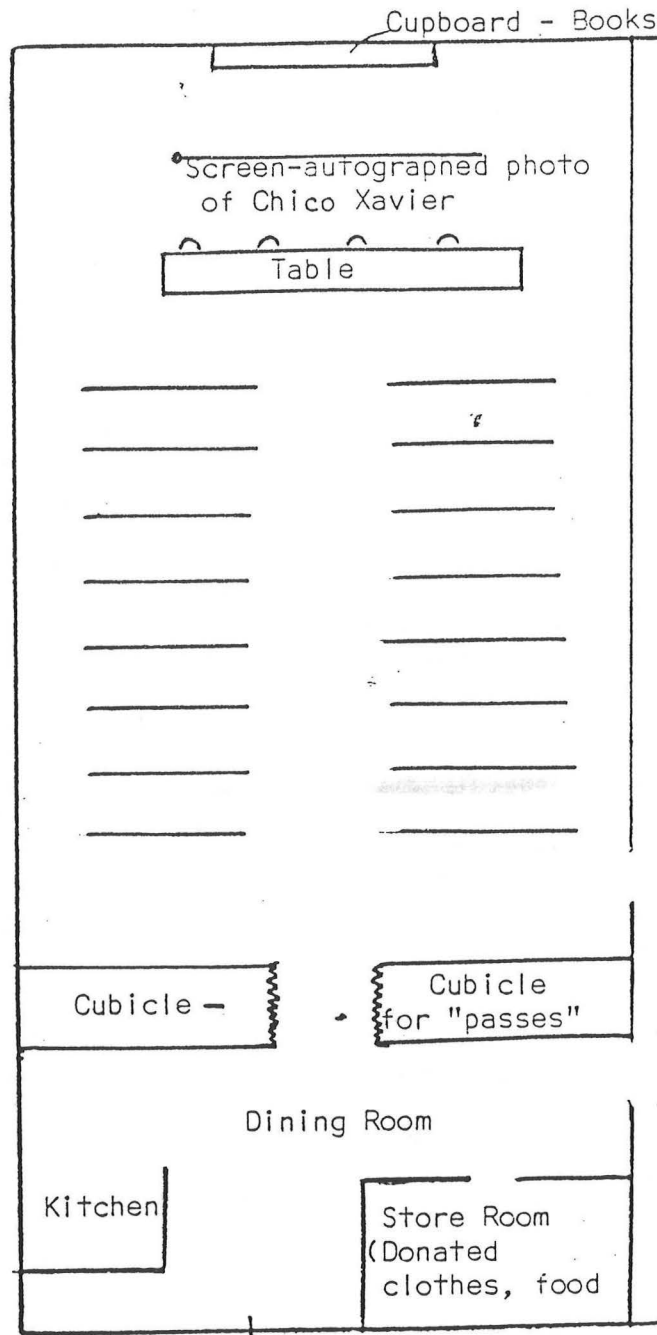
FULÓ'S HOUSE: TERREIRO DOS CULTOS
AFRICANOS ANAGÕ
SÃO JOÃO BATISTA



A household for survival and community building

Diagram 3

CENTRO ESPIRITISTA: DONA ROSÁRIA OF THE
FEDERAÇÃO ESPIRITISTA,
ENCRUZILHADA



A school room for dispensing Cultura Alta
to the Lower Orders

its personnel and its artifacts. Dona Rosária and visiting dignitaries speak from the table to an audience seated in rows--the very furniture is arranged for passive reception of messages from experts.

The remaining third of the building is reserved for other forms of dispensing from the cultura alta. In the cubicles, after hearing the message, Dona Rosária's audience may become clients. A client will enter into the cubicle and an expert in spiritual currents will dispense a therapeutic pass and sometimes counselling based on the wisdom passed on from the higher, purer spirits. Then, those in greatest need may be given food and even clothing brought by Dona Rosária from the Spiritist Federation headquarters in the state capital.

Dona Rosária's spirit world is tidily arranged. It is elaborately structured from higher spirits, with Jesus Christ at the top, through the great departed thinkers of Western civilization, down through lower spirits--old slaves, cowboy spirits, the spirits of the street, and the inarticulate caboclo and African spirits--and finally down to the evil spirits of darkness, including the African Exús. She professes the beliefs of the Umbanda cult, although among Umbandistas hers is of the kind most heavily influenced by the 19th-century European spiritualist Alain Kardec and the least continuous with more African cults such as Fuló's Xangô or Bahian Candomblé. Her exemplar is the great white medium Chico Xavier, whose portrait hangs on a screen behind the table. Xavier has published books of prayers and revelations communicated by superior spirits. And the superior spirits are not the African spirits of Xangô or the caboclo Indian spirits, the cowboys, ex-slaves, and street spirits of the Umbanda groups--but spirits of departed white, professional representatives of the cultura alta.

Much of Dona Rosária's discourse departs from a framework of oppositions: spirit vs. flesh; whiteness, light, lucidity, science, and Christ vs. blackness, darkness, ignorance, superstition, and Satan. Like most Umbandistas, she has borrowed the notion of Karma: success in this life is to prepare the spirit, in whatever walk of life, for a higher, purer existence in the extraterrestrial plane and in the next incarnation.

There is more of Dona Rosária's spiritism and that of her followers to be elaborated, but an outline of world-view and predispositions for social actions has, I hope, emerged. The predispositions may be traced out in the life of a neighbor who introduced me to the group--Maria José. Maria attends as often as she can for a complex of reasons. The existence of a spirit world that impinges on this one is very real to her, but so is the experience that nothing must take you too far away from secure lines of patronage to the Brazil of the cultura alta. Fuló's Xangô takes you too far away and offers nothing in return; Rosária's group offers needed strength from the spirits and a line for material patronage as well. The center itself is well lit, clean, and comfortable, and offers the schooling that seems necessary to get ahead but which is otherwise unavailable to the Maria Josés of Northeast Brazil. Her recent history suggests to me that Maria José leaves the center hopeful that modernity will provide, distrustful of her judgment because convinced of her ignorance, and accepting many of the

claims of the national security code--the beneficence of its representatives being demonstrated in Dona Rosária's dispensing of expensive powdered milk to Maria José's adopted boy.

Maria José may help us toward a dialectical analysis of both her own Kardecist Umbanda group and Fuló's Xangô. In particular, she suggests an explanation for the correlative emergence of a military State engineering Brazil towards identity with the national security code and the spectacular expansion of the Umbanda cult, partly at the expense of Fuló's Xangô and the cults like it. Insofar as Umbanda emerges out of a previous generation of African and Amerindian spirit-cults, it represents a triumphant re-shaping of the spirit world in accordance with the national security code and the more diffuse cultura alta.

The Maria Josés of Brazil find the re-shaping attractive because it promises participation in the power, the comfortable ethos, and even some of the material benefits of that world otherwise denied them. And so, the spirits usher in the generals' version of modernity, having first been tamed and re-ordered by it. Dona Rosária, gentle soul, has become a medium for what Harvey Cox calls "the seduction of the spirit," in more ways than one.⁴⁶ Her group is a group for hegemony, and it is difficult to imagine in it any potential for functioning as an intermediate group.

In Fuló's Xangô, on the other hand, the African spirits--or more particularly, the way of life integrated around them--encode reality in such a way as to predispose at least skepticism toward claims based on the national security code. The spirits do not respond to the blandishments of scientism nor are they reached by experts and bureaucrats. They live in story and ritual, and rather less as signs to be manipulated. They are not, themselves, of the cultura alta--in fact Exú, one of the most powerful spirits, the controller of traffic between the seen and the unseen in Xangô, has become, in the more modern cults and in the cultura alta itself, the lowest and darkest spirit of all, Exú-Satan.

A brief survey of some of the other cults helps us chart the territory between Fuló's group and Dona Rosária's. It also helps explore the dimension of communal orientation in a classification of cult potential for generating intermediate groups.

Dona Dina's cult is of the Umbanda type, although much less Kardecist than Dona Rosária's. Her salão is much more like Fuló's, and one becomes a member through participation in ritual rather than through exhortation. Dona Dina is herself a poor, illiterate fishing lady and has no patronage to offer. She does, however, have what she and her clients believe are special gifts of mediumship which can be drawn on by individuals to provide advice and prescription in dealing with the troubles of poverty. Through Dona Dina, her clients, usually paying clients, may receive help--not from the higher spirits but from the wise, often rough-diamond Brazilian spirits such as the cowboy spirit which she prefers.

In Dona Dina's cult, there are certainly departures from the Brazilian national security code: wisdom may reside in, and come from, the lower orders--the old slaves, for example. On the other hand, Dona Dina is herself an expert in magic, and is often feared as such. She and her clients understand her central role to be that of providing a service to individuals in trouble who need help to survive in the system. Hers is not the role of builder of an alternative community with an alternative culture. Her religious code does not predispose toward translation of private troubles into community issues. Her own discourse is full of the scientisms of the national security code, and her spirit hierarchy conforms exactly to the social hierarchy of that code.

One of her clients, Biu, may help us "trace out" Dona Dina's cult into the world. Biu is an occasional client, seeking aid from Dona Dina when in trouble, but avoiding participation in the cult because of fear of falling into trances. When worried that her de facto husband might leave her and their young child, she goes to Dona Dina for divination and advice, seeking, in the techniques of Afro-Brazilian religion, aid to deal with her private troubles. She does not go to cult leaders as frequently as some; the attempt at short-range manipulation of everyday life through recourse to the spirits has not become a way of life for Biu. But consultation with Dona Dina and two other cult leaders is, for her, a normal part of crisis management. And in her interpretations of her own behavior during crises in her life, she has adopted the pathos of Dona Dina's type of Afro-Brazilian spiritualism.⁴⁷ She sees herself drawn by one or another of the spirits to attempt suicide or even kill her child. It has become part of her everyday conception of herself that she is, at times, the passive victim of spirits who act upon her. She does not interpret all of her behavior in this way, nor does she consistently attribute the behavior of others to the workings of the spirits, as some of Dona Dina's other customers do. But she deals with the crises of poverty as though they were only private troubles generated by personal relationships with spirits who may themselves be manipulated from time to time through cult leaders. Dona Dina is Biu's science; the theology of the cult reinforces Biu's location of herself as one who is born to the travails of poverty, subject to the darker, more malevolent, lower spirits, needing expert help to hang on in modern, urban Brazil.

Maria Pretinha (Little Black Mary), another of the cult leaders whom Biu consults, sternly rejects the pathos with which Biu negotiates her world. Anyone may be acted upon by the spirits, usually for the better; but, as Maria Pretinha argues, and proclaims in her well-organized, if poverty-stricken life, people are ultimately responsible for their own actions, for their control over the spirits, for the purification of their own spirits. Maria Pretinha negotiates her world with irony, interpreting even her own sufferings as, in part at least, due to the still unconscious weaknesses or deficiencies in herself that she must discover and control. She goes out from her cult to assess and conduct life in a way that is strikingly similar to that of many members of the Assembly of God: insisting sternly on the necessity of traditional morality and self-discipline, allowing

efficiency and order as the only legitimations of accepted hierarchy and political authority. Unlike most members of the Assembly, however, Maria Pretinha seems predisposed by her religion to distrust the claims of experts and professionals to a monopoly of wisdom. She is medium for a spirit who in his "terrestrial" life was a sort of city slicker, a wily Afro-Brazilian operator from the urban lower classes who, despite his sins, picked up much wisdom and who has developed as a spiritual and practical guide for the living through his relationships with other spirits since his death. Maria criticizes her spirit for his remaining rough edges, but also proclaims his merits as a sort of lower-class hero who has battled upward from vice and ignorance to a higher plane of development. She insists that he knows and understands what many a learned doctor will never learn, and points out that he dispenses counsel without pretensions and at a cheaper rate than the officials from the higher classes. He is also wiser than they are: he calls his clients not just to bandage immediate problems but to turn to a new way of life, and most of his remedies, passed on through Maria Pretinha, involve clients in some sort of activity for their own spiritual development.⁴⁸

There are many more cases to be considered along with Maria Pretinha, Biu, Dona Dina, Maria José, Dona Rosária, and Fuló and his family. But the variations that constitute the Babel of the Afro-Brazilian cults in Campo Alegre have been sufficiently suggested by these cases to allow some assessment of varying potential of the cults to function as intermediate groups.

As I have read and traced out the array of cases, I have been persuaded that there are two quite divergent types of religiosity present in the cults, distinguishing different individual believers. In that neater world which will be the reward of all good sociological typologizers, each of the cults would fall tidily into one or the other type and we could predict that the religiosity of any one cult member would correspond to the religiosity characterizing the cult. In fact, I can suggest only tendencies along such lines.

One type of Afro-Brazilian religiosity evident in Campo Alegre is primarily communal and is lived in groups that possess in relatively high degree the qualities of intermediate groups. Those who experience this type of religiosity are called in teaching and ritual to become members of a distinctive historical community. The individual conceives of his or her development as taking place in and through the community's collective access to the spirits, who for all their power are dependent on and obliged to the living. Misfortune for the individual, and for the community as a whole, is explained in ironic terms--i.e., the sufferer will be held to have some responsibility for suffering and will have to take an active part in dealing with suffering. Leaders are conceived of as communicators of communal wisdom rather than as experts in the esoteric or as agents of higher culture.

The other type of religiosity is individual and instrumental in focus. Followers are involved in their cults as competitors to harness the power of the spirits to private ends.⁴⁹ The individual member seeks development by gaining competitive advantage and defensive cover

through the expertise of the medium. His interpretations of misfortune and chosen remedies connote a disposition of pathos: the sufferer has been acted upon by forces beyond normal personal control, and restoration is sought in therapies in which the medium's client is passive. Leaders are primarily experts in the therapeutic techniques. The spirits themselves are called on to serve for specified goals, rather than, as is the case in communal religiosity, to draw participants into a way of life.

Fuló's religiosity is of the first, communal, type; although I cannot claim that all who frequent his cult or consult him as a powerful medium share his orientations. Maria Pretinha, despite her disinterest in the original African spirits and her moralistic individualism, is also much nearer the communal type than any of the other cult leaders. Dona Dina, although a medium for genuinely popular spirits, does not seek to construct community around them: she is primarily a religious expert for clients to whom she is plausibly powerful. Her followers, like Biu, approach her with a pathos she shares; they hope to draw on the power which she in turn draws from the spirits. Dona Rosária, although as moralistic as Maria Pretinha, presents herself and other visiting mediums as dispensers of therapy for the afflicted. She enjoins change of heart and modernity and uprightness, but is not concerned to achieve these ends through the development of community. She and her spirits invite and entice Maria José upward, alone.

The individualist-instrumental type of Afro-Brazilian religiosity is part and parcel of modern Brazil. In the cults in which it is dominant and in the lives of those who manifest it, we may trace a Gramscian movement in which the powerful in Brazil, through their control over symbols and over the means for survival and success, are powerful even over the spirits. And, as the spirits are transformed--from exemplary historical heroes into colorful "inside-dopesters"--so they come to serve the powerful and help subordinate the less powerful. Afro-Brazilian religiosity of the individualist-instrumental type at once predisposes toward acceptance of the national security code (if not always in toto) and parades its successful hegemony (if sometimes incongruously).

The communal type of religiosity, by contrast, provides a vocabulary of motives, heroes, interpretations, and meanings which predispose men and women to make their social worlds other than the powerful desire. Afro-Brazilian religiosity of the type approached--with different pantheons of spirits and different emphases--by Fuló and Maria Pretinha does not train revolutionaries to do battle with the generals. My claim is milder than that. It is that a minor theme in the Babel of Afro-Brazilian religion in Campo Alegre is incredulity before the claims of upper-class modernity and the claims of the national security code. Perhaps that is subversive far beyond the intentions of Fuló or the suspicions of Dona Rosária. That potential for long-term subversion of a dominant order is what intermediate groups, unlike revolutionary vanguards or radical parties, are all about.

Conclusion

In the midst of the dramatic uncertainties of abertura, there is still reason for a certain sense of *dejá vu*. Perhaps the pendulum is simply traversing its normal course over the last 50 years and moving again from bureaucratic authoritarian rule to a functionally-unrepresentative representative politics. There are historical indicators that the Brazilian State is so strong, compared to civil society, that it is only over the forms of its hegemony that fools contest. Unless, that is, civil society at its grassroots is rather unexpectedly developing muscle, so that a genuine deepening of democracy could take place, despite the manipulativeness of so much that is called abertura.

I have been arguing that certain religious groups, even when they are specifically religious in nature, constitute what I call intermediate groups: groups in which effectively marginalized people at the grassroots may experience alternative Brazils and articulate their alternative perceptions and values as they build community. Such groups seem to be extraordinarily resilient in resisting hegemonic pressures.

Although I do not believe that the data allow for the euphoria of some Church apologists for the CEBs, some CEBs do function as intermediate groups. The wildest guardians of the State have sensed that they are faced with a new long-term danger. This danger might be missed if we assess Brazilian politics through too narrow a focus on what goes on in the still State-managed electoral arena rather than through a focus which looks at developments such as CEBs in civil society.

To an even greater extent--and partly because there is no group of Church triumphalists to attract attention--the phenomenon of some Afro-Brazilian cults as intermediate groups will be missed using the narrow focus. But despite fragilities (not really examined here) and ambiguities, a certain type of Afro-Brazilian cult group, illustrated through some of my own case material, does function to encourage anti-hegemonic sensibility. Speculation about what that means in the long haul probably sorts us into camps of pessimists and optimists on the prospects for the deepening of democracy anywhere. The resilience of my informants in Campo Alegre has taught me to be an optimist.

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¹Aspasia Alcantara de Camargo, "Autoritarismo e populismo: bipolaridade no sistema político brasileiro," Dados, 12 (1976), 22-45. I do not know what Camargo thinks about the present phase of abertura.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Simon Schwartzman, Bases do autoritarismo no Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Campus, 1982).

⁴Only once has redistribution through representative politics seemed a real possibility--and that ushered in the present authoritarian phase. One of the factors precipitating the authoritarian coup against the representative political system in 1964 was the social security law of 1960 which gave labor leaders a secure position of influence on the governing councils of all social security agencies. In 1963, the pro-labor Labor Minister Almiro Afonso assisted labor leaders in extending their influence so that ability to effectively redistribute and destroy the control function of the corporative system was briefly attained. See Kenneth Paul Erickson, "Corporatism and Labor in Development," in H. Jon Rosenbaum and William G. Tyler (eds.), Brazil: Issues in Economic and Political Development (New York: Praeger, 1972), ch. 7.

⁵I think I would emphasize, rather more explicitly than Schwartzman does in his conclusion, the dual and in some respects contradictory faces of the centralized bureaucracy: on the one hand, the cool rational face of rule by protected experts; on the other, the warm smiling face of the patrimonial leader offering sustenance and security in exchange for passive inclusion in State corporatist institutions. In turn it is necessary to distinguish between two types of patrimonial leader: the personal patron--the coronel still to be found in rural Brazil; and the populist leader who provides a demagogic and/or charismatic link between the masses and the State. See Francisco Weffort, O populismo na política brasileira (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978). President Figueiredo and Getúlio Vargas have both displayed the populist style within the authoritarian system.

⁶Ibid., p. 146.

⁷Ibid., p. 147.

⁸I am not saying that all groups which are not autonomous, etc., are social evils but only that to the extent that they do not have these qualities they will be unlikely to function as intermediate groups contributing to the deepening of democracy.

⁹The most important contribution to the influence approach, but one which is subtle and sympathetic to reformers in the Church, is Thomas Bruneau, The Church in Brazil: The Politics of Religion (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

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- ¹⁰ Jether Ramalho, "Algumas notas sobre duas perspectivas de pastoral popular," Cadernos do ISER, 6 (março 1977). The theme of cooptation of grassroots religious groups by upper-class religious functionaries and not just Catholic clergy is well analyzed in Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Os Deuses do Povo (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980).
- ¹¹ Almir R. Guimarães, "Comunidades de base--busca de equilíbrio entre ministérios e comunidade Cristã," Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira (REB), 38:149 (março 1978).
- ¹² Comunidades eclesiais de base no Brasil: Experiências e perspectivas, 23 (São Paulo, Edições Paulinas, Estudos da CNBB, 1979).
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 20.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.
- ¹⁶ Claudio Perani, "Comunidades eclesiais de base e movimento popular," Cadernos do CEAS, no. 75, 25-33.
- ¹⁷ Reports are collected and presented at the "Interchurch meeting [encontro] of Base Communities." These reports may be found in the journal SEDOC. The first of these encontros was in 1975 and the fourth, the last for which I have read reports, in 1981. Reporters of the meetings have noted their progressive de-clericalization. By the third meeting, and even more in the fourth, the theologians and bishops were listening. The speaking, analyzing, and organizing of the encontro was in the hands of CEB members from all over Brazil. See L. Boff, "Comunidades Eclesiais de Base--povo oprimido que se organiza para a libertação," REB, 41:162 (junho 1981), 312-320. In the following paragraphs, I will quote from a study now available in English which draws from the reports in SEDOC: Alvaro Barreiro, Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Evangelization of the Poor (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982).
- ¹⁸ For some detailed accounts, see Alvaro Barreiro, op. cit., chs. 2 and 5.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 42. The chronology section of REB under Leonardo Boff's editorship is a valuable record of reported clashes between CEBs and police or hired gunmen.
- ²⁰ Bruneau, op. cit., ch. 8.
- ²¹ Alvaro Barreiro, op. cit., p. 56.
- ²² Ibid., p. 44.

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- ²³I have drawn out some of these interactions in R. Ireland, "The Prophecy That Failed," Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture, 16:3 (Autumn 1981), 253-264. For profound considerations of the formation of popular religiosities in Brazil, I have found stimulating Francisco C. Rolim, "Religião do pobre e seu anúncio," REB, 41:164 (dezembro 1981), 745-776.
- ²⁴The special issue of REB, 36 (março 1976) remains a landmark in the consideration of variety of Brazilian folk Catholicism. See also Eduardo Hoornaert, Formação do Catolicismo brasileiro (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1974).
- ²⁵One very traditional but poor Catholic thought that the church was fine but lamented the fact that the priest was encouraging meetings out and away from it. He yearned for the days when the church and the cuartel (the barracks) stood close to one another and the priest and the other authorities could get together to maintain law and order.
- ²⁶I have analyzed the problems of communication closely in "The Prophecy That Failed," op. cit.
- ²⁷Mary Ireland, "Leaseholds on Life: A Study of Land and Lives, Campo Alegre, Northeast Brazil--1814-1977," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., La Trobe University, 1982), pp. 373-374.
- ²⁸"The Prophecy That Failed," op. cit., 259-264.
- ²⁹The obvious question is: would other members of the group have come up with anything but the prejudices of folk Catholicism? The obvious reply, to me, is that we don't know but that in CEBs in the same diocese very interesting new liturgies and analyses of urban slum life were emerging.
- ³⁰I have not even listed them all. Another comprises fisherwomen. Yet another is composed of high school students.
- ³¹Tristão de Athayde (nom de plume), "O mundo das comunidades," Jornal do Brasil 25 June 1981.
- ³²Quoted in Claudio Perani, op. cit., p. 30.
- ³³This is the title of two of Ortiz' analyses of Umbanda: Renato Ortiz, A morte branca do feiticeiro negro - Umbanda: Integração de uma religião numa sociedade de classes (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes Ltda., 1978); and the article of the same name in Religião e Sociedade 1 (maio 1977), 43-50.
- ³⁴Ortiz, A morte branca do feiticeiro negro - Umbanda, p. 197. Compare Maria Helena Villas Boas Concone, "Ideologia Umbandista e Integralismo," Ciências Sociais Hoje, 1, CNPq, 1981, Brasília, pp. 379-395. Concone draws out the very considerable overlap between Umbanda

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and integralist ideologies in the 1930s. Many elements of those ideologies are alive and well in the national security ideology of the modern military and in modern Umbanda.

³⁵ Diana Brown, "O papel histórico da classe média na formação da Umbanda," Religião e Sociedade 1 (maio 1977).

³⁶ Patricia Birman, "A celebração do poder: um ritual umbandista," Ciências Sociais Hoje 1, 403-408.

³⁷ Leni M. Silverstein, "Mãe de todo mundo: modas de sobrevivência nas comunidades de Candomblé da Bahia," Religião e Sociedade 4 (outubro 1979), 143-169.

³⁸ Roger Bastide, The African Religions of Brazil (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 397.

³⁹ As I typologize in this way, I am taking up a question raised in Anani Dzidzienyo, "African (Yoruba) Culture and the Political Kingdom in Latin America," in I. A. Akinjogbin and G. O. Ekemode (eds.), The Proceedings of the Conference on Yoruba Civilization held at the University of Ife, Nigeria, 26-31 July 1976, vol. II, ch. 17. Diagram I is, in part, a skeletal, schematic answer to his question "Does the existence and adaptation of Africanity in Latin America serve to preserve a frozen past or aid in dynamic linkages?" (p. 441). In a fuller exploration of the question, the sociology of the cults must be placed in the history of ideas about race in Brazil. This can be done with the aid of Thomas Skidmore, Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁴⁰ Maggie Velho's study of conflict in a Rio cult group brings out combinations of types 2 and 3 in the one group. Yvonne Maggie Velho, Guerra de Orixá (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editora, 1977).

⁴¹ Colin Henfrey, "The Hungry Imagination: Social Formation, Popular Culture and Ideology in Bahia," in Simon Mitchell (ed.), The Logic of Poverty: The Case of the Brazilian Northeast (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 58-108.

⁴² An excellent study on the internal organization of these groups is Vivaldo da Costa Lima, "A família-de-santo nos candomblés Jeje-Nagôs da Bahia: um estudo de relações intragrupais," (Master's dissertation, post-graduate program in the human sciences, Federal University of Bahia, 1971-1972.)

⁴³ José Comblin, The Church and the National Security State (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979), ch. 4, provides an outline of the origins and content of the national security ideology (NSI) promoted in modern Latin American military regimes. I consider that the ideology actually transmitted to the grassroots in Brazil is not the complete NSI that Brazilian generals such as Golbery e Couto have helped to formulate, but a mixture of elements from that ideology together with

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evaluations and perspectives that elite modernizers have been formulating and teaching since at least the 1930s.

⁴⁴ Bastide, op. cit.

⁴⁵ I do not want to suggest that the symbolic masking is in any way either mechanical or cynical.

⁴⁶ Harvey Cox, The Seduction of the Spirit: The Use and Misuse of People's Religion (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

⁴⁷ I have found Richard Niebuhr's distinctions between pathos, irony, and tragedy to be very helpful in formulating themes in Brazilian folk religions. See Richard Niebuhr, The Irony of American History (New York: Scribner's, 1962).

⁴⁸ I have tried in this paragraph to keep close to translations of Maria's language. Phrases like "spiritual development," "learned doctors," and "higher plane of development" are hers.

⁴⁹ In another context, this competition theme in Umbanda cults has been carefully analyzed by Yvonne Maggie Velho in Guerra de Orixá (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editora, 1977).