

LIVED RELIGION AND LIVED CITIZENSHIP IN LATIN AMERICA'S ZONES OF CRISIS

Introduction

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Abstract: In this introduction we present the concepts of "lived religion" and "lived citizenship" as tools for understanding the ways in which religious and political meanings and practices are constituted in social movements and locations of poverty and exclusion in Latin America. We first develop the idea of "zones of crisis" as a context in which struggles for rights, recognition, and survival are enacted. We then challenge reified distinctions between the secular and the religious, emphasizing religion's embodiment and emplacement in daily life and politics. Reviewing the empirical findings of the articles in this special issue, we discuss the multiple imbrications of religion and citizenship with regard to democratic politics, geographies of conflict, and safe spaces, as well as selfhood, identity, and agency. In a postsecular world, interrogating religion, secularity, and politics together enables us better to understand the complex construction of democratic citizenship and the dynamism of Latin America's multiple modernities.

In *El libro de los abrazos*, Eduardo Galeano tells a story that the pastor Miguel Brun shared with him about visiting the native peoples of the Paraguayan Chaco. Brun and his evangelizing missionaries shared their message with a cacique known for his wisdom. The cacique listened patiently to the religious text that was being read to him in his language, took his time to respond, and finally said, "That scratches, and scratches a lot, and scratches very well. . . . But it scratches where there is no itch" (Eso rasca. Y rasca mucho, y rasca muy bien. . . . Pero rasca donde no pica) (Galeano 2001, 16).

Many scholars of Latin American politics and social movements have had a

The authors are grateful to Courtney Bender, José Antonio Lucero, Richard Wood, the *LARR* editors, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on this introduction. Over the course of the broader project from which this special issue grew, we have benefitted from conversations with Latin Americanist colleagues John Burdick, Marisol de la Cadena, Amanda Hornhardt, David López, Marisol López, Betsy Olson, Conny Roggeband, Dylon Robbins, Rafael Sánchez, Fernando Seffner, and Pamela Voekel. We are grateful as well for critical dialogues from religious studies and social movement scholars working in other world areas, including Nancy Ammerman, Sherine Hafez, Robert Hefner, David Kyuman Kim, Paul Lichterman, Anthony Petro, and Robert Weller.

Latin American Research Review, Vol. 49, Special Issue. © 2014 by the Latin American Studies Association.

reaction to religion similar to that of Galeano's cacique. In theorizing struggles for rights, recognition, and survival, many did not doubt that religion was "scratching hard and well" in the places they work. But they did not necessarily see it as helping with the questions they were itching to ask about citizenship, especially the forms religion takes in spaces of material deprivation, exclusion, violence, and environmental destruction—what we refer to as zones of crises. Indeed, a rich and multidisciplinary literature has interrogated the origins and characteristics of actually existing citizenship (Alvarez et al., forthcoming; Dagnino 2003; Fischer 2010; Holston 2008; Lazar 2013; Meltzer and Rojas 2013; Oxhorn 2011; Yashar 2005) but often overlooked one of its key dimensions—citizenship's imbrication with meanings, actors, and institutions understood as religious.

These intermixings have been provocatively explored in ethnographies that focus specifically on religion and activism (Burdick 1998, 2012; Levine 1992; Drogus 1997; Peterson 1997; Cleary and Steigenga 2004; Wood 2003), providing another way to understand Galeano's story. Rather than reading the cacique's reaction to the missionaries as an assertion of religion's irrelevance, the story is perhaps better understood as a call to rethink its significance—to reconsider how religion is at work in places like the Chaco. All too often, however, research on social movements, citizenship, and zones of crisis has seen the world through the secular eyes of progressive scholars, eliding the role of religion in shaping what Partha Chatterjee (2006) calls the on-the-ground "politics of the governed." This is the case even as the hegemony of the Catholic Church has vastly diminished, yielding a new religious landscape that includes rapidly expanding Evangelical movements and increasingly public representations of indigenous and Afro-descendant knowledges.

Citizenship as it is lived in Latin America's zones of crisis is permeated by religious symbols and rituals and is frequently influenced by religious leaders and institutions. For example, the cult of Santa Muerte (a female grim reaper) fosters a community of worship and gift exchange for ex-prisoners and police in Mexico City; Catholic priests support indigenous anti-mining mobilizations in the mountains of Peru through a practice of accompaniment; and in a Rio de Janeiro Evangelical church, the leader of a violent paramilitary group invokes God to help community residents find strength to resist the temptation of drugs. As citizenship is constructed in zones of crisis, religion shapes the ways people understand themselves, the trajectories of collective mobilizations, and individual and group survival strategies. It shapes what kinds of people and what subjectivities are being constructed in Latin America's social movements and zones of crisis.

This special issue of *LARR* brings together an international group of scholars of social movements and popular mobilizations, most of whom did not set out to study religion but rather came across it in their research on struggles for rights, recognition, and survival.¹ The case studies presented here identify the presence

1. This special issue is an outgrowth of a collaborative project entitled "Religion, Social Movements, and Zones of Crisis in the Americas," which has aimed to promote dialogue around these themes across the social sciences and humanities, across academic and activist epistemologies, and between Latin American scholars and scholars of the global North. The project's core has been a series of conferences

and roles of religion in political phenomena often seen as secular in our disciplines and area studies subfields. By addressing religion in our research, we shed important light on the ways religion can both foster and limit the progressive reform sought by social movements. We examine additionally the contributions of religion to resistance, survival, and other forms of expression in zones of crisis where the basic rights of citizenship—and often progressive social movements themselves—are notably absent.

The contributors to this special issue assume that religion and politics do not have a priori, natural domains. Rather, through the perspectives of lived citizenship and lived religion we seek to discern how religious meanings and the processes to which they refer are constituted and contested in the rough-and-tumble of daily life. Our project questions the putative distinction between religion, on the one hand, and the world of rational, secular politics, on the other (Asad 2003; Finke and Stark 2005). This special issue, accordingly, is not a story of the incursion of the former onto the latter. Rather, it shows that in a postsecular world, in which religion is no longer considered a holdover from the past or anathema to modernity, interrogating religion, secularity, and politics together enables us better to understand the complex construction of democratic citizenship and the dynamism of Latin America's multiple modernities.

In this introduction, we set out the context for the other articles in this special issue. First, we elaborate our conceptualization of the sociopolitical context through the concept of zones of crisis. Then we conceptualize religion itself, emphasizing its embodiment and emplacement in daily life and politics in the diverse cases our authors describe. Finally we review the substantive empirical findings of the articles that follow regarding the multiple imbrications of religion and citizenship.

ZONES OF CRISIS AND LIVED CITIZENSHIP

Against the backdrop of authoritarian regimes and structural adjustment, governments and civil societies in Latin America have strengthened formal democratic institutions and have extended and deepened citizenship. At the same time, persistent poverty and dramatic increases in crime, coupled with the withdrawal of state social-welfare provisions, have created panoramas of insecurity, yielding "violent democracies" (Arias and Goldstein 2010). In this context, Latin American modernities appear inextricably bound to zones of crisis, that is, spaces of material deprivation, violence, and environmental destruction, as well as exclusions

held at Boston University's Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA) from 2010 to 2013, which brought together scholars of religion and of social movements and urban violence to develop new ways of conceptualizing the interactions of religion and politics in locations of resistance and exclusion. The project's principal investigators are this essay's coauthors (Rubin, Smilde, and Junge), and its funding comes from the Latin American Studies Association (through a Mellon-LASA grant), the University of Massachusetts Consortium on Social Movements in the Americas (funded by the Ford Foundation), and several institutions at Boston University: CURA, the Center for the Humanities, the Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future, the Latin American Studies Program, and the Department of Sociology.

based on gender and ethnicity. By “zones” we mean not just physical spaces but social and discursive fields in which identities, practices, and ideas are posited and challenged. Key aspects of democratic citizenship are often constructed in zones of crisis, both in terms of legal rights and the on-the-ground experiences of lived citizenship.

Many of the articles here highlight the appearance of discourses of crisis, that is, narratives of how things have gone wrong and how they might be remedied. Discourses of crisis are deployed by a range of actors and institutions. States use the language of crisis to label and respond to problems such as drug trafficking, gang violence, political uncertainty, and economic decline; social movements deploy notions of crisis to characterize the injustices and harms of the present and mobilize people to challenge these injustices; and religious institutions invoke discourses of personal or societal crisis to encourage a range of rituals and forms of collective action. Indeed, the notion that Latin Americans are in crisis or, in contrast, have finally overcome the crisis, has become a defining element of contemporary sociopolitical discussion across the region.

The cases presented in this special issue contribute to the study of zones of crisis by examining religious and political practices as experienced by real people and institutions in a range of sociohistorical contexts. In their engagement with politics, these studies recognize the presence of power relations and contestation outside of the realm of elections and formal political institutions, and often distant from capital cities and elite settings (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Rubin 2004; Smilde 2011). And we proceed with a relatively open-ended understanding of religion as having no natural domain. We conceive of religion as beliefs and practices that are predicated upon the existence of superhuman powers and can be involved in any area of social life (Riesebrodt 2010). We thereby avoid the typical scholarly dualism that sees religious practices existing in a separate and competing domain from practical and material concerns.

Several articles in the issue examine social movements and grassroots activism that originate in zones of crisis or in other locations of significant, if less extreme, danger. In these cases, self-consciously organized groups seek to influence state actors to change policies that maintain exclusion, inequality, or deprivation. In studying social movements, the authors in this issue strive to “see and not see” movements and activist projects as discrete, bounded entities; thus they examine the individuals, projects, discourses, and policies out of which activism is constituted (Rubin 2004). This includes, for example, the pathways by which Christian democratic thinkers and activists developed the programs that became “participatory democracy” under Hugo Chávez (Margarita López Maya); the religious underpinnings of the work carried out by a Native American activist on behalf of migrants crossing the desert borderlands (José Antonio Lucero); the subversive views of gender promoted by Catholic radio activists in the Colombian countryside (Mary Roldán); and discourses of envy and cleansing among participants in a participatory budgeting initiative in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Benjamin Junge). These contributors study the appearance and constitution of religious meanings in movements that are often taken to be largely secular and progressive.

Other articles examine responses to extreme deprivation that look less explic-

itly political, in that they neither articulate political causes of harm nor strategize political pathways of improvement or radical change. In these cases, the authors seek to identify the origins, meanings, and potential effects of religious phenomena with respect to citizenship and power relations in zones of crisis. They study political dimensions of religious phenomena that are largely taken to be apolitical and unprogressive. The Santa Muerte cult in Mexico City, for example, refashions citizenship—literally creates new religious practices and communities, as well as new stances toward economic crisis and state power—among poor people and criminals in the context of the loss of the protections once offered by the *priista* state (Laura Roush). In other cases authors identify intricate connections between violence and religion through which religious congregations enable drug dealers or gang members to function simultaneously as practitioners of violence and community members, or to transition from one to the other (Enrique Desmond Arias; Robert Brenneman). While these forms of cultural elaboration and ritual are not social movements in the conventional sense of the term—and do not seek or create “rights” in a liberal or legal fashion—neither should they be seen as entirely different from social movements, as they construct alternative rights to urban public spaces, experimental identities, and unconventional relationships to the state (Chatterjee 2006; Appadurai 2001).

In this issue, we use the notion of citizenship to include these sorts of alternative rights, identities, and relationships in the study of social movements and zones of crisis. Movements and individuals may participate in civil society to claim citizenship, understood as a set of civil, political, and social rights secured from the state and guaranteed through democratic political arrangements (Oxhorn 2011). When democratic procedures do not facilitate desired outcomes, movements, individuals, and groups may move—or seek to move the society around them—from “disjunctive citizenship,” in which legal proclamations of equality coexist with a host of historically embedded social and legal exclusions, to “insurgent citizenship,” in which illegality and mobilization are reconstrued as resources in struggles for social justice (Holston 2008).

Such struggles for social justice go beyond explicit political activism and the ability to vote, to exercise freedom of speech, and to receive public benefits (Jelin 1996, 104). Thus, rather than locating citizenship in the securing or exercise of a set of legal rights, our conceptual and methodological orientation emphasizes lived citizenship, reflecting a commitment to both the study of citizenship discourses in historical context as well an ethnographic approach that uncovers the practices and subjective meanings of citizenship for real people enmeshed in the experiences of daily life. In both domains, citizenship is usefully seen as a set of “conflictive practice[s] related to power—that is, to a struggle about who is entitled to say what in the process of defining common problems and deciding how they will be faced” (van Gunsteren 1978, cited in Jelin 1996, 104).

Our understandings of citizenship practices and subjectivities are influenced by Arjun Appadurai, who approaches lived citizenship from an anthropological perspective, and Brodwyn Fischer, who proceeds historically. In Appadurai’s analysis of the Alliance movement in Mumbai, he observes that practices such as savings, precedent setting, counting, exhibitions, and festivals “[allow] the poor

to work their way into the public sphere and visible citizenship without resort to open confrontation or public violence" (Appadurai 2001, 40). In her study of how citizenship was constructed in Brazil from the 1920s to the 1960s, Fischer focuses on the coexistence of "ambitious expansion of the law's scope and relevance" with the curtailment of poor people's access to formal citizenship "by laws and processes that outlawed critical aspects of their daily existence [and] clashed with less formal systems of value and practice" (Fischer 2010, 10). In this collection, we develop the concept of lived citizenship to look at the quotidian practices, prohibitions of daily existence, and less formal systems of value that, as Appadurai and Fischer demonstrate, are central to studying politics in zones of crisis.

LIVED RELIGION

Our focus on the presence and roles of religion in people's everyday struggles for rights, recognition, and survival draws on concepts and directions put forward by scholars working in and around the lived-religion approach to the study of religious phenomena (Orsi 1996, 1997; Hall 1997; Bender 2003, 2011; McGuire 2008). In our examination of religion in the case studies in this collection, we work with the ideas of embodied religion and emplaced religion and seek to push past reifications of the distinction between the religious and the secular.

The concept of embodied religion moves us beyond the classic moral/instrumental and mind/body dualisms that have long impeded an understanding of religion as practiced (Vásquez 2011; Smilde and May 2010). The first dualism tends to focus on religion as an element of abstract morality and disengaged reflection. In contrast, a focus on embodiment understands religion to be intimately involved with this-worldly goals ranging from overcoming substance abuse to seeking justice, from socializing children to escaping violence (Smilde 2007). Daniel Levine captures well this sense of religious practice. "The lived experience of religion," he writes (2012, 8), "is closely linked to ways of managing ordinary life." As a result, "it is not just that religious beliefs spill over from neatly confined church spaces to infuse action in other parts of life. On close inspection, the distinction between otherworldly and this-worldly, between committed and spiritual, does not hold up very well" (8).

Mind/body dualism, in turn, tends to steer the analyst toward a Protestant-centric focus on beliefs, texts, and cognition in the study of religion. In contrast, an embodied perspective includes rituals, spaces, and emotion (Vásquez 2011; Brenneeman 2012). People do not just live their religion by thinking, believing, and orienting themselves; rather, they feel and act by way of religious meanings and representation in real time and in real social spaces.

The concept of emplaced religion understands space not as a passive given but as always constructed. In this view, religion is one way that "individuals situate themselves vis-à-vis others, marking differences and power asymmetries by erecting boundaries, establishing centers and peripheries, and generating classifications and hierarchies" (Vásquez 2011). This has several effects on how we look at religion. It breaks down assumed separations between religious elites and ordinary people, as they are seen to be more similar than different in what they

do with religion: both groups locate and distinguish themselves and organize their social world through religion. It also shows us that lived religion does not simply amount to the ground-level enactment of established beliefs, rituals, and practices but to the ongoing creation and re-creation of them (Bender 2011). The contributors to this issue look at how average people and religious leaders not only weave religious images, practices, discourses, and values into the fabric of their daily lives but create new ones that open up alternative paths and in turn influence religious institutions and elites.

In these articles, we see how religious concepts and ideas become embedded in secular institutions of participation and protest. The contributors show how democracy and citizenship have unacknowledged roots in religious understandings of human rights and of bodies and selfhood. They also show how the involvement of religious institutions in social and political conflict can only be understood in terms of the plural relationships between religious professionals, the laity, and social movement organizations. The contributors presume no ontological separation between political and religious subjectivity but rather emphasize how these can be synonymous, overlap, intersect, or shape one another in ways that are rarely acknowledged (Hafez 2011).

Emplaced religion highlights the construction of “sacred space” (J. Smith 1988). In the course of political activism, as people stave off mining companies, protect border-crossing immigrants, or establish nonviolence zones, they may carve out spaces whose religious meanings provide particularly powerful moral, emotional, or symbolic dynamism. More broadly, research on religion and globalization has shown that religion is integral to how people construct a wide range of social spaces. Manuel A. Vásquez (2011) speaks of “multi-scalar” religion to understand how religion can be involved in the construction of belonging and agency from the individual to the global level, as religious discourses practices, meanings, and institutions traverse national borders.

Thinking in terms of lived religion facilitates the comprehensive rethinking of the words “religious” and “secular” necessary to understand contemporary Latin America. While it was once assumed that religion was on the decline as a public force and would be relegated to the private sphere, if it survived at all (Durkheim [1915] 1995; Weber [1905] 2010; Parsons 1951; Berger 1999), today it is clear that secularization means something quite different. Most centrally it means that people can no longer take for granted religious outlooks and practices—their own or those of others. In this sense, religious practice is more self-conscious than in earlier times (Taylor 2007). Religious practitioners and religious bodies also have a greater degree of autonomy from both religious and secular authorities (Levine 2012), with greater capacities to construct their own spaces and forms of practice.

Postcolonial anthropologist Talal Asad (2003, 25) has questioned the distinction between religion and secularity itself, arguing that “the secular” is a particular belief system produced by Western modernity, one that “brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life.” Asad compares the redemption narratives of democratic theory and Christianity, each of which “articulates different kinds of subjectivity, mobilizes different kinds of social

activity, and invokes different modalities of time." From this perspective, what people identify as religious and what they identify as secular depends on historical, social, and cultural contexts (Vásquez 2011).

In examining the presence of religious practices in social movements and zones of crisis, we start with the assumption that religion has no natural domain or function but rather can be better understood as a set of practices predicated upon a supernatural "source domain" (Smilde 2007) or upon a "religious premise"—"the existence of superhuman powers" to which are attributed "control over dimensions of individual or social human life and the natural environment" (Riesebrodt 2010). In this view, virtually anything humans do or create or confront can potentially be given religious meaning if it is linked discursively and/or through practice to such hypothesized forces. Conversely, since anything can potentially be religious—symbolically linked to supernatural forces—there is nothing that is inherently "secular."

This does not mean that everything is religious or that all experiential domains of human life are equally likely to be addressed through religious practices. Often it is the most difficult and uncertain areas of life that are addressed through religious practices. These may involve issues of morality, identity, socialization, and understanding what happens after death; religious practices may also cover a range of this-worldly challenges including survival in violent contexts and demands for basic rights. And of course there can be great variation between individuals or between cultural contexts regarding what is religious and what is secular. For example, while in advanced Western countries economic transactions are considered the standard for what is secular, in many cultures they have important religious significance.

The denaturalization of the religious/secular divide is essential for scholars who aim to understand religiosity in the global South. Scholars from the industrialized North are often too quick to dismiss as instrumental and insincere the religious practices of people whose basic necessities are not satisfied and who address their problems through religion. But this ignores lived experience as it is understood in this issue. Attempts to escape violence, fight for justice, or ameliorate family conflict through religious practice, for example, are considered by many religious practitioners in the global South to be religious quests supported by a God who saves people in "this world" (Smilde 2007, 2012).

Despite the broad reach and deep resonance of religion in Latin America, the literatures on social movements and the politics of reform in the region have tended to assume the incompatibility of religion with struggles for equality and inclusion. This reflects a historical association of religion with conservative elites and institutions, one that developed out of Latin America's particular version of postcolonial modernity. Religion in Latin America has been addressed as a focal point of conflict between conservatives, who promoted the presence of religion in social and political life, and liberals, who sought to restrict it, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Voekel 2007; Meyer 1976). Scholars have characterized Catholicism in broad strokes as setting the cultural context for Latin American politics (Vallier 1970; Levine 1981; Hagopian 2009) and, from the 1960s to the

1990s, motivating and sustaining organized political activism through liberation theology (Lernoux 1982; Bruneau 1982; Levine 1992; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989). And widespread attention to the rapid expansion of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches (Casanova 1994; Cleary and Stewart-Gambino 1997) has portrayed this as an alternative means to achieve social justice through this-worldly individual advancement, reformulated gender relations, and alternatives to gang life (Smilde 2007; Brenneman 2012; Brusco 1995; Burdick 1993).

Despite recognition of these widespread religious influences on culture, leftist activism, and individual survival, however, a nuanced understanding of the presence of religious meanings, discourses, practices, institutions, and networks—as decentered, partial phenomena that can simultaneously be “seen and not seen” (Rubin 2004)—has not entered the literature on citizenship and social movements in Latin America. Even when priests and nuns embraced liberation theology, their notion of what needed to be done to achieve social justice was seen by many scholars and activists through the lens of contemporary leftist political theorizing, though inflected with a new understanding of subjecthood and agency. Thus, while it is widely acknowledged that liberation theology stimulated and contributed to activism across the region, this awareness left intact relatively conventional ways of thinking about religion and its relation to agency and political change. As a result, while many average citizens active in social movements are religious in their outlooks and practices and rely on religious resources for their activism, this key aspect of their experiences has been largely undocumented and ignored by progressive scholars.

The presumed association between progressive grassroots action and secularism, however, has never described average Latin Americans, for whom religious meaning, identity, and practice are fundamental to everyday life experience. The articles in this special issue demonstrate that attention to religious dimensions of activism yields considerable descriptive and analytic depth, in many cases transforming significantly our understanding of the subjects of study—be they progressive radio stations in the Colombian countryside or criminal networks in Rio’s favelas—as well as dynamics of politics and social change. In the cases presented here, religion can be illuminating, empowering, or liberating, just as it can be deceptive, discouraging, or constraining.

THE MULTIPLE LOCATIONS OF RELIGION

The disjuncture between the outlooks of activists and the assumptions of scholars who study them was highlighted for us in 2010 when we presented preliminary findings of our project to a gathering of more than a hundred activists and intellectuals at a social-movements conference in Lima, Peru.² After our presentation, instead of a conventional question and answer period, we turned the microphones around and invited participants to share their perspectives on how

2. “Movimientos sociales: Entre la crisis y otros saberes” conference, Programa de Democracia y Transformación Global, Universidad de San Marcos, May 26–28, 2010.

religion enters into social-movement activism. Our project's core themes clearly resonated, and for more than an hour audience members told stories that ranged from spirit possession at rallies, to God directly intervening in battles with police, to the courage of Catholic priests in standing beside protestors.

We were struck by the many viewpoints and directions of inquiry that were raised, from sexual-diversity activists who experienced the Catholic Church's views on homosexuality as hostile but wanted to find common ground with their families' religious practices, to indigenous women's movement leaders who spoke of the protection offered to their bodies on the steps of Evangelical churches when the military came, in places where the state and the Catholic Church had little presence. We heard a Marxist scholar puzzle over the need for theories of religion in political action. We heard a victim of state repression explain that God turned the wind around and saved her group from the tear gas that was being used against them. And an anti-mining activist described to us indigenous beliefs about mountains and water as living beings who signaled their displeasure with mining by causing harmful climate events. Talking about religion in this hands-on fashion was clearly meaningful for grassroots organizers in the thick of mobilizing. This experience confirmed for us our guiding hunch that the religious dimensions of social movements and of other forms of collective expression, resistance, and protection in zones of crisis need to be taken more seriously than they have been in Latin Americanist scholarship. (See Smilde, Velasco, and Rubin, this issue.)

This special issue brings together case studies that do just that. They show how lived religion shapes the discourses and strategies that social movements use, as well as the alliances they develop with institutions and elites. They also show how lived religion is involved in average citizens' efforts to gain agency over difficult circumstances. In this section, we describe the sociocultural and geopolitical contexts in which religion appears, drawing from the work of the collaborators in our broader project, "Religion, Social Movements, and Zones of Crisis," many of whom are contributors to this issue. This work demonstrates that research need not either focus primarily on religion or completely ignore it, as is so often the case. Rather, we can include religion in our analyses of social movements, citizenship, and zones of crisis as something partial and decentered that often constitutes a significant part of the social field.

Religion and Agency

Religion can make situations meaningful and facilitate individual agency. This ability is especially important in contexts where basic subsistence needs go unaddressed and survival is threatened. Religion can shape how people face a difficult context, gain cognitive and emotional explanations for it, and respond to it. In Venezuela, as the state withdrew social welfare provisions in the 1990s, Evangelicalism helped young men develop new outlooks, routines, and social networks in a context of substance abuse, violence, and declining economic viability (Smilde 2007). Against the backdrop of neoliberalism, Evangelicalism provided one of the only opportunities for discursive innovation and extra-household participation.

In Central America, Evangelical practices permit one of the few viable exit paths from gang violence (Brenneman 2012).

Portrayals of Evangelicalism as a facilitator of agency have been challenged by those who see it as a creator of submissive, law-abiding subjects (Pine 2008; O'Neill 2009). Considering a broad range of engagements between religion and citizens in zones of crisis shows that the relationship between new religious practices and subjecthood is not unidirectional. Laura Roush (this issue) explains how devotion to Santa Muerte—a sacred female grim reaper—can provide a sense of protection and safety not only to potential victims but also to potential perpetrators of crime. A life-sized statue of Santa Muerte in a public space in Tepito, a Mexico City neighborhood known for its history of contraband and crime, attracts multitudes of devotees ranging from ex-prisoners to thugs linked with drug trafficking, to city policemen, with members of all of these groups attending with their families. Offerings and prayers to Santa Muerte are reminiscent of the Catholic rosary, and media attention becomes an integral part of the rituals.

Characterizing the impact of religion necessitates a perspective linked to temporal and spatial context. In his contribution to this issue, Enrique Desmond Arias describes a violent favela of Rio de Janeiro where a paramilitary protection group enforces security—often through extortion and violence—under an antidrug ideology of “clean communities.” At prayer meetings of an Evangelical Assembly of God congregation, the group’s leader links the enforcement of security with the vigilance of God and reaffirms that the word of God will give community residents strength to resist the temptation of drugs.

The contributions of religion to individual-level agency are not limited to projects of self-reform. José Antonio Lucero’s contribution shows how a former US Special Forces operative and Presbyterian lay pastor puts out water bottles for migrants suffering from dehydration in the US-Mexico borderlands. A member of the Tohono O’odham Nation, he describes his activism as “spiritual” but as independent from the church, reflecting the way he sees his own conversion from special forces soldier to human rights activist. He fights against the Tohono O’odham Nation’s cooperation with the border patrol, as well as against religious groups that support immigrants but refuse to oppose the Tohono O’odham Nation’s policies out of respect for its sovereignty.

These examples do not suggest inevitable or necessary links between religion and social activism. Rather, they make it clear how religion can be involved in the subjectivities that motivate activism and/or prevent it. In Benjamin Junge’s examination of former participatory budget activists in Porto Alegre, Brazil (this issue), he reflects on his own tendency, in earlier ethnographic research, to exclude the religiosity and spirituality of participants. Now attuned to these issues, he finds activists also using spiritual discourses of “negative energy” and envy to make sense of, explain, and justify their decline in participation.

In each of these cases, we see religion providing not abstract values but discourses and practices brought together in concrete ways to address critical problems.

Religion and Safe Spaces

One of the most important ways that religion facilitates agency in zones of crisis is by helping people and groups construct “safe spaces.” By this we do not mean liminal spaces in which identities and relations are suspended but rather spaces in which people can experience respite from the threats surrounding them and can work to reconstruct identities and social networks, develop new lines of action, address the harms of loss or violence, and create new coalitions in their struggles. This, of course, has been an oft-replicated observation in the sociology of religion: studies have shown the importance of black Evangelical churches to the 1960s civil rights drives in the United States (McAdam 2010), and of Catholic churches to the spread of the Polish Solidarity movement (Osa 1997). Several of the articles in this special issue show how religion can provide safe spaces in Latin America’s crisis zones.

Mary Roldán’s contribution reveals how in the 1960s, in Colombia’s conflicted and impoverished countryside, church-based radio and theater afforded a space for rural communities, and especially rural women, to discuss sensitive social and political topics—ranging from sexual abuse to social inequality and authoritarian governments—in a setting free from the social and political polarizations characteristic of the broader context. Many of those whose consciousness was raised through these religious programs went on to become “secular” activists in subsequent decades of guerrilla war and peace initiatives. Robert Brenneman’s article shows how, in Central America’s violent Northern Triangle, Evangelical conversion provides gang members a means of exit. Despite the lifelong allegiance demanded of gang members and the threat of retaliation for deserters, conversion—if it is thought by others to be genuine—offers a way out. This exemption reflects a widespread popular belief that a man who has truly converted should not be punished. Even among active gang members God is feared, as summed up in their simultaneously reverent and irreverent expression “Don’t mess with Curly! [gang members’ nickname for God]” In both of these cases we see changes in networks, discourses, and identities in spaces separate from the harsh conflicts of daily life.

In a study of a religious organization in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Fernando Seffner and colleagues (2011) describe a house in which Capuchin friars provide medical care and psychological support—and distribute condoms—to people living with HIV/AIDS. Stitching together Catholic principles of care with a public-health emphasis on risk reduction, this program makes possible a “theology of prevention” that complicates the common narrative of Catholic inflexibility around homosexuality and condoms. Much like the church buildings used by US Christians of the Sanctuary Movement to house illegal Central American refugees (C. Smith 1997; Nepstad 2004), this religious space makes possible an ethical intervention beyond the prejudices of surrounding society and even the national Church.

Religion in Complex Democratic Publics

Religion acts in multiple arenas in democratic politics. It shapes citizenship in civil society and in social movements where activists engage in a public politics

of protest, seeking new radical or reformist bargains. Moreover, it facilitates the creation of new discourses as actors test and push beyond their society's existing understandings and discourses. John Burdick (2012) has shown how in Rio de Janeiro, Afro-Brazilian gospel singers use biblical text and religiously inflected historical analysis to fight racism through their music. God placed the "Black voice" in their bodies during the Atlantic crossing, they explain, to enable them to follow biblical prescriptions and sing and speak against racism today. Amanda Hornhardt (2012) has shown how in São Paulo, Brazil, an organization fighting for housing rights in one of the city's poorest regions formed a novel partnership with the Catholic Church. Unlike most housing groups, it achieved political strength and accessed federal resources through advocacy by a Catholic priest, who exhibited a finely tuned knowledge of the city's neighborhoods and bureaucratic politics.

But this role is not restricted to small-scale discussion or nonelites. Margarita López Maya's article shows how the shift from representative to participatory models of democracy under socialist Hugo Chávez in the past decade and a half originated in proposals written by theologians and members of Venezuela's Christian Democratic party, COPEI, in the 1970s and 1980s, as they sought to strengthen and reform their party in accord with reformist Catholic notions of grassroots participation. These discourses originated in Catholic youth groups in the 1960s and were adopted by COPEI in the 1970s; they served as a guiding discourse for President Luis Herrera Campíns in the 1980s and integrally influenced the process that led to a new constitution in the 1990s. Thus, the positions and practices of a radical leftist movement were formulated by religious moderates two decades earlier.

Taken together, these studies underscore the political complexity of religion in contemporary Latin America. During the twentieth century, the political orientations of the major Christian groups in Latin America were generally clear: Catholic hierarchies tended to be conservative, liberationist priests were progressive, and Evangelicals politically quiescent. While there have always been deviations from these norms, the first decade of the twenty-first century has seen an increased blurring of conventional political lines. In Venezuela, for example, during the conflictive fourteen years of the Chávez government and now the *chavista* government headed by Nicolás Maduro, the Catholic hierarchy has been a strong opponent while some liberationists have been supportive. However, what matters more in determining political positions is the constituency with which a priest works. Those who work mainly with members of Venezuela's middle class focus on critiques of the Chávez and Maduro governments' threats against civil and political rights. Those who work in the barrios focus on the government's clear achievements in terms of social and economic justice. Both sides justify their politics with reference to liberation theology. There is similar complexity on the Evangelical side, where some middle-class "prosperity churches" support Chávez because his nationalism fits in with their own dominion theology—a theology that focuses on preparing the nation for Jesus Christ's imminent return (Smilde and Pagan 2011).

In all of these cases, religious meanings, discourses, practices, networks, and

institutions shape issues of democratic politics in crosscutting ways. Easy assumptions of Catholic versus Evangelical or hierarchy versus parish priests need to be set aside to look at religious discourses and actors as they are inserted in particular social networks.

Religious Geographies of Conflict

Many conflicts in contemporary Latin America have to do with space: spaces in which to live and work, spaces facing destruction, and spaces that are part of collective identities. Religion is one way in which specific places are invested with meanings, as are the conflicts that occur within them. Religion can locate everyday struggles within a context of supernatural forces, ultimate values, and sacred practices and can create new social spaces (Vásquez and Marquardt 2003; Hagan 2008).

In Venezuela, where lack of housing has reached crisis proportions, Pentecostal squatters illegally occupy a vacant urban building (Sánchez 2008). Their leader, a female pastor, speaks about the building they have taken over as “the promised land of milk and honey.” She describes the occupation as following “the will of the Father,” although “the Father” simultaneously references God, the Holy Spirit, Simón Bolívar, and Venezuela’s late president Hugo Chávez. This case study complicates stereotypes of Evangelicals as passive, law-abiding citizens, showing them to use religious discourses to frame rights claims in ultimate and sacred context, even when those claims are of questionable legality.

In her work on indigenous activists in the Andes, Marisol de la Cadena (2010) shows how activists portray mountains as sacred beings with rights. In a hybrid discourse, they incorporate Quechua and Aymara values to advocate native rights to idle land as well as environmental protection. In a mining conflict in Peru, activists assert their claim that mountains are sentient beings in order to protest possible environmental harm. In response, national politicians argue in favor of economic development; Peru’s then president, Alan García, states flatly, “Sacred mountains do not exist.” In this case, as with the Pentecostal squatters, contested spaces are identified as sacred as marginalized actors fight for their rights.

Religious spaces are not discrete and bounded but rather overlapping and interactive. In his contribution to this issue, Javier Arellano-Yanguas shows the Catholic Church to be involved on all sides of mining conflicts in Peru—from supporting the current development model to accompanying grassroots mobilizations or brokering resolutions between conflicting parties—and consequently occupying multiple geographic spaces. In this case, as in most of Latin America’s crisis zones, religion is involved in the formulation and articulation of positions across the political spectrum and physical territory.

Arellano-Yanguas argues that in the Church’s involvement there is a “spirituality of grassroots agency,” by which he means an ideological commitment among bishops, priests, and nuns to facilitate the poor as being the main actors in historical processes. This spirituality emphasizes “accompanying” the grassroots struggles of the poor but not leading them. Their religious commitments compel these Catholic actors to develop a specific type of agentive relationship with grassroots

activists in particular places, a process that often leads conservative or moderate religious professionals to accompany communities in radical demands. This “accompaniment” provides safety to protestors, as the presence of Catholic leaders makes violent repression less likely. Leaders also provide an important defense when repression does occur. One of the most innovative aspects of Catholic involvement in Peru’s mining struggles is in the hybridization of environmental, human rights, and religious discourses, which together emphasize God as creator and champion of the environment and see God in particular rivers, lakes, and mountains. Far from a heterodox extension of Christianity, these interpretations were approved by Church officials on several occasions.

Religion, Selfhood, and Identity

Looking at the role of religion in contemporary Latin American society and politics requires a rethinking of identity and selfhood. How do we conceptualize the intersecting and overlapping forms of self-awareness Latin Americans have as citizens, as social-movement participants, as believers, and as churchgoers? Shared public identities promoted by religious institutions and social movements play an important role in political and social life. To ex-gang members in Central America, for example, a public identity as *evangélico* provides protection from retaliation and a rare pathway out of gang life. At the same time, overarching public identities such as “Evangelical” or “gang member” do not always—or even often—correspond to the kinds of self-awareness that people experience in real-life social contexts. Selfhood is often characterized by fragmentation, hybridity, and performance. When we look closely at what people do and say in context, we see ambivalence, refusal, and contradiction; we see how people both invest in and subvert the discourses of political and religious movements and institutions.

In Porto Alegre, for example, the Catholic monk distributing condoms to homosexual men with AIDS experiences himself as neither a purely religious nor purely political subject as he acts in both realms simultaneously. He is inventing a new practice—the public display of condoms in a religious venue—without necessarily defining himself fully as a monk or an AIDS activist. Similarly, among devotees of the Santa Muerte cult in Mexico City, we see that prayer to the female grim reaper is accompanied by feelings of self-awareness that are simultaneously spiritual, political, and social. As devotees exchange handcrafted statuettes of Santa Muerte in the midst of a public prayer ceremony, they invite divine intervention in the form of miracles, create a community among ex-prisoners, gang members, and police, and assert their need for protection from a harsh economy and unresponsive government—all at the same time. They do not experience a single category of identity but multiple identities together. And we cannot understand their actions—past, present, or future—without understanding this juggling, or coexistence, of multiple identities.

Attention to religion in contemporary Latin American politics and society also pushes us toward new ways of understanding belief. While religious institutions and social movements promote ideological value systems using the language of “beliefs”—with scholars often categorizing them as such—we need to pay atten-

tion to the performative dimensions of belief. That is, rather than treating humans as vessels that carry coherent, fully formed values (religious, political, or otherwise), which in turn shape practice, our project reveals belief to be something that occurs and is experienced not before action is taken but in the context of taking action. In participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, for example, participants do not enter into civic life with a preexisting conviction that the envy and hostility that form part of grassroots community politics will harm them. But as they experience the difficulties of debate over months and years—and become democratic citizens in the process—they seek purification through religious ritual. Hence, rather than explaining grassroots community leaders' references to envy and purification as stemming from a preexisting religious belief in a nonhuman and potentially harmful force, these references are a part of narratives that these leaders tell themselves and each other to make sense of their past successes and failures in civic engagement. In considering the role of religion in politics, then, we need to focus not on preexisting religious beliefs but on beliefs in formation as they are performed in social and political contexts.

LOOKING FORWARD

In Latin America's postsecular future, the impact of religion is not likely to play out in any single way. Evangelicalism, for example, is not producing one kind of citizen or shaping Latin America's public sphere in one particular fashion (Freston 2008). The cases in this special issue show clearly that religion is involved in virtually all of the struggles that are shaping the region's future, providing meanings and motivations, innovative and hybrid practices, spaces for experimentation, multiple views of democracy, claims on urban geography, and support for a variety of social and political projects. We cannot understand the dynamics of any initiative or path in Latin America—be it leftist, neoliberal, urban, indigenous, violent, electoral, popular, or cultural—without understanding the multiple roles played by religion as citizens fight for new rights and reshape democratic politics.

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