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Religion and the Politics of Ethnic Identity in Bahia, Brazil (Book Review)

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Religion and the Politics of Ethnic Identity in Bahia, Brazil. *Stephen Selka.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007, 192 pp., 8 black-and-white photographs. $59.95, cloth; $29.95, paper.

Stephen Selka investigates the role of religion in encouraging, or discouraging, the formation of black identity in Bahia, the Brazilian state that is regarded as the center of Afro-Brazilian culture, religion, and politics. As he strives to understand and theorize the crucial, but complex, relationship between religion and what he terms "Afro-Brazilian identity," Selka describes how adherents of the three primary religious trends in Bahia (Catholicism, Candomblé, and evangelical Protestantism) view the effects of their religious institutions on the construction of that identity. This question is addressed through selected quotes from leaders and members of the respective religious groups (and subgroups), interspersed with questions leading to a set of theoretical considerations and reflections on religious practice, technologies of the self, identity, ethnicity and race, and social mobilization.

The book is organized into three parts. The first is a background chapter that covers some of the history and previous work on religion and race in Brazil. It reviews the literature on racial democracy and its debunking, as well as debates over cultural or political antiracist mobilization. Selka also indicates that he is building on the scholarship of John Burdick, although more about Burdick's recent treatment (2004) of the Catholic Afro-Pastorals would have been helpful to contextualize Selka's discussions with priests in the middle section of the book. That section consists of three chapters, each corresponding to a religion as it specifically relates to the current state of, and possibility of future, Afro-Brazilian mobilization, providing ethnographic details from Selka's research in an interior city and in the capital, Salvador. In the final chapter, Selka addresses previous theoretical interventions as they relate to his research questions, which range from the general (the relationship between religion and identity formation and Afro-Brazilian political mobilization) to the specific (the relationship between Afro-Brazilian ethnoreligious identity and everyday politics of race in Bahia).

This book contains some fascinating insights about religion and the construction of a black consciousness movement. Selka shows that even though Afro-Brazilian religious practices associated with Candomblé are often invoked as intrinsically linked to antiracist political mobilization, and Candomblé is seen as emblematic in Brazil (and internationally) of black consciousness, the reality is quite a bit more complex. In fact, Selka finds that "overlapping networks of

cultural and political practice in which various notions of what it means to be Afro-Brazilian compete" in what is often presented as a unified black movement (p. 3). By bringing into the discussion the multiple engagements with antiracism and black identity by the Catholic Church and evangelical Protestantism, Selka reveals the complexities of what he says is seen as a relatively simplistic equation, in which, for example, Candomblé is assumed to foster black mobilization, the Catholic Church is not trusted to support black mobilization, and Protestantism is intolerant of the assertion of black identity. Although it is a bit murky as to where these stereotypes originate, once he has set them up as common knowledge, he deftly deconstructs each of them by showing points of intersection and disagreement. He does this through the words of the people he came to know, which enables us to attain a greater depth of knowledge of the complexities than we would otherwise gain.

For example, his presentation of the re-Africanization and antisyncretism movements, in which he addresses important issues of essentialism, commercialization, and folklorization of Candomblé, and the apparent lack of success of the antisyncretism movement to address explicitly antiracist political concerns chart new territory. I was particularly intrigued by Selka's discussion of "double belonging" and its implications for theorizing not only syncretism but self-identification as well. After all, many people who are called "Afro-Brazilian" or "black" in Brazil may self-identify in a variety of ways depending on the context, making ethnoracial identity in Brazil hard to pin down. Selka does a fine job of recognizing these nuances and is generally careful not to overstate the ramifications of his informants' strong statements of commitment to a particular religious or political view. This reveals a certain sensitivity to Brazilian discursive strategies and is particularly important in his treatments of the Catholic and Protestant adherents and leaders as they make efforts to engage with a black movement that has more influence today than ever before. Moreover, Selka does not ignore party politics as he mines the complicated nature of individual and group commitment to religion and political mobilization. Although I would have liked to know more about the people quoted in the book so as to understand the context from which each was speaking, and I was looking for some information on how gender and sexuality fit into this picture (important issues in the field of religious studies and another question written about by Burdick), in all, the middle three chapters with Selka's ethnographic findings provide much information useful not only for theorizing but also for teaching about religious commitment and its impact on adherents' lives.

In the final, theoretically oriented chapter, Selka calls on a series of theorists to understand how religious belief is fundamental to the construction of the self, how "ethnic politics" and the "racialization of religion" should be taken into account as we consider the hierarchization of religious practices, and ultimately what all of this has to offer positive or negative evaluations of social movements, as well as the strengthening of social mobilization. While reading the first section on background, which laid out some of the author's questions and assumptions, I was a bit distracted by the lack of support for many categorical statements that might be controversial or that just require backup. By invoking "many people" or "some people," the author finesses the issue of whether his own research is

sufficient to support his conclusions. I was also distracted by the conflation of race and ethnicity; perhaps a section clarifying the use of each would have been helpful. In fact, even the title raises this issue.

Overall, this book is a nice addition to the growing literature on the effects of religious beliefs and practices on political mobilization, treating the difficulties of organizing potential activists in a society in which essential notions of race and ethnicity are not readily encountered or adopted. This is an extremely useful book for undergraduate classes on Brazil, religion, or race and ethnicity in Latin America.

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Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali. *Emma Baulch.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, 227 pp. $74.95, cloth; $21.95, paper.

Visitors to Bali at the close of the twentieth century often assumed that the black-leather-clad and mohawk-sporting young men whom they observed hanging out in malls and playing battered guitars by the side of the road were trying to imitate Western tourists. Emma Baulch's new book reveals just how mistaken this assumption is. This landmark study illuminates an important development in Balinese (and indeed Southeast Asian) youth culture: the emergence of elaborate social networks for the grassroots-based production, dissemination, consumption, and performance of Western popular music, particularly "underground" rock genres. Baulch argues that leather jackets, colorful mohawks, metal spikes, and related sartorial choices in 1990s Bali are better understood as signaling an affiliation with a nationwide (pan-Indonesian) music movement inspired by globally circulating media forms. The book's primary focus is on Balinese music fans' performances of identity in relation to discursive structures of power, including those emanating from the island's tourist industry, elite rhetorics of essential Balinese-ness, popular regionalist sentiment, the dying New Order state, and multinational corporations exploiting the newly deregulated Indonesian media environment.

Rather than focus on a single style of popular music, Baulch's study is laudable for its emphasis on three competing genres: reggae, punk, and metal. Thus she is able to show how the responses of these three genres' adherents to the discursive formations outlined above were mediated by the ways in which they defined themselves and their music against the other two music scenes as well as against a perceived popular music mainstream emanating from the national capital of Jakarta.