Personalism in the Brazilian Body Politic:

Political Rallies and Public Ceremonies in the Era of Mass Democracy

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Introduction

While Brazil today is a fully-fledged mass democracy in terms of voters' franchise, there appears to be a lack of many things: lack of a real civil society, of real constituencies, of real citizens, and of real political parties. Thus Francisco Wefort claims that if civil society '...does not exist, we have to invent it' (Wefort 1989:349), and Scott Mainwaring points at '...the singular nature of party fragility...', which brings him to the conclusion that '...the underdevelopment of political parties in Brazil is exceptional in Latin America and on a world scale' (Mainwaring 1993:677). So what is the problem with democracy in Brazil? Of course, there is no simple answer to this question, but one major issue seems to be what O'Donnell identified in general for Latin America as 'particularism'. For him certain forms of particularism are very important for understanding what is going on in the new democracies of the continent (O'Donnell 1996:19ff). Of course, this is not a new issue in Latin American political culture. For Brazil one may refer to the discussion on personalism at the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties (cf. Charles Wagley 1960). After being almost annihilated by structural approaches, the term 'personalism' is making a comeback. Analyzing voter behaviour, Kurt von Mettenheim makes personalistic political conceptualizations a major variable. He defines these

...as those that perceive and judge politics primarily by reference to the character of historical personalities,... without the mediating influence or rationale of party, ideology, or group interest (von Mettenheim 1995:33).

Kurt Weyland also uses the term in his analytical model to explain Brazil's democracy without equity. For him,

[p]ersonalism forms networks based on particularistic exchange and affective ties. In any large-scale society, these networks tend to assume a pyramidal form. Hierarchy thus pervades personalism (Weyland 1996:33).

In a more indirect way Scott Mainwaring hints at personalism when indicating the role of the politicians themselves in generating party underdevelopment: '[It] is in part an intentional consequence of the preferences of the Brazilian politicians' (Mainwaring 1993:702). For instance, he points at the strong auton-
omy individual politicians have within parties, at the often fierce competition for votes between candidates of the same party for the same elective post, and the impossibility for a party to negate a legislator 'the right to be on the ballot for the same position in the next elections' (Mainwaring 1993:704). This personalistic tinge to elections is also reflected in voting behaviour. One example may suffice here. While electoral law allows for voting for the party ticket itself in proportional elections (voto de legenda), Brazilians overwhelmingly vote for individuals. Even the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), known for its efforts to instruct voters to vote for the party ticket, does not really succeed in doing so in a convincing manner1. Thus, while Mainwaring is suggesting that politicians have an active role in formulating laws and procedures tailored to their personal interests, the voters also seem to be tuned in to these orchestrations. To my mind, a quibble over cause and effect between the two is not so important as the recognition that personalism poses an important dilemma for Brazilian political culture.

If networks of particularistic exchange and affective ties continue to be important, and if they are pervaded by hierarchy (Weyland, above), what does this imply for the present-day Brazilian political process? One of the ways to tackle this question is to look at public performances, the rituals2 staged by politicians. I think that in their enactment we may detect the main dilemma posed by the tensions generated in Brazil's changing political culture. I take the latter not as a static cultural reservoir impeding democracy, but as an often contradictory process of production and consumption of meanings (Hannertz 1992), concentrated in symbols and enacted in symbolic actions (Kertzer 1996). Of course, these are not freely floating flows of meaning, nor are these actions mere stage-actings. They are informed by such social categories as class, ethnicity, and regional background. Bodily arrangements in rituals, their choreographies, may thus be a way of studying a society's dilemmas. This relates to what Bourdieu in general observes, when he states that,

The cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, 'embodied' social structures (Bourdieu [1979] 1986: 468).

In the rituals the Brazilian politicians have to show, in Bourdieu's words, their cultural competence, to use their political capital in order to communicate effectively within the body politic itself and with the voters at large. And they do not do this as some Machiavellians on the loose, or as amoral political animals. They have to cope with dilemmas, ambiguities – if not paradoxes – generated by tensions and contradictions in an ever changing society (Banck 1994:154). Of course, some of these are generated by what may be called 'political reality', but others have strong moral connotations, a fact often neglected in the literature. Although the rallies in particular would be inconceivable without the

MDB – Movimento Democrático Brasileiro/Brazilian Democratic Movement
PMDB – Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro/Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement
PSDB – Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira/Brazilian Social Democratic Party
PFL – Partido da Frente Liberal/Liberal Front Party
PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores/Workers Party
participation of the public at large, the article’s main focus is on the politicians and their public appearances, how they present themselves in public and in the media, how they enact their public personality and, less consciously, how they ‘dance’ in accordance with the choreography of power, which in a sense also informs political rituals.

Next, I shall present an outline of the basis of my argument. After that I shall discuss case studies from my field work in the state of Espírito Santo: the ceremony of honourary titles awards, the campaign visit of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1996, the television campaign for the mayoral election in Vitória, the state capital, in 1992, and finally a protest rally in that same year. These cases, while certainly not offering conclusive evidence, highlight, to my mind, the major dilemma facing the construction of democracy and citizenship in present-day Brazil, which is the pervasive influence of personalism in Brazilian political culture. While also, of course, Espírito Santo is not representative for the whole of Brazil, I shall reflect on the wider implications of the article’s findings for the country’s present general political process.

Finding the Centre: of leaders, followers and photographers

In one of his most famous essays, anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1978:139) points to what he calls the ritual of Você sabe com quem está falando?! (Do you know who you are talking to?). This recurrent event in Brazilian society hints at one of its undesirable aspects: ‘It is an authoritarian rite, always indicative of a conflictual situation, and conflict is something Brazilian society prefers to deny’ (Ibid.:141). Basically, the rite is enacted when two Brazilians meet as individuals in an anonymous situation. DaMatta’s well-known example is that of a police officer fining a woman for a driving offence. After using the ominous ritualised phrase, there is the disclosure of her personal identity. She is a politician’s wife. This disclosure automatically turns the representative of the law into a person, too. The officer becomes first of all the head of a family, responsible for its well-being. Losing his job is the last thing he wants, and if she is going to talk to her husband, who is going to talk to his friend who knows the commander...... In this act the hierarchical nature of the Brazilian power structure, based on networks of personal relations is revealed and reconfirmed, after which ideally the front of stage performance of equality and harmony is restored. Several times I myself have experienced another rite of disclosure, though of a lesser social impact. As a student of local politics and a foreigner to boot, the study of ‘who is who’ in Brazilian politics is rather complicated. Of course, I knew the main protagonists and their friends. But now and then I was confronted with people I did not know who were enjoying deferential treatment. I always felt as if I were partaking in an initiation rite, when others informed me with a very special, if not conspiratorial emphasis: ‘Você não sabe?! Ele está próximo do poder!’, ‘Don’t you know?!, he is close to “the” power!’

In its most precise meaning, this phrase expresses the fact that someone is close to the president, governor, or mayor. It may thus convey the pivotal importance attributed to the executive in Brazil, and the word poder may just refer to poder executivo at all three levels of government. Yet this rather generic if not abstract term should not be taken as mere shorthand for the executive
power itself. It refers metaphorically first of all to the person who is in office. Furthermore, it can be used in a wider sense. It may refer to a strong opposition contender for office, a powerful senator or former governor, in fact any strong leader who is, once was, or has a good chance of becoming an office holder in the executive branch. Here the term overflows into another generic term of reference. Unlike the rest of Latin America where líder or jefe político are commonly used, Brazilians use the impersonal term liderança (literally, leadership to denote a strong politician). When the expression próximo do poder is used, it is foremost a reference to a strong leader. While I am not certain as to why there is this preference for hiding the person behind abstractions, it may be a euphemistic part of an etiquette suggestive of the idea that Brazil is a nation guided by objective and democratic laws. For, while these terms make clear reference not only to the importance of the person of the actual or aspiring office holder, they more importantly refer to his ability to cement a loyal following and to articulate and sustain wider coalition networks. It is this ability, more than anything else, that is behind the abstract metaphors. Both DaMatta’s and my ‘você sabe’ rituals disclose the moral code of the web of personal relationships hidden behind the metaphorical realm of the code of the public sphere of the law (cf DaMatta 1995).

While the expression próximo do poder is used metaphorically, its cultural loading, so to speak, also crosses over, consciously or unconsciously, into a politician’s behaviour. Especially in front stage situations, such as on a campaign rally platform, physical proximity to a powerful leader is eagerly sought after by politicians. Standing next to the leader has strong symbolic significance; it carries the message of proximity to the leader (and thus of derived power and influence for the actor involved) to rival politicians and to the public at large. It thus expresses, or recreates, in body action the cultural code of personalism, and intimately linked to it, of hierarchy. Its importance can also be measured by the emotions displayed. One small example from my fieldwork on the 1970 municipal election campaign will suffice for the moment.

The meeting (comício) of the opposition MDB is in full swing, notwithstanding a power failure. While these happen each day, everyone is absolutely certain that the opponents of the government party are behind it. The platform is packed to the brim. There are emotional speeches and music, rockets are fired and the enormous crowd cheers. At the centre front of the stage are the party’s three candidates for mayor, all important party figures, surrounded by as many candidates for councillor as space allows. All attention is focused on Dr Max, one of the candidates for mayor who is almost certainly going to win these elections. In reality, it is his comício. As the speakers reach their final rhetorical apotheosis, they lift their arms as does he. They ask the crowd to vote for him, there are abraços, camera lights are flashed, rockets are fired, applause is given. I discover Waldo on stage, a timid unqualified pharmacist from the popular neighbourhood where I live. He is campaigning for election as a councillor. For over a quarter of an hour he manoeuvres from the edge of the platform towards Max. Finally he ‘finds the centre’. He is ‘next to the power’ and tries to get Max’s attention by tapping him timidly on the arm. The latter, beaming, greets the crowd with one hand, and with a rapid, almost imperceptible glance seeing who it is, pushes Waldo away with the other hand. Nobody pays any attention.
Waldo breaks down and cries bitterly, whirled away by others who are trying to find their way to the centre.

While I never again witnessed such a clear case of rejection, it nevertheless shows the emotive importance attached by politicians to being literally próximo do poder. Is such eager involvement only because of the supposed benefit it implies for getting votes? Of course, this is an important pragmatic reason. A strong politician has projeção, projection. This term has more or less the same meaning as it has in the United States, i.e. that of a politician being a strong vote-getter and influential power broker. Brazilian politicians believe that if they are seen together with the main campaign protagonist it will garner votes for them, because he 'projects' his aura onto them in the eyes of the public. In this they do not differ much from politicians elsewhere. Yet, I think that the importance of personalism - and the loyalties that go with it - makes quite a difference as regards the stakes believed to be involved for the participants, politicians and audiences alike. An indicator may be found in the importance of the visual media in registering the ritual dance of próximo do poder and other political encounters. An election rally without a photographer and - in the last twenty years or so - the presence of a camcorder is unthinkable. While the audience attending the rally is important, the photograph of the abraço with a liderança may be just as important for a politician. It can be used in campaign material, or if he knows a journalist, the latter may publish the photograph in his newspaper, something thought to be highly relevant for campaigning. More recently, of course, the camcorder has constantly been used to produce material for television propaganda, as we shall see later. Yet, this eagerness for visual records is not limited to election campaigns. It is quite common when visiting a mayor or a governor for a photographer to come into the room to take five to ten pictures of the meeting. They are normally not published, but, of course, a visitor may request a copy of one. A most telling example of the importance attached to this visual recording of political encounters is the existence of thousands and thousands of photographic negatives in the state archive of Espírito Santo, dating as far back as the beginning of this century. Centre stage are almost always the governors. Sometimes these pictures were used for a wider audience, but often they were made for the politicians themselves, creating a visual record that served as icons of the power hierarchy. For those in the focused centre, these fixed images reasserted their domination. For those on the fringe of the tableau, sometimes with awe in their eyes, they were a kind of magic amulet: the photograph, through reproduction available for all who wanted to have one, was considered to be solid proof of the owner's access to power. In other words, the picture was indicative of the possibility that the owner could expect benign protection, which he could delegate to those who voted for him or who in other respects asked for his help and protection.

Thus the media, those 'machineries of meaning', as Ulf Hannertz (1996:26) calls them, has made possible the visual preservation of the fluid moments of meetings. The importance attached to the photograph, in my view, testifies to the fact that these encounters as expressions of personal power hierarchies are symbolically highly relevant for the functioning of the political system. The photographer's lens, by making the fluidity of a meeting independent of place and time, magnifies and casts into solid images the centrality of personal relations in Brazilian political culture. The photographer and camcorder operator
have thus strategic backstage roles in the rituals of public meetings. They are, however, not merely a technical presence. They are, be it at another level, as much part of the political domain as the politicians themselves. In a political culture like the Brazilian, with its code of personalism constantly weaving itself into the public presentation of institutional politics, they are the strategic decoders and ‘amplifiers’. They produce, select, multiply and distribute the iconography of power, mostly in accordance with or commissioned by politicians. As such, politics goes beyond its realm, its networks of personal relations feeding into and in turn being fed by the press. But it does not stop here as politics also filters through into such institutional arenas as economics and education. Thus, as I shall show, rather commonplace anniversary ceremonies of a monthly magazine and a university may in fact be fully-fledged ritual representations of hierarchy and personal prestige within the body politic.

Ceremonies as Power Rituals

One of the most important venues in Vitória for all kinds of ceremonies is a low building with a fashionable entrance, reminiscent of a hotel in a television series. This is the Cerimonial Itamaraty, the latter word referring to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since the well-trained diplomatic corps has enormous prestige, it spills over metaphorically into a more general notion of diplomatic, polished ceremonial.

It is here that towards the end of August 1997, a monthly magazine is holding a commemorative lunch to celebrate its foundation a few years before. It is a rather glossy periodical, containing not only social and economic materials, but also interviews with politicians. The room is replete with the latter, including all three senators for Espírito Santo, the deputy governor, several federal and state deputies and many mayors and municipal councillors. This massive participation is partly due to the presence of the president of the Senate, the Bahian politician Antônio Carlos Magelhães who is the main speaker. Before lunch he is surrounded by politicians, political friends and enemies alike. While they ‘pamper’ him with their abraços, he ‘lavishes sympathy on them’ (A aula de ACM; Gazeta Online, 1/9/97). During lunch he demonstrates his charisma and his great wit. ‘The audience is so delighted (radiante), that even when, in passing, he showed himself not to be opposed to nepotism, nobody frowned upon him’ (Ibid.), and an opponent somewhat grudgingly admitted that Magelhães was really stealing the show.

Through a ceremony which was quite insignificant in itself, this monthly magazine showed that it could count on such an extremely important politician as Magelhães. And by means of this invitation, it brought together almost all the important politicians in the state from both left and right. In this ceremony, of course, the presence of Magelhães guaranteed that the ritual of próximos do poder could be acted out successfully. Moreover, apart from the symbolic importance of the ritual, his presence provided a chance to solicit his support for federal assistance to the state of Espírito Santo whose finances were in a serious state. For this reason the governor was censured for not showing up. However in the next ceremony, all this is not apparently the case.

Recently one of the many private universities, which are flourishing in Espí-
rito Santo, was commemorating its twenty-first anniversary. The ceremony was presided over by its founder, while next to him his son, the present university president, was sitting at the mesa de honra, the table of honour, as were the most important guests, amongst whom all three senators from the state. Two of them were awarded the title of doctor honoris causa, while the third was appointed emeritus professor, as was the mayor of Vitória, the state capital. For this event a special order of merit was also created. Amongst its nine recipients were the president of the Tribunal das Contas (the mother of Vitória’s mayor, herself politically very influential), the president of the state Assembly, the mayor of the city in which the university is located, the inspector of the federal Ministry of Education, three other politicians, a renowned and politically influential lawyer and finally the writer of the state’s most influential newspaper social column (Gazeta Online, 28/5/97).

This ceremony was duly reported upon in the latter’s column, and photographs had been taken. Why is it that what to all appearances is an educational family affair can bring together so many politicians? I do not have a conclusive answer, but in pragmatic terms one may think of political protection and, simultaneously, a desire to show potential clients that the university is well connected. Such a meeting is thus in a sense a marketing event, but why are so many politicians willing to show up? In part, this has to do with the special role developed by private universities since the beginning of the seventies when most of them were founded. They catered to the necessity for many politicians to obtain an academic degree. While Leeds reported in 1964 on the autodidacto as a main self-referential term among politicians (Leeds 1964:1324-25), today a politician’s standing should preferably be academic. In pursuing their careers many politicians did not and do not have time, nor often the intellectual capacity to pass the admission examination for a public university. Private universities, mainly through their law and economics curricula, are the solution. At the same time, the politicians can reciprocate by supporting the academic institution. This mutual interest also makes these universities attractive for those aspiring to a political career. As such they form an important recruiting base for politicians.

This partly explains why so many politicians were willing to be honoured and to be present. It is also another opportunity to act out the symbolic arrangements of the power hierarchy. One gets a sense that these kinds of ceremonies, together with the many titles distributed (the majority being for specially invented orders of merit) are suggestive not only of a proliferation of ceremonial ‘gadgets’ but also of the ceremonies themselves. This impression is substantiated in the following case.

It is the eighth of September 1994, the foundation day of the city of Vitória. A hotel auditorium is the venue for a special session of the Câmara Municipal, the city council. Titles of honorary citizenship are to be conferred. This is not a simple affair. As each of the twenty-one councillors is allowed to nominate three people, this makes for a total of 63. Furthermore, special medals of merit have been coined for this event and are to be awarded to six citizens. The auditorium is crowded with politicians and the families of those to be honoured. There is a contained whirl of abraços and handshakes while the sound system offers a repertoire of semi-classical music. The military police band, which is to play the national and municipal anthems, is waiting, as is the audi-
ence, for the ceremony to begin. Counting a delay of 45 minutes, the event is to last for over three hours. The president and the secretary of the city council take their seats at the mesa. The special session of the City Council is opened. Then follows the call (chamada) for the mesa’s composition. First the special guest of honour, the former chief of the Federal Tax Agency is invited to the table; next come the governor, two senators, the mayor, the military commander, and a federal deputy who is also the wife of one of the senators. Finally they are joined by a former governor and a former mayor of Vitória, both of whom are candidates for the governorship, the campaign of which was in full swing at that moment. After that a chamada is made for important people in the audience. The anthems are played by the band and sung by all. Before the ceremony begins, the secretary reads the names of important politicians who through telegrams or cards wish to congratulate the Council on this important anniversary for the city of Vitória. The 1994 campaign filters through in this listing. Senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who is campaigning for the presidency, has sent a long letter, most of it in fact election propaganda. The secretary, who belongs to his party, reads out the whole text.

Finally the ritual itself starts. The recipients of the medals are the former tax agency chief, the former governor, the former mayor and a state deputy and former rector of the Federal University. By far the largest category of honourary citizens are politicians, including the brother of one councillor and the uncle of another. Neighbourhood leaders and evangelical ministers, both of whom are important in drumming up votes, figure prominently. The procedure is as follows: the councillor who has nominated someone is called to the front of the mesa, the secretary reads out the nomination and a short biography of the recipient of the title or medal. Then the music is switched on, a quiet waltz, during which, in the case of the medal award, the councillor concerned drapes the elaborately ribonned medal over the shoulders of its recipient and then hands over a framed diploma. The honourary citizens, in contrast, only receive a framed diploma, and each councillor awards his three diplomas in immediate succession. Of course, abraços are given and the cameras record them. The most important yet informal part of the ritual is always at the end of each entrega. The music increases in volume, and the official photo/video session starts, the recipients posing with their diplomas held conspicuously in front of them. For the medal recipients there is an abraço and a formal pose with the councillor involved, while with the titles the councillor stands in the midst of his three protégés. The music gets louder again and is accompanied by a wave of applause. The ceremony is rather monotonous, and there is only one deviant procedure right at the beginning, but this is a highly relevant one. It is during the award of the medal to the former chief of the federal tax department. He is a national hero at that moment, and after the initial praise the councillor in charge suddenly proposes that the former governor, who is campaigning for reelection, should present the medal and diploma. There is a profusion of abraços, and while the cameras are clicking and flashing, the contender smiles radiantly, shoulder to shoulder with the recipient, while on the latter’s other side the councillor is allowed to share in the moment suprême.

Two things become apparent. First, one cannot escape the impression that the almost endless list of honoured personalities reads like a ‘democratisation’ of privilege. If one councillor has the right to submit a nomination, all should
have it. At the same time, the logic of personalism puts pressure on each councilor as he has many friends. He must not discriminate too much in favour of one at the expense of others. That could mean trouble for him, especially as almost all of the honourary citizens are politicians themselves or, as in the case of community leaders and protestant ministers, important canvassers. Thirdly, the importance of the way the ritual is cast – who is standing next to whom in front of the photo and video cameras – is once again demonstrated. While the honourary titles are part and parcel of municipal politics, the granting of the medal of merit to the former tax collector transcends these limits. The protocol is broken, the councillor involved ingratiatingly invites his friend and powerful ally, the campaigning former governor to steal the show. Both stand shoulder to shoulder on either side of the honoured guest whose aura they hope to absorb in front of the camera lens. One other breach of protocol is also significantly related to the importance of personal power. It happens when the secretary, using her prerogative, takes the reading of a message of congratulation very literally. She reads presidential candidate Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s long letter in extenso. As he is expected to win the election, these are the words of the man who will almost certainly become the next president of the republic. The roar of applause after the reading is not partisan; these are the words of power. What if the man himself were to appear?

A Campaign Visit: the Courting of a Presidential Candidate

On 24 September 1994 the campaign for the general elections which were to take place on 3 October was in full swing. Senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the PSDB candidate for the presidency, was to come to Espírito Santo that day. Much pressure had been put on him and his campaign team to include the state in his schedule. However, there had been some problems. The most significant was the fact that two of the contenders for the governorship were both canvassing for him and this could make a campaign visit rather complicated (which in fact it was to be, as we shall see). These were his own party’s candidates, federal deputy Rose de Freitas, and the ex-governor Max Mauro9, an experienced politician. Rose had imposed her candidacy on the party after much internal struggle and despite pressure from Cardoso’s team, especially its coordinator and party president Pimenta de Veiga. He was in favour of the PSDB joining Max in order to create one local ticket supporting Cardoso’s campaign. There had already been photographs of Max taken with Cardoso, which could no longer be used (Gazeta 23/8/94). On the other hand, according to the same newspaper article, Rose had been prevented from declaring in the PSDB TV programme that she had a note from Cardoso endorsing her campaign. Cardoso declared that nobody in his party was allowed to use his name without his express approval (Ibid.). In a TV debate involving all four candidates Max tried to incriminate Rose in a corruption scandal, while she attacked him by saying that Pimenta de Veiga, who had obstructed her campaign, had been a friend of Max’s main fund raiser for more than seventeen years (Gazeta 19/9/94). Both also claimed to have mobilized more than forty mayors in support of Cardoso. As there were only 71 municipalities at that time, at least one of them was exaggerating. The support of mayors is an essential asset in elec-
tions; the incumbent governor, for instance, was successfully elected through a *pacto municipalista*.

Neither Rose nor Max were doing at all well in the opinion polls and their final hope was that they might be able to demonstrate to Cardoso (and through him hopefully to the voters) that they could muster real support. Cardoso’s campaign was in full swing and his election in the first round was becoming more and more likely. With the prospect of Cardoso almost certainly becoming Brazil’s next president, the principle of *adesiio* was in full swing. Indeed 41 mayors were ready to sign a *Manifesto de Apoio*, a good reason for Cardoso to come to Espírito Santo, though the rumour was that Pimenta de Veiga’s friend and Max’s fund raiser had been instrumental in this. Finally Cardoso and Marco Maciel, his running mate for the vice-presidency, arrived in Vitória.

An hour before Cardoso’s arrival the airport is already full of people. Outside a *trio elétrico*, an enormous truck full of loudspeakers, makes deafening propaganda for a PSDB candidate for the senate; inside are people from Rose’s team and more and more canvassers are arriving, many of them by bus. Several go to the visitors’ platform upstairs to welcome Cardoso with their cheers. Suddenly, Max’s *trio elétrico* arrives and hundreds of his people, waving banners and swinging to the rhythm of a percussion group, conquer the space next to the VIP room. He himself, as always, with a camcorder focused on him, shakes hands, even giving *aquele abraço* to one of Rose’s team members whom I happened to be sitting next to, expertly hiding the latter’s PSDB badge from the camera. Rose’s people are flocking in, strengthened by an enormous mass of supporters of a PSDB candidate for federal deputy who belongs to a family that has always been Max’s arch enemy in the municipality where he lives. In a festive samba they conquer space, swinging their bodies so effectively that Max’s people near the VIP room are partly edged away from their chosen spot.

According to the PSDB, the presence of Max’s people violated the terms agreed by the two teams. Another row started when, unlike a PSDB colleague who was waved through, Max’s photographer was not allowed to enter the VIP room. The problem was solved by Cardoso’s people who decided to let her in. Max himself was not allowed to stand on the airport platform, ‘but he managed to get through the door, standing there next to the PSDB reception committee... placing himself in such a strategic way, that he stood next to Fernando Henrique Cardoso’ (*Gazeta*, 25/9/97). Thus the front page colour photograph shows Cardoso in the middle, a confident Max with the badge bearing his own name in red letters on a white shirt in front, and a rather embarrassed Rose, with dark hair and a dark jacket, standing obscurely in the left corner.

When Cardoso finally left the airport through another exit than the one expected, there was a clash about who was to accompany him. Here also, Max saw his wish fulfilled, and both he and Rose went with Cardoso. While all this was happening and because of the tight time schedule, no car rally was possible. All the cars tried to leave the airport as quickly as possible to catch up with Cardoso’s motorcade. He was due to go to a stadium for the huge PSDB meeting with the 41 mayors and all the PSDB candidates. However, we were in for a surprise. On the four-lane highway next to the bridge linking Vitória with its neighbour, Vila Velha, which was Max’s home town, we saw Rose and some of her committee members standing in the middle of the traffic. They had been dumped, so to speak, because it was decided that Cardoso should first go to a
closed meeting with Max in Vila Velha. When they reached the border between the two municipalities and Max came into his own ‘territory’, Rose had to leave and find her own way to the stadium (Ibid.).

In the stadium the comício was already in full swing with music and warming-up speeches. The immense platform is filling up with some 200 people, amongst whom PSDB candidates for various positions and the forty mayors; after a long delay, Cardoso and Maciel finally arrive. They are cocooned in a struggling mess of security people, six tv cameras and innumerable photographers. At the platform they are ‘cakewalked’ to the front amongst applause, music and fireworks. There is much shuffling on the platform to get as near as possible. Rose makes her speech, welcoming Cardoso and complaining about those in the party who are against her. The mayor of an important town speaks on behalf of the mayors, offering their support for Cardoso. He does not refer to Rose whatsoever. Finally Cardoso gives a short routine speech, asking support for Rose, and for two candidates for the senate, one from the PSDB, and the other from the PMDB (which was not a party of the Cardoso alliance). They were to work with him in the coming government. Amidst applause, music and another round of fireworks, he goes to the staircase at the back of the platform, shaking hands or exchanging abraços with as many mayors as possible. While it is difficult to verify the pecking order in the tumult, one interesting item draws my attention. The PSDB mayor of Vitória, one of the most outspoken opponents of Rose, is walking around quietly at the back of the platform after Cardoso’s arrival. It seems as if he is not really interested. Than he calmly walks into the mass of people and I lose sight of him. Next morning in the newspaper, on the page which includes coverage of Cardoso’s visit, the close-up photograph of Cardoso during his speech does not show Rose next to him. There is of course Cardoso gesticulating, there is Marco Maciel, and, surprise, there is Vitória’s mayor. There is no photograph of Rose whatsoever: it is her enemy standing ‘next to the power’.

I believe that this case speaks for itself. Once again, we have here a demonstration that much energy is channelled by politicians in getting themselves identified with the powers that be. What is clear, furthermore, is the fact that the newspaper’s choice of photographs, for example, is politically informed. Both Max and the mayor have excellent channels to the newspaper journalists while Rose does not. How does television campaign propaganda come into this picture? This is not an unimportant question, as television is thought to influence about half of all the votes cast. The next case will focus on this issue.

Courting in Slow Motion

The influence of television propaganda on Brazilian elections has been growing rapidly. While any comparison with the USA may be exaggerated, one may argue that in this respect, Brazil has clearly entered the era of modern mass democracy. However Brazilian television propaganda has its own distinctive structure. The commercial networks, by law, are obliged to interrupt their programmes for free political propaganda twice a day for about a month and a half in the run-up to the elections. This implies that paid political propaganda outside these slots was in fact non-existent until recently. Furthermore, the law
also establishes specific rules for programming. Time slots are allotted to parties in accordance with the number of seats they hold in the National Congress and State Assembly, or more commonly, the number of seats held by the multiparty alliance that backs a candidate for the executive. This time is to be divided in accordance with specific rules applying to the candidates for the executive and the legislative.

The case is about the 1992 campaign for the municipal elections in Vitória and the focus is on the race for the mayorship. There were three main contenders, one from the leftist Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), a second from the centre-left PSDB, and a rightist PFL candidate. Their TV spots were generally well done. Candidates were presented in slow motion metaphorically taking the electorate with them to a most promising future. Or they were chatting with people, showing that they were just normal citizens who had nothing to do with the federal government of the corrupt president Collor who, at that time, was faced with impeachment by Congress. While one contender had a specific religious reference in his campaign jingle, even the leftist PT did, now and then, compare its star with the star of the Saviour. But little specific attention was given to the political platforms. Save for the almost messianic slow motion shots, all this sounds pretty familiar for Brazilian campaigning: religious references, the lack of programmatic issues. Very unusual, however, was the role of the incumbent mayor, the petista Vitór Buaiz. One of the founding fathers of the PT, he was generally admired for his moral stance in politics. His administration, which was soon coming to an end, had been highly successful. He had been extremely popular in 1992, giving rise to the exceptional situation of all three candidates trying very hard to identify with him. In a way they all acted as what is known in Brazil as situacionistas, as adhering to the government (a situação being a synonym of governo). Of course, the petista candidate should have been the only one, but there had been some trouble. The candidate and his radical xiita faction had united with the Trotskyist faction and together they had opposed Buaiz, who was seeking an alliance with other parties and favoured one of his close allies for the candidacy. The row had been very nasty and Buaiz was extremely upset and angry, keeping as aloof from the campaign as he could.

He never entered a platform with the candidate and when, at the very end of the campaign, he participated in a corpo a corpo (shaking hands in the street), he was at some distance from the PT candidate. Whether it was intentional or not, a photographer could never get the two together. Buaiz's aloofness was also reflected in the TV spots. While the candidate continually emphasised that he was going to continue the PT's way of governing the city, thus seeking to approximate himself to Buaiz, the PT television spots showed his photograph and Buaiz's but there was a line between them and the first was never able to show a filmed abraço with Buaiz. Once he came close. In the second week of September the two were together, but it was not a perfect shot. On Independence Day the mayor of Vitória was the next in rank to the governor on the platform for the traditional civil-military parade. The PT camera caught his image just behind Buaiz's shoulder....

The PSDB contender, a federal PSDB deputy who was an ex-communist student leader and staunch Cardoso supporter, could claim that he had supported Vítor in the latter's 1988 campaign and that he had also given him his
support through his political friends. This was, of course, pointed out in his campaign and he promised to continue Buaiz’s policies when elected. But evidently Buaiz was not shown on TV. Yet, when the chance was there, it was immediately acted upon. The city’s huge privatized steel plant dismissed more than 2000 workers and a strike was organized. During a meeting of the strikers Buaiz and the PSDB candidate both appeared on the platform to express their solidarity with the strikers. The PSDB video camera registered a really very spontaneous abraço between the two, and it was immediately shown on TV in a radiant slow motion sequence.

The third candidate was a very special case, as he was one of Buaiz’s much older cousins, a member of the rich branch of the Buaiz clan. He was the candidate for the rightist PFL, and thus the evident opponent of the leftist mayor. In 1988 he had given his support to his cousin and now he was clearly building on Buaiz’s success as mayor. His slogan was Buaiz mais uma vez, Buaiz one more time. In Brazil having the same name as a popular liderança often pays political dividends as voters are confused by the name. In a TV spot a boy was asked who he thinks would make a good mayor: ‘Ah, Ví..., Luiz Buaiz!’. But there was also a strong ideological commitment to family relations. In fact Brazilian voters often implicitly use analogous reasoning. It is all in the family: so if one is good the other must also be good. This is especially the case in popular neighbourhoods. Both Luiz and Vitor Buaiz were considered to be of a família tradicional, which many voters considered to be a positive political asset. Of course, the mayor pointed out that it was not Buaiz once again. His cousin was to make a totally different mayor, because he represented groups on the right. He was, however, careful to distinguish between party politics and family relations. Yet in the most important popular neighbourhood of Vitória, his conduct was often interpreted as showing lack of respect for an older family member.

The 1992 campaign was the last to present shots of political rallies. Congress, which always redefines the electoral law one year in advance of the next election, voted to ban these from the screen. In order to ‘moralize’ the campaign, as the Brazilian expression puts it, slow motion shots are now prohibited as misleading, or in other words, they were considered too successful, especially in combination with abraços during campaign meetings. The main reason for this prohibition apparently is to prevent scenes which showed a candidate together with political big shots or, in the case of the contenders for the presidency with as many important politicians at state level as possible, on the palanque, the rally platform. The prohibition points at two things: first, in line with my argument, these representations of the hierarchy of power are considered important, highly effective expressions of the country’s political culture. Otherwise, it would not have been an issue. Second, it shows that in Congress this issue is inserted into a general debate on political change, captured in such phrasings as ‘strengthening of democracy’ and ‘construction of citizenship’. Instead of calling it a debate, one may say that it is a fierce battle in which every word and comma are fought over. Elsewhere I have explained how local politicians in general are extremely reluctant to give in to such, as they see it, unfair rulings and prohibitions. These seriously threaten their electoral prospects by diminishing precisely the personalistic flavour which they believe to be essential for their political survival (Banck 1994, cf. also Mainwaring 1992). This, of course, is also reflected in Congress. Yet, at the same time, the debate itself is indicative...
that there is a keen awareness of the problem which personalism poses for further political development. As it is a central part of the political culture, however, one cannot expect institution building in itself to effect miracles, a point I shall come back to in the conclusions. How difficult such a general change of mind is can be deduced from the last case.

**A Civil Protest Rally**

In mid-August 1992, just when the election campaign was getting up steam with the start of the TV broadcasts, Brazil was in a state of turmoil. Amid a virulent economic recession, an unprecedented political crisis was reaching a climax. A congressional committee probed the wheelings and dealings of president Collor's former campaign leader and fund raiser, PC. Farias and was to report on the 26th. The evidence implicated the President, and the possibility of his impeachment was being seriously considered. Collor, sensing the pressure, used the occasion of receiving a group of taxi drivers in the presidential palace to invite the nation to fly the national flag on the following Sunday (August 17) to demonstrate popular support for his presidency. The impact was extraordinary, but quite contrary to what the president had expected. Collor's call to use the national flag was seen as an act of profanity, indeed as profanation of the nation itself. In what anthropologists call a symbolic inversion, a movement began which proposed flying black banners and showing other expressions of mourning. The country was declared to be mourning for the nation's dignity, its democracy. By putting on black clothes and flying black flags the population was not only demonstrating against Collor, it was also presented as a mass movement to reconquer the nation's honour and purify the national flag which currently could only be shown covered in black.

In Vitória a fairly spontaneous *carreata* (car rally) was organized that very same Sunday, the Rally of Mourning. Most people wore black t-shirts and had other black paraphernalia. Some days later thousands of students came out on the streets, many with their faces painted with black stripes. On the 26 August, the Congressional Corruption Committee met in a final six hour session, which was televised live by all the major commercial TV networks, something quite unprecedented in Brazil's television history. The committee's verdict implicated Collor and an impeachment procedure was imminent. On the spur of the moment, on the same day the Comitê em Defesa da Democracia, a multiparty platform inspired by Vitó Buaiz and under his presidency, met to organize a number of public demonstrations. It was decided that another *carreata*, the Pro-Impeachment Rally would be held the following Sunday. Part of the debate was about the fact that it was election time and all participants would be likely to use their own campaign slogans, merely adding some anti-Collor phrases. Buaiz was pushing hard to have a real non-partisan rally with such themes as ethics in politics, restoration of dignity and the defense of democracy as a way to building a more just society. This was a time for civil society to act. It had to be a manifestation of organized civil society (*sociedade civil organiza-da*), not of the political parties.

The next Sunday morning many cars assembled in the Tancredrômo, the local version of the Sambôdromo, the famous Rio carnival parade place. As
well as carrying anti-Collor slogans, practically all the cars were also very visibly adorned with the names of candidates and their party colours and symbols. The drivers parked their cars near their candidate’s van or truck, which was packed with loudspeakers and propaganda materials. Some had so many election banners that the anti-Collor slogans were almost invisible as were some of the black flags.

Buaiz came in his car, which carried only one political sticker, that of one of his closest friends who was running for councillor. As president of the organizing committee, Buaiz, together with the state governor, was going to be on the truck heading the carreata. He argued with all of the groups present about the profusion of campaign material and seemed preoccupied. It was to no avail, however, and finally he had a real row with the ‘owners’ of the truck (a trade union campaigning for the PT) he was going to be on. Finally all partisan references were removed from this truck. After this confusion the carreata took off, including Buaiz’s lorry with just a few anti-Collor ribbons being almost out of place. A multi-party meeting (ato público) had been announced for the end of the programme. Yet each group of canvassers went its own way and minded its own (election) business. A Sunday afternoon is, after all, the best time for canvassing as most of the candidates and their friends have time to go to the beach or the soccer stadium hunting for votes. Nothing is more important than a corpo a corpo, a body to body meeting, with its patting, kissing, embracing, these bodily codified symbols of the true politician.

Afterwards, in a personal interview, Buaiz explained how angry he was, but also how helpless he felt:

We had discussed the issue; no election material was to be admitted. It was a unique chance to show that we could act as citizens. But they can only think about their own personal interest. There is no notion of public sentiment.

This seems to confirm what DaMatta once stated rather bluntly: ‘The last thing we Brazilians want to be is citizens’ (DaMatta 1992:7). But are Brazilians really to be stuck permanently in a political culture in which power and hierarchy can reveal themselves in such a whimsical, menacing everyday ritual as his ‘Do you know who you are talking to?’ Will there never be sufficient transparency to make the labyrinth of power visible and predictable? I will turn to such questions in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In the Introduction I mentioned Guilhermo O’Donnell’s somewhat revisionist emphasis on forms of ‘particularism’ in the new Latin American democracies (O’Donnell 1996:19ff). This term may be dangerous, because it is too easily put into a juxtaposition with universalism, and one should be on guard against making too simple an assumption about linear change from tradition to modernity, which is normally at the back of such a dichotomic thinking. Here DaMatta’s work is again relevant. He was the one who really put the issue of personalism back on the agenda again in 1978. His distinction between the two
moral codes, one related to the public sphere of the law, the second to the web of personal relations and its codes, does not imply such a straightforward juxtaposition. In this sense, he recently criticized most authors on the 'Latin American' tradition who focus on: '...its constituent characteristics'. Instead, attention should be on the 'relational ties among them, and their underlying logic' should be studied (DaMatta 1995:272). In other words, how do Brazilians navigate between the two moral codes and articulate the ambiguities, paradoxes and dilemmas generated in this relational universe (DaMatta 1995:272)? Studies of Brazilian politics often neglect this epistemological issue.

A good case in point is Frances Hagopian's recent and otherwise important study on Minas politics (Hagopian 1996). I have criticized her work in more detail elsewhere (Banck 1999). Suffice it to say that her juxtaposition of 'traditional elites' and a 'modern state and parties' makes for a rural past in which personal relations were functional to the economic system. By implication, this should not be the case now. While she makes some rather far-fetched efforts to relate traditional elites indirectly to a class base, the overall message is that today's traditional elites are a kind of free floating relic. They have only survived because the military, who began to rule in a spirit of strong opposition to these political 'classes', came to need them, in time, to stem the ascent of a contesting opposition (Hagopian 1996:17ff). Nowhere in this study do we find the notion that the code of personalism deserves to be studied in its own right and has, so to speak, its own modernity.

In general, political science analysis tends to relate the question of Brazilian personalism, mostly in the guise of clientelism, as mainly propelled by the military regime. While paying lip service to the fact that clientelism was of course not new, the argument runs as follows. Politicians were stripped of almost all their legislative powers, certainly at the lower two tiers of the state and the municipality, and thus they became mere brokers of public goods and offices. The regime's legacy was, among other things, the 'authoritarian trash of the Organic Law of Political Parties' (Fleisher 1993:13), and a hotch-potch of casuistry in the Electoral Laws. The results are 'underdeveloped' parties (Mainwaring 1992) and rules that cater most of all to the interests of individual politicians to the detriment of ideological coherence. This legacy, together with conjunctural political developments, in fact exacerbated clientelism after democratization started in 1985 (Hagopian 1996, Weyland 1996).

In itself, this analysis is correct but it is lopsided towards institutional politics, favouring conjunctural aspects. The persistent unwillingness of a substantial part of Congress to change the authoritarian 'trash' may be related to mere self interest, but this self interest is embedded in ambiguous dilemmas, originating in the moral claims politicians have to face in their constituencies (cf Banck 1994). Furthermore, as I said in the Introduction, voters persistently and massively vote for an individual, often not even knowing the latter's party affiliation. Is this mere custom without any real social significance? Is a supposed change for the better just a question of more information or better legislation? Or does it reflect the importance attached by Brazilians to personal relations, pre-empting any legal refinement to the contrary? There are no straightforward answers to these questions. It is here that the study of political rituals, of these choreographies of power, may be a bridgehead between institutional and cultural studies of political development. In their performances, politicians do
not only act on the assumption that these rituals are effective and register with
the media in a pragmatic manner; they also often reflect in their bodily move­
ments the symbolic expression of the power hierarchy, dominated by personal
liderancas, and these are understood and appreciated as such by their audi­
ences. One should keep in mind, however, that their continuing relevance does
not imply that the public discourses used in these political rituals are mere
rhetoric. They also produce important symbolic images for identification and
action, both in politicians and audience alike. In a tortuous way society and the
body politic interact in the creation of these symbolic expressions, expressing
the dilemmas faced by the two moral codes between which, according to Da-
Matta, Brazilians are constantly navigating.

How then are we to understand the cultural significance of personalism for
institutional politics and for democracy and citizenship? First of all, we should
note that this web of signification is not a static tradition, a survival which some
legal or institutional incentive can topple by a simple stroke. Its symbolic pow­
er, its social significance is here and now. In this sense, institution building
cannot be regarded as a panacea. But this is not to say that it is irrelevant. On
the contrary, the fact that personalism is in no way to be equated with a static
tradition also implies that we should not equate ‘culture’ with ‘fixed values and
norms’. In fact, the cultural representations of power and personal influence
have changed drastically over time. Of course, urbanization, industrialization,
and more recently mass consumption and mass media, not to mention global­
ization, wield an enormous dynamic influence over the symbolic repertoire
of Brazilian society. Yet, just as important is the fact that the attraction of such
imageries of power is ambiguous and situational because it is in a constant
tension-ridden symbiosis with the public code. This is one of the important
dilemmas Brazilian society is facing when aspiring to democratic transparency
and respect for citizen’s rights. It is, I believe, wishful thinking to expect an end
to the role played by this imagery of personal power in Brazilian society. But a
creative understanding of the dynamic role of this perhaps not always desirable
yet vital force in politics may be of help in consolidating democracy in Brazil.

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Notes

1. In 1986, 1990 and 1994 the score for the legenda was, respectively, 22.7, 43.3 and 33.1 per cent. Of course, these results are far better than those of other important parties (Samuels 1997:508).
2. I follow Kertzer in defining a ritual ‘as symbolic behaviour that is socially standardized and repetitive’ (Kertzer 1989:9). Save for some precursors (Bailey 1969; Cohen 1981), political rituals have only recently received due attention by scholars: e.g. Gledhill 1994:142-147; Kertzer 1989; Lomnitz 1995). For Brazil: DaMatta (1978).
3. This is the title of one of V.S. Naipaul’s books.
4. In the Old Republic chefe was a common term of reference. With Vargas, especially during the Estado Novo, there were no limits to references about his personal leadership. My impression is that only after the Second World War and the advent of mass-democracy did terms as liderança become dominant.
5. In this context, though not to be treated here, a relation to the widespread popular belief in a person’s fluido in Brazil should not be dismissed.
6. The word paparicar is used, meaning petting, coddling, pampering, but also ‘to lick one’s boots’.
7. This is almost always a politician who, though formally nominated by the federal government, is most often indicated by senators or federal deputies from the state in question.
8. He was a highly popular public figure because he tried very hard to get the collection of taxes better organized. Following mounting pressures, he resigned from office and for a short time was a national hero.
9. In Brazilian fashion, candidates will hereafter be referred to by their first names.
10. He was elected mayor and got himself photographed together with Cardoso in the newspaper.
11. This is not true in regard to a substantial part of the political elite (cf discussion in Banck 1998).
12. For a critique of this term see Gay, this issue, and Banck 1998.

Bibliography


