

FROM FANATICS TO FOLK



Brazilian Millenarianism and Popular Culture

PATRICIA R. PESSAR

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Frontis: Romeiros on a pilgrimage,

Juazeiro, 1974.

For two saintly women
and one wonderfully mortal man,
Maria das Dores dos Santos,
Irene Oberfield Pessar,
and Gil Joseph

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At key moments in my life when I finally made the right decision or took the appropriate move, my father would playfully inquire, “What took you so long?” Were he alive today, my father might well pose this same question on the appearance of this book. The most professionally expedient step would have been to transform my 1976 dissertation on the Pedro Batista millenarian movement immediately into a book. At that time my research on popular religiosity in Brazil was arguably ahead of its day, but it failed to adequately explore the ways in which millenarianism was engaged with the state, church, and larger social forces. Realizing that I lacked the tools to move in these directions, I chose to publish several articles on millenarianism and defer the task of writing a more integrated and comparative study of the Pedro Batista movement. In the meantime I set my sights on a very different topic: international migration and refugee movements in the Americas.

During the long hiatus I continued to mull over solutions to the questions and challenges posed by my 1970s Brazilian research. The three people to whom I dedicate this book proved invaluable to this decades-long pursuit. Each in her or his own way has been an inspiration and advocate. Maria das Dores dos Santos (Dona Dodô) was the leader of the millenarian community of Santa Brígida when I first arrived in 1973. She is referred to by most of her followers as *madrinha* (godmother) Dodô. Certainly in her kindness, willingness to mentor, and unparalleled graciousness, she has been in every way a godmother to me and my project. This book documents and celebrates her remarkable life.

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mundo" (the end of the world). It was my mother who continuously reminded me that I was the guardian of a book that needed to be written. It is ironic that, early on, she urged me to write myself into the narrative and to bring a sense of intimacy and humanity to my tale. This was in the late 1970s when figures like Oscar Lewis were derided as popularists and the line between empirical ethnography and more humanistic prose was vigilantly guarded. I am deeply indebted to my mother who insisted I write my book. I also thank those pioneers who had the wisdom and courage to write more experimental ethnographies over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. I am the beneficiary of their example.

This book would never have become as thoroughly historicized nor have moved into matters of power and popular culture had it not been for Gil Joseph, my partner in debate, in wrestling with scholarly conundrums, and in a love for rural Latin America. More than any other scholar and friend, Gil has showered me with his characteristic enthusiasm and advocacy—never more appreciated than at those times when my own resolve has flagged. I had the good sense and fortune to marry this loving and inspiring man. This book has benefited immeasurably from long and far-ranging conversations with Gil about history and anthropology, power and resistance, hegemony and popular culture. I have also profited from our jointly taught graduate seminars on resistance and survival in rural Latin America, and from Gil's adept reading of multiple drafts of this book. We also are fortunate to share lives as parents. When I decided to return to Brazil in the summer of 1999 to conduct additional ethnographic and archival research, Gil seamlessly stepped into the role of sole parent. I thank him and our son, Matthew, for thriving while I basked in a long overdue return to Santa Brígida.

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I have been a professional anthropologist for more than three decades, and

my fieldwork has taken me to many places. Much like a first love, my heart and thoughts have always returned to Santa Brígida. Other stints of fieldwork have taught me that this is not only a matter of “firsts” but also a consequence of having been welcomed and accepted by an extraordinary group of individuals. The *romeiros* (pilgrims who settled in Santa Brígida) and *baianos* (original inhabitants) initially indulged me when my language and rural living skills were rudimentary. They have graciously allowed me to accompany their lives over several decades and have wholeheartedly encouraged me to share my observations with others. I have been blessed in countless ways for having maintained this association. I have learned the true meaning of faith and devotion and have been the recipient of countless acts of kindness. Many more inhabitants of Santa Brígida and Northeast Brazil have helped me over the years than I could hope to personally acknowledge and thank. Consequently, I apologize to those I do not mention by name. Several, however, require special recognition: Dona Maria das Dores dos Santos, Dona Cirilia Vieira and her entire beloved family, José Apóstolo da Silva, Mãe Ana, José Vigario, José Caetano, Joaquim Pedro Lucas and family, Dona Bilú, Dona Bahia, Dona Cícera, Dona Dina, Dona Pedrina, Dona Raimunda, Dom Elias, Raimundo Santana Gomes, Rosália Rodrigues França, Antônio França dos Santos and family, Lindoaldo Alves de Oliveira, José Rodrigues dos Santos, José and Julio Oliveira and family, Geraldo Domingos Neto, Apolinário Neto, the Ribeiro family, Antônio Bispo dos Santos and family, Eugênio dos Santos and family, the Paschoal family, João and Antônio Calunga, Zenor Pereira Teixeira, João Gonçalves de Cavalho Sá, Geraldo Portela, Monsenhor Francisco José de Oliveira, Padre Murilo de Sá Barreto, Padre Francisco Teles, Padre Rosevaldo, Marco Antônio Dantas de Almeida, Maria Rodrigues, Titus Riedl, and Paolo Marconi. To them and many others in Northeast Brazil who have shared their knowledge, deep convictions, and unstinting hospitality with me, I say, “*Deus lhe pague.*”

INTRODUCTION

Iconic images of a communion wafer soaked in Christ's blood; a religious leader's severed head affixed to a spike and paraded through the streets of Salvador, Bahia; and nearly half of the entire Brazilian army pitted against a redoubt of starving yet determined rebels. It is little wonder that millenarian struggles have riveted the attention of everyday Brazilians and a host of international scholars and artists. For the most part people have been drawn to the large and dramatic turn-of-the-twentieth-century movements of Juazeiro, Canudos, and Contestado.¹ While I share this interest, I treat these three movements only secondarily and in the context of a smaller and less-known movement founded in the late 1930s by the penitent Pedro Batista.

The Pedro Batista Movement

After years of battling a mysterious and debilitating illness, Pedro Batista one day arose from his sickbed, drawn to the religious text *Missão Abreviada*. Glancing down at a drawing of Jesus praying at the foot of an angel, Batista experienced a sudden calling to return to his native Northeastern Brazil in order to preach about the impending apocalypse. Thus the middle-aged man who earlier had been a soldier, sailor, stevedore, and farmer now turned his hand to preaching.

In 1938 Batista headed on a penitential journey on foot from Southern Brazil northward where he crisscrossed the rugged Northeast backlands.² There he healed the sick and warned about the apocalypse; he also dispensed advice about attaining salvation: "He who drinks, stop drinking; he who smokes, stop smoking, practice acts of penitence, and cast off your life of sin; for the

final Day of Judgment is drawing near.” Batista also railed against ecclesiastical reforms, such as the elevation of the figure of Christ the King (*Cristo Rei*), seemingly above all other saints. Tapping into the anger and suspicion provoked by a long history of assaults on popular religious beliefs and practices, the thaumaturge blasphemed *Cristo Rei* as both satanic and a communist tool. Batista’s prophetic teachings attracted several thousand devotees among poor backlanders from the states of Alagoas, Pernambuco, Sergipe, Ceará, and Bahia. At the same time his activities riled local state and church authorities, who branded him a fanatic and charlatan and who jailed him several times for vagrancy and disturbing the peace.

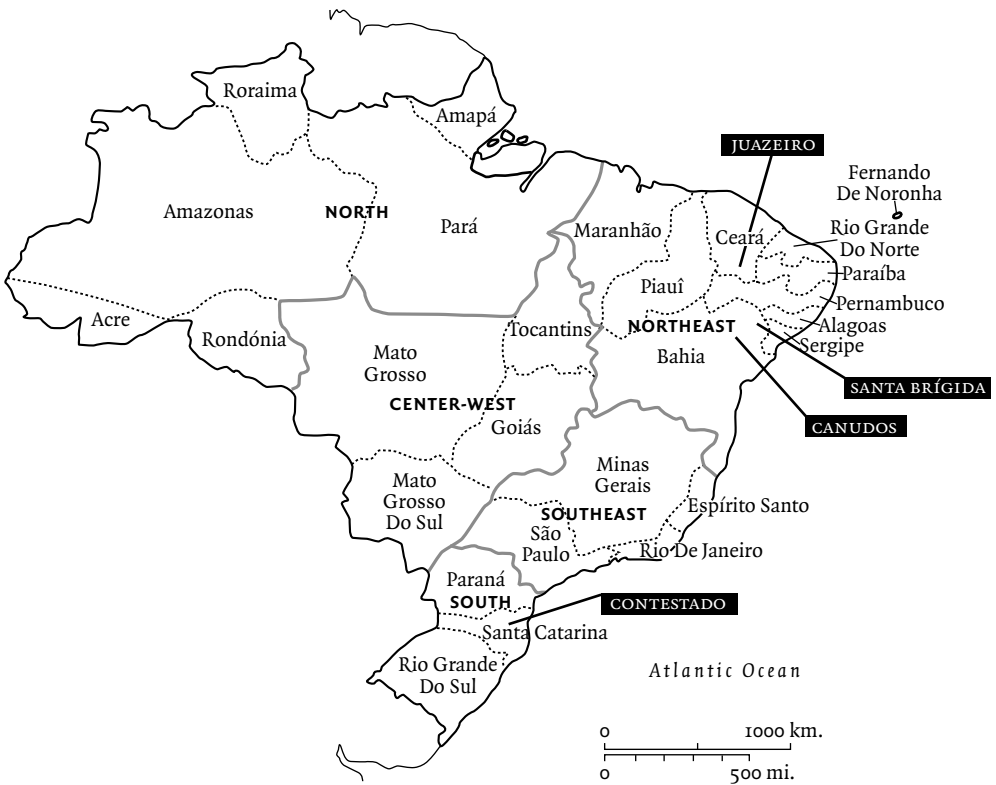
Seven years into his arduous mission, Batista decided to settle down. He chose the remote community of Santa Brígida in the northern reaches of the state of Bahia, drawn to it by a beacon of light. He was soon joined by some 2,000 followers, including another spiritual leader, Maria das Dores dos Santos (or Dona Dodô), whom some believed possessed the spirit of the Virgin Mary. The *romeiros* (pilgrims) built a holy city and prepared themselves and all humanity for the Kingdom of God on earth. They also established a prosperous farming community that by the 1950s had earned the political support and admiration of regional and national leaders alike.

Millenarian Movements

The popular mobilization organized around Pedro Batista belongs to that genre of social action classified as a millenarian movement. Such movements are distinguished by their followers’ pursuit of a perfect age (symbolized in Judeo-Christian ideology as “salvation” and “the Kingdom of God”). This ideal existence is understood to be collective (i.e., enjoyed by the faithful as a group), this-worldly, imminent, total, part of a supernatural plan, and dependent on supernatural intercession (Cohn 1970). Millenarian beliefs and actions date back to biblical times (e.g., the Maccabean revolt circa 165 B.C.) and have been recorded since then among peoples scattered worldwide.³

Brazil has a long and enduring history of millenarian actions. They stretch in time from preconquest pilgrimages by the Tupi-Guarani in search of the mythical “land without evil,” to later syncretic movements (combining native religions and Catholicism) among indigenous peoples protesting forced acculturation, through to today’s followers of such urban-based movements as the Valley of the Dawn. These latter initiatives combine spiritist and Catholic or Protestant beliefs and practices (Holston 1999).

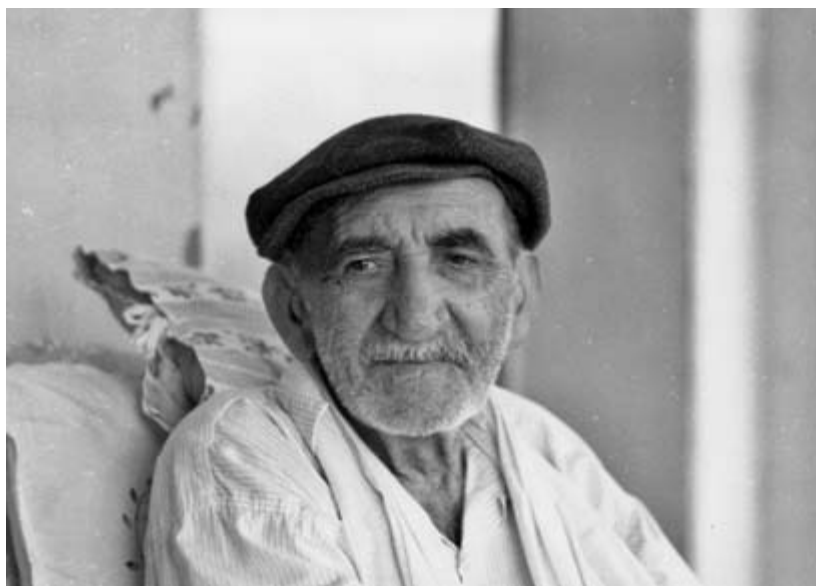
This study’s treatment of the millenarian activities in Santa Brígida, Jua-



Brazil, including Santa Brígida, Juazeiro, Canudos, and Contestado.

zeiro, Canudos, and Contestado features a particular genre of backland millenarian activity characteristic of the mid-1800s and early 1900s. Leaders of such movements commonly began their careers as thaumaturges and settled their followers in holy cities. There they prepared themselves and wider Christendom for the Final Day of Judgment and the Kingdom of God on earth.

For well over a century social scientists and other observers have sought to explain why it is that periodically, and throughout much of the world, people have mobilized collectively in pursuit of divine intervention and a perfect age. In the case of the movements featured in this study, most scholars have pointed to the profound social changes and natural disasters occurring at the time. Backlanders were repeatedly plagued by devastating droughts, epidemics, and starvation. They also suffered from economic deprivation and social upheaval occasioned by increased capitalist penetration into the rural backlands and



Pedro Batista da Silva in 1967 shortly before his death. Photo by Sérgio Muniz.

the abandonment of time-honored patronage bonds. Moreover, at the turn of the century a newly emergent agrarian bourgeoisie and its republican backers had yet to develop a hegemonic ideology capable of reestablishing meaning, morality, and security to many poor backlanders.

While it is relatively easy to see how such trying historical conditions might support the development of the first three backland movements, it is far more difficult to do so in the case of the Pedro Batista movement. By the late 1930s, when Batista began his mission, the Brazilian state had made progress in consolidating its rule and legitimating its authority. Rural dwellers had also become far more habituated to capitalist discourses and relations. Thus in 1973, when I first embarked on ethnographic research in Santa Brígida, I questioned the utility of such popular theoretical writings on millenarianism as Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels* and Peter Worsley's *A Trumpet Shall Sound*. Following the teleological logic of their arguments, advances in Brazilian state formation and economic development should have made millenarian forms of protest virtually obsolete in the Brazilian countryside by the 1930s and 1940s. Consequently, I was left to ponder why and how Pedro Batista had proven successful in initially convincing several thousand Northeasterners of the veracity of his apocalyptic message and the efficacy of his millennial mission. I also wondered what kept

followers tied to the millenarian community in the mid-1970s, some years after Batista's death (in 1967) and in the context of a highly repressive military dictatorship bent on finally transforming Brazil into a superpower. I recognized that answers to these questions would clarify why and how a further instance of backland millenarianism had survived and continued to flourish long after at least one historian of the Brazilian countryside had relegated such popular mobilization to the dust bin of history (Pang 1981–1982). I also anticipated that a study of the Pedro Batista movement might reveal inadequacies in previous interpretations of millenarianism in general, as well as in the voluminous scholarship on Juazeiro, Canudos, and Contestado in particular.

Bringing Religion In

Over the quarter of a century in which I have studied the *romeiros* of Santa Brígida (1973–2000) I have come to an understanding that does not necessarily challenge earlier explanations of this movement and its predecessors. What it does do, however, is foreground the crucial elements of religious meanings, spiritual motivations, and ecclesiastical and folk Catholic institutions. These have too frequently been overlooked or marginalized in treatments of Brazilian millenarianism.

Many authors have chosen to feature the state and the capitalist economy as the central, elite protagonists in their narratives of millennial protest (e.g., Queiroz 1965b; Facó 1972; Diacon 1991). I follow the lead of scholars who insist that the Catholic Church merits equal billing (e.g., Della Cava 1968; Della Cava 1970; Oliveira 1985; Levine 1992; Hoornaert 1997). This latter group of researchers has taken up the important task of locating the turn-of-the-twentieth-century movements amid the struggles pitting church leaders and republican politicians. Although I build on this important scholarship, analysis should properly extend back several more decades. This permits a consideration of the ways in which humble backlanders interpreted and reacted to mid-1800 ultramontane church reforms and to the Brazilian emperor's efforts to desanctify his own authority.⁴ Both moves were accompanied by modernizing initiatives in the countryside to root out discourses and practices of mystical enchantment (Monteiro 1974) — including folk Catholicism. In the wake of ultramontanism and republicanism many backlanders came to doubt their leaders' abilities both to maintain institutions and practices amenable to the attainment of individual salvation and to keep at bay the earthly evils associated with the coming apocalypse. These concerns represented not only a crisis of faith but also a breach of hegemonic understandings regarding power, order,

responsibility, and destiny—understandings that had been forged among and between dominant and subaltern classes over the centuries. Pedro Batista and the leaders of the earlier backland movements affirmed popular fears and anger over the elites' abandonment of spiritual and secular obligations. These leaders also celebrated the common people's folk Catholic beliefs and practices as efficacious vehicles to reestablish material well-being and to ensure personal and collective salvation prior to the impending apocalypse.

The claim that religious beliefs are central to millenarian movements may seem like a virtual oxymoron. Unfortunately, many scholars of millenarianism in Brazil and elsewhere have neglected to describe and analyze millenarians' religious beliefs and spiritual motivations adequately.⁵ This is likely an artifact of how Enlightenment thought became embedded in the social sciences. One of its enduring legacies is a discomfort with matters of religious belief and spiritual motivation.

The heyday of millenarian studies (and related scholarship on nativistic and revitalization movements) occurred in the 1950s and 1960s when social scientists and historians were seeking to understand "modernization" and "social change." Within that epistemological universe, religious meanings and motives were declared to be of secondary importance, if not epiphenomenal. In the hands of social functionalists, religion was the antidote for the social anomie modernity unleashed (e.g., Wallace 1956; Queiroz 1965b). In the hands of Marxist scholars, it was a vehicle for prepolitical mobilization or a mask for authentic class struggle (Hobsbawm 1959; Facó 1972). Either way religion was understood to be a stand-in for more pressing matters, and it was these latter social and political-economic issues that historians and social scientists sought to elucidate. Such marginalization of religion elides the crucial fact that in rural Brazil religious symbols and norms provided conceptual and ethical guides with which rural folk forged social and material lives. Moreover, these symbols and norms were repeatedly called on as backlanders evaluated the worth of those patrons, politicians, and clergy charged with protecting their dependents against the ravages of political unrest, economic downturn, and divine punishment.

Millenarianism as Popular Culture

Brazilian millenarianism is understood here to be a form of popular culture. Consequently, "issues of power and problems of politics" among and between members of the elite and the subaltern become central concerns (Joseph and Nugent 1994, 15). This approach rejects earlier renderings of millenarianism

that have portrayed it as originating from within backward, rural social formations and as largely autonomous from more dynamic national processes and structures (e.g., Queiroz 1965a; Queiroz 1965b). Indeed, contrary to much of what has been written, millenarianism is clearly not a primordial set of beliefs guarded zealously by marginalized Brazilians and grossly unsuited to the “modern” world. Rather, at the turn-of-the-twentieth century and for many of the decades that followed, millenarianism facilitated the creation of an alternative form of modernity. In Brazil, millenarian communities, like Canudos and Santa Brígida, represented one of a variety of “modern tracks toward the traditional [through which] the (combined and uneven) development of the modern world has created worlds of social, economic, and cultural difference” (O’Brien and Roseberry 1991, 11). The construct of alternative modernity has helped me to grapple not only with the origins of the Pedro Batista movement in the 1930s but also with its ability to accommodate and endure over the course of nearly seventy years of dramatic political, economic, and social change in Brazil.

More Than a Case Study

From one vantage point this book may be read as a case study of the Pedro Batista movement. Yet it is a case study that insists on presenting a “deep background,” one that situates the Pedro Batista movement within a relatively long historical sweep and within that genre of related millenarian movements. If this is read as a case study, it is an intentionally transgressive example. *From Fanatics to Folk* aims to unsettle that very practice that equates millenarianism with the construct of a discrete social movement. The case-study method—so prevalent in studies of millenarianism in Brazil and elsewhere—serves to constitute and legitimate our understandings of millenarianism as embodied in distinct social movements. Such movements are envisioned as both emanating out of conditions firmly rooted in fixed locations and possessing precise chronologies, usually beginning with the appearance of a messianic figure and ending with his death or the destruction of his holy city. This same spirit of spatial and temporal boundedness informs, and often limits, the analysts’ selection of those social actors and institutions featured in a given case study.

I challenge this standard approach to millenarianism in three important ways. First, I insist on envisioning and studying millenarianism in historical and spatial motion; thus my analysis of any particular episode of millenarian activity is informed by an appreciation for Brazilian millenarianism as a long-enduring yet ever-changing set of cultural meanings and social practices regarding power, identity, and destiny. I inquire why, how, and by whom mille-

narian symbols are drawn on at particular historical junctures. I also explore how the dialectic of changing social contexts and changing social actors contributes to modifications in millenarian discourses and practices.

What has been overlooked in many accounts is that millenarianism originated in Portugal as a foundational state narrative and technology of colonial rule (Myscofski 1988; Cohen 1998). Yet, several centuries later, it was transformed into a popular culture of resistance among those Brazilian backlanders who decried church reforms, the commodification of land and labor, and the intrusive actions of a centralizing state. In insisting that the brand of millenarianism championed by subaltern groups be understood as contributing to a “culture (or cultures) of resistance,” I ally myself with those scholars who generally subscribe to Marxist understandings of political economy yet seek to decenter notions of power and struggle. In doing so they, and I, stake a claim for culture as a strategic site for contestation between dominant and popular classes (e.g., Foucault 1990; Bourdieu 1977; Williams 1977). Thus in the hands of the rural poor, millenarian symbols, practices, and communities have long produced alternative and often militantly transgressive subjects, who have challenged the dominant classes’ moves toward a more homogenous and secular Brazilian citizenry. In the context of contemporary Santa Brígida, however, I question whether that strand of Brazilian millenarianism that links the four movements featured in this study and that has long fueled popular resistance can manage to retain its oppositional thrust. I raise this concern in light of the dominant reinvention of Santa Brígida and its cognate movements as sites of revered national folklore and faith. Consequently, millenarian communities that were once decried as backward and fanatical are now marketed as centers of religious and historical tourism.

Second, this study further complicates conventional understandings of millenarianism by blurring the temporal and spatial divides erected by social scientists and historians around specific movements. Instead, it charts the travels of millenarian discourses and practices across movements. It also interrogates the ways in which elite perceptions and management of older movements influenced the fates of newer ones. This revision occasions a much-needed exploration of the many ways in which particular episodes of popular millenarianism live on in the social imaginaries, cultural productions, and struggles of other social actors and their institutions—a process I refer to as “intertextuality” among movements.

Third, once most millenarian movements come to be appreciated not as finite events but as ongoing social and cultural productions, one is called on to analyze the full complement of social actors engaged in these productions. To

this end, I consider groups that have yet to be adequately brought into millenarian studies, exploring, for example, their particular roles in representing the millenarian Other. These social actors include scholars, journalists, filmmakers, and museum curators.

New analytical frameworks and narrative structures are demanded once one conceptualizes Brazilian millenarianism as a traveling cultural formation in historical motion and ongoing social production. *From Fanatics to Folk* is a hybrid text that combines cultural history, comparative/intertextual case studies (of the Canudos, Contestado, Juazeiro, and Santa Brígida movements), and ethnography. What results is an account of changing millenarian discourses and practices that combines the sweep of the *longue durée* with the detail and intimacy of ethnographic fieldwork.

This book complements in two ways the substantial body of literature that reconstructs past movements through archival research. First, most scholars have been left to glean information on the consciousness and motivations of millenarians from what Eric Van Young colorfully describes as archival “fragments” that must be “expanded” and “rehydrated” by the historian (1999, 225). Important work on the cultural history of Brazilian millenarianism has been authored by such scholars as Duglas Teixeira Monteiro (1974), Pedro Antônio Ribeiro de Oliveira (1985), Alexandre Otten (1990), and Robert Levine (1992); I have benefited greatly from these pioneering efforts.⁶ Although mindful of the dangers of upstreaming, I endeavor here to “expand” and “rehydrate” several archival fragments presented in these and other historical works by interpreting them in the light of information I have gleaned over the years while conducting ethnographic research in Santa Brígida.⁷ Second, as an ethnographer I am in the enviable position of employing interview techniques, participant observation, and archival research to describe in great detail the creation and maintenance of an ongoing millenarian community. In short, a triangulated methodology—combining archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, and the reinterpretation of secondary source materials—undergirds this study. Archival and field research were conducted during the following periods: August 1973–December 1974; April–August 1977; and the summers of 1998–2000.⁸

An Overview of the Book

Chapter 1 sets out to answer this question: how is it that millenarian symbols, once employed effectively by Portuguese conquerors and missionaries to legitimize their rule, came to be transformed centuries later into a popular discourse of resistance inspiring the insurgents of Juazeiro, Canudos, and Contestado?

To answer this question it is necessary to review instances of accommodation and struggle over the centuries between hegemonic processes of rule, such as the patronage pact, and popular forms of culture, such as folk Catholicism. The latter is understood to be a constellation of beliefs and practices that developed among nonelite Brazilians in dialogue with, and sometimes in opposition to, the official tenets of the Catholic Church.⁹ Chapter 1 also reviews the unsettling political, economic, and ecclesiastical transformations occurring over the second half of the 1800s, and it provides an interpretation of why thousands of backlanders found in millenarian symbols both a meaningful explanation of their times and guides for remediation.

Chapter 2 treats those cultural conventions and symbolic operations through which backlanders socially produced their charismatic leaders—the “sacralizing process,” as I call it. Most scholars begin with a famous—or infamous—millenarian figure (depending on the rhetorical tropes in play) already in place. In their decision to do so, we are reminded of Karl Marx’s critique of scholars who see the individual “not as historic result but as history’s point of departure” (1973, 83). By contrast, my study carefully situates Santa Brígida’s Pedro Batista, Juazeiro’s Padre Cícero, Canudos’s Antônio Conselheiro, and Contestado’s João Maria and José Maria within that historical context of millenarian resistance that fostered and facilitated their emergence as popular leaders. Chapter 2 also examines how their charisma was conferred; in no small measure it was forged out of cultural struggles that pitted humble backlanders against power holders in local government, the church, and the press.

Ever since the last half of the nineteenth century, agents of the Brazilian state and church have attempted to retake—or at the very least discipline—those spaces that folk Catholicism and millenarianism afford, lest they foster the development of alternative identities, leadership, discourses, and practices. Yet as chapters 3 and 4 document, the romeiros’ home communities remained strongholds of resistance, managing to keep alive outlawed religious beliefs and practices that were tapped and elaborated once the romeiros settled in Santa Brígida. Chapter 4 describes how the romeiros drew on popular culture to convert Santa Brígida into a “New Juazeiro/Jerusalem”—complete with its Garden of Eden, Calvary, and site of the future Kingdom of God.

Beginning in chapter 3 the book examines the tensions and negotiations within Santa Brígida, as well as between Santa Brígida and dominant institutions, over the appropriate relationship between folk Catholicism/popular millenarianism and processes of economic modernization and political centralization. As chapter 4 documents, in order to settle in Santa Brígida, Pedro Batista struck a bargain with a powerful regional political boss. The pact was

predicated on the exchange of *romeiro* votes for political protection. In short order, the boss and other agents ensured that the state came to enjoy a clear and growing presence in the millenarian community.

What is fascinating about this phase in the history of the *romaria* (community of pilgrims) is that it clearly challenges dichotomous notions that pit power holders against the popular classes and religion against modernity, and allow for little play across these categories. Chapter 4 documents that within the *romaria*'s spiritual vision there was a place for agents of the state and development technocrats. For their part, these outsiders were willing to do a fair share of "colluding." They did so, for example, by failing to register in official documents instances of millenarian beliefs and practices that they would have otherwise labeled "fanatical" and "subversive." Instead they elected to define and treat the messianic leader as if he were the equal of any conventional backland boss. He in turn returned the favor by often concealing his own and his *romeiros*' transgressive popular practices from public view and by welcoming in state institutions and agents.

Ultimately, though, there was a price to pay for collaboration with the state, as chapters 5 and 6 reveal. The state's success in inscribing itself within Santa Brígida came gradually to compromise Pedro Batista's stature as a charismatic leader among his *romeiro* followers. Moreover, the continued viability of that community as one in "a series of dispersed sites . . . where popular subjects might be formed" became imperiled (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 10). This was especially so as agents of the state managed to win over youthful *romeiros* who, in turn, abandoned the group's stringent penitential norms to embrace cultural patterns favored by the dominant classes. These chapters vividly illustrate both the allure and the fragility of charismatic authority.

As chapter 7 presents, in the latest phase of the engagement between Santa Brígida's *romaria* and agents of the church and state, one finds a reversal of sorts in the usual direction of the collaboration. As national Catholic Church leaders find their parishioners turning in ever increasing numbers to evangelical Protestantism and perceive their long undisputed position as defenders of the nation's morality and faith to be challenged (Birman and Pereira Leite 2000), they seek ways to retain their members and to infuse their rituals and theology with new excitement and passion. In this new historical conjuncture, clerics have come to reclaim popular charismatic leaders like Juazeiro's Padre Cícero and Santa Brígida's Pedro Batista and to revalue elements of folk Catholicism.

Moreover, amid fears of mass culture and globalization, nationalist elites of many countries, Brazil included, look to appropriate and revalue that which

has been labeled primordial and authentic. It is within this context, and after decades of relative obscurity, that Santa Brígida has come to the attention of official culture brokers and agents of the state (such as the ministry of culture and tourism). As chapter 7 documents, once more asserting their power to affix meaning, these representatives of dominant culture now dub Santa Brígida's millenarian discourse and folk Catholic practices as "folklore." In this way they defang these popular manifestations and remove from public view their histories of resistance and struggle.

In these officials' rhetoric and interventions one finds a romance with the folk and folklore, as if they somehow contain a form of primordial solidarity that modernity has all but stripped from the rest of Brazil. Some also raise concerns that mass media and globalization may eventually destroy all that is authentic in national culture. The crusade for "cultural preservation/rescue" (*resgate cultural*) in "remote" places like Santa Brígida is one response. Yet as chapter 7 insists, the "folk" is neither unitary nor solidary, a point illustrated by the diverse reactions and struggles within the community of Santa Brígida over their appropriation by representatives of the church, state, and media. Moreover, although some *romeiros* are more than eager to engage the state in its newfound embrace, others worry about what this partnership may mean for their continuing ability to maintain heterodox religious beliefs and practices that contradict dominant secular and ecclesiastical precepts.

A Rejection of Grand Narratives

Since the earliest days in the formation of Brazilian social sciences, researchers have been intrigued by the phenomena of millenarianism. Whether they viewed it through the lens of Darwinian positivism (da Cunha 1944), social functionalism (Queiroz 1965b; Monteiro 1974) or materialism (Facó 1963; Moniz 1978), most authors used the example of millenarian activity to make universalizing statements about both human behavior and the future of Brazil. In most cases, rural folk and their brand of religion were deemed to be either an obstacle or wholly peripheral to the march into modernity. This study joins rank with that small yet growing body of literature that challenges such binary and totalizing thinking. In this spirit, I place folk Catholicism and rural millenarians among all other coeval entities, such as the state, church, and market, which together, and simultaneously, configure Brazilian modernity (Holston 1999). And, in doing so, I showcase millenarian subjects' competing histories and alternative dispositions to modernity.

Equally problematic is that Brazilian millenarian movements are generally

portrayed as exceptional, anomalous, and pyrrhic. In contrast, my account features millenarianism over the long sweep of Brazilian history and shows it to have been both dominant discourse and popular culture—at different times the inspiration for colonial conquest, ravaged holy cities, and thriving pilgrimage centers. I argue for a revisionism that substitutes notions of millenarianism as “othered,” “traditional,” and sporadic with an appreciation of its integral, dynamic, and enduring qualities.¹⁰ Indeed, it is this very centrality of millenarian discourse that leads a contemporary historian and social critic to write, “The drama of the country rests on this contrast between dream and reality, aspiration and achievement. Paradise is destroyed, and the peaceful empire does not materialize. . . . The people do not trust their leaders and institutions but do little to make the former more responsible to public needs and to change the latter, taking destiny into their own hands. . . . Hence a feeling of frustration, of disappointment with government and institutions, and the persistence of a vague hope that a messiah may eventually bring the solution to all problems” (Carvalho 2000, 77–78).

