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BOOK REVIEW SYMPOSIUM: BEHEADING THE SAINT

BEHEADING THE SAINT: NATIONALISM, RELIGION, AND SECULARISM IN QUÉBEC. By Geneviève Zubrzycki. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. 224 pp., $105.00 cloth, $35.00 paper.

Introduction

Geneviève Zubrzycki's *Beheading the Saint: Nationalism, Religion, and Secularism in Québec* is a groundbreaking book, both methodologically and in its theoretically rich unveiling of the relation of the politics of national identity and secularizing social processes. Its contributions already have been noticed, having won the 2017 Distinguished Book Award from the Political Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association. We are pleased to be able to bring it to the attention of social scientists of religion in this review symposium.

This symposium originated in an Author-Meets-Critics Session that took place on August 13, 2017 at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion—coincidentally in the felicitously appropriate setting of Montreal, Québec. Conversations with participants following the session suggested that scholars of religion would welcome a wider dissemination of its discussions in the publication of critics' remarks. After the conference, Rhys Williams approached the *JSSR* editors with the idea of publishing a symposium about the book as a set of book reviews, and they enthusiastically agreed. Critics John R. Hall, a scholar of religion and comparative historical methods, Paul Lichterman, an ethnographer of religion and political culture, and Rhys Williams, who studies religion and national identity, along with author Geneviève Zubrzycki, present their comments below—each revised versions of the their comments from the Author-Meets-Critics Session at the ASR meetings in Montreal. We are grateful for the support of *JSSR* editor Tobin Grant, and to book review editor, Sally Gallagher, as contributors transformed their conference presentations into essays for this symposium.

The reviewers writing in this symposium establish that the book has many important contributions to offer, an appraisal with which I concur. In my judgment, this book is deserving of attention for two primary reasons. First, Zubrzycki presents a refreshing and important methodological innovation in the study of religion and national identities. Second, in studying "the process of becoming secular" (Zubrzycki 2016:17), she contributes to our knowledge of secularization in late modernity.

The book employs a visual sociology of events to amplify scholarly understanding of the rapid secularization that occurred in Québec during the "Quiet Revolution". With its legacy of an aesthetically rich Catholicism, Québec is an exceptionally well-chosen case for using visual sociology to investigate how the symbolic politics of religion can shape and even transform national identities and institutions.

Throughout the book's chapters, Zubrzycki systematically addresses the broad scholarly objectives set forth in the book's introduction. Theoretically, she aims to explain how religious and secular ideologies and practices constitute national identities as they are made and transformed. Empirically, she seeks to show the role played by symbolic politics in processes of shaping new national identities and transforming institutions. And methodologically, she proposes "a visual and material sociology of identity transformation" (Zubrzycki 2016:18). In so doing, she shows that, in Québec, secularizing processes have involved the interplay—and eventual reworking or rejection—of material religious symbols and events entwined with national identity.

The title of the book refers to a dramatic event at the 1969 parade in Montreal held during Québec's June 25 annual celebration of the nation on the Feast of St. Jean Baptiste. In the Christian scriptures, St. Jean Baptiste is the cousin of Jesus, the Messiah, and his precursor. He is venerated by Catholics, and is the patron saint of Québec. Popular devotion to the saint was widespread by the 19th century, where he represented the value of family relationships in Québec, and family as the foundation of the nation. Up through the 1960s, St. Jean Baptiste was featured in the parade that marked the annual celebration of the nation that bore his name. From the 19th century up until the 1960s, he was represented as—and by—a young boy. He was accompanied by a lamb that originally symbolized "the lamb of God" (a scriptural title for Jesus Christ). In later decades, the lamb instead came to be imagined by Québecois as a sheep, representing the passivity and inferiority of a French-speaking populace dominated by Anglophone Canada. Similarly, the boyish image of St. Jean Baptiste was contested: a weak, effeminate child was no longer an appropriate icon for a striving nation.

And so, the 1969 parade featured a papier-mache statue of a virile adult St. Jean Baptiste. That statue was toppled by Québecois activists protesting at the parade. As it fell, its head came off: St. Jean Baptiste was "beheaded," if accidentally—just as he was historically, according to the Christian scriptures. This interpretation gained broad attention through media and added fuel to the "aesthetic revolt" that helped to energize the transformation of the nation. Zubrzycki's analysis of this pivotal event is central to the book's story and illustrates the importance of attention to aesthetic contests as emotional events that have the capacity to transform national identities, religion, and their relations.

This event serves both as an organizing principle and a climax of the book's narrative, whose analyses are grounded in the history of three distinct periods: the establishment of Québec as a province of Canada, with a fusion of its Catholic and French Canadian identities in a protonational identity; the transition from French Canadianness to a Québecois secular nationalism through the Quiet Revolution during the 1960s; and the aftermath of that period up to the present, during which the need to accommodate Québec's recent immigrants' religious practices within its secularism has led to renewed contestation over the role of religion. This last chapter intriguingly reveals how Québec still struggles with a Catholic past that is presently enshrined as a "cultural heritage," but is also a painful "phantom limb" in a secular Québec that has not quite shed the continued influence of its Catholic past.

In crafting this study, Zubrzycki employs a strategy similar to other interventions in the last two decades that have effectively drawn useful concepts and methods from other subdisciplines within sociology, such as the sociology of organizations and cultural theory. These welcome efforts have yielded much new knowledge of religion. However, studies utilizing these cross-fertilizations have tended to be most useful for middle-range analysis, especially for the analyses of religious groups and movements, and have only seldom transcended this focus on the middle range. Given its focus on visual sociology and the Québec case study, readers might expect that Zubrzycki's study is also somewhat limited in its scope. But, in fact, the book reaches well beyond the middle range. In employing a visual sociology of events to understand symbolic politics and their capacity to transform national identities, she reveals religion's roles among groups and in events that help to produce macro-level social change. Because of this, her intervention has potential for broad new theory building in the study of religion. Moreover, this project is especially timely given the energetic interest in secularization, secularism, and secularity—interests prompted in part by new empirical evidence of secularizing processes in the West, such as the rising percentages of religious "nones" in the United States.

Beheading the Saint is a timely and potentially agenda-shaping book for the sociology of religion, as the reviewers in this symposium make clear. In what follows, John R. Hall, Paul Lichterman, and Rhys Williams supply additional summary and details of the book's analyses as they convey their assessments of its strengths and raise critical questions worth pondering.

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Religion, Secularity, and the Hermeneutics of Nationalism

Beheading the Saint uses the St. Jean Baptiste parade as a key theme by which to trace the interplays of religion, nationalism, secularism, and society in Québec history. During the parade in 1969, a group of protesters toppled the float with a papier-mâché statue of St. Jean Baptiste, breaking off his head—an incident that became interpreted as *beheading* the saint. This, Geneviève Zubrzycki takes to be a key historical "event" that both reflected and drove the so-called *Revolution tranquille*, or "Quiet Revolution"—that period in the 1960s when Québec shifted radically but relatively peacefully from a Catholic–French nationalism to a more secular nationalist society. This transition was complex, and one of the great things about *Beheading the Saint* is that it does not force binary meanings onto ambiguities. The book is more an exercise in hermeneutic subtlety than semiotic grid work. It artfully and coherently draws together a variety of themes: material culture, especially icons; parades; language, especially wordplay; symbolic politics; political history; visual culture; cultural tropes and their historicity; and the unfoldingness of events.

Zubrzycki's book is centrally concerned with the "shifting relationship between nationalism, religion, and secularism in a society that was, until the late 1960s, exemplary of what Charles Taylor calls the "Neo-Durkheimian" link between national identity and religion, wherein "the sense of belonging to the group and confession are fused and the moral issues of the group's history tend to be coded in religious categories" (p. 3). Analytically, the book concentrates on three topics—first, the period before the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, when initial French colonization and subsequent British and then Canadian rule shaped a fusion of French Catholic identity and French Canadian identity centered in Québec but not exclusive to it—what Michael Hechter, in his book *Internal Colonialism* (Routledge 1998) calls the "reactive solidarity" of a less powerful group that has more to gain by hanging together than by assimilating; second, the dramatic transition of the Quiet Revolution; and third, the years since, when ambivalent engagements with nationalism, religion, and secularism have left Québec with a much more ambiguous sense of nation and a curious yet important legacy of Catholicism—a set of developments that continues to unfold.

The Church promoted a national identity for Québec that was framed in Catholic religious terms, marked by an ideology of cultural survival. Under these conditions, St. John the Baptist came to figure as the iconic representative of an ethno-religious identity that was simultaneously Catholic and French. Pope Pius IX declared him the patron saint of French Canadians in North America in 1908. Importantly, people of culturally French origins were scattered all across Canada, and Québec included significant numbers of people who were neither French nor Catholic. Thus, cultural survival as an ideology left Québec without a clear basis of national identity while relegating its French population to economic backwardness and political domination by (Protestant) Canada.

The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s changed all this. The death of Premier Maurice Duplessis in 1959 was the precipitating event that yielded dramatic changes to politics, the economy, culture, and religion. New political parties emerged, private electrical companies were nationalized, the state became a key agent in promoting economic development, and a provincial welfare state was created in part through "the secularization of social services previously controlled by the Church" (p. 6). With these political and economic developments came dramatic social and cultural changes. Notably, participation in the Church declined radically and fertility rates plummeted. These events were framed culturally in relation to an abandonment of French-Canadian identity permeated by Catholicism and its displacement by a new Québécois identity centered on a secular, civic nation as a territory.

Zubrzycki traces this cultural shift through a fascinating narrative about the transformation of *La Fête de Jean-Baptiste* from a religiously infused celebration of Francophone culture to a holiday celebrating Québec as a protonation, but with decreasing attachment to John the Baptist and his Catholic symbology, culminating in the saint's "beheading" during the parade of 1969, which became the meaning that stamped the event. With St. John "beheaded," so, seemingly, was Catholic Francophone Québec.

But as Zubrzycki shows in the book's third section, Québec national identity remains contested, and the rise of secular institutions has hardly meant the demise of religion as a significant force. In part, these developments (which Zubrzycki rightly observes can hardly be called a conclusion) have been shaped by two failed nationalist referenda to assert Québec's political sovereignty from Canada, in 1980 and 1995.

In dialectical relation to these failures at sovereignty, Zubrzycki traces the persistence of religion in two main currents: first, the issue of "reasonable accommodation" of religious practices within a secular state, pertaining both to Catholicism and to other religions in the increasingly multicultural society of (especially urban) Québec; and second, the vexed issue of how to treat remnant Catholicism that materially and culturally permeates Québécois institutions and its state. She shows a double standard at work: accommodation of religious expression has its limits, which fall more heavily on Muslims and Jews than on Catholics, for under the principle of "cultural patrimony," Catholic symbols remain in place in key material locations, most notably in the National Assembly. Thus, Québec society and its polity continue to struggle with religion in ways dominated by the legacy of Catholicism. Ostensibly secular institutions are legitimated as "sacred" in a distinctively Catholic way. Zubrzycki concludes that it is important to study "'religion beyond religion,' that is, as it is imbricated in various social, political, and cultural processes" (p. 188). *Beheading the Saint* thus yields much to think about concerning religion under conditions of secularity. Because I have sometimes described myself as a "recovering Calvinist," I especially appreciate Zubrzycki's invocation of "recovering Catholics." As she rightly observes, sociologists of religion need to move beyond a narrowly Durkheimian definition in order to understand the more pervasive dispensations of religion in our era—beyond organizations, beyond institutions.

Beheading the Saint is a rich book, of importance for the sociology of religion, for studies of nationalism, as an exemplar in the analysis of material culture, icons, and social change, and for the vexed problem of secularity in relation to religion. I deeply appreciate how Zubrzycki's analytic strategy so closely links shifts in cultural symbols and meanings to specific events and social actions. Culture here is not some free-floating code: it is carried, improvised upon, and contested in everyday and public life. Potential semiotic analyses notwithstanding, Zubrzycki shows that meaningful shifts cannot be reduced to binary oppositions. As she observes, cultural symbols often have an excess of meanings potentially associated with them. The indeterminacy of symbolic shifts, combined with the multiplicities of their layerings, means that cultural shifts need to be understood hermeneutically, in their nuances and complexities. Moreover, as with Max Weber but at a local scale, Zubrzycki demonstrates that framings of meanings may have consequences unintended by the agents who engaged in events precipitating them. The protesters who knocked off the paper-maché head of St. Jean-Baptiste could not have anticipated that the event would come to be interpreted as a "beheading," but they laid a cultural track that facilitated it.

Beheading the Saint vividly demonstrates the cultural shifts that took place in relation to the Quiet Revolution. Zubrzycki shows how the Festival parade came under increasing pressure from opponents who characterized it as embodying a conservative, passive Québec. But she acknowledges that the key triggering event of change was the death of Premier Maurice Duplessis in 1959, a full decade before "the beheading." And she acknowledges the variety of political, economic, and other structural changes that transformed Québecois society during the Quiet Revolution. Yet, her main theme is cultural transformation, especially as embodied in the parade. So, there is the intriguing question: How might any causal relationship between cultural and other developments be characterized? Here, *Beheading the Saint* could be more specific. In one passage, Zubrzycki characterizes the "opposition to the religious narrative of the nation" as triggering "symbolic transformations, culminating in the beheading . . . and contributing to the demise of French Canadianness and the crystallization of a new Québécois identity" (p. 76). Elsewhere (p. 86), remaining within the realm of cultural meanings, she argues that the 1963 removal of the Lamb from the parade tableau "led *to* the dethroning and beheading." Later, in a less robust formulation, "the reconfiguration of national identity was carried out not only in institutions and through the renegotiation of church-state relations, but also through an aesthetic revolt" (p. 182). And after a few pages, we are told, "without paying attention to these multiple dimensions of aesthetic revolt it would be difficult to explain how a new national identity could dislodge another one" (p. 184). Connecting cultural shifts, even this well documented, is a challenging task. For that very reason, it will be important to reflect further on how to connect cultural transformations—in more causal or explanatory terms—to social and political transformations such as those wrought in the Quiet Revolution.

Comparative observations will help build on Zubrzycki's superb book toward a broader analysis of religion, revolutionary social transformation, and secularity. For example, there are obviously radical differences between the Quiet Revolution and the French Revolution of 1789, but a striking continuity and parallels too. The French Revolution was a dual revolution, both overthrowing the absolutist Royal state and rejecting Catholicism by imposing a resolutely secular state and a secular "religion." To be sure, many other revolutions have engaged religion. Anticipating the Soviet one, the French combined a political revolution with an anti-religious one. Earlier efforts to institute a Reformation in France had been suppressed. With the French Revolution, reformation would be eclipsed entirely. Of course, Catholicism did not disappear in France: its status was radically altered, and in ways that are paralleled by developments in Québec.

Québec, Zubrzycki emphasizes, was subjected to double colonization—first as a colony of France, then of Great Britain (and after 1867, Canada), but under the ideological auspices of French Catholicism (p. 73). In early 19th-century Québec, resistance to assimilation was led ideologically by the Catholic Church, which thereby became associated with rule by political conservatives. Thus, as in France, the Quiet Revolution was both a revolution against political rule—in this case, by surrogates who legitimated the maintenance of Québec as a "colony" of the wider Canadian state—and a revolution against the conservative religious ideology that, revolutionaries argued, sustained Québec as a "backward" society.

There is a genetic historical connection: in the wake of the French Revolution, many ultraconservative clerics fled France for Québec, presumably bolstering a sort of royal Catholicism there (p. 53). In France in 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, saying there would be *une foi, une loi, un roi*—one faith, one law, and one King. In 1908, the Archbishop of Québec City invoked Samuel de Champlain, the founder of the city, to the effect that "to be French was to be Catholic and to be Catholic was to be a better Frenchman."

Both postrevolutionary France and postrevolutionary Québec contend with what Zubrzycki calls the "phantom limb" of Catholicism, the limb no longer there that feels like it still is. Both struggle with "reasonable accommodation" or lack thereof, for religious groups in a society that has become secular, but secular under conditions in which many citizens are what Zubrzycki rightly calls "recovering Catholics."

As this brief comparison with France suggests, Zubrzycki's book opens the door to comparative study of the state, ideology, and religion under conditions of secularity. As she emphasizes, secularity has hardly eclipsed religion. What we need to learn more about is how religion articulates with other institutions and with publics under putatively secular conditions. My suspicion is that, just as Charles Tilly suggested, different societies have different "repertoires of contention," so too, culture, in this case, French-inflected Catholic political culture creates a repertoire of secularity. What will we find that such repertoires look like in other societies?

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Religion Beyond Religion

Geneviève Zubrzycki's vivid and original look at the politics of religion in Québec is a study of "religion beyond religion"—religious symbolism as it plays out in public institutions and public spaces far beyond worship settings. It is a welcome type of analysis for the sociology of religion. Until recently, much of our social research on religion had taken religion as motive or as internalized belief, essentializing religious actors in the process. Many studies now have moved beyond that default position, especially ethnographic and historical inquiries. The default understanding of religion left us with a corresponding understanding of secularity, though, that we still are working to move beyond. While many of us no longer treat religion as something borne by unitary actors who are always saturated with first-moving religious meanings, we have not dislodged the other part of the couplet: we may still treat secularity as the "other" of religiosity, the constant and absolute naught of religion. However, when we treat religion as culture, it becomes possible to see that secularity in public life may not only coexist with, but even be constituted partly by, symbols or practices that we associate with religion or religious sensibilities. This book shows us Catholic secularity, and for me that is one of the book's biggest "aha!" contributions.

Zubrzycki gives us a distinctive approach to both public religion and secularity as co-animating, cultural accomplishments. They are not compartments separated by a kind of institutional magnetic repulsion. With that as a starting point, I want to draw out two major contributions the book is making, appreciate them, and also ask a few open questions that suggest more work in the spirit of what the book does quite elegantly with the case of Québec.

One of those contributions is the method of analysis. The book's visual sociology is informed by recent writing in cultural sociology on the social power of icons—visually striking symbols that tug us emotionally and give us an experiential, sensate access to abstractions—in this case, the abstraction of "the nation." Academics are used to dealing in abstractions, looking cleverly for the concept behind what we see. If we take seriously what we *see* as a jumping-off point for analysis we are led immediately to material things and the material qualities that make abstractions such as "French Canada" or Québec real to people. I am not a practitioner of this kind of analysis, but have learned from reading it. In my nonspecialist's terms, one of the benefits of the approach is that we come to understand how materialized symbols—statues, crucifixes adorning walls, or historic church buildings of stone—do not simply reflect but help generate national and cultural identity. The material things viscerally drive the process of identification. Material icons with their textures and shapes and varied symbolic associations afford unpredictable openings for people engaging with them to feel new or revived or reoriented kinds of identification. Put simply, sights and things are powerful.

Zubrzycki gives us some of the conceptual vocabulary that we need to make good on this insight. This book illustrates why the "iconic turn" can be worth taking. Moving in that direction widens our imagination for the power of collective representations, beyond Durkheim's classic statement on the topic, helping us recognize that the aesthetic or material qualities of a symbol can matter. Different groups read different meanings from symbols and argue over them. Particularly helpful is Zubrzycki's notion of the "national sensorium," the shared, emotional force field of symbolically charged things that make national identity sensate.

As an ethnographer who does a different kind of cultural analysis, this approach is an enlightening jolt. I tried it mentally on other topics: Is President Trump an icon for people who go to his rallies—an emotionally compelling symbol whose irrepressible orange fleshiness makes real and visceral a previously taboo set of nationalist and nondemocratic representations? And that reminded me that there is the man, and the text of the man's speeches, but there also is the *rally*—the ritual. One of the things journalists picked up on during the 2016 election was that people did a Trump rally in a particular way, different from a Bernie Sanders rally or an Obama rally. These rallies engage a distinct kind of boundary drawing between we and they, a very distinct sense of what it means to participate, to be amidst a collectivity. Perhaps Trump's rallies felt more like the solidarity of the 'boys-only' clubhouse—"keep out!"—not the comraderie of a "be-in," or a noble ceremony.

This leads to one of my questions—about the cultural context of the holiday parades. The book suggests that going to the parade itself is a ritual act, one that is cultivated by media, schools, and church. So, there were the central icons of the parade, but there was also the fact of going to the parade, a ritual with its own collection of meanings for participants. The meanings of going to the annual parade, as a ritual act in itself, are part of the cultural context, a quiet but powerful part of the "national sensorium."

It should be a safe guess then that there is something recognizably distinctly Catholic about the meaningful act of parade-going, apart from the Catholic meanings accompanying the biblical story of John the Baptist or the French-Canadian or Québecois transposition of *Jean Baptiste*. The emphasis on collectivity and collective practice in Catholicism, and the focus on sacramental objects—things—is culturally distinct. This is another, quieter site at which religious meanings—the meaning of Catholic collectivity—suffuse the meaning of being Québecois, and probably inhered in this public holiday celebration even after St. John was beheaded. That collective sensibility would be part of "Catholic secularity" in Québec. It is an example of how we can find different sets of meanings working together, meanings embodied in icons and the meanings of everyday collective action.

There is more at stake than analytic nitpicking. For me, this point helps answer a question that may seem too obvious to ask, but I will ask in excessively naive terms for effect and then walk back: Why would two filmmakers risk their reputations to banter cynically and subversively on the radio about the 1969 parade? What are patriotic parades other than largely empty rituals that give us a day off from work? A broken statue in a parade may momentarily wreck the scene and make parade fundraisers' jobs harder the next year, but why would it matter that much? Why not write off those parade protesters as political hooligans, dogmatists carried away with nationalist and secularist fervor? But if there is special meaning—a Catholic meaning—in the act of collectively focused, emotionally laden spectator attention, even beyond what parade spectators would articulate easily, then it makes sense how the parade and its fragmented dénouement would become such a focus of national identity and such a productive force in rearticulating Catholic Québecois identity.

That leads to an empirical question as well as a theoretical question: Would a parade work as such a clear window onto national identity in a different cultural context in which many citizens are not as cultivated in collective ritual, not cultivated in sacraments and sacramental things? More broadly, how can we use this visual and material sociology to understand national or other collective identities in contexts where the visuals are not so striking and material objects are less a focus of attention? Put boldly—does this approach happen to comport especially well with empirical particulars of Catholic Christianity?

Another contribution of the book is the close look at how material icons or worship practices become desacralized as bearers of religious identity, and resacralized as civic sacreds—as elements of the national patrimony. We know there is something "sacred-like" about some civic symbols but it gets awkward when we try to name that conceptually with language developed for understanding religion in the narrower sense. This parallels the problem of what I call "repositioned religious ritual"—Are people doing something "religious" by prayer-giving that intends mainly to affirm a collective identity outside of designated worship settings? This is something I am studying right now. Civic sacreds, or religion-like practices beyond typically designated worship spaces, mess with our categories, and that is one reason they are interesting. They are another reason we benefit from this book's way of seeing and its fresh conceptual vocabulary for understanding religion beyond religion.

Zubrzycki uses the concept of patrimonialization to talk about the civic resacralization of religion. This is an intriguing conceptual alternative to Robert Bellah's much misunderstood concept of "civil religion." Bellah applied the concept to the United States of the 1960s, arguing that at high ritual moments, Americans invoke a generalized, not specifically Christian but Christian-informed, God—the God of presidential inaugurations, for example. Reading the civil religion essay, we can hear the voice of Talcott Parsons arguing that in modern society, once-Christian teachings became generalized values. Strikingly, in the Québec case, formerly devotional icons come back not as generalized symbols, but symbolic touchstones for historical particularity, lodged against externally imposed generality.

Patrimonialization is a concept that helps us understand how religious identity animates political projects that are about power and difference and not necessarily about belief or about claims to religious truth. Patrimonialization is national identity politics with religious icons. This is a very fruitful conceptual road to understanding religion beyond religion. Zubrzycki's visual and material approach to religion helps us grasp what makes regional, national, or ethnic particularity a magnet for collective effervescence. Though it may sound quaint to say at the moment of this writing, one may also study the icons and material textures of universalism, which have given sensate reality to different political projects in the past. Reinventing these may turn out to be a crucial if difficult task for cosmopolitan political projects now.

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Visualizing Religion in National Identity

I came to this book as an admirer of Geneviève Zubrzycki's scholarship—I read, and have cited, her first book, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (University of Chicago Press, 2006); I have used several of her articles in my classes on cultural sociology and political culture. Her concept of the "national sensorium," most developed in a 2011 article in *Qualitative Sociology*, is an important contribution to how to think about the resilience and structuring power of the visual and material in national mythologies, historical meanings, and collective politics. How the past is remembered—not just in content but also in visual and material forms—is deeply shaping on the present and the possibilities for the future.

Further, I appreciate what I perceive as the strategy behind Zubrzycki's larger intellectual project. From a focus on Poland, where a subjugated past and a contemporary nationalist movement went from state socialism to a religiously infused national identity, we now have an in-depth treatment of Québec, where a colonial and then subjugated past and a contemporary nationalist movement went from a religiously infused ethnic identity to a secularized nationalist culture. Tracing religion, politics, culture—all as expressed in material as well as textual ways—in these two cases is fascinating, theoretically important, and makes for engrossing reading. I am particularly pleased to join in this symposium with a collection of scholars who take the sociology of culture seriously, and use it to inform their sociology of religion.

This is a book, fundamentally, about processes of collective identity transformation. *Beheading the Saint* examines the aesthetic and cultural dynamics of Québec's "Quiet Revolution," wherein the collective identity of "French Canadian," embedded in an ethnic Catholicism, but not restricted to the territory of Québec, became one of "Québecois," a French-speaking, secular nation, centered enough in the province to engender two formal separatist referenda. Other issues and social dynamics were also relevant, such as concerns about economic development, and the social transformation from agriculture to increasingly urban postindustrial society with nontrivial non-Christian immigration. The provincial state is now an instrument of modernization and national development, not a sanctuary for the survival of an ethno-religious culture.

This identity transformation is shown as an historical process, and importantly, is rendered in all its messiness and less-than-complete resolution. The "old gods" of the neo-Durkheimian French-Canadian Catholic identity certainly faded under the assault by the "new gods" of a secular Québecois modernity, but they did not die as much as transform—or were perhaps reborn. The patron saint of French Catholic Québec, St. Jean Baptiste may have been "beheaded" when the papier mâché statue was toppled to the pavement in the 1969 parade, but the finality of that metaphor should not mislead about the extent to which secularism "replaced" religion. Indeed, as

Zubrzycki shows in later chapters, Catholic culture lives on—often under the cloak of a national "patrimonialization" (p. 164). Thus, a crucifix still hangs in the National Assembly, despite legal challenges, and Muslims and Jews are disproportionately inconvenienced and/or discriminated against under the secular "equality" of the law (a comparative analysis with the United States, where legal issues of "religious freedom" are currently being debated in terms of which groups are being infringed upon unfairly, could be very informative for scholars of church-state relations and religious inequality).

The transformative process is shown effectively in the book through visual and material evidence. For example, the depiction of St. Jean Baptiste was a matter of intense controversy and important transformation as a result. For decades, the saint on the parade float was a young boy with curly hair and a cherubic look, and a young lamb beside him. Critics charged that the symbol was communicating weakness and subservience, rather than as intended—representing the ethno-religious tradition in traditional ways, in which the young child had messianic implications. In response, the lamb was removed from the parade tableau, and then the final float that had the live boy on it was preceded by another float with a bronze statue of a mature male figure. Soon, the live boy was also gone, and later the bronze statue was replaced by the papier mâché figure that was vulnerable to dismemberment when hitting the ground.

This is great stuff. One can see clearly the intensity of the symbolic politics as well as the ways in which the representations change. I particularly like that after each of the book's chapters, there is a section called "Key Trope," which is a short essay with explicated visual materials. Each presents and interprets a key symbol in the construction, contestation, and transformation of Québec, motifs that endure even as they are subverted and transformed.

The four tropes presented are: family, soil, sheep, and flag. They are useful in pushing the argument forward, along with being excellent examples of using the visual in sociology. Importantly, they are demonstrations of the layering of meanings in both symbolic politics and cultural change. This particularly struck me with regard to the point about the potency of religious meanings even when overt religiousness is pushed out of the frame. Several of the tropes have both secular and religious meanings associated with them, so that lamb imagery can express both the Québecois as "sheep" who are somewhat witlessly suffering from Anglophone discrimination and exploitation, but also be the *agnus Dei* who was associated with St. Jean Baptiste. Similarly, the soil is both a reference to the agricultural heritage of Québec—and the clear moral virtue that was often appended to the traditional French Canadian Catholics who worked the land—but was also a reference to the sacred soil of the emerging Québecois nation, one that was taking on distinct territorial ambitions within Canada. Thus are the layerings of meanings skillfully presented and analyzed in the book.

The multidirection of memory and meaning, the ambiguity in and coexistence of secularity, on the one hand, and a sacralization of a diffused nationalism, on the other hand, and the materiality of collective identity, are three important things for sociologists of religion to take from this book. In the hands of a skilled analyst and graceful writer such as Zubrzycki, it makes for a convincing as well as interesting read.

But it does lead me to the principal question I had as I read the book: Can we replicate convincingly an analysis such as this one, on a case less rich aesthetically? French Catholicism generally had a rich artistic and iconic culture, and many material objects to enhance the spiritual experience of believers, and fill the data files of visual and material sociologists. There were prayers cards, magazines, paintings, live person tableaus, festive parades, statues, and so on. Would this work in a different religious culture? The cultural descendants of Calvinism and Puritanism made a point of rejecting a vibrant visual culture, just as they rejected the liturgical ritual practices. This is not to say that there is not religious culture to explore—from bumper stickers to tattoos to films and TV, etc. But the elegance of Zubrzycki's analysis is supported by the drama and beauty in the aesthetic life of French Catholicism.

Would other cases offer as convincing a line of change?

Further, part of the power of French Catholicism in Québec comes from the milieu of Québec itself—the "old world" feel of Québec City and Montreal, the deep connections to Samuel de Champlain, and the founding. It is hard not to feel the history in the buildings, the streets, and the walls of the old city. Can one get that from the Sunbelt cities of the American South and West, and their religious culture? Can the Crystal Cathedral and contemporary "praise worship" evoke a sense of history, or is its evocation of "place" in its ethos one of newness, change, and constant remaking? Sociology of religion has been overly focused on texts, words, and beliefs—a heritage, I am convinced, of our Protestant past. Too often analytic approaches that seek to find the "distinctly religious" factor in social phenomena are looking for theology, or some type of internalized spiritual orientation. We have been slow to really explore ritual, bodies, and materials as the essence of religion, not just manifest expressions of inner states. Zubrzycki shows us how beautifully this can be done; I wonder if it can be done as elegantly and persuasively on a less materially infused religious culture.

As I write this, the National Football League in the United States is roiled by controversy over whether standing, sitting, kneeling, locking arms, or some combination of those actions during the national anthem is patriotic, or respectful, an expression of individual rights, or a collective insult, about the military and their blood sacrifice for the nation, or a protest about the disproportionate violence still directed at minority communities. The layerings of meanings seem to multiply each week. Anyone reading *Beheading the Saint* will not be surprised: the material, as expressed visually, does matter. And is deeply contextual—kneeling is in one place and time understood as reverence, in other, it is a disrespectful violation, as a lamb is a symbol of pious purity or of docile subservience. Sensory experiences, from the visual to embodied action, connect the abstraction of the nation or the community to the lives of its members and their moral value. We should have more of this kind of analysis; Geneviève Zubrzycki has given us a valuable model.

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Response

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Mary Ellen Konieczny for organizing the Author-Meets-Critics Session at the Association for the Sociology of Religion last August in Montreal, and to Rhys Williams and Sally Gallagher for making possible the publication of this symposium in *JSSR*. I am, of course, deeply grateful to critics John R. Hall, Paul Lichterman, and Rhys Williams for their attentive reading of *Beheading the Saint* and their incisive comments, as well as to members of the audience for their important questions. I have greatly benefited from these exchanges and welcome the opportunity to respond in the next pages.

Causal Chains

John R. Hall specifically addressed the issue of causality in my analysis, pointing out some ambiguity in the ways I discuss causal chains. The point is well taken, and I am happy to clarify the issue here.

Causality is invoked in the book at the macro, meso, and micro levels. At the macro level, I articulate an argument that cultural sociologists often make, namely, that cultural processes such as identity (trans)formation are not merely reflective of "deeper" structural-institutional ones, but that they are constitutive of them. In the case at hand, I argue that the secularization of national identity and the articulation of a new secular, territorially-based *Québécois* identity in the 1960s was not the result of the secularization of institutions and the building of the modern welfare state in Québec, but that, rather, a new conception of the nation fueled structural/institutional reforms. I demonstrate that through a meso-level analysis of debates about the annual St. Jean Baptiste parades and the material modifications in the representation of the national icon, modifications that preceded institutional changes (see timeline on p. 88). Heated contests over Catholic

French Canadianness afforded by the annual parade in honor of the patron saint were far from being passive reflections of ongoing institutional reforms; they instead made possible the articulation of a secular Québécois identity that, in turn, provided ideological muscle for ambitious institutional reforms. Of course, the St. Jean Baptiste feast was not the only occasion to discuss and debate national identity; but it was a privileged one because of the cyclical and ritual nature of the event. At these macro and meso sociological levels, then, I privilege a Weberian model of causality that takes into account a multitude of factors, and claim that there was an elective affinity between cultural processes and institutional reforms during the Quiet Revolution.

At the micro level, my causal claim is more limited in scope but more direct: here, I show the direct consequences of specific material modifications of the national patron saint's icon from the removal of the lamb from the saint's side to the child-saint's maturation; from the severing of the saint's head to the interpretation of that incident as "a beheading" in the days and weeks that followed. I show the causal chains of signification created by a rich web of visual, material, and discursive/scriptural interpretations that led to a widely shared "reading" of the event and the resulting abolition of parades and subsequent invention of new modes of national celebration. With the material and discursive "beheading" of the saint in 1969, the macro, meso, and micro levels fatefully intersected to produce an event in the Sewellian sense, crystallizing a secular Québécois identity that had been in construction for a decade *and* institutionalizing that new identity through the abandonment of the saint as a national symbol, the abolition of the parades as a form of collective celebration, and the institutionalization of new national practices.

To be clear: I am not claiming that the parades and the beheading "caused" the Quiet Revolution. That period of transformations was in full speed already by the mid-1960s, initiated by the sudden opening of the political opportunity structure made possible by the death of Québec's premier in 1959 and the coming to power of a new generation of liberal nationalists. I am not claiming either that a new Québécois identity would not have been articulated had it not been for the protests over the parade and the final attack the symbol of Catholic French Canadianness. The definition of that new identity may not have been achieved at the same pace, with the same force, and with the same impact, however, without the debates about, and the attacks on, the saint during the parades, and without the proverbial *coup de grâce* that symbolically and then institutionally closed a chapter in Québec's history and opened a new one.

How, then, might we clarify causal relationships between cultural and other developments? How might we connect cultural transformations to structural ones in more direct causal or explanatory terms? I wish I had an easy answer to this question, or that I were able to provide a clear causal model. In analyzing complex historical processes, I find it more productive to privilege nuance over parsimony. What I see as my accomplishment in this book is the revealing of layers of meaning and identification of the connective links between the micro-cultural and the macro-historical levels. The general lesson of my work is to be found in the approach; in that attention to multiple levels of analysis. The potential cost here is that there is no single, easy, "take-away" point. But social life is messy and what I strive to do is shed light on the complexities of social processes instead of simplifying them for greater impact but at the expense of nuance.

A Visual and Material Sociology of Identity (Trans)formation

All three critics point out that the case of Québec is especially well suited for a visual and material sociology of identity (trans)formation, but wonder whether that specific type of cultural sociology would be as powerful to understand collective identities in places where aesthetics—say, visual and material culture—are less central than it is in traditionally Catholic communities. Rhys Williams ponders whether and to what extent it would work for the analysis of Protestant societies, which tend to emphasize texts more than images, and Paul Lichterman for societies where the past is not as materially present as it is in Québec or Europe. In other words, what is the comparative purchase of my approach, and can it be exportable to other cases?

I take my critics' concern as an indication of the approach's fruitfulness, since they are convinced of its analytical power for the case of Québec. My concept of the national sensorium was first developed in my work on Poland (2011), and is certainly transposable. The national sensorium consists of the visual depiction and embodiment of historical narratives and national myths in cultural forms, the built environment, and the landscape. National narratives are communicated to, and experienced by, individuals through a variety of material practices: by *wearing* a flag pin or a political button; *carrying* a placard, a cross, or a torch at a political demonstration; *draping* oneself in a flag; *moving* through a landscape dotted by places of martyrdom or victory; singing the national anthem at a sporting event; and *eating* certain foods on specific holidays, social actors sensorially experience national narratives and myths, rendering the abstract idea of the nation concrete. As they become real and close—embodied—these myths often acquire political traction and mobilize groups. Within a certain sensorium and aesthetics, elite constructions can cue paradigmatic stories and sentiments, *or their subversion* in iconoclastic acts. I argue that it is the relatively shared set of stories, images, and material symbols, and the disagreement as much as the consensus evoked in response to them, that generate "a nation"—however, thinly coherent its culture may be.

Such practices and processes are not specifically Catholic; the United States is a historically and "culturally" Protestant nation, and it has a highly developed national sensorium, which mixes secular and religious symbols in its own distinctive way. My companion concept of aesthetic revolt likewise is useful to capture the dual process whereby social actors discursively contest and materially rework iconic symbols, granting those symbols new significations that push forward the articulation of new identities, and provide momentum for institutional reforms. In today's United States, the American national sensorium is being challenged on two sides: from ultranationalists who adopt the rituals and symbols of white supremacy, borrowing from the KKK, Nazi Germany, and Trump rallies to create their own national aesthetics; and from African Americans and their white supporters who kneel during sporting events' national anthem to protest racism in American society and implore fellow citizens to face up to America's promise of equality and fairness. Both are examples of aesthetic revolts that have acquired political traction and are shaping nationwide discourse about Americanness. The point is that national sensoria differ from nation to nation. And even radical iconoclasm or aesthetic "emptiness" is a crafted sensorium, and speaks. It is up to the analyst to identify the key sites, symbols, and rituals of national reproduction/subversion in the societies they study. Would a *parade* be as significant an analytical lens in other cases? Probably not (aside from other obvious cases like Ireland, where parades celebrate ethno-national identities, commemorate violent events, *and* become the platform for political protests). In the United States, football games might well be the social space where the nation "happens."

Religion Beyond Religion

We know that the cultural is political and that the political is cultural. The challenge is to show the specific ways this is so, and to explain their manifold hybrid articulations. Instead of looking only at institutional rearrangements, I show that the relationship between national identity and religion is mediated by, expressed in, and reconfigured through the engagement with material things that impact the senses, and the performance of rituals in concrete sites and during public, and highly publicized, events. As Paul Lichterman pointed out, I look outside the familiar spaces of religion, directing my gaze at the *politics* of religion far beyond worship settings. By examining the process of *patrimonialization* of religion, that is, the discursive, material, and legal ways in which religious symbols, artifacts, and practices are sacralized as secular elements of the nation and its history, I show the continued significance of religion under conditions of secularity. If we were to look only at more "traditionally religious" spaces in Québec, we might very well miss that religion still matters, as well as how and why it does. I hope that *Beheading the Saint* provides useful cues for the sociology of religion.

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