

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religions and Political Elites in Latin America: Analysing Youth Political Elites through Religious Technologies of Government in Mexico

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Based on findings from empirical research in Mexico, this paper proposes a historically-reflexive governmentality approach for the study of religions and political elites in Latin America. It argues that the ideological frameworks of political elites are not only influenced by political and economic criteria and institutions but also by meta-institutional *religious technologies of government* that can be traced back to the colonial period and the operation of a Catholic governmental regime in Latin America. The paper discusses the case of the peculiar colonial-era *technology of charity*, its transformations, and its traces in the political rationality of members of youth political elites in 21st-century Mexico.

Keywords: Charity; Governmentality; Latin America; Pastoralism; Political elites; Religion

Introduction

This paper takes up the challenge of analysing empirically (Higley 2018) the complexities of political elites with regard to a contextual or explanatory factor that tends to be almost systematically neglected: religions. In his classical work C. Wright Mills (2000) addressed religions, and particularly (Protestant) religious affiliation, as one of the identity traits which, alongside race and 'nativity' ([1956]2000: 60), was systematically found among power elites. He also touched upon religiously inspired schools as sources of values that contributed to the 'psychological and social affinities' between members of power elites (2000: 281). However, religion was not necessarily Mills's *explanans*, it was rather one of the *explananda* –and not a crucial one. In Mills's view, '[r]eligious, educational, and family institutions' are 'decentralized areas' shaped by economic, political and military power elites; whereas governments, armies and corporations 'shape' modern life, the churches, schools and families merely 'adapt' to it (2000: 6).

Half a century after Mills' observations, religions and elites have remained mutual strangers in many specialised scholarly works. Except for rare exceptions (e.g. Aldridge 1995), religions tend to be absent in studies of elites, or end up as secondary references at best. In a work on elites in post-1989 Eastern Germany (Gergs, Hausman and Pohlmann 1997: 227), the surprisingly high incidence of religious affiliation among members of some political parties in Eastern Germany is only touched

upon. In an analysis of elites in historically Catholic Poland (Wasilewski 1997), the Catholic Church as a factual elite and the Catholic Church's contribution to Poland's 'democratic movements' in the 1980s and 1990s is only mentioned in passing (1997: 14–16) –neither significant nor secondary roles are attributed to the Church or to Catholicism regarding the ideology or practices of pre- and post-1989 Polish elites. In a study of elites in Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, France and Japan (Hartmann 2007), the author cites other scholars and their references to religion – e.g., Karl Mannheim's functional distinction between political, intellectual and religious elites (Hartmann 2007: 23). However, the author's analysis is exclusively focused on the influence of educational institutions over the configuration of elites and the empirical and theoretical links between elites and class. This analytical choice is understandable, especially if it refers to the historically secular societies of Northern Europe where religiosities may represent individual and sporadic practices, and organized religions and clerical elites have a rather low political profile (Bruce 2011; Voas 2009; cf. Aldridge 1995). However, religious elites and an array of relations between religions and "non-religious" elites can be readily observed in other socio-geographical regions. While not being the only world region where such relations take place, Latin America is a case in point.

The section below presents a classification of the literature that has addressed the interplays between religions and elites in Latin America. Three types of literature are distinguished: works that address the clergy or church representatives as elites themselves; studies that analyse religious or religion-related organizations as enabling spaces for the operation and socialization of non-religious elites;

and the literature that discusses in more or less depth the influence of religions and religious values on (“non-religious”) elites’ moral codes, public practices and ideological orientations. After underlining the institutionalist research approaches in these literature types, the paper then introduces an alternative research approach –the study of the counter-intuitive contents, and the non-evident influences, of religions on political elites through Foucauldian religious technologies of government. To start the construction of this approach, the paper discusses critically Foucault’s governmentality, the genealogical meta-institutional perspective embedded in the latter, as well as its religious *pastoral* component. Drawing on this theoretical and methodological framework, the case of religious technologies of government – more specifically the technology of charity – in colonial (16th–19th centuries) and early-postcolonial (19th–20th century) Mexico is discussed. After this, empirical evidence on both the transformations of the technology of charity and the technology’s traces in young members of political elites in 21st-century Mexico is presented. The conclusions highlight the analytical advantages of studying the counter-intuitive *governmental* contents, and the resulting non-evident meta-institutional influences, of religions on the ideological frameworks of Latin American elites, through centuries-lasting and transformable religious technologies of government and self-government.

Religions And Elites In Latin America

The works on historical and contemporary elites in Latin America also tend to convey the idea that power emerges, almost exclusively, from the economic, political, and cultural elites and the secular political institutions that have been nationally or transnationally active in the region (Albala 2016; Mellado 2015; North and Clark 2018; Rovira 2018; Sabato 2007; Simoni, Moreira and Malta 2016). However, every now and then scholars interested in Latin American elites have also addressed religious organizations, religious elements, and religious elites themselves as main study subjects.

Clerical and Religious Elites

Some scholarly works in Latin America have granted attention to clerical elites in Latin America. Although some of these works may boil down to a collection of critical notes on the Catholic (e.g. Perez 2010) and Evangelical (Werz 2007: 11) high-rank clergy, other works analyse the influential profile and activities of clerical elites in more or less depth. Godinez (2011) reviews different authors’ categorizations of the Mexican Catholic bishops’ socio-political orientations and asserts that the Catholic high-rank clergy in Mexico is best classified into a ‘Pre-conciliar’ group that ‘rejects the modern world’;¹ a ‘modernizing’ clique that agrees on the tenets of the Second Vatican Council; and a ‘progressive’ (2011: 34) section that supports the principles of both the Second Vatican Council and the Theology of Liberation. In a preliminary descriptive analysis, Mendez (2015) points out the common educational background of three Argentinean bishops –all of them graduates of the *Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires* – and presents an exploration of their

personal profiles. From a more general perspective, Perez-Diaz (2007) describes the Catholic clerical ‘hierarchy’ (2007: 73) in Latin America as a rather moderate and conservative body concerned about keeping a united front, showing proper loyalty to the Vatican’s authorities and extending its appeal to the rich and the poor vis-à-vis the challenge of emerging Protestant churches.

Other works go beyond descriptions of clerical elites and analyse the latter in more depth regarding the clerical elites’ relations with extra-religious fields and other elites. For instance, Motta (2016) discusses the intra-elite ‘conditions’ (2016: 12) that allow for the construction of power within the Argentinean Episcopal Conference (AEC) – the clerical-political organization that represents the Argentinean Catholic bishops. From a social network analysis approach, the author studies the location of bishops within the AEC and suggests that those internal locations allowed some of the members to gain formal positions in the organization. In Argentina as well, Algañaraz (2015) analyses the mutually beneficial alliances between the Argentinean dictatorial regimes of the 1960s–1980s and the Catholic clerical hierarchy as verified in Argentinean Catholic universities. While those dictatorial regimes gained ‘social prestige’ (2015: 56) and partial control of the private higher education field, the Argentinean Catholic hierarchy, and its representatives in the managerial posts of private Catholic universities, were given benefits such as a simplification of the paper work needed to establish other universities as well as the opportunity for university professors to perform as heads of ‘key sections’ (2015: 55) within the regimes. In a more extensive study, Camp (2002) analyses the formation and operation of five specific samples of what he regards as elite groups in Mexico: politicians, military officers, intellectuals, businessmen and Catholic clerics. The author’s analysis is insightful for it offers a glimpse of the internal and rather informal operations of Mexico’s functional elites. Interestingly, Camp acknowledges the influence of the Catholic clergy in political events and elections, but concludes that elite clerics form detached networks that do not influence elite politicians, military officers, intellectuals or businessmen.

“Evangelical” elites in Brazil have also been studied by scholars. Borges (2009) asserts that the number of Evangelical members of the Brazilian state-level deputies – i.e. elected members of regional legislative chambers who are openly affiliated to Evangelical churches or are pastors of the latter themselves – have been steadily growing since the 1980s. However, the author points as well that the increasing number of Evangelical officials in the chamber has not yet produced by itself a ‘political identity’ cohesive enough (2009: 158–165) as to back up the establishment of an Evangelical political party. Countering Borges’ findings, Machado and Burity (2014) assert that the Brazilian Pentecostal leaders, members and non-members of the Brazilian parliament, who get involved in politics in Brazil do display a discursively ‘hegemonic’ (2014: 613) Pentecostal front, while justifying their intervention in politics as a matter of institutional survival. Lacerda (2016), on the other hand, is more sceptical of the ‘political power of Evangelicals’ (2016: 2).

This author notes both that the Evangelicals in Brazil are in fact underrepresented as a (growing) religious minority by the proportionally low number of Evangelical members of the parliament, and that empirical studies on the actual 'political behaviour of Evangelical politicians' (2016: 19) in the legislative chamber are yet to be carried out.

Religious Organizations and Elites

Whereas several works by Latin American scholars have addressed institutions such as universities as spaces for the 'political socialization' (Gene 2014: 99) and 'career development' (Mellado 2015: 165) of elites in Latin America, a smaller number of authors have addressed religious institutions or religious groups as one of the means to elite members' early networking and socialization processes. Werz (2007), for instance, notes in passing that Catholic private schools and universities across Latin America, stand out as institutions where members of academic elites 'form long-lasting bonds' (2007: 210). In a more focused empirical study, Donatello (2011) finds that Catholic organizations, such as the Businessmen Christian Association (*ACDE, Asociación Cristiana de Dirigentes de Empresa*) in Argentina, provide members of the business elite not with axiological tools but with a space for social legitimation, access to networks and support for career development. Rodriguez (2015) analyses the education of intellectual and professional elites in Catholic institutions in the first half of the 20th century in Argentina. This author notes that Catholic institutions such as the *Universidad Católica Argentina* did not have 'a leading role in the training of [Argentina's] ruling elites', though they indeed represented a socialization space for 'the most powerful Catholic elite' in Argentina from the 1950s to the 1980s (2015: 18).

All in all, the relations between religions and elites in Latin America are not only pragmatic relations devoid of axiological content. Gené reminds us that studying elites implies shedding light on the latter's 'symbolic frontiers', that is, the conceptual notions elite members use to 'classify objects, people, practices [...] time and space' (2014: 108). Drawing on her research on business elites in Central America, Bull (2014) points out the role of religions not only as resources that can be wielded by elites, but also as constitutive elements of the 'ideological frameworks' that shape the 'mind-set' (2014: 123) of the elites' members.

Religious Ideologies and "Secular" Elites

The adoption of economic and political ideologies by clerical elites (e.g., Romero and Bustamante 2016: 90–92) is doubtless as relevant as the strictly political and economic 'orientations and norms' (Weßels 2018) explicitly adopted by secular elites. However, the aim of this section is to refer instead to the literature that addresses religions as part of the ideological frameworks of non-religious 'secular' elites. Besides studies that touch upon some religious traits in the socio-political identity of elites (Mills 2000: 60; Clark 2018), some works that discuss more substantially the different roles of religions and religious values in the elites' ideological frameworks can be found in the specialized literature. The latter include both historical and contemporary empirical cases and different theoretical approaches.

Giorgi and Mallimaci (2012) analyse the *cadres* of professional and intellectual Catholics in high-rank positions of General Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorial regime during the late 1960s in Argentina. The authors discuss the influence of the Catholic Social Doctrine, and its subsidiarity principle, on the communitarianism that was the base of some of the social policies implemented by the aforementioned Catholics, during their terms as heads of key sections within the regime's Ministry of Welfare. Based on Michael Mann's approach to religions as one of the sources of social power, Undurraga (2012) notes how the power of the business elite in contemporary Chile is based not only on the economic and political strengths it built during Pinochet's dictatorial regime but also on a 'symbolic power' partly sustained by the elite's religious 'moral conservatism' (2012: 217). Undurraga links such conservatism to the influence of the Opus Dei, and one of its sister organizations, the Legionnaires of Christ. This author also draws on Thumala's (2007) analysis of Chilean business elites.

Thumala finds in conservative and progressive strands of Catholicism 'an essential part' of the Chilean business elite's most common 'ideas, behaviour, criteria and values' (2007: 24–5). In the author's view, these are not only abstract and notional contributions from religions; the above actually legitimize the business elite's belief in, and enactment of, a civic (family values-oriented and market-driven) 'mission' aimed at society's 'betterment' (2007: 28; see also Thumala 2010: 17). To argue this the author analyses empirically her respondents' religious beliefs and values as well as the contemporary history of the Chilean Catholic Church. As part of the latter, the author argues that the adoption of leftist positions by one segment of the Chilean Catholic Church during the second half of the 20th century, brought about a counter-movement on the side of the economic elites, which felt the need to re-appropriate a conservative agenda (see also Thumala 2010: 18–20) hand in hand with the conservative values of the Opus Dei and the Legionnaires of Christ.

From a more ambitious historical-Weberian perspective, Romero and Bustamante (2016) analyse the ruling elites in Chile. These authors argue that the deployment of neoliberalism in Chile in the last decades has been affected through a 'strictly economic foundation' as well as a 'religious base' (2016: 98). To argue this, the authors discuss the ideological role of the Opus Dei in the development of ruling elites in Chile. The religious '(neo)integrism' of the Opus Dei is traced back to both the 'traditionalist ideologism' (2016: 92) of France in the late 18th century and the 'Spanish colonial mindset' (2016: 93) that, according to the authors, transformed into the national-Catholicism of the Spanish *franquista* regime in the 20th century. The 'interior ascetics, methodical self-regulation and the sanctification of [one's] work' that the Opus Dei preached, performed as values that 'incentivized the business spirit' (2016: 96) of the Chilean ruling elites. The authors conclude that the Weberian thesis on the Protestant (Puritan) ethic and the birth of capitalism in Europe can be applied to the case of the 'cultural ethos of elite Catholicism' and its role in the 'consolidation' (2016: 99) of Chile's neoliberal economy.

Alternative Perspectives?

Weber's classic work on Puritanism, Calvinism and the *Geist* of Capitalism is indeed a pioneering study. Despite the criticisms it received after its publication (Giddens 1976: xxi–xxiii), the work still stands as an original reference to analyse the ideological influence of religions in modern societies. Weber's thesis allows for the understanding of religions and religious values not as epi-phenomena determined by (Marxist) material factors but as relevant causal factors that may shape fields of social reality that lie far beyond religions themselves. In this view, religions are causal 'forces' whose 'unwished-for' (Weber 2005: 48–9) effects may impact the political and economic fields, elites included, not after decades-long but *centuries-long* historical processes. Weber's pioneering work, however, also comes with caveats. Though acutely sensitive to interpretations, meanings (Adair-Toteff 2015) and individuals' intentions (Ekström 1992), his analytical gaze –and that of many Weberians (Wendt 2017) – is strongly oriented to institutions and processes of rational institutionalization (Eisenstadt 1968; Anter 2014). When compared to Foucault, as elaborated below, Weber stands too close to religious institutions and their 'religious ideas' (Weber 2005: xxxix, 18, 32, 102, 125). His explanatory units are Luther's statements on 'the calling', Puritanism's this-worldly ascetism, and Calvinism's doctrine of pre-destination. In later works, Weber (1968) is concerned about the institutionalization of a sociological concept of charisma, which he indeed adopts, and adapts, from religious sources too.² In addition to this – and contrary to Foucault's methodological attention to local and neglected knowledges that will be discussed below – Weber's methodology privileges those sources with 'universal recognition', literally 'the best spirits of his time' (Weber 2005: 103). The result is a pioneering historical-reflexive (Szokolczai 2006) approach that on the one hand excels at pointing, or suggesting, the counter-intuitive extra-religious effects of strictly religious ideas and, on the other hand, overlooks the counter-intuitive, the neglected (e.g. governmental) ideas and practices within religions themselves.

One of Hartmann's (2007) critiques of studies on elites is timely here. For this author, a focus on 'formal contacts' and 'tangible' power sources and mechanisms – such as those analysed by Weber and the authors cited above (see also Weßels 2018) – may lead to partial accounts of elites, since 'a good share of the real power relations at work' (2007: 39) end up being overlooked. Even if the analyst is sensitive to the historical forces in the elites' backgrounds (Romero and Bustamante 2016) and the elites' informal practices (Camp 2002), the power relations that Hartmann points may still go unnoticed. Through a more sophisticated argument, Lukes (2005) also reminds us about the problems of institutional visibility and materiality in contemporary approaches to power-related phenomena. According to Lukes, the first approaches to power phenomena in contemporary societies privileged the analysis of decision-making processes within institutions. After critical assessments of this method were aired, some scholars switched to analysing social conflicts in which the blocking of decision-making and the shaping of

explicit values were verifiable. However, 'the most insidious' type of power works, in Luke's view, by preventing 'people [...] from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things' (2005: 28). Lukes sees power working in situations not only of open conflict and explicit interests but also in situations where powerless persons or groups hold 'half-articulated or unarticulated grievances or aspirations' (2005: 81). In Lukes's view those persons or groups whose unarticulated aspirations are shaped are the powerless ones. However, the authors referred to at the beginning of this sub-section do suggest the possibility of *the powerful*, or the members of ruling elites, holding not only articulated religious values but also unarticulated religious notions, as well as an unarticulated or absent awareness of how religions have shaped their selves and their ideological frameworks. Foucault's theorisations on (Christian) *religion as governmentality* is also consonant with this view of the 'non-obvious' (Lukes 2005: 102), meta-institutional effects of religions on individuals, groups, their (secular) rationalities and practices.

A Foucauldian Approach to Religions

As part of his "radical" view of power, Lukes also discusses the contributions of Michel Foucault. Lukes is sceptical of both the early Foucault, who proposed an 'ultra-radical' (2005: 88) discourse-based theory of power as a micro-physics from which individuals cannot escape, and the late Foucault, who conceived a more agentic reading of power through a 'governmentality' that did well in pointing out the presence and extent of the 'effects' (2005: 96–98) of power in societies, while falling short in the account of variations and detailed inter-governmentality dynamics. All in all, Lukes acknowledges the novelty of Foucauldian approaches and their productive impact on researchers who have taken up the challenge of applying Foucault's theorizations on power and governmentality to analyse specific empirical realities –see for instance Rose and Miller 2008; Saar 2011; Withworth and Carter 2014, to name a few.

To begin the construction of this Foucauldian theory-empirical reality linkage as to the case of elites, the two sub-sections below expand on the Foucauldian genealogy, the concept of governmentality and the latter's oldest and often neglected component: pastoralism –or religion as technology/ies of government. Once this theoretical-methodological frame is introduced, the section below expands on how a Foucauldian approach to religions as technologies of government can be applied in empirical studies of political elites' ideological frameworks.

Foucauldian Governmentality and Genealogy

As Foucault explicitly stated, his later theorizations on governmentality were meant to go beyond observable institutions and institutional conventions (cf. Weber 1968, 2005). A governmentality perspective, 'entails going behind the institution and trying to discover in a wider and more overall perspective what we can broadly call a technology of power' (Foucault 2007: 117). It also requires

the analyst to observe phenomena beyond the 'ideal functions' (e.g., sovereignty) and the 'ready-made object' (e.g., crime, madness) put forward by institutions themselves (2007: 117–8). What the analyst observes instead is the composite field of forces and different regimes of truth that have fed over the centuries the formation of contemporary institutions, their functions and their objects. This analytical focus is embedded in Foucault's definition of governmentality as the exercise of government upon individuals by means of both 'governmental apparatuses' and 'a series of knowledges' (2007: 108); that is, specific techniques and strategies that beget multiple forces as well as the logics that not only legitimize but construct the latter.³ In order to observe and investigate these elements, the analyst has to carry out not conventional (critical or otherwise) historical analyses but *genealogies*.

Drawing on Nietzsche's criticism of traditional history and metaphysics, Foucault (1977) asserts that a genealogy equates to an "effective history" that neither seeks nor assumes a 'natural' origin of things (1977: 142–3), a 'continuous development' or a given 'destiny' (1977: 153–4; see also Bevir 2008). The effective history in/of a genealogy seeks instead the discontinuities, the 'haphazard conflicts' and the contingent 'profusion of entangled events' that control the 'forces operating history' (1977: 154–5). In Foucault's Nietzschean view, this effective history/genealogy also leaves aside the concern for 'the noblest' and 'the purest' of traditional approaches and focuses instead on the 'nearest' (1977: 155; cf. Weber 2005: 103) things upon which history is imprinted, and the 'naïve' and 'local' knowledges that official histories neglect (Foucault 1980: 82). It is this non-normative approach that Foucault deploys in his genealogy of governmentality, which led him to assert that the modern state's governmentality can be traced back to a 'diplomatic-military model', the early practice of 'police', and the 'Christian pastorate' (2007: 110, 122).

Foucault's Genealogy of the Pastorate

In Foucault's counter-intuitive view, the Christian pastorate is a governmental model, or a collection of discursive-operational principles to govern people (2007, 1982), and for people to govern themselves (1993, 2014). Such pastoralism can be traced back to its ancient Greek and Hebrew antecedents, though its core was developed over the centuries by the Catholic Church after the latter's institutionalization as state religion from the 4th century on. The main principle of pastoralism is the practical use of salvation as a strategic governmental teleology (Foucault 2007: 166–7; see also Foucault 1982). From his readings of *monastic* (Zavala-Pelayo 2016a) rules and treatises, Foucault suggests additional pastoral principles, such as a 'reciprocal responsibility', or the responsibility of the community for having a good destiny and the responsibility of the pastor for taking care of the community (2007: 168, 1982: 783), and a confession-based 'analytical responsibility', where it is the pastor's obligation to be knowledgeable of the thoughts and actions of the individuals within 'the flock' (2007: 170). Other governmental pastoral principles include the 'transferability' that makes

the faults and good deeds of the flock to be considered the shepherd's as well; and an 'alternate correspondence' that equates to the use of the pastor's virtuous actions and weaknesses in the upbringing of individuals (Foucault 2007: 170–185). In later works, Foucault switches his analytical angle and discusses the technologies of pastoralism that constitute the/an agentic 'subject' (1982: 777). These 'self-technologies' (1993: 203) include a reflexive production of truth by an individual who has to scrutinize himself, ponder his/her thoughts and actions, and then reveal a truth based on these self-reflexive exercises conducive to individual agency (Foucault 2014). Although Foucault discusses at some length the 'counter-conducts' (2007: 201–215) that disrupted the deployment of pastoral government upon individuals in medieval and early post-medieval Europe, he also notes ambitiously that the pastoral principles and (self-)technologies above represent respectively the 'threshold of the modern state' (2007: 165) and the background of 'Western subjectivity' (2014: 285).

Religious Technologies of Government and Political Elites in Latin America: The Case of Mexico

Studying political elites in Latin America through Foucauldian *religious technologies of government*⁴ requires, first and foremost, a dedicated genealogy of the specific pastoral technologies of government and self-government that developed in this region. The subsection below describes the religious technologies that operated in a specific region in colonial (16th to 19th centuries) Latin America: central New Spain, or what today comprises the territory of Mexico.⁵ These paragraphs underline the deployment of *charity*, not as a Catholic virtue or discreet activity but as a Foucauldian technology of government and self-government. The post-colonial continuities and ruptures regarding this particular technology are noted too. The last sub-section describes the transformed persistence of the colonial-era technology of charity in the political-governmental rationality of young members of political elites in 21st-century Mexico. These descriptions are based on directly- (Zavala-Pelayo 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017) and indirectly-related (Zavala-Pelayo 2018) research findings that have been discussed in depth elsewhere.

Religious Technologies of Government in Colonial and Early Post-Colonial Mexico

In Mexico, as elsewhere in Latin America, the formation and operation of pastoral technologies of government began with the colonial regime of government that was displayed, and partly developed *in situ*,⁶ by the Spanish Catholic Church and its organized legions of regular (missionaries) and diocesan priests in the then central New Spain. In this view, colonial Catholicism is conceived not only as an all-embracing programme for "civilising" evangelization but also as an operative regime with distinctive *techniques* and *logics of government*, parallel to the governmental apparatus implemented by the Spanish – and later Creole – civil authorities.

As would have been noted by Foucault, this colonial pastoralism deployed intensively and extensively the teleology of salvation as a governmental discourse (e.g. Acosta [1589]1952; Lorenzana 1769; Zavala-Pelayo 2016a, 2016b). Such a colonial-salvific religious governmentality also included distinctive technologies of government that Foucault would not have observed. It has been argued elsewhere that the pastoral technologies active in New Spain included a 'ceremonial strictness' and a 'performative correctness' (Zavala-Pelayo 2016a: 182–3). The former demanded a strict fulfilment not necessarily of the self-production of truth that Foucault pointed, but of the apparently trivial exterior requirements of Catholic rituals, whether ceremonial objects, clothing or the display of the rite itself. In addition, the regime's performative correctness commanded the precise bodily performance of the religious rituals and practices – questions that had to be asked to confessants included, for instance, '[...] When in church [...] do you kneel properly?' (anonymous 18th-century *confesionario*, cited in Zavala-Pelayo 2016a:184).

Another technology was the regime's *governmental and self-governmental charity* (Zavala-Pelayo 2017: 815–6; Zavala-Pelayo 2018: 6–7). Charity has been a praised Catholic virtue and it was a behavioural principle constantly upheld in missionary (e.g. Acosta [1589]1952) and clerical (e.g. Lorenzana 1769) colonial discourses. More importantly, and counter-intuitively, such a virtuous principle of charity became a technology of government and self-government through its centuries-long and systematic use in the government of individuals and communities. Put to work asymmetrically by religious agents, this technology displayed modesty and humbleness together with strategic gift-giving, in order to gain the trust of the natives and make them 'lay their necks under Christ's yoke' (Acosta [1589]1952: 399). On the other hand, a self-governmental, and more horizontal, variant of this technology was instilled in the Indigenous, Creole and Spanish populations through discursive-symbolic tools such as the Catechisms' virtue of charity and charity-related Catholic commandments, that were displayed hand in hand with the regime's salvationist discourses (Lorenzana 1769: 392–3; Zavala-Pelayo 2017: 815–6). Such a salvific mutual charity was routinely practiced in the daily-life of individuals through organizations such as *cofradías*, that is, proto-welfare community organizations that thrived in colonial Latin America and combined devotion to Catholic saints with assistential benefits for members and their families –e.g. survivor's pension. The priest/missionary's asymmetric charity thus joined the mutual charity instilled in the population and together constituted the Catholic regime's governmental and self-governmental technology of charity. The ceremonial, bodily and charitable technologies displayed by the Catholic regime did not operate without resistances, however they became changing and complex ensembles of technologies (Zavala-Pelayo 2018) for the actual government and self-government of individuals and whole communities.

After independence from Spain was declared, the new Mexican state's parliament passed a series of secular bills in the 1850s, collectively known as Reform Laws, to terminate the public-administrative and legal-economic prerogatives

of the Catholic Church (Gonzalez and Gonzalez 2008). After this, the Catholic regime and the every-day operation of its distinctive colonial-era technologies doubtless changed. The Lerdo bill (1856) had a particular effect on the regime's technology of charity. This bill disentitled the Catholic Church from the ownership of properties that had no religious functions. Although the bill exempted '[...] hospitals, hospices, markets, correctional and beneficence houses' (de Codes 2002: 1077), several properties owned by charitable religious orders were bought up by lay individuals (Bravo 2015). After additional secular bills were passed, hospitals formerly ran by Catholic religious orders were also taken up by the state (Fajardo 2012). However, while these transfers occurred at the (meso) institutional level, the governmental and self-governmental *techniques and logics* – techno-logy – of charity did not necessarily undergo substantial changes at the micro (individual) and macro (societal) levels. Both the asymmetric charity (priest-believer) and horizontal mutual charity (believer-believer) systematically performed and instilled by the Catholic regime during three centuries of colonial government transformed yet did not cease.

The mainstream liberalist historiographies that have addressed Mexico's post-colonial developments in the 19th and 20th centuries have tended to overlook the different yet persistent role Catholic organizations and Catholicisms in general had in public affairs (Arrom 2007; Hale 1989; see also Levine 2014). Less normative studies of this convulsive historical periods depict relevant landscapes regarding the technology of charity. As Luque (2003: 77) notes, the post-Reform Catholic Church in Mexico urged lay Catholics to 'offer their lives as testimony of charity' as a counter-move. As a consequence of this counter-offensive lay charitable associations were established. Among them, a case in point is the 'Ladies of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul'. Founded in 1863, this association, rather overlooked by mainstream historiography, sought to 'visit the poor [who are] sick and procure for them spiritual and physical relief', while 'encouraging' those poor sick, 'to embrace their sickness and resign themselves to the will of God' (Arrom 2007: 457). This and other 'elite philanthropy' (Arrom 2007: 446) organizations started to fund 'high-profile private charitable initiatives' with a 'civic piety' base (Blum 2001: 15). The operation of the technology of charity in the 20th century did not stop either. In this century, a number of charitable activities 'to Christianize society' (Aspe 2008: 157) were carried out by the Mexican Catholic Action (MCA) and its sub-organizations. By the end of the 1950s, the MCA had about five hundred thousand members working and volunteering in unions, mothers' associations, drop-in meals programmes, nurseries, schools for workers, 'wardrobes for the poor' and 'charity work for hospitals' (Casillas cited in Barranco 1996: 64). In the second half of the 20th century these activities were overseen by the *Secretariado Social Mexicano*, the organization meant to disseminate the Catholic Social Teachings, including its classic tenet of virtuous charity (Barranco 1996: 65; see also Navarro 1996: 208; Levine 2014: 25). The result of these orchestrated programmes and actions was the persistence of a partly transformed governmental and self-governmental

technology of charity in 20th-century Mexico's cultural and socio-political fields. More importantly, traces of such technology can still be observed in 21st-century Mexico.

Religious Technologies of Government and Youth Political Elites

In order to trace the trajectory of the colonial-era technologies touched upon above, an empirical study of members of an apparently secularised population group – members of 'youth political elites' (Cruz 1990; Kovacheva, Nanov, Kabaivanov 2017) – was carried out in Mexico from 2014 to 2016 (Zavala-Pelayo 2015, 2017). These research subjects were selected through a positional sampling method (Hoffmann-Lange 2018) aimed at interviewing the incumbent heads of political parties' youth wings in Mexico. Thirty two high-rank members – i.e. local, regional and national coordinators, secretaries and presidents – of left-, centre- and right-oriented youth wings were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires,⁷ which included questions on the respondents' religious beliefs and values.

The analysis of the latter confirms on the one hand the genuinely secular professional identity of the respondents as well as their relative rejection of the Catholic Church's prohibitionist stance on sexual and reproductive rights.⁸ On the other hand, the analysis also suggests that one of the religious values, or self-governmental criterion (Foucault 1993, 2014), these individuals still entertain, regardless of the political party they are affiliated with, is literally 'helping thy neighbour'. However, the most striking finding was the empirical link between this prevalent charity-oriented Catholic commandment and the respondents' understanding of their public roles as professional politicians.

The majority of the respondents understood their role as politicians partly as helping people, either in terms of displaying strategically calculated mutual help or in terms of putting the politician's 'virtues' to work for the needy. An interviewee who described his professional role in the latter terms also referred to both attending 'Catholic groups' when he was younger and learning there 'about being helpful to society' (Male; national-level coordinator). Furthermore, a respondent from the centre-oriented youth wing who first asserted that politicians should above all 'help the rest of the people', later stated, in explicit terms, that the Catholic religious value she agrees with 'and must be applied in politics, is helping your neighbour' (Female; national-level coordinator). Referring to the idea of strategic help above, another respondent noted openly that the 'ideas [...] of peace, of helping each other [...] that Catholicism has' can be 'translated into' the country's 'political systems, even the bureaucratic systems'⁹ (Male; national-level coordinator).

The empirical findings above do not merely suggest that the respondents' religious self-governmental criterion of 'helping thy neighbour' has substantially shaped – together with the strictly political principles of solidarity and community building that their parties uphold differently – their understanding of the politician's professional role. What these findings also suggest, I argue, is that the institutional-organizational (meso) expressions of the colonial-era religious technology of charity were

indeed altered after the post-Reform Laws period; however the technology's combined core – i.e. its practices (techniques) at the *micro* level and its discourses (logics) at the *macro* societal level (Zavala-Pelayo 2017) – was kept alive by other secular and semi-religious institutions. The disposition of Mexico's young members of political elites, such as those reported above, to see the deployment of 'help' or charity-associated 'virtues' as part of their professional political roles can therefore be explained by utilizing a critical governmentality perspective on religions as technologies of government and self-government, and by analysing these (self-)technologies' centuries-long persistence and transformability alongside the parallel influence of more visible secular ideological forces. Further empirical studies of political elites in Latin America cannot take at face-value the findings discussed above, but can indeed adopt a parallel theoretical-methodological perspective to analyse instances of political elites and religious technologies of government in other Latin American regions.

Conclusions

Elites are complex aggregates, more or less cohesive, of individuals, groups, relations, networks, resources, and, more importantly, porous 'political rationalities' (Rose and Miller 2008: 58). The above cases of elite members of Mexico's youth wings suggest that even those political elites that portray themselves as secular and whose strictly political and economic ideological determinants have been extensively studied, represent also elite individuals and groups differently influenced by religions. Just as economic ideologies, theories of democracies or political cultures at large do (Weßels 2018), religions and religious values can also shape the elites' ideological frameworks. The study of such religious influences can doubtless be carried out from institutional historical-Weberian (e.g. Romero and Bustamante 2016) or social-networks (e.g. Motta 2016) perspectives. An insightful and productive theoretical-methodological alternative is the one embedded in Foucault's later genealogies of governmentality and pastoral technologies of government. A critical pastoral-technologies approach allows the analyst both to go beyond the institutional dimension, its visible causality (Lukes 2005) and its 'purest' empirical references (Foucault 1977: 155; cf. Weber 2005), and to grasp instead the counter-intuitive regimes of governmental micro practices (*techniques*) and governmental discourses (*logics*) that shape the 'specific patterns of elite beliefs and reasoning' (Semenova 2018: 75) in non-evident ways.

This micro-macro perspective enables analysts to observe the trajectory of centuries-lasting technologies of government in the societies' religious dimensions and to study, through the individual's fully articulated religious values (Thumala 2007, 2010; Undurraga 2012) or partly articulated (Lukes 2005) religious beliefs (Zavala-Pelayo 2015), the criteria of self-government by which those religious technologies operate (Foucault 1993). The case of the transformed persistence of the counter-intuitive charitable technology above is one example among other possible ones. Further studies on other colonial-era religious technologies of government – e.g., those with a *bio-political* (Ruidrejo 2015) or *geo-political* nature

(Zavala-Pelayo 2018)— and their changes and continuities in contemporary Latin America, can doubtless contribute to more comprehensive empirical studies (Higley 2018), and fuller understandings, of the region's political elites.

Notes

- ¹ Unless otherwise stated, citations from works originally published in Spanish are my translations.
- ² Weber borrowed the concept of charisma from the religious charisma discussed by German historian and theologian Rudolph Sohm (Derman 2012; Riesebrodt 1999).
- ³ In other passages, Foucault defined governmentality, firstly, as the ensemble of “institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics” that configure and naturalize the power needed to run a territory, its political economy and its “apparatuses of security”; secondly, as the “tendency” of the government's apparatus and methods to override “all other types of power”; and, thirdly as the process “by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became [...] gradually ‘governmentalized’” (2007: 144). Saar defines governmentality concisely as government through both “material” and “epistemic” mechanisms (2011: 39).
- ⁴ Foucault (1993, 2007) used the term “technology” to refer only to those the subject applies to him/herself. Rose and Miller (2008) distinguish between programs of government (rationalities) and technologies of government (techniques). Following the latter authors, I use the term technology (*techno-logy*) as a term that conveys more efficiently in semantic terms the simultaneous work of operative techniques (*techno-*) and discursive rationalities (*-logies*) of government and self-government.
- ⁵ The whole territory of New Spain comprised the area that today extends from the south of the United States to Central America.
- ⁶ The Americas was not the only territory where the Spanish Catholic Church converted non-Christians. Soon after the ousting of Muslim king Boabdil from the Kingdom of Granada (south of Spain) by the Catholic kings Ferdinand and Isabella in the late 15th century, the Spanish Catholic Church implemented a large-scale programme of (re-)evangelization to convert the Muslim population and thus consolidate the Christian re-conquest of Spain (Lafaye 1997: 47–56).
- ⁷ The respondents were interviewed in 2015 and at the time of the interviews were part of the youth wings of the then largest right-oriented (*Partido Accion Nacional*, 12 respondents), centre-oriented (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, 10 respondents) and left-oriented parties (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, 10 respondents). The representativeness of this elite sample is not statistical but illustrative (Mason 2002). The selection of the interviewees included both direct and snow-ball selection. The interviewees were promised anonymity; hence, their identities are disclosed neither in published nor unpublished research papers.
- ⁸ In this regard, the majority of respondents from the right-oriented party showed support instead of rejection.

- ⁹ For more detailed accounts of the respondents' religious beliefs and religious-political criteria see Zavala-Pelayo 2015, 2017.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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