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A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion

Edited by Janice Boddy
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A Companion to
the Anthropology
of Religion

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This edition first published 2013
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Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to the anthropology of religion / edited by Janice Boddy, Michael Lambek.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-67332-4 (cloth)

1. Anthropology of religion. I. Boddy, Janice Patricia.

GN470.C66 2014

306.6—dc23

2013012703

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: From top: Spirit house, Thailand © Prisma Bildagentur AG / Alamy; Religious symbols © Sebastien Desarmaux / GODONG / Godong / Corbis; Russian icon, The Synaxis of the Saints of the Kiev Caves, 19th century © Fine Art Images / SuperStock.

Cover design by RBDA.

Set in 10/12.5 pt Galliard by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited



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Preface and Acknowledgments

The anthropology of religion is a complex field and its practitioners a somewhat independent lot. The subject does not break down easily into a series of neatly alphabetized titles or bounded bibliographic entries, nor do the practitioners readily distribute themselves as “experts” on a variety of distinct but commensurable topics or subfields. In fact, we generally rebel against the sort of encyclopaedism that is sometimes expected of us, complicating or subverting any straight recounting of “the facts” with models, theories, hypotheses, arguments, and debates, and pausing skeptically before straightforward description or comparison to rehearse matters of epistemology, ontology, and semiotic ideology. Simultaneously, we complicate and subvert these models, types, or theories, confronting them with particularities and immediacies of place and practice, never letting consistency get in the way of the singularity of the ethnography or history, nor permitting the individuality or specificity of topics to unduly disfigure the holism of social life. Writing about religion as anthropologists it could not be otherwise.

We presented a fairly open-ended invitation to our contributors to this volume. We asked them to engage in vigorous appraisal and renewal of the field. We requested non exhaustive review articles but essays that advanced original arguments and addressed the field in a serious and critical way. We suggested and briefly described the following ten broad topics: *The nature of our subject or object of inquiry. The origins and history of the field. Religion and thought. Religion, politics, and law. Religion, creativity, imagination, and aesthetics. Religion, time, and history. Religion, person, self, and gender. Religion, the transcendent, and the ordinary. Religion, the environment, and the future. Religion and disciplinarity.* We added specific suggestions to many of the contributors. In most cases we received something somewhat different

from what we had expected. The result is not a series of consistent chapters, each written to the same model on a set of clearly demarcated and evenly distributed topics, and it is certainly not comprehensive of what is, in fact, a very extensive and rapidly moving field. But we think it is all the better for that, truer to thought, practice, experience, and the complex and heterogeneous articulations of religion with politics, law, economy, language, history, art, kinship, ethics, and memory.

All the chapters are original to the volume with the following exceptions. Michael Lambek, "Varieties of semiotic ideology" is appearing simultaneously in a slightly extended form in *Words*, edited by Ernst van den Hemel and Asja Szafraniec (Fordham University Press); Birgit Meyer, "Mediation and immediacy" has appeared in *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 19 (1) (2011): 23–39, copyright European Association of Social Anthropologists; and Andrea Muehlebach, "The Catholicization of neoliberalism" has appeared in *American Anthropologist*, 115 (Sept. 2013).

Because this is a Companion, not a thematic volume, nor the last word, we have not urged the contributors to refer to each other's chapters, nor do we attempt a synthesis here, or even a review of the contents. Lambek's first essay serves as an introduction more to the subject than the volume. We have grouped the chapters into sections but these are somewhat arbitrary. The essays themselves relate to each other topically and thematically in multiple ways and can be read in any order.

The various chapters draw their insights from ethnographic fieldwork carried out across a wide range of places, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, D.R. Congo, Egypt, England, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Italy, Korea, Madagascar, Malaysia, Niger, Peru, Poland, Russia, Sudan, and Vietnam. There are many more places unrepresented. In line with current trends in the field, Christianity is probably overrepresented, albeit in diverse ways. China and Japan are sadly missing, as are accounts of the once relatively autonomous societies in the Pacific and elsewhere that for a long period formed the core of the discipline and the basis for so many wonderful ethnographies. The *Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd edn, 2008) provides a window into this work as well as a selection of some of the major theoretical interventions in the field.

What we have here is the sort of Companion who is a steady but idiosyncratic friend, someone who can be counted on for their knowledge and wisdom but also for their leaps of imagination and spontaneity, their capacity to surprise, provoke, and increase the enjoyment of shared interests. Like a good human companion, this book does not merely accompany or proffer a helping hand but offers original insights and points in new directions. It serves less as an authority than as a genial provocateur.

In planning the volume we set for ourselves the condition that we would bring our contributors together to present first drafts of their chapters. Accordingly, we sought funds and, with the assistance of a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, we were able to hold two very successful workshops, one at the European Academy in Berlin and the other at the Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto. We could not have done this without the help of our good friend and colleague Heonik Kwon. Not only did he come up with the wonderful venue in Berlin, but he also very generously supplied a significant portion of the funding through the Academy of Korean Studies' international research program,

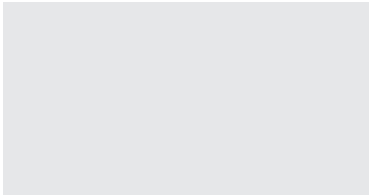
Beyond the Cold War, that he directs. Throughout the process, Heonik has matched his inspirational scholarship with enthusiasm and support. We have also received extensive support from our respective home institutions, from the Centre for Ethnography and the Canada Research Chair fund at the University of Toronto Scarborough (Lambek), from the Chair's fund, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto (Boddy), and from Trinity College of the University of Cambridge (Kwon).

In addition to the various contributors assigned to discuss one another's essays, we had the benefit of the following discussants: Kai Kresse in Berlin, and Ashley Lebner, Ruth Marshall, Todd Sanders, and Donna Young in Toronto. We owe a special acknowledgement to Bruce Kapferer, an active participant at Berlin and, as always, an inspiring, constructive, and imaginative interlocutor.

We have been ably assisted by Letha Victor, who participated in the Berlin workshop and the proofing of the final manuscript; Seth Palmer, who helped arrange the Toronto workshop; and Matthew Pettit, who attended to editorial matters and composed the index. All three have stellar careers ahead in anthropology. We thank also Rosalie Robertson, Julia Kirk, Jennifer Bray, Allison Kostka, Ann Bone, and Sue Leigh for editorial guidance and patience. Jackie Solway, as always, has offered much good advice and companionship.

Last but not least we thank our contributors, each of whom has produced a learned, forthright, and provocative intervention in the conversation that is the anthropology of religion.

Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek



What Is “Religion” for Anthropology? And What Has Anthropology Brought to “Religion”?

Michael Lambek

The study of comparative religion has flourished only when men were secure enough in their own convictions to be unusually generous. They might be Jesuits or Arab savants or unbelievers, but they could not be zealots.

Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*

The anthropology of religion is a field of great intellectual challenge and adventure. In this essay I try show some of the reasons why.

THE CHALLENGE OF RELIGION

As Winnifred Sullivan (2012) justifiably notes,

It is a commonplace in the academic study of religion to observe that the word religion is manifestly conditioned by the history of its use and that it is deeply problematic, epistemologically and politically, to generalize across the very wide range of human cultural goings-on that are now included in this capacious term. To speak of religion is to elide and conceal much that is critical to understanding the deeply embedded ways of being often denoted by the short-hand term “religion(s).”

Rather than begin by asking what religion is as an autonomous object in the world or as a distinctive human phenomenon, and therefore how best to define it or know it when we see it – the better to explain it and its relations with other objects – it is more cautious to start with the question: What has religion been for anthropology? I take anthropology to be a particular tradition of inquiry, a long conversation that is not homogeneous or fully consistent. From this starting point one could then compare what religion has been for neighboring disciplines (like religious studies); for various theoretical traditions (like Marxism); for the state (or various states, like France or Indonesia) via law, administration, and local history; for people who call themselves Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc. One could add people who do not necessarily identify their ideas and practices (with respect to ontology, reproduction, ethics, theodicy, eschatology, etc.) as “religion” or as “a” specific “religion” (as adherence to a specific token of a generally recognized type). Such a journey would return us to the starting point, and is in fact the path along which the understanding of the subject for anthropology changes or grows in a slow hermeneutic spiral of part and whole, insider and outsider perspective, ethnography, analysis, comparison, reflection, and more ethnography.

All the challenges of translation and the tensions between interpretation and explanation, structure and experience, rationalism and relativism, and universalism and particularism that mark anthropological understanding in general find their sharpest expression in the subject matter that has fallen under the umbrella of religion. Such challenges indicate the importance of and recurring interest in religion as a subject for anthropology. If at one level “religion” seems to cover expressions of a universal human or societal need, inclination, function, product, capacity, or reality, at another level there appear to be no sharper divisions among human beings than those indicated by “religions” – whether in quarrels over orthodoxy or orthopraxy evident in the European wars between Catholics and Protestants, the conflicts between Sunni and Shi’a, the disdain that has often characterized both Christian and Muslim views of those outside the Abrahamic purview, or, most saliently for the anthropological project, in the tension between religion and science (Lambek 2006).¹ That is because “religion” invokes or connotes the deepest but most particular truths, irreducible realities, and most urgent and uncompromising values according to which people (including anthropologists) live or want to live, such that people who see the world or live differently can appear wrong, stupid, unenlightened, immoral, misguided (or conversely, purveyors of higher truths and values that escape us), thereby as challenging, threatening, or simply interesting – and ripe for anthropological understanding. Anthropology struggles with simultaneously recognizing, clarifying, contextualizing, accounting for, interpreting, deconstructing, and transcending such differences, divisions, and prejudices. It is certainly not free of particular conceptions and misconceptions of its own, yet is mindful of the need to remain standing on its own two feet.

The anthropological standpoint is only one of many but that is no reason to be unduly anxious or insecure about its value. It is based on a balance of observation, understanding, analysis, auto-critique, and cumulative comparison. It is not part of the anthropological standpoint either to “go native,” to embrace all mysteries, or to reduce them to neuroscience or anything else. Anthropologists cannot go native precisely because we deal with so many natives who differ from each other. Moreover, the very idea of “going native” is likely to be a naively nonnative (romantic or new-

age) inclination in the first place and hence something of an oxymoron.² Hence our standpoint can only be at some remove, what one might call benevolent skepticism (a perspective that overlaps with much philosophy). The study of religion, like ethnography more generally, allows for the pleasure of discovery, including the tasting of other human worlds, but it also entails the sort of ascetic discipline that Weber foresaw. We observe the passions of others without fully committing ourselves to them; our own unselfconscious ceremonies take place not in churches or temples or on mountaintops, but at conferences and seminars; our discipline exists in acts of refereeing and being reviewed. Participation in our family and community rituals is tinged with the irony that comes from holding a double perspective.

"Religion" then for anthropology has sometimes been the compartment or cover term for all that is most difficult to understand or appreciate about other people (and perhaps oneself) yet, at the same time, possibly the most obvious; hence it stands as the greatest challenge for both rationalists and romantics, calling forth both intellectual and imaginative generosity, in Benedict's sense, and a certain ascetic rigor. Religion as a subject of anthropology serves as a theater in which the strongest or most dramatic scenes of anthropological interpretation are played out. Hence it should be of interest even for those anthropologists not concerned with the substance of religion *per se*. But of course this argument risks exaggerating the importance of anthropology over its subject matter; it is religion, not anthropology that exercises the imagination of most of the world's population. And it is the whys and wherefores of that exercising that in turn exercise anthropologists.

For anthropology, religion implicitly informs and underpins the worlds in which people live, enabling the *habitus* (everyday practice) to run its course, to go "without saying." It also becomes the explicit subject and object of people's passion in marked rituals and other forms of enactment, creation, contemplation, and devotion. It is "culture" in its purest or most rarified form, both deep and relatively invisible and also frequently refracted in constructions that explicitly distinguish it from the everyday or the commonsensical. It is for the sake of what we now call religion that ancient Egyptian and Mayan pyramids, Gothic cathedrals, Hindu temples, and Buddhist monasteries were constructed, and elaborate masquerades and beautiful music composed and performed. In the name of religion people receive, recite, and cherish scripture, perform daily ablutions, prayers and acts of penance, make sacrifices, donate alms, scarify their children, renounce sex, limit food or other creature comforts, seek visions, and set forth on arduous pilgrimages. Many of the great dramas of human life have been generated or carried out through what we call religion – and it remains an open question whether or to what degree the professional "callings" of modern life, in science, the arts, business, sport, or politics, might be seen in overlapping terms. Religion is also inherently complex; for participants it can be at once ordinary and extraordinary, practical and beautiful, necessary and ideal, comforting and frightening, absolutely clear and deeply mysterious, the site of the deepest certainties and of the most disturbing doubts.

The (history of the) anthropology of religion can be conceived in terms of how it has addressed the challenges of understanding. In the first instance, this is a matter of how anthropologists have positioned themselves vis-à-vis the object of study. That is to say, how they have conceptualized "religion," and how they have conceptualized their own position in relation to it. There is also the question of how scholars have

distinguished difference – the salience, boundedness, coherence, and specificity of such categories as the “world religions,” the “axial age,” the Abrahamic religions, Christianity (or Islam), Protestantism (or Sunni Islam), Pentecostalism (or Sufism), etc. – and what lies outside each and all of them. Terms such as “primitive religion,” “totemism,” “the savage mind,” “polytheism,” “magic,” “shamanism,” “paganism,” “fetishism,” “indigenous spirituality,” and TAR (“traditional African religion,” a term I heard recently in Mali), each have problematic connotations as, for other reasons, do formulations like “Malagasy religion” or “Sakalava religion.” A particular challenge has been how to address those constellations of thought and practice that do not self-consciously describe themselves as “religions,” as commensurable tokens of a common type, and yet seem to share certain features with those that do. Is “religion” a category whose criteria of membership include self-conscious recognition as “a” religion? Are the criteria to demarcate “religion” from what is “not-religion” or one religion from another objectively discernible? In what sense is religion a natural phenomenon or “kind”?³ Or ought we to see “religion” as a polythetic class in the sense that there is no single criterion universal to all members? Do such criteria hold equivalent weight (are there weaker or stronger tokens of the type, those closer to or further from a prototype)? Where, for example, would we place astrology?⁴

In place of substantive definitions, is religion better seen as an ongoing function of society or mind, rather than a distinct object within the former or discrete product of the latter?⁵ Is it society’s means or moment of recognizing (or misrecognizing) itself, as Durkheim argued, or perhaps of motivating its members, as Weber proposed? Is it culture’s means or mode of establishing truth and anchoring reality, as suggested variously by Berger and Luckmann, Geertz, or Rappaport? Is religion social hierarchy’s means of asserting its legitimacy and mystifying the workings of power and exploitation, as conveyed in the Marxist tradition? (During the Cold War, the famous Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdős impishly referred to God as The Supreme Fascist.) Is it the inevitable product or by-product of the workings of the mind, whether of fantasy and projection, as in Freud, or as elaborations of the rational impulse to distinguish, classify, compare, mediate, order, and unify things in the world, as in Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, or theorists of rhetoric or cognition? Is it the places where the mind acknowledges the limits of its own understanding, or is it the recognition of authentically transcendental experiences, the acknowledgment of manifestly extra-human sources of well-being (and misfortune), beauty (and horror), power (and abjection), goodness (and evil), truth (and perplexity)? Is it only when some set of these diverse functions conjoin in perduring symbols and practices or manifest in ritual performances, or when the mental products and experiences coalesce and are rationalized and stabilized in scriptural traditions, material artifacts, or formal institutions that we speak, or should speak, of “religion”?

INCOMMENSURABLE MODES OF INQUIRY

Answers to all these questions are sometimes contentious or at least confused. This is in part because anthropology entails a mix or conjunction of diverse epistemological standpoints and goals, including at minimum what philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1990) described as “three rival versions of moral inquiry”: the encyclopedia, the

genealogy, and the tradition. Encyclopedia has been the most straightforward; from such a perspective we simply define or recognize religion as an object or natural kind and then describe and classify its manifestations. The exercise begins as a kind of natural history but moves increasingly toward hypotheses to explain religion's presence, structure, force, etc. Today the encyclopedic approach flourishes in multiple endeavors, including attempts to accurately depict and compare particular religions, religious traditions, or religious movements historically and ethnographically, theorize the growth of secularism or fundamentalism sociologically, account for how ritual works anthropologically, explain the subjects of belief cognitively or how we come to believe developmentally, trace the progress of religion on continua construed in evolutionary, biological, and historical terms (e.g. Bellah 2011), or test various hypotheses experimentally.

The genealogical approach is skeptical, as characteristic of much continental philosophy, in which the categories themselves are interrogated and social constructionist accounts are paralleled by deconstructions. Here the main influence for anthropology has been Foucault; conjoined with postcolonial theory, arguments concern the ways in which Western European notions of "religion" as an object or objects to be admired or despised, governed, and studied were formulated with respect to the colonial encounter and the rise of the modern liberal state. Religion thus emerges as a product of discriminations in knowledge, law, and the workings of power. It is religion and religions apprehended in this sense, genealogists argue, that underlie encyclopedic approaches (even as the early encyclopedic accounts of religion outside Europe helped consolidate Europe's understanding of itself). To phrase this more positively, such an approach constitutes a historical ontology (Hacking 2002) of religion and religions. Within anthropology, it is paralleled by a movement skeptical of "domaining" practices (McKinnon and Cannell 2013), in which religion is distinguished from economy, politics, medicine, or kinship and in which the public distinguishes the religious from the profane or the secular.

Finally, the approach MacIntyre calls tradition is an interpretive and more relativist encounter between traditions, none of which is explicitly understood as either epistemologically superior to or under direct hermeneutic suspicion by the other. One can use such an approach to understand the world of a non-Western society or a past era, but equally to explore the relationship between religious and scientific outlooks within the West or elsewhere. "Tradition," then, and as it is used throughout this chapter, is not the hidebound opposite to "modernity," but rather an ongoing, historically layered set of conversations and discursive practices; modernity itself is constituted by (even if corrosive of) multiple traditions no less than are nonmodern societies. A hermeneutical inquiry might challenge any radical separation between religious and rationalist perspectives, hence, in conjunction with a genealogical inquiry, also question the foundations of a specifically anthropological, secular approach.

In brief, and to oversimplify, encyclopedia is rationalist, descriptive, and explanatory in inclination, tradition is relativist and interpretive, and genealogy is skeptical of its own (and all) terms. It is hard to imagine anthropology without any one of them.

Whereas MacIntyre sees these as mutually exclusive alternatives, they are in practice inclusive within much anthropology, often within the work of a single anthropologist or the course of a single monograph. They may be described as incommensurable to

one another, that is, as not fully meeting on every point, rather than as contradictory. Anthropology moves between them and is, in fact, the work of doing so. Anthropology juxtaposes and balances incommensurable perspectives rather than progressing definitively and irreversibly from one paradigm to the next (as proponents of each have at times polemically asserted). In effect, anthropology qua tradition is one in which each of these modes of inquiry is drawn into conversation with the others (Lambek 2011). Moreover, it is clear that proponents of any one perspective will not necessarily think alike; objectivism, hermeneutics, and skepticism each come in many forms.

It is evident that the basic definitional question – what is religion, or how do we recognize religion – will look different from each perspective; indeed, the very concern with producing an external, objective definition is particular to the encyclopedic stream.⁶ Genealogists might argue that the social context that makes particular definitions possible is one of liberalism or secularism, in which “religion” *becomes* an object (shifting historically, as it were, from ground to figure) (Asad 1993, 2003). But from the perspective of tradition there would then follow an interest in subjecting liberalism and secularism to the same sort of deep hermeneutic investigation we apply to religion. Whether this is the purview of the anthropology of religion or of some broader field cannot be answered without returning to problems of definition that generated the argument in the first place. Insofar as it is an investigation of “modernity” or throws modernity into question, it partakes of what has been called the postmodern but might better be seen as metamodern or immodern (Lambek 2013). In any case, it is an advance within the same intellectual tradition of social theory (of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, etc., now invigorated by postcolonial thinkers) that takes modernity as a condition to be understood. I will have more to say about secularism below.

None of the preceding arguments mean to suggest that we cannot judge between the relevance of any given perspective for addressing particular goals or between better and worse arguments, depictions, projects, or theories within each perspective. Moreover, once inadequate accounts are exposed, we replace them with ones we risk claiming are better – truer, more accurate, nuanced, contextualized, complex (or simpler), etc. This has been a mission of anthropology. We must continue to pursue it, even as we also pursue the genealogical path.

If the anthropology of religion does not consistently advance in the manner or image of biomedicine or mathematics, nevertheless, there have been major achievements. By and large, our understanding of ideas and practices both within and outside the scientific, Christian, Abrahamic, and world religious spheres has improved enormously. Misperceptions have been replaced by more perceptive accounts, homogeneous portraits by recognitions of heterogeneity, monovocal by plurivocal, oversimplicity and stereotype by complexity and nuance, and occasionally overcomplexity by more direct and ostensibly simpler accounts (as you may by now wish were the case here). The encyclopedic pursuit of accuracy and the hermeneutic pursuit of understanding proceed alongside the genealogical unraveling of unduly privileged conceptions. Genealogical work has been necessary for better observation, analysis, and interpretation and has long been part of the anthropological canon – including Steiner (1956) on taboo, Lévi-Strauss (1963) on totemism, Ruel (1997) on sacrifice, and Asad (1993) on religion itself. New work in this vein is exemplified by Paul Christopher

Johnson (2011; also Johnson forthcoming) on possession. These works in turn inform the positive depiction and analysis of religious forms and practices evident in our major ethnographic works. As the monographs show, good interpretation draws on the intellectual resources of the Western tradition (including comparative ethnography) to find words, concepts, and arguments that match the subtlety of what is being understood; this involves positive recovery in addition to genealogical critique. The hermeneutic position would be: What else than the language of our respective traditions do we have to work with?

HUMAN ACTIVITY

Where then do we look for, or where have we found, religion? Are there kinds of ideas and acts or conjunctions of activities that we single out as specifically *religious*?

One of the strongest directions anthropologists have taken is to examine the ways humans have constituted (inherited, reproduced, created, transformed) the foundations and contours of specific worlds, confronted or concealed the social and conceptual mechanics of world-building, and lived their lives within these worlds. This is to begin with the human condition. Human activities include describing, rationalizing, reflecting upon, and responding to the existential issues of life within their respective worlds. Questions of truth and certainty, origin and prediction, cause and remedy, objectivity and subjectivity, goals and reasons, ends and means, order and beauty, are central to human being. So are matters of distinguishing the human from (and relating the human to) other beings or kinds of being, external forces, and different worlds. There will always be anchoring concepts of time, space, cause, and person, as Kant argued (albeit not necessarily universal in their manifestations); yet questions of cosmology, ontology, theodicy, and epistemology are inescapable. They may be addressed by emphasizing either transcendent (nonhuman or extrahuman) forms, forces, or beings – or human experience, interventions, and history. The human condition is also characterized by concerns with livelihood, reproduction, exchange, freedom, oppression, exploitation, subjection, and intentionality, and by attempts to live well and according to ethical criteria and to address failure to do so consistently and completely. Where the capacity to address these matters seriously is frustrated, for example by having to defer to a regime of technocrats, or by severe structural violence, objectified religion can provide a welcome home. It gives people a place in the serious business of addressing life, that is, a place to recognize – and to acknowledge that recognition of – the seriousness of life, and not simply leave it to scientists and intellectuals or the vagaries of war or capital.⁷

It could be fruitful to begin with the three kinds of activity that Aristotle distinguished as creative production (*poiesis*), ethical action (*praxis*), and philosophical contemplation (*theoria*) – making, doing, and thinking – and seeing how such activities conjoin to form lifeworlds or living traditions as well as how given traditions inform each of these activities. First there is what humans bring into being. Religion is a source, means, idiom, and context of human creativity, through imagination and craft, in realms from dreams to dance, the musical and plastic arts, as well as captivating performances of various kinds from preaching sermons to shamanic voyages. Second, there is how humans act in the world. Religious practice is an expression,

elaboration, and enlargement of the ethical. It provides ends and means and means-as-ends for achieving the best life, for establishing and discerning values and for practicing the virtues. It can stretch the human capacities for creation and for undertaking decisive acts and commitments like founding, financing, or filling a monastery. At times it transforms, inspires, and renews value and virtue. Third, religion forms a locus of reflection on the sources, consequences, and limits of human creation and action, on the meaning of life, history, and cosmos, and on what might ground, decenter, or contextualize the human.

Each of these activities shapes and interpenetrates the others. If contemplation – thought – appears to be largely a mental activity, making and doing are each fully embodied yet also semiotically mediated activities, entailing the trained hand and eye, cultivated disposition, and concentrated, deliberate presence. Making and doing are not fully distinguishable from one another but refer here to the imaginative and the practical, the aesthetic and the ethical, the material and the forceful, the generation of particular objects and particular conditions (circumstances, relations, etc.), respectively. Myths (or masks or music) are composed (made) by means of the structural relations and transformations discerned by Lévi-Strauss (1966); thought is materialized in the semiotic details of the myth (the plumage of birds or color of flowers); and myths are recited and performed (enacted) to various ends and consequences. Deployed rhetorically or ideologically, they further shape thought, creative production, and practice, and their effects readily escape the intentions and even horizons of their original creators. Rituals provide a distinctive means of action; and acts in turn are mythically informed, draw on material objects and technologies, and are ethically and creatively consequential, bringing new criteria and conditions into being. Worlds are simultaneously constituted, conceived, and lived.⁸

The structuralist tradition has been very powerful. After a short hiatus when Lévi-Strauss's formulations seemed to have exhausted themselves, structuralism has returned with a flourish in discussions of ontology (Descola, Poirier, this volume), perspectivism (Vivaça, this volume), and in elaborations of the relationships between culture and nature, now examined more systematically (Descola 2005) than just the ostensibly simple opposition that lay at the heart of Lévi-Strauss's work.

A limit of structuralism might be that it tends to focus on the products of activity rather than action itself and that to the extent that it addresses activity, it examines contemplative thought and poesis (making) but ignores action (doing). Here it may be complemented initially by two further initiatives.

Firstly there is the Foucauldian approach, advocated by Asad and his school, which considers the work of power and religious discipline and the ways that ethical dispositions are cultivated within specific religious traditions (Laidlaw, this volume). Second, especially with respect to the practices of smaller-scale societies, a focus on ritual drawing upon Durkheim (1995) and van Gennep (1960) has prevailed. Victor Turner (1967, 1969, 1974) and others (e.g. Kapferer 1983; Coleman, this volume) have elucidated the process internal to ritual as well as the place of ritual in broader social process. Drawing on linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin (1965), Roy Rappaport (1999) shows powerfully how ritual completes its work, instantiates transformations, and establishes certainty, commitment, and an original form of truth.⁹ Indeed, in Rappaport's ambitious and comprehensive argument the very idea and force of the sacred emerges *from* ritual, even as it is the subject *of* ritual.

A systematic comparison of the work of ritual with the work of discipline (or between the two conceptualizations of the same phenomena) has not to my knowledge been made, but notions of temporality and completion are different in the two cases. Any given ritual act is embedded in a sequence of such acts, which Rappaport refers to as a liturgical order. Such orders have properties akin to structuralist models but their enactments also have consequences in the world. Each enactment is simultaneously a repetition and something new. To Lévi-Strauss's analysis of what he called reversible time, which is critical for understanding ontologies, is added a powerful account of irreversible time, or consequential acts, which is critical for understanding social process, historicity, and ethical life.

Rappaport's approach also offers an analytic by which to distinguish "religion" or the "religious" from the rest of culture or social life without thereby compartmentalizing it. One dimension of liturgical order is a hierarchical one; in certain core rituals sacred postulates are realized and these then lend themselves to ritual acts of greater social specificity, which are thereby sanctified, as when grace is said before meals. Rappaport argues that the most sacred utterances are highly repetitive, yet deeply meaningful and perduring, like the Jewish *shema*, which has continued unchanged for millennia, or the Muslim *shahada* and *fatihah* and Christian sacraments.¹⁰ Thus religion is a mode of producing a certain kind of truth or certainty that operates explicitly in certain relatively pure rituals and diffuses throughout social action. There is no clear place to establish its boundaries.

Perduring sacred postulates carry little specific information or injunctions. Rappaport argues that religious order gets into trouble when more specific postulates are elevated in the hierarchy; when, for example, affirmations of priestly or premarital celibacy are given the certainty and weight of the statements uttered in the Eucharist. Rappaport refers to this as idolatry, calling it a pathology of religion.¹¹

In sum, and far too briefly, to understand religion through Asad, Rappaport, or indeed Turner, is to begin not with concepts or beliefs, nor with theories of practice grounded in the individual, instrumental, and immediate fulfillment of need, self-interest, or competition. At the same time, their attention to ritual does not rest exclusively on its properties of formal iteration. Action is understood as structurally (culturally) mediated, intentionally predicated, and ethically consequential.

A matter of theoretical interest is whether the properties attributed to ritual are found in the illocutionary force of all utterances and hence intrinsic to sociality and constitutive of ordinary reality (Lambek 2010b) or whether, as British social structuralists and Marxists would have it, rituals are second-order phenomena, representations or distortions of ordinary reality. Maurice Bloch articulated the latter position in a number of papers (e.g. 1989a). He is therefore critical of Rappaport's claim that ritual founds the social contract, and of mine that rituals performatively constitute social persons and relations and produce or put into play specific criteria by which persons and practice can be described and evaluated. In other words, Bloch draws a sharper line between ritual or religion and ordinary life than I do, though he acknowledges (personal communication, May 2011) that it is difficult to assess precisely where this line lies and has softened his position (2013). This debate raises profound questions about social ontology and the place of mystification or necessary fictions in meaningful social worlds.¹² One point on which we agree is that the more formal the ritual the more it overcomes the contingencies of everyday practice.

EXPERIENCE

Some scholars argue that the distinguishing feature of religion is a kind of experience. Rudolph Otto (1923) famously described this as numinous, characterized by awe, and recently Charles Taylor (2007) has taken a similar view.¹³ However, while religious experience and the phenomenology of religion are rich topics of investigation, they have not seemed to most anthropologists to offer much analytic or comparative purchase and are more likely to be starting places for those who take religious accounts at face value.¹⁴

Not all approaches to experience begin with the numinous. As some existential philosophers have it, being human is being subject to anxiety – about what we can know, what will happen, how to live, being alone, achieving the good, deserving what we get, or simply (and too specifically) about death. Religion has been understood as redressing anxiety by offering certainty, truth, justice, predictability, parental figures, redemption, union, deference, deferral, guidance, or simply avenues to follow with some direction, hope, conviction, or excitement. Equally, however, religion can contribute to anxiety; in Weber's famous analysis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 2011), it is activity in worldly matters (adhering to a capitalist work ethic and saving money) that serves to offset the anxiety produced by religion (the uncertainty of salvation) rather than the reverse. Moreover, whether and in what measure it produces truth or skepticism, certainty or anxiety, well-being or pain, religion may heighten the stakes around each of these and also enable attentiveness, care, mystery, irony, and what might simply be called wisdom.¹⁵

Religions meet and generate these challenges in their own particular ways, offering their own versions of truth and order (and ambiguity and disorder), their own specific ends and means, attractions and repulsions, sites of consensus and conflict. They draw upon their own traditions – time-honored ideas, practices, liturgical orders, and forms of transmission, discipline, and reproduction – as well as on charismatic ethical spokespersons (Weber's "prophets") to do so in new ways in the face of particular historical circumstances and often by means of heated debate. There is also a whole range of practices that anthropologists study under the realms of healing ritual, exorcism (Kapferer 1983), divination (Werbner in preparation), and the like.

One of the most interesting features of religion has to do with the way immediate circumstances ("events") are absorbed or encapsulated within sets of relatively enduring ideas and practices ("structure"). Religions in this sense are not simply stable or static "worldviews" but time machines, capable to varying degrees and in various ways of slowing down or turning aside the impact of immediate events. This argument has been made in different ways both by advocates of structuralism (Lévi-Strauss, Sahlins) and by analysts of ritual (Turner, Rappaport). Conversely, religious movements can act to speed things up, producing sharp transformations in the social order and lived world (Robbins 2004) or transforming a relatively ordinary event into a potent and perduring cultural symbol (Kormina, this volume). In northwest Madagascar (Lambek 2002b) spirit possession effects a poiesis of history, articulating a historical consciousness composed of multiple voices from different periods in the past speaking in and to the present. Any analysis of religion must bring to bear questions of structure (structuring), order (ordering), reiteration, conservation,

revitalization, and natality – bringing something new into the world (Arendt 1998) – to mediate or counterpose to the immediacy, unpredictability, and disruptiveness of experience and event.¹⁶ Experience and event occur at many scales, including (to rehearse Geertz 1973) such recurrent, pervasive, or sporadic matters as individual death, suffering, puzzlement, and unfairness, but also such things as conquest, movement of capital, class transformation, displacement, interpersonal violence, and epidemics. Several of the chapters in this volume address temporality in original ways, whether looking back to ancestors (Cannell), understanding death (Astuti and Bloch, Kim, Kwon), questioning the present (De Boeck), or grappling with the sense of a single life (Badone).

It is a strong and cumulative insight of anthropological studies that religion cannot be reduced to social or psychological effects, nor religious acts to instrumentality. Many practices that anthropologists consider under the rubric of religion are ones in which ends and means are conflated. People do things on behalf of others, the world, or their religion, as well as themselves, and deliberately as well as spontaneously, with foresight rather than in mere reaction. Structure and liturgical order stand outside particular events, circumstances, needs, interests, or ambitions; it is structure and liturgical order that shape and render things meaningful, as acts, events or interests of a particular kind, in the first place. Thus, while not specifically religious in a narrow sense of the term, the devotion that so many Americans give to maintaining green, weed-free, and perpetually well-shorn front lawns (el Guindi 1977) cannot be fully explained in external ("material") terms, whether ecological, sociological, or psychological.

Although I raised matters of function and anxiety, I understand culture and religion as much in the sense of the exercise and extension of human capacities as in the meeting of human needs (Macpherson 1973; Sahlins 1976). To write or sing a hymn or play a Bach sonata is to celebrate God and to cultivate and enjoy a capacity for creating, performing, and listening, more than to stave off a particular anxiety, meet an immediate need, compete with another performer, or ask God for a favor. However, to restate a point made strongly by Geertz, generalizations about things like the human capacity for (the enjoyment of) music are empty in the absence of specification: of particular genres, practices, disciplines, instruments, performances, and occasions.

INCOMMENSURABILITY AND PLURALISM

If religious traditions or human worlds can be distinguished in this manner, each generating, articulating, and meeting challenges in distinctive ways, it is also the case that they do not exist in isolation from one another. Not only are they likely to articulate their distinctiveness most sharply along their borders (analogous to what Barth 1969 described for ethnic groups or Bateson 1958 referred to more generally as schismogenesis), or conversely, to borrow, overlap and merge into one another, but the human situation is characterized more generally by what one might call pluralism (here, religious pluralism). That is to say, if we examine any given social field it is evident that more than one tradition or set of practices is available to people interacting within it, more than one goal or value (Das, this volume). Traditions and practices are incommensurable to one another in the sense set out by Bernstein 1988

(Spies, this volume) and of course proponents within a given tradition are often in disagreement, counterposing more than one interpretation of what things mean or what to do.

Evans-Pritchard (1937) famously noted that for Azande, causality had two axes, one which corresponded more or less to Western materialist explanation – granaries collapse because termites eat the wooden posts – and the other which did not – individual granaries collapse on the heads of specific people sitting under them because of someone’s act of “witchcraft.” For Evans-Pritchard, the latter was a thicker and socially consequential alternative to the European concept of coincidence. But in addition to science (or material causality) and coincidence, Europeans also draw from a repertoire of ideas of luck, fate, astrology, unconscious motivation, divine punishment, just desserts, and so forth. These ideas are not all fully commensurable with one another and they do not produce a single model as Evans-Pritchard so elegantly did for the Azande (although Evans-Pritchard himself remarked that Zande logic was less one of commensurate ideas or structure than of practice).

Whereas structuralism, whether in the terms of Lévi-Strauss or those of Dumont, was able to propose, and often demonstrate quite spectacularly, that a society could be understood from a single underlying structure, set of structural transformations, or conceptual hierarchy, in practice alternate and incommensurable means for understanding the world and acting in it are available in most societies. The idea of a long conversation can be evoked to describe the relationship between originally distant traditions that become mutually embedded in one another through relations of power, as in the Comaroff’s account of the history of Christianity in southern Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Broadly analogous models could be drawn upon to examine relations among indigenous and Muslim traditions in West Africa or Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist traditions in East Asia. On a much smaller scale, people on the Western Indian Ocean island of Mayotte in the 1970s and 1980s articulated ideas from three incommensurable traditions in their daily practice, in this case Islam, cosmology (or astrology), and spirit possession, not to mention European traditions (Lambek 1993).¹⁷ Looking more closely, spirit possession was itself comprised of incommensurable traditions, one drawing from East African and Islamic ideas about spirits and the other from Malagasy conceptions. And these too broke down still further. Of course they can be (and are) both eroded by the forces of history and pieced together in the kind of everyday operations that Lévi-Strauss called *bricolage* (1966), in the efforts of virtuoso poets, craftsmen, and professional rationalizers, as well as in the simple acts of living together (Das 2007, and in this volume). A political economy of knowledge also shows that different members of society, whether distinguished by gender, class, education level, or other, have differential access to specific practices, authority, and truth with respect to given traditions.

Along another dimension of internal differentiation, the relationship of individuals to specific bodies of knowledge, practices, or kinds of truth shifts, sometimes continuously, between perspectives that Schutz (1964; cf. Lambek 1993) identified as those of the expert, the well-informed citizen, and the man on the street. These refer not to discrete roles or levels of knowledge but to different attitudes toward knowledge, different degrees of participation, attention, and interest. Thus, to recognize someone as Buddhist or Baptist is not to know her investment in a particular credo or practice at any given moment. Matters of consistency or commensurability only

become salient at certain kinds of attention. Attention can also be suppressed or repressed for reasons of history (Badone, Boddy, this volume).

Commensurability and structure must be understood in relation to scale, perspective, positionality, and movement. Moreover, traditions draw from each other at different rates and in distinctive ways among different sectors of society. In sum, it is virtually impossible to map a single "religion" onto a single "society" in a one-to-one correlation, if only because neither is internally homogeneous or static. Ordering is as much an ideal of a certain kind of social science as it is of certain religious outlooks or philosophers. A final point here is that at different historical periods one or another tradition may be dominant and may appear to encompass or silence others. This is captured in the notion of hegemony (or differently, in the notion of structural hierarchy) and further illustrates the point that the separation of the religious sphere from the political is as much an idealist abstraction as the separation of the religious from the social.

CHRISTIANITY

The approach MacIntyre refers to as tradition, and I would rather call hermeneutic or interpretive, acknowledges that the interpreter or investigator does not stand in a culturally free space, purified either by the objectifications of the encyclopedists or the deconstructions of the genealogists. Instead, interpreters of religion are part of a specific tradition of interpretation. For much of the comparative study of religion this has been a tradition with Christian roots, often liberal and Protestant, less often Catholic or Jewish, and rarely Hindu, Muslim, or something else. Yet an ambition or pretention of the anthropology of religion is to create an independent tradition in which to carry out and receive interpretations. This is not the neutral, empty, confident space of objectivism, nor the upturned, skeptical terrain of genealogy, but a place specifically cultivated for the task, a tradition that must work continuously on itself, developing and evaluating objective tools and methods and subjecting itself to genealogical scrutiny. As MacIntyre says, "To be an adherent of a tradition is always to enact some further stage in the development of one's tradition" (1988: 11). One result has been increased awareness as to how much of our objective toolkit is of Christian origin (Asad 1993; Cannell 2005, 2006). Indeed, it has been justifiably argued that the prototype of "religion" or "a religion" for Anthropology has been Christianity. Equally, until recently, Christianity itself was seldom the object of ethnographic investigation.¹⁸

In the last decade things have rapidly reversed, as Christianity has become both the prime subject and the prime suspect, so to speak, of anthropological reflection on religion. We have become acutely aware of the Christian bias (its immanence within our intellectual world) and at the same time newly cognizant of the rich field that Christianity provides as an ethnographic object (on Protestants and charismatics, Klassen, Daswani, Coleman, this volume). The latter is not without its paradoxes however, insofar as it further objectifies religion(s) and subjects of study ("the anthropology *of* Christianity") and insofar as Christianity's implicit effects are now displaced by its explicit dominance in the field. Anthropologists of Christianity also debate their subject matter, asking whether there is some essential cultural or doctrinal core, and

whether the spread of Christianity is intrinsically linked to the economic and political orientations it supplies (Comaroff 2010). A deeper understanding of Orthodox churches (Hann 2012; Naumescu 2012; Kormina, Boylston, this volume) offsets the tendency to a monolithic view.

Many mid-range terms that have been applied universally to religion now appear more specific than first thought. When religion is understood in a way that makes the criteria of Christianity (or more broadly, the Abrahamic tradition, as found in varying forms in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) most salient or taken for granted, that is, when Christianity is the prototype for what we mean by “religion” or “a religion,” then we look to such matters as deity, belief, faith, conversion, and exclusive adherence in defining, depicting, demarcating, or comparing religion(s). It could even be a matter of debate whether formulations of matter and spirit are specific to Christianity or of more general import. As we become genealogically or hermeneutically sensitive about the nature of Christianity and its influence on our thinking, then these are the very concepts thrown open to doubt, generating the productive exploration of alternatives. Conversely, Christian theology, no less than the philosophies and rationalizations of other religious traditions, could doubtless provide more concepts to apply comparatively.

Thus Jean Pouillon (1982) and Malcolm Ruel (1982) have explored the cultural and linguistic specificity and historical transformations of the Christian concept of “belief.” Depending on the semiotic ideology at hand, belief as an interior or anterior condition may be entirely irrelevant or absolutely critical (Keane 2007). Following the lead of Evans-Pritchard and Lienhardt, I have queried the concept of God, suggesting that certain African invocations of divinity may not refer in the first instance to a single deity, or multiple discrete deities, but might better be understood as deictic expressions (like the English word “home”) or as abstract titles (like “lord”/*seigneur*) (Lambek 2008). Don Seeman (2010) argues that even Weber’s *Verstehen* is a form of “disenchanted Calvinism,” and asks, “If Geertz, following Weber, was drawn to think about ritual primarily as an aid to theodicy (cultural meaning-making in the face of suffering), what would an anthropology look like that had grown out of a different cultural and religious milieu?”

The point is not to purge anthropology of Protestant, Christian, or Abrahamic concepts but to recognize them, understand their genealogies, and consider how they compare with alternative concepts from other traditions. We also need to ask how they manifest or refract common underlying human capacities and limits, existential concerns, and experience. It is interesting to consider not only whether a concept like “belief” distinguishes religion from other domains or perspectives like science, magic, or common sense, or whether it serves as a marker of specific religions, like Christianity, as opposed, say, to Islam (where, arguably, the comparable concept is “knowledge”). The stronger question is how in any cultural formation problems of certainty and uncertainty, confidence and loss of confidence, commitment and absence of commitment are raised, refracted, and resolved in various ways. Any local concept of “belief” must be related to the means by which truth is founded, realized, conceptualized, grasped, asserted, confirmed, occluded, challenged, celebrated, and defended.¹⁹

Debates over what is true are found within and between traditions. As the chapters in this volume by Hanks and James illustrate, questions of language and translation are critical. In addition there is the matter of how traditions variously draw on

nondiscursive means to establish (kinds of) truth. The substance of their encounters will be shaped in part by the limits of discursive means to realize it.

TRANSCENDENCE AND ITS LIMITS

An issue central to Christianity concerns the relationship of the material to the non-material. The latter is often referred to as "spiritual" when speaking of Abrahamic and Asian religions, and more dismissively as "supernatural" when speaking of the traditions of smaller-scale societies. Both are semantically overloaded terms.

The nonmaterial, immaterial, or extramaterial is relevant for any consideration of an afterlife, and hence for addressing the existential problem of death, as well as the other existential problems that Geertz identifies as pervasive in human worlds, namely suffering, intellectual puzzlement, and unfairness. The nonmaterial characterizes the "second spear" in Zande explanations of misfortune. Insofar as something lacks materiality it is not experienced directly through the senses and hence could be considered occult as opposed to patent, linked to matters of power and secrecy (De Boeck, this volume). The nonmaterial is frequently an intrinsic or distinguishing feature of both persons and deities; the proximity of the words "spirit," "spiritual," and "spirits" is no coincidence, although for that reason their usage often provokes misunderstandings.²⁰ Conversely, it can be argued that immateriality is an ideal or ideology; in practice religion is always realized in material forms (Meyer, this volume; Houtman and Meyer 2012).

In philosophical or theological discussions of religion the relationship of the material to the non- or extramaterial is often articulated through the concepts or doctrines of immanence and transcendence. These are complex terms with long legacies in Christian thought. In one discourse transcendence has been used to distinguish a particular kind of religion, in which deity is entirely outside the world as we know it, and hence perhaps even unknowable. At times, this has been said to characterize both Abrahamic and certain Asian traditions, whereas what they displace or replace are religions of immanence.²¹ In religions of immanence spirits or spiritual forces evidently pervade the world; there is no clear or sharp distinction between natural and supernatural, knowable and unknowable, matter and spirit. As Paul Radin (1964) put it with respect to Africa, "Man does not . . . ascend to heaven . . . the gods descend to earth." Hunters speak to their prey (Poirier, this volume) and miners to spirits who mediate the earth.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro elaborates the distinction elegantly:²²

God is the proper name of the Other in our tradition . . . God is the Great Other, being at the same time the one who guarantees the absolute reality of reality (the Given) against the solipsism of consciousness; and the Great Self, the one who warrants the relative intelligibility of what is perceived (the Constructed) by the subject. God's major role, as far as the destiny of Western thought is concerned, was that of establishing the fundamental divide between the Given and the Constructed, since, as Creator, He is the origin point of this divide, that is, its point of indifferenciation. It is here, I believe, that the true Fear of God originates – philosophically speaking, of course.

It is true that God no longer enjoys the limelight of history (rumour has it he is preparing a triumphal return). But before he died, he took two providential measures:

he migrated to the inner sanctum of every individual as the intensive, intelligible form of the Subject (Kant's Moral Law), and he exteriorized himself as Object, that is, as the infinite extensive field of Nature (Kant's starry heaven). Culture and Nature, in short, the two worlds in which Supernature as Originary otherness divided itself.

Well then, to conclude. What is the truth regime proper to a radically non-monotheistic world such as the Amerindian worlds? What is the form of the Great Other in a world which is foreign to any theology of creation? I am not referring to a world created by the retreat of the Creator, such as our modern world, but a radically uncreated world, a world without a transcendent divinity. My answer to these difficult questions . . . will be mercifully short . . . : the world of immanent humanity is also a world of immanent divinity, a world where divinity is distributed under the form of a potential infinity of non-human subjects. This is a world where hosts of miniscule gods wander the earth; a "myriatheism," to use a word coined by the French micro-sociologist Gabriel Tarde . . . This is the world that has been called animist, that is, now to use the term of our inanimist tradition, a world where the object is a particular case of the subject, where every object is a subject *in potentia*. Instead of the solipsistic formula "I think, therefore I am" the indigenous cogito must be articulated in animistic terms, as in, "It exists, therefore it thinks." But there, where on top of this the Self is a particular case of the Other, such "animism" must necessarily take the form of – if you excuse the pun – an "enemism": an animism altered by alterity, an alterity that gets animated insofar as it is thought of as an enemy interiority: a Self that is radically Other. Hence the danger, and the brilliance, of such worlds. (2012: 40–41)

In some traditions, deity is radically other, neither fully of nor directly in the world. But transcendence in this sense of unimaginable Otherness is not stable; it requires a completion through immanence, in which deity does become partly discernible or approachable within the human world. There must be some evidence for transcendent divinity and that evidence, by definition, is ascertainable in this world. Hence some kind of tension or movement between immanence and transcendence must be characteristic of any system of thought that contextualizes the material world in terms of something other or beyond it, whether holistic and indivisible or particulate. There are limits to any transcendental perspective. Conversely, extreme immanence may be unbearable (Gell 1995). As Aparecida Vilaça argues in this volume, Christianity is attractive to the Wari' precisely insofar as it overcomes a problem with immanence. In sum, the distinction between the transcendental and the immanent cannot be absolute or absolutely maintained.

Hence religious traditions are likely to be characterized by diverse practices that overcome or blur any clear distinction between immanence and transcendence. Concomitantly intellectuals in these traditions debate the relations of the immanent to the transcendent, divine presence to absence, the concealed to the revealed, proximity to distance, divine truth to common knowledge, ultimate reality to the ordinary and the everyday, and the significance of divine intervention in human affairs and history, as well as the justifications for various practices like mysticism or devotion to individual saints. Sometimes they emphasize the possibility and significance of direct religious experience; at other times they reject or devalue the lived world relative to the transcendent. One way to conceive of religion, then, is precisely as a sphere of human activity concerned with articulating (in thought and practice) the boundaries and relationship between immanence and transcendence.

To be sure, the issue is particularly salient for Christianity. As Matthew Engelke puts it, the "problem of presence" is "a core paradox of Christian thought, the

simultaneous presence and absence of God" (2007: 9; cf. Keane 2006). Christianity addresses (and produces) the problematic of transcendence through the Trinity; Christian theology, qua tradition, could be viewed in part as an extended conversation on the meaning of the Trinity and the relationship of transcendence to immanence; many solutions to the paradox have been proposed in theology or performed in popular practice. Practically and ethically, the issue may center on the tension between human devotion to God and God's love for humanity.²³

More abstractly, consider the Humble Approach Initiative sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation. A symposium held in Denmark in August 2011 addressed the question: "Is God incarnate in all that is?" "Researchers from several disciplines [considered the presence of the divine] in the informational structures emerging in biological evolution [as well as] in very mundane experiences of communicative love and ethical sensitivity present in human relationships." They inquired whether "God's Logos is coterminous with the world of living creatures, from amoebas to humans." The endeavor, of course, is to harmonize Christianity with science, for "Christology to respond to the challenges of evolutionary thinking. Participants will consider the 'divine reach into the very tissue of biological existence' . . . and to the furthest limits, the height and depth, of the material cosmos."²⁴

The concept of transcendence has also been gradually secularized. In Western philosophical discourse, transcendence signifies the recognition of something other than ourselves or a stepping outside of ourselves. Insofar as it does not prejudge what that external context is, or the source of its difference or power, "transcendent" appears a useful alternative to words like "supernatural" or "spiritual." The transcendent can be understood as logos, truth, possibility, nature, the infinite, or in Durkheim's case, as society. Insofar as the more-than-human constituted as transcendence is not explicit, not materialized, and perhaps not even representable, when it is not given a location "outside," "beyond," or "elsewhere," it may be understood as intrinsic, diffuse or concealed within the world or even the body, hence as fully immanent.

Thus continental philosophy draws on the concept of transcendence to capture something that is not radically beyond the human but rather completes the human by extending it beyond itself. For Levinas it could be said to be the relationship between responsiveness and responsibility.

Transcendence is the spontaneity of responsibility for another person. It is experienced in concrete life and expressed in a host of discourses, even before a *de facto* command is actually received from that other. This curious proposition hearkens to the much debated meaning of "receiving the Torah before knowing what was written in it." Levinas calls this sort of responsiveness the "Good beyond Being." Responsibility enacts that Good, that trace of the infinite, because such instances of answering to or for another are everyday events, even though they are not typical of natural, self-interested behaviors. We do not choose to be responsible. Responsibility arises as if elicited, before we begin to think about it, by the approach of the other person. (Bergo 2011)

We see here both the affinity between phenomenology and (Abrahamic) theology (the connection is explicit in Levinas) and the way the transcendent folds back into the immanent. Instances of transcendence are described by Bergo as "everyday events."²⁵ Without sufficient knowledge of these fields, I take the relationship of

transcendence to immanence to be problems intrinsic to both Jewish and Christian theology and philosophy, and perhaps also to physics.

A final point here is that scholars and exponents of religion from within the Abrahamic traditions have often singled out transcendence of the known world as a way of distinguishing what is religion or what is somehow intellectually or ethically superior religion. In the current political situation, in which Christianity and Islam are often depicted as opposed to one another or vulnerable to interference by secular institutions, it is sometimes forgotten that both traditions share a disdain for religions of immanence (i.e. those that do not acknowledge a single transcendent deity) and attempt to convert people they call pagan or heathen (James, Klassen, this volume).

For anthropologists, the tension between transcendence and immanence might share formal properties and intrinsic connections with the mind/body problem, the nature/culture opposition, the division between monism and dualism, and even the division within signification itself.²⁶ Each of these pairs exhibits the property that one term resolves the opposition by subsuming the other term, while the other term asserts the opposition; the ensuing puzzle is not fully resolvable. I do not have space to develop these issues here, which I take to indicate a central feature or constraint of human thought or the world (cf. Lambek 1998), but turn instead to a different application of the transcendence/immanence distinction.²⁷

IMMANENT AND TRANSCENDENT MANIFESTATION OF RELIGION

Despite the many definitions that have been proposed and debated for religion, much fruitful work has been carried out without paying much attention to them. Major insights have been developed under a variety of rubrics from cosmology to initiation, myth to prayer, witchcraft, spirit possession, men's houses, pollution, ethical discipline, and the like. The diversity of topics and themes addressed suggests that within many societies religion is not a single, unitary, unique, or objectified phenomenon (e.g. De Boeck, this volume). This in turn raises questions as to how it can serve as a stable object of comparison between societies. Indeed, in many ethnographies religion appears pervasive within, or intrinsic to, society and hence indistinguishable from it, except insofar as it is expressed by means of the kinds of marked distinctions and separations that Durkheim phrased as the sacred and profane. This was the case in northwest Madagascar where people who were neither Christian nor Muslim simply said that they "did not congregate in prayer" (*tsy mivavaka*) rather than describing their practices in a grammatically positive, objectifying sense. As anthropologists turned their attention to contemporary state societies and especially to Christianity in the liberal state, they encountered explicit constructs and institutions in which religion is seen as a distinct phenomenon and in which it appears at arm's length from the social, such that it is objectified and both national and transnational. It is *this* understanding of religion that has largely taken over and hence seemed in need of critique.

As I have been arguing, rather than start from competing definitions *of* religion we might inquire about different perspectives *to* religion, including one that takes it as an objectified phenomenon in much the terms that prevailing public discourse does (what we read in the newspaper, for example) and another that sees it as no

thing in itself but as somehow a dimension or feature of human worlds or perhaps as a series of dispersed moments or sites within the social. What is characteristic of the anthropology of religion as an intellectual tradition is again the way that it encompasses or shifts between both perspectives.

One of the strongest expressions of the Christian bias is the very idea that religions are bounded, discrete objects, conceivable as distinct from the wider society and from each other. This is a feature of the modern period, as Asad has argued, but rooted in early Christian ideas of unilateral conversion, explicit commitment to doxa, and (going even farther back) exclusive adherence to a single deity and a single truth. Compare the characterization of South Asian religious life as "spiritual cosmopolitanism" or "polytropy" with respect to its "eclecticism and fluidity" (Carrithers 2000: 834; but cf. Das, this volume).

In the previous section I drew on the concepts of transcendence and immanence as alternative understandings of the relation of divinity to the world and argued that although the terms have been used to distinguish kinds of religious ontologies, in practice the extremes are untenable; transcendence is always mitigated by or folds into immanence and vice versa. I now apply these terms to different ends (as different ideal types) in order to locate alternative ways in which *religion* (not deity) is itself understood in relation to society (not the cosmos). Here too, I suggest, it is not a matter of mutually exclusive alternatives.

By immanence and transcendence I now refer to two ways in which "religion" manifests in the social, either infused and dispersed within it or identified as a discretely bounded object within, beyond, or alongside it. I call the position of religion within secularism one in which religion is understood as "transcendent" to the broader society (hence, among other things, "optional" for its members) rather than immanent within it. Religion stands out as a distinct institution or set of competing institutions, its practices ostensibly bounded off from politics, livelihood, business, the arts, education, and science. Located beyond everyday life and politics, religion is thereby able to speak *to* them, at arm's length. Religion is also understood as the privileged locus of transcendent experiences. By contrast, where religion is understood as immanent to society, it is not objectified and does not stand apart from politics or the everyday.²⁸

I acknowledge that the terminology remains close to Christian discourse. It may be as well that the theological conception of a transcendent deity as described in the last section has an elective affinity with, if not a causal connection to, religion manifest as an institution partially transcendent of the social. Conversely, ideas of spiritual or divine immanence are likely to manifest as socially immanent forms of religion. Perhaps this is only to repeat Durkheim's insight that religion is ultimately society's image of itself, the flash of recognition in the dialectic of social life. However, what has become more complicated since Durkheim's day is the recognition that society is less monolithic, homogeneous, bounded, integrated, uncontested, or classifiable than Durkheim imagined. Such recognition must apply to religion as well.

Religion understood as objectified and transcendent to society is part of the picture of modernity as variously discerned by Durkheim, Weber, and others. It is also both a political project of secularism, and a diagnosis of what must be overcome by antisecularists who advocate a fully Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, or Buddhist society.²⁹ One of the consequences of secularism and the emergence of transcendent

religion is that religion becomes an objectified or objectifiable form of social identity and vehicle for identity politics, or to put it the other way round, identity politics becomes an increasingly salient dimension of religious practice and experience. Even as socially transcendent religion crosscuts older social distinctions, it creates new ones, such as “Muslims” in France or “Christians” in Meghalaya. In this respect, the subject of religion becomes intrinsically political, addressing questions of rights, citizenship, multiculturalism, and so forth (Kwon, Peletz, this volume).

In fact, however, much of the best anthropology from the 1960s through the 1980s was premised on the socially immanent dimensions of religion as first laid out by Durkheim. Structuralism explored human worlds articulated through binary relations that are immanent to practice. Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* (1966) made an enormous impact precisely because she showed that ordinary activity is concerned with exactly the same issues of classification, order, ambiguity, and transgression that are marked in explicitly religious domains, and indeed that religion builds upon such mundane structural relations and concerns, elaborating, inverting, and unifying them in particular ways. The very fact or acts of setting apart, in Durkheim’s sense of the sacred, via taboos, for example, is immanent within everyday practice rather than transcendent of it (cf. Lambek 1992). In this way, religion is not simply a representation of the social or a separate compartment within the social, but intrinsic to the social. Similarly, the literature on rites of passage explores the ways ritual constitutes the social fabric, acknowledging and initiating new members, transforming the deceased into ancestors, commoners into chiefs, and the like (Cannell, Kwon, this volume). Drawing on Rappaport, I argue that ritual places persons, relationships, conditions, and events under a description, fitting them into larger orders and establishing commitments that are specific, relatively irreversible, and frequently mutually exclusive (precluding alternatives) (Lambek 2010b). Rituals thereby ethicize social process and social change by making events responsive and relative to established criteria as well as making specific people responsible for their acceptance. While rituals draw on sacred artifacts or utterances that are set apart from the profane, they are equally a part of the ordinary realization and reproduction of social life, the way that life in human worlds unfolds (James 2004; Wittgenstein 1979).

For Geertz (1973) what distinguished religion from other cultural formulations was the tight binding of “models of” the world – knowledge and truth – and “models for” living in it – values and virtues. This binding is neither static nor absolute. There are always gaps in experience that are of no concern and others that generate anomie or anxiety, some provoking therapeutic intervention, ethical discipline, innovation, or renewal (revitalization). Such gaps are inevitable given the existence of cultural alternatives, social diversity and inequality, and human imagination and restlessness, not to mention personal suffering, collective misfortune, and other changing and unpredictable circumstances. Religion from this perspective is not a single demarcated object nor is any given religious tradition rigid or unreflective. To think otherwise is to get into the binds of objectification that Asad (1993) rightly objected to, even if he misdirected his criticism at Geertz.

In a sense, Asad’s critique of Geertz could be read to say that Geertz failed to make the distinction between religion understood as transcendent and as immanent, to realize that he was talking about the immanence of religion while apparently objectifying it at the same time.³⁰ One could infer that for Asad religion as immanent

and as object (an object that is as much politically encapsulated as socially transcendent) are more or less historically successive distinct phenomena. Asad's point about Islam is that historically it has been immanent to society rather than transcendent of it, that modernity in a sense misunderstands and transforms it by distinguishing it as "a religion," by objectifying a complex tradition as token of a type.³¹ In a sense then, Asad acknowledges religion's continued immanence. Asad was right to criticize anthropological attempts to define or universalize religion; but in doing so he was implicitly drawing on all the ethnographic accounts that portray religion as deeply embedded in social and political life, that see "religion" as cultural worlds or as an immanent dimension of such worlds rather than a discrete part, an ethnographic endeavor in which Geertz (1969) played an important role and which his essay was in fact designed to further.³²

In sum, immanence and transcendence can also stand for two ways in which anthropologists have apprehended religion, irrespective of how religion is manifest in a particular social formation. It remains possible to explore the immanent religious qualities of modernity by examining the implicit underpinnings of secularism itself, much as it remains possible, and indeed sometimes heuristically necessary, to try to distinguish religious practices or institutions as transcendent and understand them *in relation to* social, political, and economic factors rather than only as an intrinsic and formative *dimension of* the social, political, and economic (Mittermaier, Muehlebach, this volume).

A final point. It is implicit in all my usages of immanence and transcendence, whether situating deity vis-à-vis the world or situating religion vis-à-vis society, that the distinction is relative. Transcendence and immanence do not refer to distinct realms of thought, practice, or being in any absolute sense, but are matters of scale or perspective. In Tom Boylston's words, "that which is transcendent on one scale or from one perspective is immanent on a broader scale or from a more distant perspective."³³ Thus for Durkheim, religion could be transcendent from the perspective of the members of a society but immanent to that society from the perspective of the sociologist standing outside it. What we call religion includes positions, like those of the shaman or the prophet, or even the ordinary subjects of ritual, which enable shifts in perspective, whether transcendent or immanent relative to everyday experience. Likewise, acceptance of Christianity or Islam by members of an autochthonous society could render relatively immanent practices that were previously apprehended as transcendent or conversely offer a transcendent take on what had hitherto been immanent. Hence, whereas from the Urapmin perspective Christian heaven appears to offer transcendence (Robbins 2009), the material attributions they give to it do not look so transcendent from an external perspective.

RELIGIOUS FRONTS

As these remarks suggest, terms like transcendence need to be applied historically rather than simply formally. We need to keep in mind that what we objectify in social scientific or theological categories is actually continuously in flux. Social facts are historical facts. Social life occurs in time and shifts with respect to multiple forces and counterforces. It can be likened to the weather, a metaphor for something unruly,

unbounded, in constant motion yet not unidirectional, and the science of meteorology notwithstanding, notoriously unpredictable, entailing change that is not necessarily linear and in which there is no lurking notion of cumulative progress. Furthermore, the weather is simultaneously local, regional, and global – operating at multiple levels of scale and force, sometimes to contradictory effect. Different parts may be moving in different directions, at angles to one another, steadily or unsteadily.

I propose to elaborate the metaphor, with the image of the weather front in order to describe how change occurs between traditions along moving lines of opposition that are both durable and fluctuating.³⁴ The front is a moving edge but also a meeting ground, at once dynamic and confrontational, though I prefer meteorological connotations to military ones. Fronts can be parallel, converging, or overlapping. One manifestation is the meeting over time of incommensurable or contradictory ideas and practices. The front here is akin to Gadamer's profound depiction of the fusion of horizons (1985), yet conceived as changeable, lively, unpredictable, and potentially disruptive, often more engaged and turbulent than open-minded and contemplative, yet sometimes slow and calm. At the heart of the storm, horizons shrink and lower rather than extend or rise. The fusion of horizons is therefore only one of a range of outcomes at the front.

In sum, I am suggesting that we examine religious traditions not as static objects, and not only as ontologies, sets of ideas and practices, underlying structures of signification, or liturgical orders, but as social forces and movements in the context of multiple counterforces and movements, even when they are not explicitly conceived or organized as such. Like many good ideas, this one is already found in Weber; it is at the heart of his comparative project, as he attempted to chart the moving fronts of capitalism and rationalization.

The movement of intellectual paradigms or programs within academia is not dissimilar to the attractions and repulsions of religious phenomena in the world at large, equivalent to and also sometimes in direct relation or confrontation with them. One anthropological front has shifted from the encounter with distant or precapitalist societies and traditions toward studying the anthropologist's own, whether this be Europe and North America or the postcolonies. Cultural Studies and Postcolonial thought have been rapidly moving fronts against which anthropology defines itself; Religious Studies is another. There is also a movement from Christian theology, abetted by French theory, against secular approaches to religion (Milbank 2006). Theoretical fronts have included structuralism, practice theory, phenomenology, and so forth.

As noted throughout this essay, along certain fronts religion appears or recedes as a distinct object. At a general level, anthropology, and hence this volume, is part of the moving front of rationalism in relation to religion or tradition, in which the latter appear as objects as they recede in hegemony. This is traceable from the Reformation and Enlightenment, apparent now among such formations as the neo-evolutionary scientific front, the evangelical Christian front, the esoteric spiritualist front, the fronts of feminism and queerness, and calmer fronts found along ecumenical encounters of various kinds. One particularly volatile front today is that between social and political thought and resurgent religion itself, concerning the in/security of a secular perspective with respect to religion. This is playing out variously in North America, Europe,

the Middle East, and elsewhere as scholarship and religion are triangulated in relation to constitutional law, state policy, and political theory (Peletz, this volume), including the recognition, emergence, and critique of so-called political theologies.

Fronts provide good ways to conceptualize our foci of study as secularizing and countersecularizing movements, movements of religious reform and counterreform, and economic policies clash or correspond. Contemporary Islam may be characterized by turbulent weather, evident at the most general level between so called Salafi and popular Sufi fronts and between relatively private piety and relatively public engagement, all heightened by global politics, nationalism, neoliberal policies, political repression, transnational movements, and many other factors (Mittermaier, this volume). Contemporary Protestantism is marked by partially overlapping fronts of reading scripture literally and being moved by the Holy Spirit, and the latter itself tends to rapidly fission into further fronts (Daswani, this volume). Christianity and Judaism also confront movements of science, nationalism, finance capitalism, and political and social conservatism (Muehlebach, Sullivan, this volume). Anthropologists examine expanding fronts of particular strains of Christianity and Islam at multiple scales as they bump against each other, against alternative strains within their respective traditions, and against people living in animist or other non-Abrahamic worlds (Hanks, James, Klassen, this volume). The expanding fronts of various East Asian traditions, for example Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and shamanic practices, abutting Communist, post-Communist, and anti-Communist state ideologies, civil religions, and histories of violence are also worthy of attention (Kim, Kwon, this volume) as are equivalent kinds of movements in South Asia and the post-Soviet world (Das, Kormina, this volume).

While it is necessary to understand these debates in their own terms, that is, with respect to the particular concepts and authority structures of the given tradition and the specific historical, political and economic forces at play, there may be more general and recurrent features to religious fronts that one can analyze and compare. These could include fronts between rationalizing and charismatic forms of authority; between different ways of reading, reciting, and interpreting scripture; between ritual formality and devotional movements; between church hierarchies and popular appropriations; and between movements of purification and their ostensible targets (whether labeled idolaters, heretics, witches, or other). If sociology has been too quick, perhaps, to jump to comparison, create typologies, and isolate cause and effect, anthropology may have been too shy to examine religion as broad historical process and over the *longue durée*. But in any case, conceptualizing and carrying out research along a front can often prove highly illuminating.

In advocating the study of moving fronts I am not suggesting scholars abandon close-up analyses. Indeed, one of the contributions anthropology can make is to offset grand sociological theories or narratives with closer on the ground inspection. Ethnographic analyses of religious actions and rationalizations show how fronts actually move, how conversions happen (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Csordas 1994; Harding 2000; Hefner 1993; Lambek 2000; Robbins 2004), and engagements get taken up (e.g. Ortner 1989). No religious tradition or set of religious practices can be understood without the larger context of alternative ideas and practices and the ways in which neighboring traditions, religious or not, interact over the long run and in day-to-day ordinary life.

Here the concept of semiotic ideologies (Keane 2007; Lambek in Part II of this volume) may prove particularly useful, freeing us from obsessing about the uniqueness of Western history and enabling us to see that any tradition over time could and likely will shift emphasis among such forms of truth and virtue as derive from ritual order, aesthetic creation, rational thought, or experience (as constituted within a particular ontology) as people respond to an extreme application of one semiotic ideology and the limitations to it that eventually become evident. A comparison of Christian history with debates and movements in other traditions might prove instructive, although it must account for Christian bias.³⁵

SECULARISM AND THE IMMANENT

Few have described the religious condition of modernity more pithily than Michel Foucault:

If we define spirituality as being the form of practices which postulate that, such as he is, the subject is not capable of the truth, but that, such as it is, the truth can transfigure and save the subject, then we can say that the modern age of the relations between the subject and truth begins when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject. (Foucault 2005: 15; cited by Rabinow 2011: 58)

The modern condition could be partially described as one in which the subject is construed as prior and seeks an external truth or means to truth. This stands in contrast to what Rappaport calls liturgical orders, in which, through participation in ritual, the subject is made a very part of the truth, where to be a subject is already to be subject *to* the truth rather than potential master *of* it, thus where the emphasis is on the immanence rather than the transcendence of subjects to their worlds.

Attempts to calibrate truth and values (“being saved”) are part of the ongoing work of social life; at some historical moments and under some particularly powerful regimes (call them “religious”) they appear to be quite effective. This is what the ethnography of many small-scale societies has shown, and what many assume the premodern situation of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism for the most part to have been. In a Geertzian language, models of the world and models for living cohered with one another. At least, this forms a sort of ideal, both for communities of practice and for theorists of religion.

Such holistic and, in effect, functionalist portraits cannot provide the whole picture. For one thing, the conjunction of truth and value has ideological force, concealing the workings of power, interest, and the facts of inequality (whether of gender, caste, or class, see Swenson, this volume). Moreover, as Foucault intimates, in modernity there has developed a sharp break insofar as science as a powerful purveyor of truth (models of the world) is entirely inadequate in providing models for living in it (including models for the conduct of scientists or the direction of scientific investigation), let alone for saving or transfiguring the subject. Conversely, from the perspective of science, religion is seen to be inadequate in providing truthful models of the world. Between science and religion lie the unpredictable, amoral, technologically productive, and socially and environmentally destructive effects of capitalism and statecraft.

Capitalism has alluring "models for," but these are unachievable by the majority and by most standards ethically unsatisfactory. Capitalism ultimately furthers the uncertainty and anxiety of a world without a clear future.

The reaction, not surprisingly, has been an explosion of interest in religious activities that jump-start the conjunction or conflation of truth and value, leaping too quickly and comprehensively, leaving little space for alternatives, not to mention breathing room for watchfulness, skepticism, and irony that are surely also necessary for human well-being.³⁶ Additionally, Stef Aupers has made the suggestive argument that the challenge to religious belief from science, on the one side, and from the efflorescence of fictional worlds of entertainment, on the other, has produced "an undertheorized epistemological shift in the religious climate [note the metaphor!] from (religious) belief to (spiritual) experience" as epitomized in the so-called "new age" and in engagements with commercial forms of fantasy such as virtual reality games (2012: 340). In other words, the challenge to the centrality of Christian "belief" is here met by a countermove towards "spirituality." More generally, whether by means of the immediacy of spiritual or charismatic experience, rigorously disciplined cultivation of piety, literal readings of sacred texts, or the exuberance of identity politics (and construction of enemies), religious revival has seemed to reknit truths about the world with directly accessible avenues for living in it. This is perhaps a kind of short-circuiting that, to use Foucault's terms, claims to both have the truth and be saved by it. Sometimes the regulatory functions that Rappaport perceived for ritual are replaced by idolatry. Moreover, finance capitalism, environmental destruction, employment insecurity, widening income disparities, political oppression and corruption, and general uncertainty continue unabated, whatever the strictures imposed on (or removed from) bodily comportment, family life, sexuality, or critical thought, and whatever the genuine individual satisfactions achieved through religious devotion.

These various religious movements each posit some kind of transcendent divinity or divine force and claim, contest, or are assigned social transcendence in the terms described above. However, although secularism (by definition) recognizes and perhaps produces transcendent religion, something we might call immanent religion continues unremarked and unbidden, or is seen as vaguely threatening insofar as it cannot be pinned down and governed. Consider the following incident that opens the introduction to an interesting collection on *Varieties of Secularism in Asia*:

In September 2006, shortly before it opened for international flights, the new airport of Bangkok was ritually cleansed by 99 Buddhist monks. The purification ceremony of Suvarnabhumi airport came less than a week after a military coup had abolished the democratic constitution and ousted the Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, from power, and it responded to persistent claims by workers that the airport, built on reclaimed swamp land and an old cemetery, was haunted by spirits. There had been two car accidents on the airport access road that staff blamed on spirit disturbances, and workers reported hearing footsteps and traditional music in the deserted airport terminals at night. The airport, a pet project of Thaksin's, worth an estimated 3.8 billion dollars, had by this time already run into considerable problems and been delayed for years. It had been dogged by technical difficulties and persistent allegations of corruption and nepotism. Now its management also had to contend with the problem of spirits. Determined to safeguard the public reputation of the airport and boost the morale of its staff, the organization of Airports of Thailand organized a large religious ceremony on 22

September. Halfway through the ceremony, proceedings were interrupted when a young luggage operator was possessed by a spirit. Announcing that his name was Poo Ming and that he was the guardian of the land developed for the airport, the spirit went on to demand that a shrine be built to honour the spirits. The monks conferred with the spirit for a while and then sprayed the medium with blessed water after which the spirit left him and the young man regained consciousness. (Bubandt and van Beek 2012: 1, internal citations removed)

Bubandt and van Beek argue that “this irruption of the seemingly irrational . . . in several ways challenged conventional ideas about the separation between modernity and tradition, and it serves as a reminder . . . of the fragility of the division between the ‘secular’ and the ‘religious’” (2012: 2). I would say rather that it illustrates first, the way that “transcendent” religion (in my second sense³⁷) was harnessed by the state, that is, that objectified religion is considered relevant for things like inaugurating airports (hardly different from the performance of Latin prayers at graduation ceremonies at the University of Toronto), and second, the way “immanent” religion slips under the radar (quite literally at the airport) and interrupts proceedings.

It is striking that Bubandt and van Beek focus on the response of the authorities. They add the nicely ironic point that the head of airport security, who “was in charge of protecting the state-of-the-art facility from criminal activity and terrorist attacks, had himself experienced trouble with the spirits” (2012: 1). I would like to learn more about the baggage handlers. Without knowing anything about the cultural context or the preceding events, it would seem that the spirit was speaking of unfairness or injustice, and asking for an acknowledgment of previous inhabitants who had been displaced.³⁸ Indeed the performance provides the first step in such acknowledgment. Hence it should be read in the lens of the ethical, not the magical or the irrational. It is a performance characterizing a specific form of historicity, an understanding that is deeply and specifically emplaced and temporal. Both the attribution of signs and symptoms and the arrival and speech of the spirit draw upon ordinary human action, creative imagination, and judgment.

Spirits here are certainly no more threatening to secularism than they are to organized, transcendent religion; rather, they indicate religion in its immanent formation, present but largely unremarked except when the spirits themselves feel called upon to remark on events occurring in the world around them and perhaps assert the truth.

NOTES

Thanks to all participants at the workshops in Berlin and Toronto, and especially to Janice Boddy, Tom Boylston, Filip De Boeck, Pamela Klassen, Ashley Lebner, and Justin Stein.

- 1 In recent decades both science and medicine have become intensive objects of anthropological investigation in ways that closely parallel work on religion and that problematize easy distinctions between them.
- 2 The “anthropology of consciousness” movement blends the two agendas of going native and explaining (validating) religious phenomena in scientific terms. Nothing could be more specific of its time and place. An important critique of drawing authority from participation is to be found in Richman (forthcoming) with respect to influential claims by outsiders to be possessed by Haitian spirits (*lwa*). For a reflexive and quite sensible

piece by an anthropologist who claims to have been possessed, see Halloy 2006. See also Stoller, this volume.

- 3 See Hacking 1999 on "kinds" and, in effect, kinds of kinds.
- 4 Astrology lacks liturgical order and collective ritual performances.
- 5 By "function" here I refer not to its necessity for the existence of society or human well-being in the sense of the functionalist school but rather take it as an inevitable part of the workings of what we call "society" or "mind," much as dreaming is a function of mind or as, for Lévi-Strauss, is myth. This is to take "function" in a quasi-mathematical rather than concretely biological sense.
- 6 Specific questions become possible or salient depending on the perspective one starts from. Certain kinds of functionalist questions – what underlying processes does religion express, what is it good for – are characteristic of the encyclopedic stream. A hermeneutic question concerns the nature and distinctiveness of religious truth (in comparison, but not competition, with scientific truth). A genealogical question is how such truths are produced and defended.
- 7 On religion and seriousness, see Tugendhat 2006.
- 8 My ethnography of spirit mediums in Madagascar (Lambek 2002b) illustrates all these points. For example, when a powerful precolonial king suddenly rises in Mme Doso to protest a television show on the war in Vietnam, creativity, critical thought, and ethical action conjoin in the performance.
- 9 For related but different arguments beginning with the unique properties of ritual as a form of action see Bloch 1989b; Tambiah 1985; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994.
- 10 Rappaport also gives examples from outside the Abrahamic sphere. In some traditions the sacred is manifest in specific gestures or objects (such as relics) rather than verbal utterances.
- 11 The process can be linked to "fundamentalism" where ancient scriptures are read literally. Rappaport thinks the detrimental effects are both social and ecological.
- 12 Ultimately the respective positions are not mutually exclusive and their relevance may be historically variable. Concomitantly, practitioners can be simultaneously insightful, mystified, and skeptical about their practices. That is one of the fascinating things about religion.
- 13 Rappaport argued too that ultimately religion conjoins the sacred with the numinous.
- 14 But see Csordas 2004, which offers a sophisticated approach to experience.
- 15 A book that captures this multisided quality extremely well is Orsi 2005.
- 16 How this happens is shaped by the authority structures and validating procedures characteristic of the particular religious formation.
- 17 See Asad 1986 for an important early application of the concept of tradition to Islam, and also Mittermaier, this volume.
- 18 There have been, however, numerous forays into the books of the Old Testament, notably by Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach, and an essay by Leach that goes right to the heart of Christianity has recently been rediscovered (2011).
- 19 Rappaport (1999) elaborates a concept of sacred, performative truth distinct from the truths of empirical observation (correspondence truth), poetry (coherence truth), or logic (axiomatic truth).
- 20 In response to my work on spirit possession, people sometimes attribute to Malagasy practitioners a "spiritual" quality or interest. In fact, nothing could be further from their outlook than the connotations of that word.
- 21 However, some might take transcendent deity as a criterion of religion itself.
- 22 I take the liberty to quote at length because Viveiros de Castro was unable at the last minute to contribute a new essay of his own to the *Companion* and because he expresses things so brilliantly.
- 23 Sacrifice may be a critical rubric under which to understand these matters in Christianity and elsewhere.

- 24 At <http://humbleapproach.templeton.org/incarnate/> (accessed Mar. 2013).
- 25 As Bergo puts it with respect to Levinas: “the everyday facticity of the face-to-face encounter destabilizes transcendental versus pragmatic distinctions. Transcendence is ‘anthropological,’ a human affair, or it is nothing. Any philosophical translation of embodied concrete life must consider the human subject as it is constituted through relations with others in a simultaneous occurrence of particularization and loss of self.” Deleuze has argued for a philosophy of immanence, attributing this position to Kant.
- 26 Signs are at once material and meaningful (Keane 1997), whether viewed as a Saussurean dualism of signifier and signified, or in a more complex Peircean semiotics.
- 27 Yet another direction in which to take the examination of transcendence would begin with the unjustly neglected work of Karl Jaspers who attempted to use the idea of transcendence to critique religions themselves. As described by Thornhill (2011), Jaspers argued:

that the centre of religion is always formed by a falsely objectivized or absolutized claim to truth, which fails to recognize that transcendence occurs in many ways, and that transcendent truths cannot be made concrete as a set of factual statements or narratives. Religious world views are therefore examples of limited mental attitudes, which seek to hold in uniform doctrine in order to evade a confrontation with the uncertainty and instability of transcendence. In positing transcendence as a realized element of revelation, religion in fact obstructs the capacity for transcendence which all people possess; religion claims to offer transcendence, but it actually obstructs it. Second, then, as the foundations of dogma and doctrinal orthodoxy, revealed truth-claims eliminate the self-critical and communicative aspect of human reason, and they undermine the dialogical preconditions of transcendence and existential self-knowledge. Jaspers thus viewed orthodox religion as an obstruction to communication, which places dogmatic limits on the common human capacity for truthfulness and transcendence. Nonetheless, as a philosopher of transcendence, he was also clear that human truthfulness, or humanity more generally, cannot be conceived without a recuperation of religious interpretive approaches and without a recognition of the fact that the founding contents of philosophy are transcendent. Much of his work, in consequence, might be construed as an attempt to free the contents of religious thinking from the dogmatic orthodoxies imposed upon these contents in the name of organized religion.

- 28 Compare the recent discussion by Bloch (2013), for whom religion is an indissoluble part of what he calls the “transcendental social.” This approaches what I refer to as socially immanent.
- 29 Nevertheless, a “postsecular” religious community looks different from a “presecular” one, still less socially immanent than transcendent insofar as it is self-conscious and vigilant of its rights.
- 30 Seeman (2010) argues that if you “read [Geertz’s] essay while systematically replacing the word ‘religion’ everywhere it appears with the word ‘culture’ [you can see] how little the meaning of that essay changes when religion actually drops out.”
- 31 However, a self-reflexive tradition is not exactly socially immanent in my sense.
- 32 To clarify my position, I agree with many of the positive points in Asad’s essay but not with his critical reading of Geertz. I forgo discussing other aspects of the debate.
- 33 I am indebted to Boylston here (personal communication, May 9, 2012).
- 34 Metaphors of weather and front are more dynamic than those of landscapes or “scapes” (Appadurai 1996).
- 35 See for example Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) on Buddhism.
- 36 For a nice account of Islamic practice that does leave room for irony, see Louw (2012). Spirit possession can also be understood as intrinsically ironic in its multiple voicing and its apprehension of both tragedy and comedy (Lambek 2003, 2010a).
- 37 I am not implying that Buddhism posits or depends on transcendent deity in the first sense.
- 38 I take the risk of interpretation because of the striking similarity to the interventions made by spirits in Madagascar (Lambek 2002b) and Mayotte (Lambek 2002a; Bouffart 2009).

Bouffart describes the displeasure of displaced spirits at the construction of the deep-water port (2009: 185ff.).

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PART I

Worlds and
Intersections

CHAPTER

1

Presence, Attachment, Origin: Ontologies of “Incarnates”

Philippe Descola

Most anthropologists dealing with non-Western societies tend to see the notion of “religion” as translating very inadequately the range of phenomena they study. And it is true that none of the traditional definitions of religion is really satisfying. Those that emphasize the contents always miss at least one of them or, on the contrary, pile them on in excess. Marcel Mauss, for instance, who was quite aware that religion is neither an essence nor a substance and that it can only be identified when embedded in social phenomena that are historically contextualized, classified these phenomena as “representations” (myths, beliefs, dogma), “practices” (acts, performances, utterances), “organizations” (churches, colleges of priests, monasteries) and “religious systems” (particular religions or groups of religions) (Mauss 1902). By doing so, he left aside the very qualities that peoples infer in the beings (deities, gods, spirits, immortals, ghosts, genies . . .) with which humans maintain all kinds of relations that religious systems may qualify and foster; even though, most of the time, these beings do not require institutions for them to materialize and become operative in human life. In that matter as well as in a few others, Mauss followed his uncle and mentor Émile Durkheim, whose ambitions were to determine religion as an intelligible object – that is, as a reasonable one – and to render manifest the mechanism of its instauration – sacredness as a transfiguration of society – without ever having to ask the embarrassing questions about the attributes with which these “sacralized” non-humans were endowed, or about the mode of presence through which they became

known. Both questions would have attracted too much attention to the seemingly irrational aspects of all religious ontologies, including the one underlying modern European forms of worship.

The same kind of Eurocentric – or rather circum-Mediterranean – bias affects the attempts to define religion in terms of contrastive oppositions. For instance, the one that was propounded by Dumézil between the *sacra* (that which goes from the humans to the gods) and the *signa* (that which goes from the gods to the humans), a distinction where one cannot fail to detect the heavy apparatus of oblation, sacrifice, and the interpretation of omens which binds in the same conceptual parcel the Greek and Roman gods with those of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt (Dumézil 1968: 277). For these mechanisms of intertwined connectedness are entirely foreign to other peoples, far more numerous than usually stated, who offer nothing to their deities or who maintain with them a wholly unmediated dialogue, one that dispenses with ritual specialists, priests, diviners, or even shamans. In many parts of Oceania, South America or Northern Asia, no *sacra* go to the multifaceted spirits who lurk in the background, because no proper *signa* are expected from them: they may leave discreet clues as to their presence, they may even fleetingly intimate their desire to establish a relation with so-and-so, but this is a far cry from Heavenly decrees descending on mortals.

The same kind of implicit theocentrism goes with the classical distinction between, on the one hand, gods who are a mere guarantee of the world's order, who act as stewards and perpetrators of an uncreated cosmos and whose good will and zeal must be fueled by humans, and on the other hand, an omnipotent creator god to whom one owes the world itself and everything it contains, an inflexible warden of the order which he instituted and the maintenance of which depends upon the proper maintenance of the alliance that he imposes on (some) humans. The first category embraces the religions of the cosmos, various expressions of Daoism, the religions focusing on dharma, as well as all those functional polytheisms in which deities with a high degree of specialization are entrusted with the task of looking after the adequate working of such and such a sector of the world; the second category is restricted to the monotheisms born on the periphery of the Mediterranean Sea. However, both these categories leave aside a large part of humankind. In particular they exclude all those peoples who do not deem it necessary that the world be ordered – they content themselves with trying to maintain fruitful relations with its inhabitants, whether visible or invisible; they also exclude all those peoples who judge that an order once instantiated becomes sufficiently robust for it not to require a permanent struggle against its disaggregation – in Australia, for example, where the great cosmic classes instituted by the Beings of Dreamtime do not need to be constantly consolidated. In short, it remains quite difficult, and rather unwise, to characterize reflexively a universal essence of religion or of sacredness. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that most European scholars who attempted to do so in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, scholars who were themselves witnesses of, and often actors in, the process of disenchantment of the world, have used for that purpose what was most familiar to them: the transcendence of the sacred and the finitude of Man, divine wrath and the necessity to placate it, obedience and repentance, the magnificence of liturgy and the worldly influence of priests. Hence the emphasis in the definition of religion laid on what was, in Durkheim's words,

“separate and forbidden,” on cosmological order and hierarchies, on the necessary mediation of ritual, corporate groups and dogma.

However, the quest for some common ground that might account for at least a dimension of all religious phenomena may not be entirely hopeless. For there is a universal function which brings Christianity back into the common lot of immanent states and ordinary paganisms, a function that Christianity shares with art but which artists have forsaken progressively in the course of the last century when they deemed it necessary, following Marcel Duchamp’s “ready-made,” to question the self-evidence of iconicity. This function is figuration, that is, the public instauration of an invisible quality through a speech act or an image. Under all the guises chosen to consider it, religion embodies, religion incarnates, religion renders present in visible and tangible manifestations the various alterations of being, the manifold expressions of non-self, and the potencies which contain all their acts. The diverse populations of beings that religion institutes in the various parts of the world, and in the heavens that border them, have this peculiarity that, by contrast with organisms, mountains or philosophical concepts, they are all lying in wait for an incarnation, however insubstantial that may be. This is indeed a defining feature of the central figure of Christianity, but a feature it shares with the different kinds of paganism. What differentiates the various entities instituted by religion are their ontological qualities, the kind of metaphysical coherence that they exhibit, and thus the manner in which they can be rendered perceptually present to those for whom they are a matter of concern. The present chapter is thus an attempt to throw a light on religion by tackling one of its aspects: the ontological pluralism of religious beings and the different ways in which they become known to humans. It can be seen as a contribution to a natural history, not of religion per se – as in the anthropological approach inspired by evolutionary psychology – but of the various populations of “incarnates” that peoples deal with when engaged in the kind of intercourse traditionally labeled as “religious.” In sum, rather than the straightforward “anthropology of religion” – usually focused solely on humans – what this essay wishes to explore is a comparative anthropology of a kind of nonhumans characterized by their intermittent mode of being, and of the very diverse ways according to which these go about actualizing their presence.

ONTOLOGICAL PLURALISM

A rapid examination of the classical literature on religion suggests that there exist at least three major classes of entities that can become embodied and operative in certain circumstances; let’s call them “spirits,” “deities,” and “antecedents.” Each of these classes of “incarnates” appears to be typical of a specific ontology, although some of them may coexist in a single conceptual or physical space, a point I shall return to later. An ontology is taken here as an unfolding of the phenomenological consequences of different kinds of inferences about the identities of things around us, inferences which operate by lumping together, or dissociating, elements of the lived world that appear to have similar or dissimilar qualities. One of the universal features of the human mind upon which such dispositions can be predicated is the awareness of a duality between, on the one hand, physical substances and material processes (here called “physicality”) and, on the other hand, inner dispositions and mental

states (here called “interiority”). By using this grid, humans are able to emphasize or minimize continuity and difference between humans and nonhumans. Thus, on the physicality axis, it may be inferred that all physical bodies are essentially ruled by identical “natural” principles, while the opposing inference stresses species differences and postulates that what marks out different kinds of entities is, precisely, the bodies they inhabit. Similarly, on the interiority axis, the emphasis may be on continuity (all beings have the same kind of inner dispositions) or on discontinuities (humans form a kind apart because of their souls or minds). When stabilized, systematized and transmitted, each of these basic inferences results in a specific ontology, that is, a guiding principle for perceiving how and with what the world is furnished; I have labeled these ontologies “animism,” “totemism,” “naturalism,” and “analogism” (Descola 2005).

In an animist ontology, nonhumans are endowed with the same interiority as humans, but every class of beings is differentiated by the body they inhabit. It is most common among native populations of Amazonia, northern North America, Siberia, and some parts of Southeast Asia and Melanesia who maintain that animals, plants, and even inanimate objects have a human-like intentionality, lodged within a mobile bodily clothing which nevertheless determines, because of its anatomical features, the type of world they have access to and how they see it. Naturalism is the mirror opposite of animism and characterizes the modern world and Western thought. It insists on the differences between humans and nonhumans on the interiority axis: humans alone are supposed to have a meaningful selfhood, whether individual (mind, language, capacity for symbolism) or collective (*Volksgeist*, cultures). By contrast, humans and nonhumans are linked by their shared physicality: they belong to a continuum where the same laws of Nature apply. As for totemism, it is taken here not in the sense, rendered common by Lévi-Strauss (1962b), of a universal classificatory device using natural discontinuities to signify social segmentation, but rather as an ontology that stresses the continuity between humans and nonhumans both on the physicality axis (common substances) and on the interiority one (common essences). It is best exemplified by Australian Aboriginal cultures where specific plant and animal species are believed to share with particular sets of humans an identical complex of essential qualities, but one that is absolutely different from other similar groupings. Finally, in an “analogist” ontology, discontinuities are assumed on both axes, with the recognition that there exist microdifferences between the components of the world at an infra-individual level. But a world thus made of singularities requires in turn, to become intelligible and manageable, that various kinds of correspondences be set up between these heterogeneous elements (hence “analogism”). Analogism was the dominant ontology in Europe until the Renaissance, and it is still extremely common elsewhere: in the Far East and India, in western Africa or among native cultures of Mexico and the Andes.

These various manners of detecting and emphasizing folds in our surroundings should not be taken as a typology of tightly isolated “worldviews,” but rather as an outcome of different kinds of assumptions about what the world is made of. According to circumstances, each human is capable of making any of the four inferences, but will most likely pass a judgment of identity according to the ontological context – that is, the systematization for a group of humans of one of the inferences only – where he or she was socialized. The most usual milieu for that is a collective,

understood as the outcome of a specific way of assembling humans and nonhumans in a network of relations. That notion of collective, which was initially coined by Bruno Latour (1993), is meant here as an aggregating device, the purpose of which is to gather within an operational assemblage certain types of beings that each ontology distinguishes, and to exclude others. For instance, plants and animals are excluded from naturalist collectives – “societies” or “ethnic groups” exclusively composed of humans – while they form their own collectives, one for each species, in animist ontologies. It should come as no surprise, then, that incarnates find themselves distributed into different kinds of collectives according to the ontological features that go with their particular mode of presence. Let’s examine that for each class in turn.

SPIRITS

Spirits are the typical incarnates in what I have called animist ontologies, that is, where a continuity of souls and a discontinuity of bodies is assumed. There, humans and nonhumans are conceived as possessing the same type of interiority: most animals and some plants are treated as persons, each endowed with a soul which allows them to communicate with humans. And it is because of this common inner disposition that nonhumans behave as full social beings: they abide by kinship rules and ethical codes, engage in ritual activity, organize feasts, and procure their subsistence, just like humans. However, the reference shared by most beings in the world is humanity as a general condition, not man as a species. In other words, humans and all the kinds of nonhumans with which humans interact each have a different physicality in that their identical inner dispositions express themselves in different types of bodies, often conceived as clothing that can be donned or discarded, the better to underline their autonomy from the interiorities which inhabit them. Now, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996, 2009) rightly pointed out in the case of Amazonia, these specific forms of clothing induce contrasting perspectives on the world, in that the physiological and perceptual constraints proper to a certain type of body impose on each class of being a specific position and point of view in the general ecology of relations. As is often openly stated in myths and ritual chants, nonhuman persons have the same kind of “culture” as humans because they have in common the same subjective dispositions, but the worlds to which all these beings are attuned are different because each of these worlds is but an extension of the particular bodily equipment of a particular species. The resulting combination is then, properly, a pluriverse.

Each animist “body” – a bear, a birch tree, a sledge, sometimes a shadow¹ – is thus animated by a “spirit.” But it may be the spirit of another body since spirits wander between corporeal costumes, not to mention the fact that a spirit can be temporarily divorced from its proper body – notably during dreams – or even on a more permanent basis, a sad fate that often befalls the dead. In the latter case, especially shortly after death, the spirit renders itself manifest by uncanny or unexpected sounds, by leaving traces of its presence, by furtively touching the living, or it remains partially visible under the guise of a tiny miniature of its usual body.² Spirits thus exist phenomenally as “presences,” sometimes fleeting, sometimes stabilized for a while, neither perfectly visible nor completely imperceptible, the existence of which is established by the surface effects that they generate: the crack of a dead twig, a warm

breath of air, the gaze of an animal. Their instauration into a figure, albeit usually a rather incomplete one, thus happens constantly in people's daily surroundings provided they are attentive to the indexical clues that these semimaterial agencies leave in their wake.

As is the case with any other class of being awaiting instauration, spirits can also be instituted through the iconic representation of the avatar into which their original subjectivity was embedded. Figuring a spirit in an animist ontology consists mainly in rendering visible the subjective interiority of the different sorts of beings, and in showing that this common interiority is lodged in a variety of very different bodies which must be unequivocally identified by specific clues. The masks of the Yupik of Alaska provide a fine illustration (Fienup-Riordan 1996; Nelson 1983; Ray 1967). They were used during the winter rituals where they were instrumental in rendering present in the meeting house, *quasgiq*, the souls of animal persons which were honored and entertained so that they should continue of their own free will to surrender their bodies to hunters for humans to feed upon them. Among the great variety of masks, each illustrating a particular event, a myth or the story of a particular relation with an animal spirit, two main categories stand out: shaman masks figuring their auxiliary spirits, and the masks of animal spirits who were received in the *quasgiq* to be honored. In all cases, the interiority of the animal, his *yua*, is figured either by the inclusion of a human face in an animal head carved with great accuracy or, less commonly, by the adjunction of human limbs to an animal body, sometimes by a combination of both. As for the shaman masks they figure the auxiliary spirit, *tunraq*, under the guise of an animal body displaying – or hiding thanks to a mechanical device – a monstrous humanoid face. The masks were anything but static; in fact the meeting house was a sort of theater where the Yupiit staged the world of animal spirits via an array of props, including masks, that were manufactured just for one occasion, and were worn by dancers who told stories, sang songs and imitated with great realism the sound messages of animals; and it was this combination that contributed to attracting the *yua* of animals into the house. Even if the masks were often carved with a striking realism, it was rather the whole scenic design within which they were inserted that ensured their iconicity, and hence the instantiation of their agency. In this sense, the marks of interiority figured on the masks were almost needless: whatever the talent for mimicry of the mask bearer, he could not but reveal his humanity by his body, formerly partially stripped of clothes, so it was obvious for all the viewers that bringing the presence of animals was mediated by a human intentionality adopting the point of view of the animal, that is, incorporating mimetically the intentionality of the animal, without, for all that, being possessed by it.

DEITIES

Let us turn to deities. These are specialized agencies specifically assigned to social units, to subdivisions of space (quarters, cardinal points, seas or mountains . . .) and of time (day and night, seasons, life cycles . . .), to regimes of practice (crafts, statuses, caste specialties . . .) and to kinds of techniques, temperament, and life habits. Deities are common in what I have called analogist ontologies, those that are predicated on the idea that all existing things (entities, states, propensities, qualities . . .) are divided

into a multiplicity of principles, forms, materials, and dispositions separated by tiny intervals, often ordered along a graded scale, such as in the Great Chain of Being which served as the main cosmological model during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This initial state of fragmentation calls for a structuring of the multifaceted contrasts in a compact mesh of analogies connecting the qualities of each singularity present in the world – and every entity and component thereof is a singularity. Such systems are notable for the remarkable ingenuity invested in detecting all kinds of similitudes and resonances between apparently disparate objects, especially when these connections become instrumental in divining the future, pairing appropriate qualities and treating illness or misfortune. An obsession with analogy becomes a dominant feature, as in traditional China where, according to Marcel Granet in 1934, “society, man, the world, are objects of a global knowledge constituted by the sole use of analogy” (Granet 1968: 297, my translation). But the systematic use of analogy – a form of reasoning otherwise common to all humans – must be understood here as a symptom rather than a defining feature. It points to the evidence of a world made of countless differences, a world that can become comprehensible only by detecting in it resemblances and correspondences, however tenuous, between the states and components of the pieces that form the fabrics of life – including humans, themselves subdivided in multiple fragments partially located outside their physical envelope. Obviously, this kind of ontology requires a lot of work for making its heterogeneous parts stick together; and this is where deities play a crucial role, for each one of these specialized agencies is usually vested with the function of acting as a go-between with such and such a portion or a population of the cosmos.

By contrast with the spirits that wander in the animist archipelago, deities are generally firmly attached to places, where they are the object of genuine cults. They dwell in caves, in lakes, in springs, in mountains, in rocks, as well as in the various sorts of shrines that humans build for their accommodation. There they receive offerings and sacrifices; there prayers are addressed to them at particular times and it is expected of them that they will fulfill in exchange the wishes of their worshippers in the domain of expertise recognized as theirs. Although they are in no way transcendent to human existence, deities are thus less immanent than spirits: besides being located in a specific site – sometimes even embodied in an object (a stone, a piece of wood, a statue) – they are affiliated to a segment of the collective from which are eventually issued the ritual experts entrusted with their celebration, and specialized fields of intervention are assigned to them. Monotheism made a clever move when it merged all these particularisms in a polyvalent God, detached from specific places and from segmentary solidarities, a principle of totalization which has rendered more efficient and more economical the integration of disparities. Analogist collectives are thus alone in having veritable pantheons, not because they are polytheist (a not very helpful characterization, for it is usually understood as a mere pluralization of monotheism), but because, as has often been pointed out, one finds the same diversity and profusion in the little community of deities as there is elsewhere in the world at large. On the surface of the earth as well as wherever the deities live we have indeed the same world, with an identical social division of labor and an identical compartmentalization of the sectors of activity, with identical rivalries and antagonisms between its segments. This is why the various human units of an analogist collective strive, by setting up cults, to get their own particular deities to accomplish whatever they are

destined to do, and endeavor to mobilize their particular temperament and field of expertise in certain collective undertakings for which their cooperation is indispensable. This is also why analogist pantheons are so flexible: most empires were clever enough to welcome the deities of the peoples they conquered, for the cooperation of these newcomers was useful to integrate within a cosmic totality the disparate elements of which these vast collectives were composed. But conversely, it is also perfectly normal that analogist collectives subjected to Christianization – in Mexico or the Andes, for example – should readily add to the scores of nonhumans that already existed in each segment the whole gamut of Catholic saints, along with the powers that each of them is recognized to possess.

Christianity and the deities of analogist collectives also share a strange institution which is unknown among animist collectives, sacrifice. Rather than rendering this practice a defining feature of an embracing definition of religion, one could see it as a means of action developed within the context of analogist ontologies in order to establish an operational continuity between intrinsically different singularities. For this purpose, it makes use of a serial mechanism of connections and disconnections that functions either as an attractor – to establish a connection with something else – or as a separator – to break a connection that already exists at a different level and that one seeks to dissolve. For the characteristic feature of a sacrifice is that it establishes a link between two terms initially unconnected, the purpose of the operation being, to cite Lévi-Strauss's definition,

to establish a relation, not of resemblance but of contiguity, by means of a series of successive identifications. These can be made in either direction, depending on whether the sacrifice is expiatory or represents a rite of communion: thus, either of the persons offering the sacrifice with the sacrificer, of the sacrificer with the victim, of the sacralized victim with the deity; or in the reverse order. (1962a: 297–298).

Making use of sacrifice to forge a relationship of contiguity between initially separate entities may seem necessary in an analogical ontology in which all existing beings are singularities between which links need to be established. In that sense, a link between two distant and heterogeneous entities such as a sacrificer and a deity can only be constructed by a mechanism of gradual and transitive identifications between the intermediate elements.

A common feature of the mode of presence of deities is their occasional embodiment in material objects, whether iconic or not. This trait appears all the more crucial as it is often expected of these agencies that they show indications of the destiny which will befall individuals and collectives, and it thus becomes often necessary for them to render these indications manifest through physical actions. Besides, adoration and prayer are made much easier when they are addressed to objects that one can precisely identify and with which one can identify oneself. The mode of presence of deities is thus quite different from that of spirits, an important point that requires a clarification.

I surmise that spirits become present in images through an inference of intentionality that corresponds to a mentalist strategy – their material form acquires an agency because it is endowed with the same kind of intentionality as the agent that it renders present and which renders it active; while deities become embodied through a behavioral inference that corresponds to an externalist strategy – a deity's image acquires

an agency because it purportedly has a kind of human-like mode of existence corresponding to the social role it is expected to play. The internalist theory is grounded in the premise that humans attribute the cause of the behavior they observe among fellow humans to a mental disposition: it is because I presume that the person with whom I interact possesses a mind like mine, hence representations, beliefs, feelings, that I am able to interpret his or her behavior; while the externalist theory stems from the Wittgensteinian principle that a mind is inferred in others on the ground of the intuition that their behavior, notably their linguistic behavior, follows a rule that can be reconstructed. Instead of having to choose between a mentalist strategy and an externalist strategy, as Alfred Gell felt obliged to do when he discussed the mental process that can activate an agency in an image, it appears more reasonable to surmise that spirits materialize according to the former and deities according to the latter (Gell 1998: 126ff.).³ In other words, an image can be seen as having an agency, either because in certain circumstances it appears to express the same type of intentionality as the subjects who made it, inspired it or used it, or because, by stipulating for the image a social role conceived by analogy with that of a human, it appears to be able to act independently. In the first case it materializes as a spirit, in the second as a deity.

Let's go back to the Yup'ik masks to see how they embody spirits. During the ceremonies where they were used, as I pointed out, it was obvious to everyone that the presence of an animal interiority was mediated by a human agency. The dancers were not alienated by the spirit of the animal that they represented, rather in the sense of an attorney representing a principal; they kept the full control of their subjectivity and only served as a filter for the animal point of view thanks to the objectifying agency of the mask. Furthermore, as is very often the case with masks in an animist regime, these were endowed with agency during the performance only. A mentalist inference was thus activated occasionally, in an exceptional context where the mask operated as one among several other presence-triggering devices of which it embodied the figuration. There is nothing surprising in the fact that animist images are most often provided with agency through a mentalist inference, since the imputation of an interiority conceived by analogy with that of humans is precisely a typical feature of animism. If such a disposition is quite plausible when directed toward nonhumans leading autonomous lives – animals and plants – to whom representations, desires and even beliefs can be ascribed in certain circumstances, by contrast, the agency ascribed to artifacts must perforce be the index of a surrogate intentionality, precisely that of a spirit, here understood both as a subjective reality capable of mental representations and as a kind of nonhuman incarnating this subjective reality in a variety of hypostases, including man-made images.

Before turning to the materialization of deities through an externalist strategy, let's consider a third kind of potential incarnate, what I have called "antecedents," for some of these share with the deities their specific mode of presence.

ANTECEDENTS

Antecedents are literally what one has to get back to in order to understand, and accept, the conditions of the present order. However, by contrast with the creative deeds and exploits attributed to deities in an unspecified past, antecedents are sources

of qualities and rights for restricted local groups of humans only; they are fragmented determinants. Two main kinds of antecedents may be distinguished: ancestors and totems. Even if, in both cases, they constitute agencies from which social segments draw their ontological identity, they have little in common.⁴ Let's begin with ancestors. These are humans from previous generations, neither really dead nor entirely alive, often materialized in domestic or lineage shrines, whose descendants depend on them for almost everything: their status, their temperament and dispositions, their means of subsistence. In many West African societies, it is not only the possessions at one's disposal or the ceremonial prerogatives one enjoys that are allotted by the ancestors, but also one's share of happiness and misfortune, one's fate as a (semi) mortal. The cult addressed to the ancestors is thus not so much a way of honoring them and thanking them for all that they transmit; rather, it is an attempt to conciliate them and dispel their anger, an attempt that one can never be sure will be crowned with success. The flow between generations is irreversible, for it is impossible to return to one's ancestors what they have given, starting with life. The living thus inherit a debt that is transmitted unfailingly from one generation to the next, until they pass away themselves and can make their descendants in turn pay for the life and the corporate patrimony that they have received. Paying one's duties to the dead – in particular through the proper accomplishment of rituals – is not only to compensate for one's existence and everything that makes it possible; it is also an insurance for one's own survival after death.

Despite some behavioral differences between deities and ancestors – both, anyway, emerge in analogist ontologies – they share an identical mode of presence. Examining this mode will bring us back to the question of how a social agency is inferred in these kinds of incarnates. We have seen that deities (and now ancestors) materialize in an object through an “externalist” inference, by contrast with spirits who become embodied as a result of a mentalist inference. The case of ancestors' shrines among Mandé and Voltaic societies in western Africa will provide a suitable example of the former process.⁵ There, standing in houses or sanctuaries, wooden sculptures figure adult men and women, upright or seated in hieratic poses, devoid of any narrative dimensions. They are archetypal images of individuals characterized by a stage of life and a recognizable status. Among the Lobi, for instance, in a room called the “chamber of powers,” the head of the household settles the effigy of a clearly identified maternal ancestor with whom he shares some qualities. For instance, the statue of a forefather wearing on his head a calabash spiked with porcupine quills bears witness to the status of powerful healer that this ancestor shares with his descendant. During his lifetime the owner of the chamber of powers fits it with objects linked to his personal history, with ancestors' effigies and figurines carved on the occasion of an incident consequential to him or to a member of his household, so that the room appears as a vast biographical fresco where the effigy of the tutelary ancestor keeps watch over a congregation of clay and wooden statues augmented by a confused mass of objects. Now these statues, designated in all this area by words denoting the shadow and the reflection, are the doubles both of the ancestor *and* of his descendant who pays homage to it. For the configuration which links them to be activated, it must be incorporated in a figuration recognizable by the ancestor because it was carved in a specific style by the carvers working for the maternal clan. And it is only if the ancestors identify themselves in their effigies that they accept to come and

inhabit these iconic repositories. Ancestors' statues are at the same time singularities, each the double of such and such a maternal ancestor embodying the destiny of his descendant, and an archetype of the image to which the living must try to conform. It is for this reason that the statues bear the marks of the ritual transformations undergone by their descendants or that they are bound to go through.

It can readily be seen that these small "wooden persons," as the Bambara call the effigies of their ancestors, are quite different from the spirit masks of the Yupit. They do not incorporate an episodically activated nonhuman interiority; they permanently embody the network of social relations that link the ancestor to his descendants and his kin, by emphasizing the positions that they occupy in relation to each other, their reciprocal duties, and the rituals which reunite them periodically. However, the statue is not a symbol or an emblem, but indeed a "little person," that is an artifact inhabited by a human who is neither completely dead nor fully alive, and endowed because of this with an agency of his own in spite of his apparent immobility. But this is an agency of which only the effects – whether prophylactic, vindictory or reparatory – are perceptible by those they affect, a means to give credit to a presence by the result it generates. The best way to ascribe this disposition to the effigy is thus to treat it according to an externalist approach, as an eminent agent of the life of the collective; for not only does it obey the social rules that govern the relation of the ancestors to the living, but it validates them and renders them possible. Never mind, then, the obvious inertia of the carved ancestors, since these indexes, prominent in a medley of other indexes, offer to the gaze, in the darkness of the chamber of powers, the chain of affinities which bestows dynamism and substance to collective life.

Let us turn now to the second kind of antecedents, namely totems. In Australia at least, they are the prototypes of encompassing qualities, physical as well as moral, whose actual form may be left undefined. Totems are now commonly qualified in the ethnological literature on Australia as "beings of the Dreamtime," a lexical *aggiornamento* which regretfully tends to restrict their application to a single cultural area, however large, and thus strips them of the potential for constituting a worldwide class of incarnates. Although totems are not as generalized as Frazer suggested in "Totemism and exogamy," these kinds of agency nevertheless were recognized as potent means of identification in other parts of the world, particularly in North America and Oceania. However, thanks in particular to the richness of the ethnography on Australian Aborigines, the totems of this area may be singled out as good models for this category of incarnates. In Australia, then, the main totem of a group of humans, most often an animal or a plant, and all the beings, human and nonhuman, that are affiliated to it are said to share certain general attributes of physical conformation, substance, and behavior by virtue of a common origin localized in space.⁶ It may even be that these attributes that crosscut species boundaries are not derived from what is improperly called the eponym entity, since the word designating the totem in many cases is not the name of a species, that is, a biological taxon, but rather the name of an abstract property which is present in this species as well as in all the beings subsumed under it in a totemic grouping (von Brandenstein 1982).

Totemic groupings are thus systems of differences, but these go beyond a mere system of classificatory labels. For the differences are not primarily between animals and plants that would offer a system of natural discontinuities as a template for designating social discontinuities – for example, the obvious differences between the

Crow (Wardaar) and the White Cockatoo (Maarnetj) would have provided to the Nungar of southwest Australia an analogical model for the social differences between the moiety of the Crow and the moiety of the White Cockatoo. The differences are more ontological than natural, in that they bear upon bundles of attributes common to different beings, including humans, within classes designated by words denoting dispositions – for example, still among the Nungar, humans and nonhumans belonging to the moiety of “the getter” (*maarnetj*) have a set of physical and moral qualities distinct from those belonging to the moiety of “the watcher” (*waardar*), two names that also serve to designate respectively the crow and the white cockatoo (von Brandenstein 1977). And among humans, the qualities – physical conformation, color of skin, character, etc. – do not proceed directly from morphological or behavioral features of the cockatoo or the crow; rather, the two birds are prototypes of encompassing qualities of which they are deemed to offer a synthesis. They are signs for a totem which is a source of life, form and identity, but remains unrepresentable as such. When an emu or a kangaroo is painted on a piece of bark, it is not an attempt at depicting the “ancestor of the clan,” it is an instantiation in an animal of the specific combination of qualities proceeding from a specific totem, an animal which, for the convenience of figuring an indescribable abstraction, stands as a conventional representation of the totem and is named after it.

Although the embodiment of antecedents (ancestors or totems) into images is quite common, it is not a requirement for their incarnation. For even when they remain invisible or reduced to traces – as with the bones of the ancestors confined to receptacles or the effects of the action of totemic beings on the structuring of the Australian environment – they continue to maintain a metonymic relation with those whose existence they determine or instantiate. Whether embodied in statues, preserved as mummies or inhabiting shrines with their diffused presence, ancestors remain powerful agents because the attachment of descent – par excellence a relation of contiguity – is constantly reactivated by their descendants who wish to benefit from what they procure. Their incarnation is thus mainly obtained by the desire that something of them be present in the living. As for totems, they become alive through other relations of contiguity: descent also, but in a more essential way than with ancestors, as each one of them is a hypostasis of the qualities defining the human and nonhuman members of the class proceeding from it; and indexicality, because the whole world is a direct trace of their bodily moves and actions. In spite of their current invisibility, antecedents are thus very concrete since the ontological qualities and the collective privileges that they transmit, infused in bodies, objects and sites, ensure the continuity, generation after generation, between a point of origin and those that it irrigates.

There are probably more kinds of incarnates in the world than those listed in this chapter and some of them may combine features pertaining to different kinds. For instance, the many physical expressions of the souls of the dead may be likened to the mode of presence of spirits, although these manifestations do not really fall into the category of ancestors' behavior; where the spirits of the dead wander freely among the living, there is neither a dependency of a set of humans upon a set of dead nor the idea that the latter play a part in the ontogeny and the sociogenesis of the former. A certain fluidity of ontological boundaries is also encountered in Australian totems: although they are mostly prototypes from the dawn of time, they may

sometimes be described as spirit-like and whimsical agencies still intervening in the daily affairs of humans.⁷ A measure of cohabitation between different sorts of incarnates is also possible in a single collective. In the sort of typical analogist ontologies where deities and ancestors proliferate, spirits are not unknown, but they are more particularized, specialized and attached to places than in animist ontologies.⁸ Even monotheism is known to coexist with spirits. A remarkable answer to the necessity of providing a unique standpoint from which to synthesize a multiplicity of agencies, monotheism nevertheless allows for a discreet survival of what it aimed to replace, such as the *jinn* in Islam or the various *vaettir* spirits in contemporary Lutheran Iceland. But ontological crossovers are uncommon on the whole, because the qualifications of incarnates, like those of any other kind of population, follow strictly the type of qualities that each ontology requires for any being to come into existence.

By contrast with any other entity, however, an incarnate in general is entirely defined by its very movement of becoming (visible, audible, tangible, efficient, representable, lovable, horrific . . .) which confirms its intermittent existence and eventually signals that a “religious” event is going on. Whether in domestic icons of the Virgin or in Yup’ik masks, in Yolngu paintings of totems or in African ancestor shrines, the actualization of a presence in various forms is the basic process that brings to the fore different sets of agencies, with different sets of properties, which require in turn different kinds of treatment from humans. Of course, one could speak there of hierophany, a term with a solid standing in the history of religions. But hierophany implies that something out there is revealed, something sacred preexisting its manifestation and which stands in stark opposition to everything mundane and profane. On the other hand, the figuration of an incarnate – that is, its very existence – is nothing but the ad hoc objectification of an agency which corresponds to the expectations of those that become aware of its presence, expectations that are themselves shaped by the ontology of the things familiar in the context where these agencies appear. No revelation is implied of something transcendental and previously hidden from perception and consciousness – although some religions emphasize this aspect; what we have, rather, is an objectification of a potentiality the very nature of which is to become objectified now and then. Figuration is indeed the adequate term to designate this sleight of hand, midway between the capture of a form (*forma*), which evokes too neatly the idea of an inalterable prototype, and the reproduction of an image (*imago*), which overemphasizes the idea of the copy, diminished and devalued, of that same prototype.⁹ Although he had Christian iconography in mind, with its historical weight of incarnation, Hans-Georg Gadamer did not mean otherwise when he emphasized the exemplary nature of the religious image: “in it we can see without doubt that an image is not a copy of a copied being, but an ontological communion with what is copied” (Gadamer 1986: 125). No wonder, then, that in our disenchanting world, art has become the new form of religious experience.

NOTES

- 1 See the remark by Bogoras that, among the Chukchee, “Even the shadows on the wall constitute definite tribes and have their own country, where they live in huts and subsist by hunting” (1904–1909: 281).

- 2 The miniature may also be the usual form according to which a nonembodied “soul” can be apprehended, for instance among the Chewong of Malaysia (Howell 1989) or the Inuit (Laugrand and Oosten 2008).
- 3 As Maurice Bloch rightly pointed out, Gell deals with this question in a paradoxical manner since he draws on an internalist theory in his treatment of the intentionality of the works of art, while he refers to an externalist theory when it comes to explaining certain effects of their agency, such as idolatry or anthropomorphism (Bloch 1999).
- 4 Aboriginal totems are often qualified as “ancestral” in the anthropological literature on Australia, but it is obvious that they can only be so in a metaphorical way when compared to what “real” ancestors stand for in West Africa or in China.
- 5 See the chapter “Le corps et ses doubles,” in Breton et al. 2006.
- 6 This explains the kind of counterintuitive statement reported by Spencer and Gillen who, when showing a photograph of him to an Aranda man of the kangaroo totem, received this comment from him: “this one is exactly like me; as is a kangaroo,” leading them to comment “every man considers his totem . . . as the same thing as himself” (1899: 202).
- 7 For an example among the Mangarrayi of northern Australia, see Merlan 1980.
- 8 For such a case of coexistence in Inner Asia, see Hamayon 1990.
- 9 As Erich Auerbach noted in his 1938 analysis of the use of the term *figura* by Lucretius (Auerbach 2003: 17–19).

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CHAPTER 2

The Dynamic Reproduction of Hunter-Gatherers’ Ontologies and Values

Sylvie Poirier

Anthropological rereadings of animistic traditions have been recently freed from a past evolutionist bias. Coupled with what some are now calling the ontological turn in anthropology, including ethnographies of the “relational ontologies” of hunter-gatherers, this shift has opened up novel conceptual avenues by which anthropologists can better translate and understand hunter-gatherers’ values, notions of person and self, and ways of knowing, being and acting in the world. By extension, these conceptual avenues offer us new clues for understanding the manifold ways that, from the colonial to the current postcolonial periods, hunter-gatherers have evolved in their dialectical and dialogical relationships with institutionalized religions (in most cases, the various Christian denominations and, more recently, Pentecostal and other charismatic churches), secular political modernity (the state, bureaucratic structures and capitalist enterprise), and processes of individuation that define the modern subject.

I contend, however, that there is still much conceptual exploration and innovation ahead of us on these issues. One path concerns the need to continue addressing the *differences* and alterity of Indigenous and hunting peoples on their own terms, that is by *seriously* considering what they say about their world, including their epistemological and ontological principles, theories of human (and nonhuman) action, and forms of agency, subjectivity and sociality. As Viveiros de Castro has so aptly remarked: “Taking something seriously begins by not neutralizing it” (2009: 167). Approaching

differences seriously implies suspending the paradigm of universalism,¹ which has proved itself to be a most effective tool in the neutralization of the thoughts of others, and opening up to the possibility (and thus the potentiality) of the multiplicity of worlds or multiple ways of being human. If we follow the lead of a reciprocal or reverse anthropology, it would also mean seriously considering not only the differences of the Indigenous others but also their own conception of "differences."² Seriously considering the other's differences in order to "extract the unthought from our thoughts" (Jullien 2008: 190) is thus an invitation that authors like Sahlin (1995), Latour (1991), Viveiros de Castro (2009), Jullien (2008) and Chakrabarty (2000), among others, are proposing for the humanities and the social sciences. With Chakrabarty, we can indeed question the extent to which the secular (and disenchanting) conceptual language of the social sciences is at once both indispensable and inadequate to help us think through the experiences of non-Western others, to render worlds in which humans are not the only meaningful agents and where ancestral and spiritual beings of various kinds are existentially coeval with the human. Nadasdy states: "taking aboriginal people's ideas seriously (i.e. as understanding that might inform our own theories about the world rather than as merely symbolic constructs, however socially useful) necessarily entails rethinking many of the most basic concepts of social theory: personhood, agency, knowledge, power, labor, exchange" (2007: 26; see also Povinelli 1993, 1995).

In this chapter, my intention is to explore the extent to which an ontological perspective can offer us a better understanding of the lifeworlds of hunter-gatherers. This implies, in the first place, distancing ourselves from the core concept of "belief" which has been indispensable to the anthropological analyses of Indigenous religions but has proved in some respects inadequate to truly render their ways of knowing and being. The concept of "belief" is also one of the neutralizing tools alluded to by Viveiros de Castro (2009), and it is a most powerful and effective one, even more so when it is contrasted with Western rationalism and "objective" scientific knowledge. The concepts of relationality and ancestrality, and their embodied expressions, as well as the flexible, permeable and negotiable character of the ontological boundaries between human and nonhuman beings and agencies are among the avenues I explore here and consider seriously. These concepts also evoke the fundamental values of personal autonomy and reciprocity, of sharing (and exchange), long attested in the anthropological literature on hunter-gatherers. This literature would generally characterize the worlds of hunters as being open and flexible, traits that we could partly relate to the uncertainties of hunting and thus to the very pragmatic praxis of remaining "open" to all eventualities and potentialities, including "ontological potentialities" (see Viveiros de Castro 2009: 22; see also Hallowell 1981: 25).

Considering Indigenous peoples' relations and engagements with institutionalized religions, whose ontological and epistemological principles differ from their own, I also look at some avenues the former are exploring in order to perform and reproduce, in a dynamic and transformative manner, their own values and reciprocal responsibilities toward extended kin networks, the land, the ancestors and spirits of deceased relatives. While Indigenous peoples may have, in most cases, experienced their first encounters and entanglements with institutionalized religions as ontological violence, they nonetheless adapted these new cosmological and ritual forms in their own ways, attesting to their openness and flexibility, their creativity, resistance and

agency; in other words to the transformative continuity of their cosmopolitics (Poirier 2008). In this exploration, my examples will be drawn from the ethnographic literature on the Australian Aborigines, subarctic Amerindians³ and the Inuit of Nunavik and Nunavut (Canada).

WHY THE CATEGORY OF HUNTER-GATHERERS?

Despite the discussion above, I deliberately use the anthropological category of hunter-gatherers rather than the broader (political) category of “Indigenous” peoples. While all hunting and gathering peoples fall under the aegis of “Indigenous,” not all groups who, since the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, claim an Indigenous identity, fall within the category of hunter-gatherers. My aim is not to reify foraging as a mode of production, but rather to explore foragers’ various and distinctive ontological principles – their values, ethos and ways of being human – as well as some of the manifold responses to their long-lasting interactions with settler societies.

Another reason for using this category is that the Indigenous groups concerned, namely Australian Aborigines, Inuit, and subarctic Amerindians, largely continue to define themselves as hunters or as coming from a tradition of hunters. Furthermore, though hunting activities do not occupy the same place as they once did – that is before sedentism imposed by the Canadian and Australian states – they are still practiced, albeit irregularly, and are a part of their lives, knowledge and ways of being in the world. I contend that through actual hunting and gathering, but also through oral traditions, stories and memories of hunting and gathering activities and events, they maintain (or strive to maintain) their intimate relationships with and responsibilities toward the land and meaningful places. They also maintain an ethos of reciprocity with animals and various other nonhuman beings and agencies, including ancestors and spirits of deceased relatives.

Probably more than any other minority groups within modern and liberal states such as Canada and Australia, Indigenous peoples and those coming from a hunting and nomadic (or seminomadic) tradition have been and still are subject to historical, structural and ontological violence. These issues are convincingly addressed in the literature (Samson 2004; Macdonald 2010; Cowlishaw 1999; Niezen 2000, to name but a few). The various forms of violence and experiences of inequality, dispossession and suffering for hunting and gathering peoples – and Indigenous peoples in general – are an integral part of their memories, lives and post- and neocolonial ethos. However, and in spite of powerful tools of assimilation and cultural genocide (Niezen 2000) to which they are still subject, postcolonial hunters have mastered the arts of resistance and renewal in their attempts to exist on terms more in tune with their values and their epistemological and ontological principles. Many hunter-gatherers were never seduced by and never adopted the secular ideology promulgated by modernity; neither were they particularly seduced by the colonizers’ ways and values. Their manifold historic and contemporary forms of negotiation, engagement and entanglement with the “White man’s” world, with institutionalized religions, state policies, world markets and neoliberal interests in their lands, are not directed toward becoming more like Westerners but rather toward continuing to exist on their own

terms (Poirier 2010a, 2010b). From first contact to the present day, Indigenous peoples, hunter-gatherers among them, have evolved their own language of interaction with and differentiation from the world of the colonizer. To take one example from the religious domain: it is by now well known that Native peoples in North America establish a clear distinction between spirituality and religion; while *spirituality* refers “to indigenous traditions and conceptions of sacred power with potential moral implications for all aspects of life, *religion* refers to organized worship brought to indigenous communities by colonizers” (Niezen 2000: xvi). Australian Aborigines, for their part, establish a clear distinction between Two Laws, their Ancestral Law (in reference to the sociocosmic order of the Dreaming) and the Christian (or White man’s) Law.

I have also deliberately chosen to describe the lifeworld and spirituality of hunter-gatherers as a “relational ontology” rather than to use analytical categories like shamanism, animism or totemism. Recent and varying rereadings of animistic traditions (Bird-David 1999; Ingold 2000; Descola 2005), as well as the abundant literature on shamanism and its transformative continuity, entanglement, and coexistence with institutionalized religions and modernity, have demonstrated the anthropological relevance and conceptual potential of these categories. Taken together, they have proven most useful in providing a better understanding of expressions of human experience where the ontological boundaries between the human and the nonhuman are permeable and the relations between them negotiable, where spiritual powers are immanent and embedded in things, or where the notion of person, and thus of social agencies, is not exclusive to humans. The rather broad conceptual avenue of “relational ontologies” here encompasses more limited analytical categories such as shamanism, animism, totemism or perspectivism.⁴

RELATIONAL ONTOLOGIES

Before explaining what I mean by “relational ontologies,” I shall present my understanding of the concept of ontology and of what some are now calling the ontological turn in anthropology.⁵ Within our discipline, the uses of the concept of “ontology” vary, at times significantly, from one author to the other, and the ontological turn has even already given rise to some significant debates (Venkatesan 2010). Broadly speaking, the ontological turn represents a shift from questions of knowledge and epistemology toward those of being and theories of existence (Henare et al. 2007: 8). Ontology refers to the nature of reality, to the nature of things (persons and objects) and to the nature of their relations as conceived, lived, experienced and acted upon by a world’s social agents. The ontological turn allows us to investigate not so much the diversity of worldviews – that is varying representations of the same world – but the multiplicity of worlds. In that sense, the ontological perspective offers us conceptual tools to seriously consider other ways of being and acting in the world. We could also add that for anthropologists to approach differences and alterity by way of ontology is, in many respects, more destabilizing than to approach it solely through epistemology. Approaching differences and alterity through an ontological perspective allows us to take some distance from a naturalist ontology and the Western/modernist model of a universal human nature and its various cultural

expressions. Furthermore, ontologies are not only metaphysical and concerned with theories of being and reality, but also have real practical, political, aesthetic and phenomenological implications, as they inform ways of being, performing and relating (including relating to other ontologies and worlds). "Ontologies are consequently political in the widest sense and are the key to the phenomenological forms that order actual everyday life" (Clammer et al. 2004: 6) – including relationships to nature and to nonhumans, attitudes toward religion and religious conversion, spiritual power, and ritual efficiency. To the question of "how do people see the world," the ontological perspective also allows us to ask "which world do they see," and thus experience. Both of these questions should be considered together when we approach worlds like those of hunters where epistemology and ontology are closely intertwined, where knowing and being are intimately related, where knowledge is not disembodied. People may indeed experience different worlds and no system of knowledge is able to describe the world in a manner that would be definitive and encompass all the different worlds that people may experience (Henare et al. 2007).

That being said, what do I mean by "relational ontologies" as they apply to the worlds of hunter-gatherers? While all forms of being are indisputably relational, various ontological traditions conceive, value and experience the reality of relationality differently. Broadly speaking, relational ontologies can be contrasted with the naturalist and dualist ontology of Western modern thought and way of being, which establishes an absolute divide between, for example, body and mind, nature and culture, object and subject. Unlike a naturalist ontology, relational ontologies place relatedness/"relationality" as a paramount embodied value, perception and experience, such that relations take on a reality of their own. As a praxis, relational ontologies take the form of social relations of exchange and reciprocity among humans and between human and nonhuman others. Relational ontologies consider the volition and agency of nonhuman others to be facts of life (largely documented in ethnographies of hunter-gatherers), and that sociality is indisputably inclusive of nonhuman others.

It must be stressed here that in speaking of relations (and the nature of such relations), I am not referring solely to those dimensions that are objectified in local thought, categories and metaphoric systems (something structuralism and symbolic studies have admirably and convincingly analyzed), but also to their lived and experiential dimensions (Poirier 2008). In relational ontologies, relations between human and nonhuman agencies have a communicative potential and the ontological boundaries between the human and nonhuman are conceived of and experienced as being permeable, flexible and negotiable. In contrast to a naturalist ontology which relies on fixed categories and relations between these categories in order to know and experience the world, in relational ontologies categories are not fixed; rather, the nature and outcome of the relations that one experiences with something (another human, an animal, an object or a meteorological phenomenon), at a particular time and place, suggests the ontological status of whatever is encountered. In his now classic paper on Ojibwa ontology, Hallowell relates the experience of a hunter's encounter with a bear. He writes: "This Indian was not confronted with an animal with 'objective' ursine properties, but rather with an animate being who had ursine properties and *also* 'person attributes'" (1981: 36).

In relational ontologies, relatedness and relationality also ground, inform and orient local forms of subjectivities. Thus, we are not dealing here with a bounded

(interior/psychological) self and a modernist, sovereign and individualistic form of subjectivity, but with what we may call a relational self⁶ for which relations are intrinsic rather than extrinsic to the person. They are an integral part of the person, of one's sense of self. The embodied relational dimension of the self brings with it a sense of sociocosmic responsibilities toward those others (human and nonhuman) to whom one is connected. Working among the Nayaka (South Indian gatherer-hunters), Bird-David expressed this in the following manner: "I relate therefore I am" and "I know as I relate" (1999). In a relational ontology, knowing the world is knowing how to interact with these other agencies who have their own volition. Embodying and engaging in such conscious relationality and "webs of relatedness" also implies, on the part of the relational self, continuous and various forms of exchange, negotiation, and thus responsibility. From a phenomenological perspective, the question we may ask at this point is the following: Who is this I, this self who embodies relatedness, who acts and interacts in a conscious and knowledgeable relational way? What does it imply to, not only conceive, but live and experience the world in such a relational way? What is the nature of such embodied relationality? In the world of hunters, paramount relations are those with kin and extended kin networks, with the land and itineraries that connect meaningful places (and their vegetal, mineral, and meteorological constituents), with the animals and the coeval spiritual realm (ancestors, spirits of deceased relatives or spiritual beings of various kinds).

Kin-based forms of subjectivity and sociality have been well documented in the anthropological literature on hunter-gatherers. I will give three ethnographic examples here from Aboriginal Australia. These will illustrate how being a human and a social being means embodying relatedness, engaging in relations of exchange and reciprocity, and assuming responsibility for maintaining webs of relatedness. In some desert groups, different body parts correspond to particular kinship relationships. This is well exemplified in Kendon's semiotic analysis of Warlpiri sign language (Kendon 1988) and Peile's study of the Kukatja conception of the body (1997). How does it translate at the phenomenological level? Working among the Kukatja myself (Poirier 2005), I was witness on a few occasions to how different sensations (throbbing, pulsation) of particular body parts were related to close kin who were away at the time or living in another community. The following excerpt from Peile is quite evocative: "When a person experiences a throbbing across the top of his back, he is thinking about his parents. When a person feels something in the thighs, (s)he is thinking about his/her spouse. If (s)he experiences soreness in the calves of the legs, then a person is thinking about a brother or sister" (1997: 91).

When such sensations endured and became painful, it possibly meant that a kin-person was ill or in trouble. I am not saying that these kinds of bodily sensations are systematically interpreted in such a way but that it is an eventuality that is meaningful and has a truth value in Kukatja understanding and experiencing of the relational self. In other words, it has communicative potential on the basis of embodied relatedness.

My second example is drawn from Dussart's work among Warlpiri (Central Desert) suffering from diabetes, in which she underlines the ontological obstacles between Aboriginal forms of subjectivity and sociality and those that are expected from the biomedical system. She writes: "The biomedical establishment systematically presses

for those affected with diabetes to stay close to the clinic and limit travel. But this kind of restriction is anathema to contemporary Warlpiri people, erstwhile hunters and gatherers whose identity is still very much rooted in nomadism" (2010: 80). She explains how they need to remain mobile to attend to kin (living in other communities) and ancestral lands, and to partake in distant rituals or sport events; in other words, to maintain and nourish their social and cosmological networks of relationships and remain full social beings.⁷ According to Dussart, diabetics, in spite of their physical suffering, more often than not choose to "look after" their web of relatedness rather than "look after" their physical well-being.

The third example is drawn from Austin-Broos's analysis of the articulation of Arrernte (Central Desert) kinship with a welfare economy and the state. For the Arrernte, "kinship as relatedness is now embedded in a sociality rendered mainly through commodity and cash" (Austin-Broos 2003: 118) and less through detailed knowledge and experience of country. Among the many examples given by the author, I have selected the following one. Austin-Broos accompanies an Arrernte friend on a visit to an old people's home in Alice Springs. She explains how a cousin of her friend, rendered paraplegic in an accident, "was fighting hard not to be socially dead" and deprived of relatedness (2003: 127). In order to engage in relatedness and "nourish" her relational self, the paraplegic woman gave to her cousin the very few objects she had (among these, a deodorant, a few sweets, and a dress that the staff had just given to her) – to the great dismay of the staff.

These three examples portray the phenomenological and performative dimensions of kin relatedness as an embodied value and integral part of one's relational self, and show how the activation, validation and maintenance of such relatedness guide and orient a person's choices and actions.

ANCESTRALITY

I have written elsewhere about the coeval and intimate presence of ancestors and the spirits of the deceased in the worlds of certain hunting societies (Poirier 2008). By ancestry, I am referring to worlds where ancestors and spirits of deceased relatives are existentially coeval with the living and communicate with them in various ways. Ancestrality remains a major component of contemporary forms of religiosity, even for those who define themselves as Christians. Furthermore, "ancestrality is not a genealogy; it is an unfolding, regenerative, relational and creative process" (Poirier 2008: 80; see also Ingold 2000: 132–152). As a process, ancestry is connected and articulated with the relational self, with meaningful places and events. As an acknowledgment of those who were here before, of those who left knowledge and some sort of imprint of their passage, ancestry remains a major component of relational ontologies.

Among the Inuit, the well-known cultural practice of the newborn receiving a namesake distinguishes human beings from animals and connects them to their ancestors. In their sound analysis of Inuit contemporary forms of religiosity, Laugrand and Oosten write: "Today Inuit . . . derive important qualities from their (deceased) namesakes who watch over them and protect them as long as they observe the moral rules that maintain society. Ancestors live on in names" (2010: 132).

For the subarctic Amerindians, ancestors, who are the spirits of deceased relatives, are forever present in the land; they can be encountered in dreams (see below), their presence acknowledged through ritual gestures and even felt. While they were living, the ancestors, through their actions as hunters, through meaningful experiences and events, through their thoughts and emotions, left something of themselves in the form of various sorts of signs. Their presence and actions have somehow impregnated the land and the places they were intimately connected to. A few examples from the Atikamekw (north-central Quebec), an Algonquian group I work with (Poirier 2004a), will serve to make my point. An Atikamekw may address the fish he has just caught as “grandfather,” knowing that his actual grandfather had a particular relationship with the place.⁸ Before eating the fish caught during the day, a group of young men give a piece of fish or some tobacco to the fire while each of them recalls a deceased grandparent, in a gesture of respect and acknowledgment of their copresence. Some Atikamekw continue to symbolically bury their deceased relatives on their territory so that the spirits of the dead can continue to look after the well-being of their family, descendants and territory, and contribute to the success of hunting and fishing activities while protecting the hunters (Laurent Jérôme, personal communication).

Over the last thirty years, the Atikamekw have also been very active and innovative in what has come to be called the healing movement, an Indigenous creative initiative that has been spreading across Indigenous communities in North America. This is a social movement whose aim is to heal Indigenous people from the ruptures and policies instantiated by the colonialists and thus to reconnect and reposition them in ways meaningful to themselves. In the Atikamekw communities, the healing movement has meant, among other things, the reaffirmation and renewal of some traditional hunting rituals, one of these being the sweat lodge ceremony (Jérôme 2010). The stones used for the sweat lodge ceremonies are called “grandfathers,” as a generic term, and as a way to pay tribute to those who were there before. As manifestations of ancestral agencies, as sentient beings and as witnesses of the past and present, the stones-grandfathers take an active part in the ceremony. As they embody the spirits of deceased relatives, the stones-grandfathers have agency and power within the ritual setting.

This reality, from an Atikamekw perspective, does not correspond to what I would conceive as a “stone” in my naturalist ontology with fixed categories. The nature of the relationship that an Atikamekw engages in with the stones-grandfathers in the sweat lodge ceremonies is not of the same nature as the relation that I (as a modern subject) establish with the stone as an inanimate object. At the ontological and phenomenological levels, the Atikamekw relationship with the stones-grandfathers in the sweat lodges expresses intersubjectivity or interagency (in the sense that there is a form of exchange and reciprocity, a form of dialogue and intimacy with the stones-grandfathers as agents in the course of the ceremony), whereas mine is a one-way, extrinsic relationship between a subject and object which is denied any form of agency. These different conceptions of and knowledge about the “stone” give way to different relations and experiences all together; both are “true” on the basis of their own epistemological and ontological principles. One day, in 1996, I was driving back from an Atikamekw community after participating in a powwow and a sweat lodge ceremony. I was driving quite (too) fast and when my car (I did not have a

four-wheel drive, which was a mistake) ran over two stones in the middle of the track, there was a strong shock and the two tires on the driver's side blew up. My car had to be towed back. On hearing about my misadventures, some Atikamekw friends suggested that "maybe" the stones-grandfathers wanted to retain my attention and surely had something to tell me. At that moment, at that place, the particular relationship that was established between myself and the two stones was thus conceived by my friends as having a communicative potential. From the perspective of the Atikamekw, all stones – all things – have this ontological potentiality (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 22).

In Aboriginal Australia, ancestry is potently expressed through the deeds of the beings of the Dreaming, where every feature of the landscape is conceived as the "congealed labor" (Povinelli 1995: 509) of these beings or as the metamorphosis of their bodily fluids or parts. Their rich cosmology has been abundantly documented in the literature. How does it translate at the ontological and phenomenological levels? According to the Aborigines, the power and creative and reproductive essences of the Ancestral Beings continue to permeate the land in named places. These are constantly reenacted and renewed through ritual and mundane activities. Furthermore, at death, the spirit of the deceased rejoins the places with which the person was affiliated and merges again with the ancestral powers and essences. It is in this sense that we can say that the landscape is sentient; it is impregnated with ancestral power, presence and agency. At any place and moment, ancestors may decide to make themselves known to the living through a peculiar sensation in one's body, a sudden wind, the song of a bird, the unusual behavior of an animal, or any unusual event. Whenever I accompany my Kukatja friends for travel across the desert, whether walking or driving, they are constantly deciphering and interpreting signs (animal or car tracks, sounds, smells, winds, changes in the vegetation, etc.); they remain "open" to the eventuality that a visible sign might be the expression of an invisible presence, wishing to communicate something, an openness that corresponds to what Povinelli has called "the language of indeterminacy."

The regenerative process of ancestry and the relational ontology of Australian Aborigines are also expressed through mortuary practices and mourning ceremonies. Today, as Australian Aborigines in remote communities face a high level of mortality, "death and mortuary practices seem, at least to the outsider, to be a constant presence," and "provide an important source of insight into contemporary indigenous experience" (Glaskin et al. 2008: 6) and difference. For the Aborigines, the time and resources devoted to mourning ceremonies, which may seem totally unproductive from the state's and a non-Aboriginal's point of view, represent an ontological responsibility toward not only the deceased but also their sociocosmic order (Poirier 2005: 251). Mourning ceremonies, known as "sorry business," are ways to "look after" the webs of relatedness and thus convey a strong cosmopolitical stance.

Dreams and visions, as another expression and experience of a relational ontology, continue to play a prominent role in the worlds of many hunter-gatherers. While such experiences may now be less connected to hunting activities than they were in the past,⁹ dreams and visions remain a privileged medium of communication with ancestors, a source of knowledge and power,¹⁰ a space-time of creativity and innovation, a strong incentive to Christian or Pentecostal conversion, and an experience of

encounter with spirit beings of various kinds (including figures of Christian cosmology like Jesus and the Holy Spirit). For the Inuit, Laugrand and Oosten write:

Today, visions and dreams provide contexts in which Inuit can be in touch with the various agencies and beings that populate their universe, including the deceased. Dreams and visions are not conceived of as just products of the human mind; rather they are seen as allowing people to communicate with spirits or the deceased. Dreams are a medium that the deceased can use to assist their namesakes and descendants in times of need or to communicate their wish to be renamed. (2010: 240–241)

When an Inuit, a Cree or an Australian Aborigine refers to dreams and dreaming, we can expect that they are talking of something different from our Western dream-concept. Our conception of dreams, as solely personal and intrapsychic phenomena, finds no room and makes no sense within a relational ontology and sense of self. If I say that they “believe” that dreams allow an encounter with the dead or a “voyage” to the spirit world, I imply that I “know” that dreams cannot have this ontological potentiality. It is not because Western thought has not conceived of something (or conceives of it differently) that it cannot exist or be true in another conceptual system and ontology. Different concepts give way to different knowledge and thus to different kinds of relations and experiences with that thing-concept, thus creating another world.

POSITIONAL TRUTHS AND KNOWLEDGE

Les modernes croient en la croyance pour comprendre les autres (Modern people believe in belief in order to understand others). (Latour 2009: 28–29)

gods and spirits are not dependent on human beliefs for their own existence; what brings them to presence are our practices. (Chakrabarty 2000: 111)

The concept of “belief” has worked as a “neutralizing tool” in our understanding of other people’s worlds, other ways of being in the world. In order to avoid such pitfalls, authors like Sperber (1975) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have stressed that, at the symbolic and metaphorical levels, truth is relative to conceptual systems. “Truth is always relative to understanding which is based on a nonuniversal conceptual system” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 227). While this approach is a most stimulating contribution to anthropological reflection, it remains at the epistemological (and cognitive) level and does not address ontology per se. Unlike a symbolic approach, an ontological approach not only asks how a world is conceived (and how true and logical any conceptual system is), but also how it is lived and experienced, how different knowledge, valid within a conceptual system, gives way to different true experiences and other worlds. I have written elsewhere that: “Ontologies are not only thought out, they are also lived out. They open on to different forms of knowledge and practice, indeed to varieties of ‘true’ experience” (Poirier 2004b: 59) that stem from a different understanding and experiencing of the world. It is the truth and the validity of others’ experiences and ways of engaging in relations that I wish to stress here. Positionality is not relativity.¹¹ By positional truths, I mean the

various and valid ways through which a world may be known, experienced and related to. Positionality emphasizes the embodied character and lived dimension of any conceptual system and shares an ontological resemblance with Viveiros de Castro's concept of perspective. He writes: "A perspective is not a representation, because a representation is a property of the mind whereas *a point of view is in the body*" (2009: 39, emphasis in the original).

In the world of hunters, the notion of person is inclusive of nonhuman others (animals, objects, places, etc.), as an ontological potentiality. The concept of the animal-person and thus the volition and agency of animals are well documented in the anthropological literature on contemporary subarctic Amerindian hunters. The authors have stressed how animals, who are hunting partners and "grateful prey," truly give themselves to the hunters, in an intentional gesture of reciprocity. In return, the hunters must behave in a respectful way (Feit 2000; Henriksen 2008; Brightman 1993; Nadasdy 2007; among others). Local cosmology, ritual and hunting practices, dream theories, notions of personhood and agency are dynamically reproduced, transmitted and validated on the basis of such knowledge. At the phenomenological level, the nature of the (intersubjective) relations that they engage in with the animals, and their experiencing of such relations, are not of the same kind as those that I might experience with animals. In other words, such an assertion of the animal-person is not valid within my naturalist ontology. If I adopt the following position: "They" *believe* the animal is a person, "we" *know* that this belief derives from a peculiar cultural logic (a relative truth) in which the animal-person makes sense (see also Henare et al. 2007: 5), I am not really allowing myself to seriously consider their differences, positional truths and knowledge, and the possibility of a plurality of worlds.

In the worlds of hunters, the notion of the person may also apply to objects, features of the landscape or meteorological phenomena which may be related to, if not always as persons, at least as sentient agencies. In these worlds, all things have the potential to be intentional subjects (or embody a form of subjectivity) and to engage as such with humans. Here are a few examples from the literature. Povinelli's path-breaking work among the Belyuen (Northern Australia), where a place, as it embodies the spirits of Ancestral Beings, is sensitive to human presence, to their sweat and speech (1993, 1995). For the Tlingit (Athapaskan), glaciers are sensitive to smell and can listen, make moral judgments and punish infractions (Cruikshank 2005). With regard to the Waswanipi Cree, Feit (1994) talks of the wind-persons as responsible for the seasonal cycle, while Jérôme (2010) discusses how young Atikamekw drummers relate to the drum-person. I have also described (Poirier 2004b) how the wind for the Kukatja may be heard as an ancestral voice and message, and how places, as they embody the spirits of deceased relatives and beings from the Dreaming, are related to as place-persons. For these hunters, such assertions are conceptually, ontologically and experientially valid and thus true. That is to say that relations, encounters or interactions with nonhuman others have a communicative capacity, an intersubjectivity and interagency potential.¹²

Ontological obstacles, misunderstandings and conflicts are common in the relations between Indigenous peoples, the state and the institutions of the dominant society (Clammer et al. 2004). Let us consider (for a moment) that the Amerindian knowledge and perspective according to which the spirits of deceased relatives continue to permeate the forestlands is not a "mental representation" (a "belief" or a

“cultural construction”) but a different way of conceiving and experiencing the forestland, as a world of interacting agencies. From an ontological perspective, a question we may ask at this point is the following: when talking of the forest world, does an Atikamekw or Cree hunter experience the same thing as a non-Indigenous forestry engineer? Are they talking about the same thing? Are they walking through the same forest but with different representations of it? If that is the case then, and as Latour has already remarked, who will have the authority to tell that sameness, to tell what that forest “really” is and thus to impose their world and their ontology? Ancestrality, spiritual beings of various kinds, including spirits of deceased relatives, and the volition and agency of animals find no recognition and place of expression in modern political ontology. In the course of time, the Amerindian leaders, in their negotiations with state representatives and the forestry industry, have learned to talk the language of secular political modernity if they want to be taken seriously, leaving the “unacceptable” behind without necessarily abandoning it. It is in that sense that there is some form of ontological compromise which is also a form of ontological violence. In their manifold relations and engagements with the dominant society and its institutions, whether in co-management protocols or in land claims negotiations, Indigenous epistemological and ontological principles are rarely taken seriously and at face value.

CONTEMPORARY HUNTER-GATHERERS' FORMS OF RELIGIOSITY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In this last section, I present a brief overview of hunter-gatherers' contemporary forms of religiosity. The dynamic reproduction and transformative continuity of the relational ontologies of contemporary hunter-gatherers, in their animist or shamanist expressions, are well attested to in the anthropological literature. In order to convey the complexities of hunter-gatherers' cultural and political affirmation and their postcolonial dialogue with Christianity in times of social turmoil, various analytical expressions are suggested: “a conversation of spiritualities” (Preston 2010), “the accommodation of multiple ontologies” (Tanner 2009), the indigenization of Christianity, and the coexistence of ancestral and Christian forms of power and spirituality (Laugrand and Delâge 2008). Broadly speaking, it should be noticed that the values of personal autonomy and relatedness coupled with an ethos of inclusion and tolerance inform Indigenous people's readings and reception of Christian cosmology and ontology. For them, and for hunter-gatherers specifically, cosmological and ritual traditions are not strictly reproduced but rather continuously actualized (Laugrand and Oosten 2008: 66). Openness, flexibility and creativity, coupled with a sense of the indeterminate character of things and events, continue to inform the unfolding of their dynamic religious traditions, as these become more and more entangled with Christian cosmology and ontology.

For the subarctic Amerindians, the Inuit and the Aborigines, the extent and form of their dialogues with or conversion to Christianity vary greatly from one group to another. While we can observe different degrees of acceptance, rejection or resistance, there are some similarities. Among these, the ontological dimensions of relationality and ancestrality continue to act as leading threads in their ways of being

in the world and relating to it, and to inform their readings and reception of Christian cosmology and ontology. To this day, a fair majority of these Indigenous people seem to remain impervious to key tenets of Christian doctrine and ways of being, like individual salvation, the concept of sin and of being sinful, or the Christian conception that only humans have a “soul” or deserve the status of “person.” Even for those who have adopted the Christian God and other spiritual beings of Christian cosmology as novel sources of power, there remain some forms of ontological incompatibility.

Today, among settled Amerindian communities, the cosmological and ritual configurations tend to be multifaceted where different religious traditions may be present and coexist, in a more or less harmonious way depending on the communities. There are first the Christian churches (either Catholic or Protestant) which have been present, under the authority of non-Amerindian missionaries, since the early part of the last century. In the last twenty years, there has been, in some communities, an increasing presence and influence of Pentecostal and other charismatic and Evangelical churches, and a significant number of converts. At the same time, the “healing movement” and what has come to be called the pan-Amerindian movement of spirituality, with its focus on the renewal and reformulation of ritual practices that were “condemned” during the colonial period by Christian missionaries and the state, continue to gain impetus. All these influences become entangled, in various ways, with local cosmological and animist traditions, and are being (re)read within the values of a relational ontology. Religious configurations vary greatly from one community to the other. Below are three examples.

The Dene Tha appropriation of Christianity, as analyzed by Goulet, could be extended to other subarctic hunters where conversion has often meant recasting the missionaries’ message into their own language and ontology, with an awareness of the distinction between Indigenous and European ways, each with its own power and potentialities (Goulet 1998: 213). Goulet thus talks of a coexistence between Christianity and Indigenous traditions where the Dene Tha “saw the two religious traditions as complementary, relying on one or the other according to contexts and circumstances” (1998: 215). The Christian God and spirits were seen as new sources of power which complemented, rather than supplanted, their own practices. Such openness toward new sources of power is a characteristic of relational ontologies. Goulet adds: “by and large, the Dene have successfully incorporated key Christian symbols into their ways of knowing and living without changing the essentials of their world view and ethos” (1998: 221). Goulet’s analysis did not, however, include the presence of Pentecostal converts and pan-Amerindian spirituality.

The James Bay Cree communities studied by Tanner (2004, 2009) present a more entangled and complex situation. For the last twenty years, the presence and influence of Pentecostal churches and converts have gained momentum. The healing movement and pan-Amerindian rituals and spirituality have also found fertile ground, alongside the Pentecostal presence, but not without creating at times overt conflicts between these groups. While some Pentecostal converts show no tolerance toward traditional rituals and forms of spirituality, others are more open. According to Tanner, Cree animist ontology continues to inform the ways through which all these influences are read, received and performed. He writes: “The issue for the Cree Pentecostal is thus not one of a Christian-animist ontological incompatibility. There is agreement between Pentecostals and animists over the existence and the power

of the animist entities; the disagreement is over whether it is acceptable to have relations with them [in that Pentecostals identify these entities with the devil]" (2009: 265).

The three Atikamekw communities, southern neighbors of the Cree, present yet another form of religious and ritual (re)configuration and entanglement. By the turn of the last century, the Atikamekw had converted to Catholicism. Over the decades, Catholicism became an intrinsic dimension of Atikamekw culture; they appropriated, on their own terms, Catholic cosmology, ceremonies, and praying practices. Some families continued, however, to perform traditional hunting rituals (like the sweat lodge and drum beating), though on a sporadic basis and while out on their territories and unbeknownst to the missionaries (Poirier 2004a). In the early 1980s, the pan-Amerindian healing movement stimulated a ritual renewal among the Atikamekw which gradually gained impetus. Those rituals that had long been forbidden by the missionaries are now regularly performed, in their revisited contemporary forms, within the Atikamekw settlements (or on their outskirts). These rituals, which were traditionally closely related to hunting, are now aimed toward healing and reconnecting,¹³ and identity politics. Among them are the first-step ceremony, the sweat lodge, drum beating, and the annual powwow, as well as more sacred-secret ceremonies from which the non-Indigenous are excluded. The ritual renewal has also greatly benefited from exchanges and networking with members of neighboring communities, namely Cree and Ojibwa. In the beginning of the processes of (re)creating these rituals and (re)establishing their validity, the main contestation came from the elders, who, as Catholics, equated such practices with the devil. While the ritual renewal was initiated by men and women of the residential school generation, Atikamekw of all ages and generations are now involved. The Atikamekw are very much aware of the presence and influence of Pentecostal converts in the neighboring Cree communities and are, for the time being, very reluctant to let Evangelical churches into their communities, despite many overtures by the latter. To this day, there are only a few converts among the Atikamekw.

The Inuit of Nunavik and Nunavut present yet another religious configuration and a complex entanglement between Christian confessions (present on Inuit land since the nineteenth century), Pentecostal and Evangelical churches (present since World War II), some forms of neo-shamanism, and the shamanic tradition. According to Laugrand and Oosten (2010: 2008), the shamanic universe and tradition, though still diabolized by some Christians and Pentecostal converts, seems nevertheless to act as the bedrock of Inuit religiosity. These authors have also underlined resemblances between Pentecostalism and shamanism, namely the importance of ecstatic experiences, spiritual healing, public confession, possession by evil spirits, and the Holy Spirit's manifestations in one's body (see also Stuckenberg 2008). At the religious and ritual level, the Inuit continue to explore and innovate. Like other Indigenous groups in settlers' societies, they are working simultaneously toward their spiritual autonomy and political sovereignty.

After the ruptures of the colonial era and the loss of their autonomy, Amerindians and Inuit oriented their religious and ritual practices toward social healing (meaning the social "restoration" of individuals and community life), kin well-being, and reconnecting with the land and the ancestors, rather than toward the redemption of individuals. The healing movement and ritual innovation and exploration, whatever

forms these may take, may also be read as ways of connecting and networking with other Indigenous groups throughout the world, and as means of evolving or coming to terms with new forms of subjectivities and socialities in the context of their more settled lives.

According to the region, the Australian Aborigines present varying degrees of acceptance, adherence, appropriation, rejection or resistance concerning Christianity and Evangelical churches.¹⁴ There as elsewhere, the Aborigines are reading Christian cosmology and ontology in terms of their own cosmology and ontology. Even those who define themselves as Christians remain true to the Ancestral Law, the local cosmology and the presence and power of the Ancestral Beings, thereby generating expressions of Two Laws (Austin-Broos 1996) or Two Ways. For example, in most regions of Central and Northern Australia, the initiation ceremonies of boys into the Law of the ancestors are still practiced; protracted mourning rituals, according to Ancestral Law, are still taking place (Glaskin et al. 2008). Generally speaking, the Aborigines do not see any contradiction between these and their Christian faith and practices. While the indigenization of Christianity and Aboriginal engagement with Christianity take different forms, it should be noticed that land and kin-based moralities continue to inform Aboriginal ways of being and relating. Regarding this very issue, Schwarz and Dussart write: “The importance of what might be called ‘performative Christianity’ in Australia is indeed in line with the performative nature of kinship in Aboriginal societies, meaning that kinship relations have to be continually assessed and reaffirmed through social practice” (2010: 10). Australian Aborigines tend to resist and refuse the state’s attempts to “transform” their relational conception of personhood into that of a modern subject or to “transform” an Aboriginal kin-based sharing economy into an individually based market economy (Poirier 2010a). According to Schwarz (2010), Yolngu Evangelical Christians have come to a compromise between these two forms of subjectivity (and sociality) as they use their Christian practices to engage the individualism of modernity and continue kin-based moralities within and beyond Christian rituals.

The cosmo-ontological, and thus intimate, aesthetic and emotional relationships with places are so central to the Aboriginal sense of being that some authors write of a spatial ontology. Today, these kinds of relationships endure, even for those Aborigines who have adopted Christianity. According to Magowan’s analysis, Yolngu Christians “have consistently constructed their Christian faith through visions stemming from an ancestral aesthetic embodied in places” (2001: 275). In the Yolngu practice of remapping the feel of place within the idiom of Christianity, “knowledge and feelings of ancestral embodiment and Christian revelation come to be experienced simultaneously as a cohesive internal state” (2001: 276). Magowan thus talks of an experiential, emotional and spiritual synchronicity as a way of conceptualizing the intermingling of the two spiritual sources – the Ancestral Law and Christianity. The concept of synchronicity (rather than syncretism) that she proposes is relevant to the relational ontologies of hunter-gatherers in that it evokes their openness to the experiential coexistence of multiple sources of power and knowledge.

This brief exploration and encounter with relational ontologies raises a range of questions, one of these being: how can a fair and intelligent dialogue be engaged between a relational ontology and the naturalist ontology dominant in settlers’ societies? If I

reduce what the Amerindians, Aborigines or Inuit say about their world to a “world-view” (a set of beliefs, a cultural construction or a mental representation), to what extent am I really approaching their world and their experiencing of that world? Am I then not just translating their way of being in the world and relating to it in the terms of my own naturalist and dualist ontology? In today’s context and as a general rule, the principles of openness, fluidity, flexibility, and ontological potentiality continue to orient the ways hunters read and interpret events and the multiplicity of worlds, and experience, explore and negotiate the capacities of varying religious traditions, forms of spiritual power and ritual efficacies, in order to remain connected with and to participate fully in forever unfolding presents.

NOTES

Translations from the French are mine.

- 1 As suggested by Jullien, the universalism that European thought has extolled since the Enlightenment, and in the path of which anthropology has followed, is perhaps the universalism of its own cultural difference (2008: 144).
- 2 By this I mean to inquire into the epistemological and ontological status Indigenous peoples give to the very concept of “difference” and thus to multiplicity, heterogeneity, and coexistence. I make a clear distinction between “difference” and “diversity”; one is not the other. Diversity is a given, it is a condition of the living, whereas “difference” is the cultural/political/ontological meaning and status that are assigned to the relations (and the terms of these relations) between whatever is considered “different,” be they humans or other-than-humans (animal, vegetal, mineral, ancestral, or divine).
- 3 Northern Algonquian (Cree, Innu, and Atikamekw) and Athapascan (Canada).
- 4 Unlike the other three, perspectivism is not constructed on the paradigm and premise of universalism. On the contrary, the concept of perspectivism, as put forward by Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2009), gives us food for thought when inquiring into an Aboriginal theory of difference. Key concepts emerge from his analysis, like multiplicity, coexistence, and relationality, but also (ontological) potentialities and indeterminacy.
- 5 “Ontology” is certainly not what we could call “an experience-near concept” (Geertz). This was made evident to me one day when an Atikamekw friend and longtime collaborator remarked in a humorous tone, as he was reading some of my writing: “Ontology? What is that? Is it a new disease?”
- 6 This concept owes much to Strathern’s concept of the “dividual person” (1988).
- 7 On contemporary forms of Aboriginal mobility, see also Tonkinson and Tonkinson 2010 and Musharbash 2008.
- 8 While all fish do not embody the spirit of a deceased relative at all times, all fish do have such ontological potentiality.
- 9 The literature on the intimate relationships between dreaming and hunting among the subarctic Amerindians and between dreaming and the acquisition of power is rich and abundant. See, among others, Ridington 1987; Henriksen 2008; Feit 1994; Guédon 2005; Brightman 1993; Goulet 1998. On dreams and dreaming in Aboriginal Australia, see, among others, Poirier 2005; Dussart 2000; Glaskin 2011; for the Inuit, see Laugrand and Oosten 2010.
- 10 For hunter-gatherers, the concept of power is closely related to knowing the world and the land, knowing the intentions and moods of nonhuman agencies, and the right actions and moral codes to be conducted.
- 11 Ingold writes: “The relational model renders difference not as diversity but as positionality” (2000: 149).

- 12 In worlds where the ontological boundaries between subject and object or between human and nonhuman agencies are permeable, variable, and negotiable, where the person (and the acting subject) is conceived as relational and as embodying multiplicity, where thought is construed as a relational process rather than an individualist one, the notion of intersubjectivity may indeed take a different meaning. See also Jackson 1998.
- 13 Reconnecting the social and generational threads, reconnecting with the land and the ancestors after the ruptures of the colonial period imposed by the state.
- 14 On Christianity in Aboriginal Australia, see, among others, Magowan 2001, 2005; and the special issue of the *Australian Journal of Anthropology* coedited by Schwarz and Dussart (2010).

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CHAPTER 3

Cohabiting an Interreligious Milieu: Reflections on Religious Diversity

Veena Das

In much of the scholarly writing on religion it has been taken for granted that different “world religions” constitute separate traditions with their own authoritative discourses and practices. In her book, *The Invention of World Religion: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005), Tomoko Masuzawa offers a painstaking working out of the genealogy of the very concept of world religions in which she argues that the concept of “world religions” is best understood, not as a description of the world, but as an apparatus of European intellectual thought that constructed other religions outside the West as reflections of itself. By recasting these religions in terms that were analogous to the West’s own experience of the history of Christianity, it could reduce their features to those that were amenable to theorizing in parallel with the growth and development of Christianity in the West. For instance, Masuzawa asks, might the casting of Buddhism as a *Protestant* movement arising from within Hinduism have endorsed the anti-Catholic suspicion of ritual even as it managed to denigrate the existing traditions of Hinduism and of East Asian Buddhism? Instead of, then, dividing the domains of expertise in religion as “anthropology of Islam” or “anthropology of Christianity” and thus thinking of religious pluralism in terms of processes in which fully constituted religious traditions encounter each other within the framework of world history, I propose to show how these traditions themselves get constituted through interactive processes at different scales of social life and how the scales are linked through processes of

analogy, resonance, and translation. In the interest of economy I will offer limited examples of these processes, drawn from ethnographic, literary, and artistic work in India, though I recognize that building a whole ethnography centered around these issues is a very delicate task, indeed.

There are four specific scales on which the question of religious diversity could be profitably posed. First, how do religious differences figure in theological reflections and what relation do such reflections bear to authoritative discourses on correct belief and on religious practices? Second, how should we understand the management of religious differences as a matter of statecraft? Third, what are the processes of circulation and mediation between religious communities and schisms within them that are copresent within local communities? Finally, how does the presence of other religions within one's social world affect the processes of subject formation and inflect relations of intimacy within families and kinship groups?

THEOLOGICAL PUZZLES

In the case of proselytizing religions (whether conversion was sought through persuasion or through force) when a new religion comes into a social milieu made up of other religious practices or customs, the question of how to make itself intelligible to others, how to translate its texts or ritual practices in other languages, or what attitude to take toward the ways of life it encounters, poses important cognitive and ethical questions of both strategy and moral stance. But even outside the issues raised by strategy and power relations there is an existential puzzle one encounters in many texts and lives that puts settled theological positions into question. Simply stated, the puzzle is – how to reconcile the fact that there are people from other religions whose actions are recognized as good and yet who are not considered fit to be rewarded (and are even thought to be punished) because they belong to a different faith. It is possible that with processes of globalization, greater contact between different religious groups and availability of social media, these puzzles are now posed with greater urgency, but they were never absent from theological discussions.

In his study of Catholicism in Tamilnadu in the south of India, David Mosse (2012) shows that we cannot assume that there was only one kind of Christian response to the Hindu other. Diverse Christian populations spread across India reflect and are marked by different experiences of encounter with Christianity. The Syrian Christians in Kerala trace their ancestry to Apostle Thomas in 52 CE outside of the history of colonial encounters (Visvanathan 1994). Christianization of four major districts of Goa under Portuguese power, on the other hand, was much more coercive and was marked by a radical separation of the converted from what were seen as pagan practices and a direct assault on temples and superstitious beliefs (Mendonça 2002; Henn forthcoming). Mosse (2012) argues that it was in relation to this experience of coercive conversions that the Italian Jesuit Roberto de Nobili began experiments in “accommodation” in 1606, choosing to live under the patronage of a Hindu king, and arguing that the truth of Christianity was separable from the languages it must use to convey its meaning to a population in a new local context (Clooney 1999). Thus treating words as vessels that could be hollowed out and filled with Christian meaning, de Nobili was led to a distinction between Tamil civil custom

and practical life, on the one hand, that converts could participate in without jeopardizing their allegiance to the Christian message, and those practices, on the other, that were seen as so steeped in idolatry and superstitious beliefs that they were not capable of carrying the Christian message. Converts had to be weaned away from these practices but were not required to give up all signs of their previous identities. Contrast this formulation with the decrees passed by the Provincial Council of Goa in 1567, one of which even prohibited Christian converts from retaining their Hindu names. I do not want to propose a teleological view of history, which would see in de Nobili an early version of our present pictures of religious tolerance. De Nobili's purpose was, after all, a missiological one and his experiments with accommodation have been subjected to varying critical interpretations (Zapanov 1999). He argued that indigenous practices that in time were to be eliminated should be initially tolerated. It is this logic that led to the tolerance of caste marks and dietary practices and led to voluntary conversion among members of higher castes (Clooney 2007). The question of what it means to be Indian Christians has never died out: it continues to be discussed with great vigor as power hierarchies within the church missions have shifted and dalits and adivasis have come to have a greater say in church matters and a distinct "dalit theology" as well as "adivasi theology" has challenged many traditional Christian theological premises in India (see for example, Gnanavaram 1993; Clarke 2002).

In the case of Islam, too, the relation between the lived experience of the quotidian and the exclusivist claims of Muslim spirituality have been renegotiated historically at different times and places (Khalil 2012). To take a telling example from the writing of the Iranian scholar Ayatullah Murtadha Muttahari, in his book on Divine Justice (*Adl-e-Elahi*, as cited in Shah-Kazemi 2006), he asks what happens to non-Muslims who live a decent life and do not violate the rights of other people? If the good deeds of non-Muslims are accepted by God then what difference does it make if a person is Muslim or not? The pressure of this question comes from issues raised by ordinary Muslims who have experienced the goodness of others in the course of their lives. The discussion that follows is a complex rendering in which the superiority of the path of Islam is maintained but, in effect, judgment on the good deeds of non-Muslims is left in the hands of God. Ahead we shall see how this particular stance resonates with questions that ordinary Muslims face in their everyday life and the solutions they learn to live with that are never fully satisfactory but that allow relationships across religions to be maintained. Many Muslims participate in the theological discussions not through scholarly debates but through such mechanisms as asking for a fatwa (a theologically informed opinion binding only on the person who asks for it) from an Islamic seminary or a local mufti, around a personal dilemma they might be facing.

Scholarly discussions are not the only way that theological questions about the problematic of religious exclusivity might be posed. With no centralized authority, the kind of anxieties around fairness and justice are expressed in Hinduism through implicit critiques in myths and in ritual or poetic performances. Elsewhere I have described how the multiple framings in the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and in their local variations allow us to simultaneously see the events from the perspective of several characters, humans, gods, demons, as well as animals (Das 2012a; Hiltebeitel 2001). In other cases there is a continuous commentary on certain morally

ambiguous acts of the protagonists in the story, including the gods. Thus, for instance the poetic tradition in Sanskrit offers a periodic critical commentary on the controversial act of Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, who was asked to kill a learned Shudra (lowest caste in the hierarchy of varnas) ascetic who was engaged in the learning of the Vedas, as it violated the natural order of things according to the Brahmanic interpretations. Vernacular traditions too are well known for offering new perspectives on the text (Richman 2008). I offer one example of religiously sanctioned criticism offered through a poetic device: In the hands of the poet Bhava-bhuti (eighth century), when Rama performs the hateful task of killing the Shudra ascetic for daring to study the Vedas he experiences a repetition of the violence he had inflicted on his beloved wife, Sita, in exiling her to the forest, also in fulfillment of his kingly duty. In verse 2.70 of the Uttaramacharita (Rama's Last Act), Rama addresses his own right arm that is wielding the sword as if it were a stranger:

You are a limb of Rama's –
 who had it in him to drive
 his Sita into exile,
 weary and heavy with child.
 Why start with pity now?

(*somehow striking a blow*) There, you have done a deed worthy of Rama. Let the Brahman's son live again. (Bhava-bhuti 2007)

One might say that such laments and the utter contempt with which Rama utters his own name in this verse do not console the Shudra who has been killed, but they do show that there is room for critique here. It is in the conflict of voices, both in the social order and within the self, that we recognize how exclusivist claims on behalf of one religion or one order of castes raise the issue of recognizing the goodness or learning of those outside the fold – they also put into question any given, firm, boundaries between as well as within religious traditions.

STATECRAFT AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Discussion on religious diversity in contemporary social sciences has been strongly animated by the political questions arising from religious and ethnic diversity in relation to the stability of the nation-state. Although many scholars see nondenominationalism and secularism as modern answers to the management of religious conflict, it is not that the problem is new. Techniques for management of religious minorities varied within medieval or early modern empires, as did the legal status of different kinds of minorities, but in general we find that demands of statecraft led to considerable experimentation on the question of the obligations of the king toward his subjects who belonged to different religions or held different sectarian affiliations. The case of what is often presented as the Muslim conquest of India shows how complex the question of statecraft in relation to religious difference between a king and his subjects was.

Although the colonial constructions of India's past, as well as Hindu nationalist historiography, present Hindus and Muslims as two fully constituted religious groups that confronted each other over centuries of bloody battles in which the Hindu

Rajput kingdoms were decisively defeated, in fact, as Flood notes, this entangled history is much more complex. In his words, "Like most teleologies, these scenarios operate through a collapse of all possible identities into a single monolithic identification, producing as singular, static, and undifferentiated, what was often multiple, protean, and highly contested" (2009: 3).

On the one side, there was a strong association of India with idolatry, and thus the sultans who led these raids (tenth to eleventh centuries) could establish their claims to piety by the destruction of temples and desecration of idols. Combined with the temptation to loot the riches in the temples, raids by Muslim dynasties in the early period of Islamic expansion involved destruction of temples, especially those that provided the nexus between deity, icon and ruler. Persian chronicles of the achievements of Muslim rulers used a lot of rhetorical flourishes to claim that the shrines of the pagans were destroyed and that congregational mosques were built in their place and that laws and canons of Islam were promulgated in defeated kingdoms (Hardy 1960). While some of these claims were true they were highly exaggerated.

On the other side, descriptions obtained from inscriptions, coins, and Sanskrit and Jain sources suggest that accommodations were reached between the defeated Rajput kings (or their successors) under which considerable continuity with earlier practices could be maintained even while the princes held tributary status in relation to the conquering sultan. It is also clear that there was considerable traffic across Hindu and Muslim kingdoms of symbols of authority expressed in sartorial fashions, trappings of kingship, and political marriages, as well as epithets that encoded the power and fame of the king.

Once we fast-forward to the Mughal Empire, we have strong evidence of the participation of Hindus (especially of the Kayastha and Khatri castes) in Mughal administration and of Rajputs in the Mughal army. With regard to the application of sharia (Islamic law) to Hindu subjects, we see a repetition of the earlier motif of the *ullama* or jurists insisting that the king should be more stringent in applying the sharia law to Hindu subjects, while kings pleaded reasons of expediency for treating their Hindu subjects with patience and caution. Thus, for instance, the historian Zeya-al-din-Barani (fourteenth century) records his criticism of the manner in which the non-Islamic Sassanid state system was allowed to intrude into the Muslim world. Barani is critical of the self-imposed limits of Muslim sultans who are content with imposition of *jaziya* and *kharaaj* taxes on the Hindu subjects and instead urges them to wipe out infidelity in Muslim lands and to punish the leaders of the infidels with death (cited in Alam 1997). Yet in the following three centuries, the Akhlaq texts that in general emphasize greater social harmony gain in dominance. For instance, the *Akhlaq-e-Humayuni*, a fourteenth-century text, points the reader to the Qur'anic verse that reminds the pious that though there is a single God, he has sent prophets to different communities with sharias to suit their times and their climes (see Alam 1994).

Such interpretations were not purely hermeneutic exercises, for the context in which the Mughals functioned in relation to the Hindu environment had clearly changed. There was considerable traffic between Vaishnava devotional cults and Sufi cults in this period and an active interest on the part of rulers to offer patronage to both Muslim and Hindu scholars, poets, painters, and musicians. The range of literary productions in Persian by Hindu poets and scholars, as well as the emergence of new

literary languages such as Awadhi and Braja, is evidence of this particular facet of Mughal kingship (Alam 2004). The point is that new Indic notions of kingship evolved that were partly in response to the imperatives of governing far-flung territories in the Mughal Empire and partly in response to genuine curiosity about the religious, philosophical and poetic texts of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains (Alam 2003; Ernst 2003; Gandhi forthcoming). It is interesting to see the shifts in statecraft regarding questions of religious diversity and how this diversity becomes a matter for the law under colonial and modern secular regimes.

Historians of law have shown that the challenge posed by managing far-flung colonies from a metropolitan center led the British to opt for a secular governance over the risk-laden goal of Christianizing colonial subjects (Bilimoria 2000; Derret 1968). The consolidation of laws pertaining to each community as “Hindu law” for governing civil matters for the Hindus and a uniform sharia for Muslims depended on the translation of texts seen as authoritative for each community. Thus while the dominant picture of how to govern native populations was to administer them according to their own religious laws (at least in civic matters), the figure of the convert posed an important challenge to this picture. That some people wanted to convert to Christianity was seen as evidence of their desire to embrace the more enlightened doctrines of Christianity – it gave the opportunity to missionaries to make a claim on government to legitimize missionary activity, and to advocate for better civic rights for converts over property, children, etc. (Viswanathan 1998). Court cases over whether people who had converted from Hinduism or Zoroastrianism to Christianity were entitled to retain previous civic rights came up for adjudication in British courts. Das (2006) describes a case before the Bombay High Court in 1843 in which a Parsi man who had converted to Christianity appealed to gain access to his daughter since the Parsi Panchayat had dissolved his marriage on conversion and his wife had been married off to another Parsi man. In this case the court held that the natural rights of the father overrode any civic disabilities he might have incurred due to conversion.

The enactment of the Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 went some way to protect the rights of converts over property and dissolution of marriage, but the ambiguity of the law over the figure of the convert continued in postcolonial settings. This is evident during the Constituent Assembly debates after independence in which “*respect for all religions*” was considered to be a founding principle but “*propagation*” of one’s religion was hedged by constraints. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution states that “public order” may form the basis for limitation of religious freedom, including “profession and propagation” of one’s religion. Over a period of time, various states in India (e.g. Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa, Tamilnadu, and Gujarat) have enacted legal Acts that put restrictions on conversion even if there is no outright ban on conversion. The anxiety expressed in most discussions of conversion in the public domain, especially mass conversion, was that fear and allurements were used to convert members of vulnerable groups such as adivasis or scheduled castes (Jenkins 2008). Even within the Catholic Church there are current debates, especially between adivasi and dalit theologians, as to whether conversion should be a priority of the Church, given the fraught political context within which religious minorities have to function, and internal discussions on the responsibility of the Church toward vulnerable sections of Indian society regardless of religious affiliation.

Equally important is the controversy over the attempt of Hindu organizations to convert Muslims and Christians through what are known as “purification drives,” though these conversions are represented as invitations to return to the original fold and hence escape the laws on religious freedom under which restrictions on conversion have been placed.

This brief discussion on the long history of religious diversity as a matter of statecraft shows that in most complex societies, which have been shaped by experiences of different kinds of political regimes, the imperatives of governance have to balance political and religious ideologies with pragmatic concerns. It is interesting to see how shifting ideas of sovereignty, public order, and the new pressures generated by the diversity of religious groups within a single polity bring certain anxieties (e.g. about conversion, religious freedom, or public order) within the public domain even as these processes at the level of the state become the conditions of possibility for new kinds of boundaries to be drawn around groups. In the next section we shall see how relations between religious communities are shaped by proximity and how theological discussions, law, and national politics are absorbed in face-to-face relations at local level.

FORMS OF THE LOCAL

In earlier work I have described how theological issues as well as the wider politics of nationalism impinge on social relations not only between Hindus and Muslims but across divisions within Hindu or Muslim social formations. For example, in examining the ten volumes of fatawas issued by the reform seminary Dar-ul-Uloom, I found that though most questions for which an opinion was sought pertained to issues relating to marriage, divorce or economic morality, there were many questions about religious obligations that were framed both explicitly and implicitly with reference to a Hindu presence and to Muslim migration to Pakistan (Das 2010b). For instance, there were questions about whether a *dua* (optional prayer) should be said in the name of the head of the state at the conclusion of the Friday prayer in the mosque given that India was not an Islamic state and hence the head of the state was not presiding over an Islamic polity. There were also questions as to whether Muslims were obligated to migrate to Pakistan following the tradition of the migration of the Prophet to more holy places, and whether India was to be treated as *dar-ul-harb*, the space of infidels in which jihad would be an obligation for the believing Muslim. In most cases the answer was a mixed one which, while regulating forms of ritual or prayer, also allowed life at the local level to be continued. No, according to one of the fatawas, a *dua* on Friday should not be said for the hakim (political head) of India because India was not an Islamic state. But equally, according to another, Muslims were under no obligation to migrate from India because, though they were not living in an Islamic state, they had freedom to practice Islam in India. Further, as the answers state, power was shared between Hindus and Muslims, shown by the fact that government officials and even some “rulers” of India such as ministers and judges included Muslims (see Das 2010b). The fact that such anxieties are expressed within the local milieus from which the questions are sent to seminaries raises very interesting questions on what it is to share a world between groups whose relations

are inflected by theologically or politically defined issues at a scale higher than that of face-to-face relations in a neighborhood.

Working in ten low-income urban neighborhoods in Delhi over the last several years, I found that one could mark clusters of streets (with one exception) that were predominantly Muslim even within a mixed Hindu-Muslim neighborhood, but social relations were not confined to members of one's own community. The issue of what it is to relate to the presence of the other in one's social life surfaced in all kinds of quotidian ways. The proximity of Hindus and Muslims created certain forms of sociality in these neighborhoods, though anxiety about any national event that involved Hindu-Muslim conflict – such as the dispute over sacred spaces in the Ramjanmabhumi-Babri Masjid events in 1992, in which followers of right-wing Hindu parties and front organizations were able to illegally occupy the site and demolish the mosque, or the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 – carried serious implications for relationships between these local communities. In my earlier work I have shown how long-festering conflicts between neighbors (in that case lower caste Sikhs and scheduled caste Hindus) escalated after the assassination of the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 and morphed into horrendous violence against the Sikhs, aided and abetted by politicians of the then ruling Party (Congress-I) and the local police (Das 2007). I was therefore very interested to note that the residents of the areas in which I have been working subsequently have evolved mechanisms to deal with any such flash points at the national or local level that could morph into violence between religious or ethnic communities living in mixed neighborhoods. For instance, at the time of the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992, residents of one of the areas in which Muslims and Hindus live in close proximity and own shops in the adjoining bamboo market held several meetings separately among Muslims and Hindus residents to try to deal with the more “hot-headed” young members of the communities to impress upon them the dangers of any communal conflict. A “peace committee” composed of members of both communities has been functioning with the partial encouragement of the local police since 1992, to avert any threats to the fragile peace. This committee also functions as the “Bamboo Bazaar” shopkeepers’ representative committee and informally negotiates with police officers, revenue officials and sundry other street-level bureaucrats to ensure smooth functioning of the market.

Thus my argument is not that Hindus and Muslims live in complete peace and harmony but rather that they inhabit the same social world in a mode of agonistic belonging (Das 2010b). Other ethnographies support such a reading of the mode of sociality across religious or caste groups. Thus Singh (2011) describes how Kalli, a previously bonded laborer in his field-site in Rajasthan, was engaged in contesting higher caste neighbors on such issues as temple entry for lower castes and in the movement against bonded labor; yet she could become a conduit for a deity of the same neighboring caste when she got possessed, offering advice to members of the caste with whom she was otherwise locked in conflicts. In many cases it is not through voluntary resolve to get along with each other but through unbidden movements of concepts from one site to another or through analogical thinking that solidarity is expressed within two groups that co-inhabit the same space. Thus for instance, a Muslim woman explained to me that though her father had been tricked into giving her in marriage to an older man who was sickly, and many of her relatives

urged her to divorce him, she could not contemplate such a course of action. She attributed this structure of feeling to friendship with a Hindu girl in her youth who had the firm conviction that if one was destined to marry a man who was not rich or healthy it was because one was paying debts of a past life to him, and this had deeply impressed her. Such movement of ideas did not happen at a deep theological level or through deliberative reasoning – it was as if a certain mode of speaking and feeling seeped into one’s narrative of the self simply because of intimacy created by proximity and friendship.

If one further extends the idea of a neighborhood to include nonhumans such as jinns, minor deities, and ghosts, then the language for expressing relations across religious communities becomes even more complex, as these figures convey aspects of sociality that show everyday life to be itself woven with fantasy of the other in one’s life.

I received some instruction on the occult through my friendship with a Muslim healer that I have described in some length elsewhere (Das 2012b). Hafiz Mian, as I called him, often shared with me his concerns over how to maintain the purity of Islamic teaching in his life, and especially in the healing practices he deployed to cure the many ills caused by beings of the unseen world. The term for the unseen world is *neadeeda duniya* – that which one cannot see with the eyes – and refers to beings of the occult world whose presence can be sensed with other organs such as those of hearing and touch, even if they cannot be seen. In the low-income neighborhoods in which Hafiz Mian’s work is located, one of the circulating affects is the suspicion of precisely those who are close to one. Thus all kinds of misfortunes, including illness and bouts of madness, might be attributed to *uppari chakkar* (lit. to be caught in a swirl of events caused from above) that is brought about by forms of black magic through the mediation of those who specialize in the occult. Known by various names – *ojhas*, *birs*, *jhad phunk wala*, *tantrik*, *maulavi* – these men can be distinguished into those whose knowledge is on the side of light (*nuri ilm*) and those whose knowledge is on the side of darkness (*kala ilm*). What is interesting in this scene of intimate betrayals, envy, and desire to do harm, on the one side, and the ability to marshal various kinds of sacred energies to bring about healing, on the other side, is that it reveals an extremely complex web of relations between neighbors. The narratives around such occult figures disclose a world in which you might be harmed by those who are in the structural position of an enemy, or equally by those who were closest to you – or you might be harmed by the conjunction of forces carried by sounds or sights that just happen to form a moment in which you find yourself inadvertently and become the vehicle through which some occult being’s presence is announced to the world.

Consider a few examples. A Hindu man was convinced that he was besieged by misfortunes because of the envy of another Hindu neighbor who had let loose the forces of “uppari chakkar” on him. Burning with the fire of revenge, he had gone to various Hindu tantriks and ojhas, asking them to cast some spell that would cause lethal harm to the neighbor. However, he told me that nothing had succeeded – so he had gone to a Muslim maulavi who could use the angry words uttered by Allah in a spell to send disease and destruction on the neighbor. “There is a natural hatred a Muslim has for a Hindu – so I think the maulavi will be able to harness that hatred and bring this man to his destruction.” The contradictory affects – his

own hatred for his neighbor who was, like him, a Hindu conjoining with the “natural” hatred of a Muslim for a Hindu led him to seek ways of destroying another Hindu neighbor through the mediation of the angry words of Allah.

On the other hand, another local healer who was a Hindu, a retired employee of the postal department, had become the keeper of a local shrine dedicated to a Muslim pir (saint) in a small urban settlement (*kasba*) not too far from Delhi, where his ancestral home was located. He regularly traveled to the kasba to look after the shrine and had appointed an assistant who swept the site every day and offered it flowers and sweets. It seems that, after the Partition of India, many Muslims from this town had either migrated to Pakistan voluntarily or were forced to leave because of the communal violence. One such family was the shrine keeper of a local pir about whom not much was known. The shrine remained abandoned for a while, but someone used to go and light a *diya* (earthen lamp) every evening, presumably in honor of the unknown pir. Once, a visitor to the town, who did not know that the overgrown, abandoned site was a shrine, had gone to relieve himself there at night, but the *diya* chased him away. The very same night, the Hindu healer I am discussing dreamt that the spirit of the pir, named Bhooray Khan, had come into him, and he took upon himself the task of becoming the manager of the shrine. He cleaned up the place and slowly, through the medium of dreams, he began to construct the history of the local pir. He has since filled in details, making his own biography of the pir, on the model of the usual *urs* (commemorative) stories of a Muslim saint. According to this story, Bhooray Khan, who was handsome and pious, was on his way to his betrothed’s house when some village women pleaded with him to rescue their cattle from a group of raiding bandits. The handsome young man agreed to do so but died in the ensuing fight with the bandits, but not before restoring their cattle to the women, and he is consequently consecrated as a pir.

At the time that the story of the pir began to be revealed in the dreams of this man, he received the additional boon of being able to cure various ailments. Although he has never studied Arabic, he can dream of Qur’anic *ayats* (verses); he then recites them over a glass of water or another material object, with which he can cure ailments. It is not clear from his description whether he sees the verses or hears them, but in any case he says he gets knowledge – sometimes he calls this knowledge *gyan* and sometimes *ilm*, anchoring his knowledge to both Hindu and Islamic sources. Perhaps such figures that acquire occult knowledge carry an element of transgression and are hence regarded with ambiguity, but their services are widely used in the low-income neighborhoods with which I am familiar. Does this mean that they are considered to be bad Muslims or Hindus? The ethnographic record on this question seems to be mixed.

Some ethnographies suggest a comfortable relation between the self and forms of Islam characterized as vernacular or folk practiced by Muslim subjects. Thus Joyce Flueckiger’s loving portrayal of a female Muslim healer in the city of Hyderabad suggests that various Islamic mystical ideas sit seamlessly with Hindu mythical figures in the healing rituals. Flueckiger argues that in Amma’s own perceptions her practices do not flout the injunctions of Islam in any manner. In Flueckiger’s words:

I want to make room for the possibility that one basis for shared identity might also be *religious*, at the same time acknowledging the contemporary use and meanings of the

terms Hindu and Muslim that mark important distinctions outside the healing room. At the healing table itself, narratives, rituals, and cosmology include what are often identified as Hindu and Muslim traditions and motifs but Amma emphasizes what is shared across traditions and does not consider particular narratives or rituals that she performs to be either Muslim or Hindu. However, these fluid boundaries of identity are specific to the context of these (and other *éauraste*) sites; as axes of identity move out of the healing room, identities might solidify. (2006: 171, emphasis in the original)

The term *éauraste* refers to crossroads, which in the Indian context implies, not the place where a choice has to be made as to which road to take, but rather a confluence of various kinds of people and possibilities. Thus Flueckiger makes the delicate point that there are specific sites (healing rooms, *dargah* or shrines of holy men) which are considered to be natural sites of interaction and confluence between Muslims and Hindus. Her ethnography reveals that in this milieu, terms are easily translated across Hinduism and Islam – the pir is referred to as guru, Hanuman as messenger reveals affinities with maukils (angels assigned to protect the verses of the Qur'an), Vishnu and Ram are considered to have been earlier prophets before the coming of Mohammad. Thus certain aspects of the mythological figures of one religion are mapped on figures of another due to similarity – Hanuman because of his control over the wind is like the angels with their habitation in the heavens; Vishnu and Rama can be treated as prophets though not as gods and are thus like the prophet of Islam.

In an earlier paper, I too have described such translations and the work they perform in the life of a Muslim respondent from another low-income locality (see Das 2010b). However, there are other healers whose narratives show a similar traffic of terms between Hindu and Muslim figures but for whom the lethal possibilities of corruption, danger and of risking one's hereafter are a constant concern. Even the healer who has taken the mantle of serving the pir, Bhoorey Shah, has to carry on delicate negotiations with the mother goddess who is the ancestral deity of his family (see Das 2010a).

The healers might not be scholars of theology but the questions as to whether using the language of the other involves *shirk* (associating another with God) for the Muslim healer or impurity for the Hindu healer, or conversely whether there are alternate theologies that can be given expression through the use of these words, surface in all kinds of ways in everyday life. Elsewhere I have described how Hafiz Mian had to seek recourse from a Hindu guru in order to deal with the tortured soul of a (perhaps) Rajput princess who had become aligned with his grandfather at one time and had migrated to Pakistan with his father (Das 2012b). This dangerous spirit by the name of Padmini was threatening the lives of the Hafiz Mian's stepbrothers and stepsisters in Pakistan, and though his father had abandoned Hafiz Mian and his mother in 1947, he still felt an obligation to protect the children of his father's second wife. He cited some memorable words of the Guru to me, though in the typical fashion of amils (Muslim healers trained in occult healing practices), whose words are rarely transparent, he also put the reality of his own words into question later on. The Guru, in an attempt to finally release Padmini's soul and failing to do so, had said to him:

Go my son, and learn that you have to fight evil. This is not evil that *you* have put into the world – maybe this Padmini is a young princess over whom the powerful kings fought – Muslim kings, Rajput kings. May be she is just a girl whose corpse was insulted like in the satanic madness (*vahshiyat*) during the Partition – but the hurts that have

been caused cannot be just taken away. If you want to pursue *nuri ilm* (knowledge on the side of light), you will have to first know what is darkness, what is the black *ilm* that Nihal Shah's own act in forming a pact with Padmini let loose in the world, gave her *wajud* (reality, being). (see Das 2012b: 145)

Hafiz Mian helped me understand that the healing he undertakes involves him with all kinds of occult beings from Muslim and Hindu worlds but that how a healing ritual unfolds is not a matter of individual choice – he is drawn into narratives that carry great danger but courting such danger is the imperative of the calling he has reluctantly agreed to embrace as a paying of debt to the memory of his grandfather.

There are very few Christian converts in my field-sites but similar processes have been observed by others with regard to Hindu Christian transactions in other regions. Mosse (2012) detects three different patterns of intersection between Hindu village deities and the cults of the saints within local Catholicism. In Tamilnadu, Catholic saints were absorbed within a royal hierarchical sphere so that they took on the character of royal personages; in Kerala, Catholic saints and Hindu local deities were recast as siblings with divided sovereignty; whereas in the more isolated fisher folk communities of coastal regions, there was a demonization of Hindu deities. The movement between attraction and repulsion was not a one-way traffic. Hindu deities, too, took on some characteristics of Christian saints – thus, for instance, Mosse gives the example of how some benevolent aspects of the Virgin Mary rubbed off on the fierce goddesses in Tamilnadu, making them less fearsome (Clooney 2005).

The actual exigencies through which translations, mediations and new forms of relatedness occur in the intersection of different religions are varied but what is clear is that experience cannot be bound completely to authorized clerical knowledge. In particular the experience of suffering and individual responsibility for suffering in languages of sin, karma, *gunah* (transgression), or in a transcendent God's will that is seen as beyond human understanding, will lead individuals to seek out cures within less authorized forms of religious traditions (Das 2012b; Ewing 1997). The heterogeneity of everyday life invites us to think of networks of encounter and exchange instead of bounded civilizational histories of Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity. The structures of feeling in a neighborhood are defined by these networks of exchange and encounter as much as by the pressure of authoritative discourses that try to police these practices. Yet these relations are also vulnerable to events at different scales – relatively peaceful social life can be disrupted and relations between neighbors can morph into violence – as detailed analyses of communal riots shows (Das 2007; Chatterji and Mehta 2007). Pressures by reform movements that try to purge religious practices of folk elements that were absorbed through different forms of proximity within a lived religion lead to a redrawing of boundaries around a religion. While it is easier to identify and track dramatic events, it is harder to follow the slow tectonic shifts through which ongoing negotiations between different religious groups take place within local communities and which might, in time, lead to cataclysmic changes.

DESIRING SUBJECTS, INTIMATE RELATIONS, SELF-FORMATION

While the literature on religious diversity recognizes the promises and the threats of the presence of different religions at the larger scales of nation and state, as also in

theological discussions, there is relatively little attention paid to the spheres of family and kinship in which religious differences can surface within what Laura Bear calls the domestic uncanny (Bear 2007). In a recent memoir, Fethiya Cetin (2008) describes how her grandmother, who was known in the community as a pious, respected Muslim, revealed herself to be an Armenian Christian who had been abducted as a little girl by a Turkish officer during the Armenian death march and the related genocide, and brought up as a daughter in his household. Fethiya's grandmother had somehow combined the performance of Muslim piety with a secret allegiance to Armenian Christianity all her life, but wanted to reveal her identity to her granddaughter before she died. Similarly Urvashi Butalia (2000) opens her book on sexual violence during the Partition of India by revealing how she comes to know of an uncle (mother's brother) who had converted to Islam and married a Muslim woman in order to stay on in Pakistan at the time of the mass killing and displacement of the Partition of India. Butalia describes the aura of suspicion that attaches to her uncle in his conjugal family as disputes over property surface and his previous Hindu status becomes a part of the ongoing family politics. Indeed, for the generation that came of age in 1947, secrecy around abduction of women and their forcible conversion inflects the power hierarchies within the family and informs the literary sensibilities of a whole generation.

While cases of forcible abduction and conversion as in Cetin's and Butalia's books are dramatic, there is also a quotidian register in which such issues as the different ways of being Hindu or Muslim might inflect the relations between spouses, parents and children or between siblings and collateral kin. In his work on the biography of a Muslim man living in old Delhi who converted to the Ahl-e-hadis sect of Islam, Deepak Mehta (2011) argues that far from Barbara Metcalf's (2004) understanding of life stories as stable elaborations of valued cultural patterns firmly rooted in established interpretive communities, the struggle over what it is to be a Muslim reveals ongoing tensions between religion and politics, global and local events, Ahl-e-hadis and other Muslims, as well as between Muslims and Hindus. The protagonist of Mehta's paper was previously a member of several left organizations but he came to embrace the more strict and legalistic interpretation of Islam after a series of grievous events shook his faith in the secular project of the Indian nation. These events included the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. However, his son, an advertising executive, practiced his version of Islam in a more perfunctory manner, leading to tensions that were, nevertheless contained within the family. Such was not the case between two brothers, one who was a devotee of the sufi saint Nizammudin Auliya and the other who had moved toward the reformist Deobandi sect which opposed the devotional practices of making offerings to pirs in the saint shrines that I described in an earlier paper (Das 2010b). The younger of the two brothers had accused his older brother of praying at the shrine of Nizammudin Auliya, making a votive offering when their mother was very ill. The older brother maintained that he had sought the help of the pir simply to intercede with God on their behalf; he had not prayed to the saint and he did not see any harm in this devotional practice. The matter had taken volatile dimensions when the younger brother sought a fatwa from Dar-ul-Uloom on whether the brother had committed a *gunah*, while the elder brother sought the help of a local mufti in their contests over who was a better Muslim and a better son.

While tensions and conflicts are one aspect of familial relations brought into being by differences over how to practice one's religion or by more dramatic forms of conversion, there are also other ways in which kinship functions as a domain of love and care. I have described elsewhere how Kuldip, a Hindu man, married a Muslim girl and how his mother, instead of insisting on the conversion of the girl to Hinduism, created a space within the home in which her daughter-in-law could practice her religion (Das 2010b). As Kuldip's mother confronted members of RSS, a militant Hindu organization, which opposes all Hindu-Muslim marriages, she said to them, "you will find many people to protect your Hinduism but he is my son . . ." The uniqueness of the son, his irreplaceable presence, is what constituted care for this mother and trumped any allegiance to an abstractly defined Hinduism.

In general, though, most people in the areas of my field-sites know that marriages across religious communities carry great risk of familial rejection and community disapproval. Even if very few young people are like Kuldip and would actually marry outside their communities, at the level of imagination, desire often traffics with the poetic and religious imagery of the other religion. In his novel *Nar-Nari* (Man-Woman) (2002), Krishna Baldev Vaid uses the voice of an old Hindu woman who is recalling to herself the brief affair she had with a Muslim neighbor when she was a young girl. Knowing that there was no future in this love in conventional terms of marriage and children, Vaid conveys this remarkable scene of creating future memory in which the man whispers the kalma (Islamic proclamation of faith) in her ear as his tongue explores its contours and also recites the gayatri mantra (the most sacred Hindu verse) as testimony of his love. Never forget the kalma, he says, as I will never forget the gayatri mantra – you will be half Muslim and I will be half Hindu. In such literary formulations we get a glimpse of how religious otherness also becomes a language in which a desire that is not a formulation of lack but of plenitude comes into being and gives texture to memory. In the memorable words of Stanley Cavell (2010): 518–19.

I think here of my various revaluations of Wittgenstein's opening of his *Philosophical Investigations* by his citing Augustine's quasi-memory and description of his learning language, a passage that seems to express a time when memory and dream and hallucination are not as yet as dissociated as they will become, and we are as if bearers of invisibility, witnesses of lives we do not understand, or care for, stealing words also with unknown lives of their own.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In recent years the anthropology of religion has become much more attuned to the fact that religious traditions do not exist in isolation from each other – rather, religious pluralism is the normal condition in which religious subjectivities are formed. Yet the impetus to render the relations between religions as that of fully formed traditions which are juxtaposed with each other has led to the idea that religious pluralism is another name for religious tolerance, or at the very least a striving for religious tolerance. I have argued instead that our task is to track how religious diversity occurs at different scales of social life and to understand the movements that occur connecting these different scales. The complex religious landscape in India

invites us to go beyond the framework of world religions that Masuzawa criticized so effectively and to strive for new frameworks within which pluralism might be understood, for good or for ill, as the normal condition of social life.

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CHAPTER 4

Religious and Legal Particularism and Universality

Winnifred Fallers Sullivan

No one is truly modern who does not agree to keep God from interfering with Natural Law as well as with the laws of the Republic

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*

Many in the academic study of religion today continue to accept modern law's account of itself as secular, ahistorical, acultural, and sovereign.¹ "Law" simply exists. It has no need to give an account of itself. When its origins are considered, they are mostly understood to be coextensive with those of the state. For many in sociolegal studies, on the other hand, while law is understood to be multiple, varied, layered, historically conditioned, and subject to critique from a variety of perspectives, religion is seen as a singular, mostly irrelevant and primitive vestige, one that has largely, and properly, been domesticated by law. Differentiation and separation of law and religion, with an accompanying subordination of the latter, have been assumed by both these academic communities, for the most part, to be definitive and final – and right (Casanova 1994). Even, at times, desperately so. Religion may not be disappearing, but it no longer offers comprehensive possibilities (Taylor 2007). This picture is becoming more nuanced, however (Asad 2003; Sullivan et al. 2011). Across the broad landscapes of legal and religious studies today, legal and religious interdependence is, after various critiques, and understood nonpolemically, largely coming to be understood as the natural state of affairs, descriptively speaking (Berman 1983;

Comaroff and Roberts 1986; Merry 1988; Johnson 2007; Bender and Klassen 2009; Engel and Engel 2010; see also Peletz, this volume).

In this chapter, I will explore the multiplicity of legal and religious forms, the product of what Robert Cover called *jurisgenerativity*, illustrating at the same time the indeterminacy and interrelatedness of what Karl Llewellyn called “law stuff” (Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941) and what we might name “religion stuff,” as well as the difficulty of locating once and for all their combined salience for human life. I will take Isaac Bashevis Singer’s account of his father’s rabbinical court in early twentieth-century Warsaw as my text (1962, 2000). There we are given at once an intimate portrait of an ancient but modern religious legal system in microcosm, and the relativizing contexts which gave it life. All positions seem to be present in this Warsaw neighborhood, even within this very small community: religion as comprehensive, secular law as comprehensive, religion as law, law as religion, religion/law as the exclusive province of trained experts, religion/law as the customary ways of a people, the state all the while disappearing and reappearing like the Cheshire cat. We see religious and legal subjects deeply formed by the Torah while making choices within a cultural repertoire deeply recognizable as modern, yet not less religious for being so.²

NO. 10 KROCHMALNA STREET

Isaac Bashevis Singer’s memoir *In My Father’s Court*, and its posthumous sequel, *More Stories from My Father’s Court*, offer a composite description of a small-time rabbinical court, or Beth Din, in Warsaw in the 1910s and 1920s through accounts of a series of cases. The chapters were originally presented as individual stories in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, a Yiddish-language daily published in New York City.³ As the reader moves through the cases in the books, and the docket deepens, Singer builds up a thicker and thicker portrait of Orthodox Jewish legal practice in that time and place. Disputes concerning marriage, divorce, and business deals gone sour; queries concerning kosher regulation, burial and care of the poor; rules about wills and inheritance; all are brought before Singer’s father – and the men of his *minyan*.⁴ Each legal event is recounted in the voice of Singer’s child self, a curious and precocious small boy tolerated as a fly-on-the wall witness. Gender, sexuality, economics, Russian justice, food practices, magic, interreligious relations, war – all are subject to the highly specific old-but-new formation that is modern Orthodox Jewish law.

In My Father’s Court is a beautiful and elegiac book. It is a story about a religious past that the author no longer fully believes in, yet he wants us to join him in his yearning for this past, legal and religious. In many ways it is an intimate on-the-ground account of legal secularization. The particular ultra-Orthodox practices of Singer’s father are increasingly relativized and transformed by the pressure of social change, by the presence and practices of other Orthodox and Hasidic rabbis and of the official rabbis licensed by the state, by first Russian and then German state law, by the swirling politics of Zionism, Marxism and socialism, by the distant siren-song of America and American Judaism, and by the Christian norms and ways of Poland.⁵ Singer’s father ministers to a tiny group and Singer is clear that even within Orthodox

legal circles his father is regarded as extreme in his conformity to a mystical and ascetic commitment to living in the end times. He portrays his father as one of the last of a soon to be extinct and exotic example of premodern piety, a father he personally experienced as repressive and out of touch, while he also holds him up as prophet of a utopian legality ideally suited to all. This contradiction plays out in the cases, with their many-layered Hasidic distinctions and differences competing with the classicism of their topoi. The persistence of efforts to recognize and legitimate alternative jurisdictional enclaves under state law today suggests the continued importance of alternative legal cultures and the prescience of Singer's vision.

Singer's father and mother, having come to Warsaw from villages in Poland, are each the descendant of important rabbis. Singer's father is seventh in a line of rabbis stretching back to a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, eighteenth-century founder of Hasidic Judaism. He has come to Warsaw after failing to find a place in the dynastic complexities of the *shtetl*. Speaking neither Russian nor Polish, he is unable to qualify as a licensed rabbi under Russian state law and is always worried about being found out (Singer 1962: 63). His jurisdiction is the small compass of his following among the inhabitants of their apartment block on Krochmalna Street,⁶ and occasionally others who seek him out for his legal opinion. His court is both subject to and rejects the overlordship of the Russian state (1962: 22, 77). As war approaches, there is the overwhelming presence of the military draft. And, always, there is the threat of the enlightenment, the Jewish enlightenment as well as of broader intellectual trends – and, most worrying to Singer's father, of worldliness. Only fidelity to Torah can forestall these threats.

Singer's mother was the daughter of the famed Bilgoray rabbi. Also learned, she occasionally offers competing interpretations of the law; she is pictured by Singer as the rationalist to her husband's often harrowing mysticism. The Singers eke out a living in a crowded, Dickensian, apartment block without gas or indoor plumbing, No. 10 Krochmalna Street, where Singer's father reluctantly sets up his legal court, their only income being the fees he receives for his legal work, and contributions from his "congregation." Singer's father would rather be studying. They are so poor that Singer's mother must shop each day for the food for that day. Sabbath observance is stringent but always relieved by the joy of company, singing, brandy, and expectation. With one foot in the next world, always lamenting the worldliness of those around him and the persistence of the Diaspora, his father yearns for the day the Messiah will come. Without law, he says, there is chaos (Singer 2000: 155).

We see in the stories told of the cases from this court a many centuries old legal process with its own forms of pleading and methods for the establishment of jurisdiction. When a person wishes to have a case heard he or she comes to the rabbi and makes an accusation. The younger Singer is sent to summons the other parties to the court, often up dank staircases to rooms of terrible privation. "When one is called, one goes," a father whose daughter is being accused of breach of promise, sullenly asserts in response to the arrival of the young Singer (1962: 22).

"Father now began the customary ritual of questions," Singer recalls:

"Who is the plaintiff?"

"I am the plaintiff," answers the young man.

"And what is it you want?"

"I want to break off the engagement."

"Why?"

"Because I do not love her." (1962: 23–24)

The case is commenced. The rabbi hears both sides, sometimes adjourns to study his texts and talk to his fellow scholars, sometimes consults with Singer's mother, particularly as to women's matters, and then renders a verdict.

In the case of the suit for breach of promise, it turns out that the young couple do love one another. It is the greed of the young woman's father which has caused the breakup. But this is something Singer only realizes when it is over. The judgment ending the contract is mandated by their expressed mutual rejection. After lengthy discussion,

Father surveyed the scene in his study . . . Now all had become clear. He instructed both sides to declare their acceptance of his decision. He received his fee. Father's decision was that since both parties rejected each other, they could not be compelled to abide by their contract. The bride was, however, to retain possession of the gifts. (1962: 26–27)

A verdict is consented to by the parties when they touch a handkerchief, and perhaps sign a formal document of divorcement, or of "forgiveness" (1962: viii, 13, 27). Formally speaking, Singer's father has no means of enforcing his judgments. He has, as he says, no Cossacks (1962: 45; 2000: 119). Yet his authority is mostly obeyed.

Profoundly gendered, even misogynist, at times, this was a legal culture ordered by the separation of the sexes and by small cues to religious difference. "Father never looked at strange women, because it is forbidden by Jewish law"; "there were no seats for women in my Father's study" (1962: 17, 23). Yet Singer's mother was constantly consulted on the law and business women came before his father as litigants. Minute distinctions in dress, food practices, Sabbath observance, and textual interpretation subdivided Jewish Orthodoxy into rival factions. Singer himself, even as a child, was an obsessive observer of differences in the length of a coat, the shape and fabric of a hat, the color, length and grooming of a beard or sidelocks. "Father would not have given Talmud lessons to anyone in modern dress" (2000: 178). Clothes and food were the primary markers of identity and fidelity to Jewish law. But Singer was also precociously ambivalent about these distinctions. His family's poverty, asceticism, and stringent observance of kosher regulation and food ritual made forbidden food and books and clothes both attractive and repellent to the young boy.⁷

For all this seemingly antiquated and arcane detail, though, Singer, in the Author's Note to *In My Father's Court*, offers his book not as a footnote to history, nor as the record of a pre-Holocaust culture which had developed a distinctive and historically particular but now anachronistic religio-ethno-legal formation of self-government. He offers it as a model for the future, as universal justice realized:

It is my firmest conviction that the court of the future will be based on the Beth Din, provided the world goes morally forward instead of backward. Though the Beth Din is rapidly disappearing, I believe it will be reinstated and evolve into a universal institution. The concept behind it is that there can be no justice without godliness, and the best judgment is one accepted by all the litigants with good will and trust in divine power.

The opposite of the Beth Din are all institutions that employ force, whether of the right or the left. (Singer 1962: 8)

What can Singer possibly mean by this? How can the legal system of this tiny backward sect embody universal justice? The answer is in the way he understands the Beth Din to articulate the particularities of each case in light of the whole.

“OUT OF MY FATHER’S MOUTH SPOKE THE TORAH”

The details of the cases Singer presents are fascinating in themselves – and he is an entrancing writer – but his judgments also illustrate the flexibility of law. The ability of Singer’s father’s law to enable a customized justice to fit the startling and varied human situations brought before him is seemingly never-ending. Yet there is at the same time a real dignity in the elevation of both small generosityes and the inevitable pettiness of human selfishness to a place in the divine legal order. Successful law always does both.

In the first story, “The sacrifice,” an older couple comes to Singer’s father asking for a divorce. The couple is known to the community to still be in love after many decades of marriage. Indeed, Singer’s mother finds their public displays of affection a sign of “commonness” (1962: 9). And yet the wife insists that she wants a divorce so that he can marry a younger woman. All she wants, she tells Singer’s mother, is his happiness: “I will lie next to him in the cemetery. In the other world I will again be his wife. I will be his footstool in paradise. It has all been settled” (1962: 10). Meanwhile, though, “he is still like a young man. He can still have children . . . Besides, she is an orphan . . . she will be good to him” (1962: 10).

The neighborhood women, including Singer’s mother, are outraged:

My mother tried to dissuade her. Like the other women, my mother saw in this affair an affront to all womankind. If all old men were to start divorcing their wives and marrying young girls, the world would be in a fine state. Mother said that the whole idea was clearly the work of the Evil One, and that such love was an impure thing. She even quoted one of the books on ethics. But this simple woman, too, could cite Scripture. She reminded my mother of how Rachel and Leah had given their maidservants, Bilhah and Silpah, to Jacob as concubines. (1962: 11)

“The community was divided into two parts. The affair was discussed everywhere” (1962: 12). But Singer’s father and the other men of the *minyan* are agreed. Even an old man is obligated to “be fruitful and multiply” (1962: 12). Furthermore, since both parties are in agreement the divorce must be granted. As for the younger Singer, he explains that he always liked weddings *and* divorces; he also approved the result in this case: “at weddings I always got a piece of sponge cake and a sip of brandy or wine . . . when father earned some money, I would be given a few groschen to buy sweets. And then, after all, I was a *man*” (1962: 11).

As with the rest of the cases recalled in the book, “The sacrifice” excites the family and causes community-wide conversation and upheaval, but the experience of the disruption is then eventually woven back into the ongoing life under the law.⁸ Law both governs all and can only do so much. Singer’s father, the lawspeaker, sometimes seems simply to yield to the stronger wills of the litigants, litigants with their own

readings of the law, with their own “legal consciousness” or “legal subjectivity” as contemporary legal anthropologists and sociologists might describe it (Engel and Engel 2010), blessing their stubborn insistence while taking the opportunity to teach and exhort his congregation to faithful adherence. At other time, he resists, proclaiming the law’s refusal. Like the lawspeaker of medieval Iceland, he was the repository of law for a community without a state (Miller 1997).

Much of Singer’s father’s work consists of rulings on kosher regulation, often in the midst of food preparation. And, because many of the women who come to him cannot afford to lose the food that has become of questionable legality, his father must find a way. Or, sometimes it is his mother. In “Why the geese shrieked,” a woman arrives with two geese she has bought to cook for supper. She announces that although properly slaughtered, they keep shrieking when she is preparing them. Singer describes her demonstration: “The woman took one goose and hurled it against the other. At once a shriek was heard. It is not easy to describe that sound. It was like the cackling of a goose, but in such a high, eerie pitch, with such groaning and quaking, that my limbs grew cold” (1962: 18). Singer’s father takes the sound to be the warning sound of a demon: “Woe, woe, and still they blaspheme . . . It is written that the wicked do not repent even at the very gates of hell” (1962: 19). Singer’s mother, on the other hand, considers the matter carefully, observes that, “[s]laughtered geese don’t shriek,” and then deliberately takes up the geese and removes their windpipes, showing then that they no longer shriek.

Singer’s father is not impressed:

Mother went back to the kitchen. I remained with my father. Suddenly he began to speak to me as though I were an adult. “Your mother takes after your grandfather, the Rabbi of Bilgoray. He is a great scholar, but a cold-blooded rationalist. People warned me before our betrothal . . .”

And then Father threw up his hands, as if to say: It is too late now to call off the wedding. (1962: 21)

This small household seems to hold together a plethora of Jewish options, even the tension between reason and faith, while it stands together against the impurity outside. “In our home, the ‘world’ itself was *tref* [ritually unclean]” (1962: 69).

Perhaps the most moving of the cases, “A gruesome question,” begins one Sabbath night as his father sits with some of his congregation over the Sabbath meal:

On this particular Sabbath evening, fresh snow had fallen and the ground outside seemed to take on a special look of brightness. Frost palms blossomed on the windowpanes, reminding me of the Land of Israel.

In the midst of this spirit of hopeful anticipation, with its promise of blessings and fulfillment, the door opened and a poor Jew entered. He was not like an ordinary pauper but like an old storybook beggar. (1962: 29)

The old man addresses the rabbi: “Rabbi, may a man sleep with his dead wife?” The men of the congregation turn pale. Then the old man explains. His wife has died and cannot be buried until the following day. They have only one bed and live in a cellar. In order to protect her body from rats, he wonders whether he may legally sleep in the bed with the corpse.

Instantly the Sabbath assembly rises. What had been framed as a question of law becomes an occasion for social action. They reconstitute themselves as the welfare committee. A collection is taken up. A makeshift cot is found. Men and women go to the man's home to help him. Singer and his father are "from the priestly caste" and cannot enter where there is a dead body, but the others go in to help the old man. Singer peers into the window, frightened by what he observes. People speak of the unprecedented nature of such poverty and the portent it holds. The limits and the possibilities of the law are revealed. Singer's father cries out: "Dear Father in Heaven . . . Woe!" . . . "It is high time for our salvation . . . time . . . high time" . . . while Singer drily notes that "Our Sabbath night was ruined and the week that followed was a meager one because my father had given part of my mother's weekly allowance to the poor man" (1962: 32). Poor as they are, there are others yet poorer.

What upholds the entire structure is reverence for the law, for Torah. Another day the case before his father involves a large sum of money. One of the litigants wishes to take an oath. His father demurs:

Whenever he conducted a Din Torah, Father repeated the same speech: that he was opposed to the taking of oaths . . . One can never fully trust one's own memory, Father argued; therefore, one must not swear even to what one believes to be the truth. It is written that when God proclaimed, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord . . ." heaven and earth trembled. (1962: 61)

With the literal-mindedness of childhood, Singer envisions the scene:

Mount Sinai enveloped in flames; Moses standing there, holding the Tablets of the Law. Suddenly an awesome voice is heard – the voice of God. The earth begins to totter and quake, and with it all the mountains, the seas, the cities, and the oceans. The heavens tremble, together with the sun, the moon, and the stars . . . (1962: 62)

The dispute is between a large "mannish" woman and several men. In the course of a loud argument the woman repeatedly asserts her desire to swear an oath as to the truth of her assertions.

Suddenly the woman jumped up . . . She flung open the door of the Holy Ark, called out in a heart-rending voice: "I swear by the sacred scroll that I am telling the truth!" . . . Father jumped up as though to tear the scroll out of her hands, but it was too late . . . She kissed the coverlet of the scroll and began to cry with such a broken, wailing voice that one was reminded of an excommunication, of a funeral. (1962: 63)

The litigants leave. His father wipes the tears from his eyes: "Father walked over to the Ark, opened the door slowly, moved the scroll, straightened the scroll-holders. It was almost as though he wanted to ask the scroll's forgiveness for what had happened . . . For days an ominous silence hung over our house" (1962: 64).

One very early morning several months later when they are still in bed, a knock is heard at the door. It is the woman who swore the oath. Singer speaks to his father when he returns to the bedroom after speaking to the woman:

"What did you say to her, Father?"

Father looked angrily toward my bed. "What, you are not asleep? Go back to sleep!"

“Father, I heard everything!”

“What did you hear? The evil inclination is strong, very strong! For a little money, one sells one’s soul! . . . But she has repented. Despite everything, she is a true Jewess . . . Soon it will be Yom Kippur. If one repents with all one’s heart, the Almighty – blessed be His name – forgives. He is a merciful and forgiving god!” (1962: 64)

The woman had been tortured by nightmares. Singer’s father required her to return the money she had been awarded and imposed a penitence of charitable donation and fasting.

Because of Singer’s profound honesty and extraordinary art, we see both the attractions and the dark side of this intimate world where law is both awesome and mundane. Singer admires the comprehensiveness of Jewish law, its relevance for every moment of every day, and its capacity for humanity, and yet deplores its claustrophobic insularity and intolerance. He describes a crime that occurs one day outside in the square:

Every morning before prayertime Father sat by a window that looked out on the square, smoking his pipe and drinking innumerable glasses of tea as he studied and wrote. Before Father’s eyes, thieves picked pockets, snatched bundles, and conducted their crooked lotteries. But Father . . . was absolutely unaware of their existence. The neighborhood teamed with Zionists, socialists, territorialists, assimilationists. Yiddish and Hebrew secular literature already existed, but to Father, all of this non-Jewishness signified nothing.

One Sabbath evening we heard the screams of a woman . . . Father walked out onto the balcony and inquired of our neighbor Reb Haim what had happened.

“It’s nothing for you to worry about, Rabbi. Some girl has been raped.” . . .

Embarrassed, Father went inside and ordered the windows to be shut . . . only a thin wall separated his study from the forces of evil. (1962: 164)

It is a chilling moment. We do not know whether his father is unable or unwilling to help her, but the woman’s suffering seems beyond the reach of his jurisprudence.

In a series of interviews he gave in the 1960s, Singer talked about his early life on Krochmalna Street and his view of Jewish law:

Q. Your skepticism about Judaism began when you were very young, didn’t it?

A. I always loved Judaism and I always believed in God, but as far as dogma is concerned, doubt began very early. Because I saw that these dogmas are man-made things: I did not believe that God told Moses, let’s say, not to touch money on the Sabbath, or not to write on the Sabbath. They have millions and millions of little laws. They made from one law fifty, and then from the fifty a thousand, and so on. Every generation added something new. (Singer and Pondrom 1969)

We get a hint of this process of multiplication in the many small cases that come before his father, the power of casuistry, the seduction of adding something new. It is particularity all the way down, a negotiation between *Aggadah* and *Halakah*, that is, roughly speaking, between narrative and law.⁹

Singer himself seems to have, over his life, lost his faith in Jewish law, not in God. He could no longer believe that God legislated in that way. Yet his endorsement of the Beth Din as a model for the future of law remains; present with the apparently

narrow legalism and casuistry of his father's court is a more encompassing ethic, one that transcends this small community and licenses his father's role as mediator between divine law and the messiness of life. Asked to help arrange for burial in the Jewish cemetery of a young man who has committed suicide, Singer's father promises the distraught mother that he will use his influence notwithstanding her son's apparent sin. Asked later by Singer, who doubts his father has much influence with the authorities, what will happen to the young man in the next world, Singer's father replies: "He made a terrible mistake. But the Lord of the Universe is a merciful and compassionate God. The soul will be purified and returned to its source" (1962: 74).

Christianity is a constant presence. One long sad story concerns an elderly Polish Christian washwoman who dies shortly after returning their clean, starched, and ironed laundry one last time. Singer comments: "The soul passed into those spheres where all holy souls meet, regardless of the roles they played on this earth, in whatever tongue, of whatever creed. I cannot imagine Eden without this washwoman" (1962: 34). Another woman who comes to consult his father had years earlier abandoned a child conceived after she was seduced and abandoned herself. The child is now presumably baptized and a Christian. Should she feel responsible for this apostasy? His father studies his books:

The holy books described the atonement for such a sin, but would the woman be prepared to undertake such a penance? And would it not be beyond the limits of her strength? . . . Father was afraid he might go too far, might cause the woman to become ill. Then he would have committed a sin greater than hers . . .

Finally Father prescribed for her this penance: to abstain from meat on weekdays, to fast on Mondays and Thursdays – if her health permitted; to recite Psalms; to give money to charity. The woman began to weep again, and Father comforted her . . . Man must do what lies in his power and for the rest he must rely upon the Creator, for "from Him proceedeth not evil." . . . so, too, the Gentile nations are needed. It is even written that God offered the Torah first to Esau and Ishmael, and only when they refused it, did He offer it to the Jews. At the end of days they too will recognize the truth, and the righteous of the Gentile nations will enter paradise (1962: 99–100).

In the end, salvation is both universal and particular.

These cases, and the many more that are related in the two books, show us a legal world in which law is close to people and in which religious cosmologies and anthropologies explicitly authorize and inform law's dominion. Cultural coherence enables the production of law stuff and religion stuff, but other legal worlds are also always present and intertwined with this one.

SECULARIZATION AND SACRALIZATION

The secular corruption, as his father would have seen it, of Singer himself, occurs in various ways, beginning in the streets of his neighborhood. As he gets older, and his temptations move beyond sweets and storybooks, Singer speaks of devouring secular literature, beginning with *Crime and Punishment* – and of his precocious interest in science. His older brother, Israel Joshua, leaves home, ceases Orthodox Jewish observance, and joins a community of young writers and artists in Warsaw:

Even though my brother still dressed as a Hasid, he spent more and more time painting and reading worldly books, debating at length with my Mother, telling her about Copernicus, Darwin, and Newton, of whom she had already read in Hebrew books. She had a predilection for philosophy and countered my brother's views with the kind of arguments religious philosophers still use. (1962: 154)

Singer visits his brother and goes with him to the studio of a well-known sculptor:

I visited my brother several times, but each visit startled me all over again . . . through the skylight I could glimpse blue sky, sun and birds. Passover had come and gone. The paintings and statues were spangled by light . . . The ways of the intelligentsia became familiar to me. They neither prayed nor studied holy books nor made benedictions. They ate meat with milk and broke other laws. The girls posed nude with no more shame than they would have about undressing in their own bedrooms. In fact it was like the Garden of Eden there, before Adam and Eve had partaken of the Tree of Knowledge. Although they spoke Yiddish, these young people acted as freely as Gentiles. (1962: 225–226)

Singer's "enlightenment" and growing secularism cause him to shed the narrowness of his life at home and yet he retains the religious metaphors that always will structure his world and the magic realism of his writing. As his father taught him, "there is a particle of the divine in everything." Even in the ways of the artists and their models. (1962: 79).

World War I brought other changes, along with a shortage of food and heat. "The war demonstrated for me how unnecessary rabbis were, my father among them" (1962: 229, 263). When, at the end of their time in Warsaw, he and his mother are quarantined because his younger brother has come down with typhus, he exults in the transformation wrought by the health inspections:

In a strange house full of male and female guards, another boy and I had our hair cut. I saw my red sidelocks fall and I knew this was the end of them. I had wanted to get rid of them for a long time.

We were given a shower . . . I could not recognize myself in the mirror. Divested of sidelocks and Hasidic garments, I no longer seemed Jewish. . . .

Although mother had decided to eat nothing here but dry bread . . . I ate double portions, Mother's and mine, savoring the non-kosher taste. Mother shook her head over me, having hoped that I would at least be reluctant, but corruption had begun in me long before. . . .

Between Ostrzego's studio and the disinfecting station, the heder, Father's courtroom, and the study house lost their attraction for me . . . (1962: 242–244)

But it is not just the food and the clothes and the enticing sexuality. Law itself has been corrupted. Accommodation is being made.

Officially to practice Jewish law in prewar Warsaw required a license from the Russian state, a license granted only after an examination in Russian or Polish, an examination defining Orthodoxy, sacred and secular (1962: 53, 65, 92, 234). There is talk as the book goes on of the opportunity for rabbis in America to serve as a *shochet* (overseeing ritual slaughter) or a *mohel* (a ritual circumciser) and become rich. Opportunities for rabbis – under the shadow of the state. There are endless schemes for avoiding the draft:

My brother Israel Joshua was supposed to appear for conscription in Tomaszow immediately after the Feast of the Tabernacles . . . Had he remained a Hasid, a wealthy father-in-law would have ransomed him. At the most he might have wounded himself a little. Poland was full of malingerers with punctured eardrums, extracted teeth, and amputated fingers. Why serve the Tsar? But influenced by modern ideas, my brother found it necessary to offer himself to the army.

"Haven't we enough cripples already?" my brother asked. "The whole body of Jews is one big hunchback . . ." (1962: 218–219)

In the end, his brother hides out and avoids the draft until the German takeover of Poland obviates the need.

Singer's brother eventually emigrates to the United States, where he becomes an important figure in the New York publishing world. He brings Isaac to New York and gives him a job. Neither will be observant to the law of their father. Others will, though. Orthodox Jewish law is alive and well today, in Israel and elsewhere, where it continues to negotiate with the law and religion that surround it (Soloveitchik 1994).

CONCLUSION: THE "MIDDLE KINGDOM"

Another field – much broader, much less polemical – has opened up before us: the field of non-modern worlds. It is the Middle Kingdom, as vast as China and as little known.

(Latour 1993: 48)

How might we understand Singer's father's work, phenomenologically? Is it law? Is it religion?¹⁰ Is it both, and, if so, how? Lawrence Rosen, in his ethnographic study of the *qadi* court in Morocco (1989), argued that rather than understanding *religious* law to be a special category of law, legal forms should be grouped according to legal characteristics. Their religiousness is not really the important point. The *qadi* court, which had often been characterized as irrationally subjective and arbitrary by European writers, should, he argued, be understood as a form of customary law built on cases and founded in cultural logics, new and old, like the English common law, rather than understood to be defective and wanting from the perspective of legal modernists seeking universal codes and legal determinacy. The Beth Din of early twentieth-century Warsaw is likewise continuous with an ancient form of legal reasoning enshrined in commentaries and a place of mediation very specific to that time and place, taking its color from the history and cultural ways of Ashkenazic Judaism. Yet its subjects live always simultaneously in multiple worlds, multiple Jewish worlds and the shifting jurisdictions of Poland under various occupations. Their legal subjectivity is modern and not-modern like that of the Moroccans of whom Rosen writes. Also, like Islam, Judaism is a distinctively legalistic religion, both in contradistinction to Christianity's rejection of law.¹¹

Efforts at reviving or reconstituting internal special purpose jurisdictions are common today in many countries. At the same time, supranational jurisdictions, such as the European Union and those of international treaty bodies, are being created. Layered and overlapping jurisdictions abound, challenging the exclusivity of state law

and sovereignty. Furthermore, sociolegal scholars have expanded our understanding of law to include other normative and regulatory orders such as industry codes, etiquette, and professional ethics . . . even the law of the queue. What Cover (1983) calls *jurisgenesis* and *jurispathis* is continual.

In this vast and varied legal landscape, religion takes its place as both regulator and regulated. Countries with Muslim immigrant populations, for example, entertain proposals to create “sharia” courts to hear personal law causes. Muslim majority countries seek to be both Islamic and democratic, affording non-Muslim populations, such as the Copts in Egypt, various degrees of self-rule (Agrama 2010; Mahmood 2012). Indigenous populations across the globe have successfully forced the ceding of bits of sovereignty through a combination of treaty rights and demands for self-government (Richland 2011). The US Supreme Court has recently held that churches in the United States have the right to handle certain employee relations issues through their internal legal systems, exempt from national civil rights legislation.¹² Both Amish and Hasidic communities in the United States, and elsewhere, have managed to create their own legal spaces, formally and informally.¹³ India, Israel, and many other countries with mixed populations, contain specialized jurisdictions for certain areas of law. The Vatican operates a supranational legal system that operates by treaty or by consent throughout the world. The internet is making possible the regularizing and democratizing of religious law.

These variations in legal living reflect an erosion of the exclusivity of state law and its claim to a jurisdictional sovereignty understood as a zero-sum game; at the same time there is a reimagining of religion as inevitably legal and political, and law as inevitably religious (Sullivan et al. 2011; Rivers 2010; Miller 1997). As Latour says, what we are left with after we give up on modern separation and purification, after we give up on the church and the state as the only proxies for both known and unknown constituencies, is the place of “the meticulous triage of circumstances” (1993: 16). A triage with more or less potential for both liberation and disaster, as the Comaroffs, and others, have shown (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006).

On the other hand, for many today even to consider the possibility of religiously infused law is to contemplate the threat of an inevitable slide into what is often called theocracy, a condition imagined as the dogmatic and totalitarian rule by intolerant and inflexible self-appointed priests sanctioned by divine right. And yet all law operates within cosmologies and anthropologies that are shot through with religious ideas, practices, and genealogies, as countless works have shown (Goodrich 1995; Whitman 2007; Kantorowicz 1957; Sullivan et al. 2011).

In My Father's Court brilliantly and meticulously evokes a world of law entwined with religion that is neither theocratic, Erastian, nor Caesaro-papist, in other words one where neither religious nor state authorities dominate, but in which negotiation between law and ideas and practices of the human take place in a context of both religious and legal multiplicity and indeterminacy. While Singer's father is portrayed at times as a superstitious puritan of the most severe kind, he is also shown enforcing a law the vastness of whose commentary guarantees that no one is master, a law always open to interpretation, by his small group of fellow scholars, by his wife and her “rationalist” strain of Orthodoxy, by travelling rabbis who pass through, even by neighbors who have taken up Torah study on the side and come to dispute with the rabbi. The religious practices themselves are also variable. Singer shows us so many

ways to be what Singer's father calls "a good Jew." Some wear short beards. Some wear long beards. Some wear gabardine. Some wear European suits. Some read about science. Some eat from this butcher. Some from another. Some work with/for gentiles. Others avoid them. Some are Zionists. Some are Marxists. At key moments his father crystallizes and expresses "constitutional" principles: the threat of chaos without law or of the infinite mercy and compassion of the almighty.

While the Shoah is foreshadowed in every letter of this work, I do not think that brutal fact prevents our also taking Singer's account as exemplary – as an ethnographic portrait of a religious law – or of a legal religion – or perhaps just an instantiation of the universal religio-legal nature of human life. Singer himself seems to have been of two minds about the form of Jewish legalism he represented in this book. He himself chose, even before he left Poland, with his brother, to leave Orthodox Jewish practice. At various points in the book he mentions the proliferation of rabbis. Too many rabbis meant too much competition and too little work. But it also seems to have portended for him a community whose law was exhausted, in some sense.

Jews have for millennia governed themselves using Jewish law within the shadow of other legal regimes. Jewish law in the time of the Romans adapted itself to enable a Jewish life in a bustling diverse world (Dohrmann and Stern 2008). A myriad of such adjustments occurred in Jewish diaspora communities across the globe. One new dispensation came with Napoleon's setting up a Council of Jewish Notables. Orthodox Jewish law today is in conversation with other ethical traditions. The Dalai Lama has consulted with Jews about how to live as a diasporic community. And Jewish lawyers have participated in the creation of secular law.

The effort responsibly to extend current academic accounts of the relationship of law and religion to encompass all known human ways of life is causing pressure on both. This is partly the case because of the feverish politics of religious freedom advocacy.¹⁴ Neo-Kantian accounts of law are being criticized for their fundamentally Christian/individualist understandings of the human person and the exclusionary effects that result (Danchin 2011). The risk of misunderstanding is acute in discussing Jewish law because of the way in which Jewish law figures in opposition to love in various appropriations of Paul and in anti-Semitic literature generally (Yelle 2011). Singer is a complex figure. Too religious for the secular and too secular for the religious. A man with the work ethic and imagination of his father and the rationalism and practicality of his mother. His conclusion, "Only that which is individual can be just and true" (1962: 8), could be said of both law and religion.

Robert Burns, in *A Theory of the Trial*, decenters the positivist notion that the trial is a search for truth, and law an exercise in rational social engineering (Burns 2001). In a complex and sophisticated rendering of the Anglo-American jury trial, with its elaborate bringing together of lawyers, witnesses, jurors, and judge, the rules of evidence, substantive law, ritual tradition, and community mores and values, Burns argues that the trial is an effort in practical moral reasoning, a collaborative performance which, when successful, results in a series of culturally coherent actions that move the community forward. Judging law by this standard, Singer's father's court, at its best, seems to have achieved such a result. In that, it is not appreciably different from what happens in any successful regulatory or dispute resolution system.

NOTES

The author and publisher are grateful for permission to reprint excerpts from “Why the Geese Shrieked,” “A Broken Engagement,” “A Gruesome Question,” “The Oath,” “The Secret,” “My Sister,” “Reb Asher the Dairyman,” “Uncle Mendel,” “The Shot at Sarajevo,” and “Hunger” from Isaac Bashevis Singer, *In My Father’s Court* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1962). Copyright © 1966 by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Copyright renewed 1994 by Alma Singer. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, LLC.

- 1 This essay is a bit of an experiment. I am not an expert in Judaism or Jewish law but I have used Singer’s collection of tales for years to introduce students in various courses to the comparative study of the intersection of religion and law. I have come to love its capacity for disturbing students’ notions of what law and religion are and how they might be comfortably and tidily segregated. I wish to thank Hillel Gray for being a guide for me to Orthodox Jewish legal ways, although, of course, he is not responsible for my errors. I also wish to thank Sarah Imhoff for enlarging my understanding of the world in which Singer lived and the Ethics, Philosophy, and Politics colloquium at Indiana University for reading and commenting on the essay.
- 2 There is an intense revival of interest in Jewish Warsaw in Poland today, popular and academic, perhaps because the last of the generation who knew it are dying (Zubrzycki 2012). In 2010 a conference was held at University College London on the history of Jewish Warsaw; see www.warsawjewishmetropolis.wordpress.com (accessed Mar. 2013).
- 3 The *Jewish Daily Forward* is now published weekly in English and also has a web presence. Singer wrote in Yiddish but was fluent in English, as well as Polish, German, and Hebrew. He was deeply involved in translating his own work. For this reason, versions of his work in different languages are often quite different, reflecting choices Singer himself made about his audiences. Yiddish versions of these stories apparently contain many more references, both direct and coded, to Talmudic literature, as well as more overt criticism of Christians. A new biography of Singer discussing Singer’s writing practices has recently been translated from the French (Leibovitz 1966–1967; Noiville 2008).
- 4 A minyan is “a quorum of ten men (or in some synagogues, men and women) over the age of 13 required for traditional Jewish public worship” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
- 5 For one description of prewar European Jewry, see Wasserstein 2012.
- 6 I am indebted to Sarah Imhoff for pointing out that Krochmalna Street is named after Nachman Krochmal, a German Jewish idealist philosopher.
- 7 Singer’s ambivalence seemingly lasted into adulthood. Although no longer religiously observant as an adult, at least in his father’s sense, he became a vegetarian and lived a life deeply marked by the political sensibilities and work habits of his natal household. Asked about the reasons for his vegetarianism, he would say that it was not about his health, but that of the chickens (Leibovitz 1966–1967; Noiville 2008).
- 8 Sarah Imhoff suggested to me an intriguing parallel between this story and a well-known story from the Mishnah which tells of an intended divorce of a childless couple whose love saves them: Shir Hashirim Rabbah.
- 9 Naturally I do not pretend here to be giving a comprehensive account of Jewish law. Neither does Singer. There is a voluminous literature on the subject. A persistent issue is the relationship between Aggadah and Halakah. See, e.g., Atzmon 2011.
- 10 Much has been written about whether Judaism is a religion (Satlow 2006; Boyarin 2009).
- 11 Buddhism, too, like Christianity, apparently rejecting the legalism of its predecessors, is profoundly intertwined with law. One could tell stories of the casuistry of Christian confession or of the application of law in the *sangha* that would illustrate other formations of legal modernity. For a study of modern Buddhist legal subjectivity in contemporary Thailand, see Engel and Engel 2011.

- 12 *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission et al.* (Jan. 11, 2012).
- 13 There has been much litigation, for example, over the use of *eruv* for designating the limits of the household for Orthodox Jewish practice (Cooper 1996).
- 14 See essays posted on Politics of Religious Freedom, at The Immanent Frame. At <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/the-politics-of-religious-freedom> (accessed Mar. 2013).

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PART II

Epistemologies

CHAPTER 5

Are Ancestors Dead?

*Rita Astuti and
Maurice Bloch*

It would seem that, at present, there are two kinds of “anthropology of religion.” On the one hand, the kind of interpretative enterprise broadly rooted in the tradition of scholars such as Evans-Pritchard and Geertz (Evans-Pritchard 1962; Geertz 1973); on the other, the kind of naturalistic enterprise inspired by the findings of cognitive science (e.g. Boyer 1994, 2001; Whitehouse 2000, 2004). The first type seeks out the meanings of religious experience in its many different and historically situated forms. The second type aims to characterize religion and explain its universal appeal by reference to universal characteristics of the human mind.

On the face of it, these two approaches are very different, even incompatible. Arguably, the most obvious difference is methodological. The interpretative approach is based on the observation of publically observable phenomena, such as explicit statements of belief and ritual activities. The cognitivist program aims to reach upstream of these public phenomena, in order to uncover the kind of implicit knowledge which informs action before it has taken place – this can only be done through the use of experimental methods, often borrowed from psychology. Aside from the significant differences in research and presentation styles that ensue, it is the end result, the knowledge that is produced, that seems so different. Yet scholars on both sides claim to be talking about the same empirical phenomena, which they label religion. While it is possible that, in fact, they use the label to mean different things, the

overwhelming impression on both sides of the divide is that if one's own approach is worthwhile the other one must be misguided.

In this essay, we will be articulating a very different view. We will show that, notwithstanding their different accounts and methodologies, the two approaches are not only complementary, but can be beneficially combined. This is because the people whose knowledge and beliefs we want to study should and can be apprehended, simultaneously, in two ways. First, as repositories of knowledge, which they have acquired through the evolved cognitive capacities of the species, developed in, and modified by the world in which they live; this knowledge is inevitably stored within each one of them as individuals. Second, as social beings whose actions, including their verbal actions, take place in a variety of very different interactive contexts. Such interactions (as pointed out by Geertz among others) cannot be reduced to individual cognition, since they only exist as part of the communicative process that occurs between people.

Our contention is that it is only by integrating these two perspectives that we can begin to account for the multilayered complexity of what we, as social scientists, claim to study. What follows is a demonstration of the fruitfulness, and necessity, of this combined approach in the light of one specific example.

OUR STARTING POINT

In a village such as Betania – a Vezo coastal village on the western coast of Madagascar – it is hard to miss (or avoid) the presence of the ancestors. Whenever an illness occurs and is found not to respond to whatever medical treatment might be available, people will wonder whether the ancestors are causing it and will take appropriate steps to find out through expert divination or by raking their own memories. They might remember a dream in which one of the recently dead complained that her house, that is, the tomb, was dirty or that she was hungry or cold. An offering of food might be provided in order to buy time; after throwing small balls of rice to the four cardinal points and to the sky, an explanation will be provided for the delay – the money is short and has become expensive – and a promise made – that the long awaited “work for the dead,” that is the construction or repairs of the ancestral tomb, will be performed as soon as possible. The ancestral presence is also manifest when people, as a matter of course, align themselves with their ancestors' wishes by respecting their many taboos, or when they anxiously decide to try their luck and breach one that has become too difficult to maintain. As life unfolds at its own pace, the ancestors are called upon for a variety of reasons: to inform them that a new mattress has been bought, or that the construction of a new house is about to begin; to ask for their protection when a long journey is about to be undertaken or a new canoe is ready to be launched; and to bear witness to various key moments in the life cycle of their descendants – from the first time a newborn is taken outside the house, all the way to the time when she will enter the tomb.

The ancestors are people who were once alive and are now dead. According to the explanation that is often given, the ancestors maintain their presence in this world because, while their bodies rotted away, their spirits (known as *fanahy* when the person is alive and as *angatsy* when the person is dead) survive. Permanently detached

from the body, the *angatse* is able to move around, to hear and see, and to feel the full gamut of human emotions and desires. This is the theory. But in fact, when the living attend to these emotions and try to meet these desires – which they do by offering food and rum, by staging sensuous dances with the crosses that represent individual ancestors, by playing loud music and stamping their feet over the bodies that are buried underneath – the ancestors take on a much more corporeal existence than the theory suggests. Indeed, among the Vezo and elsewhere in Madagascar (e.g. Bloch 1971), the ancestors remain very concerned about the placing of their bodies (and of their descendants' bodies) in the correct tomb.

People say that the reason they know that the ancestors survive is that they meet them in their dreams. They explain that when one is asleep, one's *fanahy* is temporarily detached from one's body and, like the *angatse* of the dead, is free to move about. Dreams are caused by one's *fanahy*'s nocturnal activities: if it travels to market, one dreams about the market; if it travels to sea, one dreams about the sea; if it is approached by the *angatse* of a dead relative, one dreams of that relative. Most dreams reflect one's preoccupations during the day and especially one's thoughts just before falling into deep sleep, but those that involve dead people are emphatically said to be initiated by their *angatse*. It is the ancestors, in other words, who force themselves into one's dreams, typically to ask for, or to complain about, something. People who have experienced these dreams stress that, in these encounters, the ancestors appear as fully bodied people, looking just as they had before their death: as young or old, tall or short, sporting a favorite hat, or bearing a distinctive scar.

The ancestors are often said to be *masiake*, unpredictable and quick-tempered, ready to punish the living if they are displeased with their behavior. For this reason, their descendants expend much effort and valuable resources to try to keep them as content, or as little disgruntled, as possible – by informing them of village news, so that they don't come and ask; by obeying their taboos, so that they don't get offended; by keeping their houses in good repair, so that they have no reasons to complain. All in all, the ancestors are hard work, and people might even comment that the *vazaha* (Europeans) are lucky not to have equally demanding ancestors to worry about.

Despite all of this – the fact that the ancestors often seem to be part of the fabric of the world in which their descendants live – there are moments when the basis of ancestral existence appears to be called into question by the articulation of a different understanding of the process of dying, one that stresses the finality of death. These moments are not so easily captured ethnographically, as they are less frequent and far less prominent than those many instances when people act on the assumption that the ancestors can hear them, judge them and punish them; but they are nonetheless striking. For example, when the time comes to remove the corpse from the house where it has been kept for the duration of the funeral, the people most closely related to the deceased – the mother, the husband, the children – are likely to protest, to ask for more time, to cling to the body. It is the job of older, wiser people to remind them, somewhat harshly, that “when one's dead, one's dead” and that the deceased no longer feels or hears anything, and it does not make any sense to keep his or her body in the village since he or she will not come back to life but will, rather, just go on to stink (Astuti 1995: 114–115). As Astuti has described at length (2007: 232–234), these same sentiments might get articulated as people find themselves handling

the stiff, cold body of a dead relative. Faced with the stark reality of rigor mortis and the onset of decomposition, people might find it hard to maintain a sharp distinction between the corpse and the surviving *angatsé* and opt instead for the view that “when one’s dead, one’s dead” – inert, uncaring and unresponsive.

Two quite different understandings thus seem to coexist among the Vezo: that people who were once alive and are now dead somehow continue their existence, and continue to see and hear, want and feel, judge and punish; and that people who were once alive and are now dead are just dead and no longer sentient. Such apparent lack of consistency in people’s understandings has of course been reported in a variety of ethnographic contexts,¹ and indeed, in his *History of Madagascar*, written in 1838, William Ellis noted that “in almost the same breath, a Malagasy will express his belief that when he dies he ceases altogether to exist, dying like the brute, and being conscious no more, and yet confess the fact, that he is in the habit of praying to his ancestors!” (1838: 393) One possible explanation for the apparent – and recurrent – lack of consistency is that the understandings that contradict each other are activated in different contexts of experience. This interpretation finds support in the results of a simple inferential task that Astuti administered to some of her very patient Vezo informants.

EXPERIMENTAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS

Adopting a protocol that had originally been designed by developmental psychologists Paul Harris and Marta Giménez (2005) to investigate Spanish children’s understanding of death and the afterlife, Astuti asked Vezo participants to listen to one of two short narratives and to answer a series of questions.² In one of the narratives, a character named Rampy was described as a very hard-working man, who one day fell ill with a high fever and was taken to the hospital by his wife and children. The doctor gave him four injections, but after three days he died. In the other narrative, a character named Rapeto was described as having lots of children and grandchildren who, on the day he died, were with him inside his house; now that he is dead, his children and grandchildren often dream about him. Rapeto’s family has built the cement cross for him – the major ritual that Vezo undertake to remember and honor the dead (Astuti 1994, 1995) – and they are happy because the work was well accomplished. Each narrative was followed by the same fourteen questions, which asked whether some of Rampy’s or Rapeto’s attributes would continue to work after death. Half of the questions were about some of the character’s body parts and bodily processes (e.g., do his eyes work? does his heart work?), and the other half were about some of his sensory (e.g., does he hear people talk? does he feel hunger?), emotional (e.g., does he miss his children?) and cognitive functions (e.g., does he know his wife’s name? does he remember where his house is?). For ease of exposition, in what follows the first set of processes will be referred to as “bodily” and the second one as “mental.”³ The questions that followed the narrative about Rampy – the Deceased Narrative for short – were prefaced with “Now that Rampy is dead . . .” whereas the questions that followed the narrative about Rapeto – the Tomb Narrative – were prefaced with “Now that Rapeto is over there at the tombs . . .”

Quite deliberately, the task invited participants to address questions that they would have hardly entertained before in such a concrete and explicit fashion. On the one hand, the fact that the eyes of a dead person do not work is so obvious that it hardly needs stating; on the other hand, the fact that a dead person might remember the location of his house or might know the name of his wife is not part of the standard and rather vague descriptions of the properties of the *angatse* (e.g. that it is “like wind,” invisible and mobile). The point of asking such admittedly bizarre questions was to force participants to reason inferentially, that is, to apply their available knowledge about what happens after death to solve a novel puzzle, rather than to ask them to explicitly articulate the knowledge that they have. To illustrate: those who answered that Rapeto would know the name of his wife often admitted that they had never thought about this issue before but, having to consider the matter, they reasoned that when Rapeto’s wife dreams about him, he will have to call her name out, and they therefore concluded that he must know her name.

In addition, through the use of the two different narratives, the task was designed to prime participants in different ways, by drawing their attention either to an individual’s illness and lifeless body (with the Deceased Narrative) or to the social process of dying and to the deceased’s transformation into an ancestor (with the Tomb Narrative). The theoretically interesting question is whether this simple manipulation would affect the way participants respond to the task’s questions or, to put the same point in a different way, whether this would affect the body of knowledge that they mobilize to solve the task’s puzzles.

The results of the exercise show that all participants, irrespective of narrative context, drew a distinction between bodily and mental processes, as they were more likely to say that bodily processes (92 percent) rather than mental ones (62 percent) cease after death.⁴ In other words, in their reasoning participants by and large followed the distinction, which is often made, between the body that rots and the *angatse* that survives. However, the narrative context made a significant difference: first, participants who heard the Deceased Narrative were marginally more likely to judge that a person’s processes, whether bodily or mental, cease after death (80 percent) than were those who heard the Tomb Narrative (73 percent); second, the percentage of participants who judged that every single one of the fourteen processes they were questioned about cease after death was significantly higher when they heard the Deceased Narrative (35 percent) than when they heard the Tomb Narrative (17 percent); third, the same effect, only more pronounced, was also evident when measured exclusively against the responses about the deceased’s mental processes, in which case the percentage of participants who judged that *all* seven mental processes cease at death was higher (43 percent) in the case of the Deceased Narrative and lower (13 percent) in the case of the Tomb Narrative.

There are two striking findings that emerge from these results: the general prevalence of “extinctionist” judgments (unsurprising in the case of bodily processes, but surprising in the case of mental ones) and the significant effect that a rather minor contextual manipulation had on the way participants reasoned about death. Taken together, these two findings point to the coexistence of two ways of understanding the termination of human life that are available to Vezo adults, one which echoes the statement that “when one’s dead, one’s dead” and the other that motivates the talking to, the feeding of, the working for the ancestors. The facts that the

latter came out rather weaker than might have been expected on the basis of the ethnographically grounded feel one gets when living among the Vezo (that the ancestors are all-important and ever-present), and that its deployment was dependent on certain contextual cues, point to a remarkable fragility in the existence of the ancestors. For if it is true that a minor change in contextual priming (in the Tomb Narrative) was enough to rescue the *angitse* from total extinction (in the Deceased Narrative), one can imagine how, conversely, the existence of the *angitse* might easily fade in real life, as people move out of those very special contexts in which they take its existence for granted.

This can be illustrated with one example, reported by Astuti (2007:241). Whenever the elder of Astuti's adoptive family, in the presence of his descendants, calls his ancestors to talk to them, or to feed them, or to work for them, he adopts a special seating position, a special tone of voice, a special demeanor. Everyone else does the same, as they all follow the appropriate *fomba*, the customary ways of doing things that were laid down by none other than the ancestors themselves. But when the talking, the feeding, the working is over, the elder, as he eases himself out of his formal posture, clearing his voice and taking in a deep, liberating breath, always announces that "it's over and there is not going to be a reply" – from the ancestors, that is. As people get up, stretch their legs, and help themselves to the leftover rum, they laugh at the joke: the idea that they might actually sit around waiting for the ancestors to answer back is clearly very amusing. Even if people expect that the ancestors will answer back eventually (if they are displeased by what they have seen and heard, they will punish the living in their own time and in their own ways), there and then, as the interaction between the living and the dead comes to a close, it is a joke to think that the ancestors can act in this world as if they were hearing, seeing and speaking agents with whom one might have a normal two-way conversation.

If the elder's joke seemingly shatters the representation of the ancestors as sentient and agentive beings, it also highlights the source of their resilient existence. For while it is true that after the joke – just as in the context of the Deceased Narrative – people might adopt the notion that "when one's dead, one's dead," it is also clear that, when a dream has to be recounted, an offering has to be made, a tomb has to be built – just as when such things were evoked in the Tomb Narrative – people are more than ready to align themselves with the will of the ancestors and, as it were, follow their script. Strikingly, as they smoothly synchronize their actions, words and posture with others, they do not seem to have to commit personally to a coherent view of the properties and whereabouts of the ancestors, nor do they need to hold the same opinion as that of others. As revealed by the experimental evidence, people's views are in fact extremely varied: even when they judged that some of the mental properties of the deceased survive after death, participants differed in the overall number and choice of properties they thought would remain viable after death. And in the long open-ended conversations that followed the task, Astuti witnessed a whole spectrum of attitudes, ranging from utter fascination with the minutiae of ancestral existence, often approached with great philosophical sophistication, to indifference ("I don't know, I have never been dead"), skepticism ("it doesn't make sense, how can dead people possibly eat or drink if they don't have a mouth") or deference ("it is what the people of the past told us to do"). In fact, regardless of this endemic difference in attitudes and opinions, when the ancestors have to be fed or informed,

everyone's focus shifts to performing the correct actions, using the correct utensils, and saying the correct words on the right day and at the right time. And somehow the work for the ancestors always manages to get done.

DEFERENCE IN RITUAL AND BEYOND

To explore how people with such diverse views and attitudes succeed nonetheless in smoothly orchestrating their actions, we need to analyze the very specific nature of such actions, that is, the nature of "ritual." As has often been pointed out (Leach 1966a), the word ritual has two senses in anthropology. It can refer to an event such as that which occurs among the Vezo when a person dies or when a cross is erected for an ancestor (Astuti 1994), or it can refer to any kind of stereotyped action. In what follows we use the term in this second sense. However, it is no accident that rituals as events are characterized by much ritual as a stereotyped form of action, even though they will involve other types of actions, such as the domino playing and flirting that go on at Malagasy funerals.

If asked to explain why they organize and participate in ritual events such as those we have alluded to above (the offering of food, the construction of a tomb, and so on), Vezo would say that they offer food to a particular ancestor because she announced in a dream that she was hungry, or that they have decided to speed up the construction of the tomb because a diviner pointed at its state of disrepair as the cause of an illness.

Explanations of ritual action, by contrast, are of quite a different character. In Betania, everyone agrees that there is *one* correct way of performing a particular ritual. There may be chronic anxiety as to whether anyone *really* knows the full script, and people argue passionately as to whether the cooking pot should be moved a bit further to the east or whether the offering should be called off because the tail of the sacrificial zebu is too short. However, no one can explain why it is that the pot should be placed in any one particular place or why it matters that the tail of the zebu is of any particular length. To address this kind of question, Vezo turn to a line of argument that is familiar to any ethnographer of Madagascar and beyond: that things have to be done in one particular way because this is the way that they have always been done, following the "customary ways of doing" of the people of the past. In other words, the explanation lies in the fact that people simply and willingly follow in the footsteps of others.

This kind of explanation has the effect of decoupling the actor from the reasons for the action, since it implies a separation between those who hold the beliefs and intentions that account for the action, and those who perform it. In addition, those who say that they act in a particular way because they willingly follow others indicate that they trust that those whom they follow had valid beliefs and intentions, since only in this case would the action be justified. As a result, the actors do not themselves need to know what these beliefs and intentions are, and this is indeed what people typically say – that they have no idea why they act in the way they do. We call this willingness to follow and trust others "deference." We propose that deference characterizes, but is not limited to, ritual action, whether it is found in simple handshakes, complex sacrificial offerings, pilgrimages or marriages, and whether it is secular or

religious. Indeed, it is because deference is so characteristic of ritual action that whenever rituals are invented from scratch, their real origin is obscured and an invented traditional pedigree is provided instead.

In the kind of ancestral rituals we are considering here, the deference involved in ritual action is not addressed to particular individuals, but to generic and trustworthy others, who had themselves deferred to others, in a limitless line of deferrals that stretches back in time. As people come together to make an offering or announce a new birth, they unite in their acts of deference. As they each defer to remote and shadowy others, they all assume and trust that this is what everyone else is doing. It follows that, in the context of the ritual, all those who defer are trustworthy, since their actions are motivated by the same – external – intentionality that motivates one's own. Ritual actors can thus unproblematically synchronize their actions, irrespective of what they, as intentional individuals, believe or intend. So long as all participants are willing to align themselves with those beliefs and intentions that they all assume to be behind their ritual action, they can hold different beliefs (or none at all) and have different intentions (or none at all) because *their* beliefs and intentions are irrelevant to what they are doing together.

Our analysis goes some way towards explaining how Vezo manage to orchestrate such things as an offering of food to the ancestors or the construction of a tomb even though, as individuals, they have very different ideas about what happens after death. But our analysis raises a further question, which is: why would anybody be willing or even, at least some of the time, enthusiastic about surrendering to others, however indefinite and shadowy they might be? What is the point?

To answer this question it is necessary to understand deference in a much more fundamental way, by recognizing its significance well beyond the domain of ritual. In what follows, we loosely take as our starting point a famous article by Hilary Putnam about linguistic meaning and reference, in which he points out that language depends on what he calls “the division of linguistic labour” (1973: 704). Taking the example of “gold,” Putnam notes that while everyone for whom gold is important – say, those who set out to buy a wedding ring – have to acquire the word “gold,” they do not all have to acquire the method for recognizing whether something is gold or not. For this, most people rely on a special subclass of speakers, whose job it is to tell whether or not something is really gold (1973: 705). Extending this example beyond its linguistic scope, in both a psychological and a sociological direction (as done by Origgi 2000 and Bloch 2004, 2008) we can imagine what would happen to the normal flow of life if every buyer were to insist on finding out for themselves whether the wedding ring they are about to buy is really made of gold. They would turn up at the jewelry shop with their chemistry set, and insist on running the acid test. And having done their tests on the ring, they would most likely want to run purity tests on the silk of the wedding dress, nutritional tests on the wedding cake, counterfeit tests on the champagne, and so on. Assuming that the jeweler, the tailor, the baker and the sommelier did not send them packing, our protagonists would have spent so much time checking things out for themselves that they would have no hope of getting the wedding off the ground. The point of this story, of course, is to highlight the ease with which, in fact, we move from jeweler to tailor, from baker to sommelier, deferring to their expert knowledge and trusting their integrity. Indeed, a moment's thought will reveal that in order to live with others as

efficiently and smoothly as we do in our everyday lives, we continually and routinely abandon our own, inevitably variable, critical examination and accept to trust and defer to others as our default mode of social interaction.

In addition, our story highlights an even more fundamental role played by trust and deference in sustaining the fluency of human social life. For we may ask: what kind of thing is that “person” whom we trust and defer to? It is not the empirical phenomenon apprehended by our senses. If it were, we would have to be continually evaluating the phenomenon, the jeweler in this case, for his trustworthiness. As with the checking of the ring with the chemistry set, this would be an exhausting, time-consuming task; in fact, it would be impossible, as we would have to know and to compute far too many things about this particular jeweler, taking into account the fact that, like all living things, he will be in a state of continual modification. Instead, what we do, in order to live fluently as we patently do, is to *look past* the empirical jeweler (who might be good-humored today and a bit pensive tomorrow) to a much more permanent yet imagined creature: one whose dispositions are stable in time; and we *look past* him even further to an equally imagined creature: the role of being “a jeweler” in the sort of shop one can trust. From this looking point, we can assume that such a “jeweler” in such a shop would not risk his reputation, his custom or risk trouble with the police by selling fake gold. Furthermore, in order for us to be able to deal with the jeweler in this way, the jeweler himself had to *look past* us to a stable trustworthy “customer” who, like him, is part of a highly consequential, yet wholly imagined “social system.” By way of trust and deference, therefore, both jeweler and customer fall back on an indefinite and not clearly bounded system that involves a large but unspecified number of roles, conventions and rules, which they only vaguely conceptualize but which they rely upon to live their lives and get things done.

Naturally, the system is not watertight, and for good reasons. Probably because of an inquisitive and questioning drive that is as fundamental to the human species as the drive to live socially, there are moments and contexts in which, instead of *looking past* the jeweler’s or the customer’s empirical reality, in deference to a system we trust, we *see through* their imagined existence, as we mobilize our personal beliefs, intuitions and skepticism to see *them*. It is when we engage this critical stance, when we are suspicious and strategizing, that we find the space to think creatively, and find new solutions to old and new problems.

BACK TO THE VEZO

We would argue that our fictional story about the jeweler and his customer is not all that remote from everyday situations, including those faced by the inhabitants of Vezo villages as they go about their business. Let’s imagine one of these villagers as he sets out to organize a fishing expedition with a person he thinks of as his *nenilaby*, his mother’s brother; in dealing with this man *as nenilaby*, he must be able to imagine him as more than the empirical manifestation of the Rakoto or the Iano he happens to be talking to. The frame of reference which enables him to *look past* this particular individual at this particular moment in time is an imagined system of roles, duties, rights and expectations which all concerned – the villager, his *nenilaby*, his mother,

his father and so on – defer to and live by, in certain ways, to a certain extent, at certain moments in time.

In Betania, this all-important system of deference, which goes under the name of kinship, organizes people's daily lives in very significant and practical ways – whom one eats with, whose canoe one can borrow, whom one hangs out with, whom one can't have sex with, and so on. Because of its rootedness in deference – which blocks any serious examination of the whys and wherefores – people may not be entirely clear about how far this imagined system extends and according to which principles, but they are well aware of its “reality” and of their own dependence on it. This is especially so at key and difficult moments in their lives, for example when illness strikes or conflicts erupt. At such times, as people strive to “put things back in order again,” they must be able to put aside their personal views and understandings, their competing strategies and desires, and come to completely rest on others: on *nenilaby* as *nenilaby*, for example, whether one likes him or not as an individual. This complete abandonment of the ownership of one's actions to imagined others is, of course, how we have defined ritual.

One notable aspect of this imagined system of roles and families, in-laws and descent lines, is that, by necessity, it involves the ancestors, who are an essential part of the system and its generative nodes. When apprehended in the context of this system, the fact that some of the people one comes to rely on are alive and some are dead loses its significance (as pointed out long ago by Kopytoff 1971) since, within this system, everyone, whether alive or dead, is equally imaginary, as they are all apprehended beyond their empirical existence. This, we would suggest, explains why it is seemingly so easy to imagine that one's ancestors – who happen to be dead – are as agentive, in the way that one is agentive within the system of deference, as one's *nenilaby* – who happens to be alive. But, as noted above, the representation of (live or dead) people in terms of their imagined roles, duties and obligations is not all-pervasive. It coexists with moments when, instead of *looking past*, one *sees through* this imagined representation. So, for example, as he deals with his *nenilaby* as *nenilaby*, our villager will also retain a healthy dose of skepticism and vigilance, which will occupy the back (and sometimes the very front) of his mind. This means that, at certain times and in certain contexts, he will be able to relate to his *nenilaby* in ways which are not linked to their respective roles, but to the idiosyncratic nature of their past interactions (is *nenilaby* any good at fishing after a night of heavy drinking? is he fair when it comes to sharing the day's catch?). Unsurprisingly, the same critical stance can be applied, at certain times and in certain contexts, to the distinction between the rotting body and the surviving *angatse* (for example, if the ancestors no longer have a body, why do they want food?), which may lead, more radically, to the observation that “when one's dead, one's dead.”

In sum, what we are arguing is that attitudes and actions that are guided by deference to others coexist with attitudes and actions that are guided by one's intuitions and skeptical reflection. Ordinary life, in Betania and elsewhere, is a continual oscillation between the two.

As the reader will appreciate, this long discussion of the nature of ritual, of deference and trust has taken us back to our initial puzzle about the Vezo, whose diverging views about death do not stop them from getting ancestral rituals off the ground. In the light of this discussion, we now want to return to the results of Astuti's inferential task.

The first observation we want to make is that what participants were asked to do in answer to Astuti's questions was radically different from what they are asked to do when they participate in a ritual. While this is so obvious that it hardly needs stating, two key differences must be highlighted. The first is the fact that, quite explicitly, Astuti asked for her participants' personal opinion: she introduced the task by stating that her questions had no right or wrong answer and that she was interested in knowing "what the answer is according to *your own* thinking." By contrast, as we have stressed, when people participate in a ritual their personal opinions are totally irrelevant; what *they* think is not the point, as they merely follow those whom they trust to have had good reasons for prescribing the actions they perform. The second related difference is that the participants in Astuti's task were asked about their opinions *in isolation* (notwithstanding what psychologists would regard as an undesirable level of "contamination" between participants, who no doubt talked about the task among themselves). By contrast, as noted above, when people perform a ritual they are in the company of others, who, together, set their opinions aside and align themselves with the same trustworthy source of their synchronized actions.

Taking into account these two fundamental differences, we argue that there is no inherent contradiction in the same individual telling Astuti that, in her personal opinion, a dead person does not hear, see, remember, feel or know anything – that "when one's dead, one's dead" – and then joining in a ritual in which she defers to the opinions of others. Participants' responses to the inferential task and their participation in ancestral rituals are not a matter of either/or but of and/and. This is because the two activities require two different (if overlapping) attitudes – inquisitive and uncertain in one context, deferential and trusting in the other.

Still, we might view these two situations and the attitudes they require as radically incommensurable, given the different localization of the beliefs and intentions on which they are predicated. But in fact we are dealing with a continuum. At one extreme, people search in themselves for an explanation of what happens at death; at the other, they abandon the ownership of their reasoning and defer to others. While ritual events, with their concentrated dose of ritual action, are peculiar in containing "pure" moments in which individual beliefs and intentions are totally blocked, ordinary life, as noted above, involves a continual movement between the two extremes. We can get a glimpse of this movement in Astuti's results. As discussed above, even when participants were asked, in isolation, for their individual opinion, the narrative context that framed the questions made a significant difference to the answers they gave. In the Deceased Narrative, when the participants' attention was drawn to a corpse laid out in hospital, the image of an intentional and active ancestor did not fare as well as in the Tomb Narrative, which evoked the deceased's family ties with his descendants and made reference to the work that they had dutifully accomplished to remember and honor him. This contextual effect can be understood in terms of the different points along the continuum of deference occupied by different participants. At one extreme, those who heard the Deceased Narrative were primed to reason about the straightforward (if emotionally charged) processes by which bodily functions come to an end. About half of the participants (those who gave extinctionist answers to all of the questions) relied on their first-hand experience of the process of decomposition and of the eerie stillness of the corpse. By contrast, those who heard the Tomb Narrative, with its ancestral priming, were gently nudged

toward deference, even though, as illustrated earlier, the overall nature of the task, with its bizarre questions, forced them nonetheless to put their thinking caps on. As a result, participants were halfway between fully deferring and fully searching for a reasoned, if speculative, answer. This explains why their answers, like those of the participants in the Deceased Narrative, were personal and idiosyncratic, in such contrast with the synchronized orchestration of bodies and minds that is achieved when, at one extreme pole of the continuum, people put their beliefs and intentions to one side and allow themselves to fully trust and rest on the encompassing system of deference which ties them back to the ancestors. In fact, the experimental setting, with its narrative priming, presented people with a situation that is probably quite similar to what they experience in their normal lives, when it is often far from clear whether one should defer or reason for oneself. On such occasions, one searches for contextual clues to figure out which stance is the appropriate one.

CONCLUSION

There is of course much more that could be said about our ethnographic and experimental findings; for example, there is a very interesting story to be told about the development of children's understanding of what happens when people die, an understanding that they bring to the ancestral rituals in which they are enthusiastic and boisterous participants (see Astuti and Harris 2008; Astuti 2011). But what we have presented should be enough to illustrate the general analytical and theoretical approach we take in our work. Clarifying what this is has been the central aim of this paper.

As we mentioned at the start, our approach combines elements from two apparently incompatible sources: on the one hand, from mainstream contemporary anthropology and its characteristic interpretative approach; and, on the other hand, from the Cognitive Science of Religion, which aims to explain religion by reference to the evolved characteristics of the human mind.

Thus, as would be the case for traditional interpretative studies, we have anchored our investigation in what happens in a Vezo village. Straight off, this makes our program of research very different from that pursued by the Cognitive Science of Religion. Being an interdisciplinary field, not all of its practitioners are anthropologists, but even many who are have moved their anchoring further and further away from ethnography. Their anchoring lies instead in externally defined panhuman cognitive characteristics (e.g. Theory of Mind or the properties of different kinds of memory), while the ethnographic or historical record becomes a kind of laboratory in which to test the effects of these characteristics on the transmission of religious concepts and practices.

Something very significant results from this move, namely the separation of the different processes that make human beings the very special kind of creature that we are. Yes, as human beings we are the result of the natural history of our species. This endows us with cognitive capacities that enable and constrain our understanding of the physical and social world – a fact that anthropologists have ignored at their peril; but equally, as human beings, we are the result of the very specific cultural and social histories within which we are immersed. Because these two processes are, in fact,

always occurring simultaneously, it can be misleading to separate them. We are therefore happy when scholars such as Boyer and Whitehouse respond to anthropology's tendency to denaturalize its object of study by asserting the role of panhuman evolved dispositions; but we are unhappy when they seemingly throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater by giving up a serious and sustained engagement with the inevitably localized, culturally and historically specific nature of human life. Our refusal to give up on ethnography forces us to hold on to that baby. This, of course, is hard work, because it requires the kind of analytical integration that we have illustrated in this article.

On the one hand, like any other traditional ethnographer, we are committed to understanding the specificity of the physical and mental worlds which people create and live in, taking their perspectives and sharing their experiences. As we strive to do this as best we can, we have been aided by the new methodologies we have adopted from cognitive and developmental psychology (see Astuti in preparation, for an extended discussion), which have allowed us to produce a more precise and nuanced ethnographic account by revealing what is usually left implicit.

On the other (complementary) hand, as we get happily absorbed in the details of life and death in a Vezo village, we keep at the back of our analytical minds the very same questions, largely framed in evolutionary terms, that drive the Cognitive Science of Religion and Cognitive Science more generally – questions about the nature of human cognition and about the characteristics of human sociality. Thus, behind Astuti's experimental task are questions about the universality of the understanding of life (e.g. Carey 1985; Inagaki and Hatano 2002; Atran and Medin 2008), or of mind/body dualism (Bloom 2004). Similarly, our discussion of deference is informed by questions about human metacognitive capacities (Sperber 2000) and about the specificity of human social organization (e.g. Humphrey 1976; Dunbar et al. 2009). Keeping these questions in mind stops us from obscuring the fact that our Vezo interlocutors, like any other human being on planet earth, are members of the natural species *Homo sapiens*.

It is this double way of going about things that defines our program of research.

NOTES

- 1 For example, Leinhardt 1961 on Dinka religion; Leach 1966b on Australian Aborigines' and Trobrianders' procreation beliefs; Parry 1982 on Hindu understandings of death and regeneration; Luhrmann 1989 on magic and witchcraft in London; Stringer 1996 on Christians in Manchester; Bennett 1999 on Manchester elderly women's competing rationalist and supernatural narratives about the afterlife; Saler 2005 on Wayú religion; and see the lively debate about anthropologists' oversystematization of Melanesian cosmologies initiated by Brunton 1980.
- 2 For the purpose of the present discussion, we refer only to adult participants (21 men and 25 women: mean age = 35 years; range = 19 years to 71 years).
- 3 These English words are used here as analytical terms; whether or not they correspond to local distinctions – for example, between “what pertains to the body” (*mikasky ny vatanteña*) and “what pertains to the mind/spirit” (*mikasky ny sainteña*; *mikasky ny heritseristinteña*; *mikasky ny fanahinteña*) – is not a question that we can explicitly address in this chapter. See Astuti et al. 2004 for an extended discussion.
- 4 For statistical analyses see Astuti and Harris 2008.

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CHAPTER 6

Coping with Religious Diversity: Incommensurability and Other Perspectives

Eva Spies

Anthropologists typically encounter a variety of views and practices in the course of their fieldwork, and must accommodate this diversity during fieldwork and beyond. The proponents of functionalist and structuralist approaches in the early to mid twentieth century identified the basic universal principle that bound together such diverse views and practices as a “society” or a “social system.” Proponents of an interpretive strand tried to discern the “system of meaning” that local counterparts themselves create out of this diversity, while postmodern approaches argued against totalizing tendencies, questioning the assumption that coherence and identity are inescapable, and focusing instead on alterity and fragmentation. Today, anthropologists who adopt a constructivist approach are interested in the processes of making difference – how actors, discourses, and power relations work toward the construction of difference and diversity or, conversely, toward the construction of unity.

By looking at anthropology this way, we may understand it as the academic discipline that deals with how humans – both anthropologists and their counterparts – try to cope with the Other, or with diversity more generally. In the following, I argue that the empirical plurality anthropologists experience in the field requires a pluralistic approach, that is, an open, hermeneutical way of understanding differences, a perspectival mobility in the sense of a willingness and constant effort to change perspectives during fieldwork, or at least acknowledge the diversity of perspectives that exist (cf. Streck 2012). This approach should be adopted, however, without the compulsion

to “fuse horizons” or reduce diversity to a single perspective in our written accounts, for anthropological and hermeneutical “understanding” or “translation” need not be equated with leveling, absorbing, or dissolving difference.¹ People may experience certain practices and views as being unlike and yet accept their coexistence without feeling the need to offset one against another, and without becoming embroiled in moral, social, or logical conflict. Sometimes people do not feel the lack of fit a researcher may perceive (or vice versa) and it may be useful to examine the actor’s experience of difference to understand why this is so. Thus, I wish to stress the importance of focusing our research on and theorizing about differences rather than trying to reconcile them. Here I do not mean to essentialize difference, nor should we look exclusively at strategies of making difference. Instead, in order to understand why and how actors relate different – in this case “religious” – views and practices to each other, a researcher needs to pay close attention to the “contents” of these differences from the actors’ points of view.²

On a theoretical level this leads me to argue for the possibility of incommensurability among coeval “religious” traditions. Discussing incommensurability in the context of “religious diversity” means questioning the universality of the category “religion” and the idea that traditions are convertible, as well as taking into account the diverse ways in which so called religious traditions are related to each other by the actors involved. Incommensurability does not exclude a comparison of practices, views, and traditions, but basically observes that different traditions may not refer to the same frame of reference and are not, therefore, always comparable on the basis of a single standard. In the following I briefly outline some current models of religious diversity to show why the possibility of incommensurability needs to be entertained. Subsequently, to ground my point, I describe different perspectives on a burial ritual in the central highlands of Madagascar. This ritual, the *famadihana*, is one for which Madagascar is often cited in the religious studies literature.

COPING WITH RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: THE ACADEMIC MODELS

Religious diversity is not new to anthropological research. In the early twentieth century, in the context of colonialism in particular, the diverse forms of so-called world religions like Islam and Christianity, which emerged or were newly encountered, led not only theologians but also social scientists to engage in judgmental debates concerning orthodox “pure” forms versus syncretistic or “watered-down” folk versions.³ An interest in composite (Malinowski 1938) or acculturated, syncretized forms of religions (e.g. Herskovits 1958; Worsley 1957) later grew alongside anthropological interest in general processes of social and cultural change. Although the dichotomization and hierarchization of different traditions may still be found in these studies, as for example in the distinction between “great and little traditions” in the debate on Hinduism (referring to a textual Sanskrit elite tradition on the one hand and nonliterate folk traditions on the other), yet the focus shifted to the interrelations and interdependences of traditions existing in the same social space at the same time (Marriott 1955; see also Redfield 1956).

Through the critical study of the entanglements of colonization and (Christian) missionary work, concepts such as power, hegemony, and resistance became

dominant in the works of some anthropologists, who highlighted conflict between different (religious) traditions as well as creative local ways of coming to terms with new goods, ideas, practices, and power relations (Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Kramer 1993; Shaw and Stewart 1994; Taussig 1980). The emergence of new religious groups and forms, an intensified visibility of religion in the public sphere, and the increased spread and differentiation of religious traditions due to new media, missions, and forms of migration, as well as changing national and global power structures, prompted a host of studies from the 1990s onward dealing with the consequences of “globalization” in relation to religion. These studies did not focus exclusively on power differences between religious groups, diverse forms of competition and concurrence, or actors’ strategies for localizing and globalizing religious views and practices. In addition to heightened interest in empirical religious diversity, they increasingly questioned the concepts, approaches, and analytical tools hitherto in use: Did anthropologists underestimate existing religious diversity in the societies they worked in? Is it possible that we did this as a result of adopting a limited concept of religion with an excessive focus on (mono)theistic ideas? (See Asad 1993; Lambek 2008; Smith 1998.) If so, how must we modify our ideas of “modernity” and “secularization” when viewing current developments in instituted, public, and individual religiosity? Is it better to work with concepts like “postsecular” or “desecularized” societies and do they apply worldwide? (For instance, Asad 1996; Berger 1999; Habermas 2005a.) Moreover, if the social and political relevance of religion is not declining in most contemporary societies and a plurality of religious views and practices was, is, or becomes everyday experience for individuals, societies, and governments (and researchers too), how can we describe and analyze religious diversity today and grasp the processes involved in conceptualizing and coming to terms with it on an individual, societal, and (trans)national level? Referring to the last question, I outline below some current academic models for thinking about how different religious traditions relate to each other in a pluralistic setting and why I believe the perspective of incommensurability is helpful. In most (though not all) cases I refer to, the academic strategies for coming to terms with diversity result from empirical research. They attempt to reflect the actions and concepts of individual actors, religious groups, and institutions in religiously plural societies, and to abstract from them to more general models of religious diversity.

DUALISM AND CONFLICT

One way to conceptualize the relationship between different religious traditions is to arrange them in a dualistic frame where one religious tradition opposes another, and people may follow either one or the other but not both (Lambek 2008: 124). This suggests that the traditions are comparable and even fill the same space or have the same function and hence are mutually exclusive. Authors who come to mind here include Samuel Huntington (1996), who highlighted the absolute differences and incompatibilities of religious traditions whose relations are, therefore, characterized by rupture, rejection, or conflict. In many cases the notion of conversion follows the either/or logic as well (cf. Cannell 2006 for a discussion of the notion of conversion and discontinuity).⁴ In a novel entitled *The River Between* by Kenyan author Ngugi

Wa Thiong'o (1965), the river stands for the division between two incompatible ways of life, that is, traditional and Christian, and the antagonistic positions of the villagers on opposite banks.

Although traditions are here opposed, they are connected by their opposition: as homogeneous closed "ways of life" they can be compared and played off against each other. Those who adhere to this kind of binary either/or logic are sometimes called fundamentalists (or positivists), in contrast to syncretists (or constructivists) (Droogers 2005: 469f.).

INTERCONNECTIONS

Most current models emphasize different forms of interconnection between and among traditions. In these cases, the traditions in question are seen as being commensurable. This means that – on an abstract level – different "religious" traditions are somehow set in a single frame of reference, within which they relate to each other and can therefore be compared. Within this framework, religious practices and views refer to each other and are considered to be mutually translatable without major distortions.

Models of mixing are widespread. In this case, actor-oriented approaches emphasize processes of – sometimes creative, interest-driven, and more or less conscious – combination and blending of distinct but comparable "units." Common words used to conceptualize these processes of mixing are appropriation (Meyer 1999), syncretization and hybridization (Kitiarsa 2005; Shaw and Stewart 1994; Stewart 1999), creolization (Hannerz 1987; Stewart 2007), and *bricolage* (Bastide 1970; Comaroff 1985; Mary 2005; Hervieu-Léger 1993).⁵ Each of these concepts is accompanied by a copious and longstanding debate, and lumping them together as "models of mixing" does not do them justice. However, my point is that these models tend to imply that religious views and practices are commensurable. Furthermore, they are seen as commensurable because in one way or another they all contribute to the formation of what we may call a unified "system of meaning," "logic of action," or "religious identity" in that the models reduce (religious) diversity to a logic of making sense. The outcome of mixing is viewed as a new "entity" – indeed, a composite entity, but one that must be somehow coherent to the actors who create it. Thus every religious act or view is seen only as a part of something larger, as when a new color is added to a painting or a new stone to a mosaic: the picture changes while incorporating more and more colors, but the idea of the picture as a consistent meaningful whole is not contested (cf. Robbins 2007 and 2011 for a critical view on continuity thinking and the notion of "enduring beliefs" that underlie anthropological works on Christian convert cultures).

The *market of religions* refers to another model of commensurability, one based on secularization theories like that of sociologist Peter Berger, which assume that in so-called secular societies institutional religions lose control and relevance, while religious beliefs and practices become individualized and privatized matters of personal preference and choice (Berger 1979). The market model is a rational-choice model for explaining, among other things, the behavior of believers in pluralistic settings (e.g. Iannaccone 1992). Here the standard of comparison for all religious

activity is rational market logic, that is, utility maximization, competition, and the logic of supply and demand. Again, a single standard of comparison is applied which suggests that all views and practices we refer to as religious can be translated into and reduced to universal terms.

Pluralism is another model in which religious traditions are considered commensurable. If, following sociologist James Beckford (2008: 81), we understand pluralism as “denoting a normative or ideological view holding that diversity of religious outlooks and collectivities is, within limits, beneficial and that peaceful coexistence between religious collectivities is desirable” we again find the idea that a single frame of reference relates diverse religious traditions to each other according to a meta-standard of comparison. This concept of pluralism refers to (ideal) political and legal frameworks, which regulate the diversity of religious practices in a liberal nation-state, in which different religious traditions are placed into the frame of a community of values or a legal system, and are thus reduced to commensurable “entities.” When discussing the role of religions in postsecular liberal democracies, as has been done, for example, by philosopher Jürgen Habermas (2005a, 2005b, 2011), religions need to be seen as commensurate because diverging moral positions must be comparable and translatable into the idiom of democratic political process. Only then can religious citizens begin a dialogue with nonreligious citizens, take part in political discourse, and fight for recognition of their conceptions of the world, their truth claims and differences. Hence, acknowledgment of diversity hinges on a predefined unity.⁶

In my view all of these models share the assumption that different religious traditions can be easily translated into one another. Different religions or religious views and practices are compared by means of a common, ahistorical yardstick that is taken to be an objective standard. Religions are understood as being fully convertible merely because they are defined as “religions” or “religious traditions,” that is, because the analyst places them under a common description and ascribes to them convertible features. Therefore the models reduce differences to a single logic or principle (a “master category” in the words of Chakrabarty 2008), and thus dissolve them on a higher plane.⁷ It is in this sense that “religious traditions” are represented along the logics of identity and may be regarded as commensurable.

Ensuing sections of this chapter explore the possibility that religious phenomena need not be commensurable or made mutually consistent in order to coexist. But they also show how actors may espouse commensurability frameworks similar to those of academics just discussed.

INCOMMENSURABILITY

My discussion of incommensurability follows arguments developed by Richard Bernstein (1983, 1991) and Michael Lambek (1993, 2008). As Bernstein (1983) notes, incommensurability offers a perspective “beyond objectivism and relativism” for approaching the “problem” of difference and identity, or understanding the diversity of traditions. I would argue that in order to understand the relation between two or more practices, views, or moral statements, it is not always helpful to refer to a third “meta” point of reference, such as systems of meaning or the market. Our models must cope with situations in which practices, views, or moral statements do not appear

to be comparable according to a common standard, that is, situations in which they do not appear to be easily translatable into each other – but are, instead, incommensurable. Elizabeth Povinelli writes: “incommensurability refers to a state in which two phenomena (or worlds) cannot be compared by a third *without producing serious distortion*” (2001: 320; emphasis added). Thus, incommensurability does not refer to absolute incomparability or logical incompatibility (Bernstein 1983: 82, 96; 1991: 87, 92). Nor does the concept imply “radically different worlds,” an assumption of which relativists often stand accused (Bernstein 1991: 92f.). With the concept of incommensurability, we attempt to come to terms with situations in which people do not appear to refer to a common frame of reference and do not feel the need for one practice or view to include or exclude another. Sometimes different ways of doing and seeing things do not stand with or against each other – they simply stand side by side. They neither conflict nor merge into a coherent new composite, like a coherent system of meaning, a coherent logic of action, or a coherent actor’s identity. Neither mixing nor excluding are inevitable processes in religious encounters. In his study of the coexisting traditions of spirit possession, Islam, and sorcery in Mayotte, Lambek wrote:

The point is that the distinctions between these statements, theories, practices, or arguments are not resolvable. Invocation of one does not logically entail any of the others, nor does it rule them out. They address overlapping but somewhat different issues; each conceptualizes the world and the sense of problem somewhat differently. If they were fully commensurable, one could be reduced or subordinated to the other; there would be no reason for all of them to remain present. (1993: 397)

My experience when carrying out research on Christianities in Madagascar was very much like this: different views and practices coexist and it appears that actors do not feel the need for a reference to one practice to include or exclude another. Indeed, sometimes they simply refer to different frames of reference. This does not mean that actors do not see similarities and compare; however, in doing so they do not necessarily measure traditions against each other, look for equivalents and strive to resolve differences – they live with them (just as most of us do). Thus, when I write about incommensurability in the context of understanding religious diversity, I do so to avoid applying a metamodel that constructs equivalences and levels differences where people experiencing differences allow them to remain.⁸

To ground my argument, I recount an example from Madagascar that demonstrates different attitudes toward a burial ritual.

FAMADIHANA – PERSPECTIVES ON THE “TURNING OF THE DEAD” RITUAL

Famadihana is the Malagasy word for the practice of “turning the dead” or “reburial” in the central highlands of Madagascar. In the highlands, as in the rest of Madagascar, public burial grounds or churchyards are rare, as the tombs in the highlands are family tombs. They are solid square stone structures scattered across the landscape. For families, they mark what is called ‘the land of the ancestors’ (*tanin-drazana*). Thus land, extended family, ancestors, and tombs are closely interconnected; together they locate the individual in time and space and within a social group. Put simply, to

possess land makes it possible to have a family tomb, while the tomb demonstrates that the family has ancestors, which in turn signifies that the family has an identity and continuity, a past and a future.⁹ The ritual of “turning the dead” is based on the understanding that the ancestors (*razana*) participate in the lives of the living and exert a direct influence on them. A *famadihana* is organized by a local descent group whose members refer to the same ancestors and the same land. According to local explanations, the reason for this ceremony is that a deceased family member has announced (for example in the dreams of one of his kin) that he or she is cold and needs new clothes. More general explanations state that the family needs the blessing of its ancestors to experience health, prosperity, and fertility, thereby ensuring the unity and continuity of the family (see also Bloch 1971, 1982). To receive the blessing, descendants should follow “the way of the ancestors”: adhere to certain taboos and periodically “turn the dead.” With this ritual a family ensures that a corpse becomes an ancestor, importantly, a benevolent ancestor, and seeks their ancestors’ blessing.

The feast takes place five, seven, or even more years after a person’s death. It lasts for two or three days, and, in addition to the acts dealing directly with the remains, involves music, dancing, and drinking, and a meal provided for all participants. In most cases a *famadihana* is staged in honor of a single ancestor, but all of the corpses interred in one tomb are usually “turned” on the occasion. To “turn the dead” means that the remains of the dead are taken out of the family tomb during the feast.¹⁰ The remains, which are already wrapped in cloth, are wrapped in yet another layer of cloth (*lambamena*) by male family members; sometimes the women place them on their legs while sitting on the floor and caress them. Finally family members wrap the remains in a mat, dance with them around the tomb, and carry them back into the tomb, where they are laid on shelves. While the first funeral of a family member is said to be a sad ritual involving immediate kin, the “turning of the dead” – sometimes referred to as a “secondary burial” – is staged as a joyful celebration with the members of the extended family, many of whom come from far away, plus friends and current inhabitants of the ancestral land.

ENCOUNTERING DIVERSITY – PERSPECTIVES

Most anthropological studies of the *famadihana* do not directly address the question of how actors relate different (religious) traditions to each another. However, interestingly, they deal with the question of identity and difference: Maurice Bloch interprets the *famadihana* as a ritual praxis through which a seemingly timeless natural order of the ancestors is constructed: it produces an ideology of unity and continuity, and establishes the authority of elders (Bloch 1971, 1982) at the expense of difference, change, and freedom. David Graeber concentrates more on the ambivalences in the ritual praxis itself, and writes that the attitude toward the ancestors is highly ambiguous. Ancestral authority is performed and enacted during a *famadihana*. However, the ritual is not only about respect for the elders, solidarity, and family unity. The participants experience and express strained relationships with the elders and ancestors, characterized by competition, differentiation, violence, and fear (Graeber 1995).

In a survey carried out in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, situated in the central highlands, 97 percent of respondents stated that they are “Christians” and 71.6 percent that they practiced the tradition of “turning of the dead” (Roubaud 1998).¹¹ How are we to understand this observation? Here I present some perspectives on and interpretations of *famadihana* expressed by different actors, most of whom describe themselves as Christian, so as to demonstrate whether and how differences of religious tradition are perceived or constructed, and how actors relate the traditions to each other. As points of view are a result of interactions and social relations, this description does not rule out the possibility that actors have different views in different social contexts, or may move between perspectives or change their interpretations and attitudes over time.

OFFICIAL POSITIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

The evangelization of the Malagasy highlands began in 1820 when the congregationalist London Missionary Society arrived, soon to be followed by other groups and churches. Missionaries ignored the *famadihana* and the role of ancestors for a considerable time, and only became interested in the ritual in the late nineteenth century (Bloch 2002: 135f; Raison-Jourde 1991: 720).¹² Since then the “turning of the dead” and the role of the ancestors have been discussed in different ways by the different Christian denominations of Madagascar. The interpretations and attitudes described in the following are drawn either from the publications of theologians or from interviews I conducted (in French) in 2009 and 2010 with priests and other representatives of the respective religious groups. I spoke to some of them before I attended a *famadihana* myself, as I was interested in their opinions and their advice regarding my attendance at the ritual.

The Roman Catholic Church of Madagascar

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church of Madagascar attempted to interpret the ritual in a Christian way and even developed a Christian *famadihana* (*Famadihana Kristiana*). According to the work of Georges Razafindrakoto (2006), analogies were drawn to the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:12 (“honor your father and your mother”) and to the “second burial” of Joseph in the Old Testament (Genesis 49:29–50 and Exodus 13:19), where Joseph, first buried in Egypt, was later disinterred by Moses, who undertook to bring his remains to Israel for burial a second time. According to this interpretation, the Malagasy *famadihana* is not a “heathen” rite of ancestor worship but a ritual that shows that God had long ago given the Malagasy people the seed of Christian ideas and practices – without them being aware of it. Thus legitimized by the theological idea of inculturation, whereby aspects of traditional cultures are reinterpreted and incorporated into Christianity, the *famadihana* is no longer seen as an expression of Malagasy religion, but accepted as a cultural custom and *rite de passage* (Hübsch n.d.: 265).¹³ In a Christian *famadihana* Catholic priests preach and pray – however, they do not refer to the ancestors as a life-giving force, as Jesus is said to be the ancestor of mankind and the only source of life (cf. Dahl 1999; Domenichini-Ramiaramanana 1993: 440;

Hübsch n.d.: 261f.). In these ceremonies the ancestors no longer bless the living, they just transmit God's grace; rather, it is now "the living, through the priest as God's representative, who bless the *razana*" (Razafindrakoto 2006: 466). From this perspective the ritual is a Christian ritual and at the same time an expression of Malagasy culture, and Catholics do not have to decide between the two. The interpretation of the ritual as proto-Christian practice goes hand in hand with inculturation theology, as Catholic theologian Jean-Michel Razanajatovo writes: "on peut considérer la culture comme une 'préparation évangélique,' une semence du Verbe" (we could consider culture as a "preparation for the Gospel," as a seed of the Word) (1998: 95).¹⁴ This would indicate mixing or, at least, the adoption of a continuity model on the part of the church.

The Protestant Churches of Madagascar

The Lutheran and Reformed pastors in Antananarivo I interviewed predominantly interpreted "the secondary burial" as a religious ritual, and hence disapproved of it: you can either be Christian or adhere to "traditional religion", no mixing is allowed. In theological terms, the role of the ancestors was the main focus of their objection. According to the pastors, ancestors are placed to mediate between God and the living, a view that is unacceptable to the churches. However, the most frequently voiced objections to the *famadihana* were the expense and the massive alcohol consumption it entails, and their social consequences. The Protestant churches in general "have officially denounced the *famadihana*" as it is part of the traditional religion (Dahl 1999: 36; Ramambason 1999).¹⁵ That said, the pastors do not deal very explicitly with this ritual and tolerate it as a de facto local custom and family gathering (Razafindrakoto 2006: 469).

Christian Revival Movements and Pentecostal Churches

Revival movements such as the Lutheran Fifohazana, churches like the Adventists, and Pentecostal churches like the Malagasy Jesosy Mamony (Jesus Saves) Church and the Nigerian Winners Chapel strictly reject "the turning of the dead." The pastors and representatives I spoke to considered the *famadihana* to be a religious ritual – however one that serves false gods: the ceremony is seen as an expression of "ancestor worship," which is unacceptable. All these pastors considered the ritual not only wrong and demonic but also disgusting, and advised me not to attend. They object to any form of "mixing" and denounce every form of continuity with traditional religious views and practices. A leading figure of the Lutheran Fifohazana told me that he sees the *malgachisation* of Christianity or the emergence of "appropriated" and "ancestralized" Christian forms as the real challenge to Madagascar and the work of the revival movement.

This position expresses a dualistic view that differentiates clearly between right and wrong religious practices. The rejection of the *famadihana* has prompted some churches to buy land so as to create their own graveyards. They want to ensure in this way that deceased church members will not be "reburied" against their will and will not be "worshipped" as ancestors. In terms of the market model, this could, perhaps, be viewed as a strategic investment in religious goods and services tailored to the needs of the consumers.

VIEWS OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF *FAMADIHANA*

In late August 2009 I attended a *famadihana* in a village not far from the capital, Antananarivo. Most of the burial ceremonies in the highlands take place during this month as it is the dry season and the school-holiday period, hence many family members are available to attend, even those who live far away. The feast was organized by family members who described themselves as Christians. While waiting and watching I asked participants (in French) about their interpretations of and perspectives on this practice. Back in the city and again one year later, I also asked members of Fifohazana and Winners Chapel for their opinions of the reburial ritual. Below I present four different positions on the *famadihana*, acknowledging that others may also exist.

Right and Wrong Religions

Some people understand the “turning of the dead” as a religious ritual – albeit a “wrong” ritual of a “wrong” religion. They do not attend the feast even if it involves their own families. Some members of Pentecostal churches, such as Winners Chapel, and of revival movements such as Fifohazana, told me about conflicts with their families because of different religious orientations and the “problem of the ancestors.” However, because they firmly believe that the dead are dead until Christ decides otherwise and that the practice of “worshipping” dead bodies must be demonic in origin, they strictly avoid these ceremonies.

In terms of classification based on the models described above, this view could be seen as dualistic.

It’s All the Same

Some Christian participants of the *famadihana* understood it as a religious ritual, but one that does not conflict with Christian views. Instead, they considered the ritual as the active implementation of Christian demands, such as “honor your father and mother” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” This view was also expressed by the orator who closed the festivity I attended with a “traditional speech,” a *kabary*. Some participants considered the ancestors to be mediators between God and humans: to them, the ancestors appeared to be a plausible complement to the Christian image of the relationship between God and themselves. These participants perceived themselves as Christians and emphasized the unity of the religious traditions, as, after all, everyone believes in the same God.

This view would appear to fit with the model of mixing or synthesizing different views and practices into a single system of meaning.

Two Religions

Other participants, who told me that they were Christians, were of the opinion that a *famadihana* is a religious ritual that has nothing to do with Christianity. It does not fit with being a Christian, nor, however, does it contradict this. It is simply something else. The “turning of the dead” was seen as part of a Malagasy

religious tradition existing around the belief in the life-giving force of ancestors: a Malagasy way of dealing with important local questions and providing answers in a Malagasy way – questions concerning family, fertility, prosperity, and how one can become an important ancestor. One woman said to me: “I know that ancestors are not important to *you* [i.e. European Christians], but for us they are important – God may be here but our ancestors are here, too.” It would be interesting to establish exactly what it is that makes a *famadibana* a “religious” ritual for this woman.¹⁶

However, I would guess that for participants like her, differing religious traditions give answers to different questions and may exist side by side, without conflict and also without the need to merge them into a single, coherent “system of belief.”

Two Traditions

Other participants (Christians and non-Christians) did not think of the *famadibana* as a religious ritual. To them it was a traditional Malagasy celebration in honor of the ancestors, as to them the term “religion” refers only to Christianity with its institutions, buildings, ministers, and teachings. The *famadibana* was considered important for Malagasy people because local traditions provide them with answers to central questions. One might argue that those who do not consider the “turning of the dead” to be a religious ritual may do so because they have already adopted a Christian perspective, that is the perspective of “a transcendent religion” (Lambek 2008). For them, ancestors may be immanent rather than transcendent, as Kopytoff (1971) and Bloch (2002) describe, and therefore do not fit into a definition of religion in the Abrahamic sense. It is possible that they believe in ancestors in an intuitive way as they believe in fathers and grandfathers, that is, for them ancestors may have a different ontological status than the spiritual beings they might otherwise associate with religion (Bloch 2002: 135–138). Whatever the reason, these participants did not associate the ritual with the frame of reference called “religion.” Their frame might be “family”, “tradition”, or “local politics.”

Here the *famadibana* was not a practice that contradicts “religion” or mixes with Christian views and practices. It was simply something different. Comparisons may be made, for example, between the blessings of the ancestors and the blessings of God, but without necessarily applying the same yardstick and without necessarily weighing one practice against the other.

To summarize the perspectives presented above: According to participants of a *famadibana*, “traditions” may stand against each other, with each other, or side by side. Different meanings are attributed to a *famadibana* and different perceptions exist in relation to the differences and similarities between the practices or traditions in question. Practices and views are related to each another in different ways depending on the actors and contexts. Some do refer to religion as metacategory or *tertium comparationis*; others don’t; and in some contexts the coexistence of views and practices appeared to be an option – without the actors constructing a single system of meaning by merging different views and practices or excluding them. The fact that the participants performed the ritual together shows that their views do not represent mutually incomprehensible fixed perspectives – nevertheless they are perceived as different.¹⁷

INCOMMENSURABLE TRADITIONS AND INCOMMENSURABLE MODELS?

What can anthropologists do to understand such diversity? Models of religious encounters using a single frame of reference may not suffice for the multiple ways of accommodating the diversity that researchers encounter in the field. However, the perspective of incommensurability allows for the coexistence of different views and practices in the field, as well as of different academic models for understanding religious diversity.

By placing different views and practices in a single frame of reference, models of religious encounters tend to level diversity and to ignore the actual “contents” or experiences of being religious. The consideration of incommensurability permits us to remain open to varying interpretations of participants, hence to focus on difference itself as central to experience. This enables us to take a closer look at what actors talk about, wrestle with, or negotiate in their social interactions. In focusing on processes of constructing or deconstructing differences, that is, on the social and political functions of “religious encounters,” many contemporary writers appear to lose sight of the substance of what is at stake for the actors.¹⁸ It is important to ask not only “how” and “why” actors construct differences, but also “what” exactly actors experience and construe as different, and the consequences that arise for them. Opting for a hermeneutic approach is to attach more importance to listening to and engaging with “the Otherness of the other” (Bernstein 1991: 93, referring to Derrida). “Understanding” should not be seen here as a single act but as a lengthy open-ended process in which one tries not to dismiss, assimilate, or essentialize differences, but to grasp what our counterparts experience as different in their social praxis and what we and our counterparts experience as different (or common) in our interactions with each other in specific contexts. Hermeneutic understanding includes the need to change between perspectives as well as to reflect on understanding’s limits; it includes the possibility of not understanding, and it does not have to lead to a consensual translation or to commensurate and compatible views.¹⁹

“Encounters” between traditions or religious views and practices are complex and open processes occurring or being staged in different dimensions and contexts of social life. To interpret them we need a flexible approach; even when looking at a single situation we probably need different models to accommodate its different dimensions: “Pluralism” is, perhaps, suitable for approaching specific state policies and the ideologies accompanying encounters; “market logic” is, perhaps, sometimes applicable in explaining individual behavior or the competitive actions of churches or other religious organizations. Very often “models of mixing” will enhance our understanding of individual religious practice. The perspective of “incommensurability” may help us to describe actors’ different frames of reference, allowing us to move between different points of view and thus accommodate the coevalness of differing traditions. And sometimes we may attempt to combine models to clarify empirical observations.²⁰ In principle, however, academic models do not need to be convertible or commensurable. Empirical research shows us the possibility and exigency of perspectival mobility; scholars can use this to move between theoretical frames, for these too may “address overlapping but somehow different issues” (Lambek 1993: 397). The models outlined above refer to different dimensions of social life and different

frames of reference; perhaps we could leave them to stand side-by-side as options, and live with their differences rather than attempt to reconcile them.

In sum, this chapter has not been about finding the perfect correlation between reality and representation. It has been about refusing to substitute one perspective for another, ideally pluralizing our perspectives, and enlarging the universe of our discourse, much as Clifford Geertz once described the aim of anthropology (1973: 14).

NOTES

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the workshop “Competition and Cooperation in African Religions. A Workshop on Concepts and Methods for the Critical Study of Religious Pluralism in Africa” in Bamako, Mali, February 27–March 5, 2012. Many thanks to the participants of this workshop as well as to Kai Kresse and the participants of the workshop “Appraising and Renewing the Anthropology of Religion: Views to the Post–Cold War Worlds” April 14–18, 2012 in Berlin for helpful comments. I am especially grateful to the editors Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek and to John Comaroff, Mirco Göpfert, and Cassis Kilian for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

- 1 With reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s image of understanding as a “fusion of horizons,” hermeneutics is often accused of absorbing, assimilating, or domesticating the Other by leveling differences and emphasizing consensus in the process of “fusion.” Other authors show that Gadamer’s metaphor did not, in fact, refer to dissolving difference (e.g. Bernstein 1983; Lambek 2011). “Horizon” in Gadamer’s sense refers to the historical situatedness, whereby the horizon of presence is not conceivable without a past. Past and present are not closed separated horizons but are consciously set apart and related to each other in the process of understanding. Thus, the controlled fusion of horizons is part of the process of understanding and reflects the awareness of effective-historical consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) (Gadamer 2010: 305–312).
Describing the process of understanding as dialogue makes it clear that for Gadamer understanding can’t be one-way and that “horizons” do not refer to closed perspectives of the world of the persons involved; horizons move, change, and connect. Gadamer compares understanding and translating to show that language/linguisticity is the medium of understanding (2010: 388). Conceptualizing processes of understanding as translation and as acts of building bridges, the anthropologist Bernhard Streck writes: “The task of the humanities thus consists more of a multiple pontificium than of reduction to one spirit” (2003: 206). Thus no “horizon” is homogeneous and unchanging and there are differences between and within them which are not to be reduced in the translation process.
- 2 In emphasizing “contents” I do not wish to pretend that a clear form/content distinction is easily possible (cf. Robbins 2007: 8–9); I rather want to stress that “religious traditions” do not only work as markers for drawing boundaries but are in each case resources for and (re)constructions of values, visions of life, ways to act in the world, ethics, and explanations.
- 3 See Kollman (2010: 6–10) who is exemplifying the problems of this kind of dichotomizing classifications in the context of Christianity in Africa.
- 4 In her excellent introductory essay to the volume *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Fenella Cannell (2006) questions this notion of “Christianity as radical discontinuity” by tracing and locating the idea of “Christian exceptionalism” in intellectual as well as in church history.
- 5 Sometimes “syncretism” is referred to as the generic term for the other concepts mentioned here. Referring to Roger Bastide (who referred, in turn, to Lévi-Strauss), André

Mary (2000, 2005) raises the idea of *bricolage* again. Mary (2005) also coins the term *bris-collage* to refer to contemporary Western societies in which the need “to tinker” a coherent synthesis out of “parts” which are already “loaded” is not felt, or in which people are no longer able to do so as they have lost the knowledge of their borrowing, their historical consciousness, and the once socially defined memories. Hervieu-Léger (1993) describes modern societies therefore as amnesic as they are less and less able to refer to collective memories concerning religious traditions.

- 6 See Mouffe (1994) for a Derrida-inspired critique of this concept of liberal pluralism where the other and its otherness are thought to be reducible and integrable to a unified, harmonious whole.
- 7 Dipesh Chakrabarty deconstructs so-called universal concepts that “seemed to be meant for all”: he criticizes the premise of universal translatability and the practice of cross-cultural, cross-categorical translation that takes “a universal homogenizing middle term” for granted (2008: xiii, 85).
- 8 Referring to his research in India, the sociologist Martin Fuchs (2002) describes a similar observation, but does not use the term incommensurability – he calls it a “model of options”: In India he had the experience that different worldviews and life-forms are accepted as different ways of seeing and doing, yet a decision for one of these options does not include or exclude other options. According to him, the model of options opens up the possibility of “living together in difference” (*Zusammenleben in der Differenz*) (2002: 317). As a consequence of this Fuchs proposes an “interactional concept of translation” (Fuchs 2009: 26) for the social sciences: “Translation takes the acknowledgement of difference between and within cultures as a starting point and undertakes to open the self towards the other, thus extending and developing target and source languages” (2009: 24). In spite of his focus on difference Fuchs does not seem to question the category of religion in his examples.
- 9 Evers (2002) and Graeber (2007) demonstrate the reverse side of this ideology very impressively by describing what it means to have no land, no ancestors, and “no history.”
- 10 There are several occasions that merit the celebration of a *famadihana*: Either a family member who died in a distant place and was buried there is to be “returned” and placed in the family tomb, or ancestors already buried in the family tomb are “turned,” or a new tomb has been constructed and remains from existing tombs are moved to the new tomb as nobody should be alone in a tomb (Bloch 1971).
- 11 When asking people to which “religion” they belong, Roubaud included “ancestor cult” as a possible answer. None of the 2,086 persons asked named this “religion” as their principal confession (Roubaud 1998: 3). Many Tananarivians do not categorize their interactions with ancestors as “religion,” others may think that their affiliation with one of the established Christian churches is a sufficient answer to the question regarding their religious affiliation. In Antananarivo only 0.6 percent of the persons asked named Islam as their principal confession.
- 12 According to Raison-Jourde, ritual activity in highland Madagascar increased in the mid-nineteenth century (in the context of the growing Christian influence) but the secondary burial was not described until 1866 and 1876. The missionaries then referred to the *famadihana* as strange and disgusting ceremony (1991: 720f.). It is possible that the secondary burial was a new development, practiced only since the beginning of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the Christian transformation of existing funerary rituals, or that it was not very visible in Antananarivo of the nineteenth century where most of the missions were concentrated, or perhaps it was not held to be a religious ritual but a local custom and, therefore, ignored by the missionaries. This, in turn, may have been due to the problem the missionaries had in defining and categorizing “ancestors” and the relationship the population had with them (Bloch 2002). Larson thinks that there was “a shift in ritual emphasis from primary to secondary interment” during the nineteenth century (2001: 150) which led to a renaissance of the *famadihana* in highland

Madagascar – a ritual that can be traced back, according to him, at least to the eighteenth century (2001: 128).

- 13 See for example Keane (2007) for an elaborate discussion of the distinction between religion and culture in European intellectual history and the question this raised for missionaries and converts in Sumba, Indonesia.
- 14 Thus Razanajatovo understands pre-Christian Malagasy culture as an early or preparative stage of Christian religion where the seed of the Word of God was already sown but has not yet been grown. In another but also theological way, the Nigerian church historian Ogbu Kalu argues for continuity between “African spirituality” and “African Christianity.” He discerns all forms of Christianity in Africa as rooted in an African spiritual worldview and a primal way of being religious (Kalu 2005).

Referring to anthropological works, Robbins criticizes this assumption of a “crypto-religion” that underlies these notions of syncretism. According to him many anthropological works emphasize continuity in convert societies and tend to assume an enduring adherence to “traditional religion” hidden behind the mask of Christianity (2011: 412). Whereas he argues that we need to focus more on the converts’ experience of discontinuity.

- 15 Christians in Madagascar sometimes refer to what is understood as “traditional religion” with the word *razanisme*, which roughly translates as “ancestorism.” It is a French word formed out of the Malagasy word for ancestor, “razana.”
- 16 Adolphe Rahamefy, a Malagasy anthropologist, also refers to an ancestor “religion.” He speaks of ancestral religion or *razanisme* because the ancestors (*razana*) are at its center and because he defines religion in the sense of the Latin word *religare* (to bind). Accordingly, he interprets the relationship that must be established with the ancestors, i.e. the communication and earthly union between the ancestors and the living, as the core of religious experience in Madagascar (Rahamefy 2007: 11). Rahamefy presents what he sees as essential differences between ancestor religion and Christianity, but stresses their peaceful coexistence in Madagascar (2007: 40, 47, 169).
- 17 Wittgenstein contributed an important perspective on the problem of identity and difference, introducing the terms language game, family resemblance and defining criteria to approach among others the question of the meaning of a term and the problem of whether we talk of one “object” or about several when using a word (Wittgenstein 2009, originally 1953). According to his view there is no representational relation *sui generis* between a term, the criteria for using it, and to what they point. Referring to my case this would mean that there is not a single or universal criterion to define something, but people use different criteria in different contexts to refer for example to the performance of a ritual. Here people seemed to follow different rules in using the word religion/religious. The word religion can be in use in different cases and different characteristics could be attributed to it. However, a comparison of its uses does not lead us to a clear-cut definition of the term religion by way of finding the least common denominator. The criteria for using the term religion do not tell us something about the existence and characteristics of religion but only about the criteria for using the term in different contexts under different conditions. We may find family resemblances but no universal characteristics or a general definition associated with the term. It is the practical context of speaking that determines object, meaning, and understanding. Moreover, according to Wittgenstein the different language games within a life-form are open and thus provide the possibility to move between them and to connect them without the need of a metalanguage game. Understanding a foreign language is feasible as we all refer to human action (as Gadamer says, too). However, his approach does not seem to accommodate the diversity of life-forms within a language community.
- 18 Cf. Robbins (2007) criticizing Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1991) for their emphasis on the politics of Christian mission and not on the Christian contents.

- 19 In this context many anthropologists refer to Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of understanding as grounded in a long "conversation," in which the different "horizons" of different traditions or interlocutors are related with each other (see for example Lambek 1993, 2011; or Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Also referring to "understanding" as grounded in dialogue is Gadamer's "question-answer scheme" (Gadamer 2010: 375ff.). To understand traditions, statements, or texts is to understand them as answers to questions. Moreover, these answers are only understandable when we know and understand the questions, to which the answers refer. In this sense, "understanding" is not (only) a metadiscourse but part of the human existence and as such part of every social action. Gadamer's notion of "conversation" makes clear that understanding refers to all parties involved and may change all parties involved. There are no neutral positions and fixed horizons. Understandings are bilateral, party-dependent, and they involve revising goals, as Charles Taylor summarizes Gadamer's view (Taylor 2002: 281) – and to change horizons no homogenizing middle term is needed.
- 20 Other than for example Cannell (2006) and Robbins (2007), who tend to differentiate between "cultures" and *cultural* ways to think about change and to accommodate new (religious) forms and ideas, I would like to stress here that we may discern different ways of dealing with diversity already by looking at different dimensions of a single situation and that we have to reckon with incommensurability as an option in all these dimensions (national, organizational, individual, etc.). Thus instead of focusing on either interconnections or conflicts as cultural responses to religious encounters, we should, as Peel put it, "explore the complex ways in which continuity and rupture are combined in the production of cultural forms" (2007: 27) and at the same time we may explore the possibility of incommensurability within these cultural forms.

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CHAPTER 7

Varieties of Semiotic Ideology in the Interpretation of Religion

Michael Lambek

Consider the following questions:

- Why and how do words matter to religion?
- Is “religious” language different from “ordinary” language and in what ways?
- Is the specificity of its language a way of distinguishing religion from other phenomena?
- Do these questions and their answers apply universally or only to some specific set of historical formations?

These questions have provoked this chapter but will not be fully answered in it. How one sees the place of “words” in religion depends not only on which semiotic ideologies anthropologists discern at play within religion or among religious practitioners but also on those that inform anthropologists’ own thought. In this chapter I explore how anthropology has explicitly addressed the questions or implicitly assumed answers to them by means of its own diverse semiotic ideologies.

Semiotic ideology is a concept developed by Webb Keane (2007), drawing in turn on Michael Silverstein’s concept of language ideology (1979), cultural beliefs about language structure and use in contexts of social difference. The concept of language ideology helps address such questions as the formation of national language policies or debates about what makes “good English.” By semiotic ideology Keane means “basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world” (2003:

419). In a brilliant and wide-ranging discussion to which I cannot do justice, Keane describes semiotic ideologies as offering reflexive accounts of the relations of signs and language to what is outside them, hence to materiality, to intentionality, and to agency. Thus he contrasts religious contexts in which it is correct to repeat ritual formulae with those, especially certain forms of Protestantism, in which one should speak sincerely, individually, and from the heart.

The role and function of words and speaking are conceptualized very differently in the two cases. To answer Stanley Cavell's famous question, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1976), the former would claim, in effect, that we can mean only what we have said (and what others have said before us), while the latter would urge that we must say only what we mean (and what is uniquely ours). In other words, the respective semiotic ideologies differ on whether "saying" or "meaning" is prior and critical. This implies further that the meaning of "meaning something" itself differs in the two cases. My tentative conclusion, and answer to the big questions posed above, is that what we or our interlocutors distinguish as specifically *religious* language marks the salience and consequentiality of the particular semiotic ideology in play, such that saying something and meaning it are brought together as closely as they can be under the semiotic ideology in question. This is a fancy way of saying that religious utterances are ones whose truth value and ethical force are marked relative to ordinary utterances. Specific words and actions are often brought into play to enhance such marking and force, as when we begin, but not under every semiotic ideology, "In the name of God . . ." or place our hands on a Bible.

If the concept of semiotic ideology can differentiate among alternative kinds of speech communities or religious congregations, formations, and practices, surely we can distinguish among both philosophical and anthropological arguments according to their respective semiotic ideologies as well. To take a well-known illustration from philosophy, consider the respective positions of Austin and Wittgenstein. To summarize so severely that I risk caricature, where Austin saw answers in the ways in which we ordinarily use words, Wittgenstein saw problems in the way we use words, as though language "lets us down." Not only are words to be purged of metaphysical excess, but as Simon Blackburn (2009), quoting Fritz Mauthner (interpreting a famous Wittgenstein aphorism), puts it, "as soon as we really have something to say, we are forced to be silent." Both Wittgenstein and Austin were concerned less with the definitions of specific words than with what they perceived to be an incorrect understanding of their functions and especially with a misplaced emphasis on the function of reference itself. However, whereas Austin shows the incredible precision and fineness of distinction in "ordinary language," its ability unselfconsciously to get things right, Cavell, after Wittgenstein, attends to the danger of getting them wrong. Cavell points to the huge risks that ordinary speaking entails, the enormous consequentiality of being taken to mean what we say and of acknowledging having said it. It is precisely to the difficulty and consequentiality of meaning what one says that Roy Rappaport (1999) suggests ritual, and hence religion, offers some assistance.

A TRIPARTITE FRAMEWORK

I distinguish, in very broad strokes, three semiotic ideologies that have been applied, implicitly or explicitly, by anthropologists in thinking about religion. These have been

successive in their appearance but they are not mutually exclusive and one mode does not definitively displace the previous ones. They fit, roughly, with some other tripartite distinctions developed by philosophers.

Aristotle describes three kinds of human activity as thinking, making, and doing. Words can be examined with respect to each of these, thus not only with respect to thought (i.e. reflection, disinterested contemplation) in contrast to experience, passion, interest, creativity, action, or ethics. Words offer a means or mode of making, creating, or bringing into being, in the voice of the prophet or poet no less than that of the coolly rational philosopher. And, as certain coolly rational philosophers have proposed, words carry force and are also a matter of doing. Of course, there is often a doing entailed in making or thinking, a making in thinking or doing, and a thinking in doing or making, such that each could be considered a matter of emphasis, as a frame through which to understand something larger rather than as a discrete form of activity. But at times it is important to distinguish that something is thought without making, done without abstract thinking, etc. Moreover, each form of activity has inspired particular modes of study; linguistics itself has moved from abstract analysis of syntax and semantics to include poetics and pragmatics.

To the tripartite Aristotelian distinction I propose drawing analogies with concepts found in both Peirce and Austin. Peirce developed a set of distinctions among kinds or functions of signs, of which words are perhaps the most prominent examples, that I take here to roughly parallel the Aristotelian distinction. Although his classificatory scheme gets quite elaborate, at base the system is tripartite, distinguishing among symbol, icon, and index. I apply the syllogism that symbol : icon : index :: thinking : making : doing. I propose further that this syllogism can be extended to include Austin's distinction among the locutionary, perlocutionary, and illocutionary functions of utterances, as follows:

Thinking	:	Making	:	Doing	::
Symbol	:	Icon	:	Index	::
Locutionary	:	Perlocutionary	:	Illocutionary	

I suggest that one can discern among anthropological approaches to religion three semiotic ideologies along these lines. The first is that language serves primarily as an instrument of predication, reason and argument. Emphasis is on thinking, on words as arbitrary symbols carrying meaning, and on utterances as primarily locutionary. The second semiotic ideology is that language is creative of texts and ultimately constitutive of lived worlds. The emphasis is on making – what Aristotle called *poiesis* – and on the iconic dimension and mimetic faculty of language. Words depict or create, in ways that have a persuasive, or perlocutionary, function or effect, shaping experience and intention. Finally, the third position begins neither with words as toolkit nor with words as related within a system or structure (*langue*), but with speech (*parole*). That is, it examines utterances, understood as acts. Here the focus is on Aristotelian praxis or doing, on the indexical, immediate properties and effects of spoken words, and on the illocutionary function of utterances. Just as the second approach only comes to fruition with the concepts of sign and symbol as developed variously in Peircean semiotics and European structuralism, so the third approach develops from Austin's account in *How To Do Things with Words* (1965). Before going further, I want to emphasize that in practice the three approaches have been

neither mutually exclusive nor internally homogeneous; I am conducting an exercise in broad ideal types.

I am suggesting that the anthropological investigation of words in religion has emphasized their function either as reference, resemblance, or act. These are roughly equivalent, respectively, to Peirce's symbolic, iconic, and indexical, and to Austin's locutionary, perlocutionary, and illocutionary functions. There is further a match between the line of investigation or mode of analysis pursued by the anthropologist and the semiotic ideology at work. In offering translations, explanations, or rationalizations of and for religious ideas and practices, the referential and rational function is primary; in interpreting performances, poetry, myth, and religious symbols, and elucidating the constructions and classificatory schemes that Lévi-Strauss (1966) attributes more generally to the *pensée sauvage*, the creative function is highlighted. In the study of ritual, ethical practice, and religious agency, it is word as utterance or act that is most salient. Put another way, the tacit semiotic ideology at hand influences whether the anthropologist emphasizes the rational, poietic, or ethical dimensions of activity.

Many debates about religion hang on which semiotic ideology is dominant. Rationalists emphasize the referential function of individual words and the predicative quality of sentences and sometimes like to point to the falsity of other people's referents and predications. Nietzsche saw the importance of the iconic dimension and elegantly if acidly summarized the mistake of both the rationalists and the religious by declaring religion the worship of dead metaphors. Are dead metaphors to be revived, repeated, or replaced, taken literally or taken apart, and with what consequences?

The history of anthropological thinking about religion can be divided into roughly three phases, or waves, in which each of these attributes or functions of language have held prominence in turn.

FIRST SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGY: WORDS AS VEHICLES OF THOUGHT

From Tylor through Evans-Pritchard there is attention to language as a vehicle for reasoning, and words are assumed to have primarily referential qualities. The focus is on individual words and they are understood to be the names for things – whether understood as natural objects, concepts, or supernatural beings. Thus for Tylor, “spirits” refer to beings in the worlds of those who mistakenly believe in them. For Evans-Pritchard, Azande witchcraft and oracles are also to be understood with respect to reason and reference. Despite his strong and salutary critique of Tylor, Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1965) remains concerned with the same general question, namely the rationality of religion; he shows that the language of Zande witchcraft is not unreasonable once it is understood in context. Context refers both to the large body of ideas and practices of which witchcraft is a part and, to anticipate the turn to utterances, to the ways in which specific causal attributions and accusations appear in social interaction. Evans-Pritchard works to give the best possible translation into English for Zande words and in his later book on Nuer religion (1956) he addresses not only the specific words, ostensibly nouns, for various beings, but also the question of the copula, what it means when Nuer say, for example, “twins are birds,”

thereby coming close to a poetic model. In this conception of anthropology, the central task is one of translation, and much hangs on the subtlety with which key words and phrases are rendered.

One of the central questions that is raised in this work is whether it is correct to describe the relationship between speakers or practitioners and their words and concepts as one of “belief.” Rodney Needham (1972) explored problems with grasping the subjective condition of belief itself, while Jean Pouillon (1982) and Malcolm Ruel (1982) raised aspects of the translation problem. Pouillon showed the divergent entailments of believing, believing in, and believing that (or rather, *croire*, *croire en* and *croire que*) while Ruel documented shifts in the meaning of the word “belief” over the course of the history of Christianity. The point here is both that the concept of “belief” is central to this semiotic ideology (“belief” in spirits, God, or witchcraft) and that the rationalist program was able to generate an autocritique concerning its own key words and central concepts. However, insofar as “belief” remains central both to Protestant Christianity and to a broader folk theory or definition of religion and its contrast with science, it remains prevalent in the introductory textbooks (cf. Lambek 2006). Religion stubbornly and provincially remains something one “believes in,” attesting to what one might call a semiotic hegemony.

The deconstruction of “belief,” which has its roots in Evans-Pritchard’s critique of what he called the intellectualist position of Tylor, found its parallels in Franz Steiner’s deconstruction of taboo (1956) and Lévi-Strauss’s of totemism (1963). It could be added that these works epitomize the larger dialectical process characteristic of, and possibly intrinsic to, anthropological thought, in which words are developed for cross-cultural comparison and subsequently taken apart. This could be expanded to say that anthropology progresses by discovering the limits of its own semiotic ideologies. Insofar as anthropology is inherently autocritical, the assertion one frequently hears among colleagues that they alone are carrying out a thorough “critique of anthropology” verges on the oxymoronic. In fact, one cannot help noting that the rhetoric of reform in anthropology itself smacks of both Protestant Christianity and the semiotic ideology that underpins it. (Perhaps that is also to observe that the concept of semiotic ideology itself stems from a particular semiotic ideology.)

Questions concerning the correspondence truth and reasonableness of religion continue to be posed today, by anthropologists no less than by practitioners of religion and their critics. Thus, anthropologist Eva Keller (2006) follows her informants, Seventh-Day Adventists in a poor region of Madagascar, when they assert that their Bible study is a form of science. And cognitive anthropologists attempt to distinguish concepts from words and to examine the emergence and reproduction of what they call nonintuitive concepts that are compelling on other grounds (Astuti and Bloch, this volume). It is evident that the rationalist program inevitably must respond to the question of relativism, whether by accepting it in some form, as Evans-Pritchard did, by actively rejecting it, as the cognitivists do, or by making it disappear in the sleight of hand of deconstruction. Put another way, this semiotic ideology inevitably produces polemics.

While in some respects the deconstructionist and genealogical programs are in direct opposition to the rationalist and cognitivist ones and should be added as distinct semiotic ideologies to my list, they all share the potential, if not the expression of, or claims for, radical skepticism. However, insofar as anthropologists must respect

the practical wisdom of their subjects as fellow humans, I submit that they cannot rest in fully skeptical waters (whether of rationalist or genealogical provenance), but seek additional positions that are more ethnographically grounded, closer to the everyday practices and concerns of religious subjects.

SECOND SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGY: WORDS AS VEHICLES OF CREATION

Keller's restatement of the Malagasy (northern Betsimisaraka) remark that Bible study is science is not unlike Evans-Pritchard's quotation from Nuer that twins are birds or the phrase of the Bororo that circulates within anthropology, "my brother, the parrot." It can be argued that such phrases are easier to grasp from the second semiotic ideology. In this view, words have a poietic function; they draw things into presence or being, and do so by concretizing abstractions, and making images or tropes. Rather than referring to the world, they depict or present it, and become part of it, transforming ideas iconically into new media. Language here has both a poietic and a mimetic quality or function, that of realizing the world. Words, as signs, are deployed in complex analogies and iterations. They are not autonomous abstractions or constituted in relation to specific external referents, but formed in relation to one another and it is their relations to each other within larger structures that count more than their relations to an external world. As Lévi-Strauss showed in his analyses of myth, here the paradigmatic dimension of language trumps the syntagmatic.

This semiotic ideology, which by no means gives rise to a single, homogeneous approach, draws on a variety of sources. From Durkheim comes the idea that religion is ultimately expressive of the transcendent power of society, hence that it is metaphorical at heart, its words and images not to be taken literally. From Weber and German *Kultur* theory comes the idea that we live suspended in webs of meaning of our own inherited tradition and making, subject to interpretation. And from structural poetics come theories of tropes, rhetoric, and poetic composition.¹

Anthropologists from different traditions have given different weight to different elements. British Durkheimians emphasize the representation of the social, a thread that emerges also in the Marxist notion of ideology. This is a partial approach, not only because the social need not be the only subject of representation, but more importantly because *representation* is only a subform of the larger process that is at issue, namely *presentation*, bringing into presence. Geertz (1973c) emphasizes the relative autonomy and distinctiveness of meaningful worlds and sees the religious portions of those worlds as anchoring the rest, asserting ultimate meaningfulness in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary. He also emphasizes that our access to the meaningful worlds of others is similar to their own, namely through the interpretation of the compositions – what he calls texts – inherited, created, performed, and observed by members of a given society or adherents of a given religion (1973d). Like many American anthropologists, Geertz here conceptualizes culture on the analogy of language, but the texts he has in mind are composed in multiple media, not only, or even predominantly, in words – his illustrations include the Balinese dance of Rangda and Barong and the Javanese cockfight (1973b, 1973c) – and they do not have the fixity and boundedness that in the heyday of print culture, now past, we attributed to texts in the literal sense. Critics of the text metaphor have too often taken it literally, or

assumed mistakenly that Geertz did, thereby committing the same sin that anthropologists of religion who hold this semiotic ideology have ascribed to those holding the ideology of reference, that is, of taking the statements of their subjects too literally. Moreover, it would follow from a Geertzian position to explore both the local underlying semiotic ideologies and the way these get played out in social life.

Ultimately, Geertz's position leads him away from the means and modes by which texts are constructed and toward their interpretation. Hence he gives voice to the hermeneutic strain in anthropology that approximates the goal of translation in Evans-Pritchard. The object is to appreciate and understand the cultural works and worlds of others rather than to locate their building blocks or mechanisms and hence to take them apart, to dissolve culture, as he remarks critically of Lévi-Strauss (Geertz 1973a). It is the art of reading, not composing, that Geertz is after. Hence, too, his is not primarily a hermeneutics of suspicion.

The best exemplar of the second semiotic ideology (or an alternate variant), the person who takes it to its logical extreme or most fully develops its potential, is not Geertz, but Lévi-Strauss. For Lévi-Strauss, at the end of the day, human poesis, creatively produced form, is just that. The referential, predicative, situational, and meaningful qualities of creative practice are successively worn away under his gaze, which is one not of interpretation but of analysis. While acknowledging the acute observational powers of human beings in small-scale societies and hence the specific referential qualities of individual words for plants and animals, he is more interested in such words as elements in a second order of construction, in analogical thought (Lévi-Strauss 1966). Metaphors are taken to refer not to the world but to one another, until ultimately the constructions that emerge are just the play of form itself as spontaneously generated by the mind. By the four-volume *Mythologiques* (1964–1971), the filaments and nebulae of mythemes, like the molecules of matter or astral configurations, in some respects, find their closest counterpart and most successful analogy in music, that is, in musical composition – to be judged as beautiful with respect to internal ordering rather than as being accurate or believable in the conformity of representation to an external reality. Moreover, music is aesthetic and sensory, filling a room rather than saying something about something, and especially not predicating in a rational way such that the claim could be countered with an alternative argument. Music persuades but it cannot be argued with. It is relatively pure presentation rather than representation. In respect to his interest in music Lévi-Strauss perhaps draws close to Wittgenstein, who “felt that philosophy aspires to the condition of music” (Blackburn 2009: 18).² A different analogy, less used by Lévi-Strauss, would be to liken mythical constructions to abstract mathematics, not the practical arithmetic of counting but the playful world of number theory. One might go so far as to say that this impulse to free oneself from all worldly reference could itself be viewed as a kind of hyperintellectualized religious aspiration.

Today the legacy of structuralism has been renewed by restoring elements of contextual meaning, and cultural distinctiveness, finding its best exemplification in the work of Viveiros de Castro on cosmological deixis that clarifies the richly developed relationship of nature to culture that prevails in Amerindian culture in contrast to that of Europe (1998; Vilaça, this volume) and in Descola's exploration of the logical possibilities humans have for conceptualizing themselves in relation to who they are not (2005; Descola, this volume).

One of the omissions of structuralism is that it does not consider whether there are words that are protected from being drawn into analogical reasoning, that stand apart or remain sealed within their radical incommensurability with respect both to ordinary reference and to structure. I refer to words that fall outside specific semantic domains, words that are not constructed in relation to other words, as parts of paradigm sets, like pronouns, or typologies, like plant terms. Structuralism operates as though all words were commensurable with one another, articulated along binary dimensions; major oppositions, like life and death, are mediated by lesser ones, like day and night. I suggest there are many words that are not commensurable in this sense. Consider, for example, the triad found in German-speaking Switzerland and elsewhere among *Körper*, *Geist*, and *Seele* (body, spirit, and soul). My interlocutors (or I) have a difficult time discriminating consistently among them or indicating precisely what corresponds to each. Surely the point of Cartesian dualism, often misunderstood by Descartes's successors, though well explicated by Ryle, is that mind and body are incommensurable with one another. That means you cannot draw a clean line between them. To try to do so is not to mediate between them but to commit a category error. The possibility for category errors marks the limits of structuralism.

I suggest that many words that carry considerable religious weight are incommensurable with other words; this may be because of their extreme comprehensiveness, their complex multivalence, or conversely, because they are informationless. An example of an almost excessively comprehensive word is *sila* in the language of the Greenlandic Inuit as described by Mark Nuttall (1992). This word comprehends "weather, the outside, intelligence, consciousness, [and] the universal breath soul" ((1992): 187, cf. 69–70). Or consider the Dinka of Southern Sudan, whose concept of divinity Godfrey Lienhardt carefully tries to translate not as spirits on the order of human beings but as powers. Moreover, Lienhardt begins to grasp a distinctive semiotic ideology. "Flesh," said a Christian Dinka to Lienhardt, "was the divinity of all masters of the fishing-spear. . . . 'Flesh is one word,' he said. The Dinka expression one word (*wet tok*) means the word which is superior to many words, the decisive word, beyond argument and addition, and hence the true word . . . Many words conceal the truth while 'one word' proclaims it." Flesh makes the thighs quiver during the invocation at a sacrifice and Lienhardt tells us that what a man says when inspired by Flesh is true (1961: 138–139).³

THIRD SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGY: WORDS AS VEHICLES OF ACTION

The words that Rappaport considers to lie at the heart of religion, what he calls ultimate sacred postulates, are essentially incommensurable with other words. Such words are virtually informationless, in his terms, and hence not constituted by means of either reference or binary relations with other words. An additional feature of such words is that they are the most resistant to translation into other languages, again for lack of representation and commensurability. Yet they can be deeply meaningful. To see this we have to turn to the third semiotic ideology and the third wave of anthropological thought on religion.

If, in the first semiotic ideology, meaning is contained in abstract, individual words and in the arguments made from them, according largely to the way they approximate

something outside of themselves, already in the world, and if, in the second perspective, meaning emerges from the fruitful conjunction and juxtaposition of words in relation to each other, in the third perspective meaning emerges from the force of specific utterances. Words are conceived primarily as utterances rather than as referents or icons and it is what they do rather than what they refer to or how they are composed that is highlighted. Utterances are understood, in the first instance, as acts. This approach draws from Austin's seminal work on the performative or illocutionary function of words, but has earlier appearances in Malinowski and Lienhardt, among others. The citation from Lienhardt makes the point: Flesh *proclaims* the truth rather than depicts, argues, refers to, or symbolizes it, and it does so in the performance of the invocation at a sacrifice. The thighs quiver and the word is manifestly embodied; in fact, of course, the voice is always embodied.

Austin turns linguistic philosophy from sentence to utterance and shows that reference is only one of the kinds of acts that words can perform. Illocutionary utterances bring states of being into effect, as in naming a ship, bestowing a knighthood, issuing a legal judgment, or pronouncing a marriage, but also in greeting a friend, making a promise, offering an apology, casting a blessing or a curse, deferring to a superior, and so forth. Every utterance achieves such actions as asserting something, inviting a response, or offering one. To achieve these ends certain conditions have to be met – in the more formal cases, drawing on people with the right to conduct the performance, at the right time and place, and so forth (Austin 1965). Highly formulated conventions of performance produce what we (anthropologists and others) call “ritual” and the most formalized rituals are often what we call “religious”; conversely much of what is accomplished in ritual and religion can be understood as illocutionary (albeit not exclusively).

This has a number of entailments that Rappaport (1999) elucidates. First, a focus on words as acts not only avoids the problems with the concept of belief mentioned earlier, but it leads to the insight that ritual is effective irrespective of individual belief (qua internal state). For Rappaport, participation in the enactment of a part of the liturgical order entails acceptance of its terms irrespective of the psychological state of the performers. I can be married against my will or with due ambivalence; that need not affect the consequentiality of the act, including the utterances “I do” and “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” Public saying trumps private thinking and it replaces indecision and uncertainty with established fact and also insulates social order from psychic ambivalence and variability. This situation corresponds to the semiotic ideology of the nonmissionized Indonesians described by Keane and it may be implicitly the case even among those Protestants who explicitly hold the converse, although in that case sincerity or conviction serves as a felicity condition for effective enactment.⁴

Second, the very act of participating in the ritual, whether by officiating or submitting to it, is a sign – an index – of commitment to both the particular act accomplished and to the order of which the ritual is part. Performers become accountable for what they have said and done and to the world of which such acts are a part, that is, the world in which they fall under a particular kind of description produced by such acts or that obliges or encourages them to perform acts of this kind. Performers, says Rappaport, are themselves the first addressees of the messages uttered in rituals and their actions are reinforced by witnesses. In other words, ritual performance has

ethical entailments. We become certain kinds of people through having undergone certain kinds of rituals and we must acknowledge our subsequent actions in their light. This can be understood politically as a kind of subjection to power or authority, but more generally performance establishes the criteria by which subsequent practice is judged, hence producing ritual actors as ethical subjects. From another direction, Cavell (1976, 1996) has illuminated the great difficulty of speaking and of being accountable for and to one's words. In the context of ritual, the weightiness of ordinary speaking that he so acutely discerns is somewhat redistributed; ritual speech absolves us in some respects and deepens our commitment in others.⁵ Speakers are deeply implicated in, and even constituted through, their words. We take one path rather than another and henceforth must acknowledge this is who we are and where we stand.

Third, related to the ethical dimension of ritual utterances are important consequences for the concept of truth. In the first semiotic ideology I described, truth is a matter of correspondence and also of logic. In the second, truth is poetic, disclosed in aesthetic experience or, as Heidegger puts it, unconcealed. Where words are understood as utterances and their illocutionary function is highlighted, the matter is somewhat different. Austin argued that truth was simply not a question that could be put to performative statements. Rappaport (1999), however, argues that the relation of truth to utterance is reversed between locutionary and illocutionary utterances. (The argument gets trickier if locutionary and illocutionary are recognized as distinct functions of one and the same utterance.) In the case of the former, an utterance is discerned as true or false according to its conformity to the facts, which have precedence. I am lying or mistaken if I tell you it is raining when it is not. In the second case, however, it is the state of affairs that is judged true or false according to its conformity to the utterance. Once the rain magic has been performed, it is the weather that is at fault if it doesn't rain. If I do not keep my promise, it is my subsequent action (or inaction) that is faulty, not my original utterance. Here again Lienhardt anticipates Rappaport when he writes, "the [Dinka] sacrifice is its own end. It has already created a moral reality, to which physical facts are hoped eventually to conform" (1961: 251). As he elaborates, "human symbolic action moves with the rhythm of the natural world around, re-creating that rhythm in moral terms and not merely attempting to *coerce* it to conformity with human desires" (1961: 280). Rappaport distinguishes the truths of nature from the "fabricated truths peculiar to humanity." The latter are true only so long as they are accepted, as indicated in their reiteration in ritual. "They are, in essence, moral. They declare the truth of 'should' against which actions and actual states of affairs are judged and often found to be wanting, immoral, or wrong . . . They are the truths upon which social systems have always been built" (1999: 296). In this depiction of ethical truth Rappaport reaches on analytic grounds the point that Lienhardt discovers through ethnographic interpretation when he writes, "The word *yic*, which is translated as 'truth,' has in fact a somewhat wider range of meanings than our word now has. It implies uprightness, 'righteousness,' and justice" (1961: 139).

Finally, Rappaport argues that the most powerful illocutionary utterances are often couched in reiterated words and phrases that he refers to as ultimate sacred postulates. These are performatively realized claims that are unfalsifiable on either empirical or logical grounds, yet taken to be unquestionable. In fact, Rappaport defines "sanctity

as the quality of unquestionableness imputed by congregations to postulates in their nature objectively unverifiable and absolutely unfalsifiable" (1999: 280–281, emphasis in original). This unquestionableness derives from the formal properties of ritual enactment, not from reason or persuasion. Ultimate sacred postulates carry no information but strengthen the illocutionary force of utterances with specific content, rendering them, as it were, extrafelicitous. Thus one does not merely swear to a particular fact but swears on the Bible, or in the name of God, in words that are given to the oath taker and repeated by her. The canonical, reiterated quality of these words is marked, as is the indexical quality of the utterance as a unique individual event.

The questions with which I began included: why does language matter for religion and what is distinctive about religious language? Part of Rappaport's originality is to turn this around, to ask instead, why does ritual matter to or for language? He argues that ritual is needed as a kind of control over two of the capacities of human language, namely its enabling of lying and of imagining alternatives. Rappaport argues that ritual and language coevolved, as it were, with ritual offering order to language's code. The potential to say new things every time, which, if left unchecked, would produce radical uncertainty and an absence of sustained commitment to specific goals, hence both social disorder and anomie, is offset by the properties of ritual that enable the production of certainty and truth. In ritual, certain phrases are reiterated, time after time and generation after generation; such unquestionable words come to produce and exemplify certainty. Yet insofar as each utterance, each repetition and application is a new and unique event, it affords a reestablishment of orientation, commitment, and truth.

Sacred postulates can be invalidated only by being ignored or rejected (Rappaport 1999: 280); conversely, what is striking is their perdurance and invariance. The historical perdurance of certain phrases in the Abrahamic religions informs Rappaport's argument. Islam, in particular, is a religion that highlights invariant sacred utterances. The Qur'an is received by Muhammad and passed on through a chain of recitation. Pious Muslims learn to recite the Qur'an and utter its phrases throughout life, to open and close activities of all kinds and to mark life transitions. Prayers are uttered five times daily and the call to prayer reverberates across urban and village spaces. Words are put to music and sung in Sufi hymns and poetry and the rapid repetition of the word of God is used to bring on states of ecstasy. One could say that sacred words permeate the lives of Muslims; that Muslims are bathed in the words. Islam has developed elaborate models for both recitation and audition. As Mahmood (2004) and Hirschkind (2006) have respectively shown, these have deep ethical and aesthetic entailments. In Mayotte, where I have worked, the commemoration ceremony held for deceased relatives entails inviting large numbers of men into the mosque where together they recite a key phrase (the *tahlil*) some 70,000 times in order to ease the burden of the deceased in the afterlife. This is a blessing of their parents sponsored by the adult offspring, as mediated by the Muslim community. Indeed, in Muslim communities, the continuous circulation of utterances could be said to exemplify the gift in Mauss's analysis; here the primary vehicle is not material objects, money, or even food, which are also significant, but sacred words. Yet what is critical is not the words in themselves, available anonymously or abstractly in the form of print or electronic media, but their force as produced in specific acts of utterance and reception.

A common Muslim phrase like “In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful” includes elements of reference and poetic depiction, but most salient is the utterance and its effects. Pronounced at the onset of any activity, it sanctifies the act, places the activity under a description, and establishes criteria according to which what follows is to be judged. It makes a meal, a journey, or a sexual act into a specifically Muslim and sanctified one. It neither reports nor argues, depicts nor persuades, but proclaims and establishes. It is both indexical in Peirce’s sense and illocutionary in Austin’s. An even stronger utterance in Islam is the *shahada*; to utter the *shahada*, the profession of faith, is not only to assert that one is a Muslim, but also to demonstrate that fact and to commit oneself to it; to utter it is to *be* Muslim or to *become* Muslim. To utter it casually is to take Islam in vain. Sacred words uttered in the wrong contexts become also the strongest profanities. Whereas the abstract sentence that there is no God but God is something of a logical tautology, with no clear referent, as an utterance, an act of commitment or witness, it has tremendous force and meaning.

Here is an illustration of the significance of illocutionary utterance and the clash of semiotic ideologies in contemporary Christianity, as taken from the BBC website of Saturday, March 14, 2009. It is entitled “Atheists call for ‘debaptism.’”⁶ British Atheists claim that it is not sufficient to merely ignore or withdraw from the church but that they need a performative act to undo the original act that placed them within it as infants.

However, baptism is proving a difficult thing to undo. The local Anglican diocese . . . refused to amend the baptismal roll as Mr Hunt had wanted, on the grounds that it was a historical record. “You can’t remove from the record something that actually happened,” said the Bishop of Croydon, the Right Reverend Nick Baines . . . In the face of resistance from the Church, the [National Secular] Society has come up with a document of its own . . . Sitting on a bench in the grounds of St Jude’s Church, John Hunt intoned the opening lines. “I, John Geoffrey Hunt, having been subjected to the rite of Christian baptism in infancy . . . hereby publicly revoke any implications of that rite. I reject all its creeds and other such superstitions in particular the perfidious belief that any baby needs to be cleansed of original sin.”

The certificate has apparently been downloaded more than 60,000 times.

CONCLUSION

Insofar as words not only carry or convey meanings, the very meaning (sense, intention, reference, effect) of the word “word” itself can shift and may not be directly translatable or commensurable from language to language or language game to language game within a given language. Among the language games that could be distinguished are Protestantism in its various denominations, Roman Catholicism, and charismatic Christianity; Muslim daily prayers, supernumerary prayers, odes, and theology; anthropological, philosophical and religious studies approaches to religion. The meaning of the word “word” can even shift within a given language game as I have indicated with respect to successive waves of anthropological thought on religion, although perhaps these shifts are indexes of new language games (e.g. from explaining religion anthropologically to interpreting it).

I have suggested that religious discourse includes incommensurable words and elementary utterances of sacred postulates that may be radically difficult, if not impossible, to translate. Moreover, translation needs to take illocutionary function as well as meaning into effect.⁷

Depending on one's semiotic ideology – or one's theory of language – one takes one or another approach to words in religion and hence to religion itself. I have suggested that in attending not only to words in the abstract or in textual compositions but to words as utterances, new kinds of questions are opened up and new answers made available. Utterances propose a theory of action. This is not to attend exclusively to the spoken word or to abandon the concept of the text. We should include acts of composition, writing, reading, interpretation, and, most saliently, of recitation and reiteration. Conversely, it is not to take all utterances equally. To speak is to intervene in the course of social interaction and is always of consequence, but some moments of speaking, and some utterances, are more portentous or decisive than others. Ultimate sacred postulates add to the illocutionary force.

Every utterance is an original act, but most utterances draw on previously entextualized phrases – good morning, thank you, what a beautiful day, thank God – and so on. At the least, we draw on words whose previously encoded signification, if we are speaking the same language, we share. Rappaport describes ritual as the conjunction of the indexical and canonical. In such contexts, the canonical reiterated dimension is prominent; the utterances are framed and set apart from ongoing discourse, they contain ultimate sacred postulates, and it may be required to repeat them exactly. Conversely, one could add that in prophetic utterance the weight may be placed on the indexical dimension, the unexpectedness of the occasion and the originality of the utterance. And from the perspective of participants, the indexical dimension – the event, the experience, and the personal and possibly momentous transformation – is always salient.

In Lienhardt's account of Dinka religion, acts from the relatively trivial, like tying a knot in the grass, to the profound, like the entombment of the live master of the fishing spear, are meaningful. It is a short move to realize the converse, that meaningful utterances, like giving thanks, are acts; powerful acts include words and gestures, and often material objects. Tambiah (1985) shows that the composition of such acts often follows the logic of poetic composition and analogical reasoning discerned by Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss. Rappaport identifies several additional important aspects of highly formal acts, which he refers to as rituals, including the fact that their consequences lie primarily in the ethical field, that they change the relationship between words and world, such that truth is ascertained according to whether the world now corresponds to the word rather than vice versa, and that speakers are deeply implicated in their utterances. Illocutionary utterances, I argue, are inherently ethical – in the sense of being ethically consequential rather than inherently good or right. Illocutionary acts place persons and contexts under a description, establish criteria and commitments, and thus provide the basis and means for judgment. Ethical life depends on speech acts and acts of speaking entail ethics (Lambek 2010).

Religion has been the sphere in which the consequentiality of utterances has been recognized most explicitly; conversely, when anthropologists have observed highly consequential utterances in other societies, they have tended to locate them within the spheres they have called religion, ritual, or magic.

Although I have been operating throughout by means of triads, I do not mean to imply that speech as action will be the last semiotic ideology to appear historically or that my survey has been comprehensive and up to date. Nor are these ideologies mutually exclusive in practice. A given religious utterance may be simultaneously beautiful, persuasive, logical, accurate, and effective – and appreciated by practitioners for each of these qualities. Likewise, a given scholarly analysis can bridge the three positions, as does Tambiah's wonderful paper on magic (1985). Thus, each stage ideally does not replace the previous one but adds a new dimension to it; from the perspective of speech act theory, reference itself becomes a kind of act. It is noteworthy, however, that most scholarly presentations (perhaps Derrida is a partial exception) themselves operate by means of a semiotic ideology of reason and reference. I myself have been primarily writing *about* something and constructing an argument, rather than drawing a portrait in words or effecting a change of state.

Austin has insight into the subtlety of ordinary language, the richness of what it offers, its power to discriminate. But is religious language "ordinary" in Austin's sense or is it different and perhaps even problematic, needing the therapy that Wittgenstein sought to provide? I would say there is no single answer to these questions. On the one hand, skeptical anthropologists like Lienhardt and Ruel have applied Wittgensteinian therapy, reducing the metaphysical load that certain words like "spirit" or "sacrifice" have been supposed to carry.⁸ On the other hand, the core of much religious language may not be either ordinary or metaphysical in the first place. And besides, who are anthropologists to criticize rather than to attempt to understand those metaphysicians we do encounter in the field; that could be only from a specific semiotic ideology of our own. Rappaport is interesting in part because his concept of sanctity is at a different angle from the ordinary than is that of metaphysics. He argues that sanctity is a property of discourse; words are sacred rather than ordinary not because of what they portend or transcend but because of their perdurance and self-closedness.

It is true that I have been writing somewhat as a disciple of the prophet Rappaport. But I would also welcome a return to grammar in the sense in which it was studied by linguists interested in cultural difference, in the tradition from Sapir and Whorf to Alton Becker (1995), a kind of poetics of syntax. Grammar is often ignored because it is difficult to grasp and those who specialize in its study too often cannot or do not speak to broader audiences. However, it is my impression that distinctive semiotic ideologies probably lie embedded, or find their roots, in different grammars. To paraphrase Nietzsche (and Whorf), semiotic ideologies may be the rationalizations of dead (or live) grammars.

If language "matters to philosophers" differently at different times, so too it matters differently for different communities of religious practitioners. As practitioners and theologians argue about the nature of language and words, perhaps what anthropologists ought to do is stand apart and merely listen, record the varieties of relations they see and explore the semiotic ideologies that underlie them or are explicitly debated among practitioners. In so doing they may be able to generalize about the ways in which (and limits to which) words are constitutive of religion, about how and why words matter to and for religion. And yet they cannot do so without semiotic ideologies of their own.

The complexity of the intersection of semiotic ideologies in actual life may be illustrated by events in Groningen (where this essay was first delivered). I close with a quote from the BBC website of March 7, 2009 that will also reassure you about the future of the religious past.

An art exhibition opening in the Netherlands will allow people to call a telephone number designated for God – but they will have to leave a message. Dubbed God's Hotline, it aims to focus attention on changes to the ways Dutch people perceive religion. Dutch artist Johan van der Dong chose a mobile phone number to show that God was available anywhere and anytime, Radio Netherlands reported. Critics say the project mocks those with religious beliefs. Forming part of an art installation in the town of Groningen, the voicemail message says: "This is the voice of God, I am not able to speak to you at the moment, but please leave a message."⁹

NOTES

This chapter draws from a paper delivered at the invitation of Jan Bremmer at the conference on Words (Groningen, June 15–16, 2009), as the fourth act in the NWO (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research) initiative on the Future of the Religious Past. A longer version is being published in the volume *Words*, edited by Ernst van den Hemel and Asja Szafraniec (Fordham University Press). The version here appears with the kind permission of Helen Tartar, whose comments have been invaluable. I also acknowledge support from the Canada Research Chairs program and the University of Toronto at Scarborough.

- 1 Some exemplary books in this vein include Fernandez 1982; Leavitt 1997; Silva 2011.
- 2 The theme, metaphor, or allegory of music is key to Cavell as well – and of course music has been central to religion itself, words put to music and chanted or sung rather than simply spoken, and sometimes with no referential words at all. From the trance dance of the San to hymns of the Church of England, from Bach cantatas to Sufi odes, music plays a central role in religious performance. For some anthropological takes, see Bloch 1989; James 2004.
- 3 Lienhardt shows that to speak about religion is to sift through words. There is no way to clarify with consistency Dinka notions of divinity and the relationships among the various manifestations (1961: 96). "As rain, or thunder and lightning, or a meteorite, which fall in one place, are not, and yet are, the same as those which fall elsewhere at some other time, so DENG is one and many" (1961: 162).
- 4 For an alternative view and a focus on Chinese ritual, see Seligman et al. 2008.
- 5 It absolves some of the weight of individual choice. For a theorist like Bloch (1989), ritual is a form of coercion and hence the responsibility ultimately lies elsewhere.
- 6 Article by Robert Pigott, Religious Affairs correspondent, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7941817.stm (accessed Mar. 2013).
- 7 My father recounts that when as an adolescent he moved from Germany to England in 1939 he was perplexed by the graffiti he saw there. He thought he knew what the English word "fuck" meant and so could not imagine why anyone other than the most devoted Nazi would write "Fuck Hitler."
- 8 Informed by the religious milieu in which we are socialized as well as by prevailing stereotypes of non-Western and religious people, it has been all too easy to ascribe to their key words and central concepts excessive metaphysical weight. Some of the best anthropologists, like Lienhardt and Michelle Rosaldo, are able to support Wittgenstein's antimetaphysical view, linking "religion" more with human creativity, ritual, myth, poetry, and ethical engagement than with explanation or the transcendental. Take also Ruel's work on sacrifice, or rather, on what he specifies as nonsacrificial ritual killing (1990), because, as he

says with Austinian precision, what is at issue is not the life *of* the animal, offered up to some deity, but the life *in* the animal which is taken and redirected in a simultaneously natural and ethical flow of force or substance. In other words, “religion,” so-called, for the East African Kuria, is set of relatively formal acts which members of the community take to ensure collective and individual flourishing and well-being.

- 9 At <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7929799.stm> (accessed Mar. 2013). It continues: “Although the hotline is officially launched on Saturday, the phone number has been active for the past week, with 1,000 messages left on the answerphone. But the messages are to remain confidential and will not form part of the art project. Van der Dong told Radio Netherlands: ‘I’m not a pastor, I’m an artist and I won’t listen to the messages. It’s a secret between the Lord and the people who are calling.’ Exhibition spokeswoman Susanna Groot said there was no intention to offend anyone. ‘In earlier times you would go to a church to say a prayer and now [this is an] opportunity to just make a phone call and say your prayer in a modern way.’ Instead, the aim is to provoke debate about the priorities of modern life. The phone line will remain open for the next six months.”

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CHAPTER 8

Religion and the Truth of Being

Paul Stoller

Anthropologists have long debated the whys and wherefores of rationality. The debate, which has usually been grounded in the assumption that anthropology is a science, has often been founded upon what seem incomplete philosophical assumptions. In this essay, I probe anthropological studies of religion, including my own, to explore two epistemologies that have been fashioned to discover truth: the “truth of statements” epistemology and the “truth of being” epistemology. In the “truth of statements” epistemology, scholarship is a matter of logical coherence. Truth emerges through linear and logical argument. The “truth of being” epistemology probes deeply the philosophical depths of the human condition. The “truth of statements” epistemology has a long history and has shaped scientific and social science discourse for more than two centuries. The much less influential “truth of being” epistemology has been the province of philosophy, literature, the arts, and religious studies. In the essay, I argue that anthropologists of religion, who have usually relied upon the “truth of statements” epistemology, produce texts of ephemeral importance. Once published, these texts soon become closed to the world. Anthropologists of religion who struggle with questions of being as well as those of structure, however, are sometimes able to produce works that transcend the moment – texts that probe directly those issues – love and hate, loyalty and betrayal, life and loss, fear and courage – that define the human condition. These kinds of texts, which tend to bring into relief the textures

of religious experience, take us ever closer to the elusive “truth of being” and the wisdom that it produces.

Several years ago I traveled to the Republic of Niger to continue my study of and apprenticeship in sorcery among the Songhay people. During that apprenticeship I had memorized incantations, learned how find and mix herbal medicines, and studied how the complex patterns of thrown cowrie shells revealed elements of the past, present and future. Two years before that trip my teacher and mentor, Adamu Jenitongo, one of the most knowledgeable and arguably one of the most powerful Songhay sorcerers of his era, had died at the age of 106. His death left a void in my world, but before he died he had insisted that I continue my apprenticeship with other sorcerers so that I might refine my knowledge of the sorcerer’s way.

During that trip to Niger I asked Hamidou Salou, a *Do*, or master of the river, to teach me about divination and medicinal herbs. He invited me to his straw hut on the outskirts of Niamey, Niger’s capital city. Inside, he lit some incense and began a conversation with his ancestors, which I could not completely hear. He asked them if they would agree to accept me as an apprentice. They gave their consent and Hamidou began to teach me about water spirits and about special healing plants found in and around the Niger River. Despite the loss of my mentor, Hamidou’s teaching filled me with confidence about my studies in sorcery. In my youthful exuberance, I began to feel invincibly strong on my path – a potentially dangerous emotion in worlds of sorcery where prudence usually corresponds to a long and healthy life.

Because my study of sorcery that year was in Niamey, I lodged with friends in a lovely villa in a neighborhood north of the city center. An eight-foot wall covered with bougainvillea gave the four-bedroom villa a measure of privacy. My friends, who had begun to build their villa the previous year, welcomed me into an almost complete dwelling that was exceedingly comfortable. My friend, who worked for an international organization, said that he wanted the house to be a place of peace and harmony. Knowing of my past studies with Adamu Jenitongo, he asked me what I could do for his house and family.

“Can you perform a ritual to protect the house?” he asked.

In the past, I had performed small services for his family – protective amulets for various dwellings, marriage magic to secure the future of the two young women in the family – both highly educated professionals – who had yet to “tie the knot.” This work, the power of which stemmed from the knowledge and practices of my mentor, had produced fairly positive results. There had been no break-ins at any of the dwellings, and one of the two sisters had married. Given this track record, my friend thought I could do something positive for his new house.

“I can do that,” I said rather boldly. “I’ll make a sacrifice to Dongo,” I announced. What better way, I thought, to sanctify the new dwelling than to make a sacrifice to the mercurial and powerful spirit of thunder. “If you find me a black chicken, I’ll perform the sacrifice on a Thursday, the day of the spirits.”

On the appropriate day, I found a large, partially buried boulder behind my friend’s house, an ideal spot to perform the sacrifice. At noon, I took the chicken and a sharp knife and went with my friend to the sacrifice site. Deep down I knew that at my stage of sorcerous training I should not be making a sacrifice – especially one to the

all-powerful Dongo. But hubris got the best of me and I proceeded. After reciting the appropriate texts that harmonized the forces of the bush as well as a series of praise songs to Dongo, I slit the chicken's throat, attempting to direct the flow of sacrificial blood into a recess on the boulder's surface.

I botched the sacrifice. The flow of blood was wrong and the chicken died badly. The event made me nervous, because I thought that Dongo had not accepted the sacrifice and that my behavior had been a transgression. By late afternoon, however, those negative thoughts faded away and I enjoyed a sumptuous dinner at my friend's house.

Things began to unravel a few days later. After a short trip to Tillabéri, Adamu Jenitongo's village 75 miles north of Niamey, I returned to the capital city and was in a car accident, bruising my forehead when it slammed against the sun visor. The evening after the accident, I attended a wedding ceremony and developed a pounding headache, blurry vision, and a high fever – telltale signs of the onset of malaria. I returned to my friend's villa. Complaining about my symptoms, his in-law, a physician, gave me sulfa drugs to treat the "malaria." The drugs quickly produced an allergic reaction – a severe rash that spread over my torso and down my legs. I became more feverish and was soon too weak to walk. At night I had disturbing "malarial" dreams, all of which were about my difficult death.

After several days of suffering, I somehow gathered the strength to get out of bed, dress myself and hail a taxi, which I took to Hamidou's hut. I told Hamidou my tale of transgression.

"You are a foolish boy," he said. He told me that my teacher, Adamu Jenitongo, could no longer protect me and that my sudden and serious illness had resulted from two sources: sickness that had been sent to me from one of my teacher's rivals and the anger of Dongo, who had refused a sacrificial offering from a young and inexperienced practitioner. "You are being taught the lesson of prudence. In our world," he told me, "impatience can have deadly consequences."

"What am I to do?" I asked.

"Go home and gather your strength."

He gave me several pouches of medicines to drink in coffee or milk. He also gave me some *cheyndi*, aromatic resins "Burn them every day," he instructed. "The smoke will make your house safe. The medicine will give you strength."

Two days later I left Niger and returned home to Washington DC, where I remained sick for two months. I consulted a tropical medicine specialist who thought that I might have contracted a particularly virulent form of malaria, but couldn't be sure because the blood test results were inconclusive.

"I don't know what you had," the physician admitted.

I took the medicines that Hamidou had given me. Each day aromatic smoke wafted through my house. Each day I felt a bit stronger. After two months of rest, I regained my strength and resumed my "normal" life. Following that incident, I did not return to Niger until the winter of 2009 – a long hiatus.

This set of incidents, which, in retrospect, gave me profound and troubling insights into the nature of Songhay sorcery and religion, begs for explanation. Did the sequence of events – a car accident, the onset of sickness, the inconclusiveness of medical diagnosis, and the irrelevance of medical treatment – result from a series

of coincidences, or did a rival sorcerer produce them? Did a furious Dongo instigate these misfortunes because he wanted to punish a young transgressor? For many scholars in the human sciences, questions like these can be challenging.

There are several possible explanations for what happened to me in Niger. The car accident was a simple coincidence; it could happen to anyone at any time. The illness had nothing to do with Dongo or with “the sickness” some rival sorcerer sent to me in the night. Quite the contrary, “the sickness” was probably just a case of resistant malaria complicated by an allergic drug reaction. These are the kinds of “explanations” that emerge from a deep-seated culture of rationality in which concrete explanation – even weak explanation – gives us a fleeting sense of control in worlds of inexplicable mystery and imponderable wonder.

Songhay people would have an entirely different take on the car accident, the undiagnosed medical condition and the cure brought on through herbal infusion and aromatic incense. They would say that Dongo, who is so feared that Songhay people are frightened to mention his name directly, had expressed his anger. That anger, they would suggest, precipitated the car accident and empowered “the sickness” that a rival sorcerer had sent to me. They would say that it was foolish for a young apprentice to perform a sacrifice without a mentor’s supervision. They would say that Western medicine could never successfully treat this particular form of “malaria,” which, of course, wasn’t malaria at all.

Given the context and a deep fear of dying far from friends and family, I had escaped from Niger, returned home and followed Hamidou’s suggestions, drinking special infusions and burning incense in my house until I regained my health and equilibrium. The experience, however, changed me profoundly, for I had for the first time confronted my mortality. This confrontation compelled me to reconsider my professional and personal priorities. It also made me question my training in the human sciences. Could the epistemology of rationality explain what seemed to be a series of inexplicable events?

From the classical philosophy of the Greeks to present thinking about global processes, scholarly debates about rationality, reason and truth have been at the center of intellectual endeavor. From the origins of Socratic philosophy to contemporary debates about the role of “science” in anthropology, most scholars have struggled to produce reasoned, dispassionate treatises that, through methodological rigor and logical cohesion, have attempted to transform unruly chaos into tangible order. These themes underscore the scholarly approach to the human sciences and, by extension, the scholarly analysis of religion. It has had a bearing on how most scholars would attempt to explain what happened to me in Niger.

The notion of rational explanation emerged from the key concept of the Enlightenment, “Reason,” the capacity to use logic to make dispassionate interpretations and utilitarian decisions that reflect the truth. Reason is the eighteenth-century foundation of the truth of statements epistemology, which eventually evolved into rationalism which “was not christened till very late in the nineteenth century” (Tambiah 1994: 89). In time the debates about nineteenth-century rationalism helped to shape Darwin’s powerful theories about human evolution, but also gave rise to Social Darwinist theories that used racist explanation to suggest why some societies progressed while others remained stagnant. This mode of thinking also

suggested differences between primitive and civilized mentalities. Indeed, anthropological ancestors like Sir James Frazer, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Sir Edward Tylor found antecedents of modern thought in so-called primitive mentality.

The French philosopher Lucien Levy-Bruhl took a different tack, suggesting a lack of evolutionary connection between primitive and civilized. In his early texts, Levy-Bruhl “proposed the challenging thesis that the primitive mentality is not to be considered an earlier, or a rudimentary, or a pathological form of the modern civilized mentality, but as a manifesting of processes and procedures of thinking that were altogether different from the laws of modern logical rational scientific thought” (Tambiah 1994: 85). In Levy-Bruhl’s primitive mentality, thinkers link elements through association, or what Foucault (1970) called “resemblance,” the key episteme of decidedly nonmodern Renaissance thinking. What’s more, in Levy-Bruhl’s primitive worlds, there is no distinction between science and religion.

Levy-Bruhl’s ideas sparked a heated anthropological response. Among the most vociferous critics was E.E. Evans-Pritchard, whose unparalleled *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* in 1937 became the first, and probably the best, anthropological work on rationality. Evans-Pritchard argued forcefully that there was no empirical basis for suggesting that primitives did not distinguish religion and science. He suggested that so-called primitives routinely used empirical method in their everyday lives. Contrary to the arguments of Levy-Bruhl, he also argued that Europeans often used nonrational procedures to make routine decisions.

Although Evans-Pritchard stated that so-called primitives used empirical method in their everyday lives, he firmly believed in the superiority of Western empirical science. In various works he used a truth of statements epistemology to argue for the existence of a universal objective reality, the truth of which social and natural scientists would establish through rationalist methodologies and logical analysis beyond local context. Reflecting upon Zande religious beliefs and practices, he wrote:

It is an inevitable conclusion from Zande descriptions of witchcraft that it is not an objective reality. The physiological condition which is said to be the seat of witchcraft, and which I believe to be nothing more than food passing through the small intestine, is an objective condition, but the qualities they attribute to it and the rest of their beliefs about it are mystical. Witches, as Azande conceive them, cannot exist. (1976: 63)

And yet, confronted with the ineffability of Zande witchcraft and magic, Evans-Pritchard’s classic text is filled with equivocation. Consider the following passage:

I have only once seen witchcraft on its path. I had been sitting late in my hut writing notes. About midnight, before retiring, I took a spear and went for my usual nocturnal stroll. I was walking in the garden at the back of my hut, amongst banana trees, when I noticed a bright light passing at the back of my servants’ hut towards the homestead of a man called Tupoi. As this seemed worth investigating I followed its passage until a grass screen obscured the view. I ran quickly through my hut to the other side to see where the light was going to, but did not regain sight of it. I knew that only one man, a member of my household, had a lamp that might have given off so bright a light, but the next morning he told me that he had neither been out late at night nor had he used his lamp. There did not lack ready informants to tell me that what I had seen was witchcraft. Shortly afterwards, on the same morning, an old relative of Tupoi and an inmate of his homestead died. This event *fully* explained the light I had seen. I never

discovered its real origin, which was possibly a handful of grass lit by someone on his way to defecate, but the coincidence of the direction along which the light moved and the subsequent death accorded well with Zande ideas. (1976: 11, emphasis added)

Here Evans-Pritchard's brute confrontation with the irreducible reality of religious practice had chipped away at the foundation of a rationalist practice and belief. Equivocation was Evans-Pritchard's only way out of an epistemological conundrum that shook his fundamental worldview. How would Evans-Pritchard respond to the series of misfortunes that I experienced in Niger?

Despite the irreducible challenges of religious experience, anthropologists and other scholars in the human sciences have used the truth of statements epistemology to develop three approaches to the rational explanation of religious phenomena: universalist, relativist, and phenomenological. In the universalist approach truth is discoverable through logical precision. Truth can only emerge through universal laws of coherence and logical consistency. Accordingly, universalists believe that the truth is singular and beyond local context, which for anthropologists means that they seek to reconfigure a tangle of irrational (or illogical) beliefs that have no truth value into a streamlined set of logically coherent beliefs (see Taylor 1998; Tambiah 1994).

A number of anthropologists have taken this purely rationalist approach to explain systems of seemingly irrational beliefs. Robin Horton, who lived for many years in Nigeria, took the universalist approach in his assessment of African systems of belief. Like Evans-Pritchard, he strongly asserted that African peoples are empiricists who are capable of "theoretical" thinking. They are rational, he argued, but not rational enough because they are incapable of producing generalizable forms of reason and knowledge (1970: 159–160). The French anthropologist Dan Sperber (1985) also plunged into the pool of argument about rationality. Sperber's target was the ever-shifting and contentious debate on relativism, the doctrine that enabled anthropology to emerge from the shadows of racist evolutionary thinking. He faulted relativists for their blindness to the universal principles of cognitive development, which, he would remind us all, was species specific. "Far from illuminating new areas and solving more problems than those suggested in its adoption in the first place, relativism, if taken seriously, would make ethnography either impossible or inexplicable, and psychology immensely difficult. It is the kind of theory any empirical scientist would rather do without" (1985: 49). Space precludes a thorough discussion of Sperber's solution to the scientific assessment of the rationality of reported belief – a matrix of propositional representations, semipropositional representations, factual beliefs, and representational beliefs. In short, Sperber strongly advocated a rigorous universalist paradigm to make sense of cultural beliefs.

The work of Horton and Sperber generated quite a bit of intellectual heat. Scholars considered these works intellectually significant. Even so, it is the monumental work of Claude Lévi-Strauss that created the foundation for a universalist rationality applicable to all of the human sciences. Although Lévi-Strauss's oeuvre focused on a wide number of topics – kinship, myth, art, and cognition – he always used erudite analysis to find unity in diversity. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) the analysis yielded the "atoms of kinship," the foundation, according to Lévi-Strauss, of all forms

of kinship and marriage. In his famous essay "The sorcerer and his magic" (in Lévi-Strauss 1967), he suggested that individual feats of sorcery are less important than the system of relations that links the sorcerer, the patient, and a society's system of beliefs about health and sickness. In his masterwork on myth, Lévi-Strauss was not interested in the themes of a particular myth, but rather in how the themes – or elements – of a myth fit into a broader system of relations. He wrote: "if there is a meaning to be found in mythology, it cannot be found in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of the myth, but only in the way those elements combine" (1967: 206). He suggested further that through the analysis of myth systematics, the anthropologist can uncover a "kind of logic as rigorous as that of modern science" (1967: 227). In essence, elements of human kinship and myth may generate infinite variation. Even so, the anthropologist, *chez Lévi-Strauss*, is able to delimit universal structures of human cognition – structures that are beyond the vagaries of local context. In short, Lévi-Strauss, Horton, and Sperber would suggest that the particularities of a "sickness" that wasn't really a sickness are less interesting than treating an incident of "sickness" in Niger as data that can be entered into a universal system of analysis.

There are many anthropologists, including those who study religion, who are skeptical of rationalist claims for an objective universal reality. There are scholars who "lump" things together, the universalists, and those who "split" things apart, the relativists. For relativists, there are multiple rationalities, none of which is prior to other rationalities. Through their critiques of absolute and inflexible universalist rationality, they attempt to probe deeply into the crevices of local context – a way to avoid making serious errors of intellectual judgment.

These days, most relativists are critical of an uncritical cultural relativism. Taking off from Hilary Putnam's philosophical quip that if all is relative, then the relative is relative too, Tambiah (1994) wonders if radical relativists can dismiss the Holocaust, apartheid, or for that matter, one could add, the brand of Muslim extremism that brought on the 9/11 attacks. Even so, he is skeptical of scholars who believe, like Sperber, that all symbolic expression or social behavior can be plugged into logical propositions. Tambiah writes that universal rationalists "should beware of too cavalierly understating the difficulties that have to be surmounted in the process of translation between cultures, or of overrating the status requirement that all discourse be reduced or transformed into the verifiable propositional format of logicians" (1994: 129). He urges a more moderate course of social analysis in which scholars endorse a belief in religious universals, for example, but maintain that religious practices and beliefs differ in fundamental ways.

Perhaps the most well-known critic of rationalism among anthropologists was the late Clifford Geertz whose provocative essay "Anti anti-relativism" was a broadside against the universalists – Ernest Gellner as well as Robin Horton and Dan Sperber. "As with 'Human Nature,' the deconstruction of otherness is the price of truth. Perhaps, but it is not what either the history of anthropology, the materials it has assembled, or the ideals that have animated it would suggest" (1984: 274–275). "If we wanted home truths, we should have stayed home" (1984: 276). Here Geertz strongly argued that experience – in the field – undermines the foundation of any universalist rationality.

Put another way, the “natives” may well have something to teach us about the human condition. Terrence M.S. Evens, for his part, suggested that anthropologists of religion should employ the insight of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in which the space between self and non-self is not hermetically sealed as it would be in an immunological view of the world, which means that difference can be confronted with some measure of insight, but not absolutely resolved. Evens’s analysis of Azande practice and beliefs found a truth that is beyond our capacity to comprehend (1996: 30). Such a truth, he suggested, precipitates a kind of existential learning, which takes something away from us – “the cost of the world as we know it, which is to say, not the enrichment, as one may be used to hearing, but the veritable transformation of our-selves.” In so doing, we acknowledge that other systems of knowledge and other ways of being have much to offer us – knowledge and practices that can sometimes be transformative (see Stoller 1989, 1997, 2004, 2008). My experience with “malaria” that wasn’t malaria certainly transformed me.

The “is or isn’t” “more or less” debate about rationality in human sciences and religious studies is one that probably cannot be resolved. Relativists say that rationalists are insensitive and ethnocentric. Universalists say that relativists are naive and imprecise. Even the more nuanced takes like those of Tambiah and Geertz don’t break out of the intellectual dead zone of this interminable debate. Several anthropologists, including Michael D. Jackson (1989, 1996, 1998), Robert Desjarlais (1997, 2003), and Thomas Csordas (1997, 2002), who have, in some fashion, studied the anthropology of religion, have called for a more phenomenological approach to anthropology, which would, among other things, cut through the murk of the rationalism–relativism debate to probe the nature of human experience. To do phenomenology you start with Edmund Husserl (1970), who promoted a rigorous method, the *epoche*, which would enable scholars to confront and appreciate lived reality – experience.

The strategy for beginning, in Husserl’s case, was one which called for the elaboration of a step-by-step procedure through which one viewed things differently. His model was one of analogy to various sciences, often analytic in style; thus he built a methodology of steps: *epoche*, the psychological reduction, the phenomenological reduction, the eidetic reduction and the transcendental reduction. At the end of this labyrinth of technique what was called for was a phenomenological attitude, a perspective from which things are to be viewed. (Ihde 1976: 19)

In the phenomenological world, Husserl’s tangled techniques enabled scholars to return “to the things themselves,” the apprehension of brute and unencumbered reality (Husserl 1970: 12). In Jackson’s view, phenomenology “is an attempt to describe human consciousness in its lived immediacy before it is subject to theoretical elaboration or conceptual systemization” (1996: 2).

Husserl’s ideas were influential, but his ironclad focus on perceptual methods seemed to bypass how a person charts her or his way in the world. Extending many of Husserl’s concepts to the social arena, Alfred Schutz (1962) described neither a universal set of propositions nor a mutually exclusive set of practices and beliefs that defied reduction. Schutz believed that social worlds, which are universes of meaning, consisted of intersecting multiple realities and that the play of these multiple realities

contoured our perception of things in the world. Although Schutz problematically privileges what he called the paramount reality, which for him is everyday life, his dynamic approach to perceptual apprehension did give phenomenologically oriented scholars a repertoire of analytical moves that would enable them to make better sense of (social) reality.

Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu (1990), among others, have suggested that the subjectivist tendencies of phenomenological thinking constitute its fatal flaw. And yet anthropologically informed practitioners of social phenomenology reject such criticism as rather narrow-minded and misinformed. As Jackson suggested, “no matter what constituting power we assign to the impersonal forces of history, language and upbringing, the subject always figures, at the very least, as the site where these forces find expression and are played out” (1996: 22). He continued: “Insofar as experience includes substantive *and* transitive, disjunctive and conjunctive modalities, it covers a sense of ourselves as singular individuals as well as belonging to a collectivity” (1996: 26, emphasis in original).

Beyond the conceptual quandaries of phenomenology lies perhaps its most important contribution to an anthropology of religion: the emphasis that some of its practitioners place upon sensuousness and embodiment. For phenomenologists, embodiment is the rejection of mind–body dualism. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whom many anthropologists cite as the source of their phenomenological inspiration, “Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can . . . [it is] a being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body” (1962: 137). Echoing this theme, Jackson wrote that “the orderly systems and determinate structures we describe are not mirror images of social reality so much as defenses we build against the unsystematic and unstructured nature of our experience within that nature” (1989: 3).

The epistemological implications of this phenomenological admission are considerable because it can lead to what could be called an embodied rationality. Considering the intersection of this kind of embodiment with my own illness experience in Niger, I wrote:

To accept an embodied rationality, then, is to eject the conceit of control in which mind and body, self and other are considered separate. It is indeed a humbling experience to recognize, like wise Songhay sorcerers and griots, that one does not master sorcery, history or knowledge; rather, it is sorcery, history and knowledge that master us. To accept an embodied rationality is, like the Songhay spirit medium or diviner, to lend one’s body to the world and accept its complexities, tastes, structures and smells. (Stoller 1998: 252; see also Stoller 1989, 1997, 2008)

For most of us, and here I certainly include myself, the space of embodiment is one of deep intellectual discomfort, a discomfort, I argue, that can be profoundly productive.

The indeterminate space of embodiment makes us uncomfortable because all of us – to greater or lesser extents – are wedded to the truth of statements epistemology, which is largely based upon the longstanding correspondence theory of truth. In that theory we find truth through a faithful re-presentation of reality, a re-presentation that mirrors what there is in the world. In his monumental critique of epistemology,

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, the late Richard Rorty wrote directly about the power of the mirror metaphor and how it shapes our intellectual gaze:

It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements which determine most of our philosophical convictions. The picture that holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and being capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant – getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing and polishing the mirror, so to speak – would not have made sense. Without this strategy in mind, recent claims that philosophy would consist of “conceptual analysis,” “phenomenological analysis,” or “explication of meaning” or examination of “the logic of our language” or of “the structure of the constituting activity of consciousness” would not have made sense. (1979: 12)

Here Rorty’s critical comments can be extended to our previous discussion. The mind as mirror metaphor certainly pertains to the universalist rationality and to a lesser extent to the rationalities attached to relativism and classical phenomenology. As scholars, we take comfort in those spaces. The chaos of the world is brought into order. Confronting the tangle of indeterminacy, scholars use the truth of statements epistemology to reconfigure the bits and pieces of the world and fit them into neat and tidy categories. Instead of chaos, the world makes sense and we advance scholarly paradigms or theoretical orientations.

Taking the less followed path of our philosophical tradition, Rorty was not satisfied with the neat and tidy conditions of philosophical reflection and discourse. He preferred the thinking of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey, who in various ways focused their gazes on the cracks in the mirror. These philosophers attempted to deconstruct carefully arranged pictures of received knowledge and conventional wisdom. Although the philosophical establishment labeled the later Wittgenstein, the later Heidegger, and especially Dewey as “irrational,” Rorty saw them as the major philosophical thinkers of the twentieth century. He said that they were thinkers who steered away from the truth of statements, which Rorty called “systematic philosophy,” to take a detour toward the truth of being, which the author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* called “edifying philosophy.”

Great systematic philosophers are constructive and offer arguments. Great edifying philosophers are reactive and offer satires, parodies, and aphorisms. They know their work loses its point when the period they are reacting against is over. They are *intentionally* peripheral. Great systematic philosophers like great scientists build for eternity. Great edifying philosophers destroy for the sake of their own generation. Systematic philosophers want to put their subject on the secure path of science. Edifying philosophers want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause – wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is *not* an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described. (Rorty 1979: 369–370, emphasis in original)

How many times have anthropologists of religion confronted something that “cannot be explained and can barely be described”? How many anthropologists of

religion have suffered from a “sickness” that wasn’t a sickness or “malaria” that wasn’t malaria?

Why should anthropologists spend years studying the religious beliefs and practices of a wide assortment of peoples? There are, of course, many reasons for doing anthropologies of religion. It is important to describe ritual practices and beliefs and compare and contrast them to our own set of practices and beliefs. Such comparison can refine our comprehension of the human condition. Anthropologies of religion, however, can also document practices and events that challenge our fundamental being in the world, practices and events that, despite our best efforts, cannot be reduced to a set of logically coherent propositions that explain the here and now. Knowledge of these events can expand our imaginative capacity and enable us to refine our thinking about and representation of social worlds.

The anthropological literature is filled with descriptions of seemingly inexplicable events followed by attempts, usually rather weak efforts, to explain them. As previously mentioned, Evans-Pritchard’s *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, which is arguably one of the greatest works in the anthropology of religion, is a text filled with equivocations. Evans-Pritchard saw the bright light of Zande witchcraft streaking across the sky. He saw it land in the compound of a neighbor, one of whose relatives had died during that night. Here description overwhelms explanation. He never discovered the “real” origin of the light.

Consider Jeanne Favret-Saada’s landmark book of 1977 on witchcraft in France, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage* (Favret-Saada 1981). In that work, Favret-Saada described an elaborate system of beliefs and practices in Normandy that produced spells that seemingly both sicken and heal. When she herself entered the “system,” practitioners were concerned for her safety. They asked her if she “had something” in her pocket, making reference to a protective amulet. Once you learn about charms and spells, they told her, it is for the purpose of putting into practice what you have learned, which is for the purpose of murder. If you don’t have protection you are vulnerable to counterattack. Put another way, if you enter this world of sorcery, you expose your body to the world. You are, in other words, implicated in a very tangible and embodied way. As in the case of Evans-Pritchard, Favret-Saada’s description of the uncanny world into which she was initiated overpowered any kind of explanatory analysis. At the end of her work, she appended a kind of ecological theory of sorcery, somewhat reminiscent of Gregory Bateson’s ideas on symmetrical and complementary schismogenesis. But the irreducible power of her narrative made her concluding analysis seem – at least to me – like an afterthought.

In my own work on sorcery and spirit possession there is no shortage of uncannily irreducible events that defy systematic explanation. In the village of Wanzerbe, the great center of Songhay sorcery, I was awakened by a “terror in the night” and became temporarily paralyzed from the waist down. My teacher had taught me that if I feared for my life, I should recite a Songhay incantation, the *genji how*, which harmonizes the forces of the bush to bring about healing. I recited that text and slowly I recovered from what had turned out to be a test of my suitability to continue the pursuit of sorcerous knowledge (see Stoller and Olkes 1987). Commentators, who had never spent time among Songhay sorcerers in Wanzerbe, dismissed this

episode as a vivid dream. For them that was a reasonable explanation. For me, that “dream” wasn’t a dream. This experience was my embodied introduction into the world of Songhay sorcery, a world that challenged a taken-for-granted orientation to the world that had been shaped by the truth of statements epistemology. Put another way, the events called for an experiential explanation.

There are several ways to confront the seemingly inexplicable events that many anthropologists of religion have experienced. For many scholars, the best tactic is to apply some logically consistent theoretical paradigm and use it as a tool to better understand “malaria” that is not malaria, or a “dream” that is not a dream. Indeed this approach has led to significant insights about human cognition and, in the case of Jeanne Favret-Saada’s later work, about psychotherapeutic processes. These are, as the analytical philosophers like to say, necessary but not sufficient approaches to the irreducible and the inexplicable. And so these scholars, following the well-worn and highly productive paths of the truth of statements epistemology, have produced works that have made substantial contributions to our understandings of the psychological and social dimensions of religious experience. But, for me, there is something missing when scholars describe religious experiences as data and evoke them for the purpose of refining theory. It is a denotative approach to the description of religious experience. For me, though, experience is a great teacher; it leads us toward the embodied truths of being.

In addition to the denotative description of the ineffable, scholars can also choose to pay more attention to experience and incorporate evocative expression in order to understand and describe the spirituality of social worlds. How do you describe the ineffability of what Victor Turner and Edith Turner have called *communitas*, a sudden feeling of group cohesion that often presents itself in religious contexts? In her provocative new book, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, the inimitable Edith Turner writes eloquently about a human phenomenon that defies denotation. According to Turner,

the characteristics of *communitas* show it to be almost beyond strict definition, with almost endless variations. *Communitas* often appears unexpectedly. It has to do with the sense felt by a group of people when their life together takes on full meaning. It could be called a collective *satori* or *unio mystica*, but the phenomenon is far more common than mystical states. *Communitas* can only be conveyed through stories . . . (2012: 1)

She goes on to discuss the group dynamics of *communitas*, which

occurs through the readiness of people – perhaps from necessity – to rid themselves of their concern for status and dependence on structures, and see their fellows as they are. Why it comes is unanswerable, except through the mercies of the energy of nature and through spirits. One can answer with a functionalist explanation, but the randomness of the events renders this ineffective. Besides the experiencers of *communitas* will say: “There is more to it than that.” (2012: 1–2)

Turner also discusses the social and psychological impact of *communitas*. “In *communitas* there is a loss of ego. One’s pride in oneself becomes irrelevant. In the group,

all are in united, seamless unity, so that even joshing is cause for delight and there is a lot of laughter. The benefits of *communitas* are quick understanding, easy mutual help, and long-term ties with others” (2012: 3). To confront the ineffability of *communitas*, Turner advocates using the story form to showcase the phenomenon in action, a phenomenon that is central to ritual practices and to religious experience, which makes it a signal element of the anthropology of religion and the truth of being epistemology. In her book, Turner situates *communitas* in the stream of anthropological practice and knowledge. She writes that she is

examining an aspect of human life that is little studied . . . Anthropology has given the world a great store of scientific understanding of society, its bones and muscles, its illnesses, but it has not allowed itself to get mixed up in such matters as person-to-person feelings unless they are analyzable and unless the analysis shows some kind of objectivity about human identity or consciousness. This book, however, tackles *communitas*, togetherness itself, taking the reader to the edge of the precipice of knowledge – and beyond, over the barrier of the scientists’ analysis and into experience itself. Light dawns on what the real thing is, and we feel lucky that it exists. Then we can make discoveries. (2012: 11)

Put in the slightly different language that I am employing in this essay, Turner is challenging us to open our scholarly being to phenomena like *communitas* so that we might push ourselves beyond the analytical world that yields truth along the narrow path of the proposition and move into the narrative worlds in which we can explore the sinuous paths of experience that take us toward a truth of being.

When you study the anthropology of religion you are sometimes compelled to stretch the imagination to the limits of comprehension – and beyond. If you allow the imagination to stretch with experience, especially when confronted with the ineffability of *communitas* or “malaria” which isn’t malaria, you often find yourself in what I like to call the between – the space of imagination and artistic creativity. The philosopher N.J.T. Thomas suggested that “the principal reason that the imagination is thought to be particularly relevant to the arts arises from the ability of artists to see and to induce the rest of us to see aspects of reality differently or more fully than is ordinary – to see things – as we otherwise might not” (1999: 109). Such an orientation to the imagination is often linked to religious beliefs and to what William James first called “radical empiricism” – the sensing of the unseen. The great scholar of Sufism William C. Chittick, following the insights of William James, among others, wrote about the importance of the imagination in Islamic belief and practice: “In putting complete faith in reason,” he suggested, “the West forgot that imagination opens the soul to certain possibilities of perceiving and understanding not available to the rational mind . . . By granting an independent ontological status to imagination and seeing the visionary realm as the self-revelation of God, Islamic philosophy has gone against the mainstream of Western thought” (1989: ix–x). The impulse of the imagination enables us to follow a path leading toward a truth of being, a space between things.

In Sufi thought this space is often called the *barzakh*, the bridge that links two distinct domains – a place that is between things, a topic mentioned often in the works of the twelfth-century Andalusian Sufi master Ibn al-’Arabi. Vincent

Crapanzano wrote powerfully about the cultural and philosophical significance of the between:

If we take the imagination, as Sartre and in his own way Ibn al-‘Arabi do, as presenting that which is absent or nonexistent, we have to conclude that it is through an activity, which rests on the nonbeing of its object – the image – that we uncover those gaps, those disjunctive moments of nonbeing, that punctuate our social and cultural life. The imagination also provides us with the glosses, the rhetorical devices, the narrative maneuvers, and the ritual strategies to conceal those gaps. We uncover, as it were, nonbeing through an act that postulates nonbeing, as we conceal that nonbeing through a nonbeing we declare, in ritual at least, to have full being – plenitude. What is more “real” than objects of ritual? . . . Is it this paradox that leads to the continual (if repetitive) elaborations in ritual and drama, in literature and art, especially and most purely in music, of the asymptotic moment of crossing, that renders imaginative frontiers so menacing as they fascinate and enchant us? Such subterfuge, if one may call it so, is a source of unending social and cultural creativity – or its cessation – through repetition and the declaration of that repetition as ultimate truth. (2003: 64–65)

Following this line of thought, the imagination, in its artistic exuberance, compels us to wake up and see the world from fresh perspectives. This notion echoes Edith Turner’s thinking about *communitas* and follows the sage advice of the late Jean Rouch who liked to say that the imagination compels us to tell stories, which give birth to other stories. As I once suggested, “the imagination always brings us back to the story” (Stoller 2008: 170). These are tales, to return to the ideas of Richard Rorty, about events that “at least for the moment cannot be explained and can barely be described” (1979: 370).

Rorty made a powerful point. The ineffable may be beyond explanation or description in the here and now, but Rorty wisely left open the possibility of future comprehension and explanation. When we produce stories about *communitas* or “malaria” that isn’t malaria, it is easy to fall into a kind of mystical trap in which all reason melts away. In such a state we can become blinded by faithful belief, as when the Reverend Pat Robertson recently blamed a particularly deadly series of tornadoes in the United States on American faithlessness. Our ethnographic descriptions – our stories – of wondrous events or particularly effective sorcerous acts can be used to create in the public sphere a dangerous and destructive antiscience rhetoric, which can undermine the human sciences.

In my view of things, anthropologists should confront the ineffable with the necessary imagination that enables them to sense the conceptual possibilities of the between. We should not be afraid to put ourselves on the experiential bridge – the *barzakh* – to explore the unsettling depths of the human condition. By the same token, we should not jettison the truths that can be discovered through the various rationalities that our disciplinary ancestors developed through the truth of statements epistemology. In this way, we can blend our gazes, moving onto breezy bridge spaces where we can not only acknowledge the inexplicable but construct a discourse that valorizes the human sciences. In the end, if we walk out onto the bridge – the *barzakh* – we are likely to find ourselves in a space that leads us to a productive future that will profoundly refine our apprehension of religion and the human condition.

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PART III

Time and
Ethics

CHAPTER 9

Ethics

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There has been a marked increase recently in explicit anthropological engagement with the ethical dimensions of human life. Various proposals have been made for the form this emerging engagement should take: the “anthropology of moralities” (Kleinman 2006; Barker 2007; Sykes 2009), “moral anthropology” (Fassin 2012), the “anthropology of ethics” (Laidlaw 2002; Lambek 2010; Faubion 2011), or “anthropology as ethics” (Evens 2008) or “as a moral science of possibilities” (Carrithers 2005), and others.

Some authors have proposed a new subdiscipline, structurally comparable to the anthropology of religion as traditionally conceived, with diverse “local moralities” as its distinctive objects of study (e.g. Howell 1997; Zigon 2008; Heintz 2009). Recognition that the category “religion” is not natural but historically produced (influential formulations include Smith 1962; Asad 1993; Masuzawa 2005), and that critical reflection on its varied and changing meanings must therefore be part of the anthropology of religion, has already greatly complicated the earlier endeavor, so the proposal for a parallel field is perhaps not as straightforward as it might first appear.

For others (e.g. Lambek 2010; Faubion 2011; Laidlaw 2013), the anthropology of ethics is anyway a different order of enterprise from the anthropology of religion: not defined, that is, by a distinctive subject matter (certain kinds of beliefs, practices, institutions, etc.), but more like the theoretical turn toward the study of gender, which in anthropology as in most humanities and social science disciplines got under

way in the 1970s with all the appearance of an emergent subdiscipline. Yet, as it came to maturity, attention to gender turned out instead to have introduced a new dimension of thought, one that subtly transformed the discipline as a whole. On this latter view, the anthropology of ethics should proceed through recognizing the ubiquity of ethics as a pervasive dimension of human conduct, and will flourish (insofar as it does) not as a new subdiscipline, but by inspiring us to rethink some of the core concepts of social theory.

Nevertheless, there is also, on this view, an important affinity between the emergent anthropology of ethics and the established subdiscipline of the anthropology of religion, because practices and institutions of a generally “religious” kind have been the media through which the greater part of humanity’s sustained reflections on ethical matters has taken place, in almost all societies for almost all of human history. So although the anthropology of ethics is plainly not restricted to the study of religious forms, it is bound to be concerned to a considerable degree with some of the problems that have long concerned anthropologists of religion.

Thus the claim that concerted anthropological enquiry on ethics is a relatively recent development, while it contains some important truth, must be treated cautiously. Authors whose work has been foundational for the discipline, in ways as diverse as Durkheim (1995, originally 1912), Marett (1931), and Evans-Pritchard (1962), have asserted (meaning different things by it) that the central concern of sociology or anthropology must be with “the moral.” And anthropologists have long sought to understand the moral foundations of social life in ritual, taboo, and the sacred. They have seen in practices such as worship, sacrifice, initiation, possession, and divination some of the defining processes of ethical life: processes of creation, expression, and fulfillment (or repudiation) of mutual obligations and solidarities, formation of character and striving for values and ideals, and allocation of praise, blame, and responsibility. And these themes have dominated many of the most influential classics in the anthropology of religion throughout the history of the discipline.

In addition, intermittent attempts have been made to set out an intellectual agenda for a general or comparative anthropological understanding of morality (e.g. Westermarck 1932; Kluckhohn 1951; Read 1955; Edel and Edel 2000, originally 1959; Wolfram 1982; Pocock 1986). But despite some brilliant insights and conceptual innovations along the way – one thinks for example of Bateson’s notions of *ethos* and *eidōs* (1936), Leach’s ideas about how conflicting complexes of values might be dynamically related (1954), and Gluckman’s about the allocation of responsibility (1972) – until relatively recently none of these attempts to initiate a movement in anthropology have generated sustained momentum.

During the last two decades, however, this situation has changed markedly. Although the field is still inchoate, with the logical relations between a profusion of contending visions having not yet been clearly delineated in many cases, theoretical debates have begun to take shape and a steady stream of sophisticated ethnographies has started to appear. This progress has depended on some success in transcending two limitations of vision that have hitherto constrained anthropological engagement with ethics: a tendency to equate ethics or morality with “the social,” conceived as an order of causal regularity existing at a collective “level,” and a relativistic conception of distinct moralities embodied in plural cultures or societies.

Conceptions of the social as an order of reality superordinate to “the individual” come in many forms, but Émile Durkheim’s formulation has been exceptionally influential. Durkheim argued that the power of morality and “the sacred” both to compel and constrain human action, manifest in their being simultaneously obligatory and desirable, derives from their being representative of “society”: “a moral being qualitatively different from the individuals it comprises” (1953: 51) and the source of everything that distinguishes them from amoral bundles of natural appetites. The implicit recognition of this is the explanation for both religion, which is the veneration of society symbolically transfigured, and morality, which is the authority of society manifested in “its imperative rules of conduct.”

On the one hand, Durkheim’s powerful vision seeks to put the ethical at the center of anthropological concern in that (unlike Marxism, for example) it recognizes the constitutive importance of morality in social life, as a reality not reducible to material interests. But on the other, in equating morality with the collective and conceiving of people following moral rules as the more-or-less mechanical functioning of a natural causal system, it tends to make morality disappear from view, because there is nothing true of it that is not equally true of “society.”

Many anthropologists accepted enough of this Durkheimian framework to think that understanding morality was a matter of explaining “why custom binds” (Fortes 1977). If successive generations found Durkheim’s own answer to this question unsatisfactory, and looked to psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, cognitive science, Marxism, or phenomenology for better ones, they rarely considered that anything distinctive about the ethical dimension of human conduct required a rethinking of the essentially mechanistic concepts of classical social theory.

Durkheim’s nephew Marcel Mauss, in his classic 1938 lecture on the category of the person (Mauss 1985), provided a Durkheimian counterpart to Nietzsche’s account of changing forms of ethical subject in his *Genealogy of Morality* of 1887 (Nietzsche 1994). Mauss’s is a more benign narrative, of the social production of the distinctively modern responsible individual who is the bearer of moral rights. In line with the Durkheimian opposition between the moral-collective and the natural-individual, Mauss began by declaring a disjunction between socially constituted categories of person (*personne*), whose history he proposed to reconstruct, and the sense of physical and spiritual individuality of the self (*moi*), which he suggested people have always possessed and, he implied, therefore has no history.

Michael Carrithers (1985) rightly insists that this disjunction is invalid and there is a history to be written of senses of self (*moi*), one that is connected with but not reducible to that of the concept of the person. He distinguishes *personne*-theories, which conceive of persons in an ordered social collectivity, from *moi*-theories, in which selves are conceived in cosmological and spiritual contexts, interacting as moral agents. Moreover, he emphasizes that organized reflection on the self is not a parochial Western concern. Indeed, a decisive step in human thought and practice relating to the self took place in north India in the fifth century BCE with the development of Buddhism and other organized projects of renunciation and spiritual quest, a step comparable to that which Mauss identifies, in relation to the person, in Roman law. Mauss misses the significance of developments in India, and also those in China, because his narrative is structured by the end point of the morally inviolate legal individual. He dismisses as historical dead ends the elaborate institutionalized projects

for analyzing and refashioning (including decomposing) the self that developed in the East. But forms of life and techniques of self-fashioning originating there have been widely and pervasively influential, including in Europe, for many hundreds of years. Over the last century and more, the mutual influence and interchange of ideas and practices has intensified as traditions such as Buddhist *vipassana* meditation and Indian yoga have been reformulated and commoditized in globalizing movements (Prebish and Baumann 2002; Singleton and Byrne 2008).

Carrithers' proposal for a complement to Mauss's narrative provides the basis for bringing anthropological analysis into dialogue with other accounts of the genealogy of the moral subject, whether Nietzsche's or more recent philosophical-historical but still Europe-focused accounts (e.g. Taylor 1989). One promising line of enquiry, therefore, might be ethnographic study of the transmission across cultural boundaries of projects and practices of ethical self-cultivation, with their associated concepts of virtues and character and pedagogic practices and relationships, by organizations and movements that do not fit into a neat narrative of Euro-American innovation and emulation in the rest of the world. The Buddhist world has seen a remarkable religious revival in recent decades that has been rather less well documented than similar globalizing trends in Christianity and Islam. And organizations such as the Taiwan-based Fo Guang Shan, which seeks self-consciously to adapt what were exclusively monastic ethical practices for a fast-growing mass lay following that is also increasingly global and culturally diverse, present challenges for how anthropologists practice multi-sited research across cultural boundaries and how they conceive of the large-scale "systems" they seek to describe (Cook et al. 2009).

But, so far, little of this sort has been accomplished, partly because it has been unusual for anthropologists, including those who depart more or less radically from the Durkheimian understanding of the moral/social, to paint on a broad historical and comparative canvas. Instead, when anthropologists have sought to interpret something like Durkheim's insistence on the centrality of the moral in a less reductive way than he did, they have most often declared the irreducible diversity of moral life among what they have represented as distinct and separate cultures or societies.

Thus when Edward Evans-Pritchard described societies as "moral systems" (1962) he meant not, as Durkheim had, that the content of morality varies in predictable ways with different social structures, but rather that it is underdetermined by any such causal forces (Evens 1982). The anthropologist cannot explain the choices and actions people make; the ambition must be to render them intelligible by translating the categories and concepts in which they are made, always in more-or-less explicit contrast with "the West" or "us." Many fine ethnographic studies in this interpretive manner have characterized local societies by their dominant moral values and concepts (e.g. Lienhardt 1961; Campbell 1964; Beidelman 1971, 1986; James 1988), but whenever attempts have been made to generalize and compare in this vein beyond "local moralities" to regions or cultural areas – as with honor and shame in the Mediterranean (Peristiany 1965), for example – problems have been exposed which cast doubt on the original method (Herzfeld 1980). The assumptions of holism and internal homogeneity, and indeed the very concept of plural "cultures" as natural units existing in the world, awaiting description and comparison, have been increasingly rejected in anthropology (for just one influential line of argument, see Strathern 1991).

Yet expressions of cultural and moral relativism, which plainly only make what sense they do on the basis of such assumptions, have played like a leitmotif through the history of anthropology. Edward Westermarck's *Ethical Relativity* (1932) put forward a classic subjectivist argument for cultural relativism: moral reactions are rooted in natural emotions, and the characteristics of these emotions are universal, but the content of the moral ideas people have in any place and time is arbitrary, and accepted from their cultural surroundings largely without reflection. Westermarck's hope was that drawing attention to the arbitrariness of "our" own values and opinions would lead us to question and revise them in favor of more rational and enlightened ones. The followers of Franz Boas developed the idea of cultures each embodying in their socially approved habits a distinctive moral philosophy (Benedict 1935), although without Westermarck's grounding in an empirical psychology of moral emotions. These anthropologists' sympathetic portraits of radically "other" moralities were designed as support for moral reform at home (Mead 1928), a rhetorical form later called "cultural critique" (Marcus and Fischer 1986). This was partly in reaction to evolutionary views correlating stages in the development of technology or sociopolitical forms with advances in moral maturity, and in reaction too to popular racism. However, the contradiction involved in seeking to advance nonrelative causes and claims (for racial equality or permissive sexual mores, for example) by means of assertions of relativism has continued to give rise to a distinctively fervent inconsistency. Nancy Scheper-Hughes is only more forthright than most in asserting both that the primacy of anthropologists' ethical responsibilities should lead them to reject cultural relativism (1995), and that "anthropologists must intrude with our cautionary cultural relativism" (2000: 197) to challenge assumptions made by bioethicists. The fact that relativism is so widely regarded as a sort of anthropologist's union card has been a charter for much muddled thinking, and has inhibited serious intellectual engagement with ethics.

In much of the above the object of analysis was conceived of as "local moralities": distinctive moral philosophies embodied in and therefore coextensive with sociocultural entities. By contrast, recent writings under the rubric of the anthropology of ethics have begun from the conviction that when people pursue, or act in the light of, conceptions of human excellence or the good, certain distinctive things (including reflective thought) are involved; that these processes are pervasive and constitutive in human social life; that such diversity as they give rise to may not coincide with what are thought of as societies or cultures; and that some of the generally accepted conceptual vocabulary of social theory may not readily capture them. Fairly thorough rethinking of some central concepts in social theory, such as structure, culture, or agency, may be required in order to acknowledge and accommodate the prevalence of ethical reflection, dilemma, judgment, and conduct.

This kind of rethinking requires anthropology to be open to the variety of insights that might be gained from systematic reflection on the nature of morality, whether from moral philosophy or theology, and from varied traditions of ethical thought, quite obviously not only "Western." This work has begun, but so far rather tentatively, and to date most writings in the field have been influenced by philosophical virtue ethics, mainly as interpreted by Alasdair MacIntyre, and/or by the Nietzschean tradition of genealogy, especially as represented in the later writings of Michel Foucault.

It is easy to see why anthropologists interested in moral life have found virtue ethics more congenial than other schools of modern moral philosophy. Virtue ethicists think that an understanding of morality requires an account of specific qualities of character, such as courage, generosity, elegance, or cruelty (they differ in their lists of virtues and vices), and they hold that this requires description of the relevant linguistic categories, the moral psychology of which they are part, the practices they relate to, and the contexts and relationships in which they are acquired and used: that is to say a “thick” description of a form of moral life, in exactly the sense in which, in Geertz’s influential formulation (1973), good ethnographic description is “thick.” The attribution of a virtue, in other words, combines fact and value in just the same way as interpretive ethnographic description does. For this reason, among others, it has been natural for virtue ethicists to express the view that philosophy requires “an ethnographic stance” (Williams 1986: 203–204). Anthropological engagement with virtue ethics has however been limited, to date, by the fact that many anthropologists have encountered this diverse body of literature almost exclusively through the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre, a powerful thinker, but one whose easy appeal to anthropologists has exerted a disproportionate, and somewhat mesmeric effect.

MacIntyre (1981, 1988, 1990) thinks the failure of what he calls “the Enlightenment Project” to ground universal moral claims in objective knowledge of human nature, and therefore to model moral knowledge on the natural sciences, has fueled a disillusioned resort to cynical and manipulative use of moral language in public debate, and a popular “emotivist” understanding of moral claims as being no more than expressions of individual subjective preferences. The only way to overcome the chasm between fact and value which Enlightenment thought takes to be ineluctable, but which is instead an artifact of the atomistic individualism of secular modernity, MacIntyre argues, is to undo the work of the Enlightenment (and indeed the Reformation) and to restore moral language to its grounding in concrete forms of social practice. Within a complex social practice (take the game of chess as an example) certain forms of excellence (in this case strategic intelligence) are intrinsic goods, in that they are both required for and developed through participation in the practice (and thus different from extrinsic goods such as fame and wealth, which could be but need not be acquired through playing chess). Excellences intrinsic to complex social practices, which are in turn embedded and transmitted in historically specific traditions, are what MacIntyre calls virtues. And despite being historically produced and variable, such virtues are matters of objective fact, as it is an objective fact that strategic intelligence is necessary in order to be a good chess player.

By a “tradition” MacIntyre means a set of practices, together with the modes by which those practices are reflectively and discursively understood, and the ways they are transmitted through time. Traditions are the vehicles through which particular conceptions of human flourishing and justice are argued about, lived, and passed on. Although requiring commitment to internal standards and authority, a tradition is a setting for ongoing debate. Crucially, traditions do not exist in isolation but can be brought into genuine interaction, including in situations where those in one tradition entertain seriously the possibility that a rival tradition’s beliefs, values, or practices might be preferable to their own, as judged by their own criteria and standards. Examples include the dialogue between rival conceptions of justice in post-Homeric Greece, and critical engagement in the Scottish Enlightenment between Calvinism

and English legal tradition, but the one to which MacIntyre gives most attention is the fusion of Augustinian Christianity and Aristotelianism achieved by Saint Thomas Aquinas. In each of these cases, MacIntyre argues, traditions that embodied specific projects of rational enquiry and distinctive forms of moral life entered into processes of rivalry, antagonism, alliance, and synthesis. According to MacIntyre, these episodes demonstrate that a plurality of rationalities and forms of ethical life being embodied in different traditions does not mean they are sealed off from each other in incommensurable conceptual schemes or mutually unintelligible cultures, and therefore that his grounding of moral knowledge and value in such traditions does not issue in relativism (1988: 9–10, 349–369).

Many anthropologists have adopted MacIntyre's conceptions of virtue and tradition, although few in a very systematic fashion. His influence has been most pervasive as a result of its place in Talal Asad's project of an anthropology of Islam (1986, 1993, 2003, 2006). Asad's way of cutting through the longstanding dilemma, faced also in different forms by the anthropologies of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, of whether to identify "Islam" with some kind of doctrinal orthodoxy or with observed practice on the ground, is that it should be understood as a "discursive tradition," a formulation that involves the adoption of MacIntyre's distinctive understanding of tradition. When Asad and his students, and others influenced by them, have tried to conceptualize the form that ethical self-formation might take within Islamic discursive tradition (e.g. Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006; Scott and Hirschkind 2006), they have naturally adopted further aspects of MacIntyre's understanding of morality.

Like MacIntyre, Asad emphasizes the profound rupture of the Enlightenment in Europe and the discontinuity between, on the one hand, the unified authority of the medieval Church in relation to all important matters of truth and conduct, and on the other, modern "religion," sequestered into a privatized domain of individual emotional experience by its "secular" exclusion from public and political life. On Asad's account, Islamic tradition fundamentally resembles pre-Enlightenment Catholicism in not having suffered this radical diminution; for this reason MacIntyre's model of tradition is appropriate to it (Asad 1986; 2006: 233–235, 286–289) in a way that social-scientific models of "religion," such as Geertz's, which according to Asad incorporate crucial assumptions derived from secular modernity, are not (1993: 27–54). So this anthropological project inherits MacIntyre's moralized opposition between coherent Catholic/Islamic tradition and fragmented, secular modernity.

As MacIntyre, in his subsequent books, has progressively worked out the implications of the arguments first sketched in *After Virtue* (1981), his characterization of the constitution of moral traditions has increasingly emphasized doctrinal authority and the forcible exclusion of dissent, rather than rational argument and internal disagreement. Moreover, he has diverged from his earlier inspiration in Aristotle, in portraying the exercise of ethical virtues as an unreflective process (see Laidlaw 2013: ch. 2). It may indeed be possible to extract from MacIntyre's writings what Asad claims to find there – "a more mobile, time-sensitive, and more open-ended concept than most formulations of culture and one that looks not just to the past but to the future" (2006: 289) – but this is not the concept MacIntyre develops, as becomes increasingly clear the more fully he elaborates it, and the translation by Asad and

others to contexts of reformist Islam leaves in place rather than challenges its specifically and increasingly pronounced theocratic dimensions.

Mahmood, for instance, in her study of the reformist Islamic piety movement among women in Cairo, describes how the ethical formation practiced by the women she worked with aims at the inculcation of pious dispositions to the point where they become automatic, involuntary and “a nondeliberative aspect of one’s disposition” (2005: 137). She describes this as “consistent with the Aristotelian conception of *habitus*” (2005: 139), but if this is what occurs, it is not what Aristotle meant by habituation and is therefore not the acquisition of a virtue, in Aristotle’s sense. For Aristotle the cultivation of virtuous dispositions is not the same as the inculcation of bodily reflexes (see Annas 1993), and so despite Mahmood’s own protestations to the contrary (2005: 136–139), what she describes, having adopted MacIntyre’s conception of virtuous practice, is closer to Bourdieu’s *habitus* than it is to Aristotle’s *hexis*, precisely because and insofar as it works by “making consciousness redundant” (2005: 119).

A few anthropologists, in their engagements with virtue ethics, have avoided following MacIntyre on his Romantic and authoritarian trajectory, and developed concepts of virtue as reflective and reasoned practice. Michael Lambek, for instance, seeking an anthropological way to describe and understand the ethical dimensions of social life, prefers a virtue-ethical to a deontological or consequentialist approach, not only because he finds it responds best of the three “to what is empirically the case, not only in a vast range of pre- and extra-modern societies, but among ourselves” (2008: 151), but also because he finds in Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* (judgment, or practical reason) a way of avoiding a number of parallel antinomies, which he traces back to Plato, between detached, formal rationality on the one hand and illusion and irrational emotion on the other (2000). Lambek has suggested that we find distinctive, culturally variable forms of reflective striving for the good embodied in practices, such as spirit possession, which, like ritual in general, involve “displacements of intentionality.” A spirit medium may make use of culturally authorized media in which to speak in the voice of a conception of the general good and thus be at the same time “virtuous subject and subjective virtuoso” (Lambek 2002).

Anand Pandian (2008) has observed that MacIntyre’s conception of a tradition, as a set of ongoing arguments embedded and transmitted in practices, has the advantage that it relieves us of the false choice of seeing traditions as either unchanging and unquestioned premises, or, if not this, somehow inauthentic and “invented.” But equally, Pandian rejects MacIntyre’s insistence that conflicts of values are a peculiar pathology of secular modernity, and has interpreted aspects of ethical practice in agricultural communities in rural south India as a “fragmented” tradition.

There are clearly cases where distinctive forms of ethical life have endured over considerable periods and through massive social transformations, but plainly without being structured in what MacIntyre describes as tradition. One thinks of Wendy James’s (1988) notion of a “cultural archive” among the Uduk of the Sudan, and of Douglas Rogers’ (2009) argument that ethical transmission among Priestless Old Believers in central Russia has been effected much more decisively through everyday practices such as labor and exchange than through discursive formulations or narratives, and that this explains the survival of the community’s distinctive form of ethical life through successive persecutions. Rogers describes how prerevolutionary Old

Believers developed a distinctive way of dealing with the perennial Christian dilemma of how to transcend the world while continuing to inhabit it. They spent most of their adult lives baptized but ritually nonobservant, participation being deferred until old age. This permitted the maintenance by Elders of a strict ascetic regime – celibacy, no contact with money, no labor, separate food and drink, nonattendance at weddings and other worldly festivals – that was virtually invisible to outsiders, being conducted entirely at home. As Rogers observes, this life constituted a kind of eremitical retreat, but a withdrawal inside the home rather than, as more conventionally with eremitical life, in desert, mountain, or forest. Hence individuals would participate in the embodied practice of their religion in childhood (while in their grandparents' care) and then again much later in life, but with a decades-long period of dormancy between. This generational structure, shaped by pressure from the Orthodox Church, was then reinforced by socialist resettlement and collectivization: productive working-age parents were often moved to collective farms first, with Elders and children left in the old villages. And these same demographic changes also undermined sectarian divisions within the Church. Antireligious measures, whether closing churches or arresting priests, generally failed to affect Old Belief, which simply wasn't located where the Soviets expected to find religion. Much of the Soviet effort to reshape citizens and create good socialists bypassed Old Believer ethical sensibilities, or unintentionally worked with their grain. The removal of children to centralized schools, a demonetized economy, even the ultimate failure of socialism to supply people's material needs "seems actually to have *facilitated* older generations' efforts to avoid the things of this world as part of their attempts to sustain moral communities and subjectivities open to salvation" (Rogers 2009: 184). What Rogers calls the "ethical repertoire" of Old Believer life, "a protean set of sensibilities, dispositions, and expectations" (2009: 4), provided background continuity through several successive ethical regimes without there being anything resembling a "tradition" in MacIntyre's sense, or historically self-conscious literati to articulate it if there had been.

The later writings of Michel Foucault – the project he referred to as a genealogy of ethics (e.g. 1986, 1988, 1997, 2005) – have been even more widely influential than those of MacIntyre on the developing anthropology of ethics. In these works, consisting largely of reconstructions of ethical thought and practice in the ancient classical world, Foucault explicitly repudiated the idea, with which he had come to be associated, of power as systematic domination "that leaves no room for freedom" (1997: 293). Power relations – by which Foucault meant any relations in which people seek to influence the action of others – are always to some extent reciprocal. Indeed, it is only possible properly to speak of power relations insofar as parties are capable of reflective and self-directed action and are therefore to some extent free (2000: 337–343). Crucial here is the capacity for reflective thought and for freedom, the motion by which one detaches oneself from one's own conduct, "establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem" (1997: 117). Thus under the single term "subjectivation" (*assujétissement*), Foucault included both interactive processes whereby certain kinds of subjects are formed in social relations, and practices of reflective self-constitution and self-formation. This has implications for how one might study forms of moral life. Foucault distinguished what he called moral codes – rules that might be imposed, followed, or resisted – from ethics, which are projects

for fashioning the self in the light of ideals and values. He argued that from classical antiquity through the rise of Christianity not much changed in the content of prescriptive moral codes (so he rejects the idea that the ancients were “more relaxed” about sex, for example); however, ethics, the ways people were enjoined to work on and constitute themselves, changed profoundly: from being organized as an aesthetics of existence – an active cultivation of qualities so as to achieve a restrained excellence, in particular in wielding power over others – to a hermeneutics of the subject – a searching, interpretive investigation of one’s actions, thoughts, intentions, and desires.

Foucault’s delimitation of the ethical is not the only one that may be of interest to contemporary anthropologists, nor is his distinction between ethics and morality. The philosopher Bernard Williams (1985) used the same vocabulary to make an equally useful but different distinction. For him, ethics include any answer to the question “how ought one to live?” and morality is one particular subset of such answers: those ethical theories (paradigmatically Kantianism, but also, though he did not mention this, Durkheim’s theory) that place peculiar stress on notions of obligation, the voluntary, and sentiments of blame (see also Skorupski 1998). So whereas for Foucault “ethics” describes an aspect of morality, for Williams morality is a special case of the broader category of ethics. Both Foucault and Williams were indebted to Nietzsche (1994) in making these different distinctions, and in both cases part of their motivation lay in wishing, as Nietzsche did, to liberate themselves and their readers from the parochialism of equating one kind of value system – in Nietzsche’s case specifically Christian self-denying asceticism – with ethics as such. Both distinctions are likely to be of enduring usefulness in an anthropology of ethics that extends beyond the Western traditions to which Foucault and Williams largely confined their attention.

A further distinction between morality and ethics is proposed for anthropology by Jarrett Zigon (2008, 2009). Zigon characterizes morality as normally taking the form of unconscious habit, such that our conduct is neither thought out beforehand nor even consciously registered as it occurs. Ethics, by contrast, are brought about by circumstances of “moral breakdown,” when some event or person “intrudes” into one’s everyday life, requiring reflection and conscious decision on whether and how to act. The end of such “ethical moments” is to enable a return to “the unreflective and unreflexive comfort of the embodied moral habitus” (2008: 18), but this requires the creation of new, even if only very slightly new, dispositions, and therefore an altered moral self. Although he associates this account with Foucault’s discussion of “problematization,” Zigon’s ideas are importantly different. Foucault’s ethics–morality distinction does not imply separate subject matters; so he described ethics as “another side of the moral prescriptions, which most of the time is not isolated as such” (1997: 263). Problematization for Foucault is therefore not an isolable or occasional event or episode; it is an aspect of any ongoing form of life. He reflected that his studies of madness, criminality, and sexuality seemed to him in retrospect to be variously successful attempts to examine each of these phenomena along the three axes that characterize any “matrix of experience” (1997: 204): as domains of knowledge, as systems of institutionalized rules, and as models of the relation one has to oneself. Where he had erred was in underemphasizing the third of these dimensions. Different forms of morality vary not in whether or how much problematization occurs, but in what is problematized and how. Throughout late antiquity as described

in Foucault's later lectures and books, the loci and forms of problematization vary considerably, but there is no time at which nothing is problematized. And crucially, the point of the many techniques of the self he described is to fashion the self in terms of a particular current problematization. Foucault postulated no state of untroubled tranquility or "existential comfort" such as Zigon holds to be "our everyday way of being." The latter idea seems to owe more to Bourdieu, and to Zigon's somewhat idiosyncratic reading of Heidegger.

So Zigon's distinction – which unlike Foucault's and Williams's is a dichotomy between mutually exclusive terms – reduces ethics once again to a merely functional role in the reproduction of a society/culture, and excludes it from the ongoing routines of everyday life. It also preempts ethnographic enquiry into culturally variable ideals of human excellence, by positing the restoration of "existential comfort" as the necessary *telos* of ethics as such. But of course in many contexts an uncomfortable awareness of one's ethical inadequacy, often indeed of the necessity of ethical failure, is an elaborately developed ideal. Religious practice in such contexts often involves the deliberate cultivation of such a sense, as a precondition for ethical insight or sensitivity (e.g. Laidlaw 1995 for Jainism; Lester 2005 for Catholicism; Mair forthcoming for Mahayana Buddhism; and Robbins 2004 for the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea both before and after conversion to Pentecostal Christianity). In such contexts "existential comfort in one's world" would be read as a sign of ethical obtuseness and insensibility.

Foucault suggested that what he called techniques of the self have existed in every civilization (1997: 87), and he developed a four-part analytical framework for the comparative study of ethical projects (1986: 26–28; 1997: 263–266). Forms of ethical life may be analyzed, he proposed, by asking: What is the part of the self that is the object of ethical attention (ontology)? What is the mode in which that attention is directed (deontology)? What are the techniques used to work on the self (ascetics)? What is the state of the self the project is directed toward realizing (teleology)? Anthropologists have varied in the extent to which they have taken seriously and developed the details of this analytic; the most elaborate and impressive treatment is by Faubion (2011). But in general terms Foucault's project for a genealogy of ethics has been most visibly influential in anthropology in studies in which institutions, organizations, and movements of various kinds, mostly but not exclusively religious, are seen as providing individuals with the context and motivation for pursuing distinctive projects of ethical self-cultivation. Examples from diverse religious traditions include Laidlaw (1995), Faubion (2001), Robbins (2004), Cook (2010), and Hellweg (2011). Deservedly influential have been the landmark studies by Saba Mahmood (2005) and Charles Hirschkind (2006) of Islamic reformism in Cairo.

This general approach has undoubtedly been fruitful, enabling anthropologists to see the exercise of reflective thought and freedom in settings where what Mahmood (2005) calls "the progressive imaginary" least expects to find them. The concepts of "agency" and "resistance," for a long time almost the only tools anthropologists used to try to give expression to their sense that the people they worked with are more than the passive products of structures or discourses, have proved inadequate to contexts in which the self-realization people strive for entails wholeheartedly submitting to religious authority and transforming their inclinations so as to conform more completely with established ideals. In her study of the women's Islamic piety

movement in Cairo, Mahmood poses an important question with admirable directness: "How does one rethink the question of individual freedom in a context where the distinction between the subject's own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be easily presumed and where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for achieving the subject's potentiality?" (2005: 31). But the answer to this question is less clear. Sometimes Mahmood herself suggests that the piety movement aims at a kind of freedom that is different from what she calls "secular liberal freedom"; sometimes she suggests that the values the movement aims at are quite other than freedom, which is a concern of secular liberals and not valued universally. The equivocation arises, in part, because the category of "secular liberal freedom" goes largely unanalyzed, and is used simply as a foil for her description of the piety movement. This may well be a faithful reflection of the rhetorical strategies of at least some exponents of the movement itself, for whom the secular, the liberal, and the Western may serve interchangeably as terms for everything they are against. But it is a blunt instrument for ethnographic description and analysis, and of course liberal thought about freedom in fact contains a range of positions, not all of them necessarily secular.

Mahmood and Hirschkind both emphasize that the projects they describe, although they begin with conscious and more or less voluntary decisions on the part of those who join these movements, are directed toward making submission an unreflective, embodied disposition, a presubjective and preconscious "instinct": one's affective responses are developed, in particular through learning to experience an intense and visceral fear of God, such that ideally disobedience becomes a physical impossibility. This suggests that insofar as these projects succeed, they proceed through the progressive curtailment of the capacity for reflective freedom that Foucault claimed was the very essence of ethics, and which is their own starting point.

This Foucauldian notion of reflective freedom is different from liberal ideas such as Isaiah Berlin's "negative liberty" (Berlin 2002). Berlin's distinction between negative and positive liberty is rooted in a historical analysis of the specific dynamics of modern European political thought, and even in those terms was avowedly rough and provisional. But though rudimentary, it is not without its uses, since it enables us to distinguish the capacity for reflection and self-constitution, realized typically through pedagogic and other relations, from the more political and culturally individualist idea of negative liberty, and to distinguish both of these from ideas of the realization of one's true, essential, or rational nature which Berlin classes as "positive liberty." The dynamic in Mahmood and Hirschkind's accounts of piety Islam, whereby reflective freedom is used in such a way that it is progressively curtailed in favor of an ideal of positive liberty, is visible also in other religious traditions.

In Jainism, for instance, the ideal end to a pious life is to engage in a ritualized fast to death (Laidlaw 2005). This begins in an act of free deliberation and decision. The guru who administers the vow must ensure that the individual who takes it is not acting in a state of emotional turmoil, such as grief or despair, and is not under any pressure or constraint. Jain authors' confident and often repeated assertions that the practice is not a form of suicide rest in part on all of this, and on the fact that it is a long, slow process, requiring the continuous and protracted exercise of steady will. But the outcome of the fast, progressively realized as it approaches its end, is precisely the extinguishing of that will, as the increasingly emaciated person nears a

state of tranquil inactivity, freed from all volition and abstaining from virtually all physical movement, since this is inevitably harmful to other living things. By the end, even the desire for death itself is extinguished. And of course the state to which this practice tends, a foretaste of the final liberation from embodied existence that is only possible after death, is characterized as freedom, freedom, that is, from the passions that keep one trapped in bodily form and freedom to realize the true essential nature of the immaterial soul.

James Faubion (2011), makes a convincing case (following Foucault 1997: 298–299) for pedagogy as the foundational ethical relationship and although all such relationships presuppose initial incapacity, begin in subordination, and proceed through constraint, he offers as a criterion for genuinely ethical pedagogic relationships that their trajectory be one in which the pupil is led out of this initial condition toward greater autonomy in relation to the teacher. In his studies of Branch Davidian millennialism, conducted in the aftermath of the Waco massacre (2001, 2011), Faubion's understanding of his main interlocutor's engagement with the sect as being a process of ethical self-formation turns substantially on his estimation of her achievement of a kind of autonomy. Cook's (2010) study of female monastics in a northern Thai meditation monastery shows beautifully how their efforts to develop a condition of non-self, conceived as an unambiguously individual spiritual achievement and as a state of autonomy, depends upon and is achieved through a series of hierarchical pedagogic relations.

Mahmood's account of the women's piety movement is more individualistic – notwithstanding her expository contrast with “liberal secular Islam” – because she gives relatively little attention to pedagogic relationships and how these might develop over time, favoring instead an account of the stages the individual ideally goes through in her development of personal piety. This enables Mahmood to convey vividly the internal coherence the piety project has in the minds of its committed proponents, and seems to confirm Asad's emphasis, following MacIntyre, on the coherence of the discursive tradition. But this analytical framework makes little sense of other aspects of ethical life, such as experiences of conflicts of values, which are reserved by MacIntyre for “liberal secular modernity,” but evident enough in Hirschkind's and also Mahmood's ethnographies, and emphasized further by other ethnographers of reformist Islam.

Samuli Schielke's study, for instance, like Hirschkind's and Mahmood's, is of contemporary urban Egypt (2009a, 2009b), but he suggests that while reformist Islam calls on its followers to achieve moral consistency and coherence, the effects of attempts by individuals to do so may be complex and in their own terms self-limiting. Schielke points out that even the most sincere followers of reformist Islam also think and feel in moral registers other than those of piety. They care about and aspire in terms of social justice, community and family obligations, good character, romance and love, and self-realization. These can all be in conflict in various ways. One effect, says Schielke, of the undoubted recent success in Egypt of reformist or Salafi Islam, with its systematic devaluing of all these other values, is that debate about such conflicts has been to some extent silenced. Discursive space is dominated by the claim that piety is all that is required for a happy and fulfilling life, although this is often not people's experience. Individuals' attempts to remake themselves in line with Salafi teachings often result in failure and profound disappointment: they

lapse from the standards of good conduct they set themselves (break fasts, smoke or drink, consume unseemly media, fail in religious observance, etc.) and find that they cannot pray with the required mental discipline, or that even if they do, this does not enable them to escape from or to handle hard choices or situations of moral ambivalence.

Mahmood notes: “in the model operative among the mosque participants, a person’s failure to enact a virtue successfully is perceived to be the marker of an inadequately formed self, one in which the interiority and exteriority of the person are improperly aligned” (2005: 164). In other words, as Schielke points out, in the Salafi view the only explanation for an individual’s disappointments or unhappiness is his or her own weakness. The project itself is necessary and sufficient. But this gives the frustrated aspirant little help in dealing with doubt or failure, and no advice except to try again, this time harder. The result is that instead of the process of cumulative (if occasionally interrupted) self-perfection described by Mahmood, people’s experience of value conflict may in fact be intensified by the very attempt consistently to enact one internally coherent set of values. Schielke, concluding that Mahmood describes the project of pursuing piety but not the real-world consequences of people’s inevitably imperfect attempts to do so, plausibly suggests that this explains why it is precisely those young men sincerely committed to Islamist piety who are most likely to celebrate the end of Ramadan with conspicuously bad behavior, such as harassing women in the street or public park.

This is not a point only about Islam. It is a general one about ethical values and what it is to live in the light of them. So for the otherwise very different case of Jainism (Laidlaw 1995), it would be possible to portray a coherent project for the formation of a self-consistent virtuous self. Such a project is readily articulated in various levels of detail by Jain intellectuals (as no doubt it is by reformist Islamic leaders), and indeed by comparatively unlettered laypersons. What they describe is elegant and in many ways compelling, in this case a project for the attainment of spiritual perfection and enlightenment through the rigorous ascetic elimination of all desire, passion, and attachment. But in this form it is literally unlivable. It works as the defining project for the religious lives of Jain families and communities only because and insofar as it is combined in various ways with the pursuit of other, quite contrasting and conflicting values. Lay Jains can engage in fasting, confession, meditation, and the renunciation of various aspects of everyday life, but only at intervals and only in counterpoint to the pursuit of contrasting goods and ends. Indeed, their ability to embody and realize ascetic virtues becomes more robust, not less, because rather than being guided by automatic and preconscious learned instincts, they retain the ability to manage the conflicts between these and other demands through reflective and thoughtful self-direction, and this remains always necessary because there is no way to resolve the conflicts definitively. Actually living a life requires doing so with reference to values that make conflicting demands, and managing the inherently irresolvable tensions between them.

What might be the implications for anthropological practice of taking the ethical dimension of social life seriously? T.M.S. Evens’s account of “anthropology as ethics” (2008) attempts to realize anew the Durkheimian ambition of showing how the ethical is constitutive of the human condition. Anthropology’s attempts to grasp this have been hampered by what Evens calls a dualist ontology, an

intrinsically anti-ethical but pervasive feature of Western culture, which he identifies with the legacy of Greek science. Anthropology can transcend this by being itself an ethical enterprise, which, following Levinas, Evens understands as openness to the other. This theme is developed most particularly through a reading of the meaning of sacrifice in Judaic, Christian, and certain African religious traditions. Thus anthropology, like ethics, is engaging with and taking the perspective of the other: a self-transcending engagement that does not involve a return to how one was (an Exodus rather than an Odyssey); and a sacrifice, insofar as it involves a “self-deconstruction on behalf of the other” (2008: 286). Evens concludes with the admirable thought that “the endeavour to learn *about* another culture needs to be founded, directly and knowingly, on the endeavour to learn *from* that culture” (2008: 284), although this ambition is not one that anthropology can exclusively claim. Placing ourselves in a genuinely pedagogical relationship to the ethnography would lead, as Faubion suggests pedagogical relationships in general should, to overcoming the heuristic opposition between self and other, making the study of other forms of ethical life itself a form of self-fashioning. And there may be ways of achieving this without Evens’s despite-itself intensely dualist ideal of ascetic self-abasement before the other.

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CHAPTER 10

The Social and Political Theory of the Soul

Heonik Kwon

An interesting debate took place in March 2012 in the Shaw Library at the London School of Economics. Organized by the school's undergraduate students of anthropology jointly with their counterparts in Cambridge University, the event attracted a large group of students from both places. The topic of the day's debate is akin to the broad theme of this volume. Three students from each institution joined the panel, and the six panelists argued forcefully for or against the relevance of a naturalist approach in anthropological research. The three LSE students defended the approach in a series of well-crafted presentations, making generous references to Maurice Bloch and Rita Astuti (as well as to Malinowski), their teachers and two prominent anthropologists who advocate a cognitive or naturalist approach to religious concepts today. The Cambridge students took a stance against the motion, and they did so as judiciously and persuasively as their LSE colleagues. They challenged the idea of a naturalist approach to religious beliefs and ideas of personhood, questioning whether it was even possible to conceive of a universally shared idea of nature in the first place, especially in comparative social studies. In doing so, they made several references to, among others, Marilyn Strathern, the former William Wyse Chair of Social Anthropology at Cambridge, whose work is closely associated with a strong critique of the idea of nature. It was hard to judge which side won the day's debate. However, one comment made by a pronaturalist panelist did make a particular impression on me. By that time, the debate was quite heated and was focused on the concept of

ancestors and the related notion of spiritual existence after death. The panelist said that the idea of ancestral spirits is a widely observed social fact in many societies. That does not cancel out the fact, however, he said, that even in these societies, contrary ideas about death – that death means the end of spiritual existence as well as that of physical life – may coexist with the culturally pronounced, ideological ideas about the human soul's survival after the threshold of death. This remark provoked further opposition by the antinaturalist, propluralism group. Faced with this opposition, the panelist who had made the above remark went on arguing that everyone would surely agree that, if not the phenomenon of ancestral spirits, at least the idea of ghosts had no basis in human material reality.

I was interested to follow this turn of argument and later had an engaging conversation with the panelist who had introduced the idea of ghosts in the hope of finding some common ground between the naturalist and pluralist positions. This is partly because a categorical distinction between ancestors and ghosts has been an important part of my recent work on the history of mass death and mass human displacement in the context of the global Cold War. It is also because similar conceptual contrasts have long been a central element in the sociological theory of religion (which I discuss more later on). Moreover, in the growing academic literature about the idea of natural religion, ancestors and ghosts have once again emerged as a topical arena in the effort to elicit certain universal aspects of human religious beliefs.

Notable in this regard are Bloch's recent writings. His earlier work emphasizes what he believes to be the universal element in human collective ritual activities – the empowerment of the sacred and transcendental (often by violent means) over the secular and mundane (Bloch 1991). By contrast, his recent work tends to highlight the contrast between social ideologies of transcendental power manifested in such collective rites, and the counterideological, intuitive knowledge circulating within the everyday context (Bloch 2002). Astuti proposes a similar idea in her experimental empirical research focused on concepts of death among the Vezo, a local group in Madagascar. Focusing on children's intuitive knowledge, her research highlights the process by which this knowledge comes to confront ideologically pronounced ideas – often held and advocated by the Vezo elders – relating to the souls of the dead and ancestral spiritual power (Astuti 2007). Whereas these researches focus squarely on the concept of death and the idea of ancestral power, other similarly minded investigators extend their enquiry from the phenomenon of ancestral spirits to that of ghosts. In his acclaimed work on the cognitive basis of religious concepts, Pascal Boyer pays attention to belief in diffused spiritual entities in distinction to belief in the defined, socially central ancestral identities (2002: 84–90). Addressing a wide range of examples, from spirit beliefs in tribal Africa to typified images about apparitions in modern Western societies, Boyer argues that ideas about ghosts are in tune with intuitive rather than esoteric knowledge – for instance, the ghost in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* has an extraordinary appearance yet behaves in ways expected of ordinary human beings. He questions why ghosts and apparitions generate, across time and space, particularly strong fear and abhorrence; he also asks why, in many cultures, beloved kinsmen may turn into frightening, menacing spirit entities after death. His explanation is that the fear of ghosts originates from our deep fear of corpses.

These are all very interesting and stimulating arguments. Two issues seem to beg further thought, however. First, it is questionable whether beliefs and customs about ghosts are so distinct from those concerning ancestral spirits. The distinction between ghosts and ancestors can actually be much less clear than usually assumed. In his essay on Chinese popular religion (1974), Arthur Wolf speaks of an occurrence of apparition. One evening during Wolf's fieldwork stay in a Taiwanese village, a villager claimed that he had met an apparition, an object floating across the fields. Seeing that Wolf was skeptical of his experience, the villager told him that on the other side of the field where he had spotted the ghost, a family had been preparing their ancestral death-day ceremony at the time he had seen the apparition. He argued that the ghost he saw must have been the family's ancestor traveling to participate in the ceremony. Reflecting on this incident, Wolf writes, "Whether a particular spirit is viewed as a ghost or as an ancestor depends on the point of view of a particular person," and makes his widely cited statement, "One man's ancestor is another man's ghost" (1974: 146). Villagers in Taiwan move in and out of the house where they keep altars for family ancestors. The spirits of the dead, in villagers' understanding, also can be mobile in their own lifeworld. When people are gathered inside the house for the purpose of performing a tribute to their ancestors, the invited spirits of the dead are categorically ancestors. Beyond this domain, the social status of the spirit is uncertain and may be assigned to the opposite category of a ghost.

The second issue is that it is questionable whether fear of ghosts and the related negative moral identity of this spiritual category are easily generalizable. If the identities of ghosts and ancestors are in part a question of perspective – of where in the structure of a particular moral landscape the viewer is situated (e.g. within the house of worship or outside it) – it is reasonable to imagine that the same should apply to the moral identity of the spiritual entities. Furthermore, the shifting moral identity of ghosts can be part of the patterns of everyday lives, as was the case with Wolf's Taiwanese informant, or it may speak of specific historical conditions, such as the aftermath of the large-scale destruction of war. In the latter context, unnatural death and death without proper ritual atonement may be a generalized phenomenon rather than an isolated incident. When displacement from the ancestral home becomes a generalized and shared experience between the dead and the living, the living may configure a different moral relationship with ghosts than they might do in times of peace.

In this essay, I reflect on the ancestor/ghost categorical distinction in a broad historical perspective, partly with reference to my ethnographic work on Vietnamese ancestor worship and other commemorative practices. Since, as mentioned, this categorical distinction is not new in the history of ideas, I will start the discussion with a brief overview of how the distinction is conceptualized in the founding text of the modern sociological theory of religion.

DURKHEIM'S GHOSTS

Durkheim and his collaborators in the early French sociological school took great interest in explaining the origin of social solidarity in a modern and secular way by departing from the traditional, theological explanation. Whereas the school's

formative scholars were commonly interested in the origin of collective identity, the specific ways in which they pursued this interest varied considerably. This is particularly notable in how they approached the relationship between the soul and the body and, more broadly, between the spiritual and the corporeal in the constitution of human sociality.

For Durkheim, the unity of the body and the soul, or “a symbolic expression of the personality,” as he calls it (1995: 274), is pivotal to the construction of social solidarity, and he describes tribal rituals in indigenous Australia in this light: as events in which the consciousness of a common origin and fate is being generated through ritualized actions and bodily participation. In this ritual construction of collective identity described by Durkheim, however, the unity of body and consciousness closely communicates with the opposite condition: the separation of the soul from the body. The collective tribal rituals he discusses involve the tribe’s totemic or ancestral identities, through which living participants self-generate the sensation of collective existence. The ritual actions affirm the inseparable, solidary relations between the living and the dead in such a way that, in Durkheim’s words, “Each individual is the double of an ancestor” (1995: 280). The act of worshipping the sacred existence of the dead, according to this scheme, is that of rendering sacred the profane entity that the dead stand for in relation to the living: the ideas of shared destiny and collective unity. This symbolic construction of social unity requires the soul’s separation from the body, which results, according to Durkheim, in ‘the true spirits’ (1995: 277):

A ghost . . . is not a true spirit. First, its power is usually limited; second, it does not have definite functions. It is a vagabond being with no clear-cut responsibility, since the effect of death was to set it outside all the regular structures. In relation to the living, it is demoted, as it were. On the other hand, a spirit always has some sort of power, and indeed it is defined by that power. It has authority over some range of cosmic or social phenomena; it has a more or less precise function to perform in the world scheme.

For Durkheim, the categorical distinction between “the true spirit” and “the ghost” relates to the relative conceptual distance between the soul and the body. He writes: “A soul is not a spirit . . . it is the body’s prisoner. It escapes for good only at death, and even so we have seen with what difficulty that separation is made final” (1995: 276). In other words, the spirit is the result of a successful separation of the soul from the prison of the body, whereas a failure in this work of mortal separation results in a ghost. The former develops into a “positive cult,” through which the living can associate with the memory of the dead in socially constructive and regenerative ways, while the latter falls into a “negative cult,” accompanying a system of pollution taboos and abstinences.

This way of dividing death into two separate moral domains and focusing analytical attention on the positive spirit of the society – the transcendental spirits freed from the prison of the body – set a dominant trend in subsequent studies of religious symbols. These studies often refer not only to Durkheim’s theory of collective representation and social solidarity but also to Hertz’s work on the representation of death and moral hierarchy.

Robert Hertz, a student of Durkheim and a formidable independent thinker, opened a way for rethinking moral symbolic dualism. Most notable in this matter is his essay on the symbolism of death, published a few years before Hertz’s promising

young life was cut short on the Western Front in 1915. Whereas Durkheim was mainly concerned with how social solidarity was created and maintained, Hertz took upon himself “the task of studying the responses of society to breaches in that solidarity” (Hertz 1994: 18). One of Hertz’s central concerns was semantic opposition between two apparently identical objects, such as the right hand and the left hand. He questioned why the right side represented, in the French language and beyond, positive values of strength, dexterity, faith, law, and purity, whereas the left stood for all the opposite values and meanings, including “bad death” and its cultural impact on human souls. The spirits of the dead whose souls failed to part with the prison of the body are closely associated with the left hand in the ethnographic material Hertz drew upon. Hertz believed that for these unfortunate spirits, “death will be eternal, because society will always maintain towards these accursed individuals the attitude of exclusion” (1960: 86). In the spirit of the time, however, Hertz was optimistic about the evolution of moral symbols:

The distinction of good and evil, which for long was solidary with the antithesis of right and left, will not vanish from our conscience. The constraint of a mystical ideal has for centuries been able to make man into a unilateral being . . . [However,] a liberated and foresighted society will strive to develop the energies dormant in our left side and in our right cerebral hemisphere, and to assure by an appropriate training a more harmonious development of the organism. (1973: 8)

Hence the ambidextrous human body, which is free from the preeminence of the right hand, represents a democratic social body that is freed from the moral symbolic hierarchy of right and left. Hertz viewed the antithesis of left and right as both a complementary bipolarity and an asymmetrical relationship, the former being the natural condition of what Durkheim called *homo duplex* and the latter resulting from the imposition of collective, hierarchical norms on the individual body. Furthermore, he argued that the symbolic bipolarity was a reversible dualism in archaic or egalitarian societies (e.g. after a hunter succeeds in a predatory act, he is vulnerable to an attack by the spirit of the slain animal manifested in the form of illness or misfortune), meaning that these societies did not postulate a fixed moral hierarchy in the life of the dead because they lacked such a conception in their organizations. This symbolic reversibility explains why death rituals (or the lack thereof) in egalitarian societies appear to be shockingly incongruous with the theory of moral hierarchy based on the observation of hierarchical societies (see Woodburn 1983).

The above shows that a considerable difference exists between Durkheim and Hertz regarding their views of moral solidarity. For Durkheim, the distinction between “the true spirits” and “the ghosts” is a social-structural question relating to the spirits’ variable positions in collective representation, whereas for Hertz it is a political question tied to a hierarchy of moral values; in other words, the distinction speaks of the nature of society for Durkheim, and for Hertz, of an ideology of moral and political hierarchy. When Hertz speaks of his vision of ambidexterity in the evolution of moral symbols, therefore, what he has in mind is a recovery of the freedom of human thought from the rigidity of a moral symbolic hierarchy.

However, Hertz’s idea of symbolic ambidexterity remains abstract and metaphorical. Had he survived the carnage of World War I, which brought about a sea change in how people viewed death and mass death, and had he had the chance to write

more about the moral symbolism of death, perhaps Hertz would have tried to develop and substantiate the idea. I do not know; what I do know is that what he tried to convey in the aforementioned work has much to suggest for understanding the progression of modern political history in the past century, in particular, the history of mass violence and mass death. In the next section, I will briefly discuss Hertz's political theory of the soul and related idea of symbolic ambidexterity in the context of the Vietnam War (1961–1975) and how today communities in Vietnam strive to do justice to the legacies of tragic death from this war. The ethnographic details that follow are drawn from my published accounts of the commemoration of war in contemporary Vietnam (Kwon 2006, 2008).

NON-ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

After the war was over in 1975 and the country reunited, Vietnamese society was strongly mobilized to focus its attention on the forward-looking revolutionary vision for a prosperous political community and to cultivate a collective optimism based on revolutionary sentiment and love of labor. Crucial to this process was the empowerment of a heroic memory of war and related civic morality of commemoration. This process materialized in the form of numerous cemeteries of revolutionary war martyrs and memorials dedicated to their memory, erected in the immediate postwar years at the center of communities' public spaces throughout central and southern Vietnam. At the same time, the apparatus of the unified Vietnamese state put great emphasis on centralizing and controlling commemorative practices. It empowered the commemoration of heroic revolutionary death as a principal civic duty and at the same time discouraged the traditional culture of ancestor worship and other diffuse spirit beliefs.

The state-instituted centrality of the heroic memory of war in postconflict Vietnamese society also changed domestic space. Political campaigns focused on substituting the commemoration of heroic war dead for the traditional cult of ancestors, first in the north after independence in 1945 and then in the southern and central regions after unification of the country in 1975. Memorabilia of war martyrs and revolutionary leaders replaced ancestral tablets in domestic space; communal ancestral temples and other religious sites were closed and gave way to the people's assembly hall. In the latter, ordinary citizens and their administrative leaders discussed community affairs and production quotas, surrounded by the vestiges of the American War in a way structurally similar to how peasants and village notables earlier talked about rents and the ritual calendar in the village's communal house, surrounded by the relics of the village's founding ancestors.

Recent accounts from prominent Vietnamese writers show how this construction of heroic national memory contributed to excluding and stigmatizing the expressions of pain and wounds during the postwar era, not only in the public realm, but also in the intimate spheres of communal life. Stories told by such celebrated writers as Bao Ninh, Duong Thu Huong and Le Minh Hue commonly take issue, within diverse backgrounds of postwar life, with the inability to express publicly the grief about the destructive past and the losses it incurred – an effort to obtain the right to be sad, as one acute observer notes (Templer 1998: 3). They all make a break

with the conventional, official narrative of war based on the paradigm of the heroic revolutionary struggle of a unified nation against intervention by a foreign power. The protagonist in Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, a survivor of a battle that killed all of his close comrades, finds it impossible to readjust to life after the war. He finds it hard "to remember a time when his whole personality and character had been intact, a time before the cruelty and the destruction of war had warped his soul" (Bao 1993: 26). He is haunted by memories of the dead and the deaths he was responsible for, and his only means to confront these memories is to write about the lost and the killed, known or unknown. Bao Ninh's novel was published in Hanoi in 1991 and banned immediately after release, although the censorship made his work even more popular in Vietnam and beyond. The works by the two other writers mentioned above all appeared in the early 1990s and experienced a similar fate to *The Sorrow of War*. Their appearance represented the momentous change that engulfed Vietnamese society at the time.

In the early 1990s, while rumors of these works were circulating in towns, Vietnamese rural communities also began to forcefully assert their freedom to express and attend to their war-induced pain and wounds, although in different ways and using different means of expression. Their assertions involved, most prominently, the revival of traditional commemorative rituals and a related change in the commemoration of deaths from conventional postwar practice, which focused exclusively on the category of heroic sacrifice, to a practice that included the diverse casualties of war. In the material culture of commemoration, the change was manifested in the form of building new domestic ancestral shrines, family ancestral temples and graves, and community ancestral halls, all of which mushroomed across Vietnam throughout the 1990s. In many areas, particularly in the central region, this development, referred to as "commemorative fever" by some observers (Tai 2001: 1), included an equivalent process on the categorically opposite side of ancestor worship in Vietnamese religious tradition, which is the milieu of the spirits of the dead unrelated to the commemorator by kinship ties. As a result of this development, the structure of contemporary Vietnamese domestic commemorative ritual in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces – where I studied the local history of the war in the second half of the 1990s – situates the ritual actor between two separate modes of afterlife and milieus of memory. On one side lies the household ancestral shrine, or its equivalent in the community ancestral temple, which keeps the relics of family ancestors and household deities. The other side is oriented toward what Michael Taussig calls "the open space of death," which is the imagined lifeworld of the tragic, non-ancestral, unsettled, and unrelated spirits of the dead (Taussig 1987: 7). The ritual tradition in central Vietnam represents this open space of death in the form of a small external shrine, popularly called *khom* in Quang Ngai and Quang Nam provinces, which is usually placed at the boundary between the domestic garden and the street. Within this dual spatial organization, typical ritual action engages with both the interior and exterior milieus of memory through a simple movement of the body. The most habitual act of commemoration consists of kowtowing and offering incense to the house-side ancestors and turning the body to the opposite side to repeat the action toward the street-wandering ghosts. This two-directional act may be accompanied by a single beat of the gong followed by three or four beats of the drum.

The communal development described above arose in central Vietnam against the enduring wounds of war felt in communal life, as well as against the background of the postwar politics of memory, which focused on the heritage of heroic war death. Persistent wounds are forcefully expressed in stories of apparitions of grievous ghosts of war that are popular in rural Vietnam. In the part of Quang Ngai province that the international community came to know as My Lai after the tragic mass killing of civilians in March 1968, residents told me many stories of the spirits of the dead in pain. Some of them vividly recalled the lamentations of ghosts in the villages and cries that they had heard coming from the killing sites. Residents in one settlement claimed that they had seen old women ghosts licking the arms and legs of small child ghosts; they interpreted this as an effort by the elderly victims to ease the wounded children's pain. People in another settlement graphically described young women ghosts, each walking with a small child in her arms and lamenting the child's lifeless body. The mother ghosts were grieving, the villagers explained, for their dead children. One family living along a dirt road that leads to the sea claimed that they had seen a group of child ghosts trailing faithfully behind a group of young mother ghosts. According to them, this happened a night or two before the massacre's anniversary. On this occasion, they could hear the ghosts conversing jovially among themselves.

According to the old village undertaker I often spoke with, the village's "invisible neighbors," as he often referred to these ghosts, could lament their own physical pain or feel it when their loved ones suffered pain; they might have grievous feelings about their own tragic, unjust death or cry over their children's deaths as if they, themselves, were still alive. Their moods and sentiments, and even their forms, fluctuated with the circumstances. The child ghosts appeared dead in their grieving mother's arms on a moonless night during a rainy season; these same children could be seen playfully running after their mothers on a pleasant evening before the anniversary day. It appeared to me that My Lai's ghosts led lives with their own ups and downs and that the fluctuations in their lives were intertwined with the rhythms of life among their neighbors.

The My Lai villagers regularly held modest rituals at home and outside their homes on behalf of their "invisible neighbors" – offering incense, food and sometimes votive money to the *khom*, at the sites of apparitions or elsewhere – and they explained the condition of these invisible neighbors' lives using the concept of "grievous death" or "unjust death" (*chet oan*). This concept entails that the agony of a violent, unjust death and the memory of its terror entrap the soul in negative conditions of afterlife. The human soul in this condition of post-mortem incarceration does not remember the terror as we, the living, normally would; rather they are believed to relive the violent event, perpetually reexperiencing the agony of violent death. The memory of death for the tragically dead, in other words, is a living memory in its most brutal sense.

The idea that the dead can feel physical pain goes back a long way in Vietnamese mortuary and religious tradition, and it relates to the notion that the human soul is a duplex entity. It has the spiritual part, *hon*, which corresponds to *spiritus* as opposed to *anima* in the European philosophical tradition, and the bodily, material part, *via*. The material soul senses and feels, whereas the spiritual soul thinks and imagines. In a "good death" (which Vietnamese call *chet nha*, meaning "death at

home,” as opposed to *chet duong*, “death in the street”) in peaceful circumstances, surrounded by loved ones, after enjoying longevity, the material soul eventually perishes together with the decomposing body. Only the spiritual soul survives a good death (although in the case of the body of the deceased being buried in a place inappropriate for entombment, the material soul is reawakened and may feel the discomfort and pain of improper burial). It is believed that the ritually appropriated pure spirit travels across the imaginary threshold between the world of the living (*duong*) and the world of the dead (*am*) to eventually join the pure domain of ancestor worship. On the other hand, the soul of one who experiences a “bad death” (violent death away from home, *chet duong*) remains largely intact and keeps its predeath dual formation because of the absence of ritual separation. The material soul is believed to linger near the place of death and the place where its decomposing body is buried. It feels the discomfort of improper burial and awakens the spiritual soul to the embodied memory of the violent death. The material soul’s bodily pain and the spiritual soul’s painful memory communicate with one another, and this communication between the two kinds of souls can generate the perilous condition, mentioned above, which the Vietnamese call *chet oan*, or “grievous death.” The mass deaths such as those suffered at My Lai, although they took place “at home” and therefore may not be “deaths in the street” strictly speaking, nevertheless constitute *chet duong* and *chet oan*. In this case, the intensity of violence changed the idea of home and resulted in mass graves where people unrelated by kinship were entwined together.

Being captivated by memory of the violent death event, the soul experiencing “grievous death” is unable to depart to the other world until the situation is corrected by the intervention of an external power. This perpetual reexperiencing is conveyed by the idea of “incarceration” (*nguc*) within the mortal drama. In one village in Quang Nam province, the village’s specialist in death and Daoist rituals used the example of a road accident when he kindly tried to explain the meaning of “grievous death.” He said that all accidental deaths on the road are tragic, but only some of them result in the grievous death of *chet oan*. If a man is driving his scooter at a speed that is not permissible, he is doing it with the knowledge that his action could lead to a fatal accident. If he crashes into a tree and dies on the way to the hospital, his death is not necessarily a grievous one, according to this Daoist master. The man did not intend to die, but he helped create the circumstances in which his death was possible. Hence, the death that is circumstantially expected circumvents the cultural category of unjust and grievous death. The road accident of a prudent schoolgirl on her bicycle is, however, clearly a grievous death. She is not responsible, the master explained, for the tiredness of the overworked truck driver who crashed into her bicycle from behind. She neither created the circumstances of the road accident, nor expected any such tragedy on her usual way back from school. Accidental death in these circumstances was not part of the person’s self-awareness, and it therefore induces grievous feelings in the spirit of the dead.

The same logic applies to the condition of war. Whereas the soldiers fought with a certain awareness of the risks inherent in their activities, villagers supported their fighting without, in principle, having to risk their lives in doing so. Deaths of armed soldiers were anticipated, whereas unarmed villagers were expected only to till the soil, bring up the children, raise the pigs, and protect their families and village. For

these two groups, war death takes on different meanings, and the civilian death becomes more complicated to deal with ritually than the soldier's death because of the former's circumstance of unjustified, grievance-causing death. A large-scale civilian killing in a confined place, such as happened in My Lai in 1968, is clearly a tragic, unjust event, but its injustice has additional meanings related to specific cultural understanding of the ethics of war and the morality of memory. These understandings resonate with the legal concept of noncombatant immunity in the theory of justified war, but the "injustice" of death in the Vietnamese conception relates further to the morality and ethics of commemoration.

The My Lai villagers mentioned names of certain old villagers as the most grievous victims of the 1968 massacre, and these names belonged to families whose genealogy was decimated by the violence. Decimated family genealogies provoked the strongest sense of injustice and moral indignation in other communities affected by civilian massacres. A grievous death in this context not only destroys an innocent life but is also a crisis in the social foundation of commemoration, and the idea of justice points to the right to be commemorated and accounted for. According to this culturally specific conception of human rights, the right of the dead to be liberated from the violent history of death is inalienable, and the protection of this right depends on the secular institutions of commemoration.

The concept of "grievous death" signifies a state of imprisonment within the terrifying memory of experiencing a violent, unjust event, but it also has a progressive connotation that points to concrete measures against captivity. In the Vietnamese conception, liberation from the incarceration of grievous memory is referred to as "disentangling the grievance" (*giai oan*) or "breaking the prison" (*giai ngục*). This work against grievance involves the appropriate intervention of sympathetic others; family-based or village-based death commemorations and the provision of ritual offerings to the "invisible neighbors" are two prominent forms of this moral intervention. The commitment to this work of memory, and its demonstration in communal ritual activities, was, as mentioned earlier, one of the most prominent changes in Vietnamese villages in the 1990s.

The work of memory is also a collaborative project. It ought to involve not only acts of outside intervention in the form of death commemorations, but also the fateful inmate's strong will to be freed from history. Apparitions such as those of the mother and child ghosts mentioned earlier are commonly understood as a sign of the growth of self-consciousness and self-determination on the part of the sufferers of grievous historical memory. That the souls of the dead can suffer from the enduring effects of a traumatic historical experience is an established, legitimate idea in Vietnamese moral and cultural tradition. In addition, this idea is firmly present in the eruption of "commemorative fever" and related ritual revival. The idea is bound up with everyday Vietnamese ritual commemorative practices, which paint the world as a place that the living must share with the dead. In this milieu of interaction with the past, the apparitions in My Lai are more than history's ruins or uncanny traces. Rather, these ghosts are vital historical witnesses, testifying to the war's unjust destruction of human life with broken lives but unbreakable spirits. The sufferings endured by My Lai's ghosts are not the same as those we gloss as traumatic memory. However, we can imagine that their collective existence is a reflection of the historical trauma the community as a whole has suffered.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary Vietnamese culture of commemoration helps us to rethink the theoretical heritage of the early French sociological school and, in particular, to reconsider the category of ancestors and ancestral spirits in light of the progression of modern political history. The Vietnam War was one of the most formative events, and a violent manifestation, of the global Cold War. In places that experienced this twentieth-century conflict in ways that contradict the meaning of “cold” war, such as facing a tumultuous civil war that divided the community in radical and violent ways and caused many deaths, the category of ancestors is not a homogeneous, unitary entity, as Durkheim understood it. Rather, it constitutes a broken and profoundly wounded category. In this historical milieu, communities struggled with the contradictions between traditional moral norms and modern political reality (e.g. between the norm of home burial and the reality of modern total war that causes radical displacement of human lives). They were also driven to select politically “good” deaths from the mass of other war deaths and to extract an ideologically cohesive genealogy out of the enmeshed history of violence across the ideological spectrum (e.g. the difficulties faced by Vietnamese families and local communities in dealing with the remains and memories of those who fought against the revolutionary war). If the left and right are both historically and genealogically constitutive of the social self, how can this identity be reconciled with citizenship in a state society that is based on the renunciation of one’s relatedness to the “wrong” side as defined by the political community?

To help confront this crucial question of modern history and social development, Hertz’s insight into the dynamics of moral hierarchy regarding the symbolism of death has much to offer. In Hertz’s work, Durkheim’s “true spirits” appear to be a contested truth, inseparable from the political forms and ideological orientations of the truth bearer: It is an ideological question rather than an aspect of the nature of society. When Hertz writes about spirits in death rituals, these are not the same spirits as those referred to by Durkheim as the true spirits of society. Hertz, unlike Durkheim, saw the accursed spiritual entities (that is, the spirits that are, for Durkheim, outside society and therefore outside the sphere of sociological analysis) as meaningful spirits worthy of the name.

The ancestor/ghost contrast has a long history in the anthropology of religion and has been, in fact, one of the formative elements in the advancement of conceptual schemes in this research sphere. I argue that this advancement was particularly prominent, in its early stage, in the transition from the social to a political theory of the soul. I also argue that much of this early theoretical development continues to have great relevance to understanding the progression of modern history and how individuals and communities cope with the ruins of such history today. In this regard, I am afraid that I must disagree with the remark made by the panelist introduced at the outset of this essay. There is nothing more unusual or more extraordinary about ghosts than there is about ancestors. Nor can we easily appropriate the phenomenon of ghosts as the case for an ultimate limit of cultural pluralism. As Boyer notes (2002: 84–90), there is plenty of the work of intuitive knowledge in the social imagination about specters and apparitions. I would like to add, however, that the vitality of these

particular beings sheds light on understanding society and history, not merely on explaining some fundamentals of human religiosity. The latter is Boyer's interest, and I can say with confidence that this interest is not the same as what makes stories about ghosts and apparitions popular in Vietnam. Their popularity is, instead, because of the extraordinary capacity these spiritual beings possess to help the living to cope with, narrate and hopefully come to terms with their arduous historical experience. In this sense, there still is much merit to pondering the ancestor/ghost contrast as a sociological and political question; that is, precisely in the way that our intellectual ancestors once did at the outset of the twentieth century. And we must remember that these ancestors of our discipline worked on this question while being confronted with the clouds of political crisis gathering force on the horizon of modern Europe, shortly to become the storm that would kill, along with many millions, one of the most brilliant theorists of the political origin of religious concepts.

NOTE

This essay originates from a talk given at the conference on the Anthropology of Religion held in Berlin European Academy in April 2012. Part of the essay was presented also at the conference in the Collège de France in June 2012 held in memory of Durkheim's *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (published originally in 1912). It draws upon research on comparative Cold War cultural history supported by the British Academy and the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2010-DZZ-3104). I thank these institutions for their generous support. I also thank Michael Lambek, Janice Boddy, Seong-nae Kim, Maurice Bloch, Bruce Kapferer, Wendy James, Frédéric Keck, Perig Pitrou, Bruno Karsenti, Philippe Descola, Wiktor Stoczkowski, Bruno Latour, and Marcel Fournier for their kind interest and comments.

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CHAPTER

11

Ghosts and Ancestors in the Modern West

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The processes by which the living relate to the dead were classically described by Robert Hertz, who suggested in 1907 that the deceased remain members of the social collectivity after death (Hertz 1960). This continued membership depends, for Hertz, on the performance of funerary rituals which first symbolically acknowledge the trauma and decay of death, but then assert the continued presence of the departed in a new and transformed status, as “ancestors” of the living. “Secondary burials,” in which permanent monuments are often constructed for the dead, especially mark this ancestral status. Ethnographies like that of Heonik Kwon (2006) show how the classic Hertzian formulation of the processes by which the living relate to the dead can still be relevant in the analysis of contemporary cultures in the traumatic aftermath of twentieth-century global war. In present-day Vietnam, those who died in the conflict but have not been settled into their place by their descendants,¹ or for whom the rituals through which this transition is achieved have been interrupted by forces beyond the control of local actors, remain in the landscape as ghosts. If “placing” of the dead (Bloch 1994) is properly carried out by burial rites, but also through the identification by the living of the circumstances under which the deceased were killed, then the dead can eventually be incorporated as ancestors, able to receive acknowledgment from and confer blessing on living descendants in relationships of reciprocity. Similar situations have been described for victims of the Korean War and their descendants (Kim, this volume) and of Soeharto’s repression of the 1960s revolution in Indonesia (Steedly 1993; Dwyer 2009).²

Sociological and anthropological theories of modernity have long presumed that kinship in the contemporary world is superseded by disembedded forms of relatedness conditioned by state politics and the capitalist economy, an assumption challenged by closer examination of comparative ethnography (McKinnon 2013; McKinnon and Cannell 2013). Secularization theories, meanwhile, often generalize the Protestant-capitalist model to suggest (against Weber's grain) that secular outlooks generally develop from salvation-focused and global religions (Cannell 2010). This claim is supplemented by assumptions that "primitive" forms of religion based around ancestral or other local cults are generally succeeded by salvationist religions (Cannell 2011). An influential formulation of the latter claim by Gluckman, which decisively contrasted attention to the dead in "ancestral cults" and salvation religions, especially Christianity, is discussed below.

The upshot of these converging teleologies has been to regard "ancestors" as paradigmatically nonmodern, since they are taken to stand for both premodern kinship and premodern religion. Further, attention to ancestors has been offered as an example of the holistic integration of life in traditional societies, in contrast to the heavily differentiated institutions and forms of living in modernity. "Kinship" and "religion," in other words (also "politics" and "economics"), may be the same thing in traditional societies, but not in modern ones. From this point of view, "ancestors" can never be modern.

Evidence of the persistent importance of ancestors recorded by Kwon, Steedly, Kim, and others already represents a significant modification of this established view. In all these cases, ancestral observances have been integrated into non-Christian global religions, including Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. However, proponents of the modernization view might argue that the salience of ancestors is less surprising in contexts where many people continue to live in villages and pursue agricultural and other more apparently traditional ways of life.

Above all, relationships with "ancestors" are not supposed to characterize contemporary, Western settings, particularly not the Christian, European Jewish, eclectically "spiritual," or explicitly secular urban settings common in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, New Zealand, and continental Europe. Building on earlier work (Cannell 2011) I shall argue that anthropologists might do well to rethink these assumptions given the tremendous explosion of interest in popular genealogy and family history in precisely these parts of the world. Elsewhere I have argued that the grip of modernization paradigms is so strong that the expansion of Western ancestor-making has been largely described in self-fulfilling terms, as both "not about kinship" and "not about religion." Instead, it has been interpreted within paradigms that better fit sociological assumptions about what modernity is like in the West, in particular through tropes about the insecurity of an atomized modern "self" and its supposed need for social and psychological reassurance. However, these paradigms tend toward circular forms of explanation (Cannell 2011).

Rather than concede that there is a continued interest in ancestors in the modern West, social historians, sociologists, and others have tended to focus on a contrastive figure of the ghost. Ghosts fit default modernization paradigms better than ancestors because they can be understood as reflecting anxieties of and about the modern "self." They may be viewed both as a comment on the development of psychological and psychoanalytic modes of narrating human experience over the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries, and as an effect of modernity as experientially destabilizing, particularly because of the secular and scientific challenges to traditional religion over that period (McCorristine 2010). In other contexts, ghosts as a category come to stand for the central experience of loss which is understood to characterize the contemporary West, whether viewed in terms of the effects of the two world wars, or social and cultural deracination brought about by the industrial revolution and upheavals of the postindustrial economy.

It would of course be completely unhelpful to deny the historical differences between (say) the United Kingdom and Vietnam, or the United States and Indonesia, from the nineteenth century to the present day. Ghosts do have a distinctive history and set of associations in the West, particularly, it would appear, in Protestant and post-Protestant settings (Walsham 2008). I argue, however, that modernization assumptions have often short-circuited interpretations of what is actually at stake in the relationship of modern Western people to their related dead, leading to an over-drawn contrast between “modern” societies with ghosts, and “traditional” societies with ancestors. I am in sympathy with authors who question the idea and actuality of the “atomized” modern Western self (Day 2012), who are skeptical about the “obviousness” of secular mindsets in dealings between the dead and the living in the West (Bennett, 1999; Layne 2003, 2006), who suggest the “immodern” properties of kinship (Lambek 2013), and who complicate claims that Western scientific perspectives are readily separable from religious ones (Feeley-Harnik 2001).

This essay begins with an ethnographic sketch from my research with English family historians. I then discuss some anthropological literature on the category of ancestors, including Fustel de Coulanges’s *The Ancient City* of 1864 (Fustel de Coulanges 2006) and Meyer Fortes’s essay on *pietas* (1961). Finally, I offer some reflections on the relationship of “religion” and “kinship” in contemporary Western genealogical practices, and preliminary reflections on the wider meanings of popular genealogy.

GENEALOGICAL ANCESTORS, TELEPATHIC GHOSTS?

I met Alys³ in 2004, and she along with several other members of the Cambridge family history societies kindly agreed to an interview with me about her hobby. I knew that Alys had played an active administrative role in family history groups, as well as having promoted family and local history in schools and on local radio, and that she had owned and worked in her own taxi business for some years. Like a number of other keen family historians I met, Alys had not had a standard school-to-university education, but had pursued further study, including adult education classes, at different times in her life, and had also learnt to read secretary hand and other historic forms of handwriting in order to be able to work with archives.⁴ In the university town of Cambridge, she saw herself as a skilled autodidact in contrast with professional academics whose openness toward and respect for amateurs was, she observed, variable.

Although family historians like to point out that there are different kinds of interest that people may take in the past, and different ways to approach their hobby, certain kinds of story did feature prominently when I asked people to tell me what mattered to them about family history. Paradigmatic episodes tended to address what I have

called breaches or wounds in kinship (Cannell 2011), in which anomalies in the family record corresponded to social and class inequities in the past. Alys, for instance, vividly recalled as a young child being taken with her sister on a car trip from London to a Cambridgeshire village by her father on a mysterious family errand. The village might as well have been outer space, she commented, so unfamiliar was the country environment to a child who had grown up in the East End of London. She met an elderly great-aunt – her grandfather’s sister – for the first time, and also the great-aunt’s adult son, who had Down’s Syndrome, although as a child she hadn’t understood the condition. Told to keep the visit a secret from her grandparents, Alys only later learnt what was behind this visit. Her great-aunt had, like so many young people at the time, been in service up at the local great hall. In a story of class exploitation repeated all over the country, she became pregnant by the local squire, a man with an unpleasant reputation, who had been in trouble with the courts over cruelty to animals. Unusually, the squire was induced to give the pregnant girl a tiny tied cottage on the estate, where she brought up her child, who was born with Down’s Syndrome. Her son’s fate was probably much better than if he had been confined to an institution, as was common at that time. The rest of her family, however, was never the same after these events. Alys’s grandfather was angry and humiliated by the impossibility of calling the seducer to justice. He and another sister went to work in London to distance themselves from the local repercussions “because of the shame,” but when news of the child’s disability reached them in London, the other sister took it as a further mark of shame and hanged herself, fearing she would never find a respectable husband. Alys’s grandfather blamed this death on his sister back in the village and her child, and they died unreconciled. When, years later, Alys’s father heard that his Cambridgeshire aunt was ill and might die,

he couldn’t bear, he wanted the family link to remain, so he . . . took it upon himself to visit her. But it was quite a burden for us never to say. We didn’t realize it was because the child was illegitimate. But it was more because my grandfather, he took to the grave this hatred of her, because he blamed her for the suicide.

This story might sound like the plot of a melodrama, but it was brute reality for many ordinary families, a reality frequently encountered and revisited by people conducting family history research. One strand that runs through a diversity of practices and attitudes, I have argued (Cannell 2011), is an effort by living family historians to do what they can to right these past wrongs. This activity has a number of aspects. As Alys’s story illustrates, the effects of shame could be devastating for modest families who valued respectability. In an attempt to protect everybody concerned, many families would try to disguise the illegitimacy by, for example, bringing up the baby as the youngest child of its grandparents and casting the baby’s mother as its older sister. These subterfuges, however, would often exact a price in terms of tensions and confusions in relationships in later life. For most family historians to whom I spoke, it went without saying that “re-placing” the “mis-placed” person in the family record was an act of care and respect, worth making even if the illegitimate person was now deceased. In many cases, putting the record straight in this way was connected to other acts of restitution and moves toward healing family breaches, such as reconnecting descendant living kin who had previously not known of each other, or not known how to contact each other.

Contrary to the claim sometimes made that hobbyist genealogy is a “solipsistic” pursuit or one ultimately driven by a lack of genuine connections between the modern self and social others (Segalen and Michalat 2002; Basu 2007), living kinship sociality thus can and frequently does result from the work of tracing family history (Cannell 2011). At the personal level, this aspect of family history clearly has a strong element of “filiality” or moral attention to the related dead which is felt to be healing. As I have argued elsewhere (Cannell 2011), many family historians tell their stories in a way which emphasizes an underlying sense of restored reciprocity between dead and living family members; the living care for the departed, and it follows that the family tree becomes a source of present connection for the living. This sense of personal restitution runs together with a powerful and widespread sense of the class dimensions of the past; without laying claim to any explicitly political agenda, English family historians clearly identify the kinds of “shame” which damaged the lives of their antecedents with a form of social injustice that is now recognized for what it is, and whose grip on the present it is within their power to limit, if not erase.

Alys’s story strongly shared these elements with many others that I heard, but she also said that in some ways she regarded herself as not necessarily typical. One unusual element of her work in family history was that she crossed over between ordinary local family history groups, most common in England, and exclusive “one-name” groups, which are oriented toward the production and reproduction of claims to an elite identity. While family history societies meet regularly in church halls and social centers, and hold talks on aspects of local history to which all are welcome, “one-name” societies meet in private venues such as Oxbridge colleges, are focused on the pursuit of a surname as lineage or pedigree, and are usually less interested in general local and social history, but strongly interested in possible connections with other elite pedigrees up to and including royalty. Generally, those without a claim on the pedigree are not invited to such meetings, but Alys had been asked to assist as an administrative officer.

A second way in which Alys considered herself unusual was in the relationship to knowledge about the past she experienced when carrying out her research. Genealogists almost universally record experiences of “serendipity,” in which help in locating a long-sought piece of information seems to come from someone or somewhere else, an experience which can be glossed in a variety of ways, from elusive references to the mystery of happy accident (common in England), to explicit claims about help from the deceased or from angels or other agents (common in the United States and among some faith groups). Alys described a number of experiences in which physical contact with evidence from the past (for instance, a Tudor parish record she was transcribing) had given her access to knowledge which was not explicable in any ordinary way. She stressed that the knowledge she gained was by no means only about her own past family; indeed, her interest was in the social history of ordinary working people in general. In the case of the Tudor parish register, she had “known,” just by touching his handwriting on the page, that the priest who wrote the record had been a recusant Catholic. The priest came from the same locality as her family, but was not a relative.

When I asked her how she thought this knowledge came to her, Alys provided several, partially overlapping explanations in a speculative, open-ended form, rather

than as a tidy theory. She wasn't really sure of what was happening, she said, but felt receptive to forms of communicative energy or vibrations that were on a physical wavelength – on an analogy with electricity, say – but one which was not yet understood or “received” by most people. Perhaps science would move on to discover what this was. But she also returned several times to the idea that particular persons from the past were assisting her; “not – I wouldn't want to call them spirit guides,” she said, and yet “spirit-guides” seemed to be the term that kept coming to mind. Again, these almost-spirit-guides were not, in Alys's mind, restricted to close kin; there were, she said, many good people she had known and loved in her life, and some of those people were now dead; perhaps they were helping her. If so, the list of those she mentioned certainly might include a much-loved family member who had been tragically lost very young, also friends now passed away, and even some strangers met rather fleetingly, but with a sense of intense connection, during her working years. In a taxi, she commented, people would often confide all sorts of things to the driver on the way to the airport, and a sort of impersonal intimacy would be generated. Almost as if it were a modern-day confessional box, I suggested, and Alys agreed, although the Catholic imagery was not her own. On a few occasions, after such conversations, Alys had been shocked to learn from local newspapers that the person she had been talking to had unexpectedly passed away soon afterwards.

Alys's account of doing genealogy is complex and occupies a deliberately ambiguous terrain of meaning. More elements feed into it than I can describe fully here, including, for instance, a conscious interest in Hindu ideas about reincarnation originally sparked by childhood conversations with her father, who had served abroad in India. Although this might sound like a mere quirk of Alys's biography, one might recall that the long history of exchange of ideas about religion between India and Anglophone nations necessarily consisted in thousands of such idiosyncratic contacts, as well as in the formal influence of named movements such as Theosophy (compare Bender 2010). The idea of communication with the dead as a form of physical, rationally demonstrable process also seems to echo the assumptions of a Cambridge-based movement of the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Society for Psychical Research or SPR, which sought to establish the scientific basis of telepathy between living people, and of telepathic communication with the dead as an extension of this form of communication. The SPR, which was led by academics and proceeded by gathering large-scale survey evidence, sought to distance itself from popular spiritualism of the time, whose reputation for “superstition” was felt to threaten the seriousness of the endeavor (McCorrestine 2010: 139). Whether Alys's perspective has any unrecognized historical link to the SPR, or whether her ideas derive from other sources, the point I wish to make is that informal, popular forms of knowledge circulation, including autodidactic methods and oral transmission, seem to be central to the ethos of family history, and offer an interesting parallel with the exploration of class positions which they also entail. It makes sense to think of Alys as one of a large number of people who are “transmitting” certain versions of history itself (cf. Lambek 1998). This history, *pace* Schneider (1968), opposes the “one-name” approach to history in which elite antecedents are resources to be remembered while others are forgotten; instead, it offers an inversion of this view, in which all of the ordinary English people of the past are accorded the status of ancestors, with

something to gift to those who come after them. The means of remembering and knowing them are also exercised by ordinary people, not just by a class or a closed academic elite.

Another important aspect of Alys's account of family history, however, is precisely that it is impossible to derive tidy categories from it. Ghosts, although not so named (cf. Bennett 1999), seem as much present as ancestors, and not clearly distinguished from them. Alys's knowledge practices much resemble spirit-mediumship in some ways, but are only conceptualized by disclaimer. The dead – both related and unrelated – are by turns the subject, the means, and the recipients of Alys's communicative transmissions. At other moments, Alys seems to see herself in the perspective of a future ancestor; she says, for instance, that she is writing a journal for her descendants, but somehow cannot address her granddaughter, who is already known and real to her. Rather, to be able to write she must imagine great-granddaughters yet to come, descendants in the abstract.⁵

Paul Basu has remarked, in the somewhat different context of American roots-tourism in Scotland, that popular genealogical searches sometimes seem almost like a mystery religion; however, Basu immediately withdraws the observation, qualifying it with the statement that in the end, genealogy is about the attempt to stabilize the unstable modern “self” (2004: 171). My suggestion here is to the contrary: modern genealogical practice is, in fact, a space both for exploring nonreducible mystery and for articulating and exploring what the dead and the living owe each other in the contemporary world. The question therefore becomes, by what route did anthropology arrive at the more reductive view of modern ancestors as a noncategory? The next section explores this puzzle.

ANCESTRAL PIETIES

Several distinguished analysts have drawn attention to the implied or overt continuities with social evolutionism in associating respect for “ancestors” with “simple” societies. In *The Invention of Primitive Society* (1988), Kuper rereads both British structural-functionalism and French structuralism in terms of these limitations. Kuper gives an account of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, two classic ethnographers of African forms of “descent,” whose identification of lineage-based systems like those of the Tallensi or Nuer as “stateless societies” tacitly reproduced, in Kuper's view, Henry Maine's notion of the evolution of societies from kinship to territory, and Lewis Henry Morgan's distinction between *societas* and *civitas*. While agreeing with this general point, McKinnon (2013) offers a closer analysis of the reasoning used by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, compared to arguments of other theorists following the same general trend, which emphasizes the former's understanding of the progressive multiplication of “domains” of life within a given society.⁶ I have argued, further, that there is a parallel between the assumption in standard secularization theory that religion lacks private and/or public salience in modernity, and similar, though often tacit, assumptions about kinship (Cannell 2013; McKinnon and Cannell 2013). Thus, as well as reexamining the relationship between kinship and modernity, we need to reassess the relationship between the two “subordinated” realms of classic modernization theory: kinship and religion.

One might read this last suggestion as a comment on a de facto division of thinking about what ancestors mean within the discipline of anthropology. Kuper's book, for example, has been explored largely in terms of the notion Kuper critiques, that lineage organizes society prior to and in the absence of the state. This provides, however, a very "secular" reading of what "descent" means. The dynamics of "descent," which have equally to do with the status and character of ancestors, the nature of relations between the living and the dead, the applicability of the description of ancestors as "supernaturals," and the relationship of ancestral ideas to indigenous ethics, memory, and history, have meanwhile been taught largely under the rubric of "religion" (e.g. Barber 1981; Kopytoff 2010). While the many rich ethnographic accounts of ancestral thinking – such as those written about Madagascar (Bloch, e.g. 1986, 1994; Astuti, e.g. 1995; Lambek, e.g. 1981, 1988) – explore the ways in which ancestors are precisely both "kin" and objects (or subjects) of ritual and religious practice, some of this sense seems to be lost in translation, at least at the level of student experience. Such a split between "two sides" of "descent" may have been suggested by, for example, Evans-Pritchard's division of his work between a volume on Nuer religion (1971, originally 1956) and others on Nuer kinship and political organization, or even by the argument of *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1970, originally 1940) which, for McKinnon (2013), suggests two strands of social differentiation – one which abstracts supra-kin political and economic relations from the jural aspects of kinship, and another which abstracts and secularizes political and territorial relations from what were previously treated as nonutilitarian and religious units. That jural kinship is first abstracted from domestic (natural) kinship to create stateless polities (lineage societies) suggests that kinship, not religion, is the dynamic through which social differentiation proceeds.

While such a division may have been made for convenience, it has had important repercussions for theory. Moreover, it stands in tension with other moments in the work of Evans-Pritchard and – as I argue below – of Fortes, which focus specifically on the inextricability of "kinship" and "religion" in concepts of the "ancestral."⁷ That said, other commentators have also, and more explicitly than Kuper, seen Fortes's work in particular in terms of "two sides": the "kinship/political" trajectory of "descent" and the "religious" side of "ancestral cult." Rubie Watson's ethnography of the T'eng lineage of the Hong Kong New Territories took as its first angle of critique the views of Maurice Freedman who, borrowing from Fortes, assumed that large-scale corporate lineages would eventually disappear with increasing social differentiation (Watson 1985: 4). Watson argued that the Chinese context showed lineages to have both developed historically within a complex centralized state and been institutionalized partly as an outcome of prior clashes over property interests, interpretable as class interests. Thus the supposition of evolutionary development from stateless and egalitarian kin organization to class stratified property-holding and the state was disrupted by Watson's evidence.

Secondly, Watson considered the "religious" dimensions of "lineage," focused on ancestors. Here she reads Fortes's work where it draws most closely on Max Gluckman's influential 1937 essay on the opposition between ancestral cults and "cults of souls." For Gluckman, ancestral cults were focused on the help that the collectivity of the ancestors could convey to their living descendants, usually when requested through appropriate rituals. He opposed these to "cults of souls" found within

Christian Catholic practice, in which the living pray to assist the dead in the afterlife, for example, by shortening the time their souls must spend in Purgatory before being cleansed of sin and admitted to heaven.⁸ For Gluckman, salvationist religions, in which prayers for the dead did not admit the possibility of reciprocity, were antithetical to ancestral cults; the dead were not “ancestors” and did not assist their living descendants. Watson, however, showed that in the Hong Kong New Territories Daoist and Confucian (salvationist) religion, rituals to ensure a happy destination for the dead in the afterlife were carried out alongside a lively “ancestral cult,” in which ancestors were honored in the house for three generations, then ideally in secondary burial and commemoration sites; in return they conferred blessing on their descendants. Finally, and also relevant to the present discussion, Watson commented that what looked like a single formation of “descent” from the point of view of Fortes’s African ethnography seemed in a Chinese context more like a cluster of different elements – genealogical reckoning, patrilineality, patriarchal authority, a strong emphasis on the filial duty of children, especially sons, written recording of family lines – and that these elements could be found in China in different combinations at different places and times.

Like all the best anthropological thinkers, however, Fortes writes from inside the mental and emotional world of his Tallensi ethnography, in a way which gives his insights a life and resilience that exceed whatever criticisms the limitations of rigid forms of “descent theory” might elicit – criticisms that should perhaps be addressed to later readings of Fortes’s own intentions. One of his most powerful essays, surely, is his Henry Myers Lecture for 1960, “*Pietas in ancestor worship*” (Fortes 1961). Although the essay is well known, it is worth revisiting, as its subtlety and complexity belie simplified views of Fortes’s arguments.⁹

Fortes begins by setting out his theoretical approach. From Malinowski, he tells us he has learnt that social practice should be considered in terms of its present function and meaning in a society (not only its supposed origins); from Radcliffe-Brown, he has learnt that customs are embedded in social structure “and significant of social relations.” The third point is vaguely attributed to the “prevailing climate of psychological thought” of the 1930s: that “custom is a socially tolerable expression of motives, feelings and dispositions that are not always acknowledgeable . . . and that may be disruptive” (Fortes 1961: 166). In this lecture, Fortes tells us, he has been tempted to explore the last formulation, relating the Freudian idea of the Oedipus complex, taken in a very general form, as a possible human universal, to the system of taboos operating in Taleland between fathers and their eldest sons (and also, to a lesser extent, between mothers and fathers and eldest daughters). These taboos – that is, that an oldest son should not eat from his father’s plate (although other children may do so) – reflect the social management of the difficult structural fact that, for the Tallensi, eldest sons are (as Fortes says quoting Rattray) “waiting to step into the dead man’s shoes” (1961: 168). Mutual affection and respect between fathers and eldest sons must coexist with this structural antagonism, a fact which Fortes reports that Tallensi recognize with a sense of irony.

The limited structural positions to which first-born sons can only succeed on their father’s death are not “jural” positions within the lineage (since these can be inherited by younger brothers as well as sons and are not subject to the same taboos), but ritual positions: officiating for the patrilineal ancestors and assuming the respon-

sibilities consequent on that office which affect daily life, such as the transfer of bride-price for a son's marriage. Fortes lists with care the processes by which, through funerary rituals, a deceased man is made an ancestor, while his son becomes the new officiant with whom the ancestors now communicate; only then are ritual taboos between father and son lifted, so communication can pass freely to the newly deceased (1961: 176).

Although from one perspective Fortes's material can be read as he first frames it, in terms of the trio of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and (a generalized) Freud, from another point of view its heart lies with the last of these more than the other two. Fortes seems to have drawn here on a broad-brush psychoanalysis which would become widely viewed with suspicion by anthropologists of the British school who identified themselves as engaging closely with work on "descent" and its critical developments (Kuper 1983: 64; see also Parry 1994: 152–158).¹⁰ Indeed, in pointing to Freud's Oedipus complex, Fortes accomplishes two pieces of suggestive analytic work. First, he brings into consideration the idea of *universal* human impulses; in the closing sections of the lecture, he returns to this theme by providing wider comparisons, including a scene from nineteenth-century England, via Trollope's novel *Barchester Towers*, in which Archdeacon Grantly, son of a bishop, is torn between sorrow at his father's impending death and the knowledge that if his father does not die *soon* any hope that he can succeed him to the bishopric will be lost owing to an imminent change of political administration (Fortes 1961: 188). Fortes's point here is that the socially constructed complex of feelings occasioned by situations of father-son structural antagonism may be found in a wide range of ethnographic contexts. Interestingly, his line of thought takes this dimension of "ancestral cult" into the area of Western modernity, modifying any impression that Fortes was committed to contrastive social typologies.

Secondly, it is not only Freud who propels this line of thinking, but also and equally, Fortes tells us, Fustel de Coulanges, to whom he is "especially indebted." Together with Robertson Smith, Fustel observed the "connexion between institutions of kinship on the one hand, and religious beliefs and practices on the other" (Fortes 1961: 167). But while Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites* (1894) attributes the origin of religion to the impulse to worship an amplified maternal or (more austere) paternal figure, Fustel de Coulanges's earlier work had reversed the causality, and derived agnatic kinship from "ancestral cult." For Fustel, a key point was that Roman law, rather than privileging "natural" kinship, provided for the adoption of legal male heirs to sustain a patriline, and such heirs, he claimed, had a primary duty to sustain the ritual recognition of agnatic ancestors. This duty fell as an obligation on the heir in a system unchosen by the incumbent or his successor, features suggestive of the Tallensi for Fortes. Out of this system of succession and the conflicts of feeling it creates is generated the ethic of *pietas* – for which Fortes deliberately chooses the Latin term (attributed paradigmatically to Aeneas by Virgil) meaning loyalty, care and mutual duty between parent and child despite and through the inescapable structural replacement of father by son. *Pietas*, I suppose, is a form of civilized neurosis holding the Oedipus complex in check. But Fortes does not elaborate on the psychoanalytic dimensions of his argument. One might argue that what the Freudian reference does, apart from indexing the potential universality of human feelings, is to index the power and mystery of feelings about generational succession.

Moreover, the privileging of Fustel de Coulanges makes the mutual implication of kinship and religion in such contexts more general than the Tallensi material would at first suggest. Thus, as well as being concerned with specific (nonmodern) contexts in which – to put it in Maussian terms (Mauss 1985, originally 1938) – there is a set number of available social “persons” and individual human beings in turn occupy these roles, Fortes’s essay speaks to other contexts, including that of modern Europe, where (again in Mauss’s terms) every individual occupies the space of a social “person,” and problems of “succession” should, in theory, be largely moot save in specialized zones like the Church of England detailed by Trollope and – perhaps more obviously – among the English aristocracy, where the rules of male primogeniture still apply.¹¹

GHOSTS OF ANCESTORS

By evoking Fustel de Coulanges and Robertson Smith together as a pair, and refusing to choose between them, Fortes places his argument about ancestors in a deliberately ambiguous space. Fustel argues that “social structure” derives from “ancestral cult”; Robertson Smith that ancestor-worship is an expansion of parental authority within Semitic lineage organization. Fortes declines to judge, and does not need to do so in terms of his own material, since for Tallensi “kinship” and “religion” are not separable. He implies that there are modern settings where complete disambiguation is impossible as well.¹²

Fustel de Coulanges is usually seen by anthropologists as having influenced Durkheim, who inverted Fustel’s causal logic to produce his famous account of “religion as society worshipping itself” on which the claims of an anthropology of religion to intellectual independence (neither theology nor natural science, but social science) were to rest. This way of tracing the intellectual genealogy – however accurate in its observation of Fustel’s importance for Durkheim’s thought – seems to contain a strange logical slip. Durkheim is presented as freeing the sociology of religion from entanglement in the truth claims of religious phenomena; British anthropologists such as Fortes and Evans-Pritchard were also familiar with a famous statement of this argument with reference to anthropological “functionalism,” made by Radcliffe-Brown (1945). Yet Fustel was not advancing truth claims about the reality of Roman ancestors. He argued instead that Roman belief in the reality of patrilineal ancestors and the necessity of continuing to honor them accounts for several developments in Roman inheritance law and the subsequent development of Roman concepts of citizenship. Perhaps Fustel’s recognition of earlier and speculative theories (naturist and animist) about the universal “origins” of human religious experience (on which Durkheim commented in 1915 (Durkheim 2008: 49) and was, of course, concerned to set aside in favor of a focus on religion’s social functions) has tended to overshadow his essentially historical – and thus, to my mind, plausible – central claim.¹³ Subsequent anthropological readings, which adopted a strongly materialist approach to religion often influenced by the Marxist anthropology of the 1970s, overlaid earlier distinctions about the role of ancestors with the assumption that, since religion is ideological, the “real” causative forces and motivations of social life must always be sought at the level of political economy.

The net effect of these secular trajectories in the development of anthropological theory has been to occlude the possibility that “ancestors” might be relevant to modern Western concerns in at least three ways: (1) following ideas about contrasts between premodern and modern societies, ancestors are regarded as tokens of an “earlier” or “other” kind of social formation; (2) following “secular” readings of “descent,” ancestors have to do with “religion” while lineage has to do with kinship as social organization; (3) following secular theories of social causation, the critical analysis of religion as ideology can be easily conflated with the claim that religion is not a real or primary cause of social events, even though there is no necessary incompatibility between these views.¹⁴

My argument here has been that academic anthropology generally assimilated a model in which kinship in the past (or in “traditional” contexts) might be religious, while kinship in modernity (or in “Western” settings) would be secular. Some anthropological writing, however, like Fortes’s essay on *pietas* and the ancestors, continued to revisit and implicitly to question these widely accepted distinctions. In what follows, I trace a parallel tension in ordinary English people’s ambivalence about the status of ancestral research in relation to categories of “religion” and “secularity.”

ANCESTORS INTO GHOSTS: THE INTERDICTION OF KINSHIP AS RELIGION

There is one feature of Alys’s account of her engagement in family history which has not yet been explicitly discussed here. Like other English family historians I have met (although unlike some American family historians I have worked with, especially American Latter-Day Saints) Alys showed a very clear reluctance to talk about her research in connection with the term “religion.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, her experiences and those of other people engaged in this kind of research clearly exceeded the utilitarian or what is usually meant by “secular” approaches and attitudes.

Elsewhere (Cannell 2011) I have argued that this marked avoidance of the term “religion” is not, as some secularization theories would have it, unproblematic evidence of a declining interest in matters of faith in the modern West. Rather, it is the outcome of a particularly fraught history of disputes within European Christianity, and most especially in Reformation and post-Reformation England, about how far and in what way popular observances for the related dead could be permitted within the bounds of formal church rituals. The Catholic Church itself changed positions on this question several times between the fall of Rome and the Reformation. As a number of historians of the English early modern period have made clear, however, the issue took on new intensity at the time of the Tudor Protestant settlement.¹⁶ The influence of the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination was crucially important here; since an omniscient God knew which souls would be saved and which damned, Calvinists were particularly opposed to elaborate funerals or post-mortem rituals which might in any way suggest that man’s intervention could influence the fate of the departed. As the revisionist historian Eamonn Duffy (1992) has pointed out, the adoption of a centrally Protestant position by the new state church (the Church of England) meant that in parts of the country where popular opinion had not yet inclined toward the new teachings, many ordinary English Catholics were suddenly and traumatically denied the opportunity to pray for the family dead and deprived of a sense of connection

between the living and the dead of the local parish community, expressed and fostered through chantry masses and other regular practices. Historians of the Anglican settlement, however, have added the equally interesting observation that adjustment to religion without space for attention to the dead appeared to produce long-lasting existential dilemmas even for Protestant-minded English people. As quickly as funerary rites were outlawed, they were reinvented under other names, as Maltby's work on the prayer book (1998) and Martin's analysis of new forms of funerary oration have shown (2001). Even austere Protestant clerics had great difficulty in teaching themselves to *feel*, subjectively, that there was no communication between the living and the dead, whatever their credo demanded they believed and preached. Indeed, there seems to have been increased anxiety about ghosts and rising numbers of ghost sightings at this time, as if the dead, deprived of the means by which the living had previously made them ancestors of the parish, were refusing to settle for the meager attentions now permitted to them. As Walsham has rightly observed (2008: 51–56), although the key accusation of Protestants against Catholics was “superstition,” much of what we think of as superstitious actually took a crucial turn in the early years of the Reformation, in a conflicted conceptual space that generated a particular understanding of “the supernatural.” The observation that countries with a Protestant legacy evince more concern with the figure of the ghost than do those that are predominantly Catholic cannot be proved without further research, but has a *a priori* plausibility in the light of this history.

To make this series of connections is to invert the logic of anthropological arguments which see a progressive movement from ancestral cults (in which the dead, properly respected, assist their living descendants), to Gluckman's “cults of souls” (in which the dead are helpless to assist their descendants, but rely on the living for prayers to help them escape Purgatory), then to ghosts as marking the severance of even that one-way relationship between the living and the departed. Rather, what we have traced is the evolution of this way of describing modernity, which in the Protestant world rests in part on the attempt to forbid contact between the living and the dead, to deny reciprocity between the living and the dead, and to outlaw any classification of attentions to the dead as “religion.” These efforts at banning contact with the departed were never, it seems, completely effective even among strong Calvinists – and partial accommodations were reached within the Church of England and its rituals as time went on – but led to a heightened anxiety about this area of human action and experience.

As Charles Taylor (2007) has argued, the default assumption that we live in “a secular age” is itself the outcome of lengthy historical processes. We could add that ideas about secularity, like ideas about religion, have profound material effects because people come to believe these things are true, and act accordingly. That people in England have come to think it obvious that kinship with the dead is not “religion” is one small instance of such a historical process.

In contemporary English popular discourse about relations with departed kin, we in fact see the result of several layerings of conceptual interdiction of this kind. At one level, English people may pay filial attentions to their dead kin and establish relations of reciprocity with them, but inherit a conviction that this kind of activity is “not religion.” At another level, as Gillian Bennett has shown (1999; see also Day 2012), English people are also very cautious about transgressing the standards of

educated scientific opinion when describing experiences of or thoughts about contact with the related dead. Thus, most people would claim that they do not believe in “ghosts,” because ghosts for ordinary people in present-day England (as for nineteenth-century academics in the SPR) are a dubious category to recognize, which may court being labeled by others – or labeling oneself – as irrational or ignorant. Nevertheless, Bennett found that many recently bereaved widows had experiences of continued contact with their deceased spouse, not as a visual apparition, but as presence sensed through familiar scents or sounds, or little gifts of assistance, as with finding a lost object in an unlikely place. These experiences were always narrated in a self-deprecatory and oblique fashion, of the kind, “I know it sounds silly, but . . .” Thus, the idea of continued kinship with the departed seems to persist in certain situations in English life, despite the difficulty of phrasing it in categories which ordinary English people find acceptable. Perhaps, indeed, the difficulty of articulation itself constitutes some form of partial protection for numinous experiences in a secular environment disinclined to treat them seriously; mystery lives on within the disclaimer, even for people who describe themselves as neither religious nor even generically “spiritual.”

The difficulty created by the Calvinist legacy in respect to relations between the living and the dead did not fade away with time and familiarity. Indeed, some sources cited by McCorrestine (Harvey 2006; Greenblatt 2001; Kollar 2000; see McCorrestine 2010: 156–157) suggest that these tensions were resurgent at different times and places in England and Wales (at least) between the late seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. McCorrestine does not, however, review the Reformation evidence in any detail, but leans instead toward a version of Ariès’s classic argument that changes in family affect in the nineteenth century rendered the loss of loved ones less bearable than in earlier times (Ariès 1982).¹⁷ For McCorrestine, as for a number of other authors, the key factor in the nineteenth-century attitude to the dead is that it defines the cusp of the modern period, understood in terms of heightened experiences of loss. The heightened affective atmosphere (the argument goes) caused people to seek more urgently for evidence of the post-mortem survival of their loved ones; however, at the same time, developments in scientific understanding threatened traditional Christian claims. The search for a humanist space that would accommodate scientific rationality yet sustain hopes for the survival of beloved others created both intense experiential manifestations of the “reality” of the dead, and periodic losses of hope in various intellectual endeavors which were themselves amplifications of loss. The Society for Psychical Research, whose members “sought a science of the soul” (McCorrestine 2010: 156), was only one among a range of such enterprises which tended to fall just on one side or the other of a traditional Judeo-Christian belief in post-mortem survival.¹⁸ Such experiments were also subject to a kind of repetition compulsion; although the SPR’s attempts scientifically to prove telepathic communication with the dead collapsed in the 1890s, when less “respectable” popular spiritualism was also revealed as fraudulent deception, attempts to communicate with the dead reemerged with desperate urgency during and after the 1914–1918 war with its immense loss of life. At this time, too, new forms of ritual and commemorative accommodation for the dead arose; interestingly, the Church of England reintroduced public liturgical prayers for the dead in response to huge demand from bereaved families.¹⁹ Prayers for the dead were still contentious among some minority

Protestant constituencies, but widespread popular demand for response from the national church proved stronger than the legacy of Calvinist interdiction.

Again, I am not negating the importance of nineteenth- or twentieth-century historical developments; rather, I want to contextualize and qualify the tendency to assume that the main explanatory dynamic for these developments is that they signify the arrival of “modernity” as some kind of known quantity. Thus McCorrestine’s central argument, that the ghosts of the SPR period reflect the arrival of the modern “self,” is to me less satisfying than the many interesting and original strands of argument he draws out on the way to this conclusion. As I have argued previously (Cannell 2011), the very appearance of the term “self” has too often seemed to shut down anthropological debate. It has carried too much baggage, being made to stand for the attenuation of both religious faith, and kinship understood as both ideology and structure. The modern self, it is implied, is where social constraints on the individual come untied, where faith that reaches beyond the individual fails; the modern self is not really part of either social process or social imaginary, but is atomistic, solipsistic, and detached from others.

In fact, however, as Day (2012) has argued, the contemporary self is not necessarily atomistic at all; indeed the self is simply the current idiom for personhood, and is understood in most circumstances as both dependent on others – including kin – and as a resource for the production of social others. While contemporary assertions of individualism and autonomy are important, they are often less apparent in daily life than has been claimed; indeed, for all its complications, daily life today consists precisely of mutual bonds of dependence and affection with “family,” and the work required to sustain these. It is only surprising that so many people should be interested in family history if one assumes either that the contemporary self is indeed atomistic, or that modern kinship can be reduced to absolutely purified utilitarian secularity. My suggestion is that neither of these assumptions is justified.

CONTEMPORARY ANCESTORS

I have suggested that, although contemporary societies are not holistic in the manner described by Mauss and others for small-scale and noncapitalized contexts, “kinship” may remain more relevant and more deeply interpolated with other fields of life than our default models of modernity generally allow. In particular, and with reference to this Companion, I suggest that the relationship between “kinship” and “religion” may be far more intimately engaged in contemporary life than we have supposed. Moreover, secularization studies have led us to overlook the historical mechanisms by which attention to the related dead was heavily interdicted within Protestant “religion,” while continuing to have an ineradicable imaginative power for ordinary people. Popular hobbyist genealogy, so we are told by those who practice it, involves people looking for the place of their families in history, and rediscovering their ancestors. Various political and commercial interests are at stake in some fields of genealogy, such as the tracing of ethnic “roots” on the one hand, and the interpretation and misinterpretation of DNA evidence on the other (e.g. Nash 2004, 2008; Palmié 2007) – and the origins of the latter in a particular scientific definition of the “genealogical method” (Bamford and Leach 2009).²⁰ I suggest here, however, that

ordinary hobbyist family history, while it has attracted less anthropological attention, may merit just as much consideration.

Secondly, and more speculatively, if the wave of grief and mourning that accompanied and followed World War I – including the second wave of British spiritualism – produced a historical period thronged by “ghosts,” perhaps this is not entirely disconnected from the current engagement with popular family history. In addition to the sheer loss of life, the trauma of World War I in England was particular in several ways: most civilians lived the war at a remove from the battlefields (in contrast to the exposure of civilians to the Blitz in 1938–1945); soldiers who died in France were buried in their thousands in cemeteries far from home; many bodies were never reclaimed and remained in the trenches and battlefields. We know that despite the efforts of the British state to construct new public forms of commemoration that would present a decent picture of noble sacrifice, relatives regularly saw soldiers who had died in battle appear to them as ghosts with maimed bodies (Wittman 2011). These ghosts could be understood as a kind of public reproach, especially in light of the disillusion about the leadership of the officer classes, the validity of traditional class distinctions, and the value of the war that spread among ordinary soldiers from 1917 on.

Alongside the popular enthusiasm for family history in the UK and elsewhere, there is today an intense commitment to recover the bodies of soldiers lost in the battlefields of 1914–1918. New possibilities for identification have been opened up by DNA evidence, and many families of deceased soldiers are tenaciously dedicated to finding a lost ancestor (who, at this remove in time, they rarely knew personally) and offering him a proper burial at last.

As Feeley-Harnik (2013) and others (Schantz 2008) have observed, from one point of view genealogical documents are sometimes used by families in the UK, the US, and no doubt elsewhere as a correlate object for a headstone; the space on a genealogical chart where the name of a dead person is written was once called a “tablet.” In ways that are sometimes implicit and sometimes, in certain religious framings, explicit (Cannell 2005, 2007) genealogical documents can be considered a form parallel to secondary burial.²¹ They help to “place” the dead, while partly transcending problems of distance and physical separation between the dead and the living.²²

It is important to state that modern genealogy in nation-states is not, in my view, collapsible into a single project; indeed, it is probably a feature of bilateral kinship systems and their intersection with Christian and post-Christian thought about individual identity that genealogies can signify both connection and exclusion through precisely the same information and representations, depending (like a Rorschach test) on how a viewer or a group of viewers looks at the situation. Nevertheless, if claims to ancestry have often been used to make elite claims, it would appear that in England over the long twentieth century they have also powerfully reflected an element of democratization, a sense in which an increasing number of ordinary people feel able to assert a claim to “have ancestors.”²³ After the mass sacrifice of World War I, the claims of ordinary people to greater social and political equality became difficult to ignore. Yet promises made on this count were not delivered, and provision for veterans was notoriously inadequate. It was perhaps only from 1948, with the establishment of the National Health Service and the consolidation of the welfare state at the end of World War II, that these promises began to be fulfilled. It is

therefore plausible to argue that the rise of popular family history is above all a postwar project of a particular kind, in which ordinary ancestors are finally given their collective place; whether or not such a social space will hold through the immediate future is a different question.

NOTES

Thanks are due to the editors of the *Companion* and to fellow discussants at the workshop for this volume, as well as Mary Beard, Paola Filippucci, Jessica Martin, Simon Jarvis, Phillip Williamson and members of the Cambridge Family History Society.

- 1 For an ethnography of the transformation of ghosts into ancestors under more “normal” social conditions see for instance Metcalf 1983.
- 2 But see Kidron 2012 for a different situation obtaining in post-atrocity Cambodia.
- 3 Not her real name.
- 4 “Secretary hand” is a formal style of handwriting used mainly in legal and official documents from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries.
- 5 And explicitly, female descendants.
- 6 McKinnon (2013) argues that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard understand social differentiation to proceed from a progressive differentiation of domains of life within a society, rather than from the causal dynamic of property-holding (as in Morgan’s argument) or alliance (as in Lévi-Strauss). She also notes that both assume that natural dyadic kin relations precede group relations in society (undoubtedly following here Radcliffe-Brown’s distinction between domestic and jural kinship), rather than primitive kinship being a collectivity from which individuals must be disambiguated (as in Morgan).
- 7 For another example of what I argue is the inadvertent blunting of anthropological categories of analysis by unexamined assumptions about the secular character of such categories, see Cannell 2013 on Schneider’s conceptualization of “American kinship.”
- 8 See Spies, this volume, for another discussion of directionality in relations between the living and the dead in the context of Madagascar.
- 9 I am grateful to the late Susan Benson for originally suggesting that I should think about this essay.
- 10 Lambek remains unusual in being at ease with drawing on ideas from psychoanalysis within a largely classical anthropological approach which includes close attention to the Fortesian tradition. See e.g. Lambek 2007.
- 11 Noting that at the time of writing a decision has been made to extend primogeniture so that daughters as well as sons may be heirs to the British throne.
- 12 It is notable that Fortes here departs from the position taken in a well-known essay by Radcliffe-Brown on religion and society which, while paying respects to Fustel, precisely argued for a Durkheimian inversion of Fustel’s argument: society produces religion, and religion does not produce social effects (Radcliffe-Brown 1945: 37).
- 13 Fortes notes that Fustel has been criticized for the speculative character of his arguments (Fortes 1961: 168) but does not cite any major scholarly refutation of Fustel’s claims about agnatic kinship. A classic assessment was given by Finley (1977) who criticized Fustel’s lack of critical material on his sources, and his “subtly polemical” commitment to a theory of a single line of “Aryan” social development driven by the religious cult of the hearth. Finley notes Durkheim’s observation that Fustel had misconstrued the nature of the Roman *gens*, but also credits Fustel with being one of the few scholars to pay attention to the importance of kinship organization within city-states, and praises his impeccable reading of Roman sources. This leaves the validity of Fustel’s individual suggestions somewhat in limbo. Interestingly, as of this writing I have been unable to locate any statement by classicists that would contradict Fustel’s interpretations, and I am told

- that Roman domestic ancestors (as opposed to Roman cults of gods) are a relatively understudied area among current classical scholars. The identification which Fustel apparently makes between the Roman *lares* and agnatic ancestors is, in modern views, difficult to prove (since the *lares* are now thought to be complex, possibly composite, figures) but not necessarily wrong (Professor Mary Beard, personal communication, Mar. 10, 2012).
- 14 Anthropological understanding has drawn and continues to draw profoundly for its critical energies on materialist analyses such as those of Bloch (e.g. 1986) in which treatment of the ideological is never crude or reductive. The contribution of materialist perspectives to anthropological thought continues to be essential, and this tradition informs important cognitivist approaches such as those taken by Astuti and Bloch in this volume. The present piece, however, takes a different approach, concerned more centrally with the possible limitations of analytic categories developed within the historical arc of secularism.
 - 15 The term moral is acceptable in this context, and some people would not reject the word “spiritual.”
 - 16 This refers to the compromise Elizabeth I had to make between radical Calvinist and continued Roman Catholic tendencies in her kingdom and defined the character of the Church of England as it developed under the official headship of the English sovereign.
 - 17 Ariès’s classic book has generated many different levels of debate, including about its periodization, its evidencing and the implications of accepting its theses for the study of non-European settings, but these are beyond the scope of the present paper.
 - 18 The activities of the Parisian Mutual Autopsy Society described by Hecht (2003) are an interesting comparison to the SPR. While declaring themselves atheists, the members of this society (including Renouvier and others in the generation immediately preceding Durkheim) dedicated themselves to a physical search for the key to the character of each deceased friend in the brain, reproducing a correlate of the notion of the soul and the religious obsequies they rejected.
 - 19 Phillip Williamson, personal communication, Sept. 20, 2009.
 - 20 The essays in Bamford and Leach’s excellent edited volume illuminatingly discuss a range of topics, taking as their starting point the work of Rivers on the technical definition of genealogy. The intersection with religion is not a specific focus of this volume, but the essays will reward any readers interested in genealogy.
 - 21 I am indebted to Michael Lambek for a comment which clarified this point.
 - 22 Computerized records, such as those famously collected and promoted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, of course enable forms of ancestor-making which are accessible from any place which has a computer and internet access. The fascinating intersection between the specifics of Latter-Day Saints doctrine on sacred work for the dead, and changes in forms of genealogical practice is, however, beyond the scope of the present essay.
 - 23 I do not intend here to ignore the large numbers of people in England who are still denied social inclusion; in particular, I have not to date met many recent UK immigrants who are members of family history societies, and I note that their perspective may be quite different.

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CHAPTER 12

The Work of Memory: Ritual Laments of the Dead and Korea's Cheju Massacre

Seong-nae Kim

INTRODUCTION: THE WORK OF MEMORY AS MORAL PRACTICE

It has become almost a popular cliché that the politics of memory is particularly fraught in postcolonial and post–Cold War countries. In the particular history of East Asia, the work of memory is found in the foundational narratives of nation-building in the context of colonial and postcolonial conflicts and the traumatic experiences they produced. However, the consistency of the foundational narratives of national memory is interrupted by the dead or injured bodies of the unknown soldiers or mere war victims, which remain indifferent to the discursive contexts of nation-building.¹ These bodies and their traces tell different stories of violence (Chi 2010; Kwon 2008). Their different stories and memories stem from the utter reality of their “otherness” in that their identities are never fully provided or glorified in the scheme of national memory, but only revealed through their ghostly transformations such as spirit possession. They have been invisible in the work of national memory, but recaptured in dreams and ghostly narratives in popular memories. These fragmented memories forecast newly emerging subjectivities in the sociocultural landscape of the postcolonial, post–Cold War era. Once forgotten but presently returned, the ghosts demand to be worshiped as family ancestors and also included in the ancestral shrine of the modern nation (Kwon 2007). The agency of spirits and ancestors thus intervenes in the work of memory in the moral politics of nationhood.

In this chapter, the work of memory constituted by means of the haunting bodies of the dead is approached as “a moral practice.” As Lambek writes, memory contains “assertions of continuity on the part of subjects and claims about the significance of past experience. Such tacit assertions and claims, based as much on cumulative wisdom and moral vision as on individual interest, form a kind of moral practice” (1996: 248). Adopting Lambek’s idea of memory as a moral practice, there is an exploration of the way in which the imagery of violent deaths and their popular memories are culturally mediated in ritual practices of shamanic spirit possession and ancestral worship, and how they make a strong case for contestations in the work of national memory.

The chapter focuses on the particular case of the Cheju Massacre of 1948 in Korea. The Cheju Massacre prefigured the Korean War in 1950 and the ideological battle of the Cold War. The events began on April 3, 1948 as a communist guerrilla rebellion and popular protest against the American military occupation, but developed into a civilian massacre under a planned act of state terrorism toward the “reds” after the establishment of the anticommunist state in South Korea on August 15, 1948. This violent event officially ended in the year of 1954 after the Korean War’s armistice agreement and the displaced Cheju people returned to their home villages. This violent period of six years’ duration has been generally known as “the April Third Incident” (the 4.3 or *Sasam*). During the Cheju April Third Incident, over 30,000 of Cheju Island’s inhabitants were massacred in “screening operations” and house-to-house searches in a campaign, supported by American military aid, to weed out so-called “reds.” Most victims of the “red hunt” were, however, innocent civilians with no claims to any ideological position.

Regardless of the semantic politics of naming, whether it was a communist insurgency or a popular uprising against a foreign occupation, there has been common agreement on the fact that the April Third Incident was a mass civilian massacre at the hands of the state and it has been officially described as such by an authoritative governmental pronouncement of October 2003. Following the Korean nation’s division, anticommunism in the South effectively silenced the public memory of the Cheju Massacre for over half a century. Before the democratization process of the 1990s and official commemoration of the Cheju Incident, shamanic rituals and family ancestral rites were the only vehicles for expressing the traumatic memories of the massacre.

In order to argue that the work of memory engages in moral practice, I begin by illuminating the local forms of spirit possession and ancestor rituals on Cheju Island and exploring the ways in which they articulate different temporalities and constitute vernacular memories of the massacre. Then, I will examine contestations over the meaning of collective death and suffering in divergent works of personal, family, and official memories of the Cheju Massacre.

SPIRIT POSSESSION AS EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST

In early anthropological analyses of spirit possession, a distinction was made between “possession trance,” which is expressed in altered states of consciousness, and “possession” without trance states (Bourguignon 1976).² In this typological analysis, both

types suppose that a person is changed through the presence of a spirit entity. Thus, possession forms are often explained as the intrusion of an external agency, an “other” to the self, such that the possessed person experiences an altered state of consciousness. However, possession does not merely represent the otherness of the spirit world but addresses questions of hegemony and resistance, power and morality, which are contested in contemporary discourse (Lambek 1996: 239; cf. Boddy 1989; Kendall 1985). Possession is an embodied phenomenon. Once their presence in the host is recognized in physical pain or misfortune, spirits demand a response in the form of a cultural performance that addresses their authority and renders it bearable and durational. This approach takes possession as an integral and public component of society, not a peripheral or deviant form. As Janice Boddy asserts, possession is a holistic social reality which is best addressed in terms of “the potential range of its significance within the cultural and social context” (1989: 136).

In this chapter, spirit possession is approached as a form of embodied knowledge that produces human agency as manifested in the ritual practice of the double personalities of the spirit and the host. When the host is “inhabited by a specific, identifiable, or potentially identifiable spirit who maintains a stable, coherent identity,” spirits operate not as an “other thing” but “as social persons, distinct in public identity from their hosts” (Lambek 1993: 320). Here I explore the ways in which possession embodies the vernacular memories of the Cheju massacre.

In Cheju shamanic practice, the spirit of one who died an “unnatural” death cannot depart to the other world, but must wander around as a spiteful soul in this world. Such spirits try through dreams to tell the true circumstances of their deaths to the family members or neighbors to whom they were closest in life. The spiteful soul will speak to one who seems able to understand and convey her story. In the patriarchal family structure, those who are most often possessed by the spirits are marginal persons with the least power, that is, housewives or children. Ironically, what is manifested in the fantastic supernatural world that substitutes for the everyday reality can be described as something “more genuine” than the phenomena of the real world where one often cannot speak the truth of lived experience, or where the truth can easily be subjected to distortion. At least in folk religious traditions, the truth of dream images and the lamentation of spiteful souls are guaranteed.

In the shamanic rituals of Cheju Island, the phenomenon of spirit possession is an opportunity for the spirit of the dead to borrow the body of the shaman to begin speaking spontaneously in “whatever words come out of her mouth.” The words that the shaman conveys are referred to, in the Cheju dialect, as *yonggyeullim* or lamentations of the dead. The shamans of Cheju Island claim that when they put on a shaman’s robe and sit at the *sin chari*, or the “place of the spirit,” the words come spontaneously out of their mouths and they begin to “see things.” This is because “the spirit has something to say.” The lamentation that the shaman conveys in the state of spirit possession constitutes an actual testimony to the injuries of the Cheju Massacre (Kim 2000).

The lament of the spirit of the dead may sound too naive and powerless to assert the truth against the misrepresentations of the massacre. Nevertheless, the laments of the spirits, even in their powerlessness, assert the grave historical reality in which the truth of the April Third Incident has been stifled by the official language of state power. Although obscure and feeble, these diffuse representations of pain were the

only way to resist the firm and violent order of the anticommunist state of South Korea until 1987, when the victims' testimonies were first discussed publicly. Since 1995, when the Cheju Island Provincial Assembly published its first report on the investigation of the damage of the April Third Incident, and even now, after the promulgation in 2000 of the special law for the investigation of the truth of April Third, representations such as spirit possession and ritual laments of the dead have become recognized as a culturally sanctioned source where the memories of the suffering of April Third are preserved and contested.

While the historical character of the Cheju April Third Incident has not been classified under a single conceptual title, whether "communist rebellion," "people's uprising," or "massacre," for over sixty years, the popular mode of representation of suffering has been manifested in the "non-obvious acts and moments of resistance, a kind of diffuse consciousness" like a dream or spirit possession (Scott 1992). The survivor endures the pain of forced silence. It is sometimes too painful a process for the survivor to express in words her physical wound and the memory of that injury. Depending on who is the subject of performance in a ritual of mourning the unjust deaths, and depending also on who controls the language of that mourning, the truth of the April Third Incident can be either brought out or distorted. The pain of the living is the legacy of the dead. The dead and the living perceive their pain identically. This is because as long as the pain of the dead remains unhealed, the living cannot go on living in peace.

THE PAINFUL MEMORIES AND LAMENTS OF THE DEAD

In 2006, an old lady who was 90 years old, Pyung-chun Chung, a Korean-Japanese living in Tokyo, returned to her old home village, Tongbok-li on Cheju Island, Korea, in order to offer the shamanic ritual of invoking the ten kings of the underworld, which is locally called *siwang maji*, for her dead parents and brothers who were killed in the Cheju Massacre. This ritual event could be the last one in her life to add to the seven rituals she had already held for the dead family members. At the age of 40, when Chung dreamt of those dead and fell seriously ill, she had the first shamanic ritual for her own family victims. Over the next fifty years, Chung offered this ritual several times, whenever she or her children had problems in health or business.³

"Listen carefully! My dear ninety-year-old lady! You have survived until now, to the age of ninety because you have been *elected by the ghosts*. If you had not been elected by them, you could have passed away even before the age of forty or at the age of sixty. Because of your election by ghosts, you have lived to this old age until your hair turned white and you could not easily walk even one step forward." (As the shaman weeps while chanting, the lady client of ninety years of age weeps as well.)

During the ritual, the Cheju female shaman Sunshil Simbang chanted the laments of this elderly client as well as the dead in a dialogic mode by oscillating between their two part voices:

On whom could I depend? Leaving behind all my own children in Japan, I returned to my old home village (weeping). My own father! (wiping her tears with the towel)

Remembering my father, I returned to my old home village. For the sake of my dead father and brothers, I helped their adoption of the nephew. Aigo! On whom could I rely as I became so old over the age of ninety now! I returned to the old home village where my dead sister's children still live. Because I am the ghost-elected one, I decided to offer this shamanic ritual. As this ritual proceeds, the dead father comes and weeps. The dead mother also sits together with us and weeps (weeping). Also the dead brothers come and weep. The dead sister also comes and weeps. (As the shaman weeps, the lady client also weeps, mentioning the name of "her dead mother-in-law"). Please come, dead parents-in-law too! Aigo! (Here the shaman's voice changes into that of the dead) Because we have such a filial descendant like her, we have been invited to this ritual luckily several times unlike other souls who would rarely receive ritual offering! Aigo! This time all the ancestral spirits sit together and discuss what to do for her. After this ritual, we would do better to move to the other world forever. As such, ancestors are lamenting like a mourning bird. As this ritual is well accepted by the ancestral spirits, you dear ninety-year-old lady and your sons and grandsons will overcome any misfortunes in the coming year.

Throughout Chung's lifetime, she accepted her destiny to be elected by the spirits of her dead parents and brothers. Her constitution was fragile due to the ghostly election of her body and soul. What does it mean "to be elected by ghosts" (*kwisin taemun*)? In the ritual convention of Cheju shamanic culture, it means that the spirits select and possess a particular person as the host. In the idiom of spirit possession, the hosts could be "elected" by deities, ghosts, ancestors, or evil spirits. Once elected, the hosts are destined to provide regular ritual offerings. Like ancestor-descendant kinship relations, the hosts are ritually bound to possessing spirits. If the hosts fall ill and suffer misfortune, it is recognized as spiritual malaise which is to be comforted. Chung's life would be never secure and safe if she forgot or disregarded her ritual bondage with the spirits.

However, in this episode of Chung's family ritual of mourning for the dead, her spiritual bondage seems to have lasted too long, for more than sixty years after the massacre. Although the shamanic chants reflect on the emotions of fear and terror in the mind of the survivor, the pragmatic effect of spirit possession and ritual laments would be anticipated to lead to the closure of suffering and painful memories. But more significantly, the spirits of the dead that afflicted Chung and her families are taken as "family ancestors" in spite of their ghostly presence. Perhaps because those spirits were perceived as ancestors, Chung's election by ghosts could endure throughout her life. The conceptual division between ghosts and ancestors became obscure. It is an irony that spirit possession and laments of the dead purport to provide a moral practice to maintain kinship amity with ghosts. Next, I discuss how this correspondence between afflictive ghosts and beneficent ancestors operates in variant forms of ancestor rituals and also in contestations of public and family commemorations.⁴

CONTESTATIONS OF PUBLIC AND FAMILY MEMORIES: A TESTIMONY

Cheju history after the April Third Incident starts from the recognition that "every accumulated thing had disappeared." Over half the villages on the slope of Mt Halla were burnt down and destroyed, and the villagers were forcefully dislocated. While

the survivors distinguish the post-Incident generations as “new people,” they testify that they have lived in a state of emergency, seeking for the truth of the massacre, and also in persistent terror of the state policy of anticommunism. For the people of Cheju Island, the April Third Incident is not simply a past event but a durational persistence in present everyday life. After the Cheju April Third Special Law of Resitution for the Victims was established in 2000, official research of victims’ testimonies and damage to the village communities has been carried out at the national level. From 2007, memorial halls were built on the local sites of the massacre and stone monuments inscribing the names of the victims were erected in the village territory as well as in the public memorial park. These places became the sacred sites of regular public commemorations and also historical pilgrimage from outside. In this way, the violent deaths were controlled under the visible signs of the national memory of the state.⁵

However, there is the gap between national official memory and local individuated memory. The fragmented and interiorized nature of vernacular memory forms reveals both the violence of national memory and paradoxically the urge to find a place in it for recognition. The following testimony of Dok-son Hyun, a 74-year-old woman living in Pukchon village on Cheju Island, illustrates the vitality of local vernacular memories and the moral practice to generate counternarratives of public memory of the massacre. This testimony was adapted from a public oral testimony during the fifty-third anniversary commemoration of the April Third Incident in 2001.⁶

In the past, before the official acknowledgment of the “civilian massacre by state violence” in 2003, Pukchon village had had a bad reputation as a “red village,” and villagers suffered for over sixty years from this bad reputation. Hyun testified concerning her brother’s violent death during the Pukchon village massacre in 1948. On December 16, 1948, her brother, aged 24, was shot to death together with twenty-five other young men by soldiers on the outskirts of the village. He was accused of helping mountain communist guerrillas. Even though as a member of the militia he took the side of the police and the military, he was killed as a “red.” In accordance with her own sense of justice, Hyun refused to take sides among the three agents of power. In her testimony, we can see how Cheju people, including Hyun, feared all three armed forces: the military, the police, and the mountain guerrillas. Hyun resolutely made a claim to recognize the innocent death and restore the honor of her own family and also that of Pukchon village as a whole.⁷

In 2007, Pukchon village’s memorial hall, called Neobeunsungi Sacred Memorial for Victims of Cheju April Third, was the first one to be constructed at the site of the massacre. The massacre happened in places such as the elementary school yard and adjacent farms. A public monument inscribing the names of 454 victims of the massacre was erected on the same ground. Its public commemoration ceremony has been held every year in the lunar month of December 19, which was the date when the massacre occurred in a whole village scale over just one day in January, 1949. In the village as a whole, commemorations take three consecutive steps: family ancestral worship at midnight before the public ceremony, village community ancestral ritual led by village leaders early in the morning of the public ceremony, and a public commemoration ceremony in the late morning officiated by government officials and representatives of surviving families in other villages. At each step of commemoration, local participants make clear distinctions in the object of worship.

At the public commemoration ceremony of the sixty-third anniversary of the Cheju Massacre on January 22 (December 19 by the lunar calendar), 2011, Hyun explained the reason why she was attending the public ceremony in addition to the rites for her own family victims. In the public ceremony she *secretly* conducted a private ritual offering of food and liquor to the ghosts of the unmourned dead whose whole families were massacred or who died without family descendants. She would murmur a prayer that says, "Right here a younger sister of Jang-son [Hyun's dead brother's name], Dok-son Hyun comes to you! O Sorrowful elders! You should come to this ceremonial altar to receive me as your single descendant. Please do not think you are alone without descendants!" When she bowed to those unseen elder ghosts, Hyun felt that they greeted her, calling her name, "Our dear little girl!" Hyun played the role of representative descendant to those ghosts of the victims. In the interview, she always referred to the ghosts as "hungry people or people without descendants." She deals with them as if they are living elders. She believes that once those elderly wandering ghosts "eat ritual rice" in her offerings, good things will happen to the whole village. Her undoubted belief in the good will of the elderly ghosts indicates that those ghosts are treated as ancestral benefactors.

Dok-son Hyun's ritual acts of declaring the innocent death of her brother and treating the ghosts as "collective elders" were not so much to defend the prerogatives of the family and genealogical ties as to restore the customs and values of village life as a whole. For her, collective public commemoration is an apt opportunity to express her moral vision of "imaginary community" where even the ghosts of the unmourned dead participate in the collective kinship of villagers, both living and dead. Hyun's vernacular commemoration indicates the historical nature of the self-conscious work of memory.

NEW KINSHIP PRACTICES: ANCESTOR WORSHIP AND POSTHUMOUS ADOPTION

Bifurcate Images of Ancestors and the Ancestrality of the Ghosts

In the two cases of Chung and Hyun's vernacular memories of the massacre, we can ask further questions about the ontological status of ghost and ancestor, and also the moral practice of kinship and ancestor worship in the context of the anthropology of religion. Meyer Fortes suggested in his study of Tallensi kinship and ancestor worship that a man becomes an ancestor not because he is dead but because he is worshipped by descendants (Schnepel 1990: 12–13). Thus the first and main task of ancestor worship is to reinstate and enshrine the deceased as an ancestor. The dead have to be "brought home again." In the ritual practice of calling the ghosts into even a temporary ancestral altar, which was set up collectively at public commemorative ceremonies, the moral imperative of kinship amity is preserved. The ancestrality or ancestorhood of the ghosts becomes salient beyond their genealogical identity in the family. Ancestor worship extrapolates the filio-parental relationship to the religious plane, where the life of the descendants remains dependent on and accountable to the mystical power of the ancestors. Thus ancestors are like elders, parents or other living kin. Within the scheme of kinship, ghosts never get lost, but perpetually return or are "brought home again" so that the life of the living can be secured.

Although Fortes emphasizes Tallensi people's belief in ancestral authority that operates to bring ghosts home, he does not consider the divergent images of ancestor between kin and non-kin, between men and women, that originates from their different social positions vis-à-vis the ancestors. As Arthur Wolf observes in the Chinese case, "one man's ancestor is another man's ghost" (1976: 146). Such bifurcate images of ancestors can be applied to Korean ancestor worship. According to Janelli and Janelli's ethnographic work (1982: 166), women as non-agnatic members of the kin group incline toward the more negative view of ancestors, while men as formal members of agnatic kin groups idealize ancestors and their mutual dependency. Shamanism portrays ancestors as self-interested, afflicting their kin to enhance their own comfort. As we see in the case of the 90-year-old Chung's enduring state of spirit possession, however, the shamanic image of ancestors is not intrinsically antithetical to ancestor worship. There is consistency between them in terms of their goals or ritual procedures that consent to the social order of kinship as a moral community.

In front of Puckchon village's April Third Memorial Hall, visitors see the scenes of those (three or four) dead children's burials without any conspicuous marks such as tomb stones. According to Cheju ritual culture, no formal ancestral memorial ceremonies are offered to children under 15 years old, or to those who died at a young age unmarried or childless. Only private and intimate memorial ceremonies with a glass of water or small offerings of (nonritual) ordinary food are conventionally permitted. This particular form of ancestral rite is known as *kamaegi morun sikgye*, a secretive and private "ancestor ritual unknown even to the crows." More properly, this is a type of "distant kin's ancestor ritual" (*gwendang chesa*) because sometimes its ritual officiant is appointed from the distant kin group. There is clear difference between the normal family ancestor worship and the secretive private ancestor ritual. In the case of the normal ancestor worship rite, which is held inside the house, ancestors receive an offering table with a full set of ritual foods. However, in the private secretive ancestral rite, no ritual food offering is prepared but only a bowl of rice placed in a hidden place in the house. Therefore there is no meaningful separation of ritual time and space.

The chief performers of these private memorial ceremonies are mostly women who are mothers or sisters of the victims of massacre. Women survivors continued as lamenters of the dead, a role which had traditionally been given to women in Korean society. Unlike the normal ancestor worship for agnatic kin, mourning for violent deaths is the responsibility of women in the family and kinship community (Janelli and Janelli 1982: 175). Hyun's claim for the mourner's right for the elderly ghosts at the public commemorations exemplifies her moral sensibility as the true lamenter and mourner. Both in private and public realms of ritual commemoration, she acted to transform ghostly beings into ancestors to be worshipped properly.

Ghosts are never forgotten. During normal ancestor worship, small pieces of the ritual offerings are taken at the end of the ritual and thrown to the roof top. Like hungry wandering ghosts, crows usually take the debris outside the human residence. Because ghosts are not "proper ancestors," however, ritual observance of the secretive commemoration should be limited to only a single immediate generation. Also it is limited to women members of the surviving families. It should be in principle kept secret from male family figures due to the fear of death pollution of the family.

Supposedly it lasts only for the performer's own generation. Actually, however, it has already continued to the second generation. In my fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, the memorial ceremonies for the dead children and childless victims of the massacre were given with a proper tablet and held normally inside the house. The secretive ritual for the ghosts has developed into normal and morally proper acts of family ritual. The souls of those who died during the massacre remain here and now, demanding the proper status of "ancestor." The private memorial rituals for the dead who had not been welcomed to the normal lifeworld were indeed "assertions of continuity" of kinship practices and "claims about the significance of their deaths" in the present (Lambek 1996).

As illustrated in Chung's spirit possession and Hyun's private memorial ceremony, the moral position of the Cheju women survivors that conjoins the realms of life and death, ghosts and ancestors, family insiders and outsiders, attests to the new paradigm of memory politics in which all dead are revered equally and permanently regardless of kinship identity. In fact, all dead are not equally able to be worshipped. On Cheju Island, the dead who were known to be guerrillas or communist sympathizers were not welcomed to the genealogy or brought home again. But exactly because of their social alienation and historically liminal status, such nonaligned spirits might be the appropriate objects of the secretive ancestor ritual. Paraphrasing Heonik Kwon's *After the Massacre* (2006), this new paradigm of memory work could be termed "the bipolarity of post-Cold War memory."

Posthumous Adoption and Qualifications of the Victims

There has been a politically sensitive debate concerning who has the right to achieve the legal status of the "surviving family" of the Cheju massacre. This debate concerns contestations over the qualification of the victims and also the legality of kinship relations. The tension between blood ties and adoptive ties in family and kinship appears in the public arena of commemorations. Who are qualified victims to be recorded on the public monument at the village memorial hall? This question is closely related to the question of who are qualified to receive proper ancestor worship.

These conflicts in kinship practice are the result of the nationalization of individual deaths under the control of the state. Even the status of the victims required legal approval through formal hearings and reports of the neighboring survivors or village leaders who could testify to the factual truth about the death. However, because many victims of the Cheju massacre died young, childless or without any family heirs who could observe ancestral memorial ceremonies (*chesa*), close relatives were adopted according to the civilian rule of genealogy (*jokbo*). This kinship practice, "posthumous adoption of heirs" (*sahu yipyang*), means "adoption of the living person by the dead" (Janelli and Janelli 1982: 130, 161). It appears frequently in the places where mass deaths occurred during the Korea War as well as after the Cheju Massacre.⁸ Because most victims died young and unmarried, without descendants who could offer ancestral ceremonies, they would have remained unquiet ghosts. Therefore, posthumous adoption has been widely permitted for the sake of providing the victims with formal genealogical status as ancestor. This is, of course, not an ordinary type of adoption, which occurs while one or both parents are still living. Heirs have always been agnates of the adopting parents throughout Korea during the last few centuries (Janelli and

Janelli 1982: 54). Because adoption is the means for remedying the absence of a natural heir, the genealogical positions of the adoptee are significant only for lineage membership. Due to the fragility of adoptive ties, they do not replace blood ties in terms of ancestor worship and the ethic of filial piety.

Posthumous adoption of heirs has been culturally acceptable and a frequent practice on Cheju Island. There were numerous families whose members all died without successors during the massacre. This kind of cultural genealogical adoption has not caused any problems in the context of social memory for the family or village community. Although the civil law code changed in 1992, so that posthumous adoption of heirs was no longer legally sanctioned, this change did not at first cause any trouble because there were no guaranteed restitutions connected to the morally correct adoption practice.

However, after the Cheju Special Law of Restitution for the Victims of the April Third Incident was established in 2000, the condition of adoption changed. Because the genealogical adoptees were not legally acknowledged, they could not benefit from the Special Law; for instance, they could not get an identity card as the surviving family or the benefit of financial reimbursement for medical examinations. Although the amount of the financial benefit is rather small, the legal status of the “surviving family” appears significant, particularly because it is now considered a matter of family “honor” that was verified by the state. Hyun and her fellow “women survivors” in the village display their vision of the past as a rhetorical tool to control their “honorable” future as if those dead victims of massacre were transformed into heroic figures who are eligible to be enshrined at the national cemetery. Their claim for restoration of the massacre victims’ honor would pave the way to building a morally authentic community in peace beyond the ideological struggles that have been sustained by the anticommunism of the South Korean state. The practice of posthumous adoption is the work of vernacular memory that redeems the dead and the living in the solidarity of kinship.

STRANGER SPIRIT-ANCESTOR AND THE ICONIC POWER OF THE INITIATION DREAM

Pain, when embodied, closes in on itself. . . In order for pain to find its freedom in the semeiosis of culture, it must pass through the liminal phases of either terror or beauty, or both.

(Daniel 1996: 139, 144)

Giving testimony requires the courage to confront violence itself as well as the fear of violence. Such courage may be obtained collectively through the solidarity between the victim and other women who recognize and acknowledge her suffering. The solidarity of pain can be achieved when a woman, by means of her body, can bear the pain of another, that is to say, in the words of Emmanuel Levinas, “when one is willingly taken as a hostage for the other” (as cited in Kang 1997: 94). When she takes the place of someone else, she can give meaning to that other’s pain just because it is “for the other.” Levinas (1974) refers to this pain as the pain in substitution. It is, of course, not the case that all pain in substitution is laden with significance. The

solidarity of pain may not come together until one can expose oneself to the “possibility for injury” such as that which the other experienced.⁹

When the language that expresses pain is monopolized by state power and patriarchal men, the solidarity of pain may be sought in laments and dream images, the forms of expression prior to language, and in spirit possession, the supernatural, and religious forms of expression in the imaginary realm. How do ghostly dreams and spirit possession heal persons and families from traumatic memory? How do ghosts mediate therapeutic process? Following Lambek’s discussion of the moral practice of spirit mediums in Madagascar (2002), I approach Cheju shamans as moral agents who cultivate a receptive capacity to external forces, either benevolent or malevolent, and react to them according to the judgment of particular circumstances. Shamans are agents who transform personal experiences into public performances of healing. They are able to maintain practical wisdom in the liminal state of being haunted by ghosts.

The initiation dream story of a Cheju shaman, Kun Simbang, redresses the balance of painful memory of massacre and emancipation from trauma (Kim 1995). The word “simbang” is here the local title for shamans on Cheju Island. At the age of 42 in 1964, Kun Simbang had her first healing experience, and also had a mysterious dream, which I here call an initiation dream. In the dream, a mysterious man, perhaps the tutelary mythical ancestor of the shaman, prophesied her destiny to serve thousands of spirits of dead people. That dream came true in reality. Kun Simbang suffered from extreme poverty because as a widow she had to survive with six children. Her husband was also a victim of the massacre. As her clients in the village increased in number and brought rice and money in payment for her healing practices, her family could live securely. At the age of 45, she had a formal initiation rite. Kun Simbang told me about this dream with vivid imagery:

At the crossroads near the chicken farm house now, there had been a *chongsal* [a house gate made of two wooden poles]. I was hung to that. My hands and feet were swollen, and tied up as if I was praying. Then a giant man several yards in height, like a tree trunk, wearing a hat like an American MP’s helmet, of room size, walked down the street from the southeast. He had a huge iron club, red on one side and black on the other. As he approached me, I saw thousands of people, children and adults, men and women, coming toward me from every direction. Some of them held spears in their hands; some were working in the fields. That man [*orun*, indicating a respectable person] stood by me and said angrily, “Who bound her? Who chained her?” And he touched me three times with the red side of his iron club. Thereafter I was released from the *chongsal*. As I turned away my face while crying, he held and comforted me. He said, “Don’t cry. I will offer you a straw-sack of rice and two sacks of barley. Don’t cry and go back home.” Walking back home in the dream, I woke up. Next day I told an old neighbor woman about my dream rather cautiously. I dreamt last night that a big gentleman wearing a half-moon shaped MP’s helmet on his head approached me and touched me three times with an iron club. He said that he would send a sack of rice and two sacks of barley to my house. You see, that old woman responded, “That sounds really queer!” . . . But next day around 4 o’clock in the afternoon, unexpectedly a special relief food arrived at my house. A gourd bowl of flour and two bowls of corn powder! So they were equivalent to one sack of rice and two sacks of barley exactly as predicted in the dream!

When I first heard this dream story in 1984 during my fieldwork, I could not figure out why the giant man wore an American military policeman’s helmet and carried

with him an iron club, or why Kun Simbang was hung at the gate of the village. Usually the gate, *chongsal*, is located in front of a private house. And who were those thousands of people, especially those carrying bamboo spears? The three dream images of the stranger American spirit, the village gate, and thousand ghosts are allegories of the Cheju Massacre. The dream images in Kun Simbang's dream not only integrate the personal experience of poverty and rebirth of a shaman but also perform the spectacle of a political unconscious on the background screen of the Cold War system.

The *chongsal*, the village gate to which Kun Simbang was tied up by her hands and feet, was actually the surveillance gate, standing in front of a sentry post which was temporarily placed at the village boundary for the purpose of self-defense against the communist guerillas during the April Third Incident. It was constructed with four three-foot wooden poles on each side and two horizontal ones lying across the vertical poles. Indeed the *chongsal* stood there to signify the physical limits of village safety. Each village was surrounded by a protective stone wall. At the gate stood two stone towers, seven-foot high and three-foot wide, between which was the *chongsal*. Each village militia ordered curfew between sunset and dawn. When the villagers had to work in the fields outside the fortress, some of the armed village militias accompanied them. Outside the *chongsal* anyone was susceptible to the rebels' attack or the danger of being suspected as a communist compatriot. Kun Simbang was hung there as if she were awaiting a public condemnation like a captured communist rebel.

The giant man wearing an MP's helmet and carrying an iron club resembles the real image of American MPs who came to Cheju Island as military advisors to the Korean central army, and whom the police dispatched from the mainland during the massacre. The image of a big, tall American MP in a jeep driving fast without inhibition on rough roads, anywhere he pleased, would deeply impress Cheju natives. Despite his formidable posture as the victor of the internal ideological warfare, how was the American MP imagined as the source of salvation from poverty? The imagery of the MP as a superhuman and nearly divine benefactor (which was actually used by pro-American political propaganda) overlapped allegorically with that of the beneficent ancestor in Cheju popular culture. At the historically deeper level of popular imagination, the image of "a giant man" and ancestor has its roots in folk tales of divine winged heroes. In these tales, the protagonist is portrayed as a tragic hero like a warrior or military general who lost the battle or a peasant rebel who represented the oppressed peasant class in the rebellion against corrupt bureaucracy but was killed afterwards. The common plot of their stories is as follows: although they were born with a sign of divinity or novelty such as small wings in the armpits, they could not become noblemen or victors on the battlefield because their wings were discovered in their infancy and cut off for fear of their "excessively rebellious spirit." They are portrayed as superhuman, very big or strong in comparison with ordinary men. In general, the tragic imagery of those heroes' stories is identified with the historical fate of Cheju Island in the popular imagination. If the heroes' tragic deaths represent the fateful history of Cheju Island's devastation, hunger, political neglect, and oppression, their divine births do justice to their desire for freedom from the force of fate.

Returning to the initiation dream, we can see here the cultural logic depicting the relationship between the giant benefactor and the thousands of hungry ghosts in the background. Kun Simbang explained to me later that they were "the three

thousand soldiers” who are the hungry, low-ranked group of spirits of the dead in the shamanic pantheon who died violent deaths such as suicide or murder, or who were anonymous war victims. In the dream, the giant man obliged Kun Simbang to feed those ghosts; here the latter represent the hungry, oppressed, neglected people. The giant man manifests himself as the stranger ancestor and popular hero of the Cheju people. In short, we can postulate here the emancipatory function of Kun Simbang’s initiation dream as transcendence from the immediate reality of poverty and social alienation.

The dream image of the American MP and that of the ancestor are not identical; they are rather oppositional. Literally speaking, the one is the victor, and the other is the victim. However, in terms of the iconic power of emancipating benediction and prophesying, these two images correspond. Also, in the mythic account of dream representation, they transform from their intrinsically tragic positions (one as the foreign invader and the other as the native rebel against the former) so as to glorify the future. In waking reality, the two images of the “ancestor” may feed the thousands of hungry ghosts and liberate the Cheju people from political turmoil. This is the revolutionary moment in sobriety that transcends “the deficiencies” of past history that has been infiltrated by violent ideological conflicts. The nonidentical images of the American MP and the tragic heroic native rebels do not hamper a more advanced interpretation of the dream; instead, they stimulate a deeper understanding of the complexity of the history of ideological warfare and its violent effects on Cheju Island.

Despite the fact that the American military presence on Cheju Island during the April Third Incident was actually threatening to her autonomy, the American MP’s benevolent posture, ironically associated with the iron helmet and club, transcends the unforgettable terror of the violent massacre of innocent people together with Kun Simbang’s husband’s death. This transcendence is certainly the popular expression of a utopian ideal in the political unconsciousness of the Cheju people, which is indeed manifested in Kun Simbang’s unquestioning recognition of the MP man as the mythic ancestor of the shaman who is obliged to heal the wounds of the Cheju people.

Like photos, dream images which are reproducible take on an iconic value as near-truths. They forge bonds of intimacy without yielding their autonomy between the American and state dominator and the victim, and restore the body of the victim: the shaman’s body hung on the village sentry gate. This allegorical imagery of the shamanic initiation dream serves as a displacement of state power through the moral agency of vernacular memories of the Cheju Massacre.

CONCLUSION: DURATIONAL MEMORY

For the survivors of the Cheju April Third Massacre, time is durational as well as chronological. Durational time is experienced continuously, and thus the passage of time cannot appease a durational memory of mass killing. The experience is part of the survivor’s inner reality. As we see in the case of women witnesses of violence and rightful mourners for the unmourned, what they have survived is an event to be endured, not a trauma to be healed (Langer 1996).¹⁰ It is not part of their historical past, but of their durational present, and as such is both unforgotten and unforgettable. The survivors are defined by their memory, a traumatic memory that can be

told but not shared except by means of imagistic representations such as spirit possession, ancestor rituals, and public commemorations. The durational persistence of trauma could never be completely healed because the witnesses' and survivors' testimonial narratives of survival after the massacre become the death stories of themselves and their families.

The National Commission for Disclosing the Truth and Restoring Victim's Grace of the Cheju April Third Incident in 2000 was a dramatic effort to provide a public space in which the terror unleashed during the massacre could be articulated and publicly heard. It sought to give judicial acknowledgment to stories of traumatic injury and vernacular memory that may have been suppressed and silenced. In the public witnessing and hearings, one of the assumptions behind the judicial reckoning of truth is of a mimetic relation between memory and event. However, the most difficult task of testimony for the witness and survivor is to remember not only objective events but also one's own place in those events. When the trauma is voiced, we need to pay attention not only to the content of testimonial narratives but also to the processes of their formation within personal and local experiences. It may not only establish a new context for interactions between the perpetrators, witnesses, and survivors, but also generate new contexts through which everyday life may become possible in the present, here and now.

In this chapter, I have paid attention to the gendered nature of recounting traumatic experiences of the Cheju Massacre. Women survivors testified primarily against the brutality committed on sons, husbands, and brothers – rarely could they speak of the harm done to themselves (Das and Kleinman 2001: 12; Das 2007). The stories women tell record impossible levels of violence, but their terror lies in the manner in which the everyday punctuates these accounts. The memorialization of these events is in the register of the everyday, as women speak of the dispersal of families and the extraordinary tasks of continuing to maintain everyday relationships after the massacre – never heroic struggle but solidarity for survival.

NOTES

This chapter is based on my recent fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, and also previous articles on the Cheju (Jeju) April Third Incident. The completion of this work was made possible by a generous support from the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2010-DZZ-3104).

- 1 See the Japanese case of countermemory practice of the body, Igarachi 2000. See also Chinese contestation of social memories of the Cultural Revolution, Mueggler 1998.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of recent anthropological studies on spirit possession, see Cohen 2008.
- 3 This shamanic ritual for the dead invoking ten kings of the underworld, *siwang maji*, was held for three days at a local shamanic shrine on Cheju Island, Korea, in 2006. This type of ritual is usually offered to family ancestors, but this time the shaman, Sunshil Simbang, invited 150 more souls of the dead who were massacred on the same day together with the ritual host's dead parents. Sunshil Simbang explained that those dead souls should be greeted and treated as fellow elders who had lived as neighbors in the village before the massacre. Thus, this shamanic ritual was actually performed as a community commemoration ceremony for all victims of the massacre in Tongbok-li. For the whole transcription of ritual chants, see Jung-sik Kang et al. 2008.

- 4 Jay Winter (1995) also makes an eloquent claim on behalf of local communities of bereavement.
- 5 This kind of official state ceremony for the dead who died violently in the war and similar mass deaths has been practiced since the Choson Confucian dynasty (1392–1910). It was called *Toje*, a Confucian rite to placate the spirits of victims of infectious disease, wars, or criminal judgments, as their perturbed souls would not be properly mourned by families due to their violent “bad” deaths. This state commemoration rite was an effective means of dispelling mass anxieties, and can be interpreted as a measure taken by rulers and Confucian reformers who chose to enforce their ideology upon the general populace. Before the Choson era, Buddhist rituals of water and land were practiced for the same purpose but at the individual level. Therefore, we can interpret this official state ritual for the violent deaths as instrumental in facilitating the extension of the political order.
- 6 Dok-son Hyun was 21 years old during the massacre. Although she was married, she was living in her home village with her parental family. Her husband was away at work in the peninsula. Her two brothers and two young nephews who were 7 years old were massacred. Because there was no descendant to observe the ancestral rite of her parental family, she adopted a distant relative for the ancestor worship duty.
- 7 Ten years later, in January 22, 2011, I met Hyun again during the public commemoration in Pukchon village. She was now respected as the representative testifier of the Pukchon massacre, and had received the award of Courageous Mother of the April Third in 2010. Her personal mission was seemingly accomplished.
- 8 Inchu Pyo (2003) reported widespread practices of similar posthumous adoptions after the Korean War in the villages of Cholla Namdo Province.
- 9 Borrowing the words of Stanley Cavell (1994), Veena Das rephrases the expression “a hostage for the other” as “pawning of voice of the other” (1996: 69).
- 10 Although Langer’s analysis is based on the TV testimony of a woman Holocaust survivor, I found a great similarity with Cheju women survivors in terms of the limit of linguistic representation of the trauma.

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CHAPTER 13

The Globalization of Pentecostalism and the Limits of Globalization

Girish Daswani

Globalization and Pentecostalism are intimately connected in a double sense. On the one hand, it is globalization that makes possible the rise of Pentecostalism and offers it the means to spread. On the other hand, “globalization” summarizes what Pentecostals find wrong with the world and what they hope to transform. I illustrate this interconnection and the dilemmas to which it gives rise by focusing on a particular denomination whose members I have followed for some years.

The Church of Pentecost (CoP) is a global church with over eighty branches located outside of its headquarters in Ghana. At the time of writing, the home page of its website displayed a list of its eighty-four member countries, scrolling across the screen from right to left like flashing news bulletins or stock prices.¹ The names are indexical of a divine commitment to, and financial investment in, countries such as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, India, Lebanon, United Kingdom, United States, and Zimbabwe (the list continues). The phrase “Bringing the world to the saving knowledge of Christ” underpins the title of the church, elucidating the imagined reality summoned up by the list. While the information does not change as frequently or rapidly as international news or stock markets, it affirms the missionary presence of the church and the international flows of its leaders and members. The website is an apt artifact of our globalized age, electronically capturing its urgency, continuous movement, and fluctuations. For viewers, the website also helps to thicken social relations by enabling the virtual participation of church

members living in different parts of the world. One of the news items from 2011, for example, informed CoP members about the chairman's public lecture at the Global Christian Forum in Manado, Indonesia. Another, from 2012, shared a blog post from the immediate past-chairman, who writes about the failure of the church in Europe to live up to expectations. While residing in Hamburg, Germany, he invited CoP members to pray for the European branches of its church. "Now, while the fastest growing churches are in Africa and Asia, Christianity has taken a nose-dive in most parts of Europe. We are the fruit of their missionary sacrifices. Our presence in Europe at this time is divine . . . *REVERSE MISSIOLOGY*."²

The globalization of CoP can be understood in terms of Arjun Appadurai's (1996) five dimensions of transnational or global cultural flows: (1) *ethnoscape* (the international distribution of people through migration and, in this case, reverse missionization), (2) *mediascape* and (3) *technoscape* (internet, radio and TV programs produced and books published by CoP, new media technology), (4) *financescape* (international flows of tithes, missionary offerings, and property investments), and (5) *ideoscape* (the universal Saving Grace of Jesus Christ). Appadurai shows how the world is imagined into and out of being through the multiple intersections of these spatial and temporal dimensions of globalization. His ideas provide a useful and important theoretical movement away from the part/whole analysis of globalization, whereby the least parts (the "local") make up the greater whole (the "global"). What such a portrait of the global church and its international assemblage does not do, however, is reveal the moral debates articulated around what "globalization" is doing to and for religious institutions such as CoP in Ghana. For "globalization" is no longer the property of the "state-capital nexus," as Appadurai importantly notes later (2000); nor is it the property of the social sciences or confined to academic debate. For my Pentecostal Christian interlocutors, who use the discourse of globalization to make sense of, and act upon the world, it is a lived reality.

CoP leaders believe that globalization represents a causal force in its own right, one that helps bring an unchanging God to a changing world, while also triggering cultural tensions and social anxieties that potentially threaten the stability of Pentecostalism in Ghana. When they say, "we are living in a changing world," church leaders refer to several problems they face within the church and with Pentecostalism in Ghana. They point to the shifting values of a new Ghanaian Christian society, in which personal fame and fortune are emphasized over the belief in Jesus Christ. For church leaders, globalization is not just a boon; it also poses problems that need solving. As I go on to show, such problems are a direct reflection of how Pentecostals, who are committed to a transcendental "unchanging" standpoint (Keane 2007; Engelke 2007; Robbins 2010), view their relationship to a "changing" world. This chapter addresses the limits of globalization by examining the moral limits of the transcendental certainty that accompanies the Christian idea of change. Before expanding on ways through which church leaders negotiate these problems, I provide a brief introduction to the anthropology of Christianity and to CoP.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY

Over the last decade, a theoretical framework for the cross-cultural study of Christian societies and Christianity that particularly applies to Protestant and Pentecostal

churches has emerged (Robbins 2003, 2004; Bialecki et al. 2008).³ This new focus attends to what those who call themselves Christian say, and do, and moves beyond functionalist descriptions that conceive religious adherence as a response to socioeconomic deprivation or anomie, or as an effect of charismatic leadership (Robbins 2004). It also acknowledges that the vocabulary of anthropology and the social scientific understanding of modernity have been deeply influenced by Christian history and philosophy (Asad 1993; Sahlin 1994; Cannell 2005, 2006; Cannell, this volume).

The anthropology of Christianity has developed an understanding of Christianity as a cultural phenomenon that contains certain features that can be compared globally (Robbins 2004; Coleman 2010; Daswani 2012). For example, it has been shown how Pentecostalism exports a model of rupture that consistently incorporates the traditional cosmologies of local societies by diabolizing them, turning the local spirits and divinities into agents of the Devil (Meyer 1999; Robbins 2007). Such a process creates a productive tension with the existing values of the host society in which Pentecostalism is introduced. Pentecostalism's institutional success as a global religion is also attributed to its emphasis on a rich ritual life (Robbins 2009), whereby bodily practices and authorized modes of invoking the transcendental play an important role in creating religious experience and, in turn, religious subjects (Meyer 2010: 123). As such, it appears to be a specific regime of practice through which specific moral selves and political subjects are formed (Marshall 2009; O'Neill 2010).

While Pentecostalism is both global in its reach and local in its application, and thrives off the tensions between its own values and those of its host societies and cultures, I seek to understand the globalization of Pentecostalism through its moral limits, at least in the ways that my interlocutors from CoP described them.

CoP AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF PENTECOSTALISM

CoP leaders shared a model of Christian freedom that they see as universal, and which sometimes sits uneasily with other expressions of individual and Christian freedom. This incompatibility causes them to ask questions about their experience of increasing fragmentation in a global village and to wonder how the different parts fit into a universal whole. Their Pentecostal freedom, which is aligned to the ways in which born-again Salvation is experienced and put into practice, is always in the process of vanishing or in threat of moral dissolution. They complain that their pretheoretical commitments to universals are being destabilized by generational and ideological shifts in their membership, as well as by the entry of more recent forms of Pentecostalism, also known as Charismatic Christianity.

While most southern Ghanaians might label themselves as Christian, there are recognizably different kinds of Christians in Ghana. This is an important point that needs to be emphasized, since a Christian identity must be seen in relation to a specific affiliation to a Christian denomination and/or church. These include mainline/historic churches, African independent churches, classical Pentecostal churches, neo-evangelical/mission-related churches, and neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches (Omenyo 2002: 34). CoP is one of three major Pentecostal denominations in present-day Ghana that emerged out of the earlier missionary efforts of the Apostolic Church, United Kingdom, which arrived in the Gold Coast in 1937. It is commonly

referred to as a classical Pentecostal church, but also shares certain family resemblances with the other types of Christian churches described above. The specificities of CoP, especially its organizational structure, are particularly important in explaining why it has been so successful in Ghana and abroad. Unlike many newer Charismatic churches that are located in urban areas, CoP has an effective rural base that serves as the first point of contact for Ghanaian converts before they migrate to urban city centers such as Kumasi and Accra. Another important factor for CoP's success is that the church has a strong clerical and bureaucratic structure that controls the organization and operations of church officers, pastors, and prophets. Its phenomenal growth is also linked to allowing prophetic activities such as deliverance and prophecy to coexist alongside the Charismatic message of "health," "wealth," and "success." While health, wealth, and success are important to many African Pentecostals, CoP distinguishes itself from its Charismatic cousins through its emphasis on holiness, patience, and self-discipline.

The rising popularity of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana since the early 1980s has overlapped with the liberalization of Ghana's media, the subsequent appearance of the more recent wave of Pentecostalism known as Charismatic Christianity, as well as Ghana's turn to democracy in 1992. The newly imagined freedom brought about by the liberalization of the economy and media, as well as by the entry of many more Charismatic churches into Ghana's religious-scape, has also been cause for concern among CoP leaders. Charismatic churches in Ghana emphasize the immediate benefits of conversion, including worldly prosperity, success, and healing, and teach that demons and ancestral curses continue to affect a believer's life even after they have come to Christ (Gifford 2004). CoP leaders worry about how these Charismatic churches and the logic of purely interested exchange have penetrated Pentecostalism in Ghana. They are concerned that these changes promote a message of Salvation that neglects the importance of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, focused instead on worldly promises of immediate return. In this case, the Spirit of the Pentecostal gift – the selfless sacrifice of Jesus for all humanity – becomes juxtaposed with the selfish and individualized nature of human beings and market relations.

These concerns and questions are critical commentaries on the Pentecostal incommensurability between the transcendental "unchanging" God believers serve and the immanent "changing" world they live in. They are also expressive of the ongoing judgments CoP members make in understanding how to mediate between such seemingly opposite poles. In locating such Pentecostal anxiety in the context of globalization, it is helpful to return to the anthropological idea of the Gift in anthropology and compare it with the Gift of Salvation. While I do not want to equate the Maussian gift with the Christian one, I believe that the "unexamined" principle through which Marcel Mauss was analyzing the spirit of the gift can be applied to the Spirit of Pentecostalism.

THE MAUSSIAN GIFT AND THE CHRISTIAN GIFT

I conducted research with CoP in southern Ghana and in its international branch in London between 2002 and 2004. During fieldwork, I realized that Pentecostalism mediates a transcendental God through interpersonal interactions and relationships

of exchange across several value spheres. An important question that the Ghanaian Pentecostals I met frequently asked themselves was: “What form should these relationships take?” My interlocutors shared ethical concerns regarding how Pentecostal Salvation ought to be achieved, in their own lives and in the lives of others, and what it should look like. These preoccupations materialized as questions, which varied from the “what” (“What are the acceptable forms of Christian practice?”) to the “why” questions (“Why are some Pentecostals seeking profit and fame over service and evangelism?”). For many, the disinterested gift of Salvation was largely incommensurable with the interested nature of the individual and market relations.

Marcel Mauss (1990) famously taught us that, within gift economies, objects are seen to partake of something of the personality of the giver. Drawing upon the words of a Maori sage, Tamati Ranapiri, he writes about the *hau* or “spirit” of the gift, in which a part of the donor’s soul becomes entangled with the gift, whose wish to return home compels the recipient to make a return. While Mauss shows us that there is no such thing as a free or pure gift, Jonathan Parry (1986) suggests that Christianity’s universalistic conception of disinterested giving, and its devaluation of the material world by a transcendental other, provides the ethical reasoning for the universalized idea of the “pure gift.” While “the ideology of a disinterested gift appears in parallel with an ideology of purely interested giving” (Parry 1986: 466), another important consideration is the moral reasoning through which religious subjects make sense of, and navigate between, this duality of interestedness and disinterestedness.⁴

According to Pentecostals, the Judeo-Christian God sacrificed his only son, Jesus Christ, a Heavenly gift, to save people from their sins. For those who accept Jesus as their personal lord and savior, this gift of Salvation, a spiritual bond between recipient, donor, and the moral community of believers involved in this exchange is created.⁵ By accepting the gift of God (through Jesus), Pentecostals share in his Holy Spirit and are compelled to make a return through this Spirit. According to Pentecostals, it is Jesus’ initial sacrifice and the Spirit of this gift of God that allows the church to grow and become global. In fact, the giving of monetary gifts to help the Christian church expand globally is said to have begun on the day of Pentecost when Jesus’ apostles, as well as over 3,000 other persons present, experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, also called the gifts of the Spirit. According to Acts (2:43–47), those who joined the movement gave their support tangibly by pooling resources for the benefit and expansion of the group. Similarly, in the CoP narrative, it was such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Gold Coast (Ghana’s colonial name) in 1931 that foretold the coming of a European missionary and the formation of this African church (Church of Pentecost 2000), which was destined to take the Gospel all across Africa and to the world as a whole.⁶

While they await the return of Jesus or their entry into Heaven, whichever comes first, CoP members are obliged to conduct themselves according to Christian principles, win souls for Jesus, and give their own monetary gifts of tithes and offerings to the church, helping invest in infrastructure and missionary work. Like Mauss’s gift, the Pentecostal gift is thus a “total” social phenomenon – religious and moral, relating to economics, politics, and family. In this narrative, Christian Salvation is framed as a “pure” gift – one that creates a long-term reciprocal relationship and commitment to God and evangelization. Being not so quick to drop the importance of the

concept of the “pure gift” in Mauss’s work, James Laidlaw (who draws on Derrida) explains that the idea of the free, disinterested, gift is also a “logical tool” that is largely “left unexamined” by Mauss (Laidlaw 2000: 627), what Roy Rappaport (1999) might describe as the moral contract behind the contract. This moral content left unexamined by Mauss in fact provides the sacral force from which church leaders and theologians draw the authority to propose solutions to protect themselves against the dangers of cultural and social change brought about by globalization, binding and insulating CoP values regarding Salvation from untoward global forces. CoP leaders argue that individualism and the selfish capacities of the capitalist market are not the primary source of explanation for change in our lives, but that the power of the transcendental is. While the transcendental nature of the gift is left unexamined by Mauss, Pentecostals draw on its moral authority to speculate on its degrees of application in the world.

In responding to globalization, Pentecostals are directly addressing the world they live in and what they see as its problems. As I go on to show, church leaders are ethical actors who question the conventional parameters of what is acceptable in the present and provide situational adjustments, which aim to either alleviate moral ambiguities or create innovative positions around which new norms eventually develop. The ethical field provides a basis for understanding global Pentecostalism. This focus on ethics in anthropology places more attention on the means (the journey) than on the ends (the results) of decision-making processes (Laidlaw 2002). It also examines how practical judgments are made in response to changing circumstances (Lambek 2010). An anthropology of ethics helps highlight how CoP leaders problematize globalization and try to find Christian resolutions to an inappropriate balance between the incommensurable values of a Universal God and the global circulation of other universalized ideas, such as the notion of individual human rights.

THE PROBLEM OF “POSTMODERNITY”

According to one CoP Apostle the “globalization of Christianity,” namely the effects of a more aggressive marketing of Christianity, the increasing use of media and the internet, and the culture of consumerism, will leave the church vulnerable to people’s desires for “quick-fix results, sensationalism and emotionalism.” These forces of globalization in a postmodern society have serious effects on the church, especially its “less mature members,” he said to me. His views were partly a response to the recent era of political and economic liberalization in Ghana, a period of cultural change that was based on a model of freedom whereby the satisfaction of individual needs was seen as a token for social and economic benefits for all. He described this model of “postmodernity” as one built out of relations between equal parties. This ideology of individual autonomy and equality without deference to a Universal God was problematic for many church leaders. As the church website posted in 2011:

THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the Church, Apostle Alfred Koduah, has described postmodernism and the permissive lifestyle engulfing today’s world as fallacious traps and advised proponents of the teachings to turn to Christ in order to enjoy the peace that currently eludes them . . . Apostle Koduah said the view of human right leaders

that a person's life is his or hers to live the way he or she pleases once he or she is over 18 is a satanic teaching that seeks to sideline God as the giver and sustainer of life . . . He was not surprised that the teachings permit same-sex marriages and atheistic views which he considered an affront to God who instituted marriage to be a holy institution. On the challenges of the youth, he said The Church of Pentecost recognizes the youth as a very important wing of the Church and strives through its teaching and programs to nurture them in the fear of God.

Apostle Koduah is the General Secretary of CoP. When I met him between 2003 and 2004, he had just completed a Masters degree in theology and started working on a PhD. He dedicated a lot of his energy to thinking about the youth of the church and to the challenges they were facing in this time of globalization. The youth of the church, he said, were influenced by many ideas that were coming from outside of Ghana. His reservations concerning globalization exemplify the concerns that other Pentecostal theologians have with a new world context, including a modern scientific worldview and religious pluralism. This critical engagement with globalization has been loosely called "global theology" (Yong and Heltzel 2004: 209). My conversations with him reflected a challenge he faced with other global Pentecostal theologians, namely how to systematically clarify the Truth of the Bible within an age of globalization. As the passage quoted above shows, Koduah's concerns for Ghana are particularly focused on what he calls the "postmodern condition." The general argument of Koduah is that while Enlightenment rationalism aspired to attain shared universal truths, this period of postmodernity emphasizes the limits of human reason.

In a 2003 presentation, held at the church's Pentecost University College in Accra, entitled "The Church of Pentecost in the post-modern era," Koduah located Ghanaian contemporary society within a Western evolutionary three-stage model of historical change: (1) premodern period, (2) modern era, and (3) postmodern era. If the modern era posed the problem of not believing in anything, the post-modern era, he said, posed the larger and more dangerous problem of a "belief in one's self." If modernity rejected religion altogether, postmodernity claims that no one has a monopoly on Truth. The church now had to contend with what he considered a "postmodern" problem, which included "a multi-cultural awareness" that celebrated "differences at the expense of the Universal." These were moral anxieties regarding the role of Christian meaning in a global world, of which Ghanaian society and politics were part: "Because the world has become a part of the global village, Ghana is a part of the effects of existentialism . . . it has taken permanent residence in Ghanaian society and . . . entered popular culture through television talk shows and the government's stress on the fundamental rights of the individual."

According to Koduah, multiculturalism and existentialism celebrate "differences at the expense of the Universal." In his explanation, "existentialism" emerged because "human beings cannot live without worshipping something," so they "began to believe in themselves." This idea of "believing in oneself" is problematic, since the public practices of such an inner belief are not aligned with a Christian, transcendental source. An ideology of personal freedom and its accompanying rights-based discourses depend on an understanding of a specific "self-owning subject" that enjoys free expression and choice regarding belief and practice (Asad 2003: 150). These

ideas surrounding one's freedom to worship any God, or not to worship God at all, as well as to own one's body and sexuality, were not fully commensurable with a Pentecostal Christian ideology. Nor were they compatible with the universal claims of a global faith whose morality is sustained by the Scriptures:

For believers and practitioners of existentialism, meaning is a purely human phenomenon . . . individuals create meanings for themselves, no one can provide a meaning for someone else. It is meant to be private and personal. It is non-committal and you cannot impose meaning on others . . . this has led to subjectivity and relativity, where everyone is in their own reality . . . where "what is good for you may not be true for me." This is directing lifestyles of people today . . . makes gays and lesbians come out openly and shamelessly, makes people do things with their bodies, such as tattoos, earrings, body piercing, sex changes . . . allows sexual promiscuity, provocative songs and films.

While Christianity dominated the public sphere in Ghana, the establishment of individual human rights was understood as tantamount to the loss of church authority over the private lives of individuals. "Can the Church stand the test of time?" Koduah asked. "Will the next generation of church leaders be able to defend the faith in this society of permissiveness? Can we pass on the baton to succeeding generations?" This model of the postmodern subject expressed a growing anxiety about the moral boundaries of the Pentecostal subject. It raised concerns about the incommensurability between believing in oneself and placing one's faith in the transcendental authority of the Christian God. Christian and biblical absolutes could not be sacrificed in favor of a compromise with the "sin that is going on," Koduah commented. The Apostle advocated that the church return to the Bible and engage in evangelism, "to convince even the die-hard postmodernists that Jesus is still alive and the Bible is still the power of God for those who believe." With the public "rejection of objective truth," how was the church to continue to advocate the exclusive salvation in Jesus Christ and defend the doctrine of uniqueness of Jesus Christ in a plural society?

Apostle Koduah was also articulating his own Christian cosmopolitanism. He was representative of church leaders who used their own symbolic capital, theological education, and transnational mobility in speaking to the problems of a new generation of Pentecostals. Such church leaders were critical of a younger generation of Ghanaians for their indulgence in new forms of conspicuous consumption, sexual promiscuity, and Western or foreign ideas associated with globalization. The most dangerous threat came from changes within Pentecostalism in Ghana. For many church leaders, Charismatic Christianity, which they viewed as one of the problematic consequences of globalization, posed a serious moral dilemma. According to CoP leaders, many of the newer Charismatic churches were corrupting the minds of the younger generation of CoP members with harmful aspects of a new global culture. Like the Pentecostals, the Charismatics emphasized becoming born again and Holy Spirit baptism, but they also focused on deliverance from evil spirits and witchcraft and on the prosperity gospel. These churches, also known as Ghana's "new Christianity" (Gifford 2004), were very popular with the "postmodern" generation and many youth were leaving CoP to join them. Church leaders complained that something had to be done. It was partly for this reason that CoP initiated English Assemblies and the Pentecost International Worship Centers (PIWCs).

THE “POSTMODERN” GENERATION: PENTECOST INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE

Now because of the internet, you can go anywhere. You can go to any country because of the net. And as you have already seen, Ghanaians do a lot of traveling. Definitely culture has changed and some of these things have affected some of the youth. And that was the time that some of the charismatic churches were coming up and emerging . . . Yes it was also a move to arrest the interest of some of the youth. While at that time many remained with the church, you see in the late nineties many of the young who did not have the chance to come to the PIWCs going to the Charismatic movements. (Apostle Dr Opoku Onyinah, Chairman, CoP, personal communication)

The PIWC was where I spent most of my Sundays and many weekday prayer services in Accra, Kumasi, and London. Through my regular visits, I came to know the more educated and affluent Ghanaians who lived in Ghana’s urban centers. The aim of the PIWC was to bridge the “generation gap” and retain educated members of the church influenced by the university and town fellowship of the 1980s that initiated the Charismatic churches and ensured their subsequent influence in Ghana. PIWCs were usually made up of Ghanaians who preferred the English language and were not content with the traditional CoP programs and activities. They started off as English Assemblies to retain Ghanaian members who preferred to worship in English and then later became “International” to amalgamate people of other cultures and backgrounds. One church leader described the reasons for establishing PIWCs as follows:

You see we are in a changing world and we have a lot of Ghanaian youth who speak more English language than the local language now. By their upbringing they want to see things done in a certain way which most of the traditional local churches cannot offer, so such people will find solace in such places, which are the PIWCs.

Compared to the recent wave of Charismatic teachings, CoP was seen as a traditional Pentecostal church. CoP members had to behave modestly, were separated in church services according to gender, and women could not wear makeup or jewelry and demonstrated holiness by covering their hair in church. Personal modesty, holiness and obedience to church authority were highly valued. These norms sometimes clashed with the changing expectations of the next generation growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. PIWCs became associated with Western forms of worship, songs, dance (the “Holy Ghost dance”), and relaxed their rules on the mixing of genders and style of dress during church services. PIWC members, who were mainly younger and educated CoP members, interpreted these changes as a movement away from what they described as the “cultural practices” of CoP. They identified with an international Christian community and were considered the elite of the church. Apart from having access to higher institutions of learning, many members of PIWCs had good jobs and were entrepreneurs and well-traveled.

The aim of PIWCs, as one Apostle put it, was “not only to retain our young people” but also “to attract the postmodern generation.” In addition to a generational difference, cultural difference was perceived. In an interview with a reporter from the church, Apostle Onyinah, who was very instrumental in getting the PIWCs

started, said: “The world is now the status of a global village . . . Culture is progressive so now the culture of Ghana itself has changed. We can’t say that this is Ghanaian culture. Now we see that the youth have adopted all kinds of culture . . . Yes, Western culture . . . sometimes even from the East, oriental culture.”

The PIWC was linked to a changing culture that had emerged from more travel and exchange between Ghana and the rest of the world. The modernity of the new church elite was based on a more cosmopolitan lifestyle, new forms of consumption, and an access to education, all of which previous generations lacked. However, while CoP adapted to the changes in the Pentecostal scene and even adopted some teachings and practices associated with the Charismatic churches, these newer churches also became targets for speaking about a selfish individualism that resonated in Ghana’s new moral economy.

Church leaders worried that the logic of purely interested exchange had penetrated Pentecostalism in Ghana and that changes in the market economy promoted a message of Salvation that neglected the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, focusing instead on worldly promises and the satisfaction of immediate needs and desires. “They lack patience,” many CoP leaders and members told me, referring to the many Pentecostals who expected to have their prayer answered immediately. Here the Spirit of the Pentecostal gift – the selfless sacrifice of Jesus for all humanity – is opposed to the selfish and individualized nature of human beings and global market relations. Church leaders saw a Charismatic moral economy that promoted profit and personal fame over the saving grace of Jesus. According to some CoP leaders, the newer Charismatic churches promoted a “New Gospel.” They complained that this new influence came from outside Ghana and through foreign evangelists who provided a skewed version of the Gospel and promoted a new level of commercial consumption of popular Pentecostalism.

THE “NEW GOSPEL”: BETWEEN CHARACTER AND CHARISMA

In the 1980s, Christian books and cassettes (video and audio) on ancestral curses and demons, and on how to exorcise them, emerged in Ghana’s public realm. CoP leaders described such products as flooding the Ghanaian market from outside, mainly from North America and Nigeria. This commercialization of Pentecostalism produced what Birgit Meyer calls a pentecostalite public culture, where Pentecostal “music, popular theatre, call-in radio programs, and video-films” converge with popular culture in the public realm (2004: 92). These books, cassettes, and films emphasized that the Christian is already healthy and wealthy, and that the believer has only to take possession of this reality. They also promoted the idea that demons and ancestral curses continued to affect believers’ lives and hold back their wealth, health, and success, even after becoming Pentecostal.

CoP leaders argued that these new texts rendered Ghanaian Pentecostals self-absorbed in problems associated with negative aspects of African culture, preventing them from realizing that Christians already had the necessary tools for Salvation upon conversion. According to the previous CoP chairman, Apostle Ntummy, globalization has led to the spread of books from all over the world, including Nigeria, the United States, and Britain, which brought new cultural values into Ghana. As he said to me:

I think the book that has done the greatest harm has been Derek Prince's *From Curse to Blessing*. . . Derek Prince was invited to Nigeria and he taught so much about these curses. Nigerians embraced it and some Ghanaians were at the conference and they invited him to come to Ghana. When you talk about curses generally in the African context and you mention idol worship or witchcraft, that will not exclude anybody. Everybody's background is related to these things. Where the power, the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, is not mentioned, is not highlighted and is marginalized now, to the extent that "Oh, you may believe in Jesus but the curses are still there. You need a powerful man of God to break them for you." I think this is unfortunate. If the blood of Jesus is not powerful enough to do it, will that man of God be more powerful?

Global evangelists such as Derek Prince (1915–2003) taught that demons had the power to cause illness and psychological problems and that curses held converts back from receiving God's blessings. Such teachings were popular in Ghana and other parts of Africa as they confirmed the volitional nature of ancestral curses and witchcraft spirits. However, according to CoP leaders, the sacrifice of Jesus is a pure and fully transformative gift, which does not require a return to an African traditional past. As another church leader said, demons no longer had an effect on you and there was no need for prayer leaders or prophets to assume the role of Jesus. Rather, Pentecostals should have patience and work toward remaining instruments or channels for God's miracle. International preachers who promoted such teaching and their followers in Ghana were seen to be opportunistic and motivated by profit.

A backward and morally inferior "calculating machine" (Mauss 1990) had infiltrated the pure vision of Pentecostalism that these CoP leaders held. According to them, the individualistic values of a profit-oriented neoliberal market economy and the commercialization of Christian teachings were threatening to damage the reputation of Pentecostalism in Ghana. As a CoP leader told me, it is "character" rather than "charisma" that made a Pentecostal Christian virtuous and deserving of becoming a pastor or "man of God." If charisma is a personal quality that can be transferred between persons or acquired through one's station in the world, character is a divine quality that is cultivated over time. In CoP, Christian character is slowly developed over years of training, through taking on responsibilities within the church and through submission to church authority. Even after several years of such training, a church member must receive the calling of God, which is confirmed when one is chosen by church leaders to become a CoP pastor. Charisma, on the other hand, focuses on the individual's ability to satisfy people's immediate needs and give them what they want. While CoP pastors had character, many Charismatic pastors and profit-seeking prophets simply had charisma.

Ghana's neoliberal market economy helped promote charisma over character. Church leaders had also witnessed a proliferation of independent Bible schools, what Apostle Koduah called "Wayside Bible Schools." Becoming a pastor had become a profession that required money and a certificate, he complained. He called this a "Western world attitude," according to which education was enough to make you into a new person.

In the Western world, you see people graduating from high school or college. One decides to become a doctor, he enters the medical school, and another person decides he wants to be a pastor. He enters theological school. As if that becomes his profession.

We feel this is wrong. This is not a professional thing. It is a calling! . . . For example, a certain young man who maybe does not know what he is about simply enrolls into Bible School. He graduates and does not know what to do next. So next time you see him, he is organizing all-night meetings and the next day he is a bishop, he is a pastor, carrying so many titles. Go and see what is happening in his character; that is a different story.

According to Apostle Koduah, Pentecostalism was no longer a calling from God that provided divine direction, but a commercialization of Christianity that allowed you to become a new person through paying for a few courses in theological college. The latter was spiritually aimless, except in its pursuit of individual gain and self-interested pleasure. “There are three main pitfalls in ministry,” he told me, “what we call the three F’s – Fame, Female and Finance.” This did not mean that some CoP pastors did not gain more popularity over others or did not accept gifts of money, donations of property, or participate in fundraising events for the church and its overseas missions. They obviously did. With regard to the latter, I was a witness to many a church service where the amounts grew higher and higher as people were asked to step forward and make a public declaration of their commitment to provide these funds – in which the honor of the giver and recipient was simultaneously engaged. In some cases, church members offered foreign currency, American dollars or British sterling, in order to make a public display of their special status. These offerings were interpreted by church leaders as investments in God’s divine plan, not as gestures of self-interest or aggrandizement of the individual pastor or CoP.

The changing market economy, the advance of capitalistic logic in Pentecostalism, and the individualistic demands of a new generation all point to the limits of the transcendental authority CoP leaders inhabit. They also illuminate the need to better manage relationships through the practice of judgment. In their struggles to create a balance between such incommensurable values, CoP leaders reject the principle of equivalence (that all Pentecostals are the same) and indivisibility. They are also critical of an ideology of individual rights, of Christians who are self-interested and of a moral economy that does not consider Jesus first. Instead, CoP leaders are seeking an “optimum economy” (Mauss 1990: 77) that is based on a divine gift, where an unknown other is the apparent recipient (Coleman 2000: 202). In keeping with this line of argument, discourses on human rights and Charismatic practices are seen to stem from the self-interested nature of global actors, such as policy-makers, pastors and prophets.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to better understand how Pentecostalism engages with globalization by paying attention to the ethical judgments of CoP’s leaders with respect to social and global change. Church leaders are not arguing that all aspects of globalization are bad or that commercial capitalism is systematically a matter of selfish individualism. Instead, they are positing degrees of separation (between transcendence and immanence) and of differentiation (between non-Christians and Christians, and between “Christians” and true Christians).

The anthropology of Christianity has helped develop a cross-cultural framework that takes the views of Christians seriously and shows how they participate in a social and moral project of transforming their lives and the world around them. It also acknowledges that many contemporary anthropological assumptions regarding exchange and social change are closely tied to Christian ideas. In comparing Mauss's idea of the gift with the Pentecostal gift of Salvation, I have alluded to the close association between the Maussian and Pentecostal theories of exchange, and their respective attempts to simultaneously acknowledge and work at balancing the interested and disinterested dimensions of the gift. I have argued that the limits of the Maussian free gift are the limits of the Pentecostal sacrificial gift, and that the unexamined, noncontractual force behind the act of giving provides the contractual moral content in Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism, like globalization, exceeds representation. The only way to understand how Pentecostal individuals and groups engage with globalization is to look at the public practices that give these concepts concrete form. In paying more attention to the ethical practice of Christians from different denominations and backgrounds, we can further an understanding of their attitudes toward the changing world, themselves, and in turn, others. CoP leaders realize that the church is affected by the social and ideological changes associated with globalization. As social actors, they are formed by their practice, and yet also able to critically assess the multiple opportunities and challenges that globalization entails.

NOTES

I wish to thank the organizers and the participants of the *Companion to the Anthropology of Religion* workshop held at the University of Toronto, organized by Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek in April 2012. My colleague Todd Sanders provided me with very helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter. For their close readings of drafts of this chapter and for greatly helping to improve the quality of my contribution, I especially thank Katherine Blouin, Janice Boddy, Ann Bone, and Michael Lambek. Any remaining infelicities and deficiencies are of my own making.

- 1 The website is at <http://thecophq.org> (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 2 Posted Mar. 17, 2012 by Apostle Michael Ntuny on his blog (capital letters in the original), at http://mkntuny.blogspot.ca/2012_03_01_archive.html (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 3 Sometimes to the neglect of Christian Orthodox churches (Hann 2007) and Catholicism (Napolitano and Norget 2009).
- 4 Fenella Cannell (2005) has argued that the model of Christianity drawn from by Parry (1986) in describing the "pure gift" is an ascetic one premised on an antagonism between body and spirit. Cannell's American Mormon interlocutors, like her Catholic interlocutors from Bicol in the Philippines, do not seem to make a radical distinction between matter and spirit, between this world and the next.
- 5 Pentecostalism has its modern roots in a Christian movement that started in the early twentieth century in Topeka, Kansas, but also derives its biblical identity from the Book of Acts in the Bible, which describes an outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto the apostles of Jesus following his ascension into the presence of God (Acts 1:1–11). This outpouring of the Spirit takes place on Pentecost, which commemorates the promise of a new beginning for God's covenant people.
- 6 The first three of eight promises of the covenant entitled "God's Part" are: "That He God would raise a nation out of Africa that would be a spearhead and light to the world,

heralding the 2nd Coming of Christ Jesus our Lord”; “That the Gold Coast has been chosen to fulfill this eternal will and purpose of God”; and that the church “would become a great International Pentecostal Church which would send out missionaries from the Gold Coast to all parts of Africa and the world as a whole” (Church of Pentecost 2000: 147).

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PART **IV**

**Practices and
Mediations**

CHAPTER 14

Food, Life, and Material Religion in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity

Tom Boylston

Food and eating play some part in most if not all systems that get described as “religious.” This may take the form of disciplinary practices or dietary laws that set prescriptions and boundaries as to when and what it is proper to eat; it may take the form of a group of people eating together in commemoration of a religious figure or event; or, very often, it may entail gifts and offerings of food to incommensurate beings – noncorporeal, divine, “meta-empirical,” spiritual, or however they may be construed. Quite often more than one of these elements may be combined: an offering to a god may be preceded by a period of fasting and followed by a commemorative feast. The Christian Eucharist, at least in some of its forms, follows this pattern. Food is not the only kind of religious offering – money and other valuables are also common – but it is one of the most prevalent, and food offerings have characteristics that deserve special attention. In particular, food is ephemeral: it will always either spoil, or be eaten, digested, and excreted; by definition, it will always be transformed by living beings that draw their sustenance from it. To offer food to gods or spirits, then, is to traffic with the immortal, the disembodied, or the unchanging, by means of the most temporal and transitory of material media.

Religious food practices can involve offering food to a deity (or other noncorporeal being), eating in the name of or in commemoration of a deity, eating with the deity, or actually eating the deity itself, as in the case of the nonreformed Eucharist and in some forms of Aztec ritual, for example (Carrasco 1995: 457–458). From a litany of

diverse practices, each with their own distinct social logics, it is possible to extract a common question of comparative interest: how does food act as a medium between person and deity, and does it matter that the medium is food and not something else? Should we think of food offerings or food sharing as purely symbolic, as standing for something else, or is the material form of the offering significant in its own right? This essay is an attempt to think through these questions as applied to food and religious practice in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

Ethiopian Orthodoxy presents a case where mediation is not only central to religious practices, but the mediatory potential of food comes to be definitive of Christian personhood and belonging, more than doctrine, and more than any discourse of “belief.” The offering, consumption of, and abstention from food are the main channels by which Christians in the part of Ethiopia where I have worked produce and define their relationships with other Christians, with non-Christians, and with God, the angels, and the saints.

Interpersonal relations and relations with divinity, thus, often entail the sharing of food as a common medium. Mediation has become a key focus in recent studies of material religion (see e.g. de Vries 2001; Meyer 2008; Engelke 2012): since most if not all social relationships are mediated in one way or another, paying attention to the processes and materials of mediation affords key insights into how we actualize or realize connections with Others of various kinds – incommensurate, intimate, incarnate, or something else. I will concentrate on two aspects of mediation that emerge from recent work in the anthropology of religion: how a substance or material thing may act as a medium between two actors, helping to realize a social relationship; and as a vehicle for symbolic content, helping to realize meaning.

Food is a useful subject for this project partly because of its ubiquity, and partly because its material potential – to nourish, and to produce sensations of pleasure and displeasure, satiation and want – is so obvious and important. Furthermore, because food is always related to biological transformations and the organic processes of life and death, it provides the most striking possible contrast between worldly life and the existence of realms or beings that, because they are noncorporeal, are not subject to the same inevitable transformations.

As the ethnographic record shows, however, food can take on a vast range of symbolic meanings that could not conceivably be reduced to its material properties or to commonalities in human biological or cognitive responses (Feeley-Harnik 1995: 565). As such it makes an ideal ground for investigating the interrelationships between symbolic and material (especially organic) processes.

I will start with a brief discussion of the development of material approaches to the study of religion, and some notes on commensality and the sociology of food. For the rest of the essay I will focus my attention on two aspects of Ethiopian Orthodoxy as practiced on the Zege Peninsula, where I conducted fieldwork in 2008–2009. These are the Eucharist, understood as the ritualized consumption of the body of Christ, and fasting, which has special importance in Ethiopia as a basis of Christian belonging and devotion. Both practices manipulate the affective and universal properties of food consumption in order to constitute particular kinds of relationships in a Christian idiom: hierarchical and incommensurable relationships with God, relationships of shared belonging and existential commonality with other Christians, and relationships of partial (but mediated) exclusion with Muslim neighbors. In each case

the material mediation of the relationship through food is not incidental but constitutive. Food actualizes the relationship as it contributes to the physical constitution of the actors involved. It also ensures that religious practices and relationships are thoroughly entangled in the material environment and in circuits of production.

As well as constituting relationships in the present, both fasting and the Eucharist can be understood as practices of commemoration. But the forms of commemoration that they exemplify lie on a fault-line between remembrance as a mental, subjective process, and remembrance as an embodied reconstitution, repetition, or reenactment of archetypal relationships or events. The symbolic character of memorial meals overlaps with their material effects, blurring the line between remembering social others and recreating them. My aim is to explore the role of religious consumption on this fault-line: if eating partially constitutes social relationships, to what extent can eating with incommensurate beings (or eating them) be seen as bringing them into tangible existence?

MATERIAL RELIGION

As a topic of study, “material religion” emerges from the recognition that any religious system, formation, or practice, like any other sociocultural phenomenon, takes place in the realm of the senses. As Engelke writes: “All religion is material religion. All religion has to be understood in relation to the media of its materiality. This necessarily includes a consideration of religious things, and also of actions *and* words, which are material no matter how quickly they pass from sight or sound or dissipate into the air” (2012: 209). Religion, however we may choose to define it, may entail discourses of immateriality, ineffability, or absolute otherness, but it will always also include sensory (and hence, we might add, impermanent) forms (Meyer 2008). A question of interest, then, very often becomes: How is the ineffable, the incommensurate, or the other construed as manifesting in sensible form? How does the abstract become tangible? For Engelke, this question can be formulated as, “how [can] God, or the gods, or the spirits, or one’s ancestors . . . be recognized as being present and/or *represented*.” The answer is, in one way or another, by material forms. This essay will concentrate in particular on how food makes God present to people, as well as making people more present to each other.

Attention to the material aspects of religion is not in itself new (a tendency in early anthropology to regard the immaterial as a higher or truer form of religion notwithstanding – Engelke 2012: 212; Pels 2008). Ortner’s discussion of “bodying the gods” (1978: 147–148) is one among many examples of the materialization of the divine so as to engage in relations with it. But a recent development has been to try and make explicit the mechanisms by which matter becomes meaningful, or by which meaning materializes.

Taking a lead from the philosophy of C.S. Peirce, material semiotics involves distinguishing the ways in which signs relate to their referents – most famously, as icons (which resemble their referents), indexes/indices (which relate to the referent by some existential or causal connection), and symbols (which relate to the referent purely by convention). The relations of signs to their referents are not entirely arbitrary, but dependent upon permutations of these types of linkages. Signs, furthermore, always

have semiotic form: some medium, however ephemeral, by which they are available to the senses (Keane 2007: 41–42). Something purely abstract could not function as a sign. Finally, Peirce includes room to account for the sign-maker and its recipient, or the encoder and decoder: signs are always middle grounds between actors.

Signs have materiality in themselves; and through this materiality they forge connections between social actors. From this perspective, signs share something with gifts: meaningful things that pass between people. Or, indeed, and here the religious angle becomes clearer, between people and God, or spirits, or saints. Words and things are the media of communication both among people, and between people and other beings. As such, they offer commensurable grounds for making comparisons in how these relationships resemble or differ from each other, and in what ways they allow the engagement of others in the sensible world.

Many religious practices make use of semiotic forms that suggest immateriality or ethereality: song or chant, incense, smoke and fire, flowing water, scent (Engelke 2007: 241; Engelhardt 2010; Feuchtwang 2010: 61–62; Fuller 1992: 73). Frequently the smell of perfume is said to please incorporeal beings, or the smell of food to nourish them. In biblical Judaic sacrifice it was the burnt part of the offering, rising to heaven as smoke, that was God's portion. Ritualized speech and gesture, obeying certain prescribed forms, is often the appropriate means of reaching gods or ancestors. But almost any substance or form can become a medium for communication with other beings, embodied or spiritual, human or not, and a contention of studies of material religion is that these forms matter.

Extremely often, food becomes a medium for exchange, supplication, or communication between humans and divine or spiritual beings in a manner generally but not exclusively referred to as sacrifice. This term has proved problematic for anthropology precisely because there exists such a huge range of practices similar but not identical to Greco-Roman and Judaic practices that have come to be so-referred. The aim of this essay is not to treat the question of sacrifice head-on but to crosscut it with an analysis of food as a medium of religious practice, communication, and organic process.

For the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians with whom I worked, commensality is the starting point of daily ethics. Eating together is the first sign of community belonging, and a regular prophylaxis against centrifugal, individualistic forces present in all humanity. Food is integral to religious practice as well, in the Eucharist and the great annual feasts, although in these cases commensality is counterposed to rigorous practices of fasting. And it is fasting, above any other practice, ritual initiation, or doctrinal belief, that marks a person as an Orthodox Christian (Ephraim 1995, Levine 1965: 104).

THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE MEAL

Commensality has long been recognized as a potent tool both for unifying people and for marking boundaries between groups, particularly in what Robertson Smith in 1889 referred to as Semitic societies (Robertson Smith 2002). As he remarks: "Those who sit at meat together are united for all social effects, those who do not eat together are aliens to one another, without fellowship in religion and without reciprocal social duties" (Robertson Smith in Feeley-Harnik 1981: 11). And as

Feeley-Harnik notes, dietary rules have always served to mark Jewish groups off from others: "Food was one of the most important languages in which Jews expressed relations among human beings and between human beings and God" (1981: 19). For Christians, meanwhile, and by deliberate contrast, the bread of the Eucharist stood for human universalism (1981: 2).

Mary Douglas also discusses the meal as encoding social relationships: "If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries" (Douglas 1972: 61). On the symbolic properties of food she describes the meals of the ancient Israelites as "a kind of classical poem" (1972: 70) in that they encapsulated eternal and boundless values in temporal, tangible form.

The food-as-language metaphor is troublesome, however. Food can, unquestionably, take on a range of historically contingent, symbolic meanings. However, whereas the Saussurean case that meaning is produced by a system of differences among phonemes that have no positive value in and of themselves still retains its explanatory power for language, the positive and affective qualities of food – its necessity, its taste, its nutritional value – are not so easily relegated from the sphere of meaning. Food actively contributes to the formation of those who eat it: it affects both our physical constitution and our mood (Bennett 2010: 39–43). This is even more so if the meal includes alcohol. Meal sharing creates bodily ties between people and the productive cycles in which they are participating, a point that will take on particular significance in the next section, when I discuss the sharing of food with divinity.

For the sociologist Georg Simmel, two key positive properties of food are that it is needed on a regular basis, and needed by everyone:

The sociological structure of the meal emerges, which links precisely the exclusive selfishness of eating with a frequency of being together, with a habit of being gathered together such as is seldom attainable on occasions of a higher and intellectual order. Persons who in no way share any special interest can gather together at the common meal – in this possibility, associated with the primitiveness and hence universal nature of material interest, there lies the immeasurable sociological significance of the meal. (Simmel 1997: 130)

The meal provides cause for people to gather repeatedly, and so establishes a basic pattern of togetherness. Further, more arbitrary or negatively defined conventions, such as the rules of cutlery at upper-class European tables, may accrue to eating practices in order to mark distinctions of class and status, but the repetitive necessity of food is essential to establishing fundamental social patterns, particularly a basic idea of consubstantiality.

For Simmel, the idea that people can actually share a common substance by dining together is an illusion that "gives rise to the primitive notion that one is thereby creating common flesh and blood" (1997: 131). This notion may not be so "primitive," however. Food sharing entails genuine sharing of substance in two ways: shared food (1) is prepared by the same person(s), and (2) comes from the same origin via the same productive work.

It matters that food is prepared by the same person because to accept hospitality is to trust, and to indicate that you trust, that your host will not poison you. This is a basic but important point, as the ethnographic record indicates that concerns about

poisoning are prevalent (Bloch 2005: 55). The relationship between the trust and the meal is indexical: rather than saying, "I trust you not to poison me," you demonstrate that trust through action. From here the meal can also index hierarchical relationships between host and guest in various ways, but every shared meal starts from the basic establishment of trust.

It matters that shared food comes from the same origin because this ties the meal's participants into a single economy of production. This is perhaps clearer to participants in a meal in rural Ethiopia than in London or France: the *injera* bread on which the shared food is served (on a single plate) is made from *t'eff* grain that was grown by nearby farmers. If you are in the Zege peninsula in northwestern Ethiopia, your host most likely traded for the *t'eff* with coffee grown in the Zege forest. You will probably be aware of how rainfall has been that year, and how *t'eff* prices have been fluctuating (badly, since I conducted fieldwork during the world food price crisis of 2008). In Western Europe, eating means participating in similar, if more extended linkages, but the consumer is usually somewhat alienated from these networks of production. For people in Zege, food indexes its origins quite clearly: it is (and signifies) the congealed agglomeration of the labor, the land, the rainfall, and the trading networks, as well as the cooking process, that brought it to the table.

The indexical association between food and its origin has especially important consequences in the consumption of meat (Feeley-Harnik 1995: 572; Vialles 1994), because of the necessity of killing an animal whose structural makeup and organic properties are evidently very close to those of humans. As the Pentateuch mentions repeatedly, animals have blood, and blood equates to life (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:14; Deuteronomy 12:23). If blood is life, then we can infer that life is construed as liquid, as basically premised upon flow. This is worth remembering in discussions of material religion where "materiality" can too easily be taken to denote solidity; in fact the most important distinction between material and nonmaterial realms may be the ubiquity of flux, transformation, growth, and decomposition to the processes of material life. There is a case that the organic ought to occupy the foreground of our studies of religious materiality.

In Ethiopia as elsewhere the common life of animals and humans means that animal slaughter and the consumption of meat take on distinct religious associations, which explains why Christians and Muslims will share vegetables and bread but not meat. Informants refer to the prayers said during slaughter as the reason for not sharing meat, and the prohibition is taken seriously, with one friend telling me I would become ill if I were to enter a church after eating Muslim meat.

If refusing to share food can produce social distinctions, as Robertson Smith realized it can also play into subtler patterns of difference and integration. The historical, contingent divisions between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia and the religious associations of slaughter create a logic of separation, but the actual practice of refusing to share meat instantiates and demonstrates – indexes – the division. It creates what it represents, in the same way that sharing food does not just represent social togetherness, but produces it. This feedback between contingent, conventional representations and indexical action is what Gregory Bateson (1936: 175) called *schismogenesis* and is a large part of the reason why it does not make sense to view either culture or religion as independent of material conditions, or as wholly

determined by them. The symbolic associations and the material uses of food feed back into one another, entrenching difference in the process.

Unwittingly, I established myself as a Christian in Zege by eating meat with Christians and by fasting when they fasted. This was why it was a cause of some consternation when I inadvertently accepted meat at a Muslim wedding. Nobody ever asked what I believed or if I accepted Jesus Christ as my savior, but I was indicating my alignment on a mundane basis without realizing it. However, just as meat-sharing rules instantiate a potent distinction between Muslims and Christians, other conventions of hospitality and commensality mitigate these divisions in the name of a broader commonality, an ethic of neighborliness and togetherness that had great importance in this area that was generally considered Christian, but with a significant Muslim minority. At any family event that called for a feast – christenings, marriages, funerals – the hosts, whether Christian or Muslim, always make sure to provide nonmeat as well as meat dishes, so as to be able to host their neighbors of the other religion. Christians would also make special batches of nonalcoholic beer to serve to Muslim guests on these occasions. This was true even of events of the religious calendar, like Christmas and Easter, in which meat was an essential part of the celebrations for Christians. The ethics of visiting and hospitality apply to all people in Zege, while the ethics of slaughter and sacrifice are religiously specific. So practices of food sharing can, operating in different registers, index both consubstantiality and essential difference. Within Christianity, this interplay of incommensurability, separation, and shared substance comes to the fore in the ways in which people actualize relationships with God, as I begin to describe in the next section.

EATING (WITH) GOD

The Eucharist is the ritual centerpiece of Ethiopian Orthodoxy and of all other unreformed Christianities, which share the view that the Host transforms into the actual body and blood of Christ. This transformation, crucial in the literal and radical sense, has some important logical connotations. It means that Christ can become fully present in any place that the liturgy is carried out, and because the sacrament is a ritual creation, no matter how much bread and wine is consumed, there will always be more. Thus the Eucharist becomes an index of omnipresence, of infinitude, and of universalism: Christ can become present at all times to all people, yet will never be exhausted. Just as the regularity of meals brings a regularity of substance sharing among people, the regular performance of the Liturgy affords the continuing renewal of the consubstantial relationship with an eternal and limitless God. As long as it is accepted that the Eucharist entails real presence, the act of its consumption will render all of the ensuing details true. Orthodox churches have become associated with particular political territories – Greece, Russia, Ethiopia – but what unites them and maintains their universalist aspect is the shared participation in the Eucharist (Binns 2002: 41).

The question of Eucharistic transformation was a central controversy in the European Protestant Reformation, in which Christ's omnipresence was an explicit point of contention. Neither Luther nor even Calvin fully rejected the notion of actual presence in the Eucharist; rather it was Zwingli who insisted that the rite was a mere expression of the faith of the believer, akin to a soldier's oath. Moreover, an argument

that Zwingli and his supporters deployed was that Christ could not be present at the Eucharist because he was seated at God's right hand (MacCullough 2004: 147–148). For Reform Protestants, spirit might be omnipresent but the idea that the body of Christ could be everywhere was becoming unsupportable.

For Catholics and the Orthodox, sharing in the *bodily* presence of God remained integral to being a Christian, while Lutheran and other non-Reform Protestant churches held a range of positions, varying as to whether they saw the Eucharistic presence as bodily, pneumatic, dynamic (the presence of divine power), or otherwise. For those churches that did deny any kind of divine presence in the Eucharist, the change was revolutionary: in transferring agency from the sacramental power of God to the active faith of people, it laid the groundwork for the various forms of rationalist humanism that would so profoundly affect the trajectory of European modernity.

While it is generally true that in Christianity God's presence on earth is established through Christ, in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity it is usually considered proper to approach Christ via a mediator. Saints, angels and Mary intercede between Christians and God, while Christ, although both human and divine, is considered too pure to be approached directly by humans in their profane state. The Eucharist is thus the only way for people to achieve the direct presence of God. But because of the purity problem, it is bound by such a series of restrictions that many people most of the time are unable to take Communion at all. This difficulty has the effect of increasing, rather than diminishing, the sacrament's importance.

The bread and wine must be handled by priests – empowered by the sacrament of holy orders – and by virginal deacons. The communicant must have abstained from all food and water for at least two days beforehand, and from sexual activity for longer. A person who has ever had sexual relations outside of a single marriage sealed by the Eucharist (including remarriages) can no longer take the sacrament, and husbands and wives may not take it independent of one another (Fritsch 2010: 271). Communicants must have no open wounds, no illnesses or runny noses; a fly entering your mouth renders you ineligible. Menstruating and postpartum women cannot even enter the church, and it is expected that people who have begun puberty but not married will also not take the rite. It is expected that God will punish any transgressor.

These rules minimize the worldly connections of the communicant and place her in a state where the offering can be identified with nothing but God. To maintain the distinction of this meal the bread is made of a wheat not often used in other foods, and the wine is made from unfermented dried grapes never used outside church (Fritsch 2010: 276). Prior to the liturgy the priests prepare the Communion bread and mark each piece with the imprint of thirteen crosses in analogical commemoration of the last supper, and then the ceremony and prayer of the Anaphora effect the miraculous transformation of the Host.

At least two priests and three deacons are required to perform the liturgy, defined as the preparatory service for the Eucharist. Liturgical duties dominate the lives of priests, given both the amount of textual knowledge required and the absolute necessity of fasting fully before every service so as to remain fit to handle the Host. The section of the service at which worshippers are present lasts between two and three hours; including the preparatory prayers and readings, priests will be occupied for perhaps five or six hours. For the Communion, the celebrant priest washes his hands twice and announces that he is free of the sin of anyone who takes the Communion

in an unworthy state; once his hands are washed, he touches only the bread and the chalice. The priest gives pieces of bread to the communicants, one at a time, and a deacon serves them wine from a ladle. After the Communion, deacons dispense holy water for communicants to ensure nothing of the host remains in their mouths, and for anyone else in the congregation to take. The service finishes with celebratory prayers and, on nonfasting days, singing and dancing (Chaillot 2002: 104-105).

Much of the liturgy is conducted in Ge'ez, the classical language spoken only by the priesthood, although readings are now usually given in vernacular Amharic. The Anaphora, the prayer of offering, remains in Ge'ez, and contains an *anamnesis*, an exhortation to ritual remembrance (Fritsch 2010: 274). This is important because it has become a matter of debate whether the Eucharist is a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, as the Ethiopian Church avows (Aymro and Motovu 1970: 34), or a commemoration in the more restricted sense of a reminder. For Ethiopian Orthodoxy, the fact of transubstantiation and the consumption of the host render the mental state of the communicant quite secondary, as is often the case in rituals.

It is notable that the terms *Anaphora* (Greek) and *Host* both mean "offering," as do the Amharic *qurban*, referring to the Eucharist as a whole, and the Latinate *oblation*, used in the Catholic rite. In every Orthodox and Catholic tradition, that is, the Eucharist is an offering to God. It is offered with ritual prayers, transformed and sanctified, *returned*, and then consumed.

This pattern – offering, sanctified return, consumption – conforms to an archetype visible in rituals from across the ethnographic record,¹ usually referred to as sacrifice. One way to view this form is as a means of mediating and actualizing a relationship with the intangible, ineffable, or incommensurate. Gifts, meals, and words actualize social relationships: they give the relationship form and, in the process, constitute them. And what the Eucharist, like other sacrificial forms, establishes is a social relationship between incommensurate partners: a person and God.

Feuchtwang (2010: 74) makes a case that the pattern of offering, transformation, and return is definitive of hierarchical religious ritual. The return, he argues, must be excessive, out of all proportion with the gift, in order to index the plenipotency of the god. Here a ritual is construed as the invitation of the guest to become host: a gift offered is transformed into a gift received, and the consumption of the gift acts out a negation of the possibility of no response. That is, the return of the gift indexes that the god exists and, just as important, responds to your offerings. By actualizing the relationship, it partially actualizes the incommensurate being. This model illuminates the Ethiopian Eucharist in striking fashion. The gift of bread and wine is returned as the eternal body and blood of Christ, whose eternity is a function of the repeatability of the ritual.

Why, though, is it important that the Eucharistic gift be consumed? Would the ritual have the same effect if a nonfood offering were made or if, as in the case of reformed Protestantisms, the food were not transformed by ritual means? For one thing, it matters very much for the experiential and affective aspects of the ritual. The Ethiopian rite emphasizes this through the fasting required of the communicant: the stomach must be completely empty and the throat dry before consuming the body and blood. God can only be fed to those who are hungry and thirsty. Moreover, the substance of God is experienced as unmixed with any other external substance, with the exception of some holy water, itself a by-product of the Communion (Fritsch 2010: 276).

The rules of food sharing between people also apply to food sharing between people and God. To accept hospitality is to create and index relationships of trust, and to participate in the same substance, hence the same networks of production, as the host. What the “sleight-of-ritual” (Rappaport 1999: 108) achieves is a transformation of the recipient into host. People make the offering to God, and then receive the same offering back as guests of God. The Christian addition is that God does not just sanctify the offering, but becomes the offering, because the Eucharist is, quite specifically, a revisiting of the sacrifice of Christ.

If the medium of food constitutes the relationship, at least partially, then this manner of consumption creates a very particular kind of relationship. It embodies and indexes a condition in which contact with God is isolated from physical contact with human beings and the substantial world. An incompatibility is established between the quotidian routine of consumption and the sacred practices by which people seek contact with God; this incompatibility defines the relationship between body, world, and divinity. Nonetheless, relations with God, like relations with humans, are actualized through the produce of the land. Christ is not an interlocutor but a part of your self, immanent in production and consumption. This is a profoundly different relationship to divinity and Christian identity than is found in traditions that deny presence in the Eucharist, because in those traditions a gulf frequently (but not necessarily always) develops between divinity and humanity (Pels 2008; Keane 2007: 200), whereas the transubstantial Eucharist makes human bodies divine on a regular basis.

The Eucharist shapes relations among people as much as it does between people and God, as Augustine recognized:

If you have received well, you are what you have received; for the Apostle says “we many are one bread, one body” . . . There is commended to you in that bread in what manner you ought to love unity. For was that bread made from one grain? Were there not many grains of wheat? But before they came together into one bread, they were separate: through water they were joined . . . You have been made the bread, which is the body of Christ. And in like manner unity is signified. (Augustine in Dugmore 1958)

The Eucharist makes possible the analogy between the body of Christ and the body of the Church, blurring the distinction between the human body and society or, in Christian thought, healing the gulf between body and society brought about by the fall.

Simmel notes:

Only the Christian communion, which identifies the bread with the body of Christ, was able to create the real identity of what was consumed on the foundation of this mysticism and thus an entirely unique type of connection among the participants. For here, where it is not the case that each person consumes something denied to the others, but where each person consumes the totality in its mysterious undividedness that is granted equally to everyone, the egoistic, exclusionary quality of every meal is most completely transcended. (1997: 131)

For Catholics and the Orthodox, the Eucharist allows a single substance to be shared equally among all Christians, thus binding them as commensals. Because of the trust indicated in accepting food, eating the same substance brings about a ritual commitment to the community. But this community can only be brought about via an initial

refusal of social-material connections, in the form of the fasting and other purity requirements that restrict Eucharistic practice.

CHRISTIAN CONSUMPTION: FASTING AND HOLY WATER

The extreme sanctity of the Eucharist raises it to central importance in Ethiopian Orthodox practice. But by the same token, the sacrament cannot be the basis of day-to-day religion for the majority of people (Levine 1965: 96). The requirements of material production and reproduction – eating, working, and sexuality – conflict too sharply with Eucharistic purity restrictions. Nevertheless, the most important forms of quotidian and universal religiosity are themselves based on consumption. Most important of these is fasting.

An upshot of the regularity of the meal is that mutual abstention can become as much of a binding social force as mutual consumption (Lambek 1992: 250; Fortes 1987: 139). When a meal is expected at a certain time, not to participate, or not to share in certain foods, becomes noteworthy. So Lambek argues that Malagasy taboo practice can unite practitioners such that “body and society are understood to form a totality” (1992: 255). Taboo sharing is a kind of *poiesis*, action that is creative in the sense that it builds and constitutes persons and worlds (Lambek 2000). Similarly Ethiopian Christian and Muslim eating practices are poietic of Christianity and Muslimhood. And, what is more important for the Ethiopian Orthodox, so are practices of fasting.

Lambek uses the idea of *poiesis* to highlight the element of world-creation common to religious practices; religious action is not just about making sense of, controlling, or disciplining the world, but producing it as a sociocultural reality. To discuss how food sharing builds relationships, while at the same time building people, is to talk about *poiesis*. This is a useful framework for thinking about fasting because, as the ensuing ethnography will show, one thing that Ethiopian Orthodox fasting does is produce Christians; alternatively and more properly, fasting is a discipline by which Ethiopian Orthodox Christians intersubjectively produce each other. The material form that fasting takes – the refusal of certain or all foods at certain times – is integral to fasting’s particular effectiveness because it shapes the very experience of sustenance/nutrition and of the passage of time.

As mentioned above, lay people in Zege for the most part show little interest in matters of creed or doctrine. When people wanted to know if I was a Christian, they never asked me what I believed; they asked, “Do you fast?” (*s’ommiñña nebz?*). Fasting is necessary and, it sometimes seems, sufficient to Orthodox Christian identity. It is constitutive of basic social relationships and even of daily experience in Zege, shaping the religious and economic life of the area and the country, and forming the centerpiece of many people’s projects of self-formation. Feasting is a major part of the dynamics of fasting, as I will discuss, but it is by fasting that Ethiopian Orthodox Christians tend to define themselves – both as special and distinct, and as universal.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church recognizes seven major fasts, although only the clergy are expected to keep all of these. For the laity, what fasts one keeps is largely a matter of conscience, although the Lenten fast of fifty-six days and the Fast of Nineveh of three days are mandatory. In addition, every Wednesday and Friday is a

fasting day, in commemoration of the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, although few people are aware of this reasoning. What fasting precisely entails is dependent on context and conscience: at a minimum, you do not consume any animal products on a fasting day (Ephraim 1995: 337). Many people take this further by taking no food or water until noon, or until the Liturgy is finished: 3 p.m. on weekdays, 9 a.m. on weekends. Priests and those who attend the Liturgy must fast completely until the service is finished (Aymro and Motovu 1970: 63–64).

The fasts are laden with symbolic content. Each relates to a particular event in biblical history, with the Lenten fast and its culmination in the Easter feast being the archetype and consummation of the fasting and feasting year. However, many people are unaware of the official reasons or historical connotations of why they are fasting, or have their own separate understandings of what they are doing. This fact renders a straightforward symbolic reading of fasting problematic: fasting practice is not principally communicative in any linguistic sense. Christians in Zege construe their fasting as efficacious, transformative action, not merely as representing something.

Participating in the fast indicates that one is a Christian: this is the primary way that fasting is locally understood. But it indicates Christianity precisely in the act of constituting it. People who fast are building relationships between each other and between themselves and divinity: by refusing to partake in certain parts of the worldly food economy, they align themselves with a different regime of value. At the same time, each fast has much more specific meanings: the Fast of Nineveh, for example, commemorates the story of Jonah (Fritsch 2001: 165), but very few lay people are aware of this. For priests, though, the association with the biblical story is crucial. This is a good example of why semiotic form matters. The semiotic form of the fast is a practice of abstention, and as a practice in itself it can take on a number of different and even contradictory meanings for different people (and different kinds of meanings – the Nineveh Fast *indexes* Christian belonging while it *symbolizes* the destruction of Nineveh). This phenomenon Keane refers to as “bundling” (2003: 414), and it has great significance for understanding religious practice.

As well as combining multiple ways of signifying in a single form, bundling describes how a form or practice may combine affective properties with symbolic ones. In the case of fasting, the manipulation and experience of hunger is an inalienable part of the act. Fasting days are qualitatively quite different from nonfasting (not to mention full feast) days. The archetypal case is that of Lent.

The Lenten fast brings about an economic slowdown which is significant even in cosmopolitan Addis Ababa, where the numerous butcher-restaurants will close everywhere but on one particular street, and many places will cease serving meat. Lent dictates the economic life of the Zege Peninsula, since no meat or eggs can be sold and people are generally eating less, while Easter weekend itself entails a frenzy of trade in which prices for chickens and sheep will double or triple. During Lent a quietus pervades the whole of life. In the middle of my first Lent, I commented to a friend that I was feeling fairly low and that nothing seemed to be happening. He replied instantly, *s’om new*, it is the fast, and told me that everybody felt this way. Many people were quite simply tired. One wealthy friend did have a sheep privately killed and turned into stew; this was done in extreme secrecy, and is the only time I have witnessed the fast broken in Zege. During Lent it became increasingly difficult to interview the normally affable priests, as they would frequently be asleep. Their

fasts entailed long periods of no food or water on a daily basis, while their liturgical duties were increased. Several priests told me that they found the fast extremely difficult and tiring, while emphasizing at the same time that it was a good and desirable thing, even a healing and regenerating endeavor. This state of affairs lasts for eight weeks, and intensifies over the final week leading up to Easter.

No marriages are permitted during the great fast, or on any other fasting day, though certain exceptions may be possible in emergencies. Weddings are feasts, so perhaps their incompatibility with fasts is obvious, but the rule nonetheless serves to illustrate the division between times of celebration, reproduction, and interpersonal connection, and those of restraint and isolation. Weddings involve not just sexual reproduction, but also the related abundance of food, drink, and dancing that accompanies the ceremony. The period before Easter carries associations of perdition, fallenness, and suffering; the period after, by contrast, with salvation and hence, life.

The great fast reaches its peak on Easter Saturday, the *gehad* (vigil). The clergy and the particularly devout will take no food or water for the entire day and are not even supposed to swallow their own saliva. On this day, no greetings are permitted, and no shaking of hands, which people told me commemorated the betrayal of Christ by the "Jews" (*Ayhud*). This heightened fasting combined with the refusal of greetings brings out a parallel that is latent at other times: between fasting and being alone, as opposed to feasting and being together. Both fast and feast are collective actions, but while the feast is an orgy of consubstantiality and mutual organic interconnectedness, the fast brings about a collective isolation.

The extreme nature of the Easter Saturday fast brings forth another latent association: the fast as reenactment of the Passion. This is not just remembrance in the modern English, cognitive sense but rather the classical Greek *anamnesis*: "the sense of bringing before God something that has happened in the past in such a way that 'its consequences take effect in the present'" (Dugmore 1958 citing Dix). The fast may put people in mind of the suffering of Christ, but it may not. What is primary and inescapable is that people suffer as Christ suffered, and therefore revivify that suffering and the rebirth for which it prepares. Fasting as embodied action bundles together remembrance and reenaction, but like any ritual action, the aspects of remembrance or thought may alter or be absent altogether, while the formal action of abstinence remains in place.

If the fast reenacts the suffering of Christ, the feast of Easter Sunday is its antithesis: the poietic production of joyous plenitude, consubstantiality, and togetherness. In the house I stayed in in Zege the women were up while it was still quite dark on Easter Sunday morning, in order to have the chicken *wot'* (stew) prepared for dawn and the breaking of the fast. As the men awoke, we ate our first meat in two months then headed outside together to slaughter the sheep we had bought and to skin and butcher it for the women to cook, taking the occasional raw piece off the carcass and eating it straight away. The household served alcohol, and one of the four brothers who were home for the holiday was drunk by midday. Throughout the day the women remained at home preparing food and receiving guests, although this did not completely prevent them from taking part in the commensality and they were able to eat and talk with people to a reasonable degree. Some of the men stayed in the house to welcome guests, while others went out visiting, as did I. My friend Menilek took me to a clearing in the forest where a consortium of men had bought and

slaughtered a bull and were dividing up the meat, organs and all, and consuming some of the best cuts together, raw, while drinking liquor.

The poorer families will obtain at least some kind of sheep's meat, and even the smallest amount can be stretched out into a large enough stew to serve guests. One family I breakfasted with compensated for their thin stew with copious amounts of cheap liquor, which was an effective way to show the requisite hospitality while perhaps ensuring that their guests would not notice, or not remember, the two gristly morsels of meat they had been served. Visiting neighbors and friends, or hosting them, is crucial at Easter as the fast turns into an outpouring of commensality. There is meat and drink everywhere, in every house, and I had to be careful to visit my closest friends so as not to cause unwitting offense.

The superabundance of meat and drink on Easter Sunday deserves emphasis. The experience of eating together with other people gains its extraordinary power from the long fast that precedes it. My feeling was of sensory overload, and I think many others felt similarly. Suddenly the fast made new sense to me, in the way that it gave meaning to food, and to joy, and togetherness. I have tried to evoke the phenomenal and sensory potency of the long and arduous fast followed by the outburst of plenty: the experience reverberates for much of the rest of the year, and it is of course the length and difficulty of the fast that makes the ensuing feast so powerful. It is difficult not to view other fasts and feasts as reflections on or acknowledgments of the big one. And throughout this period, people experience daily life as Christians at a fundamental level. The fast shapes every meal, it shapes your relations with others, and it shapes to a large extent the ambience of the place you live in.

Recall that in Feuchtwang's theory of ritual sacrifice as excessive hospitality the offering to the God is characteristically followed by an incommensurable, superabundant return. In the case of the Eucharist, I have described the transformation of the oblation bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in these terms. I would suggest that the Easter fast/feast can also be understood in terms of this framework: throughout the fast people offer themselves in submission, in a small imitation of Christ's passion (the Amharic term for the obeisances given during the fast is *sigdet*, "surrender"), and the return is the feast. This would help to explain the excessiveness and sensory overload of the festivities of Easter Sunday. The food consumed is the hospitality of God, and thus on a scale beyond human possibility. Indeed, it is crucial that sheep meat is among the food eaten at Easter, and my informants make it quite clear that this is because of the idea of Christ as the Lamb of God. Unlike the Eucharist, this association of food with Christ is metaphorical rather than actual, and yet the formal symmetry of the rituals (fast, offering, incommensurable consumption) is striking.

The offer-return-consumption pattern is something of a "key scenario" in Orthodox practice, because it condenses and embodies a set of critical values and assumptions about the nature of reality (Ortner 1973: 1342). As a further example, personal and communal relationships with saints also take the form of offer-return-consumption. If a person wishes to achieve some effect in their life – pregnancy or relief from poverty, for example – the correct course of action is to make a request of a saint or Mary in the form of a vow, *silet*. If the wish is granted, you recompense the saint by holding a feast, known as *zikkir*,² "remembrance," on that saint's annual holiday. Thus the offering of thanks to the saint is consumed by one's neighbors, uniting them in the act of remembrance.

Mutual associations, too, take the form of a *zikkir* remembrance feast. The *mahber*, the most important form of rural voluntary association in Orthodox Ethiopia, is always convened in the name of a saint, and attended by a priest to say prayers in that saint's name. There follows a shared meal as the association goes about its business, which may range from relaxed sociality to intricate machinations of local politics (Ancel 2005).

The Eucharist, the fast, and the *zikkir* share in common this element of commemoration. Feeley-Harnik has noted how frequently food sharing takes on a commemorative aspect (1995: 567), but does not offer an explanation for why this might be. And yet the term "commemoration" may mislead, because no state of mind, no cognitive act of thinking about things and beings past, is demanded of any of the participants. What these acts of consumption and nonconsumption achieve, rather, is a twofold action: to reconstitute (to re-member in the radical sense of re-assembling, putting the parts back together), or to reactualize, a hierarchical relationship with God, Mary, or the saints, while simultaneously unifying Christians as consubstantials under God's aegis.

Sharing food binds people together, partly because it indexes trust and dependence on a common productive source. Mutual abstinence from food can also bind people together as it produces common boundaries between them and those who do not abstain; in the same way, refusing to share food entrenches and reifies divisions. This much is uncontroversial. Patterns of abstinence and consumption may not be fully commensurate, however: between Christians and Muslims, rules of neighborliness apply at some times, and rules of religious separation at others.

Sharing food with divinity does something further. The Eucharist creates consubstantiality between humans and God. But this coming together is temporary and bounded by severe purity restrictions; it does not bind human and God together as relative equals, as mundane food sharing does. Religious commensality creates a dual-layered relationship, among the people who share in the consumption, and between the people and the deity who becomes both the recipient and the giver of the food. People eat together, but what they consume has been passed through a gift-loop where it is given to and returned by God. Eating the food, then, is accepting the gift, and so actualizing – re-membering, re-constituting – the human-divine relationship. Since the deity can only be known through its worldly mediations, we could say that the act of consumption maintains the deity's very existence in the tangible world. Moreover, it means that God or God's presence is produced from the material environment; God is part of the same circuits and networks as the food we eat. But the ephemeral and organic nature of food means that any divine presence so produced will always be partial, temporary, mitigated, or intimated, because deity is in so many ways the antithesis of organic life. Indeed, this partial or intimated quality of presence may be distinctive of religious practice more broadly.

NOTES

- 1 Or, as Descola (this volume) suggests, wherever an analogical ontology prevails.
- 2 Wendy James and Michael Lambek have pointed out the similarity with the (almost certainly cognate) Arabic *dhikr*, also used in the sense of commemoration.

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CHAPTER 15 Trading with God: Islam, Calculation, Excess

Amira Mittermaier

And it is not so long ago since [man] became a machine – a calculating machine.
Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*

Wealth never decreases because of charity.
Hadith (prophetic saying)

The relationship between religion and economy has preoccupied many great minds. Karl Marx approached religion as an ideological force, a form of social control, and as part of the superstructure that is shaped by relations of production. Max Weber, by contrast, treated religion as an independent variable and traced an “elective affinity” between Protestantism and the “spirit of capitalism.” Although Weber never finished his work on Islam, he is commonly understood to have claimed that Islam, unlike Protestantism, is largely incompatible with capitalism.¹ Responding to this claim, many scholars have examined the relationship between Islam and capitalist developments in more detail (e.g. Gran 1998; Rodinson 2007; Tripp 2006; Turner 1974). Economist Timur Kuran (2012) argues in a recent book that the Middle East has suffered from underdevelopment because Muslim legal practice places institutional constraints on economic growth. Diverging from such narratives of delay or decline, anthropologist Daromir Rudnycky (2010) has coined the term “spiritual economics” to refer to the emergence of spiritual reformers throughout the Muslim

world who reinterpret the Qur'an to endorse ethical dispositions strikingly similar to those identified by Weber as pivotal to the spirit of capitalism: hard work, self-discipline, and individual accountability.

Regardless of its roots, today capitalism is a social and material reality around the globe. Faced with the question of "how to lead a good Muslim life in the world of capitalist modernity" (Tripp 2006: 9), Muslim communities have developed Islamic forms of socialism, Islamic banks (Hefner 1998), and Islamic financial alternatives (Maurer 2001, 2005). Such economic arrangements are sometimes criticized for simply adding the adjective "Islamic" to something already preformed (Ramadan 2008). Examining deeper entwinements between Islam and capitalism, this chapter describes intersections (and frictions) between a neoliberal calculative reason and Islamic charity practices.

Neoliberalism, as a form of capitalism, proposes that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" (Harvey 2007: 2). It turns rationalized economic practice into an ethos that pervades all of society. For Foucault, the problem of neoliberalism is how "the overall exercise of political power can be modeled on the principles of a market economy" (2010: 131), and Nikolas Rose speaks of a "morality of numbers" and "techniques of calculation" (1999: 23, 214).² Building on these definitions, in his ethnography of an Indonesian state-owned steel company, Rudnyckij (2010) characterizes neoliberalism "as a relatively mundane but increasingly ubiquitous practice of making economic calculation a universal standard for the organization, management, and government of human life and conduct."

Drawing on fieldwork in Egypt in 2011 and 2012, I consider the interplay between a neoliberal calculative spirit and Muslim practices of almsgiving, food distribution, and volunteering. Whereas Islamic philanthropy has been widely "neoliberalized" in recent years and now aims to turn "the poor" into productive citizens (Atia 2012; Hafez 2011; Moll 2012), the charitable modes of giving on which my work focuses address immediate need and often take the form of handouts distributed by volunteers. These practices seem to evade a neoliberal ethos of productivity. Arguably, as in other geographical contexts (Li 2007; Muehlebach 2012), one could read the charity boom itself as an effect of neoliberalism, yet doing so fails to capture the complex religious ethics and divine economies at work in the realm of charity. These ethics and economies in turn might themselves be partially inflected by a neoliberal ethos. Accordingly, instead of tracing erasures and displacements, I draw attention to intersections, interplays, frictions, and disjunctures.

Counter Max Weber's claim that "Islam was never really a religion of salvation" (1963: 263), charity is widely understood in Egypt today as a way of "trading with God" (*tagāra ma' rabbinnā*). By giving to the poor, believers hope to secure themselves a place in paradise. Some Egyptians argue that the counting of "points" is a relatively recent phenomenon, one that has increased noticeably since the 1970s.³ In this chapter I describe this emergent calculative logic alongside a parallel, coexisting economic theology, one that is mindful of divine abundance and the limits of calculation. In engaging ethnographically with these two different economic theologies, my aim is threefold: First, I want to highlight the complexity and variety of Muslim attitudes toward charity and unsettle claims about an all-pervasive neoliberalization of everyday life. Second, I propose an understanding of the economy

that extends beyond its this-worldly parameters by bringing the afterlife into the equation. And third, this chapter aims to contribute to the anthropology of Islam by complicating approaches that overemphasize the coherence and continuity of the Islamic tradition, as well as those that overemphasize the economy's determining force. As an alternative I suggest approaching Islam as a heteroglossic field in which multiple discourses, logics, and imaginaries converge and undo each other.⁴ Approaching Islam (or religion more broadly) as heteroglossic draws attention to instabilities and ambiguities and allows us to consider how Islamic discourse and practice might be inflected by modern modes of calculative reason while at the same time destabilizing capitalism, neoliberalism, and market logic as "the only games in town" (Maurer 2001: 11). I use Islamic charity practices as a window into such ambiguities and heteroglossias.

I begin with a brief overview of the two economic theologies that are central to this chapter, followed by some brief remarks on the anthropology of Islam. Next I engage with the two economies in more depth, contrasting *thawāb* (divine payback) with *baraka* (divine abundance). Last I suggest that Islamic charitable giving in Egypt today is not only affected by but also exceeds and speaks back to capitalist imaginaries.

TWO ECONOMIC THEOLOGIES

"They simply don't get it," says 'Ali. An employee at one of Cairo's oldest charity organizations, 'Ali barely makes enough to pay for his son's private education but says he likes working in the field of *'amal al-khayr*, literally "the doing of good," or charity. We're sitting in the donations office, a small room with a desk, two chairs, numerous folders on the shelves, and a blasting air-conditioning unit. A wealthy-looking woman has just dropped off a large stack of bills, first counted by her own hands, then by the hands of one of the employees, and finally by the money counting machine. The woman is handed a receipt and leaves. "They pay their *zakāt* by the cent [*bil-millī*]," 'Ali complains. "If they owe nine pounds [in alms], they'll give you nine and not ten." Although 'Ali can explain the *zakāt* rules in great detail (2.5 percent on money that has been in one's possession for a year, 10 percent of one's crop, one out of forty animals, and so on),⁵ in his view *zakāt*, Muslims' obligatory alms, cannot be reduced to a percentage, to numbers. *Zakāt* should be about an attitude of empathy and *al-khayr* (the good). Thus, he explains: "If you owe nine pounds in alms, you should give ten, or even better twenty or one hundred, however much you can." *Al-khayr*, in 'Ali's view, cannot be computed on a calculator.

'Ali and other Egyptians complain about Muslims having become "calculating machines" not only when computing their alms payments but also when expecting divine rewards for their donations and charitable deeds. Instead 'Ali promotes an ethos of generosity, one that partakes in an economy of *baraka*, of blessings, abundance, and overflow. By foregrounding the importance of generosity, 'Ali criticizes a calculative approach to charity, one that I describe in this chapter as an economy of *thawāb* or divine rewards. Contrasting *baraka* and *thawāb*, I examine two versions of what Marcel Mauss calls an "economic theology" (1967: 55). Both versions are prevalent in Egypt today and, while *baraka* as a concept is often associated with Sufism, the

two modes cannot easily be mapped onto a “Sufi-Salafi” (mystical-literalist) divide but converge in all kinds of spaces, communities, and discourses.⁶

Alms-giving (*zakāt*) is one of the five pillars of Islam. Whereas in some countries (among them Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia) the collection and distribution of *zakāt* is regulated by the state, in Egypt alms-giving is handled privately (at least to this date). Giving is a matter of one’s conscience but also a public signifier of piety. Alms can be handed directly to the poor or dropped off at mosques or charity organizations. The Qur’an prescribes how much one ought to give and lists rightful beneficiaries. Diverging from ‘Ali’s view that *zakāt* should not be calculated “by the cent,” many believers take the Qur’anic numerical prescriptions quite literally. Muslims in North America might use *zakāt*-calculation websites that invite them to input information on

cash on hand and in bank accounts (savings, checking); refundable deposits (e.g., on rented apartment); non-delinquent loans (money you loaned to others); expected tax refund; gold and its certificate; shares, stocks, bonds, IRA [individual retirement account], pension plans, options, etc.; business cash on hand and in banks plus invoices due; business inventory; net income you are entitled to as of zakat due date; your liabilities.⁷

Here the divine imperative to give becomes closely tied to one’s mundane economic dealings and is translated into a straightforward numerical calculation. Once the information is entered and the *zakāt* calculated, a click leads the visitor to a different website for online donations via credit card. The visitor is informed: “Your donations are tax-deductible . . . May Allah reward you for your kindness and support.” In Egypt, too, donors can use calculators, websites, and computer programs, or ask shaykhs at their local mosques for help in calculating their required *zakāt* payment. The rewards, in Egypt as elsewhere, are this-worldly *and* otherworldly.

Alms reflect a contradiction inherent in the gift which is “in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but [is] in fact obligatory and interested” (Mauss 1967: 1). Already the Qur’an promises multiple rewards for alms-giving and charity. Verses such as “[God] blesses charitable deeds with manifold increase” (2:276) assure the believer that giving away money will, paradoxically, lead to an increase in wealth.⁸ Other verses, such as “Surely the men and women who spend in charity and give a goodly loan to God, will have it doubled for them and will receive a generous reward” (57:18), are generally understood to promise rewards in the afterlife.⁹ Whether in this world or the next, the countergift of alms given to the poor is expected not from them but from God.¹⁰ Giving alms to the poor is thus a mode of “trading with God” (*tagāra ma‘ rabbinnā*), an expression used widely in Egypt today to incite Muslims to donate or volunteer. The notion of trading with God implies a contractual relationship between God and humans, one that seems to encourage calculation and today often draws on banking vocabularies, suggesting for instance that donating to a charity organization equals opening “an account in paradise” (*ḥisāb fi-l-janna*).¹¹ Believers are continuously reminded that giving alms and volunteering are great investments. The notion of trading with God is also often evoked by those Egyptians who want to explain what has gone wrong with charity: People used to give for the sake of giving; today giving is inherently selfish, calculative, and – some would add – deeply capitalist.

According to Marcel Mauss, “it is not so long ago since [man] became a machine – a calculating machine” (1967: 74). But Mauss also shows that precolonial and premodern gift-giving was highly calculative as well (see also Bourdieu 1977). Counting or calculating Muslims are not an exclusively modern or capitalist phenomenon. Following the mass translation of Greek texts into Arabic in the ninth century, Arab philosophers contributed much to the development of mathematics, and the very term Algebra comes from the Arabic *al-jabr* (restoration). The Islamic tradition has been dealing with numbers from the very beginning.¹² The five daily prayers require keeping track of units (*rak‘as*); performing *dhikr* involves elaborate counting for which prayer beads are often used;¹³ and the numerical *zakāt* rules require careful calculation. The Qur’an and Hadith (traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) are full of numbers. A concern with numbers and precision has a long history in the Islamic tradition irrespective of capitalism and its neoliberal forms, and calculation is not restricted to these forms of economy.¹⁴ Capitalist modernity, however, has raised the stakes of calculation, tying practices of counting to a highly calculative outlook and subsuming all spheres of social life within the realm of number values.

In a recent article on the Islamic Revival in Egypt, anthropologist Samuli Schielke illustrates how “capitalist ethics themselves infiltrate the promises and practices of religion” (2012: 138). Schielke approaches capitalism as a particular “mode of subjectivity and sociality,” a mode focused on benefits. Everyday life in Egypt, he argues, is increasingly dominated by the future, be it through promises concerning this world or the afterlife. Schielke relates the “concern for the fine details of maximizing reward” to a “more general vision of the human condition that privileges profit as a paradigmatic motivation and outcome of action” (2012: 139). In line with Schielke’s argument, this chapter aims to show how contemporary Egyptians engage with a neoliberal ethos, using mathematical calculations to make sense of their lives outside of the sphere of economics, as well as of their prospects for afterlife. Yet, while tracing a neoliberal remaking of Islamic practices and discourses, I simultaneously suggest that religious imaginaries are not simply subsumed by neoliberal capitalism but also expand, if not subvert, its logic. My interlocutors’ economic theologies are best understood not as an effect of an all-pervasive neoliberal reordering but as local articulations that do not always fully resonate with the spirit of capitalism. Trading with God is never the same as trading with humans for the simple reason that the trade partner is divine and therefore never bound to the logic of the calculator. Furthermore, when trading with God, the payback is not only this-worldly but also otherworldly, thus altering the very scope of the economy.

In addition to the obligatory alms (*zakāt*), many Muslims give voluntary alms, called *ṣadaqa*. The latter can be money, food, labor, time, care, and, according to a hadith, even a smile. The notion that even a smile can *count* complicates the very practice of *counting*. Smiles are difficult to capture by calculators, spreadsheets, and percentages. The trade relationship with God needs to be understood within the tension between *thawāb* (divine payback) and *baraka* (divine blessings) – as contractual yet also exceeding human calculation. My interlocutors’ modes of trading with God reveal a religiosity that is entangled with, but not reducible to, a calculative logic. Even highly calculative approaches to charity are never fully contained by the logic of the calculator. Only close ethnographic attention – of the kind that is not limited to the visible world – can help unravel the convergence and coexistence

of religious and capitalist imaginaries. Before turning to my ethnographic sketches of *thawāb* and *baraka*, I next briefly explain how my approach fits within the anthropology of Islam.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ISLAM

In a recent attempt to define an emergent field, Jens Kreinath (2012: 1) begins with what the anthropology of Islam is *not*: It is not the study of texts or the Prophet's life for their own sakes; it is not studying Islam as a homogeneous and coherent system of beliefs and practices; it is not about describing the essence of Islam. Careful to distinguish their work from that of Orientalists, anthropologists working on Islam have long been suspicious of texts. Lila Abu-Lughod warned anthropologists of "the pull of classical Orientalism with its privileging of textual over ethnographic Islam [which might] drag anthropologists away from studying current practices, meanings, and social contexts" (1989: 296), and Michael Gilsenan suggested that historical Islamic writings are useless for an anthropology of Islam as they "give only inadequate and scattered accounts of what ordinary people are supposed to believe, and then only as seen through the eyes of literate specialists" (2000: 13). Patrick Gaffney, in his study of Muslim preachers in Egypt, challenges presumptions of the classical academe "which consider[s] texts, the more canonical the better, the essence of tradition" (1994: 27). Wary of the hegemonic force of theological frameworks, Hamid el-Zein even proposed an anthropological framework that abandons "Islam" for the sake of local *islams* (el-Zein 1977). Responding to such antitextual trends, Talal Asad argued in the 1980s that if one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith (1986: 14). Asad's framework of discursive tradition draws attention to the importance of texts and the ways in which textual traditions shape embodied practices and historical contexts. Building on this framework, Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* does not proceed from the individual subject as a given but rather draws attention to how "the individual is contingently made possible by the discursive logic of the ethical traditions she enacts" (2005: 32). Taking seriously the concept of "discursive tradition" means engaging with textual traditions, thinking about continuities, and unraveling the ways in which texts are related to bodily practices, subjectivities, and projects of self-cultivation.¹⁵

Taking issue with the foregrounding of pious subjects, Samuli Schielke has problematized the tendency to portray Islam as a "perfectionalist model of self-discipline" (2010: 1). His research is dedicated to capturing the messiness of everyday life. He works with young men in the Egyptian countryside who sometimes aspire to being pious subjects but at other times smoke pot, watch TV, dream of emigrating, or simply kill time. In Schielke's view, portraying Islam as an all-encompassing ethical project of self-cultivation obscures the fact that daily life is characterized by "the ambiguity between and an uneasy coexistence of religious morality and discipline, communal respect and reputation, the expectations and promises of consumerism and romantic love, and the limitations of practical circumstances" (2009: S25). In short, Schielke argues that there is "too much Islam" in the anthropology of Islam (2010: 1). Though illuminating and provocative, Schielke's critique of the

self-cultivation model runs the risk of reinscribing Islam as a bounded entity while portraying everyday life as overly compartmentalized. My fieldwork on Islamic charity practices repeatedly reminded me that my interlocutors are not capitalist subjects at one moment and pious Muslims the next. Capitalist modes of being-in-the-world merge and converge with states of piety. It is this merging, this convergence, but also what Schielke calls “uneasy coexistence,” that deserve our close attention.

At the other end of the spectrum we find works that highlight ruptures and shifts in the Islamic tradition and approach contemporary Islam through the lens of the state, capitalism, or neoliberalism. Gregory Starrett (1998), for instance, traces the ways in which “Islam” has been objectified by the modern Egyptian state and is put to work as part of a larger project of shaping industrious, disciplined citizens. Lila Abu-Lughod’s study of Egyptian soap operas (2005) shows how Islam is managed (and produced) in the name of the national community. Whereas Saba Mahmood’s work considers how textual traditions shape contemporary believers, the emphasis in these latter works is shifted to the state and the economy.

Thinking Islam dialogically means proceeding from neither Islam nor the “secular” as a given.¹⁶ A compelling example of a dialogical approach is Charles Hirschkind’s *Ethical Soundscape*. While also building on Talal Asad’s work, Hirschkind highlights continuities, including the revival of “fragments of buried experience,” along with ruptures, unexpected turns, and “radical departure[s]” (2006: 122, 161).¹⁷ He describes a religious tradition that is “significantly transformed by the processes of modernization and rationalization” but in which the state can never fully subsume Islamic practices. There is always an excess, an element of “friction and disjuncture between the modernist discourses of the state and the religious traditions it seeks to encompass, reform, and regulate.” As such, Hirschkind does not describe a linear progression “but rather a series of partial displacements, recuperations, and reorientations” (2006: 40f., 62, 66). The concept of heteroglossia similarly draws our attention to continuities, convergences, and radical departures, all at once.

My interlocutors often use terms that they would call “religious” or “Muslim.” Attention to traditions continues to be crucial. At the same time my interlocutors’ idioms, imaginaries, and practices are inflected by modern calculative reason. Unraveling some of these entwinements, I suggest that the concept of “discursive tradition” is necessary but not sufficient for capturing contemporary religious imaginaries. Building on more dialogical approaches, I examine how in Egypt divine economies and capitalist calculations intersect and reshape one another. I thereby hope to shed light on the economization of religion *and* the ways in which religious traditions inflect secular models of economy. The concept of “trading with God” is particularly revealing as it brings together the divine, the afterlife, and modern regimes of calculation. Trading with God is highly capitalist and tweaks capitalism, both at once.

ECONOMIES OF *THAWĀB*

Question: Someone asked me whether or not a Muslim would only have to be 51% good to enter Paradise when we were discussing the balancing of good and bad deeds on the Day of Judgment. Please give me some more information on that because I was unable to answer that question.¹⁸

Besides raising the puzzling question of how one can be 51 percent good, this fatwa inquiry asks about God's mode of accounting on Judgment Day (*yawm al-ḥisāb*).¹⁹ The latter is literally the Day of Calculation and is commonly associated with the image of a scale. But how does God calculate? How does the Divine Scale work? Does one need to be as good as possible, or do one's good deeds merely have to outweigh one's sinful deeds? The scholar responding to the request cites a number of Qur'anic verses, among them:

And they whose weight [of righteousness] is heavy in the balance – it is they, they who will have attained to a happy state whereas they whose weight is light in the balance – it is they who will have squandered their own selves, [destined] to abide in hell. (23:102–3)²⁰

He also cites the eighth/ninth century scholar al-Tabari:

All people will be called to their account on the Day of Judgment. Even if the good deeds of the person surpass his bad deeds by only one good deed, he will enter Paradise. Likewise only one bad deed more, entitles the person to enter the Fire (Hell). And the one whose good and bad deeds are equal will be among the people of A'raf, in a kind of limbo.²¹

The fatwa implies that one's fate in the afterlife can come down to one single deed; it's a simple equation in the end.

Mathematical imaginations of Judgment Day emerge already in the Qur'an. The Islamic tradition contains its own language of trade, reflecting historical economic context (Bamyeh 1999). Drawing on Georg Simmel's insight that "money was uniquely capable of bringing the chaotic flux of objects in the world into the realm of a standardized law of value" (cited in Bamyeh 1999: 22), sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh argues that the rise of money-based exchange allowed for an abstracting of the world.²² He points out that in the Islamic tradition the relationship to God is conceptualized as highly contractual, expressed for instance in the Qur'anic verses: "Behold, God has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return . . . Rejoice, then, in the bargain, which you have made with Him" (9:110–111). Not surprisingly the system of charity, which was largely developed in Medina, is also based on the "economies of exchange and production that the faithful were familiar with" (Bamyeh 1999: 242f.). That is, Islamic charity, too, is from the very beginning entangled with and shaped by a logic of trade and exchange. In Bamyeh's words: "Alms were not given to the poor but in effect to Allah himself, who had to assume the role of an authoritative tax collector until an Islamic state that could assume such a responsibility would come into existence." Alms in this sense were not considered to be a tax but rather a "loan" to God, who guaranteed repayment of the principle along with a hefty interest" (1999: 243). Bamyeh notes that the investment-friendly economy with God in spirit goes against the Qur'anic frowning upon speculative wealth enhancement through usury (1999: 244).

Bamyeh reminds us that trading with God is not a modern phenomenon. Yet while calculation is neither new nor modern, it takes on new meanings in a modern, neo-liberal context in which domains of life previously excluded from an economic rationality become subsumed within the logic of the market. To offer the reader a

sense of how a calculative economy of *thawāb* (divine rewards) works in Egypt today, I next turn to Resala, one of Egypt's largest charity organizations. Resala was founded in 1999 by a group of Cairo University students with the help of one of their professors. Today the organization has over fifty branches that are constantly buzzing with activity. Volunteers come to read to the blind, cook for the poor, tutor children from underprivileged families, donate blood, teach free language or computer classes, mentor orphans, sort through donated medication and clothes, work on the media or outreach team, or go on group visits to orphanages or senior homes. While most of the Resala branches are located in affluent neighborhoods, many of the volunteers come from working-class or slum neighborhoods. Because of their social background, age, and the high unemployment rate in Egypt, the volunteers do not have money to give to those in need. Wanting to nevertheless partake in the "joy of giving" (*mut'a al-'atā'*) – one of Resala's key slogans – they give their time and labor instead. Volunteering is considered a form of *sadaqa*, a nonobligatory form of giving.

When asked about their motivation for volunteering, the young men and women at Resala offer a variety of responses, ranging from the social ("it's a way of making friends") and banal ("otherwise I just spend my entire day on Facebook") to the religious ("God commands us to help those in need") and political ("how could people care about elections if they don't even know what they're going to eat tomorrow?"). Dr Sharif, the organization's founder, similarly highlights the multiple benefits of charity: "In the afterlife, and the current life, the rewards are endless . . . You will gain success. You will gain happiness! Feelings of usefulness and self-satisfaction! Respect, people's love!"²³ Partly the reward is this-worldly: success, a sense of self-worth, love. Yet the Islamic Revival since the 1970s has also reversed an earlier erasure of the afterlife promoted by modernist Muslim thinkers.²⁴ Today giving to the poor is never just about social change, redistribution, or personal growth but also involves a trade relationship with God. Dr Sharif accordingly includes the otherworldly in his speech: In the afterlife, too "the rewards are endless . . ." After listing a number of social and personal benefits, he elaborates on these less immediate rewards: "Volunteers are actually the ones who gain the most of all. What better way to build yourself a house in heaven? It is the poor who allow us to go to heaven."²⁵ Many volunteers at Resala similarly explained to me that by doing good deeds, one collects points (*thawāb* or *ḥassanāt*) that will facilitate one's entry into paradise. In Egypt today, a concern with the afterlife materializes in the practices of collecting points, counting, and multiplying.

Within an economy of *thawāb*, even the smallest act can carry enormous weight. Ahmed is a volunteer who has been offering weekly religious lessons at one of Resala's branches. His lessons are popular and well-attended. In one lesson, called "Our return to paradise," Ahmed explained to his listeners how a single act can make a big difference. "Say your friend sends you a song on your cell phone. What do you do? Do you listen to it or delete it?" The teenagers in the audience giggle. Part of the religiosity that they are trying to cultivate involves overcoming the desire to listen to music. Yet the temptation persists. The scenario that Ahmed describes seems familiar. Ahmed turns his two palms upward and approaches one of the young men. "So this one song, where do you put it?" he asks. His right palm stands for the side of the scale on which one's good deeds are recorded. Deleting the song would add weight to that side. (Ahmed lowers the right hand to illustrate the point.) The left side stands

for listening to the song; it is the side on which sins are recorded. (Ahmed lowers the left hand while explaining; then he lowers it even further, adding that if you not only listen to the song but also forward it to other friends, you accumulate additional “negative points” each time they listen to the song. “And then imagine they forward it to other friends, and they listen to it as well” . . . Ahmed’s left hand sinks lower and lower.) “So where would you put the song?” he urges the young men. One by one, they enact the correct decision, placing their right hand onto Ahmed’s right palm, pressing it down, saying that they would delete the song. This collective performance highlights and reinforces Ahmed’s point: *one* song, *one* word, *one* deed can make all the difference. While this is quite shocking – the very thought that a single song can impact one’s fate in the afterlife – it is also quite simple. Your fate is in your hands.

Volunteers at Resala learn to embody an ethos of rewards; they learn how to count and keep an eye on the future, including their afterlife. Dr Sharif visits the different Resala branches on a regular basis to teach new volunteers about the meaning and benefits of volunteering. Visitors are also instructed about the relationship between volunteerism and the afterlife through large posters mounted on the walls: “Caravan to paradise” (*qāfila illa al-janna*) reads one poster inviting volunteers to join a day-long trip to a village to fix houses, build bathrooms and roofs, and distribute food and medicine. Another poster motivates volunteers with the title: “Receive the keys to your house in paradise.” The economy of *thawāb* is reinforced each time a volunteer works in the communal kitchen on the days when food is prepared to be taken to one of Cairo’s slum neighborhoods. Sometimes I would pass by the kitchen on my way to a different activity, and I would be invited in and, even after protesting that I only had a minute to spare, would be given a task, such as stirring food, cutting meat, or scooping rice out of big pots onto disposable containers for the individual meals. “*Yallā* [come on], take some *thawāb*,” the volunteers in the kitchen would cheerfully instruct me. The same logic comes to bear on the act of distribution. When the “distribution team” moves from house to house in a slum neighborhood to deliver the meals, more experienced volunteers keep an eye on the group, making sure that everyone has the chance to hand out an approximately equal number of meals. Everyone should be able to collect the same number of points. Once a young woman, who was delighted by the idea that I was studying “good deeds” (*ʿamal al-khayr*) in Islam, insisted that I hand out both her and my share of meals. She gave me the gift of gift-giving. Both in the communal kitchen and while distributing food, volunteers thus assist each other in gaining *thawāb*. Sharing here occurs between the volunteers, ironically backgrounding the very act of giving to “the poor.” For the most part “the poor” are configured in these contexts as a “gate to paradise.”²⁶

Within an economy of *thawāb*, one good deed does not necessarily equal one point. Savvy believers can take advantage of more complex calculations and remind each other of how to maximize their rewards. Advice is shared in mosques, on metros and buses, in charity organizations, among friends and strangers. For instance, one can *multiply* one’s rewards by paying attention to the context in which particular actions are performed: According to hadiths, praying in a congregation is seventy-seven times superior to praying alone, and giving alms in Ramadan is seventy times more meritorious than giving at any other time. Other actions are valuable because of what they are *equal* to: The Prophet assured believers that performing the minor

pilgrimage (*ʿumra*) during Ramadan is equal to performing the pilgrimage proper (*hajj*). (In monetary terms, the minor pilgrimage is significantly cheaper.) One can also *substitute* certain deeds for others: A hadith notes, “Whoever provides food for breaking the fast of a fasting person receives the reward of the fasting person, without the reward of the fasting person being reduced in any way.” Sometimes such advice is shared, and others are encouraged to multiply their rewards. At other moments, believers seem to be competing. One time, when an especially pious woman at Resala shoved her way into the front row of the prayer congregation, forcing others to move back a row or two, she explained loudly that she wanted the extra *thawāb* that is gained by praying in the first row.

These examples suggest that trading with God is inherently oriented to profit and investment. At the same time many of my interlocutors emphasize that ultimately God owns everything, and we only borrow our possessions from God. And since God is the real owner of wealth,²⁷ the flow of profits, paybacks, and points is never bound to human rationality. The logic of calculation, investments, and accumulation is always provisional and at any moment can be disrupted by divine excess and divine justice, both of which exceed human understanding. To examine the ways in which divine–human (but also human–human) relationships overflow the logic of the calculator, I next turn to economies of *baraka*.

ECONOMIES OF *BARAKA*

In December 2011, shortly before leaving Cairo, I attended one final lesson at Resala. After the lesson and communal prayer, we were divided into smaller groups, separated first by gender, and then by marital status (into “mothers” and “girls”). After joining the group of “girls,” I was asked whether I had any lingering questions. I said I did and that I still did not fully grasp the concept of *thawāb*. I was still confused, I said (and meant it). On the one hand it seems to come down to mathematical calculations; on the other hand, Ahmed had repeatedly emphasized that we can never understand God’s wisdom (*ḥikmat rabbinnā*). A hadith evoked to underscore the latter point (one often cited by Sufis but occasionally also by Ahmed) recounts how a not very pious woman (in some versions, a prostitute) once gave water to a thirsty dog and entered paradise because of this one act alone. A different hadith tells the story of a woman who went to hell for having locked up a cat and deprived it of food. Stories of such single decisive acts seem to disrupt the logic of the calculator. Here it is not a matter of whether one’s good deeds outweigh one’s bad deeds – the question about the 51 percent – but in the case of the prostitute, through God’s mercy, the single act of giving water to a thirsty dog erases an entire sinful life.

Citing this example, I asked the young women at Resala how they reconciled the ungraspability of God’s wisdom with the calculative logic of *thawāb*. My question seemed to resonate; a number of the women spoke in response. They were not certain either but collectively tried to come up with a position that eases the tension they themselves struggled with. One of them pointed out that it is never a simple matter of counting. It is not the case that you have one hundred deeds that count, and if you do sixty this way and forty that way, you will go to paradise. We never know how many points we receive for each act. So when we pray, we pray the best possible

way, do our ablutions the best possible way, and pray with multiple intentions because we never know how many points God will give us for this particular prayer. “But,” she added, looking firmly into my eyes, “we do know that if you don’t pray, you get negative points; that much is clear.”

While one should always try one’s best, divine accounting ultimately recedes from human understanding and with it from predictability. Even at Resala, where volunteers are continuously instructed to collect “points,” divine excess can override all calculations. Occasionally Resala volunteers carefully plan a food caravan and, based on previous home visits, compile a list of families in need. They then prepare the corresponding number of meals (matching the number of family members in each household), and repeatedly count and recount the meals, but in the end nevertheless find themselves with more meals than they had counted. Generally stories about such extra meals involve recipients who are extremely poor but were not on the official list. The excess of meals is attributed to *baraka*, divine blessings. An economy of *baraka* is never a simple plus/minus equation.²⁸

In other religious spaces in Egypt even more emphasis is placed on the limits of human reasoning and calculation. Conversely, the abundance of divine generosity is highlighted. The point in such spaces is precisely *not* to be calculating. The best modes of charity are those that do not keep count. In so-called *khidmas*, Sufi spaces around saint shrines where food is given out to visitors, the people in charge often explained to me that they have no source of income but never ask people for donations.²⁹ Instead, they rely on God’s generosity. In these spaces, too, many people report that when you prepare food for those in need, the food will miraculously multiply. The notion of miraculous abundance – one also found in many other religious traditions – disrupts straightforward mathematical calculations. Here one plus one does not equal two but is always more. Giving is the ultimate way of multiplying. In a *ḥadīth qudsī*, God promises: “O son of Adam, spend (in charity), and I’ll spend on you!”³⁰ It is for this reason that, as another hadith holds, “wealth never decreases because of charity.” I have heard numerous stories in Egypt in which giving away money, especially at a financially critical time, led within days to an even larger amount of money returning to the donor.³¹ The implicit understanding is that one can never expect this to happen. God’s generosity is not bound to human expectations or calculations. Nevertheless, those relying on God learn again and again that God’s generosity is boundless; that the world is full of *baraka*, divine blessings.

Some scholars associate the economy of *baraka* with premodern forms of Islam. For instance, Marion Katz, writing about celebrations of the Prophet’s birthday (*mawlid*), notes that an increasing rationalization of believers’ lives in modernity has displaced premodern ideas which were based on “non-arithmetic principles according to which gift-giving enhanced rather than depleted resources and well-being” (2007: 211). As she explains, in the past these principles were defined and understood within a web of earthly and supernatural relations and exceeded a rational numerical logic. Indicating that the premodern economy of *baraka* subsumed that of *thawāb*, Katz points out: “the mathematics of divine reward (*thawāb*) are magically elastic, and their meaning lies in the wondrous and beneficent incommensurability of meager human actions and bounteous divine reward, rather than in any numerical equivalency” (2007: 211).

Similarly, many Egyptians pointed out to me that the pervasive focus on “collecting points” is something relatively new. My mother, who grew up in Egypt in the 1940s and 1950s and moved to Germany around 1960, is a vocal opponent of calculative approaches to charity. According to her (possibly nostalgic) memories, fifty years ago “Egyptians helped others for the sake of helping.” Today, by contrast, every date or sip of water offered to those breaking fast in Ramadan becomes a point, an investment. Others suggest that the overemphasis on *thawāb* is deeply materialist or capitalist. Yet the logic of the calculator has not replaced the economy of *baraka*. The two rather coexist and continuously inflect each other. Hassan, an Egyptian anthropologist and a friend of mine, strongly disagrees with the notion that the logic of *thawāb*, of counting points, is particularly modern or capitalist. In his view, both economic theologies have been part of the Islamic tradition from early on; the calculative logic of *thawāb* might even have preceded the notion of pure giving related to *baraka*. In Hassan’s view, it is human to give because you want something in return. Even a mother who feeds her child does so not out of pure love but because she has interests. She wants to live on in her child and she wants the feeling of motherhood. Interests (*maṣāliḥ*) are integral to being human.³² Second, as Hassan repeatedly reminded me (without ever having read Mohammed Bamyeh’s work), the Qur’an itself is steeped in commercial terminology.

In Hassan’s view, there are two strands of Islam, one associated today with Wahhabism, the other with Sufism. The former originated in the society of Bedouins and merchants in which Islam was first revealed; the latter emerged in agricultural societies such as the one found in Egypt. Because the Prophet Muhammad was speaking to merchants, he used a language of trade. “If you do your ablutions, you get this and that many points,” Hassan explains. Thus, he notes, the concept of *thawāb* is part of the “archive of our culture and Islamic religion,” yet Islam adopted different forms in agricultural societies in which “you just throw some seeds on the ground, and rain comes, and the seeds grow. It’s very different from the Bedouin society in which you have to fight off other tribes to stay alive.” The agricultural version of Islam, for Hassan, is one that gives rise to concepts of giving, love, plenty, and *baraka*. The Wahhabi version, which since the 1980s has been reinforced in Egypt through labor migration and missionary activities (and which, Hassan worries, will continue to spread in Egypt as a result of the Muslim Brotherhood’s rise to power), is an Islam of trade, counting, and *thawāb*. The Sufi version is an Islam of generosity, hospitality, and *baraka*. Hassan’s portrayal of agriculture is problematic in that it erases labor from the equation, and he reproduces a stereotypical image of Bedouin societies. Nevertheless, his insistence on the interplay of social, economic, and geographical forces effectively cautions us against fetishizing modernity and romanticizing the precolonial Islamic tradition as a “previous phase in which [the thought of civilizations] was less cold and calculating” (Mauss 1967: 46).

The economy of *baraka* is not restricted to a previous phase. It is part of Egypt’s contemporary landscape of giving, which in turn is situated within a wider capitalist world. At first sight *baraka* even seems to converge with a particular aspect of capitalism: the semi-miraculous multiplication of wealth. Given “the unpredictable and chaotic nature of global capitalism in a post-socialist economy [which] makes both wealth and poverty often appear sudden, unpredictable, even miraculous” (Schielke 2012: 141), capitalism itself is unpredictable and evades a calculative logic.³³ Yet this

seeming convergence does not mean that *baraka* is a capitalist concept or that capitalism is divinely blessed. *Baraka* highlights the limits of human calculative reason and reminds the believer that God is the ultimate owner of all wealth. Whereas *baraka* refers to a divinely blessed form of excess, interest (*ribā*) and excessive accumulation are prohibited in Islamic law (Maurer 2005: 107f.). According to the logic of *baraka*, since everything belongs to God, our borrowed wealth ought to be shared. *Zakāt*, almsgiving, for this reason is widely understood not as a human act of charity but as an enactment of God's provision and the "right of the poor" (*haqq al-faqīr*). As a lived, constantly transformed concept, *baraka* engages with the uncertainty and unpredictability of life while simultaneously reminding believers of the limits of human reasoning and ownership.

CONCLUSION

Looking for an alternative to a society composed of calculative machines, Marcel Mauss (1967:75f.) turns to the Qur'an:

Your possessions and your children are only a trial and Allah it is with whom is a great reward.

Therefore be careful of your duty to [Allah] as much as you can, and hear and obey and spend (*sadaqa*), it is better for your souls; and whoever is saved from the greediness of his soul, these it is that are the successful.

If you set apart from Allah a goodly portion, He will double it for you and forgive you; and Allah is the multiplier of rewards, forbearing.

The knower of the unseen and the seen, the mighty, the wise.³⁴

Whereas Muslim televangelists find in the Qur'an support for a neoliberal ethos of self-discipline, individual responsibility, and hard work, Mauss seems intrigued by a Qur'anic ethics of giving. He then makes a move reminiscent of many modernist Muslim thinkers: He erases the afterlife and boldly proposes replacing "the name of Allah by that of the society" (ibid. 76). In the Qur'anic context, the promised multiplication of rewards refers to the End of Time. In Mauss' re-telling, the possibility of an economy of mutual assistance refers to a this-worldly utopia. And yet it is telling that Mauss looks for inspiration in a Qur'anic model which emphasizes that humans are never the actual owners of wealth. Mauss is wary of a communist alternative but seems to appreciate the provisional, unstable nature of wealth built into the Qur'anic economy. He envisions a society in which "the rich should come once more, freely or by obligation, to consider themselves as treasurers, as it were, of their fellow-citizens" (ibid. 66).

Diverging from Mauss' modernist, secularist teleology, in Egypt the Islamic Revival has reintroduced the afterlife into religious imaginaries and discourses. The return of the otherworldly calls for close ethnographic attention to the resulting economies – worldly and divine ones. By examining my interlocutors' everyday modes of giving – be it of food, alms, or time and labor in the form of volunteering – I outlined two different economic theologies: an economy of *thawāb* (divine payback) in which each deed is expected to amount to a point that will facilitate one's entry into paradise; and an economy of *baraka* (divine blessings), which highlights abundance and generosity while resisting calculation. I complicated approaches in the anthropology of Islam that

read contemporary practices as either grounded in the textual tradition or as molded by economic forces. Both the paradigm of “discursive tradition” and that of “neoliberal Islam” or “market Islam” are of limited use when trying to understand the complex logic of trading with God. Far from placing emphasis on resolution, the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia draws attention to the coexistence, convergence, and divergence of multiple meanings, discourses, and forces. An economized Islam, or an Islamic economy, is never simply the combination of “Islam” and “economy” but always also calls upon us to consider emergent, unintended consequences, and the ways in which different fields and forces speak to and reconfigure each other.

In trying to make sense of the world and their relationship to God, many of my interlocutors in Egypt turned to quasi-numerical calculations. Given that the conversations in this chapter all happened in 2011 and 2012 – a time of revolutionary upheaval and a widespread sense of uncertainty – the appeal of a one-plus-one-equals-two equation is all the more understandable. More broadly, the tendency to render all goods and actions calculable can be read as an effect of the partial neoliberalization of everyday life. And yet my interlocutors know very well that human calculations always fall short. God’s wisdom is always greater than human knowledge. The sinful woman who gives water to a dog ends up in paradise, and even the most carefully calculated number of meals is miraculously altered if there is more need in the world. The discourse of *thawāb* demands of believers to keep count; that of *baraka* reminds them that counting is pointless. Reading the limits of calculation against everyday calculative practices not only helps us understand the complexity of lived religiosities, but more importantly might also alter what we take the “economy” to be. Concepts of trading with God both mirror and exceed this-worldly economic imaginaries. As such, everyday religious practices offer insight into a neoliberalization of everyday life but can also speak back to, and denaturalize, the taken-for-granted, including our analytical frameworks. Ultimately, trading with God is not only about the afterlife; it also offers a way of engaging with the capitalist present *through* the afterlife. It is not simply about the future but also speaks to the here and now.

NOTES

This chapter draws on fieldwork in Egypt (2010–2012) which was generously funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Much-appreciated time for writing was afforded by a faculty fellowship at the Jackman Humanities Institute at the University of Toronto. For comments on earlier drafts of this chapter, I am grateful to Janice Boddy, Michael Lambek, Ruth Marshall, and participants at the workshop on the *Companion to the Anthropology of Religion* held at the University of Toronto in April 2012. Last but not least, I thank Alejandra Gonzalez Jimenez who has read and commented on multiple drafts of this chapter.

- 1 Anthropologists, historians, and political theorists have deconstructed and historicized the concepts of “religion” and “economy.” Capitalism, too, is not a given but has multiple meanings and histories. Weber described types of capitalism found in precolonial India, the ancient Mediterranean, the Muslim world, and China, but located “capitalism proper” in the modern West. To account for cultural and historical variations, some anthropologists speak of “capitalisms” (Blim 2000). This chapter focuses on a neoliberal form of capitalism and the resulting economization of social life that subsumes everything within

- the logic of the market and renders all goods calculable. For an alternative take on neo-liberalism in Egypt, see Elyachar 2012.
- 2 On a modern trust in numbers more broadly, see Foucault 1970 and Hacking 1990. On the emergence of calculability in relation to the “economy” during the first half of the twentieth century, see Mitchell 2002.
 - 3 The period since the 1970s is marked by a convergence of the Islamic Revival and Sadat’s open-door (*infitāḥ*) policy. Mubarak’s structural adjustment policies in the 1990s continued to enrich a small minority of Egyptians (along with foreign corporations) while nearly a third of all Egyptians today live below the poverty line. In post-Mubarak Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood’s economic policies up to this date have kept Egypt firmly on the neoliberal path.
 - 4 The concept of heteroglossia stems from Bakhtin (1981) and allows us to consider how multiple, divergent discourses converge in texts and individual utterances. While linguistics traditionally emphasizes the centripetal forces that centralize and unify a language, Bakhtin draws attention to the centrifugal forces that decentralize and disunify. In my earlier work, I used the concept of heteroglossia to highlight interplays, tensions, and unexpected convergences between Islamic dream interpretation and Freudian psychology (Mittermaier 2011).
 - 5 Those with wealth below a fixed threshold do not have to pay *zakāt* although a separate small *zakāt* payment is required of all Muslims during Ramadan (*zakāt al-fitr*). The latter is calculated as well: it ought to correspond to “one bushel, or about 2.2 kilos, of the local staple food, or the equivalent in cash” (Benthall 1999: 29). In Egypt each year the monetary equivalent is determined by al-Azhar, the authoritative institution of Sunni Islam. In 2011 it was about 15LE (US\$2.50) per household.
 - 6 On overlaps between the Islamic Revival and Sufism – two realms often thought to be dichotomously opposed – see Hirschkind 2006, as well as my own work on Muslim dream interpretation as a practice located simultaneously at the core and the margins of Islam (Mittermaier 2007, 2011). Many practices closely associated with Sufism such as devotion to *ahl al-bayt*, the Prophet’s saintly descendants, or *dhikr*, the repetitive recitation of prayers and remembrance of God, are prevalent throughout Egypt, including in communities that would reject the “Sufi” label. ‘Ali, for instance, would never call himself a Sufi.
 - 7 See http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/zakat/Zakat_calculator.shtml (accessed Apr. 2013). IslamiCity is a global website, launched in 1995 and operated by Human Assistance and Development International, a nonprofit organization in California. Donations made to IslamiCity are used for the organization’s outreach and educational projects. Generally today *zakāt* is given to the “poor” and “needy,” two of eight categories listed as permissible recipients in the Qur’an.
 - 8 Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Qur’an are Muhammad Asad’s.
 - 9 This is Ahmed Ali’s translation. Muhammad Asad translates *muṣaddiqīn* not as “the men and women who spend in charity and give a goodly loan to God” but as “the men and women who accept the truth as true.”
 - 10 Comparatively, for an ethnographic account of how American evangelical Christians handle the tension between *compassion* – the idea of unconditional benevolence – and *accountability* – implicit reciprocal obligations, see Elisha’s *Moral Ambition* (2011). Elisha highlights the “complex assembly of moral ambitions that together support a worldview that represents charitable actions as conditional and unconditional *at the same time* but does not appear to provide sufficient methods to resolve potential crises and contradictions” (2011: 181, emphasis in original). While Elisha emphasizes the implicit expectations imposed on recipients, I highlight the expectation of receiving a reward from God. The role of the poor in the charitable economies that I studied is mostly to receive the gift but at times also includes the obligation to ask God to bless the donor. The poor in the latter case are not just recipients but also intermediaries. Other intermediaries are the Prophet’s saintly descendants (*ahl al-bayt*) to whom believers promise monetary

- donations (*nadhr*) in exchange for a favor (usually related to health, marriage, fertility, or exams).
- 11 This phrase is taken from the pamphlet of a small charity organization in Cairo.
 - 12 Thinking about numbers does not need to be limited to an engagement with capitalism or mathematics. Rather, “people’s familiarity with the religious archive on number may preserve disciplines of thought that are rehearsed and re-applied just as often as the rational-commercial disciplines in everyday life” (Guyer et al. 2010: 51). On sacred numbers in Islam, see Schimmel 1994b. Elsewhere Schimmel (1994a: 76–83) exemplifies the importance of numbers in Islamic imaginaries with the three stages of the self; the five pillars of Islam and five prayers; the seven circumambulations of the Kaaba during the *hajj*; and the ninety-nine names of God.
 - 13 *Dhikr*, literally the remembrance of God, involves the recitation of short prayers, Qur’anic verses, and God’s Ninety-Nine Names. It can be done silently or in a congregation. The practice is central but not exclusive to Sufi communities.
 - 14 For a fascinating genealogy of modern accounting that links the emergence of bookkeeping in the late Middle Ages to the ritual of confession, see Aho 2005.
 - 15 As Anjum (2007) points out, the close link between tradition and self-cultivation in the writings of Talal Asad and his students reflects their indebtedness to Alasdair MacIntyre’s (and Aristotle’s) concept of tradition.
 - 16 For a critical rethinking of the “secular,” see Hussein Agrama’s reflections on the Egyptian uprising in 2011. Agrama (2011) uses the term “asecular” to demarcate a space outside of the problem-space of secularism and points out that the very question of whether Egypt will be a religious or a secular state is produced and reproduced by the state.
 - 17 Consider, for instance, how Hirschkind opens his ethnography with the description of Cairo’s cacophonous soundscapes: pop music, Qur’anic verses, traffic, and voices all merge. See also his discussion of Shaykh Kishk’s sermons which borrow heavily from a cinematic aesthetics (2006: ch. 5).
 - 18 Fatwa website, at <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=86124> (accessed Apr. 2013).
 - 19 According to common eschatological understandings, Judgment Day (*Yawm al-Ḥisāb*) is the same as the Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al-Qiyāma*).
 - 20 A related Qur’anic verse promises that on Judgment Day “not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least. And if there be no more than the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it into account” (21:46).
 - 21 *A‘raf* appears only once in the Qur’an (7:46). The term refers to heights occupied by those between Paradise and Hell. This verse is sometimes taken as the basis for a “limbo” theory in Islam. A common interpretation holds that the place is for those “whose good deeds keep them from the Fire and whose evil deeds keep them from the Garden . . . and who are therefore the last to enter the Garden, at the mercy of their Lord” (Smith and Haddad 2002: 91).
 - 22 The decisive factor for Bamyeh is not only money but also the emergence of long-distance trade, intertribal trade, and seasonal markets. Of course, a careful analysis of monetary and trading metaphors in Islamic imaginaries would need to take into consideration the differences between barter and money exchanges, the traditional *sūq* and modern markets, and so on.
 - 23 Dr Sharif, public speech, August 24, 2006, cited in Atia 2012.
 - 24 Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad offer an encompassing account of Islamic understandings of death and resurrection, covering both traditional and modern thinkers. Highlighting a strong connection between the afterlife and morality in Islam, they point out: “So intense is the Qur’anic concern for and insistence on the day to come when all will be held accountable for their faith and their actions, that the ethical teachings contained in the Book must be understood in the light of this reality” (2002: 2). The emphasis on the accountable individual diverges from pre-Islamic understandings of a god that created the world but then retreated and left humans to their fate. In contrast to the central role of the afterlife in

- traditional texts, the afterlife is backgrounded in modernist Muslim texts. On the rise of the “social” as a primary locus of concern, see also Chapter Seven in Asad 2003.
- 25 Dr Sharif, public speech, Aug. 24, 2006.
 - 26 This does not mean that volunteers ignore the poor. Evoking the framework of divine justice, many volunteers point out that “the poor” are assured a place in paradise as well; they will go straight to paradise without being questioned first. A related hadith recounts: “I stood by the gate of Paradise and saw that the majority of those who entered were the poor and wretched. The rich [Muslims] were detained while the people of Hell were ordered to be taken to Hell.” Exceeding this eschatological framework, volunteers are sometimes compelled by their experiences in slum neighborhoods to ponder structural reasons behind poverty.
 - 27 See Mauss’s observation that “among the first group of beings with whom men must have made contracts were the spirits of the dead and the gods. They are in fact the real owners of the world’s wealth” (1967: 13).
 - 28 I never heard the volunteers talk about having gained more points as a result of the multiplication of meals. The experience of miraculous multiplication ruptures the very practice of calculating.
 - 29 Numerous *khidmas* are set up on *mawlid*s, celebrations of saints’ birthdays or death days. Other *khidmas* are open throughout the year. Although they are not neatly aligned with an economy of *zakāt*, they are part of a larger landscape of giving. *Khidmas* serve food and/or tea, sometimes also offer a place to sleep, and are understood as places of *baraka*.
 - 30 A *ḥadīth qudsī* is a tradition that contains the words of God but is not part of the Qur’an.
 - 31 An online sermon on “trading with God” hints at Christian equivalents of the notion of excess. The preacher describes the pleasure of real estate bargains and continues: “And I just LOVE trading with God. Know why? I ALWAYS WIN! I always get far more than I give” (emphasis in original). At <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/trading-with-god-gerald-manning-sermon-on-giving-yourself-155475.asp> (accessed Apr. 2013).
 - 32 This resonates with Jonathan Parry’s rereading of Mauss, according to which it is only in capitalist systems that we begin to believe in the myth of the free gift whereas alternative economies acknowledge the binding nature of gifts, the intertwinements of gifts and trade, and are not limited to this-worldly trade partners (Parry 1986).
 - 33 On convergences between occult economies and economic uncertainties in a different geographical and religious context, see Comaroff 2000 and Marshall 2009. Drawing on research in Nigeria, Ruth Marshall notes, “coupled with the extreme volatility and unpredictability of everyday life, and the development of increasingly criminalized and occult forms of accumulation over the 1990s, we can observe a growing public obsession with unseen evil powers, which find its expression in dramatic public and publicized accounts, which stage new forms of wealth, desire, and frustration in increasingly violent terms” (2009: 171f.). For a classical Marxist rereading of Latin American stories of devil contracts and baptized bills that speak back to capitalism, see Taussig’s *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* (1980).
 - 34 Qur’an 64:15–18. I cite from Ian Cunnison’s translation of *The Gift*. Comparatively, on Mauss’s rereading of the Qur’anic sura, see Maurer 2005: 93.

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CHAPTER 16

Ritual Remains: Studying Contemporary Pilgrimage

Simon Coleman

In their introduction to a book on interdisciplinary approaches to ritual, the theologian Michael Aune and the psychologist Valerie DeMarinis comment on what they see as the peculiar fate of ritual in contemporary academic and social contexts: “Once it was seen as a relic,” but “nowadays, it seems ritual is everywhere and doing practically everything” (1996: 1). Admittedly, their observation has an ironic implication. After all, any activity that achieves ubiquity risks becoming banal. Yet, for Aune and DeMarinis the point is that ritualized behavior, in whatever form, retains and has even regained salience in both religious and nonreligious contexts.

For anthropologists, ritual never really went away. However, the continued significance and diffusion of ritual in Western, plural, societies has brought with it notable theoretical and methodological challenges to a discipline founded in the study of supposedly smaller scale and more stable sites of inquiry. Thus Alexander Henn poses pertinent questions about examining the role of rituals in late modern, postcolonial contexts: “How can the taken-for-granted assumptions that rituals are formalized, rule-governed and repetitive practices be reconciled with the fact that they are subject to contingencies emerging from political upheaval, socio-cultural change and human creativity?” (2008: 10).

We should not go too far in claiming that ritual suddenly faces fresh challenges in the context of late modernity: that would be to reinstate long-discredited distinctions between societies of tradition and societies of change. However, in this chapter, I

want to explore some of the strengths and weakness of anthropological approaches to understanding ritual when applied to a particular context that is plural, heterogeneous, unstable, and subject to secular challenges as well as impulses. It is also a context where ritual is patently flourishing, at least if assessed in terms of the sheer quantity of people and activities involved. My focus is on the pilgrimage site of Walsingham, in Norfolk, England, an ancient, rural village with picturesque shrines that have become steadily more popular throughout much of the past century, attracting constituencies of visitors of varied religious persuasions, ethnic backgrounds, and class affiliations. Walsingham is highly attractive for any connoisseur of Christian worship styles: there one can find “High Anglicans,”¹ Roman Catholics, followers of Russian Orthodoxy (especially in the neighboring village of Great Walsingham), and even conservative evangelicals, who come on major processional days to protest against everybody *else’s* rituals. But there is also much food for thought for those who have a taste for more ad hoc ritual styles: the careful observer can witness numerous informal, improvised ritual events, some of them confidently orchestrated, others pursued more haltingly by nominal Christians or nonbelievers. All of this is occurring in a context where the most recent census results (for 2011) for England and Wales suggest that the number of people self-identifying as Christian since 2001 has gone down dramatically, from 71.7 to 59.3 percent, and where around a quarter of the population, over 14 million people, report that they have no religion at all.² Going to church on a Sunday is certainly a minority pursuit: a 2002 survey done by the European Union put the UK fourth from bottom in European countries in terms of rates of regular attendance.³

In assessing what is going on at Walsingham, one salient question seems to be how we are to understand the relationships between the very different ritual forms we can find there. In other words, how does the formal relate (if at all) to the informal, or the self-consciously traditional to the improvised and evanescent? This seems a valid inquiry, even if we need to avoid setting up overly rigid dichotomies since no ritual repetition can ever be perfectly achieved and no improvisation is ever entirely novel. Furthermore, reflecting on the theme of this chapter, how useful are extant anthropological models of analyzing ritual or pilgrimage when applied to Walsingham?

Through attempting to respond to such questions, this chapter explores the ambiguities contained in my title: “ritual remains.” On the one hand, we can say that ritual “remains” at Walsingham in an active, agentive sense of persistence over time: there are very many examples of formal, professionally produced rituals that are still to be found there – striking examples of what most Christians who attend (other than evangelicals) would be happy to call authorized “liturgy.”⁴ On the other hand, we can take it to refer to the noun phrase “ritual remains,” meaning what is *left behind* of ritual once some aspect of it has been removed. This latter interpretation evokes much more of a sense of the informal, the fragmented, the unofficial. But again, some interesting ambiguities persist. First, to what extent are such fragments consciously constructed in relation to what are perceived (by practitioners as well as ethnographers) to be more intact liturgical wholes? Second, and I think more significantly, should we as anthropologists focus most of our attention on what appear to be the central, core, somehow intact ritual forms? Or do we thereby make the mistake of assuming that the informal is somehow a debased, imperfect reflection of the orthodox?

I shall discuss these questions below. For now, I need to add that it is no accident that I am choosing to explore such themes by looking at a contemporary pilgrimage site. As Ian Reader (2007) has noted, across the globe pilgrimage centers associated with almost every religious tradition have been booming in recent decades. That does not mean, however, that rates of conventional religious practice have been going up. Thus Reader cautions against simply viewing rising numbers as providing evidence of growing faith, as the increases may be caused by factors that have little to do with organized religion (2007: 216). Consider for instance the vast improvements in opportunities for travel for many people, the development of tourist industries, the spread of spending power in many parts of the world, and so on. Part of the appeal of pilgrimage might also be that it provides a taste of religion without requiring the forms of regular, institutionalized devotion that seem to be in decline in places such as the United Kingdom (see Davie 1994; Woodhead 2012). Striking juxtapositions of ritual and tourism, religious orthodoxy and more diffuse heritage, might prove very attractive or at least resonant for the relatively “unchurched,” who nonetheless feel some historical or cultural connection with Christianity.

Such reasoning, or at least informed speculation, takes us back to contemplating Walsingham as a place containing a considerable variety of forms of ritual and ritualization. It also prompts reconsiderations of two still influential anthropological theories of pilgrimage, which have tended to point students in diametrically opposite directions to each other in the examination of ritual. One view, articulated most comprehensively by Victor and Edith Turner in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978), has emphasized the idea of Christian pilgrimage as a “set apart” ritual activity, a search for the sacred that is helped by the ways in which shrines enable people to feel separated from their everyday lives and concerns but also united with each other. The alternative view, proposed originally by John Eade and Michael Sallnow in *Contesting the Sacred* (1991), directly challenges the “set apart” theory by suggesting that pilgrimage reflects and amplifies, rather than deflects or diffuses, secular interests and ideologies. We shall look at these ideas in a little more detail below, but for the time being I claim that neither perspective is satisfactory as it stands. Neither sufficiently grasps the complexities and varieties of the ritual events that we witness in a place such as Walsingham – the ways in which they may shift ambiguously between engagement and alienation, the formal and the informal, the set apart and the everyday. Neither, in other words, explores the numerous ways in which ritual can “remain.”

In the next section, I address anthropological conceptions of ritual, especially in relation to plural contexts, before developing my points on the anthropology of pilgrimage. I then present some ethnographic details from Walsingham, before returning to my central questions concerning the adequacy of our approaches to ritual.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RITUAL AND PILGRIMAGE

Providing a satisfactory summary of theories of ritual in a short space is a well-nigh impossible task. I therefore find it helpful to return to Alexander Henn’s specific focus on the contingencies of ritual (2008: 10). His piece is useful because he juxtaposes his approach with what he sees as the classic idea in sociology and anthropology

that rituals provide powerful markers of both social structure and cultural intelligibility. As Henn puts it, Émile Durkheim emphasized the need to explore functional aspects of ritual in the making of human sociality and institutions. Much later, Clifford Geertz (1973) encouraged scholars to interpret rituals as akin to texts that could be “read” by informants and analysts. Meanwhile, Victor Turner (e.g. 1973) theorized ritual as a dialectical process, moving between structure and antistructure, secular and sacred.

Such “normative,” “intelligible,” and “dialectic” emphases (Henn 2008: 11) clearly differ from each other but share a tendency to emphasize the capacity of ritual to generate feelings of certainty and continuity. They also largely present ritual as a marked activity that expresses some kind of cultural core and makes itself relatively readily available as an object of study for the analyst.⁵ Vincent Crapanzano notes in the same volume as Henn that while some ritual actions are minimally extended and others are lengthy, in practice “it is temporally extended rituals that become the privileged model of most ritual theorizing” (2008: 327). It is not surprising that as researchers we gravitate toward seemingly coherent ritual events that have their own integrity and logic. Even Maurice Bloch’s approach (e.g. 1974, 1986), which examines the fate of ritual activity over time and stresses the need to separate intentionality from ritual, emphasizes the ways in which the persistent, internal machinery of ritual integrates singular events into a “timeless order” (Bloch 1986: 185; see Berliner 2010: 19).⁶

Of course, by now our discipline has explored some departures from such themes of ritual coherence. Let me mention just two examples here that I find useful. Tomas Gerholm’s “postmodern” view (1988) of a Hindu funeral ritual in Trinidad explicitly draws attention to fragmentation of meaning and diversity of experience in what he sees as an alternative to a Turnerian view. One feature of his piece is a description of a ritualized tribute paid by the writer V.S. Naipaul to his deceased sister – a fragment of a ritual taking place in complex relation with, but thousands of miles away from, the official funeral in the writer’s country of origin. Naipaul’s improvised action both acknowledges and in a sense challenges the official, public ritual, so that we see here chains of ritualized events that contain multiple temporalities, subjectivities, and modes of address. Catherine Bell’s highly influential thesis, developed in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992), tries to move the focus away from seeing ritual as an autonomous activity, and proposes instead a notion of “ritualization” that takes into account links with strategic activities in social life in general. Bell’s thesis also resonates in certain respects with so-called “performance theorists” (e.g. Schieffelin 1996; compare also Keane 1997),⁷ who emphasize the need to understand how any given ritual action is also a specific, contingent social event, which may well succeed or fail in its own terms.

Even so, it seems to me that what one might see as “centripetal” tendencies of description and analysis still characterize much anthropological work on the subject. By “centripetal” I mean the propensity not only to see ritual as itself at the core of cultural practices, but also to search for the necessary and stable “core” of ritual itself, the basic structures or actions that we need to focus on in order to understand what is happening when the ritual is performed. For Talal Asad, our understandings and approaches are situated in an anthropological canon based on arguments about coherence and order that can actually be found in Christian thought itself (Asad 1993: 29;

see Tomlinson and Engelke 2006: 3). We might want to debate the details of Asad's historical genealogy, but it seems clear that ritual's role as distiller of culture, marked by what we assume to be its reproducibility and intensification of focus, is still evident in much of what we write. Commenting on this theme, Rupert Stasch refers to the ways in which "anthropological work has converged toward a theory" that notes how ritual contains "unusual density" of "representational relations" (2011: 159), with the result that "a ritual event is characterized by the exceptional quantity and vividness of the general types that are felt as present in its concrete particulars." These assumptions tend to lead to certain analytical and descriptive strategies, so that "anthropologists' practice is to draw connections between a ritual form and broader features of its sociocultural context" (2011: 160).

The immense explanatory power of such approaches cannot be denied, and I shall be drawing on it at times below. But I also want to explore the potentialities of a slightly different perspective, and one that I have hinted at in referring to my interest in ritual fragments and "remains." So what happens when we also take a more "centrifugal" view of ritual, when we direct our gaze toward occasions when ritualized qualities of action are much more inchoate, perhaps not even understood by some informants *as* ritual? Or when ritual articulations are re- or disarticulated through ignorance, incompetence or indifference displayed by participants? Or again, how do we capture occasions when formal rituals are merely faintly echoed by others? We might also consider the *non*reproducible aspects of ritual – those occasions when, to adapt Hervieu-Léger's comments on religion (2000: 166–170), such action does not lead obviously into traditions capable of generating communal memory or plausible public practices?⁸ My interest also extends into how we might deal with the disengaged "participant," and with what in some situations might be defined as boredom or alienation. Of course I am creating something of a catch-all category here, but the basic point is to try to draw attention away from the focus on ritual cores.⁹

What happens when we apply this approach to the analyses of pilgrimage referred to earlier – the "communitas" and "contestation" paradigms? As is well known, the Turnerian approach to pilgrimage adapts Arnold Van Gennep's notion of liminality – perceived as a threshold time and space of transition from one state or role to another. When translated from analysis of tribal society into Western contexts, liminality in effect becomes instead a more flexible, optative state that the Turners call the liminoid. For instance Christian pilgrimage is usually undertaken by choice, unlike the experience of the tribal initiate who *must* undergo a given rite of passage in order to achieve the next stage of personhood. Even so, the experience is often unforgettable, and a sense of the potentially momentous nature of pilgrimage is enhanced by the Turners' focus on major, national or international sites such as Lourdes (France), Guadalupe (Mexico) and indeed Walsingham. In their account, while the journey of the pilgrim typically becomes gradually more and more hedged in by symbolic markers of the sacred, the arrival itself is nonetheless a key moment, when the pilgrim reaches a religious site in a state of high anticipation or considerable exhaustion, or both. The shrine, usually framed by historical, theological and mythical associations, hosts rituals of great intensity and is aided by the particular sociality that develops among pilgrims. One of the Turners' most famous analytical constructs is that of *communitas*, the liminal or liminoid state achieved by a pilgrim's temporary transition away from mundane structures, roles and status toward a looser, usually

temporary commonality of feeling with fellow visitors. Overall, then, the Turners characterize the great pilgrimage site as a relatively *sui generis* “center out there” (e.g. Turner 1973), ideally divorced from conventional social structures and often geographically remote, and yet powerful enough to attract visitors from afar.

Published a little over a decade after *Image and Pilgrimage*, Eade and Sallnow’s edited volume also covers a variety of Christian pilgrimage sites but brings the analytical focus back to the mundane workings of power and authority. Drawing on frameworks derived from both Marx and Foucault, these authors propose a new agenda for pilgrimage studies that involves depicting the power of a shrine as a kind of “religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices” that are brought by diverse constituencies and interest groups (1991: 15). Or again: “The sacred centre . . . in this perspective, appears as a vessel into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes, prayers, and aspirations.” This vessel is capacious, but it does not function as a melting pot, and so pilgrimage becomes “an arena for competing religious and secular discourses, for both the official co-optation and non-official recovery of religious meanings, for conflict between orthodoxies, sects, and confessional groups” (1991: 15, 2).

Elsewhere (Coleman 2002), I have pointed out that a curious parallel between the *communitas* and contestation paradigms is evident in the way they both clear an analytical path for themselves through creating images of blankness: the stripping away of everyday statuses in *communitas* has its counterpart in the emptying out of any cultural or material particularities of the pilgrimage “vessel,” so that it seems to become an entirely open receptacle. The key difference is in the location of the agency that is then asserted. For the Turners the sacred shrine retains its identity whereas visiting pilgrims cede theirs, while these polarities are precisely reversed in Eade and Sallnow’s volume. What I want to point out here is the significance of another theoretical trope common to both: that of the *center*. It constitutes a location “out there,” of remote but alluring sacrality in the Turners’ account, while it retains authority in Eade and Sallnow’s view precisely because it reflects back and amplifies the aspirations and assumptions of the everyday world, including those of conventional religious institutions. In this respect, it is also notable that while contributions to *Contesting the Sacred* emphasize the presence of conflict over religious symbols, they nonetheless tend to depict subgroups of pilgrims uniting internally around their particular discursive and ritual appropriations of a given shrine. Thus Roman Catholics are presented perceiving the world differently from Protestants; clergy coordinate in articulating their common interests against those of lay people, and so on.

The juxtaposition of these two approaches to pilgrimage shows how, despite their apparently opposed views on the fundamental character of pilgrimage, both nonetheless rely quite closely on what I have been calling a centripetal approach to ritual. Both present pilgrimage as literally and metaphorically oriented around a central ritual core, whether that core contains dominant and dominating symbols or is an “empty vessel”; the default ritual experience assumed by them is emotionally intense and symbolically dense, spatially and temporally framed by and through shrine ritual. Certainly, both paradigms characterize dimensions of pilgrimage experience that can be found at Walsingham, but my point is that neither is fully equipped to take adequate account of the much more complex, ambivalent and glancing interactions that also take place there. The very radicalism of the imagery of stripping away identity

is powerful but ultimately not subtle enough to take into account pilgrimage experiences that are much more fragmented and diffuse. We surely miss much by looking only at the “core.” So let us now turn towards Walsingham.

WALSINGHAM

According to the legend surrounding its foundation, Walsingham’s sacred history began when the Virgin Mary appeared to a local aristocratic woman, Richeldis, in 1061. The Virgin transported her devoted follower in a vision to the Holy Land so that Richeldis could record the measurements of Jesus’ childhood house in Nazareth and build an exact replica of it in Norfolk. The date of 1061 refers to a time five years before the Norman invasion, and the period between the mid-twelfth century and 1538 saw Walsingham become the most important center for the cult of the Virgin in England, before it was destroyed on the orders of Henry VIII.

The pilgrimage site lay largely dormant, its past hinted at only by the ruins of pre-Reformation buildings until it was revived in the early decades of the twentieth century by competing groups of Anglo- and Roman Catholics. This twinning of rivalry and revival led to a material and ideological fragmentation of the site, as Anglicans constructed a church and a replica of the Holy House just to the north of the original shrine, and Roman Catholics took over a chapel that had acted in the medieval period as the last stopping-point for pilgrims before entering the village from the south. Neither religious administration has permanent control of the center of the village, where the original shrine seems to have been based in medieval times.

Walsingham has become a major British pilgrimage destination since World War II in particular, and both shrines play host to firm supporters, more casual visitors including tourists, and formal annual processions. Within Anglicanism as a whole, the site remains controversial in certain key respects, such as its administration’s official opposition to women priests, whereas the Roman Catholic shrine occupies a more comfortable part of its respective religious landscape. While the two shrines have had difficult relations in the past, both now adopt a largely ecumenical stance to each other.

When I began fieldwork at Walsingham in the 1990s, I expected to find explicit and intense engagement on the part of pilgrims with the material panoply available at the Anglo- and Roman Catholic shrines available in the village, and I was not disappointed. Dense liturgical fields were being constructed in and around Walsingham by networks of pious pilgrims who would come on annual visits from parishes located across the country. For instance, the Anglican shrine administration estimates that around 10,000 visitors attend its formally organized pilgrimages every year, residing for a time in the shrine complex.¹⁰ Interviews with parish pilgrims from both styles of Catholicism often reveal something of the spiritual power that a visit can evoke, especially among those whose everyday lives are located in urban contexts remote from the picturesqueness and piety of Walsingham. In general, parish pilgrims do not undergo physical privations in journeying to or staying at shrines, but the sense of being enclosed in a frame of focused devotion is encouraged by the relatively compact spaces of the village and its apparent separation from architecture or landscape that would disturb the experience, including that of going back in time within

a place that has so many medieval buildings. While there is an ordinary-looking housing estate in the village, it is situated far enough away from the Anglican shrine so as not to be noticed by most people.

The visits of such parishes are orchestrated by a combination of parish and shrine priests. Both sets of clergy have talked to me of the pressure to maintain a relatively conservative liturgical attitude in relation to regular visits of parishes. Thus, one Anglican worker at the shrine noted in an interview: "You know there isn't any time period for perhaps a more experimental . . . worship. I should suspect also that the clientele actually are not coming to Walsingham for that, and perhaps the more experimental types of liturgies are *more* appropriate within the parish setting, within a . . . community where those needs are recognizable." Two reasons for this relatively conservative stance have been mentioned to me by priests. One is that parishioners demand it, seeing Walsingham as a kind of "witness" to the legitimacy of their faith and liturgical practices, including masses, stations of the cross, sprinkling of holy water, and processions. Another is that it does not pay to be liturgically experimental when so many different people are coming through a given shrine, and so offense might be caused. What is intriguing about such remarks from the point of view of theoretical approaches to pilgrimage ritual is that they almost depict a *communitas* produced through an excess of "structure" and tradition rather than their removal. Pilgrims often feel intensely connected with each other in ways that they might not feel at home, but such intensity is not produced through relaxing liturgical rules or challenging priestly or other hierarchies.

Yet the Anglican shrine administration provides another statistic, which is that perhaps 300,000 people in total "visit" Walsingham each year – a much greater figure than the parochial numbers for both shrines combined. So what does "visit" mean for those nonresidential pilgrims who make up over 90 percent of visitors? Nobody is quite sure. Some are well versed in what to do and what to see. Others, undoubtedly, are not. For instance, I have met visitors who were convinced that they had had some kind of powerful experience at "the shrine," but were not certain whether it was actually the Anglican or Roman Catholic shrine that they had encountered. In the face of such attitudes the temptation, even for an anthropologist, might be to focus instead on those who demonstrate liturgical competence within their ritual surroundings. But we are still left with the question of what to make of those experiences involving less committed religionists who are motivated perhaps by curiosity, boredom with surrounding beaches, or willingness to indulge the wishes of a pious friend or partner in paying a visit. What might it mean to regard such people as located "in" some version of Catholicism? Here again are the observations of the Anglican worker:

You do get people here very often, who obviously have little understanding of the place and you know there are plenty of leaflets around about the place but they don't seem to read them . . . A lot of visitors stay for the sprinkling, a lot of them write intercessions, and light candles, and people who have *very* little faith you know have conversations with you and say are we allowed, can *we* write intercessions, I don't believe myself, or I don't go to church myself, but my aunt is very seriously ill, or my daughter's just about to have a baby or something.

At first sight, my suggestion that we need to take such activities into account, as well as the complex liturgical territory that lies between, say, lighting a candle without

“believing” and undertaking annual parish pilgrimages may not seem a very promising way to focus on the workings of ritual in Catholic contexts. But it surely points to something vital in our understanding of much contemporary religious expression among the “300,000” rather than the “10,000.” In this sense, Walsingham presents the fascinating opportunity to observe people from highly varied walks of life and kinds or degrees of faith as they are confronted with “Religion” with a fairly big R. There is a parallel here with encounters with religion at weddings or places such as cathedrals, though visits to Walsingham often produce a considerable step up in intensity. Here are the kinds of activities that people engage in but that ethnographers tend to avoid discussing very much because they seem so evanescent, even trivial. Their ubiquity and glancing character might indeed make them seem banal, but to adopt an attitude of dismissiveness would be to ignore much of what actually occurs at a place such as Walsingham.

Such contemporary visitors to Walsingham are not illiterate in the sense that their medieval forebears were, but they are theologically and liturgically ill-informed, so that their encounters with ritual spaces are frequently dominated by themes of touch, sight, smell, and whichever other experiential frameworks they can bring to mind. Their visits may therefore involve highly variegated forms of cultural encounter and framing, resonating with a wide range of inchoate associations, both secular and sacred, as well as somewhere between the two. Such encounters may have liminoid-like (or liminoid-lite) qualities, as people are taken out of their aesthetic or spiritual comfort zone, but the ritual frames around what occurs are often very underdetermined. Even so, the visits do often involve specific, material encounters with shrines or the landscapes around shrines, and so to think of these sacred sites as neutral, “empty vessels” would also be misleading.¹¹

Let me give a few examples of what I mean. Quite early in my experience of Walsingham I paid a visit to the village with some friends, a Dutch Catholic woman who was pregnant and her husband, an Irish Catholic (decidedly lapsed). They entered the front of the Anglican shrine church, and were confronted, as all visitors are, with a vast number of images, scents, candles, and altars, including the “holy” well. Facing such a choice of ritual props, Marianne briefly paused, and persuaded David to take a ladle of water from a container by the well and then, somewhat self-consciously, to pour some of the water over her rounded stomach. Neither made much subsequent comment about the event, and we went on to make our tour of the shrine and its garden before going to one of the many cafés that line the main street of the village.

A trivial, low-intensity, marginal incident, perhaps: part bricolage and partially linked with a Roman Catholic sensibility attaching itself with semi-articulated ease to an Anglican worship space. If asked, they would probably have responded that they were there mostly as tourists, with perhaps an ethnographic interest attached (Marianne also had some social scientific training). They entered not during the time of a service, but simply when they happened to arrive in the village. Thus in a sense we see enacted here what “remains” from an attempt to interact appropriately with the material culture of the shrine (bearing in mind also that the shrine is designed to be open to this kind of visit). It is difficult to apply conventional models of ritual analysis that invoke tropes of repetition, rigid sequencing of elements or possibly heightened emotion to such an event. So there is seemingly not much to write about here in comparison with, say, a vast, “national,” Anglican procession through the village. But

in some respects a reflection on such “minor” ritualized occasions is useful precisely because of the way it points *away* from such ritual cores as formal processions and High Masses, and away from much in the way of elaborate ritual or wider religious commitment. A satisfactory view of ritual must surely include consideration of the full-range spectrum of activities, including but certainly not confined to formal “cores.”¹²

Marianne and David point us away from conventional forms of worship, but they do so very much within the space of the Anglican shrine (albeit away from the altar or the replica of the Holy House itself). But we might also follow our ritual trails away from the village itself in a way that is reminiscent of Gerholm’s description of Naipaul’s ritualization of devotion toward his sister while being located many miles away from her funeral. For instance, a group of Roman Catholic nurses whom I interviewed in the North of England drew explicit parallels between the forms of touch that they experienced at Walsingham (in relation to statues as well as fellow pilgrims) and the comforting touch of a nurse in a hospital, such as they were used to practicing at work. I think a further implication was that they also saw themselves as providing a bodily link between “their” place of pilgrimage in the south of England and their places of home and work in the north of the country. We see here elements of a kind of sacramentality that extends from bodies into different forms of sociality as well as into different landscapes and spaces. Perhaps it draws implicitly on historical links between shrines and places of healing; but in a more contemporary sense it allows for a permanent, chronic sense of sacramental exchange between significant sites and activities in a person’s life. The boundaries between the ritual and the mundane are thus traversed by an action as “trivial” and as fleeting as a touch, which “connects” on many levels of experience.

These examples encourage us to look at places and moments where ritual and aesthetic registers blend unpredictably with each other and oscillate in and out of focus in people’s lives, as pilgrims engage with numerous sites of potential inscription in but also away from the shrine, in parish churches that acknowledge the site but also in the homes and memories of families, avowedly religious and nonreligious, who have visited at some time in the past and may or may not intend to visit again. In these senses a focus on what from the perspective of the “core” looks like the “margins” may serve to diffuse but also enlarge our sense of Walsingham as a place where ritual occurs, but also one where it is catalyzed, evoked, hinted at, converted into subtle and metonymic fragments of religious engagement, formed not only into firm sequences of ritual stages but also into chains of ritual association that may link with distant temporal and spatial contexts.

The kinds of ritual semi-engagement I am describing here are evocative of what Richard Schechner (1985) calls “restored behavior” – performance that draws from some social or individual behavior and memory from the past (or, we might add, the imagination) rather than mimicking a scripted role. To adapt Danièle Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) term, there is a chain of memory being created but the memories themselves come from many different and unpredictable sources. Confronted by a relic, an altar or a procession, many visitors cannot follow any scripted liturgical role because they simply do not know what it is, unless they choose to join a service where they blend liturgically, and often uneasily, with the self-confessedly devout. But this does not prevent Walsingham from proffering more diffuse forms of recognition and

broadier sensuous fields of interaction. The “memory” thus invoked will not necessarily be from Anglo- or Roman Catholic sources but it might well be from more generic and generative experiences of religious action, or even from a sense that the shrine points toward a broad landscape of English history and architecture that is somehow already known from literature, film, or other media.

Let me describe another event, drawn from my earlier work (e.g. Coleman 2009), because it illustrates so eloquently what I think is evident in the responses of many informants. It refers to a middle-aged Roman Catholic man who had lost his faith in his twenties. Paul’s ambivalence toward his faith was echoed in his family situation: while his wife was an Anglican who had herself visited Walsingham as a child, certain members of his natal extended family were deeply pious Roman Catholics, one of whom had actually gone to live in Walsingham and who organized an annual pilgrimage for the extended family – over a hundred people – to visit the village together. Each year the pilgrimage caused a dilemma for Paul: how could the obligations toward family be reconciled with a faith toward which he had become distant? Often, the dilemma left him feeling simply unable to even come on the trip. However, he also described one memorable occasion where ambivalence was initially expressed in a rather different way, through negotiating a particular detachment in relation to the event. As he told me, he deliberately arrived late, avoiding the bus that had been chartered to take everybody to the village before they engaged in a formal procession along a road called the Holy Mile. Paul then stood by the disused railway line, looking back:

And in the distance, I saw this pilgrimage in between autumn hedgerows. And, my family doesn’t dress up a lot, they’re sort of a very dowdy lot, and they could have been from *any* era really. It looked absolutely wonderful, magnificent, and they were really processing, in a pilgrimage, along the lane in between the two hedgerows . . . and [it was] deeply moving actually, and I felt very happy . . . observing them, and they were my lot too, and I felt very comfortable with that, not being *totally* part of them, but being close to them. . . . Then I walked down across a field and joined halfway.

In this meditation on both pilgrimage and the viewing of pilgrimage we see how, for Paul, seemingly generic images from the English landscape combine with images of his family to render the image almost timeless, rather than connected with his current feelings of ambivalence toward some of his relatives. Paul’s response is to step into his own visual frame to rejoin his family along the Holy Mile itself, even if he is careful to state that he is nevertheless not totally part of them. So the particular temporality of the event is crucial: Paul’s action is a concession for the time being, not a permanent reconciliation with the church, or indeed a ritual act that will necessarily be repeated in the future.

Implicit in Paul’s description of his experience is another dimension of visiting Walsingham that I have picked up from many of my informants. It is notable that some of the more informal visitors are put off by the sheer intensity of a tiny, easily crowded place such as Walsingham. For the ritually committed, the village forms a volatile but exciting semiotic arena for parallel and competing liturgical forms that index theological, political, sexual, and other cultural orientations. Anglicans might be processing in one direction through the village and Roman Catholics in the other. Both, especially on more important pilgrimage days, are likely to be framed by the

shrill protests of evangelical Christians who visit the site precisely to oppose its perceived semiotic crime of idolatry. For the less committed this atmosphere can seem less exciting than stifling, even at times alarming. This problem is compounded by the worry that they might become caught up in an act of religious participation that they would later come to regret. Such ritual seduction is most likely to occur through placing oneself in the midst of liturgical activities, and so visitors may find themselves escaping the shrines and wandering around the local countryside. When they do so, we might ask how far “Walsingham” (as an event and experience, rather than as the place itself) can actually go. And is the ritual “core” undermined, complemented, or enhanced by such actions? We might say that, at the very least, it is *relativized* as well as ritualized.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: FROM THE LIMINAL TO THE LATERAL?

What then are some common factors in the varied ritual stances of people like Paul, Marianne, David, and those who wander around the local lanes rather than staying in a shrine or a procession? The metaphor I suggest here – that of laterality (Coleman 2009) – invokes a spatial reference that acknowledges but seeks distinction from the Turnerian notions of the liminal or liminoid. Many of those whom I have been describing neither wish nor, in some cases, are able to achieve a state of being enveloped by *communitas*. They may of course observe others in such a state, and do so with a range of emotions from the admiring to the mocking, but remain, as it were, on the ritual threshold of other people’s ritual thresholds. In this sense, they come close to experiencing what Grace Davie has termed “vicarious religion” (e.g. 2006), involving the delegation of the religious sphere and consequent articulation of the sacred to others. For these ambivalent “pilgrims,” however, religion is often about more than delegation as such, since it includes various forms of performance occurring adjacent to that of more competent or committed others. The boundaries between observation and participation may indeed be blurred, as in the example of Paul, who moves from one stance (or space) to the other. The imagery of “lateral” rather than “liminoid” participation gives a sense of the ways in which engagement can occur that are mimetic of ritual but somehow out of focus or carried out away from conventionally “central” social and liturgical fields of action. It also refers to the huge range of potential cultural references that may be drawn on to create “restored memories” of “religion- or ritual-like” performances.¹³ Here we find examples of “ritual remains” that are easy to ignore but which are likely to accompany and surround more formal liturgical acts.

Overall, my aim then is to relativize notions of ritual cores and in the process to challenge boundaries set up by and between *communitas* and contestation theories, both of which belong to the more centripetal wing of ritual studies. In making this point I hope I am not setting up yet another rigid binary between seeking and fleeing ritual centers. Rather, I wish to both invoke and blur the distinction. And although I have been talking about pilgrimage, I hope that I have suggested ways to think about other contexts as well. Ritual is to be found in churches and shrines where people engage in acts such as mass and confession, sharply distinguished from the everyday; it is expressed through the crowds of evangelical protesters who contest

Catholic forms of the sacred and thus accuse Walsingham pilgrims of idolatry; but it is also contained in those ubiquitous but fleeting acts where the uncommitted stumble against and try to make sense of conventional liturgical forms, or glance at rituals as they are also trying to construe relations of kinship or friendship. Here we see ritual “remains” that are so ubiquitous and diffused that we have failed to acknowledge properly that they even exist.

NOTES

I want to thank Bruce Kapferer for his insightful comments on an earlier and rather different version of this chapter. I hope to follow up on more of his suggestions elsewhere. Thanks also to Michael Lambek for astute editorial comments.

- 1 Briefly put, High Anglicanism is a branch of the Anglican Church in England whose ritual practices are close to those of Roman Catholicism. It emerged in the nineteenth century and its fortunes have waxed and waned ever since. While the precise definitional issue is complex, for the purposes of this essay the term High Anglicans is equated with what is often called Anglo-Catholicism.
- 2 See Office for National Statistics 2011. Intriguingly, Norwich – the city closest to Walsingham – had the highest urban proportion of its population reporting “no religion,” at 42.5 percent.
- 3 For the churchgoing trends, see WhyChurch, at http://www.whychurch.org.uk/images/charts/ch_eu_church_att.png (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 4 This is a term taken from the Greek *leitourgia*, and implies a public form of duty or service, in other words one that is publicly sanctioned and oriented.
- 5 A partial exception is Leach’s distinction between the “practical” and the “impractical” in human action (e.g. 1976), although his stress on ritual as a system of communication is not appropriate here. Don Handelman provides a useful discussion of issues of framing in “understanding how rituals are organized within themselves” (2004: 9), while critiquing the work of Gregory Bateson (1972). I do not directly discuss in this chapter the relevance or otherwise of cognitive approaches to ritual: for a summary of such approaches see Salazar 2010.
- 6 For a magisterial discussion of ritual that sees it primarily as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts” see Rappaport 1999: 24. Rappaport also depicts a hierarchy of greater and less ritualized and sanctified acts, but still more formally connected than in my argument.
- 7 As Keane (1997: 5) has noted, many anthropologists are increasingly uneasy with the assumption that formalized ritual holds the key by which an entire culture can be unlocked: certain ritualized activities must be embedded within larger practical arenas of social action.
- 8 Admittedly such observations contrast somewhat with Leo Howe’s (2000) juxtaposition of performance-based approaches to ritual with analyses that more clearly acknowledge the power of inscription, that part of the text-based metaphor for understanding social action that focuses on the observable effects it has for *future* performances. Howe’s argument is plausible, particularly when he insists that inscription must be understood as going beyond questions of meaning, but for my purposes he overstates the strategic, conscious aspects of inscription while also emphasizing a particular and limited source of its effects, i.e. marked ritual performances. Such performances are important, but I am also interested in how effects and more diffuse resonances might be traced in contexts far away from overtly ritualized action, where issues of reproduction might not even occur to either informant or analyst.

- 9 This is an approach that is prompted by my observations at Walsingham, but it is also raised in pertinent ways by Rebecca Slough (1996) in her exploration of the ritualized experience of singing Christian hymns. Slough is interested in the links between different levels of knowledge and the character of ritual participation (drawing on Polanyi 1958). Slough argues that people who have never attended a hymn sing do not possess any easy way of locating their activities within an established ritual framework: "They may leave with a description of what happens at such events based on their observations of the action sequence. They have no internal structure to orient their behavior toward it. The experience can tumble over them and may leave them feeling overwhelmed or indifferent" (1996: 196). I agree that inexperienced participants in Walsingham rituals may feel overwhelmed by them, but consider it important to reflect on how such people may draw on other knowledge, derived from religion or other forms of aesthetic participation, in making sense of such worship.
- 10 See <http://www.walsinghamanglican.org.uk/welcome/index.htm> (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 11 Compare here Keane's (2010: 27) insistence on the importance of a focus on the *materialities* of semiotic mediation in his critique of Bloch.
- 12 And we should include the possibility that some ritual expressions may be formal even if physically articulated away from core, or orthodox, contexts. Thus, for instance, I have encountered pilgrims who have undertaken elaborately orchestrated versions of the stations of the cross, but in the surrounding countryside rather than at either of the shrines.
- 13 In fact, Schechner's and Turner's approaches to performance theory were influenced by one another and they even collaborated.

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CHAPTER 17

Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies, and the Question of the Medium

Birgit Meyer

When research on religion and media took off some fifteen years ago, they initially were approached as two separate entities, each with their own logic, the question being how both related to each other. The question reflected a sense of puzzlement about the unexpected relation between religion and media. By now many scholars, certainly within anthropology, approach the religion–media nexus in a new way. Media are understood as intrinsic, rather than opposed, to religion, playing a role in broader practices of religious mediation that link humans with the divine, spiritual, or transcendental. This is a stimulating new perspective that helps us to grasp the new place and role of religion in our time. Showing that the use of electronic and digital media actually shapes the transformation of religion (de Vries 2001), recent work in this field critiques facile views of religion as being in danger of corruption by the forces of mass mediatization, entertainment, and the logic of the market, and argues that the adoption of media is key to the manifestation of religion. In order to convey a sense of what is at stake, let me present three vignettes that show different aspects of the use of media in lived religious practice.

One: In early January 2008, during a short field trip to Ghana, I attended a prayer service – Jericho Hour – organized by Action Chapel (Christian Action Faith Ministries) in Accra. This prayer service takes place every Thursday and attracts a large number of people, most of whom are members of other churches yet feel drawn to this powerful event, in the course of which pastors promise “showers of blessings”



Figure 17.1 Jericho Hour, Christian Action Faith Chapel, Accra.

that materialize in health, wealth, visa and other much wanted matters (Meyer 2007) (Figure 17.1). While prayers were on, suddenly the electricity broke down. Through this the importance of microphones became obvious. Everything came to a standstill, and prayers could only continue when the generator was switched on – indicating the importance of the “generator” not only in generating electricity, but religious experience. Loudness – to such an extent that participants’ bodies vibrated from the excess of sound – and also pastors’ use of microphones in rhythmic sayings induced a certain trance-like atmosphere that conveyed a sense of an extraordinary encounter with a divine force that was experienced to be present, and that could be reached by opening up and stretching out one’s arms.

Two: In August 2008, together with Maria José de Abreu, I visited the premises in São Paulo of Padre Marcello Rossi, who is famous for what he calls the “aerobics of Jesus” and has become a Catholic media celebrity with his own TV show, music CDs, movies, and publicity stunts. While I had read about his activities in the context of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal through the research of de Abreu (2005, 2009), the visit to the location was truly intriguing. The service more or less followed the liturgy of the Catholic mass. What was so special about it were the sweeping songs sung by the swirling, enthusiastic priest and his band, with which people joined in with all their hearts, and how this paced their mode of breathing (Figure 17.2). Singing and moving the body made people participate not only by listening, but with all their senses. The most amazing moment occurred when Padre Marcello invited the participants to “recharge their battery.” He asked all of us to rub our hands so as to produce energy, and then touch our neighbors to experience a kind of electric sensation, or shock. The experience of shock was mimetically reproduced by him shouting “brroom brroom,” making skillful use of the microphone. This suggests that technologies of sound amplification and the metaphor of electricity may well be harnessed to generate a sensation of the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit among those present.

Three: When I visited Ghana in the summer of 2009 to pursue my research on the Ghanaian video-film industry (Meyer 2004), there was quite a craze about sakawa. Sakawa-boys, it was said, seek to gain spiritual powers in order to be able to



Figure 17.2 Mass celebrated by Padre Marcello Rossi, São Paulo.



Figure 17.3 Poster advertising a movie about sakawa.

lure unsuspecting victims into all kinds of internet fraud (“419”). While some actually get rich, others do not make it through the initiation ritual – for instance, sleeping in a coffin for a number of days – and die or reemerge mutilated, for instance with a dog’s head. Once rumors were out about these practices, which associate sites of utmost technological development and global connectivity such as internet cafés with secret spiritual powers, a host of spectacular posters, newspaper articles, and films came out that reported the phenomenon (see Figure 17.3).

Eventually, the reality and danger of sakawa was asserted by pointing at these media products. Movies, in particular, were cited as being true insider revelations, thus lending visual credibility to what initially started as vague rumors: "It is true: I saw it in that movie!"

These vignettes from Ghana and Brazil point toward an intriguing set of relations between new (or rather, newly available) media and religion. While the first vignette reveals – via the detour of technological failure – the relevance of sound amplification for creating a powerful prayer event, the second invokes a deliberate analogy between technology and what belief is all about, and the third mobilizes the medium of film to lend credibility to what started as a rumor about some hidden, spiritual acts. Taken together, these vignettes are a fruitful starting point to reflect on the role and place of new media in practices of religious mediation. While media, by virtue of their technological properties, play a central role in bringing about such links, to the participants they are not present "as such." These media rather seem to vest the mediation in which they take part with some sense of immediacy, as if the use of microphones or film would yield some extraordinary experience that brings people closer to the divine.

In a special issue of *Social Anthropology* on "What is a medium?" Patrick Eisenlohr invited the contributors to address the salient paradox that ensues from placing media in a broader framework of mediation: the more we recognize mediation as being central to social-cultural life, the less we can offer a straightforward answer to the question of what a medium is (2011: 1–5). Eisenlohr's suggestion to explore this paradox by taking as a starting point "the propensity of media to erase themselves in the act of mediation" (2009: 9) is well taken.

The point here is not to invoke a universally valid media theory that accounts for this propensity of erasure,¹ but to call for an analysis of the social processes through which media become so entangled with what they contribute to mediate that they are not visible as such, at least not for those who are partaking in mediation. Practices of religious mediation appear particularly able to invoke a sense of the immediate presence of the divine, as in the case of the first two vignettes in which the Holy Spirit is invoked, or to incorporate the medium of film in such a way that it can be harnessed so as to produce an actual religious revelation. Thus, though it may be counterintuitive in the first place, the vignettes suggest that mediation and immediacy do not belong to two opposing realms, but are intertwined. This entwinement is the angle from which I will address the paradox signaled by Eisenlohr.

My reflections are based on, and have been generated within, a large comparative research program, titled "Modern mass media, religion and the imagination of communities," which I convened between 2000 and 2006.² First, I will document the already mentioned shift from a dualistic opposition to an encompassing notion of mediation in our research program. I argue that this shift requires a fundamental critique of approaches to religion that oppose media and immediacy. Second, based on this critique I propose to combine the notions of "sensational form" (Meyer 2006b) and "semiotic ideologies" (Keane 2007); these notions are helpful to conceptualize how achieving a sense of immediacy and divine presence depends on authorized mediation practices. Third, I argue that the attribution of qualities such as "mediated" or "immediate" to certain forms and experiences depends on particular, authorized views through which media may "disappear," be present and contested

or “hyper-apparent” and relate these modalities to religious transformation. In conclusion, I turn to the question “what is a medium?”

FROM “RELIGION AND MEDIA” TO “MEDIATION”

In the mid-1990s, in the aftermath of Ghana’s return to a democratic constitution and the liberalization and commercialization of hitherto state-controlled media, I started to be interested in the relation between Pentecostalism and (at the time wildly popular) Ghanaian video-movies (e.g. Meyer 2004). Struck by “born again” pastors’ skillful use of electronic media such as cassettes, television, and radio that allowed them to be extremely present in the public sphere – both visually and orally – and conversely, by the appropriation of Christian modes of vision and “looking practices” into popular cinema (Meyer 2006a; see also Morgan 1998, 2005; Pinney 2004), I got intrigued by the relation between religion and media. This is what prompted me to design a larger research program. Its aim was to investigate how religions transform by adopting mass media and, conversely, how public (media) culture draws on religious repertoires. Focusing on modern mass media, such as television, radio, cassettes, and film, as well as information and communications technology (ICT), the overall concern of the research program was to scrutinize how the (new) availability of such media in the aftermath of media liberalization and the ICT revolution transformed the role and place of religion in the public sphere.

Initially, we did not think much about the question of what is a medium. We simply took the answer for granted, as our focus was on modern mass media. However, as we ventured deeper into our respective research locations, our notion of media became more encompassing, also including bodies and things. Our understanding of media moved from a view of media as defined by particular modern technologies toward a broader view of media as transporters of content that connect people with each other and the divine. Shifting from a technological to a social view of media as bridging between people and levels went along with stimulating debates about the mediated nature of social life (Mazzarella 2004) and the potential of media to act as “mediators” that shape and effect the content which they transmit, rather than merely acting as tools of transmission or “intermediaries” (Latour 2005: 39–40). This prompted us to move beyond a narrow and present-centered view of modern mass media as bringing about something entirely new, and instead to place the adoption of new media in a historical framework of longstanding practices of religious mediation that transform over time by negotiating newly available technologies.

Even though it is important to acknowledge that properties of media technologies constrain and facilitate particular mediations and modes of communication at the expense of others, it would have been reductive to ground our approach of media in a deterministic view of technology (see also Verbeek 2005). In fact, technological determinism itself locates technologies within a particular vision of society in which technologies are instrumental and ultimately disenchanting. Examples such as those invoked by the vignettes, pointing at the embeddedness of microphones and movies in religious practices and beliefs, spotlight that it would be beside the point to adopt a view of media as neutral technologies that act according to their own logic.³

The point is that technology never “comes in a ‘purely’ instrumental or material form – as sheer technological possibility at the service of the religious imagination” (van de Port 2006: 455), but is to be embedded in the latter through an often complicated negotiation process in which established authority structures may be challenged and transformed (see also Eisenlohr 2006; Kirsch 2008; Larkin 2008; Schulz 2003, 2006).

The conceptualization of religion as mediation was a major step in our research program because it alerted us to a barely acknowledged, implicit bias against media in the study of religion (see also Meyer and Moors 2006). As mentioned already, scholarly interest in the relation between religion and media was generated by an initial puzzlement about the interaction between these fields that were not only imagined as separate, but also as belonging to entirely different registers. I would like to argue that this puzzlement refers back to Protestant views of religion, echoed by scholars such as Max Weber (Weber 1970) and William James (1982), that place personal experience and immediate encounters with the divine at the core, and regard form and (church) structure as secondary. Meaning, content and inward belief are privileged above media, form and outward behavior. Such a view reflects post-Enlightenment Protestant self-descriptions as developed in reaction to Catholicism’s emphasis on sacraments and the use of images. The Protestant charge of iconoclasm can fruitfully be analyzed as a clash between competing visions on media. Importantly, the Protestant critique of the power attributed to media in the Catholic Church and its own emphasis on reading the Bible did not simply yield a plea for substituting one medium (icons) for another (biblical text). At stake was a move out of media, toward immediacy. The Protestant vision dismissed religious media as human-made and hence misguided for getting close to God. Only by reading the Bible – the living word of God – could believers achieve a personal and immediate link with God without the interference of church authorities.

This is an intriguing media theory by itself that should, however, not be taken at face value by scholars. The tension between the Protestant emphasis on an immediate encounter between believers and God, who is found to resist being represented via human-made forms, on the one hand, and the actual dependency on some kind of mediation so as to get in touch with Him has been captured by Matthew Engelke (2007) as the “problem of presence.” This problem of presence ensues from the concomitant denial of mediation and the striving for immediate encounters with God that demand mediation of some sort. This contradictory stance is coupled with Protestant misgivings toward “mere” form, and the search for “real” content located beyond form (Meyer 2010a).

As stated already, the suspicion of media does not only pertain to Protestantism, but also shaped the (early) study of religion as a modern discipline. Regarding the biblical text as a medium that distorts original content, the “father” of religious studies Max Müller (1893; see also Fox 2009: 4–9), for instance, called for appropriate modes of interpretation that lead back to the immediate origin of what has been stored imperfectly in the textual form (“word” becoming “flesh” again, the concern of “biblical hermeneutics”). Here immediacy is typically understood – and privileged – as being prior to mediation. Richard Fox (2009) has argued that this view is still echoed in many contemporary media theories that distinguish between form and content, or medium and message, and privilege the latter above the former as being

more genuine. I agree with Fox that, certainly in commonsense understandings, media are still often understood as means to make up for the lack – or even loss – of immediacy. In such a perspective, media are defective, in that they can only convey a second-rate, mediated experience. By contrast, one of the central theoretical concerns in recent research on religion and media is to critique and transcend this problematic perspective, according to which media – understood as instrumental tools or vehicles of content – compromise and alienate by definition.⁴ From the perspective of mediation that has already informed much recent work on the religion and media nexus, media are understood as taking part in effecting the divine or transcendental. They produce belief (see also de Certeau 1984; Derrida 2001).

SENSATIONAL FORMS AND SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGIES

In order to grasp how the divine or transcendental is effected through mediation, I have coined the notion of “sensational form” (Meyer 2006b). Sensational forms are relatively fixed modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, offering structures of repetition to create and sustain links between believers in the context of particular religious regimes. These forms are transmitted and shared; they involve religious practitioners in particular practices of worship, and play a central role in modulating them as religious moral subjects and communities. Pleading to reconsider the importance of “form” as being a necessary condition without which “content” cannot be conveyed, I stress that for me “form” does not stand in opposition to “content,” “meaning,” or “substance.” Such an opposition reproduces a problematic, Protestant understanding of religion that dismisses form as an “outward” matter, and privileges content and “inward” belief instead (Meyer 2010a; see also Asad 1993). As argued in the previous section, it is high time to acknowledge that this understanding enshrines a particular, historically situated religious media theory that certainly demands analysis but should not be an unquestioned starting point in research on the religion–media nexus. Including all the media – broadly understood as mediators – that are used in linking up with the sphere of the transcendental, the notion of sensational form is meant to explore how mediation conveys a sense of that sphere.

It needs to be stressed that the notion of sensational form does not assume the primacy of senses as harbingers of religious experience, but calls for a focus on authorized forms that organize such experience. Here lies a significant difference with regard to approaches (developed within the anthropology of the senses, for instance) that posit a rift between the registers of language and the symbolic, on the one hand, and experience, on the other, and according to which the latter is more direct and genuine than the former. In my view, addressing the paradox of mediation and immediacy requires developing a new synthesis of approaches that stress the importance of the senses and experience with those stressing the forms and codes that are at the basis of cultural and religious systems.

Of particular relevance here is Webb Keane’s notion of “semiotic ideology.” If the notion of sensational form points at the organization of religious experience, “semiotic ideology” is helpful to get a clearer understanding of the status that is being attributed to words, things or images, from the perspective of a particular, historically

situated religious tradition. He developed this notion in his study of the encounters between Dutch Protestant missionaries and the Sumbanese in Indonesia so as to better grasp the different ways in which both sides construed the power and value of, for instance, words and things. Keane grounds this notion on the concept of “language ideology,” that is, “what one believes about language” (2007: 16) or, in the words of Michael Silverstein, “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (quoted in Keane 2007: 16). Ideology is used here not in the sense of a false consciousness, but in order to stress “the productive effects of reflexive awareness” (Keane 2007: 17), the point being that such ideologies are not confined to the level of immaterial representation, but always require objectification in the material world. Linguistic ideologies, understood in this sense, feature in concrete material settings that are inhabited by people. Invoking “semiotic” rather than “linguistic” ideology, Keane seeks to encompass other semiotic domains than language alone. Especially important here is the Peircean distinction between icon, index, and symbol, which offers a more complex theory of the relation between signs and the world than Saussurean linguistics, that presume a split between representation and reality. Semiotic ideologies thus identify significant categories of signs and define their relations to reality in particular ways that organize the material world.

The usefulness of the notion of semiotic ideology with regard to exploring the attribution of value and power to modes of speaking and expression in practices of religious mediation is obvious. In his ground-breaking research, already mentioned, on the Friday Masowe Apostles (Engelke 2004, 2007), who regard the Bible as a distractive thing that stands in the way of “real” contact with God and can therefore as well be used as toilet paper, Matthew Engelke reveals an ultra-iconoclastic semiotic ideology that regards things as problematic because of their “thingliness,” while at the same time accommodating the use of substances such as sticky honey. Although from an outsider’s perspective such a substance might be identified as a “thing,” the crux of the matter is that, from an insider’s perspective, honey is coded as being beyond materiality. This is a particularly intriguing example, because it shows that the dismissal of things does not exclude recurrence to what we would identify as matter – the point being that what qualifies as matter from the outside may well be framed as “spiritual” within a particular semiotic ideology.

While for the Friday Masowe Apostolics the Bible is thus unsuitable to link them with God, they consider honey as a viable harbinger of God’s spirit. Achieving a sense of immediacy that goes hand in hand with marking honey as “spiritual,” and thus as a medium that becomes one with the substance it conveys, obviously depends on framing honey on the basis of a particular semiotic ideology and casting it as a particular sensational form. In an intriguing alternative case of an African Pentecostal Church in Zambia, Thomas Kirsch (2008) has shown that the use of written biblical texts and liturgies need not stand in the way of, but rather prepares for an immediate encounter with the Holy Spirit, thereby challenging the usual opposition of oral and written, and Spirit and Letter, that still informs much scholarship.

These ethnographic cases suggest that what a medium is and does is not intrinsic to the medium itself, but subject to social processes that shape religious mediation and authorize certain sensational forms as valuable. As Patrick Eisenlohr (2006) also has argued, with regard to his work on the authorization of religious cassettes among

Muslims on Mauritius, the acknowledgment of the capacity of new technologies to mediate, and even convey immediacy, does not depend on these technologies themselves, but is rooted in broader notions and practices that attribute certain capacities to these technologies. In this sense, there is no radical distance between substances such as honey, the Bible, or modern mass media, as they can all be harnessed as mediators that operate within authorized sensational forms.

Synthesizing the notions of sensational form and semiotic ideology bridges between two epistemological approaches that have hitherto been taken as distinct, and yet need to be brought together in order to understand how and why semiotic codes are taken to be foundational of a certain religious tradition or perspective of the world. In other words, such a synthesis allows us to grasp how semiotic forms become persuasive, and are experienced as ultimately real and immediate (see also van de Port 2011).

MODALITIES OF MEDIA AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGION

One of the questions around which my reflection about the findings in our research program evolved was how new (or newly available) media impact on established sensational forms and relate to the semiotic ideologies that are characteristic for particular religious regimes.⁵ The issue of the adequacy of old and new media to mediate spiritual power may give rise to vehement disagreements and contestations, but also make that media “disappear” or become what I would like to call “hyper-apparent.”

“Disappearing” Media

In many of the research settings we encountered, we noted that in established practices of mediation no clear separation was drawn between medium and message, or form and content, on the level of religious practitioners. For example, for the Ewe, a legba statue is not understood as consisting of a mere material object that has a spirit behind it, but as an actual embodiment of spirit power (Meyer 2010b), just as, in Catholicism, icons convey a sense of God (their dismissal as human-made “idols,” pointing at the sheer materiality of the icon, is a typically Protestant critique of Catholic mediation). Similarly, even though the question whether it is appropriate to use radio for public readings from the Qur’an involved complicated negotiations among Muslims in colonial northern Nigeria (Larkin 2009; see also below), once a positive decision was taken, such readings formed a virtually natural part of public life in which Islam is omnipresent. All these examples, and the vignettes presented at the beginning, show that what can be identified as “media” from an outsider’s analytical perspective (such as ours) may be perceived as being fully embedded in religious practice.

This leads us right into the heart of the issue of the “disappearing” medium. The media that are involved in invoking and getting in touch with some divine power, and in binding and bonding believers, are made to “disappear” through established and authorized religious sensational forms that mark these media as genuine to the substance they mediate. In this way, media are authenticated as being

part and parcel of the very transcendental that is the target of – and from an outsider’s perspective: invoked by – mediation. In other words, mediation itself is sacralized (see also Chidester 2008) and attributed with a sense of immediacy through which the distance between believers and the transcendental is transcended via particular sensational forms and semiotic ideologies (see also van de Port 2011: 81).

Thus, media tend to “disappear” when they are accepted as devices that, naturally as it were, “vanish” into the substance that they mediate. This phenomenological “disappearance” stems from the fact that medium and message, form and substance, are not split up analytically. Conversely, they “appear” if this synthesis is cracked. This is often the case when the appropriateness of the medium to transmit a particular content is contested (and of course also in scholarly analysis). The point here is that the “appearance” and “disappearance” of media are socially produced and depend on authorized perspectives of what media are and do, or are not supposed to do, in a broader practices of mediation.

Contested Media

Media are most explicitly marked and subject to debate when the (in)appropriateness of a particular medium is questioned or when new media become available and the question arises whether and how they could be incorporated.⁶ By contrast, as argued in the previous paragraph, once they are fully embedded in practices of mediation they are not likely to be acknowledged explicitly and thus tend to “disappear.” I have already invoked the Protestant iconoclasm as a contestation of existing media and of Catholic practices of media use, generating new sensational forms (bible reading) and semiotic ideologies (devaluing icons, upgrading text). Also in the contemporary world, religious groups struggle with how to deal with the omnipresence of mass media. Until long after television had become available, orthodox Protestants in the Netherlands shunned this technology and expected their members not to watch. By contrast, now there are special channels catering to these audiences, showing that evangelical Christianity and televised Christian spectacles, such as pop concerts, may go together well (van der Stoep 2009).

In Ghana, since the liberalization and commercialization of press, film, radio, and television, the neotraditional Afrikania movement in Ghana has struggled to rescue “African Traditional Religion” (ATR) from the assaults of Pentecostal churches that have become hegemonic in Southern Ghana. Comparing the media practices of Afrikania and the Pentecostal-Charismatic International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), Marleen de Witte (2008) shows that Afrikania finds it difficult to accommodate to the predominance of visibility that prevails in Ghana’s current public sphere. While Afrikania seeks to master its own representation in the mass media, paradoxically the traditional priests whom it claims to represent wish to maintain an aura of secrecy, insisting that the gods and their abodes do not lend themselves to being captured through the eye of the camera, and reproduced on screen, as this will entail a loss of spiritual power. Another intriguing, related case forms Mattijs van de Port’s (2009) study of how Candomblé, even though becoming a significant presence in the public sphere of Bahia, manages to engage in “the public performance of secrecy,” asserting that modern visual media such as television and film are not able to capture the real thing Candomblé is about. Brian Larkin (2009) showed how the

availability of print and radio, which were coded as prime media of colonial modernity, became central to conflicts about the modalities through which Islam was supposed to be present in public. He argues that the embracing of these modern media by Sheik Abubaker Gumi was part of reformulating Islam, a project through which Islam was aligned to a more rational religious practice that fits in with the modern, secular state.

The point is that the availability of new media may cause critical deliberations about their potential to generate and sustain genuine spiritual experiences and forms of authority within existing religious traditions. As message and medium, content and form only exist together, the central question is how earlier mediations are transformed by being remediated via new media (Bolter and Grusin 1999; Meyer 2005; Hughes 2009; see also Oosterbaan 2011), and whether and how these remediations are authenticated as acceptable and suitable harbingers of religious experience, modes of communication, and ways to express public presence.⁷ Debates and conflicts about media, and the new forms of public presence allowed by them, are central to religious transformations and hence a fertile starting point for studying religious dynamics.

“Hyper-apparent” Media

While the examples just given point at hesitations regarding the adoption of new mass media, it is often the case that new audiovisual media are being incorporated eagerly into religious mediation practices, generating new sensational forms. Maria José de Abreu (2009) shows that for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), television is regarded as a modern technology that is suitable to render present the Holy Spirit. Analyzing charismatics’ richly somatic experiences of contact with the Spirit, she discerns a telling homology between the Holy Spirit and an “electricity generator” that “infuses energies,” and the association of the bodies of believers with “antennas of retransmission.” Here, television is not considered as a *Fremdkörper* (alien element), but as exceptionally suitable to screen the message of the CCR to a mass public. The medium thus becomes hyper-apparent, in that it is celebrated as a technological realization of already existing religious modes of looking and visualization. The medium is sacralized as a fulfillment of a religious project that transcends mediation and produces immediacy. A similar idea of direct transmission underpins Rafael Sánchez’s (2009) analysis of Pentecostal squatters in Caracas who have their bodies seized by the Holy Spirit as its prime medium and, in turn, seize whatever houses or goods the Spirit tells them to take. Sánchez analyzes Pentecostal church services in the Monarchical Church in Caracas as a “televisual context” in which participants raise their arms, not unlike a “forest of antennas,” eager to transmit “live” the power of the Holy Spirit. These examples suggest remarkable elective affinities between religious modes of representation and new audiovisual technologies (see also Pinney 2004; Stolorow 2010).

At stake is, in other words, a confluence of new media technologies and the spirit that they claim to make accessible. In this sense, spiritual power materializes in the medium, and is predicated to touch people in an immediate manner. Instead of vanishing into mediation, media here become hyper-apparent. As Bolter and Grusin (1999) have shown, often the introduction of new media, as for instance mobile phones, stresses the capacity of the new medium to enable immediate communication

(see also van de Port 2011: 82–84). Both the “disappearing” medium and the “hyper-apparent” medium suggest complete consonance between medium and what it conveys, thereby blurring “form” and “substance.” In this sense, a “hyper-apparent” medium gains another kind of appearance than is the case when we refer to media in terms of particular technologies.

Elective Affinities between ICT and the Holy Spirit: Immediate Connections

So far I have looked at the ways in which new media are negotiated and possibly embedded into practices of religious mediation. However, the negotiation of media by religious groups does not occur in a void. In many settings, including Ghana, media liberalization and commercialization signaled a significant shift with regard to the capacity of the state to monopolize and control access to mass media such as film, radio, television, and the press. This shift occurred within a broader process of democratization and neoliberalization, through which the state retreated from directly controlling the public domain and the market. As the “availability” of media depends on policies, access to and use of media are political.

Importantly, in such settings media are not simply available as neutral technologies, but convey particular visions of the world. While the sakawa vignette presented at the beginning of this essay points at anxieties and desires unleashed by the possibility of engaging with people far away via the internet, it is all the same clear that in Ghana new information and communications technologies and the vision of the world that they convey have a strong appeal. During recent stints of fieldwork, I noticed that the advertisements of mobile phone and ICT companies reveal a concern with spatial and social mobility, connectivity, and immediacy (see Figure 17.4). Global connections and immediate contact is what these technologies promise to bring. In other words, they invoke a particular vision of the global. The global is not “up there” and far away, but is promised to be realized in immediate connections between living people who have the appropriate technologies. Being positioned in the right network implies not only instant communication, but also having a grip on the world, as the recent advert by the new Glo network suggests, using the faces of known artists and boldly promising: “Rule your world” (see Figure 17.5). These technologies are placed in global technological infrastructures that are partly controlled by states, but also elude such control, whilst promising some degree of control to the users.

In my view this vision of worldwide connectivity via new technologies that allow for “direct” and “life” encounters has an elective affinity with the Pentecostal project of linking believers into global born-again networks and its broad vision of the world as connected via techno-religious circuits that are powered by the Holy Spirit. The idea of “ruling” one’s world and the Pentecostal vision of individual spirituality that is severed from spirits that embody traditional social ties – with the wider family, or the village (Meyer 1998) – clearly resonate with each other. At least in the Ghanaian setting, Pentecostals have shown themselves to be very successful in seizing the newly available media technologies and incorporating them into particular sensational forms that bring about immediate encounters with the Holy Spirit, with which born-again believers are to be filled.



Figure 17.4 “Experience immediate connection”: Vodaphone advert, Accra.



Figure 17.5 “Rule your world”: Glo advert, Accra.

The striking similarity between Pentecostal renditions of the Holy Spirit, for instance in terms of electricity, and the global vision of immediate connections propounded by ICT adverts shows once again the shortcomings of a mere technological definition of media. The ICT adverts spotlight that these media themselves are socially embedded into particular mediations that link the local and the global. In analyzing

such elective affinities, the point is not to reduce religious projects and visions of the world to mere technologies, but to explore the extent to which the logic of religious outreach and the lure and world vision that goes with media technologies confirm each other. Media offer new possibilities for religious transformation.

CONCLUSION: "WHAT IS A MEDIUM?"

A while ago, I gave the manuscript of an article in progress to one of my Masters students in anthropology, a young Ghanaian with a Pentecostal background. In line with the argument advanced above, in that article I sought to show that the particular use of media in Pentecostal services is sanctioned by specific sensational forms, through which media are sacralized and thus are prone to "disappear" or become "hyper-apparent," thereby conveying a sense of an immediate encounter with God. He commented: "On page 14: you wrote: 'This is not to say that media are just called upon to make up – not to say fake – the presence of the Holy Spirit, but to indicate the inextricable entanglement of media in religious communication' . . . *Honestly the preceding descriptions actually sound you are really saying so. May be you may rephrase.*" I did not follow his suggestion "to rephrase." Although I seek to understand the dynamics through which media are incorporated into mediating the Holy Spirit in such a way that they virtually "disappear," this does not mean that these media are no longer there. "Disappearance" is achieved through certain acts and shared perspectives. Seeking to explain the incorporation of media into a particular religious sensational form, so as to grasp how by virtue of being sacralized they convey a sense of immediacy, I approach media on two levels. Those partaking in a sensational form through which a medium is rendered invisible may dismiss my analysis as problematic, because it spotlights the work invested into producing this invisibility, through which immediacy occurs. This implies that the strength of such an analysis depends on an alternative perspective that sees media present where, in the framework of the semiotic ideology within which they operate, they have vanished.

Here we touch upon an intriguing paradox: Although throughout this essay I have stressed the importance of identifying from within the specific sensational forms and semiotic ideologies that underpin mediation and establish immediacy, my analysis still requires a standpoint that is external to the very sensational forms and semiotic ideologies that I identify as central to engaging media. This raises questions about our own semiotic ideologies that underpin our own thinking about media as scholars. I am suspicious of grand, universally applicable theories of media and mediation that seek to establish in general or even universal terms what a medium is and how it works. Though presented as universally valid, such theories, as I argued in the first section above, may still bear traces of semiotic ideologies that are indebted to modern Protestantism. In order to avoid this, our own media theories need critical attention.

In my view, anthropology has much to contribute to this project. The fact that the concomitant "presence" and "disappearance" of media seem to show up when semiotic ideologies clash with each other – be it in the context of an encounter between different traditions, in shifts in mediation practices that mark a process of transformation in relation to the availability of new technologies, or as part of

scholarly analysis – suggests that the possibility of knowing what a medium is, and how it works, always requires both distance and affinity. Because what a medium is can only be identified by adopting a perspective that is external to the semiotic ideology within which it operates and which makes the medium “disappear” in the first place, any answer to the question “what is a medium” is necessarily both distorting and revealing. For this reason, this question cannot be answered in a straightforward, objective sense. The point is that it can most fruitfully be addressed by placing at the center of our inquiries the paradox of mediation and immediacy around which this essay evolved.

NOTES

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- 1 This brings to mind Niklas Luhmann’s point that in any mediation process, the medium itself is rendered invisible (Luhmann 1997; see also Krämer 1998). Taking as a point of departure that mediation is constitutive to all communication (in that a distance is overcome), Luhmann’s constructivist approach characterized a medium as a repertoire of loose elements, which remains invisible yet able to produce a broad variety of fixed forms. My approach to the invisibility of media differs from Luhmann’s in that I explore invisibility on another level. Instead of taking invisibility as intrinsic to mediation on a universal level, I am interested in the actual social processes that may make a medium “disappear” or “appear.”
- 2 This research project was made possible thanks to a grant from the Netherlands Foundation for Social Science Research. Besides myself, nine researchers (five PhD students, Maria José Alves de Abreu, Marleen de Witte, Francio Guadeloupe, Lotte Hoek, and Martijn Oosterbaan, and four postdocs, Stephen Hughes, Brian Larkin, Rafael Sánchez, and Mattijs van de Port) conducted research in West Africa, South Asia, Brazil, and the Caribbean. The project also facilitated short-term visits by international fellows (Meg MacLagan, Charles Hirschkind, and Jeremy Stolow). See Meyer 2009.
- 3 A new instance of such a stance is the mediatization thesis recently launched by the Danish sociologist Stig Hjarvard (2008a, 2008b), who argues that in our time modern mass media impress their own logic onto cultural expressions. Understood as a metaprocess that occurs on the same level as individualization and commercialization, mediatization refers to the power of “the media” (understood as “agents of religious change”) to frame religion in high modern societies, entailing the rise of what he calls “banal religion.” Especially among Scandinavian media scholars, Hjarvard’s theory has raised much debate about the degree of agency attributed to modern media. The fact that he himself stresses that his theory pertains to secularized northern Europe, and thus is not applicable globally, suggests that this approach is of limited use for our research. Nonetheless, even with regard to the northern European setting I doubt the usefulness of his framework in helping to understand and explain the role of media in the transformation of religion. For a very illuminating, critical discussion of mediatization see Lovheim 2011. It is useful to distinguish between “hard” (including Hjarvard’s) and “soft” (including Hepp 2009; Lundby 2009) versions of mediatization developed in media studies. The “soft” versions emphasize the importance of taking into consideration the social use of media.
- 4 However, I do not agree with his quite harsh and polemical critique of recent work on religion and media as still being grounded on this view. Unfortunately, he neglects recent work in anthropology (to which he only refers in a footnote) that critiques such media theories. This again underlines the importance of bringing anthropological insights into broader debates.

- 5 Some of the examples given in this section are based on my introduction to *Aesthetic Formations* (Meyer 2009).
- 6 So far, as Michelle Rosenthal (2007) has also pointed out, research on the relation between religion and media has mainly concentrated on the adoption of new media. However, the rejection of certain media, and the discourses around this, are also a very intriguing topic for further research. This is also the point made by Engelke (2007), who argues that the explicit rejection of certain media is central to religious mediation. See also Spyer (2001), who argues that the insistence that “the cassowary will not be photographed” enhances its aura.
- 7 In this sense, the negotiation of new media technologies may well be approached as “technological dramas,” e.g. as theatrical plots situated in the midst of social-religious power structures through which technologies – broadly understood – are shaped (Beck 2009).

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PART **V**

**Languages and
Conversions**

CHAPTER 18 Translating God's Words

Wendy James

Religious responses to the decades of civil war in post-independent Sudan were widespread. An interesting case is provided by Christiane Falge (2008), who witnessed the rise of two different movements among the youth of eastern Nuer country, especially where it extends across the Ethiopian border. One was a fairly typical take-up of evangelical Christianity, looking to “modernize” the people with the help of a network of contacts in the diaspora, especially the United States. The other was an apparent return to tradition, to the remembered prophecies of the late nineteenth-century charismatic figure of Ngundeng Bong, whose primary role was as a peacemaker, but who had come in recent years to represent Nuer unity and their growing empowerment within the southern Sudan. This movement was also supported from the diaspora, and by the late 1990s people were meeting in groups, singing songs of the prophet and exchanging versions of his sayings; they were speaking of a new “Ngundeng Church,” and this was supported by the traditional elders.

The young leaders began to institutionalize their movement within Ethiopia. Falge describes how they asked the Inter Church Committee of the Funyido refugee camp where they were based to admit the Ngundeng “Church” as part of its administrative structure. “The committee agreed on the condition of various membership assets, like a literate leadership, a church building, a drum, a book/bible and a hierarchy of elders including a pastor” (2008: 185–6). The leaders set about these tasks, at first lighting on Christiane’s own copy of Douglas Johnson’s book *Nuer Prophets* (1994)

as a candidate for their “bible,” though finally rejecting it as a “colonial representation.” They then started collecting stories of Ngundeng’s life from the elders, his “miracles and prophecies about the war, the refugee camps and the origin myths of their lineages,” compiling these by hand for use in church services, and referring to these written texts as their bible. They created new hymns from the material, using Christian melodies they taught to the elders, and circulated photos of Ngundeng’s Mound. By 2002 a building with a circular plan was put up, Wednesday was set as the weekly day of rest, and a new “Christmas” was established in January to mark the prophet’s birth (Falge 2008: 186).

These activities seemed to cover everything needed to appropriate memories from the past and set up a formal church of a “modern” kind. In this period of social and religious ferment such a church had to be set up *under authority*, even if only that of a refugee camp committee. Written “scripture” was clearly required at the heart of things, with its promise of bringing wisdom and spiritual inspiration from the past to bear directly on problems of the present, along with the newly constructed building and hierarchy of elders sanctioned by the committee. In this essay I review some key issues of this kind for the social and political history of religion by focusing on the introduction, maintenance, uses, and translation of written scriptures, alongside the contribution that today’s anthropology is making from its lively treatments of “performance” as much as the description of formal beliefs and their verbal expression, whether spoken or written. Scholars of Christianity itself, including anthropologists, are today highlighting the active socio-political and personal contexts in which real-time communities are themselves interpreting and arguing about the Bible, in their efforts to bring its core truths into their present lives. The variety of such contexts to be found in the West as well as elsewhere (especially across the “Global South”) is well illustrated by a recent collection entitled *The Social Life of Scriptures* (Bielo 2009). The ways that such *argument about scripture* may enter into and shape modern political life, with respect to Islam as well as to Christianity, is explored in *Religion and Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 2008* (Williams 2011), with an introductory essay by myself. However, instead of starting with written scripture, my approach here presents some of the rich linguistic, cultural, and ceremonial contexts into which written scripture (whether Christian or Islamic) may be *introduced* for the first time as an authoritative source. My main examples will come from the central regions of the Nile Valley, mainly the Sudan and South Sudan, but also from adjoining countries and occasionally elsewhere.

THE FLUIDITY OF SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN THE NILE VALLEY

Estimates of the languages spoken today in the central Nile Basin vary from the lower to the higher hundreds. This gives an impression of extreme diversity, fragmentation, and barriers not only to linguistic but also to cultural interactions and joint ventures. But the situation on the ground, at least in the Sudan as it was formerly constituted before the secession of South Sudan in 2011, was very different. Bilingualism, and multilingualism, which of course enable cross-cultural communication at every level, were far more common than often appreciated by scholars (see James 2008). Where meetings drew together people from different language backgrounds, interpreters

could usually be found to translate, sentence by sentence, from one to another. Visiting speakers, including government personnel, could be translated orally into one or more local tongues at the same meeting. Arabic had spread southwards as a *lingua franca* through trade, military activity, and general population movement for several centuries, at least since the time of the Funj Kingdom of Sennar (1504–1821) and this process accelerated with the Turco-Egyptian conquest that followed. By the late twentieth century it was quite common for various regional dialects of colloquial Arabic to be used to communicate between people whose mother tongues were quite different. I was in a Komo-speaking village in far western Ethiopia in the mid-1970s, trying to learn the language (closely related to Uduk, which I had already studied on the Sudan side of the border). My only real interpreter/assistant was an Anuak man who knew both some Komo and some English. The local *lingua franca*, of which I had only a smattering, was Oromo (I had taken lessons in the United Kingdom in Amharic, but although some people in western Ethiopia could speak it, they did not like doing so). When the local Komo people really wanted to get something over to me, they would speak in a very colloquial style of rural Arabic, the only tongue we had in common!

Where sheer geographical distance has diluted even the formality of colloquial Arabic as spoken in the northern parts of Sudan, we can see and hear an increasing contrast with the dichotomies and hierarchies of the original. For example, in the southern dialects of Arabic which arose in the context of the expansion of Turco-Egyptian control in the nineteenth century and spread as far south as today's northern Uganda, where it is recognized as KiNubi and spoken even in some of the urban areas of Kenya, things like grammatical gender have been dropped. Even as someone reasonably familiar with the gendered grammar of pronouns and verbs in the northern colloquial tongue I had picked up while based in Khartoum for some years, I found it quite a social shock when later living in Juba to be referred to myself – in what is now known as “Juba Arabic” – as “he” rather than “she,” and it took me some time not to use the feminine forms for women friends. Along with this seeming lack of formality was the dropping of plural verb forms to indicate respect; and of course the disappearance of the extremely elaborate greeting exchanges of northern Sudanese elite society. Here was a real “scaling down” of the social hierarchies assumed in relatively conservative spoken forms of Arabic, which retain recognizable connection with the classic forms. As they spread further and further from the centers where the classical – and written – forms were still preserved, colloquial dialects developed their own momentum and, in the case of Juba Arabic and KiNubi, passed beyond the role of *lingua franca* to become “creoles,” the mother tongue and only language of many townspeople in the southern regions of Sudan and parts of East Africa. These transformations of spoken language, however, had little to do with the vitality of Islam as such, to which the written scriptures of the Holy Qur'an and associated ancient literature remain central; below, I return to this theme.

SPOKEN LANGUAGE AS “PERFORMANCE” IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGION

Although there are ideological exceptions, it is generally thought reasonable among anthropologists, at least since the time of Durkheim's classic *Elementary Forms of the*

Religious Life of 1912 (Durkheim 1995), to use the word “religion” when referring to historical and ethnographic cases where the whole corpus of practices and “beliefs” has developed quite flexibly within an oral culture. Even where spoken language may include formal expression through myth, song, or formulaic address to some other world beyond the everyday, this need not inhibit the “carrying over” of ritual practice from one language context to another. Consider Aboriginal Australia, Durkheim’s main example, where long-distance interactions are standard and ceremonial or religious forms are clearly interrelated across the continent.

Let us start, however, “beyond language” altogether. There are ceremonial practices which often attract the label “ritual,” but do not depend much, if at all, on formalized spoken language; one thinks immediately of many “rites of passage” – births, illness and recovery, even death and burial. There are also some sacrificial acts, whether simple libations or complex animal sacrifice, which do not depend on linguistic formulae; or practices such as divination that rely on the silent manipulation of objects. In the foothills of the Sudan–Ethiopia border, there used to be a practice, around the time of the harvest, of “throwing away bad things” in a westerly direction, downhill and toward the setting sun. This began somewhere well inside Ethiopia, and passed steadily on from one settlement to the next; Uduk villages received it from Bertha country and passed it on to the Meban downstream. The main diviners’ cult I found flourishing among the Uduk in the 1960s used a divination technique which appears to have originated with the Bertha, where it might have come to prominence as a focus of resistance to Islam. It consists of several diviners each lighting a wand of young wood from the “false ebony” tree (*cir*; *babanusa* in Arabic) and holding it over a gourd of water, watching the pattern of spurting flames and the way blobs of soot fall into it and slowly circle around. This is done in silence except for a few exclamations of “Ha!” “Hmmm.” The diviners then extinguish their wands and go off, usually in search of the lost “shadow” or “soul” of the patient (see James 1988a: 299–311 for more detail). I am not aware of any verbal formulae involved in all this, nor in the actual practices of healing. The anthropologist is left to simply observe, and then hang around in the hope of talking to someone informally about what it all means. Some explanations end up with reference to strong visual images: the need to combat the Rainbow, for example, which shows up in many contexts across the region (1988a: *passim*). The diviners’ cult, with healing practices and an elaborate ceremonial structure of stages of initiation into five different Orders was itself taken over from Jum Jum sponsors to the north of the Uduk (their language is also known as Wadke) and its center was still at Jebel Silak, where the local language is a dialect of Bertha and from where many devotees were sponsored over the region as a whole.

Closely allied in technique were activities associated with the cult of the *arum* (“spirit”) of Leina, whose specialists regularly collaborated during the 1960s. Leina had been a ritual/prophetic leader on the Nilotic model among the Meban in the 1930s, giving trouble to the government. He later visited the Uduk. However, by the 1960s, when basic Christian teachings were familiar to most of the Uduk-speaking community, my informants described him as having really been an Uduk himself, who died, then rose again from the dead; hence his visits back to his own people (James 1988a: ch. 3, 159–206). The Leina specialists were certainly still active among both the Meban and the Uduk as late as the early 1980s.

The “ethnic” or “cultural” pattern of this whole borderland has sometimes been represented as a patchwork quilt; but this suggests a heterogeneous mix of

incompatible and clashing elements, echoing the undoubted language differences. I would prefer instead the image of a tapestry, threads weaving in and out, the connections between one part of the pattern and another showing differently as the light changes, or as the decades of fading and repair come and go (1988a: 270). Fundamental cultural themes of this whole borderland region, for which I have used the phrase "cultural archive," are primarily images, musical forms, gestures, and techniques, rather than linguistic dogma or definable cosmologies. There is relative fluidity in the way specific, often quite local, communities select and recombine such imagery and practices; the verbal "translation" of their meanings is not often a major issue. They can even interact with, and become absorbed into, local understandings framed by the enduring scriptures of the world's dominant religions. However, issues of "translatability" come to the fore as written scriptures claim their unique moral and religious authority over traditional customary practices. To anticipate my argument as it develops below, the project of translating the Bible into local vernaculars involves in the first place an ironing out of linguistic diversity, as one standard dialect has to be chosen for the "Word of God" from perhaps several spoken variants, along with the fluid patterns of local practice and belief that may be associated with them. At the same time, Bible translation creates a new and externally defined "center" of ritual practice in conjunction with the world of modernity and the specific sorts of political authority recognized within it.

Perhaps by contrast with the fluidities of linguistic and religious practice in the eras before the invention of writing or in the spaces that may still remain outside its influence, the "Religions of the Book" – to adopt a phrase from the Arabic – have clearly helped institutionalize political forms on a mounting scale throughout history. The Abrahamic religions seem to have been particularly prone to fierce projects for distinguishing between those who belong to, and those who are outside, the community of believers – itself ordered by territorial claims and behavioral rules as much as by "belief." In many cases, no doubt following some remembered experience of struggle against oppression, the religious movements that emerged from the old Mediterranean have retained the potential for developing a deeply authoritarian relationship to the community of their followers. Proselytizing, imperial conquest, notions of a chosen people, claims to land on the basis of sacred scripture and holy places, *jihad* against the unbelievers and punishments for apostasy, have variously marked the history of these religions and the "rights" of their followers. As Talal Asad has convincingly demonstrated (1993), it is in their image that Western perceptions take as self-evident what "a religion" might be; but then how far can this starting point adequately reflect the nature of "religion" elsewhere in the world?¹ While disciplinary practices and guidance over personal and family matters are also a core of Hindu, Buddhist, and other "Eastern" religions, in their "traditional" forms these have not asserted authority over territory and the body politic in a comparable way, though recent events have seen a sharpening of religious nationalism and identity politics here too.

INTRODUCING "RELIGIONS OF THE BOOK" INTO THE NILE VALLEY: KEEPING THE SCRIPTURES SPECIAL

Anthropologists, seeking from the beginning an approach distinct from those of history and theology, have only recently come to integrate the phenomenon of

written texts into their studies of religion as a whole. In medieval times, the term “ritual” meant a book, the written text of the liturgy, but it escaped the confines of the church to become a general term in modern English, and particularly in anthropology, to denote almost any kind of formal ceremonial action, including those which did not include verbal elements (Asad 1993). The application of this term, along with other concepts which once related to something sacred, has shifted more and more toward the sensory; toward bodily discipline, the visual, to music, memory, and the aesthetic. A return to the written documents of scripture, where they do exist, reminds us that here we are entering into an explicitly *political* world defined in relation to these texts; a world of social discipline, of hierarchies of knowledge, privilege, and authority over not only the spiritual, but the temporal world of land and tribute, trade and patronage, the social division of labor, family inheritances, and the law.

Well to the south of ancient Egypt with its long record of written texts (both inscriptions and papyri) in its particular hieroglyphic script, the little-known civilization of Meroe flourished, with its political center not too far north of present-day Khartoum. The Meroites almost certainly spoke a language of the Nilo-Saharan family, to which the indigenous tongues of Nubia upstream of the Egyptian border belong; these are still spoken alongside Arabic in the north and resemble the majority of other languages spoken in the southern regions of the former Sudan. The royal pyramids and other monuments of Meroe, dating from c. 750 BCE to 350 CE are inscribed with texts in Meroitic script, which is quite distinct from Egyptian and has not yet been fully deciphered; linguists know how it was pronounced, but not what it meant. Of course we have no idea of the role played by this script, or the monuments, but we might well assume they were central to the communal ceremonies of the time.

The “Religions of the Book” first spread into the Nile Valley with the extension of Coptic Orthodox Christianity from Egypt in the early centuries of our era, resulting in a chain of monasteries linking Alexandria with the Nubian Kingdoms and with Axum in Ethiopia. But although the missionaries did make converts there is no evidence that they tried translating the Coptic Bible into any local tongues. The monasteries, which flourished for almost a thousand years, did not long survive the Arab conquest of medieval Nubia and were replaced by Islamic institutions and networks from the fourteenth century on. However, the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia has maintained a continuous history since the fifth century; Ge’ez is treasured today much as Latin was by the medieval church in Europe. Only scholars can really explain the holy texts to their congregants (though very recent changes include exegesis and teaching in Amharic, and Amharic hymns on Ethiopian radio; see Boylston, this volume). Of course the position of Islam up to the present day is still very conservative with respect to language; there is no authorized path to any translation of the holy Qur’an. Children all over the Muslim world are encouraged to study the Book in Qur’anic schools, to learn and to chant texts and associated teachings from the past in classical Arabic. But this focus on the sacred texts coexists with many varieties of colloquial Arabic spoken in mosques and among Muslim teachers, plus a polyglot range of communities who speak quite other tongues than Arabic at home – as is the case today in the Nile Valley. In cases like those of modern Islam, modern Ethiopian Orthodoxy, and almost certainly the medieval monasteries of

Nubia, the sacred scriptures were written in a form of socially and politically "authorized" language, to use Bourdieu's term; and the congregations of the faithful were the "communities of recognition" which gave substance to the forms and history of these religious institutions (Bourdieu 1991, esp. 72–76, 107–116). To "recognize" the centrality of scripture is to take for granted its authoritative significance in relation to oneself, and not necessarily to "understand" it in the literal sense. In some cases we are perhaps not too far off the one-time significance of the royal inscriptions of Meroe or Axum; their former ceremonial centrality, and potential attraction to new devotees, are obvious today to archaeologists and passing tourists alike.

The preservation of ancient scriptural texts in a style we could almost call "monumental" makes for what many would regard as a deeply conservative set of attitudes. In Arabic, the very term for "religion" or "faith," *al-din*, refers exclusively to Islam, though respect is accorded to other "Religions of the Book." How can this starting-point be made appropriate for academic study? We cannot translate a course title, or book title, such as "the anthropology of religion" into Arabic. It could perhaps become a comparative study of the Religions of the Book, plus some of the "traditional" customs and practices of householders, *al-ada*, or those of heathens on the fringes of civilization – even while the latter may be feared as courting the occult (and occasionally engaged for such ends). I have had the experience of teaching Sudanese students who were comfortable hearing about "Witchcraft among the Azande" – "Oh yes, that's interesting; we have witchcraft here too in the North" – but were quite taken aback at books on the "Religion" of the Nuer or the Dinka (Evans-Pritchard 1937, 1956; Lienhardt 1961). Such classics in anthropology as we understand it could scarcely be translated into Arabic without diminishing the dignity of the beliefs, practices, and indeed peoples they describe. A revealing example of the skewed way in which indigenous Sudanese languages relate to Arabic is that of the word *kujur*, originally indicating an indigenous ritual leader in one of the languages of the Nuba Hills. The term has entered Sudanese colloquial Arabic as an all-purpose word meaning "magician," or wizard. Ordinary speakers of colloquial Arabic would use this term for those Nuer leaders Evans-Pritchard termed "priests" or "prophets" – the latter was a real shock for my students in Khartoum, as of course Muhammad was the last of the prophets. Douglas Johnson reports an encounter laden with significance here: during the relatively peaceful decade of the 1970s, he was walking in the market of Malakal (a town then linked both with the southern and northern Sudan) with Stephen Cic, an old friend and Nuer local politician. They stopped to chat with some local northern merchants, who soon switched from Nuer to Arabic in order to ask Stephen what Douglas was doing in Nuer country. Stephen replied, also in Arabic, that he had come to study the life of "*al-nabi* Ngundeng," using the Arabic term reserved for the Prophet Muhammad and his predecessors. Stephen's mischievousness was obviously very close to the line (Johnson 1991: 33).

Sunni Islam, taking over from the medieval Christian-run kingdoms of Nubia, had reached the middle Nile by the early sixteenth century. It played an integral part in the founding of the new Funj Kingdom, based at Sennar on the Blue Nile. In Jay Spaulding's phrase, Islam "remained an exotic royal cult" for some time (1974). But Muslim missionaries introduced the Maliki school of Islamic law, and the first mosque was built in the seventeenth century. More or less in tandem, Sufi practice, which sought mystical experience through asceticism and spiritual exercises, also became

established. To summarize what I have noted elsewhere (James 2011: 89–94), Sufism led to the spread of *tariqas* or religious brotherhoods – still important today – in which authority is vested in a leader recognized as having spiritual power or *baraka*. *Baraka* is passed on from a teacher or spiritual master to his followers, often to his own son, and the master’s tomb might later become revered as a shrine. The characteristic Sufi mode of worship has long been the *dhikr* or *zikr*, in which the names of God are chanted, often in conjunction with music, songs and circular dancing, occasionally producing trance. The Sufi communities flourished particularly in rural areas, where syncretism with pre-Islamic beliefs was relatively unproblematic.

It is not difficult to imagine that the “Religions of the Book” in the Nile regions have always faced puzzling and unorthodox phenomena stemming from their peripheral regions or from within their contained minorities and marginalized categories. Quite beyond the important challenge that Sunni Islam and the mosques have long faced from the Sufi Orders, there are the widespread “spirit possession” cults such as the *zār*, of which we have fine accounts for the northern Sudan from the work of Janice Boddy (1989) and Susan Kenyon (1991, 2012). Variations of the *zār* are not limited to the geographical extent of Islamic religious authority in the Nile Valley and related parts of northeast Africa such as Somalia, but are known in Christian Ethiopia under the same name. It is intriguing to speculate on how far their history might go; did they perhaps emerge at the time of the original introduction of Christianity to Nubia and Ethiopia (or even earlier?) and simply carry on through the centuries during which Islam became established? Whether in the style prevalent among women, and typically under women’s leadership, or in the variant known as *tambura* among ex-military slave families or in modern refugee camps, the *zār* phenomenon is twinned as a familiar opposite, almost, to official religion. It spreads easily, incorporating new apparitions into its repertoire of spirits, who can possess people and have to be exorcised or accommodated. Its basic ideas and activities are expressed through song, music, dance, and theatrical enactments; specific languages, or spoken formulae, are neither here nor there. In the Sudan, it doesn’t matter much if participants speak Arabic, or are good Muslims; and in Ethiopia, you certainly don’t need Ge’ez, or even the modern national language of Amharic to be a practitioner. On the other hand, the sacred texts and teachings of both Islam and Ethiopian Christianity have a space, and special language, for the irruptions of “marginal” spirits and for ways to control them or neutralize their presence.

In his recent study of the rise of “spirit possession” as a concept which grew up in Western theology and philosophical thought alongside the expansion of economic and political control over modern populations, and moved with the history of slavery to the New World, Paul C. Johnson (2011) emphasizes the easy way that this kind of cult can move, and be “translated” in the many senses of that word. However, Johnson’s analysis does not extend to the parallels we may find in the history of Islam – where a concern with trade, property, and slavery has also, no doubt, been very significant in provoking the spread of spirit possession; nor to other regions where this factor may not be so convincing. And this approach does not take up the relation between what we take for typical cults of “spirit possession” and the authorized Words of God against which the spirits seem to arise. I have emphasized here that at least for the regions I am discussing, the early arrival and persistence of the Religions of the Book, and the jealous protection exercised by them over written scriptures

and their associated disciplines, are part of what fuels the ongoing vitality of “spirit possession” movements in the region. Unpredictable spirits, difficult to control, are already identified as mischievous “outsiders” in many passages of scripture and sacred teachings devoted to promoting the singular authority of the Deity. They are simply part of God’s unruly entourage, part of the new spiritual hierarchy entailed by the creation of new social and political hierarchies. They are not expected to speak the language of the Bible or the Qur’an.

ANTIQUE TEXTS IN GENERAL: LIVE PERFORMANCES AND AUDIENCES

Of course a vast proportion of the followers of the key “Religions of the Book” may themselves be illiterate. But so were many of Shakespeare’s early audiences! And today while many may now *read* his plays, it is surely due largely to their *performance* on stage that they have been so successfully transmitted, and welcomed through translation into new settings. Language does not travel as easily as music, dance, or performance art. It remains true, following Steiner’s inspirational work *After Babel* (1975), that all human communication and understanding, even within the “same language,” involves an element of translation; but it is surely the context of performance, even in the most informal encounter, that makes sense of its linguistic content.

The British theater director John Russell Brown made several visits to Asia in order to experience local drama genres, theatrical productions and audience responses (Brown 1999). He was struck by the informality of the audiences and their impromptu reactions, and felt that he was closer here to the London audiences of Shakespeare’s day. His most surprising experience was actually to find himself at a cremation on Bali. There seemed to be no formal direction behind the whole day; people came and went, talking casually among themselves, joining in the ritual from time to time, music fading in and out as the procession of several hundred kept moving. Even during songs and prayers, or at the actual lighting of the pyre, there seemed to be no dominant command to attention – and even in this context of a local ritual, as distinct from an actual “theater” production, Brown experienced something of the overlap between these forms from a point of view he extrapolated to Shakespearean audiences (1999: 29–33).

Shakespeare’s plays are of course themselves frequently “translated” from one time-period or place to another; the texts themselves have been pruned and rearranged many times since the beginning. Yet the productions are so strong in plot that they can withstand all kinds of linguistic translation. And each new language setting seems to bring forth new fruits of understanding. Just to mention two examples: A bilingual production “Romeo & Juliette” opened in Ottawa in 1990, the Anglophone Montagues engaging with the Francophone Capulets, enhancing the storyline to great effect, especially for a Canadian audience watching it on Victoria Island, in the middle of the river separating Ontario from Québec.² Again, thirty-five plays by Shakespeare were presented at the Globe Theatre in London in the spring of 2012, each in a different language of the world. I attended *Cymbeline* in Juba Arabic, which managed to delight the audience with plenty of pantomime-style costumes, dancing and drumming and appeals over the shoulder to the crowd, sometimes ironically in English. But despite the fact that only a handful of the audience actually understood what

was being said, the understandable background problems of a kingdom facing tax and political demands from distant overlords, the romances, jealousies and mistaken identities among the younger generation – and the final intervention of Jupiter – ensured that all went down well. The original text is in any case somewhat fragmentary and “fictional” in nature and open to all kinds of placing and interpretation. As Shakespeare himself said, the play’s the thing; and we might well ponder this in relation to questions of the translation, and transposition, of other revered and ancient texts, such as the sacred scriptures, around which performance has to be staged for them to become socially entrenched.

TRANSLATING THE SCRIPTURES: NEW LANGUAGE SHAPES, SOCIAL HIERARCHIES

A set of very pertinent essays with the intriguing subtitle *Holy Untranslatable?* probes the ambiguities and delights of translating sacred scriptures (Long 2005). The essays consider not only modern Christian Bible translation from several points of view but also Buddhist texts, including Tibetan; Jewish translations of the Hebrew Bible; faithfulness to Sanskrit in translating classical Hindu texts; whether to modernize in translating the Orthodox liturgy; translating gender pronouns then and now from the Hebrew Genesis; translating the words of Sufi saints; cultural aspects in Qur’an translation . . . and more. The question of the “target” readership and language for any specific translation is a dominant theme through these essays. It is also frequently assumed that it will reach an “audience,” including in some cases an internet audience, as much as a readership. Lynne Long asks some sharp questions in her introduction – “But what exactly is it that defines a text as holy? And what is it about that holiness that makes translation difficult or even impossible?” Further, “Restoring the context is one of the most difficult things for a translator to do” (2005: 1, 3).

Nevertheless, in the most prominent case, repeated translation has been an essential and continuing part of the history of the Bible. Marie Isaacs has studied the implications for Hellenistic Judaism, and subsequently for early Christianity, of the way that the Jewish diaspora in the Greek-speaking areas of the eastern Mediterranean found it necessary to uphold respect for their faith in part by translating the Hebrew scriptures into Greek. A key concept here was the Greek *pneuma*, approximately meaning “spirit,” but with wider and more flexible potential use than the Hebrew *ruach* (cognate with the Arabic *ruh*). *Pneuma*, originally a pagan term, was employed by Hellenistic Jewish translators to convey the nature of the Jewish God, and the “inspiration” behind Christ and the early Church (Isaacs 1976: 143–145). The story of further translations of the scriptures into Latin, German, English, and so on (including Tyndale’s fresh return to the original Hebrew and Greek) as it moves on to the King James Bible is a rich and complex one. On the four-hundredth anniversary of its original publication in 1611, a stage play was presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company enacting the deeply dramatic story of encounters between translators, shifts to and fro over specific English language expressions, and arguments with church authorities, a saga which lasted many generations and included banishments and death sentences (Edgar 2011). Of course the controversies continue in a very lively way in our own times, with the New English Bible (1961), the Good News Bible

(1966), the New Message Bible (1993), and so on becoming parts not only of academic and theological argument but social argument too.

MODERN CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY TRANSLATION IN THE NILE VALLEY

Modern Christian missionary activity, led by Catholic priests of the order of the Verona Fathers, began in the southern regions of the Sudan in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Those were the days when priests often spent many decades immersed in the life and language of the areas where they were posted, some providing valuable ethnographic studies, from which modern anthropologists have been able to take their bearings. Several also produced carefully thought-out and still-respected dictionaries and translations of scripture alongside their spiritual and practical teaching. In the case of the northern Nilotic-speaking peoples, primarily the Dinka, Shilluk, and Nuer, missionary scholars encountered a world which for them had many Old Testament echoes. The people were strongly oriented to their cattle herds, to seasonal migrations which brought them into contact with other groups; to an ideology of patrilineal descent which provided a moral framework for relations between groups over large distances; to an encompassing hierarchy of spiritual presences in the Above, and to stories of miraculous events and prophetic visions in their own past. The way the early missionaries presented this world was deeply respectful.

Godfrey Lienhardt (1982) raised some pertinent questions about the challenge for the translator in this situation. "Thus there were just enough parallels between Catholic and social doctrine for the Christian message not to appear entirely new, but . . ." If Dinka accepted the Christian miracles, why should they reject similar miracles attributed to great religious leaders in their own tradition? "Why leave their own established religious leaders who called upon their people to become reconciled with God and each other, who made blood sacrifices to cleanse them from sin, who often called for peace, in order to follow others with a similar message?" (1982: 84). Dinka oral tradition includes a rich range of historical stories, myths, songs, and styles of formal ceremonial speech; and the language was well furnished with spiritual vocabulary which in many ways lent itself to the Bible translation project. Lienhardt explores the subtle contexts in which key terms may shift in meaning in the process; and interestingly, he cites actual conversations and contexts where this is clearly happening.

Let me quote just one example, referring to the earliest conversation reported between local Dinka and the missionary Giovanni Beltrame, supposed to have taken place in the 1850s and published in 1880. Lienhardt notes that "among many statements, questions and answers in Italian and Dinka which *do* represent Dinka usage even to the present day, a reformulation of Dinka meanings has already started to take place" (1982: 91). Asked where a bad man goes after death, the Dinka are reported to have replied (and here, Lienhardt translates from Beltrame's Italian rendering of the Dinka) that when a bad man dies, the "*Demonio*" (for the Dinka *jok*) will come and take his soul (*l'anima*) to the house of fire. A good man's soul will go with "Great Deng" into the sky. "Deng," rendered in this Italian text as *Dio*, Lienhardt explains, is the name of an important divinity, sometimes identified with

God-in-the-above or *nhialic*. However, the Dinka word *wei*, meaning “breath” and associated with bodily life, is not the same entity as the Italian *anima*, for the Christian soul. This evidence from an early source represents the start of a long and continuing exchange in the particularly promising context of Dinka translations; the style of traditional religious language and cosmology does seem to lend itself to such engagement. Lienhardt proposes an analogy for the phenomenon: taking the phrase that astronomers use for the way that the relation between the stars seems to shift as you change your point of observation, he speaks of “linguistic parallax” – the relational shift that takes place between key terms in one language as you translate into another. Each may retain something of its original sense, while its relation to others may change (1982: 89–90).

In other cases, translation cannot proceed so smoothly, but requires one to decide how to deal with abrupt contrasts between the source and “target” language and associated cosmologies. Indeed, as among Uduk church followers, translation can entail a radical reorientation of cosmology and an introduction of new authority through both language adjustment and the institution of a newly organized social body. Language work was given particular emphasis by the largely Protestant mission organizations which entered the southern regions of the Sudan during the Anglo-Egyptian condominium government (1898–1956). Members of the Sudan Interior Mission (now “Serving in Mission”) were based in Upper Nile Province from 1938, though part of their sphere of activity, including the homeland of the Uduk people, was transferred to the Blue Nile Province in 1953. All Christian missions came under pressure from the Sudan government from the early 1960s, and the SIM were among the last group to be deported, in 1964. As an evangelical movement, they had a particular commitment to providing the Uduk (and other minorities in their domain) with the Word of God in their own language, and right up to this point they struggled with the task. Printed copies of the New Testament in Uduk were delivered only shortly before they had to leave. By contrast with the Catholics among the Dinka, decisions here about how to use existing words had proved to be more than a matter of cosmological perspective.

A detail on the social side which makes this clear has only been confirmed for me quite recently, through current linguistic research by Don Killian, who has been working with Uduk-speaking students in Addis Ababa (political conditions ruling out field research in the home areas or even the refugee camps of the border zone with Sudan). Don learned from his informants that the word *yim* meant “she.” Now I am quite certain that in the old days (my own research going back to the 1960s) there was no such female pronoun; the third person singular pronoun for all was *a’di* meaning “he, she” or even “it.” There was however a term of greeting and address used reciprocally between girls, or between women, who had worked at some task or traveled together; they could greet each other as “*ayim pem!*” – my special friend. I was also aware that the SIM missionaries had decided to use this term in the scriptures, where some respect was needed for certain figures; they felt you couldn’t call the Virgin Mary by a pronoun meaning “he, she, or it.” The effect then spread to the classroom; most of the teachers were women, and the pupils had to speak of them respectfully as *yim*, “she.” Today’s student generation away from home have come to understand this term as a general female pronoun, and they take for granted things such as men and women sitting on different sides of the church. This

seemingly minor case of introducing opposition and hierarchy at the level of pronouns is only one detail within the overall landscape of linguistic-social adjustment.

More central to the mission's translation project was the invention of a name for God, about which the missionaries themselves once wrote (Forsberg 1958), as I have since (James 1988a). There used to be a rather diffuse presence of vitality in living things, *arum*; it sometimes left the body and persisted after death, but was always associated with the earth. So a brand-new hybrid term was created for "God": Arum-gimis (with a capital initial of course) meaning "that *arum* which is in the sky"; and by default, all the others were dubbed *arum a'cesh*, the spirits of the earth, and associated with Satan.³ I have also discussed at some length the contradictions which become apparent as a result of translating hymns from English into Uduk, and then back again, with all the resonance of the schoolroom rather than the original poetry (James 1988b).

This case shows very clearly that putting the scriptures into a local African language where there has been little space for hierarchies or dogmas or transmitted formal language is not merely a matter of "translation" but of creating new registers which enshrine these things along with a new respect for writing – not just as something deployed by outsiders, but now entrenched among themselves as the Word of God. Uduk speakers, now scattered in many places, including several communities in the North American diaspora, are conscious of having been transformed into a new "community of recognition," around the authority of the translation; but the question remains: how deep can this sense of recognition go?

CONCLUSION

Most scriptures have some acknowledged claim to contain wisdom from long ago, some claimed directly from spiritual revelation or even the words of God; but others may be basically historical accounts from a variety of oral traditions and first-hand observers written down at different times and brought together. They embody heterogeneous materials; they refer to known peoples and places and the reader can usually find some way of relating to the content. Perhaps the case of trying to register the Ngundeng Church in Funyido refugee camp, with which I opened, has all these elements; the content is primary, and the writings newly collected from elders who already have "authority" for the newly assembled followers. These are themselves clearly already a "community of recognition."

Do all those movements we dignify with the Western scholarly term "religion" have a need for written scriptures at their heart? The case of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints and the Book of Mormon might appear to reinforce this image (for a useful introduction, see Givens 2009). The Book was revealed to Joseph Smith by an angel in the 1820s, and he was miraculously able to "translate" its text from an unknown language inscribed in strange characters on "golden" plates. Apart from passages which clearly parallel parts of the Old Testament, the content is very difficult to relate to known history of any kind, though tremendous efforts have been made to connect it with hypothetical migrations of the "lost tribes of Israel" or with pre-Columbian America. The distance between this text and its "community of recognition" must surely be far from that accompanying the history of most other

Religions of the Book. The Book of Mormon has now been translated into more than a hundred of the world's languages – including, for the wider region discussed here, Amharic, Arabic (of North Africa), Kisii (Kenya), Luganda (Uganda), and Swahili – though not as yet for any indigenous Sudanese language. We are yet to learn of the subtler side of these translation projects, or how new believers relate to the results, but there is no doubt of the practical modern attractions of membership in the Latter-Day Saints church in the developing world.

We live in distinctive linguistic communities. But at the same time *translation* is one of the distinctively human gifts, and multilingualism far more frequent among real human communities than often supposed. The moral sphere of our common humanity must extend beyond one language or local cultural form for there to be any history at all. A potential for translation is a capacity of intellectual agency we all share, and along with music, dance, and the always innovative spatial choreography of our social lives, it shapes our very selves as persons, as I discussed in *The Ceremonial Animal* (2003). The treasuring of ancient religious texts links us to the past in quite special ways, which themselves demand exegesis and self-aware commentary. The possibility of their translation, and retranslation, opens a way for the regular redefinition of our sense of how we are placed in the world of others, personally, culturally, and politically, whether we ourselves undertake the translation or receive and respond to it in some new context of religious practice. In translating God's words, we reorient ourselves to each other.

NOTES

- 1 See also Vilaça, Klassen, Lambek, this volume.
- 2 Laurie Maguire explores some of the rich resonances of this event (2007: 62–67).
- 3 See also Vilaça, this volume, on how a Christian semiotic ideology shifted cosmological understandings among Wari' converts in the Amazon.

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CHAPTER 19 Christianity as a Polemical Concept

Pamela E. Klassen

In the early evening of July 14, 1898, the Toronto-based Anglican missionary Frederick Du Vernet (1860–1924) arrived at Little Forks Reserve on the Canadian shore of the Rainy River, a swift-flowing border between Ontario and Minnesota. Meeting an enthusiastic welcome from “the pest of the river, the mosquitoes + the ‘bull-dog’ flies,” he donned his mosquito veil and continued to document with camera and pen the Christian missions to the Ojibwe. Under the guidance and hospitality of fellow missionary Jeremiah Johnston, a “Christian Indian” who was an Ojibwe-speaking, Cree-English veteran of the Anglo-Sudan war, Du Vernet witnessed the ongoing contest between colonial and Ojibwe views of the land and its people. He left behind a twenty-six paged diary that shifted between zealously Christian prose and a proto-ethnographic style. Undercutting his use of missionary stereotypes with portraits of Ojibwe men and women who staunchly defended their territory and rituals twenty-five years after signing Treaty 3 with Queen Victoria, Du Vernet also documented how he himself became something of a pest of the river to many Ojibwe he met.

Du Vernet’s diary is a rich historical resource for Ojibwe-missionary relations under Canadian colonialism, but also for the anthropology of religion, as the Rainy River region would host a succession of anthropologists over subsequent decades. The ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore (1867–1957) visited from 1907 on, producing

photographs and wax cylinder recordings of Ojibwe music, accounts of Episcopalian missionaries, and books such as *Chippewa Customs* (Densmore 1939, 1929). In 1932, on the recommendation of Catholic priest and ethnographer John M. Cooper, Ruth Landes (1908–1991) made her way to Manitou Rapids, a reserve the Canadian government had established in 1915 by forcibly amalgamating several others, including Little Forks, into one smaller, contiguous reserve. From her two summers of fieldwork on both Canadian and United States sides of the Rainy River, Landes wrote three books: *Ojibwa Sociology* (1937), *The Ojibwa Woman* (1938) and *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin* (1968). Read comparatively, these missionary and anthropological texts reveal how their authors participated in imagining and representing “Indians” under colonial regimes. More specifically, they illuminate how use of the qualifying adjective of “Christian” had the power to make certain practices and people appear and disappear. For the missionary, a Christian Indian was worth a good deal of ink; for the anthropologist, Christian Indians merited little attention yet provoked considerable anxiety. Exploring multiple effects of the word “Christian,” I first discuss what has come to be called the “anthropology of Christianity,” then turn to an analysis of the successive visits of missionaries and anthropologists to Ojibwe of Rainy River. Now the site of the Ojibwe-run Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Centre, which I visited in the summer of 2012, this stretch of the river continues to generate stories of the past and present (Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Centre 2012).

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY

The anthropology of Christianity has emerged as a space for comparative thinking in which scholars studying such diverse places as Papua New Guinea, Guatemala, Zimbabwe, and Canada converse about what different people mean when they call themselves, and/or live their lives as, Christians. At the same time, it has emerged as a space for genealogical thinking within which orienting concepts in the anthropology of religion, including the idea of the “secular,” are questioned (Robbins 2007; Cannell 2005, 2006). Some of this critique depends heavily on the work of anthropologist Talal Asad, whose *Genealogies of Religion* illuminated the deeply Christian history of the category of religion itself.

The idea of “religion,” Asad argued, arose in the early modern period as part of a colonial classification practice in which Christianity was often the standard, or example, by which other “religions” could be recognized as such (1993). For Asad, religion as a category appeared as a “transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon” that could be objectified and analyzed separately from other “modern” conceptual categories such as politics, economics, law, and science. The invention of “religion,” then, was necessary for the formation of the very notion of “secular” modernity, to borrow from another of Asad’s titles (2003). That is, what is often glossed as secular, including the state, the university, and scholarly research, has itself come into being partly through the conceptual differentiation of religion from the “real” life of economics, law, and politics. At the same time, many people, and not only anthropologists, would argue that activities and structures of power that go under the names of religion, economics, or politics are very much intertwined, and have always been so. Or, as Michael Lambek puts it in his introductory chapter to this volume, religion may be

“immanent” and pervasive within the everyday workings of a particular society, as well as “transcendent” and objectified through its ideals and ideologies.

While the constellation “anthropology of Christianity” may be relatively new, several scholars prior to Asad had developed the insight that the category of religion stands in a very particular relationship to Christianity. Some have traced the colonial origins of modern anthropology to complicated engagements with missionaries as both contributors and adversaries, as well as with Christian conceptions of what counts as “religion” (W. Smith 1962; Evans-Pritchard 1966; Stocking 1991; Tambiah 1990; Douglas 2002; J. Smith 2004; Fabian 1983). Put simply, when anthropologists found “religion” in their field sites, they often recognized it with the help of a “Christian” template or model. Take, for example, Bronislaw Malinowski’s classic definition of magic, science, and religion. For Malinowski, religion operated on a higher “moral” plane than the “occult” demands of magic, and was also more dogmatic than the “practical” efficacy of science allowed. Religion was concerned with ethics, as the source and enforcer of moral order via collective tradition and solitary revelation. With assumptions similar to those of philosopher William James, Malinowski argued: “Everyone who has experienced religion deeply and sincerely knows that the strongest religious moments come in solitude” (1954: 38). He compared “savages” to “religious Christians” to provide evidence for his theory: “I have *seen and felt* savages shrink from an illicit action with the same horror and disgust with which the religious Christian will shrink from the committing of what he considers sin” (1954: 57, emphasis added). With his own visceral witness as barometer, Malinowski adduced the Christian concept of sin as proof for the universality of human horror for the illicit. But however willing he was to use Christianity as a template for analysis, he was less interested in studying the Christianity brought to the field by missionaries. For Malinowski and for many early anthropologists, Christianity encountered in the field was avoided, brushed aside, or even (understandably) reviled as a foreign, colonial force that irrevocably altered the indigenous cultures they sought to study (Cannell 2005, 2006).

With Christianity at once repudiated and used as a tool for recognizing religious “difference” in a variety of times and places, the question becomes, what have anthropologists meant by the terms “Christianity” and “Christian”? One recent attempt to address this is offered by Gil Anidjar’s engagement with the work of Talal Asad, in which he starts with the premise that “concepts are polemical.” Anidjar argues that anthropology “concerns itself with the comparative understanding of concepts as polemical interventions, as acts and operations, parts of an orientation, of a way of being” (2009: 370). Paraphrasing Arjun Appadurai (1992: 38), I would restate this: a concept is an argument in the guise of a category. Encapsulated in one small word can be a long history of argument and even violence – whether the word be Christian, Indian, or even anthropology. Anidjar, following Asad, argues that Christianity itself is a concept that cannot be considered natural or “factual” in any way – it is a concept that does a certain kind of analytical and argumentative work in both scholarly and popular conversations.

But just what kind of work does the concept of Christianity do, and on what grounds? Anidjar floats the provocative idea (or perhaps submerges it, as he places it in a footnote) that “anthropology is a ‘Christian science’ (after the manner of psychoanalysis as a ‘Jewish science’)” (2009: 391). But he does not explain how this

might be so – is it that anthropologists are Christians? This is untenable if only because many early anthropological thinkers of both theoretical and ethnographic note – including Ruth Landes – had significant Jewish roots. Perhaps it means that anthropological concepts are Christian? Again, what does it mean to call something “Christian”? In one way, I think Anidjar is quite right to call anthropology a Christian science, although for reasons that he does not articulate. Underlying the modern discipline of anthropology as the study of humankind are early Christian theological roots, in which anthropology was the study of “human nature as it relates to God” (Klassen 2011). This history has been largely forgotten by anthropologists of religion – and by anthropologists of Christianity – even though theological anthropology is still very much alive in theology schools and on library bookshelves. The continued legacy of Christian theological categories and modes of argument for the very concept of anthropology itself, as well as for such anthropologically deployed concepts as ritual, transcendence, and immanence, deserves further consideration. As Malinowski’s mention of the Christian who shrinks from sin suggests, even when anthropologists have tried to discern religion within the cultures they have studied, they have often turned to “religious Christians” as their reference point.

Neither Anidjar nor Asad are directly concerned with how the “idea of anthropology” was first born as a theological concept – a space in which to think about what it means to be human within a Christian theological conversation. Instead, like many anthropologists thinking about Christianity, Anidjar largely wrote about the idea of Christianity in relation to the more generalized concept of religion, and in relation to a very particular other religion, namely Islam. This makes sense when considering how in the twenty-first century rousing defenses of “Christian Europe” or “Christian America” have been launched to counter what some Christians – religious or not – see as a Muslim menace. When religion, as Anidjar and Asad argued, has come to be understood as “a polemical concept that constitutes and frames violence and the space of its circulation” – or, to put it in Christopher Hitchens’s even more polemical words, when “religion poisons everything” – understanding the political effects of that category as it is used by scholars, politicians, and critics at large is an urgent task (Anidjar 2009: 385; Hitchens 2007). And when the category of Christianity is used anew as a polemical concept in both anthropology and political life, this too is a time for careful, critical reflection (Robbins and Engelke 2010).

One critical approach to the question of how Christianity has recently come to function as a polemical concept for anthropologists can be found in Chris Hann’s contribution to the debate (2007). Hann contends that anthropology’s supposed “overdetermined history of neglect” of Christianity is rather hard to substantiate. He insists that to create the subfield anthropology of Christianity by arguing that Christianity has been ignored is to seriously misrepresent an important trajectory in the field, including a large body of research on Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity in eastern and southern Europe.

Hann’s criticisms go further. He contends that much research going by the name of “anthropology of Christianity” has not been sufficiently comparative or historical and is overly focused on Pentecostal and non-Western Christianities often tacitly framed as “exotic.” Instead of approaching these relatively new Christians by thinking comparatively and historically, Hann argues, the new anthropology of Christianity partakes of the very idealism that it seeks to correct. “In the final analysis,” he concludes, the

anthropology of Christianity “reinforces the position to which ostensibly it is opposed, namely deep-rooted Western assumptions of Christian exceptionalism” (2007: 407). In other words, making Christianity into its own anthropological subject risks letting the category of Christianity stand as a natural, rather than a polemical, concept.

Scholars at the forefront of this new anthropology of Christianity are considerably more polemically and theoretically aware than Hann credits. That said, at least one other area not mentioned by Hann, or other essayists of the anthropology of Christianity, can be understood as a longstanding exercise in the study of anthropology’s entanglement with Christianity that is both deeply comparative and historical. Ethnohistory, as practiced largely by scholars of the Americas and Africa, has long been an academic approach that takes the effects of Christianity seriously, in its focus on the encounter between largely Christian colonizers and indigenous peoples (Brown and Vibert 1996; Peel 1995; Elbourne 2002).

Ethnohistorians of North America work primarily with a combination of historical and anthropological methods and theories to narrate the complexity of Aboriginal–Settler encounters from multiple perspectives, including those of First Nations, Métis, missionaries, and colonial officials. As Jennifer Brown, a historian of First Nations peoples in Canada, phrased it, ethnohistory has focused on “rereadings of documents, mediation processes in texts and memories, and the complex cultural constructions that natives and newcomers in centuries of encounters have elaborated around each other and themselves” (1992: xiii). Many classic works of ethnohistory have paid significant attention to Christian missionaries as colonial ethnographers whose writings had profound effects on early modern theories of social, political and economic life (Trigger 1986; Marouby 2007). More recently, scholars have focused on particular Aboriginal groups or individuals and their interaction with, and sometimes adoption of, Christianity, not only as a polemic, but also as an element that “Christian Indians” integrated into a “powerful spiritual repertory” (Brown and Matthews 1993: 69; Hallowell 1992; Barker 1998; McNally 2000; Neylan 2002; Anderson 2007; Wenger 2009; Wheeler 2008).

The biggest challenge for ethnohistorians has been to find historical sources that convey the complexity of indigenous cultures – sources that can often be difficult to derive from conventional forms of historical evidence. Archives of personal and institutional writings, government documents, and memoirs were seldom written in Aboriginal languages or from the perspectives of indigenous peoples. Oral histories, interviews with elders, storytelling, analysis of archaeology and material culture, and ethnographic research became essential for any kind of scholarly research on indigenous peoples, even when scholars realized that asking elders for personal testimonies was often considered narcissistic “bad manners” among indigenous groups themselves (Cruikshank 2000). Ethnohistorians largely distinguished themselves from other anthropologists who research indigenous peoples by writing historically about particular cultures without resorting to the ahistorical, ethnographic present, a stylistic choice that had allowed many mid twentieth-century anthropologists to portray indigenous peoples as unchanging (Fabian 1983). At the same time, ethnohistorians also shared anthropologists’ interest in local cultures at the margins of grand historical and colonialist narratives.

As ethnohistorical writing shows, the idea of the “Indian” is as polemical as that of the “Christian” in the history of the Americas. The “Indian” constructs

a general type from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural groups living in the Americas before white explorers and settlers arrived. A category mistake stemming from Columbus's shaky grasp of geography when he thought he had reached India, "the Indian" has had profound effects on the discipline of the study of religion (J. Smith 2004). More devastatingly, colonial legislation such as Canada's "Indian Act" has meant that the "status" of being Indian has profound legal and economic consequences for Aboriginal peoples (Dickason 1992). For both theoretical and political reasons, ethnohistorians have been particularly concerned to complicate the category of the Indian, and some, in concert with many Aboriginal writers, have argued for abandoning the category altogether. I continue to use the phrase Christian Indian in this essay because both Du Vernet and Landes use it liberally as a collective marker, and it is found in other contemporaneous missionary and anthropological writings.

Though some have called for the "end of ethnohistory" as an inherently colonialist approach to the study of indigenous peoples, others, such as Catherine Desbarats, have argued for its critical continuation oriented by the insight that "historical knowledge is made and not found, that it is also limited and uncertain, and made through acts of configuration that have the power to surprise even their authors, and that are profoundly shaped by the time and place in which they emerge" (Desbarats 2006: 88). Polemical concepts abound in all kinds of writing and in all kinds of knowledge production. Our task as scholars is to show how such concepts are made of human interactions within historical and cultural parameters, while being wary, and humble, about our own fabrication of polemical concepts as we write. Even polemics, we could say, are not a "natural" form of human interaction.

In the rest of this chapter, I combine the insights of critical ethnohistory with the spirit of Anidjar's call to attend to Christianity as a polemical concept. I inquire into the changing uses of the polemical concept of the "Christian Indian," as missionaries and anthropologists applied it to Ojibwe of the Rainy River. I start with the 1898 missionary diary of Du Vernet and end with the 1968 *Ojibwa Religion*, a book published late in life by Ruth Landes, based on fieldwork conducted in 1932–1933 when she was a graduate student studying under Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas at Columbia University. Du Vernet and Landes visited many of the same places along the Rainy River, separated by a time span of about thirty years – years which were very significant for Ojibwe in their interaction with missionaries and the Canadian government (Waisberg and Holzkamm 1993; Vecsey 1983). By reading the texts of Du Vernet and Landes side by side with the help of ethnohistorians and my own conversations with Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung staff, I argue that the missionary and the anthropologist, in part because of their differently polemical concepts of the Christian Indian, were both insightful about and ignorant of what it was they were witnessing on the Rainy River.

THE MISSIONARY'S ACCOUNT

Travelling by steamboat, canoe, and foot on a tour of Anglican parishes and schools among the Ojibwe of Rainy River, Frederick Du Vernet was at once entranced by the landscape and the people, and dismayed by the "heathen" practices he

encountered. Anglicans and Roman Catholics were the predominant missionary groups in this region, but were still rather weak in 1898. The Ojibwe Grand Council had refused to allow the Methodists to establish missions in both 1849 and 1854, and in the reserves where Anglicans did manage to build churches and/or schools they were only mildly successful (Brown 1987). Reports of government Indian Agents from that time and Du Vernet's own account admit as much: in the 1898 Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, the Long Sault and Manitou Rapids Bands were said to total 124 people, with the "great majority [being] pagans" (Government of Canada 1899).

Long an important economic and ceremonial center for indigenous peoples, Rainy River was the site of many ancient burial mounds and a rich source of sturgeon. In 1873, the Ojibwe of this region made a treaty with Queen Victoria of Great Britain, via the Canadian government, "to cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada for Her Majesty the Queen and Her successors forever, all their rights, titles and privileges whatsoever, to the lands included within the following limits . . ." in return for reserve lands, farming equipment, hunting and fishing rights, and financial compensation.¹ The Canadian government consistently showed bad faith in meeting its terms of the treaty, especially by setting legislative and practical obstacles in the way of an already thriving Ojibwe agricultural and fishing economy. Throughout this half century of government and missionary presence, missionaries along the Rainy River, despite often being partly Ojibwe or Cree themselves, faced strong opposition from Ojibwe leaders to any Christian proselytizing (Brown 1987; Waisberg and Holzkamm 1993).

Du Vernet's guide along the Rainy River was Jeremiah Johnston, a part English, part Swampy Cree Anglican missionary based at Long Sault. Du Vernet was impressed with Rev. Johnston's commitment to his mission, and with his past service as one of several hundred First Nations "voyageurs" sent to the 1884 British campaign to rescue General Gordon from the siege of Khartoum during the Anglo-Sudan War (cf. Benn 2009). Jeremiah Johnston had "grown up a Xian," and sought out theological and missionary training at the Anglican St John's College in Winnipeg (Du Vernet 1898: 1). He was the ideal kind of Christian Indian for missionary work, in the eyes of the Anglican Church: educated, capable of conversing in Ojibwe, and with more experience traveling the British Empire than most Canadian missionaries. His wife, Mary, was part Scottish and also part Cree, and the source of many interesting stories for Du Vernet.²

In addition to recording stories of Mary Johnston's seafaring bravery when rescuing her children and fully grown men from stormy waters, Du Vernet also recorded several stories that Mary told him about Christian Indians from the northern Manitoba mission of Jack Head. One story related Mary's dismay when a young woman named Kitty continued to practice Ojibwe rituals such as the "medicine tent" even after her baptism. Facing serious illness, Kitty had been "persuaded by her husband to renounce Xy + go thro: the medicine tent. Mrs Johnston heard this and was very much disappointed as 'Kitty' seemed a good Xian girl." Du Vernet went on to record Mary's story about comforting Kitty during her dying hours with Christian hymns and prayer, only to be shocked on discovering the preparations Kitty's father had made for her burial:

When she got there she found that though the body was not cold she was painted and fastened up in a blanket in a sitting posture for heathen burial. Mrs J. turned to Kittie's father + said "What does this mean – Kittie was one of our Xian girls I cannot have her buried like a heathen." The old man said, "do as you like." So she went home + got some clothes and asked some Indians to make a coffin + they came + washed the Indian girl + laid her out. Watching by her the rest of the night with only the old Indian in the house for none of the rest would come near. The next day she had them gather together. They sang a hymn + had a prayer in the house + at the grave she asked a Xian Indian to offer up prayer. (Du Vernet 1898: 3)

The medicine tent that Mary Johnston condemned was a space in which men and women trained as ritual experts could placate the spirits, cure family members, or otherwise help those who came to them for aid. Declared to be heathen practice by Christian missionaries and censured by government Indian Agents, the medicine tent was also partly an Ojibwe response to such colonial attacks, and the primary mode of healing in a culture yet to be reshaped by biomedicine (Vecsey 1983; Lux 2001).

Mary Johnston's "interesting story" of Christian Indians who combined Ojibwe rituals with those of Christianity was the kind of detail that Du Vernet repeatedly recorded in his diary. Writing of the church service on what he declared to be his "first Sunday in a mission to the heathen!" Du Vernet elaborately described the Communion ritual and each of its participants, both "Christian" and "heathen," with "Indian" and "white" serving as modifiers. I quote this part of his diary at length, in part to demonstrate how important this process of categorization was for him, but also to show how he was not always sure why Indians became Christian, or what kept them faithfully so:

In front of the pew where these were sitting was an Indian lad about 12, a Xian[.] Back of Mr Wood, was an old Indian Thomas Bunyan, a Christian (one of) whose sons is buried in the Churchyard. the other was with him in Church though ill. Another still older Indian who came in late calls himself Mr. Johnston, grandfather. he is interested but is still a heathen. His wife being strongly opposed to Xy.

On the same side was a little Indian girl who has been baptized. a brother of the boy. the mother is still a heathen + how they came to be baptized seems a mystery [sic]. The parents were losing their children one by one + so they decided to have the last three baptized by H. Cochrane.

On the other side is Mrs Crow and her two daughters all Xians. John Crow is away on a steam boat he is a pilot + gets \$75 a month. Mrs Crow is consumptive. For some time the heathen friends persuaded her to go to the medicine tent occasionally. One day Mr. J. had a long talk with her (pointing out inconsistency) + she solemnly promised never to go again. Which promise she has faithfully kept. There are on this side also two young Indian men. One is paying attention to Annie Crow. and lastly there on the same side is Joseph McLeod. He has come 40 miles by steamer from Hungry Hall to attend this service. He is the Xian Indian who pleaded so pathetically with Arch: Phair for a teacher at H.H. his trip here has cost him \$2.00 (I paid \$1.00 on hearing this). (Du Vernet 1898: 10–11)

Many of the Christian Indians he met were, in Du Vernet's description, poised on a tentative line between heathen and Christian. No matter what side of the line an

Ojibwe was on, Du Vernet and Johnston were always hopeful when one showed up in church, and used the occasion to emphasize that being a Christian Indian and celebrating Communion was sensible in both colonial and Christian terms: "I administered the bread + Mr. J. the wine. (treaty covenant) There were 8 Cmts. [communicants] besides the 2 Clergymen. 4 white people four Indians. Mrs Crow. her 2 daughters + Mr McLeod. A solemn feast. very quiet." (Du Vernet 1898: 11). With his parenthetical comment of "(treaty covenant)," Du Vernet accomplished his own form of comparative analysis, suggesting that the bread and the wine of Communion were akin to the treaties signed between the Queen and the Ojibwe; loyalty to Christ was also loyalty to the Queen. Perhaps he meant that the white Christians and the Indians Christians enacted a liturgical echo of the treaty in consuming the bread and the wine. How far he would have taken this analogy is hard to say – did the Ojibwe take in the body and blood of the Queen in signing their treaties; did the Queen and her representatives consume the Ojibwe?

Either way, the quiet solemnity of the Communion feast was not to last the day. Thomas Bunyan, the "old Christian," came back for Du Vernet's evening service that same Sunday, one of only a handful of people who showed up due to competition from a dance:

At the evening service there were not so many we heard afterwards that there was a great dance going on + that 8 horses had been gambled away I heard the tom-tom at 12 that night + at 2 + alas 3 o'clock as I could not sleep because of the heat + the mosquitoes. There were about 14 present [at church] 8 being Indians. Thos Bunyan a baptized Xian. let his house for "the big tent" (ie for the dance + gambling) Thomas is trying to face both ways I am afraid (he is a brother of the old Chief). (Du Vernet 1898: 13)

Thomas Bunyan's attempt to face both ways – being baptized and attending church while opening his house up for Ojibwe rituals of dancing and gaming – was a posture that Du Vernet alternately condemned and tried to understand.

Traveling along the Rainy River with Jeremiah Johnston, Du Vernet described many encounters with people – often older women and men – who faced only one way, and who expressed strong opposition to Christianity through silence, by slamming doors, and by offering clever retorts to the missionaries' attempts at conversation. Long quotes recorded in his diary gave these foes of Christianity the space in which to voice their opposition, often without his defending Christianity in return; witness this account of an elder's response to his presence: "While at breakfast an older Indian Woman (who had opposed the mission pulling up the stakes when the land was marked off) opened the door + seeing us at breakfast slammed it again" (Du Vernet 1898: 13). While Du Vernet considered the converse of the Christian Indian to be a "heathen," he repeatedly noted his respect for aspects of Ojibwe ritual and tradition. He clearly valued the Ojibwe language, and Jeremiah Johnston's facility with it, and was acutely aware of when he was imposing where he was not wanted. He also described his relationships with many Christian Indians for whom he had great respect, including Jeremiah Johnston and another Anglican missionary, Peter Spence.

From one perspective, Du Vernet also faced both ways, as someone both attracted to and repelled by Ojibwe practices of the medicine tent and grave houses. His

description of one encounter while walking through Long Sault with Jeremiah Johnston reads in part as a missionary condemnation of the heathen and in part as detailed ethnographic field notes, similar to his minute recounting of church services:

Hearing a sound of incantation we went into a house. It was being used as a medicine tent. a man + his wife who had lost their son two weeks ago were propitiating the evil spirit that the rest of their family might be left alone. These two were sitting in one corner on the matting which went round the house on cedar twigs near the end in the middle was an altar like pile of clothing bead work and surrounded by two tin dishes these were a sacrifice to pacify the deity. The sacrifice being afterwards divided among the medicine men. The medicine men (3 of them sat in a row) one was swaying forward repeating a meaningless refrain. incantation. the other two, Chief Cut-leg and another with a pipe in his mouth, would interject "A-yah". In front of the man (inflection ah—Ya—ah—Ya) repeating the word of incantation was a tin rattle partly filled with shot [and] a pan of broth. In the middle of the floor near the door were two kettles of broth. made out of a dog which had been killed. called "the Dog feast" beside this was the tom-tom a wooden cask with a tight leather head. Chief Cut-leg got his crutches and hobbled out muttering something which Mr. J. took to mean that our presence was not desired there but we stayed on for a little while. It was most interesting but very sad. this propitiation offered in ignorance to a higher power. Even tho: it was all such a fraud, the medicine men getting the spoils I stood with uncovered head with a feeling of reverence as it was a degraded + ignorant cognition of a Superior Being in whose hands lay their destiny. (Du Vernet 1898: 16)

Most interesting but very sad – a feeling of reverence in the face of a fraud – Du Vernet read the Ojibwe practices in light of his own commitments to a Christian "Superior Being."

Though I have no evidence that Du Vernet read anthropological works on the Ojibwe, later anthropological debates demonstrate that anthropologists also worried about Christian notions of a "supreme being" when considering Ojibwe and Algonquian ritual practice. For example, anthropologist Irving Hallowell's review of Father John Cooper's *The Northern Algonquian Supreme Being* of 1934 demonstrated Hallowell's hope that vigilance in data collection was the answer to any Christian distortions to Ojibwe culture:

in view of the fact that the natives of this district [James Bay] are at present adherents of Christianity, the intrinsic difficulties confronting the investigator must not be overlooked. Dr. Cooper's results indicate the degree to which he has surmounted these. Observing every caution in the collection of data and weighing with judicious care the reliability of his informants . . . (Hallowell 1935: 674)

Hallowell went on to argue that Cooper's description of "manitu" as "supernatural personal being" disproved anthropological arguments that manitu referred to a vaguer, less deified, "supernatural force." Manitu was instead endowed with "supernatural (conjuring) power, or 'mind power' as distinct from physical strength" according to Cooper and Hallowell (Hallowell 1935: 674; cf. Cooper 1933). Both missionaries and anthropologists interpreted Ojibwe "supreme beings" with their own particular "anxieties of influence" (Bloom 1997) about how the Christian

monotheistic, personal God should or should not form the template for their concept of the “supernatural.”

Whether Du Vernet even knew of *manitu*, the rituals he observed on the Rainy River moved him emotionally. His diary records not a simple castigation of Ojibwe practices, but encounters that made him rethink and “re-feel” his own Christianity, if only in a most limited way. Along with his interest in the medicine tent, he was fascinated by Ojibwe graves, giving a detailed account of one and arguing that “as the Indians take great care of their graves it is right that the Christians shd do the same” (Du Vernet 1898: 8). Most comfortable when he was with Jeremiah Johnston’s family and in the Long Sault church, Du Vernet’s variously fascinated and uncomfortable encounters with Rainy River Ojibwe began a longer process in which he came to rethink his own notions of the spiritual and its currents, with strong influence from First Nations traditions. By the time he became the Archbishop of Caledonia in British Columbia, living for twenty years among the Northwest Coast Indians intermittently visited by anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Edward Sapir, Du Vernet came to his own understanding of “mind power” and argued against the state and church colonial project of residential schools.³

Du Vernet’s “diary of a missionary tour” is a particularly rich resource precisely because of its differences from both published missionary writing and published ethnographic accounts. It does not operate solely within the more conventionally triumphalistic genre of missionary articles found in the many journals and newsletters published for supporters in the urban churches of Canada or missionary societies of Great Britain (Stevens 2004). Emphatic declarations of heathen practices are there, but so too is a more personal hesitation in which Du Vernet pauses to reconsider his Christian confidence when observing the ritual and material culture of the Ojibwe and documenting their strong resistance to Christianity and to Canadian government claims of legitimacy. In his hesitation, he left space for reconsidering, and evidence for demonstrating, Christianity as a polemical concept along the Rainy River.⁴

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST’S VIEW

The Ojibwe territory that Du Vernet encountered in the summer of 1898 was a place of great contestation among provincial and federal governments, white Canadian settlers and US tourists, missionaries both native and white, and the Ojibwe themselves. That year, the effects of an important legal case meant the government took away Ojibwe fishing rights in the area; this led to destruction of the sturgeon population by overfishing from nonnatives and the building of dams (Holzkamm et al. 1988). Even more disastrously, the Canadian government’s lack of support for Ojibwe agriculture, as promised in Treaty 3, along with a government decree that Ojibwe farmers could not sell their produce to whites, meant the destruction of Ojibwe farms. The federal government, under pressure from the provincial government, then commandeered the fertile land of Ojibwe reserves, in order to give this land to white settlers who, they argued, would make it agriculturally “productive” (Waisberg and Holzkamm 1993). The Rainy River reserves that Du Vernet and Jeremiah Johnston had visited in 1898 no longer existed by 1914, when the Canadian government forcibly moved all the residents into one reserve at Manitou Rapids,

handing the former reserve land over to white Canadians for “cultivation,” whether or not they were Christian.

By the time Ruth Landes came to Manitou Rapids in 1932, the compounded effects of the theft of Ojibwe land and devastation of their agriculture, rice cultivation, and sturgeon fishing were keenly felt. But aside from a few vague references, Landes tells her reader nothing of the massive upheaval experienced by these Ojibwe, and largely presents Christianity as a persistent but relatively new nuisance. In a Boasian tradition of finding one or two key informants, and recording their stories in textual form, she found a most prolific source in Maggie Wilson, an English-speaking Ojibwe woman living in Manitou Rapids whom Landes presented as a relatively new convert to Christianity (Darnell 1998).

Maggie Wilson was a good storyteller, as anthropologist Sally Cole’s recent edited collection of Wilson’s letters to Landes in 1933–1934 shows (Wilson 2009). When in Manitou Rapids, Landes paid Mrs Wilson to tell her stories directly; back in New York City, she paid Mrs Wilson for stories relayed by letter, as transcribed into English by her daughter Janet. From these letters, and from her two summers of fieldwork with Mrs Wilson and in an Ojibwe community in Minnesota, Landes wrote her three Ojibwe ethnographies; I focus most specifically on how Landes depicts Christianity in *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin*, published in 1968.

Unlike her earlier two Ojibwe books, written in the ethnographic present, Landes wrote *Ojibwa Religion* in the past tense. Always careful to note that her data were specific to the Ojibwe of Rainy River region in the 1930s, Landes recycled some material from these earlier books, but did not try to obscure the fact that her fieldwork was more than thirty years old. Her portrait of Ojibwe religion differed little from her earlier depictions of the Ojibwe as individualistic people living a life of “hazardous subsistence,” dominated by the personal search for guardian spirits and the fear of evil shamans:

Hunters and food-gatherers, ever threatened by starvation and disease, they were profoundly religious. They saw all life as a personalized Mystery, voicing this in their tremendous esteem for visionary shamans who succeeded at life’s risky activities. They pursued magical formulas, philosophies, and techniques which we outsiders can separate from religion only by our civilization’s alien opinions about magic’s impersonality. Adept shamans were believed to manipulate the manito Supernaturals as we do electricity. (Landes 1968: 3)

Pointing out how distinctions of “religion” and “magic” were themselves culturally specific, or we could say polemical, Landes acknowledged the cultural situatedness of theories of “religion,” at the same time as she used this particularity to make her comparisons. In Landes’s account, the Ojibwe’s “profoundly religious” nature came directly from their status as “hunter-gatherers,” an interpretive conclusion then verified by the specificity of an example in which a shaman pulled on the power of the manito Supernaturals as “we” would flick a switch. Echoing earlier ethnographic debates about the presence or absence of Supreme Being, Landes’s description of the Ojibwe sense of life as a “personalized Mystery” worked via an underlying polemic against Christian influence, in which she at once acknowledged and obscured the role of “Christian civilization.” By her account, the Ojibwe visionary tradition was

alive and well despite the “heavy pressure of Christian society and civilization” (Landes 1968: 8).

Maggie Wilson was one example of this visionary survival. Landes described Mrs Wilson, a woman in her mid-fifties in 1932, as “a Christian convert (or perhaps re-convert, since her father had been one)” (1968: 16). Beginning in 1914, Mrs Wilson received a series of dream visions that taught her a set of dances to support the Canadian war effort in Europe where her son-in-law was an active soldier. The visions instructed her to teach the dances to her Ojibwe community, as well as to non-Ojibwe neighbors. After considerable success in leading these dances in Fort Frances during the teens and 1920s, Mrs Wilson recalled that she became the focus of jealousy and “converted” to Christianity in the late 1920s (cf. Brown and Matthews 1993). We do not learn from Ruth Landes what kind of Christian Mrs Wilson became, but she does tell us that for Mrs Wilson, facing both ways was not a real conflict: “Mrs. Wilson’s Christianity raised no doubts in her mind about the mystic beliefs and practices she shared with Will [another Ojibwe visionary], for it consisted largely in profiting from the missionaries, as she explained in casual, artless remarks” (Landes 1968: 16–17). For Landes, Christianity functioned largely as an empty category that could be kept apart from real Ojibwe religion: “Christianity and native religion were not challenged in one another’s terms” (1968: 95).

Elsewhere however, both Landes and Mrs Wilson suggested that the interaction between Christianity and Ojibwe religion prompted conflict both within Mrs Wilson, and within her community. Telling the story of her dream vision, Mrs Wilson recalled, “I would have known more songs if I had kept on dreaming but the [Anglican] missionary scared me saying the devil was after me” (Landes 1968: 211). Landes herself revealed that for Mrs Wilson, being a Christian Indian willing to talk to an anthropologist had both social benefits and social costs. In a section on “sorcery” among the Ojibwe, Landes wrote:

One summer at Manitou, midé shamans terrorized Mrs. Wilson with threats when they suspected that she, a Christian, was telling me about the [Midéwiwin] Society and getting paid – for *they* wanted the fees. She felt no guilt however, but hoped they would not “give me a twisted mouth or make me crazy so I would not know when I moved my bowels or made water.” (Landes 1968: 57–58, see also 74)

For Landes, the conflict between Christianity and Ojibwe religion took place largely in a register of material gain or economic pressure. Economic and land issues had indeed long been an important register of Christian–Ojibwe contact, as ethnohistorians have shown. Du Vernet’s diary revealed as much when he noted the Ojibwe woman elder so opposed to the Anglican Church taking reserve land that she pulled up the stakes marking the “new” church property every time the missionary tried to plant them. But there were other registers along which Christianity traveled, even within Maggie Wilson’s family.

A dedicated genealogist, Landes described taking family histories of many Ojibwe at the Manitou Rapids reserve, through which she determined that kinship norms were very different from actual marriage and divorce practices in the community. Her genealogies did not bring her to reflect, however, on the fact that Maggie Wilson came from a long line of Rainy River Christians. Not only was Maggie Wilson the daughter of a Christian father, she was also the granddaughter of Anglican missionary

and Church School teacher Peter Spence, a Cree from the Lake Winnipeg area. Du Vernet visited Spence on his missionary tour, and found him of such interest that he wrote about him in a separate part of his diary, which is no longer extant. Maggie Wilson was also the stepdaughter of Thomas Bunyan, who was likely the “old Christian Indian” whom Du Vernet described as “facing both ways.” Maggie Wilson may well have encountered Du Vernet on his visit in 1898, when she would have been 19 years old and living on the Hungry Hall reserve. Maggie’s husband, John Wilson, and her daughter, Janet, were also “Christian.” While we gain some insight into what it meant to be a Christian Ojibwe from Du Vernet, Landes’s account offers us very little direct understanding of this conjunction, as she considered Christianity a foreign influence that got in the way of her analysis of Ojibwe religion.

Interestingly, however, Landes did find Christianity analytically helpful as a tool of comparison when thinking about Ojibwe ritual. For example, in describing the obligation of a bear visionary “to eat the flesh [of the bear] during ritual feasts or forfeit the manito’s patronage,” Landes mused: “the logic exactly paralleled that of the Christian rite of consuming wafer and wine” (1968: 28). She described Maggie Wilson as “a bear visionary (though also a Christian)” who strove to avoid this ritual obligation, though she did not explain Wilson’s objection to eating the bear meat with its parallel eucharistic logic (1968: 28). Elsewhere, Landes compared the Ojibwe stories of conflict between Sky Supernaturals and Water Monsters to the “conflict between God and Satan in Christianity,” and paralleled aspects of the Midéwiwin rituals to “Catholic Carnival” (1968: 31, 163). In contrast to such casual readings of Ojibwe religion through Christian templates, Landes more consistently argued that Christianity and Ojibwe religion were entirely distinct, when, for example, citing Ojibwe views of a bridge to the afterlife: “Some say that sinners fall into the water, to wallow miserably forever. (This seems to be a Christian intrusion since the Ojibwa usually exclude ethical judgments from the ghost world)” (Landes 1968: 197). Though willing to use Christianity as a template through which she and her readers could recognize “Ojibwe religion,” Landes was strongly averse to recognizing Christianity as *part* of the Ojibwe religion she was encountering in 1930s Manitou Rapids.

Maggie Wilson never quite became Christian in Landes’s view. As Landes’s treasured, authoritative source for wide generalizations about Ojibwe society, Ojibwe “woman,” and Ojibwe religion, Maggie Wilson had to be more Indian than Christian. In the past decades, however, as the concept of the Christian Indian has become even more polemical (and complicated) in ethnohistory, the anthropologist has herself become a primary source for ethnohistory, and for the history of the anthropology of religion. Ruth Landes’s writings have provoked two very different rereadings. Sally Cole published a biography of Landes in 2003, organizing her reinterpretation of Landes’s Ojibwe research around the polemical concept of “woman.” Cole argued that Landes’s fieldwork with Maggie Wilson was an early version of feminist, reflexive anthropology, praising Landes’s relationship with Maggie Wilson as a connection through storytelling of two women on the margins of their communities (Cole 2003, 1995). However, filtering their relationship primarily through their common identities as women misses the ways that Ruth Landes’s lack of interest in Maggie Wilson’s Christianity and the long history of Christianity in her family shapes Landes’s portrait of both Wilson and Ojibwe religion. Maggie Wilson and her daughter knew that

Landes wanted the “pure” yet intimate – even juicy – Ojibwe stories, and that is largely what they gave her (Wilson 2009).

Another rereading of Landes’s work is less admiring. In 1997, three scholars, Joan Lovisek, Tim Holzkamm, and Leo Waisberg, took Landes’s Ojibwe research to task for what they called its “fatal errors, including mistakes of fact, omissions, and use of questionable ethnographic methods” (Lovisek et al. 1997). The authors argued that Landes’s portrayal of Ojibwe as “atomistic individuals” who were hunter-gatherers with little political organization was not just false, but also damaging to later Ojibwe political struggles for sovereignty. By ignoring Ojibwe traditions of communal organization, agriculture and crop cultivation, and paying scant attention to the 1914 forced amalgamation of the multiple Rainy River reserves into one band at Manitou Rapids, Landes had presented an ahistorical and ultimately false portrait of Ojibwe culture. More specifically, the authors contended that by focusing so profoundly on the stories of one woman, Maggie Wilson, who was of Christian and Cree background, Landes’s claims to representing Ojibwe culture were suspect: “Landes chose to ignore the possible implications of Wilson’s self-identification as Cree. In doing so, she portrayed Wilson as representative of the Manitou Rapids Ojibwa, a society into which her father’s family had emigrated as Anglican catechists” (Lovisek et al. 1997: 137). Ruth Landes’s Ojibwe research may fit within both a feminist framework of women teaching women, and a postcolonial framework that documents anthropological exploitation and misrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples. Within the framework of the anthropology of Christianity, it is a fascinating example of how Christianity could function both as a focus of anthropological repudiation and as a source of anthropological imagination.

FACING BOTH WAYS

In Frederick Du Vernet’s day, a missionary could use the adjective “Christian” to do at least two things at once: distinguish Christians from heathens and conjure a union of very diverse peoples as Christian. Du Vernet used the polemical concept of “the Christian” both to create difference and inculcate unity, but in so doing he also portrayed non-Christian Ojibwe as rational, strong-willed people who opposed Christian “intrusions.” Portraying Christian Ojibwe as people who felt responsible both to Christianity and to Ojibwe traditions, he documented their various approaches to the struggle of what he called “facing both ways.” Ruth Landes’s anthropological interests led her to consider Christianity as a polemical concept in a very different way, as she sought to bracket Maggie Wilson’s Christianity as at best a veneer, and at worst a contamination of authentic Ojibwe practice. At the same time, she used Christianity as a comparative template through which readers could recognize that the Ojibwe had “religion.”

Christianity is still a presence along the Rainy River today, though a new kind of mission has taken the Anglicans’ place. In the late 1960s, Mennonites from southern Ontario established a church on the highway running through Manitou Rapids, and it remains there to this day. Ojibwe grave houses are still found throughout the Rainy River First Nation, and gravestones in the Mennonite cemetery now have English and Ojibwe names etched side by side, along with Ojibwe clan symbols such as eagle

feathers and bears. Just as Anglican missionaries ceded place to Mennonites, cultural anthropologists such as Landes ceded to another denomination within their group when archaeologists arrived in the Rainy River First Nation in the 1960s. Fending off “pot-hunters” and settlers who had wantonly destroyed ancient burial mounds in search of Ojibwe treasures, the archaeologists began excavating remaining mounds “scientifically,” guided by Ojibwe assistants (Kenyon 1986; cf. Chamberlin 2007). The excavation of ancient pots and skeletons provided grounds for the federal government to declare the former Long Sault Reserve protected land, which Ojibwe people actually living on that land had not provoked. A battle long-fought by the Rainy River Ojibwe to regain Treaty 3 lands taken by government and church (waged even by the old woman who pulled up the stakes in 1898), was at last settled in 2005.⁵

The Rainy River Ojibwe have a long history of facing both ways in the struggle to retain their land and their community, perched as they are on the border of two nations that sought to remove them from their home. The Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Centre may be seen as the most recent version of facing both ways. Visitors to Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung can see large-scale photos of the Long Sault and Manitou Rapids taken by anthropologist Frances Densmore almost one hundred years ago, and remark on how little the landscape has changed. They can enjoy a tour of the ancient burial mounds that passes by the old, grassed-over Anglican cemetery, marked by a new fence built by Ojibwe elders. The hundred-year-old Anglican graves, of course, were not the material artifacts that attracted the official “heritage” designation. Instead, the archaeologists’ interpretive approach to the ancient burial mounds helped make Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung a place for Rainy River Ojibwe to curate their own history. Ojibwe living along Rainy River let the missionary Jeremiah Johnston live among them as an act of hospitality – a hospitality also extended to more recent Mennonite missionaries; they extended this hospitality to anthropologists, and to me, when I visited to bring them a copy of Du Vernet’s diary. Perhaps facing both ways is a way to think of the hospitality on which all anthropology depends, namely, the cordiality of the “native” who greets the stranger while remaining rooted in her community. Neither duplicity nor disloyalty, facing both ways is worth considering as stance of engagement and interpretation that steps beyond a solely polemical framework into one that acknowledges the responsibilities that the past entails and the possibilities that the future presents.

NOTES

For their insightful comments, I am grateful to Michael Lambek, Janice Boddy, Donna Young, John Marshall, and the other participants in the University of Toronto *Companion* workshop, as well as to Joel Robbins and the Christianities group at the University of California at San Diego. I would also like to thank Art Hunter and his colleagues at the Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Centre for their hospitality and insights, and the Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada for granting me access to the diary. Finally, I thank Barbara Burkholder for accompanying me to Rainy River, and Prof. Dr. Roland Hardenberg and the Institut für Ethnologie at the University of Tübingen, as well as the Humboldt Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for their support of this research.

- 1 The treaty, along with current Ojibwe discussion of its implications, can be found at the official website of the Grand Council of Treaty # 3, <http://www.gct3.net/grand-chiefs-office/gct3-info-and-history/government-of-canada-document/> (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 2 I discuss Jeremiah Johnston and his family in more detail in Klassen 2012.
- 3 Du Vernet is the subject of my current book project, "Confessing Nations: Mediums and Missionaries on Indian Land" and I discuss his notion of "radio mind" in more detail in Klassen 2011.
- 4 Other missionaries, especially Aboriginal and Metis missionaries, demonstrated the contested nature of "Christian" identity in colonial North America, sometimes with outright critiques of "the unprincipled white man [as an] agent of Satan" (Jones 1861: 29).
- 5 See Rainy River First Nations Settlement Agreement Remission Order, at <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SI-2007-31/page-1.html> (accessed Apr. 2013).

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CHAPTER 20

Reconfiguring Humanity in Amazonia: Christianity and Change

Aparecida Vilaça

Scholars have frequently credited Christianity with an important, if varying, role in the ontological configuration of “modernity.” According to authors whose ideas are of interest here, and simplifying matters considerably, two movements are deemed essential in the transition to modern life: a separation of the domains of nature and culture, implying a narrowed definition of humanity, and the genesis of individualism.

For Latour, a totally natural nature only emerges among moderns, who work to purify nature from culture (2000: 98). The true success of this separation, Latour argues, stems from the emergence of a God who, becoming transcendent at the same time as coming to exist in intimate space, turns into a “remote referee” who guarantees the efficacy of purification, maintaining “as much distance as possible between two symmetrical entities, Nature and Society” (2000: 38–39, 127) (see Keane 2007 for a critical view of the Christian purification).

Descola, in a book dedicated to the categorization and analysis of ontologies, identifies Christianity, and more specifically the Christian Creation, as the key event in the constitution of the Moderns, who are taken as paradigmatic examples of the naturalist mode of identification “founded on an apartheid regime” between humans and nonhumans (2005: 540). Descola argues:

In order for the nature of the Moderns to acquire existence, a second operation of purification would be necessary [the first concerns the Greek concept of *phusis* and its developments by Hippocrates and Aristotle, 2005: 99–100], it would be necessary for men to become exterior and superior to nature. It is Christianity to which we owe this second perturbation with its double idea of a transcendence of man and a universe created out of nothing by divine will. From this supernatural origin, man assumes the right and the mission to administer the Earth, God having made him on the last day of genesis in order for him to exert his control over Creation. (2005: 103)

In his 1938 essay on the notion of the person, Mauss (1999) analyzes the transition over the course of the West's history from the notion of a person as multiple (the persona) to individual, associating the final moments of this transition with Christianity. Mauss's essay was later reworked by Dumont in his analysis of the genesis of the individual as a cardinal value in modern societies (1983: 30). A notion of the individual prior to Christianity is, he argues, present in ancient Greece, especially among the Stoics (1983: 36–39, 48; see also Tillich 1968: ch. 1), although in the latter case it contained the otherworldly characteristics that also typified the ideas of the first Christians. It was with the institution of the church and its political stabilization, and especially after the Reformation, that the mundane antagonistic element that characterizes Christianity in the form of an opposition between one's relation with God (individual) and relation with the world (holistic, collective) disappeared (Dumont 1983: 70–71, 73). The final blow was landed by Calvin, who established the importance of the worldly action of the individual devoted to God, insofar as this action is the only evidence of his or her choice and salvation. The individual is thereby inserted completely in the world and individualism becomes the dominant, unrestricted value (Dumont 1983: 73).

My objective in this essay is to analyze the correlation between these two movements, that is, between the process of separating nature from culture and the birth of the notion of the individual, based on ethnographic questions related to the Christian experience of the Wari', a group of around 3,000 people living in the Amazonian southwest.

This is not in any sense a novel correlation. Indeed it was pointed out in these same terms by Dumont, who argued that the historical process whereby the Christian individual became stabilized in the world was coincident with that which separated humans from nonhumans: the identity established between human and divine will in Calvinism consolidated the separation between man and nature already present in the thought of Saint Augustine, and man became master and owner of nature (Dumont 1983: 56, 60, 76).

It is interesting to note that while these and other authors (for a broader discussion see, for example, Hefner 1993; Kee 1993; Wood 1993) argue that the transformations introduced with Christianity properly speaking were determining factors in the production of ontological changes in the societies with which "Christian culture" (Robbins 2004) came into contact,¹ for many ethnographers of contemporary native peoples its effects have been much less pronounced (see, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; also see Barker 1992 and Robbins 2004, 2007 for critiques of this perspective). This panorama has been changing in recent decades, especially following the influential ethnography of Joel Robbins (2004) on Urapmin Christianity (Papua New Guinea), which played a decisive role in the inauguration of a new field of the

anthropology of religion, the Anthropology of Christianity. However, anthropologists clearly still find it difficult to name and conceptualize the transformations experienced by those native societies exposed to the Christian message for a relatively short time but who, nonetheless, embrace it enthusiastically, changing not only their rituals but also their quotidian practices (see Jackson 1984: 50).

As I have observed elsewhere (Vilaça 2009b), according to Viveiros de Castro (2002:191–196) and Robbins (2007: 7) the reasons for this resistance are diverse. First, since anthropology as a science has been constructed in opposition to religion (that is, the monotheistic religions) and Christianity is the hegemonic religion in the societies of origin of most anthropologists, the latter, with their cultivated interest in the exotic, tend to ignore or reject its influence on native systems of thought and practices (see Cannell 2006; Van der Geest 1990; Harding 2001). Moreover, as the above-mentioned authors remind us, the conceptual tools of our discipline are based on the idea of continuity, or the “resistance” of cultural systems or ontologies (Descola 2005: 497, 524), such that the notion of rupture intrinsic to Christianity (taking the conversion of Paul the Apostle as its “mythic” reference model) and made clearly explicit by many native converts (Robbins 2004, 2007; Meyer 1999) is challenging to conceptualize analytically.

This question becomes further complicated when we focus on diverse native Amazonian groups who reproduce themselves through radical changes that involve transforming into the Other, appropriating the latter’s “culture.” Here opposed concepts like tradition/change and continuity/rupture are intrinsically related, which has led ethnologists of the region, including myself (Vilaça 1997, 2009a, 2009b, 2011), to question the radicalness of the changes provoked by Christianization by placing them in continuity with a series of transformations occurring in mythic and historical times as narrated and experienced by native peoples (Bonilla 2009; Capiberibe 2007; Grotti 2009; Gow 2001, 2006, 2009).²

With the passing of time, however, the collective experience of Christianity may undergo changes (Maxwell 2007: 26), as seems to be the case among the Wari’. Exploring these changes from the viewpoint of cultural continuity (which, as I said, would be indissociable from the idea of transformation) is obviously possible (see Robbins 2009: 232–233), but we run the risk of obscuring new phenomena and thus losing the opportunity to develop another kind of reflection, one that forces us to conceptualize change. In the case of the Wari’, one of the important novelties relates to a particular development of the native notion of “heart” which, as the locus of the thought and affect that should be expressed clearly in the body, begins, over the years, to designate an interior and secret self, visible to God and invisible to humans.

MELANESIA AND AMAZONIA

The current anthropological discussion on Christianity leads us directly to Melanesia, which over the last decade has been the main ethnographic reference point for this debate. Over the same period, for reasons that primarily concern affinities between analytic concepts, Melanesian ethnology has been establishing an ever closer dialogue with the Amazonian literature (Gregor and Tuzin 2001; Viveiros de Castro 2001;

Strathern 1999; Kelly 2005, 2011a, 2011b; Vilaça 2002a, 2005, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Vilaça and Wright 2009).

Recognizing the central role played by Melanesian ethnography in developing concepts of Christianization, I turn to the missionary and ethnologist Maurice Leenhardt in order to formulate the problem I will analyze here. Inspired by the essay by Mauss – to whom he was closely linked – on the historical evolution of the notion of the person, Leenhardt in 1947, in Chapter 11 of *Do Kamo* entitled “Structures of the person in the Melanesian world,” embarked on an in-depth analysis of the person among the Canaque of New Caledonia and how this concept began to transform following contact with Europeans and in particular the Christian message. According to Leenhardt, until the advent of contact the Canaque saw themselves as distributed among their relations, including relations of “mythic participation”³ involving the mixture between persons and their totems. Leenhardt argued that the Canaque saw their own bodies as being dispersed in various directions or relations without the possibility of synthesis or unification (1971: 249–250). As his informant Boesou explained, the arrival of the missionary and the Christian message gave them “a body” (1971: 263), which Leenhardt associates with the idea of a properly human body, disconnected from mythic participation. In his words, the person “detaches itself finally from the socio-mythic domain where it had been trapped . . . The psychological self that had been seen wandering everywhere, far from the body, is finally fixed” (1971: 264). However, Leenhardt has a complex vision of this “detachment” from the mythic world of participation. In warning of the “unwelcome” processes of individuation brought by schooling, employment, and other practices linked to the contact with the West, he suggests that when personhood loses its “social meaning,” a rupture occurs, “freeing [one] of mythic thought” (1971: 267, 266, 272), providing the possibility of “differentiating the diverse participations and retaining only those that interest the person” (1971: 269). This seems to propose a selection of participative relations inspired by the Christian message (the “new religion”) – from among those conceived (by Leenhardt) as real, that is, properly human – that must be maintained, and others, with their totems, that “no longer inspire trust” (1971: 269, 268). According to Clifford in his biography of Leenhardt, the latter saw the Canaque undergoing the transition “from a diffuse, participatory consciousness toward self-consciousness. . . . [C]onversion was the emergence of an internalized moral conscience based on an intimate communion with Christ” (1992: 78).

My interest in Leenhardt’s analysis of the Canaque’s Christian transformation does not reside with the “rationalization” of the native thought suggested in his text. In contrast to various authors who focus on this point (Horton 1975; Weber 1956; Bellah 1964; Geertz 1973), Leenhardt’s concern, according to Mauss, and making use of an enormous wealth of ethnographic and linguistic detail, is focused on the passage from plurality (“personas,” Leenhardt 1971: 262) to that unity understood as the “psychological self.” He attributes this transition to a change in the conception of the body attendant upon the rupture of the mutual constitution between the Canaque and the beings of their mythic universe. This reflects a clear shrinkage of the notion of humanity, yet one that preserves a form of participation, namely the participation among persons. The emergence of the “psychological self” is thus a consequence of this ontological reduction.

We need to note, however, a problem in Leenhardt's argument, pointed out by Strathern (1988: 268–271). For Leenhardt, as for Mauss before him and Dumont after him, the individual that emerges from these transformations already potentially existed. Here we can recall that for Mauss this new concept of the self formed over historical time from a germinal existence identified among many different peoples, including the Zuni, but overall the Hindus, Chinese, and Romans (Mauss 1999: 337, 348–354). Mauss's idea was appropriated and amplified by Dumont in a more detailed historical study, which showed the genesis of the individual to be associated with questions of value and hierarchy: a preexistent notion of the individual, objectified in the figure of the religious ascetic, became stabilized in the world (1983: 76), especially with the advent of Calvinism. Leenhardt claimed that the place of the "self" among the Canaque was "empty," "no member of the group showed themselves capable of subscribing to this, of naming themselves, of saying, 'I am,' 'I act'" (1947: 250). However, Strathern (1988: 268–271), analyzing the diagram of the Canaque person furnished by Leenhardt (1947: 249), detects a mistake: some of his "more subtle discursive observations" (Strathern 1988: 378 n1) reveal that Leenhardt had conceived of a center, that is, the (albeit virtual) possibility of the totalization of this person. For Strathern, "Leenhardt's star shaped configuration carries the one and same presumption: living within, guided by, driving, functioning as, or knowing through these structures of relationships must be the individual subject" (1988: 271). The model of the person proposed by Strathern for Melanesia, which grounds her critique of Leenhardt, focuses on the notion of the essentially divided or dividual person who contains the perspective of the other within himself, determining his thought and action (1988: 272); see also Mosko 2010. This, as we shall see, takes us directly to Amazonia (see Vilaça 2011).

The question of individualism in Amazonian societies has been discussed for some decades, especially in the wake of the pioneering work of Rivière (1984). Starting from an observation common among the region's ethnographers, who "have characterized the members of these societies as individualistic," Rivière looks to specify "the nature of this individualism." He rejects the notion's psychological dimension, and relates it instead to characteristics of Guianese social organizations, which are inherently cognatic and do not include corporate groups that organize wider social contexts (1984: 94–95). In highlighting the centrality of corporal participations ("sharing in a common substance") among persons from the same group, Rivière suggests the existence here of something markedly distinct from the modern individual (see also Burridge 1979; Morris 1987, originally 1972).

Overing Kaplan (1975) was one of the first authors to call attention to this peculiarity of Amerindian societies, in her monograph on the Piaroa, but especially in her later attempt to develop a positive conceptualization of the region's native groups (Overing 1977), which until the 1970s were described through a "litany of negations and lack": "no lineages, no corporate groups, no land-holding groups, no authority structure" (Overing and Passes 2000: 1). This effort culminated in the articles by Seeger (1980) and Seeger et al. (1979), where the notion of corporate groups was replaced by that of corporal groups, pointing to the centrality of the body for constituting identity in Amazonian collectives, defined not by genealogical structures but by sharing substances over the course of life.

In a more recent work, Overing returned to the theme of the individualistic aspect of these societies, reinforcing precisely the paradox of this conception when applied to the Amazonian world. Overing and Passes observe that in Amazonia there is the widespread idea “that the self who belongs to a collective is an independent self, and that the very creation of the collective is dependent upon such autonomous selves . . . [Moreover] Amazonian peoples, who notably value their ability to be social, have as well an antipathy to rules and regulations, hierarchical structures and coercive constraints” (2000: 2; see Robbins 2004 for an analogous conception of the individual among the Melanesian Urapmin). However, the authors point out, this impression of independence and freedom is complicated by the “embodiment of self and community” described in various chapters of their organized book, as well as by the fact that “at the same time, the moral gaze is other-directed, where the autonomous I is ever implicated within and joined with an intersubjectivity” (2000: 2).⁴

THE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY

The first Wari' relations with the whites were established at the start of the twentieth century and were based exclusively around warfare until “pacification” in the early 1960s. This was when Wari' were contacted by the Indian Protection Service (SPI) and American fundamentalist Protestants from the New Tribes Mission (NTM) (see Vilaça 2010).⁵ The NTM missionaries settled in Wari' territory and immediately spent their time studying the native language and translating the Bible.

At the start of the 1970s, the Wari' by their own account experienced a mass conversion to Christianity and remained Christian until the first years of the 1980s, when they deconverted, once again collectively (see Vilaça 1997). When I began my field research in 1986, few people called themselves Christian. Indigenous festivals and shamanism had both resumed.⁶

Another moment of conversion took place in September 2001, linked, Wari' say, to the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, which they watched on the community television, and took as a sign that the end of the world was at hand. This marked the beginning of a phase of Christian revival that has led to approximately 70 percent of the adult population now declaring themselves “believers.” Since then and until the present, these worshippers have attended religious services – most conducted by native pastors entirely in the Wari' language – and engaged in the day-to-day activities of village churches.

HUMANITY AND “PARTICIPATION”

The Wari' – and other Amazonian peoples – traditionally have a concept of humanity which is far more comprehensive than our own. An enormous variety of beings are conceived as human, alongside the Indians themselves: jaguars, tapirs and numerous other mammals, birds, all kinds of fish, bees and snakes. Humans are characterized as having a soul (*jamixi'*) that is not an attribute of the body, but a capacity for transformation. As human beings, *wari'*,⁷ they live in houses, drink beer, hunt and roast their prey, perform rituals and care for their children. The difference between

them lies in their bodies and in the empirical world that they project. For the Wari', beer is a fermented maize drink; for the jaguar, beer is blood; while for the tapir, beer is the mud found along river shores. As Viveiros de Castro has observed (1998, 2002), we are faced by something very different from our multicultural relativism, which presumes a single empirical universe or natural world onto which diverse culturally determined perspectives are projected (see also Lima 1999). Perspectivism implies a single culture common to all and distinct multiple natures. Instead of multiculturalism we have a multinaturalism. We are also faced with something different from so-called animism since, although all these beings are human, they do not see one another as human beings (see Viveiros de Castro 1998: 474; see also Descola 1992, 2005). The jaguar sees himself as human, and sees the Wari' as animal prey/food, *karawa*. From the Wari' point of view, the situation is reversed. The relationship between predator-prey is the key idiom for establishing the difference between human/nonhuman.

The great specter haunting this world is not solipsism, as in our own, but metamorphosis, which implies the risk of being captured by the other's perspective and – by having one's perspective altered – ceasing to be human in the eyes of one's own kin. Metamorphosis results from predation by an animal during which the victim is transformed into a member of the animal's species. Numerous situations – mythic or quotidian – are recounted in which a Wari' encounters a person or a group of people and begins to interact with them, perceiving them as equals, until at some point they suddenly become suspicious not of their actions (since they act as human beings), but of their world. The Wari' person may notice, for example, that they offer a pot of drink they call beer but which to the Wari' person's eyes looks like blood. Confronted with this evidence, he or she now realizes that those who looked like humans are in fact jaguars and, coming to their senses at last, leaves quickly. If the person accepts the beer and drinks it, he or she turns into a jaguar too, meaning that they continue to perceive themselves as human, but are not seen as such by their Wari' kin. Such possibilities constitute a significant existential problem for the Wari' and other Amazonian peoples.

Since "identity" is determined by the Other's gaze (or action) and dependent on the interactional context, we might say that the locus of the "self" is displaced rather than empty (as in Leenhardt's sense) since it is projected outside. As Anne-Christine Taylor writes of the Achuar Jivaro: "Subjectivity . . . is primarily a matter of refraction: it takes its source in the sense one has of others' perceptions of self" (1996: 206). Metamorphosis does not affect one's own self-perception, therefore, but the view that others have of oneself.

Because the difference between beings is given by their bodily constitution – with metamorphosis the means of transformation – one mode of resolving the problem involves stabilizing bodies through their assimilation, which the Wari' conceive as a process of making kin (Vilaça 2002a, 2005), constituting a collective human identity distinct from animals, enemies and others by sharing food, bodily substances, care, memories and affects (see Gow 1991; Grotti 2009). The process involves a continuous investment that must be shared by everyone. So, for example, a child who is badly cared for, poorly fed, runs the risk of being captured by an animal and becoming a member of the latter's species, losing his or her humanity in the eyes of the Wari'.⁸

In line with the conception common to various Amazonian peoples, who conceive of themselves as communities of substance (Seeger et al. 1979), Wari' who live together say they share "the same body" (*kwerexi*), across a spectrum ranging from closest kin to distant affines. The latter, non-kin by definition,⁹ are consubstantialized by everyday actions (eating together, for instance, and by being called by consanguine teknonyms, like father of my grandchildren for a son-in-law), although they never cease to represent an alterity internal to the group. They thus constitute a continual focal point of tension. Capable of moral slip-ups and witchcraft, affines are, as myth makes explicit, domesticated enemies (*wijam*) and, like enemies in general, associated with animals, *karawa* (Vilaça 2010).¹⁰ Consequently the relational opposition *wari*'/*karawa*, equivalent to that between human/nonhuman, which constitutes the Wari' "dividual" (Strathern 1988: 13–15, 117, 135 n10, 348 n7), is replicated in the opposition between consanguines and affines, or kin and non-kin.¹¹ Humanity ("wari'ness") is therefore distributed along a continuum, polarized by close kin at one end and animals at the other. As Taylor observed in her study of the notion of the person among the Achuar Jivaro, we are not dealing with a category but with "an array or cline of relational configurations" (1996: 210; see also Kelly 2005; Leite 2010).

The fabrication of kinship can be conceived as a continuous attempt to restrict humanity,¹² which takes alterity, whether in the form of animality or affinity, as its starting point (Viveiros de Castro 2001, 2004). Another central aspect of this model is the importance of the occasional controlled reversal of this process, that is, the need for alteration (affinization or animalization) for the dynamics of the system to work. As various Americanist authors have shown, especially following the works of Overing Kaplan (1975) on the Piaroa, the "outside," where the gods, spirits and enemies are located, is central to the reproduction of Amazonian collectives (also Overing and Passes 2000: 20–22). While difference may be reintroduced in an uncontrolled form in the case of disease, conceived as involuntary metamorphosis, in the context of ritual and shamanism difference is purposely reintroduced in order to reconstitute the innate or given that serves as the starting point for these chains of differentiations. This, as Viveiros de Castro has pointed out (2001), refers us to Lévi-Strauss's concept of "dualism in perpetual disequilibrium" (1991). The two movements represented by the extraction and reinsertion of difference are not conceived as contradictory, but exist in dialectical tension, precisely echoing Roy Wagner's model of the episodic alternation of the inventive processes of differentiation and conventionalization associated with everyday and ritual activities respectively (Wagner 1975; see Leite 2010). I return to this point later on.

The conception of humanity as a continuum having markedly distant poles enables the coexistence within these systems of another type of contradiction, or dialectical relation in Wagner's terms (1975: 116–124). In his inaugural article on Amerindian perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro (1996, 1998) observed, based on comments from diverse Amazonist ethnographers, that the region's natives appear to oscillate between very distinct conceptions of humanity, ranging from an unrestricted humanism where all beings are human, to an exacerbated ethnocentrism in which humanity is attributed solely to coresidents or even just close kin. According to Viveiros de Castro (1998) this apparent contradiction stems from the shifts of focus typical to perspectivism, as well as from the opposite and correlated movements of fabricating kinship

(stabilizing) and metamorphosis (see also Taylor 1996: 206–207, 213 n10; Descola 2005: 460–461, for another formulation of this contradiction).

This theme was recently reexplored in relation to Yanomami mythology, which, as we shall see, is of particular interest to the Wari' case.

AN AMAZONIAN GENESIS

The traditional mythology of the Yanomami, inhabitants of northern Amazonia, includes two distinct sets of human origin myths, whose contradictory aspect was first noted by Albert (Albert and Kopenawa 2003: 76 n35) and recently further explored in Leite's (2010 and 2013) analysis. The first set contains narratives that focus on how the ancestors lost their humanity, thereby projecting a "common background of subjectivity and sociality" and highlighting the "instability of bodily forms" (Leite 2010: 24). The second set concerns the creation of a distinct Yanomami humanity by a demiurge. In the latter narrative, the fall of the sky provokes the transformation of the ancestors into animals; a small group of ancestors survives inside the trunk of a palm tree in the form of eggs, which are transformed by the demiurge Omama into the true Yanomami, each ascribed with specific social functions (Leite 2010: 34). As Leite emphasizes, the principal characteristic of this second mythological set is precisely "the end of the promiscuous transformability" that typified the first humans (Leite 2010: 35). In the words of a Yanomami man:

Omama made the people turn into Yanomam, he put an end to the transformations. He made the Yanomam speak in the same way we do today, he made people stop turning into others. . . . He straightened us out. Before he was there, people were ignorant. The forest was unstable and people were always changing form. They used to turn into tapirs, caimans, woodpeckers; . . . Finally Omama created us as a new people after these first Yanomam were thrown down. We are different Yanomam. (Albert in Wilbert and Simoneau 1990: 39, emphasis added, cited in Leite 2010: 37; see also Viveiros de Castro 2007; Kelly 2011a; Kopenawa and Albert 2010)

Several other Amazonian groups such as the Piaroa (Overing 1985, 1990) and Yekuana (De Civrieux 1980; see Kelly 2011a) possess the same kind of creation mythology, that is, one in which a demiurge acts to stabilize humanity. But Wari' do not, and this absence among them helps us to comprehend the focus of their interest in Christianity, as we see below.

STOPPING "PARTICIPATION" OR THE CHRISTIAN GENESIS

In services conducted by the Wari', the Book of Genesis, especially the first chapter, plays a central role. As well as regularly commenting on divine creation in their sermons and prayers, Wari' display posters on church walls that contain verses from Genesis translated into Wari' language (see also Vilaça 2009b, 2012). Witness the following:

Genesis 1:26. He also said: Let's make people. Who are similar to us. He will be the leader/chief (*taramaxikon*) of all the fish and birds and all the strange animals. He will be the leader of all of the earth too. He will be the leader of all the strange animals who crawl across the earth. This is what he said.

(Bible text in English: And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.)

Genesis 1:28. He spoke contentedly. Reproduce yourselves many times . . . Spread across all the other lands. Be leaders. Be leaders of the fish, the birds and all the animals.

(Bible text in English: And God blessed them, and God said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.)

Genesis 1:30. Eat all the animals, all the birds, and all the strange animals that crawl across the earth as well.

(Bible text in English: And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.)

Given that the Wari' experience humanity as an unstable position, a consequence of the ontological continuity between humans and animals, it seems plausible to suggest that there was a kind of blank space (Lévi-Strauss 1991) among them ready to accept the biblical myth of Genesis, allowing for the introduction of the figure of a demiurge previously missing from their mythology (which lacks any kind of creation myth) and ending involuntary metamorphosis – or in the words of Leite (2010: 35), “promiscuous transformability.”¹³ Wari' adoption of Genesis as an origin myth is related to their interest in the story of divine creation, focused on the separation between humans and animals in the form of predators and prey.

Leite's observations concerning the actions of Omama among the Yanomami reveals Omama's similarity to the Christian creator God, since diet in both cases is a key factor separating humans from animals, making this opposition equivalent to one between predators and prey: “With the demiurge's intervention the body of animals ceases to be a human body – potentially dangerous because invested with ‘souls,’ an enemy body – to become merely and definitively a source of food that can be consumed by the Yanomami without risk of eating one of their own, or becoming confused with what is eaten” (Leite 2010: 37).¹⁴

The similarity also extends to the relation between the trickster figure in Yanomami mythology and the Christian devil. According to Leite, in the creation saga: “Omama is accompanied by his twin brother Yoase, who always disrupts or twists his ‘creation’ . . . undoing the order and separations established by his brother.” The author adds: “the stabilization of a specific human form, sought by the Yanomami and enabled by Omama, will never be definitive because of Yoase's influence” (2010: 35, 51).¹⁵

It is important to stress that in the Amazonian world metamorphosis is not simply a negative process associated with disease: it also comprises an important source of power when undertaken voluntarily.¹⁶ Through metamorphosis shamans are

constituted as special beings, mediators in relations with the outside, just as, in many groups, men are able to marry and exercise the position of chiefs by becoming killers, temporarily metamorphosing into their victims.¹⁷

Leite concludes, therefore, that “the articulation of these two sets [of myths] enables us to distinguish a fundamental aspect of the Yanomami person, namely that the endeavour to stabilize a specific form cannot in any definitive sense exclude the potential for alteration” (2010: 50).¹⁸

Like the trickster Yoase of Yanomami mythology, the Wari’ Christian devil counter-invents (see Wagner 1975) the primordial world of ontological mixture by restoring the agency of animals and enabling metamorphosis. During the earliest periods of Christian experience among the Wari’, diseases associated with hunting and consuming animals were linked to the action of the devil. The Wari’ would say that the devil “entered” the animal and made it act vengefully. As one man said: “It is the devil that stays with the animal spirit” or “animal spirits don’t exist. It is the devil that enters them.” Or that “the devil enters our mouth, enters our head. Not the animals” (see Opas 2008 for a similar conception among the Yine/Piro).

THE NARROWING OF HUMANITY

The deepening of Christian experience among the Wari’ seems to be leading to innovative modifications of this system, which take us back to those described by Leenhardt among the Canaque. These changes are objectified in the transformation of the notion of heart and in the action of the devil, the former pointing to the emergence of an “inner self” and the latter to an effective narrowing of the notion of humanity. My goal is to show the relation between these two phenomena, and I begin with the second objectification.

Previously the devil’s actions among the Wari’ focused on animal agency; today they are shifting toward a more narrowly defined universe of humanity in being deemed responsible for the morally inappropriate actions of Wari’ themselves. In other words, today the attacks of animals which, qua humans, preyed on the Wari’ have ceased to serve as the primary explanation for sicknesses, and the shamans, who had acted as mediators between humans and animals precisely because they could occupy the two positions simultaneously, are gradually disappearing. The place of animal attacks as *causa mortis* has been overtaken by the alternative preexisting explanation, sorcery practiced by affines who are motivated by the anger provoked in them as victims of avarice and adultery. These are the moral defects most widely condemned by the Wari’ and associated with the Christian notion of sin. Such actions are attributed to the agency of the devil, who is said to seduce the person and lead him or her to act sinfully. Public confession basically consists of a declaration made before other believers that the person “fell in with the devil.” Hence the devil’s agency leads to anger and morally negative acts, the result of which may be death.¹⁹

From having been a mediator between humans and animals, the devil has therefore become an agent that exposes affinity, a relation the Wari’ consider a constant source of tension. As I have already observed, both myth and social practice show that for the Wari’ an affine is a kind of internal enemy, partly domesticated, but retaining the potential for alterity characteristic of both enemies and animals.

The passage from animality as a general condition of metamorphosis to affinity as an expression of alterity, however, seems to imply a reduction in the scope of humanity and an interruption of the characteristic Amerindian dialectic between its wider and narrower ranges of application.²⁰ This would seem to involve what Taylor, exploring cultural changes among the Achuar Jivaro arising from contact with the West, defines as a narrowing of experience. In her words:

Acculturation begins in a condition of being locked into a state of undefined or unmarked normality by no longer engaging in the situations of interaction characteristic of the extreme states: thus an acculturated, or potentially acculturated, Jivaro is simply an ordinary being, what the Achuar themselves aptly call a *nangami shuar*, a “just-so-person.” (1996: 211)

As I observed above, since (voluntary) metamorphosis has a positive sense, this narrowing does not just constitute a gain, it also involves a clear loss of this means of empowerment. A “just-so-person” is freed from predation by animals and the risk of being transformed into one of them, but also loses the traditional means of standing out and becoming special. The two are indissociable.²¹

It remains to determine, therefore, whether we can trace any parallel between the restricted notion of humanity described here and the emergence of the “self” mentioned above.

INDIVIDUALISM

As soon as humanity ceases to be a position constituted through the human action of differentiating from animals, humans appear to become distinct, as though affinity as a site of alterity were insufficient to maintain the relational dynamic characteristic of the dividual person (Vilaça 2011). Additional transformations appear to be underway. In parallel with the now affinized rather than animalized devil, we can note the emergence among the Christians of an interior self that was once completely alien to the Wari’ (Robbins et al. n.d. has a broader discussion of this question).

The Wari’ term for the body (*kwerexi*) not only designates substance and flesh, but also affects, memory and a way of being, such that one says that a particular woman smiles a lot because her body is like that, or that a tapir likes to bathe in the rivers because the tapir’s body is that way. Not only animals and persons, but everything has a body: the wind blows strongly because the wind’s body is like that, or the rain falls in the afternoon because the rain’s body is made that way.

There is no notion of the soul as a constituent of the person, such as a vital principle or center of agency. As mentioned above, for the Wari’ the soul (*jamixi*) is a principle of transformation and only ever becomes present in the form of a body metamorphosed into an Other.²² It is the heart (*ximixi*, our center or core, like the core of a fruit), the vital organ that distributes the blood throughout the body (see Conklin 2001), which constitutes the seat of thought and intelligence. The Wari’ say, for example, that a sad person has a squeezed heart, someone disorientated has a wandering heart, and those who act in a morally reprehensible manner have no heart. In a translation of the Bible it is said that Jesus gave hearts to the Wari, who, from having been fierce, became pacific. Like the body, the heart is not an

exclusive attribute of humanity (or “wari’ness”), since every being or thing that reveals agency has a heart. Thus even those animals that do not have a human potential (a soul) have a heart, due to the fact that they know how to find their prey and make shelters, in the same way that the electric door to my garage, which seemed to open by itself, suggested the idea of a heart to my Wari’ father, Paletó, during a visit to the city.

Everything that occupies the position of humanity acts from its own point of view within a typically human morality. In cases of kidnapping by jaguars described by the Wari’, said to have occurred in the recent past, the jaguar is motivated by the desire to make kin and for this reason attracts the Wari’ children, who follow the animal into the forest. And it is precisely because the jaguar acts like a human that it is perceived as a relative by the kidnapped child. The form of the body is, as noted earlier, the result of a particular relational context, and a human body has human feelings. From the viewpoint of the child and the jaguar, all of them were human and they thought of themselves as humans. The equivocation (Viveiros de Castro 2004) is not perceived within the relational pairing but from a third point of view, that of the children’s families who, missing them and observing the footprints on the ground, realize that they have been taken by the jaguar (see Vilaça 2009a). This does not involve, as we might suppose, a dissociation between appearance and essence or between body and affect, outside and inside. While the body is not a mirror of the soul, since the latter is precisely an Other, it *is* the mirror of the heart. A thin person is a sad person with a clenched/moaning heart, caused by mourning, a poor diet, or any other act or feeling implied in their relations (see Conklin 1989). A pregnant or merely fat woman is evidence of a full matrimonial relationship. She has a body-heart which reflects her relational situation. Any change in feelings and moral attitudes becomes visible in the body and indicates change in the relational context. Someone without an appetite, for example, may thereby reveal the establishment of relations with other, equally human types of beings, including various kinds of animals. Captured by these relations and acquiring the perspective of the animals, the person accepts their food and consequently eschews the food offered by his or her kin. In these cases, shamans during curing sessions typically say that the animal soul (*jami-karawa*) has shot the heart of the sick person or is eating it. Behavior that we attribute to the “personality” or the need for privacy, and which we tend to see as innate (Wagner 1975), is generally speaking, in the Amazonian world, the result of poor relational choices. Hence there are no individuals who can exist outside of relations, only persons with the wrong relations. This applies to the figure of the sorcerer as someone who, in Amazonia (though this is not the case for the Wari’), is revealed by his or her isolation and idiosyncratic ways, evidence of relations with other types of beings.

Today, though, the Wari’ seem to be starting to understand the meaning of privacy, through the relation with God, and express this notion through the use of the term “heart” in what for me were new contexts. They say, for example, that someone knows with their own heart, so that one must not condemn them or try to discover their feelings. Only God, they say, sees our heart – that is, knows our reasons and intentions. Although the general term used to designate a way of being or a personality is, even today, the body, as in “my body is like this and that’s why I do/like such things,” the pair body-heart has begun to divide into two parts, not necessarily

connected: one external and visible, the other internal, invisible and private, the locus of thoughts and desires. This points to the formation of the “psychological self” associated with Christianity that Leenhardt described.²³

Given that God is now the only being capable of seeing the content of people’s hearts, we could argue for continuity between this and the traditional concept of “identity” as something realized in the eyes of others. However, if God is the seat of perspective, he is no longer an other as were the animals from which it was necessary for people to differentiate themselves. The separation between humans and animals is still central for the Wari’, as we saw in the adoption of biblical Genesis as a creation myth (Vilaça 2011), but now this separation is achieved not by differentiating human agency, but by identifying with the divine perspective (expressed in Genesis). Identification is achieved through the establishment of a relation of affiliation, which in turn makes all Christians (ideally) siblings to each other (relating the Wari’ among themselves, with other Indians, and with the whites). The present restriction of the devil’s action to the universe of affinity comprises an important step in this inversion. Where before the devil’s actions restored the innate world of mixture and metamorphosis, forcing Wari’ even with divine help to directly to separate themselves (explaining the persistence of shamans), now the separation of humans and animals is clear (and shamans have today disappeared). This is the sense of modernization or ontological transformation most clearly applicable to the Wari’ and which allows us to associate the narrowing of humanity with individualization.

Wagner’s reflections in *The Invention of Culture* (1975: 124; 145–146) on the transformation of tribal societies toward urban Euro-American forms are of particular interest here, for they allow us to conceive of the birth of a notion of individuality without having to suppose its innate existence, in contrast to other models (e.g. Dumont 1983; Leenhardt 1971), which are thus poorly suited to comprehension of the Wari’ universe. According to Wagner, this transformation arises from two indisociable movements. The first is the inversion in the direction of the inventive process from differentiation to collectivization, while the other involves the rejection of contradiction which is constitutive of differentiating systems. A brief exploration of this observation gets us closer to understanding the Wari’ case.

Wagner suggests there are two modes of inventing or symbolizing the world: the conventionalizing mode, namely our own, which tends to produce conventions out of differences and singularities (individualities and personalities), and the differentiating mode of tribal peoples, among others. In the latter the focus of human action is not to follow or respect certain rules to “make society,” since the latter is given or innate, but to extend the rules, testing them and creating from them (1975: 41–50). Although all societies realize both movements, in normal day-to-day contexts one of them is understood as morally correct action, while the inverse movement, leading back to the innate, is seen as resistance (1975: 51). In other contexts, however, as in the case of ritual for native peoples, and of art for urban Westerners, there is a deliberate inversion of the dominant inventive movement, producing convention in the first case and differences in the second (1975: 116–124).

Wagner notes that these two types of inventive movement are not symmetric, and identifies an important distinction between societies that consciously conventionalize and those that differentiate. The first “pattern their thought and action on a model

of consistent, rational and systematic articulation, stressing the avoidance of paradox and contradiction" (1975: 116). Here the fundamentalist Christian message of missionaries in contact with the Wari' provides a paradigmatic example; in the words of one New Tribes missionary and coauthor of a highly influential catechism manual: "What we announce here is precisely what happened literally in time and space. It is real, it is a fact, it is history" (McIlwain and Everson 2003: 39). Groups that differentiate, however, are "dialectical societies," who "play out the dialectical and motivational contradictions consciously in their management of roles, rituals and situations" (Wagner 1975: 116).

Leite (2010) suggests that the two Yanomami mythologies outlined above are related precisely to the dialectic between differentiation and conventionalization that Wagner describes, while extending them to the notions of metamorphosis and stabilization commonly found in Amazonian ethnology (see Viveiros de Castro 2001). According to Leite, the first myth, in which humans and animals are created simultaneously, is one "of metamorphosis and differentiation," in the sense that human action is defined as a production of differentiated (somatic) collectives, counter-invented as interspecific metamorphosis. The second, which predefines a differentiated humanity, is the "mythology of stabilization and conventionalization," and is thus a deliberate inversion of the salient inventive process (Leite 2010: 50).

Considering the transition of tribal societies, whose preferential mode is differentiation, to modernity, which is characterized instead by the conventionalization of individualities conceived as innate, Wagner argues that in crisis situations a change in the inventive movement can imply the end of the dialectic between convention and differentiation (1975: 116). In analyzing this more radical type of change, he turns to the example of Christianization and the invention of God and Nature. Wagner suggests that the end of this dialectic leads to the invention of society as a hierarchical relation between man and anthropomorphic powers (the church, among others) (1975: 124). Hence the cultural codes or controls cease to form the basis for inventive improvisation and become a set of rules to be followed. We shift from a view of action as a "continual adventure in 'unpredicting' the world" and life as an "inventive sequence" (1975: 145, 146) to an attempt to conform to the code. Reflecting on the encounter between native and Western peoples, Wagner concludes that what the urban middle class perceive as strange or paradoxical in the natives is not their primitivism but a "quality of brilliance" typical of those who conceive life as "inventive improvisation" (1975: 89, 88). Associating "acculturation" with the loss of such brilliance, Wagner alludes to Christianity: "The dullness that we find in mission schools, refugee camps, and sometimes in 'acculturated' villages is symptomatic not of the absence of 'Culture,' but of the absence of its very antithesis – that 'magic,' that very swaggering image of boldness and invention that *makes* culture" (1975: 89).

With this movement, then, tribal societies appear to become more like our own in terms of their mode of symbolization, constructing the innate as particularities and individualities to be conventionalized and conceiving of action as compliance with those created conventions, as in how the Wari' relate among themselves through God. From making the qualities of paradox and contradiction the "basis of their thought and action" which includes the two contradictory movements of

differentiation and collectivization, and the play between two radical different notions of humanity, they turn to the avoidance of those qualities (1975: 116).²⁴

FINAL REMARKS

The transformation experienced by the Wari' with the advent of Christianity does not seem to have been provoked by the message of creation contained in the myth of Genesis *per se*, since to those embedded in the Amazonian universe the message was conveyed in traditional mythic terms. In this sense the adoption of Genesis remains continuous with traditional forms of transformation.

The relation with God is the focus of the transformation properly speaking. God's highly peculiar characteristics are precisely what make the Wari' want to identify with him, inverting the way of relating with alterity in the construction of kinship. As I have shown elsewhere (Vilaça 2011), the possibility of the Wari' sharing the divine point of view (which assures the Wari' their differentiation from animals) depended on forming kinship relations with the missionaries and God, achieved through commensality in the former case and the construction of affiliation through prayers in the case of God. The adoption of the alien perspective is attained through the bodily transformation that enables kinship.

However, while the Wari' made themselves children of God in their own way, changing their bodies and hearts, God made himself father and demiurge in a distinct and very particular way. First, he is invisible even to shamans, who in the beginning went searching for him in the sky, but were surprised to be unable to see him, or even his house (see Gow 2006 for the same experience among the Piro). God's incorporeality,²⁵ a unique characteristic in a Wari' universe governed by the principle that everything has a body, excludes the possibility of this new kinship relation involving an arena known to them, namely the adjustment of perspectives through bodily transformations. Moreover God's omnipresence, his totalizing gaze, renders the notion of perspective paradoxical. By definition, in the perspectivist world there can be no all-encompassing perspective.

We can conclude, therefore, that while the messages contained in the two creation myths (that of the Yanomami, and that of the Wari' interpretation of Genesis) analyzed here are similar, an important difference exists between them, determined by the figure of the demiurge and his relation to humans. Omama lived among the Yanomami as one of them. But God is not a Wari' and not even his son who became man is considered an ancestor or even a human by them. The difference between Omama and God was noted by the Yanomami themselves: according to the account of the shaman Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert 2010), although these two figures were blended at the start of Evangelical missionization among the Yanomami, soon after God received his own name, Teosi, a corruption of "Deus," "God" in Portuguese.²⁶

It seems that the difference between these two demiurges is essential, in the precise sense discussed by Dumont, Wagner, Latour, and Descola, among others: divine transcendence is a guarantee of the "constitution" of the Moderns, that is, it is crucial to the success of the human/nonhuman separation (or, the avoidance of contradiction). It is as though this separation unleashes a process of internalization in chain

reaction. This could be related to what Viveiros de Castro, in his analysis of the relation between horizontal and vertical (sacerdotal) shamanism in northwestern Amazonia (see Hugh-Jones 1996), calls the “political cooling” of mixed shamanic systems (meaning that shamanism is subsumed by power relations), with the eclipsing of the horizontal shamanism based on nonhierarchical relations with alterity and the featuring of a well-defined sacerdotal shamanism, related to ancestrality and hierarchy: In his words: “sacerdotal transformation, its differentiation from the underlying shamanic function, is associated with a process of constituting a social interiority of a substantive kind” (Viveiros de Castro 2002: 471). The Wari’ experience, as well as that of the Canaque according to Leenhardt, appears to suggest that this social interiority can be linked to a kind of personal interiority, which, as I observed, has been developing with the transformation of the notion of the heart.

Clearly, parallel processes relating to the insertion of Wari’ in the market economy contribute to this movement toward individualization (see Weber 2002). Although the Wari’ do not work outside the village, many today receive wages and financial assistance from the government. There is also a school in each village, and televisions with free-to-air channels and DVD players. Recently some young men have become students at an Indigenous University in Rondônia, living in the city for two months at a time, the length of each study module. My aim here, therefore, has not been to deny the influence of the other means of modernization in the “purification” process experienced by the Wari’. Rather, I have searched for another way to think about the phenomenon, one that takes into account questions inherent to both Christianity and the Amazonian world.

NOTES

The present essay is the result of an intense discussion with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, José Kelly, and Tainah Leite concerning the work of the latter (Leite 2010) which, as will become clear, circumscribes the entire problematic developed here. My thanks to Joel Robbins, Mark Mosko, Rupert Stasch, Naomi Haynes, Jon Bialeki and other people present at the Christianity Seminars held by the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, San Diego, where I presented an initial version of this article, and to Carlo Bonfiglioli, Alejandro Fujigaki, Isabel Martínez, Susi Kolb and other participants of the seminar run by myself at the Universidad Autónoma de México. I also thank Philippe Descola for discussing my paper in the seminar that originated this volume, and Michael Lambek and Janice Boddy, for their detailed and rich comments to the final version of this chapter.

- 1 It is interesting to note that, for Descola, each of the four existent ontologies or modes of identification (among them naturalism and animism) are fairly stable, apparently “defying the passing of time” (2005: 497), and any transition from one to another is very slow, depending on historical, climatic, and technological changes, as occurs in the example he analyzed of a transition from animism to analogism in Siberia. He writes, “this type of rectification of ontological boundaries takes place in small steps and over a fairly long time” (2005: 524). In a way that seems to me to contradict somewhat this notion of stable ontological boundaries, Descola considers the possibility of more than one ontology coexisting within the same community, organized in a hierarchical relation (see Lloyd 2006: 23, in his review of Descola’s book: “there will be one dominant ontology, so he claims, but that does not exclude traces of others”; also see Robbins 2004 for an analogous model of relations between different “cultures”). For Lloyd (2006: 23) this

- coexistence is especially evident in populations with differentiated social groups, including Euro-American societies where “naturalist” atheist sections of the population coexist with “animist” religious groups for whom, for instance, the wine drunk in Catholic mass is really the blood of Christ.
- 2 Robbins has generalized this problem from another perspective. For him “claims of continuity and discontinuity are always relative, depending on what features of the situation we choose to emphasize . . . projects of continuity are always present, even when what is carried forward is indigenous models of change” (2009: 233).
 - 3 A category taken directly from Lévy-Bruhl, of whom Leenhardt was an admirer and personal friend (Clifford 1992: 151–152).
 - 4 The coexistence in these societies of apparently contradictory premises is an important aspect worth highlighting in the observations made by these authors and one to which I return later.
 - 5 And a Catholic priest, although, for several reasons, Catholicism did not develop as religion among the Wari’ (see Vilaça 2002b).
 - 6 I did most of my fieldwork between 1986 and 1994, and from 2001 to 2008 I spent around one month per year among them.
 - 7 *Wari’* (in italics) means “we,” “human being.”
 - 8 Consequently, a Wari’ person (or an animal from its own point of view) remains a dividual, composed of a human aspect and an animal aspect (conceived as a potency related to the soul), even though one of these aspects is obviated by the actions involved in producing kinship and by the direct predation of animals, which are thereby located in the prey position. As I have looked to show in a recent article, traditionally the Wari’ individual is the “individual” in the sense proposed by Strathern (1988), that is, a temporary configuration of the dividual with one of its components obviated, but not eliminated, as a consequence of the interaction with another dividual, individualized in an opposite and symmetric manner (Vilaça 2011; see too Viveiros de Castro 2001 and Mosko 2010).
 - 9 The Wari’ exhibit a Crow-Omaha type kinship terminology which has no prescribed positions of affinity. Although marriage usually occurs among people who live in the same area, marriage between cross-cousins, which is very common in Amazonia, as well as with other genealogical close kin, is forbidden (see Vilaça 1992, 1995, 2010).
 - 10 Understandably they are the only eaters of the dead in funerary cannibalism since they can perceive the nonhumanity of the deceased.
 - 11 For a fractal model of the Amazonian person, see Viveiros de Castro 2001 and Kelly 2005.
 - 12 Or individuation in the sense given by Strathern 1988.
 - 13 In passing we can also note a duplicity in the biblical Genesis, which is divided into two chapters that overlap each other to some extent, though this duplicity is different in kind to that observed in Amazonia. Hence, although we find a clear separation between humans and animals/plants in both chapters, in the first the universe precedes man, who is clearly separated from the world (as a predator), while in the second humanity is newly created in the figures of Adam and Eve, who precede the world insofar as they are given the power to create it by attributing names to its creatures. This duplicity is a constant topic of discussion among the Evangelicals, who look to resolve the implied contradiction.
 - 14 See the same type of effect in the creation of current time as a differentiation from the “before time” among the Piaroa, based on Overing’s analysis: “Speciation also took place: beings who once could mate no longer could (usually) do so; animals, fish, and plants, autochthonously human in form, received their form of today” (Overing 1990: 608, cited in Kelly 2011a: 16). For an analysis of this kind of transformation, see Viveiros de Castro 2007.
 - 15 An analysis of a similar effect caused by the Yekuana trickster Odosha is in Kelly 2011a.

- 16 According to Overing and Passes: "The paradox is such that such disruptive cosmic forces are at the same time . . . the original source for all life within the human community" (2000: 22).
- 17 On the constant presence of the primordial mythic world in the current Yanomami world, Kelly (2011a) observes: "The shamans personify these ancestral spirits in their original human form when they make them 'descend,' transforming into them in order to cure, protect, attack and so on. But the most important point here is that these figures are the vital images (*no ubutipi*) of today's animals: their origin, their support, making the relation between myth and cosmos something more complex than, or better, something distinct from simple history." Albert observes: "The mythical time is conceived of as the origin of society but also as a parallel dimension of its present reality to which only shamans have access through the use of hallucinogens": quoted in Wilbert and Simoneau 1990: 320, cited in Kelly 2011a.
- 18 In the Yanomami case, therefore, we are not faced with two sets of myths of distinct origin, but "one and a half," as Viveiros de Castro observed in his reading of Leite's work (personal communication, 2010), given that the actions of the trickster Yoase in the second set of myths makes clear the encompassment associated with the mythology of metamorphosis (and of alterity as the "given" of Amerindian ontologies).
- 19 On the tendency among Christianized peoples to emphasize the moral domain, see Robbins 2004. Also see Opas 2008 for the extension of this domain to the relation between humans and animals.
- 20 I would note that the transformation into whites, *wijam*, which for a certain period served as the primary mode of alteration, has today become more attenuated following the extension of the Christian notion of brotherhood to the whites as a whole.
- 21 See Lévi-Strauss 1991 on the end of the dualist succession of differentiations among Amerindians as a "paralyzation of the system."
- 22 The soul, *jamixi*, is an other within. Aware of this aspect, the missionaries and Wari' translators avoid using this term to designate the aspect of the person that will survive after death, using instead the term *tamataraxi*, which, though used as a synonym of *jamixi* in various contexts, tends to designate specifically the double of the body active during dreams and which has the same human aspect of the person.
- 23 While this dichotomy opens the way for the Christian conception of sincerity (see Robbins 2008), until now it has failed to take any real hold in the Wari' experience, and they have some difficulty in translating this concept (see Pouillon 1993 on the verb *croire*, to believe). On the concept of secrecy in the Pacific see Robbins 2008; Schieffelin 2008; Stasch 2008; Rumsey 2008; Keane 2008.
- 24 Kelly 2011a: 29: "Differentiating societies live this dialectic in perpetual disequilibrium (Lévi-Strauss, 1991) and in exchange gain stability. This is what Gow (2001) means when he states that the Piro 'retain the scale' of their lived world, conceived by him as a system in transformation." Although I have explored the collective version of differentiation here, associating it directly with the production of the kin collective, it is important to note that Wagner also refers to processes of individual differentiation (that produce powerful people), which have recently been analyzed by Kelly (2011b) in the context of the relation between Indians and whites in Amazonia. This notion of differentiated and powerful individuals takes us back to our earlier discussion of individualism in Amazonia, provoked by a widespread perception among ethnographers that the region's peoples combine a high degree of individual freedom with a strong rejection of rules. This said, it is important to stress that the central point of Wagner's argument resides in the distinct modes of symbolization which determine what is conceived as innate or as fabricated. In the Amazonian case, the fact that there is no innate conception of the individual makes the result of the process of differentiation something fairly distinct from our individual and closer to the Melanesian "individual" of Strathern's model, that is, a provisional configuration

- of the “dividual” one of whose components (in this case the social) is obviated through the relation with an other that presents itself as its opposite.
- 25 A problem common to many native Christianized groups, as becomes clear in the words of a Biak shaman (Indonesia) rejecting God’s transcendence: “God may be great, but he is not here” (Rutherford 2006: 260).
 - 26 Kopenawa later identifies him with the trickster Yoase (Kopenawa and Albert 2010: 492).

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CHAPTER 21

Language in Christian Conversion

William F. Hanks

Religious systems differ widely in the degree to which they encourage or even recognize conversion. World religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity all have histories of conversion during which they have acquired (and lost) adherents, but they do not all define or regulate conversion in the same ways. In Christian doxa, conversion is an intensely personal and conscious act of faith, accompanied by the renunciation of sin, including all competing faiths, and assent expressed in confessions of faith, prayer and collective spiritual practices. The Christian convert joins a community of others and is called to direct contact with God in the three persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a contact that will make many demands on his or her person, self and practices. The bestowing of a new name at conversion, or the performance of the rite of baptism are ritual expressions of the new person that the convert becomes. There may be a period of formal instruction, as in missionizing contexts, a sequence of phases, as in the Catholic progression from baptism to first communion to confirmation, or a more sudden “holistic” adoption of Christianity by a social group, as in the Urapmin case described by Robbins (2004). But in all cases, conversion proceeds by the affirmation of a new framework, which entails more or less an abandonment of the past. The turning toward is also a turning away from. Whether the convert renounces all or part of a prior set of beliefs and practices, and whether or not what is abandoned is a recognized religion or a less formal set of values and orientations, still the past gives way to the present of the

convert. For this reason, what defines legitimate conversion depends on the criteria of the new toward which one turns, not the old from which one turns away.

Described from the viewpoint of Christian dogma, adult conversion is an acutely conscious act in which the convert knowingly and purposely takes on the new spiritual, moral and ethical principles. Whether it is a sudden revelation or a phase in a protracted process of learning, the convert is aware and in some sense chooses it.¹ Renunciation, to whatever degree, follows from the obligation to choose. Arguably, the alternatives do not fully preexist the required choice, but are rather the product of the obligation and the polarization of the old in opposition to the new that is achieved through preaching, persuasion and denunciation. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) nicely show in the case of Tswana Christianization, the polarizing process in which missionaries attempted to refute Tswana ritual ways sharpened, and in a sense constituted, the terms in which Tswana would be evaluated. Some Tswana took on the Christianity of the Nonconformist missionaries, others rejected it, and most were somewhere in between (if indeed they engaged the dogma at all). Yet all were caught up in the distinctly colonial terms in which the contrast was drawn. Moreover, as these authors emphasize, the really significant transformations of Tswana brought on by Christianization were to be found in ordinary practices, not in the more limited sphere of religious dogma and rites. Much of this broader change was unstated and backgrounded – insinuated rather than confessed.

This essay will concentrate on Christian conversion with a special focus on conversion to Catholicism among Maya people of sixteenth-century Yucatan, Mexico. As elsewhere in Latin America, the Maya conversions were most intensive in the early colonial period, increasingly giving way to maintenance and the care of established parishes. In Yucatan, a variety of destabilizing factors created the need to continue with conversions well into the seventeenth century, and the need to monitor backsliding into idolatry was still a concern in the mid-eighteenth century, two centuries after the conquest.² The tie between religious conversion and colonization was especially clear in the first century, when it is explicitly theorized and implemented through the missions as a core element in the project to conquer, rule and remake Maya people. For the first century of the colony this process was dominated by Franciscans, mostly Spanish and all recruited from Europe. Parallel with the Franciscan missions, the secular clergy under the bishops and the Provisorato prosecuted a highly controversial and destructive campaign to extirpate idolatry that included conducting Inquisition in Yucatan (Gonzalez Cicero 1978; Clendinnen 1987; Farriss 1984; Hanks 1986; Chuchiak 2000). Concurrently, the Maya population suffered catastrophic decline. While secure population figures are unavailable, estimates put the Maya population at well over a million prior to Spanish contact in 1519, dropping to under 250,000 by 1549 and continuing to decline to a low of about 127,000 in the 1730s (Farriss 1984: 59).

Some of what unfolded in Yucatan has analogues in the missionization of Tagalog by Spanish Jesuits during the same period (Rafael 1993), the Jesuit missions among the Tarahumara of Mexico (Merrill 1993), in the secular and mendicant missions in colonial Cuzco described by Durston (2007), and in the nineteenth-century Tswana missions by English Nonconformists (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). In each case, conversion is embedded in the project of colonizing native people, and in the Spanish cases, conquering them (*conquista* being a much more intensive and totalizing

project). This means both that the valence of religion for social identity is complex and that conversion is interpenetrated with social transformation of other kinds, including domination, governance, relocation and so forth. These cases make a sharp contrast with the rapid, seemingly spontaneous Christianization of the late twentieth-century Urapmin of New Guinea (Robbins 2004). Robbins notes that no Western missionaries touched the Urapmin, that they Christianized on their own over little more than a decade, and that this process did not entail renouncing core Urapmin beliefs, but produced a kind of doubling of belief. This doubling and the moral torment it generates is a central theme in Robbins's provocative account, and I believe it does have analogues in colonial societies. Yet the contrast between the Urapmin example and the colonial literature is so stark as to put in question whether they all involve the same notion of "conversion." In particular, colonial conversions are laden with institutions, historically protracted, and embedded in relations of force and hegemony. In trying to compare colonial with noncolonial cases, these factors may be more consequential than similarities or differences in the religious dogma.

Another salient feature of the Maya case is the central role of language in evangelization. Like all Christianity, sixteenth-century Catholicism was a religion of the Word and of the Book. Writing, images, bodily gestures and memorization were integral to every phase of evangelization, from initial encounter between missionary and Maya through the repeated practices of converts and communicants. Writing, books and iconography were also salient features of Maya religion, which was a state religion with an elaborately hierarchized and literate priesthood, and immense ritual spaces with pyramids and building complexes entirely made of stone. Maya religion had developed over the 1,500 years prior to the Spanish arrival and was arguably a world religion at different points in its history. It had always been shaped in part by its relations to other systems, such as the Olmec, and especially in the postclassic period, the Nahuatl-Toltec (also known as Aztec) of central Mexico. Thus, at the conquest, the Maya already had a long history of interreligious and intercultural exchange. They also had a rationalized and institutionalized religious system. What made this history of exchange and imperial expansions so different from the colonial period was that the Spanish both settled the Maya by force, and spared no effort to eradicate the preexisting Maya ritual system. From a Mesoamerican perspective, this exclusionary posture, grounded in the renunciation that is part of Catholic conversion, was among the most novel and destructive aspects of Christianity. It placed a heavy burden on all involved – the Maya because they were subjected to relentless refutations, and the Franciscans because they had to persuade the Maya and spell out the contrast between truth and falsity in order to induce them to affirm the one and reject the other. This process of polarization and evaluation went a long way toward defining Maya religion in colonial discourse.³

Renunciation and repentance were not only an aspect of the onset of the converting process. They were (and remain today) an ongoing feature of Catholic practice. They were present in sermons, prayers, fasting, almsgiving, the church calendar, and indeed most pious practices. The most obvious example of this is the sacrament of confession or reconciliation, in which the penitent declares his or her sins explicitly and without holding any back to a priest vested with the authority to absolve.⁴ The sixteenth-century Franciscans recognized a distinction between the initial conversion to Christianity, which they called *conversión*, and the ongoing renunciation of sin,

which was certainly emphasized but seldom described as conversion. The former was accomplished by baptism and, if the convert was an adult, by renunciation of all other gods, and assent to the Truth of Jesus and the gospels.⁵ In current Catholicism, a distinction is made between the “first conversion,” marked by baptism, and the “second conversion,” accomplished by the ongoing “movement of a contrite heart by grace to respond to the merciful love of God” (catechism of the Catholic Church, see Catholic Church 1994: 359, sections 1427–1428). If baptism is the central sacrament of the former, confession is the central sacrament of the latter.⁶ Franciscans wrote and preached that Maya ritual was utterly false, sinful and deadly to the soul. Such denunciations were a velvet glove, however, compared to the iron fist of the extirpation campaigns, which continued in force through the seventeenth century. From the beginning, Maya pyramids, associated with ritual and blood sacrifice, were destroyed and the materials used to build churches, often on the same site. Material artifacts of ceramic, wood and stone were confiscated and the priests who used them imprisoned. In 1565 Franciscans under the Provincial Fray Diego de Landa held an infamous Auto Da Fé in which a great quantity of Maya books were burned along with the disinterred remains of deceased Maya found to have been idolaters. Maya nobles, shorn of their hair and clad in the *sambenito* of the Inquisition, were forced to witness the pyre on which their religion burned.

The Inquisitional archive of these dire undertakings indicates that the Maya system continued to replicate itself well into the seventeenth century and beyond (Chuchiak 2000). Moreover, it turned out that many of the Maya priests caught in the practice of “idolatry” were the same individuals who worked alongside the Franciscans as *maestros*, that is, teachers of catechism in Maya, and trainers of scribes who would go on to work in the colonial government. One by-product of missionization was the creation of this group of actors caught in the potentially acute double consciousness of being leaders and authority figures in both religions at once. The more aligned the *maestro* was with Catholicism, the more his ongoing practice of Maya rites would be a heresy or apostasy in his own eyes, in any case a grave injury to his exclusionary God. By contrast, the more aligned he was with Maya ritual, the less the fact of combining it with Christianity was an insult to dogma, yet the more it placed him in a double bind, for he was propagating a religion dedicated to the destruction of his own. Anything approaching a balanced commitment to the two religions would indeed produce ambivalence (Hanks 1986) and moral torment (Robbins 2004).

The affirmative “turning toward” was also an ongoing process rather than a punctual event. For the practicing Maya Catholic, this meant regular prayer (at specified times of the day, week, season), the observance of the church calendar and the feast days, the regular receiving of the sacraments, and obedience to the commandments of God and Church. It is obvious that such a demanding set of obligations took aim at far more than collective worship, reaching well into ordinary life. It would require time and the sedimentations of habitual practice to really take root, even under ideal circumstances. The conquest period and early colony in Yucatan were far from ideal. Forced displacement and bloodshed, waves of contagious disease and the lack of a common language posed formidable challenges. Worse still, Maya resistance to Spanish rule, including its missionary arm, was widespread and enduring. This took several forms, including flight over the southeastern frontier, unauthorized

movement between towns within the colony, litigation, absenteeism and the persistence of Maya religion even among converts who assisted the missionaries as catechism teachers.⁷ Many Maya clearly refused to renounce their own religious practices, and this instilled in the missionaries an almost morbid anxiety over authenticity. The outwardly Catholic Indio might harbor a hidden idolater, in which case conversion was a stepping-stone to apostasy.

In the early years, Franciscans practiced mass baptisms, knowing that the newly baptized did not understand the sacrament they were undergoing, but reasoning that, like infants, they could still be converted and hence saved. In the face of criticism and changing circumstances, this practice gave way to the more canonical one of individual baptism at a font, including the bestowing of a new name and pouring of holy water over the head of the communicant and subsequent instruction in the faith.⁸ It was however the second conversion that was the more demanding since it required self-conscious will to identify and renounce sin, and to affirm faith in word and deed.

WHAT MOTIVATES CONVERSION?

A major theme in the comparative literature on conversion is the motivations of why people convert. Summarizing two main strands in the literature, Robbins (2004) distinguishes what he calls “instrumental” and “intellectual” motives. The former have to do with worldly goods (including prestige, legitimacy and access to community) that the convert seeks to acquire by identifying with the new religion, and the latter with the intellectual appeal of that religion and the answers it provides to significant questions felt by the convert. The intellectualist convert is a seeker, we might say, and the instrumentalist an operator.⁹ Robbins’s own account joins the two, arguing that the Urapmin first took on Christianity for instrumental purposes, but persisted in it for intellectual ones (2004). In his explicitly evolutionary model, the first stage assumes instrumental interest but not understanding, while the second assumes (or at least suggests) the inverse. In colonial Yucatan, it is clear that the two moments coexisted in the ongoing cycles of renunciation and affirmation. It was certainly in the instrumental interest of Maya elites to display their Christian piety, since only converts were citizens, yet the intellectual debate was raging in the teaching, preaching and exhortations of missionaries. If we understand motivation as individual motive, it will be necessary to recognize that individuals can act with multiple motives, not all consistent with one another. But the most basic difficulty with this model from the present perspective is that it assumes conversion to be a conscious act that individuals undertake on purpose. Therefore to query motive is to query intention and individual meaning. In colonial contexts, such as the Tagalog of the Philippines (Rafael 1993), the Sumbinese of Indonesia (Keane 2007), the Quechua of Peru (Durstun 2007), the Tarahumara of Mexico (Merrill 1993), and the Tswana (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), the question appears quite different. A colonial religion was implanted as part of a project of domination and inculcation, typically entailing relocation, surveillance and political-economic reorganization. Under such circumstances, conversion is as much motivated by the social fields it is embedded in as by anyone’s meaning or intention. As Comaroff and Comaroff spell out, this

crucially shifts the analytic focus from the personal, largely conscious affirmation of dogma to the collective, largely unnoticed consequences of engagement with a sweeping social formation.

Franciscans in Yucatan were acutely aware of these questions and their missionizing project operated in several spheres and on several levels concurrently. They called this project *reducción*, from the verb *reducir*, meaning; “to reorder, subjugate or convince” depending upon context. From the 1552 Ordinances of Tomás López Medel going forward, the stated objective was to induce Maya to “make themselves new men.” This was to be done through a broad array of methods, instrumental, intellectual, bodily and aesthetic, and embedded in pedagogical practices regulated as to time and place. The sixteenth-century Franciscans used spectacle, punishment, repetition and memorization, song, reasoned argument and beauty (of built space, vestment and speech) to move Indios throughout New Spain, Guatemala and the Andes toward their God.¹⁰

The evangelization proper was only part of the Franciscan project. They knew they needed reinforcements, which, if not provided in additional manpower, would be produced through organizational forms.¹¹ They also knew they must monitor their flocks to offset the constant danger of backsliding. For these reasons, they undertook the massive *congregaciones* whereby they forcibly relocated whole towns of Maya people into centralized *pueblos reducidos*, often destroying the earlier Maya towns in the process. In the first fifty years, an estimated four hundred Maya towns were reduced to about two hundred, many of them newly created; others were sited on preexisting towns, but still with the effect of dramatically expanding the population. In both cases, the *congregaciones* transformed the landscape and the distribution of people on it. Over the first half-century the *cabildo* form of government was introduced into the *pueblos reducidos*, along with norms for proper behavior known as *policia*. The church calendar, with its feast days, saints’ days, seasons and ceremonies, was established. Missionary schools were established for indoctrination and the order undertook a massive building program. In little more than forty years, large convents with sometimes massive stone churches were built in more than two dozen towns, and friars were posted to them according to the needs of the *guardianía*, or parish (see Figure 21.1). Mission pedagogy took place in and on the grounds of these convents, most of which were in the northwest quadrant of the peninsula. Unlike in Europe, where monasteries tended to be apart from towns, the Franciscan convents in Yucatan were in the center of the towns.

Each *pueblo reducido* was not only supposed to be orderly within but also took its place on the ordered landscape of the province. The colony was administratively subdivided into *partidos* and subregions, the missionary analogue of which was the parish system. In each *guardianía*, one town was the *cabecera* “head town” and the others were *pueblos de visita*, ministered episodically from the center. There was much movement of people from the *visitas* to the *cabeceras*, and missionaries traveled from the head towns to celebrate the sacraments in the *visitas*. Many *visitas* had churches, which were attended to by trusted Mayas, called *Indios de confianza*, who kept them kept clean and empty when not in use for worship.¹² The *guardianía* had a radial structure with no perimeter (see Figure 21.2): it defined hierarchy and pathways between the center and the periphery, but did not define an inside as opposed to an outside. In fact when one looks at a more detailed map of *guardianías*, *visitas*

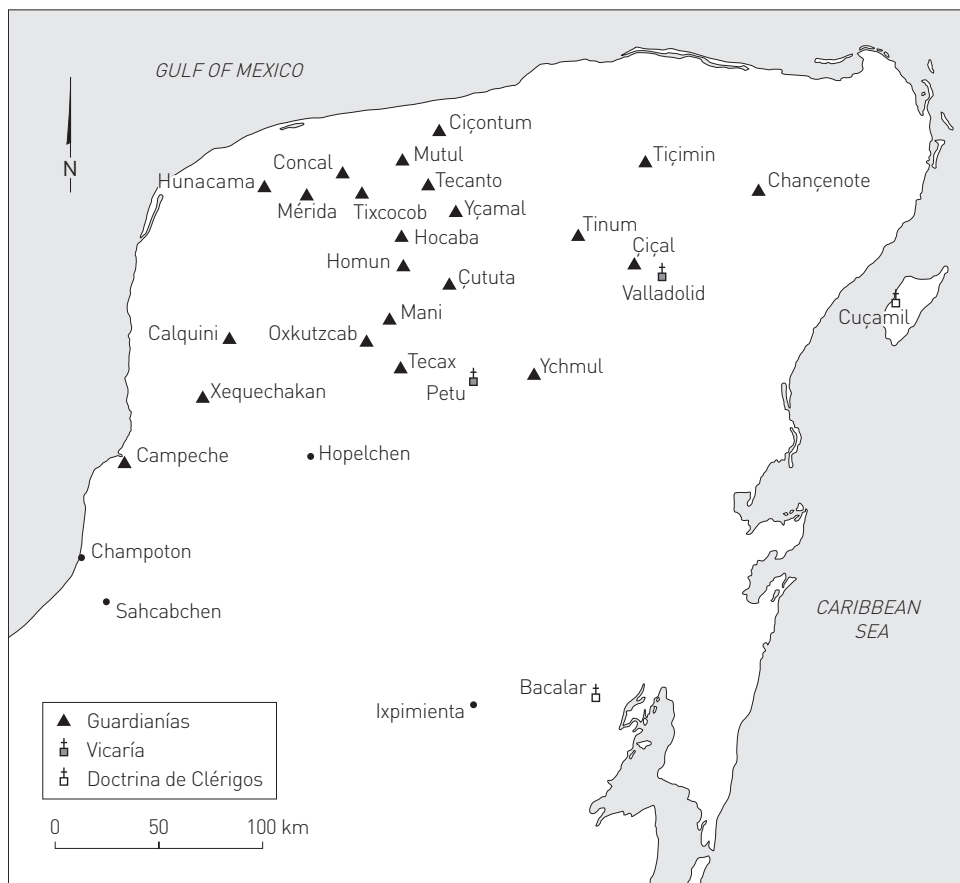


Figure 21.1 Map of the *guardianías* of Yucatan, 1582 (from William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (University of California Press) © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California).

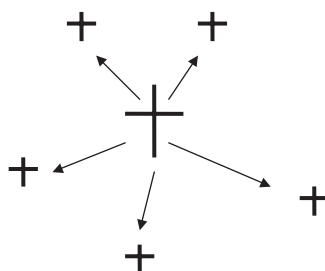


Figure 21.2 The radial structure of the *guardiania* (from William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (University of California Press) © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California).

from different parishes are interdigitated, making it impossible to draw a line around the territory corresponding to the unit.¹³

The sheer scope of *reducción* and the degree of self-awareness on the part of Franciscan missionaries make *reducción* a total project of conversion. By reordering lived spaces, ordinary conduct and ways of thinking, their first objective was to create in the Indios the disposition and ability to convert. As López Medel put it in 1552:

tanto más hábiles y dispuestos para la doctrina cristiana y para recibir la predicación de el santo evangelio, cuanto más están puestos en la policía espiritual y temporalmente. (1971: 391)

([they will be] all the more apt and disposed toward Christian Doctrine and toward receiving preaching of the Holy Gospel, insofar as they are placed in proper civility (both) spiritually and temporally.)

In this passage the spiritual and the temporal are distinguished and joined together, reflecting the prevailing belief among missionaries and Crown representatives that in order to convince the Indios of Christianity, it was necessary to habituate them to a new way of being in the everyday social world. Taking López Medel at his word, we can see that he recognizes the need to instill the motive to convert, but this motive is itself to be the result of living in *policía cristiana*, in the built spaces of the *pueblo reducido*, according to the rhythms of civic and church practice. Coordinated transformations of built space, conduct and landscape created a kind of circularity: churches, monasteries and towns were built to foster the conquest and conversion of belief, which would in turn feed into the orderly use of the same built spaces. Under *reducción*, this circularity motivates conversion.

LANGUAGE IN CONVERSION

If *reducción* was aimed at space and conduct, it was no less explicitly aimed at language. Here too the Maya case presents a striking example in which religious conversion is thoroughly embedded in linguistic transformation, implying a great deal of linguistic labor.¹⁴ The centrality of the Word is at the heart of Christianity as it came to Yucatan. This guaranteed that the colonial field was in part an asymmetric encounter between languages, the one European and the other Maya. The same applies to Dutch and Sumbinese in Indonesia (Keane 2007), English and Tswana in southern Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), Spanish or Portuguese with native languages throughout Latin America, English or French and native languages of North America, and English and Bengali in India. While these examples of conversion under colonization differ in many ways, they have in common that the Word entered into translation, either in the teaching and preaching or in the direct rendering of sacred texts (prayers, scriptures) in the native language. This is what occurred in Yucatan, where the entire evangelization and ministry among Mayas was conducted in Maya (as were the local *cabildo* governments).¹⁵ The missionaries knew that in order to convince Maya people of their truths, they had to talk with them, and provide them with language in which to practice the faith through prayer and sacrament. In Europe, translation was undergoing an explosive development as the Bible was rendered in the vernacular languages and explorers and missionaries were encountering

non-Western languages around the world. Missionary linguists were at the forefront of this effort in the Americas, and their work marks what has been called the birth of modern linguistics (Smith-Stark 2007). In Yucatan, the decision to evangelize in Maya immediately called for translations of key texts and concepts. This in turn required knowledge of Maya grammar with which to form words and phrases for the exotic concepts of Christianity. According to Franciscan chroniclers, native Maya speakers gave critical assistance to the missionaries, which in turn required that these Maya engage the Christian concepts very closely in order to re-render them.

Early on there was a sense that Maya was so expressive and Christianity so universal that accurate translation was within reach. Early translators rendered most Christian concepts in Maya, retaining Spanish for *missa* “mass,” *Cruz* “cross” and some other terms, but translating virtually everything else in the catechism and composing sermons apparently directly in Maya. It was not until the mid-eighteenth century, two centuries after the conquest, that Fray Pedro Beltran de Santa Rosa María, a Creole Franciscan, pointed out some of the devastating errors in the received Maya versions of prayer and catechism. In 1639, Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar, also a Creole but a secular priest and dean of the cathedral of Merida, was sufficiently confident in the possibility of accurate translation, as well as the intelligence of the Maya people, to say that anyone who fails to learn should be punished for lack of will (Sánchez de Aguilar 1996). The cornerstone of the missionary vision was that the Maya were spiritual children, led astray by the falsehoods of their wicked priests, but capable of spiritual perfection under the loving care of their missionary fathers. For some early friars, the conversions would be a return to an earlier age, before the rise of idolatry, when the Holy Spirit was present in the New World (Phelan 1970). In the mid to late colonial period, the early optimism would give way to a more sober assessment of the difficulty of both conversion and translation, perhaps best portrayed in the writings of Pedro Beltran de Santa Rosa María of 1740, 1746 and 1757 (see Beltran de Santa Rosa María 1868, 2002, 1912).

COMMENSURATION

Given the pivotal role of Maya language in the project of *reducción*, the missionaries or their surrogates had to acquire spoken or written competence in the language, develop an analysis of its grammar and begin the work of finding or creating Maya counterparts for Spanish or Latin terms. The analytic reduction of the language to a grammar was embodied in the *Arte*, a practical and pedagogical manual of the language stated in terms of paradigms, conjugations, grammatical categories and exceptions.¹⁶ While missionary writings indicate the existence of many such works, the extant ones were published in 1620, 1686 and 1746. The alphabet and lexicon of Maya were embodied in the bilingual *vocabularios*, some included as annexes to an *Arte*, and some as stand-alone bilingual dictionaries.¹⁷ Systematically lacking dates and named authors, none of the dictionaries was published during the colonial period. They were apparently maintained in the monasteries and amended by successive generations of missionary linguists. The linguistic conversion was long and arduous.

The cross-linguistic correspondences established in the bilingual dictionaries are presented as simple equivalences between a headword in the first language (flush left) and a gloss in the second language (to the right). Thus for example,

<i>Sacramento de bautismo</i> "sacrament of baptism"	<i>usacramentoil oc ha</i> "the sacrament of enter water"
<i>Bautisar</i> "baptize"	<i>ocça ha ti pol</i> "cause.enter water to head"
<i>Confesar</i> "confess"	<i>toh pul keban</i> "straight cast sin"
<i>Comunión</i> "communion"	<i>ukamal ucucutil yumilbil</i> "the receiving of the body of Lord.revered"

Taken at face value, the Maya forms on the right are the indigenous equivalents of the Spanish forms on the left. But there are many hidden factors of concern to any missionary linguist.¹⁸

First, both the Spanish and the Maya forms may have multiple uses. In Spanish, *confesar* was vague as to what was confessed, sins or faith, whereas the Maya gloss is unambiguously about sin. *Oc ha*, literally "enter water," was also used to describe a leaky roof through which rain enters. Thus the pairing of Spanish with Maya can narrow or alter the designation of either, or both. Second, the Spanish terms for elements of dogma are technical terms whose meanings were grounded in a philosophical and theological system and the practices of worship that went with it. It is this system that determines the meanings of the Spanish, yet the Maya has no such backing, and if it did, it would be non-Christian. Thus, *ucucutil Jesu Christo* means "the body of Jesus," which is equivalent to the communion wafer, but only in the context of transubstantiation during the Eucharistic celebration. Placing the consecrated host on the tongue of the communicant, the priest says "the body of Christ," not "communion." Here the same background practice that Spanish "comunión" designates also grounds the Maya neologism but the Maya is what Benvéniste called *délocutif*, a verb derived from an utterance (1991). Third, although the Maya recruited to gloss Spanish was mostly ordinary rather than technical, it too was grounded in a broader system, namely the semantics and pragmatics of Maya. This Maya background can break through to destabilize even well-established meanings. For instance *cucutil* had been used for the body of Christ for nearly two hundred years when Beltrán de Santa Rosa María pointed out a pernicious ambiguity, since the *cucutil* was not actually the body, but one of its parts, namely the genitals. As the first native bilingual to publish an Arte, and arguably the best linguist in the colonial period, Beltrán criticized the received Maya version of the catechism for scandalous errors.¹⁹ Similarly, *toh pul keban* meant literally "straight cast sin" whereas simple *pul keban* meant to spread discord (cf. "to cast aspersions"). Failing other reinforcement, "straight cast sin" could as well mean "to cast true aspersions."

A fourth feature of the glosses is the obvious tendency of Spanish words to be glossed into Maya phrases, in which the Maya is a compressed description of the source meaning associated with the Spanish counterpart. The salience of washing the head with water in baptism is brought to the fore in *oc ha*, as is the declaration of sin in *toh pul keban*. Both sacraments could of course be described otherwise, and both have alternate glosses in the dictionaries, focused not on the administration of the sacrament, but on its effect.

<i>Bautismo</i> "baptism"	<i>ca put sihil</i> "second time born, reborn" ²⁰
<i>Confesión</i> "confession"	<i>choch keban</i> "untie sin (absolution)"

In other words, the process of rendering Christian Spanish in Maya was much more than translation. It was what I call commensuration, a neologistic process in which new lexemes and phrases were coined in Maya for concepts derived from Spanish Catholicism. Pursued over two centuries and implemented in a wide array of genres, commensuration marked the entire corpus of missionary writing, linguistic and evangelical alike. Judging from analysis of the corpus they produced, their labors were guided by five principles, which I call interpretance, economy, transparency, indexical grounding, and beauty.

Interpretance is the initial assumption that for any expression in Spanish, there is at least one interpretant in Maya. The interpretant and the Spanish original were of course never identical in meaning, but were rather counterparts with overlapping reference. When Spanish terms like *Dios* or *missa* are left untranslated in otherwise Maya texts, they are usually described as borrowings, but they are better understood as terms for which interpretance was suspended – usually for specific reasons. *Dios* was translated as *ku* in the earliest extant doctrina (Fray Juan Coronel's version of 1620) but revised to *Dios* thereafter, on the grounds that the same term already referred to a Maya divinity. The apparently Christian Maya person could be praying willy-nilly to a false god. By retaining the Spanish form, they distanced their God from the Maya counterpart. Similarly, there was plenty enough ritual language in Maya to describe the collective service known as mass, but they retained *missa* as an emblem of the Catholic Eucharistic service. Yet despite these and a relatively few other cases of nontranslation, the extensive corpus of Christian Maya shows that interpretance was the rule. All of the remaining principles presuppose it by providing evaluative preferences on the form of interpretants.

A striking feature of Maya *reducido* is the recurrence of a small class of Maya roots used to render a large class of Spanish concepts. The verb root *oc* "enter," for instance, was derived into Maya counterparts of: baptism (*oc ha* "enter water"), believe (*oc ol* "enter heart"), faith (*oc olal* "enter heart.nominal"), convert (*oc sic ba ti* "cause oneself to enter into"), chastity (*ocol ku* "enter god"), to signify (*oc ti than* "enter language"), translate to Maya (*oc sic ti maya than* "cause to enter into Maya language"), and incarnation (*ocol ti uinicil* "enter into humanity"). The result of this kind of economy is that, armed with a small number of roots and basic derivation patterns, the missionary could gloss a whole swath of relevant concepts. This is what I am calling economy.

In order to achieve economy, it was necessary to modify roots so as to distinguish their different senses. *Oc* "enter" is an intransitive verb of motion, which implies a subject who enters, and a goal space or state into which the subject enters. By adding a noun or prepositional phrase to the root, one forms a simple compound or phrase, such as in *oc ol* "enter heart," as in the opening line of the Credo

Ocan ti uol Dios yumbil, uchuc tumen tuzinil
Entered into my.heart God lord.revered mighty by all
I believe in God the Father Almighty

Here the bare infinitive *oc* is derived as a stative to indicate that the entering has already occurred, and the noun *ol* “heart” is possessed *u-ol* “my heart.” The subject of the stative verb is *Dios*, and the monumental first person belief is cast as “God having entered into my heart.”

The grammatical elaboration illustrated here goes still further if we introduce an agent of change who causes the entering – as in a missionary who baptizes a convert or a translator who causes meaning in one text (Language 1) to enter into another text (Language 2). Recall that the missionary aim was not to convert Maya people into new men, but to induce them to *make themselves* new men. In a theology in which conversion is a conscious affirmation that also entails renunciation, daily vigilance and penance, the agency implied by the reflexive is crucial. It was precisely spelled out in the Maya neologism for conversion:

Ocsic ba ti Dios
Cause.to enter self to God
“Convert to God”

All of these and many other examples illustrate the principle of transparency according to which the Maya neologisms are composed of discrete parts arranged in a whole whose meaning is a function of the meanings of the parts and the grammatical relations between them. Each part of the Maya form designates an identifiable element or aspect of the source concept. The combined result of economy and transparency is that Maya translations tend to be compositional phrases, even when the Spanish source term is a single word. The Maya in effect renders part of the Spanish meaning explicit. Moreover because economical translation uses the same resources over and over, it also renders explicit the interconnections between different concepts. One would never know from the Spanish lexical forms *bautizar*, *convertir*, *crear*, *traducir*, *encarnar*, *significar* that the concepts they stand for are intimately related, especially in the project of *reducción*. Yet in the Maya counterparts, the relatedness is transparent in the recurrence of the root. For a missionary learning Maya, this kind of explicitation had the heuristic value of anchoring the neologism in an already known theology and evangelical project. For the Maya neophyte, it would have the inverse effect. In learning the basic vocabulary the neo-Christian simultaneously receives a little lesson in the *doctrina*.

Yet the generative effects of transparency and economy are strictly dependent on knowing that the Maya neologisms stand for specific concepts. Few if any of them are so explicit as to be unequivocal without some reinforcement. A Maya speaker with no exposure to Christianity would never figure out from the form *oc ha* that this designates the rebirth of the person in Christ. It could as well designate a leaky vessel, the arrival of rain or a form of torture in which water is poured into the head through the orifices. What was needed was a way to attach the neologism to the target concept. This attachment is what I call indexical grounding. *Oc ha* is indexed to baptism as *oc ol* is indexed to monumental belief.²¹ Indexical grounding was achieved through pedagogy and the regular usage of Maya *reducido* in the catechism, sermons and notarial genres (Hanks 2000). If interpretance opens the way to commensuration, indexical grounding locks down the counterpart relation between neologism and referent.²²

A second order of indexicality arises in the relation between the neologism and the doctrinal texts in which it was deployed. With prayers like the Credo or the Our Father, the practitioner learns the prayer by heart and is enjoined to recite it repeatedly, including in all masses. The practices of prayer bind the individual words into the larger texts of the prayers. As a result, the first lines of any prayer projects the whole. For anyone with a basic knowledge of Christianity, the words “Our father who art in heaven” project the Our Father, as surely as “Hail Mary full of grace” projects the Hail Mary, “In the name of the father” projects the Sign of the Cross and “I believe in one God the father almighty” projects the Credo. The first line is a metonym of the whole, and the target meanings of the words in that line are thereby secured. The canonical status of prayer, and the holiness of its language imbue the Maya *reducido* forms with the same qualities. In like fashion, the utterances and semantic values of Maya *reducido* are bound to the built spaces of the missions and town councils, and to the embodied practices for which these spaces were designed. *Policía cristiana*, the measure of civility in urban life, was tied into the same mandates as were inculcated in the classroom, confessional and from the pulpit. In light of this, it is unsurprising that the Maya *reducido* of prayer made its way into the Maya town councils and is readily identifiable in the notarial documents produced there (Hanks 1996; 2010: chs 9–10). By binding the neologistic lexicon to texts performed by Maya speakers, they tied it into the broader cycles of *reducción*, which reordered space, conduct and language concurrently.

The last principle of commensuration that I will cite is the search for beauty in translation. The premise was that a more beautiful rendition would be more effective in turning the Indio soul toward God (Código Franciscano 1941). It is well known that the Franciscans valued simplicity in language. This is repeatedly emphasized in the writings of Saint Francis and in the Rule of the Order. It is perhaps for this reason that the imagery of Maya *reducido* prayer is lean and tightly constrained by transparency to the source concept. Unlike what Durston (2007) found in Christianized Quechua, we find little poetic parallelism in the Maya prayers. This is noteworthy because Maya had and still has today a rich poetic tradition based on parallelism, emblematic imagery and elaborate word play (Bricker 1981, 2007; Bricker and Miram 2002; Edmonson 1986; Hanks 1988). Moreover, the missionaries knew of this tradition, and coparticipated with Maya authors in writing petitions to the Crown in elite Maya style. The simplicity they sought in prayer was a form of sanctified poverty in expression, stylistically spare, humble and uncluttered. It is possible that the avoidance of Maya elite style in Christian prayer was part of the effort to eradicate forms of language associated with non-Christian ceremonial, but it also seems a strategy to keep the focus on God, and not on the words with which humans worship God. The clean and voluminous spaces of the stone churches, the functional transparency of the division between altar, pulpit and pews, the visual images of saints, the candles and incense and the collective singing of prayer in plainsong were all part of the sensorium and all directed toward the beauty of their God. Simplicity and transparency in language took their place along with other sensory experiences, including proprio-sensory ones such as heaviness (of sin)/lightness (of grace), sadness (contrition) and joy (celebration of the mysteries of the faith), pain (moral or physical).

Part of what made for a beautiful neologism was that it formulates the source meaning concisely, by focusing on its most important aspects. To render absolution

as “untie sin,” confess as “straight cast sin,” baptism as “enter water,” and prayer itself as “weep heart speech” are all in this sense concise and pertinent. Among the best examples of this was the rendering of the epithet “God almighty” or “Dios omnipotente”: *Dios yumbil uchuc tumen tuzinil*. *Dios yumbil* renders “god revered lord,” *uchuc* is “powerful” and *tumen tuzinil* is the all-embracing omni of omnipotente. *Tumen* is a relational noun glossable as “because, by” (as in “it was done by John”). *Tusinil* is a neologism formed on analogy with the relational nouns (cf. *tuyokol* “above, atop,” *tuyanal* “below,” *tulacal* “all,” *tupetel* “all”). Like its relational analogues, it is composed of four morphemes: t- “in, at” + u- “its [possessive pronoun]” + sin [verb root] + VI [possessive marker]. The root *-sin-* is what Mayanists call a “positional verb,” meaning that it designates a position assumed by its subject, especially the human body. This position is exemplified by the arms outstretched to the sides, fully extended and embracing – precisely as they are in the crucifixion. The missionaries clearly knew this, because they translated crucifixion as *zini ti cruz*, “he was stretched out on the cross,” a phrase that occurs in the Credo. Moreover, in several of the dictionaries, the verb form and the neologistic form appear in the same entry. In short, the crucifixion is embedded in the “all” of “almighty” (Hanks 2009, 2010).

Many of the missionary linguists and those officials who approved their published works comment on the expressive power of Maya language and the linguistic virtuosity of Maya speakers. They, or their native speaker assistants, knew the grammar very well and deployed the morphology, rules of compounding, incorporation and phrase structure to draw fine distinctions in meaning with a precision rivaling or surpassing Spanish. Through commensuration, neologisms were produced that were economical (therefore interrelated), transparent (therefore intelligible), properly indexed to doctrine (therefore true) and pleasing to mind and ear. Over time, what resulted was the lexicon and register of Maya *reducido*. This register was not a Christian overlay on an indigenous semantics, as traditional views of religious syncretism would have it. Rather, it was the opposite: an indigenous formulation of a Christian semantics. As the register developed over the colonial period, and spread from missions to *cabildo* government and over into the rebel Maya sector, Maya *reducido* became the written standard. The entire archive of colonial Maya is marked by it. This process included thousands of notarial documents, nine substantial books and sundry other works written by Maya people.

COMMENSURATION AND CONVERSION

The first link between linguistic commensuration and religious conversion follows from the missionary decision to convert and maintain Maya Christians entirely in Maya language. This link was established in the project of *reducción* and it subsumes translation within the broader reorganization of space and conduct. For indigenous neophytes, the Maya *reducido* versions of Christian doctrine and prayer were the forms to which they were taught to assent. If a prayer like the Credo were mistranslated, the faithful who recited it would misbelieve, resulting in confusion or much worse. Accuracy, aptness and transparency in translation were prerequisites of proper conversion. The long process of creating and standardizing Maya *reducido* was in

this sense the linguistic analogue of the second conversion. Just as conversion reorients the subject, commensuration reorients the language – turning it, as it were, toward the Christian semantics. And just as the practices of prayer and piety reaffirm the new faith, the same practices embed the new variety in speech acts that feed into the expressive habits of Maya speakers. Maya *reducido* and the semantic values it expressed infused language at the moment that prayer infused *policía cristiana*. The effect of this is nowhere more evident than in the writings of Maya scribes, authors and the anonymous chroniclers of the Books of Chilam Balam (Edmonson 1986; Hanks 1988, 2010). These indigenous writings were the discursive space in which Maya *reducido* is taken up as the language of Christianized Maya people. We can surely distinguish grammar from doctrine, but we cannot untie the knot that binds them.

There are intriguing parallels between translation and conversion, nicely developed by Rafael (1993) and Durston (2007). Both processes arise from the encounter of a foreign element (language or religion) with a local one (Spanish with Maya). The language into which translation occurs is subordinated to the meaning of the canonical source text. Likewise, the convert is subordinated to the mandates of Christian faith. At first blush, one might speak of translation as the conversion of meaning and conversion as the translation of belief and practice.

Appealing as it is, this way of describing the relation is misleading because it overlooks crucial differences between the two processes. Most missionary translation was Spanish to Maya, whereas the conversions were decidedly Maya to Spanish. The subject of conversion is a person or group, whereas what translates is a text or a designation. Christian conversion entails renunciation of “idolatry” and other sins, whereas Maya translation in no way renounces the Spanish source text. On the contrary, it rests on a deep understanding of the source texts, which retain their status as legitimate originals thereafter. An effective translation retains the main references and import of the source text, whereas effective conversion erases or remakes what precedes it. At this point, conversion and translation seem more like opposites than analogues. The problem has to do with a reversal: in translation, the target language was Maya, subordinated to the meanings of the Spanish source text; in conversion, the target religion was Christianity, replacing and so dominating its Maya counterpart. This dominance is naked in the denunciations of Maya religion and the rigors of Inquisition and extirpation, all of which reinforce and abet the semantic cleansing of the language.

Translation as commensuration was possible only on the basis of detailed understanding of the grammar and semantics of Maya (non-*reducido*). Economy required learning the semantic potential of core roots, stems, words and phrases, Transparency implements this knowledge to yield remarkably apt Maya counterparts of philosophically precise Christian concepts. The combination of the two made it possible to render explicit some of the broader system to which source concepts belonged, by coding it in the grammar of the Maya neologisms. The indexical anchoring of neologism to referent, over and above transparency, economy and even beauty, was the *sine qua non* of adequate interpretance.

Conversion proceeded not by commensuration between the two religions, but by incommensuration. In no way was Maya Christianity to be composed of elements of Maya religion, nor was there any relation of interpretance between the two religions.

To be sure, Landa, Lizana and other early missionaries saw fascinating parallels between what they claimed to be Maya practices and Christian baptism, confession, and even the cross. They also displayed extensive knowledge of the Maya calendar, the ceremonies that marked its phases, and some of the “gods” it engaged. And they considered Maya people to be predisposed to worship, which they wrote of as a resource for the would-be Christian. But the ritual practices themselves and the language spoken in them, were systematically condemned as falsehoods produced by the devil. Incommensuration erased the very referents of “idolatry” along with burning the books, smashing and burning effigies, dismantling ceremonial pyramids and rooting out Maya ritual experts. The impossibility of interpretation means there can be no counterpart relation between the two religions. Missionaries built cathedrals of meaning out of the semantic resources of Maya, just as they built churches of stone from the debris of smashed pyramids. But when it came to religious conversion, the detritus of the previous religion was rooted out, not reused. A Maya translation of Christian prayer could be beautiful, but no beauty was to be had in the fusion of Christian faith with Maya religion.²³

As Maya *reducido* took root among Maya people, and was acquired by successive generations, it ceased to present itself as translation and acquired the status of de facto original. More gifted Maya *maestros* knew and likely understood the European originals of prayers, but the vast majority of Maya were monolingual and for them the Maya version of doctrine simply was the doctrine. Missionaries measured the relation of Maya versions to their Spanish originals throughout the colonial period, just as they fretted about idolatry, the competing original. But for Maya people, the archival evidence suggests that it became a native register in a specifically colonial language. If not indigenous in the idealized sense, it was nonetheless autochthonous to the colony, and remains so today. This slow process of autochthonizing the neologos is where translation gives way to linguistic conversion, causing the language to enter into a new yet original universe of reference.

NOTES

- 1 I hold aside cases of forced conversion, which are at best atypical and at worst ruled out by the stipulation that the convert freely and consciously affirm the new faith.
- 2 Durston (2007) makes very productive use of the distinction between conversion and maintenance in his discussion of the emergence of “pastoral Quechua” in the colonial Andes.
- 3 Spanish and missionary attitudes about the Maya people and language were complex, and are explored more fully in Hanks 1986, 2010.
- 4 According to the catechism of the Catholic Church, only God can forgive sins, but ordained priests are invested with the authority to “bind and unbind” in the world (Catholic Church 1994: 362–363). Absolution is the unbinding of sin, wiping it away from past as well as present. Making characteristically good use of Maya grammar, missionary linguists translated “absolution” into Maya with the neologism “*choch keban*,” which translates as “untie sin.”
- 5 Interestingly, the only existing confessional manual from the colonial period – Coronel’s version published in 1620 – asks pointed questions about sexuality, lying and other sins, but is silent on idolatry. This contrasts sharply with Quechua confessional manuals

discussed by Durston (2007), where a number of questions are directly focused on idolatrous practices of penitent Indios. At the same time, the colonial dictionaries (known among Mayanists as the Motul, the Vienna, San Francisco I and San Francisco II) include discussions of Maya divinities, and in the case of the Vienna dictionary, a lengthy inventory of divinities idolized by Maya people (Hanks 2010). Moreover, all of the major missionary historians from the period discuss Maya ritual practice in sufficient detail to demonstrate their exposure to it. Beltran likens the idolatrous Indio to a cat who can be partly trained not to kill a mouse, but will always revert to killing if given the chance.

- 6 It is worth noting that the verb “confess” is ambiguous, because it designates either the true declaration of wrongs or the true declaration of one’s faith. To recite the Credo with appropriate feelings is to confess one’s faith. In the Spanish language archive, indigenous practitioners of Christianity were referred to as *almas de confesion* “souls of confession.” The nexus with conversion is evident in the fact that this ambiguity corresponds to the two phases on conversion, renunciation and affirmation.
- 7 Farriss 1984 is the first major history of Yucatan to make these forms of resistance, especially flight and drift, central. See also Bracamonte y Sosa and Solis Robleda 1996. On the role of native assistants see Farriss 1984, Hanks 2010.
- 8 The legal implications of receiving baptism without comprehending the full import of the sacrament became evident in the Inquisition. Maya persons who had been baptized without understanding were nonetheless considered Catholic. From this it followed that persistence in Maya ritual practices was apostasy and severely punished.
- 9 As Robbins points out, the intellectualist position, perhaps best represented by Horton (1971, 1975a, 1975b), bears a strong affinity with Weber’s discussion of rationalization in world religions, and shares with it the focus on the individual. Another prominent proponent of rationalization was Geertz (1973), and see Hefner 1993 for strong synthesis of this line of research.
- 10 Elsewhere in New Spain, Dominicans, Augustinians, Jesuits also pursued *reducción*.
- 11 The friars were vastly outnumbered by the Maya population they sought to convert. Sixteenth-century reports on the *guardianías* indicate ratios as high as 2,200 Maya *almas de confesión* per friar, whereas the target ratio was 500:1. This fact was lamented by successive provincials and bishops, and was partially offset by the key role played by Maya assistants in teaching the religion. These *maestros* were highly trained Maya elites who oversaw instruction, trained gifted individuals in writing, and hand-picked the scribes who kept official records in the local *cabildo* government.
- 12 *Visita* towns were occasionally described as “*bajo camapana*” “beneath bell(s).” Rafael (1993) notes that the same expression was used by Jesuits in the Philippines to denote towns with a missionary presence yet without a church. In Yucatan, the goal, if not always realized, was to build one and only one church in the center of every pueblo.
- 13 As is clear in the notarial archive, individual pueblos in the colonial period did have perimeters, hence surrounding edges that functioned as thresholds distinguishing inside from outside. These thresholds were highly salient in defining the jurisdiction of the town government, although lands owned or used by members of the pueblos were always outside town limits, but still acquired or sold through the *cabildo*. The interaction between the parish, the individual towns, and groups of towns is fascinating and demonstrates that the parish, while defined by the missions, was a political resource for alliances of Maya elites (Hanks 2010).
- 14 For reasons of length I am unable to address adequately the important comparative literature on language in evangelization. In addition to the works cited in the text, see Fabian 1986 on Swahili under British colonization, Robbins 2001 on prayer in Urupmin, and Csordas 2012 on language in US charismatic Catholicism. The Csordas work is unique in its attention to self and reflexivity, charisma and in its grounding in phenomenology.

- Robbins 2007 takes up a theme also central in Keane 2007, namely shifting language ideologies under conversion.
- 15 The decision to evangelize in the native language had several motivations, including practical necessity, royal decree and the stipulations of the Council of Trent, which governed much of the Yucatan missions.
 - 16 It is well known that the model for Spanish missionary grammars was the work of Antonio de Nebrija, the author of the first grammar of Castilian in 1492, who is often quoted for his statement that language and empire have always gone hand in hand (Nebrija 1992). For the Maya grammarians, it was his *Introducciones latinaes* of c. 1488, not his Castilian grammar that was the model (Nebrija 1996).
 - 17 To get a sense of the scale of these dictionaries, the largest of the four extant ones has 15,975 Maya headwords. It uses or defines 19,255 different Maya words, for a total of 87,155 word tokens. The next largest is estimated at 14,000 Spanish headwords glossed with about 40,000 Maya forms (including repetitions of a single Maya form in multiple glosses) (Hanks 2010: 123).
 - 18 There is a strong parallel between the challenges faced by the early missionaries and those faced by Quine's "radical translator" (1960). Both confront massive and seemingly irreducible indeterminacy of meaning and reference. Unlike Quine's imaginary linguist, the missionaries throughout Yucatan and New Spain solved the problem practically, by translating whole texts rather than isolated words, by learning to speak Maya fluently, by working with native speakers, some of whom they taught Spanish and "grammatica," and by creating neologisms for new concepts. Their work was also integrated into the much broader project of *reducción*. Whatever radical indeterminacies inhered in the early phases, Maya ceased to be so foreign for the missionaries, who cultivated and propagated the language. This familiarity of the other language and the scope of their engagement go far beyond the scenarios envisioned by Quine, even if the problems he developed remain ultimately unresolvable.
 - 19 He also pointed out that the then standard version of the Hail Mary in Maya actually does not say "Hail Mary full of grace, the lord is with thee," but rather "Hail Mary full of grace, the lord is on top of thee," complete with sexual connotations.
 - 20 The same expression cited here was used also to translate resurrection. Thus, through economy, the Maya reveals the relations between (1) the rebirth of the child in Christ through baptism, and (2) the rebirth of Christ in God through resurrection.
 - 21 I rely here on a distinction proposed by Bellah (1991) and developed in Hanks (2002) between mundane belief that and monumental belief in. *Oc ol* is the counterpart of the latter, not the former.
 - 22 There is a strong parallel between neologisms and proper names as analyzed by philosophers (Searle 1983: ch. 9, esp. 258–261). Both combine intentional content with an index to the individual denoted.
 - 23 A clear example of this was the famous Franciscan Fray Bernadino de Sahagún. Writing sermons in Nahuatl, Sahagún produced heavily indigenized images of Christian concepts, and his writing was repressed by the church (see Ricard 1986: 109–121; Burkhart 1989).

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PART VI

Persons and
Histories

CHAPTER 22

Canonizing Soviet Pasts in Contemporary Russia: The Case of Saint Matrona of Moscow

Jeanne Kormina

If you happen to be in Moscow, take the subway to Marksistskaya (Karl Marx) station and, when you get off the train, ask people how to get to *Matronushka*. Everyone will be able to tell you. Or, if you want to find the place yourself, just follow the women dressed in long dark skirts and kerchiefs; they are probably pilgrims going to visit one of the most popular Russian saints, Matrona of Moscow. Follow them to the Pokrovsky convent where the relics and venerated icon of the saint are housed. You will see the women buy white flowers (an odd number, according to Russian custom, as if the saint were alive) from sellers or small shops on the way, then enter the gates of the monastery yard and join the long queue to the shrine. While in the queue you will have time, certainly several hours, to notice that fellow visitors are socially diverse; long-skirted women mingle with casually dressed urbanites, ordinary men and women of different ages, whom your eye would never take to be pilgrims in the city crowd. After several hours' wait you at last have a chance to mount the wooden platform in front of the icon on the wall of the convent and, observed by hundreds of believers and a dozen policemen guarding the shrine, you may kiss the icon and put your forehead and a palm to it for a while. After that you can also visit the convent to see the sepulcher containing relics of the saint, kiss it, pray with your own words and ask for help with problems large or small in spoken or written form.

You can leave your letter to the saint near her icon or tomb. But if you forget to do so, you can send your message to her via email or ordinary mail, as indicated on the convent's web site.¹

Seemingly well-established, popular, and rooted in tradition, the cult of Matrona of Moscow is in fact strikingly new. Matrona was only canonized as a local saint in the Moscow diocese in 1999, and no evidence of intensive folk veneration of her before canonization is available. In a sense, the Church itself initiated the popular veneration of this saint.

The canonization of Matrona was the most successful project of its kind carried out by the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-Soviet period. The image of this saint owes its origin to the populist politics of the Russian Orthodox Church, and can tell us much about the specifics of popular Orthodoxy in contemporary Russia. However in this chapter I focus largely on another aspect of the veneration of St Matrona and several other new saints, namely that their hagiographies and cults are part of the process of making Soviet history usable in the post-Soviet context.

SOVIET PAST, POST-SOVIET PRESENT: RUPTURES AND CONTINUITIES

The Bolsheviks who seized power in 1917 had as their main goal to build a new, modernized state and society. There was no place for religion in this modernization project; the Bolsheviks believed that religion would disappear naturally, since this "opium of the people" would not be needed in the society of the future. Like others of their time who believed in progress and social evolution, they thought a science-based way of world-making would inevitably supplant religious ideologies. To hasten people through the transformation, soon after the Revolution they undertook deliberate antireligious measures such as opening reliquaries containing saints' bodies. Reports of these "openings" written in dry technical language were published in central and local newspapers. The body parts, relics, and other items found in the coffins were exhibited in churches or monasteries so that people could see with their own eyes that the bodies were not undecayed; in some cases the reliquaries were found to be empty (Marchadier 1981).² The Soviet regime thereby undermined the moral authority of the Russian Orthodox Church, and accused it of deceit. Moreover, in the course of "translating" religious discourses and practices into secular language, the regime made the sacred seem ridiculous. This kind of damage could hardly be reversed. It stimulated the objectification of religion, a "crucial byproduct of this modernist project" (Pelkmans 2009: 5).

The most visible result of the Soviet secularization project, what Luehrmann (2011) calls "secularism Soviet style", was the domestication of religion (Dragadze 1993). Religion disappeared from public spaces; instead, deinstitutionalized and marginalized, it moved into the domain of private life. Deinstitutionalization meant that believers performed their religious duties without the support and control of their churches, and religious professionals (priests) were replaced by amateurs (lay believers) who took care of believers' everyday needs. In the absence of priests, many of whom were killed or exiled, or chose a secular profession and left the church, pious village women baptized children, helped organize funerals, and performed other rites that are often labeled by researchers as "folk religion" or "religious superstitions"

(Rock 2007). Religion was moving from the center to the periphery, literally (geographically) as well as metaphorically (socially).

In the history of religions under the Soviet regime, which of course cannot be covered even briefly in this chapter, there was a short period when the state became interested in the potentialities of institutionalized religion, the Russian Orthodox Church in particular. This was in the middle of World War II, when the Soviet state began looking to the Russian Orthodox Church as a resource for mobilizing popular patriotism. A massive religious revival in the territories occupied by German troops also influenced Stalin's decision to meet in September 1943 with three chief hierarchs of the Church, including the future Patriarch Sergius of Moscow. The result was that Stalin gave the Church some freedom and support under strict control of the state (Chumachenko and Roslof 2002). As will be discussed later, this temporary change in the religious politics of the Soviet state became a source for speculation and myth-making in the 1990s.

The process of desecularization in the Soviet world started in the 1980s and took different forms in various parts of this not very homogeneous space. Yet one common characteristic can be noted, what Hann (2000) refers to as the “(de)privatization of religion” closely linked to economic liberation and the appearance of a religious market. This market attracted many churches, religious movements and missionaries who arrived to convert ex-Soviets to new religions (Pelkmans 2006). The missions were highly successful because their teachings about born-again individuals perfectly fit the cultural rupture between Soviet and post-Soviet claims for personhood experienced by the converts. Besides, as several researchers point out, people sought clear world-making strategies, and the new religions provided the needy with this possibility. Many of these churches belong to global Christian networks and organizations, such that joining meant acquiring new, extranational identities.

The religious market has developed in different ways in different parts of the post-Soviet world. While in some countries there exists a sphere of relatively free competition (Ukraine, for example; see Wanner 2007; Naumescu 2006), in Russia the state controls the market, openly supporting a religious monopoly of the Russian Orthodox Church. It does so because it appreciates the potential of the Church to help “the Russian people” overcome the rupture between Soviet and post-Soviet times by presenting them with an image of Russian history as logical, coherent, and unproblematic.³

SOVIET PAST, ORTHODOX VARIANTS

As I have written elsewhere, loyalty to the Soviet past has grown significantly in Russia within the last decade.⁴ Nostalgia for the Soviet past is deliberately promoted by the Russian state but has also developed independently at the grass-roots level in the social memory of kin groups and local communities. Local museums in towns built by prisoners of the Gulag system tend to include this part of their history in the evolutionist narrative of progress, turning the dramatic story of the Great Terror into a positive narrative of industrialization.

These ideological tendencies presented a serious challenge to the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church, who had to clarify and reformulate their position

concerning the Soviet period of Russian history. From the late 1980s through the 1990s the Church – like the rest of Russian society – was enthusiastically involved in the process of rewriting Soviet history. The Church reproached the Soviet state for its militant atheism and especially for the murder of priests and devoted believers. Like many post-Soviets, Orthodox historians started doing research in the newly opened archives in order to write the tragic story of state–church relations during Soviet times and to rehabilitate those brothers in faith who were killed or who died in Soviet prisons and camps. The result of this “archival” period for Orthodox people was the mass canonization of so-called “New Martyrs” of Russia. In these canonizations and the public discourse surrounding them, the Soviet period is conceptualized as the “Russian Golgotha” (or Calvary). An Orthodox historian, Olga Vassilieva, writes:

Hundreds of thousands of innocent people were killed in the years of unprecedented persecution of the Church. For a period of long decades Orthodox Russia was on Golgotha. The light of the sacrificial love of the new Orthodox martyrs, confessors and *pravedniki*⁵ shows to those who live today the path to salvation. . . . [D]ue to their suffering for Christ we gain the possibility of the church life. (Vassilieva 2008: 21)

The first martyr of the Soviet regime was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1989; it had canonized twelve more by 2000 when the Jubilee Bishops’ Council decided to canonize all martyrs and confessors of the twentieth century known by name (there were 1,071 at that time), as well as those who were still unknown. The last point means that for martyrs discovered later on, the canonization process has been simplified; by decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, they can be readily added to the existing list of new martyrs instead of having to go through the complicated full procedure of canonization. All in all, by the beginning of 2011 the list contained the names of 1,774 saints.⁶ A commemoration day for the new saints was established and a special icon, *The New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia Known and Unknown*, was created (see Figure 22.1). The icon depicts crowds of people, some with written names, others without, concentrated around a central group of royal “passion-bearers” – Russian Tsar Nicholas II and his wife and five children, killed in Yekaterinburg by Bolsheviks in July 1918. The royals were not canonized as martyrs because, as the canonization commission concluded after long and tense debate, they had not suffered for the Orthodox faith but for other, political, reasons. In Church tradition, passion-bearers are saints who were tortured by fellow believers and compatriots rather than by those who persecuted Christians as martyrs. Their religious deed is to have endured suffering and faced death in a Christ-like manner. Yet, though the royal family was not canonized as martyrs in Russia, the discourse surrounding their canonization in the 1990s presents them as exemplifying all martyrs who suffered at the hands of their compatriots.

Some variants of the icon *New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia* have hagiographical border scenes where tortures of the martyrs are portrayed. The persecutors of the Orthodox Christians are depicted wearing gray military uniforms, signs of the “godless” state which they represented and served. Clearly, the canonization of these New Martyrs and Confessors was the product of a political agenda. It declared the



Figure 22.1 The icon *The New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia Known and Unknown*.

position of the Church toward the Soviet period of its history and blamed the state for the believers' suffering and persecution. In other words, these canonizations argued for a huge cultural rupture between the pre-Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

Despite the efforts of those who organized the canonizations, the New Martyrs have not become objects of popular veneration. Their icons do not reveal the “potentiality” of wonderwork and their burial places have not become sacred sites attracting pilgrims. One reason for this failure is the absence of the saints’ bodies and individual

burial plots (Brown 1981). The saints lack the materiality that is so crucial for popular veneration. Such materiality is closely connected to locality, that is, to the place where the holy remains are kept and where the community that builds a kind of spiritual kinship with the local saint exists. Whether buried in mass graves or somewhere else, these saints have no evident bodies. In the Russian Orthodox tradition it is quite possible to become a venerated saint without any biography and with unknown identity – these details can be clarified by the proposed saint himself or herself in dreams or appearances to the living (see Levin 2003; Shtyrkov 2012). However, it is absolutely necessary for a saint to have his or her material representation – a holy body – in order to become the object of veneration. The same logic applies to modern secular states that preserve the bodies of political leaders whom they have “canonized” as their creators (Verdery 1999).

Interestingly, while the Russian Orthodox Church canonized the Tsar’s family, it did not officially recognize the human remains found near Yekaterinburg in 1991 as theirs, even after a series of genetic tests verified their authenticity and the remains were solemnly buried in Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral in St Petersburg where Russian emperors have been entombed since the eighteenth century. Without Church support, the remains cannot be venerated by believers as holy relics. Church officials explained their position as stemming from concern for the possible veneration of “false relics.” If verified, the potential of these remains was considerable, as the following makes clear.

In 1993 Patriarch Alexei II called upon the Russian people to repent the sin of regicide. In this way, as Rousselet (2011: 150) notes: “a new moral judgment was to be made on Soviet history. The understanding of the spiritual dimension of the Soviet tragedy and the subsequent repentance were considered to be grounds for reconciliation of all Russian people.” However, a decade later the call for collective repentance disappeared from the political agenda of the official Church, to be maintained only by groups of right-wing monarchist Orthodox dissidents who are pejoratively called “Orthodox fundamentalists” or more neutrally “zealots” (Rock 2002). These people insist that Nicholas Romanov be canonized as a martyr, as the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad had done in 1981. But they go further: for them Nicholas is the “Redeemer” (*iskupitel'*), who by his death expiated the sins of the Russian people in the same way as Jesus Christ did for the whole of mankind. Although the Church denounced this way of venerating new saints as a heresy of *tsarebozhie* (veneration of Tsar as God), it failed to stop the activities of these Orthodox dissidents. Icons and other images of the emperor depicted as a redeemer can be found in many parts of the country; one “underground” icon known as “Zealous sacrifice” depicts the head of Nicholas II in a Eucharist vessel.

By refusing to verify the royal remains, the Church deliberately sought to limit their veneration. The canonized emperor and his family are, however, popularized in contemporary Russian society as a model for ideal family life (Rousselet 2011). Yet another reason the New Martyrs have not become popular saints is that they cannot serve in this way either as “models for” or as “models of” contemporary Orthodox Christians (Macklin 1988).

By the late 1990s, voices critical of the Soviet past, which had been especially loud during the perestroika period, began calming down. The following analysis of the cult of the new saint – Matrona of Moscow – sheds light on recent tendencies

in the social memory of the Soviet past in contemporary Russia. These can be summarized as “reconciliation with the past.”

RECONCILIATION WITH THE PAST: MATRONA

In July 1997, Afanasy Gumerov, a Moscow priest with a PhD in philosophy and theology, received an order from his Bishop Arseny to start collecting materials for the canonization of saints in the Moscow diocese, as some other dioceses had already started to do. Within a few weeks Gumerov had collected a list of some twenty-five names of proposed saints. He began with the Life of Makarius (Nevsky), Metropolitan of Moscow in 1915–1917.⁷ While working on the second candidate – Ivan Vostorgov, a priest and a leader of the Russian Monarchist party who was publicly executed by the Bolsheviks together with several other politicians in 1918, and would be canonized as a martyr in 2000 – Gumerov was interrupted. He was ordered immediately to proceed to the hagiography of a very different personage who had nothing to do with either politics or Church hierarchy, an uneducated village woman, Matrona Nikonova. As Gumerov explained in an interview published in an Orthodox journal, this happened because the Church was anxious about veneration occurring at Matrona Nikonova’s grave as “it could be seized by one of the groups of schismatics” (Gumerov 2011). In fact, by 1993 one of the convents near Moscow had already published a collection of memories about Matrona. This small paperback newsprint book with a picture of birches on its cover (see Figure 22.2)⁸ includes a short biography of Matrona and stories of her life told by people who used to know her, mainly her covillagers who migrated to Moscow in the 1930s as did she, and their children. The book was severely criticized by the famous Orthodox writer, polemicist, and professor of theology Andrey Kuraev for promoting “paganism” and “folk religiosity,” that is, a variant of religion practiced by “ignorant, superstitious people” (Kuraev 1998). Indeed, Kuraev’s book, “Occultism in Orthodox Christianity,” contains several vivid and ethnographically accurate descriptions of curse removals ascribed to Matrona, as well as other evidence that could hardly be included in the Vita of a Christian saint. Kuraev chastised the publishers of the memoir for the poor quality of the text and asserted to readers that even if Matrona were canonized, he could not pray to her sincerely.

Clearly, as representatives of Orthodox intellectuals neither Gumerov nor Kuraev was enthusiastic about the potential canonization of Matrona. Indeed they are among the exceptional few, almost exclusively religious professionals, for whom the New Martyrs serve as role models. However, the majority of believers, that is the laity, needed different saints. An example of a successful “lay saint” was another woman, Saint Xenia the Blessed of St Petersburg. Sainted during the first post-Soviet canonization campaign in 1988, she became an object of popular veneration as a helper and protector, especially in cases of social suffering, such as poverty, injustice, and loneliness (Kormina and Shtyrkov 2011b; Shtyrkov 2011). According to her Life, she lived in the city of St Petersburg in the eighteenth century, was married, widowed at the age of 26, had no children, and after her husband’s death decided to become a beggar. She is glorified as a holy fool, a sort of saint who deliberately hides her holiness from people and behaves asocially, or at least unconventionally (Ivanov

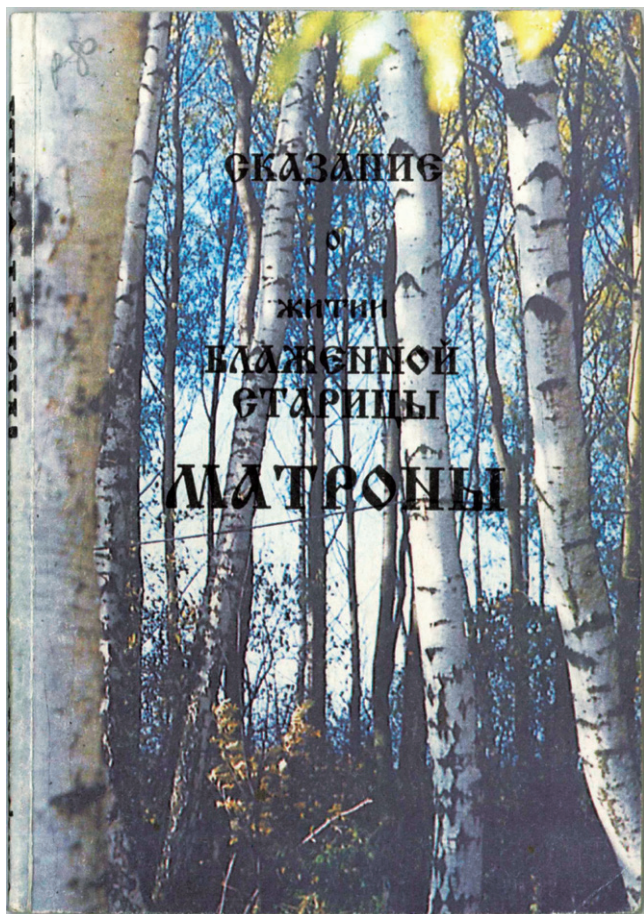


Figure 22.2 Cover of the first published Life of Matrona, *Story of the Life of the Elder Matrona*, written and edited by Zinaida Zhdanova (Holy Trinity New Golutvin Convent, Kolomna, 1993; reproduced by kind permission of Hegumennes Ksenia).

2006). Xenia is depicted on her icons and by her devotees as a typical pensioner, a poor elderly woman who can understand the needs of simple people because she suffered herself. In other words, she is a “model of” the majority of contemporary Russian Orthodox Christians.

It could be said that Matrona appeared in part as a sort of replica of Xenia, a female protector for another capital city of Russia.⁹ The two are often painted in one icon, and their Lives are sometimes published under the same cover. However, ideologically Matrona is distinct. Her suffering, a necessary quality for a proper Orthodox saint, was of a different kind. New Martyrs suffered violence at the hands of their ideological enemies and persecutors; St Xenia was a holy fool who deliberately chose physical suffering as a city beggar and experienced mental suffering from her loss; St Matrona was born already suffering physically.

Matrona Nikonova was born in 1885 to a poor peasant family in Tulskaia province. Her mother did not want to have another baby in the family and was thinking of

abandoning her. However, before her birth, her mother saw in a dream a white bird with a human face, eyes closed. The girl was born blind, but her mother decided to keep her at home. As a child, Matrona liked going to church on her own. At the age of 7 she revealed the gift of prophecy. People started consulting her, and instead of being a burden to her family, she became its main breadwinner. At the age of 17 she became paralyzed and did not move on her own for the rest of her life. She died in 1952.

In the mid-1990s, when Gumerov, the Moscow priest, started researching the biography of Matrona, there were few similar candidates for the role of this new type of saint – a simple woman who had managed to preserve her religiosity during the Soviet period. Remarkably, according to available documents (memories and variants of saints' Lives composed by amateur hagiographers) all who did so had had physical disabilities. This new category of saints was called *staritsa* (female elder), a female parallel to *starets* (male elder).¹⁰ The elder is usually an elderly monk or priest who has many spiritual children visiting him for confession. According to widespread opinion, the elders have special knowledge, a kind of inner spiritual sight that allows them to know the identity, sins, and problems of visitors without even asking them, and to give the right advice to these unasked questions. Some elders, especially women, are believed through their prayers to help their clients miraculously recover from incurable diseases, while other elders specialize in performing the ritual of exorcism for those thought to be possessed by demons. The believers, as well as some researchers, state that the social institution of *startchestvo* dates back at least to the eighteenth century, but in fact it looks very “post-Soviet” (Paert 2010).

Although the repertoire of deeds ascribed to the elders is quite rich and diverse, the main quality they share is their embodiment of the sacred. Venerated as living saints, the elders are an important part of the Russian religious revitalization movement that began in the late Soviet period. *Startsy* are not included in the official church hierarchy and represent, in the eyes of anticlerical believers from liberals to fundamentalists, a kind of alternative religious authority. In contrast to the official church hierarchs who are blamed for corruption or collaboration with the Soviet state, *startsy* are held to have lived truly ascetic lives in monasteries and remote parishes, beyond political intrigues and economic self-interest, and thus to have preserved an uncorrupted Orthodox tradition.

In contrast to male elders, however, *staritsy* seldom communicate actively with believers. Obviously, they cannot perform rituals of confession and absolution (this is allowed only to priests, and Orthodox Christianity does not allow women to be ordained); some of them cannot even speak because of their health problems. These “containers of charisma” are ideal “blank screens” onto which every group of believers can project its own imagination of “proper” sanctity and the religious way of life (Bornstein 1997).

A SOVIET SAINT

The Life of Matrona states that in the 1920s her two brothers became Communists and she had to leave her home village for Moscow. Otherwise, with her religiosity

and suspicious visitors, she could have caused trouble for her brothers' families. In Moscow she moved constantly from one place to another, lived with the families of her distant relatives and covillagers, and continued to receive visitors who found her via the network of her countrymen, but not only through them. She was consulted by different sorts of people, believers as well as nonbelievers, and, as her *Life* stresses, she helped them all.

In May 1946 one of Matushka's close friends, Tania, brought a woman-commissar dressed in a brown leather coat. She had just arrived from Berlin. Her husband had been killed during the war, and she was an atheist . . . Her only son went out of his mind. She said: "Please, help me! My son was treated in Basel. But European doctors cannot help. I came to you because I am in utter despair!" Matushka asked her: "If God heals your son, would you believe in God then?" "I don't know how it is – to believe!" (Khudoshin 2005: 241)

The unhappy mother-commissar is an atheist merely because she does not know how to believe. The narrator suggests she would likely be a believer if only she knew the way. In other words, her atheism is not her conviction or the result of her individual free choice but, in contrast to her "natural" religiosity, or readiness to become religious, it is artificial and false. This story is quite revealing in terms of how religiosity, in its Orthodox Christian variant, is often represented in contemporary Russian society. Considered to articulate the ethnic and national identity of "the Russian people," religious belonging is often understood as an ascribed social identity, rather than one that is acquired.¹¹ To put it differently, the episode with this mother suggests that rupture in religious transmission is artificial, while continuity is "natural." And of course it reminds readers that children suffer for the sins of their parents, in particular for their parents' nonbelief.

The *Life of Saint Matrona* is filled with ethnographic details of Soviet everyday life, such as *propiska* (local registration which every resident had to have; the saint did not have this registration in Moscow and, hence, lived in the capital illegally), dispossession of the kulaks (prosperous farmers), etc. *Matrona's Life* tells the story of Soviet modernization from the point of view of a village migrant to the capital city. The "social characteristics" of this saint, such as her peasant origin, experience of migration, and marginality, make her a typical Soviet person of her time, similar to the great-grandmothers of her current devotees.¹²

In the national mythology of contemporary Russia, World War II, always called the Great Patriotic War, has a special place. It is represented as an unquestionable moral victory for the Russian people, who saved the whole world from fascist occupation. Some variants of the *Life of Matrona* depict an episode of the saint being visited by the leader of the Soviet Union. It is thought that Joseph Stalin visited her at the critical moment in September 1941 when German troops were about to occupy Moscow and Stalin had to decide whether to leave the capital or not. Although omitted from the official *Vita* of the saint, the story is reproduced in productions of secular publishing houses, which, unlike church publications, are not censored. The internet is yet another way this apocryphal story is spread. Below is a "secular" variant published by a female writer in the book "Help of the saints: Matrona of Moscow" in 2009:

I cannot say whether this story is fact or fiction. But they say that Stalin himself visited Matrona in her room in Arbat [centrally located old district in Moscow] in the fall of 1941. He was told that there is a blessed clairvoyant *staritsa*, Matrona, who protects the city with her prayers from capture by the enemies. Stalin came to her to ask for advice on whether he should surrender Moscow, as Kutuzov once did, or not.¹³ According to the legend, Matronushka blessed him to pluck up his spirits. (The same way St Sergius of Radonezh blessed Dmitry Donskoy for the Battle of Kulikovo.) She hit him on his forehead with her small fist and said: “Do not surrender Moscow, think well, and when Alexander Nevsky comes he will lead everybody [to the victory] . . . The entirety of our heavenly host helps you.” (Serova 2009: 71)

In her variant of the story of the saint’s meeting with the political leader the writer invokes other historical personages in similar situations. In this way she creates continuities between different historical episodes when “Russians” successfully defended their independence. In this picture, Stalin appears as an Orthodox leader similar to Prince Dmitry Donskoy, who struggled against Mongol domination and defeated Mamai, commander of the Golden Horde, at the battle of Kulikovo in 1380.¹⁴

The story of Matrona’s meeting with Stalin is portrayed in an icon that was recently passionately discussed in different parts of Russian society (see Figure 22.3). The discussion focused on the phenomenon of so called “Orthodox Stalinism,” that is, a version of Soviet history claiming that Joseph Stalin and other Soviet leaders were



Figure 22.3 Icon *Saint Matrona Blesses Joseph Stalin for Victory in the Great Patriotic War*.

believers themselves and supported the Church, especially during the war. In this way, the Russian Orthodox Church is represented as a bridge connecting different episodes of Russian history and giving coherence to the national historical narrative. At the same time, in the folk historical imagination, Stalin appears as a political leader who won World War II. This makes him a hero in the eyes of many.

A FOLK SAINT

Matrona is not only an atypical saint for the Orthodox Christian tradition because of her deep embeddedness in routine Soviet life, which helps adherents to imagine the Soviet period as more religious, a time of spontaneous or primordial religiosity shared by the whole Russian people, ordinary citizens as well as political leaders. What makes her even more unconventional is that she is the only saint in the whole Orthodox Christian tradition to be pictured blind (Figure 22.4).

A saint is usually pictured on icons as he or she is present in the heavenly world. The saints on the icons are neither fat nor thin, tall nor short, too old nor too young. As the Russian émigré iconographer and theologian Leonid Ouspensky writes in his book on the theology of the Orthodox icon, icon painters depict not earthly faces,



Figure 22.4 Icon of Saint Matrona.

but heavenly images of canonized people (1989: ch. 9). The icon is understood as a window to the other world, and the saints as depicted on the icons are already in that other world, close to God. The reason why believers in need pray to the saints is because in the imagined landscape of heaven the saints are located near God. They are seen as mediators who connect God and believers, and as advocates for those who ask in prayers for their help.

Thus, when believers look at an icon, they see the other world. This approach reduces the attention paid to the materiality of saints' bodies to small individual details that help icon painters and believers distinguish among them. So why is Matrona depicted on the icons as blind? The question is especially intriguing because in Christian tradition, physical blindness has always had negative connotations. It is used either as a metaphor for the spiritual blindness of pagans who do not believe in God, or to signal miraculous punishment for a crime against a holy person, item (an icon, for example), or place (Shtyrkov 2012).¹⁵

In Slavic folk religious traditions, however, physical blindness usually indicates a person's inner spiritual sight directed to the other world. This gift of clairvoyance is often ascribed to local healers who are treated by the official Church as magicians, having nothing to do with Christianity. In recent times the most famous figure of this type was the Bulgarian prophet Vanga (1911–1996). Vanga lost her sight as a young girl and is always depicted as blind. She became a popular hero of Russian tabloids in the late 1980s to early 1990s, and it is possible that her popular image influenced depictions of Matrona, making the latter's blindness acceptable. There are many hagiographical parallels between the two personages, such as village origin, unhappy childhoods, and episodes of visits by political leaders during World War II (it is believed that Vanga was visited by Tsar Boris in 1942). Like Vanga, Matrona could foresee the future and perform healing miracles. In both cases there were strong debates about canonization, and, in contrast to her Russian colleague, Bulgarian Vanga has not been officially sainted. It is also true that during the Soviet period Vanga did not pretend to be a Christian; she was a charismatic "new age" person who was even appointed as a research fellow of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Iliev 2000).

As some researchers argue, Vanga had her own predecessor in Stoina (1883–1933), another blind clairvoyant from the same region who lost her sight at age 7 and is locally venerated as a saint. Stoina's enthusiasts have pushed for her canonization, but this has not happened yet (Ivanov and Izmirlieva 2003).

It would appear that the blindness of Matrona of Moscow is depicted in her icons so as to stress her folk origin and hence her authenticity, making her a sympathetic figure to believers "from the street" (not to call these mostly urban people "folk believers"). Moreover, the majority of saints gained holy status through suffering; Matrona's inborn suffering marks her faith and sanctity as "natural," as if both her sanctity and religiosity were not achieved but innate.

CONCLUSION

Saint veneration is probably the most important and characteristic part of the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition as a lived religion. To become a "lived religion" again,

post-Soviet Orthodox Christianity needed new, up-to-date saints who would attract the attention of the community.

The canonization of a saint is always a political act. Every canonization is a political statement, whether openly articulated or not. In the post-Soviet period the recent history of relations between the state and church has been at the center of several levels of public debate. As a consequence, the official Church elaborated a number of projects in which its attitude toward the Soviet past was reformulated. On the one side, the New Martyrs project was promoted by the liberal Church establishment and inspired and initiated by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. The canonization of New Martyrs asserts that during the period of religious persecution, the Orthodox tradition in the USSR was interrupted and almost disappeared. The canonization of Saint Matrona, on the contrary, states that religious life continued under the Soviet regime, embodied in people such as this blind and paralyzed village woman.

Matrona is one of the most popular saints in Russia today. Frankly, this means that the decision of the Church to canonize her was politically wise and astute. Making their pilgrimage from the Karl Marx metro station to Pokrovsky convent in the center of Moscow, people meet a folk saint whose shrine is guarded by state police, and feel with their own bodies the history of their nation as it is taught by the Russian Orthodox Church. The Church has different kinds of narratives of Soviet history at its disposal, two at least, one told in the genre of a documented life history (Martyr saints), the other in the genre of a folk tale (St Matrona). While these are targeted to different groups, it is safe to say that the story of Matrona is published and purchased in many more copies by far.

NOTES

This research was supported by the Academic Fund Program of the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, in 2012/2013, research grant #11-01-0126.

- 1 At www.pokrov-monastir.ru/ (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 2 Between 1918 and 1922, sixty-two Christian saints were exhumed, with one Catholic among them (Marchadier 1981).
- 3 The law on freedom of conscience and religious associations passed in 1997 tried to restrict the presence of foreign as well as local new churches and religious movements by introducing an "age qualification." According to this law only those religious associations which could prove that they had been established for at least fifteen years (that is before perestroika) could be registered. New Pentecostal churches solved the problem of their legal status by, for example, joining one of the already existing unions of Pentecostal churches.
- 4 Some of the ideas presented in this chapter were first formulated in an article written with Sergey Shtyrkov (Kormina and Shtyrkov 2011a).
- 5 Vassilieva lists the categories of the new saints. *Pravednik* is a saint who did not take a monastic vow and was not tortured. These saints are quite rare; probably the most famous of them is John of Kronstadt (Kizenko 2000).
- 6 This number does not include those Soviet martyrs who have been canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad since 1981.
- 7 He was canonized in 2000 for his missionary work in Altai (Siberia).
- 8 Birches are a national symbol of Russia.
- 9 St Petersburg was built at the beginning of the eighteenth century as a new capital of the Russian Empire. In 1918 Moscow again became the capital of Russia.

- 10 In 2007 and 2009 two collections of biographies of the elders who lived in the twentieth century were published by one of the respected Orthodox publishing houses in Moscow. The first one included 115 male elders while the second one had 70 names of female elders.
- 11 This popular essentialist conception of religion (as well as of nation and ethnicity) explains also why some pilgrims whom I studied and who were not sure if they were baptized preferred to believe they had been secretly christened in their Soviet childhood (Kormina 2010).
- 12 Her Life looks so pro-Soviet that there is even speculation that it was fabricated by the KGB to promote political conformism among believers (Kahla 2007: 97–98).
- 13 Mikhail Kutuzov was a commander-in-chief in the first Great Patriotic War against the invasion of Napoleon in 1812–1813. He lost Moscow to save the army.
- 14 He was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988.
- 15 Interestingly, in the church of St Nikodemus in Athens which belongs to the Moscow Patriarchate and has a Russian-speaking congregation, the icon of St Matrona hangs under that of a saint martyr of the second century, Paraskevi of Rome, who holds in her arms a vessel with eyes in it. According to her Vita, Paraskevi blinded the Emperor Antonius Pius who had imprisoned and tortured her, by throwing boiling oil into his eyes from a large kettle into which she had been put. Later, she cured him – or rather he was cured by God due to her prayers – and he put an end to persecution of Christians. No wonder that Paraskevi of Rome is invoked as a healer of the blind. By placing a new Moscow saint close to Paraskevi of Rome, believers include her in the assembly of traditional Christian saints and try somehow to “legitimize” her blindness.

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CHAPTER 23

Reflections on Death, Religion, Identity, and the Anthropology of Religion

Ellen Badone

Through a reflexive account of my own family's experience, I seek in this chapter to formulate some observations about the relationships among religion, death, ethnic and personal identity, and the anthropology of religion. My story spans two continents – Europe and North America – and three centuries, starting at the end of the nineteenth, and extending to the second decade of the twenty-first. It is a tale of mobility and displacement, of religious identities dislocated by immigration and reconstructed in a fashion similar to that described by MacCannell, who argues that the process of modernization separates people from the social groups and places where they originated, liberates them from “traditional attachments into the modern world, where . . . they may attempt to discover or reconstruct a cultural heritage or a social identity” (1976: 13, see also Giddens 1991). Not all the details in the story are clear – there are questions I should have asked people in my family, but it is now too late. I tell the story as I know it, piecing together *des bribes et des morceaux* (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 14), the scraps and pieces, as best I can from the vantage point where I am now situated: that of a middle-aged Canadian anthropologist and professor of religious studies who has worked on popular Roman Catholicism in Brittany, France, over the past thirty years.

Frada Bermann was born on December 27, 1884 in a shtetl community which she later told her own children was called Belinito, in “Petite Russie,” or White Russia.

I do not know the exact location of Belinito, and have never been able to find a settlement with that name on maps. However, it was probably in the area that is now Belarus, and was definitely within the Pale of Settlement, those provinces of Russia and eastern Poland outside of which most Jews were not legally permitted to reside (Deutsch 2011; Glenn 1990: 13). Frada's parents were Hirsch Bermann and Etha Reozine Henikoff. In Belinito, Frada and her family lived in a house she described as a "log cabin," and Hirsch Bermann was a skilled craftsman who sometimes carved and painted icons for the neighboring Russian Orthodox community. When Frada was almost 14, in 1898, she left Belinito, following her father who had already emigrated to England. In the late nineteenth century, the Pale was becoming increasingly overcrowded owing to new residence restrictions that forced certain categories of Jews who had previously been allowed to live elsewhere – such as university students and professionals – to return to the Pale (Glenn 1990: 13). Economic crisis created uncertainty, which was combined with anti-Semitic violence and discrimination against Jews in the labor market (Glenn 1990: 30–32). Hirsch Bermann must have been like many of his contemporaries in the Pale, for whom "the desperate need to earn a living and the gnawing fear of pogroms were sufficient inducements to leave" (Glenn 1990: 43). The Bermann family apparently followed a typical pattern of emigration for the period: "Before the turn of the century, the husband usually made the journey first, sent for the working-age children, and eventually arranged for his wife and the youngest family members to emigrate" (Glenn 1990: 48). Hirsch established himself in London and sent for Frada and her 10-year-old brother, Maurice. At 14, Frada would certainly have been considered "working age," and she might possibly have already been apprenticed to a dressmaker or seamstress, as were many girls in the Pale after they turned 13 (Glenn 1990: 26). Frada and Maurice journeyed by train across the border to Riga, where they boarded a ship for England. Frada traveled on Russian Passport #3861, issued in Riga on September 11, 1898. Maurice had no passport so Frada and the other passengers in the train compartment hid him behind their legs under the seat at the border crossing.

Between the time when Frada and Maurice left Belinito and their arrival in London, Hirsch Bermann fell ill and died. Somehow, the children made their way to Paris, where they had other relatives. Later, their mother and a younger sister, Lea, joined them (see Figure 23.1). In Paris, Frada trained, or continued to train, as a dressmaker. The sewing trades were the dominant form of employment for women in the Pale, and women who worked as seamstresses or dressmakers gained social respect (Glenn 1990: 19, 23). Frada must have been gifted with her needle, for she was hired by the renowned haute couture establishment Maison Paquin, located in central Paris on Rue de la Paix. When she was in her twenties, a family friend thought she would be a good match for Carlo Badone (Figure 23.2), a young immigrant from northern Italy who worked in the same trade. They were married on August 16, 1910 in Perreux, Nogent-sur-Marne, near Paris. Soon after, they moved to London, where they opened a tailoring business and showroom in Mayfair (Figure 23.3). Frada gave birth to two daughters, Henriette in 1912 and Annette four years later. The third child, Louis, born in 1924, was my father. This is his story, and mine.

Louis grew up in a house on Bruton Street near Berkeley Square in one of London's elite neighborhoods, where his parents had established themselves for easy access to their high-end clientele. Carlo kept a notebook with business records; it



Figure 23.1 Lea, Frada, Maurice, and Etha Berman, Paris, circa 1900.

contains the measurements of customers whose names in many cases are prefaced by “Lady.” According to my father, Carlo and Frada made clothes for Mrs Dudley Ward, wife of a Liberal MP, with whom the future Edward VIII had a passionate affair in the early 1920s, before he met and married the American divorcée Wallis Simpson and abdicated the throne (see Bennett 2003). Louis was educated at Westminster City School. Summer holidays were spent visiting his grandmother, Frada’s mother, and cousins in Paris. They also visited Carlo’s family in northern Italy, at Bordhigeira and Ventimiglia on the coast and near Asti in the interior. After Louis was about five, however, the visits to Italy stopped, because Carlo would have risked being forced to join Mussolini’s army.

It cannot have been easy for my father and his sisters growing up in London during the 1920s and 1930s in a mixed Italian Catholic and Russian Jewish immigrant family. According to my father and my aunt Henriette, Frada Bermann had beautiful “tiger eyes” (Figure 23.4), spoke five languages fluently, and shook hands with Lenin when he came to address a group of expatriate Russians in London. The latter detail suggests that she and her family might have been influenced by the socialist ideas



Figure 23.2 Carlo Badone as a young man.

that led to the founding of the *Bund* or Jewish Workers' Union in 1897, which was especially prominent in northwest Lithuania and White Russia (Glenn 1990: 43). My father remembered that his parents were always working, and rarely had time to demonstrate affection toward their children, although they made them beautifully tailored dresses and suits that earned Henriette the nickname "Chic" when she worked as a secretary in London during the 1930s. The maternal presence in the household was "Ma Vieille," a French housekeeper who cared for the children (Figure 23.5). She told stories of surviving the Paris Commune of 1878 and never learned English despite living for much of her adult life in London. As a result of Ma Vieille's influence, my father and his sisters grew up speaking French fluently, and maintained a lifelong affection for France and all things French.

My father was circumcised, but I do not know whether he ever attended synagogue, or had a Bar Mitzvah. My aunt Henriette told me that she and Annette went to "Sunday School" at the synagogue, and she showed me their "confirmation" photos. I wonder, but do not know, whether this confirmation was a form of Bat Mitzvah. Henriette also told me that every time her parents argued – which happened often – Carlo would make reference to Frada's Jewish identity. He would bring it up as though it were the reason for what he perceived as her flaws and shortcomings.

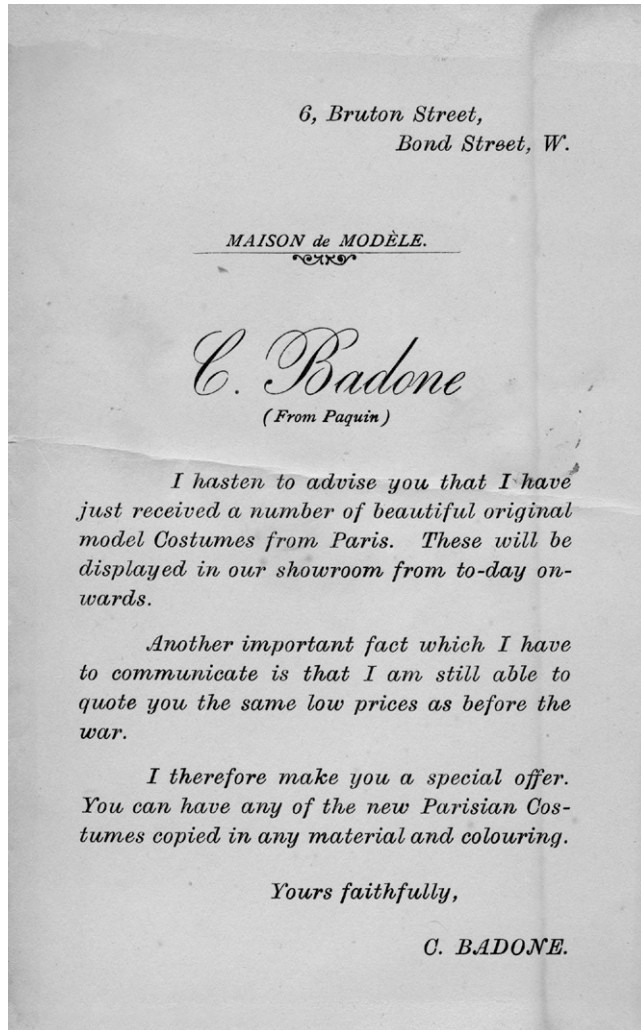


Figure 23.3 Carlo Badone's couturier business.

Ma Vieille was a practicing Catholic, and apparently led Annette to consider adopting the faith. In this atmosphere, my father developed a lasting mistrust of religion. When I was around 10 or 11, he saw me reading a book about religion – I think it was actually a biography of Emanuel Swedenborg – and I recall him telling me, “That’s metaphysics, and I don’t like metaphysics.” An engineer and a scientist, he liked the physical world with its predictable laws and stable properties.

During World War II, my father’s school was evacuated to the countryside in Kent, where he was billeted with “normal” English families who, unlike his own, did not have frequent and emotional quarrels. Too young to enlist in the army, he served in the Home Guard, and went on to study metallurgical engineering at the Royal School of Mines (later part of Imperial College) in London. After the war, in 1948, he followed Henriette to Canada, where she had emigrated as a war bride after marrying



Figure 23.4 Frada in London.

a Canadian serviceman. In the 1950s, Louis worked on the Avro Arrow project in Canada (see Figure 23.6), helping to develop what some consider the most advanced and fastest military interceptor jet of its time, intended for use against the threat of Soviet bombers in the Canadian Arctic. In a cruel blow, for my father and the 14,000 other people employed on the project, the Canadian government, under Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, canceled the program in a cost-cutting measure in 1959 and ordered all plans and prototypes for the aircraft to be destroyed. As a result, the Canadian aviation industry lost a number of leading scientists and engineers to the United States, notably to the NASA space program (Chase 2012; Kirton 1988; Stewart 1997). The cancellation of the Arrow is one of the landmark events in the Canadian collective consciousness, symbolizing the crushing defeat of Canada's aspirations to be a world leader in aviation technology and a major player competing with the US on the geopolitical stage. My father had job offers from the US, and could have emigrated once again, but by that time he was married and settled in Toronto with a family.

In Toronto, my father was introduced to Donalda Hastie, daughter of an English mother and Scots father. Her parents had immigrated to Canada and settled in Toronto after World War I, during which they had met in France where they were both serving in the British army. My mother's childhood was spent in the



Figure 23.5 Ma Vieille.

predominantly white Anglo-Saxon, Scots and Irish environment of Toronto during the Depression. Her family, like my father's, experienced – or at least was perceived by outsiders to experience – religious division. My mother recalls with wry humor how the minister came to pray in their living room for a “divided family” in which the husband was Presbyterian while the wife was Anglican. My Presbyterian grandfather died when my mother was six, and from that time on the family was simply Anglican, although I am not sure how regularly they attended church services.

Louis and Donalda were married in 1953 at the Anglican Church of the Redeemer in downtown Toronto. When my sister and I were born, we were christened at the same church. I think it is fair to state that my parents' decision to have us baptized stemmed more from the desire to avoid flouting social convention than from religious conviction. In the same way, my sister and I were taken to Sunday school and later church services with my parents at St John's Anglican Church in north Toronto. As my mother explained, she thought it would provide us with some religious



Figure 23.6 The Avro Arrow rollout (courtesy of Canadian Aviation and Space Museum).

background, which she felt would be a good thing. St John's is a historic church with a very English atmosphere. Perched on top of a hill, it overlooks the valley of one of the branches of the Don River that flows through Toronto into Lake Ontario. When St John's was founded in 1816, the church must have dominated a bucolic, pastoral vista. Now, it is almost hidden behind plate-glass office buildings, and looks down on the intersection of Yonge Street and Highway 401, one of the busiest thoroughfares in Canada. St John's still had a rural "feel" in the 1960s when I attended Sunday school there. Like a traditional English village church, it was, and still is, surrounded by its cemetery. A reproduction wooden lych-gate marks the entrance from the road into the churchyard. The site is the product of nineteenth-century settlers' attempts to recreate the landscape of England in the New World. It was here that I was introduced to religion, and the aesthetics of the stained glass windows, the pipe organ music and the readings from the King James Version Bible moved me and touched some inner chord.

Nobody told me that I was – at least in part – an outsider to this Christian tradition. I knew about my Presbyterian maternal grandfather, but never inquired about the religious background of my paternal grandparents. In any case, they seemed far away, in London. They visited Canada only once, when I was three, and died before I turned ten. I knew them chiefly through the packages of presents they sent at Christmas, which always included Italian biscuits, Amaretti di Mombaruzzo, made in the village where my grandfather's relatives lived. It never occurred to me that those relatives might be Catholic, and my father never mentioned that his mother was Jewish.

Throughout childhood, I continued to attend St John's with my younger sister and my parents, wearing freshly polished shoes, best dresses, hats and white gloves.

My parents joked that the minister, an intellectual, gave sermons that made a more persuasive case for atheism than for belief. Then suddenly, in 1966, my sister died, following a seizure related to the cerebral palsy with which she had been afflicted since birth. Her funeral was at St John's and she was buried in the churchyard there under a heart-shaped pink granite stone. After that, attending church became difficult for my parents, and often they drove me to Sunday school but left me to attend on my own. I continued to be curious about religion, and at 14, I was awarded the prize for the best girl student in my confirmation class. The boy who received the male counterpart prize went on to become a minister, and I too might have followed a religious calling. In the late 1960s, St John's started a youth group, to which I belonged. Its brand of Anglicanism was more evangelical than "High Church" and we became "born again." This development alarmed my parents, who insisted that I stop attending church. By that time, neither of them attended services, although they continued to make monthly donations and remained parishioners of St John's throughout their lives.

It was not until I was 17 that I learned about my Jewish grandmother. My aunt Henriette was visiting Toronto, and the two of us made a long car trip together. During that drive, she filled in for me the gaps in the family history on my father's side. That conversation was a revelation. For several days afterwards, every time I saw my face in the mirror, I wondered about my identity. It was as if there was another person there, looking back at me, whose existence I had not been aware of previously. Yet I did not set out to recover my Jewish roots. Life was busy; I had moved beyond born-again Christianity, and my grandmother's Jewish background seemed to have no connection to my everyday reality. Moreover, my father had completely embraced my mother's Scots and English ethnicity. She always said she had married him because he was "interesting." Paradoxically, however, he muted the "exotic" aspects of his family background, choosing to adopt my mother's more mainstream identity.

During their leisure time, and especially after my father took early retirement from his engineering job in 1980, my parents became involved in many activities centering on the theme of heritage, broadly defined. My mother researched the history of their house in north Toronto, built in 1834, and together my parents published a book about it. They also bought a farm near Peterborough, Ontario, where they spent weekends and vacations, working hard to restore a century-old log house on the property. My mother studied Gaelic, and they took up Scottish country dancing. In honor of his wife's father's clan affiliation, my father bought a kilt in the Graham of Montrose tartan, which he proudly wore to Burns Night celebrations and Tartan Balls. They even raised Highland cattle on the farm. All this seemed perfectly normal and reasonable to me. I never questioned why my father did not show any interest in exploring his Jewish background. He did maintain contact with cousins in Italy, whom we had visited when I was 13, but distance and the linguistic barrier worked against our developing a close relationship.

Writing about the childhood of pianist Glenn Gould, who grew up in Toronto in the 1930s, Kevin Bazzana observes that in contrast to its present-day multicultural diversity, Toronto's population before World War II was 80 percent British, "and a colonial mentality prevailed: a Torontonion could do no better than strive to be British" (2003: 16–17). This was the world in which my mother was born and came of age. Likewise, even in the Toronto that I was familiar with between the 1960s

and 1980s, British ethnicity remained a marker of elite status. To be English was valued. That is why my father delighted – to my frequent embarrassment as I grew older – in telling people that he had grown up on the same street in London where Queen Elizabeth II lived, before the abdication of Edward VIII put her in direct line to the throne. Being Scots, or Celtic, was almost as valued as being English – perhaps more so in a strange reversal of status hierarchy. The plucky Celts could be understood as subaltern, the original indigenous residents of the British Isles who had been displaced to the hinterlands by Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Norman invaders, but who nonetheless held fast to their ancient heritage. In search of connections to the Celtic past, my parents traveled through Scotland and Ireland, visiting standing stones and archaeological sites from Skara Brae to the Hebrides.¹ I too shared this passion for the Celtic world, inspired in part by the florescence of Irish, Scots and Breton music that started in the 1970s. It was this passion that led me to visit Brittany, the peninsula of northwestern France which juts out into the Atlantic Ocean, and which shares much in common linguistically and culturally with the Celtic regions of the British Isles. After I began my doctoral studies in cultural anthropology, Brittany became my ethnographic *terrain*.

I did not, and do not now, think of myself as Jewish. Yet I have Jewish relatives in London, France, and even Israel. Although I have met some of these relatives, most I do not know. Yet, by blood links, I am just as closely related to them as I am to the Anglo-Canadian second cousins with whom I grew up in Canada. But I feel I cannot claim the Jewish part of my background because it was not part of my childhood experience, and I have no real emotional connection to that world. To become Jewish would require an intellectual process of study and conversion. Of course, technically by Orthodox standards, although my father would have been accepted as Jewish, I would not (although I would have been Jewish under the Nazi definition). I am not culturally Jewish. In fact, I did not even know much about Jewish culture until I read Barbara Myerhoff's work as a graduate student, and began, dimly, to perceive a connection between my grandmother and the shtetl world left behind by the elderly immigrants in *Number Our Days* (1978). Later, teaching Religious Studies courses on Death and Dying, I lectured about Myerhoff's work, showed her films, and had my students read "A death in due time" (Myerhoff 1984). My academic exposure to Judaism led me tentatively to ask my father questions, not so much about Jewish practices (Did your mother light Sabbath candles?) but more about his mother's memories of childhood in Belinito.

Only very late in life did my father come to some halting, incomplete reconciliation with his Jewish roots. By that time, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Canadian society – at least in Toronto and southern Ontario – was more relaxed about ethnic variation. Looking at the class lists for my undergraduate courses I marveled at the range of exotic names, from Ananathi Pillai through Zdanek, and found it hard to believe that in the early 1960s, "Badone" was the most foreign and unusual name in my elementary school classes. Several months before he died, I took my father and mother to the "Chagall and the Russian Avant-Garde" exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario. My father was still ambivalent about his connection to the world depicted in Chagall's paintings, but took some pleasure in observing that the black and white photos in the exhibition of shtetls in Belarus where Chagall had lived were very much like his mother's descriptions of Belinito. One of Chagall's

paintings shows an icon-maker, and the exhibition illustrated how the Russian Orthodox genre of icons had influenced some of Chagall's designs. My father reminisced that his own grandfather, Jewish like Chagall, had also been an icon-maker.

Once my father had reached his eighties, in Toronto it was no longer necessarily a mark of low status or a social handicap to acknowledge an ethnic identity other than the dominant British or Celtic one. He became less wary, and would occasionally in conversations with me and my children make reference to his mother's Jewish roots. His cousin Henry, the son of Maurice whom Frada Bermann had hidden under the seat in the train at the border crossing, came to visit us in Canada, since Henry's own son – my second cousin – was living and working in Ottawa for a time. Nonetheless, I think that, like my aunt Henriette, who once told me that it was safer not to tell people about our Jewish background “because you never know,” my father was afraid of the consequences of “coming out.” Perhaps he and his sisters had been too close to Nazi Europe during the Holocaust to ignore the possibility of a renewal of anti-Semitism. Even if the likelihood of physical danger was remote, there was always the unexamined, taken-for-granted cultural prejudice that inspired comments such as one I overheard from a friend of my maternal grandmother, who decided to not purchase a dress because its large and very colorful designs looked “too Jewish.” My father was also probably reluctant to deal with the political consequences of being Jewish in the post-9/11 world. Would he be considered a traitor if he did not support Zionist policies? And would people in the Jewish community expect him to start attending synagogue?

Louis Badone (Figure 23.7) died on February 19, 2012, one day after a family dinner at which he was able to see his grandson, who had just arrived home from college in the US for a mid-term break, and write a card and check to his granddaughter for her twenty-first birthday. My father had suffered a heart attack the



Figure 23.7 Louis Badone, 1924–2012.

previous month, but seemed to be stable, although weak and frail. When he was rushed to the hospital in the afternoon of February 19, my mother, my husband, and I were with him, and we were able to stay by his side in the emergency department until he passed away, close to midnight. Fittingly, or perhaps paradoxically, the hospital where he died was Mount Sinai, originally Toronto's Jewish hospital. The date on the death certificate signed by the doctor is actually February 20, 2012, the fifty-third anniversary of Black Friday, the day the Diefenbaker government cancelled the Avro Arrow. My father had been planning to give a talk about the Arrow to commemorate the anniversary at the retirement residence where he and my mother were living. He almost made it to the day. I think he wanted his own demise to coincide with the date that marked the passing of the aircraft that symbolized so much for his generation of Canadians, and has acquired almost mythical status in Canadian history. In "A death in due time," Barbara Myerhoff describes how the death of Jacob Kovitz, at his ninety-fifth birthday celebration, brought his life to closure in a full circle. He died at the time he had chosen, surrounded by his family, in full possession of his speech and faculties to the end. So, too, in a less dramatic and public way, did my father.

He left behind prearranged, prepaid instructions for his funeral. As he wished, his body was cremated and a memorial service, in the presence of the ashes, was held at St John's. The service was classically Anglican. We sang "Jerusalem," "All Things Bright and Beautiful," and "Amazing Grace." The minister talked about the Resurrection and the promise of eternal life. Following the service, we walked through melting snow to my sister's grave, where my father's ashes were interred. So, we commemorated his life as he had wished, with an Anglican ceremony, and incorporated his remains into the landscape of a *lieu de mémoire* (see Nora 1989) that enshrines the connections between Canada and its British, Christian legacy.

What is the moral of this story, what does it all mean? The short answer is that one does not have to end one's life with the same ethnic and religious identity that one acquires at birth. In my father's case, of course, he was born with more than one identity which he could emphasize or downplay, according to circumstances. He opted for neither of his parents' identities, but instead threw in his lot with the British, Anglican world which he encountered outside the home, at school and in university. Later, in Canada, he "became" a Scot. If the construction of identity, religious and ethnic, is always an emergent process, subject to negotiation depending on one's situated position, for my father, this process was more self-consciously aware than it is for most people. He never took his identity for granted, as given, but was always mindful of the differences between himself and those he encountered and how best to negotiate common ground based on the characteristics or cultural resonances that they could be construed as sharing. What my father's story shows is the extent to which religious and ethnic identity can be malleable, or at least how malleable it was over the course of the twentieth century, when people could escape their roots and past by immigrating to a New World. Would my father's kind of chameleon magic be possible now, when families can keep in close contact across the globe through Skype, email, Facebook, phone calls and affordable air travel?

Aside from my father, the other protagonist in this story is, obviously, myself. Like Ruth Behar (1991), I have been inspired by the loss of a close family member to reflect

on the relationships between my family background, my professional career, and my connections to various religious traditions both “at home” and “in the field.”² Somehow, I went from being religious, without being aware of the full extent of my religious heritage, to becoming an anthropologist of religion. Indeed, it was through anthropology that I came to know most of what I know, both about being Jewish and about being Catholic. There is an irony here, that my grandfather and Italian relatives grew up in the religious tradition that I discovered as “Other,” European Catholicism. Through ethnographic fieldwork in Brittany and elsewhere in France, I have participated in masses, pilgrimages, processions, and recitations of the Rosary. I am far more familiar with these Catholic ceremonies than with the services of the Anglican Church, of which I am a confirmed, but rarely participating member. Certainly, the religious sensibility that I developed as a child at St John’s made it seem natural to take part in Catholic rituals in France. The aesthetic elements – music, sunlight filtered through stained glass windows, flowers on the altar, poetic liturgy – were the same. So my personal background facilitated my career as an anthropologist.

The personal and the professional have intersected in other ways as well. Sitting in the emergency room at Mount Sinai Hospital, watching my father as his strength deteriorated, I noticed that he repeatedly grasped the sheets on the hospital bed, pulling them toward himself and then pushing them away. His gestures evoked an image from a conversation I had in Brittany in 1984 with an elderly woman who washed and laid out the dead for wakes in her village. She had told me in Breton that often dying people will “*daspugn an traou*” or “gather things up,” clutching at their clothing and sheets, opening and closing their fists, pulling the material toward them ceaselessly. Likewise, as the hours wore on in the hospital, I found myself spontaneously thinking the words of the Rosary in French: “*Sainte Marie, Mère de Dieu, Priez pour nous, pauvres pécheurs, Maintenant et à l’heure de notre mort.*” Somehow, I felt it would have been more fitting and comforting to repeat the Rosary in this situation than to respond to my mother’s brightly hopeful, but futile, attempts at conversation. At least more fitting for me, given my experience doing fieldwork in Brittany, but not for my mother or my father. Likewise, my years of teaching Anthropology of Death and Dying courses informed my response when the nurse asked me if my father was a “full code.” I knew what that meant, and I knew he did not want CPR or chest compressions, and so he was able to slip away in peace.

Can one be an anthropologist of religion and still have religious faith? Many of us “bracket truth,” sidestepping questions of belief, as does Clifford Geertz, who suggests that “such questions cannot even be asked, much less answered, within the self-imposed limitations of the scientific perspective” (1973a: 123; see Rabinow 1983). Others, like E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1965) or Edith Turner (2005), claim that faith in a religious tradition of one’s own allows the anthropologist to be more sensitive and perceptive in studying the faith of Others. For myself, I do not know. Just before he died, when he stopped responding to our voices, my father seemed to startle to attention, and his eyes opened wide. He appeared to be staring, as if transfixed, at something the rest of us could not see. Part of me would like to think he had entered into another world at that point; part of me thinks that was the moment when consciousness ceased for him, everything went black, and the world receded into nothingness. I will not know until I go there myself. Meaning must be sought and constructed in this life, however, not in the next, if there is one.

As Durkheim famously stated, religion binds individuals into an enduring social community. Barbara Myerhoff understood this aspect of religion very well. Whether or not our spirits live on, by belonging to an ethnic and religious community we transcend death. The imagined community continues, even if its members do not survive. Unlike Jacob Kovitz, my father did not find his place in the Jewish community. Neither did he find it in the Catholic community, as do many of the elderly people I have known in Brittany. Ultimately, however, he constructed both meaning and a community for himself, through reference to “Canadian heritage,” something he both adopted and created.

As a child, I remember visiting countless antique stores with my parents, who avidly collected rustic Canadian furniture, which they then lovingly stripped of paint and refinished in our backyard. The transformation from pieces of “junk” to valuable oak, pine, or maple antiques with a warm, shiny, wood-grain patina was remarkable to my eyes. Our house was furnished with chairs, tables, desks and sofas rescued in this way from oblivion. The decor was fitting, for the house had been constructed in 1834, and my parents proudly recounted that according to archival sources they had located, early settlers had stood at its front door and watched William Lyon Mackenzie’s troops marching down Yonge Street during the Rebellion of 1837, a popular uprising against the oligarchic form of government that prevailed in the colony of Upper Canada at that time (Buckner 1988). My parents’ love of history inspired them to join the North York Historical Society, of which my father served as president. In this role, he spearheaded a campaign to have another historic north Toronto house, the home of David Gibson, Scottish settler and supporter of the 1837 rebellion, bought by the city and preserved as a museum. My mother volunteered for years there as a tour guide, wearing period costume, complete with bonnet and a paisley shawl from Scotland. My parents also expended much energy and funds in the restoration of their log house at the farm. However, my father’s greatest success in heritage preservation involved the house where I grew up and lived until my early twenties in Toronto. Located near the central artery of Yonge Street with its bus and later subway lines, and close to Highway 401, the house was in a neighborhood menaced by redevelopment plans from the 1960s. For years, my father wrote letters, petitioned the city, made presentations before council meetings, and negotiated with developers, first to have the house designated as a historic site, and finally to have it preserved for posterity after being moved to a new location overlooking a park in the center of a new high-rise complex.

One of our neighbors attributed my father’s success in saving our house to his “bulldog-like tenacity.” Even in his eighties, he continued to lobby the Toronto Heritage Board to prevent the destruction of historic buildings and to have commemorative markers erected at historic locations. I find it slightly odd that my father was so passionate about history to which he had no “natural,” genetic connection. However, Canada – understood as an extension of Britain in the New World – was his adopted country. By preserving the Gibson House, and his own home, he helped create tangible monuments to that imagined community, which in turn, provide symbolic material to which the community can refer in the process of recreating itself.³ In his directions for his funeral, my father requested that his tombstone be inscribed with the words, “He was a preserver of heritage.” Somehow, by preserving heritage, I think he hoped to preserve something of himself, to prevent the erosion

of memory and halt the relentless passage of time. Heritage was his religion, if we define religion as the attempt to create connections to a domain perceived as enduring, orienting experience in a meaningful way, and transcending the individual self.

Anthropology in the postmodern era has almost forgotten E.B. Tylor's hypothesis, framed in *Primitive Culture* (1873), that animism, or the belief in spiritual beings, constitutes the "minimum definition of religion" (quoted in Lessa and Vogt 1979: 10). Tylor traced the notion of the spirit, in part, to the experience of witnessing death, suggesting that "thinking men, as yet at a low level of culture" asked themselves the question: "what is it that makes the difference between a living body and a dead one?" (Tylor 1873, quoted in Lessa and Vogt 1979: 12). We now cringe at the evolutionary and sexist connotations of such formulations. Likewise, we dismiss as reductionistic and overly simplistic Malinowski's functionalist argument from the early twentieth century that "Of all sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life – death – is of the greatest importance" (1948: 29). For Malinowski, religion was born of "direct emotional forces created by contact with death and with the corpse" which generated the need to deny mortality and take comfort in afterlife beliefs (1948: 32).⁴ A more theoretically sophisticated, phenomenological rather than historical, approach to the origin of religion is offered by Csordas, who suggests that the "experiential source" or "phenomenological kernel" of religion is a "primordial sense of 'otherness' or alterity." Awareness of alterity, he argues, is a condition of human embodiment, "part of the structure of being-in-the-world," making religion "inevitable, perhaps even necessary" (Csordas 2004: 164). Without wishing to rehabilitate Tylor or Malinowski, I would like to look for the point of intersection between their observations about death, and Csordas's ideas about alterity. Although Csordas is concerned with the sense of otherness that emerges in intersubjective encounters among living individuals, it is reasonable to argue that death defines the most paradigmatic form of alterity. For the living, the complete otherness of a lifeless body that moments earlier had been animated represents an unfathomable mystery, the prototype of the unknown. The corpse is, in the words of Otto, whom Csordas quotes, a *mysterium tremendum*, but of a more tangible, concrete character than the numinous. If conscious being is located in the body, death, the absence of embodied vitality, is clearly "other." In joining Csordas's theory of alterity with earlier anthropological ideas about death and religion, we can, perhaps, uncover new insights into the power of religion. For the faithful, religion is perceived to transcend alterity both in the form of individual isolation and in the form of mortality.

I am probably guilty in this formulation of reifying and essentializing both religion and alterity.⁵ Certainly, I hold the position that "religion" is socially constructed, and a category that has far more salience in the Western, Abrahamic traditions than elsewhere (see, for example, Asad 1993; Reader 1993). Moreover, it would be possible to claim that religion has far more maleficent impacts in the world than benignly offering transcendence of alterity and death. I do not dispute that religion serves as an agent of power and repression, instigating violence and legitimating gender, class and colonial subjugation. Yet I would argue that it is precisely religion's claim to overcome alterity and death that gives religious institutions their power to command allegiance and exert social control.

My fusion of Malinowski, Tylor and Csordas may or may not work as a scholarly construct. However, it does not work for me on the level of providing personal

meaning. For that, I turn – not to Catholicism, Judaism, or the Anglican Church, the three religious traditions that are in some sense my “own” – but to the kind of experience that people told me about in Brittany. These experiences belong to a domain that clerics and theologians might call “superstition,” and earlier generations of anthropologists would have termed “folk” or “popular” religion, or “Little Tradition,” as opposed to the “Great Tradition” of the canonical, scripturally based “World Religions” (see Brown 1981; Davis 1974; Hume 1956, originally 1757; Lanternari 1982; Redfield 1956). Following William A. Christian, Jr (1981: 178), I prefer to think of these types of experience as “religion as practiced” by people in their everyday lives, rather than “religion as prescribed” by official religious institutions. In 1983–1984, I lived for thirteen months in La Feuillée, a rural community of about 600 people in interior Finistère. My ethnographic fieldwork concerned the impact of rapid social change on cultural constructions of death in this region, historically known for its funerary customs and narrative traditions concerning death and the world of the dead, the *Anaön*, in Breton (Badone 1989). Talking with elderly people in La Feuillée, I heard many narratives about *intersignes*, omens foretelling death that often involve the actions of birds or animals: dogs howling, roosters crowing at night, crows or magpies gathering around a house where someone later dies, and most importantly, the call of the “death bird,” *labous an ankou*, often identified as the owl or sparrow-hawk. These omens are signs connecting the present with the future, and the material world with the unseen. Narratives about *intersignes* address profound issues of death, grief and loss, lending “interpretability” to tragic circumstances by setting them within the context of a larger preordained pattern or plot. The signs that people told me about were mostly precursors of death, although in some cases, they could be simultaneous, as when a clock stops suddenly at the moment of its owner’s death. I interpreted *intersignes* as evidence for a worldview in which the future is understood as “written in advance.” *Intersignes* enable certain individuals to “see” the future, to know beforehand what must inevitably occur. In fact, many people told me narratives in which the significance attributed to *intersignes* was an “after-the-fact” interpretation: the premonitory signs were noted as “unusual” phenomena, but not recognized as omens until after a tragic death occurred. Ultimately, I theorized, *intersignes* and the process of telling stories about them are cathartic because they provide proof that existence is not a series of random coincidences. Part of an enchanted world, *intersigne* narratives express faith in the interconnectedness of phenomena on all levels: human, animal, and the material and spirit worlds. *Labous an ankou* calls, not at random but because the bird is aware of events among its human neighbors, even before they themselves are aware.

In my own case, I have not experienced premonitory signs, but rather unusual occurrences, small events, but nonetheless not ordinary ones, following the deaths of family members. If asked by an anthropologist of religion, I would say that I do not rationally believe that these events were communications from beyond the grave.⁶ Rationally, I believe they were simply interesting coincidences. Nonetheless, these events endow my everyday life with significance, making me feel that things are as they should be.

When my aunt Henriette died in March 2003, I traveled with my parents to Victoria, British Columbia, where she had been living, to arrange the cremation and funeral. We sorted through her clothing, arranged to have her furniture auctioned,

and took home some black and white photos of her youth in London during World War II and her early days in Canada as a war bride. The day after my return from Victoria, buying coffee on campus, the cashier handed me my change and a coin went spinning wildly across the floor. Stooping down to pick it up, I discovered it was a genuine 1945 nickel, inscribed with the V for Victory and a flaming torch. Somehow, I saw it as a sign from my aunt, a token of her era, sent to me to show me that she was at peace, that things had been done as she would have liked, and that she had safely made the passage to the other world. I keep that coin in my office on my desk.

After my father died, I wondered – thinking it was silly of me to wonder – if there might be a similar event. Indeed, there was something that I think of as a sign, again on my first day back at work after his funeral. I was alone, coming down a stairwell in the Anthropology building. The stairwell has windows overlooking a neglected courtyard planted with shrubs and a tree bearing red berries that attract the birds in winter. As I descended the stairs, a bright red cardinal flew into the window, knocking against it, and for an instant, our eyes met before he flew away. I was close enough to this beautiful, “other” creature to touch him, if not for the glass window that separated his world from my own.

My father, a confirmed materialist and atheist, would have scoffed at my whimsical fancies about signs from some spiritual realm. At one level, I am tempted to agree with his perspective. Yet, like Katherine Ewing (1994) in her encounters with Sufi saints in Pakistan, I am also “tempted to believe.” Ultimately, I am caught between faith and skepticism. Perhaps the one religious system I can embrace is anthropology. As Loring Danforth claims, “An anthropological perspective or world view, no less than a religious one, is a ‘mode of seeing . . . a particular manner of construing the world’ (Geertz 1973a: 110) . . . Anthropology, in the last analysis, involves a quest for meaning, a search for cultural and often personal identity through the practice of ethnography” (Danforth 1989: 296). Like pilgrims and preservers of heritage, anthropologists too seek immortality and transcendence of individual alienation through constructed connections with other peoples, places, and temporal domains.

NOTES

Family photographs courtesy of the author.

- 1 My interpretation here is informed by Basu’s (2004) discussion of “roots-tourism” as a form of pilgrimage in the Scottish Highlands.
- 2 See also Bruner 2010; Heilman 2002. My reflections constitute a form of autoethnography, which, according to Deborah Reed-Danahay “stands at the intersection of three genres of writing which are becoming increasingly visible: (1) “native anthropology,” in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group; (2) “ethnic autobiography,” personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3) “autobiographical ethnography,” in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing” (Reed-Danahay 1997: 2). Stoller, this volume, takes a similar experiential, reflexive approach and focuses on the relevance of the researcher’s background in influencing their life as an anthropologist.
- 3 Osborne (1996) provides further discussion of the construction of national identity through reference to heritage landmarks in the Canadian context.

- 4 The efficacy of religion and ritual in providing comfort in the face of death has, of course, been effectively challenged by Geertz (1973b) and Rosaldo (1989), among others.
- 5 See, however, Csordas's argument that alterity is "experientially concrete but has no content prior to its elaboration in an ethnographic or historical instance" (2004: 172).
- 6 See Needham 1972 and Ruel 1982 for discussion of the usefulness of the concept of "belief" in the anthropological study of religion.

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CHAPTER 24

Spirits and Selves Revisited: *Zār* and Islam in Northern Sudan

Janice Boddy

This chapter is an effort to make sense of recent religious transformation in a close-knit Muslim community experiencing rapid economic and social change. The teleologies of modernization – Weberian bureaucratization, disenchantment of the world, separation of church from state – may be glimpsed in my example but with a twist. In historical European societies “religion” emerged as a social category when politics was disembedded from the matrix of “tradition” and the secular state evolved to control public morality. It then became possible to speak of “*a* religion,” a set of beliefs (and disbeliefs) and shared practices appropriate to them. In such pluralistic contexts religion, though managed by the state, belongs to the private or domestic sphere (Asad 1993). However in the case of contemporary Sudan, religion, here Sunni Islam, is the idiom of statecraft; Islamic principles govern the public sphere despite inconstant official tolerance of other faiths. While Muslim Sudanese consider certain conventional practices to be outside religion, and thus secular, this does not imply their espousal of secularism as a political ideology (cf. Asad 2003). Indeed, religion continues to infuse most things that people in this community do. Yet what is sanctioned as *properly* religious is undergoing change, being defined more narrowly than in the past. Local notions and experiences of personhood seem to be shifting too, in relation to both Islamization and the expansion of economic and social opportunities. While the community I describe is undeniably “modern” as well as

religious, its modernity and religiosity are ineluctably shaped by the social and historical conditions in which its members are enmeshed. My argument revolves around *zār*, a form of spirit possession, and its abandonment by a group of northern Sudanese with whom I have conducted research since 1976. The discussion concludes that the appearance or disappearance of features that we, or our interlocutors, consider “religious” can only be understood holistically, in relation to a broad complex of forces ranging from national economic policies to intimate techniques of the self.

TWO RITUALS

In April 1907, on the eve of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday in the newly built town of Port Sudan, a young British engineer saw “the weirdest show.” He had been guided by native officers to a large enclosure “decorated with flags, and lighted with lanterns” from which they could see the *zikrs*, ecstatic rites invoking the names of Allah, that were taking place all round. A *zīkr*, he wrote to his parents, “is hard to explain.” Its “necessary ingredients are some music, a crowd (forming a ring), and some form of dancing.” The dances have as “their object, the working up of a rather curious excitement, which seems to be more religious than anything else.”

The oddest thing I saw was a ring in which the music was supplied by two tom-toms and the performers were women: they were crouched on the ground and were entirely covered by large blankets spread all over them. All that could be seen was the convulsions of the blankets. My guide was very careful to explain that the women were not free agents at all, but that their contortions – they knelt down and waived [sic] their heads up and down violently – were entirely the work of a particular devil or spirit which always had the same effect. Rich men pay considerable sums for their wives to “work off” this devil with appropriate paraphernalia in the way of music and so on.¹

The “oddest thing” the engineer saw was not a *zīkr* but a *zār*. Yet the two rites have much in common, for each has memory at its core. *Zīkr* means “remembrance” – of Allah and the founder of the holy way along which disciples process. *Zikrs* are ceremonies associated with Sufi brotherhoods or *ṭarīqas* (paths) in which adherents, typically men, utter sacred chants while rocking back and forth in unison in an attempt to achieve oneness with the Divine. Participants may enter trance, break off from the group and begin to whirl or dance wildly, sometimes flourishing swords or canes. A colorful example can be seen in Omdurman every Friday at sundown when members of the Qadriyya order gather before the tomb of their Sudanese leader, Shaykh Hamid an-Nīl.² The focus of a *zīkr* is *al-ākhirā*, achieving a taste of the afterlife in the here and now.

Zār rituals, conversely, are staged to celebrate and appease invisible anthropomorphic beings of *ad-dunyā* or the mortal world, who can overwhelm humans and take possession of their bodies, producing or intensifying physical ailments in their hosts as they do so.³ *Zār* “spirits” (s. *zār*, pl. *zayrān*) or “red winds” (*rīḥ/rowḥan al-āḥmar*) are ethereal analogues of powerful “others” who have influenced local communities in the past: Egyptian and British officials, Turks, Ethiopians, Arab nomads, Nuer and Azande from the far south, even crocodiles and electricity. Their targets are mainly women; *zayrān* threaten human continuity for they are attracted to blood, the source

of a woman's fertility, and are prone to hinder its regular flow. They are capable of stopping menses, seizing a "seed" being nourished in the womb, or inducing hemorrhage after birth. Interestingly, the first *zār* ceremonies in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan appear to have been modeled on *zikrs* (Constantinides 1972; Makris 2000) and the engineer's observations suggest that at the start of the twentieth century the two were performed as complementary devotions on Islamic holidays. Today they are firmly distinguished, and Sudanese who consider themselves pious Muslims condemn the *zār* as un-Islamic; followers of mosque-oriented Sunni Islam may be dubious of *zikrs* too.

This chapter addresses transformations in local semiotic ideology (Keane 2007) and the dynamic interplay of Islamic intensification, global consumption patterns, biomedicine, and electronic mediation with which one Muslim community in Sudan is presently engaged. As change can only be assessed from a standpoint, I adopt as a baseline my ethnographic observations in rural Sudan of 1976–1977. But this is only heuristic: conditions have surely always been in flux. What I provide, then, is more a series of snapshots taken from my vantage point at different moments in a community's life that together suggest a trajectory of modifications in sociality, religiosity, and gender relations. The context in which this has been taking place features a recent influx of oil wealth and social media, the contraction of state support for social programs in the context of international conditions to end Sudan's decades-long civil war, widespread underemployment, significant advances in female education, and the rise of a consumer-oriented middle class. I begin by sketching historical shifts in the relationship between local Islam and *zār* that suggest a corresponding shift from holism to pluralism in social epistemology. I then describe some implications of Sudan's political and economic milieu for the construction of sociality, selfhood and gender relations. The intent is to fathom the collapse of *zār* in a community where it thrived a few years before, and to uncover some empirical complexities of "Islamization"⁴ as that process unfolds in contemporary Sudan.

HISTORY

Zār's diminished status and its gradual detachment from Sudanese Islam owes something to the promotion of religious conservatism under British colonial rule. According to Constantinides (1972, 1991), *zār* arrived in the region around the time of the Ottoman conquest (1820–1821), and by the start of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1898) had grown so popular that it was seen as a threat to orthodox, legalistic Islam. It was denounced by Al-Azhar-trained religious scholars (*ʿulama*) whom the British appointed to official posts in a bid to stem local tides of charismatic zeal.⁵ British officers and Egyptian *ʿulama* considered *zār* a "superstitious" irrational practice whose main adherents, Sudanese women, were even more "backward" than Sudanese men who followed Sufi or Mahdist ways.

Despite this, *zār* was a going concern during my inaugural field trip (1976–1977) to (pseudonomous) Hofriyat, a village on the Nile some 200 kilometers northeast of Khartoum. But it was controversial. While neither sex doubted the powers of *zayrān* to intervene in human lives – *zayrān* were classed as a type of *jinn*, whose existence the Qur'an confirms – most women and men publicly differed over how to handle

them when they did. Men considered *zayrān* malevolent beings that must be dislodged by Islamic exorcism. Women saw *zayrān* as self-serving and capricious rather than evil, not unlike humans but exaggeratedly so; an intrusive *zār* could withstand Qur'anic recitation and was likely to become vengeful if it were tried. *Zayrān* must be appeased, they said, and thereby drawn into perpetual relations with their human hosts, domesticated. In the end most men quietly funded *zār* ceremonies for their afflicted wives. Within a few decades such disagreements and implicit collusions had become surprisingly moot.

December 2010: I am chatting about *zār* with my old friend Zaynab in the reception room of her suburban Khartoum house, when her 16-year-old granddaughter enters and asks, "What is *zār*?" I am stunned. The girl's great-grandmother, Umselima, had been a famous Hofriyati *shaykha* (curer, one who is able to negotiate with spirits) of the *zār*, but stopped practicing on returning from the Hajj shortly before I arrived in 1976. Zaynab herself had once pondered whether she'd inherited her mother's vocation. How on earth, I thought, could her granddaughter not even *know* about *zār*?

During three stints of fieldwork between 2008 and 2010, I learned that several other practices had changed, practices that had once afforded me clues to local cultural logic in which a fundamental connection existed between moral and physical states. In the 1970s and 1980s Hofriyati had deemed it unthinkable to adopt a stranger child (potentially murderous), eat chicken (considered dirty meat), or leave daughters uncircumcized (their bodies impure); today these are being done. Themes of purity, propriety, cleanliness, and enclosure harbored in past proscriptions had resonated deeply across experiential domains, catching up and linking together bodies, foods, objects, social relations, and domestic space (Boddy 1982, 1989). In this recursive context, a rupture in sociophysical defenses either signaled possession or paved its way: a *zār* might take advantage of some "open" or "impure" condition to intrude into a woman's body (rarely a man's), causing or exacerbating illness in hopes of experiencing the human world and being ritually entertained. Most problems attributed to *zayrān* concerned breaches in the local expression of female selfhood, such as miscarriage, failure to conceive, bearing daughters to the exclusion of sons, all of which might lead a man to divorce his wife and seek another capable of providing descendants. These were painful violations of the female self, a set of ideals that condensed in the concept of "beauty" (*jamāl*): having a healthy, plump body with taut glowing skin, a body purified, clean, and smooth, actively fertile, cared for, and not overworked (Boddy 1988, 1989; Muhammad 1993). Beauty was closely aligned with dignity, the antithesis of exposure, manifest in bodily restraint, covered heads, downcast eyes, and closed mouths in the presence of strangers, especially men. Dignity and propriety inhered in the infibulated, covered and protected female body, in encompassing courtyard walls and productive marriages between close kin. *Zayrān* in 1970s Hofriyat required that people maintain such scruples lest the spirits opportunistically intervene; *zār* thus supported and sanctioned the apparent constitution of the (human) female self. Moreover, *zār* provided an exogenous explanation for failure to meet female gender ideals: if a woman miscarried, for example, the blame lay not with her (or indeed her husband) but with troublesome *zayrān*. There is a certain irony here, since *zayrān* themselves are ethnically "other" than Hofriyati; yet, like

past colonial masters on the earthly plane, they demanded that their subjects/hosts fully express their indigenous, “authentic” selves.

Zayrān belong to the world that surrounded Hofriyat as “other” in time and space, such that women displayed an embodied archive of influential foreigners when manifesting their spirits and acquiring their demands. *Khawāja* (Westerner) spirits, for example, require the trappings of European modernity to “be” and enact themselves: imported soap, whiskey and soda, socks and shoes, jars of jam, helmets. They are partial to electric fans, air conditioning, swimming pools, trains, cars, airplanes, other Europeans, churches, and bars. *Khawājāt* are wealthy, arrogant, and very often drunk. Here *zār* furnished an inverted and perhaps unwitting parody of colonial conceits: notions of self-sacrifice and martyrdom that suffused the Sudan Political Service, the compulsory asceticism of its recruits. In the *zār*, earthly desires, selfishness, and irreverence reign supreme. To colonial British, of course, the *zār* exemplified northern women’s heterodoxy and excess; but for Sudanese it contained an implicit critique of British self-importance, intemperance, and zeal.

Equally, however, *zār* enabled a subtle if equivocal embrace of “modernity,” a trying on of other selves (compare Lambek forthcoming), that in the process invariably affirmed the value of one’s own. In the context of *zār*, gender and colonial subjectivities, hierarchy and difference would often intersect: a woman might be a prosperous *Khawāja* one minute, a pious Muslim cleric or a lowly Slave the next. But ideally she returned to herself when the drum rhythm changed to that of another *zār*. She’d come back to herself refreshed, participants said, with renewed awareness of herself and the outside world. In this sense, *zār* served as more than a continually revised narrative of foreign contact; in facilitating cultural comparison it was also an indigenous form of ethnography (Boddy 1989).

However personally enlightening an episode of *zār* might be, one would be mistaken to assume that Hofriyat imagined themselves as sovereign individuals, existing independently of other persons and having separate needs, responsibilities, and goals. Rather, bodies and selves were highly relational, implicated in each others’ existential states, unthinkable save as intertwined with kin. And *zār* helped clarify the point. For instance, a woman might share *zayrān* with her mother or mother’s sister because bodily fluids were thought to flow in the maternal line and spirits “follow the blood.” Similarly, a woman’s *zār* might possess her child in the womb or at her breast. Equally, however, a mother might become possessed by her daughter’s *zār* should the daughter die of postpartum bleeding. People were materially engaged in each others’ constitutions and well-being; selfhood was, in this sense, distributed, and bodies permeably connected within an enclosing web of kin.

Indeed, so dense was this web of kin that possession offered a means to sort through some of its strands. Just as a *zār* might possess several humans at once, a human might be possessed by several *zayrān*, each belonging to an ethnic group parallel to those of non-Hofriyat on the human plane. Unrelated humans might share a spirit; a woman, her sister, and daughter might not, or could have spirits with antagonistic demands. Possession thus added layers of meaning to existing human relationships. It carried the potential to nuance multifaceted relations thickened by repeated kin and village endogamy.

If Hofriyat selves of the recent past were highly relational, whither that configuration in the context of creeping neoliberalism and continuing religious purification?

Already by the mid-1980s there had been modifications to women's and men's religious expression. More and more people were praying five times a day and women were minding new, less generous controls on their liberty, constrained to stay closer to home than before. With the Islamist coup of 1989 came a stricter interpretation of Sharia law; modesty police began arresting those who defied the regime's public dress codes and limits on cross-sex socializing. By the mid-1990s women who staged and attended *zār* ceremonies to alleviate spirit distress had begun to feel old-fashioned. *Zār*, they learned, is a pre-Islamic custom; according to Sudan's growing cadre of religious scholars, it constitutes *bid'a* – literally, innovation, that is, unorthodoxy – and is therefore wrong. In the mid-1980s, collective *zār* rites were officially reclassified as folk theater (Hurreiz 1991; Boddy 1995); with variable success they were banned by civic order in 1991 (Boddy 1995; Badri 2006).

On visiting Hofriyat in 1994, after the government injunction on *zār* had been declared, I saw no obvious dip in rates of *zār*-related illness or commitment to its ritual alleviation among my friends. At a party to mark publication of my first book (on *zār*) a good part of the evening was spent drumming and chanting the spirits' "threads" (songs); one by one women entered trance, allowing *zayrān* to "descend." A colonial English *zār* asked me for whiskey, which, given the state of prohibition in Sudan, drew immediate guffaws from the crowd. Several women revealed that they sorely missed being able to appease their spirits through regular rites; *zayrān* were annoyed, fed up with being ignored, and causing them to suffer even more. My presence had been a good excuse to hold a *zār* despite the authorities' disapproval. The women, after all, could claim it was just an anthropological show – a performance of ethnicity.

In 2010, a conference was held at Omdurman's Ahfad University for Women to commemorate the life of Dr Tijani al-Mahi, the first trained psychiatrist in Sudan and a champion of *zār*. Attendees sought government permission to mount *zār* rites in hospitals where the drumming had soothed distressed patients in the past. Biomedical treatment for depression and other psychological ailments is costly, and counseling scarce. But *zār*, they said, is a culturally appropriate and highly beneficial alternate therapy that should be revived before all memory of the rites is lost. Defining *zār* as folk psychotherapy would seem palatable and strategic where the state decides what is religious and what is not. Rather than demonizing *zayrān* and their powers, as is the case within hegemonic Islam, this move rationalizes and compartmentalizes *zār* as something outside of Islam's purview. The two public responses to *zār* in the context of Islamic modernity – its demonization, and its secular rationalization as theater, ethnicity, or folk psychotherapy – exist in tension in contemporary Sudan, informing past adherents' sensibilities to one or another degree. Whether negatively or positively, both distinguish *zār* (as something cultural) from proper religious practice (which is not).

During recent visits to Hofriyat in Khartoum, older women spoke of *zār* but, on reflection, always at my request. Most said they no longer observe the rites, a few that they do so in private and alone. The standard explanation: "We've left them. Such things are not Islam." In the past they made no such claim, but confidently considered *zār*, and the gamut of their everyday practices, to be proper parts of Islam. Now text-based Islam dominates the public sphere; practices of earthly life belong to the realm of "culture": domestic, familial space. Behind closed doors, women say,

they will light spirit-appropriate incense, or make coffee to assuage Ethiopian *zayrān*, but nothing more.

Yet *zār* has not declined everywhere in Sudan. Its collective rites are still practiced in the poorer quarters of Omdurman, if surreptitiously lest these attract animated crowds in defiance of state assembly laws. And as Kenyon (2012) shows, *zār* flourishes in Central Sudanese towns such as Sennar, though spirits manifest differently there than in the past, behaving during rites much as human Islamic healers might do, having acclimated to the current realpolitik. The relatively abrupt abandonment of *zār* by Hofriyati thus merits further exploration. Islamic resurgence, government injunction, and the growing distinction between culture and religion have surely played a role, but these are, I believe, supported by shifts afoot in the constitution of persons and selves. In what follows, then, I focus less on *zār* than on the quotidian context in which its apparent demise has taken place.

RETURN

It's December 2008 and I am back in Sudan after an absence of almost fifteen years. Khartoum has the familiar reek of dust, diesel, burning garbage, and *Bint as-Sudan* perfume. But otherwise the transformation is astounding. There are scores of brave new buildings – the downtown has become a diminutive Doha; there are new roads, a couple of highways, fewer roundabouts, and more traffic lights to disobey. Despite continuing US sanctions, the arrival of oil wealth, Gulf money, and Chinese investment has revolutionized the country. There are millions of cell phones in use, 4,000 internet cafés,⁶ three satellite TV networks with hundreds of foreign stations and at least a dozen local ones, and an appalling crush of cars. Khartoum sprawls for miles in all directions, the houses smaller, flimsier, and more ad hoc the further from the center one goes. Along major byways there are gleaming glass and steel Toyota dealerships, whimsical Arabian Nights palaces with all mod cons, Chinese chain restaurants, even a Seven-Eleven and a two-storey air-conditioned shopping mall with an upscale Turkish supermarket selling chicken parts on plastic wrapped Styrofoam trays. In the international center beautification efforts have produced irrigated patches of grass and flowering shrubs, but they are a thin veneer. Just beyond lies a decade's accumulation of filthy pastel plastic bags, caught in the thorns of each rare and valiant acacia, swept into long low piles by the wind, each with its own small herd of rum-maging goats. In laneways and on every patch of dirt the detritus of rising consumption is brazenly displayed and largely ignored, though garbage trucks can be seen to ply the pavements now and then.

Dire poverty and tremendous opportunity are close companions here. The economy began to pick up with the development of oil and gas resources in 1997 followed by the first exports of crude in 1999. Then, in 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) officially ended twenty-two years of civil war between the Islamist government in Khartoum and the secularist south, allowing international access to the oilfields until July 2011 when the separation of South Sudan took place. Given the north/south power-sharing accords in force when I arrived, Islamic dress codes no longer applied to non-Muslims; with 4 million internally displaced persons (mainly from the south and west) living in and around Khartoum, those rules had become

challenging to enforce in any case. Rising fortunes seemed to have tempered the state's Islamic zeal, and lightened the atmosphere in the urban and the rural north. Women would go bareheaded in public without fear of official censure, though most Muslim women still modestly covered their hair.

By 2003 negotiations with the International Monetary Fund had already produced a reformed banking system, restructured taxes and tariffs, and privatized social services, especially health care. The stage was thus set for oil revenues to flow when the peace accords were finally agreed. This sent the economy soaring in 2006, 2007 and the first part of 2008, with GDP growth at over 10 percent per year.⁷ With the global monetary crisis, growth declined but did not stall, hovering around 5 percent in 2009, slipping to just over 2 percent in 2010.⁸ What Sudanese call “fixing the land” (*ṣullāḥ-t-al-waṭā*) began during the boom: a new mega-dam was built at Merowe on the main Nile to provide hydroelectric power to the north, while inundating a further swath of archaeologically significant land. As the government released its hold on the market, private capital, imported foods, electronic equipment, and all manner of Chinese goods rushed in. Automobiles – once closely regulated – were suddenly widely available for purchase by bank loan, with interest. Industrial enterprises sprang up all over: poultry farms, commercial dairies, market gardens, horticultural nurseries. Paint stores and home renovation shops opened on every urban block. Each remotely middle-class house acquired a satellite dish; the world once carefully kept at bay by courtyard walls was now bidden to enter (albeit virtually) domestic space. Although the village lagged behind in this rush to embrace the new – Hofriyat didn't get electricity until November 23, 2008 – villagers were prepared for it. On November 24 they tuned in to Al-Jazeera, Oprah, and CNN.

Elusive peace, growing prosperity, and the relaxation of government controls led to greater possibilities for some, higher hopes of positive change for most, and increased precariousness for many, in part because of shifting consumption patterns and new ideas about what constitutes “normality.” Kin bonds seemed to be strengthening and loosening at the same time, being reconfigured from what I'd seen in previous visits when “close” (ideally first-cousin) marriage was still highly prevalent and families focused on intensifying relations over the generations, with each close marriage building on previous ones, though the definition of closeness could certainly expand when it suited people's needs. Some novel intergenerational tensions had emerged, and ideas about personhood and marriage were shifting in step. Considering these points in greater detail leads back to what I had once understood a good Hofriyati would never do. Information technology is subtly implicated in them all.

MOBILE PHONES

Sudan leapfrogged over the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first where technology is concerned. Robust evidence is provided by figures on telephone use: between 2006 and 2009 the number of landlines increased from 1.5 to 3.6 million, while the number of cellular lines rose from 5 million to over 15 million, increasing at a rate of 500 percent per year (Zain Group and Ericsson 2010: 4). If there are indeed more than 15 million cell phones in use among some 40 million people, the crude saturation rate of Sudan in 2009 was just shy of 38 percent, remarkable for

one of the poorest countries in the world. Four wireless companies now compete in Sudan, offering extremely low rates and family plans that include text and photo messaging; range is exceptionally good due to satellite coverage of nearby Arabia and the Gulf. Herd boys, camel drivers in the desert, and street-corner tea ladies can all be seen using mobile phones; elderly men and women have learned to use them with alacrity and they've become essential to their care. The traditional men's garment, the *jalabiya*, has been redesigned with pockets to house a mobile and not have it pinched, as the phones are prime targets for thieves. Young women wear their phones in beaded sacks at the ends of fashionable necklaces or in special compartments in their (now necessary) handbags. Businessmen usually have a late model mobile from each of the three top companies on the go; service providers are notoriously ranked, and whipping out a particularly expensive mobile – or two or three – has become a public assertion of prestige.

For political and economic reasons kin are widely dispersed these days and every family has members living abroad, in Doha, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada or the United States. Cheap phone cards and reasonable long distance rates enable scattered kin and friends to remain even more intimately connected than when they had lived in adjacent neighborhoods. Hofriyat and its sister villages have branch settlements in greater Khartoum; people “from the village” meet regularly in the city and rural areas at engagements, weddings, funerals and other events, and maintain a vast network of immediate yet physically distant contacts every day. One man who lives in Khartoum presides over the Hofriyat rural council 200 kilometers away, and runs its large agricultural project by daily conference call. When someone has an accident or falls sick, family know within seconds and begin to converge *en masse* at the person's home or hospital bed. It is far easier for rural and urban Hofriyati to visit, thanks to a paved road that, given a surfeit of automobiles and the launch of regular bus services, has reduced the trip between village and metropole to at most three hours one way (from ten to twelve hours as recently as 1994). In the village as well as the city everyone always has guests.

Ingenious forms of entrepreneurial activity have arisen, such as the brisk trade in cell-phone minutes made possible because credits can be readily transferred from phone to phone: one can buy a heavily discounted phone card for, say 500 minutes, load it into a mobile, then sell the time in small quantities to others at face value, thereby making a profit (generally, I'm told, around 4 percent). Indeed, cell-time has become a surrogate currency especially among women, who may buy inexpensive clothing, sandals, cosmetics, and costume jewelry in city *sūqs*, send the items to rural areas with returning kin, and ask a relative there to resell them in the countryside where they are less readily available or more expensive to buy from shops. When the agent has managed to sell the lot, she converts the cash into a scratch card, loads the minutes into her phone and sends them to the original purchaser, minus a fee (in minutes) for her services. The recipient reaps the proceeds when she resells the minutes for cash. Here time is literally money, as is the sociality that this “time” represents.

The social effects of cell-phone use have not escaped the notice of economists. As a study commissioned by a major telecom provider reports: “by being constantly reachable on their mobiles, many women in Sudan have been able to start

small businesses for the provision of beauty and hairstyle services, without the need to incur the initial costs of setting up beauty salons” (Zain Group and Ericsson 2010: 15).

. . . AND EDUCATION

Another shift has been building gradually, and recently accelerated with economic growth. The cell phone plays a significant role here too, and discussing it gets me closer to unraveling why Hofriyati no longer consider it unthinkable to adopt a stranger child and, indirectly, why *zār* may have lost its prior relevance.

For decades Hofriyati and other Arab Sudanese have placed a high value on educating girls. This concern declined during the first years of Islamist rule, but as the state’s restrictions on women’s comportment abated, it revived. There are more universities in Sudan than ever before, over forty at last count, and women are attending in droves. I do not suggest that the institutions are all first-rate or that significant barriers to female education have disappeared; women’s reproductive roles are still valued over their productive ones, and in poorer families a daughter’s education may be sacrificed for a son’s if resources are tight. The price of pursuing the civil war, followed by economic sanctions, peace talks, and ensuing structural adjustment programs that began in 2002, led to reductions in government funding for education from the late 1980s, and an attendant decline in quality. The cost of books, uniforms, school breakfasts, etc., that must be privately borne is prohibitive to many (Badri 2006, 2009). That said, the economic boom has produced an emergent bimodal attendance rate at high schools and universities, echoed in other parts of the world. According to UNICEF figures, between 2003 and 2008 one-third of the secondary school-aged population in Sudan was actually enrolled, with attendance concentrated, not surprisingly, in the urban and peri-urban north which was least affected by war and civil unrest. During those five years, 35 percent of boys in Sudan started high school, compared to 32 percent of girls; however, attrition rates are far higher for boys – only 17 percent completed high school as compared to 22 percent of girls (Nour 2010; UNICEF 2013). “Female enrollment share” for Sudan (the number of girls enrolled in secondary school, expressed as a percentage of the total number of pupils in secondary school) stood at 61.7 percent in 2008, the second highest in the world.⁹ With increased access to university places and a quickly growing economy, it’s the rare Muslim family in north and central Sudan that does not have a daughter in university or recently graduated, even among the lower middle class where most Hofriyati can be found. And the cell phone is a contributing factor: with it, parents and brothers feel they can monitor a young woman and ensure she is safe when outside the home, not least when attending a coeducational institution such as the University of Khartoum. Moreover, so few men now attend university that coeducation has become a moot point. If the graduation ceremony I attended in January 2010 at the Khartoum University of Science and Technology provides any indication, less than a fifth of university students today are male.¹⁰ Indeed, female domination of postsecondary education is a common subject of everyday talk among northern Sudanese. By educating themselves girls are making it harder to find husbands, they say.

I was repeatedly told that young men do not continue to “read” because they need to make money to contribute to household expenses (most live with extended kin), help fund their sisters’ education, and accumulate savings toward their own future marriages. Most whom I spoke to hope to start some enterprise, such as collectively buying a car for use as an unofficial taxi, or forming a musical ensemble to entertain at weddings – the music and wedding businesses being quite lucrative in Sudan. Some young men work at several jobs in order to make ends meet. Thus more twenty-something Hofriyati daughters than sons are university educated but few of either are married or permanently employed. An increasing number remain with their natal families and participate in the grey economy through which goods and services are distributed via domestic extensions of the market, earlier discussed. This situation has been contributing to some intriguing shifts in the realm of marriage and family life.

WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGE

Men must typically work many years before they can afford to marry. The costs of a Hofriyati wedding are high: unless a prospective couple are close kin, the groom’s parents are wealthy, or the bride-to-be is particularly religious and agrees to modest proceedings, it can cost tens of thousands of pounds.¹¹ I attended six weddings and three engagement parties during nine weeks of research between 2009 and 2010; weddings are not rare. However, in each case the groom was between 33 and 45 years of age, and the bride fifteen to thirty years younger. When I began doing field-work the age differential was not as great, ten or twelve years at most. The time it takes to accumulate the requisite funds has increased, as have notions of what a proper wedding should entail. In the 1970s and 1980s the groom’s opening gift to the bride consisted of a *towb*, a gold ring, and a new pair of sandals. This would later be followed by a nominal cash payment – the *mahr* or surety for the bride in case of divorce – and a trousseau containing several matched sets of nightgowns, underwear, dresses, shoes, handbags, and *towbs*, generally between five and six sets, plus a watch, gold jewelry, perfumes, sweets, and food enough for the wedding feast. It was expensive to amass, and often meant having to go abroad to work for several years (Boddy 1989). Given the growing availability of consumer goods, inflation, and the escalating expectations of what a proper wedding should be, that time has only increased.

Now when a man has been accepted by a woman and her family, he heads to a wedding shop to buy a specially designed metal tray containing crisp new paper money in ten, twenty, and fifty note denominations. The bills are shaped into some artful design: funneled and arranged in overlapping tiers to resemble petals of a flower, or folded to resemble a series of fans, in the center of which is piled gold jewelry, a watch, an ornate metallic cell phone, imported cosmetics (often including the latest skin-lightening cream) and expensive perfumes. The whole is wrapped in decorative transparent cellophane and tied with a bow. The cost may be in excess of 10,000 Sudanese pounds. In addition, the bride, her mother, and her sisters receive *towbs* and other clothing, sweets, cases of soft drinks, and quantities of food. The transfer is called the *ṣad al-māl*, the dam of wealth, the gift that ends negotiations. On the day of the *ṣad al-māl* the groom also pays for the bride to have her hair

coiffed with flowing extensions, her nails polished, face made up (false eyelashes have become *de rigueur*), and hands and feet hennaed in intricate designs. He must repeat this just before the wedding proper, plus buy or rent her a frothy white wedding gown, hijab and/or Western-style veil. He is also responsible for making several subsequent deliveries of foodstuffs for meals, paying the *mahr*, arranging for rental cars (always white), official photographs and videos, musicians, DJ, sound system, and venue rental. All are at his and his family's expense. For second marriages the fanfare is more subdued, but costly just the same. The lengthy preparations Hofriyati undergo constitute a form of bride-service, where a man must prove his worth to the family of his future wife in order to cement the deal.

Who are the brides? In the small sample of weddings I attended they ranged in age from 17 to 35. The 17-year-old had not yet finished high school, and her fiancé agreed to let her graduate, though she had no desire to attend university. Another was 19 and no longer studying, the others were in their late twenties or early thirties and at least two had met their husbands through friends at university. Only one of the marriages was arranged between kin, a fact that was no doubt reflected in lower wedding costs.

Further, prevailing conditions have modified women's expectations of marriage, more, it seems, than men's. I know a number of Hofriyati women with postsecondary training who look forward to having a car and a nicely furnished house of their own; some have refused suitors who were unable to include such items in the *ṣad al-māl*, which would surely try a man's confidence in proposing a match to an educated woman's kin. I discussed this situation with two female PhD students who teach courses at a local university. They agreed this had become a problem, but went on to say that for them even a wealthy Sudanese suitor would not be enough. As single working women they have it good: they can travel abroad, own and drive a car, do what they like (both are living with their natal families). A husband would be too disruptive, able to restrict a wife's mobility, require her to be home to fix meals at regular times and serve him and his friends, have lots of children, do housework. Neither wished to marry, even as a prelude to having a family, for reasons I'll shortly discuss. These students have a no-nonsense view of the entailments of marriage and in-laws in Sudan, and prefer the liberty they presently enjoy. For them, Sudanese men are not yet sufficiently "evolved" – they used the English word – to be desirable mates. Other bachelor women, however, were hoping for companionate marriages to (well-off) men of their choice, and, as a sign of waning parental authority, several had successfully eluded matches arranged by kin.

As Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) have shown, the desire for companionate marriage is growing in various parts of the world where arranged interfamily alliance or, in the case of northern Sudan, the intrafamilial intensification of bonds, were once the norm. In peri-urban Sudan television and films from abroad have clearly fueled aspirations: characters in *Grey's Anatomy*, American films, and popular serials from Egypt and Turkey have become role models for local girls. New terms have entered everyday speech, such as "love story" and *jikiys*, meaning paramour of either sex, from the English slang word, "chicks." Both are derived from popular media; they refer to boy-girl romantic relations based on mutual attraction and care. Between 2008 and 2010, couples could be seen walking side by side in city streets or sitting together in cafés. Fewer than ten years before such acts were punishable by imprisonment or

the lash; in the post Peace Agreement context authorities seldom paid mind. Although the influx of foreign images is significant here, the recent easing of cross-sex relations may have something to do with the protocols of television viewing as well.

NEW MEDIA AND GENDER

Satellite TV has reshaped domestic space. Televisions are communal objects; only the well-off households boast more than one set. Hofriyati women and men of all generations watch programs together, in the same room, even if they are not immediate kin. (A degree of gender segregation was previously the norm.) Viewing preferences vary, of course, with younger women and men favoring serials, talk shows, fashion channels, music videos, soccer, and intriguingly, programs on medicine and science. Because most Hofriyati under the age of 50 are at least partially literate many can follow subtitled foreign shows, and several understand English even if they hesitate to speak it. When left on their own, older women and men tend to watch religious programming in Arabic. However, during the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in 2008–2009 and the inauguration of President Obama that followed, everyone was glued to Arabic news stations, especially Al-Jazeera. An intriguing upshot of satellite penetration is that modern standard Arabic (locally referred to as *fushah*) spoken throughout the Middle East has been slowly displacing the colloquial tongue, drawing even those with little formal education into the broader Arabic-speaking world. The marked differences between women's and men's speech that I'd observed on earlier field trips are fast disappearing. With educated daughters quick to correct their mothers' folksy (*dariji*) words, the colourful malapropisms that had provided me a window onto Hofriyati women's lives thirty years ago surface less frequently too.

The relaxation of gender mores and the drawing together of male and female worlds carry other implications. I noted above that cell phones have been liberating for young women, who are no longer out of earshot when attending university, going to the *sūq*, reading in the library, or riding crowded buses from place to place. Family members speak to each other on the phone several times a day, in essence performing surveillance, policing each other's whereabouts, and giving parents a sense of security about their daughters' behavior that is not consistently justified. Even if girls do not linger outside the home, their male and female friends can readily contact them there.

Significantly, cell phones are personal, individual means of communication. In any spontaneous gathering of neighbors and kin, a phone is bound to go off every few minutes, whereupon the owner may get up to answer it in private. *Privacy* is a relatively new phenomenon, especially for women and girls. Once when my research assistant received a call in my presence she turned aside saying her *jikiys* was on the line. When I later asked if her parents knew she had a boyfriend she said no, they'd been discreet, carrying on their relationship over the phone, texting, sending photos, and arranging places to meet. Another woman in her mid-thirties had, to her mother's intense chagrin, refused offers of marriage from three men, each of whom had a house and a car, because she hoped to marry her "love story" with whom she carried on an active cellular (and perhaps less virtual) relationship but who was still too poor to ask for her hand. So as to maintain confidentiality should a parent find one's cell

phone lying around, daughters regularly delete records of incoming or outgoing calls. Cell-phone use has helped foster newly ascendant sensibilities of intimacy, privacy, and secrecy among Sudanese youth.

It is thus not entirely surprising to learn that unwed pregnancy is on the rise and a matter of considerable public concern. An unmarried girl who gets pregnant has few resources; she can search for an illegal abortionist or try to disguise her condition under voluminous wraps, but if she's discovered she risks a "shotgun" marriage (apparently becoming more common), being disowned and forced to live on the street (also becoming more common), or being beaten or killed for dishonoring her kin (rare, but not unknown). Since most young women have undergone genital cutting, she would likely need assistance to deliver, preferably enlisting a trustworthy midwife or friend. Hospitals require a husband's name and address for childbirth admission, but it's not difficult to give false information and the hospital is bound to help regardless. At one facility I was told by nurses and medical residents that single and very poor married women who present for emergency delivery often sneak out of the hospital afterward, leaving their babies behind. Newborns have also been abandoned in the backs of three-wheeled taxis or left in cardboard boxes on the steps of mosques. So prevalent has the problem become that there are now several overflowing orphanages in Khartoum and Omdurman where until recently there was only one; these are Islamic charitable organizations (many of them run by doctors) in which older unmarried women work as house-mothers.¹² The growing number of "*awlād ḥarām*," illicit children, is widely talked about and, I was told, one of the main differences between the Sudan of the mid-1990s and today. It surely reflects the diminished supremacy of communal concerns.

I would venture more. The cell phone, together with satellite TV, has provided infrastructural support for a partial realignment of personhood in northern Sudan, away from its once highly collective relational form (in which it was impossible to think of oneself without reference to kin), toward a more individualized and interiorized sense of self and agency, though given the continuing salience of kin this is hardly the autonomous individualism of Euro-American political philosophy, at least not yet. Contemporary communications media have also helped nurture the aspiration for companionate marriage, a focus on nuclear family investment, and a desire for financial independence, especially among educated women, though their hopes may not be fulfilled.

FERTILITY

The high cost of getting married and creating a conjugal home means that marriage is often delayed until early middle age or even beyond, especially for men. Late marriage may be contributing to further distress for, according to Hofriyati, failure to conceive is a growing problem – though how one determines "failure" is by no means clear, as newlyweds are expected to have a child within the first year of marriage. Lest all blame be cast on the still widespread practice of female genital cutting, there is now ample evidence that FGC does not lower fertility in the population as a whole, which is why fertility impairment is no longer cited by nongovernmental organizations seeking the custom's abolition. While FGC can contribute to individual fertility

problems, Sudan in 2011 had about the same infertility rates as other countries,¹³ a healthy population growth rate of 2.4 percent, and an average number of children per woman of 4.1.¹⁴ Yet such figures offer little solace to the afflicted. In the past, childlessness might have been accepted as one's fate, have led to divorce so that both partners could try again, or been laid at the feet of *zayrān*. Now *in vitro* fertilization offers a remedy to childlessness permitted to married couples under Islam (Inhorn 2004, 2006) and several IVF clinics have sprung up in Khartoum over the last half-decade. But the costs, again, are high: at least US\$5,000 per attempt, and few couples can afford it. However, for both men and women, having a child is a mark of full adulthood. Given these pressures and the growing number of abandoned infants, it's not difficult to understand how the possibility of non-kin adoption is now being seriously entertained. Adoption is not, however, an uncomplicated resort.

Under Islam, caring for someone else's child (*kafāla*, sponsorship, nurturing; or *tarbiya*, raising) is deemed a charitable act and a legal obligation for an orphan's male kin. But full-fledged adoption is prohibited, described as a "legal fiction." A child should be raised with full knowledge of his or her biological origins. Legally, social and biological parentage are merged in Islam, and children are expected to carry evidence of their paternal bloodline (*nasab*, *nishā*) in their names.¹⁵ These names provide a guide to inheritance protocols, as a man's step or foster-child cannot inherit from him in the same way as his natural child even if they were raised together as siblings. As Marcia Inhorn notes, "Islam is a religion that privileges – even mandates – biological descent and inheritance. Preserving the 'origins' of each child, meaning his or her relationships to a known biological mother and father, is considered not only ideal in Islam, but a moral imperative" (2006: 95). Sharia inheritance rules divide one's estate into fixed shares; the number of shares an heir receives depends on his or her precise blood (or immediate affinal) relationship to the deceased. These principles are regarded as divinely inspired means to prevent injustice and preserve the integrity of the patriline. In the past, I was told, a childless Hofriyati family might circumvent religious norms and secretly raise an orphan as if it were a child of their blood (cf. Inhorn 2006: 95; Bargach 2002); the wife might feign pregnancy and even induce lactation in order to claim the baby as her own and thus escape the severe disgrace of caring for an illicit child. Yet in December 2010 the following ad was being broadcast on several local TV stations in Sudan: The scene opens in black and white. A woman wearing a *towb* and a man dressed in shirt and slacks sit at opposite ends of a plush sofa in their modern apartment, looking away from each other and glum. The voiceover says something like, "Why be sad and angry if God has not sent you children?" The image shifts to full colour. Now the couple sit close together on the couch, smiling fondly at a little girl seated on the man's knee. The voiceover continues, "Consider adopting," and gives the name and phone number of a Muslim charity in Khartoum.

I was, needless to say, astonished by the ad, and it sparked much of the discussion I've described above. Yes, my friends said, we know of cases where people have done this. In the village there's a man who's adopted two boys as his sons. It's now happening a lot in the city. But there can be unfortunate consequences. They told me that a number of years ago a wealthy unmarried woman in Omdurman took in an orphaned boy and raised him as her own. She put him through medical school and

he became a well-known psychiatrist. But when she died and he was keeping vigil at her house, weeping for his mother, her brothers arrived and threw him out, saying, "she isn't your mother, you have no family." The Sharia courts agreed and the psychiatrist went insane.

While this may be an apocryphal story, it is interesting nonetheless. Stranger-adoption is not a panacea for childlessness. Yet the possibility has now entered public discourse and legal measures are being taken to facilitate it and protect the parties concerned. It is losing its stigma. Recall the PhD students I spoke about earlier, the ones who were loath to wed. Although they did not want husbands to tie them down, they did want children, and one of them had investigated the possibility of adopting a little girl. She learned that it is now legal for a single woman to adopt as long as she is financially secure and her brother or father agrees to stand as guarantor. Motherhood without marriage, social motherhood that is not coincident with biological motherhood, these are new prospects. Have they contributed to the decline of *zār*, given the links between possession and frustrated fertility? Is fertility now less concerning for women than it was, childbirth less a hallmark of female selfhood?

Notwithstanding the village man who adopted boys, it seems that female children are preferred as stranger-adoptees and it is telling that the TV ad featured a little girl. Presumably, the problem of inheritance is not as grave for girls, whose future husbands can be expected to support them; northern Sudanese women often forfeit parental inheritance to their brothers so as to endebit them, a form of social insurance. Adopted children *can* inherit from the one-third of a person's property that may be freely willed. However, to be considered binding, such bequests must be written and witnessed, and even then they can be challenged by lawful sons.

The adoption of non-kin poses other difficulties. In a Muslim family, when a social daughter or son reaches adolescence, modesty rules come into play between the child and adoptive family members of the opposite sex. An adopted girl is classed as a potential wife to her social father; she would therefore have to cover herself in his presence, and before his biological sons, her social brothers, should they exist. Corresponding modesty demands complicate the adoption of a stranger boy, whose social mother and sisters are permissible spouses and would have to cover in his presence. In Saudi Arabia these conundrums are apparently being addressed by encouraging a lactating sister of the adoptive father or mother to nurse the baby, thereby creating bonds of milk kinship between the adoptee and his or her social kin (Mattson 2008: 28). Milk kinship, *riḍā'a* (nursing) is a weak form of biological relationship created postnatally, in that the ingested milk helps to grow the bones, flesh and blood of the child. Milk kin (*awlād laban*) must observe the same prohibitions on marriage that govern "blood" kin with whom sexual relations would be incestuous. But precisely because milk siblings are unmarriageable, modesty protocols between them are relaxed. While milk children do not have the same status as blood kin with regard to inheritance, a milk child can take the family name and expect the support of siblings who might otherwise disown him or her. I do not yet know if *riḍā'a* is being advocated for cases of adoption in Sudan, but I do know that Hofriyati have used it in the past to manipulate parentage and marriageability (Boddy 1989; see also Altorki 1980; Mattson 2008).

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

I noted earlier that the practice of female genital cutting is also being rethought, at least by some. Although rates are still high in Sudan, research by scholars at the Ahfad University for Women, United Nations agencies, and Sudan's Ministry of Health suggest they have fallen gradually over the years (Government of Sudan 2011). Some of the families I am closest to, especially Hofriyati who now live in Khartoum, say they have stopped circumcising their daughters altogether. The question (again) is why? Here Islamization is not an adequate explanation, for religious instruction has been equivocal; while some Muslim scholars decry FGC, others endorse it, or one of its forms.

Hofriyati friends say their main reason for stopping is that FGC causes health problems. But this knowledge is not new: Hofriyati acknowledged as much to me in the 1980s yet insisted that because "*ṭabūr*" (purification) created moral female bodies, they would continue to practice it, despite the negative health effects that might ensue. Indeed, *ṭabūr* was considered to *promote* health by hastening maturation in a sickly girl. So what has changed? For one thing, biomedicine has become the first and most acceptable resort for people seeking solutions to health concerns of all sorts. In the past, women having fertility problems or associated difficulties might suspect they were possessed by *zayrān*. And *zayrān* forbade their hosts to consult medical doctors, save those who were spirits themselves. I suspect that the waning of *zār* may be linked to falling rates of FGC, though not in any causal way. The displacement of *zār* in the hierarchy of resort for ill-health has surely increased women's dependence on biomedicine for problems surrounding conception, pregnancy, and birth. The rise of IVF clinics is a case in point, though some women undergoing fertility treatment apparently also consult popular Islamic healers who may well be part of a defiant *zār* underground in disguise.¹⁶ And a plethora of alternative medical therapies from hand-held ultrasound treatment to acupuncture are now being practiced by popular healers who claim to have received their knowledge and abilities from God. That said, the current ambience of "rationality" and anti-"superstition" reflected in the salience of biomedicine and Islamist injunctions against *zār* have at least two implications for the practice of female genital cutting, *ṭabūr*, the one intellectual or discursive, the other, economic. I address these in turn.

Medical education programs shown on Sudanese TV channels (such as Shuruq) have spread the message that FGC is harmful to women's health. Such shows are popular with northern women, who bear primary responsibility for the reproductive success of their marriages and family well-being. Women watch to learn about treatments for common complaints such as "lazy colon," hemorrhoids, or *dukt* (for *duḡḡt ad-dum*, hypertension), and are now hearing about FGC in this context. Still, the practice has long been medicalized; the Wolff sisters, British nurses who taught medical midwifery in the 1920s and 1930s, introduced bio-therapeutic methods to the traditional cutting, suturing, and aftercare of girls (Boddy 2007). Since the end of the colonial period virtually all FGC operations performed along the Nile from Khartoum to the northern border have been done by medically trained midwives (Government of Sudan 2011). Women are therefore used to thinking about the procedure in medical terms, just as they also think of pregnancy and birth as requiring medical intervention. Although information on *ṭabūr*'s harmfulness had been

aired on radio in the past and is widely taught in schools, the visual immediacy of respected male doctors discussing the practice on communally watched TV seems to be having a greater effect in getting women and men to discuss it. This is raising men's awareness and deepening women's understandings. Interestingly, while the World Health Organization advocates *against* medicalizing FGC lest the biomedical context lend it prestige and ensure its persistence, its early positioning in a biomedical context may be contributing belatedly to its decline.

By comparison, the human rights approach to abolishing FGC has gained little traction; its presumption of ontological individualism has thus far made little sense to the women with whom I work. This, despite the fact that individualistic *behavior* is hardly rare and, if I'm right about the individualizing effects of new media, relational selfhood may well be undergoing change. It is true, however, that young women who regularly watch Oprah on TV have been exposed to Western condemnation of female genital cutting. Many now refer to it as FGM (female genital mutilation), though whether they understand what the acronym stands for is unclear.¹⁷

The medicalization of FGC under the British may well have preadapted Sudanese to view the custom in terms of women's health as well as local morality. Television may be contributing to cross-gender conversations about its potential harm. But there is another factor that is surely pressing families to heed medical counsel against the practice: the partial withdrawal of the state from the medical arena. Under structural adjustment initiatives (as well as continuing high levels of military spending), public funding for health care has severely declined. In the 1980s medicine was fully socialized, with private consultations available after-hours. That system has been replaced by one in which few services are funded by the state, most are privatized, and even government-supported hospitals and clinics require fees for use. Pensioners and the formally employed have private health insurance that provides coverage to the extended family, but these plans typically pay less than half the expense of a hospital stay, operation, or prescription drug. Accidents, catastrophic illnesses, chronic ailments such as the ubiquitous *dukt* and *sukari* (diabetes), put inordinate strains on meager budgets and require contributions from the broadest networks of kin. There's been a modest health craze going on among Hofriyati in Khartoum: talk of (men) stopping smoking, everyone eating less sugar and more fiber, and getting exercise in order to promote vigor and avoid incurring medical debts. If "FGM" causes problems for the health of girls and women it now makes economic sense to stop. This is clearly not the only reason for their decision but a contributory factor given the escalating costs of living, making a family and enabling social continuity. Female circumcision has slipped out from under the aegis of morality, just as, perhaps, the once enchanted female body is falling increasingly under biological purview. This surely has implications for the conundrum of overdetermined selfhood that *zār* had once helped to assuage (Boddy 1988).

MEMORY, PLURALISM, AND EATING CHICKEN

My closing points have to do with social memory, and the fact that Hofriyati now eat chicken where once it was taboo. When I lived in the village in the 1970s and 1980s, no one would think of serving chicken. Once on a visit to Khartoum I stayed

at a hotel where men from Hofriyat worked as waiters. I remember being dumbfounded one evening when one of them snatched a very welcome peice of capon off my plate and replaced it with a gristly chunk of mutton, saying that, as I was now Hofriyati, surely I could not eat such filth. So, in early 2009 I was surprised to find myself at a family lunch where everyone was tucking into a beautifully cooked Ethiopian *zigni* – a spicy chicken stew. Afterwards I asked when they'd started eating chicken? And was surprised to hear, "We've always eaten it." "But . . . but . . . but . . ." I stammered, "you told me it was dirty. You said you would never eat it. Even the waiters at the hotel wouldn't let me touch it." "Oh," they said, "that meat must have come from wild chickens, the ones we eat are clean." Which is to say that edible chickens are raised on industrial poultry farms, housed inside "civilized" barns, and when purchased they've already been plucked, cleaned, quartered and wrapped in plastic. So the symbolism of purity and enclosure that all those years ago had been key to helping me fathom Hofriyati logic remains intact, if bruised, despite the variance in our memories.

Memory is a serviceable, if tricky, resource. In the wake of the 2005 Peace Accords, which acknowledged the rights of southern as well as northern Sudanese in a multi-cultural, pluralistic state, people from the Hofriyat area of the Nile did a *volte face* and began to consider themselves an ethnic group where before, as members of the dominant population, they did not. In part this is evidenced in the explosion of a popular musical form, the *dalūka*, referring to a type of drum, a rhythm, and the songs and dance that accompany it. The *dalūka* is now a prominent part of local weddings, with bands formed under the leadership of a singer named for his town or village of origin (e.g. the group Mahjoub Kabushiya: Mahjoub from Kabushiya). The dance involves two men standing face-to-face jumping as high in the air as they can for three or more syncopated drumbeats, each trying to outleap the other. Later in the evening, men may challenge each other to a mutual whipping contest. The *dalūka*, I was told in 2008, is totally new, something I hadn't seen before. But I had. My friends seemed not to recall that they, as civilized villagers, had once disparaged this very dance as being practiced only by desert nomads, people who, villagers claimed, ate not only chickens but little birds, people with whom they denied kinship or the possibility of marriage. Yet now the region's farmers and nomads are extensively intermarried and live in adjacent homes. The "new" *dalūka* is a creative anachronism, a social memory lapse that, by erasing difference at one level, the local, affirms it on another, that of the nation as a whole. As such it may signal a subtle reorientation of affiliations, a leaning away from kin and tribe to region, origin place.

More, the *dalūka*'s status as an expression of local "culture" suggests a shift of Hofriyati consciousness: during my first field trip, as I noted, women used the term "Islam" to describe their total way of life, including female circumcision, food preferences and taboos, the ideal of marriage between close kin, and a panoply of other practices including *zār*. Further, in the *zār*, spirit representatives of other "nations" were always depicted relative to rural Muslim Sudanese, not as positively self-defined beings in and of themselves. *Zayrān* were distorted mirrors, caricatures that invariably dramatized what Hofriyati were not: blustering, swaggering officials of the colonial regime, simpering prostitutes, brash Darfuri peanut sellers, airplane pilots, Catholic priests. Tellingly, no *zayrān* who plagued Hofriyati were analogues of Hofriyati themselves.

The folklorization of *zār* by government officials in the 1990s was an attempt to insert into local consciousness a crucial distinction between “culture” and Islam. While there was no suggestion that *jinn* had become less powerful or problematic to human health, the historical and foreign anthropomorphic traits of “red *jinn*” or *zayrān* were recast as products of culture, disenchanted. To follow the spirits as of old rather than to exorcise them would be to disdain religious authorities, the now hegemonic class. There are clear political and economic implications to Hofriyati saying of elaborate possession rites, “We’ve left them. Such things are not Islam”: alignment with a particular socioeconomic and political class. Yet for Sudanese who still overtly practice *zār* the pantheon of *zayrān* continues to expand as it has always done, in tandem with historical events; thus it has recently come to include Islamist government ministers.¹⁸ This is a significant addition given that spirits are characteristically “other” to those they possess, and reflects, perhaps, the widening gulf between subalterns who practice *zār* and administrators who would have them stop, with Hofriyati at least strategically positioned on the latter side.

The shift in Hofriyati political horizons is also apparent in articulations of cultural identity – *dalūka* performances, especially. In the *zār*, foreign entities had materialized in the bodies of local women; in the post-CPA moment foreign encounters are less ethereal and materialize without benefit of ritual. For Hofriyati who have relocated to Khartoum or another conurbation in Sudan, or who travel frequently between the countryside and city, “others” such as Southerners, Darfuris, Kababish, Afghanis, Chinese, Europeans, Ethiopians, can be met in the street everyday. They may be one’s neighbors and share one’s compound wall. Their ethnicity is recognized and Hofriyati’s place *among* them (yet not *of* them) is affirmed on the highly popular Sudanese TV network Harmony, devoted to short song and dance recitals from various parts of the country and beyond. Participants sing in their own languages, perform characteristic behaviours (the sort that would have been caricatured in the *zār*) and wear “typical” ethnic dress. In the roster are videos of a Hofriyati *dalūka* group playing in local costume in front of the ancient pyramids of Meröe, iconic of nearby Hofriyat. The *dalūka* is a performance of one’s *own* ethnicity, not mimetic of others’ ethnic traits. The landscape over which villagers are geographically dispersed has been reconfigured into a series of discrete ethnic groups each of whom traces its origins to a common source. In the post-2005 context of official pluralism, ethnic groups and religions are strategically depicted as independent sets of commensurable (e.g. Lambek’s introductory chapter to this volume) practices and beliefs.

But we cannot leave matters there, for the *dalūka* (qua drum) was also the principal instrument of the *zār*, whose beats, calibrated to reflect spirit identities and accompanied by vocal “threads,” had the power to pull *zayrān* into the human realm. The *dalūka* was also used to mark the much anticipated culmination of a wedding (which shared a structure with local *zār* rites),¹⁹ when the bride was unveiled to the assembly in all her primped and glowing splendor, kitted out in her family’s gold. As the groom slowly lifted away her red and gold veil, she would start to dance, eyes shut, gestures tuned to the beat of the *dalūka* and the words of love refrains sung by a chorus of unmarried girls.

The *dalūka*’s tie to revelation has lapsed; *zārs* don’t happen and weddings no longer feature bridal dances of this sort. Yet while Hofriyati do not recall how the

dalūka once hailed the bride as a wife, or summoned and identified *zayrān* when acolytes “beat the zar” (*duggu az- zār*), articulations of identity linger in the drum, however unwittingly redeployed. In modern weddings, bride and groom travel together by car to a hotel or other rented venue, she in her white gown, he in a tuxedo or formal suit. A grand entrance ensues. The couple slowly walk the length of the room to take up positions sitting side-by-side on a stage facing assembled guests. A hired band plays *dalūka* songs while the guests consume tinned soft drinks through straws and individually plated cellophane-wrapped meals of cold chicken and salad are handed round by uniformed staff.

Like the other discursive moments I have described – like rethinking chicken as a clean food, female circumcision as bad for reproductive health, or adopting an unknown child as a worthy deed and not the kiss of death – the new-old *dalūka* belongs to the shifting landscape in which Hofriyati continually negotiate what it means to be moral persons in the contemporary world. The highly relational self that had frustrated colonial educators generations ago (Boddy 2007) and that I had described for 1970s Hofriyat (Boddy 1988) is modulating, and both privacy and a modicum of individualism are becoming more pronounced. The last is surely indexed by those personal, equally filled (i.e. commensurate), compartmented plates of wedding food, as it is usual in the everyday to eat by hand from a common bowl.

Early in the twenty-first century Hofriyati were drawn into a whirlwind of social change that has seen them actively reconfiguring gender expectations, families, and personhood. New technologies, economic expansion, continuing global and more narrowly national processes of Islamization are all being taken up and transformed in novel and not always obviously consistent ways. Two young Hofriyati women, for instance, have donned the burqa and use cell-phone “apps” to help them stay focused on God’s word. My overwhelming sense is that it is no more possible to disentangle the religious from the mundane or secular today than it was in the “holistic” past. Indeed, mindful that the term itself is a product of specific historical and social forces, what we call “religion” cannot be understood except as embedded within a much broader range of practices and ideas. Despite apparent rationalization and increasing divergence between “culture” and “religion,” Hofriyati practices are as finely imbricated – if in different ways – as when *zār* had not yet become a casualty of history but was held to be part of Islam.

NOTES

I am grateful to the following for their generous support of my research: Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman (Balghis Badri, Nafisa Badri, Gasim Badri, Ahmed Abdel Majeed); Canada Council (1974–1977); Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (1984–1986, 1990–1991, 1996–2000, 2006–2012); Connaught Fund, University of Toronto (1994); H.F. Guggenheim Foundation (1998–1999); Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Program (2003); University of British Columbia; and archivists in Sudan and throughout the United Kingdom, but especially Jane Hogan of the Sudan Archive, Durham University. I remain most deeply indebted to women from the region of “Bajrawiya North” for our continuing conversations.

- 1 F.C.C. Balfour, letter to his mother, SAD 303/6/56-57, Sudan Archive, Durham University, cited with permission.

- 2 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jz-x8Z0IGt0> (accessed Apr. 2013). In the video women dance on the sidelines in the manner of *darawīsh* or Islamic holy men *zayrān*.
- 3 According to villagers with whom I worked *zayrān* are a type of *jinn*, specifically red *jinn* or red winds whose domain is parallel to the visible world and contiguous with it. While *zayrān* are invisible to humans most of the time, they are natural beings who live, die, marry, produce offspring, and manifest cultural attributes such as language, ethnicity, nationality, and tribe. They have exceptional abilities, including the capacity to move through walls, enter human bodies, and possess more than one person at once.
- 4 For a very different discussion of the complexities of Islamization in contemporary Malaya, see Peletz, this volume.
- 5 North Sudan was a colony of Ottoman Egypt from 1821 to 1882–1884, when a charismatic Muslim leader Mohammad Ahmad, who claimed to be the Mahdi (awaited one), gradually succeeded in overthrowing Egyptian rule. The Mahdist state was “re”conquered by British and Egyptian troops between 1896 and 1898. British officials considered Mahdism a political threat and sought to stamp it out; officials remained wary of enthusiastic religious expression (Islamic, Christian, or indigenous) throughout the colonial period (1898–1955). See Daly 1986.
- 6 OpenArab Net: the Initiative for an Open Internet, Sudan; formerly at <http://www.openarab.net/en/node/1623> (accessed Apr. 2010; page no longer available).
- 7 Economy Watch 2013, based on sources from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, United Nations, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and CIA, *World Factbook*; see also CIA *World Factbook* data on Sudan, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/su.html> (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 8 CIA *World Factbook* data on Sudan. Since the separation of South Sudan in 2011, Sudan’s economy has fallen into recession, showing a negative growth of –4.5 percent.
- 9 “Secondary level female enrollment share,” statistics from <http://www.nationmaster.com/> (accessed Jan. 2013), citing UNESCO figures.
- 10 In 2004, the *Sudan* University for Science and Technology was described as a university for girls by the Sudan Gender Profile compiled by Wafaa Elfadil for the United Nations World Food Programme. In 2010 the Khartoum University for Science and Technology was a coeducational institution with a men’s soccer team.
- 11 The exchange rate moved from S£2.40 to the US dollar in 2008 to S£5.70 in 2013.
- 12 See Bargach 2002 on such a system in Morocco.
- 13 Balghis Badri, personal communication.
- 14 Source: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sudan_statistics.html (accessed Sept. 2011).
- 15 This is why there is no true levirate in Muslim Sudan despite the fact that a widow can be asked to wed her deceased husband’s brother. Unlike such anthropologically famous examples as the Nuer, no man can sire children in another’s name.
- 16 Wida’a Ahmad, personal communication.
- 17 The significance of Oprah Winfrey in Sudan should not be underestimated. She is widely admired. A light-skinned black woman who is rich and unafraid to speak her mind, she is also long-haired and portly, as a northern Sudanese woman is or ought to be. There are several Oprah beauty salons (as well as Obama barbershops) in Khartoum and Omdurman.
- 18 Sue Kenyon, personal communication.
- 19 The events and paraphernalia of a *zār* paralleled those of a local wedding; the woman for whom a *zār* was held was referred to as the “bride of the *zār*”; the wedding veil features in contrary ways in each rite, etc. See Boddy 1989 for a full discussion.

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PART VII

Powers

CHAPTER 25

The Political Landscape of Early State Religions

Edward Swenson

Anthropologists have long recognized that religious institutions commonly underwrote the administration and political economy of archaic states. In most instances, it could be reasonably argued that religion and polity were indistinguishable from one another and co-constitutive. Indeed, comparative analyses of the religious foundations of early complex societies have yielded valuable insights, especially studies that have investigated aesthetic media and public ritual as mechanisms of social control. However, approaches that reduce religion to ideology (simply to legitimize centralized authority) or interpret ritual events as instruments that uniformly colonized bodies and minds tend to evacuate the culturally specific meanings of early state religious programs and the distinct fields of social difference they engendered. Even archaeologists who interpret religious practices as inseparable from material processes most often limit their analysis to an investigation of how ritual practices symbolically reified and justified social inequalities, a perspective that ironically reaffirms traditional superstructure models (see DeMarrais et al. 1996). Critical of social evolutionary, Marxian, and cognitive psychological theories, I propose to move beyond ideological perspectives by grounding past religious complexes in the physical landscapes they inspired – landscapes which materialized the unique political efficacy

of state cults by creating historically particular dependencies on real and imagined places.

By investigating how religion actively *worked* in the political construction of persons, places, and things, a landscape perspective provides a strong empirical basis from which to transcend ahistorical interpretations of religion as having functioned simply to legitimize or mystify state institutions – ideology as traditionally understood. As employed in this essay, landscape refers to the entire constellation of places that mediated the political, economic, and spiritual life of past communities. It includes everything from ceremonial architecture and topographic features to canal networks, settlement systems, and urban and rural infrastructures (David and Thomas 2008: 38; A. Smith 2003). Whether natural or humanly made, such places were imbued with meaning, “constructed” in the double sense of the word. “Landscape” as I use it here also emphasizes the persistence of the material past in the present and the efficacy of the built environment to direct future action (Fogelin 2007: 79). In the spirit of practice theory, it recognizes that experience and signification are not simply dictated by *a priori* cultural schemes but are in a perpetual process of *becoming*, as social actors interact with their historically constructed material surroundings (Pauketat and Alt 2005). Attention to how ceremonially charged landscapes prescribed people’s movement through space and time reveals how identities were forged by the ritual regulation of the temporalities of social practice and the materialization of varied social memories. Therefore, ancient state religions did much more than ideologically mirror political hierarchy, and the focus on landscape should permit archaeologists to move beyond static models of cultural scripts or dominant ideologies to consider how people (ritually) constructed their environments and were progressively shaped by them. In this regard, monumental architecture and built environments provide invaluable evidence that supplements texts and iconography for formulating inferences about the distinctive nature of religious institutions in ancient polities.

A landscape approach also affirms the inextricable co-constitution of the religious with material practices and offers a more nuanced means than standard typological models of interpreting the role of religion in the operation of past political organizations. In other words, analyzing ritual performances as variant modes of place-making within specific landscapes intends to historicize political relations and mechanisms of subject formation in a manner that evolutionary generalizations, including chiefdom or even state, fail to accomplish (A. Smith 2003). An often profoundly religious undertaking, place-making is implicated in the creation of diverse forms of community, polity, and social order, and the state institutionalization of unique religious traditions resulted in the creation of very different political worlds. Therefore, the great diversity in the construction, symbolism, and interconnections of the locales that physically inscribed the state most often corresponded to remarkably differing political theologies and governing institutions.

A brief comparison of the Mahayana Buddhist program of Jayavarman VII in Angkorian Cambodia (1182–1218 CE) with Inka imperial theology (c. 1530 CE) will demonstrate that the production of space and the establishment of novel attachments to meaningful places played an integral role in the religious creation of imagined communities and political subjects. Ultimately, the comparison will show how the

variant spatializations of the two state religious projects structured historically particular political regimes and social inequalities.

“SUPERNATURALIZING” AUTHORITY IN PREINDUSTRIAL STATES

The fact that ritual engages other-than-human powers (whether transcendent, immanent, ancestral, etc.) can account for its intimate connection to authority and the legitimization of political hierarchy. Ritual commonly opens an essential conduit to the ultimate sources of creation, transformation, vitality, or philosophical truth, and it thus represents a central medium by which power has been articulated and represented (Valeri 1985). As an efficacious act (to initiate, propitiate, fertilize, hex, bless, empower, etc.) ritual often brings divine and vital forces directly into material being (see Lambek’s introductory chapter, this volume). Throughout history, restricted access to religious mysteries constituted a key source of political power in both non-stratified and hierarchical social formations (Barth 1975; Godelier 1978; Valeri 1985: 147). The cross-cultural prevalence of theocratic notions of rule, in which the paramount leader incarnates a supreme deity or is invested with the mantle of supernatural legitimacy, is therefore unsurprising (ranging from the god-pharaohs of Egypt, the Chinese mandate of heaven, the cult of Augustus in ancient Rome, and the divine right of kings in medieval Europe). As Lincoln notes, religion is not simply wielded to naturalize authority but ultimately to “supernaturalize” it (1994: 112), and the affective power and heightened symbolism of ritual dramas were instrumental to the materialization of authority in past social formations (Bloch 1989; Geertz 1980; Inomata and Coben 2006; Kertzer 1988).

Anthropologists have thus identified significant cross-cultural commonalities in the political theologies of archaic complex societies (see Trigger 2003). Statecraft predicated on the ritual reenactment of cosmogonies to ensure world order and revitalize agricultural and human fertility formed an integral component of state cults in regions as diverse as Mesopotamia, the Andes, and Mesoamerica (Carrasco 1999; Jacobsen 1976; Swenson 2003). The elaboration of such ritual systems likely correlated in part with agricultural intensification and related developments in economic specialization. In a similar manner, the institutionalization of human sacrifice and other modes of ritual violence allowed political regimes to exert control over the fundamental forces of life, fertility, time, and divine intercession (Swenson 2003). Anthropologists have argued that ritual performance secured the authority of early states by converting the arbitrary and conventional into what appeared to be universal and natural. Adopting a Marxian perspective, Bloch (1989) contends that aesthetically charged ritual performances protected mythic/social charters from evaluation or challenge. Human inequalities formed part of a distant and authentic past, and social divisions were cast as integral to the never-changing natural and moral order. Certainly a “structure of correspondence” linking social and divine hierarchies characterized the religious traditions of a number of archaic states, as exemplified by the identification of the cosmos as a royal estate and gods as kingly rulers in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia (Jacobsen 1976). In fact, cosmogonic processes were commonly propelled by divine acts of place-making (both earthly and architectural), and linguistic equivalents of

the word “architect” (literally signifying “first builder” in Greek) were often employed to describe creator deities such as the Assyrian Marduk (Casey 1997: 27). Ancient rulers similarly fashioned themselves as architects of order and prosperity and embarked on great construction campaigns as a means to subdue chaos and defend moral and religious principles (see below).

Future comparative research will no doubt continue to make valuable contributions to understanding the role of religion in the emergence and organization of preindustrial complex polities. However, studies of this kind should not obscure the equally striking variability in the religious constitution of archaic states. Obviously, statecraft in early Mesopotamia had little to do with nourishing deities to ensure cosmic regeneration as characterized certain early polities in the Americas. In considering later states such as imperial Rome, the sponsorship of the cult of Jupiter, the Vestal Virgins, and the hierarchy of priests (to greatly simplify the matter) formed part of a distinctive political theology that obliquely shaped government policy while creating real and imagined communities in a manner strikingly different from, say, Aztec traditions. The Aztec, like the Romans, were famed for their complex religious liturgies and hierarchical priesthood, but the cosmologies and sacrificial rituals of the two, and the social structures they mediated, were distinctly different. A comparison of the Roman liturgical calendar with the onerous Aztec festival round reveals that the temporal regulation of *emplaced* ritual and economic practices was central to the negotiation of supralocal identities and dependencies (Clendinnen 1991; Scullard 1981). However, the divisions and associations produced by the ritual manipulations of space and time were as historically distinct as the built environments of Rome’s Capitoline Hill or Tenochtitlan’s Templo Mayor. Although political orders and religious complexes do not correlate in any predictable way, it is safe to assume that the ontologies and philosophies underwriting particular theological traditions significantly structured the ritual agendas of past political regimes. Differences in conceptions of being, deity, gender, death, theodicy, spirit, and the material world must be taken into account in interpreting the particular contours of archaic state cults. Moreover, the power of oracles to subvert government directives or foment factional enmities (as in both imperial Rome and the Inka Empire) has long been recognized by anthropologists and historians (Lincoln 1994; Gose 1996; MacCormack 1991). Interpretations that treat archaic state religions merely as ideologies of legitimization or mystification tend to lose sight of such historical factors and thus elide the heterogeneity and complexity of past ritual traditions.

A CRITIQUE OF RELIGION AS IDEOLOGY IN EARLY COMPLEX POLITIES

Investigations of the emergence of early complex societies have traditionally cast the meaningful political landscape as epiphenomenal to processes of social stratification and the concomitant transformations in religious institutions that such developments often entailed. This is ironic given the general recognition that urbanization and the institutionalization of power asymmetries were commonly marked by both monumental architecture of a sacred nature and radical shifts in the material and spatial underpinnings of social life (Trigger 2003; Whitehouse and Hodder 2010). In this regard, Adam Smith (2003) justifiably takes issue with the evolutionist view of space

as an inert object shaped by rational politico-economic motivations and differing simply in terms of ecology and the distribution of resources. Similarly, models that formulate settlement hierarchies and predictable (economically rational) central-places minimize historical differences in regimes of spatial production. Declaring that a recognizable polity qualifies as a state if it is characterized by a four-tier settlement hierarchy, interpreted in turn as transparently mirroring the workings of an extinct government hierarchy, downplays the religious meanings encoded in built environments and their integral and varied role in shaping cultural dispositions, political allegiances, and the temporal rhythms of economic life. While archaeologists continue to adopt Flannery's "ground plan of archaic states" (1998) to determine whether an archaeological culture had attained state-level status, there are limitations to this view. Regarding the presence of royal tombs, palaces, and temples as transhistorical spatial criteria for the identification and analysis of preindustrial states both elides historical process and foregoes other possibilities.

In contrast to the "mechanical absolutist" perspective of space held by social evolutionists (see A. Smith 2003: 36–45), culturalist approaches demonstrate greater sensitivity to the diverse meanings and affects of political landscapes by examining the cosmological symbolism inscribed into ceremonial architecture. Inspired by the theories of Geertz, Tuan, and Wheatley, archaeologists researching preindustrial urban settlements have interpreted ancient temples or even entire cities as exemplary centers and simulacra of the hierophanic spaces of cosmogonic origins and creation (Kolata 1993; Townsend 1982). Choay argues that built space was "deeply endowed with signification" and thus "hypersignificant" in precapitalist societies (1986: 242–243), given its homologous correspondence with cultural constructions of society and cosmos. She cites Levi-Strauss's famed study of the Bororo village to indicate the all-encompassing semantic load of premodern spatial experience. But can precapitalist cities and related landscapes be accepted simply as "hypersignificant," a term that perhaps implies a unifying and essential sacrality? The problem with such a perspective is that monumental constructions do not conjure the same sentiments and meanings among different social actors, and rituals orchestrated in religiously charged arenas are often conceived in remarkably differing ways. Indeed, there is danger in assuming *a priori* that Maya pyramids, Sumerian ziggurats, Buddhist stupas, etc. were built to materially inscribe celestial geographies or to transparently communicate shared religious values. Therefore, exemplary center models also tend to diminish historical variability in the meanings and political effects of religious landscapes.

Regardless of their theoretical sympathies, then, archaeologists in particular commonly view religion as a form of ideology that either promotes social solidarity among a larger collective or creates sectarian bonds that effectively legitimize political inequalities and coercive government policies (Brumfiel 2001; Miller and Tilley 1984). Therefore, even if the mythologies and scripted performances of a Maya ball court differ from the symbolism and Hindu devotional practices of Angkor Wat, both monuments have been examined as communicating/materializing the power of the state to rule and administer (Mabbett and Chandler 1995; DeMarrais et al. 1996). As a consequence, the political valences of ceremonial monuments are investigated in terms of how edifices reflect institutionalized social inequality and promoted solidarity or exclusion. Although this argument might be reasonable to a point,

interpretations of this kind disembed state cults from their wider cultural, religious, and social contexts.

Traditional Marxian and even Weberian understandings of religion as constituting an explicit form of political ideology – as integrative in the Durkheimian sense or in Marx's notion of social control and false consciousness – continue to guide anthropological investigations of early state religions. Engels's interest in the origins of Christianity among the exploited and impoverished of the Roman Empire, and his writings on the German peasant revolts of the sixteenth century, reveal that religion was also viewed as a force of class solidarity and subversion and not simply as an instrument of exploitation (see B. Morris 1987: 46–50). Clearly, a dominant ideology position (Abercrombie et al. 1980) did not narrowly guide Engels's or Marx's interpretations. Weber also understood religious convictions as expressions of the interests of different segments of society, claiming for instance that salvational movements are popular among the oppressed, and that ecstatic prophetic cults appealed to women who were often excluded from doctrinal religious traditions (1965: 107). In a loose reconciliation of Marx and Weber, anthropologists now reject the notion that changes in religious ideology are simply dictated by transformations in social or economic structures and have come to view ritual practice as an active *material* force driving historical process (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Lambek 2006).

Notwithstanding the continued value of such foundational theories, which inspired later anthropologists to explore ritual as a prime medium of political struggle and social change, the continued tendency of archaeologists to reduce religion to a singular form of political ideology poses the danger of flattening politics to a bimodal field of elites versus non-elites, or dominating versus dominated (who either predictably resist or acquiesce). Such “oppositional” thinking (McGuire and Saitta 1996: 97–198) is liable to obscure the historical context of social difference as well as the active ways religion structured culturally particular traditions of personhood, community, rank, and authority.

In sum, archaeologists have traditionally interpreted ceremonial constructions strictly in terms of how they mirrored sociopolitical inclusion (solidarity) or exclusion (to either safeguard or resist privileged interests), thus disregarding the historical specificities of political organization as structured by unique cosmologies and theologies. In explaining the emergence of complex societies, no matter the causes identified, religious institutions and their spaces have commonly been seen as functioning to foster a spirit either of incorporation – facilitating the coordination of more complex economic and social interactions – or of exclusion so to secure and naturalize the sacred and material privileges of an emerging elite class. Accordingly, the configuration, scale, and symbolism of religious constructions are consistently read as measures of the degree of inequality distinguishing a particular society. For example, proponents of energetic and related approaches estimate the time and labor-energy required to build religious monuments as a gauge of stratification and social complexity (Abrams 1989). Access-pattern studies of sacred buildings, including proxemic and space syntax analyses of entry points and the architectural prescription of movement and communication, have also been mobilized to interpret class and status divisions (Moore 1996), such that the interplay of exclusive and inclusive space within religious edifices is deemed expressive of the degree of social control and hierarchy characterizing a given community. For instance, during the Andean Preceramic and Early

Formative Periods, the construction of monuments with restricted, summit-top rooms has been interpreted as signaling the institutionalization of power asymmetries predicated on the monopolization of ritual knowledge by a privileged few, thus affirming classic theocracy arguments for the emergence of the earliest Andean states (Feldman 1987). Whether these monuments housed oracles, staged initiation rites, or were the scenes of sacrificial rites would seem critical to deciphering their layout and restricted access patterns. However, such possibilities are disregarded, and the ceremonial edifices read simplistically as gauges of inequality and political centralization. And although Foucault argues for a fundamental break between premodern strategies of power based on ritualized spectacles of authority and modern disciplinary technologies of surveillance, his theories on the panopticon have been employed to interpret ancient sacred landscapes as instruments of normativization and repressive social engineering (Graves and Van Keuren 2011). Once again, a rather narrow and dehistoricized conception of religion as ideological control guides analyses of this sort.

In fact, interpreting ceremonial architecture exclusively as a measure of political centralization or hierarchy is related to the many dichotomies that have long underwritten anthropological explorations of the intersection of religion and social organization. These dichotomies classify religious programs according to their degree of doctrinal standardization, social inclusiveness, and level of hierarchical institutionalization. They loosely include Weber's traditional and world religions, Goody's nonliterate and literate religions, Smith's utopian and locative models, and Humphrey and Laidlaw's performative and liturgical modes of ritual (see Johnson 2004; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; J. Smith 1987). Whitehouse's contrast between the imagistic and doctrinal mode of religiosity represents a recent attempt to provide a cognitive explanation for what he perceives to be the fundamental truth of these older theories, and his work is of value in encouraging anthropologists to consider the varying frequencies, modes of transmission, forms of memory, and affective fields typifying distinct ritual genres. Whitehouse argues that egalitarian and small-scale societies are structured by the imagistic mode of religiosity characterized by low-frequency, intensely emotional, and often violent rituals (climactic ordeals) which create powerful, "episodic" memories. In contrast, the doctrinal mode is distinguished by higher-frequency, low-arousal rites that are codified in theological treatises (conducive to the creation and transmission of "semantic memory") and usually defended by a professional priesthood in the service of a hierarchical governing institution. Imagistic events founded on grand spectacle are not lacking in state systems (coronations, state funerals) but they play a subsidiary (if invigorating) role to the standardized and highly regulated doctrinal mode which more effectively naturalizes/communicates social divisions and regulates the religious life of dispersed and heterogeneous communities (Whitehouse 2000).

Archaeologists have recently been attracted to the theories of Whitehouse and cognitive psychologists who argue that explanations of state formation are productively sought in deciphering shifts from the imagistic to doctrinal modes of religiosity. As Whitehouse and Hodder write in their examination of transformations in ritual practices at Çatalhöyük: "The imagistic mode of religiosity is much more ancient than the doctrinal mode . . . [and] the emergences of doctrinal mode dynamics constitutes a major milestone in the evolution of social formations, paving the way

for more centralized, large-scale, and hierarchical patterns of political association” (2010: 142). In fact, in the spirit of Fustel de Coulanges and Wheatley, Whitehouse (2000: 170) gives primacy to religious transformations in the precipitation of complex social formations, suggesting that the development of the doctrinal mode of religiosity facilitated economic reorganization, improvements in information processing and communication, and even possibly triggered the development of writing systems culminating in the first proto-state systems of seventh-millennium Southwest Asia (see also Johnson 2004).

Despite greater attention to issues of memory, affect, and communication, the modes of religiosity framework reproduces many of the problems besetting noncognitive theories on the political functions of religion. The distinction between imagistic and doctrinal modes pivots on reductive constructions of social inclusion and exclusion predicated simply on engineering solidarity or consensual/conflictive social division. Whitehouse (2000) claims that the imagistic mode is effective mainly in forging bonds of belonging among small groups of co-associates, thus casting it as “exclusive,” the quintessential realm of collective effervescence or *communitas* acting upon a select, intimate group of initiates, hunters, warriors, or shamans trained in ecstatic rites. In contrast, the doctrinal mode is defined as socially “inclusive” (but marked by diffuse social cohesion) as reflected in the development of uniform material culture, religious symbolism, and architectural spaces. Such standardization enables the effective and widespread transmission of orthodox religious systems. Revolutions in expressive art to communicate canonical religious worldviews, the routinization of high-frequency rites, and the formation of interregional and homogenized material styles are further interpreted as evidence for the development of doctrinal and thus inclusive (but decidedly unequal) political formations. In this regard, scholars argue that one can detect a general shift from embodied ritual performance (which can be prone to improvisation and spontaneous creativity) to more tightly scripted liturgical rites (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994).

High-arousal, imagistic events may have been exclusive, difficult to disseminate, and pluralistic in terms of the powerful episodic memory that they elicited, but it is important to stress that low-frequency spectacles often require months if not years to organize and prepare. The political economy underwriting “theater states” (Geertz 1980) is thus critical to understanding the interpenetration of religions and modes of statecraft in past complex societies. Such behind-the-scenes production was no doubt a medium for the dissemination of religious values as important as the celebration of the ritual itself. Indeed, determining how the scheduling of festivals, processions, pilgrimages, and annual commemorative rites structured quotidian practices is critical to interpreting the extent and breadth of supralocal religious organizations (see Lambek 2002). Focusing on such practices would further circumvent problematic assumptions of “shared beliefs” (false consciousness), or simplistic structure–agency dynamics that situate practice reductively within the dialectical framework of agents as “willful transgressors” (or willful participants) and structures as “formalized jailors” (A. Smith 2001: 160–161). The different perceptions and experiences of emplaced “imagistic events” identified with founding ancestors, culture heroes, cosmogonic battles, and memories of past celebrations must also have shaped subjectivities in relationship to regularly coalescing and dissolving social units. The identities and dependencies activated by such events most likely departed from the generic and ahistorical categories of

class, rulership, status, and gender which typically guide archaeological investigations of ritual politics.

In truth, Whitehouse's model seems to have minimal application for understanding New World complex societies, which confound distinctions between imagistic and doctrinal religious forms. Spectacles of human sacrifice central to the "stagecraft" of numerous Amerindian polities were largely structured by the calendar round of emotionally powerful imagistic events (Swenson 2003). In the Mediterranean world as well, Price (1984) has shown that Roman imperialism and the cult of the emperor succeeded in no small part in conquered provinces such as Asia Minor through the sponsorship of low-frequency but seasonally regulated festivals, processions, and public religious observances. Certainly, one could argue that governing apparatuses commonly employed calendrical tactics ("the tyranny of the calendar") to control the movements and association of peoples, overloading and numbing subjects with sensory stimulation (Bloch 1989). As suggested above, the anticipation of certain festivals might have played an even more powerful regulating role than the evanescent and carnivalesque experience itself. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the interdigitation of the festive, religious, and the quotidian varied considerably from society to society both in terms of state oversight and in the distinctive landscapes sedimented by such practices.

In the following two sections I provide examples of how "religion as ideology" models fail to capture the nuances of relations between the meaningful, built landscape and political forms in premodern states.

EMPLACING STATE RELIGION: ANGKOR

Place-making as an inherently religious enterprise integral to the exercise of power in archaic complex polities is readily evident in the medieval Angkorian (Khmer) kingdom that controlled much of Southeast Asia from the ninth to the thirteenth century (Coe 2003; Higham 2001). The capital of Angkor (Yaśodharapura) in modern-day Cambodia constitutes the largest preindustrial urban settlement in the world, and its networks of villages, canals, reservoirs, rice fields, and temple complexes covered an area comparable to modern-day Los Angeles (Fletcher et al. 2007). At his ascension, the Khmer king was expected to erect a new temple following Hindu cosmological templates. The quincunx towers simulated the peaks of Mount Meru and the vast *barays* (reservoirs) symbolized the sacred oceans surrounding the heavenly abode of the gods (Higham 2001). Recent archaeological research has confirmed that the *barays*, steeped in religious significance, also served as critical lynchpins of the rice-based political economy supporting the high populations of the metropolis. They formed part of a sophisticated hydro-engineering network of tanks, channels, moats, and embankments that ingeniously distributed water to fields during the dry season and stockpiled and diverted excess rainwater during the monsoons (Fletcher et al. 2007).

In the late twelfth century CE, the famed ruler, Jayavarman VII (reign 1182–1218) embarked on perhaps the most ambitious building program in history, one that departed significantly from the architectural and religious projects of early Khmer kings (Maxwell 2007; Sharrock 2009). He "erected more sandstone than all his

predecessors combined and turned the royal sculpting workshops into a strategic asset of the realm,” doubling “the city’s temple population within a generation” (Sharrock 2009: 113). Jayavarman’s regime commissioned the construction of an extensive network of roads to facilitate the movement of armies and pilgrims, plus rest houses, 102 state-funded hospitals (*ārogyasāla*), and vast monastic and religious complexes, including the legendary Prah Khan, Ta Prohm, and Banteay Kdei. These complexes each housed roughly 12,000–15,000 monks, servants, and attendants and formed small cities in and of themselves, provisioned by hundreds of thousands of villagers (Mabbett and Chandler 1995: 209–210). Jayavarman’s city of Angkor Thom was also revolutionary in conception and design. The cosmic city, surrounded by high laterite walls and deep double moats 3 kilometers long, was anchored in its center by the Bayon, the king’s Mahayana Buddhist temple (Gaucher 2004). This shrine is renowned for its multiple *gopura* towers sculpted with the serene gaze of Jayavarman himself as the likely incarnation of Lokeśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion. Indeed, the radiant Buddha-faced towers – “an expression of royal-divine power streaming out to connect with a network of local territorial deities” – represent the most famous iconographic innovation of his reign (Sharrock 2007: 232). Recent investigations have revealed that Angkor Thom was orthogonally gridded by an extensive network of symmetrically aligned furrows, roads, and canals, prompting Gaucher (2004) to conclude that it represents the most authentic realization of a utopian Indic city.

It has been argued that the Jayavarman’s megalomania drove the unprecedented building campaigns (Stern 1927: 182), but there is now a growing consensus that the construction program was closely related to his endeavor to convert the Angkorian realm to a Buddhist kingdom after four centuries of Śaivite rule (Hindu devotion to Shiva) (Sharrock 2009). Indeed, since the ninth century, Buddhist sects had been repressed, marginalized, or sublimated into a predominately (but decidedly syncretic) Khmer-Hindu cult (Maxwell 2007; Sharrock 2009). Sharrock remarks that “the prospect of achieving some degree of acceptance among the urban elite of how Buddhist teaching, ritual, liturgy, and mythology could embrace and even surpass the long-established Śaiva rituals of state and the learning of the Brahmins must have seemed daunting” (2009: 115; see also Coe 2003: 122). He further notes that the shift from “state Śaivism to state Buddhism” represented the most significant development in the religious history of Cambodia (2009: 120). In fact, Jayavarman’s political innovations entailed the partial transference of administration and spiritual affairs from Brahmins to monks, and it seems apparent that the dramatic realignment in community, administration, identity, and even spirituality that he engineered was not simply reflected in his grandiose constructions but was actually enabled by this fundamental reorganization of the religious landscape (Coe 2003: 125). Earlier Khmer kings usually built only one state temple, but Jayavarman’s “politics of compassion” resulted in the systematic reordering of the political and religious geography of the realm (Kolata 2005). The survey of more than fifty of his hospital complexes in Cambodia and Thailand further reveals remarkable standardization in the layout and construction of the temple component of these centers built for the medical and spiritual well-being of subject populations (Dagens 2005; Pottier and Chhem 2010: 171).

The great building campaign further coincided with the reworking of the festival calendar and notable transformations in the configuration and iconography of temple

buildings (Sharrock 2009). Jayavarman's religious construction, including the Bayon, "suggests participation in rituals on an unprecedented scale" in contrast to the more exclusive and secret rites performed behind the moats and high walls of earlier complexes, including Angkor Wat (Sharrock 2009: 145). The "Dancing Halls" added to his many prominent temples were likely intended to stage tantric Buddhist rites, and these ample precincts could accommodate a much larger number of participants and spectators than earlier Hindu shrines. The large complexes also served as hospitals, universities, and festival grounds. Jayavarman's regime thus attempted to expand and reconstitute the collectives taking part in state religious and economic events. In fact, the textual record indicates that female officiants secured a newfound place in the Buddhist rituals of the state (beyond Tantric dancing) (Sharrock 2009: 148). Pronounced shifts in the perception and experience of temple architecture, fundamentally altering people's attachments to and understanding of sacred places, also seem to have been essential to Jayavarman's project to remake the Angkorian empire. Sharrock interprets the iconographic evidence (especially the prevalence of images of Garuda taming *nagas*, and Vajrapani/Vajradhara – the great Bodhisattva of conversion) as suggesting that the shrines to Śiva, Viṣṇu and other Khmer-Hindu deities in Jayavarman's many temples were subverted to the Buddhist *mandala* of the larger edifices in which they were emplaced.¹ In other words, Hindu deities were literally converted to advance Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist interests. Sharrock analyzes the iconography as further demonstrating Jayavarman's attempts to reform his subjects, convert state officials, and justify his extensive imperial conquests.

Jayavarman VII's constructions were intended to increase the karma of his deceased parents and alleviate the suffering of his subjects (Mabbett and Chandler 1995: 208). Obviously, the ideological dimensions of his extraordinary landscaping project were much more complex than simply legitimizing authority, reproducing a timeless present beyond challenge, or creating docile subjects through the awe and beauty of his monuments. The religiously directed production of new places resulted in the creation of entirely new hierarchies, political economies, and social fault-lines, including shifts in gender, class, and village-based identities as expressed in the expansion of extensive monastic orders. The systematic destruction of Jayavarman's Buddhist iconography by later kings reveals that he was far from successful in subverting Brahman interests. Nevertheless, his adventures in place-making irrevocably transformed the kingdom. The later spread of Theravada Buddhism, a tradition suspicious of excess, heroic rulers, and grandiose ritual displays, unsurprisingly coincided with the cessation of massive temple buildings in Cambodia (Higham 2001). This later development represented another politico-religious remaking of peoples and places.

EMPLACING STATE RELIGION: INKA

A cursory examination of the Inka politico-religious landscapes suggests striking parallels with Jayavarman's innovations in Angkor. The Inka (1300–1532) adopted an explicit policy to remake the sacred geography of the empire, and their imperial project was propelled by an obsessive desire to impose a new ecological and spatial order on the known world (D'Altroy 2006; Kosiba 2010; C. Morris 1998; Niles 1999). They famously straightened out river systems as a means to define and

hierarchize social space (D'Altroy 2006: 137), and the regime embarked on a massive building program converting hill slopes into productive agricultural terraces and constructing one of the largest preindustrial networks of roads, rest houses (*tambos*), and storage facilities. The entire empire, "Tawantinsuyu" (realm of the four quarters), was partitioned into four great sectors (*suyus*) which were further subdivided into homologous and complementary units of dyadic or quadripartite arrangements of upper and lower territories ("*sayas*") (D'Altroy 2006: 87–89). The dividing lines of the four great *suyus* originated at a single point at the temple of the sun (Qorikancha) in the sacred capital of Cuzco, considered the navel of the universe.

In the Andes, communities were defined by animated places called *huacas*. Rivers, unusual boulders, mountain peaks, caves, or other natural and constructed features served as the literal progenitors and life-giving oracles of their respective social groups (Salomon and Urioste 1991). The Inka exploited this profound religious attachment to place by systematically uprooting peoples and resettling them in hostile territory (to divide potential enemies) or establishing them in environments newly brought under cultivation. Given the inseparability of geography and cosmology in Andean worldviews, radical alterations in place necessitated dramatic transformations in origin myths and ritual observances (Salomon and Urioste 1991).

There is ample evidence that Inka conquest and place-making were religiously motivated. The physical reshaping of the world mirrored the cosmogonic acts of their creator deity Viracocha (see MacCormack 1991), and temples to the Inka sun god, Inti, were built in conquered religious centers throughout the empire. In fact, violent conquest was an inherently ritualized undertaking equated with cultivation and fertility; the reordering of "barbaric peoples" was accompanied by the systematic reclamation of lands for state agricultural and religious projects (Bauer 1996). The cyclopean stonework of Inka ceremonial architecture, with its power to refract light and cast shadows, expressed the Inka valuation of shimmering sunlight and the emissive, generative power of Inka kingship (Herring 2010). The central plazas and majestic waterworks of Inka monumental architecture further materialized principles of dyadic social complementarity while celebrating agricultural fertility and the movement of fructifying liquid that united human bodies with the environment and the larger "body politic". Inka rituals of place-making thus reinforced conceptions of the landscape as living, fluid, and dynamic – a majestic textile (a master symbol in the ancient Andes) seamlessly uniting the peoples, huacas, and life-forms that comprised the world as reordered by Inka conquest (MacCormack 1991).

The political and religious production of space in Inka South America could fill volumes, and the point of the comparison is not simply to demonstrate the primacy of place in the state religious programs of the Inka and Angkorian Cambodia but to stress their equally significant differences. In fact, a comparison of the extraordinary *ceque* complex of the Cuzco area with the provincial "New Cuzcos" built throughout the Inka Empire reveals considerable diversity in Inka rituals of place-making that were clearly tailored to meet the challenges of administering diverse peoples and territories (Morris 1998). The *ceque* system consisted of 328 huacas arrayed on 41 sight lines or processional waves, and these numerous shrines were analogous to knots tied onto *quipu* chords, the Inka recording device (Bauer 1998; Cobo 1979, originally 1653; Zuidema 1964). The huacas consisted of rock formations, hydraulic installations, or other ritual constructions that were distributed in all four of the *suyus*. The

sight lines radiated outward from Cuzco, likely forming visual beacons and routes of pilgrimage to and from the Qorikancha. This remarkable complex consisted at once of an integrated agricultural and water shrine, a monument to Inka conquest and mythic history, a sidereal-lunar calendar, a cosmographic pilgrimage network, and a materialization of the social divisions and ethnic identities of the circum-Cuzco region (Bauer 1998). The patterned clustering of specific types of huacas expressed principles of homology and hierarchy, and each individual shrine was organized on a particular *ceque* line according to a tripartite schema of status, religious significance, and ethnic affiliation (see Zuidema 1964).

The entire complex symbolized Cuzco as the sacred pivot of the empire, but the individual huacas were maintained by separate social groups (lineages or *ayllus*). In fact, only one or a few of the 328 huacas of the *ceque* system appear to have been ritually activated on any particular day of the agricultural year (Cobo 1979). Ritual performances conducted at particular monuments during set periods of the religious calendar powerfully emplaced local communities in space and time as dictated by Inka mytho-history. In this light, the individual shrines can be productively interpreted as particular “chronotopes” that materially refashioned the histories of the diverse social groups residing in the Inka heartland. As theorized by Bakhtin, chronotopes refer

to points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse. Time takes on flesh and becomes visible for human contemplation; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time and history . . . Chronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members’ images of themselves. (1981: 7)

Indeed, certain *ceque* shrines commemorated Inka battle victories or momentous mythical events marking the migration route of the founding siblings of the dynasty. Rather remarkably, then, the Inka accentuated the political and ethnic divisions of the circum-Cuzco area by sublimating them into an integrated (conflated) geographic and temporal schema. The political relations manufactured within the *ceque* system obviously differed from the associations, divisions, and temporal routines shaped by Jayavarman’s “landscape of compassion.”

The “transient” cities built throughout the Inka imperial provinces (Huanuco Pampa, Inkawasi, Chuquito, Tomebamba, Incallajta, Hatuncolla) have been interpreted as “New Cuzcos” that replicated and extended the power of the cosmic center (C. Morris 1998). However, the organization and symbolism of these settlements were built to achieve political and religious objectives distinct from Cuzco’s *ceque* system. Far-flung communities congregated at these evanescently urban centers with their massive feasting plazas during set times of the year to partake in lively commensal rites and reclamation projects (C. Morris 1998). Pilgrimages to these evocative centers, controlled access to particular sectors of the settlements (including entryways reserved to specific ethnic groups), the possible staging of intercommunity ritual warfare, and the use of prized Inka vessels for the prodigious consumption of corn beer variably but powerfully inculcated identities, emotions, and social divisions distinctive to Andean structures of practice and Inka strategies of statecraft (see C. Morris 1998). However, for the many pilgrims and laborers who migrated to these majestic sites, the centers were likely experienced as decidedly “heterotopic” spaces

(Foucault 1986; Swenson 2012). Heterotopias denote markedly *other* places of alternative experience and heightened emotion. Commonly defined as places removed from the normative spatial and temporal rhythms of daily life, heterotopias have also been interpreted as condensing, reflecting, or refracting many of the other places constituting a larger community (Foucault 1986). For Inka officials at sites such as Huanuco Pampa, the new Cuzco may very well have been perceived as a cosmic-political center, while for rural pilgrims its potency was perhaps felt in terms of its *peripheral* location, a place of intense alterity and exceptional aesthetic and religious immersion far removed from their centered world of ancestral huacas, agricultural fields, and residential hamlets. Indeed, as a liminal space of encounter likely predicated on the staging of ritual warfare between diverse ethnic others, these settlements constituted nexuses of fundamental social reordering. Of course, liminal space/times powerfully engender transformation through the juxtaposition and reconciliation of contradictory entities, including different people and their associated places. The great feasts and ritual battles possibly conducted at these centers may have effectively “transformed guests into imperial subjects” of the Inka (C. Morris 1998: 307). Similar to the *ceque* complex, however, these rites accentuated ethnic differences and reordered the hierarchical arrangements of social groups in a way that intensified their dependence on Inka religion and political economy. Still, the heterotopic atmosphere and grand scales of rituals staged at the provincial Cuzcos clearly forged identities and interdependencies far removed from the punctuated and more exclusive ceremonies orchestrated at the *ceque* shrines surrounding Cuzco.

CONCLUSION

The comparison above demonstrates that anthropologists stand to make valuable contributions interpreting the intersection of religion and power by investigating the production of historically varied political landscapes and by developing heuristics sensitive to the vicissitudes and potentialities of ritually manufactured places (Swenson 2012). Place-sensitive heuristics, including chronotope or heterotopia briefly sketched above, are better suited to illuminate the historical particulars of the religious programs of early complex polities than taken for granted, “metahistorical” models, including most notably chiefdom and state (A. Smith 2003; Swenson 2012). In this light, much would be lost if analyses of Inka and Angkorian political theology proceeded simply in terms of their success in legitimating authority or the degree to which they conformed to one of Whitehouse’s modes of religiosity. Certainly, the massive building projects of Jayavarman VII and the Inkas effectively “absorbed” the surplus labor of subjects, regulating their time, social encounters, and access to resources. However, construction itself was likely viewed as an inherently religious act, empowering for rulers and workers alike, who were transformed in conjunction with the places they were creating. Indeed, the “festive mode of production” underwriting the Inka political economy cast reclamation projects as grand ceremonies of commensal revelry and collective effervescence. Jayavarman’s building campaign also intended to fundamentally reform subjects by generating karma and alleviating suffering. The religious monuments of Angkor or the Inka clearly defy reduction to ideological (epiphenomenal) symbols of centralized power.

Ultimately, investigations of early state religions should focus on how regimes were produced and reproduced by specific cultural landscapes, an approach that would permit historically sensitive understandings of how particular theological doctrines, festival rounds, and public ritual performances affected subject populations. As Lefebvre (1991) argues, power is ultimately exercised by controlling the production, experience, and representations of space. Indeed, the right to build and define place is equivalent to the right to assert identity and participate in political life. Archaeologists should therefore analyze the production of religious space not just as a measure of hierarchy or social incorporation but as fundamental to the inner workings of past political regimes.

NOTE

- 1 In the Hindu tradition, Garuda is an anthropomorphic bird creature, the mount of Viṣṇu and sworn enemy of the *nagas*, an intelligent race of snakes. However, in Jayavaraman's sculptural iconography, "all associations with Viṣṇu were dropped and the magical Eagle grows into a towering, barrel-chested defender of Buddhism and the new temple enclosures built by the King" (Sharrock 2009: 124). The new depictions of Garudas as protectors of Buddhism are complemented by "gentle" Garuda figures who, as good Buddhists, no longer hunt the *nagas* but convert and care for them.

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CHAPTER 26

A Syariah Judiciary as a Global Assemblage: Islamization and Beyond in a Southeast Asian Context

Michael G. Peletz

Scholars writing about Muslim cultures and politics part company on many issues but agree that the period since the 1970s has seen the florescence of Islamic piety in conjunction with diverse manifestations of a “resurgent” or “revitalized” Islam in various public arenas. The evidence thus adduced comes from most parts of the Muslim world, though scholars of comparative religion rightfully point out that we see generally similar dynamics in Christian contexts and among Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and others (Casanova 1994; Juergensmeyer 2003). As with capitalist markets, modern states, and civil society, it seems that public religions are here to stay. This despite their much-heralded demise in most twentieth-century literature bearing on modernization, which posited both the decline of religious beliefs and practices and their relegation to marginalized private domains as a *sine qua non* for joining the ranks of the modern (Asad 2003).

Many scholars have conceptualized these dynamics as manifestations of the de-privatization of religion or the desecularization of public life. Others, assuming they are dealing with Muslim-majority nations in which Islamic law (*syariah/shari‘a*) has

gained currency, refer to the Islamization or syariahtization of legal systems, state structures, or national cultures (e.g. Hamayotsu 2002; Kepel 2002; Shaikh 2007; Liow 2009; Lee 2010).¹ Academic growth industries have sprung up in the wake of these processes but I would argue that in many instances the processes and their entailments are poorly understood. This is particularly so when one ranges beyond the conventional areal foci of Islamic studies (the Middle East and North Africa) and engages data from Southeast Asian nations such as Malaysia, a religiously and ethnically diverse Muslim-majority country that in recent decades has experienced stunning economic transformation and patterns of sustained growth that are probably second to none in the Muslim world.² The Malaysian case is of further significance in that the nation's political and religious elites enjoy a reputation in many parts of the world for representing the best of Islam and modernity, if not "*the shining light of moderate Islam*" (Shamsul A.B. 2001: 4709). The questions then become: How are processes of Islamization playing out in Malaysia? And what types of discourses and dynamics characterize the operations of the syariah judiciary, which is an exceedingly important player in a wide array of legal, political, and religious arenas?

I have addressed the first question elsewhere, as have others.³ Here I concentrate on the second (obviously related) question. One of my arguments, based on anthropological fieldwork and archival research spanning the period 1978–2012, has to do with the heuristic value in the Malaysian setting of the term Islamization, commonly utilized to gloss the heightened salience of Islamic symbols, norms, discursive traditions, and attendant practices across one or more domains of lived experience. I suggest that, as generally used by Western social scientists and other observers since the late 1970s (and the 1979 Iranian Revolution in particular), the term obscures understanding of recent developments bearing on Malaysia's syariah judiciary, especially those implicated in its actual workings and the directions in which it is currently moving. These latter developments, many involving bureaucratization and corporatization rather than a return to tradition, are heavily informed by common-law practices and sensibilities associated with the legal traditions inherited from British colonizers; by the rebranding of longstanding Malay practices in specifically Islamic and Arabic terms; and, more recently, by Japanese systems of management and auditing that Malaysian authorities have embraced. In order to make sense of the vicissitudes of change in the realm of Islamic law, I find it useful to regard Malaysia's syariah judiciary as a global assemblage in Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier's (2005) sense.

Brief clarification of the term assemblage will be helpful here. Dictionaries explicate the concept with entries such as "a machine or object made of pieces fitted together" and "a work of art made by grouping found or unrelated objects." Rough analogues include a conglomeration and a miscellany. Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1966) notions of *bricolage* and *bricoleur* are both apposite, even though what Lévi-Strauss means by *bricolage* and what Ong, Collier, and the contributors to their edited volume mean by assemblage are very different, as are the contexts and objectives of their use. *Bricolage* is relevant because of its attention to processes and products of assembling and constructing "by means of a heterogeneous repertoire," that is, fiddling, tinkering, and creatively utilizing "whatever is at hand," regardless of its provenance or original purpose (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 17); *bricoleur* because it emphasizes that the processes

and products are the result of creative human agency. Of more immediate relevance is Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) work, which builds on Marx, Kafka, and Foucault, and informs both the Ong and Collier volume cited above and this essay. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage highlights "diversity, differentiation, and mobility," as well as multiplicities, metamorphoses, and anomalies (1987: 503). Unlike Lévi-Strauss's corpus, Deleuze and Guattari's is practice oriented, drawing attention to assemblages as power-laden and "imbricated heterogeneous forms" that "may open onto and . . . [be] carried off by other types of assemblages" (1987: 509, 530–531 n39), and that are in any event "contested, temporal, and emergent" (Clifford 1986: 19; see also Marcus and Saka 2006; Sassen 2008; Anderson et al. 2012).

To characterize Malaysia's syariah judiciary as a *global* assemblage is to suggest, further, that it is profitably viewed in relation to the global circulation of goods, services, discourses, and structural imperatives and constraints of various kinds, including those associated with neoliberal globalization. From this perspective, Malaysia's syariah judiciary is composed of a congeries of contested sites characterized by the interplay of a number of heavily freighted, globally inflected discourses, practices, values, and interests of disparate origins. The content of this assemblage will be empirically unpacked as I proceed. Suffice it to add here that its heterogeneities and contingencies, like its mutually contradictory transformations, are, as Collier and Ong put it, the "product of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a single logic" (2005: 12).

ISLAMIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION IN MALAYSIA'S SYARIAH JUDICIARY

Islamization/Creeping Desecularization

Malaysia's Islamic resurgence, often referred to as the *dakwah* movement, is a multifaceted, heterogeneous phenomenon of urban, middle-class origin dating from the early 1970s, even though it is most appropriately viewed as an outgrowth of earlier developments in Islamic nationalism and reform, such as those associated with the Kaum Muda (Young Group) movement of the 1920s and 1930s (Roff 1967). It has been fueled by state policies in conjunction with religio-political developments elsewhere in the Muslim world and has entailed heightened expressions of piety among Malays (new technologies of the self, new patterns of comportment and consumption) and other far-reaching changes. The latter include the Islamization of Kuala Lumpur's monumental architecture; nationwide campaigns to build and refurbish prayer houses and mosques; the passage of myriad legislative measures bearing on Islam; the creation of an international Islamic university and a nationwide system of Islamic banking and finance; and the cooptation by the state of charismatic Muslim intellectuals by offering them influential posts in the state apparatus.

In this context it is not surprising that in recent decades Malaysian political and legal (as well as educational, familial, and other) institutions have become increasingly inflected by Islamic symbols and idioms; that the scope and jurisdiction of Islamic law have been broadened considerably; and, more generally, that what Clive Kessler has referred to as "the long march toward desecularization" (2008: 62) has proceeded largely unchecked in certain domains. Commonly cited (e.g. by Norani Othman

et al. 2008; Liow 2009; Lee 2010) as evidence for these trends are the following six sets of (mostly legal/political/religious) developments, which I mention in rough chronological order.

First, the seemingly straightforward and at first glance relatively innocuous 1988 revision of the Federal Constitution, known as amendment 121(1A). This amendment specified that civil courts have no jurisdiction over matters falling within the purview of Islamic courts. In doing so, it largely eliminated reviews and appeals in the civil courts of the rulings of Islamic courts. It also set the stage, as far as many Malaysians and outside observers are concerned, for Islamic sensibilities and dispositions to trump the Constitution.

Second, Prime Minister Mahathir's late September 2001 declaration that Malaysia is an Islamic state. This enigmatic declaration, which was aimed partly at offsetting President Bush's post-9/11 characterizations of Muslim polities as extremist and hostile to the United States, proved to be politically explosive in many (especially non-Muslim) quarters.

Third, Deputy Prime Minister Najib's July 2007 public "confirmation" that Malaysia is indeed an Islamic state, which was followed by warnings from on high that those wishing to avoid detention should avoid public deliberation of whether this is in fact true.

Fourth, the apostasy case of Lina Joy (née Azlina Jailani), which began in 1990 and culminated in a 2007 Federal Court ruling that essentially refused to recognize her renunciation of Islam – or her conversion to Christianity – on the grounds that this was a matter to be addressed by Islamic courts. The latter courts, as it happens, do not countenance apostasy involving the abjuration of Islam (though they do facilitate non-Muslims' conversion to Islam). This decision made clear that the freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution does not pertain to those who, like Joy, are born Muslim.

Fifth, a host of incidents since the 1980s that have involved campaigns of Islamically inflected moral policing, aimed mostly but not exclusively at Muslims, which have reached new heights in recent years. In some instances, these campaigns have been overseen by the rapidly growing and extremely well-funded state religious bureaucracies. In others, they have been orchestrated by Islamic nongovernmental organizations that aim to galvanize Muslim public opinion concerning how and in what specific directions Islamization should proceed.

And sixth, legal strategies on the part of Islamist groups to harass Muslim feminist organizations such as Sisters in Islam and other like-minded reformers, by mounting lawsuits against them alleging defamation, blasphemy, apostasy, etc. These strategies have become particularly intense in the past decade or so and commonly involve what John and Jean Comaroff (2005: 30) refer as to "lawfare." Lawfare is typically characterized by a regime's "use of its own rules – of its duly enacted penal codes, its administrative law, its states of emergency . . . – to impose a sense of order upon subordinates [and enemies] by means of violence rendered legible, legal, and legitimate by its own sovereign word." In the Malaysian setting, tactics of lawfare are not confined to those who are part of the state apparatus; they are commonly deployed by conservative Muslim sectors of civil society to silence groups perceived as threatening their values and interests, or those of the "race," nation, or global Muslim community (*umat*).

Several scholars (Kessler 2008; Norani Othman 2008; Liow 2009) have provided superb documentation of the step-by-step constriction of public and intellectual spaces for discussing issues of public interest that these developments have entailed. Some have observed that at present the key debates among Malay political and religious elites concern not whether Malaysia is (or should become) an Islamic state but what kind of Islamic state it *already* is and what types of additional measures are needed to entrench that status (see, e.g., Farish Noor, cited in Fuller 2006).

Syariah, Common Law, and the Islamic Judiciary as Global Assemblage

It is curious that even when scholars provide magisterial genealogies of these developments, they typically convey little sense of the dynamism of syariah or of the hierarchy of religious courts or bureaucratic behemoths such as the Department of Islamic Judiciary (Jabatan Kehakiman Syariah Malaysia, established in 1998) charged with managing and auditing their procedures and outcomes. Except when addressing matters of *hudud* law, differences between the Shafi'i legal tradition (which predominates in Malaysia) and the other schools of law in Sunni Islam, they often depict the syariah in rather static, undifferentiated, and monolithic terms, the relevant discussions chiefly confined to the expanded jurisdiction of syariah and the border skirmishes with the civil judiciary and defenders of the Constitution that such expansions commonly incite. Typically elided in these accounts are discussions of how the syariah judiciary is structured and managed; what the routine operations of the syariah courts tell us about the local cultural logics of Islamic judicial process; and how on a day-to-day basis the courts deal with male and female litigants, and matters of marriage, divorce, spousal maintenance, child support, and custody.

This literature also obscures crucial dynamics that are jarringly dissonant with most scholarly and popular understandings of terms such as Islamization.⁴ Relevant here (and explained in more detail below) is that for many decades now, the political, religious, and specifically legal elites involved in reforming the syariah judiciary have consciously endeavored to model it on its far more powerful and eminently more prestigious *secular* counterpart, Malaysia's *civil* judiciary, and the *common-law* traditions inherited from the British colonial era with which that counterpart is inextricably associated. This is not to imply that elites have abandoned efforts to enhance the operations and legitimacy of the syariah judiciary in specifically Islamic terms. Far from it. Nor am I suggesting that all innovations introduced in recent years, such as the formal mediation processes referred to by the Arabic-origin term *sulh*, which were initiated in 2001 (but which build on longstanding Malay precedents), are of non-Islamic origin or design.⁵ My point about modeling needs to be understood in relative rather than absolute, mutually exclusive terms, especially since virtually all of the world's major legal systems are deeply hybrid with respect to the historical origins of their characteristic features and the ways in which these features are currently configured, inflected, legitimized, and contested. Germane here is John Makdisi's (1999) argument that key elements of English common law developed by Henry II in twelfth-century England, including common-law notions of contract, debt, and trial by jury, were adapted from medieval Islamic law of the Maliki tradition practiced in North Africa and Sicily, elements of which were incorporated first into the Norman

law of Sicily and subsequently into both the Norman law of England and what came to be known as English common law.

Circumstances of the sort outlined above help explain why Malaysia's syariah judiciary is profitably viewed as a global assemblage. Put differently, the concept of global assemblage is useful both because Malaysia's syariah judiciary is a good example of a global assemblage and because the notion of a global assemblage helps us comprehend features of this judiciary that have been poorly understood or glossed over in most accounts of Malaysia's Islamization. Consider the syariah judiciary's modeling on the system of civil law. This modeling is evident in the Islamic court's greatly increased reliance on written evidence (as distinct from oral testimony) and in its heightened concern with written precedent, reflected partly in the rapid growth in the past few decades of Malay- and English-language academic and professional publications that Islamic judges and lawyers are expected to read, master, and respect. This modeling is also apparent in the Islamic courts' tendencies toward more adversarial hearings, partly a function of the recent proliferation of lawyers in the courts; and in augmented concerns on the part of court officials and lawyers alike with procedures characteristic of the civil judiciary. Such concerns were strikingly obvious both in the nearly seventy motions and hearings I observed in the syariah courts in Kuala Lumpur and Penang during the period 2010–2012 (and in the sixty or so cases in the civil courts that I sat in on for comparative purposes in 2012), and in the various legal documents shared with me during this time. I refer here to procedures for lodging complaints; turning problems into cases; maintaining a sense of order and decorum in the courtroom; generating and handling summons, arrest warrants, affidavits, and appeals; discerning what constitutes fact and legally salient evidence; delivering and recording judgments; and for keeping records and managing paperwork and electronic files more generally. As one knowledgeable observer put it, the latter procedures "are almost a carbon copy of . . . [those] used in civil (secular) courts" (Maznah Mohamad 2010: 516).

Recent decades have also seen significant shifts toward common-law sensibilities in the substance of family law administered by Islamic courts, even as they witnessed controversial cases involving the imposition (in some instances commuted) of "Islamic punishments" such as whipping or caning for adultery and the consumption of alcohol. Many of these shifts date from the 1980s and early 1990s and could easily have been reversed since then but have in fact become further entrenched. While technical examples are provided elsewhere (Horowitz 1994; Peletz 2002, n.d.), suffice it to note that several bear on the increasingly restricted legality of men's prerogative to enter into polygynous unions and to effect extrajudicial divorce (via the *talak*/repudiation clause); the more liberal division at divorce of conjugal earnings; and the expanded grounds for certain kinds of divorce initiated by women, such as *fasakh* ("judicial voiding of the marriage contract," "annulment"). Importantly, such shifts have not occurred in a simple unilinear fashion; they have proceeded in fits and starts and have occasionally been temporarily or partially reversed (Kamali 2000; Norani Othman 2008).

Consider too that in contemporary state-sanctioned parlance, Malaysia's Islamic judges are designated by the generic (Arabic-origin) term for judge or magistrate, *hakim* (sometimes by the more specific *hakim syarie*), whose primary referent in the Malaysian context has long been civil court judges. The flip side is that the more

conventional (Arabic-origin) term for Islamic judge, *kadi* (sometimes rendered *qadi*, *qadzi*, etc.), prevalent in Malaysia through the early 1990s and long before, is no longer in official use.

This sociolinguistic engineering constitutes a striking break from Islam's classical juridical past, which is inextricably linked with the term *kadi*, and from the terminologies and symbolics of Islamic judiciaries in most of the modern Muslim world. It reflects official strategies to upgrade the status and prestige of Islamic judges *in relation to civil law judges* in the eyes of the legal-judicial profession and the populace as a whole. Official thinking has it that such upgrades require "rebranding," the term half-jokingly used by a high-ranking member of the syariah judiciary with whom I discussed these matters in 2011. A key feature of this rebranding involves capitalizing on the legitimacy of the civil court system by incorporating various features of that system into the syariah judiciary, and divesting Islamic judges of the negative connotations of the term *kadi* – rural, backward, capricious, and irrational – some of which were foregrounded in Max Weber's Orientalist caricatures of "*kadi-justice*" (Weber 1968 [1925]). These sensibilities signaled a sharp contrast to the situation that prevailed during my fieldwork in the late 1980s, when *kadi* was clearly the most appropriate term of reference and address.

Corporatization and E-Governance Thoroughly resonant with the foregoing are the sartorial styles and professional activities and organizations of Islamic judges and syariah lawyers alike. Syariah lawyers (generally known as *peguam syarie*) are increasingly involved in hearings in Islamic courts, as might be expected in light of the rapid growth of the Malay middle class, the greater financial stakes in cases concerning divorce, spousal maintenance, child support, and conjugal earnings (which, taken together, dominate the docket), and the pressures toward bureaucratic specialization, rationalization, and reform spawned by these and attendant developments. Not coincidentally, both syariah lawyers and Islamic judges organize their professional practices and formal associations on civil law models, such as those of the Malaysian Bar Council and Lincoln's Inn. Even in small towns far from the capital, moreover, their professional attire is nowadays exceedingly "corporate" in the smartly tailored, Western black business suit sense of the term, much like (but even more corporate than) that worn by their colleagues in the civil judiciary, some of whom donned the long white wigs of their English counterparts and former colonizers through the early 1990s. Here too we see clear evidence of the rebranding that capitalizes on the legitimacy of the civil judiciary.

Terms such as Islamization, like the kindred syariahtization and desecularization, obfuscate these dynamics. They sometimes suggest, or are interpreted to mean, certain kinds of homogeneous (or homogenizing) processes that we think we understand, perhaps due to familiarity with broadly analogous processes in other parts of the Muslim world such as Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Sudan. Moreover, given the full range of developments – many of them mutually contradictory – that have occurred in the Islamic judiciaries and national legal systems of these latter nations in recent years (Otto 2010; Hefner 2011), it is not clear whether designations such as Islamization or desecularization are particularly meaningful. In any case they reveal very little about the actual workings of Malaysia's Islamic judiciary, or, expanded jurisdictions aside – admittedly no small matter – the directions in which it is moving.

In Malaysia, the relevant dynamics have less to do with one or another variant of Islamization than with contextually variable processes of bureaucratization, rationalization, corporatization, and neoliberal globalization. In light of the scope, force, and overall salience of corporatizing developments in recent decades, I should make clear that my use of the concept of corporatization takes as its point of departure the hierarchically authorized models, practices, sensibilities, and dispositions, along with the pecuniary and other values and interests animating and sustaining them, that prevail in upper-level management circles in corporate/capitalist business sectors of Malaysia and beyond. More generally, I am interested in the relative permeation throughout Malaysian society of certain economic and attendant administrative/managerial principles and ideals, once associated largely with the upper echelons of rational (industrial) capitalism, that have become increasingly hegemonic and “commonsensical,” though variably so, across a wide variety of cultural-political and other domains.

In the past decade or so, Malaysian authorities, in consultation with international advisors from a variety of fields, have embraced globalized forms of e-governance with a vengeance, much as Mazzarella (2006) has documented for India. Before clarifying e-governance, a fascinating example of Islamic modern Malaysian style, I should mention that these advisors hail from corporations such as AT&T, the Bechtel Group, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Motorola, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, and Sun Microsystems.

The expression e-governance, like the synonym E-Government (which those who authorize official Malaysian discourse favor), refers to the use of “high-end, state-of-the-art information and communication technologies to facilitate efficient and effective delivery of government services through . . . [densely networked] electronic delivery channels.”⁶ E-governance works across – and systematically integrates – the entire spectrum of state agencies; ideally it will enable “citizens to access, transact and obtain any government service via a range of multimedia portals such as phone, PC . . . and interactive TV.”⁷ One rationale for developing e-governance is that in order to remain transnationally competitive “the business of government” must be continually reinvented, building on “forms of governance” that are “at once stable and predictable yet agile and flexible.”⁸ This move is squarely embedded in ideologies of “high modernity,” which James Scott characterizes in terms of “a self-confidence about scientific and technical progress” and “the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws” (1998: 4). According to the latter logic, “if the future is viewed as a scientific and technological puzzle, then E-Government will be the integral interlocking piece that completes the picture, at least for now.”⁹

Malaysia’s commitment to e-governance is a central entailment of Mahathir’s Vision 2020, launched in 1991, which aimed to ensure that Malaysia would join the ranks of fully industrialized nations by the year 2020. As part of this commitment, Mahathir (Prime Minister from 1981 to 2003) poured resources into what is known as the Multi-Media Super Corridor (MSC). The MSC is a zone of high-tech development 50 kilometers long and 20 kilometers wide, which extends from Kuala Lumpur’s city center in the north to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in the south; it contains Putrajaya (the government’s administrative capital, and offices for over 40,000 federal employees),¹⁰ as well as Cyberjaya (a massive IT-themed town with a

science park and university complexes at its core). Sometimes characterized as a *mélange* of Silicon Valley and Hollywood, the MSC is a key component of the government's strategy to create "a technology-literate workforce that can perform in a global environment and use Information Age tools to support a knowledge-based economy."¹¹ E-governance, for its part, is promoted as "the crown jewel of the MSC," though one should add that, according to some scholars (Bunnell 2004), the MSC has fallen far short of government expectations.

E-Syariah Portal In 2002, as part of the e-governance initiative, authorities rolled out an extremely sophisticated, visually stunning, and highly interactive E-Syariah Portal. The E-Syariah Portal was created with a number of specific goals in mind (in addition to the general objectives of e-governance noted earlier). One goal is to enable Islamic judges, lawyers, auditors, and others to code, classify, manage, and track cases and their outcomes electronically, thereby reducing the notorious backlog of suits and allaying widespread criticisms along the lines of "justice delayed is justice denied" which highlight the plight of women, who continue to comprise the vast majority of plaintiffs in the Islamic courts.¹² Another objective of the E-Syariah Portal is to facilitate officials' efforts to amass reliable information on the whereabouts and financial resources of litigants and other "persons of interest" to the Islamic judiciary and to the police and others who help them develop their databases.

The E-Syariah Portal is also designed to disseminate legal forms and other information to members of the public, who are designated in official literature as "users," "customers," "citizen-users," and "change targets." Users can surf the sites accessible through the E-Syariah Portal to obtain details of syariah lawyers registered with the system, and lists of the different types of civil and criminal cases handled by the Islamic judiciary. Users can also access information relevant to the state-specific statutory laws that bear on each type of case, and activate links to passages from the Qur'an and *hadith* that officials have selected to provide authoritative religious rationales for the statutory laws and relevant punishments in question. In addition, the portal prominently displays the exact times at which Muslims are called to prayer each day. One of the reigning ideas is that the portal will serve modern Muslims' needs in much the same way as a "one-stop shopping center."

The E-Syariah Portal is thus equipped with critically important pedagogical, legitimating, and regulating tools. These tools are geared, on the one hand, toward encouraging technological and digital literacy, much like the courts encouraged print-based literacy during my fieldwork in the late 1980s; and, on the other, toward enhancing surveillance, discipline, and control. Not surprisingly, the latter goals are omitted from official pronouncements, which are cast in discourses of reform that "promise and pledge" to "revise and streamline Islamic law" and its administration, to clarify the "visions, missions, and (quality) objectives" of the courts, and to "manage complaints and advice within 14 days of their receipt." According to spokesmen in the Prime Minister's Department, the more encompassing E-Syariah Project aims to "introduc[e] administrative reforms to upgrade the quality of services of the Syariah Courts by enhancing the effectiveness of the Islamic Justice Department . . . in coordinating and monitoring its respective agencies and to improve the productivity and efficiency of the Syariah Courts management nationwide."¹³ Rather hard to miss is the global management-speak suffusing these kinds of official overviews, and

the fact, quite familiar to most readers in these neoliberal times, that “good governance is . . . [made] synonymous with sound development management.”¹⁴

Japanese Management and Auditing More recently, we see evidence of an extension or revival of Mahathir’s Look East policy of the early 1980s, which included government and corporate efforts to utilize Japanese management techniques in local industrial production so as to encourage continued Japanese investment and inculcate Malay employees with a version of the Japanese work ethic. I refer to the fact that the syariah judiciary and the governmental apparatus in its entirety have adopted Japanese systems of corporate management and financial auditing. This has involved launching widely advertised campaigns that emphasize the 5Ses – in Japanese: *Seiri*, *Seiton*, *Seiso*, *Seiketsu*, and *Shitsuke*; in Malay: *Sisih*, *Susun*, *Sapu*, *Seragam*, and *Sentiasa Amal*; in English: Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain. These euphemisms do not do justice to the goals or demands of the campaign which, like others of its sort, aims to encourage new modalities of self-management, ethical engagement, and “social awareness” (of one’s self, one’s work habits, one’s coworkers, one’s workplace) so as to better discipline, motivate, and govern Muslim and other Malaysian citizen-subjects; enhance their efficiency, productivity, personal accountability, and global competitiveness; and help guide the nation to a more prosperous and secure future (cf. Rudnycky 2010).

When I visited the Islamic court in Kuala Lumpur in the (northern) summers of 2010 and 2011, the campaign was in full swing. The walls of the registrar’s office, for example, were adorned not only with the usual photographs of the Prime Minister, the King, and the Queen, plaques bearing beautiful calligraphic renderings of the words Allah and Muhammad, and flow charts depicting the organization of the court hierarchy and the stages involved in processing cases. They also featured prominent wall hangings celebrating and explicating the new, Japanese-origin system of management and auditing, some of which enumerated the 5Ses in both Japanese (a language that is unintelligible to virtually all Malaysians) and Malay. In their backstage offices, moreover, various members of the judiciary were wearing jackets emblazoned with the 5S logo. Others thumbed through, carried around, or had within easy reach official guidebooks for implementing the 5S system, such as *Panduan Amalan 5S Sektor Awam* (5S practice guide for the civil service) (Government of Malaysia 2010); these include glossy color photographs illustrating the proper way to maintain one’s bulletin boards, filing cabinets, surge protectors, and toilets. The more expansive goal is to ascertain how best to manage and audit the work flow, overall operations, and “outcomes” of the syariah judiciary and otherwise provide the public with the quality of service demanded by Total Quality Management (TQM) protocols and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The ISO is, for many Malaysian policy-makers, the ultimate arbiter of an ever-proliferating range of standards and more encompassing normativities for business, government, society, and culture alike, as is readily apparent to anyone who has recently spent time in Malaysian universities, government offices, or other venues associated with the production or dissemination of official or public culture.

This last, Japanese-inflected corporatizing development dates from 2010. Systematic assessment of its impact might thus be premature. It is quite likely, however, that it will affect employee productivity and morale, courtroom procedures, and dealings

with the public in some of the same general ways as studies collected in Marilyn Strathern's edited book *Audit Cultures* (2000) described for broadly analogous dynamics in the United Kingdom, Greece, New Zealand, and elsewhere. One common theme in these cases is that they typically involve "coercive accountability" on the part of those subject to rapidly proliferating audit regimes. Limited resources (time, money, intellectual capital) associated with the provisioning of vital services are subject to compulsory reallocation so as to meet one-size-fits-all assessment protocols based on top-down corporate business models that are patently ill-suited to many of the extrabusiness contexts in which they are unilaterally imposed. Another common theme is the diffuse, enduring alienation experienced by employees who feel their relative autonomy and authority to make informed judgments about the services they provide has been seriously compromised by bottom-line corporate considerations masked in discourses focusing on efficient time-space management or lofty ethical imperatives.

This is precisely what we see in Malaysia's civil courts: the fetishization of key performance indicators (KPIs) has become a tyranny for judges and lawyers alike, litigants (especially plaintiffs) being the most disadvantaged (Whiting 2011). Should we see similar developments on the Islamic side (one syariah judge told me that they are already evident in the syariah lower courts) the major losers could well be women, who, unlike men, are heavily dependent on the courts (hence the state) to negotiate their relationships with their spouses.

Even if systematic assessments of the effects of runaway audit culture in the syariah judiciary are premature, the other dynamics alluded to here have been evident for decades now and merit serious consideration. Some of them raise intriguing, politically sensitive questions about the ontological status of present-day Malaysian syariah. One question has to do with the bureaucratized, corporatized, positivized syariah that exists in contemporary Malaysia: Does this form of syariah have any organic or other connection with the premodern and early modern variants of syariah that, in addition to being community based, were thoroughly grounded in local cultural conventions and certain kinds of "*ijtihadic* hermeneutics," as scholars like Wael Hallaq (2009), addressing the Muslim world as a whole, have discussed with such insight and clarity?¹⁵ The question is an exceedingly important one in Malaysia and elsewhere in light of heavily freighted debates and wars of position bearing on what is authentically (or quintessentially) "Islamic," what roles one or another conceptualization of syariah should play in the nation at present and in the years to come, and who is qualified to engage these debates (Peletz n.d.).

CONCLUSION

My goals in this essay have been threefold: to delineate some of the empirical complexities of Malaysia's syariah judiciary and the mutually contradictory directions in which it is moving; to problematize the trope of Islamization as a gloss for these phenomena; and to illustrate that this judiciary is profitably viewed as a global assemblage. In these concluding remarks, which focus largely on Islamization, I draw attention to broader issues, including some of the advantages and limitations of the notion of assemblage.

There are important comparative and theoretical implications of my argument that the term Islamization is a woefully incomplete and otherwise misleading gloss – partly because it is so reductionist – for the changes that have occurred in recent decades in regard to Malaysia’s syariah judiciary. Processes of Islamization and syariahtization, like those involved in desecularization, and of course secularization, are not monolithic, seamless, or all-encompassing, like a steadily advancing forest fire or some giant avalanche or tsunami. Their directions, dynamics (in terms of force, intensity, degree of institutionalization), and overall vicissitudes vary tremendously across the terrain of any particular case and, needless to say, from one case to the next. Their temporally specific, always emergent, and invariably contested “products,” moreover, commonly involve a “reorganization of functions and a regrouping of forces” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 320). They are thus usefully viewed as global assemblages insofar as they are forged in relationship with a multiplicity of global discourses, practices, incentives, and constraints, widely disparate in origin, often keyed to analytically distinct processes of bureaucratization, rationalization, and corporatization.

Our descriptions and analyses need to make provision for the variegated nature and provenance of these discourses and practices, their ever-shifting articulations in rapidly changing fields of forces, and the different ways in which legal, religious, and other “orders [take shape and] endure across differences and amid transformations” (Anderson et al. 2012: 173). If they do so, they can help clarify a number of empirical and conceptual issues, including (1) why, across time and space, the operations and directionalities of global assemblages are “heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial, and situated” (Collier and Ong 2005: 12), though of course variably so; (2) why they cannot be reduced to a single cultural-political or other logic of the sort often foregrounded or assumed by terms such as Islamization, syariahtization, and desecularization; and related to this point, (3) why terms of the latter variety have often been invoked to explain changes in Malaysia’s syariah judiciary even as arguments of a rather different if not contradictory sort, involving claims that recent years have seen “the [common-law] legalization of Islam” rather than “the Islamization of [common] law” (Horowitz 1994: 257), the development of “Malaysian Anglo-*Shariah* law” (Hooker 1999: 75), or the “secularization of [Malaysian] *sharia*” (Maznah Mohamad 2010), have simultaneously been advanced to sum up transformations in the same assemblage.

To put some of this more broadly, legal (and other) assemblages have their own unique logics and enjoy a (variable) measure of autonomy, even when they operate in states with exceedingly top-heavy executive branches that resort to lawfare to manage their agendas, personnel, and other resources. This is the case whether or not the assemblages are implicated (as they are in Malaysia) in the shrinking space between syariah and civil law arenas and in related processes that have seen many features of the civil judiciary folded into the realm of syariah, resulting in an increasing amalgamation of the two domains favoring the heightened salience of organized Islam in the public sphere. Expressed as a negative proposition, changes in legal assemblages, including those that are heavily inflected by politics and religion, are not appropriately construed as epiphenomena either of dynamics in political domains, where (in Malaysia and most other Muslim-majority nations) processes of

Islamization are deeply entrenched, or of heightened piety in private or public realms, another entailment of Islamization in much of the Muslim world.

This is not the place to provide genealogies of the term Islamization, a floating, open-ended signifier with “meanings fluid, variant, and elusive” (Starrett 2010: 628) that has long been used by Muslim intellectuals to conceptualize various processes in early and subsequent Islamic history (Al-Attas 1969; Ali 2010). My interest in the term focuses on its invocation since the 1970s by Western social scientists and others concerned with the late twentieth-century “resurgence” or “revitalization” of Islam. During this time Islamization has become a “gatekeeping” concept in Arjun Appadurai’s (1986) sense. Such concepts (e.g. fundamentalism, political Islam, Islamism) “define the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in the region.” In doing so, however, they sometimes “limit . . . theorizing about the place in question” (Appadurai 1986: 357) – in this case, the Muslim world in its entirety. Similar gatekeeping has occurred with many valuable anthropological studies focusing on topic-locale icons such as “lineage in Africa, exchange in Melanesia, [and] caste in India” (Fardon 1990: 26). Like those and other concepts used with reference to societies broadly distributed across space and time, the term Islamization often discourages recognition of the complexity of the phenomena to which it is purportedly relevant (social, cultural, and political change among contemporary Muslims). Recent developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria – to say nothing of post-9/11 dynamics in Iraq and Afghanistan – make it clear that we do not get very far by shoehorning our observations and analyses into problematic binaries such as secularization versus desecularization/Islamization (alternatively, “good Muslims” versus “bad Muslims”; Mamdani 2004).

Many transformations presently taking place in the Muslim world have little if anything to do with Islam per se (though some obviously do). The fact that social, political, and other changes involve Muslims does not automatically render them good candidates for inclusion under the rubric of Islamization, unless of course we are ready to make the untenable twofold claim that Muslims are necessarily “more religious” than Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and others, and that, following from this, virtually everything Muslims do, say, think, or feel is ultimately motivated by or otherwise keyed to a feature of Islam. In the absence of hard data supporting these kinds of claims, we are best advised to proceed empirically, on a case-by-case basis, with the aim of generating fine-tuned ethnography and the kinds of richly comparative sociohistorical and analytic insights for which Weber, despite his problematic depictions of “*kadi*-justice,” was justly famous.

In their recent review of anthropological studies of Islam and politics, Soares and Osella caution against “automatically privileging religion as the principal – or perhaps unique – foundation for Muslim identity and political practice” (2009: 2). They encourage a focus on *islam mondain* (“Islam in the present world”; 2009: 11) and the development of a more nuanced, ethnographically grounded appreciation of the many different ways of being Muslim:

Islam mondain does not privilege Islam over anything else, emphasizing instead the actual worlds in which Muslims find themselves. This allows us to avoid . . . narrowly instrumentalist analyses of the relation between Islam and politics [as well as] . . . analyses that reduce the politics of Muslims to an epiphenomenon of Islam or the micro-politics of ethical self-fashioning. (2009: 12)

Broadly similar approaches, according priority to the everyday lives of “ordinary Muslims,” have gained currency in recent years, as have related, practice-oriented perspectives on Islamic law (Messick 1993; Peletz 1997, 2002; Bowen 2003; Ahmad and Reifeld 2004; Marsden 2005). Baudouin Dupret’s study of Islamic law in Egypt is relevant here, partly because his observations are germane to Malaysia, Indonesia, and other Muslim-majority contexts. Dupret observes that when Egyptian judges deal with cases involving Islamic law, “explicitly ‘Islamic’ considerations are few” (2007: 97), despite the Islamization of many features of Egyptian politics and everyday life, and that

[r]eference to Islam . . . moreover . . . is always mediated through the use of Egyptian law’s primary sources, that is, legislation and case-law, . . . tak[ing] place in the banality and . . . routine of a judge’s activity, which consists mainly in legally characterizing the facts submitted to him . . . [T]he judge is . . . more interested in manifesting his ability to judge correctly – according to the standards of his profession, the formal constraints that apply to its exercise, the legal sources on which he relies and the norms of the interpretive work his activity supposes – than he is to reiterate the Islamic primacy of the law he implements . . . [L]aw is a practical accomplishment, rather than an archaeological search for the Islamic pedigree of the norm. (2007: 97–98)

Approaches like these reveal that in dealing with Islamic law, the everyday discourses and operations of courts in Egypt are not too dissimilar from their Malaysian or Indonesian counterparts, and that, certain obvious differences aside, all such courts have a good deal in common with lower courts in the United States as described by Merry (1990). These kinds of approaches thus go a long way toward de-exoticizing syariah and the varied assemblages in which it operates.

I (re)turn, finally, to the notion of global assemblage, which I view as “good to think with” and more useful as a heuristic device for understanding dynamics of change in Malaysia’s syariah judiciary than the trope of Islamization or any others that come to mind. I mentioned earlier that the concept of global assemblage is useful both because the syariah judiciary is a good example of a global assemblage and because the concept of global assemblage helps us comprehend features of the syariah judiciary that have been poorly understood or elided in most accounts of Malaysia’s Islamization and modernity. Here I want to underscore a different, cautionary point. If scholars have at times been too quick to see evidence of Islamization amidst the transformations presently occurring in the Muslim world, there are analogous dangers in applying terms like assemblage that are overly facile or literal. The concept of assemblage has been used by anthropologists (and others) since the late 1990s in lieu of notions such as system and structure, which undergirded a good deal of work in the social sciences and humanities through the mid to late twentieth century and were often intended (or taken) to imply degrees of fixity, stability, and finality. I would caution that we need to avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater by placing too much emphasis on disorder, uncertainty, congeries of contingencies, “the ephemeral, the emergent . . . the decentered and the heterogeneous” (Marcus and Saka 2006: 101), and thus giving short shrift to the noncontingent, to structured and systematic imperatives and constraints that are reproduced over time, and to generalization and explanation. “If pushed too far, if insisted on too literally – if it

becomes anything more than an allusion – assemblage rapidly becomes a dead metaphor in one’s work . . . rigidifying into the thingness of final or stable states that besets the working terms of classical social theory” (2006: 106). A good way to guard against these dangers is to ground our descriptions and analyses in the kind of deep hanging out that has long been the hallmark of the ethnographic enterprise. Clearly, however, no combination of extant methodologies or analytic terminologies can fully resolve all dilemmas associated with the ways we characterize the complexities we encounter in the field.

NOTES

I am grateful to Ikmal A. Mohd-Adil for research and editorial assistance. I would also like to thank Abdullahi An-Na’im, Janice Boddy, Ann Bone, Mark Cammack, John Comaroff, Vincent Cornell, Kim Dovey, Bruce Knauff, Michael Lambek, Winnifred Sullivan, Steve Tipton, and Amanda Whiting for comments on some of the material presented here. A greatly expanded version of this essay appeared in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 55 (3): 603–633, (2013); this version is published with the permission of CSSH and Cambridge University Press.

- 1 I spell Malay terms, including those of Arabic origin, in accordance with the conventions of “standard Malay,” except when quoting published material following other guidelines. I should also note that I use the terms Islamic law and *syariah* (*shari’a* in Arabic) interchangeably.
- 2 Ethnic Malays, nearly all of whom identify themselves as Sunni Muslims, constitute 51 percent of Malaysia’s population of approximately 29 million people; see <http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?lang=en> (accessed Apr. 2013). The two other major ethnic groupings are the Chinese, the majority of whom practice a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, and the Indians, who are mostly Hindus. Since all Malays are Muslims and since nearly 85 percent of Malaysia’s Muslims are Malay, I sometimes use the terms Malay and Muslim (and non-Malay and non-Muslim) interchangeably.
- 3 Peletz 1997, 2002, 2005; see also Chandra Muzaffar 1987; Muhammad Abu Bakar 1987; Hussin Mutalib 1993; Liow 2009.
- 4 The chief exceptions are Horowitz 1994 and Maznah Mohamad 2010.
- 5 See Ramizah Wan Muhammad 2008; Peletz n.d.
- 6 From Prime Minister Mahathir’s foreword to *E-Government in Malaysia* (Muhammad Rais Abdul Karim and Nazariah Mohd Khalid 2003).
- 7 Muhammad Rais Abdul Karim and Nazariah Mohd Khalid 2003: 54–55.
- 8 Ibid., 2.
- 9 Ibid., 3.
- 10 Ibid., 85.
- 11 Ibid., 32.
- 12 Amidst the many currents of change described here, a key constant is that the vast majority of plaintiffs are women and that most defendants are men, typically plaintiffs’ husbands or former husbands, who are summoned to court to address charges of failure to provide spousal maintenance or child support, or to clarify plaintiffs’ marital status, e.g. whether they have formally divorced their wives or have simply abandoned them or been negligent in sending them money and news of their whereabouts.
- 13 Muhammad Rais Abdul Karim and Nazariah Mohd Khalid 2003: 78–79.
- 14 Rittich 2001: 932, cited in Sassen 2008: 201; see also Mazzarella 2006.
- 15 *Ijtihad* refers to independent reasoning/judgment; innovative legal interpretation of (or on the basis of) sacred texts; judicial creativity.

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CHAPTER 27

The Catholicization of Neoliberalism

Andrea Muehlebach

I start with four scenes and one proposition.

Scene 1: It was 2005 and I was sitting in a parish common room with Michele, a young man who works for a nonprofit organization that trains Milanese high-school students in the art of volunteering. His was just one of the many volunteer classes taught by various organizations in the northern Italian region of Lombardy today. As elsewhere in the world (Milligan and Conradson 2006), voluntarism has exploded in northern Italy in the context of the state's withdrawal from the provisioning of social services. Tens of thousands of volunteers provide services in the form of care toward the elderly, immigrants, the poor, and the disabled. Michele started his classes by displaying images of human suffering, instructing students to "see with their hearts, not only with their eyes," and by then asking them what they felt (they said: "compassion, anger, pity") and who should act upon this suffering ("the state," whereupon Michele instructed them that no, *they* were responsible, or at least core-sponsible, for the common good). Sitting under a giant banner with "I CARE" (in English) written across it, Michele elaborated: "Let's take the example of a boy who doesn't understand what hunger is. If he cuts his finger and makes himself suffer, even if it is only for ten minutes, half an hour, an hour – *that's* how he can begin to imagine what someone feels who goes through this for their entire life. *That's* how he understands."

Scene 2: Giorgio Vittadini, then president of a powerful organization called the Compagnia delle Opere (Fellowship of Good Works, or CdO) spoke to 5,000 members at its national assembly in 2000. This hugely influential business organization was founded in 1986 and consists of over 340,000 member businesses and coordinates more than 1,500 nonprofit organizations. The CdO is the economic arm of the conservative Catholic movement *Comunione e Liberazione* (Communion and Liberation) whose piety is combined with both free marketeering and a deep immersion in the traditional world of Christian Democratic politics (Ginsborg 2001: 133). In his speech, Vittadini argued “for a politics that does not put obstacles into the paths that life takes,” and against “the manipulation of society by the state.” Italians, he said, need a “state that is truly secular [and] in service of social life, according to the Aquinian concept of the common good” (Chiarini 2000). Years later, Vittadini, now president of the Foundation for Subsidiarity, argued even more explicitly against the “Hobbesian” welfare state and its incapacity to think of humans as capable of “positive impulses.” Citing a papal encyclical and Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Vittadini argued for a conception of humans as “spiritual beings” who naturally realize themselves through “interpersonal relations” of sympathy, compassion, and pity (2009: 1–3).

Scene 3: In 2003, I sat listening to speakers at a conference on “Creating a System of Proximity,” organized by the Catholic organization Caritas. The keynote speaker was Don Virginio Colmegna, who was then the head of Lombardy’s Caritas, an organization that mobilizes thousands of volunteers into service provisioning. Colmegna is a priest with strong leftist commitments; a *prete operaio* (worker’s priest) who worked in factories during the social uprisings in the late 1960s to be closer to everyday experiences of exploitation and struggle. Nowadays, he vehemently battles fiscal austerity and the government’s abandonment of the poor. At the conference, he was holding one of his famously charismatic speeches. Eyes wide open and fixed on the audience, he spoke of volunteering as a pure act of gifting, with a content and temporality profoundly different from market logics. “Because people develop bonds, dependencies, even friendships,” he explained, “the relationship initiated by volunteers should ideally continue indefinitely. This is what distinguishes volunteering from a service that is monetized and discrete. Volunteer work,” he said, “is *not* discrete and *not* measurable. It is expansive and qualitative and productive *not* of measurable value, but of solidarity!”

Scene 4: In 2010, the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences met to discuss the global economic crisis in light of the moral principles enshrined in the church’s social doctrine. In his address to the Academy, Pope Benedict XVI argued for the “essentially ethical nature of economics as an activity *of* and *for* human beings” – for an economics that places the person at the center of its activities and that is not “amoral and autonomous *per se*” (2010: 15). Economics, like life more generally, ought to be infused with the ethics of charity (*caritas* or “authentic love”). Indeed, that “interior impulse to love authentically” is “planted by God into the heart and mind of every human person” (Pope Benedict XVI 2009: 1–3).

I would like to propose that these scenes are refractions of an articulation currently underway between contemporary neoliberalism and Catholicism.¹ Why has Catholicism become good to think with for many social actors engaged in projects of neoliberalization today? All scenes represent moments – albeit at vastly different

scales – in Catholicism’s attempt to infuse the contemporary world with love (charity or *caritas*). The church does not consider love to be a human emotion but an expression of the divine. Love is thus not “personal sentiment or romantic emotion” but a “theological principle or ontological premise – a force on which being itself is based” and which is not “derived from anything that is” (Mayblin 2012: 246–247). Indeed, a long Christian tradition starting with Augustine posits that the inaugural event constituting God’s creation was divine love – a gift free, gratuitous, and so unmerited by us humble humans that we could never dream of reciprocating it. Without this gift, without this primordial moment of life-constituting, revolutionary excess, all would “lapse into immobility and nothingness” (Fitzgerald 1999: 391–392).

Yet love, like Catholicism itself, is a hybrid beast and can express itself in multiple ways. Catholicism, like Christianity more generally, consists of competing centers of religious (as well as political and economic) power. Its “core,” characterized by the “inconsistent hegemonies of mystical and scholastic Catholicism,” is internally contradictory and shaped and transformed both by the “reverse flows of energy” from the “periphery” and by “the syncretistic transformations of official doctrine by local belief and practice” (Schneider 1991: 183). Love can therefore appear in the form proposed by Vittadini, as a sentiment felt by human “spiritual beings” who are desirous of relieving suffering through good works. Here, the poor are made objects of love and met with charitable acts. As an ethic of “distributive justice,” it sets forth “the obligation of the person with superior responsibilities to his/her subordinates” and makes sure “that the burdens and benefits are distributed among subordinates in equal or proportionate fashion” (O’Boyle 1998: 18). Love here functions not to alter status, but, rather, to reproduce it in the form of a highly differentiated moral order (Parsons 1942: 98). In Lombardy today, it is this kind of love that is integral to the neoliberalization of social services and that is systematically marshaled by the state.

Yet love can also be expressed by those unruly subjects who reject pity and who insist on developing “bonds, dependencies, even friendships” with the poor, as Don Colmegna puts it. The love promoted by the worker-priest is a form of solidarity that resists the paternalism of charity and insists on social justice and equality. Here, love, together with the voluntary poverty of Jesus, does not suppress “equity consciousness” and obviate critiques of injustice (Schneider 1991: 188). Rather, it “easily reinforces ideologies of social and economic equality” and confers legitimacy to egalitarian critique (Schneider 1991: 194). For Don Colmegna, love must be tied to a commitment to a redistributive system based on justice and rights. This love refuses to ground itself in individual acts of fellow feeling and understands the gift as a refusal of market logics. How, then, does the appearance of this loving subject in the midst of welfare reform, a subject that can be both critical of and complicit in projects of neoliberalization, reinvigorate and reconfigure both neoliberalism and Catholicism?

Lombardy has in the last two decades seen the rise of a distinct mode of neoliberal governance steeped in elements of conservative Catholic social doctrine (Colombo 2008: 117). The regional government, a stronghold of right-wing politics spearheaded by Berlusconi’s People of Freedom Party and the anti-immigrant, secessionist Northern League, refers to citizens as clients who now freely choose services in a welfare economy increasingly governed by market logics. At the same time, the government is hyperinvested in the production of a highly sentimentalized public sphere

organized around emotions such as compassion and solidarity. The state, while withdrawing its welfarist functions, mediates this withdrawal by mobilizing thousands of volunteers into caring about and for the less fortunate. Many citizens, Catholic or not, agree with Vittadini that the mass mobilization of sympathetic citizens replaces the coldness of the state with the warmth of citizens' hearts. They consider neoliberal community care to be more "natural" than stifling modernist forms of state provisioning and more effective because it is oriented away from a "distant" state toward more intimate, face-to-face forms of fellow feeling and action. The Lombardian model is thus very much in line with the Vatican's official stance on social welfare. As Pope Benedict XVI put it, a commitment to the common good animated by charity "has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have" (2009: 3).

Love in Lombardy thus functions as a crucial corollary to the marketization of welfare and as a key sentiment in the restructuring of care. But the goal of the Vatican is to make love a force in economic life more generally. When Benedict XVI insisted that capitalism had become a disenchanted machine deadened by the "impoverished notion of economic life as a sort of self-calibrating mechanism driven by self-interest and profit-seeking" (2010: 14), he attempted to counter extreme market fundamentalism with Catholicism's own charismatic magic. By reinserting *caritas* not only into "micro-relationships (with friends, family members, or within small groups) but also [into] macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)" (2009: 2), Benedict XVI proposed a global economic order where "all economic decisions and policies must be directed towards 'charity in truth,' for without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and all social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation" (2010: 15).

The task of this essay is to track the role of love as a key element in the reorganization of Italian state welfare provisioning and to thereby explore Catholicized neoliberalism as "moral style," that is to say, as an ethic or cultural sensibility that is less ideology than diffuse disposition, less explicit doctrine than "collective psychomoral stance" (Appadurai 2011: 519). Though inspired by Max Weber's writing on capitalism's spirit (Weber 1992), I do not think of the moral style outlined here as anterior to "concrete calculative capitalist behavior" (Appadurai 2011: 519). Instead, I think of market and morals in corollary terms; moral disposition comes with market disposition. I here draw on Karl Marx's brief statement on capitalism's moral style where he argued that while "the ethics of political economy is *acquisition*, work, thrift, sobriety . . . the political economy of ethics is 'the opulence of a good conscience, of virtue'" (1987: 97). For Marx, liberal political economy exhibits not only a market but also a moral face. This moral face was one where political economy's doctrine of ascetic self-denial – "The less you eat, drink and read books . . . the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save* – the *greater* becomes . . . your *capital*" (1987: 94–95) – was dialectically intertwined with a political economy of ethics propelled by the desire for a good conscience. Just as the devaluation of human beings grows in proportion to the increase in the value of commodities, so does the opulence of virtue flourish in proportion to market rule. Moralization abounds in proportion to commodification, the desire for good conscience in proportion to exploitation.

The Lombardian experiment is thus more than a mere local curiosity.² Rather, it is a variant of a tendency that extends into and beyond Europe and that is transforming the Protestant ethic into a Catholic ethic; an ethic that couples the market to moral sentiment; economic rationality to the emotional urgencies of *caritas*. Catholicized neoliberalism thus differs profoundly from the messianic, salvational face exhibited by the Protestant ethic at the turn of the millennium – be it in the form of Wall Street bankers or proliferating Pentecostal sects who present the market as an end in itself; a gospel of prosperity promising instantaneous rushes of wealth through quasi-magical means (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). The charisma of Catholicized neoliberalism lies instead in the injunction that parts of this wealth ought to be redistributed through charitable action.

EXPERIMENTATION

The Wall Street crash of 2008 led to a host of exuberant proclamations that announced the death of *laissez-faire* and likened the financial crash to the fall of the Berlin Wall or the collapse of the Soviet Union. Others were more hesitant and asked instead whether “flamboyant denunciations of the follies of *laissez-faire*” in fact coincide with “desperate efforts to reboot some reformed version of the same system” (Peck et al. 2010: 100). Yet others caution that the rhetoric of crisis obscures the by now *de facto* embeddedness, indeed “ecological dominance” of neoliberalism in state structures and policy instruments (Bob Jessop, cited in Peck et al. 2010: 108). Others still have begun to explore the potential of a counterhegemonic moment, especially in parts of the Latin American world (Hardt and Reyes 2012); a postneoliberal impetus carried forward by the Global South (Brand and Sekler 2009). Critics from the same region have cautioned against too much optimism by pointing to the emergence of curious hybrids: “nationally redistributive neoliberalisms” based on a violent neo-extractivism that simultaneously sustains “the mirage of a new modality of state intervention” through social policies and the expansion of rights (Colectivo Situaciones 2012: 142). Whether neoliberalism is collapsed, perversely resilient, or reconstituted through social protections erected upon new rounds of injustice, questions remain about its fate and future. The present is met, instead, with “moments of paralysis and panic, opportunism and obfuscation, visionary experimentation and catastrophic failure” (Peck et al. 2010: 100). Here I want to place emphasis on the sense of experimentation that seems to undergird the present; an experimentation that allows for a conceptualization of the present as a terrain of struggle into which a diverse array of actors – the Catholic Church being one of them – are attempting to insert themselves.

This insertion of the Catholic Church into global economic debates coincides with another trend well captured by Ananya Roy, whereby an emergent concern over poverty “not only shapes social life but also serves as a key part of the remaking of the global economy” (2012: 105). This global ethic expresses itself through a “renewal of development through reconstruction, humanitarianism, and bottom billion capitalism” (the microfinance industry); through “the struggle to find a moral compass for the forms of market rule associated with poverty interventions” (“responsible finance” and “consumer protection”); and, most important for this essay,

through “zones of intimacy where poverty is encountered through volunteerism, philanthropy, and other acts of neoliberal benevolence” (2012: 105–106). Roy insists that many of these “ethical subjects” foreground moral and medical rather than market values. This “moral vision” is not an afterthought to core business (Redfield 2012: 159) and cannot be reduced to “crude neoliberalism” (Roy 2012:107). One might call this a moral neoliberal that has come to accompany the market neoliberal (Muehlebach 2012): a moral neoliberal that cannot easily be read as a thinly disguised weapon wielded to mask the realities of exploitation, or as a social palliative that “corrects socio-psychological disequilibrium” and helps individuals manage inner anxiety (Geertz 1973: 201). Instead, this is a larger shift in the social conventions that govern collective moral responsibilities (see also Haskell 1985a, 1985b) – a shift linked but not reducible to the intensification of market rule. As a social and economic phenomenon, Catholicized neoliberalism weds markets to a specific moral form; a form hinging on a core loving subject that may also ambivalently disrupt market rule.

SACRED MODERN

From the perspective of the Catholic Church, the opening afforded by the current moment is a long-awaited opportunity. After all, it looks back on more than a century of attempts to reclaim and rehabilitate the sacred in light of secular modernity (Smart 2010: 9).³ Such attempts grew out of a protracted battle between the church and representatives of the modern age; a battle over moral authority and sovereignty at a moment that Catholics would come to call “one of the greatest tragedies of the nineteenth century” – the de-Christianization of Catholic Europe (Camp 1969: 2). By 1891, the church had formulated a body of theory in response to what it perceived to be a triumvirate of evils – the intense anticlericalism spawned by the French Revolution, the excessive individualism promoted by laissez-faire capitalism, and the collectivism, statism, and secularism of a burgeoning Communist movement. Spearheaded by an encyclical written by Leo XIII entitled “*Rerum novarum*” (Of new things), Catholic social doctrine, as this body of theory came to be called, was the church’s attempt to reconcile secular industrial society with Catholicism through Thomist philosophy (Camp 1969: 10–11). These attempts continued during the twentieth century in encyclicals written by successive popes, including “*Quadragesimo anno*” (Pope Pius XI in 1931), “*Mater et magistra*” (Pope John XXIII in 1961), and “*Pacem in terris*” (Pope John XXIII in 1963). The goal was to articulate a series of general moral principles applicable to all “just” societies (Camp 1969: 25).

A first moral principle directly addressed the increased radicalism of the poor and their “moral degeneration” (Pope Leo XIII 1891: Article 1; see also Camp 1969: 1). Capitalism was not to be fought but accepted as an organic order within which all members participated as organs would in a human body (van Kersbergen 1995: 182). All social groups had their indispensable roles to play in the societal division of labor. Leo XIII considered cooperation and “tranquility” between classes to be possible and natural, indeed “beautiful,” since the division of labor was a direct consequence of the divine scheme of things, as Thomas Aquinas had already argued

(Pope Leo XIII 1891: Article 19; Camp 1969: 27–29; Weber 1992: 160). As Pope Benedict XV later wrote in “Ad beatissimi apostolorum” (1914), society functioned best if organized around the “mutual affection” between rich and poor (Camp 1969: 92), bound together by ties of charity and “a recognition of their mutual need for each other” (Camp 1969: 36). Affection, once again, functions not to alter, but to reproduce social differentiation (Parsons 1942: 98).

This organicist, decidedly nonrevolutionary vision was accompanied by the church’s sacralization of private property as natural right (Camp 1969: 72). The church had recently seen the fledgling Italian nation-state expropriate its vast tracts of land, nationalize its charities, and challenge its most sacred institutions (Schneider and Schneider 1976: 119). These humiliations provoked deep hostility in Catholics toward state interference. The church thus proclaimed private property a “fundamental principle in every ‘upright’ economic and social order” (Camp 1969: 72). “*Rerum novarum*” was in this respect an unusual document because it was one of the church’s few interventions that did not conform to Thomist tradition. Instead, Leo XIII inserted John Locke’s theory of private property into papal social teachings. Neither Aquinas nor any other medieval theologians nor the scholastics had viewed private property as part of fundamental natural law (Camp 1969: 55). Breaking with this tradition, the church proclaimed private ownership to be a natural, indeed redemptive agent in human life. After all, “men always work harder and more readily when they work on that which belongs to them; nay, they learn to love the very soil that yields in response to the labor of their hands, not only food to eat, but an abundance of good things for themselves and those that are dear to them” (Pope Leo XIII 1891: Article 47). It was private property that distinguished “man and the animal creation” (1891: Articles 5–6).

And yet the church did not promote possessive individualism. Rather, it thought of all human beings as naturally inclined toward each other, not as individuals, but as persons belonging to social groups. Human beings were considered to be embedded within *Gemeinschaft* rather than aggregated within *Gesellschaft*. Social personalism, as this theory is called, spurns bourgeois ideas of the individual and holds that man’s freedom can only be realized “amidst other men in their social and historical conditions” (Smart 2010: 27–28; van Kersbergen 1995).

Crucially, it was the family that served as “the original human society” and “the foundation of all others.” The family was “the model for social entities at all levels” (Camp 1969: 30). For Catholics, a just social order would allow the father to fulfill the sacred duty of providing for his family (Camp 1969: 84). Analogously, the distributive mechanisms that were to organize society were charitable, reflected originally in the love of the father and, transposed to the level of society, in the paternalistic love of the rich toward the poor. This emphasis on the embeddedness of individuals within a naturally hierarchical yet loving order culminated in the church’s enshrinement of “subsidiarity” as a key organizing social principle. According to this principle, society grew out of “a delicate interdependence in which different social groups owed one another active solidarity. . . . The state and politics had a role, but in facilitating, rather than substituting for, the active agency of groups and moralized individuals working together” (Holmes 2000: 39). It is in this light that Benedict XVI’s encyclicals must be read. “We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything,” he wrote in 2005, “but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity,

generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need" (Pope Benedict XVI 2005). "By considering reciprocity as the heart of what it is to be a human being, subsidiarity is the most effective antidote against any form of all-encompassing welfare state" (Benedict XVI 2009).

Wedding Aquinas to Locke and *homo oeconomicus* to what one might call *homo relationalis*, the church has spent more than a century crafting a social doctrine that combines the sanctification of private property to a conception of the person tightly enclosed within the reciprocal, loving relationality of families, neighbors, and local communities. Private property and (at least some degree of) social inequality are considered to be an expression of a divine order of things, as is the human capacity to love and give.⁴ In fact, as Jane Schneider has argued, love and social inequality have been intertwined in Christianity from the start. As early Christianity arose in tandem with the expanding Roman Empire's commercial and military rule and its concomitant more stratified social order (Schneider 1991: 194), new social inequalities cohered well with Christianity's "ideas of a generalized, abstract love" that was supposed to infuse the entire Christian *communitas*, including relationships between enemies or between social inferiors and superiors (1991: 192). For Schneider, such "generalized a moral sentiment obviates dwelling on the consequences of one's acts or venting moral outrage at local level injustices and encroachments." Though whole "categories of distress" such as widows and orphans were recognized, their plight was interpreted as the outgrowth of a generalized worldly depravity that was beyond human comprehension, rather than as a victimization by particular, responsible others (1991: 192). With the rise of a God who was "categorically forgiving" came the rise of an ideology of forgiveness that humans, likewise, should unconditionally practice (1991: 193). Such love was not merely preached but practiced as the reach of early Christianity expanded through small-scale communities of brotherly love – congregations where all children of God would come together despite their differences in status. Schneider recognizes the potentially radical egalitarian message entailed in the concept of brotherly love but shows that since its inception it was more often used in the service of reproducing social inequality. Indeed, much later, love would "enhance the legitimacy of proto-capitalists" (1991: 194–195) and "smooth over and even delegitimize the sharpened ethical dilemmas that accompany monetization, commercialization, and capitalist development" (1991: 205).

THE MORAL AND THE MARKET SUBJECT

In Lombardy, twentieth-century commitments to welfare state building have long been replaced with the argument that the state ought not to have a monopoly over care. Reformers cast the privatization of social services to the nonprofit and voluntary sector as a new democratic collaboration between the state and society, whose latent vitalism slumbered far too long under the heavy blanket of welfare-state paternalism. Regional ex-president Roberto Formigoni repeatedly argued that the modern state stifled people's natural desire for reciprocal relations because it never trusted them in their sovereignty and creativity. By summoning new social solidarities that challenge

those of the modern state, welfare in Lombardy has for two decades now moved toward decentralized and privatized (or, in the language of Catholicism, subsidiary) forms of provisioning. Rather than monopolizing the sacred duty to care, the now “secular” state has made all equally responsible for the common good.

Formigoni, who is a member of the *Compagnia delle Opere* and who during his regional presidency was accused of filling numerous regional political positions with members of the same organization, built Lombardian welfare using the grammars of Catholic social doctrine. The key concept used was and is that of subsidiarity. Promoters of the Lombardian model of welfare argue that its original meaning was first expressed by Pope Pius XI, who referred to both the “vertical” distribution of powers away from the “colossus” state toward local intermediary bodies, as well as the “horizontal” distribution of powers between public sector and private actors (“persons, family, nonprofit organizations, market”). The aim was to mitigate against excessive individualism and the “destruction of the social fabric” (Colombo 2008: 182–183).

Arguing that this vertical and horizontal rearrangement of responsibilities and duties will provoke a “cultural and even anthropological” shift in citizens’ conceptions of “man and society” (Casadei 2000), Formigoni insisted that Lombardy’s new “welfare society” differs significantly from neoliberal models of welfare because it is inspired by Catholic social doctrine. Yet the deep structural changes that have transformed Lombardian welfare can only thinly veil the fact that the lived reality of a Catholicized welfare system bears “a distinct affinity with strategies of public service liberalization” that have been pursued elsewhere “for efficiency’s sake” (Colombo 2008: 193). Indeed, the subsidiary form that accompanies the restructuring of welfare in Lombardy strongly resembles the neoliberal rescaling of welfare in many parts of Europe and beyond; away from a Fordist-Keynesian government of society in the name of the national economy toward welfare communities, many of which are fraught by the unequal distribution of resources so characteristic of neoliberal entrenchment (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 374).⁵

The restructuring of modernist state space through the idioms of Catholic social doctrine are not occurring in Italy alone. As Douglas Holmes has shown (2000: 25), much of the architecture of the European Union is similarly oriented around subsidiarity as a master trope. It was the Maastricht Treaty that first placed subsidiarity at the core of the EU political imaginary. Since the 1990s, the term has become the defining concept around which the EU has structured its political visions of decentralization and devolution. Anyone asked to trace the concept’s origins refers to Jacques Delors, the key architect of the EU and a French Catholic Socialist very involved in France’s Catholic labor movement. Deeply knowledgeable about the church’s social teachings, Delors’s championing of subsidiarity on the EU level profoundly influenced the architecture of the emerging EU polity, even though Catholic social doctrine is, of course, far from being its official doctrine (Holmes 2000: 39). In this universe, it seems natural to leave welfare provisioning to the societal entities peopling civil society, as they are considered to be “closer” to the family and local community than the “remote” central state (Esping-Andersen 1990: 61). Social personalism has similarly enjoyed remarkable revitalization not only in Lombardy but also in Christian Democratic politics in other parts of Europe as well, where welfare states are also being restructured through a moralized restoration of associational

initiatives (Dierickx 1994: 22–23). A recent open letter written by Georgetown University professors and addressed to ex-vice-presidential hopeful Paul Ryan offers insight into comparable processes unfolding in the United States as well. Ryan was accused of misusing subsidiarity as a “rationale for gutting government programs”: “Subsidiarity is not a free pass to . . . abandon the poor to their own devices. This often-misused Catholic principle cuts both ways.”⁶

In Lombardy, “horizontal subsidiarity” has in practice allowed for a drastic decrease in public funding. Hiring freezes prevented local governments from satisfying growing demand for public services directly. Provisioning was devolved and privatized to nonprofits, social cooperatives, Catholic institutions, and trade unions. Thousands of citizens were marshaled into voluntarily providing what reformers often call “proximity services” in the welfare community. All groups were made subject to market logics and now bid competitively against each another for public contracts (Bifulco and Vitale 2006: 503). In this “quasi-market system” (Colombo 2008: 191), providers operate according to new management procedures previously typical of the private sector. The “welfare society” came with a predictable set of problems. Local authorities reduced funding without serious planning and monitoring, awarded contracts to the lowest bidder, and paid little attention to the quality of services. Despite new state regulations aimed at halting the deterioration of services, ongoing waves of privatization have left many citizens with the sense that the historically unreliable Italian state is further abandoning them at a moment of increased vulnerability.

At the same time, the last three decades have seen countless initiatives on all levels of government to represent volunteering as a deeply entrenched moral wealth of the nation and as an indispensable social resource for the welfare of the country. No other country in Europe relies as extensively on volunteer labor as Italy – about one-quarter of all nonprofit organizations rely exclusively on volunteers, not paid labor (Ranci 2001: 75–76). Voluntarism is also strongly promoted by the state, which uses 82 percent of its national social service budget to fund nonprofit and voluntary organizations (Ranci 2001: 79). According to the most recent report made available by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the number of voluntary organizations has exploded by 152 percent since 1995 (ONV 2006). Much of this is made possible by the legal, institutional, and affective environment that has been actively fostered by the state; an environment that is heavily infused with the core idioms and concepts drawn from the Catholic imaginative universe.

A national law governing volunteer work, for example, was passed in 1991 by the Italian parliament and became the first legal document that refers to voluntarism as gratuitous (*gratuito*). *Gratuità* (translated as “free-gifting” and “free-giving” by the Vatican) is central to the teachings of the Catholic Church and essential to the biblical revelation. The appearance of *gratuità* in law signals lawmakers’ interpretation of voluntarism as an earthly expression of God’s initial free gift to humanity: it is His divine love that precedes and thus constitutes the human experience (Baker 1983: 38). Voluntarism was thus implicitly conceptualized as replicating this inaugural and life-constituting event. *Gratuità* is also a key concept in the Charter of Values on Volunteering, a document that circulates widely among volunteer organizations and was discussed in several of the volunteer classes I attended. Free gifting, the charter postulates, is the “distinctive element” of voluntarism and renders it original vis-à-vis other civic engagements.

Gratuità is also often appealed to by many members of the Italian public who question the nature of contemporary capitalism. The late Pope John Paul II was only one particularly prominent voice in this conversation when he insisted that society needs to convert to the idea of *gratuità*. As he said in a speech on Ash Wednesday in 2002, “Today’s society has a deep need to rediscover the positive value of free giving (*gratuità*), because what often prevails in our world is a logic motivated exclusively by the pursuit of profit and gain at any price.” He argued that Christian faith, “reacting to the widespread feeling that the logic of the market’s profit motive guides every choice and act,” instead proposes “the idea of free giving, founded on the intelligent freedom of human beings inspired by authentic love” (Pope John Paul II 2002). Love and free giving – *caritas* and *gratuità* – have thus both become a concern of the church and the state, at the very moment when care in Italy is privatized and commodified.

But how is the sacred vitality of society fostered, its energies captured and marshaled? How are citizens moved into becoming loving subjects? In some cases, local governments have explicitly called upon citizens to do good. One Lombardian municipality, for example, sent letters to 3,200 pensioners, inviting them “to not remain insensitive to the needs of the weak” and to provide services ranging from transportation to “affection” and “friendship” to the frail old, the disabled, and children (FIVOL 2005: 29). In other instances, the state has sought to more systematically foster a “culture of voluntarism.” Between 2003 and 2012, the state’s National Agency for Socially Responsible Nonprofit Organizations initiated a program (the CEAS Project) aimed at mainstreaming voluntarism into the country’s high school curricula. Michele’s class was part of this broader initiative. Today many other institutions, both religious and secular, offer courses ranging from interpersonal communication to the cultivation of relations of “proximity” among individuals. Thousands of members of the Lombardian volunteer sector are schooled in training courses every year. The state, together with its private partners, thus marshals the empathetic stances of citizens. It puts “emotion” – conventionalized, stabilized, and qualified sensibilities (Massumi 1995) – to work.

These training courses are sites where one can track the concrete production of a normative moral subject governed by a particular moral style – a citizen responsive to suffering and acting upon suffering in ways reminiscent of Catholic demeanor and disposition. This was evident, firstly, in the exegetic exercises that students were instructed to engage in during several classes I observed in late 2005. One class, consisting of a group of middle-aged volunteers being trained over several weeks by a retired philosopher who made a point of announcing that he was *laico* (not affiliated with the church), spent a morning poring over the Charter of Values on Volunteering. The women and men attending the class were instructed to “extract the key words that constitute the text” (they ended up focusing on *gratuità* as well as altruism and solidarity) and to critically illuminate their true meaning (*gratuità*, the group concluded, was to give without receiving). We were further asked to discuss the “essence” of voluntarism. The class responded, with the teacher writing our responses on the blackboard: *umiltà* (humility); *rispetto ed empatia* (respect and empathy); *generosità e costanza nell’impegno* (generosity and continuous commitment). One woman mentioned her desire for gratification, which the teacher wrote on the blackboard only to put a question mark beside his own writing. He began to

lecture us on the fact that voluntarism, as an expression of *gratuità*, was entirely disinterested and that the desire for personal gratification was voluntarism wrongly understood. What he reiterated through authoritative textual exegesis was the semantic and affective core around which voluntarism in Italy is organized – gifting animated by selfless, sacrificial love.

Many classes further entailed pedagogical techniques whose very form bore resemblance to some core tenets of Catholicism – its teachings on the will and the will's education, its technique of confession (including the art of listening), and its interpretation of what it means to properly express love. Michele's pedagogy exemplified the cultivation of this moral style. For him, the necessary prerequisite for proper ethical action consisted of young citizens having their selves be pierced by images of suffering. Michele had instructed the students to view the images "with their hearts, not only with their eyes," thus leading them away from removed forms of visual contemplation and toward a more visceral, grasping of worldly suffering. This pedagogical technique once again echoed a long Christian tradition of divine love, also called grace, making itself manifest on the level of bodily intensity. Indeed, the scriptures describe God as pouring himself into human hearts through the Holy Spirit and instruct believers to glorify God in their body. The Holy Spirit thus comes to dwell in the Christian nervous system, "striking" the elect or by "softening their hearts" to respond to the word (Fitzgerald 1999: 397). The human capacity to respond to divine love is not about autonomous choice. Instead, a "disposition" toward God's love is evoked and secured by divine mercy alone (Fitzgerald 1999: 397). Grace, in short, is a form of affect. It is divine love received by human hearts having been struck.

The pedagogical technique deployed by Michele was strongly reminiscent of Catholic teachings on the will and its education. In Catholicism, different kinds of will exist, including a deliberative will which results in formal choice and is often considered will in its fullest form. But Catholicism also holds that ordinary volition often takes the form of "spontaneous and immediate reaction upon very simple data," and that human beings often apprehend concrete situations "almost without reflection and achieved almost at a stroke." Will and emotion or affect are therefore treated under the general heading of appetite (or appetite) and usually distinguished from knowledge and intellect. Will as appetite is thus not pure affect or sensation. It is a "rational appetite" and distinct from the lower vegetative or sensitive appetites in that it can exercise control over them. Will, while originally moved by sensation, can and must be educated. Children, for example, are considered "creatures of impulse" who are constantly engrossed by impressions. The random actions that result from their impressionability must be tempered by the awakening of the rational faculties and the gradual development of a judicial power. This is how voluntary, as distinguished from mere spontaneous attention, is developed.⁷

Michele's class exemplified the education of will in this Catholic sense – the marshaling of citizens into viscerally bearing witness to suffering and to responding to suffering through proper affect and action. The latter were achieved through a specifically Catholic, confessional modality of self-knowledge and disclosure. Truths were considered to be hidden within individuals; revelatory acts of inscription and verbalization then allowed for steps to be taken toward reform (Giordano 2008: 597). As is the case with confession, Michele summoned students into moving away from a past self that might have ignored suffering toward a future self that will not. It is

important to note that this pedagogical form was integral to all classes I attended, including classes that were not linked to the church and instead part of what some commentators argue is an increasingly secular-democratic civil society (ONV 2006: 8; Ranci 2001).

The cultivation of an emotive self was also voiced by many Catholic volunteers I met. "You see," one lady from a church parish providing care for the elderly explained to me, "the poor want to be understood in all of their pain. They want sympathy. Yes, that's what it is. It's about sharing their state of suffering. They need support that is moral, not only material." Knowledge of and encounters with the Other were considered to be best achieved through cerebral rather than visceral means; moved by the heart rather than removed through the contemplative mind. This was clear also from the insistence, coming from both church and state actors as well as from institutions across the religious and nonreligious spectrum, that listening was central to voluntarism. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in 1984, "correct and ecclesial theology stresses the responsibility which Christians necessarily *hear* for the poor and oppressed" (emphasis added).⁸ The Ministry of Labor's website at one point wrote that listening is central to voluntarism and "assumes its true significance" "not as a pure and simple physical fact, but as a real and truly emotive and intellectual activity."⁹ Both church and state have thus created institutions that cultivate and promote this art. Caritas today manages about 3,000 Centers for Listening (Centri di Ascolto) for the church. It describes these centers as "privileged pastoral instruments" and "an antenna of love [*l'antenna della carità*] that serves and animates local communities."¹⁰ A number of people I worked with who were staunchly *laico* and members of Italy's ex-Communist Party similarly insisted that listening was a key talent necessary for the proper execution of voluntary work. Almost half of all antipoverty nonprofits in Milan offer listening (*ascolto*) as a service, in addition to the distribution of food and medication (ORES 2009: 5). It is as if the encounter with poverty must be performed through more than mere material intervention and is instead enriched by a specific emotive stance animated by concern and compassion.

POST-WASHINGTON CONSENSUS NEOLIBERALISM

How does the mass mobilization of selflessness in Lombardy articulate with Catholicized neoliberalism more generally? Joseph Stiglitz, Professor of Economics at Columbia University, Nobel Prize-winner, and Senior Vice President and Chief Economist at the World Bank in the late 1990s, is perhaps the most famous proponent of this "new neoliberalism." Distinguishing between "Washington consensus neoliberalism" and "post Washington consensus neoliberalism," Stiglitz has criticized the Washington consensus's all too strong faith in "unfettered markets" and its minimization of the role of government (2004: 1). Having dominated policies in global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund since the 1980s (Fine 2001: 134–135), the Washington consensus refers to a set of development strategies that almost exclusively focused on "privatization, liberalization in the form of structural adjustment and fiscal austerity, and macro-stability (meaning mostly price stability)" (Fine 2001: 1). Proponents of the post-Washington consensus, in contrast, present it as a means to transition away from the orthodox,

radically antistatist neoliberalisms of Reagan and Thatcher toward “benign” third-way neoliberalisms first introduced by Bill Clinton, Gerhard Schröder, and Tony Blair (who, non-incidentally, converted to Catholicism as soon as he left office). Its program is, broadly speaking, made up of several key elements, some of which are crucial to the articulation that interests me here. First, the post–Washington consensus exhibits a strong skepticism vis-à-vis both laissez-faire and strong statism, promoting instead the reinvigorated figure of “society.” Rather than being supposedly nonexistent (if we remember Margaret Thatcher’s famous 1987 claim that “there is no such thing as society”), society (or, as it is more often called, “social capital”) has now become a central means through which “market imperfections” are addressed (Fine 2001: 139). Post–Washington consensus neoliberalism elevates nonprofits, civic associations, voluntary organizations, and other third sector actors to key partners in policy-making and service provisioning. Promoted as adjective rather than noun (*social* capital, *social* cohesion, *social* inclusion or exclusion), society comes as an addendum and descriptor rather than as an object *sui generis*, a relation produced voluntarily by citizens rather than an a priori domain into which the state interjects.

Both Catholicism and post–Washington consensus neoliberalism ascribe a potent charisma to this form of the social. For the former, society’s intermediate bodies are animated by human beings’ divinely inspired capacity to love and gift. For proponents of social capital, trustful reciprocal social relations are conceptualized as a “powerful magnetic field” that makes some communities prosper in contrast to others (Putnam et al. 1993: 153). This joint emphasis on the powers of the social, coupled with a concern about the “colossus” state and the excessive market, has made new kinds of posturing vis-à-vis the less fortunate through mutual help and charity central to post–Washington consensus neoliberalism (Fine 2001: 196). These charitable posturings, identified by Ben Fine more than a decade ago, have today in the United Kingdom, for example, articulated themselves through a “red Tory” political theology (inspired largely by Radical Orthodox theologian John Milbank) that promotes a “return to ‘parish-led’ social services” (Cooper 2012: 654). Such posturings seem also to have radiated outward from the “magnetic field” of “society” into the corporate world itself. As newly “ethical subjects,” corporate actors have developed their own stances toward human suffering and find themselves compelled to respond to it (Roy 2012).

Second, Catholicism and post–Washington consensus neoliberalism thus both combine a commitment to markets with the valuation of reciprocal relations. Under the post–Washington consensus regime, “stocks” of social capital accumulate if well exploited and invested, generating “social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well-being” (Putnam et al. 1993: 177). One can read this as a radical extension of the calculative rationality of neoclassical economics into realms that were previously not governed by such rules (Fine 2001: 10). At the same time, the rise of social capital has also seen economic and policy discourse shift away from focusing exclusively on “rational” market relations toward a heightened awareness of “real people’s values (not the utility functions of *homo oeconomicus*), [and of] how people interact in their daily lives (locally, in families and work groups, not just as buyers, sellers, and citizens)” (Bowles, cited in Fine 2001: 6). The science of *homo oeconomicus* has begun to include the science of *homo relationalis*: of humans who relate to one another not through self-interest but through dispositions – moral styles – that are, to return to Putnam, based on trust

and reciprocity. It is not just material wealth but vibrant social relations and even happiness (Wali 2012) that are now considered key to the wealth of nations. The post-Washington consensus, while firmly wedded to methodological individualism and rational choice, nevertheless exhibits a tendency that attempts to capture and harness the powers of the relational and interpersonal. Yet this expansion of new frontiers of profit and accumulation might simultaneously entail the grounds for an “agonistic” ethics (Roy 2012: 106). Like Catholicism, which weds Locke to Aquinas and the sacrality of private property to the sacrality of the social person, the post-Washington consensus similarly insists on both the disembedded propertied individual and the embedded person; on profit and trust; accumulation and reciprocity.

Yet both Catholicism and post-Washington consensus neoliberalism, even as they jointly criticize *laissez-faire*, propose theories of society and economy that tend to leave neoliberalism’s basic structural features intact. Their emphases on a new culture of cooperation and benevolence, while seemingly placing them at the vanguard of the reaction against market rule, in fact help make persuasive some of contemporary neoliberalism’s basic premises – its antistatism, its drive toward third-sector privatization and decentralization, and an intensification of *caritas*. Catholicism and contemporary neoliberalism thus both unexpectedly share a common ethical orientation: modes of conviction and moral sensibility that seem to suggest a fundamental realignment of the relationship of the privileged to suffering and how it should be encountered.

This displacement of a “Lutheran Washington consensus” with a “Catholic” post-Washington consensus, as Ben Fine off-handedly put it (2001: 168), is more than a mere metaphor. In fact, the major proponent of post-Washington consensus neoliberalism, Joseph Stiglitz, is also a member of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, founded by Pope John Paul in 1994. The Academy has published on the changing world of work, the risks and opportunities presented by globalization, the dilemmas of democracy, and questions of intergenerational solidarity. The aim, says Harvard Law School Professor Mary Ann Glendon, the current president of the Academy, is to focus on the deeper, underlying crisis of meanings and values (Glendon 2005). Through numerous meetings and a vast array of written interventions, the Academy has become a vehicle through which the church has attempted to reassert its authority in worldly matters and to enchant the neoliberal project through Catholic social doctrine. Glendon argues that the Academy has helped to “train the spotlight on the human dimensions of social issues – dimensions that are too often ignored by value-free, or purely secular social scientists.” All members of the Academy “share many of the concerns that animate the social doctrine of the Church” and appreciate continental European religious thinking because it is similarly interested in finding the key to a central puzzle that Pope John Paul II posed in his day: “how to provide a ‘moral and juridical framework’ to discipline, without stifling, the creative energies of the market.”

MORAL STYLE

I have pointed to the co-occurrence of markets and morals, of a cold and calculating and a loving subject. What might this seemingly split moral universe tell us about

contemporary neoliberalism's moral style? A rereading of Max Weber offers insight here.

Moral responsibility in Catholicism, Max Weber wrote, was cumulative in Puritanism and cyclical in Catholicism. While Catholicism's control over sinners is "at times scarcely perceptible in practice, and hardly more than formal," Puritanism is characterized by an "unexampled tyranny" which generated an intense form of everyday piety; a system that focuses "on the control of conduct" (Weber 1992: 36–37). Good works for the purpose of salvation do not exist in Calvinist thought. The sinner's salvation cannot, as is the case for his or her Catholic counterpart, consist of a "gradual accumulation of individual good works" and of a "succession of individual acts" that can be used as occasion demands "to atone for particular sins" or to "better his chances for salvation" (Weber 1992: 115–117). Catholic realism lay in its recognition that "man was not an absolutely clearly defined unity to be judged one way or the other, but that his moral life was normally subject to conflicting motives and his action contradictory" (Weber 1992: 116). Such contradictions could be temporarily resolved through the giving of alms to mendicant preachers, the undertaking of crusades and pilgrimages, the doing of charitable "works," the saying of prayers, and the participation in the miracle of the Eucharist. All were "especially efficacious ways to hasten expiation for the 'deadly sins' of pride, avarice, envy, anger, gluttony, sloth, and lust" (Schneider 1991: 198).

Contemporary neoliberalism's moral style, like Catholicism's, similarly consists of "cycle[s] of sin, repentance, atonement, release, followed by renewed sin." Weakness is accommodated by "various forms of penance" such as, for example, "conscience money" (Weber 1992: 74). Gifts are a means for the penitent to seek redemption and to constantly shift between "lofty ideals" and the "makeshift adjustments" necessary for the functioning of everyday life (Herzfeld 2009: 10–11). In Lombardy, neoliberalism's moral style expresses itself in precisely such terms. Its market-driven welfare system is intimately dependent on the hypermoralized world of volunteers who help resuscitate solidarity through their practices of "free gifting." The public thus produced consists of both *homo oeconomicus* and *homo relationalis*, of both the disembedded individual and the embedded person at once. One might say that on a global level, Catholicized neoliberalism operates according to the same corollary ethic. Cycles of extreme exploitation and dispossession are accompanied by a new ethical voluntarism; sin accompanied by repentance through worldwide commitments to charity and philanthropy. Importantly, these acts of redemption – of striving for and achieving good conscience – require an Other dependent on and willing to receive our gifts and thus capable of operating as a vehicle for consolation. Structurally, such redemptive acts thus require and maintain unequal relations between giver and receiver; a paternalism that can wound since it places the receiver outside of the possibility of mutual ties (Douglas 1990: ix). As a structure of feeling, this moral regime tends to rely on sentiments such as pity, which in Hannah Arendt's words from 1963 is cruel because it "automatically leads to a glorification of its cause, which is the suffering of others." Pity cannot exist without the presence of misfortune and indeed demands it (Arendt 2006: 79). It makes the poor objects of love, not subjects in their own right, as they are encountered through the kinds of paternalist posturing envisioned by someone like Giorgio Vittadini.

Yet the problem lies in more than just paternalism. It lies also in the fact that ethical voluntarism is legally unenforceable and thus subject to the whims, fads, and desires of its agents. Because it relies on the “self-regulation and self-revelation” of individuals who then posture as “guardians” against what they deem to be the unacceptable effects of market rule (Appadurai 2011: 529), this moral regime is fickle; characterized by limits that are fiscal, political, or emotional. A number of representatives of some of the most progressive volunteer organizations that I spoke to came to this conclusion very quickly. One particularly tireless volunteer said: “Until now, I have always said yes. But now, slowly, I am beginning to understand . . . that we are not a [public] institution. All we can do is offer support. We offer what we can, but we can also say no.” Here, the volunteer voiced precisely the inevitable logic of (voluntary) charity; that it can waver, dry up, desist, and begin to withdraw from certain kinds of suffering and certain kinds of people.

At the same time, this moral style – the direction and meaning that love can take – is potentially indeterminate. It is, after all, not a thing but a relation; and as a relation, it can harbor different meanings and practical expressions. Love does not need to take the form of paternalistic pity. It can also express itself through solidarity, which establishes “a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited.” It is “aroused by suffering but not guided by it” (Arendt 2006: 79). For someone like Don Colmegna, the poor occupy a central ecclesiastical place in the Christian church and must therefore be met with love as friendship, an exchange that aims to overcome inequality and create lasting ties. The leftist volunteers I worked with similarly insisted that their voluntarism was animated by something distinct from pity. As Natalina, a woman active in a powerful national voluntary organization that grew out of Italy’s communist tradition put it,

we don’t go to church, but when I see a brother in difficulty, I hurry to help him out. Before this, we used to call these types of activities “Christian gestures.” But I engage in gestures of love and brotherhood. . . . We offer them [the needy elderly that her organization targets] a coffee and we help them out. We [leave] him with dignity, you see? Nearly everyone does it [volunteering], but there are different ways to do it. We do it with love, but we never have pity in our hearts.

Indeed, many volunteers I met combined, like Natalina, their everyday “gestures of love and brotherhood” with active participation in demonstrations against government policies of austerity, racism, and precarity. Some worked double-shifts in political organizations concerned with, for example, immigrant rights. Many insisted that voluntarism was an act of insubordination to market rule, a commitment to relations outside of the wage nexus. They lived and breathed the kinds of equity consciousness that brotherly love can, in their case, not suppress, but enhance.¹¹

What, then, can love be and become? The Catholic Church itself looks back on a long history of doctrinal battles over the meaning of love, ranging from liberation theology’s coupling of love to justice and solidarity with the poor to the church’s response that such commitments posit a “fundamental threat to the faith of the Church.”¹² Beyond the church, the questions that remain are how we differentiate paternalist charity from solidarity, and how we make charity morph into justice.

NOTES

I am indebted to Douglas Holmes for our many inspiring conversations on Catholicism. I also thank Salvatore Giusto, Michael Lambek, Amira Mittermaier, Noelle Molé, and Valentina Napolitano for their engagement with this text. Finally, I want to thank Andy Graan for a crucial reference.

- 1 I use articulation in Stuart Hall's sense in that the linkages described here are contingent and non-necessary while at the same time productive of strong resonances and "unities" across a wide array of differentially positioned social actors (Hall 1986: 53).
- 2 Of course, it is not surprising that Catholicism is the vehicle through which neoliberal reform is articulated (in Italy, modern state politics have since their inception been rendered through the core principles of the Catholic imaginative universe; Acanfora 2007; Muehlebach 2012). But I use the Italian case to make a larger argument about neoliberalism's "moral style," the goal of which is to demonstrate that this articulation of neoliberalism and Catholicism is today not merely an Italian phenomenon.
- 3 I borrow the term "sacred modern" from Pamela Smart's book of the same title (2010).
- 4 "Rerum novarum," while criticizing the ways in which some employers "look upon their work people as bondsmen" (Pope Leo XIII 1891: 20) also naturalized social inequality by arguing that "there naturally exist among mankind manifold differences" that in turn "necessarily" lead to "unequal fortunes." Leo XIII went so far as to argue that social and public life can only be maintained through these natural differences since "each man, as a rule, chooses the part which suits his own peculiar domestic condition" (1891: 17).
- 5 The organization of society through the principle of subsidiarity also splendidly dovetails with the right-wing secessionist Lega Nord's political program, with which Formigoni's (now flailing People of Freedom) party formed a coalition.
- 6 Open letter by Catholic leaders to Paul Ryan on budget cutting. At <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JRLM7Jh9PnrxtafWYENXdAmxnXd4gQJMYTu3H4TFHA/edit?pli=1> (accessed May 2013).
- 7 See "Will," in *New Advent*, Catholic Encyclopedia. At <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15624a.htm> (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 8 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Liberation theology." At <http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/ratzinger/liberationtheol.htm> (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 9 Since 2012, CEAS has been outsourced to Caritas. See http://s2ew.caritasitaliana.it/pls/caritasitaliana/consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=386 (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 10 For more information see http://www.caritasitaliana.it/pls/caritasitaliana/V3_S2EW_consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=01217 (accessed Apr. 2013).
- 11 See also Napolitano and Norget 2009 and Norget 2010 for the role of Christian base communities in political mobilization in South America.
- 12 See "Instruction on certain aspects of the 'theology of liberation,'" at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html (accessed Apr. 2013) and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Liberation theology."

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CHAPTER 28

The Sacred and the City: Modernity, Religion, and the Urban Form in Central Africa

Filip De Boeck

All over the world, new religious movements have become a highly visible part of the urban landscape. In the city of Seoul, a multiplicity of mega-churches is currently being built at rapid speed by evangelical Christians. In Lagos, the church building of the Winner's Chapel offers room to 50,000 believers, but it is by no means the city's largest church (this honor goes to the National Temple of The Apostolic Church, that can accommodate 100,000 followers, making it larger than London's Wembley Stadium). In Beirut, Hezbollah is in charge of the urban planning and rebuilding of war-ravaged neighborhoods in the city's southern suburbs (Fawaz 2009), whereas in Bangalore local Hindi festivals and contemporary religious movements radically redefine the standard paradigms of urban public space (see Srinivas 2008). From Africa to Asia and Latin America, and right across the religious spectrum, these new movements and organizations, as nonstate actors, have become major –and often very global – political players who frequently collaborate with, or bypass and even replace, state agencies to realize their own future-oriented visions of the urban good (Metrozones 2012; Hancock and Srinivas 2008). In doing so, they not only impact infrastructurally on the urban landscape but they also contribute to a fundamental refashioning of urban popular cultures and media landscapes (Meyer and Moors 2006; Oosterbaan 2008; Pype 2012).

But cities themselves are not only passive surfaces on which the often spectacular return of the religious is being inscribed. Cities impact on religious spaces and

structure the experience of the religious, and the sentiments surrounding it. As Gomez and Van Herck, in their recent volume *The Sacred in the City*, remark: “The city has a constitutive effect on our relation with the sacred and interacts with the human search for meaning in life and with the sacred in all its many guises” (2012: 3).

This chapter seeks to analyze new manifestations of the religious and the sacred¹ in urban space, as well as the ways in which urban cultures and infrastructures mediate diverse practices, discourses and affects in the various domains of the sacred. By investigating the alignments, collusions and collisions between these two fields, the city and the sacred, this chapter intends to bridge between the anthropology of religion and an anthropology of the urban form and imagination, a field that has recently found a new impetus through its focus on cities in the “Global South,” especially in the African context (see De Boeck and Plissart 2004; Guyer 2011; Murray and Myers 2006; Myers 2011; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Simone 2004, 2010).

How then does the sacred – in its various guises and manifestations – resonate with urban realities and with the ways in which urban projects, driven by the (secular) logic of the state or the neoliberal capitalist market, envisage possible futures for the city? To answer that question I will turn to the Central African context, and more particularly to Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and one of Africa’s largest and most vibrant urban environments.

In Kinshasa, the notions of the *polis* and the *sacred* do not seem to offer a lot of steady ground to sustain a straightforward understanding of what urban reality is about in this Central African context. In the Congolese setting, it is not so clear what the notion of the polis, in its double meaning of urban community and of political community, might mean, nor is it clear to what extent Kinshasa has ever belonged to its inhabitants. The meaning of what is sacred is no longer fixed either. Kinshasa is caught between an autochthonous ancestral past to which, for many urban dwellers, it has often become very difficult to return in an unproblematic way, and a model of modernity (often still inspired by former colonial models, images, and ideals) that has become as difficult to grasp and seems to be located in a distant future that cannot easily be accessed or realized by a majority of urban residents that remains encapsulated within an urban present that is itself punctuated by breakdown, decay, paucity, and poverty.

Today, as elsewhere throughout Africa, the idea of an insertion into global modernity seems to be promoted most strongly, albeit in sometimes rather peculiar ways, in the enchanting spaces of Neo-Pentecostalism. It is in these contemporary religious movements that the terms of the polis and the sacred have become locked together. This chapter will discuss the specific ways in which these linkages have come about, as well as the contradictions, paradoxes, and uncertainties that this entwinement has generated.

THE POLIS AS URBAN AND POLITICAL COMMUNITY

In terms of the polis as city, most Kinshasians have never had an officially recognized right to the city. During the colonial period access to the city of Kinshasa, then still Léopoldville, was carefully controlled and regulated by the colonial authorities, and the city

itself was developed along strictly defined racial as well as gender lines, which gradually turned the city into a model of urban segregation that inspired, for example, urban planning under South Africa's apartheid era. After World War II, Léopoldville, then a city of 40,000 inhabitants, rapidly expanded to reach 400,000 a mere ten years later, on the eve of Congo's independence from its Belgian colonial masters. In 1949, in response to the growing demographic pressure, the Belgian colonial administration developed an ambitious ten-year plan for Léopoldville and other major cities in the country. This plan, known as the *plan décennal*, drastically reconfigured the city by means of a vast housing scheme that also formalized the division between *La Ville*, the white European heart of Léopoldville, and *La Cité*, the term used to denote a surrounding belt of informal settlements and of regulated social housing also known as *cités indigènes*, "indigenous neighborhoods," constructed around and away from the downtown area. These areas still form the core of Kinshasa's current urban infrastructure. *Ville* and *Cité*, the two mirroring parts of the city, were spatially demarcated by a railroad, a market, strategically placed army barracks, as well as by belts of empty no-man's land and other *zones tampons*, spaces that even today have not yet fully densified. The borders between the two parts of the city, the European center and the African periphery, were porous in the sense that Congolese were allowed into *La Ville* as "boys," workers, watchmen, manual laborers and so on, but all of this Congolese *main d'oeuvre* needed special permits to stay in this area of the city at night, or else had to retreat into its own neighborhoods at the end of the day. These and other measures effectively installed a tangible color bar that ran through the city in all kinds of visible and invisible ways (De Boeck and Plissart 2004; De Meulder 2000; de Saint Moulin 2010, 2012).

In many ways this division retained some of its former meanings even after the sun of independence had risen over the country. Today, Kinshasa is home to an estimated 10 million inhabitants. Until very recently, however, the Belgian *plan décennal* was never followed by another formalized governmental attempt at controlling, steering and guiding Kinshasa's development. Many of the neighborhoods of the peripheral city continued to expand at an ever increasing pace, but this expansion took place in a rather unorganized, unplanned, chaotic and often spontaneous and ad hoc manner, leaving the majority of a rapidly growing number of urban residents to fend for themselves. This greatly impacted on the quality and reliability of Kinshasa's urban infrastructure, and it also determined the access to amenities such as electricity and especially water, a precious commodity that many Kinois (inhabitants of Kinshasa) have to struggle for on a daily basis. After independence, *La Ville* remained a rather exclusive and expensive part of town, although today the divisions are no longer so clear cut as they used to be in colonial times. But even so, this still is where the country's political and economical power centers are located, and where embassies, international hotels, fancy supermarkets and residential areas for expatriates and local political and economical elites are situated. And many of Kinshasa's inhabitants still have the feeling of trespassing when they access this city center.

This became abundantly clear in the local interpretation of a statue of Lumumba, Congo's legendary first post-independence prime minister. The statue itself was erected a decade ago at the Échangeur de Limete, a major roundabout on Boulevard Lumumba, the main road leading into *La Ville* (see Figure 28.1). The statue portrays Lumumba with one raised hand, a greeting gesture to salute and welcome the



Figure 28.1 The statue of Patrice Emery Lumumba on the Échangeur de Limete (reprinted with kind permission from Sammy Baloji).

inhabitants of the city. However, it did not take the inhabitants of Masina, Ndjili, and other parts of the peripheral city very long before they came up with their own alternative reading of what the statue conveys. For them, Lumumba was put there by the urban authorities as the gatekeeper to the city, raising his hand and telling the inhabitants of the surrounding *cités* in a loud and clear voice: “Okokota te!” (You will not enter!). Stopping them in their tracks, the people’s hero Lumumba, by an ironic twist of fate, thus prevents the slum dwellers of Kinshasa to cross the borderline into the “real” city, a place where they do not belong and which will never be theirs.

The exclusionist logic that informed colonial urban planning was never totally abandoned and has even made a spectacular return in recent years. For some years now, a successive series of city governors has been engaged in “cleaning up” the city. This cleansing basically boils down to a repressive politics of erasure, destroying “irregular,” “anarchic” and unruly housing constructions, bulldozing bars and terraces considered to be too close to the roadside, and banning containers, which Kinshasians commonly convert into little shops, from the street. The same is happening to the small street “restaurants” known as *malewa* (which provide many women, and therefore whole families, with an income), as well as many other informal structures and infrastructures allowing urban dwellers to survive in the volatile economy of the street. The urban authorities started to wage a war not only against these “illegal” structures and activities but also against the very bodies of those who perform or embody them. Among those who first fell victim to the state’s effort to “sanitize” and recolonize the city, rewrite the city’s public spaces, and redefine who has a right to the street and to the city, were Kinshasa’s street children and youth gangs.

The same exclusionist dynamics are fueling an even more outspoken attempt at redefining what a “proper” city means today (De Boeck 2011). During the campaign

leading up to the 2006 presidential elections, President Kabila launched his Cinq Chantiers program, his Five Public Works. After decades of official neglect with regard to urban planning, and fifty years after the end of the Belgian *plan décennal*, the concept presented the outline of a sort of recovery plan for Congo, and summarized the government's pledge to modernize education, health care, road infrastructure, access to electricity, and housing accommodation in the DRC. In 2010, the year in which Congo celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its independence from Belgian colonial rule, and a year before the 2011 presidential elections, the "chantiers" were geared into a different speed, especially with regard to the latter three issues. Downtown Kinshasa went through a radical facelift, under the guidance of Chinese engineers, Indian or Pakistani architects, and real estate firms from Dubai, Zambia or the Emirates. Along the main boulevards and major traffic arteries such as the aforementioned Boulevard Lumumba all trees were cut down and adjacent gardens and fields were destroyed, while the roads and boulevards themselves were widened to become eight-lane highways leading right into the heart of the city. Some landmark buildings were embellished or restored, while others made way for new construction sites on an unprecedented scale. Plans also exist to build a new viaduct connecting an upgraded Ndjili international airport with *La Ville* (and more precisely with its Grand Hotel, one of the two international hotels of downtown Kinshasa). The viaduct will follow the Congo River, and run over and above the heads of the hundreds of thousands of impoverished inhabitants of the commune of Masina, commonly referred to as "Chine Populaire," the People's Republic of China, because it is so overpopulated.

Today, also, almost every main street and boulevard of Kinshasa is covered with huge billboards in a sustained politics of visibility for the governmental Cinq Chantiers policy, which was rebaptized as a "revolution of modernity" after the 2011 elections.² The boards announce the emergence of this new city and offer a spectral, and often spectacular, though highly speculative and still very volatile, vision of Congo's reinsertion into the global ecumene (see Figure 28.2 and Figure 28.3). The advertisements promise to bring "modernization" and "un nouveau niveau de vie à Kin" (a new standard of life to Kinshasa). Apart from the classic infrastructural works (bringing light to the streets, bridges and roads, for example), the billboards also show representations of soon to be constructed conference centers, five star hotels, and skyscrapers with names such as Modern Paradise, Crown Tower or Riverview Towers. Many advertisements sport a portrait of President Kabila alongside the statement that Congo will soon be "the mirror of Africa." Kinshasa, in other words, is again looking into the mirror of modernity to fashion itself, but this time the mirror not only reflects the earlier versions of Belgian colonialist modernity, but also longs to capture the aura of Dubai, Mumbai and other hot spots of the new urban Global South (Roy and Ong 2011).

But nowhere does the specter of neoliberal global modernity conjure up the oneiric more spectacularly (and nowhere does it reveal its exclusionist logics more strongly) than in another construction project, which is currently already underway: the Cité du Fleuve (see Figure 28.4). This is the name given to an exclusive development to be situated on two artificially created islands. These are being reclaimed from sandbanks and swamps in the Congo River. The quixotic Cité du Fleuve is supposed to relocate the entire Kinshasa downtown area of Gombe. According to the current



Figure 28.2 “The revolution of modernity”: advertisement for the construction of a new “modern cité” on the outskirts of Kinshasa (reprinted with kind permission from Sammy Baloji).



Figure 28.3 Advertisement for the rehabilitation of the Échangeur de Limete: “Yesterday’s dreams, today’s realities, tomorrow’s better future” (reprinted with kind permission from Sammy Baloji).



Figure 28.4 Promotional image for La Cité du Fleuve (reprinted with kind permission from Robert Choudury, General Director of Cité du Fleuve).

plans it will span almost 400 hectares, include 200 residential houses, 10,000 apartments, 10,000 offices, 2,000 shops, 15 diplomatic missions, 3 hotels, 2 churches, 3 day care centers, a shopping mall and a university. The Main Island, the larger of the two, will offer mixed commercial, retail and residential properties, while North Island, the smaller of the two, will be reserved strictly for private homes and villas. The two islands will be connected to Kinshasa by means of a bridge.

According to the developers' website, La Cité du Fleuve will provide "a standard of living unparalleled in Kinshasa and will be a model for the rest of Africa" and, so the website's comments continue, "La Cité du Fleuve will showcase the new era of African economic development." In reality, once more, most people currently living in the city will never be able to set foot on the two islands. If all goes according to plan, the Cité du Fleuve will be accorded the administrative status of a new municipality, and will be subject to its own special bylaws. Thus operated as a huge gated community, the Cité du Fleuve will inevitably redefine what is center and what is edge in Kinshasa. It echoes many of the ideas behind currently fashionable concepts such as the "charter city," that is, a special urban reform zone that would allow governments of developing countries to adopt new systems of rules and establish cities that can drive economic progress in the rest of the country. But at the same time, it also replicates the segregationist model of *Ville* and *Cité* that proved so highly effective during the Belgian colonial period. It is clear that the islands will become the new *Ville* while the rest of Kinshasa, with its 9 million inhabitants, will be redefined in terms of their periphery. In this way the new city map will redraw the geographies of inclusion and exclusion in radical ways, and relegate its current residents to the city's edges.

These new developments underscore the political reality of the city, namely the fact that, in political terms, the polis has always been a place of exclusion. Under Belgian colonial rule, the Congolese were defined not as citizens but as subjects (see Mamdani 1996), and were thereby excluded from full participation in the political life of the polis. During the Mobutu regime, a new, apparently more inclusive notion of *citoyenneté* or citizenship was generated, but at the same time Mobutu designed himself as the ultimate sovereign in a country in which the law remained in force but gradually

lost all substantive meaning. Kinshasa and the country at large thereby were – and to an important extent still are – condemned to a perpetual state of exception, a zone of social abandonment with an almost camp-like urban infrastructure, in which the Congolese *citoyens* have become *homines sacri*, to adopt Agamben’s notion (Agamben 2005), people caught in a politicized form of natural or “bare” life, subjects placed outside both the profane and the divine law, whose lives are, often quite literally, desacralized, and constantly exposed and subjugated to death (and the 2010 assassination of the leading human rights activist Floribert Chebeya in Kinshasa painfully reminded us once again of the necropolitical nature of Congo’s governance).

THE SACRED

This brings us to the second term, that of the sacred. The long history of contact with Christianity that Congo has maintained ever since the sixteenth century (see MacGaffey 1986) has turned the notion of what sacrality means today in this Central African setting into an extremely complex, slippery, multilayered and palimpsestuous concept. Over the centuries, contact with Catholic and Protestant missionaries has profoundly transformed and reshaped the autochthonous ritual and cosmological horizons of Central Africa. In the Lower Congo, Christianity was translated and reinterpreted in local terms almost right from the start of its introduction. The spread and success of early Antonionist movements, such as Kimpa Vita in the seventeenth century, attests to this (see Thornton 1998), as do, much later, many prophetic and messianic movements of which Kimbanguism became the best known (see Mélice 2011). But although much of the local cosmological structures continued to exist in spite of these historical upheavals, it is also clear that the introduction of Christianity, together with the political and economical impact of colonialism – and *de facto* both often went hand in hand – deeply penetrated Congo’s regional belief systems, occasioning far-reaching changes in local lifeworlds, and causing a profound mental colonization which had a long-lasting impact that continues to have a powerful effect even today.³

The breaches and ruptures thus introduced by the model of colonialist modernity that the colonial state and its religious emissaries promoted were, in a way, exacerbated even further by a second wave of religious colonization from the late 1980s onward. During this period, in which the Mobutist regime finally started to crumble after three decades of ruinous reign, Neo-Pentecostal and other churches of Christian fundamentalist signature started to take over the local religious “market.” One could argue that their impact has – to some extent – been even more profound than the previous waves of Catholic and Protestant evangelization – some even speak of a Pentecostal “revolution” (see Marshall 2009 for the Nigerian case, and Meyer 1999 for similar processes in Ghana). Thus, preaching a radical rupture with the autochthonous ancestral past which is constantly demonized (Engelke 2010), these “churches of awakening” (*églises de réveil*) promise a joint venture between “Business” and “God” (see Figure 28.6 below), and thereby promote an insertion into the “modern” ecumene of global neoliberal capitalism. Given its tremendous success, Neo-Pentecostalism manages to intervene in many, often even some of the most intimate, aspects of people’s daily lives. This happens, for example, by the way in which the

new Christian ideologies and theologies are redefining the longstanding Central African landscapes of lineage and kinship affiliation. They do so by propagating a move away from the extended family and its accompanying kin-based model of solidarity, by recentering the focus toward the more “Western” model of the nuclear family and its related forms of singularization and individual rather than collective subject-formation, and by trading the logic of the gift for a monetary and capitalist oriented logic, with all that this entails (a new work ethos, new notions of accumulation and maximization of profit, new forms of self-realization and individualism . . .). This explains why Pentecostal preachers in Kinshasa often state that “family is witchcraft”: Given the neoliberal notions of selfhood that are promoted by these churches, those family members (nephews, nieces and other dependents) who, within the gift-based logic of kinship solidarity, could always turn to maternal uncles for help are now not only being reformatted as “strangers” but also redefined as “witches” when they try to do so, because, for a true and authentic Christian, it is “by the sweat of your brow that you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:19).

Profound changes such as these processes of “de-parentalization” (Tonda 2008) have provoked further, often dramatic shifts in the city’s social realm, as attested by new forms of witchcraft accusations directed against children. These children are increasingly blamed by their parents and elders for all the mishaps, misfortunes, illnesses, and deaths that occur in their families. As a consequence of these accusations, many children are excluded from their families, secluded in churches to be exorcised, and they frequently end up as street children in the process (see De Boeck 2008). So, rather than creating “flexible citizens” and engendering “colluding social hierarchies” (Kanna 2010) between an older structural logic of personhood and kinship and a newer set of neoliberal ethical values, millennial capitalism has thus impacted heavily on local notions of authority and gerontocracy, on gendered labor divisions, on intergenerational dynamics as well as multiple other, often very intimate, domains of daily life.

In spite of the complex zones of friction it generates in people’s daily lives, the Neo-Pentecostal theology is nevertheless embraced enthusiastically by many. Part of that success is certainly due to the fact that faith goes hand in hand with an emphasis on the miraculous, the promise of material success, and the possibility of becoming part of an aspiring but – in the Congolese context – still largely nonexistent middle class (for whom class-driven gentrification and equally hypothetical projects such as the Cité du Fleuve are being designed). The success of charismatic Christianity is also due to the fact that spiritual transformation and salvation becomes an individual achievement, through a spirituality that is open to everyone, and potentially within the reach of all. More generally, the broader encompassing Pentecostal narrative of Armageddon, a struggle between the forces of good and evil set within the eschatological time-frame of the Apocalypse (see De Boeck 2005), is one that people easily relate to, given the harsh living conditions they endure in the city, the material and spiritual insecurity they encounter in their daily lives, or the more general feeling of an omnipresent nationwide multicrisis on the political, economic and sociocultural level.

Indeed, the Pentecostal narrative has profoundly permeated the public sphere. It has imposed new mental structures onto daily life, but it has also punctuated, marked, shaped and reconfigured the public urban space in a very physical and material way. There are church buildings emerging on every street corner of Kinshasa, and the sound

of prayer accompanies one wherever one goes. It is by no means an exception for bars – these other ultimate urban spaces that are so profoundly linked to the rise of the African city, its popular culture, its notions of leisure, its time (the night), and its politics – to convert into churches, in a movement of spatial visualization and “sonic sacralization” (De Witte 2008; see also Larkin 2008) that infuses the urban public sphere with divine meaning, and stamps the aesthetics and moralities of a new spiritual geography onto its surface. At the same time, these infrastructural conversions also squarely posit the religious in the urban realm of market, capital and business as presented and advertised in the city’s mediascape: it is no coincidence that a majority of Kinshasa’s radio and television channels are owned by churches (Pype 2012).

POLIS–SACRED: BEYOND THE “PRECARIOUS BALANCE”

It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that within this omnipresent Pentecostal whirlwind, the sacred and the polis have become intricately intertwined. The polis, the city as political community, is constantly being reshaped along spiritual lines, turning it into a City of God, a New Jerusalem.⁴ Religion thus profoundly impacts upon the city’s and the country’s contemporary politics, in which the Pentecostal narrative of spiritual redemption is increasingly also being interpreted in terms of market-driven economic development (Freeman 2012; Pype 2009) and sociopolitical redemption (and as illustrated above, both religious and political leaders use the notion of “revolution” to do so).

Although Pentecostalism is very successful in promoting specific forms of empowerment in the guise of personal transformation, the Pentecostal “revolution” by no means implies the invention or imposition of a new liberation theology. Rather, I would argue that the rapprochement between the state and the city’s main preachers and prophets has led to a further maintenance of the societal status quo. Two decades ago, political scientists tended to describe the relationship between the African state and its civil society as a “precarious balance” (Rothchild and Chazan 1988) between a politics from above and a politics from below (Bayart et al. 1992). It became clear very quickly that the relationships between the above and below are far more complex than this simple opposition allows for. The nature of the relation between the state on the one hand, and “civil society” on the other, is not so much, or not solely, defined by a marked opposition, or by a dialectical relationship of oppression and resistance, as it is, on the contrary, primarily marked by a lack of distance, by familiarity, complicity, connivance, and “mutual zombification,” to use the famous phrase of Achille Mbembe (1992). Like an increasing number of political parties, national nongovernmental organizations and grassroots organizations, the preachers and pastors of the new religious field have also become an integral part of this postcolonial arena, and have even started to define its terms, as is attested by the religious privatization of public functions which the state no longer seems to be able to maintain, as well as by the overall religious transfiguration of the political realm.

The existence of the state (often reduced to competing factions who follow their own pathways of accumulation) is not so much evidenced by its capacity to uphold law and order, but rather by the unlawfulness and arrogant arbitrariness it constantly instigates. For decades now, the Congolese state has been forcing itself into the spaces

of survival of the common citizen by means of corruption and repression. As such, the illegality initiated by the state has found its way from the center to broader layers of society. Simultaneously, the blurred boundaries of the state apparatus provide people on the local levels of society with the opportunity to penetrate the spaces that the imploded state should but does not occupy. The blurring of the boundaries between state and civil society, the interplay between official law and unofficial practice, the interpenetration of the “above” and the “below,” and the complex interaction between multiple, dialectically interdependent sociopolitical and cultural spaces and groups generates the opportunity for constant negotiation and collaboration while simultaneously weakening, I would argue, the public (including the religious) realm as a whole, generating spiritual and material insecurity and other new forms of violence that, though very tangible, are often more covert.

This is not to deny that the history of the DRC has obviously been marked by blatant political violence, produced during a sometimes harsh colonial regime, as well as during a violent decolonization process (1960–1965), which was followed by thirty years of ruinous dictatorship under Mobutu (1965–1997), a long and painful political transition against the backdrop of violent warfare which involved many of the DRC’s neighbors (1998–2003), and a slow and fragile process of democratization and state reform after the 2006 presidential elections. In recent years Kinshasa received its share of that violence: it lived through two massive and violent waves of looting in 1991 and 1993; it was briefly drawn into the war in Brazzaville, on the other side of the Congo River, in 1996 and 1997; it was invaded by the former Rwandan allies of Kabila Sr in August 1998; and it saw some of its worst violence in the period immediately prior to the 2006 elections, when two presidential candidates, Jean-Pierre Bemba and current president Kabila, openly engaged in armed clashes in the streets of Kinshasa, leaving hundreds of people dead. Yet one might argue that, in spite of this recent violent history, Kinshasa was spared the worst. Within the city, with all of its shortcomings (its unmanageable size, its poor administration, its lack of insertion into a formal economy, its insufficient policing, its failing material infrastructure, and its extremely young population – a factor that greatly contributes to the growing insecurity in many parts of the city), violence is often generated on a different, much more hidden level. It is generated in the folds of the city, the shadow zones or grey areas existing in the hiatus between the practical levels of its everyday existence and the official moral discourses and practices of its administrative, judicial and religious frameworks that are supposed to regulate, sanitize, control, discipline and uplift this unruly city life, but that often produce exactly the opposite effect. While also offering opportunities and opening up possibilities, it is within this hiatus, this gap between principle and practice, that the city incessantly produces a more occult violence, a violence that destabilizes the standard meanings and terms of reference of people’s daily lives, and makes (material and spiritual) “uncertainty” the main characteristic of this postcolonial urban life.

THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE “MYSTIQUE”

Indeed, for many in Central Africa’s urban landscapes, local reality has become unfathomable, difficult to understand and interpret. More than ever before, perhaps, local reality

is the *occultus*, in its double sense: it is not only that the urban processes that structure local lives are often clandestine and therefore remain hidden, but local reality itself has become impossible without a “knowledge of the hidden” and of the newly emerging spiritual realms beyond the physical reality of everyday life. Because of the recent impact of the Neo-Pentecostal wave, the meanings of these spiritual worlds have – yet again – profoundly changed and have become totally unpredictable. Ancestors no longer behave in the way people expect them to, nor do witches, who seem to become more numerous by the day. A whole library of recent anthropological work documents the continent-wide surfacing of new witchcraft beliefs in the globalizing “modern” context of the urban arena. Much of this literature focuses on the intimate links between the notion of witchcraft and the concepts of modernity, governance and development (see Bonhomme 2012; Geschiere 1997, 2010; Nyamjoh 2001; Sanders 1999; Smith 2008; West 2005).⁵ People indeed tend to instrumentalize witchcraft beliefs to acquire accumulative powers in spiritual, “nocturnal” or “occult economies” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) by means of which they may access the fruits of modernity denied to them in daily life. In fact, it has been argued that charismatic Christianity, with its emphasis on neoliberal values, on spiritual combat and war between the forces of good and evil, and on the diabolization of ancestral beliefs, has greatly contributed to the preservation and renewed significance of the figure of the witch in contemporary urban African worlds (see De Boeck 2008; Meyer 1999).

In summary, rather than corroborating Weber’s thesis about the *Entzauberung* (disenchantment) of the world, the rise of modernity, which is also propagated by charismatic Christianity, only seems to have unleashed more powers of darkness. In former times, throughout Africa, people always used the processes of mirroring between the realities of the day and the night, or of the living and the dead, to make sense of the world and of themselves. The obverse and the reverse of the world were united through links of similarity, according to a principle that Achille Mbembe (1997) has called “simultaneous multiplicities.” Today, however, a change seems to have appeared in the mechanisms operating this simultaneous multiplicity of the two different domains that exist in and through each other. In many urban (and rural) sites throughout the African continent, something seems to have changed in the slippage between visible and invisible, in the folds of local life, between the diurnal and the nocturnal, between reality and what we might call, for lack of a better word, its double, its shadow, reflection or image. Within the local experiential frame, the double which lurks underneath the surface of the visible world somehow seems to have taken the upper hand. The world of shadows is no longer experienced as a similar but parallel reality. On the contrary, it has come to inhabit and overgrow its opposite, thereby making the physical world more incomprehensible and even dangerous every day, as is attested, for example, by the pandemic of witchcraft accusations against children which Kinshasa has been undergoing these past twenty years (see De Boeck 2008; Tonda 2008). A term that is often used in Lingala (the *lingua franca* spoken in Kinshasa) to describe this new uncanny, elusive and confusing character of the local world that one inhabits is *mystique*. For most in (urban) Congo it is increasingly frequent to designate people, things and situations as “mystique,” that is, as difficult to place, interpret and attribute meaning to.

Local urban experience, in summary, seems above all to be generated in the folds and shadows of a city that itself exists as a huge friction zone, marked by a

generalized feeling of uncanniness. The spiritual insecurity in the city mirrors the material uncertainties that punctuate the urban terrain. Rather than offering a steady ground, an unchanging background or canvas against which to read the passage of time and of one's life, enabling one to generate a sense of stability and meaning and to interpret change and transformation, the urban "local" manifests itself as a pool filled with quicksand, a topos as unstable as the sandy hills upon which Kinshasa is constructed.

This is not only true with regard to the level of an unmoored *imaginaire*, but also with regard to the very materiality that determines people's lives. The material conditions of these lives stand in sharp contrast with the bourgeois aspirations and ideals promoted by evangelical churches and urban gentrification projects. The harsh material conditions of urban life also give a different meaning to the notion of the miraculous. Often, my interlocutors in Kinshasa tell me: "When I leave my home in the morning I do not know if I will make it back alive in the evening. And each day, when I *do* come home in the evening, I tell myself: it is a real *miracle*!" Between morning and evening, between leaving and returning, there are so many material and logistical obstacles, so many dangers lurking, so many parameters changing, that there is the constant possibility of sudden disappearance and imminent death. The local realities of one's street or one's neighborhood never offer a steady setting for one's daily activities. The local is not necessarily the familiar. In the few hours between the time one goes to bed and the time one gets up again in the morning, the world as we know it might have vanished. Overnight, one's street might have turned into an unknown territory and a social minefield: prices might have changed and one's francs might have devaluated by 500 percent; soldiers might have erected roadblocks on all the roads giving access to the neighborhood; the power relations between local gangs might have switched; the man selling Coca-Cola in the kiosk across the street might have been necklaced with burning tires because he was caught stealing in an adjacent compound; sudden and inexplicable deaths might have occurred or, even worse, one's children might reveal themselves to be witches; erosion due to heavy rainfall or deficient drainage might have swept away the neighbor's house; without warning, electricity might have been switched off, only to come back three weeks later, or else the main electricity cables or water pipes feeding the neighborhood might have been stolen by the very people supposed to fix it . . . The material infrastructures of absence, lack and incompleteness that determine the daily rhythms of urban life, the very architectures of degradation and decay that often constitute the physicality of local living in the urban, the technologies of fixing and repairing that such an architecture generates, everything adds to the feeling that to venture into the local world of one's own street in the morning is to venture into a vast, and increasingly exotic, unknown. "Terrain eza miné!" as Kinois say: "the terrain is full of landmines," and one always runs the risk of inadvertently stepping on one . . .

OF FUNERAL RITES, CIVIC WRONGS, AND A POSSIBLE RIGHT TO THE FUTURE

The city's material and spiritual crisis has clearly left its mark on the modalities of social life in the urban context, and has provoked some radical changes in it. One

example among many others is provided by Kinois youth's dealings with death, the management of which – surprisingly – seems to escape the totalizing control of both state and church in Kinshasa. In various guises, death itself is omnipresent in the city.⁶ In February 2012, I returned to Kinshasa after a year's absence, and on the very first day, on the way to the campus of the University of Kinshasa, I was shown the house of “Mort-Mort,” a famous “marabout” who, according to Kinshasa's radio-trottoir, counts the city's governor among his clients. I was also told that Kinshasa's popular Mercedes 207 taxi-buses were now commonly referred to as *esprits de mort*, “spirits of death,” because of the many deadly car accidents the taxi-drivers had recently caused. Later on during that day, I drove to the house of my host, located in one of Kinshasa's many popular neighborhoods behind a new hotel called Apocalypse, and upon entering his compound, I noticed the graffiti on an adjacent wall: “Autopsie V3” (see Figure 28.5), the name of one of the neighborhood's youth gangs. “V3” refers to a Motorola mobile phone model, and hence to the necessity of being “networked” in one's neighborhood. The gang's name “Autopsie” comments on the neighborhood's state of profound infrastructural decay.

The inescapable presence of (symbolic and physical) death has indeed profoundly reconfigured the access and use of public space in the urban setting. Some decades ago, for example, placing a corpse in a coffin on view in the middle of the street would have been unthinkable. In the 1960s and 1970s mourning rituals took place inside the compound, while children were barred from any contact with death itself. If a funeral procession passed through the streets, mothers would call their children indoors: children were not supposed to come into contact with death, since they represent the beginning of life and should not be contaminated by its end. Today, however, owing also to lack of space within the compounds, the body of the deceased is often placed upon a bier in the street, under a funeral chapel, and people gather around the body to mourn the deceased and hold nocturnal wakes accessible to all. Streets are blocked and palm leaves are placed at their entrance. As such, the dead,



Figure 28.5 “Autopsie V3,” Masina, Kinshasa, March 23, 2012 (courtesy of Filip De Boeck).

also because they have become so numerous, have quite literally taken possession of the urban public space and have redefined its meaning and its use in the process.

In Kinshasa, as elsewhere in Congo, mourning rituals (*matanga*) have always been extremely important communal moments of encounter, creating wide-ranging social networks that are regenerated from one *matanga* to the next. As Durham and Klaitz remark with regard to funerals in Botswana: “People find themselves connected in their very physical well-being through emotional states and sentimental connections recognized and forged in public space” (2002: 778). What produces the connectedness between all those present is the sense of shared, collective *Trauerarbeit* (labor of loss), shaping up around an intimate, often corporeal and tactile, and always highly emotional relationship with the very body of the deceased. Family members, friends and neighbors gather around the dead body, weep, sing, address the deceased, touch and embrace the body, dance around it and take care of it during a whole night of mourning, until its burial the next day. That does not exclude this collective labor of loss from being a ludic happening as well. *Matanga* invariably also offer occasions for laughter, amusement, flirting and excitement; they hold out the promise of new encounters, or the joy of meeting up with old friends and acquaintances. At the same time, *matanga* are very weighty occasions in which existing hierarchies and power relations within and between families, lineages and clans are reaffirmed or contested.

In Kinshasa today, *matanga* often continue to be important motors for the production and renewal of the cohesion of social networks, especially if the deceased is an adult person or elder. The *matanga* is the nocturnal time-space in which the whole social landscape that develops between people during the day is constructed. It sets the scene for the replenishing of the social weave which unfolds during the day. *Matanga* lose their broader integrative force, however, when a young person dies. Normally, the fathers and maternal uncles of the deceased are the ones in charge of the funeral. They decide upon the time and place of burial, raise the necessary money, hire chairs, an orchestra and choir, contact the authorities, take care of the formalities for burial, meet the cemetery authorities, supervise the unfolding of the mourning period until the burial, assemble the deceased’s family (the mother’s and father’s sides, and the in-laws), conduct the palavers surrounding heritage and funeral contributions, and, most importantly, establish the cause of death, certainly in cases where witchcraft is suspected to be at the origin of a person’s death.

In the past two decades, however, the city has witnessed a powerful reversal of these norms and rules: increasingly, children and young people are taking over the control of the mourning and burial rituals (see Figure 28.6). This is especially true when a young person dies – and given the city’s demographics (75 percent of the city’s 9 million inhabitants is under the age of 25) – this has become the rule rather than the exception. The death of a young person triggers a lot of anger and rebellious sentiments among age-mates (see De Boeck 2009; Dississa 2009; Vangu Ngimbi 1997). This anger is directed at all public figures of authority and seniority, starting with the parents and elders of the deceased. They are the first ones to be blamed for this death. In such a case, the neighborhood’s youth will invade the scene, single out fathers and uncles and accuse them of witchcraft, thereby reversing the accusations of witchcraft parents and elders commonly seem to launch against their offspring, the “child-witches.” When young people start to accuse elders, this often leads to



Figure 28.6 The cemetery of Kintambo, Kinshasa, 2008 (still from *Cemetery State* (2010), documentary film directed by Filip De Boeck).

violent attacks. Often, the elders are chased from the site of mourning, while the young people of the neighborhood take over the control of the funeral, sometimes even burning down the house of the parents of the deceased. In the end, they will confiscate the corpse to perform the burial themselves. As such, families totally lose the control over the burial of their young relative.

As noted before, generation has always been a more important marker than class in Kinshasa. In this way, the cemetery has become the site of an intergenerational battlefield for Kinshasa's young (who refer to themselves as *bana désordre*, "children of disorder"). In a city which does not give them a full right of access to the urban public sphere, they occupy, appropriate and colonize the cemetery, their city. And they refer to this cemetery city as *Leta*, "the State." The violent appropriation of the *matanga* and the colonization of the cemetery is indeed known as *kuluna*, a word derived from the Lingala verb *kolona*: to plant, to sow, to cultivate. *Kuluna* is also a derivative of the French *coloniser*, while referring to the military notion of *colonne* as well. By colonizing this counterstate, they use this newly appropriated territory to claim a right to the city, impose their (dis)order and make themselves heard. By turning their age-mates' corpses into political platforms, the young shout their criticisms and direct their anger at their parents and elders, but also at politicians, priests and other official authority figures. These, the young seem to say, have not lived up to their promises, they have forsaken their responsibilities and have "sacrificed" the younger generations. Violent as their protest may seem, the political and moral criticisms voiced by poor urban youth are not expressions of nihilism. They do not, like some exotic version of the Punks of the 1970s, shout "No More Future." Using funeral rites to address civic and moral wrongs, they actually try to convey the contrary: their right to a possible future. Unchanneled, raw, not recuperated by the official discourses of the state or the churches, the often violent and unruly singing

and dancing of urban youth during funerals highlights their ongoing efforts at reconceptualizing both the polis and the sacred, questioning their place in the urban space, and more broadly the meaning of the public sphere itself, or the content of a notion such as citizenship. By refusing the role of *homines sacri*, and resisting the fact that their own deaths, caused by the state of exception to which the city and the state have condemned them, remain meaningless, they reintroduce the possibility of sacrifice, in an attempt to turn their own deaths into meaningful events again. In doing so, they try to renew the signification of the notion of sacrality itself. By shifting the sacred away from the official discourse of the churches, they reconnect it to much older moral matrices and ritual vocabularies that find their origin in precolonial autochthonous pasts, pasts for which these urban young people reinvent a future. The “disorder” they thus create is the only way at the disposal of a generation that is excluded from social or political power to define a new moral ground from which to formulate alternative futures for themselves, their city and their country.

LINES OF FLIGHT AND THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF FUTURITY

In these and other, often perplexing ways, Kinshasa’s inhabitants constantly generate “moments of freedom” (Fabian 1998), moments that represent possible lines of flight, offering the possibility for a Deleuzian move of “decentering” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). They create – and this is not so much a voluntary choice but rather a bare necessity – new possibilities, through language and practice, out of the destabilized meanings with which the social and infrastructural organization of the city constantly confronts them.

If violence is generated in the cracks and folds of the city, so is opportunity and possibility. Forced by the city to step back from habitual ways of thinking and acting, an overwhelming majority of Kinshasa’s residents is well trained to improvise its way through urban life and to look for feasibilities in the hiatus. Kinshasians know how to insert themselves in the interstices and fill in the gaps. Sometimes they do so to resist the city, but more often they seek to collude with the city in order to survive in it.

These strategies of survival come with a specific temporality, far removed from the teleological time-frames of the nation-state or the Pentecostal churches, and the futures they propose (see Guyer 2007). Conscious actors and participants in their own lives, people incessantly struggle to stay in control. Therefore, they are continuously seizing and capturing the opportunity of the moment to reinvent and reimagine their lives in different ways. But at the same time these processes of seizure remain highly unpredictable. In these urban lives there is never a straight line between today and tomorrow, or between here and there, between possibility and the impossible, success and failure, life and death. Rather than existing through habit and routine, or rather than being formatted by the regulated temporalities of the predictable and the unchanging, postcolonial urban lives are often shaped through movements of the miraculous and the unexpected, which constantly seem to be steering the urbanites off course, launching them into new orbits.

Such lives, therefore, are never fully autonomous projects either. Rather, they seem to consist of constant stops and starts, directed by the tricky and unforeseeable processes of seizure and capture, which in turn are structured, not only by the spatialities

of various networks, of shifting contexts and haphazard connections, but also by the specific temporality of the *moment*, unpredictably wedged in between the immobility of endless waiting, and the effervescence of sudden movement. Living in the urban local, which in itself has become an increasingly unstable and nomadic ground, constantly generates new opportunities and openings, while simultaneously also causing sudden closures, producing a lot of fallout and “collateral damage” along the way. Urban survival, therefore, often necessitates an extreme (mental and physical) flexibility, a capacity that Kinois sometimes describe as *mathématiques* (a notion picked up and further developed by In Koli Jean Bofane in a recent novel, *Mathématiques congolaises*, 2008). Generated in the moment and therefore rarely knowing where they will end up, the meandering lines of local lives constantly generate conjunctures and conjectures of sudden action and passivity, power and powerlessness, expectation and disappointment, rise and fall, dream and nightmare. And because of the often instantaneous, spontaneous, improvised and random nature of individual biographies, and because of the equally unplanned ways in which these individual biographies get caught up and become entangled in other networks of physical and mental contact with other people and other discourses, practices and ideas, the line of one’s life is rarely unidirectional, and one can almost never plan it ahead of time.

To deal with the city, therefore, is to deal with hazard. Prepared to open up to the unexpected and the miraculous, and not necessarily by choice, local urban lives are profoundly marked by the dynamics of the hazardous and the accidental, and that is also why their memories often remain diffuse and opaque. Therefore, perhaps, lives lived locally remain difficult to capture within the historicist approaches of modernity and its accompanying ideologies of linear development, progress and accumulation. The promise of the redemption of one’s soul in a blissful afterlife often seems equally far and distant. The immediate and often dystopian quality of living and surviving in the local moment of the urban seems to be far removed from the utopian futurities that the state and the churches have on offer. Instead, popular urban cultures, as diverse theaters of dreams and theaters of struggle, generate a world that continuously de- and reconstructs itself, continuously stops and starts, and keeps history, memory and questioning in motion.

NOTES

- 1 I prefer to use “sacred” as a more inclusive term to discuss a wide range of discourses, ideas and embodied practices surrounding ancestry, witchcraft, death, and other spiritual notions that seem to be excluded from the term “religion” in the current context of the Democratic Republic of Congo. There, “religion” is used in a more exclusive way to refer to hierarchical and institutionalized church structures and belief systems embodied by Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostalist, and Kimbanguist churches.
- 2 Kinshasa’s TV channels run daily spots sponsored by the government to promote and highlight this “révolution de la modernité” (as observed by the author on Digital Congo, March 2012).
- 3 For example, the Belgian colonial policy defined many urban centers throughout Congo as “centres extra-coutumiers,” that is, in opposition to the “village,” as “modern” spaces where traditional frames of reference, ritual beliefs, and customary policies could no longer be applied. The urban colonial space thus effectively represented a rupture with the rural sociocultural context which bracketed it.

- 4 The Kimbanguist Church has chosen to construct its own “New Jerusalem” outside of Kinshasa, at Nkamba, the movement’s holy city in the Lower Congo province, erected on the spot where Simon Kimbangu was born in 1887 and started his career as prophet in 1921.
- 5 For a critical review of some of this recent literature on the African occult, see Ranger 2007.
- 6 Kinshasa is by no means an exception in this. Although the classic topics of death and mourning have never ceased to be of importance to anthropology (see for a recent example Connerton 2011), the increasing production of death throughout the African continent has given rise to a recent revival of anthropological and historical studies concerning funerals and mourning rituals in various African contexts (see e.g. Jewsiewicki and White 2005; Jindra and Noret 2011; Noret 2010; Noret and Petit 2011; Lamont 2009; Lee 2011; Vaughan and Lee 2008).

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